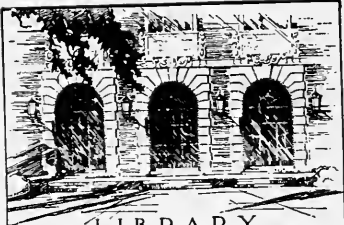




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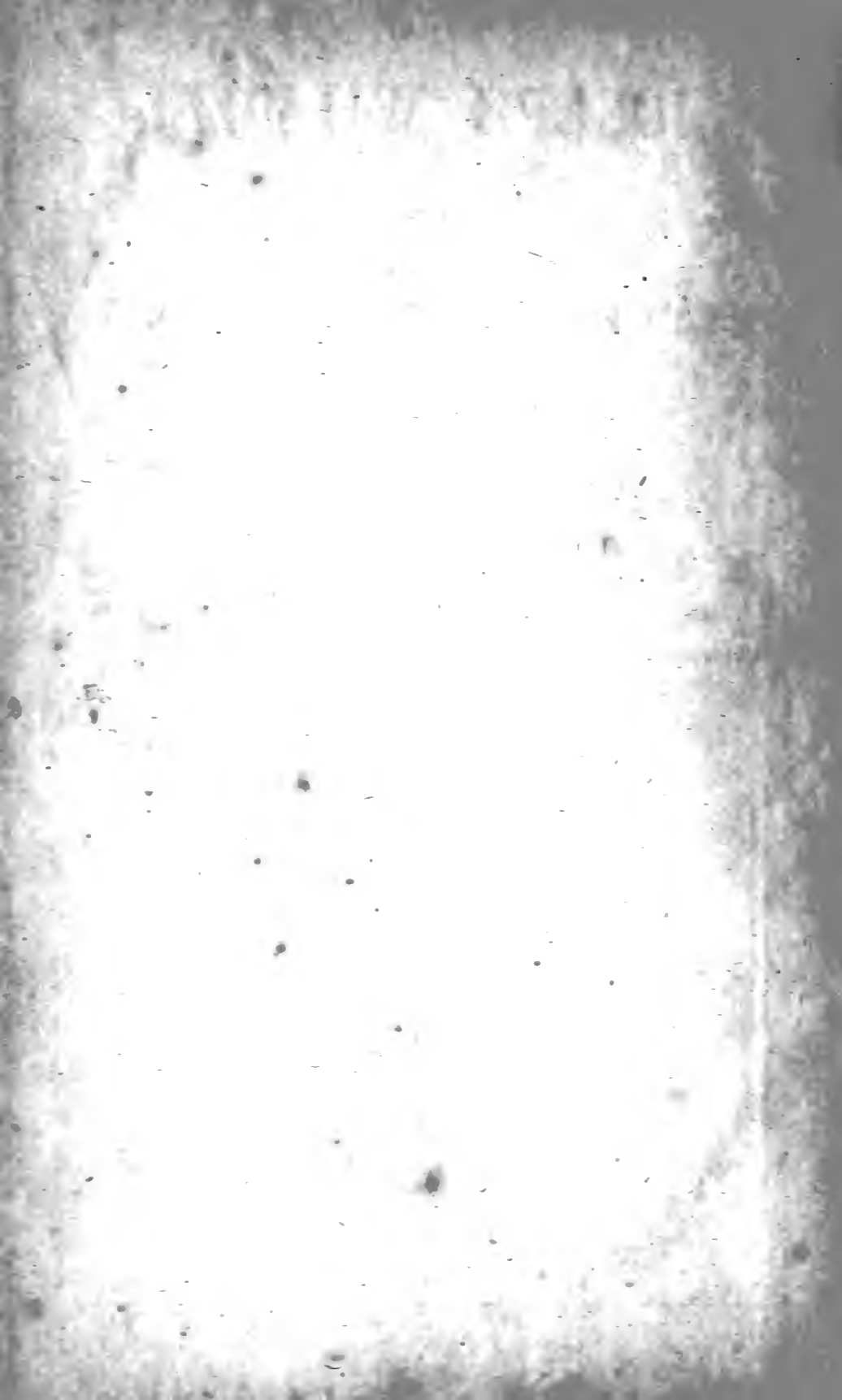
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# JOSEPH WILMOT;

OR, THE

## MEMOIRS OF A MAN-SERVANT.

BY GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS,

AUTHOR OF THE FIRST AND SECOND SERIES OF "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON," "THE MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LONDON," "THE SEAMSWOMAN," "THE BRONZE STATUE," "FAUST," "THE NECROMANCER," "THE MASACRE OF GLINCOR," "POPE JOAN," "THE PIXY," "ROBERT MACAIRE," "MARY PRICE," "THE DAYS OF HOGARTH," "KENNETH," "WAGNER, THE WEHR-WOLF," "THE SOLDIER'S WIFE," "ROSA LAMBERT," "THE LOVES OF THE HAREM," "THE BYE-HOUSE PLOT," "THE CORAL ISLAND," ETC., ETC.

WITH FIFTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS,

BY EDWARD CORBOULD.

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VOL. II.

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LONDON:

PUBLISHED, FOR MR. REYNOLDS, BY JOHN DICKS, AT THE OFFICE,  
No. 7, WELLINGTON STREET NORTH, STRAND.

1855.

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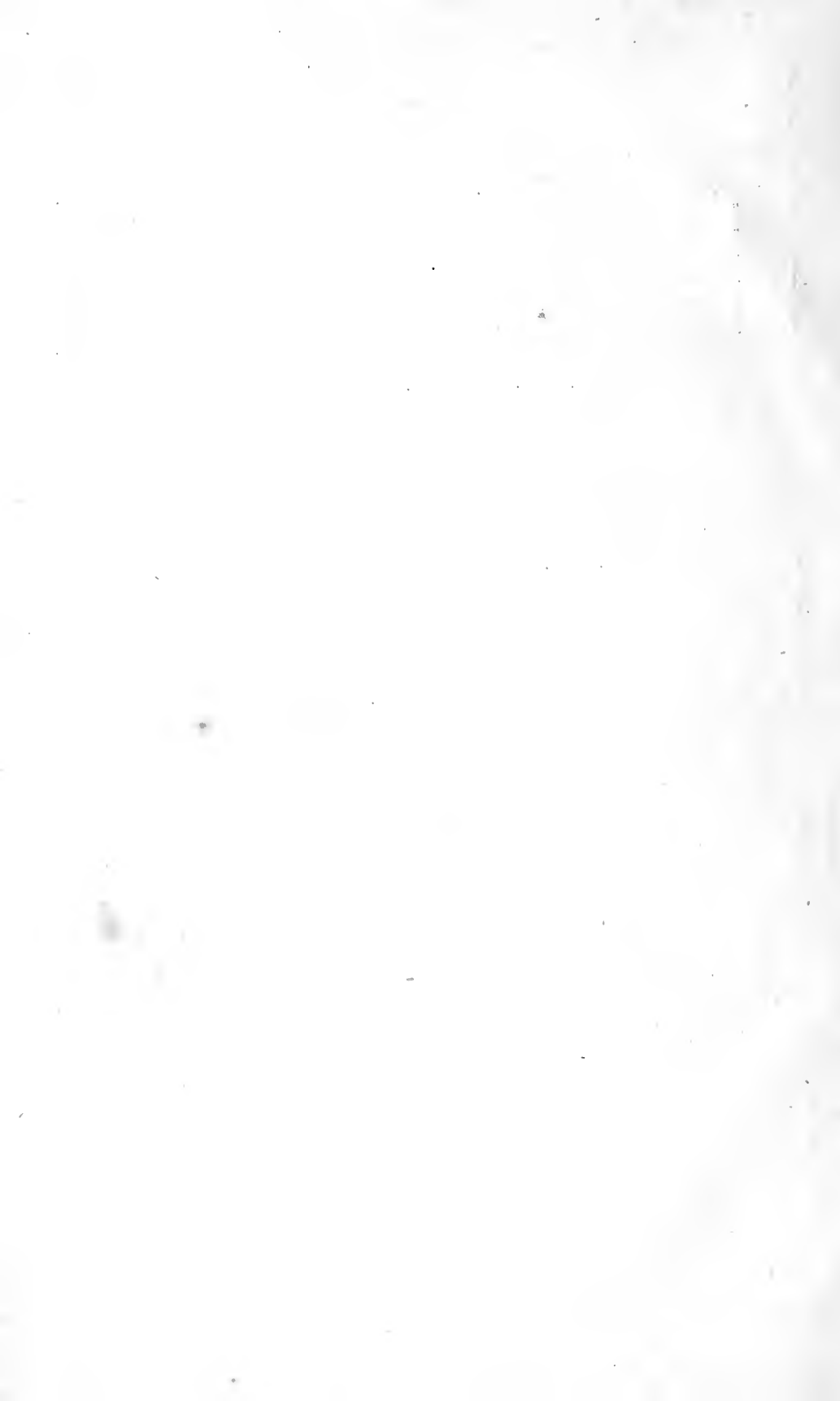
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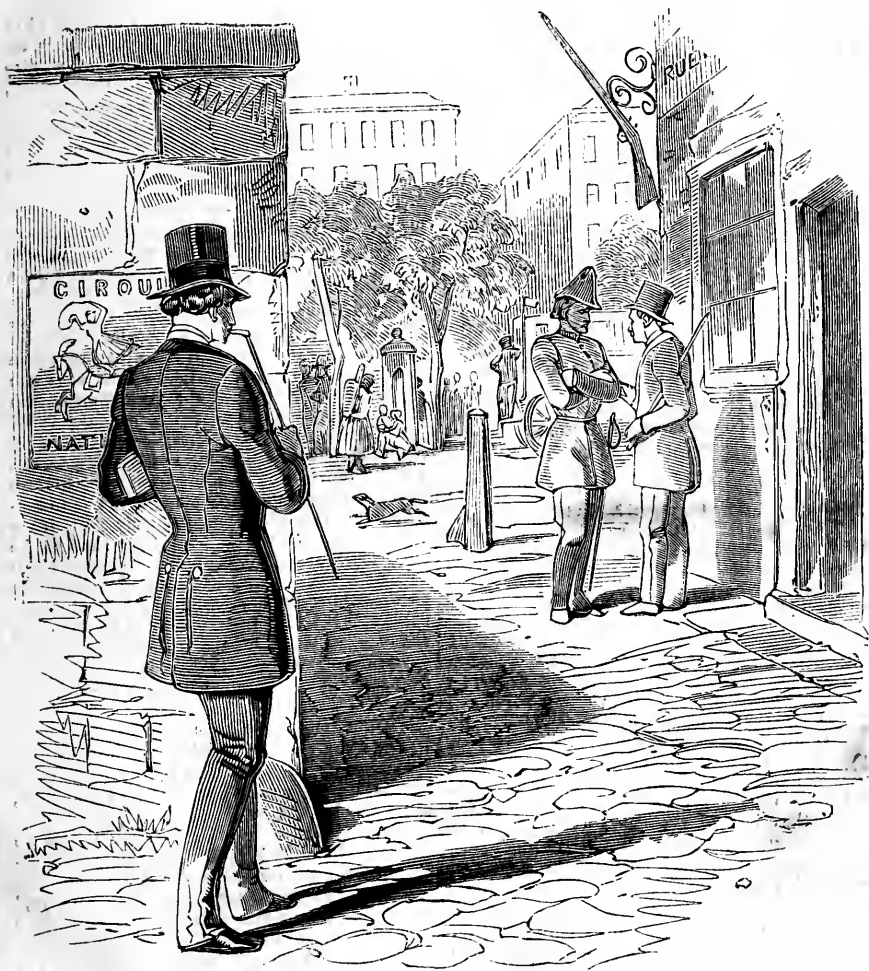
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JOSEPH WILMOT;  
OR, THE MEMOIRS OF A MAN-SERVANT.



CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE LECTURE MEETING.

THE third day after my interview with Made-moiselle Eugenie Delacour had arrived; and in the meantime I was totally unable to find any

opportunity of speaking to the youthful Theobald, Marquis de Paulin. I saw him on several occasions: he looked pensive and melancholy—but showed not the slightest inclination to address me. On the contrary he evidently avoided me; and I thought I could understand the reason. It was that he was fearful lest his feelings should on the one hand prompt him to put that question

which his pride on the other hand forbade him to utter. Nevertheless, I comprehended that it would not take much to induce him to speak to me; and I therefore entertained little fear that an occasion would present itself. The third day had now arrived: the meeting was to take place in the evening; and I knew that Mademoiselle Delacour would be grievously disappointed if I failed of success in the task which I had undertaken.

I accordingly watched for an opportunity to throw myself in the way of the youthful Marquis, — resolving to address him. It was about noon when I was summoned to the Duke's apartment; and he bade me take a case of pistols to a gunsmith's in the Rue de la Paix, — intimating that he had already given the tradesman instructions as to what the weapons required doing to them. I hastened to acquit myself of this errand, that I might return without delay to the mansion, in order to watch for the Marquis; and I was not long in reaching the Rue de la Paix. Just at the moment that I arrived in front of the gunsmith's shop, I observed a *gendarme* and another individual, who was in plain clothes, stop and exchange a few hasty words. The man who was in plain clothes — and who was of respectable appearance, having the air of a tradesman — said emphatically to the *gendarme*, "Yes — it is for to-night!"

They then separated, — the *gendarme* crossing over to the opposite side of the street; and the man in plain clothes entering the gunsmith's. I also entered, and sat down till the other who had preceded me, should have been attended to.

"Good day, Monsieur Cresson," said the gunsmith to the individual alluded to. "I suppose you have called for the parcel? It is in readiness."

"Yes," responded Cresson: and then he repeated the same significant phrase which he had uttered at parting to the *gendarme*, but in a half hushed and mysterious manner — "It is for to-night!"

The gunsmith threw upon him a look as darkly significant as the phrase itself was; and then unlocking a drawer in the counter, he took forth a large heavy parcel, enveloped in brown paper and tied round with strong whipcord. He likewise delivered a bill, which Monsieur Cresson immediately paid, and which I observed amounted to a sum of forty pounds, speaking in English money. He then took the parcel and issued from the shop, — thus leaving the gunsmith at liberty to attend upon me. I delivered him the pistol case, telling him that I came from the Duke de Paulin; and taking my departure rapidly, I retraced my way to the mansion, — thinking no more of Monsieur Cresson and his mysterious phrase; for indeed the incident was by no means one calculated to dwell in my thoughts, the more especially as these were tolerably well absorbed in the enterprise which I had in hand. As I approached the mansion, I perceived the Marquis de Paulin advancing along the street; and I was resolved to avail myself of the opportunity which accident was thus affording. The youth was walking at a slow pace and in a pensive manner, with his eyes bent down: he did not therefore observe me until I came close up to him; and then I boldly said, "Monsieur le Marquis, may I be permitted to speak to you?"

"Certainly," he at once responded, with remarkable affability: and methought there was a glitter of satisfaction in his eyes, as if he felt that the moment for explanation was come, and without any detriment to his own personal pride, inasmuch as the ice was not first broken by himself.

"You will think, Monsieur le Marquis," I proceeded to observe, "that I am taking a very great liberty; and you will think more than this too — namely, that my proceeding is a very extraordinary one."

"At all events I have no reason to think ill of you," replied Theobald; "and therefore rest assured that I shall not travel out of my way to put an unjust construction upon your proceeding, whatever it may be. Speak in all frankness."

"I thank you, Monsieur le Marquis, for this kind permission," I continued. "And now start not — nor think me too bold — when I observe that there is something upon your mind."

The youthful nobleman gazed earnestly upon me, — his looks expressing mingled confusion and wonder at a mode of address which might well indeed appear strange to him: but he said not a word.

"Yes, Monsieur le Marquis," I continued, "there is something upon your mind. Humble as I am, I have conceived a sufficient interest in you to regret that you should be thus unhappy: and hence the boldness of the present step which I am adopting towards you."

The looks of the young Marquis were still full of confusion: he evidently knew not what to say, nor how to treat the language I was using towards him. Indeed, it was quite natural for him to consider it a very great liberty on my part, if my object were only to express sympathy: but on the other hand, I could judge by his demeanour that he partially suspected I had some deeper motive for thus addressing him. Still he continued silent: but he bent a look upon me which was as much as to imply that he awaited farther explanations.

"Monsieur le Marquis," I resumed, "these are no idle words which I am speaking: nor are they a mere obtrusive declaration of compassionate interest. I will therefore at once follow up what I have already said, by adding that as you have something on your mind, it is in my power to remove it — thereby restoring you to happiness, and I may say to confidence."

The young nobleman blushed: for it was no longer possible for him to doubt that I was alluding to his love for Mademoiselle Delacour.

"I can give you no farther explanations now," I continued: "nor indeed is this the place where they can be given at all."

"Then what do you suggest? what do you require of me? what do you wish me to do?" asked the young nobleman, full of curiosity and suspense.

"May I beg, Monsieur le Marquis, that you will meet me this evening at a quarter to nine, at the corner of the first street beyond the gate of the mansion? However mysterious the present proceeding may seem in your eyes, rest assured that it will tend to the elucidation of all that is troubling your mind; and it will have the effect I promised — namely, that of restoring you to happiness and confidence."



"I believe you, strange indeed though your conduct naturally appears," rejoined the Marquis; "and I will keep the appointment which you have just given. I of course presume that the matter is entirely secret?"

"Entirely so, Monsieur le Marquis:"—and not choosing to tarry with the chance of being questioned, I bowed and hastened along to the mansion.

I was exceedingly glad at having thus far accomplished my purpose. I saw that the young nobleman's curiosity was much piqued—that at the same time he had the fullest confidence in the assurance I had given him—and that he would not therefore fail to keep the appointment, nor refuse to accompany me whithersoever I might choose to lead him.

At about half-past eight in the evening, I sauntered out of the mansion, and proceeded in the direction of the place of appointment. There I walked to and fro, wondering what would be the result of Mademoiselle Eugenie's stratagem to convert her youthful lover to her own political principles—and thus, as she had expressed it, render him all the more worthy of the devoted affection she experienced for him. I could not help thinking the experiment a very hazardous one: for he was a youth of the most delicate sensibilities—and it struck me as being quite possible that he would regard her proceedings in respect to the Secret Society as unfeminine—unmildly—and in every sense unbecoming her sex, her position, and her aspiration to be some day led by him to the altar. Besides, I reflected that the eloquence of the speakers might fail to move him; and that so far from the impassioned fervour of republican orators making upon his mind the impression which the ardent girl so fondly anticipated, it might shock his own political prejudices, and lead to an irreparable breach between himself and the young lady. I was even sorry that I had not made all these representations to Eugenie when we met in the Champs Elysées: but it was now too late—the affair was progressing as she herself had sketched it out—and all I could do was to perform my own part, sincerely wishing her success.

Punctual to the appointed time, I was joined by the young Marquis,—and now I felt it necessary to say a few words which might prepare him somewhat for the scene to which he was about to be introduced.

"I hope and trust, Monsieur le Marquis," I began, "that you will leave yourself entirely to my guidance: for though the proceeding I am about to adopt, may at first appear to be utterly unconnected with the result that is aimed at, I can assure you that it is an indispensable preliminary. I now propose to conduct you to a place where you will find other persons, and where you may hear strange language: but I beseech you to listen attentively—to betray no surprise by your looks, whatever you may feel in your heart—to offer no interruption—but to bear yourself altogether as if it were a scene which you were before-hand fully prepared to encounter."

"What strange words are these which you are addressing to me?" inquired the young Marquis, as if in doubt whether it were prudent for him to proceed another step in an affair so densely shrouded in mystery.

"Do you think, Monsieur le Marquis," I said, half coldly, half indignantly, "that I am capable of any treachery? If you mistrust me, I beg that you will at once stop short in the matter: but I can assure you that I am doing all this entirely in your interest, and to serve no personal motive of my own."

"Forgive me if I hesitated for an instant!" said Theobald, with the fervour of a generous heart. "I did not suspect you—I merely thought it strange that you should observe so much mystery. But lead the way—and I will follow."

"And you must follow, Monsieur le Marquis," I said, impressively, "as if blindfold you were conducted by my hand: and you must not ask me a single question as to anything you may hear or see: but above all, look not astonished—betray no outward wonderment—or we may fail in achieving our object."

"Proceed," said Theobald. "I will be guided by you in all things."

I now led the way towards the place of meeting, in respect to the precise whereabouts of which I had in the afternoon taken the special precaution to refresh my memory; and the small narrow doorway was soon reached. It stood half open: I took the hand of the Marquis; and as I pronounced the word "*Liberté*," I led him into the narrow alley, which was pitch dark.

"Good! Pass on," said a voice behind the door: and I felt the hand of the Marquis quiver for a moment in my own.

But I said nothing; though I squeezed that hand,—thereby significantly impressing upon him the necessity of attending to the instructions I had previously given. The bell tinkled,—having been evidently thus agitated by the individual behind the outer door. Then the inner door opened: a light gleamed forth: this time however it was not the charming Eugenie who was acting as portress—but a man in a mechanic's dress performed that duty. To him the watchword was repeated from my lips: we traversed the ante-chamber—the man opened the door at the extremity—and I conducted the young Marquis into that spacious apartment which I now entered for the second time.

On this occasion it was not dimly but well lighted. There were about fifty persons assembled; and the same description which was given of the meeting in a previous chapter, as being the representatives, so to speak, of all grades of society, will suit them now. Theobald stopped suddenly short: it was however only for an instant,—the quick look which I flung upon him at once recalling my urgent instructions to his mind. Methought he immediately comprehended the nature of the scene amidst which he was thus introduced; and as I led him to a seat, he whispered to me, "I fear, Joseph, that you have brought me to a place which I ought not to have entered—But it is too late to retreat!"

"Hush, Monsieur le Marquis!"—and again I bent upon him a deprecating regard.

"There must be some extraordinary mistake," he whispered in the lowest tone that could possibly be audible: "there can be no earthly connexion between this scene and that which I have upon my mind!"

"Have patience," I rejoined, likewise speaking

in the lowest whisper: and then I began gazing around me, as much as to imply that I would not listen to any further observations.

Theobald evidently resigned himself to whatever might now take place; and though I could well understand that his soul must have been filled with uncertainty, suspicion, astonishment, and doubt,—yet I must do him the credit to add that he maintained a perfect control over his looks. There was a low hum of whispered conversation going on in the room: no one was on the platform; the table at which the secretary had been seated on the former occasion, was now removed—as was likewise that smaller table with the death's head upon it,—the space being filled up with additional benches for the accommodation of a larger audience than was wont to meet at the secret deliberations of the society. As my eyes slowly wandered around, I perceived in the wall opposite to where we were sitting, a small window, not more than a couple of feet square: it had a green curtain within, and which was closed; but I could see that a light was burning in the place with which it communicated. And as I still gazed upon that window, I perceived the green blind drawn slightly aside for not perhaps more than the space of an inch; and methought that I caught a glimpse likewise of a delicate taper finger in alabaster relief against the dark drapery, and of an eye beaming through the little opening. Ah! there was no longer any doubt as to Eugenie's place of concealment. But I did not choose to keep my looks riveted too long upon that window, for fear lest Theobald's regards should also be directed thither, and that he might prematurely suspect something.

My eyes now wandered slowly around the apartment, to ascertain whether Lamotte, or his military friend, or the tall gentleman who acted as my second, were present: but I discerned them not. My looks however settled upon a countenance which struck me as being not altogether unfamiliar: yet I could not immediately recollect whose it was; and my attention was quickly diverted thence by a sudden sensation, as if the entire assembly had been all in a moment thrilled by an electric shock. This simultaneous feeling was produced by the entrance of a gentleman upon the platform, by means of a door at one extremity of that raised dais; and as it was on the same side with the little window, I had no doubt it was the door of communication with the adjoining room, to which that window belonged.

The gentleman who thus appeared upon the platform, was short and slender, of a beautiful figure, and genteel bearing. He was dressed in deep black: his frock coat, with large lappels, was buttoned across his chest; and as it fitted tightly, it displayed the perfect symmetry of his shape. His countenance was pale and pensive; his hair was of raven darkness: he wore no beard nor moustache; and his eyes shone with a preternatural light. His age could not have been more than thirty, if so much: but as I contemplated his features—as I was well able to do by the strong light of the apartment—I noticed that there was a world of deep thought depicted in that pale face. The sensation which greeted him, was the only testimonial of admiration and applause which the audience dared show; inasmuch as loud cheering,

the clapping of hands, or the stamping of feet, might have been heard outside. But as I again looked slowly around, I perceived that on many a countenance there was the glow of that enthusiasm which the appearance of this individual had kindled into wild fires within the breast; and that those same fires too were now flashing forth from many eyes. The young Marquis gazed with curiosity upon the scene; and I thought to myself that this first symptom of interest bestowed on something apart from what was uppermost in his mind, was a somewhat favourable augury on behalf of Eugenie's scheme.

A profound silence now pervaded the apartment; and after a brief space it was gently broken in upon by the individual on the platform. His voice was mellow and rich: but evidently expert in the art of oratory, he pitched it low at the commencement, in order that as it rose with the conscious power of his own eloquence, it might produce the grandest effects,—like those of an organ swelling gradually from a low key into the full glory of its magnificent sounding. And thus was it with the orator. He began by introducing his subject to the attention of the audience, in a low and deliberate manner. This subject was to be divided into two parts: the first exhibiting the wrongs endured by the masses—the second indicating the remedy. As he entered upon the former branch, he expatiated with a telling effect on all the evils of the political and social systems: then, as he grew warmer, his voice swelled, his utterance became quicker, his gesticulation impassioned—until at length all these were enhanced to a degree which produced effects thrilling, and exciting beyond description—almost maddening. But whenever he had worked up the feelings of his audience to such a height that his keen perception told him they were about to burst forth in a furor of applause at his eloquence, or into an ebullition of fiercest indignation at the wrongs he proclaimed and the authors of them whom he denounced—he would cease for a moment—he would place his finger upon his lip: the effect was instantaneous—magical—spell-like: and all was still!

Every now and then I glanced towards the young Marquis; and I was certainly astonished at the effect produced upon him. I could scarcely have believed it—much less hoped it: although I had assuredly hoped everything for Eugenie's sake. He listened with suspended breath: he drank in the orator's words as if human language had never before developed such power to his comprehension. And that eloquence carried conviction too: I saw that it did—I understood what was passing in the youth's mind: his looks proclaimed it all. A glow suffused itself upon his countenance, usually so pale: a brilliant animation appeared upon those features, recently so pensive. And then, too, at some passages of the orator's speech, I saw that Theobald's slender form quivered: then he seemed shocked by some startling denunciation of the nation's wrongs: and then again he would make a quick spasmodic movement, as if about to spring to his feet and proclaim his indignation at what he heard. From him my regards occasionally travelled towards the little window. I noticed that the space through which the observer was looking, each time grew wider; and as the light fell full

upon Theobald's countenance, I knew that Eugenie—for she I felt convinced the observer was—could plainly mark every variation of feeling which the youth's features expressed. At length the orator concluded, after a brilliant display of eloquence which lasted for an hour and a half; and then the young Marquis, clutching me violently by the arm, whispered in a quick excited manner, "By heaven, he is right in every syllable he has uttered!"

"You think so?" I asked eagerly: for I felt that the crisis was now at hand which was to decide Eugenie's fate.

"I have heard things to-night," answered Theobald, still in a low excited whisper, "such as I never dreamt of before. It appears as if my mind had undergone a complete revolution—as if a film had fallen from my eyes. I behold the world in a new and different light! Oh, to have thus imbibed the true principles of liberty! It is the duty of every man and woman——"

"Of every woman?" I echoed, still speaking eagerly.

"Yes—of every woman," repeated Theobald emphatically, "to study and ponder these things. And every child too should be taught them——"

"And suppose," I interrupted the enthusiastic young Marquis, "Mademoiselle Delacour entertained such opinions?"

"But she shall! she must!" returned Theobald vehemently. "Oh, if she were here!"

"She is," I rejoined. "Behold her!"—and as I spoke, I in my turn clutched the Marquis forcibly by the arm, to keep him down in his seat: for he was on the point of springing forward to rush to the platform.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, but in a low voice: and I saw that he now comprehended it all—how it was I had become acquainted with his Eugenie—wherefore she addressed me so courteously when we encountered in the Champs Elysées—and how it was that she had not dared reveal to him the truth so as to explain the mystery which had troubled and bewildered him.

At the instant that I had bidden the Marquis de Paulin look in a particular direction, the beautiful Eugenie came forth upon the platform, by means of the door to which I have previously alluded, and by which the eloquent orator disappeared in the midst of the sensation which followed his thrilling speech. This sensation was now prolonged as Eugenie entered on the dais; for it was natural enough that one so young and lovely, so enthusiastic and so fervid in the principles which she had adopted, should thus excite the admiration of all present. She descended from the platform: slowly and with a modest demeanour she passed along the middle of the room: timidly her glance was flung towards the spot where the Marquis and I were seated;—but yet I saw that there was a certain satisfaction and triumph reflected in her looks—she had not failed to observe from the window the impression produced upon her youthful lover by the splendid orator's eloquence. Another speaker appeared upon the platform; and in the renewed sensation which his presence caused, attention was diverted from Eugenie as she drew near to us.

"Compose yourself, Monsieur le Marquis," I hastily whispered to Theobald: "beware how you

compromise Mademoiselle Delacour by any display of excitement."

I saw that the hint was only too necessary: for the young Marquis, whose highly susceptible feelings were wrought up to a pitch of perfect exaltation, would have sprung forward, unmindful of all others present, to strain Eugenie in his arms. She sat down with us,—flinging a look of warmest gratitude upon me: and then she began whispering to her lover. I averted my eyes so as not to be a restraint upon them: and now my looks again happened to settle upon that man whose countenance had in the earlier part of the evening struck me as being not altogether unfamiliar. I had totally forgotten him during the hour and a half that the first orator's speech lasted; and now as my eyes fell upon him again, the recollection flashed to me that it was the Monsieur Cresson whom I had seen at the gunsmith's shop in the morning. Yes—and with that remembrance too came the circumstance of his hasty colloquy with the *gendarme*, and of the phrase which I had twice heard him so significantly repeat—"It is for to-night!"

A strange sensation of trouble came over me—a presentiment of impending evil—a suspicion of that man, which I felt rapidly growing into an aversion. Nor were my feelings of apprehension allayed, when I noticed that he was now studying my countenance, and methought in a peculiar manner—as if he also remembered having seen me in the morning at the gunsmith's in the Rue de la Paix. I did not choose to suffer him to perceive that he was the object of any attention on my part, nor that I noticed how he was regarding me. I therefore slowly turned my eyes in another direction; and in about a minute, I whispered to Mademoiselle Eugenie, "Don't look at him immediately—but do you know that short, dark, middle-aged man sitting close under the little window?"

As if in an indifferent manner, the young lady gazed leisurely round the apartment; and then said to me, "Yes—his name is Cresson—he is a worthy citizen, and one of the staunchest members of the Society; but he is somewhat too fierce in his zeal, and is believed to be rather inclined to the doctrines of the old reign of terror."

"Mademoiselle Delacour," I answered, deliberately, though speaking in the lowest whisper, "that man is a spy, and mischief is impending!"

"A spy? Oh, no!" she responded, her manner totally unruddled. "Of all men he would be the last I should suspect."

"Nevertheless, he is a spy!" I rejoined: and then in a few hasty words I proceeded to explain the incident at the gunsmith's,—how he had spoken to the *gendarme*—how he had twice repeated the phrase, "It is for to-night!"—and how he had received a large parcel for which he had paid a considerable sum of money.

"You are right, Mr. Wilmot," answered Eugenie, when I had finished: "that man is a spy—and we shall every one of us be arrested."

Any alarm which this announcement was but too well calculated to excite within me, was totally absorbed by a sense of wondering admiration at the extraordinary nerve and calm intrepidity which Mademoiselle Delacour displayed. There was a

partially heightened flush upon her cheeks: but it was easy to perceive that it arose from indignation against the treacherous-minded Cresson, and not from the influence of fear. The young Marquis, who was listening to our low whispered discourse, now said, "For heaven's sake, Eugenie, depart at once! Not for worlds would I have such a fate befall you!"

The young girl bent her looks searchingly upon her lover; and then she said, "I see, dearest Theobald, that your solicitude is indeed only on my account—and I thank you. If it had been otherwise, I should despise you. Dearest, dearest Theobald, you know not how proud of you I am this night!"

The youth's cheeks glowed with enthusiastic fervour at the compliment and the tender assurance which flowed from the lips of her whom he loved so well;—and I gazed admiringly upon that enthusiastic as well as beautiful young couple. At length I said to Mademoiselle Delacour, "How will you act?"

"It is useless to do anything," she responded with the same calm intrepidity as before. "Every one is marked: and whether we be arrested here to-night, or at our own homes on the morrow, it matters but little. Nevertheless, depart you with Theobald——"

"And leave *you* here?" said the Marquis. "No—Eugenie—never, never! If you remain, I remain likewise."

He was rewarded by another look of tender admiration bent upon him by the sweet eyes of Eugenie; and at this moment we became aware of an unusual noise in the ante-chamber. The door was suddenly burst open: the other door—namely, the one leading upon the platform—was simultaneously dashed in; and a posse of soldiers with fixed bayonets, and *gendarmes* with drawn swords, thronged in from both entrances.

I must confess that I was seized with a momentary alarm: but as the next instant I glanced towards Eugenie and the young Marquis, and beheld that tender pair of scarcely eighteen displaying a cool and noble intrepidity, I was smitten with a sudden sense of shame at my own weakness. All was now confusion; and some of the male members of the Secret Society made a desperate resistance as the *gendarmes* endeavoured to capture them. Wounds were inflicted—in three or four parts of the room there were fierce scuffles—but I was not left long enough to behold the result: for amongst the very first to be surrounded and arrested, were the Marquis, Eugenie, and myself.

"Offer no violence to this young lady," said Theobald: "it is the only favour which the Marquis de Paulin condescends to ask:"—and he spoke with a dignity which would have sat admirably upon a man of even double his age.

"The Marquis de Paulin?" echoed an officer who was in command of the detachment of military: and he looked amazed.

"Yes—I am the Duke de Paulin's son," rejoined Theobald; "and I beg that any respect which this announcement might procure towards myself, may be transferred to this young lady, who is the niece of an eminent banker."

"If you will pledge your word of honour, Monsieur le Marquis," continued the officer, "that

you will hold yourself in readiness to obey any summons on the part of the authorities, you may return home. I take this responsibility upon myself."

"Will you accord the same favour to Mademoiselle Delacour?" asked Theobald.

"I dare not, Monsieur le Marquis," replied the officer, shaking his head regretfully. "I am perhaps even stretching a point and incurring a risk——"

"I thank you for your courtesy," interrupted the Marquis; "but I will share the same fate as that which is in store for Mademoiselle Delacour."

Rapid yet fervid was the glance of admiration and love which the young lady threw upon Theobald: the officer could not help surveying him also in an admiring manner—then he bent a compassionating look on Eugenie—but the next instant he shook his head gloomily, and said, "I must do my duty."

We were now all three conducted forth from the place; and on reaching the street, the Marquis inquired of the two soldiers in whose charge the officer had left us, to which prison we were to be consigned? The answer was, "To the Prefecture."

Theobald then requested that we might be permitted to proceed farther in a hackney-coach; and this demand was complied with. A vehicle was soon obtained; and we three occupied the interior,—one of the soldiers riding on the box, and the other standing behind. During the transit both the Marquis and Eugenie expressed their deepest regret that in my endeavour to serve them, I should have become involved in so cruel a dilemma: but I bade them not render themselves uneasy on my account—while, as for in any way blaming them, it was altogether out of the question.

On reaching the Prefecture, we were separated, and all three consigned to different apartments: but we shook hands warmly before our companionship was thus severed.

## CHAPTER LXXVIII.

### THE CONCIERGEERIE.

It was not a badly furnished nor uncomfortable room in which I was incarcerated: but it was well protected with bars and bolts—so that escape was impossible even if I had entertained an idea of attempting it. I now found myself in a very serious predicament—although I had no apprehension for my life, as I knew perfectly well that the generosity of Eugenie and the Marquis would lead them to explain to the authorities how I had happened to be present at that secret meeting. Besides, when I reflected upon it, I did not conceive that the offence could possibly amount to high treason, as no deliberations for any specific purpose had taken place, but there were merely violent speeches delivered and listened to. I would not suffer myself to yield to despondency—much less to despair: for I had continuously before my eyes the magnanimous example of Eugenie and the young Marquis. Nevertheless, I caught myself

sighing more than once, as I thought of Annabel, and reflected what her grief would be when she came to hear of the perilous situation in which I was placed. The reader may be assured that I slept but little that night: for although I sustained my fortitude, yet my meditations were of a nature but too well calculated to keep me awake.

In the morning, at about nine o'clock, a decent breakfast of coffee and bread-and-butter was brought in to me by a turnkey; and a couple of hours later I was conducted to a large apartment on the ground floor,—where five functionaries were seated at a table. I presently learnt that one was the Chancellor of France and President of the Chamber of Peers—another was the Prefect of Police—the third was the Judge of Instruction—and the remaining two were secretaries to take down the examination. I advanced towards the table with a firm but respectful look; and the Judge of Instruction, on questioning me, intimated that as one of the secretaries understood English, he might serve as an interpreter if I did not find myself proficient enough in French to undergo my examination in this latter language. The interpreter became necessary; and the substance of the examination can be given in a comparatively short space.

I was asked my name, my age, my occupation, and so forth. Then I was informed that as I had been found at a secret meeting held for the most odious purposes, if I had any explanation to give the examiners were ready to receive it. I respectfully inquired whether my name had been mentioned by any prisoners previously examined?—for I thought that if the Marquis de Paulin and Eugenie had not as yet obtained an opportunity of giving any explanation on my behalf, I would not be the first to allude to so delicate a matter as their love and the circumstances which had taken me to the meeting. I was informed, in answer to my question, that nothing had been said relative to me by any previously examined prisoner; and therefore I judged that Eugenie and the Marquis had not yet appeared in the presence of this tribunal. I accordingly declared that on the present occasion I had no explanation to volunteer. But now followed an almost overwhelming announcement. I was informed that I stood charged with the crime of high treason, and of meeting and conniving with others for the purpose of assassinating the King, of overthrowing the government, and of establishing a republic. The secretary who acted as interpreter, pointed towards a side-table, on which I beheld a number of pistols and powder-flasks,—the secretary observing that these were discovered on the preceding night concealed under the platform of the apartment in which the meeting was held. At first I was too much astounded, alarmed, and bewildered for deliberate reflection: but as I regained my self-possession, an idea flashed to my brain—and I ejaculated, “The traitor Cresson!”

“You must not call him a traitor,” said the secretary sternly: “he is a loyal subject to his King. What excuse have you, young man—an alien—a foreigner—having no concern with the affairs of our nation—for joining in this diabolical plot?”

“I am innocent,” was my answer. “I indig-

nantly repudiate the black charge—Not for worlds would I dream of the horrible crime of assassination! Yes, gentlemen—and hear me while I declare my firm conviction to be that those weapons and that powder were conveyed to the place of meeting by Cresson himself! Permit me?” I added: and walking straight up to the side-table, I took one of the weapons and one of the flasks in my hand. “Yes, it is so!” I ejaculated, as I perceived upon both pistol and flask the name of the gunsmith in the Rue de la Paix.

I was now asked to explain upon what ground I made so serious an accusation against Cresson. I described the incident with regard to that man; and when the interpreter had repeated it to the tribunal, the functionaries composing it whispered together for some minutes. At the end of this conference I was ordered back to my prison-chamber; and when again alone, I reflected on all that had just occurred. I felt assured that my statement in respect to Cresson had produced a most important effect upon the examining functionaries, and I hoped it would lead to some good result.

Presently the door opened; and the Duke de Paulin, accompanied by an elderly gentleman dressed in black, made his appearance. The Duke seemed much affected: for he had just come from visiting his son in an adjoining chamber. Methought he was disposed to be angry with me: for in the first instance he accused me of being the cause of involving the Marquis in so perilous a predicament. The gentleman in black—who proved to be a barrister—whispered something in the Duke’s ear; and the nobleman, instantaneously softening towards me, said in a musing strain, “Yes—it is true—Theobald enjoined me on no account to speak harshly to you. Indeed he would not have told me the entire truth—thus showing how it was that he accompanied you at your own instigation to the meeting-place—were he not anxious to make it apparent that you had no motive beyond that of serving him and this precious virago Mademoiselle Delacour.”

“Mademoiselle Delacour, Monsieur le Duc,” I answered, in a tone of firm but respectful remonstrance, “is a young lady who deserves not to be flippantly nor disparagingly spoken of.”

“Cursed be the day when she and Theobald first met!” ejaculated the Duke vehemently. “Ah! Joseph, you do not seem to comprehend the frightful danger which menaces you all. Do you know, unhappy boy, that these secret conspiracies have gone to such a length that the King and his government have determined to make a terrible example? Heads will roll upon the scaffold—and numbers will be sent to work in chains at the galleys. Sooner almost the former fate instead of the latter for my unhappy son!”—and the Duke, sinking upon a chair, covered his face with his hands and sobbed convulsively.

I was much affected by this spectacle of a father’s distress: for I knew that with all his faults the Duke de Paulin was much attached to his children—and he might be especially supposed to feel the dreadful calamity which had overtaken his first-born whom he had hitherto proudly regarded as the future heir to his wealth and title.

“But surely, Monsieur le Duc,” I said, “when

the circumstances by which Monsieur le Marquis was led to visit that place, become known——”

“It will avail him nothing!” ejaculated the Duke vehemently. “Cresson the spy has deposed to the visible effect which the speeches made upon my unhappy son; and this tells terribly against him. Besides, I am no favourite with the King: I belong to that old *regime* which regrets the elder Bourbons, and openly avows its distaste for the existing dynasty. The Citizen King abhors the Carlists, and will gladly deal them a blow through the scion of one of their oldest and proudest families. Nevertheless all that can be done, shall be done. This gentleman is a barrister of eminence; and he will undertake the defence of my son and of yourself. You see, Joseph, that I do not leave you unfriended.”

As the Duke thus spoke, he bent upon me a significant look,—as much as to imply that as I had faithfully kept his secret in respect to the revelations of his wife’s manuscript-narrative, and as I had likewise rendered him some services with regard to Mademoiselle Ligny—he was now proving his gratitude. I thanked him for his kind consideration; and proceeded to give such explanations as the barrister required. I found that the Duke and the legal gentleman had already learnt from the lips of the Marquis, the fullest particulars in respect to the circumstances which had led us to the meeting; they had also from the same source received some intimation of the Cresson affair—and it was on this point that they now specially needed additional details. I was just on the point of commencing the required particulars—the barrister was ready with his writing-materials to take down whatsoever I had to say through the medium of the Duke as an interpreter—when the door suddenly opened; and the Prefect of Police made his appearance, followed by a couple of *gendarmes*. I was at once informed that I was to be removed elsewhere: the Duke and the barrister requested a few minutes’ delay that they might terminate the business they had with me: but the Prefect peremptorily refused compliance; and I was astonished at the almost brutal manner in which he treated a nobleman of the Duke de Paulin’s rank. The barrister demanded whither I was going, in order that he might see me in my new place of confinement: but the Prefect refused to answer any questions—the *gendarmes* seized upon me—and I was hurried away. A hackney-coach was waiting in the court-yard below: into this I was put—the police-officers accompanying me. They drew down the blinds—the coachman had doubtless already received his instructions—and the vehicle was borne away from the precincts of the Prefecture.

The drive was not a long one—indeed it lasted not many minutes; and when I alighted, I found it was the prison of the Conciergerie to which I had been brought; for the ominous-looking building, overlooking the waters of the Seine, was known to me. The wicket in the huge grated gates was opened: I was conducted into a large hall, in the midst of which stood a stone table with writing materials upon it. A turnkey attended upon us: one of the *gendarmes* produced an official document, which that turnkey signed and gave back: the two police-officers then took their departure—

and the gaol official conducted me up a staircase along a gloomy stone passage to a chamber which he gave me to understand I was to occupy. It was very decently furnished: the turnkey informed me that it was his own furniture, and that if I chose to retain it, I should have to pay a few francs a week for the use of it—but that it was entirely optional, and if I refused he would supply me with such articles as the prison regulations allowed. I gave him to understand that I should cheerfully avail myself of his offer—but that I had very little money about me, although I had plenty more in my box at the Duke de Paulin’s mansion. The turnkey answered that as I should require my clean linen and other effects, he would send a porter to the Duke’s house to fetch my box, if I gave a written authority for it to be delivered up. This I was only too glad to do, in order to have my necessaries and comforts about me; and in the course of the afternoon the trunk was brought.

The turnkey now gave me to understand that in respect to meals, I could either have the gaol allowance, or that I was welcome to be supplied from an eating-house. Before I gave a decision, I thought it better to ascertain, if possible, how long my imprisonment under present circumstances was likely to last; so that I might regulate my expenditure according to my resources. The turnkey replied that so far as he could judge, I might reckon upon at least six weeks’ incarceration before any change would take place in respect to my position. I found that I should be perfectly justified, according to the contents of my purse, to have my repasts from an eating-house; and I saw that the man was somewhat pleased with this decision: so that I imagined he was either connected with the eating-house which he recommended, or else that he had a very good understanding with its proprietor. Thinking that he was inclined to be communicative on the strength of the gains which he would reap from my presence in that gaol—and knowing a sufficiency of French to be enabled to converse on ordinary topics—I asked him what was the motive for removing me so abruptly from the Prefecture? He now all in an instant became distant and reserved,—simply informing me that I was *au secret*. Not precisely understanding the term, I besought him to explain it, observing that there could be no harm in his suffering me to be acquainted with the precise nature of my position. He then said that I was ordered into secret confinement: that is to say, I was to be kept a close prisoner, and not to be allowed to communicate with a single soul except the gaol-authorities—to receive neither visits nor letters from outside the walls—nor to despatch any correspondence to friends or relatives. At this announcement, I felt alike afflicted and indignant,—asking whether I should not be allowed to receive the visits of a legal adviser—and whether, when the time came, I was all in a moment to be put upon my trial without being in the slightest degree prepared for my defence? The turnkey, after some little hesitation, told me I might make myself perfectly easy on that score: and then he begged me not to question him any farther.

When left alone, I first examined my box,—thinking that perhaps although it was locked, a note might have been thrust underneath the lid by the Duke, if he had any reason or wish to com-





municate with me. But on opening the box, I found that it must have been previously unlocked and thoroughly ransacked, as all the articles which it contained were differently disposed from what they were when I myself last saw the interior of that trunk. I therefore concluded that it had been opened by the gaol-authorities by means of a skeleton key, in order to discover if there were any correspondence affecting my case, or any articles which were prohibited from entering the gaol by the regulations of the place. After a careful scrutiny, I found that nothing had been abstracted: I counted my money and found the sum perfectly correct: my clothes, my linen, my private papers, my books, and my writing-materials were all in the box.

And now I must say a few words in respect to my room. It was of tolerable size; and though the walls were so massive, it was light and airy—

for the window looked towards the Seine, and by opening it I could enjoy the fresh breeze that blew from the river. I could not however look out of it, because the window itself was deep in the embrasure, or slanting aperture in the immense wall; and the inner mouth of that opening was fenced with iron bars. It was moreover high up; and I could only catch a glimpse of the roofs and chimneys of the houses on the opposite side of the river. The wall was so thick that even my arm when stretched out straight through the grating of bars, would not enable the tips of my fingers to touch the glass: but the window was opened or shut by means of two cords, running different ways through a pulley. As I stood contemplating that window, the thought stole into my mind that as it looked upon the quay on the bank of the Seine, and the wall went straight down to the very footpath where people passed to and

fro, there was nothing to prevent me from tossing a note through, addressed to any one with whom I might choose to communicate,—always of course trusting to the chance that the person who picked it up would take the trouble of conveying it to its destination. But a second thought told me that it was preposterous to suppose that the gaol-authorities would commit such an oversight, if it were intended to prevent me from communicating with persons outside the walls: and then the recollection flashed to my mind that when I had passed that way in my rambles about Paris, I had observed that there was a sentinel keeping guard upon the quay under the prison-walls. Ah! and during those rambles which on two or three occasions had led me into the vicinage of the Conciergerie—and when I had gazed up at that sinister-looking place—how very, very far was it from my thoughts that I should ever become an inmate there!

In respect to my room, I may repeat that it was comfortably furnished—perfectly neat and cleanly in all its appointments; and that therefore, apart from the privation of liberty, the uncertainty of my position, and my anxiety on account of others, I had nothing to complain of. With regard to exercise, I was informed by the turnkey that I might walk for a couple of hours every day in the court-yard, at a time when the other prisoners were in their respective cells or chambers. The turnkey moreover communicated the not very agreeable intelligence, that certain windows which he pointed out in that court-yard—and which had double gratings, hugely massive—belonged to the condemned cells in which prisoners sentenced to execution were lodged for the twenty-four hours immediately preceding the fatal moment that was to terminate their existence; but that previously they were detained after their trial in other gaols—most commonly that of Bicêtre. It was with a cold shudder I gazed upon those windows; and I inwardly resolved never to avail myself of the privilege of walking in that court-yard when it came to my knowledge that there were criminals in the condemned cells.

There was no restraint placed upon me in respect to the use of my books and writing-materials: the turnkey however gave me to understand that it would be totally useless for me to endeavour to communicate with any one outside the walls; and as he glanced significantly towards the deep set window of my chamber, he intimated that sentinels were posted day and night on the quay beneath. This intelligence only confirmed my own previous impression; and when the turnkey added, with another significant look, that the continuation of the kind treatment I was experiencing, depended entirely on my own conduct, I was more than ever resolved to run no insane risk by endeavouring to send a note flying forth from the window. But as I felt deeply anxious in respect to those who were arrested along with myself—especially considering the serious aspect which was given to the whole affair by Cresson's diabolic villany in respect to the arms and ammunition—I inquired of the turnkey, on the second day after my removal to the Conciergerie, whether I might not be permitted the perusal of newspapers? To this he gave a decisive negative; and thus I found that as for the present I was dead to

the world, so it was intended to keep the world as it were dead to me.

I managed to divert my mind sufficiently with my books for the first three or four days: but as they were limited in number, and I had read them all before—indeed was previously intimate with the contents of most of them—this resource soon failed. Then it was the idea struck me that I would commence writing my memoirs; and pleased with a project which promised me occupation as long as my imprisonment under present circumstances was likely to last, I set to work. Thus, gentle reader, you now understand that no considerable portion of this narrative of mine was penned within the walls of a French gaol.

It must not be supposed that because I have indulged so long in matter descriptive of my position and circumstances at the Conciergerie, my thoughts were riveted solely thereon. No—far from it! I often wondered, with a racking brain and an aching heart, whether through the medium of the newspapers my involvement in this dilemma had travelled to England and reached the ears of my friends at Heseltine Hall: for if so, I knew full well that Mrs. Lanover and the beautiful Annabel would be profoundly afflicted—and that I should become seriously damaged, if not irreparably ruined, in the estimation of Sir Matthew Heseltine. The old baronet had sent me out into the world on a two years' probation; and during this interval my conduct was to be taken as the test of my worthiness to become the husband of Annabel. I had been directed to travel over the Continent to gain experience of the world and to enlarge my mind: ample funds were supplied me for this purpose:—and how had I acquitted myself? Nearly six months had now elapsed since I left Heseltine Hall: I had not got farther on my travels than Paris: there I had suffered myself to be swindled out of all my little fortune: instead of gleaming the experience of good society, I had sunk down again into the position of a menial—I had become involved in a serious dilemma—and I was now the inmate of a prison! Even if in the long run I obtained my liberty, how could I return at the expiration of the probationary period to Heseltine Hall, with the hope that Sir Matthew would consent to bestow his granddaughter upon me? These reflections visited me often and afflicted me profoundly: but still, on the whole, I *did* venture to hope that everything would yet find an issue for the best: for, as I have before said, I loved—and love itself is hope!

The reader may wonder wherefore, in the early stage of my imprisonment, I thus dared to reflect upon eventual restoration to liberty—and why, on the other hand, I was not trembling for my very life itself? On this point I will say a word or two of explanation ere resuming the thread of my narrative. I was a close prisoner—debarred from all communication with the world outside the walls—my treatment was lenient—and the turnkey had hinted that my incarceration, under existing circumstances, would be limited to a few weeks: I was not again brought before the Judge of Instruction—and yet my case was left totally incomplete at the first examination: I was even prevented from making any arrangements for a defence—the turnkey had bade me not trouble myself on that point—and I likewise bore in mind how sum-

marily I was hurried off from the Prefecture when visited by the Duke and the barrister. The deductions I drew from all these circumstances, were natural enough,—especially as I had read of the unscrupulous and iniquitous stratagems to which Louis Philippe's government had recourse when having a particular aim to carry out. In a word, I felt convinced that I had been spirited away into secret confinement in order to stifle the evidence which I could give with regard to the Cresson affair—that it was intended to leave me out of the prosecution altogether—and that when, through the absence of my vitally important testimony, a conviction should have been obtained and vengeance wreaked against the offenders, it would be held time enough to dispose of me. I therefore concluded that when all was over, I should be set at liberty and hurried out of France, with an order never to return.

I have already said that I was allowed to take a couple of hours' exercise each day in the courtyard of the prison; and this was usually between nine and eleven in the morning, or between three and five in the afternoon, according to my own option: for at both of those intervals the prisoners in that particular compartment were assigned to their own quarters. I had been about five weeks at the Conciergerie, when the following incident occurred. It was one afternoon, as I was walking in the court-yard between three and five, that the gate opened and a *gendarme* appeared, leading in a prisoner. With an instinctive feeling of curiosity my eyes settled upon that prisoner; and to my astonishment I immediately recognised Mr. Dorchester. He was no longer apparelled nor disguised in the same fashion as when a few months back he had played the part of Mr. Downton at Meurice's Hotel, and had so successfully plundered me of my property: but he now looked precisely the same Mr. Dorchester whom I first knew at Oldham. He was dressed in black, with a white neckcloth, and therefore had a clerical air. The recognition was instantaneously mutual: an ejaculation burst from my lips; but the villanous hypocrite, assuming a sanctimonious demeanour, lifted up his hands—raised his eyes also, until the whites were visible beneath the pupils—and in a canting lugubrious tone, said, "It is heaven's will, Joseph, that we should be thus chastised for our misdeeds!"

The *gendarme* immediately ordained silence, and imperiously waved his hand for me to retreat to the farther end of the yard. This intimation I at once obeyed; and he conducted Mr. Dorchester into one of the buildings overlooking the enclosure. I marvelled what offence the sanctimonious villain had committed—but entertained little doubt that it was his swindling propensity which had at last brought him within the fangs of the law. It would be a miserable affectation on my part to pretend that I felt at all on his behalf: on the contrary, I was by no means sorry to think that he was at length obtaining his deserts.

On returning to my own chamber, I informed the turnkey who attended me thither to lock and bolt the door upon me as usual, that I had recognised in a new prisoner an individual who had robbed me in a particular manner a few months back. The turnkey, not belonging to the department of the gaol to which Dorchester had been assigned, was ignorant of the offence for which he was brought

thither: but he promised to make inquiries and let me know. Accordingly, in the evening the man informed me that the Rev. Mr. Dorchester had only arrived in Paris a few days previously—that he had taken up his quarters at an hotel in the Place Vendôme—and that having formed the acquaintance of an English gentleman there, he had persuaded him to change his Bank-notes for French gold at some particular money-dealer's of whom he (Dorchester) pretended to have a special knowledge. The Englishman, it appeared, thankfully accepted the proposal, and was induced to entrust a bundle of bank-notes to Mr. Dorchester, to be added to his own. Dorchester contrived to give his new acquaintance the slip, and managed to decamp out of his sight: but he was discovered and arrested within half-an-hour, just as he was about to enter a diligence starting for some town in the interior. The turnkey farther informed me that Dorchester had been tried this very day of which I am writing—and that it was from the Palace of Justice (where the tribunals are) that he was being brought back to prison by the *gendarme* at the moment I had seen him. His sentence was a year's imprisonment, to be undergone in the gaol of La Force, to which he would be removed in the course of three or four days. The reader will be struck, as I was, with the similitude between my own case in respect to Dorchester and that for which he was now condemned; and it appeared to me a most extraordinary coincidence that I should be by circumstances placed in a position to see the culprit immediately after he had received his sentence from the court.

I could not help noticing that the turnkey lingered about in the room after he had given me the information relative to Mr. Dorchester; and methought, by the official's manner, that he had something more to say, but hesitated whether to give utterance to what was in his mind. I asked him if he had told me all in respect to Dorchester?—he replied in the affirmative: then he looked hard at me—then he played with his keys—and then, with a strange abruptness, he bade me "good night," issuing quickly forth and locking the massive door behind him. To a person in my position the slightest incident was of importance, not merely as breaking in upon the monotony of a prison-life, but also as appearing to be the harbinger of some change. That the turnkey had a communication to make, but hesitated to make it, was evident enough. Yet I did not think it was any evil intelligence which he had to impart: for his manner, while conversing about Dorchester, was gay and laughing; and subsequently there was nothing in his hesitation, his fidgetting, and his sense of embarrassment, that could be taken as an augury of ill. What, then, could it mean? Was the term of my imprisonment now really at hand?—did he know the hour and the day?—was he prompted by good feeling to set my mind at ease, but prevented by a sense of duty from speaking the word which would have that effect? I slept but little that night—and anxiously looked for the turnkey's coming with my breakfast in the morning.

But when he made his appearance his demeanour was the same as it ordinarily was; and I fancied that I must have been mistaken on the preceding evening. I felt disappointed: a hope

which I had hugged, was thus suddenly destroyed. He left the room: the repast remained on the table scarcely tasted; and I regretted that I had not questioned the man. But not more than half-an-hour had passed, when I heard his well-known footsteps approaching along the stone passage outside: I thought that he must be going to another chamber—no, he stopped at mine—the key turned in the lock—the bolts were drawn back—and he entered. It immediately struck me that there was something peculiar in his look—a certain significance, as if he had really something to say: and starting up from my chair, I gazed upon him with an indescribable suspense. Oh! if the hour of my liberation were at hand, what happiness!—but I scarcely dared indulge in the wild, thrilling hope!

And the turnkey gazed also upon me in a peculiar manner, so that feeling the state of suspense to be utterly intolerable, I clutched the man violently by the arm, exclaiming, "For heaven's sake, speak!"

"Would you like to escape?" he asked me, in a low deep voice, and then flinging his looks around as if the very walls themselves had ears.

"Escape?—yes!—if the term of my imprisonment be not legitimately at hand. Oh, yes! I will escape!—unless," I ejaculated, suddenly interrupting myself, as I was smitten with an apprehension,—“unless you are doing this to try me!”

"No, no," rejoined the man quickly: "you shall escape! You have friends outside—your presence is urgently required elsewhere—but ask me no questions—be ready at noon—and you shall escape!"

Having thus spoken, the turnkey hurried from the chamber: the door was again locked and bolted upon me—I was once more alone. But, Oh! what joy now filled my heart,—joy at the prospect of breathing the air of freedom once again; and yet a joy which soon became commingled with suspense almost amounting to an apprehension lest the project, whatever it were, should fail. And then, too, came numberless conjectures. Who were the friends outside? why was my presence so urgently required? and where? Were those friends connected with the Secret Societies? or were they persons employed by the Duke de Paulin? and was my presence needed to proclaim all I knew of the infamy of Cresson the government spy? But if so, should I not be walking out of one lion's den direct into another? Ah, that thought was selfish! Oh, to save the young Marquis and the beautiful Eugénie—and all the rest—if possible!

In feverish suspense passed the time until the hour of noon; and then the turnkey made his appearance,—introducing another individual to my chamber: and that individual was Lamotte, my opponent in the late duel. He shook me warmly by the hand; and then in a few hurried words gave me explanations as to the plan already concocted for my escape, the service for which I was required, and the immensely important results which were certain to ensue. Without an instant's hesitation did I yield my assent to everything; and then commenced the preliminaries towards the accomplishment of my escape.

It is necessary to observe that Lamotte had entered the prison under pretence of visiting some

criminal who was incarcerated in another compartment of the gaol: but my turnkey had stealthily introduced him into that portion of the edifice where the captives were kept *au secret*, or in close confinement. Lamotte had brought with him several articles which were requisite for my effectual disguise. In the first instance we changed clothes; and as we were pretty nearly of the same height, and he was but little stouter than I—both of us being of slender figure—his garments fitted me well enough. The articles he had brought with him consisted of a false beard, moustache, and whiskers: for of the two former my countenance was deficient, and of the last mentioned—namely, the whiskers—I had but little. Those succedaneous articles were most admirably contrived: they had a perfectly natural appearance, so great was the artistic skill wherewith they were fashioned. Lamotte himself affixed them to my face by means of gum which he had brought with him in a small phial; and in less than half-an-hour the metamorphosis was complete.

Now came the dangerous part of the ordeal: but ere issuing from the chamber, I could not help asking the turnkey how he meant to act in order to save himself from getting into serious trouble, as it must inevitably be discovered that he had connived at my escape.

"If you get clear off," answered the turnkey, "as I hope and trust you will—I shall not be long ere I likewise show this place a clean pair of heels. I shall get into Belgium or Germany—perhaps over to England—without delay; and it will be a long, long time before I honour France with my presence again."

From these words I comprehended full well that the man was very heavily bribed for the part he was performing—and that the bribe, indeed, must be of a sufficient amount to indemnify him fully for the loss of an excellent situation. I shook hands with Lamotte, who was to remain a captive in my stead: the turnkey opened the door—and we issued forth together. The stone passage was threaded—the door at the extremity gave me egress—and I began descending the stairs, the turnkey following at a little distance. As I glanced back over my shoulder, I saw a certain degree of agitation depicted on the man's countenance: but he made me a rapid sign to proceed. My heart fluttered: and yet I felt confident that my countenance—or rather as much as could be seen of it from amidst the artistic patches of hair—betrayed not the emotion which I experienced inwardly.

The stairs were descended; and I entered the great hall, or vestibule, in the midst of which was the stone table with the writing materials upon it. The turnkey, who had now nothing more to do in respect to my escape, had satisfied himself that no one perceived me descending from the compartment of the prisoners *au secret*; and he turned away towards the farther extremity of the hall. Imitating, as well as I was able, Lamotte's air and gait—and negligently swinging a cane which he had brought with him, but which had been transferred to me—I advanced towards the great iron gates. This was the moment to be dreaded. If the turnkey on duty there, retained a too perfect recollection of my own profile from the view which he had of it on the day I was brought thither five

weeks back—or if he had particularly regarded Lamotte's features when he ere now entered—or if he had any other cause to suspect the proceeding, all would be over. I confess that my suspense was poignant to a degree,—not so much on my own account, as because I was now aware of all the tremendous interests which depended upon my escape. Lives and liberties were hanging by a thread which the faintest breath of suspicion on the part of this one turnkey would in a moment snap asunder!

I advanced up to the gate; and with an air as if perfectly at my ease, I put my hand into my pocket and drew forth a five-franc piece. I saw that the turnkey who had come forth from the little lodge by the side of the gate, was regarding me attentively: I purposely dropped the coin, so that as it fell upon the pavement, he might behold the liberal amount of the fee that was destined to pass into his own hand. But as I stooped to pick it up, I heard not, as I hoped, the key turning in the lock: for I had fancied that the sight of the five-franc piece would inspire him with most courteous alacrity.

"You forgot, monsieur," he said, as a matter of course addressing me in French, "to write your name in the book as you entered."

I thought all was lost: for if I gave him an answer, he would at once perceive by my accent that I was not a Frenchman; and if I gave him none at all, my silence would seem equally suspicious. Fortunately he waited not for any reply, but at once led the way into his lodge, where he opened the "visitors' book," and handed me a pen.

"Now," I thought to myself, "if he asks me who is the prisoner that I came to visit, I shall betray myself:"—for by an unaccountable oversight, or else through ignorance of the forms of the prison, Lamotte had forgotten to state that I should have to go through this ordeal—while the other turnkey had no doubt fancied that Lamotte's signature was duly inscribed on his entrance. However, I wrote the name of Lamotte in as Frenchified a hand as I could assume, the turnkey indicating the place with his finger; and then pointing to another column in the soiled and dog-eared book, he said, "The name of the prisoner whom you came to see?"

Like an inspiration from heaven did a thought flash to my mind: and I at once wrote down the name of Dorchester.

The turnkey was perfectly satisfied; and preceding me to the gate, he thrust the key into the lock. I slipped the five-franc piece into his hand—the wicket opened—he lifted his hat to make me a polite bow—I stepped forth and was outside the prison.

## CHAPTER LXXIX.

### THE CHAMBER OF PEERS.

It would be impossible to describe the thrilling sensation of mingled joy and wonderment which springing from my heart, galvanised my entire frame as I thus found myself at liberty. I could scarcely believe it: it appeared something infinitely too good to be true—too marvellous to

be real. The fresh air seemed to intoxicate me: the sense of liberty was enebriating, like the effect of strong wine suddenly taken down the throat at a draught. I remember that my first impulse was to run madly away from the prison-gate: but fortunately I checked it at the very moment of its inception; and I continued to maintain a careless lounging air as I passed the sentinel on the quay. I had my instructions—I thoroughly comprehended them—and turning into the nearest street, I found, as I had been led to expect, a hackney-coach waiting. The driver was on his box—some one was seated inside—but as I approached the door, it was immediately thrown open. I sprang in—the door closed quickly again—and the hackney-coach drove off.

My hand was now warmly grasped by the tall stout gentleman who had been my second in the duel with Lamotte; and he congratulated me with perfect exultation on the success of the stratagem.

"We shall be only just in time," he added; "for the prisoners are to be had up for sentence at one o'clock, and it is close upon that hour already."

"And what think you will be the result?" I inquired, with no inconsiderable anxiety.

"Let us hope for the best," responded my companion, who did not now exhibit that cool indifference and indolent *nonchalance* which he had shown on the occasion when he was conducting me to the spot where the duel was to be fought.

"And am I to appear in this disguise?" I asked, raising my hand to my face—thereby indicating the false hair that was upon it.

"Only until the very moment you are about to enter the Chamber," was the Frenchman's answer: "then you can tear it all off—and if a few marks of gum remain upon your countenance, it will be no great matter. But in passing through the throng of *gendarmes* that there will be about the place, it is expedient to preserve your disguise lest they should recognise you."

The hackney-coach pursued its way to the Palace of the Luxembourg, which contained the hall where the Peers of France assembled; and it was this same Chamber of Peers which constituted the tribunal that had tried the prisoners accused of high treason. The vehicle stopped at the gate of the Luxembourg—my companion and I alighted—we traversed the court, which was thronged with persons of all grades and classes, who were waiting for intelligence of the sentences about to be pronounced upon the prisoners: for the trial, as the reader may suppose, had produced an immense excitement,—and all the more so inasmuch as the youthful son and heir of the Duke de Paulin, as well as the young and beautiful Eugenie Delacour, were amongst those who were now in the presence of that august tribunal to receive judgment. My companion and I had some little difficulty in making our way through the crowd: but at length we reached the main entrance of the palace. On the steps, and beneath the portico, there were numerous *gendarmes*: my heart palpitated violently—but we experienced no molestation. We entered the hall, where there were more *gendarmes*; and these were conversing with ushers, messengers, and other officials.

"Your tickets, gentlemen?" said one of these.

My companion produced two cards; and we were told to pass on. We ascended the magnificent marble staircase, where there was an array of soldiers on each side, ready to present arms to every one who came in a Peer's uniform. On gaining the summit of that staircase we passed through two or three rooms; and on reaching a small ante-chamber, which happened to be unoccupied, my companion said, "You may now divest yourself of these:"—and he indicated the false beard, whiskers, and moustache.

I speedily followed his counsel; and as there were conveniences for ablution in a corner of this ante-chamber, I hastily dipped a towel in water and applied it to my face: for the gum, now that the false hair was torn off, produced a most uncomfortable sensation.

"Come!" said my friend: and we issued from the ante-chamber.

Emerging into a passage, my companion was about to draw aside a large heavy red curtain with a gold fringe, which covered a doorway—when a *gendarme* abruptly made his appearance; and in a moment I recognised him to be one of those who had removed me from the Prefecture to the Conciergerie. I saw too that the recognition was mutual: for the man literally staggered back in amazement. I lost not however my presence of mind: for never was it more wanted!

"What means this?" demanded the police-official, recovering his own self-possession almost as speedily as I had regained mine: and he seized me by the arm.

"He is wanted here," said my companion: "or else how do you think that he could be in this place?"

"True!" said the *gendarme*: and at the same instant my name was released from his gripe.

My companion pushed me forward—the curtain was drawn back—a door covered with red cloth, rolled noiselessly on its hinges—and I found myself in the Chamber of Peers.

It was a large semicircular hall, handsomely fitted up. In the middle of the line cutting off the semicircle, was an elevated platform richly carpeted, and reached by a flight of steps on either side. In an arm-chair on this platform, the Chancellor of France was seated in his robes at a desk: immediately in front of him, but a little lower than the desk, was the tribune from which the Peers were accustomed to speak. The benches rose amphitheatrically and in semicircles from the front of this tribune, towards the farther extremity. The front bench was occupied by about thirty prisoners, being those who were arrested on the memorable night at the meeting-place,—the remaining persons who were present on that occasion, having contrived to effect their escape in the confusion created by the desperate scuffling in the midst of which, be it recollected, I had been borne away. And amongst these prisoners my glance at once singled out Eugenie Delacour—and the next moment the Marquis de Paulin: for they were seated together. All the other benches were occupied by the Peers in their uniforms; and the galleries were thronged with spectators—most of them by their appearance pertaining to the higher order of society. I must add that in the small open space between the front of the tribune and

the seat occupied by the prisoners, a long table had been temporarily placed; and this was for the accommodation of the counsel engaged in behalf of the accused. The door by which my companion and myself had just entered, opened close by the presidential seat; and as there was a throng of ushers, *gendarmes*, and other officials immediately inside, we became for the first few moments mingled amongst them, so that we were not at once perceived by any of the prisoners.

At the instant we thus entered, the barrister whom the Duke de Paulin had engaged for the defence of his son, was addressing the President; and as he spoke in a clear, deliberate, measured manner, I caught and perfectly comprehended what he was saying.

"I object to sentence being pronounced on my client," were the words thus caught, "because I repeat what I urged on a former occasion—that he has not received a fair trial. A witness of most material consequence was spirited away—a young Englishman, who, though himself implicated in the general charge, could have thrown such light on the foul proceedings of the spy Cresson, that the law-officers of the Crown would never have dared sustain a prosecution on the testimony of the government's dastard hireling."

"I cannot permit you," interrupted the President, "thus to attack the witness Cresson, who denied upon oath the imputation of having with his own hands conveyed the arms and ammunition to the place of meeting."

"Remain here one moment," said my companion to me in a hurried whisper: and leaving me amidst the throng just within the red door, he advanced towards the table and spoke a few words in a low tone to the barrister.

"Monsieur le President," the legal gentleman almost immediately went on to say, "I have now the best possible reason in the world for objecting to sentence being pronounced upon my client,—a reason, too, which every other counsel at this table will with equal justice advance on behalf of their own clients. And the reason is, Monsieur le President, that the missing Englishman must be produced—Joseph Wilmot must stand forward to give his testimony. The law officers of the Crown have not chosen to include his name in the indictment—he is therefore eligible as a witness—and I summon him—he will stand forward—he is here!"

No pen can describe the immensity of the sensation which suddenly prevailed within the hall of the Luxembourg, as the barrister, with his fine sonorous voice swelling exultingly as he went on, gave utterance to those last words. At the same moment, too, I stood forward from amidst the group at the door: I advanced to the table—and all in an instant many phases of interest were presented to my vision. I saw the quick start which galvanised all the prisoners—I beheld the rapid looks of joy and mutual congratulation which were exchanged by Eugenie and Theobald—I observed, as my eyes swept round, the astonishment which seized upon the Chancellor of France—I observed also the utter discomfiture which smote the quailing Cresson, who was seated on a bench just beneath the tribune. As for my own feelings, they were as completely beyond description as the general sensation itself was. The Peers were for



the most part leaning forward in their seats to catch a glimpse of me: others were standing up, having thus started to their feet;—and a glance round the galleries, showed me that *there* the sensation was not less. All in a moment I had become the focus for countless regards; and yet I felt not confused—there was within me a sense of proud heroism in the consciousness of coming boldly forward to perform a sacred duty.

“You must examine your witness,” said the President, thus addressing himself to the barrister after more than a minute’s pause: and when he had thus spoken, so profound a silence pervaded the hall, that a pin might have been heard to drop.

“I will examine the witness through an interpreter, Monsieur le President,” said the barrister: “for though I believe he is tolerably well acquainted with the French language,—yet in so serious a matter, it will be preferable that he should not trust to idioms and forms of speech less familiar to him than those of his native tongue.”

An interpreter was promptly found, and was duly sworn to translate my evidence faithfully. My examination then commenced; and I explained, through the interpreter, how I had visited the gunsmith’s shop by the Duke de Paulin’s order—how I had seen Cresson speaking to the *gendarme*, and had heard him utter the phrase, “It is for to-night”—how he had repeated the same words to the gunsmith himself—how he had received a large parcel, which was evidently of no inconsiderable weight—how he had paid a thousand francs (£40) for the same—how I had recognised him again in the evening at the secret meeting—how at the Prefecture I had examined the pistols and the powder-flasks alleged to have been found at that meeting, and how I discovered that they bore the name of the very gunsmith of whom I had been speaking. At the conclusion of my evidence—and indeed at several points of it—there was a strong sensation amongst the spectators in the galleries, as if they were indignant at the means thus adopted by the government, through the aid of an execrable hireling, to make out capital charges against a number of individuals. But that sensation was far stronger amongst the prisoners themselves; and the President of the Chamber appeared to be so dispirited by the turn given to the proceedings, that he did not even venture to utter a syllable in suppression of those evidences of strong feeling.

The barrister engaged on behalf of the Marquis de Paulin, continued to question me; and now it was to elicit from my lips how I had been spirited suddenly away from the Prefecture, and kept *au secret* at the Conciergerie until within the last two hours;—and when I had concluded, he said with a significant smile, “We will not ask you how you escaped: it is sufficient for our purpose that you are here.”

A Peer now rose in his place, and said, “I demand, Monsieur le President, that the Chamber be put in a position to re-consider its decision of ‘guilty of high treason’ against the prisoners.”

As my eyes fell upon that Peer, I observed that he was the Field-Marshal, the Duchess de Paulin’s father. Scarcely had he resumed his seat, or the President had time to utter a word, when the red door by which I had entered, again opened;

and the Duke de Paulin made his appearance, accompanied by the gunsmith of the Rue de la Paix. I should observe that the Duke was not a Peer of France: for the members of the Chamber of Peers in Louis-Philippe’s time sat not by virtue of hereditary right, nor by the fact of possessing titles—but were created by the King himself. Though the Duke de Paulin was not therefore a Peer, yet every one present knew him; and his sudden appearance renewed the sensation which my testimony had previously occasioned. The rumour had already spread outside the walls that an important witness, having escaped from the Conciergerie, was giving his evidence; and the Duke de Paulin, having just heard the same rumour, was at no loss to conjecture who the escaped prisoner was: and he therefore testified no astonishment on beholding me. But if he displayed not surprise, his countenance on the other hand evidenced hope and satisfaction; and he hastened to confer for a few minutes with the barrister. During this interval I observed that Cresson—who had hitherto been sitting with his face bent downward, as if in mingled shame and gloomy sullenness—was taking advantage of the interest excited by the Duke de Paulin’s presence to steal towards a door on the other side of the tribune. To this fact I hastily directed the attention of the barrister,—who accordingly rose up, and addressing the Chancellor, said, “Monsieur le President, I demand that the government witness Cresson be detained; as I shall be enabled to prove incontestably—even if it be not already done—that he has perjured himself.”

The President was compelled to order a *gendarme* to keep his eye on Cresson: but the presiding functionary issued the mandate with a very bad grace: he was evidently uneasy, as well as half bewildered—he felt the painfulness of his position—and he now occupied his seat without dignity either personal or moral.

“Monsieur le President,” continued the barrister, “you will perhaps recollect that in my speech for the defence of my client on the occasion of the trial a few days back, I stated that not only the young Englishman who is now before us, had been disposed of by the government so as to prevent his testimony from being heard—but that the gunsmith likewise had been induced to secrete himself. I moreover stated that the Duke de Paulin had instituted the most rigorous search to discover the gunsmith. That search failed. But the gunsmith has no longer been able to reconcile it with his conscience to refrain from giving his testimony in a matter affecting the lives of so many of his fellow creatures. He has therefore voluntarily emerged from his place of concealment, and he repaired just now to the Duke de Paulin’s mansion. He is here—and I shall proceed to examine him.”

There was a renewed sensation at the close of the barrister’s speech; and the gunsmith having been sworn, deposed to the following effect:—

He had known Cresson for a considerable time. About three months back, Cresson had called and given him an order for a certain quantity of pistols and ammunition. Not thinking that Cresson was in a condition to pay ready money for the goods, the gunsmith hesitated: whereupon Cresson gave him to understand that he was secretly employed

by the government, and that it was intended to use the arms in a particular way the result of which would be the uprooting of the secret societies throughout France. The gunsmith declared that it was not so much the desire for gain which had induced him, on this representation, to undertake the order, as it was his wish to see a blow struck that would intimidate the secret conspirators and break up their organization. Cresson had told him that by the aid of an old woman who was charged with the duty of sweeping and cleansing the meeting-room, he should be enabled to enter the place before the members assembled on the particular night in question, and that he would take that opportunity of secreting his parcel of pistols and ammunition underneath the platform. The gunsmith farther deposed that he had been induced to keep out of the way since the arrest of the prisoners, in consequence of a message from the Prefect of Police; but that, as the barrister had already stated, his conscience would no longer permit him to remain absent or silent while human lives were trembling in the balance.

So soon as this deposition was made, the President exclaimed, "The Chamber will deliberate with closed doors!"

This was a signal for all strangers to withdraw. The crowds began to pour forth from the galleries—the prisoners were removed in the custody of *gendarmes*:—witnesses and barristers—every one indeed who was not a member of the Chamber of Peers, was compelled to retire. I should observe that no restraint was put upon me: although I had escaped from prison, no order was issued to take me into custody again: I was not even put under the *surveillance* of the *gendarmes*; and this circumstance appeared a good augury for the result of the proceedings, inasmuch as it was tolerably evident that the President of the Chamber dared not any farther outrage public opinion by a fresh measure of coercion and injustice. I accompanied the Duke de Paulin, the barrister, the gunsmith, and my tall French friend into the antechamber,—where I explained to the Duke the particulars of my escape. He himself was confident as to the result of the deliberation with closed doors—and all the more so because he knew that his father-in-law the Field-Marshal, who was a personage of considerable influence, would urge upon his brother Peers the necessity of completely revoking the verdict to which, as it appeared, an immense majority of them had come on the occasion of the trial.

In about half-an-hour the barrister engaged for the Marquis de Paulin, was sent for into the Chamber; and after a brief interval, all the other counsel employed for the prisoners, were summoned thither likewise. As I afterwards learnt, the President proposed to them a compromise with the view of saving the dignity of the Chamber and the honour of the Government as much as possible, and of avoiding any additional scandal in respect to the whole proceeding. It was proposed, on the one hand, that a full and complete acquittal should be pronounced in respect to all the prisoners, on the ground that the principal witness against them—namely, Cresson—had committed the foulest perjury; but that, on the other hand, the counsel for the prisoners should abstain from a criminal prosecution against this witness. Fur-

thermore it was proposed that no notice should be taken of my escape from prison; nor should any individuals who had connived or assisted thereat, be visited by law-proceedings:—while, on the other hand, the endeavour should be to hush up as much as possible all the circumstances regarding myself as well as the gunsmith, and such a complexion should be given to the turn which the proceedings had taken, that it should be made to appear before the world as if the detection of Cresson's perjury, by other and simpler means, had alone led to the acquittal of the prisoners. This much was stipulated for the purpose of rescuing the government from the odium which would attach to it if it were generally known that one witness was kept away by being placed *au secret*, and that means were adopted to procure the voluntary absence of another. Such was the basis of the proposals made to the barristers; and "in the interest of their clients they thought it better to accede to them: for if they pushed matters to an extreme, they would leave those clients open to a severe punishment on the second count in the indictment, which charged them with illegally meeting in secret—the first count being the one for high treason.

The result therefore was that the Chamber of Peers, revoking its former decision, pronounced a general verdict of acquittal; and with much form and ceremony the President ordered Cresson to be committed to gaol to take his trial for perjury. But though I never subsequently learnt how the man was disposed of, there can be little doubt he was promptly set at liberty, and his pockets being well lined with the government's money, he was either sent out of the country, or else ordered to take another name and establish his abode in some place remote from the metropolis. Lamotte, who had remained a captive in my stead, was restored to freedom: but whether the turnkey who connived at my escape, ran away from Paris—or whether finding that the storm so quickly blew over, he remained in the metropolis—I cannot say.

In respect to the closing act of the great drama in the Chamber of Peers, it was glossed over in the public newspapers in a manner perfectly agreeable to the wishes of the President—a circumstance which must not startle my English readers, when I inform them that the press was almost as completely at the mercy of Louis-Philippe as it has since been at that of Louis Napoleon. Thus, if any print had ventured to speak out too plainly on the subject, it would have been seized at its own office, as well as stopped in its passage through the post,—while such few numbers as might have already gotten into circulation, would have been bought up by the police. My name did not appear in a single newspaper; and I found that it had not been mentioned in the first instance when the journals published their accounts of the arrests at the secret meeting. The Marquis de Paulin's barrister, in his speech at the trial, had alluded to me merely as "a young Englishman, who being more or less implicated, was captured with the others, but who had been disposed of by the government with a view to the suppression of certain important evidence he was enabled to give." I subsequently found, too, that the reports in the English newspapers were exceedingly meagre, deficient, and incorrect,—which however was not to



be wondered at, when it is considered that the Parisian correspondents of the London journals relied upon French newspapers for their information with regard to the case. I have been thus careful—though perhaps somewhat wearisome and prolix—in noting all these facts, in order to show how it was that my name did not once transpire in connexion with the entire transactions, through the medium of either French or British prints; and thus those who knew me in England, remained in total ignorance of the strange and eventful ordeal through which I had passed.

## CHAPTER LXXX.

### THE LOVERS.

It may be easily supposed that I received the cordial thanks of the released prisoners generally

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—but of the Marquis de Paulin and Eugénie Delacour especially—for the important service I rendered them on effecting my escape. On returning to the mansion, I likewise received the felicitations of all my fellow-servants there; and the Duke de Paulin, after lecturing me on having involved myself in the affairs of his son and Mademoiselle Delacour, conjured me to be more cautious for the future. Thus, so far as I was concerned, I soon relapsed into my former routine of existence,—with this difference perhaps, that the young Marquis de Paulin took every opportunity not merely of demonstrating a kind feeling, but likewise one of friendship. Thus, whenever we fell in each other's way, and found ourselves alone together, he conversed with me on past occurrences, as well as upon the political principles which he had imbibed at the meeting, and to which he clung with all the fervour of his enthusiastic disposition.

Occasionally, too, the Marquis spoke to me of

Mademoiselle Delacour—but always with a certain degree of sadness. He treated me with the fullest confidence, and made me aware of how the love-matter stood. It appeared that his father the Duke was somewhat inclined to yield to the youth's entreaties that he might be permitted to regard Eugenie as his affianced bride—but that his mother the Duchess was inexorable upon the subject. In this feeling she was supported by her father the Marshal, to whose opinion she always exhibited great deference, but especially so in a matter where her own sentiments were already so completely in the same channel. The Marshal and the Duchess regarded Theobald's infatuation for Eugenie Delacour as the cause of the terrific dilemma from which he had just escaped; and they conceived that he had brought down an almost indelible disgrace on the name which he bore, by having become compromised with secret conspirators. There was another grievous cause of offence on Theobald's part in the eyes of his mother and his grandfather, and this was his decisive refusal to pen a letter to the newspapers declaring that he only went to the meeting through curiosity, and that he entertained not the slightest sympathy with the opinions he there heard enunciated. Republican doctrines were odious and abominable in the estimation of the proud Duchess and of her monarchy-loving father; but Theobald was too high-minded to repudiate sentiments which he had learnt to admire, and which indeed he now cherished as fervently as did Mademoiselle Delacour herself.

All the same sentiments which influenced the veteran Marshal and the Duchess in the view which they took of Theobald's conduct, were likewise shared by the Duke de Paulin,—but with this material difference, that he was inclined to make allowances for his son, to regard his proceedings with forbearance and his position with sympathy. In a long conference, he questioned Theobald as to the real state of his heart in respect to Eugenie Delacour, and finding that the youth loved the beautiful maiden so fervently, the Duke was inclined to make some sacrifice of his own prejudices, opinions, and wishes in order to secure his son's happiness. Thus he supported Theobald's ardent wish that his engagement with Eugenie should be recognised, and that the old banker—her uncle—should be communicated with on the subject. But on the other hand, the Duchess de Paulin would not hear of such a proposition; and in this resolve she was firmly backed by her father, the Marshal, who in consequence of all these things, was now a daily visitor at the mansion. Scenes of some violence took place between the Duke on the one hand and his wife and her father on the other; and these scenes were of a character which could not escape the knowledge of the domestics. It was known, too, that the Duchess insisted upon Theobald being sent back to the German university for a year or two: but the Duke would not consent to this step. The Duke had, however, obtained a promise from his son, that he would not again seek to obtain clandestine interviews with Mademoiselle Delacour until something decisive was settled; and the youth—feeling grateful for his father's advocacy of his wishes, hopes, and aspirations—conceived himself bound to act in accordance with that sire's counsel.

The reader may well imagine how afflicting this state of things was to a youth of Theobald's generous heart, keen susceptibility, and high spirit. He loved his parents devotedly—and he beheld them at warfare on his account: he knew that scenes of violence frequently occurred between them—and he deeply, deeply felt that he was the cause. But what could he do? Renounce Eugenie Delacour? No—a sense of honour, a regard for her happiness, and the solemn conviction that his own was likewise bound up in their mutual love, forbade him from putting an end to those sad parental conflicts by a deed of voluntary perfidiousness and deliberate infidelity towards the charming and adored Eugenie. But still it was impossible that matters could continue in their present state: it was the demoralization of an entire family which was involved—the disruption of all the most sacred elements of cohesion—the rending asunder of all the most solemn bonds of union. Theobald's countenance grew visibly paler day by day—his look more profoundly sad and mournful. All the domestics pitied him sincerely—but no one more than myself. He frequently asked me if in my rambles I ever beheld Mademoiselle Delacour; and I noticed that every time I answered in the negative, the sadness of his countenance deepened; but he proffered no request upon the point,—though I perfectly well understood that in his heart he wished I were enabled to respond otherwise and deliver to him some tender message from the object of his love. But I did not think it becoming on my part to volunteer such an office; therefore I remained silent,—though it cut me to the very quick to behold that interesting youth thus pining away visibly.

One day—about six weeks after my emancipation from the Conciergerie—I was proceeding along the Boulevards, when I beheld Mademoiselle Eugenie issuing forth from a shop and about to enter a carriage which was waiting. She herself was pale—she looked ill—and there was a deep despondency in her air: but the moment she beheld me, her looks brightened up somewhat; and proffering her hand with a modest affability, she addressed me in a way which proved that after all that had occurred she regarded me as a friend, and that the conventional distinction of social grades and positions were in her estimation as naught under such circumstances.

“Dare I ask you concerning the Marquis?” she said hesitatingly and tremblingly, and yet with a world of mingled hope and suspense in her looks.

To have deceived her as to the youth's real condition would have been tantamount to letting her believe that he bore their separation with comparative indifference; and I felt that this would be even more cruel than to acquaint her with the actual truth. I therefore answered in a saddened tone, “The Marquis de Paulin is much changed, Mademoiselle: he pines in secret—aye, and more—his affliction is only too visible!”

The tears started into Eugenie's eyes, and the folds of her elegant shawl rose and fell with the silent but not the less convulsing sob which agitated her bosom. For a few moments she could not give utterance to a word; and then she said in a broken voice, “And I too have suffered deeply—deeply! I know that he has promised his

father not to see me for the present—I know too that the Duke is taking his part against the Duchess: for the Marquis penned me a last note to tell me all this at the time that he gave his sire the pledge demanded. Shall you tell him that you have seen me?" she asked hesitatingly and bashfully.

"Most certainly," I replied: for I knew what she wished my response to be.

"Tell him to hope—as I also hope!" resumed Mademoiselle Delacour. "We are both very, very young—I fear too young to think of marriage; and though it is hard to be separated, yet was this calamity to be foreseen. I fear, Mr. Wilmot, that there is now much trouble, even if not actual strife, within the walls of a mansion where all ought to be harmony and peace?"

"Alas, it is indeed so!" I responded: for I saw no necessity to deceive the young lady on any single point: indeed her own good sense would have naturally raised true conjectures in juxtaposition with any false representation on my part. "I regret to inform you, Mademoiselle, that it is a house divided in itself—a family split into two sections! and if this state of things lasts, the happiness of the whole will not be merely wrecked, but scandal will become busy with the name of Paulin."

"Then let Theobald act with energy!" at once exclaimed Eugenie, her countenance suddenly assuming an air which showed that she was resolved to use all her own energies to meet the emergency in a becoming manner. "I know the character of the Duchess, though I am not personally acquainted with her: she is inexorable—she will not yield at present—and she is doubtless supported by her father, who carries all the sternness and severity of military discipline into the private affairs of life. Let Theobald absent himself from home for a time—let him return to Germany: we are already separated—and if we be forbidden to meet, as well were it to find ourselves hundreds of miles as only a few streets asunder. Tell him, Mr. Wilmot, that his departure from home will be the only means of preventing a complete breach between his parents; and that is a catastrophe to be averted by almost any sacrifice. We must trust to circumstances—we must put our faith in heaven. I feel that we were born for each other: the same sentiment which inspires us both, must make him entertain the same idea; and therein will be his consolation—for he may rest assured that whatsoever Providence has willed, will be wrought out by its own inscrutable means. Yes—for although the experiences of life have hitherto led us to regard it as a tangled web, yet through the woof there runs the golden thread of hope: and why should we despair?"

I was deeply touched by the young lady's language, as sensible as it was pathetic; and in the counsel which she sought to convey through me to Theobald, I beheld additional evidences of that strength of mind and high intelligence which were united with so many feminine graces.

"Rest assured, Mademoiselle," I said, "that every word to which you have just been giving utterance, shall find its way to the ears of Monsieur le Marquis. Indeed, your advice is excellent; and coming from such a source, I have not the slightest doubt it will be followed."

"Would it be too much to ask you to make me acquainted with the result?" inquired Mademoiselle Delacour, again speaking timidly and hesitatingly.

"Most cheerfully will I do whatsoever I can to serve you, Mademoiselle," was my response.

"You may come to me at my uncle's house," she rejoined; "I am completely mistress there—and my kind-hearted old relative puts no restraint upon me."

I promised to fulfil the young lady's wishes in all things: she bade me farewell, and entered her carriage, which immediately drove off. But just as I turned away, I caught a glimpse of Adolphe hastening round a corner at a little distance. This individual, be it recollected, was principal valet to the Duchess; and I had the best possible reasons for knowing that he was her spy. The thought of again having a watch set upon my proceedings had long been absent from my mind: but now I felt convinced that I was watched anew—and most probably because the Duchess fancied that after I had been so mixed up in the love-affairs of her son, I should possibly be employed by him in delivering notes and messages to Mademoiselle Delacour. Therefore, on my return to the mansion after extending my ramble as far as I thought fit, I was quite prepared for a summons to the presence of the Duchess. Nor was I mistaken: for the moment I reached the gate, the porter gave me to understand that I was to proceed at once to the apartments of my noble mistress.

I obeyed the mandate—and found the Duchess alone. Her countenance was severe; and the instant I appeared in her presence, she said to me, "You are acting as a go-between on the part of my son and Mademoiselle Delacour."

"I am perfectly well aware, Madame la Duchesse," I responded, firmly though respectfully, "upon what ground this accusation is flung out against me. But I deny it: and were I not in the presence of a lady—and that lady to be the mistress of the household—I should add that I deny the charge with indignation."

"Insolent young man!" cried the Duchess, becoming crimson with rage. "But doubtless you are backed in your presumptuous conduct by your master the Duke. What airs are these you dare give yourself? The same person," she added with bitter sarcasm, "who bore letters from the Duke to his mistress, would scarcely scruple to play a similar part between others."

I felt that the Duchess had some reason for flinging this taunt at me; and I blushed in my turn—but it was not with rage, it was with shame; and at that instant I experienced a bitter annoyance with myself at having consented on that second occasion to bear the Duke's missive to Mademoiselle Ligny.

"Madame la Duchesse," I said, recovering my self-possession, "I implore you to believe me when I declare that since that memorable day in the Chamber of Peers, I have never seen Mademoiselle Delacour until this afternoon. My meeting with that young lady was purely accidental—"

"And it was accidental, I presume," added the Duchess, "that you remained in conversation with her for a quarter of an hour?"

"I see that Adolphe has been very precise in his information to you, Madame la Duchesse:—"

and I could not help thus making her aware that I knew her valet to be a spy upon my actions. "But inasmuch as Adolphe could not have acquainted you with the discourse which took place between Mademoiselle Delacour and myself,—I will repent it, Madame la Duchesse, if you permit me:"—for indeed I thought that so far from there being any necessity to make a secret of our discourse, it was one which did Eugenie so much honour that if anything could at all move the Duchess towards her, it would be the judicious counsel she had given.

There was perhaps an air of such sincerity in my countenance as I spoke, that the Duchess felt I was not in any way deceiving her; and she at once bade me proceed—nor did she utter another taunting expression.

"Mademoiselle Delacour," I continued, "begged me to recommend to Monsieur le Marquis that he should without delay absent himself from home and return to the German University."

The Duchess contemplated me earnestly as I thus spoke; and evidently believing me, she said, "And do you purpose to repeat that message to my son?"

"It assuredly *was* my purpose, Madame la Duchesse," I answered.

"Then go!" she immediately rejoined: and when, having bowed, I approached the door, she added, "Perhaps you will for once obey an instruction issued from *my* lips, and abstain from mentioning that I have questioned you upon these subjects?"

"I am not aware, Madame la Duchesse, that I have ever proved disobedient to any commands which you have been pleased to issue: and therefore I certainly shall not disobey on the present occasion."

Having thus spoken, I issued from the apartment, and proceeded in search of the young Marquis, whom I presently found in the garden. I communicated to him the particulars of my interview with Mademoiselle Delacour, and repeated all the advice which she had transmitted through me.

"Admirable Eugenie!" exclaimed the fervid Theobald, his countenance kindling with animation: "the slightest syllable from thy lips is a command for me! Yes, Joseph, it is indeed the only course to be pursued—and I will adopt it. My mother has already insisted that this very plan should be carried out; and if my father has hitherto strenuously opposed it, it was only because he thought it would be implacably coercive towards myself. But when I beseech his consent, he will yield it. Yes—it is the only course to be adopted," repeated the young Marquis in a musing strain. "Two or three years will soon pass away—and when my mother finds that my heart is as fondly devoted as ever to the adorable Eugenie, she may possibly relent. At all events my absence from home will put an end to these dreadful scenes on the part of my parents,—scenes which though now only intermittent, might in time take the form of a settled animosity. I will go to my father at once, and beseech his assent."

About a couple of hours afterwards, I met Amelie—the Duchess's principal lady's-maid—in the upper servants' hall; and as we happened to be alone there at the time, she hesitated not to speak confidentially.

"There has been another dreadful scene on the part of the Duke and Duchess," she said; "and I could not help overhearing it: I was in the inner room when it occurred. The Duke burst in and accused the Duchess of having been secretly persuading the Marquis to leave home: she indignantly denied it; and I am sure that she was right—for I know her manner so well. But the Duke was heated—and he persisted in the accusation—so that the Duchess at length told him plainly he was uttering a falsehood. He literally cried out with rage: and then the Duchess taunted him bitterly with his love-affair in respect to Mademoiselle Ligny—and she said something, too, about a terrible secret that she knew concerning him——"

"Ah! she said *that*?" I ejaculated, instantaneously smitten with the conviction that the Duchess had alluded to the affair of the ruined castle on the Rhine.

"Yes—she said *that*," responded Amelie, surveying me with astonishment. "But what do you know in respect to that secret?"

"Nothing, nothing, I can assure you," I hastily answered: "only it struck me as strange that the Duchess should so far forget herself as to make ungenerous allusion to any secret which may subsist between husband and wife."

"It *was* ungenerous," observed Amelie: "but I must tell you that the effect was instantaneous—for I heard the Duke implore the Duchess to remember that he was her husband. He then apologised for his violence towards her; and ultimately consented that the Marquis should leave the house to-morrow and return to Germany. He then quitted the room—and Madame la Duchesse almost immediately afterwards left it also."

"And thus," I said, "your presence in the adjacent chamber remained unsuspected?"

"Precisely so," rejoined Amelie; "and I assure you I was very glad—for I felt myself to be in an exceedingly awkward position: I would not have remained there a moment if there had been another means of egress."

"The proper plan, Amelie," I said, in a tone of remonstrance, "would have been for you to come forth the instant you heard that the Duke and Duchess were about to converse on private matters."

"Ah! it is very easy for you, Joseph," exclaimed Amelie, "to read me a lecture: but you should make allowances, and picture to yourself how I felt on hearing the Duke burst into the chamber in that violent manner. Indeed, he and his wife were deep in the midst of accusations and recriminations before I had time to collect my thoughts or recover from the dismay into which I was thrown."

At this moment other domestics entered the servants' hall, and our conversation terminated.

On the following morning the Marquis de Paulin sought me in my own chamber, and placing a letter in my hand, he said, "I am about to depart. At first my father would not hear of it: he would have it that I had been over-persuaded by my mother—and I could not convince him of the contrary: but after an interview with my mother, he seemed satisfied, and gave his assent to my departure. You told me that you had promised to communicate the result to Mademoiselle Delacour:



may I beseech you to place that letter in her hands? It is written with the full concurrence of my father—but on the express condition that during my absence from home, whether it be long or short, I will not again correspond with her. My father has exacted from me a pledge to this effect—and I will keep it. I feel more tranquil in my mind now that I am going away: I am fulfilling Eugenie's wish—and I implore heaven that my absence may give back peace and tranquillity beneath this roof. And now, Joseph, farewell. I entertain for you the warmest feelings of gratitude and friendship—”

But the youthful Marquis could not give utterance to another word—his voice was broken with sobs—he was profoundly affected. He wrung my hand—and burst from the room. The travelling-carriage was in readiness; and within a quarter of an hour he took his departure.

In the forenoon of that same day the Duchess de Paulin left the mansion—attended by Adolphe, Amelie, and Florine—to pay another visit to her father's country-seat. I was by no means sorry at this occurrence, inasmuch as I felt that I could acquit myself of my mission towards Mademoiselle Delacour without the fear of having my actions again espied. I proceeded to the residence of the banker; and on inquiring for Mademoiselle Delacour, was informed that she was exceedingly ill and confined to her bed. This announcement took me with surprise indeed, as it was only on the previous day that I had seen her; and though she had looked pale and desponding, yet it had not for a moment occurred to me that her health was so threatened. I learnt that on returning home after having been out shopping in the carriage, she was seized with fainting fits, and that for some hours her condition had inspired the utmost alarm. Ultimately, however, the physicians had declared that the crisis was over—she had passed a tolerably good night—and though still seriously ill, was no longer considered to be in danger.

I delivered the letter to one of Mademoiselle Delacour's maids, from whose lips I had received the above intelligence; and the girl requested me to wait for a few minutes. This I did: and when she re-appeared, she said, “Mademoiselle desires me to thank you for your attention; and she begs you not to communicate the circumstance of her illness, should you have occasion to write to the personage from whom that letter came.”

I gave an assurance to that effect; and as I slowly and mournfully retraced my way to the mansion, I pondered on the young lady's illness, which I had no difficulty in ascribing to the grief she must have experienced on learning from my lips on the preceding day how much Theobald felt his separation from her, and how he was distressed by the scenes which had been occurring at home.

## CHAPTER LXXXI.

### THE SPY ADOLPHE.

THE Duchess remained absent for about a fortnight,—during which interval the Duke was constantly away from home; and as he did not go out in his carriage nor on horseback, I could not help

thinking that his visits were paid to Mademoiselle Ligny.

One morning—it was the day before the return of the Duchess—the Duke went out somewhat earlier than usual—indeed immediately after breakfast; and I availed myself of the opportunity to take a long ramble round the Boulevards. As I was proceeding along—being now at a considerable distance from the ducal mansion—I observed a man who was apparently lounging in an idle way against the trunk of one of the huge trees on the Boulevards. But on recognising Adolphe, my attention was as a matter of course more closely directed to him; and I saw that beneath that lounging air, he was concealing his character of a spy; for his looks were riveted upon the gateway of a house on the opposite side of the immense thoroughfare. He was in plain clothes; and he did not immediately notice me. Had he been all the time in Paris during the absence of the Duchess? or had he only just come up from her father's country-seat, which was at no great distance from the French metropolis?

These were the questions which naturally occurred to me; and I could not help thinking that the man had been pursuing his execrable part of spy during the whole time of the Duchess de Paulin's absence. Or else wherefore should he be in plain clothes? wherefore in Paris at so early an hour—as it was scarcely eleven in the forenoon? And then too, methought that his accompanying his mistress when she departed from the mansion, was only a subterfuge in order to throw the Duke off his guard and render it all the more easy to watch his proceedings. For that Adolphe was really watching for the Duke now, was my positive conviction,—although if it were Mademoiselle Ligny's residence that was being thus espied, she must have changed her quarters since the last time I visited them.

I stood still on thus recognising Adolphe; and upwards of a minute elapsed before he noticed me. First I beheld him give a sudden start and move more completely behind the tree,—in doing which his looks encountered mine. I instinctively glanced across the Boulevard, and caught a glimpse of the Duke de Paulin's form as he entered the wicket of the gateway of the opposite house. Adolphe was seized with confusion: but quickly recovering himself, he said, “Ah, Joseph! you are out betimes.”

“And you likewise,” I observed, with a significant look. “I know what you are here for; and I should be ashamed of myself if I were you to play a detestable part which only aggravates the contentions between our master and mistress.”

“And how dare you lecture me?” exclaimed Adolphe, suddenly assuming a very fierce demeanour.

“Because you have espied *my* actions also,” I answered: “and I had made up my mind that if I ever caught you doing so again, I would inflict such chastisement as to make you remember it for a long, long time afterwards.”

“At all events, I am not watching you now,” returned Adolphe sullenly, and also with a visible quailing and shrinking—so that I could see he was a coward notwithstanding his recently assumed air of fierceness.

“I know you are not,” I said quietly; “and

that is the reason I did not knock you down the instant I beheld you lurking behind this tree in so suspicious a manner. Adolphe, I despise you!"—and with these words I was passing on my way.

"Joseph," he said, hastening after me, "you will not tell the Duke that you found me here?"

"I shall not condescend," I answered, "to give any promise in one way or another to such a despicable character as yourself. You are but one remove from that spy of the Government who so nearly swore away a number of human lives."

Adolphe gnashed his teeth with impotent rage; and he was about to say something more, when at that instant we both simultaneously caught sight of the Duke de Paulin advancing across the Boulevard. Adolphe was about to flee precipitately: but I seized him by the arm—for I thought it better he should be held fast on that spot to give an account of his conduct to his master.

"What are you doing in Paris, Adolphe?" demanded the Duke, confronting him with a stern countenance: but as the valet was so overwhelmed with confusion and affright that he could not answer the question, the Duke turned to me, saying, "Under what circumstances did you fall in with him, Joseph?"

"I was walking round the Boulevards, Monsieur le Duc, for my recreation—and I found Adolphe here."

"Here—and in plain clothes!" ejaculated the Duke: then for a few moments he seemed bewildered how to act: but suddenly making up his mind with a dignified firmness, he said, "Adolphe, although especially attached to Madame la Duchesse, yet you are after all in my service—for I am the master of the household. I therefore dismiss you—and I forbid you from ever again crossing the threshold of my mansion. Joseph, follow me."

Adolphe muttered something about "the Marshal and the Duchess being bound to take his part;" and he turned away. I followed the Duke, who walked slowly along the Boulevard; and when we were at a little distance from the spot where that scene had taken place, he stopped short and said, "Adolphe saw me enter that house opposite?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc," I answered.

"And methought from the manner of you both, as I caught sight of you from the window, that your conversation was somewhat excited?"

"I certainly reproached Adolphe," was my response, "for acting as a spy, Monsieur le Duc, upon your proceedings."

"You are a good young man!" he ejaculated: and waving his hand for me to proceed in one direction, he turned and slowly began to retrace his way towards the point whence we had just come.

As I proceeded along I thought to myself that fresh scenes of violence would ensue when the Duchess should return to the mansion, inasmuch as Adolphe was certain to lose no time in communicating to her the fact of his discharge. The reader must not however think that because I had so severely blamed Adolphe, I was taking the part of the Duke in his conduct with respect to Made-moiselle Ligny. Nothing of the sort! I con-

sidered the Duke to be deeply reprehensible: but at the same time I could not help despising the base wretch who by enacting the part of a spy, only contributed towards the rancorous animosity which the Duchess already experienced with regard to her husband. And here, before continuing the thread of my narrative, I must observe that my mind was fully made up to leave the Duke's service after a proper interval should have elapsed from the earliest day on which I might be in a position to give notice to that effect. Heaven knows that I was not unmindful of the immense obligation under which I lay towards him: but matters were becoming so unpleasantly complicated beneath his roof, and I was somehow or another so continuously finding myself mixed up therein, that I was resolved to escape at the earliest opportunity from those scenes of trouble and annoyance.

Before returning home after the occurrences on the Boulevards, I called at the old banker's residence—as indeed I had done three or four times during the past fortnight—to inquire after Made-moiselle Delacour. I learnt that though somewhat better, and progressing favourably, the young lady was nevertheless still confined to her chamber,—her illness having been a very serious one indeed.

In the afternoon of the following day the Duchess returned to the mansion, accompanied by Amelie and Florine: but Adolphe was not with the carriage. I happened to be in the court-yard when the Duchess alighted: I saw that her countenance was exceedingly pale, with traces of much recent agitation upon it. She did not speak a word to a soul—she looked neither to the right nor to the left—but entered the building and immediately repaired to her own private apartments. Shortly afterwards Florine came to inquire if the Duke were in: and she addressed herself to me. I informed her that he was not; and she desired me to intimate, the moment he entered, that the Duchess wished to see him. Florine then hurried away; and I saw by her manner that she was angry and agitated,—a mood for which I could very well account, inasmuch as she was engaged to the discarded Adolphe.

Shortly afterwards I met Amelie in one of the passages; and she said to me, "So Adolphe is discharged—and you were present when it took place? He came home to the Marshal's country-seat yesterday afternoon, and told the Duchess everything,—not omitting to state how you had threatened him. I overheard it all: for the Duchess bade him speak in the presence of myself and Florine. She was dreadfully excited,—declaring that there was no harm in her servants becoming acquainted with things that all the world must know in a very short time. I am afraid there will be a dreadful scene presently when the Duke returns."

"I am afraid so likewise," I remarked. "Has Adolphe been in Paris the whole time that you were at the Marshal's?"

"Pretty nearly," replied Amelie: "but it does not appear that he succeeded in dogging the Duke's steps until the day before yesterday; and then he traced him to the house where Made-moiselle Ligny is now lodging. He watched again yesterday morning,—little thinking, I dare say,



how he was destined to be discovered. The Duchess has however promised to do something for him: she dared not bring him back—and Florine is very wretched at being separated from her lover. And now, Joseph, I mean to give you a hint,—which is that the Duchess is dreadfully embittered against you. She considers it is entirely through you that Adolphe was detected by the Duke: and she will doubtless insist upon your discharge.”

“Madame la Duchesse,” I responded, “will thereby be only anticipating a resolve which I myself have formed: for I am determined, Amelie, not to remain longer than I can help beneath this roof.”

The good-natured Amelie was about to make some observation, when the bell of the Duchess's boudoir rang; and she was compelled to hasten away. I descended the stairs; and meeting the Duke in the hall, just as he happened to enter, I delivered the message entrusted to me by Florine. He turned away, I saw that a cloud gathered upon the countenance of my noble master: but he spoke not a word, and at once proceeded to his wife's apartments.

It was now about six o'clock in the evening; and feeling unwell and agitated after the exciting incidents of the day, as well as with the idea that a terrible scene was about to take place between two persons who at the altar had vowed to love and cherish each other,—I went out into the garden. It was now the month of August: the weather during the day had been oppressively sultry—but with the approach of evening a gentle breeze had sprung up, and it refreshed me. I walked for about an hour,—when I was joined by Amelie, who looked exceedingly pale and agitated: and she had evidently been weeping, for the tears were yet moist upon her cheeks.

“Oh, Joseph!” she said, in a voice that indicated feelings profoundly stirred, “it was just as I thought!—a terrible scene has taken place!”

She stopped and sobbed at the recollection of all she had heard and beheld, but after a little while she continued as follows:—

“Florine and I were with the Duchess when the Duke entered. His first words were to desire us both to leave the room: but the Duchess ordered us to stay—observing, in a bitter tone, that though Monsieur le Duc thought fit to dispose of the male dependants of her household according to his own will and pleasure, he dared not usurp the same right with regard to the females personally attached to her. Hereupon the Duke turned upon his heel, saying that he would visit Madame la Duchesse at a more suitable opportunity. Ah! Joseph, if you had seen the Duchess then!—it was like a tigress that she bounded towards the door—locked it—and retained the key in her hand. She then began overwhelming the Duke with reproaches,—accusing him of continuous infidelities towards her—justifying herself for employing whomsoever she chose to watch his actions—and vowing that unless he made her all possible amends, she would remove altogether to her father's dwelling. The Duke besought her to be calm and to hear him: the Duchess however desisted only from her reproaches, upbraids, and her threats, through sheer exhaustion. It was a very painful scene: I felt so agitated that I wept: but that hard-hearted

wretch Florine seemed to rejoice in the manner in which Madame la Duchesse treated her husband.”

“And what said the Duke?” I inquired; for I was somewhat curious to learn whether my own name was brought up on this occasion.

“The Duke was deeply afflicted,” continued Amelie: “he spoke nervously and entreatingly, and yet with a sufficient degree of calmness to contrast strikingly with the rage and violence into which the Duchess had worked herself up. He frankly admitted that he had visited Mademoiselle Ligny during his wife's absence: but he declared, with every appearance of solemnity, that it was a mere friendship which subsisted between himself and that lady. He denied the right of the Duchess to institute an espial upon his proceedings: he said that it would be beneath the dignity of a husband to make any pledges in respect to matters which had come to his wife's knowledge merely through that system of espial. He complained that her father had caused much mischief between them: but he wound up with the assurance that if mutual concessions were made, their happiness might yet be reconstructed. The Duchess indignantly demanded what concessions he sought at *her* hands? He answered that he required a stop to be put to the interference of the Marshal—a solemn pledge to be given that the spy system should cease—the recall of the young Marquis, and a more lenient view than had been hitherto taken of his love for Mademoiselle Delacour. The Duchess insisted that as a preliminary to all amicable negotiations, the Duke should pledge himself by oath to renounce his acquaintance with Mademoiselle Ligny—and that inasmuch as Adolphe was discharged on account of being obnoxious to the Duke, *you*, Joseph, should be likewise discharged as being obnoxious to herself. The Duke took your part,—declaring that you had in no way offended: and then the violence of the scene was renewed. In the midst of it, however, it suddenly assumed a singular phase. The Duchess, walking straight up to her husband, said peremptorily, and with an access of calmness—but a calmness that was terrible and ominous—‘One word in your ear!’—The Duke listened: the Duchess whispered for a few moments; and then the Duke, turning very pale, murmured in a hollow voice, ‘Ah! you threaten me with *that*?’—The Duchess retreated with an air of malignant triumph; and the Duke, after pacing the apartment in deep agitation for more than a minute, suddenly exclaimed, ‘I will think over it! This scene has already lasted too long: we have exposed ourselves too much: I beseech you, suffer me to retire.’—The Duchess tossed the key to Florine, bidding her unlock the door; and the Duke went forth.”

Here Amelie stopped; and I reflected on all she had just told me. Full well did I comprehend what it was that the Duchess had whispered in her husband's ears: there could be no doubt it was a terrible threat of exposure in respect to that *one* fatal episode in his life which had placed him so completely at the mercy of his imperious spouse. As for myself, I was determined that the stipulation insisted upon by the Duchess, should be as promptly complied with as the Duke might think fit: for I was prepared at an instant's notice to leave the mansion. Amelie and I conversed for a

few minutes longer upon all that had taken place; and I said to her ere parting, "If you can possibly find the opportunity, it would perhaps be as well to intimate to Florine that I intend to ask permission to leave the Duke's service without delay. Florine is sure to repeat it to the Duchess; and it may remove at least one barrier in the way of an amicable understanding between our unhappy master and mistress."

On separating from Amelie, I repaired to the Duke's apartments; and as I entered the room where I expected to find him, I saw that he was engaged in mixing the contents of two phials: but the moment I made my appearance, he threw his handkerchief over them, and somewhat impatiently demanded, "Well, Joseph, what is it now? Any new calamity to drive me to desperation?"—and he spoke with an exceeding bitterness.

"No, Monsieur le Duc—I sincerely hope not," was my response. "Pray do not think me ungrateful—I beseech you not to fancy for a moment that I have forgotten your generous conduct towards me: but circumstances compel me to request my dismissal."

"Ah! your dismissal?" ejaculated the Duke, as if smitten with an idea. "Has Amelie or Florine—?"

"I feel, Monsieur le Duc," I hastened to observe—so as to efface from his mind, if possible, the suspicion which I saw had entered it, to the effect that I had learnt some particulars of the evening scene, from the lips of one of the Duchess's maids,—“I feel that my presence beneath this roof, cannot be agreeable to Madame la Duchesse after the manner in which I yesterday morning treated Adolphe. Indeed, to speak more frankly still, I would rather go elsewhere——”

"But I was thinking of setting out on a journey to-morrow," interrupted the Duke; "and I purposed that you should accompany me. Listen, Joseph. You already know enough not to be surprised when I tell you that there are serious misunderstandings between the Duchess and myself. I have therefore resolved to absent myself for a time: I will go to an estate which I possess in the south of France—and I will leave it to mutual friends to effect a reconciliation between the Duchess and me. The Duchess will remain here: I do not attempt to blind my eyes to the fact that I have given her cause of serious vexation and annoyance: but it is useless for me to attempt pacific overtures while she is labouring under the influence of excited feelings. My temporary withdrawal from home, will therefore prove the best means of opening the path for conciliatory negotiations. Observe well what I tell you, Joseph! You are a young man of superior intelligence as well as of generous feelings: I have always been accustomed to treat you with more or less confidence—and therefore I do not mind giving you these friendly explanations now."

Nevertheless, I was somewhat astonished that the proud Duke de Paulin should address me as if I were an equal, and that he should thus openly touch upon such delicate family matters. I reflected for a few moments; and it occurred to me that I should be wrong under all circumstances—especially considering the debt of gratitude I owed the Duke—to persevere in demanding my dismissal, when on the morrow my departure from

the mansion in attendance upon him would relieve the Duchess of the annoyance of my presence beneath that roof. I therefore expressed my willingness to leave myself entirely at the Duke's disposal; and he appeared pleased at my decision.

"I do not wish it to be known prematurely," he continued, "that I am about to depart. My orders to that effect will not be issued until the last thing to-night, when the Duchess shall have retired to rest. The travelling-carriage will be ready at nine to-morrow morning. See, therefore, that you remain silent on the subject: for if it were to reach the ears of Madame la Duchesse, there would be a renewal of those distressing scenes previous to my departure. I shall entrust you with a letter in the morning, to be given to one of the Duchess's maids,—and which letter, addressed to my wife, will inform her of my motives in taking this decisive step. And now leave me."

On going forth from the Duke's presence, I ascended to my own chamber to pack up my clothes in readiness for the contemplated departure; and when I reflected on all that had just taken place, I could not help thinking that the Duke was about to take the very best possible step under existing circumstances. It was quite clear that animosity and bitterness on the part of the husband and wife had reached that point when it was no longer expedient for them to dwell beneath the same roof—and that during a period of temporary severance, the interposition of judicious friends could alone restore friendship and happiness between them. I was engaged in my own room until close upon ten o'clock,—by which time supper was over in the servants' hall. I descended for the purpose of obtaining some little refreshment; and at about half-past ten, was ascending again by the servants' staircase to my own chamber, when I was rapidly passed in a corridor by a man who seemed anxious to avoid me. His plunge into the obscurity of that passage was so precipitate that I obtained but the merest glimpse of his form, and had not the slightest conception who he was. My first impulse was to follow him,—thinking it might be some evil-intentioned person who was concealing himself in the house for dishonest purposes: but then it occurred to me that this was scarcely probable, even if it were possible—as in order to have entered the interior of the mansion, he must first of all have come in by the gateway, where the porter would have been careful not to allow any stranger to penetrate farther, nor to cross the court-yard after dusk, unless accompanied by one of the valets. I therefore thought it useless to interfere—and ascended to my chamber. Going to bed at once, I soon forgot the little incident of which I have just spoken.

It now becomes necessary that I should remind the reader of certain particulars which I gave in an earlier chapter relative to the sleeping apartments of the Duke and Duchess de Paulin. The mansion was built in the form of a square, with a court-yard in the centre. The outer line of building with the gateway, looked upon the street: the inner line had its frontage looking upon the garden in the rear of the premises. It was on the ground-floor of this inner line that the



apartments alluded to were situated,—the windows looking upon the garden, and having their Venetian blinds always closed at night-time. The two suites of apartments were separated by a passage or vestibule,—one entrance thereto being from the great hall and consisting of folding-doors—another entrance being a single door opening on the garden. The reader is requested to bear these details clearly in his mind.

I had retired to bed that night in a comparative state of tranquillity,—inasmuch as I was satisfied with the prospect of leaving Paris on the morrow, and thus getting away from the midst of those scenes of trouble and annoyance in which I had been recently more or less mixed up. I soon fell asleep, and slumbered on tranquilly for several hours,—when I was awakened by something unusual—though what it was, I could not for the first few moments conjecture. That I had however been startled, was beyond doubt: my own

sensations told me that such was the case; for I was trembling all over as if under the influence of a vague and unknown terror. Then I heard a bell ringing violently; and I recognised it to be the one communicating with the bed-chamber of the Duchess—and it hung in the room occupied by Amelie, and which was immediately opposite to my own. I sprang out of bed with the conviction that something was wrong,—my first impression however being that the Duchess was taken ill. It was daylight—and a glance at my watch which lay upon the table, showed me that it was a quarter past five o'clock. The bell had now ceased ringing by the time I had huddled on a few clothes; and I rushed down stairs. At the instant I descended into the great hall, I was horrified on hearing piercing shrieks thrilling through all the lower part of the building; and they seemed to come from the apartments of the Duchess. Amelie, half-dressed, was endeavouring

to open the folding-doors: but they were fastened inside. She was pale as death, and trembling violently: she flung a glance of horror and alarm upon me,—gasping forth, “Good heavens, Joseph! what can be the matter?”

“The Duchess must be in a fit!” I exclaimed: and I threw myself with all my force against the folding-doors in the hope of bursting them open. But my endeavour was vain: the piercing cries still vibrated from inside—and then they were interrupted by long heavy groans.

“No, it is not a fit!” I ejaculated, wild horror in my brain: “the Duchess is being murdered! Ah!” I ejaculated, as a thought struck me: “let us get in by the garden-entrance!”

Having thus spoken, I flew to the hall-door opening into the court-yard; in half-a-dozen seconds I unlocked and unbolted it; and we passed round to a passage leading along the extremity of the building into the garden,—Amelie closely following. On reaching the door communicating with the vestibule whence the respective suites of the ducal apartments led off on either side, I tried that door but found it locked. The cries had ceased: but as Amelie and I rushed to the windows of the Duchess’s bed-chamber, we heard the heavy groans mingled with deep convulsing sighs, issuing from within. I endeavoured to force open the Venetian blinds—but in this likewise failed. Meantime Amelie was wringing her hands and giving vent to the most piteous lamentations. As for myself, I was in almost an equal state of dread excitement. I glanced up at the Venetian blinds with the thought of climbing upon them in such a way that by my own weight I might tear them down: but instead of the bars slanting down towards the floor of the chamber inside, they slanted up towards the ceiling,—thus totally precluding the possibility of peeping through them to see what was passing in the room, and also preventing me from obtaining a footing to climb up them. But it was while flinging that glance upward, that I was struck by the appearance of a column of smoke ascending from one of the chimneys belonging to that end of the line of building in which the Duke’s own apartments were situate.

Scarcely had I directed Amelie’s attention to this smoke, when we were joined in the garden by the Duke’s principal valet and three or four other domestics. The valet bade me clamour at the Duke’s shutters, while he and the rest endeavoured to force the door. I sped to execute the instructions thus given; and dashed my clenched fists violently against the Venetian blinds of the Duke’s bed-chamber,—at the same time calling out to him to rise, for that something terrible was happening to the Duchess. For nearly a minute no answer was returned;—and a minute was a perfect age under circumstances so horrible as these! At length I thrust my hand between the bars of the blinds, and violently broke a pane of glass. Then, in a few seconds, the window-sash was thrown up inside; and the Duke’s voice exclaimed, “Thieves! Begone!—or by heaven, I will fire!”

“Oh, Monsieur le Duc!” I ejaculated: “for God’s sake open the door!”

“What, Joseph! is that you?” he cried, in a tone of amazement.

“Yes, Monsieur le Duc! Something dreadful has happened to the Duchess!”

“To the Duchess? Good heaven! I will open the door!”

Meanwhile the valet and two footmen had been hurling themselves against that door with all their might; and just at the very instant that the Duke declared his intention of hastening to open it, the servants burst it in. I sped to rejoin them; and now the horrified party was swollen by five or six other domestics, who also being alarmed, had come round to see what was the matter. We entered the vestibule—we rushed into the ante-chamber of the Duchess’s suite of apartments—we traversed the dressing-room—we burst into the bed-chamber. And, heavens! what an appalling sight met our view!—The Duchess was murdered!

## CHAPTER LXXXII.

### THE MURDER.

STRETCHED upon the carpet near the couch, lay the unfortunate Duchess in her night-dress, which was covered with blood. Her hair too was all clotted with gore—her forehead appeared to be smashed in—the blood was streaming from numberless stabs in her bosom, her shoulders, and her arms—and in one of these wounds the blade of a broken poniard was sticking. A pistol lay near her in a pool of blood upon the carpet: the bell-ropes, torn down from that part of the wall against which the bed stood, was likewise upon the floor; and there were marks of bloody hands upon the draperies of the couch, the coverlid and sheets, the walls and the furniture. Tables and chairs were overturned; and the appearance of the chamber indicated that the death-struggle must have been as desperate as it was frightful. But as if nothing should be wanting to complete the ghastly horror of the scene, the unfortunate Duchess herself still lived—the spark of existence was not extinct within her—her eyes were open, and staring wildly, though with the glaze of death coming rapidly over them—and her bleeding bosom beat with subdued sighs as a gasping, gurgling sound came from the throat. She was unable to speak; and my conviction is that though she stared so wildly, yet that she was unconscious of all that was passing around.

We were now altogether about a dozen in the chamber; and four or five—some males and other females—hastened to raise the bleeding form of the Duchess and place it upon the bed. At first I saw scarcely anything distinctly, except the one hideous spectacle—that gore-stained, wounded shape from which life was rapidly ebbing away. But all in a moment I became aware that Adolphe the discarded valet was present amongst us; and he was one of those who were placing the Duchess upon the couch. I had not however time to bestow a second thought upon the circumstance; for a figure, enveloped in a dressing-gown, rushed through the crowd of domestics—and flinging himself upon the bleeding, mangled form of the Duchess, gave vent to lamentations which thrilled through every brain. This was the Duke de Paulin.

There were now numerous and quickly uttered ejaculations, that surgeons should be sent for; and

other voices added in the same exclamatory manner, "The police likewise!"

Some of the male domestics set off to act upon these suggestions; and amongst those who remained, it now became noticed that Adolphe was present. His name being uttered in tones of surprise, the Duke suddenly sprang up from the form over which he had thrown himself; and seizing Adolphe by the collar, he cried in a tone expressive of mingled rage and affliction, "Villain, you have murdered my wife!"

Adolphe turned pale as death, and staggered backward. He endeavoured to speak—but could not give utterance to a single word. All eyes were riveted with unmistakable suspicion upon him. The whole of us, with the exception of himself, were only half-dressed—barely indeed so much as half: for each had evidently huddled on that mere sufficiency of apparel which decency demanded,—whereas Adolphe was completely dressed as if he had not been in bed the whole night.

"Ah!" I suddenly ejaculated: "it must have been he whom I saw!"

This exclamation on my part drew all attention upon myself; and I quickly explained how on ascending to my chamber between ten and eleven on the preceding evening, I had beheld the form of a man gliding stealthily past me in the obscurity of the passage.

"And here is his hat," ejaculated one of the footmen, picking it up from under the bed.

"Away with him!" cried the Duke: "keep him in security till the police come! The villain—the miscreant! he has murdered my poor wife!"

And Adolphe, overwhelmed by the dreadful accusation—still vainly gasping to give utterance to some words, which however stuck in his throat—was forcibly hurried from the chamber, amidst the execrations of those present.

This scene with Adolphe was all the work of a minute: indeed the entire incidents which I have been describing, occupied merely seconds, however long they have taken me to record and may take the reader to peruse them. And the characteristics of the scene were hurry, excitement, confusion, dismay, and horror. While the Duke was charging Adolphe with the deed, Amelie and two other maids were by the side of the couch on which the unfortunate Duchess lay. Amelie endeavoured to pour water down her throat, in the hope of reviving her: but the death-rattle was already there; and within a minute after Adolphe was hurried from the room, the murdered victim ceased to exist.

The Duke de Paulin now himself appeared to be so crushed and overwhelmed with the horrible calamity which had overtaken him, that he sank upon a chair gazing vacantly around. I besought him to remove from the presence of the horrible scene; and he suffered me to lead him into the adjacent apartment, which was the dressing-room of the deceased Duchess. There I gave him a glass of water; and when he had imbibed a small portion, he recovered somewhat,—murmuring, "O Joseph, how dreadful! how shocking! What will my dear Theobald think?—and oh, my poor children!"

Then he covered his face with his hands; and resting his elbows upon his knees, remained in

that attitude for upwards of a minute,—completely motionless. No tear glided between his fingers—no sob convulsed his breast—no sigh or murmur issued from his lips; and methought it was an affliction too profound—too closely allied to despair, to find for itself a vent by such issues as those. All of a sudden the Duke started up; and advancing hurriedly towards his own suite of apartments, entered them, closing the door of the antechamber behind him. I dared not follow: it seemed to me that he wished to be alone to give way to that terrible affliction which was also too sacred to be intruded upon.

And now medical men and police-officers arrived at the mansion; and first of all, the surgeons proceeded alone to the chamber where the murder had taken place, and whence all who had remained with the corpse had been ordered by the intendant of the household to go forth, so that the room might be left undisturbed until the authorities should have instituted the usual inquiry. The medical men found life to be extinct; and thus the chamber was quickly thrown open for the entrance of the commissary of police and a couple of his functionaries. In the meantime two other *gendarmes* had relieved the footmen who were stationed at the door of the apartment to which Adolphe had been consigned, and where he was left by himself. The domestics separated to their respective chambers to apparel themselves; and as we passed each other, it was in silence—but with mingled horror and distress visibly depicted upon the countenances of us all.

In my own mind I had no doubt that Adolphe must have been the assassin; and from the circumstance of his so suddenly appearing amongst us when we first entered into the chamber of the unfortunate Duchess, as well as from the spot where his hat was found, I conceived it equally certain that he must have remained hidden under the bed of his intended victim until he considered it a suitable time, or else plucked up the necessary courage, to perpetrate the hideous deed. And what could his motive have been? Methought that I read it easily enough—and that it was vengeance, allied perhaps with cupidity. I had never liked his morose, sinister, downcast look; and I knew that he must be greedy of gold—or else he would not have consented to play the despicable part of a hiring spy. Perhaps, I fancied to myself, he had calculated upon the accomplishment of his twofold crime of murder and plunder with far greater ease than it had been executed—that he had not foreseen the desperate struggle and the agonized pulling at the bell which had caused the alarm—but that he had hoped to get clear off with his booty ere the foul deed should be discovered. And as for the vindictive feeling which methought must have partially, if not mainly influenced him,—it appeared to me by no means difficult to comprehend it. He might have fancied that the Duchess, by not bringing him back to the mansion, had too indifferently suffered him to be sacrificed to the Duke's indignant wrath: perhaps too the unfortunate Duchess had failed to indemnify him in a pecuniary way to the extent of his expectations; and hence his vindictiveness. But alas! how fatally, I reflected to myself, were the Duke de Paulin's hopes of becoming reconciled to his wife,—how fatally were they destroyed!

and what must the unhappy nobleman's own thoughts now be at thus finding himself suddenly separated by death from that wife with whom he had last parted under such sad circumstances!

I was in the midst of all these mournful ideas, when a footman came hurriedly to my chamber, and stated that I must go down stairs at once to give my evidence before the commissary of police. I had just finished my toilet—and was naturally prepared, under the circumstances, for a summons of this sort. On descending, I found that the examination was taking place in the great dining-room. There, at the head of the table, sat the commissary of police, with writing materials before him. The Duke de Paulin, still in his dressing-gown, and looking ghastly pale, was seated near the commissary. Two *gendarmes* stood just within the door. Those were all the persons whom I found in the apartment.

The moment I entered, the commissary said to my noble master, "It will be necessary, Monsieur le Duc, for you to withdraw."

The nobleman gazed for a moment with visible astonishment upon the commissary—and then said, "Methinks, sir, that I have a deep interest—sad and terrible as it is—in the progress of this inquiry."

"It is true, Monsieur le Duc," answered the commissary: "nevertheless, painful as it may be for me to repeat my request that you will withdraw, it is absolutely necessary."

The Duke offered no further remonstrance—but slowly quitted the room, with looks bent down: and I sincerely pitied him—for his feelings were evidently harrowed to a frightful extent. As the door closed behind him, the commissary of police beckoned one of the *gendarmes* to draw near; and he whispered a few words to the officer,—who thereupon left the apartment.

The commissary of police asked me if I could speak French sufficiently well to comprehend him; and by my answer I showed that I had made such progress since being examined through the medium of an interpreter in the Chamber of Peers, that I was quite adequate to the task.

"Did the Duke de Paulin make any particular communication to you yesterday evening?" asked the magistrate.

"Yes, sir; he bade me prepare to accompany him on a journey this morning."

"State any other particulars in respect to that conversation."

I then recited word for word, as nearly as I could recollect, the discourse which the Duke had held towards me—and how he had spoken with frank confidence of the views and hopes he had entertained with regard to the results that a severance from home would bring about. The commissary then questioned me as to my having seen a form glide past me in the obscurity of the passage: but I was totally unable to say that it was the form of Adolphe whom I had thus seen. The commissary now bade me sit down,—observing that for the purposes of justice each successive witness must be kept under his own eye until the close of the investigation.

The next witness introduced was the Duke's principal valet; and he deposed to this effect:—

"When I attended upon Monsieur le Duc last evening at about ten o'clock, he ordered me to

pack up his trunks for a journey which he intended to undertake this morning. He likewise charged me to give instructions the last thing, to have the travelling-carriage ready at nine this morning—but to take care that his contemplated departure should be kept as secret as possible,—inasmuch as he dreaded another dispute with the Duchess ere he could get away from the house."

The commissary of police now questioned the valet as to the circumstances under which the tragedy was first discovered; and he likewise examined me upon that point. In the course of the explanations which I gave, the recollection flashed to my mind of that volume of smoke which I had seen ascending from a chimney belonging to the Duke's bed-room and the other apartments immediately above it. I had altogether forgotten this incident until now; and I mentioned it. The commissary beckoned the remaining *gendarme* towards him, and gave that functionary certain whispered instructions,—on receiving which he issued from the dining-room, and his place at the door was almost immediately taken by another police-officer.

Amelie was the next witness introduced; and she corroborated my statement and that of the valet in respect to the circumstances attending the discovery of the murder. She was followed by the groom, footman, and coachman, to whom the valet had issued the orders relative to the Duke's contemplated departure.

Scarcely had they given their testimony, when the *gendarme* who had been last sent out, returned to the room, and whispered for a few minutes with the commissary of police. He likewise produced a sealed letter, which the magistrate opened and read.

"You said, I think," remarked the commissary, turning towards me when he had finished the perusal of the letter, "that the Duke de Paulin spoke to you yesterday evening of a written communication he intended to make to the Duchess?"

"He did, sir," I responded; "and Monsieur le Duc informed me that he should entrust the letter in the morning to my hand, to be by me confided to one of the Duchess's maids, so that it might reach the Duchess immediately after our departure."

"Tell me," said the commissary, "is this letter worded in the spirit in which Monsieur le Duc so frankly and confidently spoke to you last evening?"

I took the letter and read it; and I could scarcely keep back my tears as I did so. It was penned in the most affectionate and contrite strain. Therein the Duke admitted that he had been culpable of proceedings on which the worst construction might be put: but he pledged his honour as a man and his soul as a Christian that there had never been anything actually criminal between himself and Mademoiselle Ligny—but that their friendship was Platonic, and that he had been all the more led to befriend her in a pecuniary sense because he regarded her as the victim of unfounded jealousy on the part of the Duchess. He went on to describe that she had lost her situation as governess in the family through this jealousy—that she had suffered seriously in health on account of the chagrin she experienced at the unjust



suspicious harboured against her; and the Duke furthermore stated that considering the little attentions he had shown Mademoiselle Ligny while she was beneath his roof, to be the cause of his wife's jealousy, he had held himself bound by every sentiment of honour and humanity, to succour her after she was discarded from a place which she had looked upon as her home. Then the letter went on to implore the Duchess to accept this explanation as the true one—and to show a disposition of leniency and forbearance on her husband's behalf. The Duke assured her that he still loved her tenderly notwithstanding all that had taken place: he wrote most pathetically of their children,—imploping that they might not have their young minds demoralized by beholding the complete severance of their parents. Finally, he expressed the fervid hope that during his temporary withdrawal from home, the dispassionate and judicious intervention of mutual friends would lay the basis for a complete reconciliation which nothing thenceforth might disturb.

I was deeply moved by the perusal of the letter which the commissary handed me, and which I now gave back to him,—observing, “This is indeed in the spirit in which Monsieur le Duc spoke to me last evening.”

The commissary now ordered Adolphe to be brought in; and at the expiration of a few minutes, he was introduced between two *gendarmes*. He looked pale and dejected: though scarcely a couple of hours had elapsed since the moment he was charged with the crime, it seemed as if he had suffered whole weeks of illness and sorrow.

“I am ready to hear whatsoever explanation you may have to give,” said the commissary of police: “but recollect that you are not bound to proffer any account of yourself unless you think fit.”

“Oh, indeed, Monsieur le Commissaire!” exclaimed Adolphe, with a sudden energy which surprised and even startled me; “I am only too anxious to enter upon explanations. I was for a long time in the service of Madame la Duchesse: and I became attached to one of her maids named Florine. We beseought that our espousals might take place: but Madame la Duchesse declared that we must wait for some time, until we had secured an independence to enable us to dispense with servitude and to set up in business. We foresaw that this would be a long interval;—and we were secretly married about seven or eight months ago. As perhaps you are aware, Monsieur le Commissaire, I was suddenly discharged by Monsieur le Duc the day before yesterday. I informed the Duchess of the circumstance; and she most kindly and graciously promised to see after my welfare—a pledge in which she was joined by her father the Marshal. But I could not bear to be separated so suddenly from my wife; and I penetrated last evening into the mansion. The reason why I passed Joseph Wilmot so stealthily in the corridor, was because I knew that he was not friendly disposed towards me; and I feared that if he beheld me in the house, he would inform the Duke. I remained in my wife's chamber—and soon after daylight rose with the intention of leaving the mansion before any of the other servants should be about. The porter at the entrance-gate is a friend of mine: he gave me

admission last evening, and would have afforded me egress this morning. But just as I was about to take my departure, I heard a strange commotion amongst the servants: the report circulated that something dreadful had happened to the Duchess;—and carried away by feelings of an awful curiosity, as well as by gratitude towards my deceased mistress who had ever behaved most kindly towards me, I lost all control over my actions and proceeded to the chamber of the Duchess. It may naturally be conceived that in the dreadful excitement which prevailed there at the first moment of the discovery of the deed, my presence should have been overlooked. I was one of those who raised the wounded form of the Duchess from the carpet; and that is the explanation of the blood-stains upon my garments. As for my hat being found under the bed, I recollect perfectly well dropping it from my palsied hand on beholding the shocking spectacle of the murdered Duchess; and it is quite easy to conceive how it could have been kicked beneath the couch in the excitement and confusion which prevailed—and most probably by one of those who raised the Duchess and deposited her on that couch. Those explanations, Monsieur le Commissaire, are all I have to say.”

This tale, so coherent in all its parts—and being precisely that which could alone explain away the amount of circumstantial evidence that weighed against the accused—was listened to with breathless suspense by myself and my fellow-servants there assembled—but with a becoming magisterial imperturbability on the part of the commissary, as well as without the slightest emotion on that of the *gendarmes*. I was astonished—but still very far from convinced: for if Adolphe were not the murderer, who possibly could be? I had not however many moments to reflect upon his explanation—which the magistrate duly committed to paper—when the progress of the inquiry began to develop new phases. One of the medical men now entered; and presenting a little packet—appearing to be half a sheet of writing-paper folded up—he said to the commissary, “This, sir, contains the hair which was found tightly grasped in the hands of the murdered lady, and which she had evidently torn from the head of her assassin during the desperate struggle of life and death. I have thoroughly cleansed it from the encrusting gore; and it is now fit for the purposes of justice.”

The commissary opened the packet: I glanced towards Adolphe, expecting to see him turn pale at the test to which he was about to be submitted; but to my astonishment his self-possession had greatly increased; and with this seeming composure of conscious innocence, he had lost much of that sinister downcast air which habitually characterised him. Methought that it was either the greatest excess of hardihood to which a bold effrontery had ever reached—or else that the man was indeed innocent,—in which case again recurred the bewildering question—Who could the murderer be?

The commissary drew forth the hair from the packet; and giving it into the hand of the surgeon, requested him to compare it with the hair on Adolphe's head. The distance which I and the other witnesses sat from the spot where the accused stood, prevented us from noticing the pre-

cise shade of the hair which now formed so deeply interesting an item in that stage of the inquiry. The medical man placed the hair but for a single moment against that of Adolphe; and then immediately said, "For form's sake, Monsieur le Commissaire, I obeyed your mandate: but I knew beforehand that this hair which I now hold never came from the head of the accused."

I and my fellow-servants exchanged looks of astonishment; and my next feeling was one of extreme distress that I should have so wronged Adolphe as to believe him guilty,—the more so as it was partially through me, in respect to the incident in the dark corridor, that the weight of the crime had been thrown upon his head.

But phase after phase was following one another in rapid succession: for scarcely had the commissary of police directed Adolphe to be seated—the two *gendarmes* still keeping close to him—when another *gendarme* entered the room, and produced certain articles to the commissary. One was a pistol—another the piece of the poniard-blade which had been found sticking in the person of the murdered Duchess; and the officer said, "These have been cleansed, sir, from the blood which was upon them. And here, sir," he added, in allusion to a third article, "is the handle of that poniard, from which I have not cleansed the blood stains."

"Does any one here present recognise this pistol?" asked the commissary, at the same time beckoning to me and my fellow-servants to approach the table.

We did so: and both the valet and myself were seized with consternation and dismay as we glanced upon the weapon with the butt-end of which the skull of the unfortunate Duchess had been beaten in.

"You know it?" said the commissary, gazing upon us both.

"Yes, sir," answered the valet. "It is the Duke's!"

This announcement acted upon our fellow-servants like a galvanic shock: it was a revelation—it proclaimed the Duke de Paulin to be the murderer of his wife! So dizzy a sensation seized upon my brain, and such a sickness upon my heart, that I staggered back to my seat: for I also knew full well that this pistol belonged to the Duke—it was one of those I had taken to the gunsmith's some months back to be repaired.

"And the handle of this poniard," said the commissary to the *gendarme*,—"where did you find it, with these blood-stains upon it?"

"In a drawer in the Duke's own room," answered the officer.

Again at this moment did the door open; and while the magistrate was assuring himself how well the broken blade corresponded to the fragment left attached to the handle, and how accurately the two pieces fitted together,—that *gendarme* whom he had sent out after I mentioned the incident of the smoke from the chimney in an earlier stage of the proceeding, now re-appeared. He carried in his hands an elegant writing-desk of ebony richly inlaid with mother-of-pearl: and Amelie hastily whispered to me, "It is our poor deceased lady's desk!"

Ah! now a light flashed in unto my mind: and before another word was said in the course of the magisterial investigation, I comprehended the

meaning of the smoke which I had seen ascending from the chimney.

"This desk, sir," said the *gendarme* who brought it, "escaped your special notice when you drew up your description of the appearance of the chamber. It has evidently been wrenched open—and by the confusion of its contents, has been rifled of a portion of them. Ah, doubtless it was forced with this!" added the *gendarme*, as he caught a glimpse of the handle of the dagger with a small fragment of blade still remaining in it.

"Yes—here are the precise marks," said the commissary, as he fitted that handle of the blade into the place where, when the lid of the desk was closed, the forcing instrument had evidently been thrust. "I have it in my depositions," he continued, addressing himself to the *gendarme*, "that when I sent you out just now to investigate the Duke's room, you discovered a quantity of tinder lying in the grate?"

"Yes, sir," answered the *gendarme*,—"evidently the tinder of papers recently burnt."

"The smoke!" whispered Amelie to me: and her countenance was ghastly with horror—as I have no doubt mine also was, while each successive incident was thus tending to the inculcation of the wretched Duke.

"And there was water, too, tinged with blood, in the basin in the Duke's apartment," added the *gendarme* who was now specially engaged in this portion of the inquiry.

The commissary of police now drew a cambric handkerchief stained with blood, from beneath a quire of paper which had hitherto lain upon it: and beckoning the valet to approach, he said, "Can you tell me to whom this belongs?"

The valet examined it; and on recognising the arms of the ducal house of Paulin embroidered in the corner, he was compelled to give such an answer as afforded another link in that chain of evidence which was being so surely and fatally followed up. It appeared that this kerchief was found in the chamber of the Duchess when the commissary first instituted his search there: but he had hitherto kept it back, to be produced only at the moment he thought most advisable. But that the magistrate had from the very outset the gravest suspicions in respect to who the real murderer was, now became apparent enough: and hence the order for the Duke to withdraw from the room during the inquiry. This inquiry, as the reader has seen, was conducted with great tact,—the magistrate first making himself acquainted with all the circumstances of the case, and allowing at the outset the Duke de Paulin himself to give whatsoever explanations he thought fit. That those explanations had been chiefly in respect to his own contemplated journey and the letter to be left for his wife, was also clear to my comprehension: and hence was it that I became the first witness summoned into the magisterial presence. Then, being once in possession of what the Duke himself had to say, and of the circumstances attending the discovery of the tragedy, the commissary had taken the next requisite step: namely, that of allowing Adolphe to exculpate himself, so as to prepare the way for turning the whole tide of evidence into the channel which should unmistakably bring the deed home to the wretched Duke himself.



As for the papers that were burnt, I need hardly inform the reader that these must have consisted of that manuscript-narrative of the Duke's iniquitous transaction in respect to the ruined castle upon the Rhine,—and which, when I was first in his service, had fallen into my hands.

The magistrate now proceeded in formal terms to pronounce Adolphe's discharge from custody; and he then said, looking around upon my fellow-servants and myself, "I need not inform you, after all you have heard, that the whole weight of accusation rests against your unhappy master. It is my painful duty to order his committal to the prison of the Luxembourg: but I have no objection that this intelligence should be conveyed to him in as delicate a manner as possible. Whether he knows that he is suspected, I am at a loss to say: but from the very first moment the *gendarmes* have had their eyes upon him; and when he quitted the room just now, I entrusted the duty of a special *surveillance* to the one who followed him. It may be therefore that a guilty conscience tells him he is suspected. Nevertheless, as I have already said, I have not the least objection that the announcement of his forthcoming removal to the Luxembourg may be broken to him in the most delicate manner. Will any one of you undertake the task?—a painful one, I admit—but still one which a sense of humanity, if not of actual duty, may lead you to perform."

All eyes were at once turned upon me; and after the manner in which the magistrate had just spoken—travelling out of his way as it were to suggest the most benevolent course which could under the circumstances be adopted—I dared not hesitate to accept the mission. But I undertook it with a heavy heart: indeed, my feelings were of so painful a character that I could have sat down and given vent to them in tears. I however preserved my fortitude as well as I was able—and issued from the room. In the hall I found a number of the domestics congregated; and from something which one of the *gendarmes* must have said—or else from observing that the Duke was really under *surveillance*—they had conjectured that suspicion attached itself to him. My looks, as I appeared in the hall, at once confirmed that suspicion: but no question was put to me—no impertinent curiosity was displayed: the countenances of all expressed a deep dejection mingled with a dismayed consternation.

I inquired where the Duke was—and learnt that he was in an apartment facing the dining-room. Thither I proceeded: my first glance showed me the Duke, still habited in his dressing-gown, seated upon the sofa: my second glance showed me a *gendarme* just outside the window, seeming to be lounging negligently in the courtyard: but I knew that in reality he had his eye on the Duke—for he was the very one who, on a whispered command from the commissary, had followed the wretched nobleman from the dining-room.

I approached the Duke de Paulin: he looked up at me like one lost: there was something fearfully wild and vacant in his gaze. It was not simulated, I am convinced: it was all but too real—and he recognised me not.

"Monsieur le Duc," I said, "will you permit me to address you?"

"Who are you? is it not a dream?"—and then he pressed his hand to his brow as if to steady his reeling, rocking brain.

For nearly a minute I was so profoundly affected that I could not give utterance to another word: and it was with the utmost difficulty I could keep down the sobs that were rising up in my throat. Good heavens! was it possible that this great nobleman whom I beheld before me—who dwelt in a palace—was surrounded by luxury—had hosts of domestics at his command—and possessed enormous wealth,—who, in a word, but a few hours back had every means, if he had chosen to use them rightly, for ensuring his earthly happiness—was it possible that this man was a murderer? Had he wrecked all those sources of enjoyment—or rather, had he rendered himself incapable of appreciating them any longer by the tremendous tragedy of the past foul night? He had asked me whether it were all a dream,—he had also put his hand to his brow to steady his thoughts: and I now fancied it must be a dream—and I likewise in my turn pressed my palm forcibly against my throbbing forehead.

"Monsieur de Duc," I said after that pause, "do you not know me? I am Joseph Wilmot."

This name appeared all of a sudden to act as a spell upon him—to serve as a point around which all his scattered ideas could suddenly congregate—a focus about which his confused thoughts might rapidly group themselves. He again looked up at me: there was far less vacancy—less wildness too in his gaze—but, O heaven, a world of ineffable despair!

"Yes—you are Joseph Wilmot," he said, "and you have come to tell something dreadful—I see that you have! What do they say of me—of *it*? Dare they suspect—But no! they cannot—it is impossible!"

"Monsieur le Duc," I answered, "prepare yourself for a terrible announcement—"

"Ah, then it is so!" he ejaculated, the already ghastly pallor of his countenance becoming more ghastly still: and rising from his seat, he staggered, or rather reeled across the room.

A dimness came over my eyes: tears were in them: I hastily wiped them away; and at the instant that I thus saw clearly again, I beheld the Duke apply something to his lips. A wild idea of poison smote me: I sprang forward—and seizing his arm, exclaimed, "Wretched man, what would you do?"

A phial fell from his grasp: he bent upon me a strange look of triumph, and then sank, or threw himself, I know not which, upon a sofa that was near. I beckoned to the *gendarme* who was looking in at the window: I rushed forth into the hall, where the assembled domestics were startled by the wild manner in which I ejaculated, "The Duke has poisoned himself!"

## CHAPTER LXXXIII.

### THE LAST HOUR.

THE medical men who were still in the house, were speedily at hand to render their assistance: the phial was picked up—and by the few drops which

remained in it, one of the surgeons promptly detected the contents to have been a mixture of arsenic and laudanum. Emetics were forced down the would-be suicide's throat: they quickly operated—and he was conveyed to a chamber.

It is more easy to conceive than to describe the excitement which prevailed throughout the household, when the intelligence of this new crime on the Duke's part was spread like wildfire. The medical men soon pronounced however that the deed would not be followed with fatal consequences: but they recommended that the Duke should not be removed to prison until the evening. And not alone on account of his attempted suicide was this delay deemed expedient—but likewise because of the crowd which was gathered in the street, and against which the porter had to bar the great gates of the mansion. For the rumour of the tragedy had spread abroad since the earliest hour; and it was now past nine o'clock on this memorable morning. The multitudes had therefore assembled; and when it was known how frightful was the death of the Duchess—how her person was covered with wounds, and how her skull had been beaten in—the bitterest execrations were levelled against the murderer. But now that at length it transpired that this murderer was none other than her own husband, the fury of the crowd could scarcely be restrained; and I verily believe that if time had not been afforded for the mitigation of that strong feeling—and if the Duke had been at once conveyed away to prison—the enraged populace would have torn him to pieces.

After that distressing scene with the Duke, I retired to my own chamber, to compose my feelings, if possible, in solitude. When I reflected upon the various incidents of this stupendous tragedy, I was all the more amazed, horrified, and shocked thereat. I could come to no other conclusion than that the Duke had planned the crime some hours before he executed it—and that he had endeavoured to arrange his proceedings in such a way as should best avert suspicion from himself. That pretended journey—that long letter which he had penned to his wife—the way in which he had spoken to me, with an appearance of so much friendly candour—the orders he had issued, with so much seeming precaution, through the medium of his principal valet,—all these were part and parcel of a scheme concocted with a devilish ingenuity. Doubtless he had expected to be enabled to despatch his intended victim at once,—in which case he would most probably have done something to give the apartments an air of a forcible entrance having been effected; and it might be that he would have completely succeeded in averting suspicion from himself—for even the quarrels with his wife would never of themselves alone have been sufficient to hurl the charge of murder against his head. The resistance however which he had experienced at the hands of the unhappy Duchess, had discomfited all his hopes, and turned the train of circumstances into a new channel. His subsequent actions showed how fearfully he must have been bewildered,—the pistol left on the carpet—the broken blade in the body—and he himself carrying away the handle after he had forced the desk, as if in the frightful confusion of his thoughts and the mad agitation of his brain he had totally lost sight of the necessity of leaving the handle

there likewise,—and as if he had also overlooked the fact that his kerchief remained there too to strengthen the tale against him! But it was evident that his chief anxiety, after dealing those murderous stabs and blows, was to possess himself of the manuscript narrative so closely regarding his honour—and that this one idea being uppermost in his mind, he had rushed back to his own room to commit those papers to the flames.

As for the poison, I now recollected the circumstance of finding the Duke busy with a couple of phials when I had entered his apartment on the previous evening, and when he so quickly concealed those phials from my view. The wretched man! he was *then* preparing for any casualty that might arise: he was securing for himself the means of suicide in case aught should transpire to taint him with suspicion! And, Oh! what a night must he have passed!—long hours perhaps of mingled hesitation and anguish—and then a ferocious resolve triumphing over his better feelings! Yes—there must have been much hesitation on his part: or else wherefore postpone the crime until past five in the morning? wherefore not have accomplished it in the midst of that darkness which was most congenial to such tremendous turpitude?

And now I must proceed to observe that there were other evidences of the Duke's crime, in addition to those already described to the reader, and which in themselves were damnable enough. The wretched man, as I have said, was enveloped in a dressing-gown until the moment when he was borne to a chamber after having made his unsuccessful attempt at suicide; and on the dressing-gown being taken off, his shirt was found stained with blood, as well as rent in several places. The hair discovered in the spasmodic grasp of the unhappy lady's hands, corresponded precisely with his own: there were blood-stains upon the doors of his own suite of apartments; and besides the tinged water in the basin in his bed-chamber, a towel was found thrust between the mattresses and likewise bearing the sanguineous stains.

The crowd continued in the street throughout the day; and at a late hour in the evening, a hackney-coach was got round into the Champs Elysées, which the garden of the mansion adjoined. A picket of *gendarmes* was in the close vicinage of where the vehicle stopped, in order to resist any infuriate demonstration on behalf of the populace, should it be suspected that the culprit was to be removed in that direction. The idea that such a stratagem would be adopted, seemed however not to have occurred to the multitudes: for they remained in the street. Thus was it that between nine and ten o'clock, the wretched murderer, in a half senseless condition, was carried out to the hackney-coach; and he who was accustomed to visit in his own sumptuous carriage the palaces of his wealthy compeers, was conducted in a miserable lumbering public hackney to a gaol!

Immediately after the commissary of police had decided upon committing the Duke de Paulin to prison, he likewise thought it expedient for the ends of justice to order the arrest of Mademoiselle Ligny. From the suspicious circumstances connecting her name with that of the Duke, the magistrate no doubt conceived it to be quite



possible that she was an accessory before the fact. She was accordingly taken into custody in the course of the day; and though in a preliminary examination she half indignantly and half in bitter affliction repelled the foul charge, she was transferred to the Conciergerie.

On that same day, too, a messenger was sent off to the German University to communicate the distressing intelligence to the young Marquis de Paulin; and I shuddered as I thought of what the effect might be upon the delicate susceptibilities of that nobleman. The Marshal arrived at the mansion in the course of the afternoon; and profound was his affliction. He took away with him the motherless children who were there with their governess; and as the two eldest daughters were at a boarding-school in the country, it became the veteran's mournful duty to communicate to them their mother's tragic end and their father's crime. I need not add that the whole affair produced an

immense sensation throughout the capital; and all the more so, because the government did its utmost to prevent the public press from giving elaborate details. It was conceived that the Duke de Paulin's crime would be made the handle of an attack on the aristocracy of the country generally; and as there had recently been other circumstances tending to embitter the middle and poorer orders against the upper ones,—as a Minister of State too had been charged, tried, and found guilty of speculation and corruption—and as the recent occurrence at the Chamber of Peers had resulted in nothing favourable to the Government, Louis Philippe trembled lest this new scandal should still further imperil the existing order of things. Thus, in pursuance of secret commands issued by the Minister of the Interior, the commissary of police suffered but little to ooze out beyond the principal incidents of the tragedy: and these could not of course be suppressed. But no detailed ac-

count of the evidence was published in the newspapers; and, if I remember aright, with the exception of Adolphe, Amelie, and the Duke's valet, the name of no other domestic transpired. At all events I am very certain that my own did not: for I watched all the leading newspapers, both French and English, to make myself certain on this point.

The intendant of the household issued a recommendation to all the servants to remain within doors as much as possible, not only for decency's sake until the funeral should have taken place, but likewise to avoid the chance of being questioned by gossips and other curiosity-inspired persons relative to the details of the tragedy. Moreover, by command of the Marshal, it was determined that the obsequies should be celebrated with the least possible delay,—so that they might be over by the time the young Marquis arrived, and thus spare him an additional cause of excitement as well as of bitterest woe. It was accordingly at eight o'clock in the morning of the fourth day after the murder, that the remains of the Duchess de Paulin were borne to their last home. The funeral-ceremony took place at the church of the Madeleine; and in the family-vault beneath the marble pavement, the mangled corpse of the once brilliantly beautiful lady found its resting-place.

But in the interval how had it fared with the Duke de Paulin? From the moment that he was consigned to the Luxembourg, he sank into the complete stupor of apathy,—gazing vacantly on those who addressed him—answering vaguely and incoherently to the questions that were put to him. It does not appear that until the last hour of his life—of which I have soon to speak—he awoke to a consciousness of his own dreadful position. The awful crime which he had perpetrated, seemed to sit like a tremendous night-mare upon his soul,—crushing and weighing it down—keeping it in a state of numbing consternation—steeping in torpor all its energies—and rendering the wretched man utterly incapable of deliberate reflection.

But what of his last hour? It was about four o'clock in the afternoon of the same day on which the funeral had taken place, that the Marshal—the father of the late Duchess—came to the mansion; and ordering me into his presence, addressed me in the following manner:—

“I have just this moment come from the prison of the Luxembourg: I have seen that unhappy man—and he is arousing himself from the state of torpor in which he has hitherto remained. I do not think that he has long to live—and this is likewise his own impression. It seemed as if a presentiment of death's approach had stolen into his mind,—exciting it to some little degree of energy. He would not listen to me—he would not speak to me: but he has asked for *you*—and you must go to him! Let it be under circumstances of the strictest privacy: everything must be avoided that feeds the morbid curiosity of the public, and sustains the excitement which the dreadful transaction has occasioned. Speak not therefore to the other domestics upon the point: but hasten to the Luxembourg—I have already arranged for your prompt admittance to the wretched man's presence.”

It was by no means an agreeable duty which I was thus called upon to perform: but how could

I refuse it? The veteran Marshal seemed bowed down with the weight of affliction: he spoke with so profound a sadness that it touched me to the very soul; and as he said a few words relative to his deceased daughter—whom he had loved so fondly, and whom he had that same day followed to the tomb—the tears trickled from those eyes which had never quailed nor grown dim when amidst the din, the roar, the tumult, and the crash of battle. I accepted the mission, and hastened to perform it,—my fellow-servants imagining that I was merely going on some ordinary errand on the Marshal's behalf.

Issuing from the mansion, I entered a cab; and promising the driver a liberal fare, was whirled rapidly along to the Luxembourg. A few weeks back I had proceeded thither to make my appearance as a witness in a matter where life was concerned, in the Chamber of Peers: I now repaired to the same place in a matter where death was concerned, in the prison of the edifice! Solemn thoughts were in my mind: my reflections were of an awe-inspiring character. As the Marshal had intimated, I found no difficulty in at once procuring admission to a well-furnished apartment, in which my unhappy master was confined. I was permitted to be with him alone: and never shall I forget that scene!

The Duke de Paulin was sitting upon the bed with his arms folded across his chest, and his looks bent downward. Whether it were that he did not hear the door open and shut, nor the usher's intimation that some one sought his presence,—or whether it were that he dared not immediately meet my looks, and required time to summon up a sufficiency of fortitude for that purpose,—I cannot say. Heaven alone *now* knows!—heaven alone, besides that man himself, knew what at that instant was passing in his mind! I experienced a trouble such as I had never felt before—an undefinable sensation of mingled pity and abhorrence,—as if I were in the presence of some hideous reptile which was nevertheless writhing in death-agonies, so that it was possible to compassionate the tortures endured by a stricken being, while it was impossible on the other hand to avoid keeping in view the dread devastation it had caused in its time.

Two or three minutes elapsed ere the Duke de Paulin raised his countenance: and then, as he did slowly and gradually lift it,—heavens! what a ghastly face it was which thus revealed itself to my view! Sunken were the cheeks—cavernous the eyes—the skin looked like wrinkled parchment upon the bones. I saw too that the hair had grown many, many shades more gray than it was when I first knew him: for *then* indeed it was only just beginning to turn. And the eyes,—their lustre was gone: they were dull as if the glaze of death were already upon those balls! Then I observed his hands: they were so wasted—so thin—that it was painful to regard them: and the nails had a blueish tint as if the poison which he had taken at his own mansion, still to some little degree circulated in his veins. As for his form, it was wasted to a shadow: he was naturally of slender shape—but he was now a mere skeleton; and his garments hung loosely upon him. I was cruelly shocked by the spectacle thus presented to my view; and sinking upon

a chair, I could not stifle the sobs that rose up into my throat.

"This is kind of you to come," said the unhappy man, in a voice that was low and broken. "My days would be numbered if left to be regulated by the decree of justice: but my minutes are now numbered, because I feel that life is ebbing out of me. This is my supreme hour—I know that it is so—*she* stood before me a short time back—she raised her arm—and at the same time a cold icy voice like that of death bade me prepare to go hence!"

I gazed mournfully on the wretched man's countenance: methought that his intellects were unsettled. He seemed to divine this conjecture on my part; for he went on addressing me in the following manner:—

"You believe that it was a mere vision of my fancy—and you think that my reason is disturbed? But it is otherwise. Never was my mental perception so clear as at this moment. When a man is already looking death in the face, his sight becomes so keen that he can see things which remain invisible to ordinary eyes. Joseph, *she* is present in this room—*she* is here in her blood-stained shroud—*she* is standing close by the very spot where you are seated!"

I gave an involuntary start as the Duke de Paulin thus spoke; and I could not help glancing quickly around. But the next moment ashamed of that access of superstitious terror which had seized upon me, I reverted my regards upon the Duke—and said to him, "Would it not be well for you to have a physician—and—and—a priest?"

"Of what avail will either be for me?" he asked, in that low hollow voice which sounded as if it came up from the tomb-like cavern of his own heart. "No—the physician can do naught for my body; and the priest can do naught for my soul. Both—both are condemned! Or else wherefore does *she* remain standing there in that blood-stained shroud? Listen, Joseph! Just now I awoke as if from a long night which was one continuous and awful dream. But do you know what it was that awoke me? I will tell you. Gradually methought the walls of this prison-room grew lighter and clearer: they lost their opacity—until at length they became diaphanous as glass. I could look through them: I could behold all the busy world of Paris—the multitudes thronging the streets—the human tide flowing through the great arteries as well as through the tiniest veins of the vast city. But my looks were riveted on one point—the church of the Madeleine. And the walls of that church grew transparent as these of my prison-chamber. Deep down through the marble pavement could my eyes penetrate; and the vaults were revealed to my gaze as plainly as the pebbly bottom of a rivulet may be seen through the pellucid water. And I beheld the lid of a coffin slowly upraised—and a form rose thence at the same time. Ah, Joseph! wherefore did they bury her in that blood-stained shroud?"

"For heaven's sake, Monsieur le Duc, speak not thus!" I imploringly exclaimed, as I felt a cold shudder gradually creeping through me from the crown of my head to the very soles of my feet. "Madame la Duchesse was buried in a befitting

manner. Of this rest assured,—and banish that phantasy from your mind."

"Joseph, it is no phantasy," answered the Duke, in the same sepulchral tone as before: and his haggard glazing eyes were fixed upon me. "You have been deceived—the world has been deceived likewise: *she* was buried, I tell you, in a gory shroud—and the Marshal ordered that it should be so. Did I not see her arise slowly from her coffin? did I not behold her come gliding through the air towards me? did I not tremble as *she* entered this room, passing through the wall of glass as easily as *she* had burst the bonds of her ceremonies?—and do I not behold her *now*, close behind where you are seated?"

"Monsieur le Duc!" I exclaimed, starting up from my chair: for there was something terrible in all this; and the diseased imagination of the guilty man seemed even to my conception to raise up the ghastly form which was thus haunting himself.

"Wherefore are you thus incredulous?" demanded the Duke in his low cavernous voice. "I tell you that I beheld her come—I felt blowing upon me the cold ice-wind which wafted her hither—I feel its influence now, that glacial atmosphere which ever environs the dead! Yes, *she* came—and *she* bade me prepare to die. In the hour which is now passing, shall I have ceased to be. Yes, yes—*she* gazes upon me now, with the ghastliest significance!—her livid lips quiver slightly, as if words are wavering upon them—but I hear them not. And just now her father came—and he stood by her side: but he saw her not—though I saw her *then*, and see her *now*, as plainly as I behold you!"

"Monsieur le Duc," I said, "I conjure—I entreat that you will permit me to summon persons hither—the physician—the chaplain—the governor of the prison—"

"No—I charge you to remain!" interrupted the Duke peremptorily. "What can the physician do for me? Ask me what I feel?—but can he prescribe against the presentiments of death? Or what can the priest do? Drone over to me the same prayers that he has recited so often to other inmates of this room,—prayers which he is paid for thus repeating, and in which there is everything mercenary, but no sanctity. No—leave your physician and your priest to those who require them: I need them not. But my time is passing, and the destroyer comes on apace. Already while we have been conversing these last few minutes, has *she* in her blood-stained shroud drawn nearer towards me—the space between us is diminished!"

"Monsieur le Duc," I said, in a tone of fervent entreaty, "let us kneel together, and I will pray with you. You are not about to die yet: but still your time is short, and you should turn it to the best account."

"Thus likewise spoke the Marshal to me ere now—but I would not hear him!"—and for a moment there was a kind of acrimonious vehemence in the Duke's manner.

"Pardon me," I said; "but you were wrong to treat the Marshal thus. He came from the best of motives—"

"Talk to me not of him!" interrupted the Duke petulantly: then immediately recovering his deep lugubrious monotony of tone, he said, "I had no



parting words for *him*—it is to *your* ear, Joseph, that they are to be breathed. Listen then! You will speak to my son—you must entreat Theobald not to look with too much horror upon the memory of his miserable sire. You must tell him that with my last words I gave my full assent to his union with the object of his love when the proper time shall come. But bid him cherish her, and cling to her: bid him beware of the *first* dispute! For when once angry words have issued from the lips of husband and wife, they do not evaporate into thin air—but they fall upon the pathway of their life: they are evil seed which take root, spring up into rank weeds, and become frightfully prolific of evil. Tell my son all this, Joseph—and bid him regard his wretched sire's last words as he would a revelation from the dead. You promise me this?"

"I do, Monsieur le Duc," I answered in a broken voice, for I was profoundly affected. "Oh, you are very ill!" I exclaimed, smitten with consternation at the sudden pallor which overspread the Duke's countenance—a pallor which was different from the ghastliness which had previously sate upon it; for it looked like the whiteness of death.

"*She* is drawing nearer still," he said in a voice which even in a few swift brief moments since he had last spoken, had become perceptibly altered: it was weak, feeble, and gasping—and his whole form appeared to be quivering as if an ice-wind were indeed blowing over him. "Yes," he continued, "my last moments are at hand. I feel—I feel that I—I—am dying!"—and he sank down upon the bed on which he had hitherto remained seated.

I rushed to the door which had been locked upon me on my entrance: I beat against it with my fists—I clamoured for succour. In a few moments it was opened: the usher who had conducted me thither, made his appearance—I told him that the Duke was dying—and he sped away for medical aid. I remained alone with the wretched man—but not *alone* in his estimation. No—*another* was there likewise! I loosened his neckcloth—I gave him water to drink—I bathed his temples—I raised him upon the pillows. He gasped heavily as if his breath were failing him: but his eyes remained riveted as if upon an object which was visible only to himself—and I knew that it was the ghastly spectre which his fevered fancy had conjured up to haunt him.

"See, see, Joseph!" he said, faintly, yet in an excited manner: "she is advancing—Death has taken her form, in which to approach me—her breath is ice—it blows upon me colder and colder—Oh! she comes nearer and nearer!—Ah! shield me from her!"

His eyes glared horribly: he was under the influence of so frightful a terror that I myself was frightened: it was a dread thing indeed to be thus all alone with that dying murderer. The door opened: the usher re-appeared, accompanied by a medical man, and some female—doubtless to serve as a nurse.

"Oh, let them all come and stand round my bed!" groaned and gasped the guilty man, his eyes still glaring horribly, and his entire form shrinking as it were from the presence of the ghastly object which still remained palpable to his fancy. "Let them all stand before me—let

them shield me—Oh, let them keep her off!—She comes, she comes—My God, she comes!"

"A priest! a priest!" I hastily whispered to the usher: "he is dying!"

"The chaplain is on his way hither," responded the official: and scarcely were the words spoken, when a venerable priest made his appearance.

"Oh! shield, shield me!" again gasped forth the perishing Duke: and now my ear caught the dread death-rattle in his throat. "Shield me, I say!—she advances in her blood-stained shroud!—Oh, it is a blood-mist through which I behold her—but her breath is cold—Ah! she comes!—she passes between you—No, no—not yet—no—My God!—No, spare me!—Ah!"

And all was over. That last ejaculation was uttered at the instant that the venerable priest, kneeling at the side of the couch, presented the crucifix to the murderer whose soul was then flitting away from its mortal tenement. And as if inspired by a simultaneous feeling of the most solemn awe,—the usher, the physician, the nurse, and myself, we all knelt down by the side of that couch and prayed for the soul of the Duke de Paulin.

## CHAPTER LXXXIV.

### THE NIGHT'S WORK.

ON issuing forth in profound mournfulness, and with a heavy weight upon my mind, from the prison of the Luxembourg, I was stopped a moment by the governor who requested me to avoid giving publicity to the last fearful moments of the deceased murderer. I assured him that such was already my intention; and I returned to the mansion where the Marshal was awaiting me. I reported to him everything that had taken place: he listened with a dread interest; and when I had done speaking, he reflected profoundly.

"Theobald will be here to-morrow, or the day after at latest," he at length said: "think you that it will be expedient to repeat to him every word that his miserable father uttered?"

"Yes—every word which regards himself!" was my firmly given answer. "I have promised the Duke that I would faithfully fulfil the mission entrusted to me; and it is too sacred—too solemn to be violated."

"Yes—you are right, Joseph," rejoined the Marshal, after another interval of reflection: "it is your duty, and you must accomplish it. Now go and send the intendant of the household to me."

I obeyed the Marshal's order; and having done so, repaired to my own chamber, without even mentioning to any one of my fellow-servants that I knew the Duke de Paulin to be no more. I remained in my room in solemn meditation until nine o'clock,—when I descended to the servant's hall. I was then told that the Duke was dead; and I received the intelligence as if previously unacquainted with it—for I was by no means desirous to be questioned on the subject. The evening meal was partaken of in gloomy and mournful silence. So soon as it was over, the

intendant, who presided, directed the under-servants to be summoned from their own hall; and when the entire domestic establishment was congregated, the intendant addressed us in the following manner:—

“I am now about to speak by command of the Marshal, who exercises within these walls a paramount authority in his capacity of our young ducal master's guardian. Listen, then, to what I have to say. In the course of the coming night strange sounds and noises may reach your ears: but you are not to be alarmed—and you will keep your chambers. On no account and on no pretext is any one to issue forth. For the present I can say no more—I am forbidden to be explicit: but in the morning you will comprehend wherefore these commands have been issued through me.”

The intendant ceased; and not a syllable was spoken by any of his listeners. We all seemed to feel that whatsoever his solemnly mysterious allusions pointed at, was a subject too sacred for the display of curiosity. We separated to our respective chambers; and no doubt all the rest felt as I did—namely, under the influence of a species of awe-inspiring terror. But a terror at what? the reader may ask. I can scarcely give any explanation. It was not that I feared anything would happen to myself: but there was something so strange, so ominous in the mandate which had been issued, and in the warning which had prepared us to hear unusual sounds and noises, that it was impossible to avoid experiencing a feeling which cannot be otherwise defined than that of a vague and unknown terror.

To think of retiring to rest, was—for me at least—out of the question. The death-scene at the Luxembourg Prison haunted me with all its horrors; and now too I was every moment expecting to catch the first of those sounds—whatever they were to be—of which the intendant had spoken. Thus were my ears keenly alive to the faintest noise which met them. The creaking of a board—the rustling of the leaves in the garden—the whirr of the bat's wings in the air—everything startled me. Frankly do I admit that my sensations were tinctured with superstition—and yet in no such definite way that there was any particular thing which I apprehended. One hour passed—and at about eleven o'clock I heard footsteps and voices in the garden upon which my window looked. The night was exceedingly dark: but even if it had been quite light, I should not have opened the casement—for after the intendant's injunction, I conceived it would be improper and indelicate to exhibit any curiosity. But I sat in my chamber, and listened. I heard the sounds of heavy wheels rolling on the gravel-walk beneath; and I recognised them to be those of barrows which men were bringing into the premises. Then I heard the continuous noise of bricks being shot out of those barrows; and these were succeeded by the clattering of trowels, as if masons were engaged in some particular work. But what could it be? Not the faintest idea could I form; and I sat conjecturing while the sounds continued and the work went on.

Thus the greater portion of the night was passed; and I sought not my couch. Daylight came—but still I did not open the window; and

at about five o'clock in the morning the work, whatever it was, appeared to have been completed,—for the clatter of the trowels had ceased—the men were wheeling away the barrows—I heard some one who remained sweeping the gravel-walk—and then all was still.

“What could it have meant?” I asked myself for the hundredth time; and then retired to rest,—sleep soon stealing upon me from the effects of exhaustion.

It was eight o'clock when I awoke. I felt weak, ill, and languid, as well as deeply distressed in spirits. Having performed my toilet, I went down stairs; and at once proceeded into the garden,—where I found a dozen of my fellow-servants grouped together and gazing with a sort of bewildered awe towards the windows of the apartment which had been the scene of the fearful tragedy. But those windows—where were they? Nothing but screens of brick and mortar met my view:—compact masonry filled up the spaces in which the windows were set. For upwards of a minute I stood riveted to the spot,—my looks riveted likewise on those results of the night's mysterious work. At length I gazed slowly round upon my fellow-servants; and Amelie, with a pale countenance, drew me somewhat aside,—saying in a low half-hushed voice, “It was by the Marshal's order! The intendant has just explained all that he left unsaid last evening. And not only the windows, but the door also of that room is walled up. Not an article has been removed thence: everything belonging to the chamber is therein immured!”

“But what could be the Marshal's feeling in taking so strange a step?” I inquired, well nigh lost in utter astonishment.

“He would suffer nothing which belonged to his deceased daughter to be destroyed; and yet it was impossible to leave the very furniture which was blood-stained with the tragedy, to be used in that apartment, and the sight of it constantly reminding whomever should enter of the catastrophe which there took place. And it was likewise out of regard for the feelings of the young Duke—who will doubtless be here to-day—that the Marshal was anxious to prevent him from witnessing the scene of his mother's death and of his father's crime. Therefore to accomplish all these aims, there was but *one* course to pursue—and he has pursued it!”

The explanation was complete enough: but it effaced not from my mind the painful and almost dismayed sensation which the walling-up of that room had produced upon it. There appeared to me something dreadful—I might even say horrible—in the idea of thus converting the scene of the tragedy into a mausoleum eternally enshrining the blood-stained objects which bore tremendous testimony to the foul deed. It seemed to be likewise a strange morbid feeling—a false and unnatural one—that had preferred such sepulchral preservation of those fearful relics to their complete and immediate destruction. And as for sparing the feelings of him who now bore the title of Duke de Paulin, by the walling-up of that chamber, it appeared to me a perfect mockery: for never could he set foot in the garden without having his eyes riveted upon the walls which shut in the place where his mother had perished so miserably and where his father

had sinned so darkly. Better, better far would it have been to renovate that chamber completely—to paper, to paint, to decorate, to furnish it anew—and thus destroy as much as possible its identity with the scene of the crime.

Such were the reflections which I made to myself as I slowly passed away from the garden. After breakfast I issued from the mansion, with the intention of calling at the old banker's residence to inquire concerning Mademoiselle Delacour: for since the fearful tragedy I had found no opportunity to pay this mark of respect. I felt but too well assured that the young lady must have been deeply affected by those fearful and startling circumstances. She knew how delicately and keenly susceptible was Theobald's mind; and she must have doubtless trembled—as I myself trembled—lest his very reason should rock and reel, and perhaps be utterly overthrown, by the quick succession of horrors which were smiting him upon blow.

On reaching the banker's house, I learnt that Mademoiselle Delacour was so much worse, and her illness had become so exceedingly serious, that little short of a miracle could save her life. I was profoundly afflicted,—afflicted on account of herself—afflicted on that of Theobald. Shocking would it be if that fair flower—one of the fairest on the face of the earth—should be destined to wither and perish in the earliest stage of its bloom!—and shocking too if the unfortunate young Duke de Paulin were to have the death of his well-beloved superadded to the catalogue of calamities which he had already so deeply and bitterly to deplore!

With such gloomy reflections in my mind, I wandered away from the banker's house, and roamed about the streets of Paris for two or three hours: for I liked not to return to the mansion where everything so forcibly reminded me of what had taken place; and under existing circumstances I could not do so ungracious and indelicate a thing as to demand my immediate dismissal. After thus roaming about till past mid-day, I entered a coffee-house to take some little refreshment: for I had eaten nothing at breakfast, and still felt faint, languid, and unwell. I took up a newspaper—and therein read an account of Mademoiselle Ligny's examination before the Chancellor of France and other authorities on the previous day. Mademoiselle Ligny had conducted herself with a dignified firmness at certain parts of the examination—but at other stages, she was dreadfully afflicted. She had indignantly repudiated the idea of being accessory before the fact, to the murder of the Duchess de Paulin: she denied ever having been improperly intimate with the Duke; and persisted in averring that the sentiment which had reigned between them was merely a Platonic friendship. It appeared from the report in the newspaper, that the Chancellor of France had treated her with the greatest harshness, and had even assumed the demeanour of a cowardly bully towards her. He had endeavoured to coerce her into a confession that she herself was the whole and sole cause of the dreadful tragedy. She admitted, with tears in her eyes, that the allegation might unfortunately to a certain extent be correct: but she added that as she was innocent of anything immoral in respect to the Duke, she could not possibly be held responsible for the lengths to which

the jealousy of the Duchess had run, and the crime into which that jealousy had helped to goad the Duke. Several letters, which the deceased nobleman had written to Mademoiselle Ligny, and which the police had found in her writing-desk, were produced and read; and they certainly tended to corroborate the averment, singular as it may appear, that it was simply a Platonic friendship which had subsisted between them. After the examination, Mademoiselle Ligny had been ordered back to the Conciergerie: but the newspaper report concluded by expressing a belief that she would shortly be discharged, as there was evidently not the slightest ground for implicating her criminally.

Scarcely had I finished reading this narrative in the journal, when Monsieur Lamotte entered the coffee-house. Immediately accosting me, he shook me warmly by the hand; and the conversation naturally turned upon the recent deplorable occurrences. He informed me that Mademoiselle Ligny had been liberated that same forenoon: for that happening to pass the Conciergerie he had seen her enter a hackney-coach, and was told by some one on the spot who she was. He assured me that she looked so pale, so thin, and careworn—and that her figure was so bowed down—she had the air of a woman of fifty; and he was astonished when I told him that she was in reality but a few months past thirty.

It was verging towards three o'clock in the afternoon when I returned to the mansion; and I was informed by the gate-porter that the young Duke de Paulin had arrived about a couple of hours back. On repairing to the servants' hall, I learnt that Theobald had been closeted with the Marshal from the moment of his arrival. I tremblingly and anxiously inquired how he seemed to bear the weight of accumulated calamities; and I was told that he looked the very picture of blank despair as with slow and languid step he had descended from the post-chaise which brought him back to a home where misfortunes had preceded him like a ravaging army. Judging from the keenness of his susceptibilities, I had expected to hear that he was overwhelmed with grief, and that he had sunk weeping and lamenting bitterly into the arms of the foremost who were present to receive him. I liked not therefore the account that was given me: it seemed ominous and foreboding to an alarming extent. Infinitely rather would I have heard that his grief had displayed itself passionately—violently—vehemently, than that he should have worn that look of blank, settled, hopeless despair.

I had not been in the mansion many minutes, when a bell rang; and the valet who answered the summons, returned to inform me that I was to proceed to the apartment where the Marshal and the young Duke were together. I felt a sickness at the heart—for I had a most painful duty to perform: but I nerved myself as well as I could to accomplish it. The instant I opened the door of the apartment, the Marshal came forward; and bending upon me a significant look, as much as to bid me execute my mission with as much caution and delicacy as possible,—he issued from the room. I was now alone with the young Duke; and he was standing near a centre-table, with his arms folded across his chest, and his looks bent downward.



His form, so slightly modelled, was entirely motionless; and he might have been taken for a statue placed there. Pale too as a marble statue was his countenance; and when he slowly turned it towards me as I approached him, I was struck even far more by his look than I had been by the description given me by the servants of his appearance: for in that look there was indeed all the utter blankness of despair,—a despair which had reached that extreme point at which the advent of hope seemed impossible—a despair which proclaimed that the unfortunate young man felt he had no more concern with the affairs of this life, and that his heart was as completely entombed in a living sepulchre, as the contents of the chamber of the tragedy were themselves immured within walls through which no light could penetrate.

“Joseph,” he said, in a voice that was low and deep as well as hollow and monotonous, “you have a message for me from my late father. Tell it me at once. I know that your good feeling and your generous heart will prompt you to spare painful allusions as much as possible: but you need not be thus considerate. I am in that state in which a man must know everything that concerns him; and whether it be good or whether it be evil, matters indeed but little—for earth has no joy of which I can now become sensible, and it has no calamity which can do me more harm than I have already experienced. Speak then frankly, my friend,—for such indeed have you been towards me.”

He took my hand and held it for more than a minute in his own: he did not however press it: the action on his part was a testimonial of kindness—but it was performed without animation—all energetic vitality seemed to be crushed out of him. I was so deeply affected that when I endeavoured to speak my voice was choked with sobs, ill-subdued and convulsing; and the tears ran down my cheeks. I pressed the hand which in a way so dead had taken mine: but it lay like that of a corpse within my clasp. Not a muscle of his countenance moved: but he gazed upon me with the prolonged, fixed, unearthly look of illimitable despair.

“What did my father say, Joseph?” he again asked.

“He bade me entreat you,” I responded, now recovering the faculty of speech—but yet scarcely able to trust myself to utterance, lest my affliction should gush forth in a passionate ebullition,—“he bade me entreat you not to look with too much horror upon the memory of your unhappy parent.”

“If there be forgiveness in heaven,” answered the young Duke, still in the low deep voice and with the cold rigid manner of a stupendous despair, “there must be forgiveness upon earth; and who should be the first to forgive, if not a wretched father’s own son? What else did my sire bid you say to me?”

“That with his last words he gave his full assent to your union with Mademoiselle Delacour—”

But here I stopped suddenly short, smitten with the dreadful idea that it was something which bordered upon a cruel mockery to speak of an alliance with one who lay at the point of death.

“I see that you have something to tell me in respect to Eugenie,” said the young Duke. “What is it?”

“She is ill—she is very ill,” I hesitatingly answered.

“Better for her that she were dead,” rejoined Theobald, “than that she should live to cherish a love for one who can never become hers. Because marriage is a festival—nuptials are associated with ideas of happiness—wine sparkles in the glass—the scene is decorated with flowers—but it were a mockery for a living corpse as I am, to raise the goblet to his lips or to place roses upon his brow. And now proceed, Joseph. What else did my father say?”

“Monsieur le Duc,” I answered, “it is needless to repeat another syllable that fell from your sire’s lips.”

“And why so?” asked Theobald. “Speak, Joseph—do not hesitate. My grandfather the Marshal has informed me that you faithfully promised my dying parent to fulfil the supreme mission with which he entrusted you; and you must accomplish your pledge.”

It instantaneously occurred to me that if anything could soften the cold rigidity of the young Duke’s despair, and bring his mind back, however slightly, to a healthier tone—it would be to get him to speak more and more of Mademoiselle Eugenie. I accordingly said, “The late Duke’s parting words conveyed an admirable counsel; and he entreated that you would bear it in mind as if it were something spoken from the tomb. He bade me tell you, Monsieur le Duc, to cherish her whom you love, and to beware of the first dispute which ruffles the tenour of married life. And now I have faithfully acquitted myself of the mission which I undertook.”

“I thank you, Joseph,” replied the young Duke. “And now leave me.”

“Oh, no!” I exclaimed: “I cannot leave you thus! I know—I feel how shocking it is to talk of love under such circumstances as these: but remember, Monsieur le Duc, Mademoiselle Delacour has not offended you! Love has its duties as well as its delights; and no misfortune which overtakes you, can absolve you from that duty which you owe to the object of your love. I tell you, Monsieur le Duc, she is ill—”

“Ill!” he repeated: and for the first time during that most painful interview there was a slight tremulousness in his hitherto statue-like form.

“Yes—ill, Monsieur le Duc!” I vehemently exclaimed. “I told you so ere now. Mademoiselle Delacour is very ill—”

“Very ill!” he repeated: and the tremulousness which had swayed his form was transfused into his accents.

“She is very ill,” I continued: “she has been ill for some time—ever since you left—”

“Poor Eugenie!”—and the Duke was more and more moved.

“Yes—she is very ill—dangerously so! Oh, Monsieur le Duc, she is stretched upon a couch whence she may perhaps never rise again!—and will you not now devote one thought to her who has loved you so tenderly and so well—whose beauty was your admiration—whose enthusiasm was transfused into your own soul?—will you not think of her who is sure to be thinking of you, and who perhaps in her dying moments is fondly though faintly murmuring your name?”

"Eugenie dying!—is it possible?" exclaimed the young Duke, in accents the wildness of which did indeed contrast strangely with his former low, deep, hollow tone of despair. "Joseph, you are saying all this to move me—to excite me—But no, no—I am dead to everything in this world!"

"Then, Monsieur le Duc," I exclaimed, "you are dead to that love which exists in fondest vitality in the heart of her who cherishes it towards you! And, oh! what would your feelings be if a messenger came this moment with the tidings that she was no more—and that in her last moments she had craved but a single instant of your presence!"

"Enough, Joseph—enough!" exclaimed Theobald: and sinking upon a chair, he burst into tears.

This spectacle gladdened my heart. Yes, reader—I use the phrase deliberately: it gladdened my heart. I had endeavoured to bring this scene about—to make this impression—to create this revulsion of feelings. Even though I pierced his soul with the intelligence of Eugenie's alarming illness, yet I knew that it was better to goad him thus into the susceptibility of emotions, than to leave him in that unnatural condition of blank and numbed despair. The rock had been stricken—the living waters gushed forth—and I felt that I had acted wisely and well.

"Yes, Joseph, you are right," said the young Duke, suddenly springing up from his seat and grasping me by the hand. "I must not think of myself alone—I have no right to renounce the whole world so long as it includes *her*! Ah, I feel that if she were well and with me now, she would minister the softest, the sweetest, the holiest consolations. But, good God! what calamities have overtaken me!"—and pressing both his hands to his wildly throbbing brows, he murmured, "My God, my God! why was I ever born to experience all this?"

"And now again you are wrong, Monsieur le Duc," I gently whispered, as I approached him: "it is not for men to demand an account of the Eternal for his actions."

The young Duke bent upon me a look of the deepest contrition and humility; and taking my hand, he did *now* press it warmly, as he said, "Yes, you are right! Step by step you are teaching me my duties. Oh, that you had been with me when first I received the intelligence of this dreadful deed! I should not have been haunted by all the horrible thoughts which rose up, gaunt and ghastly, and spectre-like in my mind!"

"And now, Monsieur le Duc," I said, seeing the influence I had obtained over him, and determined to exercise it, as I hoped and trusted, to his advantage,—“you will make some communication to Mademoiselle Delacour—you will send her a message—or you will go to her!”

"I dare not go to her at once," replied the young Duke: "it were indecent—it were unseemly for me to take such a step within the first few hours of my return to this mansion of dreadful memories. But go you, Joseph—see Eugenie's maid—and through her transmit on my behalf a suitable message to her mistress. Say that tomorrow at an early hour in the forenoon I will be there. But one word more, Joseph:"—and then after a brief pause, and now speaking in a lower

tone, Theobald said, "But if her illness be still very, very alarming—if there be any danger—Oh, then come back to me quick, and I *will* speed thither at once!"

I departed to execute this commission. I made the best of my way to the banker's residence: but on reaching it, I was smitten with dismay on perceiving all the blinds drawn down and the gate closed. Inquiry was unnecessary: I nevertheless made it—but it only elicited the response which I had anticipated. Poor Eugenie was no more!

## CHAPTER LXXXV.

### THEOBALD.

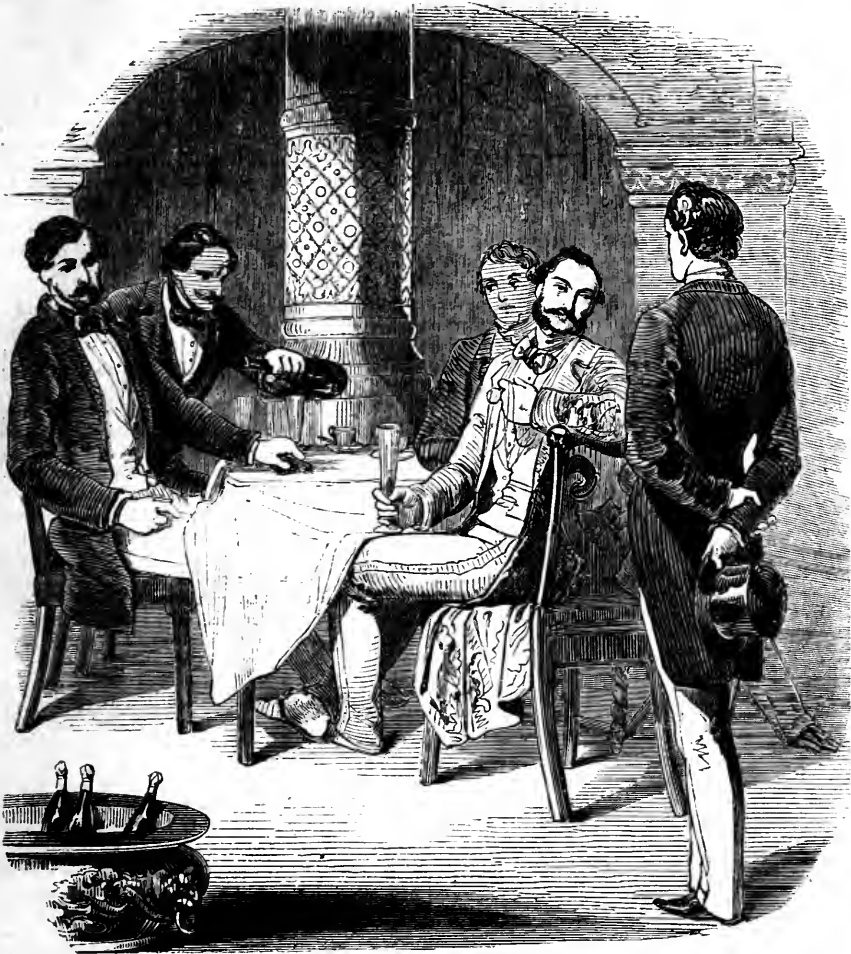
IN the course of my career I had on various occasions found myself compelled to undertake disagreeable and painful duties: but what task could possibly be more afflicting to my own feelings than this which I had now to perform? As I slowly retraced my way towards the mansion, I walked through the streets in a state of dismayed consternation: it appeared indeed as if some tremendous calamity had fallen upon my own head. I remember that as I thought of what the consequences might be—or rather wondered what they would be—I closed my eyes for a moment, as if by thus obscuring my outward vision I could shut out some hideous ghastly object that was haunting my mind. As I neared the mansion, I slackened my pace more and more: I could have wished that it was still miles and miles away, so that the fatal instant that I so much dreaded might be postponed as long as possible.

As I entered the gate, it occurred to me that I had better perhaps first of all communicate with the Marshal, and suffer him to break the cruel intelligence to his grandson: but then I remembered that the commission had been entrusted to me, and that it was indeed my duty to perform this painful task myself: I accordingly proceeded to the apartment where I had left the young Duke; and I found him there alone. He was seated at a table, on which his elbows rested; and his countenance was buried in his hands. He was evidently in profound thought,—so deeply absorbed in his reflections that he had not heard me enter the room. I advanced close up to the table, and gently placed my hand upon his shoulder. He slowly raised his countenance, and looked upon me in such a strange vacant manner, that I was seized with mingled alarm and horror: for I fancied that his intellects were altogether deranged.

"Well, Joseph, what is it now?" he inquired, with a sort of listless apathy. "Ah, I recollect!—you went to convey a message to Eugenie:—and now he all in a moment seemed to become more intelligent.

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc," I answered, in a mournful tone, and without the slightest endeavour to banish that same melancholy from my looks: for I wished him to read therein the dread intelligence that I had to impart.

"Enough, Joseph!" he said: "I understand it all!"—and again did his countenance put on that look of blank fixed despair which it had worn on his arrival. "Eugenie is dead—I know it—I read



it in your face. I expected that it would be so: a strange presentiment told me that she was no more; and if it were possible for this heart of mine to be now moved by any feeling, it would be one of joy to reflect that she is gone from such a dreadful world as this. O Eugenie—dearest Eugenie! we shall meet in another and a better world!—we shall meet in heaven—and such love as we have experienced is fitted only for the purest and holiest of places! It was too ethereal for a sphere so gross as this. Yes, my adored Eugenie! you are now an angel in heaven—you are looking down upon me from that empyrean height to which my own spirit yearns to ascend—And God in his mercy grant that it be not retained much longer within this mortal tenement!”

There was a deep and exquisite pathos in the young nobleman's language and tone; and the same feeling blended indescribably with that look of despair which sat upon his countenance. I

said all that I could to strengthen his mind: but as for consolation or solace, there was none to offer—and it would have been a veritable mockery of his feelings to speak to him of such solace in connexion with the things of the earth. The young Duke listened to me in silence—and his eyes were fixed upon me: but I know not whether he paid much attention to what I said, or whether his thoughts were elsewhere—I however believed the latter. I went forth from his presence, and at once sought the Marshal.

“Pardon me, Monsieur le Comte,” I said, for the Marshal bore the rank of Count,—“for venturing to intrude my opinion under such delicate circumstances, but I fear that a certain piece of intelligence which I have just been in duty bound to communicate to your grandson—”

“And that intelligence?” demanded the Marshal anxiously.

“Mademoiselle Delacour's death!” I responded.

"Ah! she is dead?" ejaculated the Marshal: and then in a profoundly mournful tone, he said, "I comprehend you, Joseph—you fear that my grandson's brain is unsettled. That apprehension likewise fills my own mind. A watch must be kept upon him: but yet he himself must remain unconscious of it. Time perhaps will heal the wounds which these terrific calamities have inflicted——"

"Think you, Monsieur le Comte," I asked, "that it is wise and prudent for the Duke to remain beneath this roof?"

"I have already spoken to him upon the subject—but he has given me no decisive answer. To-morrow he will visit the family vault in which his mother's remains are deposited; and he expressed his resolve to follow those of his father to the grave. Afterwards I will bear him away with me to my own country-seat; and it is my wish that you should remain attached to his service—for he has conceived a friendship for you."

I could offer no objection: for whatever my own inclinations might have been, I dared not think of abandoning the unfortunate young Duke under existing circumstances. The Marshal said that he should endeavour to make some arrangement by which my own sleeping-chamber should be near that of his grandson; and he left me for the purpose of rejoining him in the drawing-room where I had left him. But in the evening the Marshal took an opportunity of speaking to me again.

"I informed my grandson," he said, "that you had consented to remain attached to his person. I suggested as delicately as possible that it would perhaps be as well if he chose an apartment to which an ante-chamber is attached,—so that you might occupy the latter: but he expressed his intention to retain the room which has always been his own within the walls of this mansion. There is a bed-chamber underneath it; and this I should recommend you to take as your quarters. I know that with the good feeling you entertain towards my unhappy grandson, it is not too much to ask you to sit up and listen attentively during the earlier part of the night,—so that if you should hear him pacing overhead in an agitated manner, you could go up to him on some pretence—you might do your best to console him—or you could come and arouse me."

I promised to do what the Marshal requested at my hands; and I repaired to the servants' hall to inform one of the housemaids that I was to occupy the particular chamber which has just been mentioned. No one had slept there for a considerable time; and the housemaid informed me that there were no draperies to the bed—that it was too late in the evening to put them up—but that on the morrow the chamber should be restored to its wonted state of comfort. I assured her that I cared nothing for the absence of the draperies; and as the bell now rang to give the signal that the Duke de Paulin was about to retire, I hastened up-stairs to attend upon him. On joining the young nobleman in his own chamber, I found that his look and manner were still full of that strange vacancy which had so much shocked and alarmed me on my return with the intelligence of Eugenie's death. I endeavoured to give the conversation such a turn as to enable me to expiate upon the necessity of human beings arm-

ing themselves with all becoming fortitude to meet and endure whatsoever inflictions it might please heaven to send upon their heads. The young Duke listened—but not in the manner I could have wished; and I was compelled to arrive at the painful conclusion that the influence which a few hours back I had succeeded in obtaining over him, was now completely gone. He spoke to me kindly—he regarded me with friendship—he would not permit me to perform a single menial office in respect to his night-toilet: but he said nothing which enabled me to hope that my words produced a salutary effect upon his mind. When he was nearly disapparelled, he put on a dressing-gown and said, "I am going to sit up awhile, and look over some letters—they are Eugenie's—ere I retire to rest."

"Will you permit me," I asked, "to remain with you until you do think fit to seek your couch?"

"No," rejoined the Duke: "it is unnecessary, Joseph—I would fain be alone. With these letters before me, I can fancy that I am communing with the spirit of my beloved Eugenie; and this delusion would not remain with me, unless I were altogether by myself. Go, my dear friend—and perhaps when you return to me in the morning——"

He stopped short; and I said, "Yes—heaven grant that I may find you with a mind strengthened—and if not consoled, at all events prepared to endure its burden with a becoming fortitude!"

He shook hands with me; and I quitted the chamber. As I was descending the stairs, the Marshal beckoned me into his own apartment, which was on the same floor as the room that I was to occupy.

"How seems my grandson now?" inquired the veteran.

"I scarcely know what to think, Monsieur le Comte," was my answer. "I like not that strange despairing vacancy of look—that self-abandonment as it were to utter hopelessness. Would that I could see him weep bitterly and give way to the tide of affliction!—for all this would relieve his heart. Or else I could wish that he exhibited a strong fortitude—or a true Christian resignation: but his mood evinces nothing of all this!"

"What can we do, Joseph?" said the Marshal. "To insist upon placing any one with him, would betray the apprehensions which we entertain, and perhaps have the effect of putting certain ideas into his own head. No—all that can be done is for you to listen, as I have suggested; and I do not—no, I do not think that the poor boy will lay violent hands upon himself."

I quitted the Marshal, and retired to my own chamber. I sat down and listened attentively; and during the first hour I every now and then heard the young Duke moving over head. Then, when the sounds had ceased for some time, I crept noiselessly up the staircase—and listened at his door. At first the silence was so dead that a cold terror crept over me; and I cannot explain how immense was my relief when my ear caught the sounds of regular breathing from within. I continued to listen with my own breath suspended; and at length feeling convinced that the young Duke had retired to rest and was asleep, I stole down the stairs again. The Marshal appeared a

the door of his own chamber: he had caught the sound of my footsteps, lightly though I trod;—and as he himself was full of nervous trepidation on his grandson's account, he came forth to learn what I had to say. I gave him the satisfactory intelligence that the object of our solicitude was now sleeping; and the Marshal, with a beam of joy upon his countenance, remarked, "It is a good sign that he should thus be enabled to slumber. Let us hope that he will awake in a frame of mind that will cease to fill us with alarm."

I fervently echoed this aspiration, and once more retired to my own chamber. Still I did not immediately seek my couch: I sat up and listened till considerably past midnight: but there was no sound of the young Duke moving about. I thought that I might now venture to lie down; and as my lamp was on the verge of extinction, I hastened to put off my apparel.

It was some time before slumber began to steal upon my eyes: for my mind was filled with many painful thoughts. At length however my ideas grew more and more confused—a dreamy repose came over me—and then I slept profoundly. Without knowing how long I had thus slumbered, I found myself slowly awakening: and it was still night—for the room was pitch dark. I did not recollect having dreamt anything thus to arouse me; I had no consciousness of any sound overhead; and as I lay and listened, all was profoundly silent. But I gradually became aware that the bosom-front of my night-shirt lay damp and heavy upon my chest, to which it seemed to cling with a sticky unpleasant feeling. I felt it with my hand—and it was indeed quite wet. Just at the moment too that my hand thus lay upon it, something fell on the back of that hand, as if it were a drop of water. I cannot describe the vague and horrible sensation that crept over me: but I lay for nearly a minute completely petrified. Again did something fall upon my hand, which lay as if palsied upon the damp bosom of my shirt. This thing occurring in the midst of the utter darkness, terrified me to an extent that I could now have shrieked out. With my other hand I felt the back of the one that lay upon my breast; and it was wet—but not with water's light fluid—it was wet with something thicker and more consistent. I sprang from the couch in a state of almost wild distraction: I groped about for lucifer-matches—and at length found them. The instant that one flashed as I struck it against the wall, I glanced at my shirt—and it was covered with blood. Quick as lightning I looked up to the ceiling immediately above the bed; and a dark dripping stain *there* confirmed with an almost freezing effect the horrible idea which in vagueness and dimness had been agitating in my mind for the last few moments. Madly I rushed from the room, and precipitating myself into the Marshal's chamber, ejaculated something—I know not what—I cannot remember what words they were which thus in mingled anguish, horror, and frenzy, burst from my lips: but they were sufficient to convey a frightful revelation!

A light was burning in the Marshal's room: we rushed up the stairs—the Duke's door was fastened inside—but I threw myself with desperate violence against it, and burst it open. Then, good heavens! what a spectacle met our view!—what a wild,

rending, mournful cry went forth from the Marshal's lips!—and how penetratingly was it echoed from my own! The wretched young nobleman had destroyed himself: he had cut his throat literally from ear to ear—he lay stretched upon the floor—and, O horror! his blood oozing through the joints of the oaken wood-work which formed that floor, had dripped upon myself as I lay in the room below. The entire household was speedily alarmed: but their unfortunate master was beyond the reach of human succour.

Let me dwell no longer upon this crowning incident of the stupendous Paulin tragedy: but let the reader suppose a fortnight to have elapsed from the date of this shocking occurrence. The young Duke's remains had been consigned to the tomb—the Marshal, stricken down to the very dust by this fresh calamity, had gone to his country-seat—and I was now without a situation. The veteran had offered to take me into his own service: but I had declined, though respectfully and thankfully—for I could not endure the thought of being continually in the presence of any one whose merest look would vividly bring back to my mind all the horrors of which I had been a witness. I had taken leave of my fellow-servants, who had all likewise quitted the Paulin mansion,—which was now to be shut up; for the title—a title which seemed to have a fatalism fearfully clinging to it—had devolved upon a child.

I had taken a lodging—and did not immediately purpose to seek for another situation, as my mind had received such a shock that it was absolutely necessary to adopt means to restore it to its proper equilibrium. Indeed, I was compelled to consult a physician; and he recommended me to leave Paris for a time—if not altogether. I had, speaking in English money, about sixty pounds in my possession,—being the accumulation of my wages, and the amount of a present which the sorrow-stricken Marshal had made me when I left the mansion. At first I thought of returning to England: but on reflection I considered it incumbent upon me to remain abroad during the period of probation specified by Sir Matthew Heselstine. Following however the physician's advice, I left Paris—and proceeded into Belgium. I remained six weeks at Brussels,—living with great economy so as not to exhaust my resources before I felt myself to be in a condition to do something to earn my bread for the future. I took a great deal of exercise, and endeavoured to divert my mind as much as I possibly could: but it was by no means easy to shake off the effects which that rapid succession of frightful occurrences had produced upon it. For often and often when I was alone, the ghastly forms of the murdered Duchess—of the murderer Duke—and of the self-destroyed Theobald would rise up before me: dreadful dreams haunted me by night—and I would start up with a cry upon my lips and the perspiration cold upon my brow. But at length my mind grew calmer; and I came to the resolve to seek change of scene and a new position at one and the same time.

My object now was to get into the service of a single gentleman or family about to travel,—as I wished to see as much of the Continent as possible, so as to fulfil as far as circumstances would permit, the instructions I had received from Annabel's eccentric grandfather—and likewise to



amuse my mind and occupy my attention. As the autumn was verging towards winter—for it was now the middle of October, I knew that many persons would be journeying to the south of France or into Italy; and I hoped to be enabled to travel likewise in the same direction and at their expense. I learnt that by feeing the porters at the principal hotels, I might hear of any situations that happened to be vacant: I adopted this course—and in a few days was informed that there was something which might suit me if I repaired to a particular hotel that was principally frequented by the English. Thither I bent my way one forenoon at about eleven o'clock; and spoke to the porter from whom I had received the message. He told me that there was an English gentleman—a Captain Raymond—stopping at the hotel,—that he was going to winter in Italy, and that he required a body-servant. I was moreover informed that he was a very dashing gentleman—spent his money freely—appeared to know everybody—and was no doubt both wealthy and well connected. He was at that moment entertaining two or three friends at breakfast: but he had given instructions that any applicant for the place was to be shown up. I at once agreed to apply: the porter summoned a waiter; and the latter conducted me up-stairs to a little ante-room, where he bade me wait a few moments. The sounds of loud laughter and of somewhat uproarious merriment came from an inner apartment; and into this apartment the waiter proceeded.

Almost immediately returning to me, he said that I might walk in. I obeyed; and entering the room, beheld four gentlemen seated at a table covered with succulent viands as well as with bottles of champagne: for the wine seemed to be more in request than the tea and coffee. I had no difficulty in recognising which was Captain Raymond, inasmuch as there was but one of the gentlemen who was loosely clad in dressing-gown and slippers,—the others being in full out-door costume. The Captain was a tall handsome man, of about five-and-thirty, with dark hair and a glossy moustache. His three companions were still younger men—elegantly apparelled—but all having a certain rakish dissipated look. I should add that these guests were English as well as their entertainer.

"What was that you were saying, Harcourt?" inquired Captain Raymond, as I entered the room: "that you would wager fifty guineas we don't complete the dozen of champagne?"

"Yes—fifty guineas!" replied the gentleman thus addressed: and he tossed his pocket-book on the table.

"Don't bet with Harcourt—for you are sure to lose, Raymond," ejaculated another of the guests, with a laugh. "He always wins. It was but yesterday he won a cool hundred of me about the height of the drum-major of that regiment that we saw marching past just now. I do believe he went and measured him before he made the bet."

"Nonsense, Villiers!" cried Mr. Harcourt. "But here's the young man, Raymond."

"Oh, ah!" said the Captain: and having quaffed a glass of champagne, he slowly and patronizingly turned his eyes upon me. "What is your name?"

"Wait a moment!" vociferated Mr. Harcourt. "I'll bet any one twenty guineas that his Christian name is either John, James, or Thomas. No one ever knew a man-servant with any other than one of those three names."

"Done!" exclaimed the guest who had not as yet spoken. "I'll take you, Harcourt:"—and the bet was laid accordingly.

"Now, young man," said Captain Raymond, "what is your name?"

"Stop!" again ejaculated Mr. Harcourt. "Only tell us your Christian name first of all—because I have something to say about your surname."

"My Christian name is Joseph," I answered.

"Mowbray has won, by jingo!" cried Captain Raymond.

"So you see, friend Villiers," said Harcourt to the guest who had spoken about the drum-major, "I do lose sometimes:"—and he paid the bet he had just lost, with a most careless indifference in respect to the coin itself. "Well, I was wrong for once—and his Christian name is Joseph. Joe!—it's a nice short name to call one's servant by. But about his surname,—what the deuce could Joseph be coupled with unless Brown, Thompson, Robinson, Noakes, Smith, or Jenkins. I'll take five to two that it's one of those six."

"Done!" ejaculated Mowbray: "I'm your man."

"Well, what is your surname?" inquired Captain Raymond.

"Wilmot," was my response.

"Lost again, Harcourt!" ejaculated all the others: and this new wager was at once paid.

The gentlemen then refreshed themselves with glasses of champagne round; and Captain Raymond at length said to me, "In whose service did you live last?"

A cloud came over my countenance; and Mr. Harcourt perceiving it, ejaculated, "I'll take five to one that his last master never paid him his wages."

"I can assure you, sir," I said, "it is no subject to deal thus lightly with."

"Then I'll take five to two his last master was hanged!" cried Mr. Harcourt.

"Done!" vociferated Mr. Villiers: and the pocket-books were again had recourse to.

"Stop! I bar!" ejaculated Harcourt. "He may have been guillotined, if it was on the Continent."

"Well, have it so," responded Villiers. "Put to death, we'll call it."

"Gentlemen," I said, beginning to be much disgusted with this scene, "you will pardon me if I withdraw for the present: and I can wait upon Captain Raymond at a more suitable opportunity—"

"Nonsense, my good fellow!" cried the Captain: "no time like the present! Your appearance and manner suit me well enough—and I have no doubt we shall soon come to terms. Just humour these friends of mine—and then we'll get to business."

"I will at once state, sir," I answered, "that I was last in the service of the Duke de Paulin in Paris."

"The Duke de Paulin!" echoed Harcourt. "By jingo, what a nuisance to be so near winning and

yet to lose! Why tho' deuce didn't he live a little longer—and then he would have been guillotined, and I should have won my wager."

"Come, come," said Captain Raymond, "no more of this: you see it is not a very pleasant subject for the young man. Of course you have got a testimonial?" he added, again turning to me.

"A testimonial, sir, signed by the intendant of the late Duke's household:"—and I produced the document.

"Ten guineas that there are five mis-spelt words in it!" ejaculated Mr. Harcourt: and snatching the paper from Captain Raymond's hand, he placed it with the writing downward upon the table.

"I'll take you," cried Mr. Mowbray: and then they all grouped themselves together to con over the document—but I knew very well that Mr. Harcourt would again lose, for every word was correctly spelt. There however arose noisy though good-humoured contentions as to whether a particular letter was an e or an i, and whether another was a y or a g: the affair was however settled in the long run against Mr. Harcourt—but a good twenty minutes were spent in the discussion.

"You understand," resumed Captain Raymond, once more addressing himself to me, "that I am going to travel into Italy——"

"Stop!" cried Harcourt. "I'll wager fifty guineas that Raymond is on the scent after an heires, if the truth can be got at."

"Raymond himself is the best person," said Mr. Villiers, "to take that wager, if he knows he can win it: and if not——"

"Well," interrupted Harcourt, who seemed determined to bet upon something; "I'll offer the same wager that Raymond comes back a married man by the next Spring."

"I'll take you," cried Villiers: and as this was not a bet that could be decided on the present occasion, it was duly booked.

"I am going to Italy," continued the Captain; "and I want a young man to attend upon me in the capacity of valet. He will wear plain clothes, and will have little enough to do——"

"I'll wager ten guineas," cried Mr. Harcourt, "that the young man proclaims himself completely qualified to do nothing!"—but as nobody responded to the offer, Captain Raymond continued to address me.

"I start off the day after to-morrow—and I purpose to winter altogether in Italy." He then named wages, and other little matters; and concluded by asking whether I chose to take the situation.

"Stop!" vociferated Mr. Harcourt. "There is a solitary fly—a late one for the time of year—the last of his race perhaps!—and I'll wager twenty guineas I bring him down from the looking-glass with the first flip of my handkerchief."

The bet was at once taken by Mr. Villiers; and Mr. Harcourt sent his handkerchief "flipping," as he called it, towards the mirror: but he sent something more at the same time and in the same direction: for the handkerchief caught up a silver fork from the table, and dashed it in the centre of the magnificent looking-glass,—starring it completely. This produced an uproarious burst of

laughter, in which Mr. Harcourt himself most cordially joined; and he at once offered another heavy bet that he would strike the other mirror, which was at the farther extremity of the room, precisely in the middle as he had accidentally done this one. The waiter however came rushing in, full of dismay and consternation at the noise of the cracking glass; and Mr. Harcourt had considerable difficulty in recovering from the fit of laughter into which the expression of the domestic's countenance threw him. The man was despatched to inquire of the landlord the cost of the damage; and during this little scene I had time to deliberate with myself whether I should accept Captain Raymond's offer. I certainly did not much like the incidents attending my first introduction: but then I thought to myself that his wild rakish habits were nothing to me—and that if in his service I could see the world and amuse my mind, my object would be gained. I therefore gave him an affirmative response; and it was understood that I was to join him at the hotel on the following day.

I was punctual at the hour named; and on the ensuing morning I set out with my new master on our way to Italy. I pass completely over the details of our journey—and beg the reader to suppose us just entering upon the classic soil of that southern clime.

## CHAPTER LXXXVI.

### THE VILLAGE HOTEL.

I HAVE said that Captain Raymond was a tall handsome man, of about five-and-thirty—with dark hair and eyes. I gathered from a few occasional observations which he made, that he belonged to an old aristocratic family, and that he had been a captain in the Guards—but that having sold out on inheriting a tolerably handsome fortune, he now retained his military title from mere courtesy. He was reserved, and somewhat haughty—but by no means stern nor unkind in his manner; and it was invariably in a gentlemanly way that he addressed me. He did not seem to be so wedded to dissipated habits as I had been led to judge from the circumstances of our first interview: it was only when he fell in with fellow-countrymen of his own, of a similar position in life, that he would plunge into a conviviality bordering upon an extreme.

Having traversed Sardinia, we drew near to the Etruscan Apennines,—the Captain's purpose being to pass some time in Florence. I remember perfectly well that it was about three o'clock one afternoon, towards the close of October, that the post-chaise entered a picturesque village in the Duchy of Modena, and situated just on the outskirts of that line of mountains. Here Captain Raymond intended to pass the night, and commence the passage of the Apennines on the following morning. The post-chaise rolled into the court-yard of an hotel, which was of considerable dimensions for so small a village: but this circumstance may be explained by the fact that the village itself was a favourite halting-place for travellers passing through the Duchy of Modena

on their way to Florence, the Tuscan capital. Just as Captain Raymond alighted from the post-chaise, ejaculations of recognition burst from his own lips and from those of an elderly but fine-looking gentleman who happened to be traversing the hotel-yard at the moment.

"This is indeed an unexpected pleasure to encounter your lordship here!" said the Captain, as they shook hands in a manner which showed that they were upon intimate terms.

"We have been tarrying here for the last two months," replied the nobleman, "on account of a serious accident which happened to Lady Ringwold."

"An accident? Indeed!" exclaimed Captain Raymond. "Of what nature?"

"An accident common enough to travellers," replied Lord Ringwold—for such it appeared was the nobleman's name—"an accident, too, which we often read of in romances, and which is at times most useful to the novelist—I mean the upsetting of our carriage. We were three inside—her ladyship, myself, and our daughter. I and Olivia escaped with only a few contusions: but Lady Ringwold had the misfortune to fracture her leg—and there was no help for it but to remain in this village until now."

"And how about medical attendance?" inquired Captain Raymond.

"It fortunately happened," responded his lordship, "that there was an Italian gentleman stopping at this hotel at the time; and he, it appeared, had received a medical education, though he had not pursued the profession. He rendered immediate assistance; and though he was going elsewhere, he remained at the hotel for a week in constant attendance upon her ladyship. He was then compelled to leave, to visit some property in a neighbouring district: and as he is now residing there, he regularly visits her ladyship two or three times a week; and she has progressed so well under his skillful treatment, that we have not thought it necessary to call in any other professional aid."

"It was most fortunate for your lordship," observed Captain Raymond, "that you should have fallen in with such an individual."

"Most fortunate," returned the nobleman: "for strong symptoms of fever at first developed themselves—and both Olivia and myself were very much alarmed on her ladyship's account. However, thanks to Signor Volterra—for that is the Italian's name—the ordeal has been safely passed through, and the day after to-morrow we purpose to prosecute our journey to Florence."

"And it is precisely to Florence that I myself am bound," rejoined Captain Raymond. "It was my intention to continue my route to-morrow—"

"Wherefore not postpone it for a day?" exclaimed the nobleman; "and we can travel in company—which will be all the more safe as well as agreeable in traversing the Apennines, which, as every traveller in Italy knows, are infested by lawless bands."

"It will give me the greatest pleasure to postpone my journey and accompany your lordship," answered Captain Raymond. "Indeed, I am the master of my own time—I am travelling merely for amusement—and I had some thoughts of wintering in Florence: but I was informed the other

day that Florence is cold during the winter months."

"Sometimes it is so, when the winters are damp after a rainy autumn," observed Lord Ringwold: "but with such a splendid autumn as we have had, and which indeed we are still enjoying in this charming spot, there is every reason to anticipate that there will be this year a healthy winter at Florence. At all events, according to our present plans, we purpose to pass the next few months in the Tuscan capital."

"And that will be no mean inducement," rejoined Captain Raymond, "to fix my determination also."

"But there is no necessity for us to remain here talking in the court-yard," ejaculated the nobleman, "Come to my apartments and see the ladies."

Captain Raymond gave me a few hasty instructions as to securing rooms for a couple of days at the hotel; and he accompanied Lord Ringwold to that nobleman's suite of rooms. Having attended to the duties which I had to perform, I was shown by a waiter to what might be termed the servants' hall; and there, amongst the assembled domestics, I found the valet and the lady's maid who were attached to the service of the Ringwold family. I was much pleased thus to encounter natives of my own country; and we dined together. After the meal I walked out with the valet into the village,—which, as I have already said, was picturesque in its site and its aspect. The trees had lost none of their foliage; and many, if not most of them still retained the verdant appearance of summer in defiance of the embrowning, searing, and mellowing influence of autumn. Indeed the atmosphere was quite warm, although the month of November was close at hand; and there was just a sufficiency of a breeze blowing from the Apennines to impart a healthy freshness to the air.

I learnt from the valet that Lord and Lady Ringwold had two daughters—the elder being in England with another branch of the family—and the younger, the Hon. Miss Olivia Sackville, now accompanying her parents on their Continental travels. I was further informed that Olivia was about four-and-twenty years of age and of surpassing beauty—so that it was somewhat astonishing she had not as yet married: unless indeed it were that she had no fortune, and that the family was comparatively a poor one, his lordship's income not exceeding three thousand a year. The conversation then turned upon Lady Ringwold's accident, and the surgical assistance which Signor Volterra had rendered. I learnt that this gentleman was about seven-and-twenty, and remarkably handsome. Having inherited some little fortune at his father's death, he had abandoned the medical profession; and as he possessed a small estate some twenty or thirty miles distant, in the territory of Modena, it was thither he had repaired after his sojourn at the hotel in attendance upon Lady Ringwold. But, as I had overheard his lordship tell Captain Raymond, Signor Volterra regularly visited her ladyship three times a week,—coming on horseback for the purpose.

"Of course," added the valet, "it would be an insult for his lordship to offer a pecuniary recompense to Signor Volterra: and therefore a very handsome piece of plate has been procured from



the city of Modena in order to be presented to him."

In the evening I had an opportunity of seeing the Hon. Miss Olivia Sackville; and her personal appearance fully justified the encomiastic mention made of her by the valet. Indeed, she was a superb specimen of Saxon beauty. Her form, on somewhat a large scale, was nevertheless most symmetrically proportioned: the well-shaped head was poised upon a neck of swan-like curvature and dazzling whiteness,—the outlines blending with the sloping and softly rounded shoulders and expanding into the rich fullness of the bust. Her complexion was dazzlingly fair, with the tint of roses upon the cheeks. The light brown hair showered in myriads of ringlets on either side of a face somewhat too round perhaps for perfect beauty, but which despite that deficiency of the classic oval, was unquestionably lovely. Its expression was that almost indescribable admixture of languishing sweetness with patrician dignity and the consciousness of high birth, which is often to be met with amongst ladies of the British aristocracy. Her large blue eyes were melting in their look; but there was that proud curl of the short upper lip which formed, so to speak, the antithesis to the prevailing sweetness of the upper part of her countenance. Though she had reached the age of four-and-twenty, and must therefore for some six or seven years have mingled in the gay circles of fashion, yet she had lost none of the first freshness of youth; nor had the heated atmosphere of crowded saloons marred the natural bloom of her complexion.

I was lounging in the court-yard of the hotel in company with the valet, in the forenoon of the following day, when a gentleman on horseback rode into the premises. He appeared to be about seven-and-twenty: his height was nearly six feet—he was upright as a dart—and his slender form was as admirably proportioned as that of the Belvidere Apollo. He had hair as dark and as glossy as the wing of a raven; and it clustered in natural curls about a high open forehead and round his head. His complexion was congenial with the Italian climate,—not swarthy like that of a Spaniard, but of what may be termed a delicate duskiness, as if with a tint of bistré. He wore whiskers, and a slight moustache, curling at the extremities: and as he spoke to the hostler who hastened forward to receive his steed, his lips of vivid red revealed a splendid set of teeth. There was something in this individual which at once struck and interested the beholder. Intelligence sat enthroned upon his high and open forehead, and flashed from his superb dark eyes. The profile of his countenance was of classic perfection, with a nose entirely straight, and with that oval configuration of the face in which, as I have ere now noticed, Miss Olivia Sackville's was deficient. He was dressed with simple elegance,—his admirably-fitting garments setting off the symmetry of his tall, upright, slender form, and his sweeping length of limb. I could not help thinking to myself at the very first moment that I set eyes upon this individual, that his appearance in an English ball-room would produce no ordinary sensation; and from all that the valet had told me on the preceding day, I was by no means astonished to learn that he was none other than the

Signor Volterra who had so generously bestowed his skill and his time upon Lady Ringwold.

Having consigned his steed—which, be it incidentally observed, was a splendid animal—to the hostler, Volterra proceeded to the apartments occupied by the Ringwold family. As I was subsequently informed by the valet, he remained to luncheon,—some business preventing him from accepting an invitation to stay to dinner. The piece of plate was presented to him by Lord Ringwold ere he took his departure, which was at about three o'clock in the afternoon; and I was further informed that Volterra expressed his regret that his lordship should have sought in any way to recompense services which it had been alike his pride and pleasure to render. In the course of conversation, the valet mentioned that Signor Volterra spoke the English language with considerable fluency,—he having visited the British metropolis a few years previously, and remained some time there in order to improve his medical education at the hospitals.

I must now explain that at the back of the hotel there was a spacious garden with shady avenues, and the whole extent dotted with a number of little summer-houses—or rather wooden pavilions—for the accommodation of those guests who chose to take their wine or other refreshments in those cool retreats during the sultriness of summer. In a word, these grounds resembled to a certain extent an English tea-garden of the better class: only it must be understood that the pavilions were very tastefully fitted up within, and beautifully decorated without.

This day of which I am writing, had been exceedingly sultry; and no breeze blew from the Apennines as on the previous one. I knew not whether it was the change of climate or the fatigues of recent travelling—or whether I had partaken of something which had disagreed with me: but certain it was that in the evening I felt much indisposed, with a general sensation of physical uneasiness. The friendly valet was drinking wine with the domestics of a French nobleman who had that day arrived at the hotel: they were smoking cigars too in the servants' hall;—and unable to endure the heat and the odour of the atmosphere, I strolled forth at about nine o'clock to walk in that garden of which I have been speaking. It was not however without regret that I quitted the society of the French nobleman's domestics: for they had just begun to relate the exploits of some formidable bandit-chief who infested the Apennines. All that I learnt ere being thus compelled to leave the servants' hall, may be summed up in a few words. This redoubtable chief, it appeared, had once been an officer in the household of the Grand Duke of Tuscany: but having slain a fellow-official in a drunken brawl, he was compelled to fly. Betaking himself to the mountains he joined the bandit horde whose chief he soon became. He was represented as a man of about five-and-forty—stout and thick-set—of herculean strength and lion-like courage. It was further said that he could assume at pleasure the courtly manners he had been wont to adopt in other times when he was attached to the Grand Duke's person. There was something mysterious about the man, inasmuch as he had been twice captured by the Tuscan

police, and twice condemned to death—but on both occasions had escaped under circumstances which unmistakably denoted a connivance on the part of the authorities. These were all the particulars which I learnt relative to Marco Uberti—who was the name of that formidable bandit—ere I was compelled to leave the servants' hall.

I walked into the garden, and lounged about there for perhaps a quarter of an hour,—when I felt my indisposition gaining upon me so much that I entered the nearest pavilion, and stretched myself upon a bench inside. The shade of overhanging trees rendered the place completely dark; and the air was so still that scarcely a leaf rustled. Sleep gradually stole upon me; and as I presently found myself awakening, I became aware that voices were speaking in a low tone at the entrance of the pavilion.

"But why not address yourself to my father?" were the first words which my ear thus caught: and they were spoken in a tremulous yet silvery clear female voice.

"No—not yet! not yet! dearest, beloved Olivia!" was the response of the young lady's companion—and now I recognised the rich-toned voice of Signor Volterra: for I had heard him speak to the hostler on his arrival at the hotel in the forenoon. "The time will shortly come when the state of my affairs will enable me with a better grace to beseech your hand of Lord Ringwold. Meantime, dearest Olivia, though we are about to be separated, you will not forget me?"

"Forget you, Angelo!" murmured the patrician lady: "no—never, never! You wrong the fidelity of my heart by even asking such a question."

"It is not that I mistrust you, dearest," returned Angelo Volterra: "but it is sweet for a lover to receive the reiterated assurance of reciprocal affection. Think you that too often from those sweet lips of thine could flow forth the words, '*I love thee*'? Oh, the joy—the happiness of that moment when first I elicited the soft avowal! I went forth from your presence with an unknown ecstasy flooding my entire being: I could scarcely believe that such bliss was really mine. Fifteen days have elapsed since that one—the happiest of my life!—and often and often have I doubted whether it were all true, or whether I were deceiving myself with the most elysian of dreams. No—it is true! and you love me, dearest Olivia—and I love you in return—heaven knows how much I love you!"

There was a pause, during which I heard the billing sounds of kisses; and then Volterra spoke again in that voice which seemed like one of golden harmony.

"Yes, dearest Olivia, the time I hope is not far distant when I shall be enabled to present myself before your father—proclaim my love—and demand your hand."

"Think it not indelicate on my part, Angelo," responded the lady, her tones conveying all the bashfulness she experienced, "that I should have urged you to speak to my parents at once, and to hesitate no longer: but my motive is simply that never yet had I kept aught concealed from those fond parents of mine; and this secret,—though in one sense a sweet one," she added, with increasing hesitation—"nevertheless weighs at times like lead upon my heart. I feel when in my parents' pre-

sence as if I could throw myself into their arms, or fling myself at their feet, and implore their pardon as if for a duty violated or a fault committed. And now that we are about to separate, dear Angelo, and that you cannot define for how long, I feel—Oh! I deeply feel that the necessity of keeping this secret will increase my unhappiness!"

"Olivia, your words fill me with indescribable pleasure and pain," answered Angelo Volterra,— "pleasure because every syllable conveys the assurance of your love—and pain because that love alone suffices not for your happiness. Listen to me, dearest Olivia! As yet my fortune is small and insignificant, in comparison with what it may soon be. Your father belongs to the proud aristocracy of England; and your beauty, as well as your rank and accomplishments, warrant his lordship in seeking for a suitable alliance for his daughter. He would refuse me, situated as I now am; and surely, Olivia, you would spare me the pain of such refusal? Besides, there is another light in which this matter is to be regarded. Where did we first meet? By your mother's sick couch, only two months back; and it was my fortunate lot to be enabled to render services of more or less importance. Now, if I were to address myself at once to your father, and request to be recognised as the suitor for his daughter's hand, would he not deem me most unhandsofly and ungenerously presuming on the services which I have so rendered? and would he not be justified in telling me that I rated those services at far too high a price? Is not all this true, Olivia?"

"It is," she murmuringly answered: "and you will forgive me, Angelo, for so urgently pressing the point?"

"Oh, speak not of forgiveness, my adored—my worshipped Olivia!" exclaimed the enthusiastic Italian. "And now let me thank thee for having granted this interview—the last that we shall enjoy for some little time to come! You are about to proceed to the gay and splendid city of Florence—my own native city—"

"You sigh, dear Angelo," interrupted Olivia: "is it that you regret your absence from that city of which you are ever wont to speak in terms so rapturous?"

"I regret that circumstances prevent me from accompanying you thither," rejoined Volterra: "I regret that when you appear in brilliantly-lighted saloons, and every eye is ravished by your beauty, I shall not be there to behold you—I shall not be there to whisper in my own heart, 'That lovely being by whose presence all looks are fascinated, is pledged to accompany me to the altar!'—This is why I regret my absence from Florence: and it is a feeling, Olivia, which you can understand?"

"Rest assured, Angelo," answered the patrician lady, "that I shall not voluntarily seek those gay and brilliant circles of which you have spoken: but if compelled to accompany my parents thither, my thoughts will be far away—Need I add," she gently and softly asked, "in which direction they will travel?"

"Oh, no!—for every syllable you utter gives me the assurance of your love. Never, never until I first beheld you, Olivia, was this heart of mine moved towards woman! You are the first whose beauty even taught me to love; and you will be the last! That we shall soon meet again, and that



our love will be crowned with happiness, is my fervid faith—my fondest hope: but if heaven should decree otherwise—if amidst the many chances and vicissitudes of this life there should be so sad a destiny reserved for me that this parting is to be eternal—”

“Oh, wherefore speak in terms so desponding as these?” exclaimed Olivia, almost in a tone of affright. “Tell me, dearest Angelo—tell me that there is naught beyond the circumstances to which you have alluded, that can stand as a barrier to our hopes?”

“Need I remind one of your intelligence,” asked the Italian, with a certain mournfulness in the masculine harmony of his voice, “that man proposes but that heaven disposes—and that the fondest hopes which human hearts can ever conceive, are sometimes doomed to disappointment? What, for instance, if I failed to obtain possession

of that large addition to my fortune which I feel convinced can alone render me acceptable to your parents as a fitting suitor for their daughter’s hand?”

“Think you, Angelo,” asked the lady, in a tone of gentle reproach, “that my parents are so thoroughly worldly-minded that they take no heed of your manifold good qualities?”

“Oh, let us not waste this precious time in dull and profitless argument!” exclaimed the Italian, his tones again gushing with the enthusiastic fervour of love. “We are about to separate—and we must now speak of naught but that feeling which unites our hearts. We will indulge in hopes and banish all fears: we will trust in the mercy of heaven, and will not apprehend its undeserved wrath. Yes, dearest Olivia, I now hear a secret voice whispering in my soul, giving the assurance that this golden dream shall be realized, and that

the day will come when we shall smilingly look back upon the past hours of our anxious uncertainties."

"Yes—God grant that it may be so!" murmured Olivia: and then as the parting moment came, I could hear her weeping bitterly.

"Oh, calm and compose yourself, my beloved one!" said the Italian: and though I could see naught, yet I knew full well that he must be straining her to his breast. "Have faith, I repeat, in the mercy of heaven to crown our love with happiness. Oh, I was foolish—I was mad to yield to a moment's despondency, and give utterance to words which have dispirited you thus!"

"But now your words cheer and console me," replied Olivia. "Farewell, dear Angelo—farewell!"

"Farewell, my best beloved!"—and after another minute, during which fervid kisses were exchanged, they separated.

I heard Olivia's light step departing in one direction—and the heavier tread of her lover dying away in the distance, as he sought the further extremity of the garden, doubtless to leap the palings there. And now the reader will ask wherefore I had continued an unseen witness of a proceeding of so sacred and delicate a character? He recollected that I was sleeping when Angelo and Olivia had first sought the bench in front of the entrance of that pavilion; and on awaking I knew not how long they had been there. If, when their words first reached my ears, I had stepped forth and announced my presence, they might have disbelieved my statement that I was previously slumbering: they might have regarded me as a wilful eavesdropper, revealing myself only through fear of discovery and of personal chastisement at the hands of the indignant Italian. And then, too, I reflected that I was about to travel in company with the Ringwold family—and that it would be painfully humiliating for Olivia to feel every time she encountered my looks, that I was the possessor of her secret. Under all these circumstances I considered it better to keep my presence in that pavilion unknown to the lovers; and as I subsequently reflected on the course thus adopted, I saw no reason to repent.

It was quite clear that Angelo Volterra had only declined Lord Ringwold's invitation to dinner in order that he might have an opportunity of returning stealthily to the village in the evening to keep his appointment with the beautiful Olivia. Earnestly did I hope for her sake that no guile lurked beneath the glowing words of passion which he had breathed to her, and that he had rightly stated the circumstances which made him prudentially resolve to abstain yet awhile from addressing himself to her parents. And yet somehow or another I had my misgivings—vague and undefined, certainly—and of no positive contexture: but still they *did* float in my mind. I endeavoured to persuade myself that the Italian's conduct towards Olivia was marked by a manly frankness; and assuredly, when I reflected on the noble candour which seemed to sit upon his brow and to be expressed in his looks, as I had seen him in the morning, I was disposed to be angry with myself for suffering such doubts and apprehensions to haunt me:—but I could not keep them off.

On re-entering the hotel, I found that it was

eleven o'clock, and that the servants' hall was now deserted. I retired to my own chamber: for Captain Raymond never needed my services of an evening. My indisposition had nearly passed away; and when I awoke in the morning, I was quite well.

## CHAPTER LXXXVII.

### THE APENNINES.

It was not till nearly mid-day that Lord Ringwold's travelling-carriage and Captain Raymond's post-chaise were in readiness for departure,—the delay being occasioned by some unforeseen difficulty in procuring post-horses. At length we set off. Lord and Lady Ringwold, with their daughter Olivia, occupied the interior of their own carriage: the valet and lady's-maid sate upon the box. With regard to the post-chaise, Captain Raymond was inside, and I was on the dickey thereof. I should observe that it was originally proposed that the former equipage should serve for us all: but it was represented by the landlord of the hotel that the nature of the roads among the Apennines would preclude the possibility of the horses dragging such a load. We accordingly set off in the manner described,—the travelling-carriage leading the way.

As we approached the Apennines, they wore the appearance of immense wavy mountains of verdure on the outskirts—but growing higher and higher towards the centre of the range, where the mountains were crowned by arid peaks. Numerous streamlets gushed forth from this assemblage of hills; and the winding road carried us over rude but picturesque bridges—through villages which remained unseen in the depths of valleys until suddenly come upon—amidst groves—and along the outskirts of forests. There was an endless variety of scenery; and as each successive object arrested my attention, I thought but little of the terrible bandit Marco Uberti. I should however remark that I had seen Captain Raymond charge two pairs of pistols in the morning—that he had one pair with him inside the carriage—and that I had the other pair in a small box upon the dickey. I likewise knew that Lord Ringwold's valet was equally well armed: but all these precautions had been kept secret from the ladies and from the maid, for fear of terrifying them.

The journey was pursued for about three hours; and we were now advancing more and more into the heart of the Apennine range. But presently I observed that the postillions pointed with their whips towards a cloud that was gathering above one of the highest ridges in the eastern direction; and as they did so, they exchanged ominous looks. I was thus led to watch that cloud; and I was astonished at the rapidity with which it expanded, and at the threatening aspect that it assumed. I now noticed, too, that the postillions urged their horses on at a quicker pace. The cloud went on expanding: it grew darker and darker—it came more and more overhead, until all of a sudden so terrific a peal of thunder burst forth, that with the countless reverberations amidst the mountains, it seemed as if ten thousand cannon were being discharged in as many different points throughout the Etruscan

Apennines. Then the rain began to pour down in torrents; and the storm continued with fearful violence. The vehicles were stopped that the lady's-maid might enter the travelling-carriage—while Captain Raymond bade me take a seat inside the post-chaise; and he insisted that Lord Ringwold's valet should do the same.

After this temporary halt, the two equipages dashed along at a tremendous pace: for the road which we were now pursuing, happened to be in excellent order. Never shall I forget that storm in the Apennines!—never did I hear the great voices of nature speak in such terrific sounds, nor behold the lightning blaze forth in such frightful flashes! And ever and anon such furious gusts of wind swept amidst the mountains, that it seemed as if a whole multitude of men were dashing against the equipages for the purpose of flinging them over. We beheld trees torn up by the roots and carried like things of no weight, as well as with the rapidity of arrows, across the road and the adjacent districts. But despite that rushing, raging, roaring wind, the rain continued to fall in torrents; and myriads of muddy cascades dashed down the heights. We were not however more than an hour in that storm: for at about four o'clock the vehicles dashed up to the front of a small hostelry situated in a lonely place, and without another human habitation anywhere in sight.

Here we descended; and on inquiry, it was ascertained that there was every prospect of the storm continuing yet some hours: there consequently seemed no alternative but to pass the night at this lonely little inn. The Ringwolds and Captain Raymond took possession of the only parlour of which the hostelry could boast: the lady's-maid, the valet, and myself were consigned to the kitchen. The landlord and landlady, who were elderly persons,—together with their daughter—a handsome, good-natured young woman,—bustled about to prepare the best repast which their means would enable them to furnish; while the postilions, having put up the horses and drawn the vehicles under the protecting roof of a somewhat spacious shed, betook themselves to an outhouse to dry their clothes—for they were drenched to the skin. Dinner was first served up in the parlour; and then we in the kitchen partook of it: the fare was by no means bad, and there was a sufficiency.

The storm continued until about eight in the evening, when it began to abate with as much rapidity as it had come on: and by nine o'clock it had completely passed away,—leaving the night clear, serene, and beautiful. The accommodations of the hostelry were so exceedingly limited that only the most imperious circumstances could have led our party to resign themselves to a halt for the entire night in such a place. It appeared that about seven miles ahead there was a village with a tolerably commodious inn, and which was fully capable of lodging us all. It was therefore determined by the occupants of the parlour that the journey should be resumed to that point; and it was a little before ten o'clock that we set out again. The night, as I have already said, was clear and beautiful; and the storm had left behind a delicious freshness in the air: but the roads were completely cut up by the rain—and our

progress was necessarily so slow that it seemed as if we should be two good hours in accomplishing the few miles from the lonely inn to the village that was now our destination.

When about midway between those points, the road wound about the base of a towering height; and on the other side there was a thick wood. Here too the road was so bad that the horses laboured fearfully to drag the vehicles along. I candidly confess that as I sat upon the dickey, I began to think of the formidable bandit Marco Uberti; and I said to myself, "If ever robbers are particular in choosing the most favourable spots for their depredations, this is assuredly one to be so selected."

Scarcely had this thought passed through my mind, when a dozen horsemen suddenly appeared in the road. I can convey no better idea of this abrupt apparition than by begging the reader to suppose that they all in an instant sprang out of the earth: though the real solution of the mystery no doubt was that they suddenly emerged from the deep shade of the trees which skirted one side of the road. My first impulse was to snatch at the box of pistols which I had with me on the dickey: but scarcely had I even so much as touched the lid, when one of the horsemen knocked me off the chaise with the handle of his whip. At the same instant I heard pistols fired—and then consciousness abandoned me as I dropped into the road.

Speedily however was I recalled to my senses by piercing screams which rang through my brain. Looking up, I perceived two of the banditti lifting Olivia into the arms of another who was on horseback,—the two first-mentioned having dismounted. I sprang to my feet, and was rushing forward,—when I fell over something near the fore-wheel of the post-chaise: it was the corpse of a bandit who, as I subsequently learnt, was shot by my master. Scrambling up again, I beheld Captain Raymond bound fast to the hind-wheel of the chaise,—so that if the horses had started off, he would have inevitably been killed. Lord and Lady Ringwold were struggling desperately in the grasp of some of the banditti, and in passionate terms beseeching that their daughter might not be carried off. These entreaties were uttered in English,—and thus the ruffians could not understand them: nor were they indeed likely to have paid any merciful attention to them even if it were otherwise. I did not see the valet: but the maid lay on the box, her head having fallen back on the roof of the carriage. I hoped it was merely in a swoon, and that she had not been killed by the banditti: but I had no time to ascertain.

All that I thus saw took me but a single moment to embrace at a glance, though the description has occupied several minutes to give. I should add that the trunks all lay open upon the road; and some of the banditti were busy in rifling them of whatsoever they chose to carry away. I was flying to the succour of Captain Raymond, when the screams of Olivia Sackville grew so thrillingly piercing—proclaiming an anguish so frightfully poignant—that I turned quickly to glance in that direction. The horseman to whose arms she had been consigned, and who retained her in front of him on the saddle-bow, was galloping away with her. A riderless horse stood close to the spot where I had come



back to consciousness; and it was this intervening obstacle that had prevented the circumstance of my resuscitation from being observed by the ruffians, who were all busied in various ways,—some, I should not forget to observe, in keeping guard over the postillions. The frenzied shrieks of Olivia, the agonizing screams of her mother, and the piteous lamentations of Lord Ringwold, produced such an effect upon me as to make me feel as if I were going mad. Totally forgetting my master, I sprang upon the horse which stood near me, and galloped away from the midst of the scene. It was in frenzied pursuit of Olivia's ruffian abductor that I thus sped. Not for a moment did I pause to reflect that I had no weapon of any kind wherewith to attack the man or to defend myself: I was obeying an impulse which was the effect of the feelings that were so highly wrought by the entire scene, and so intensely goaded by the cries and lamentations of distress.

Indeed, such was the confusion of my brain—such the wildering hurry of my thoughts—that I failed even immediately to notice that I myself was being pursued: for three or four of the banditti had sprung upon their horses and galloped after me the instant that I shot away from their midst. The fact was brought to my knowledge by the somewhat disagreeably startling intimation of a bullet whistling close by my ear. But I galloped on; and as my thoughts grew more collected, I reasoned to myself that I might just as well continue my way in the desperate hope of being enabled to render some assistance to the unfortunate Olivia, as to turn round or to halt and encounter almost certain death at the hands of the miscreants who were pursuing me. But another and another bullet whistled by my ears: still I pressed on at the utmost speed of which the horse was capable—for it was a high-spirited animal, and there would have been no need to use whip or spur even if I had been furnished with them.

Such was the arrowy velocity with which the horse darted along, that I outstripped my pursuers, and was rapidly gaining upon the ruffian who had carried off Olivia. He did not seem to take any notice of me; for it would have been easy for him to fire a pistol at me as I overtook him: but he evidently fancied that it was one of his own people who was in his rear. I was close upon him:—in the beautiful clearness of the night I could distinguish Olivia Sackville supported on his left arm; and as she was motionless—struggling not, nor giving vent to any cry—I concluded that she had swooned. But what should I do to succour her? how could I contend against that ruffian-abductor, who, like his fellows, was no doubt armed to the teeth? Scarcely had these thoughts flitted through my brain, when my disengaged hand happened to rest upon one of the holsters; and to my joy I now discovered that I was the master of a brace of pistols. That they were loaded, I was tolerably well convinced, as they were evidently ready there for service. At all events I did not wait to ascertain the fact: but taking one in each hand, and yet keeping hold of the reins, I made the horse dash alongside of the animal which the ruffian-abductor bestrode.

The very first glimpse I obtained of him smote me with the conviction that he was none other than Marco Uberti himself. I thought it no harm to shoot such a wretch dead upon the spot,—as it was to deliver an innocent young lady from his loathsome arms; and levelling one of the pistols at his head, I pulled the trigger. But it flashed in the pan; and before I had time to use the other one, the horse suddenly shied and threw me. Almost at the same instant the pursuing banditti galloped up to the spot:—half-stunned by the fall, I was utterly incapable of offering any resistance, and was accordingly made prisoner. One of the banditti levelled a pistol at my head; and in the twinkling of an eye my mortal career would have ended, when Marco Uberti—for he the abductor proved to be— ejaculated a word the effect of which was the sudden lowering of the pistol. The banditti made signs for me to mount the horse again; and when I had done so, a cord was tied to my feet under the animal's belly,—so that I could not, by suddenly throwing myself off again, escape from my captors.

The road was pursued for another half-hour,—Miss Sackville continuing all the while in a state of unconsciousness. At length we reached a narrow pass, formed by the almost perpendicular walls of two colossal heights: from this pass there was a diverging gorge at a point where one of the heights ceased; and in a few minutes we reached the entrance of a wood, into which we penetrated. Our way was now continued through an almost total darkness: but the banditti took very good care that I should have no chance of escape, even if I meditated the attempt. A few minutes more brought us abruptly into the midst of a group of cabins or huts, so completely embowered in the wood that I question whether they could be seen in the day-time until thus suddenly come upon. Farther on there was a much higher object, which appeared to be the ruin of some edifice: but I could not at once ascertain if my surmise was correct. I have forborne from breaking the thread of my narrative to explain what my feelings were from the moment that I was captured by these lawless desperadoes: it may however be easily understood that they were of no very pleasurable nature; for though I had been preserved from death at the hands of the miscreant who levelled the pistol at me, I could scarcely hope that my life would be preserved altogether—or even if it were, that I was destined for kind treatment. And then, too, the idea of that beautiful young woman falling into the hands of the unscrupulous monster Marco Uberti,—it was sufficient to harrow the soul with the most frightful forebodings on her account.

But to resume the thread of my narrative. The little hamlet, or group of huts, was reached in the manner already described: Marco Uberti curtly issued a few orders, which being spoken in the Italian language, I could not understand; and while he passed forward with his lovely and still insensible burthen, the banditti who had me in custody, made me alight at the door of a hut, the cord having been previously unfastened from my feet. From this hut a man with as ruffian a look as that of any of my captors, came forth with a lantern; and having exchanged a few words with his returned comrades, he made way for me to pass

into that hut. The light of the lantern showed me that the place contained a rude mattress stretched upon some clean straw; and there were a few cooking utensils on a shelf. But I was soon made aware that there was something else too in this hut: and *that* was a chain, one end of which was fastened to a portion of stone-work which formed the massive chimney of the little habitation. A ring or fetter at the other extremity of this chain was fastened round my leg by means of a padlock: the banditti retired, taking the lantern with them; and I was left a prisoner in total darkness, and to the gloomy companionship of my own thoughts.

The chain permitted me to throw myself upon the mattress—which I did: for I was exhausted by all that I had gone through. Knocked off the box of the post-chaise—then riding a spirited horse at a tremendous rate—and thrown from that animal's back with considerable violence,—I had indeed experienced enough to prostrate me; and I was covered with bruises. But though thus wearied, I had not the least inclination for sleep: I was agitated by appalling apprehensions on my own account, and on that of Olivia Sackville. I need hardly say that I tried to see if I could slip off the fetter to which the chain was fastened: but I could not.

In about half-an-hour I heard the trampling of steeds in the vicinage of the hut, and voices conversing in tones of coarse hilarity. I concluded that these were the remaining members of the gang returning from their work of plunder in respect to the travelling-carriage and the post-chaise; and it was pretty evident from their mirth and laughter that they had every reason to be satisfied with their booty—although of course I could not comprehend what was passing between them.

In another half-hour the door of the hut suddenly opened; and Marco Uberti, accompanied by two of his followers—one of whom carried a lantern in his hand—made his appearance. The description I had heard of him at the village-hotel, was strictly accurate: he was short, stout, and powerfully built: he had evidently been good-looking in his earlier years, before dissipation and the traces of all the worst and darkest passions of the human soul had marred his countenance. His eyes were dark and piercing: his bushy brows in their ebon blackness contrasted strikingly with his hair which was streaked with gray: but his look was not altogether so ferocious as I had anticipated from his description as well as from his character. He was dressed in a semi-military uniform—a blue frock-coat, gray trousers, and a foraging cap with a gold band,—but all the worse for wear, and soiled with the mud which his horse's feet had thrown up. It appeared that one of the individuals who accompanied him (not he with the lantern), understood several languages, and came to act as an interpreter. The following colloquy then took place between Marco Uberti and myself, through the medium of this linguist, who, finding that I was an Englishman, spoke to me in that tongue.

"I learn from one of my men who questioned the postilion, that the young lady's father is an English nobleman, and I therefore suppose he is exceedingly rich?"

"Before I answer any questions," I said, "it is absolutely necessary I should learn the motives for which they are put."

"It is no use for you to assume an impudent air. Answer all questions without putting any—or you shall swing to the bough of the nearest tree. Do you think your vile paltry life was spared through any puling mercy? or that those into whose hands you have fallen, would hesitate to take it if you anger them, just as they would that of the veriest dog? Now, answer the question that was put to you. What are the circumstances of the English nobleman?"

It instantaneously struck me that Miss Olivia was only carried off for the purpose of being retained captive until a sum of money should be paid for her ransom: and therefore I at once concluded that it was better I should represent the truth in respect to Lord Ringwold's means, so that too large an amount should not be demanded at his hands.

"I can assure you," I said, speaking through the interpreter, "that he is poor for an English nobleman."

"But what do you mean by the word *poor*? Ideas of things are relative and comparative. What is his annual income?"

"Three thousand pounds, speaking in English money."

Marco Uberti sneered contemptuously when this sum was named to him by the interpreter; and then he reflected for a few minutes. At length breaking silence, he said something to his two men, which elicited their approval, as I could tell by their looks; and then the interpreter remarked to me, "The destiny of the young lady is decided; and if you ever see her father or mother again, you may tell them that their daughter has won for herself the infinite honour of becoming Marco Uberti's bride. Now, as for yourself, will your master ransom you? and will he conduct the negotiation in a fair and honourable manner?"

Much as I was shocked at the thought of the beautiful Olivia becoming the wife—or it would no doubt be the mistress—of the lawless bandit, it would be a miserable affliction on my part not to admit that my next feeling was one of joy at the prospect of having my own life spared; and though I knew not to what extent the demands of the robbers might reach, nor how far Captain Raymond might be inclined to extend his generosity towards me, I hastened to exclaim, "Yes—my master will assuredly ransom me!"

"In that case," was the response, "you will have writing materials given you in the morning—you will pen a letter according to certain terms which will be dictated—and you will then continue our prisoner until the messenger whom we will despatch with your note shall have returned."

Here the interview ended: Marco Uberti issued from the hut, followed by his two men; and I was once again left in utter darkness, in solitude, and to the companionship of my own thoughts.



## CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

## THE TOWER.

SCARCELY a quarter of an hour had elapsed after I was thus left to myself, when I heard the door of the hut gently opening, and some one glided stealthily in: but I could not see the individual, so profound was the darkness—nor knew I whether it was male or female. I started up on the mattress, my chain clanking with the sudden motion; and a cold shudder swept through me—for my first horrifying idea was that some ruffian was stealing in to murder me. A low “Hush!” however conveyed a partial reassurance—but not a complete one: for how could I hope to find a friend amongst that gang of miscreants?”

“Here! take this and use it,” said a voice, addressing me in the English tongue, but speaking in so low a tone that I could not possibly have recognised it even if in its louder accents it was perfectly familiar to my ear. “An hour must suffice for the work; and then I shall return to you. It is now considerably past midnight—and there is no time to be lost.”

While the man—for of a masculine sex the individual was—thus addressed me, his hand groped about to encounter mine; and he placed in my grasp a small object which by the touch I immediately discerned to be a sharp file. He stole out of the hut, gently closing the door behind him; and I lost not a moment in going to work with the instrument thus supplied me. Though my hands continued busy in filing away at the ring, which was attached to my leg just below the knee, my thoughts had leisure for surmise and conjecture. Who could the friendly individual be? Supposition pointed to the man who had acted as interpreter, from the fact that my mysterious well-wisher had addressed me in English; and methought too that I recognised—now that I came to reflect—the same degree and style of foreign accent which had marked the interpreter’s mode of speech. But then, wherefore should he thus succour me? had my appearance moved him to compassion? or was there any ulterior purpose to serve? On these points conjecture was of course useless: but as the time was wearing on, I supposed that I should soon have that part of the mystery cleared up. I thought, when first taking possession of the file, that an hour would be ample time to cut through the ring: but I soon found that my progress was not so great as I had expected, and that iron does not eat into iron with so much readiness as man preys upon his fellow-man. Indeed, when I had calculated that an hour must have well nigh passed, the ring was yet very far from being severed—and it resisted all my attempts to snap it.

Presently I heard the door slowly opening again; and my unknown friend entered.

“What progress have you made?” he at once inquired, but still speaking in the same low and unrecognisable voice as before; yet the accents tended to confirm my suspicion that he was indeed the interpreter.

“The ring is barely three parts severed,” I replied in a whisper.

His two hands quickly felt for the ring; and by

a dexterous jerk, which he was better enabled to give than I, he broke it at once.

“Now follow me with all possible precaution—and speak not a word.”

He took my hand, and led me forth from the hut. The darkness was still complete beneath the dense canopy of trees; but as my eyes got more and more accustomed to it, I could just discern that my unknown friend was taller than the interpreter—and therefore he was indeed still *unknown*. We passed through the wood, he guiding me by an evidently circuitous route; and then, as we abruptly emerged from the dense shade of the trees, I found myself close by the wall of what appeared to be the ruin of a large tower or castellated edifice. This, be it observed, was the lofty object I had caught a glimpse of when first introduced on that memorable night to the group of huts in the midst of the embowering wood. But the sky had become much darker in the interval; and though no longer involved in the dense obscurity of the wood, yet objects were only seen dimly and indistinctly. I looked at my companion: his tall form was enveloped in a flowing mantle; and as he stopped to address me I could just discern that he had a black mask upon his countenance.

“One of the most perilous incidents of our proceeding,” he said, still speaking in the lowest possible whisper, “is now to take place. Round the angle of that building a sentinel is posted. It is for you to overpower him. I do not wish death to be unnecessarily dealt: yet if need be, you must take his life, or it may be impossible to rescue the English lady from a horrible fate. Are you the man to proceed with the enterprise?”

“Show me the means, and fear not on my account,” was my firm though hastily given response.

“‘Tis well!” said my companion. “Here is a sword whereof the handle is heavy. Steal round the corner, and deal the sentinel a blow with that handle sufficient to stun him: then gag him with your kerchief—bind him hand and foot with this cord—and drag him round the next angle so as to leave clear the doorway at which he is posted. But if the first blow fail, hesitate not to deal a second—and let it be a sure one. Should I hear the least struggling, I shall be in a moment by your side to render assistance. Yet spare his life, if it be possible: for though our own would be scarcely worth five minutes’ purchase in case of detection, yet am I loth that blood should be unnecessarily shed.”

Without waiting to reflect upon the singularity of the circumstance of so perilous and difficult a portion of the proceeding being allotted exclusively to me, when if my companion were to render his assistance the task of overpowering the sentinel would be comparatively easy and prompt of performance,—I took the cord and the sword. The former I tied loosely round my waist, so that it might be instantaneously available for use; and the latter I found to be of the weight and form of a cutlass. Grasping it by the blade in such a manner that it might serve the purpose of a bludgeon, I stole up to the angle of the building, and peeping round for a moment, discerned the dark form of the sentinel leaning on his rifle in a

lounging attitude, and with his back towards me. The next instant the heavy hilt of the cutlass descended upon his head; and he fell forward with only a low moan. My knee was upon his back quick as the eye can wink: but he moved not, beyond a slight spasmodic quivering. I turned him round, and thrust my kerchief into his mouth. Then, with the utmost celerity, I bound him hand and foot; and according to the instructions I had received, dragged him round the next angle of the building, depositing him in the midst of some long rank grass. I waited for a few moments to assure myself that he was not dead: for though I really need not have stood on any squeamish punctilio with the bandit, I was nevertheless averse to have his death upon my conscience. Having convinced myself that he was only stunned, I hastened back towards the spot where I had left my companion; and quickly informed him that everything had been done in pursuance of his instructions.

It appeared that the sentinel had been posted at a door deeply set in a Gothic arch; and this door my unknown companion at once opened—for it was not locked. He led me across the threshold into a place where utter darkness prevailed, but which by the odour and by the sounds of animals moving, I at once knew must be the banditti's stables. My companion having the materials for producing a light about him, a match was applied to a candle in a lantern suspended to the ceiling; and he bade me lose no time in saddling and bridling a particular horse which he indicated. While I was thus engaged, he made a rapid survey of the other steeds,—there being perhaps fifteen or sixteen in all; and having selected one which either by its appearance or from previous knowledge he judged most fitted for the service it had to perform, he caparisoned the animal with a lady's side-saddle and with a light bridle: for I should observe that in one corner of this spacious place, which had evidently at one time been the entrance-hall of the castellated edifice, there was a space bearded off for a harness-room, and where there was a miscellaneous assortment of all such materials.

When the two horses were caparisoned, my unknown friend was leading the one which he had got ready towards the door, when his hat came in contact with the lantern: it fell off, carrying away his mask with it—and to my indescribable astonishment I recognised Angelo Volterra. So immense was my amazement that I gave vent to an ejaculation: he clutched me forcibly by the arm—and his face, naturally of a dusky tint, was now pale even to ghastliness with his emotions.

"Hush! for heaven's sake hush!" he said. "And now that you know me, you must swear not to betray me."

"Good God!" I ejaculated, but in a low voice: "was it you that gave the information which led to the attack—?"

"No—ten thousand times no!" exclaimed Volterra, his cheeks now flushing with every appearance of the haughtiest indignation. "Think you that if I had been so vile—But enough! You must swear that you will not even breathe to a living soul the name of him who succoured you this night, and who through you purposes to effect the flight of Olivia Sackville. Or at least," he

added, "you must swear to keep the secret until it shall be no longer necessary to retain it."

"I cannot take such an oath!" I answered; for I felt it to be my imperious duty to make Olivia aware, if we did indeed escape together, that her love was conferred upon a bandit—or at least upon the associate of banditti.

"Then all is lost!" rejoined Volterra—not with rage nor passion—but with a look and tone so deeply desponding, so full of an ineffable despair, that for the moment I was smitten with compassion towards him.

"And wherefore should all be lost?" I asked. "You must have good feelings, or you would not undertake all this for the rescue of that lady—"

"Good feelings!" he echoed: and an expression of loftiness swept over his countenance. "If you did but know me—if you did but understand me—if you could but read this heart of mine, you would not for another instant hesitate to comply with my request. But every moment is precious—precious as gold! The robbers are banqueting—but if the time for relieving the sentinel should arrive—Oh!" he abruptly exclaimed, "will you not put faith in a man who is giving you every proof of those good feelings by which you have appealed to him? On my soul, I am not what I seem!"

While he was thus speaking, uproarious shouts of merriment from some other part of the building reached our ears.

"Oh, if in his drunken madness Uberti should take it into his head to perpetrate an atrocity!" exclaimed Volterra, with such ineffable anguish depicted upon his countenance, that I, but too well catching his meaning, shuddered from head to foot.

"There is one condition!" I said, as an idea suddenly struck me.

"Name it! name it!" he vehemently ejaculated: but still this hasty colloquy was carried on in a tone scarcely above a whisper.

"I will take the oath—and I will keep it," was my response, "so long as I am in a condition to have the certainty that you will not again see Miss Olivia Sackville—"

"From what I have learnt," interrupted Angelo Volterra, "your master Captain Raymond intends to winter at Florence—as do also the Ringwold family. You will therefore be enabled to watch whether I violate the condition which you impose. And that condition—I accept it! Hear me then swear that never again will I seek the presence of the Ringwold family unless enabled to do so under circumstances that will allow me to explain all that must be so darkly mysterious in your eyes!"

"And I on the other hand," I now unhesitatingly said, "as solemnly swear that I will not breathe your name in a manner that shall prejudice you in the opinion of any one."

"I confide in your honour!" exclaimed Volterra, grasping my hand and pressing it with enthusiasm. "There is so much frankness in your looks—so much genuine honesty in your countenance—that I believe you, and my mind is at ease. Now let us lead forth these animals."

Volterra put on his hat, which the lantern had knocked off: but the mask he consigned to his pocket—and therefore I saw that he had all

along worn it only in the hope of effectually concealing his countenance from my view. We led forth the horses; and he, proceeding first, plunged with the animal whose rein he held into the wood.

"Now we must fasten the horses to this tree," he said, "and all the rest depends upon yourself. I am about to instruct you how you are to effect the rescue of Lord Ringwold's daughter. But first let me tell you how you are to proceed when that deliverance shall be accomplished. We stand at this moment at the entrance of a path leading through the wood in a contrary direction from that by which you were brought to the banditti's hamlet; you will have little difficulty in pursuing the path—and moreover the horses know it. On emerging from the wood, at a distance of about three quarters of a mile, you must take the road to the right—follow it carefully—diverge not from it—and in less than two hours from the time of starting, you will reach a village. Thence you can procure a guide and an escort—perhaps even a vehicle; and you will do well to push on to Florence without delay—for doubtless your master will have proceeded thither, and the parents of the lady likewise, to invoke the Grand Duke's aid in rescuing her whom we ourselves are about to save. Here is gold for the expenses of your journey; and now listen attentively to the final instructions which I have to give, and which though last, are the most important of all."

Angelo Volterra had placed a heavy purse in my hand as he spoke; and he continued in the following manner:—

"Now retrace your way to the spot where you left the sentinel: assure yourself that he is still gagged and secure: pass round the building and you will reach another door. It is unfastened—enter without fear—and in the little vestibule with which it communicates, you will find an inner door. It will be merely bolted: open it—and you will behold the object of your search. Hurry her away with you—lead her to this spot—and see that ye both mount hastily."

Volterra paused for a moment: and then added, "I shall linger here—but concealed in the deep obscurity. If all pass off well, my presence will remain unnoticed: but if there be discovery and pursuit—in a word, if aught go wrong, *then* with the weapons which I have about me will I battle unto the very last to cover the retreat of Olivia and yourself. Remember your pledge—and in no case violate it!"

I gave a reassuring answer, and hurried away to execute the instructions I had received. The sentinel had recovered his consciousness; and so far from his life being endangered, he was now in the enjoyment of the fullest vitality, which he was exercising for the purpose of releasing his arms from the bonds and relieving his mouth from the gag,—so that it was fortunate I returned to him at that moment. But I had so bound him that he could not rise to his feet. I thrust the gag further into his throat—I tightened the cords—and even through the obscurity which prevailed, I could see the convulsive rage which distorted the miscreant's countenance. Doubtless he would have killed me on the spot if he had the power: and yet I had taken so much pains to avoid the necessity of robbing him of his life!

I had retained possession of the cutlass, with which I was determined to defend myself until the very last, if seen and attacked by any others of the banditti. I passed round the building; and glancing up, perceived lights streaming through an array of four windows, whence the sounds of the uproarious merriment evidently came; and therefore I had no doubt that those were the windows of the robbers' banqueting-hall. I passed on, and reached the door which Angelo Volterra had described to me. As he had given me to understand, it yielded to my touch; and I found myself in a small vestibule lighted by an iron lamp suspended to the arched ceiling. On the left hand was another door, with two massive bolts: these I drew back—and as the door opened, I perceived that there was a light inside. As I crossed the threshold, I instantaneously caught a glimpse of Olivia Sackville, who had evidently that moment started up from a seat near a small round table;—and I may observe that the chamber was tolerably well furnished. Her countenance was as pale as death: her very lips, naturally of so bright a carmine hue, were ashy: her hair was floating all dishevelled over her shoulders and down her back: her hands were clasped—and she was on the point of falling upon her knees to implore mercy of the terrible bandit whom she expected to appear before her. But when she saw that it was I, indescribably rapid was the change that took place in her looks: for they at once expressed hope, suspense, and amazement.

"Come quick, Miss Sackville!" I said: "delay not—and we shall both be saved!"

She darted upon me a glance of wild joy and fervid gratitude—thrust on her bonnet and shawl—and thus in a few moments was ready to accompany me. We sped along—the prostrate sentinel was passed—the angles of the building were turned—and in safety we reached the wood where the horses were awaiting us. I assisted Miss Sackville to mount: I sprang upon the other steed; and I said with a significance which she could comprehend not, but which *another* whom I knew to be close by *could* full well understand, "Ten thousand, thousand thanks to him who by liberating me, afforded the means of assuring your deliverance!"

I then led the way along the path through the wood, which we threaded without another word being spoken. On gaining the road, I broke that silence by inquiring if Miss Sackville was accustomed to ride on horseback?—and she at once responded in the affirmative.

"But tell me," she said, in accents of feverish anxiety—"tell me, even before I speak a syllable of gratitude towards yourself, whether my beloved parents are safe?"

I explained to her how I had quitted the scene of the attack the very moment after she herself was carried off—and that therefore I was in complete ignorance of what had subsequently occurred: but I added that there was every reason to hope and believe that no violence had been used towards Lord and Lady Ringwold, nor any unnecessary cruelty inflicted on my master beyond the tying him to the post-chaise:—"Because," I added, "the individual who ere now gave me my freedom, bade me conduct you to Florence; for thither, he said, your noble father and mother as well as Captain



Raymond are certain to proceed with the least possible delay."

I furthermore suffered Miss Sackville to comprehend that it was one of the banditti who having taken compassion on us both, had thus accomplished our deliverance—but that not daring to stand the risk of his friendly connivance being suspected by his comrades, he had so arranged matters that it would appear as if my escape had taken place altogether unaided. As for the circumstance of my knowing where she was confined, and likewise of being enabled to obtain possession of horses, the friendly robber (I said) had no doubt calculated that his comrades would be so utterly in the dark as to be unable to form the slightest conjecture upon the point. And now Olivia poured forth the sincerest gratitude towards me for the perils I had incurred on her behalf; and she readily consented to press forward with all pos-

sible speed, not merely to elude pursuit if it were instituted, but likewise to be relieved with the shortest delay in respect to the somewhat painful misgivings which still haunted her on account of her parents.

We reached the village that Volterra had mentioned to me, and alighted at a small hostelry, where we had to knock up the inmates: for it was not as yet five o'clock in the morning. Fortunately the landlord could speak French: otherwise our position would have been somewhat awkward, as neither Miss Sackville nor myself knew a single syllable of Italian. I thought it better to explain that we had escaped from the power of Marco Uberti's band, not merely to account for the circumstance of the young lady travelling alone with me at such unseemly hours, but also as a reason for requiring an escort. The landlord seemed to be so lost in amazement at the tale that for

some minutes he could do nothing but give vent to ejaculations of wonder in his own tongue; and then he hastened to interpret our explanations to his wife. Ultimately however we ascertained that a chaise could be furnished us: but as for the escort, it was not so easy a matter to accomplish, unless we chose to wait an hour or two till the mayor could be seen. I recommended Miss Sackville to decide upon pursuing the journey without delay, inasmuch as long ere this our flight must have been discovered when the banditti went to relieve the sentinel. She placed herself entirely at the guidance of my counsel: we partook of some refreshments—and the chaise was then in readiness. It was a wretched rattletrap of a concern: but that signified little—for on the other hand two good strong horses were attached to it. I had retained my cutlass: I purchased a pair of pistols of the landlord; and taking my seat on the box, I resolved to do my duty until the very last, if we were overtaken and attacked. The landlord inquired what he was to do with the two steeds that had borne us thither: and I recommended him to consult the mayor of the village, or any local authority upon the subject.

Our journey was now resumed. Half-an-hour's drive brought us to the limit of the Apennines; and we passed through the town of Pistoja, from which Florence was about twenty-five miles distant. We were in the Tuscan dominions; and the farther we advanced the more charming was the aspect of the country in the clear daylight. All was verdure there, as if it were bright midsummer. The road wound its way along the bank of a river in the pellucid depths of which the shadows of overhanging trees were reflected: and from the midst of groves the birds sent forth their blithe carolling,—thus reminding me of joyous spring in my own native England. Ever and anon I looked back to see whether we were pursued: but when Pistoja had been passed and we advanced farther and farther into Tuscany, my apprehensions grew fainter and fainter. At length the Apennines were left so far behind that they now wore the aspect of an assemblage of blue clouds skirting the surface of the earth. The horses were changed—the journey was continued—and it was yet early when we entered the city of Florence.

Miss Sackville knew the name of the hotel at which her parents had intended to put up; and on arriving there she was instantaneously relieved from all farther suspense and was speedily clasped in the arms of Lord and Lady Ringwold. Captain Raymond was likewise there: for after the attack by the robbers, they had journeyed on until Florence was reached,—Angelo Volterra's opinion being well founded, that they would use all possible despatch to invoke the succour of a detachment of ducal troops in order to rescue Olivia from the hands of the miscreants. Need I say that Lord and Lady Ringwold had endured the most poignant mental tortures on their beloved daughter's account—or that their joy was now indescribably great in receiving her back to their arms? Or is it necessary for me to declare that I was overwhelmed with the warmest expressions of gratitude and the most enthusiastic praises for the part that I had performed? As for the valet and the lady's-maid, relative to whose fate I had remained in uncertainty,—I soon found that they were

safe. It appeared the maid had been only in a swoon upon the box of the carriage when I caught a glimpse of her there; and the valet had been stunned by a blow which had knocked him into the road.

Reserved and distant to a certain extent as Captain Raymond's manner had habitually been towards me, he now completely unbent—grasped me warmly by the hand—and lavished the highest encomiums upon me. I told Lord and Lady Ringwold and Captain Raymond precisely the same tale that I had narrated to Miss Sackville,—and which indeed was every syllable correct, save and except only in the representation that our deliverance was to be attributed to an anonymous friendly bandit instead of to Angelo Volterra.

"It is fortunate indeed that circumstances should have thus turned out," said Captain Raymond, "inasmuch as from certain information we have obtained there seemed to be no chance that the ducal troops would be placed at our disposal. Marco Uberti and his band would have led them such a dance amongst the Apennines that they would have been wearied out—perhaps enticed into a defile where they would have sustained terrific loss; and all these casualties being held in view, the Tuscan authorities would have refused to send any troops at all."

"It certainly does seem extraordinary," I remarked, "that if there were a possibility of capturing these desperadoes, the Grand Duke and his government should not have long ago adopted measures for the accomplishment of that aim."

"And there is perhaps another reason," resumed Captain Raymond, "why nothing of the sort has as yet been done. From what the landlord of the hotel told us on our arrival at an early hour this morning, the Grand Duke is inclined to deal charily and leniently with Marco Uberti."

"Is it because the terrible bandit-chief was once an officer in the ducal household?" I inquired: "for if so, the Tuscan Sovereign carries his attachment towards a discarded dependant to a very remarkable extent."

"No one appears to be well able to solve this mystery," replied Captain Raymond. "Some imagine that Marco Uberti is acquainted with certain State secrets of such vital importance that the Grand Duke would on no account have them revealed: others declare that they are family secrets whereof Marco Uberti is thus in possession, and that they are of such a delicate character it is most desirable to prevent them from becoming known. But from what the landlord said, it would appear that there are persons who hold the belief that when Marco Uberti fled some years back on account of slaying a brother-official in a quarrel over their wine-cups, he carried off with him a number of important papers, the publication of which would most seriously compromise the Grand Duke in respect to his diplomatic dealings with other Sovereigns. But be all this as it may, there have been positive proofs that Marco Uberti does possess some mysterious means of finding favour with the Tuscan Prince. Twice during his brigand-career has he been captured when venturing alone and in disguise into the heart of Tuscan towns near the Apennines; and on both occasions, though condemned to death, he has been suffered to escape with the notorious connivance of the

authorities. Under all these circumstances, therefore, it was by no means probable that the Grand Duke would have lent the aid of his troops for the rescue of an English lady when he shows himself so indifferent in respect to what his own subjects endure at the hands of those brigands."

Here the conversation ended. I should observe that the banditti had plundered the Ringwolds and Captain Raymond of all their money and jewellery; and they had even taken off with them from the scene of their iniquitous exploit, such articles of wearing apparel and linen as they fancied from the various trunks,—my own, as I now found, not having formed an exception. Were it not for the civility of the landlord of the hotel at the nearest village to that scene of plunder, the travellers would have found themselves entirely destitute of funds wherewith to pursue their way to Florence,—which journey, as already hinted, they had prosecuted for the remainder of the night. None of their private papers had been taken from them; and as both Lord Ringwold and Captain Raymond had circular letters of credit on the principal continental bankers, they were at once enabled to replenish their purses. Captain Raymond generously insisted on making good the amount of my loss in respect to the things abstracted from my trunks; and he placed a liberal sum in my hands—ostensibly as an indemnification—but I comprehended perfectly well that it was also as a reward for my conduct during the past night. In the course of the afternoon I was summoned to the Ringwolds' sitting-room in the hotel; and when his lordship, his wife, and daughter had once more renewed the expression of their thanks, the young lady with her own hand presented me a small packet,—observing at the same time, "Nothing can ever repay the amount of obligation I owe you: but this will at least serve to remind you henceforth that you behaved in the noblest manner towards one who is not ungrateful."

I bowed and retired. On ascending to my own chamber in the hotel, I opened the parcel, and found its contents to consist of a very handsome gold watch and chain. The present, for more reasons than one, was not unwelcome: I naturally valued it as a memorial of the service which I had been instrumental in rendering; and it likewise furnished me with an useful appendage instead of the one I had lost on the preceding night:—for I forgot to observe in its proper place that during the time when I lay in a state of unconsciousness after being knocked off the post-chaise, the banditti had rifled me of both watch and purse.

## CHAPTER LXXXIX.

### THE DUCAL RECEPTION.

SOME days passed, during which I amused myself by visiting the public buildings of Florence, and becoming acquainted with its beautiful environs—especially in the vale of the Arno. One morning when I awoke, the first thought that flashed to my mind was that the 15th of November, 1841, was now reached; and that precisely one twelvemonth had elapsed since that memorable

day on which Sir Matthew Heselstine had decreed the probationary period of two years.

"Yes—one year has elapsed," I said to myself: "and what countless incidents have been crowded therein! All that I have seen and gone through during this one year, was sufficient for a life-time. Has it enlarged my experiences? has it taught me an easier and a deeper reading of the human heart? Yes—I feel that I can answer these queries in the affirmative. One year has fled: an equal period must be passed ere I can return to Heselstine Hall to learn my fate. And what were the old Baronet's words ere I took my departure?—'If at the expiration of this probationary interval of two years,' he said, 'you find yourself, by any misdeeds committed in the meantime, to be unworthy of an alliance with my granddaughter, you will be at least honourable, wise, and prudent enough to refrain from keeping the appointment.'—It was thus that Sir Matthew Heselstine spoke: methinks I see him *now* as he gazed upon me *then*! But can I not lay my hand upon my heart with the consciousness of unimpaired rectitude? Will he be so cruel as to deny me the hand of the beautiful Annabel, because through the treachery of a villain I was plundered of the funds he placed at my disposal and have sunk down into a state of servitude again? Or will he not rather esteem me all the more highly for the reason that so far from applying to him for a replenishment of my purse, I at once addressed myself to the pursuits of honest industry in order to earn my bread? Heaven alone knows what this second and last year of my probation may bring forth: but one thing is certain—that no temptation shall beguile me into error—no blandishment however sweet, and no trial however severe, shall cause my steps to stray from that path of rectitude which for the first year I have so faithfully pursued. And when the 15th of November, 1842, shall come, I may find myself enabled to appear before the old Baronet, feeling that at least I deserve to be received with open arms. Oh! and if then, to use his own words, there be festivities and rejoicings, they will not be given solely to welcome the wanderer home—but to herald that still brighter day when the band of Annabel shall be clasped in mine at the altar!"

Yet while indulging in these reflections—balancing my hopes and fears, and in the enthusiasm of the heart giving an immense preponderance to the former—there was one painful recollection which stole into my mind,—the saddest and mournfullest reminiscence connected with the past twelvemonth, so far as I myself was personally concerned: and the reader will scarcely require to be informed that it was in connexion with Calanthe and our child. Never, never could I think of that tragedy of the chateau without a painful tightening at the heart, as well as with apprehension lest if that fatal amour of mine were known to Sir Matthew it would prove destructive of my hopes with regard to Annabel.

Let me pursue the thread of my narrative; and be it borne in mind that I am now writing of the 15th of November, 1841. On this day there was to be a grand reception at the ducal palace—a ceremony corresponding with the united ones of a levee and drawing-room at the Court of the British Sovereign: that is to say, it was a reception for



the higher class of both sexes. The Ringwolds and Captain Raymond were to be present on the occasion; and my master—who since the affair in the Apennines had treated me in the most friendly manner—said to me after breakfast, when I was attending upon him in his own room, “The Court reception will, I understand, be a brilliant one: have you any curiosity to witness it?”

I answered that I should be much pleased to behold such a ceremony.

“You shall be gratified, Joseph,” responded the Captain. “It appears that in the great hall where the reception takes place, there is a large gallery for the accommodation of those who, not having the privilege of the actual *entrée*, are nevertheless able to obtain cards to witness the proceedings. Lord Ringwold has obtained a card from the English Minister at the Florentine Court; and it was with the kind consideration that you might perhaps like to avail yourself of it. Here it is. You must apparel yourself in your best: and I do not flatter you, Joseph,” added Captain Raymond, with a smile, “when I venture to predict that in gentility of appearance you will be second to none in that gallery.”

I took the card, thanking Captain Raymond for having undertaken to present it to me, and begging that he would express my gratitude to Lord Ringwold for having procured it on my account.

“By the bye,” said the Captain, as I was about to leave the room, “I am going to dine to-day at the British Minister’s; and therefore after the ceremony your time will be at your own disposal. Indeed you may regard it as a whole holiday.”

As I left the Captain’s presence, I could not help thinking there was something singular in the coincidence that he should of his own accord bid me observe as a holiday this very day which in my own mind I had already marked as such, on account of its being the anniversary of that memorable date when Sir Matthew Heseltine gave me to understand that under certain circumstances I might aspire to the hand of the charming Annabel. Proceeding to my own chamber, I put on my best apparel; and at about noon repaired to the ducal palace. The card at once procured me admission to the gallery, which was already more than half filled with well-dressed persons of both sexes. I however obtained a good seat in the third tier from the front; and as there was yet half-an-hour until the commencement of the ceremony, I had ample leisure to survey the magnificent hall. It was of immense size, and lofty in proportion. From the doors beneath the gallery a carpet of purple velvet, fringed with gold, and about three yards wide, stretched across the marble pavement to a sort of dais, on which stood two thrones for the accommodation of the Grand Duke and Duchess. The windows of this superb hall were of stained glass: the intervals between them were occupied by pictures from the pencils of the first masters; and along the walls were ranged statues and vases. As yet the body of the hall itself was empty: but the gallery where I was seated, was rapidly filling:

Precisely at half-past twelve o’clock the sounds of a splendid military band stationed somewhere outside, came echoing through the hall; and from a side-door near the dais the ducal procession made its appearance. It was opened by a body

of troops—for on the Continent no ceremony is considered complete without the presence of soldiery; and these troops, breaking into two lines, ranged themselves along the walls in front of the statues and vases. Several noblemen and gentlemen in court dresses entered after the troops, and stationed themselves on either side of the dais: then five or six personages, walking together, and forming an exclusive knot of their own, made their appearance, placing themselves by the side of the thrones, only standing a little back; and these I was informed were the Ministers of State. My informant, I may as well observe, was an elderly and very agreeable Italian gentleman, who sat next to me in the gallery, and who happened to speak English, if not well, at least in a manner that rendered him perfectly intelligible.

Scarcely had the Ministers thus entered and taken their places, when there was a loud flourish of trumpets from the brass band outside—the lines of troops presented arms—and every hat in the gallery was at once taken off: for the Grand Duke and his Duchess were now entering. It is not my purpose to give any description of these personages: suffice it to say that they seated themselves with a becoming dignity in the gilded chairs, or thrones, prepared for their reception; and a host of pages, ladies-in-waiting, and other Court dependants, swelled the throng already gathered on either side of the dais.

The entrance-doors underneath the gallery were now thrown open; and numbers of handsomely apparelled gentlemen and elegantly dressed ladies began to pour in. I recognised amidst the foremost of the throng Lord and Lady Ringwold, and immediately behind them the beautiful Olivia, leaning on the arm of Captain Raymond. The Hon. Miss Sackville evidently attracted considerable attention: as well indeed she might—for there was something splendid in that specimen of Saxon loveliness. The company, as they poured in, moved towards the upper end of the hall: but the foremost stopped short at a respectful distance from the dais, until the reception commenced. Those who got there first were speedily increased in number: but still there was no inconvenient crowding; and any individual of distinction or any lady of remarkable beauty was certain to attract a due share of attention. All of a sudden I noticed that amongst those who were nearest to the extremity which the gallery overhung, there was a visible sensation; and the cause of it was speedily discerned by us who were up in that gallery. It was a young lady leaning on the left arm of an old gentleman; and his right arm supported another lady. But, good heavens!—was it possible? did my eyes deceive me? or did I veritably and truly behold Sir Matthew Heseltine, Annabel, and her mother?

Yes: it was no dream—no delusion!—and it was Annabel who had thus become the cynosure of all regards. Ah, Olivia, you were indeed eclipsed now! Who can describe Annabel’s ravishing appearance? Dressed in a robe of white richly-watered silk, her exquisite figure was set off to the utmost advantage: the luxuriant ringlets of golden hue showered upon her neck and shoulders: a wreath of pearls and a single white camelia decorated her head. I could not see her face: but I could imagine all its ravishing beauty, with the



modest blush upon it, and the large azure eyes cast down beneath their dark fringes: for I knew that Annabel was not one who possessed a vanity that could be flattered by the universal homage paid to her beauty as her light feet moved over the purple velvet carpet fringed with gold.

Impossible would it be to describe the mingled astonishment and joy which I experienced on beholding the object of my heart's devoted love. For some minutes, I had no thought for anything nor anybody else: all my ideas, all my faculties, and all my susceptibilities of ecstatic feeling, were concentrated in that one object. I gazed as if looking on something that I had never seen before, and now dazzled and bewildered, yet ineffably ravished, by the appearance of that seraphic figure. At length it all in a moment struck me that those who sat next and near to me in the gallery, might be amazed by the display of my emotions: but as I glanced rapidly to the right and left, I was relieved on observing that they had no eyes nor attention for aught save the spectacle that was passing before them.

And now I looked more attentively at Sir Matthew Heseltine and Annabel's mother. I could not see their faces any more than I could catch a glimpse of that of Annabel: but I noticed that the old Baronet walked with a firmer step than he was wont to do when I was with him—and I was rejoiced at this proof of the excellent health which he experienced. Mrs. Lanover was handsomely dressed; and she likewise walked with an ease and lightness which contrasted in my remembrance with the sickly languor that had characterized her in former times. But the effect which Annabel's appearance produced upon that brilliant assemblage amongst which there were already so many rare specimens of female loveliness, alike Italian and foreign, was visible to every eye,—notwithstanding that it was necessarily subdued by a prevailing well-bred courtesy, and likewise by a sense of the august presence in which the company found itself. To my heart the homage thus silently yet eloquently paid by all eyes to Annabel's bewitching loveliness, was fraught with ineffable rapture; and when the intelligent Italian who sat next to me, made some observation on the subject, I could not possibly conceal the whole extent of what I felt.

"What a charming girl! what an angelic figure! what a beautiful shape!" he whispered to me. "I would give the world to behold her countenance! If it only correspond with that elegant form of hers—But really one would imagine that you had all of a sudden fallen desperately in love with her! I think she is a native of your country: that golden hair bespeaks as much—How ravishing! how beautiful!"

"Yes—ravishing and beautiful!" I involuntarily echoed, but likewise in a whisper: and then the Italian's eyes were averted from my animated countenance and riveted on Annabel's form again.

The reception now commenced,—the brilliant assemblage passing in pairs in front of the dais—the gentlemen bowing low to the Grand Duke and Duchess, who stood up during the ceremony: but there was no kissing of hands. The proceeding may be thus explained:—When the reception began, the company all fell back on one side of the line of carpet which intersected the length of the

hall; and passing slowly in front of the thrones, they defiled down the other side of the carpet,—in this manner issuing forth from the doors under the gallery. I noticed that the Grand Duchess appeared much struck by Miss Olivia Sackville's appearance,—following her with her eyes for a few moments after she had passed. Several minutes elapsed before Sir Matthew Heseltine, with Annabel on his arm, appeared in front of the thrones,—Mrs. Lanover being immediately behind her father and daughter, and now in company with some other lady who had been also compelled to separate temporarily from her own party in order to observe the rule of passing in pairs before the Tuscan Sovereigns. I was most anxious to ascertain how Annabel would be received by the Grand Duchess, who was evidently so much struck by the appearance of Olivia. An enthusiastic joy took possession of my soul when I perceived her Royal Highness stop Annabel and address a few words to her. I knew that Annabel spoke French fluently, and Italian moderately well—thanks to the instructions which she had received from her accomplished mother; and therefore in whichever language the Grand Duchess addressed her, she was enabled to give a response. Of all those who had previously passed, not one had arrested so much attention as this: it was a homage which the Grand Duchess no doubt felt herself irresistibly led to pay to the beauty of her who was peerless at the Tuscan Court that day. Yes—it was a homage, and not a mere act of condescension: and the Italian who sat next to me, nudged my elbow, hastily whispering, "There! the Duchess is speaking to your fair countrywoman! I suspected her Royal Highness would do so!—I was convinced of it!"

Ah! that must have been a proud moment for old Sir Matthew and Mrs. Lanover, when they beheld the being who was so dear to them thus become the marked object of the Royal attention in preference to all the rest; and my own heart was gushing with indescribable emotions. The tears came into my eyes for very joy—but I hastily wiped them away: yet I kept my handkerchief partially up to my countenance: for Sir Matthew and Annabel, together with Mrs. Lanover, who had now taken her father's arm again, were advancing amidst the line that was defiling towards the doors. And now I could catch a glimpse of Annabel's countenance: in a few instants more I beheld it completely; and my Italian companion was in raptures when he found that it did indeed so fully correspond with the seraphic beauty of the figure. But I did not choose to be seen by the old Baronet nor by Annabel and her mother. It is true I would have given the world to exchange one look with Annabel: but I dared not risk the chances of meeting her eyes if she should happen to glance up towards the gallery, for fear that in the suddenness of the surprise that would seize upon her, she should direct her grandfather's attention in the same direction. Accident had brought us into the same city, and on this occasion to the same place: but the old Baronet's instructions were equally as valid as if we had been hundreds or thousands of miles apart—and I was in no way to communicate with Annabel, by letter, word, or look, until the probationary period should have expired. Oh! it was indeed hard when I thus beheld her in all the

mingled radiance and bashfulness of her beauty—her cheeks still suffused with the modest blush which the marked attention of Royalty had conjured up,—at that moment, too, when lovely though she always was, she seemed lovelier than ever to my ravished gaze,—it was hard, I say, to restrain myself from rushing down to the doors whence she was about to issue, and snatch one pressure from her hand, receive one word from her lips, and drink in the delight of one glance from her azure eyes! But no—I dared not!—and when she disappeared from my view beneath the gallery, in company with her grandfather and mother, it seemed as if a beautiful vision had melted away from my sight—as if darkness had suddenly taken the place of light—as if there were a dreary void where an angel a moment before had been!

I cared not for the rest of the proceedings; indeed I saw nothing more throughout the remainder of the ceremony. It is true that I continued gazing in the direction of the ducal thrones—and doubtless I had the appearance of being as much interested as at first: but in reality all my attention was concentrated inward—my mental vision was alone exercising its faculty—I saw only the images of those three whom but an hour back I had deemed far away, and whom I therefore so little expected to behold in the Tuscan capital!

“Is it not a splendid spectacle?”—and as my Italian companion thus addressed me after a long silence, I awoke with a sudden start as if it were from a dream. “Ah! you are thinking of that beautiful creature who was the object of such universal admiration? But still you cannot help admiring the general spectacle. It is one of the grandest receptions I have seen for some time. I generally manage to obtain a card for admission to the gallery. Ah! I recollect that some six or seven months ago there was a grander reception still—and such a scene took place, I never shall forget it!”

As the Italian paused, I said for courtesy's sake, “And what was that scene which made such an impression upon you?”—but I can assure the reader that my thoughts continued to be far otherwise engaged than with the Italian's conversation.

“At that time,” he resumed, “the Grand Duke's nephew, the Marquis de Cassano, was Minister of the Interior: he was a man of great accomplishments—liberal-minded—and would no doubt have done a world of good, if he had not been thwarted by the other Ministers. I must inform you that for a few days previous to that grand reception of which I have spoken, strange rumours had been in circulation to the effect that the Marquis de Cassano was secretly conspiring with the ultra-liberal party for the purpose of compelling the Grand Duke to dismiss the obnoxious portion of his Cabinet and grant constitutional freedom to his people. It was even said that Cassano had gone so far as to encourage the ultra-liberals to take up arms and assume a menacing attitude in order to carry out their views. Some believed these tales—others did not: but every one appeared to think that some extraordinary scene would take place at the reception. And sure enough there did—”

At this moment I was startled by something which produced as sudden an effect upon me,

though of a very different nature, as the appearance of Annabel had previously done. For happening to look slowly around the gallery, I perceived the door at the extremity open at the same instant; and an individual thrusting his head in, looked intently down into the body of the hall. And that individual was Mr. Lanover!

The hall was now nearly emptied—the Grand Duke and Duchess were retiring with their suite—and the last remnant of the brilliant assembly that had passed by the thrones, were desfilng towards the door. They were not twenty in number, and could therefore be scanned at a glance. It appeared to be only such a glance as this that Mr. Lanover threw upon them; and then he immediately disappeared, the door of the gallery closing again. He did not observe me: of this I was perfectly confident: but his sudden apparition turned all my thoughts into a new channel. My Italian companion went on talking: but I scarcely comprehended a word he said. I afterwards remembered only that he told me some tale about the Marquis de Cassano's detection and disgrace, and of some exciting scene which occurred at the grand reception whereof he had previously spoken. I do not even know whether he had made an end of his story by the time the persons in the gallery rose to withdraw.

I took my leave of him; and issuing forth from the ducal palace, retraced my steps towards the hotel. As I proceeded thither, I continued to reflect on the sudden appearance of Mr. Lanover. Could it be possible that he was on friendly terms with Sir Matthew Heseltine—that he was again living with his wife, and that they were all travelling together? I scarcely thought this could be the case: but if it were otherwise, was he following and watching them without their knowledge? and did he mean them mischief?—for Mr. Lanover was certainly not an individual to go roaming about the Continent on a mere excursion of pleasure. The longer I thought on all these things, the more I was perplexed: I knew not at what conclusion to arrive. Then, as I drew near the hotel, it occurred to me that Sir Matthew and his party might possibly have put up there—especially if they had only very recently arrived in Florence: for it being a spacious establishment, it was quite possible for them to have been a day or two there without my catching a glimpse of them. My first care, therefore, on reaching the gateway, was to inquire of the porter, who spoke several languages, whether there were such persons staying at the hotel; and the answer was in the negative:—neither was there such an individual as Mr. Lanover.

I did not choose to roam about the city while it was daylight, for fear of encountering Sir Matthew Heseltine, whose positive instructions I thus incessantly kept in view: for I knew how much depended on implicit obedience to the will of the eccentric old Baronet. Nevertheless my heart yearned—Oh! it yearned for a moment's interview with Annabel; and I likewise reflected that if they were all ignorant of Mr. Lanover's presence in the Tuscan capital, they ought to be made aware of it. But then, on the other hand, if he were there with the Baronet's knowledge and consent, would not the circumstance of my giving an intimation on the point be regarded as a mere excuse to present

myself to Annabel. There was a strong and painful conflict within me,—at one moment my feelings prompting me to speed off in the endeavour to find where the Baronet was stopping—and the next moment my fears and my prudence holding me back. Thus the hours passed on, while I was in this state of irresolution; and when evening came, it still found me reflecting in the solitude of my own chamber.

## CHAPTER XC.

### THE FRAGMENT OF THE LETTER.

It was now dusk; and I issued from the hotel without any settled purpose in view. I walked through the streets in a pre-occupied and abstracted manner; and thus nearly an hour passed. I thought of returning to the hotel,—when just as I began to retrace my way, a person enveloped in a cloak passed me rapidly; and as he was proceeding in the same direction, I had time to notice by the glare of a shop-light that he was Mr. Lanover. Muffled though he were in that cloak, it was impossible to mistake his uncouth dwarfish form. I felt persuaded he had not recognised me: indeed he did not for an instant look back: and he continued his way with the rapidity of one who had important business in view. The idea of some treachery being contemplated by that man, was immediately strengthened in my mind; and I followed in the same direction which he had taken, and which indeed I was pursuing at the time. He had in the first instance disappeared from my view; but as I quickened my pace, I speedily came within sight of him again. He was still hastening forward, looking neither to the right nor the left; and I said to myself, "The vile humpback has assuredly some mischief brewing."

For upwards of five minutes did I thus follow him, until the street terminated at some stately mansion surrounded by groves of evergreens. There was a lane to the right and to the left: but each path was so dark that I could discern no human form as my looks were rapidly plunged both one way and the other. Neither could my ear catch the sounds of footsteps; and thus I was totally bewildered how to act—for I had forgotten while following Lanover, that the street terminated so abruptly at that point, and I had not therefore kept near enough to be still on his trail when he disappeared amidst the darkness. But I had not stood many moments hesitating what course to adopt, when I heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs approaching along one of the dark pathways to which I ere now alluded: the horseman stopped short all of a sudden; and then the sounds of a man's footsteps were plainly audible. Words were exchanged by two voices; and one of them was Mr. Lanover's.

Treading on tiptoe, and advancing with the utmost caution, I crept along the wall of the nobleman's mansion towards the spot where the humpback and the horseman had thus met: but they were conversing in tones so low that I could not possibly catch what passed between them—yet I felt convinced that it was in the English tongue that they spoke. And I should

observe that the words they had first interchanged were equally unintelligible as to sense, though they were audible as to sound. Even in the lowest accents it was impossible to mistake the harsh jarring voice of Mr. Lanover: but whose voice the other was, I could not form the slightest notion. As for the form of the horseman, so deep was the obscurity which prevailed on the spot, that I could only just discern a shape darker than the darkness—but no outline of lineament, nor even so much as the nature of the individual's apparel. The interview between this person and Lanover barely lasted three minutes: the former suddenly wheeled round his horse and trotted away at a good round pace—while the humpback retraced his steps with rapidity, passing so close to the spot where I was standing against the wall that his cloak brushed against me.

"Now," I said to myself, when he was gone, "I am more than ever convinced that there is some mischief brewing: but of what nature can it possibly be?"

This query defied all conjecture: but an intuitive feeling made my imagination point to Sir Matthew Heselstine's party as the object of that mischief. I had no fear that it was directed against myself. That scrap of a letter which I had found at the chateau where Calanthe and the child died, had convinced me even far more than Lanover's compact with me at the same place, that I was no longer the object of persecution on the part of the person or persons who had originally employed him as the agent of their atrocious and incomprehensible schemes.

But now that I felt assured the vile humpback was meditating mischief to others—and those others, especially *one*, the object of all my nearest and dearest interest—I was in a moment relieved from that uncertainty how to act which had been for hours oppressing me. It was now nine o'clock in the evening: but I nevertheless thought of visiting all the principal hotels before I retired to rest, in the hope of finding where Sir Matthew and the two ladies were located. All of a sudden, however, it struck me that, as English subjects, they must have obtained their cards of admission to the reception from the British representative at the Florentine Court. Accordingly to that Minister's mansion I at once bent my way; and a quarter of an hour's walk brought me thither. I asked the gate-porter if there were not a book kept at the Embassy containing a registry of the names of all English visitors who paid their respects to the Envoy? I was answered in the affirmative; and the porter at once conducted me to a waiting-room where the "visitors' book" was placed before me for my inspection. I speedily discovered the signatures of Sir Matthew Heselstine, Mrs. Lanover, and Miss Bentinck—(for he it recollected that according to the old Baronet's desire, his granddaughter had resumed the surname of her father). Oh, how delighted I was to behold the beautiful, fluent, but delicate hand of the adored Annabel! I saw by the date prefixed to the signatures that they had only been two days in Florence; and with regard to the address, it was at an hotel, but quite in a distinct quarter of Florence from that in which the establishment was situated where I dwelt with my master. I must add that the name of Mr. Lanover did not appear in the visitors'

book; and this was an additional proof, if any were needed, that he was *not* travelling in company with Sir Matthew Heseltine and the ladies.

Issuing forth from the Embassy again, I at once took a hackney-vehicle and proceeded to the hotel indicated in the book which I had been inspecting. On arriving there, I addressed myself to the porter, who, I found, understood French; and in response to my inquiry, he said, "Sir Matthew Heseltine and the two ladies took their departure this afternoon at four o'clock."

"Indeed!" I ejaculated, my heart smitten with a feeling of bitter disappointment: for I had confidently expected that in a few minutes I should find myself in the presence of Annabel. "Whither have they gone?" I mechanically asked.

"I really do not know," replied the porter: "but if you particularly wish to learn, I can doubtless ascertain from the proprietor of the hotel."

The man accordingly hastened off to make the inquiry: but in a few minutes he returned with the intimation that the proprietor was out, and the other persons belonging to the establishment who could answer the query, were likewise temporarily absent.

"It is of little consequence," I said, at the same time thanking the man for his trouble: and to myself I murmured, "They are gone—that is all I need care to know—and I am disappointed!"

"That English gentleman and the two ladies," observed the gate-porter, "passed several weeks at this hotel a few months ago. In the interval they have visited Rome and Naples; and therefore it is most probable they are going to extend their tour to other parts of Italy. I am not sure, but I think I heard something said by Sir Matthew Heseltine's valet that they meditated an excursion to Venice."

"And probably they may have gone in that direction!" I exclaimed, sincerely hoping that such was the fact, as in this case they would scarcely incur any risk of encountering the formidable Marco Uberti and his savage horde. "How many servants had they with them?" I asked.

"Two—a valet and a lady's-maid," replied the porter; "and they are journeying in their own travelling-carriage."

"Perhaps you can inform me," I said, after a few moments' reflection, "whether they were visited during their sojourn here by an English gentleman of very peculiar appearance?"—and then I described Mr. Lanover.

"No such person visited them," rejoined the porter,— "at least not to my knowledge: but as I am not always here, I will ask my wife, who attends to the gate when I am absent."

The woman had not seen any one answering to Mr. Lanover's description; and having remunerated the porter for his civility, I took my departure in the hackney-vehicle. As I was returning to the hotel at the further extremity of Florence, I marvelled more and more what business Lanover could possibly have in hand; and I could not help being struck with the coincidence that I should have seen Annabel, her mother, and her grandfather on that very day which was the anniversary of the one when the instructions were issued to me by the old Baronet,—a day, too, on which I had been so seriously reflecting on those

instructions from the moment of my awakening in the morning. On reaching the hotel, I sought my chamber: but it was a long time ere sleep would visit my eyes—for I was haunted by all kinds of misgivings in respect to the presence of the vile humpback in the Tuscan capital simultaneously with that of the Baronet and the ladies.

On the following day, shortly after breakfast, a letter was given to me by one of the hotel-waiters to take up to Captain Raymond's apartment; and I was informed that it had been just left by an English livery-servant. As I was ascending the stairs, I happened to glance at the address of that letter; and I was instantaneously struck by the hand-writing. It was unmistakably familiar to me: but in order to convince myself that I was really not labouring under the slightest delusion, I sped to my own chamber before I delivered the letter. There I compared the writing of the address with that of the little scrap which I had found in the room occupied by Lanover at the chateau where Calanthe and our child died. Yes, the writing was indeed the same—there could not be the slightest doubt of it; and I re-read for perhaps the thousandth time, the few lines which were written on the fragment thus alluded to. The reader will remember that they were as follows:—

"very fortunate that you let me know whither you were going previous to your leaving London. I therefore lose not a moment in writing to enjoin that nothing more is to be done in respect to Joseph. Should accident throw him in your way, I charge you to leave him unmolested. When next I see you, I will give such explanations as will satisfy you that this resolution"

The letter which I held in my hand, was sealed with armorial bearings, having a Peer's coronet: but I was not sufficiently versed in heraldic devices to know whose arms they were, nor what was the degree of rank which the coronet indicated. It however appeared to be tolerably certain that the writer of the communication to Mr. Lanover—of which communication I had preserved the scrap just referred to—was an English nobleman. This surmise, amounting almost to a certainty, was a fresh source of bewildering conjecture for me. Who could be the nobleman that had any interest in making me the object of those bitter persecutions which I had at one time endured at the hands of Mr. Lanover, the vile instrument of that incomprehensible and most rancorous animosity? Who, in a word, was the high-born aristocrat that in the first instance had urged on the miscreant humpback to take my life, and then to ship me off to a far-distant colony? Why was there ever so strong a motive thus to deal with me? and why had that motive ceased to exist at the time of the writing of the letter of which I had procured the fragment? All these questions were bewildering and perplexing enough; and by no possible conjecture could I answer them.

However, I hoped speedily to ascertain who the nobleman was that I had so much reason to regard as the author of the mysterious persecutions which I have just alluded to. Composing my features, I repaired to Captain Raymond's apartment, and presented him the letter.

"Ah, from Lord Eccleston," he observed in a careless manner, as he glanced at the address,



the handwriting of which was evidently familiar to him.

I could scarcely prevent a cry of amazement from thrilling forth from my lips as this name struck my ear. Lord Eccleston my persecutor!—but for what earthly reason? Many, many reminiscences flashed to my mind,—the anxiety of Lord Eccleston when simple Mr. Mulgrave, to get me into his service at the time I was first at Delmar Manor—the strange and incomprehensible looks which he and Lady Eccleston flung upon me when, only about a year back, I had presented them with the leaf from the Enfield register—and subsequently the singular expressions to which they had separately and individually given utterance on the occasion of the fire when I saved her ladyship's life. All these incidents swept through my brain: but still they afforded not the slightest clue to the comprehension of the motive which

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had rendered Lord Eccleston my persecutor through the medium of the infamous Lanover.

Captain Raymond did not perceive that the mention of Lord Eccleston's name had produced any particular effect upon me: for his eyes were fixed on the letter, which he opened and read. Its contents were very brief, for they were speedily perused; and as I was about to leave the room, Captain Raymond said, "Stop a moment, Joseph. I will write the answer to this letter at once—it is merely an invitation to dinner—and you can take it to the hotel where Lord and Lady Eccleston are residing."

While the Captain was penning the note, fresh thoughts sprang up in my mind. Perhaps, after all, Lanover's presence in the Tuscan capital at the same time with Sir Matthew and the ladies was a mere accidental coincidence?—perhaps he in reality harboured no scheme of mischief with re-

gard to *them*?—and perhaps he was in Florence on account of some private business with Lord Eccleston? But if so, was I the object of that business? had I been traced thither? was I, for reasons inscrutable to myself, again to become the object of dark and malignant machinations? Perplexity upon perplexity—bewilderment upon bewilderment!

Captain Raymond gave me the note, and explained where the hotel was situated to which I had to take it. Before I set out, I put in my pocket the fragment of the letter to which allusion has so frequently been made; and as I proceeded to the hotel where the Ecclestons were stopping, I deliberately settled in my mind the course I should pursue. On reaching the establishment, I did not send up Captain Raymond's letter by one of the domestics: but I requested an interview with Lord Eccleston. I gave no name, for fear that if I did, the audience might be refused: I merely despatched a message to the effect that an Englishman requested five minutes' conversation with his lordship on very particular business. The waiter who bore the message speedily returned; and I was conducted to an apartment where I found Lord Eccleston—but her ladyship was not there.

"What? *you*, Joseph!" ejaculated the nobleman, in most unfeigned astonishment: and at the same time methought an expression of uneasiness flitted over his handsome countenance. "What has brought you hither?"—and I saw that he quickly surveyed my apparel, as if to judge therefrom the position in life which I at present occupied: but if such were his object, he could thence deduce nothing—for I wore plain clothes, and these were a simple suit of black.

"In the first place, my lord," I said, "I am the bearer of this letter from Captain Raymond."

"Ah! then you are with Captain Raymond?" said the nobleman. "In what capacity?"

"As his servant, my lord," was my response: and then I waited until he had glanced over the contents of the note. "But it was not merely," I resumed—and I spoke in a voice of cold firmness,— "to deliver this letter that I sought an interview with your lordship. I have explanations to demand—"

"Explanations?" repeated Lord Eccleston; and for a moment an unmistakable expression of uneasiness swept over his countenance: but the next instant assuming an off-hand, careless manner, he said, "And what the deuce can you have to require from my lips in the shape of explanations?"

He was lounging over the fire-place; and though he affected to turn his eyes in a negligent way towards the time-piece on the mantel, I could nevertheless discern—for I watched him narrowly—that he flung a furtive uneasy glance towards me.

"I believe your lordship," I resumed, "is no stranger to a man bearing the name of Lanover?"

I was convinced at the moment that the nobleman turned pale as I mentioned this name, and that he likewise darted another keen scrutinizing look at my countenance: but still he affected a calm indifference of manner as he said, "Lanover? Lanover? Yes—I have certainly heard the name before—Ah! by the bye, it is that of your

uncle! I recollect!—he was the person who took you away with him some few years ago from Delmar Manor!"

"As for his being my uncle, my lord, I have never felt completely sure on that point; and from all I know of him—from all perhaps that *you* know of him likewise," I added, looking significantly in Lord Eccleston's face, "I can be but little flattered by the idea that such a man is in reality a relation."

"I don't understand you," said the nobleman, now assuming a haughty demeanour; but beneath it there was still a visible uneasiness; and I knew perfectly well that if I were not upon the right track he would ere this have ordered me from his presence.

"In a very few words, my lord," I resumed, "I will give you to understand that accident has this day made me aware of the fact that to *you* must I ascribe the bitter, bitter persecutions which I have experienced at the hands of Mr. Lanover."

"What do you mean?—will you explain yourself yet more fully?" exclaimed Eccleston, surveying me with dark suspicion and uneasiness. "If I bear with you, it is because I cannot forget that a year ago you saved her ladyship's life: and besides, you have made such serious accusations that in justice to myself I must disabuse you of that extraordinary delusion under which you labour."

"It is no delusion, my lord," was my firm response. "How can there be any misunderstanding on the subject, when it is positively known to me that your lordship wrote to Mr. Lanover, commanding that I should thenceforth remain unmolested. The author of the persecutions previously carried on against me, could alone decree their cessation. It was *you*, my lord, who so decreed—*you* therefore whom I must look upon as the instigator of atrocities from which even an intended murder was not excepted! Yes, my lord, your countenance has all along strengthened my suspicions—your look now confirms them!"

The nobleman's features did indeed corroborate what I said: for there were trouble, uneasiness, apprehension, and suspense mingled in the expression which they assumed. The colour too went and came upon his cheeks; and his regards, which at first were fixed intently and piercingly upon me, sank beneath my own.

"I really don't understand you, Joseph!" he abruptly exclaimed. "You say that this morning an accident revealed something to you—"

"Do you know that handwriting, my lord?" I interrupted him: and I produced the fragment of the letter.

Eccleston now became pale as death: his ashy lips quivered—and his hands trembled visibly.

"Once more your lordship's looks betray you!" I said. "The moment I beheld the handwriting of the letter which you sent to Captain Raymond, I was enabled to identify it with this."

"Ah! you have no better reason than *that* for making the accusation against me?" he said, his looks in a moment visibly brightening up: for my remark was indeed tantamount to a revelation that the writer of the letter to which the fragment originally belonged, had remained unknown to me until this day. "And because there is some little



similitude between one handwriting and another," he continued, with more effrontery than he had as yet displayed throughout the interview, "you all in a moment jump to the conclusion that I have been instrumental in working you a mischief—and that I have corresponded with your uncle? It is really too preposterous!"—and with an air of indignation he tossed the fragment into the fire.

"You would not have done that, my lord," I said, speaking angrily, "if your conscience did not reproach you with the guilt of all that I have advanced! Perhaps you will pretend to be ignorant that your worthy acolyte Mr. Lanover is in Florence—or at least was yesterday?"

"Lanover in Florence?" ejaculated Eccleston, with a surprise apparently so sincere that I was staggered what to think. "On my soul I knew it not!—and to me," he added, in a careless manner, "it is an affair of the utmost indifference; for I tell you that I know nothing of your uncle beyond that interview with him at Delmar Manor when he came to claim you."

"Well, my lord," I said, "if you persevere in these denials I certainly have no means of compelling you to confess your past injustice towards me, nor to explain the motive. But perhaps the day may come when you will be sorry for having persecuted one who never could have possibly done you any harm. Ah, my lord! if for some inscrutable reason you intend to renew those persecutions, and if you have come with Lanover to Florence for that purpose, I must bid you beware: for the motive which formerly induced me to spare that man, has ceased to exist—and I vow most solemnly that if he dare practise his machinations against me henceforth, I will invoke the protection of the law of this country, or of any other in which I may find myself at the time."

"Again I tell you, Joseph," replied Lord Eccleston, "that I bear patiently with you because I owe you a debt of gratitude for the salvation of her ladyship's life: but by the mode in which you are addressing me, you are passing all bounds of decency—and if I condescend once more to give you the most solemn and sacred assurance that I meditate no harm towards you, and that I was perfectly ignorant of Mr. Lanover's presence in this city——"

"Enough, my lord!" I interrupted him: "nothing can efface the suspicion—nay, the conviction,—from my mind that the fragment which you have just burnt belonged to a letter written by your hand; and therefore henceforth I must judge you by your actions, and not by your words."

I then bowed slightly and distantly: and was turning towards the door—when it opened, and Lady Eccleston made her appearance. She was dressed in an elegant morning-wrapper; and her beauty was of that rich commanding splendour which I described when narrating the incident of my visit to the house in Manchester Square on the occasion that I called to place in his lordship's hands the leaf of the Enfield register. Her ladyship started on beholding me—at the same time bending upon my countenance a look which had the same peculiarity that I had noticed on the occasion just referred to—a look in which it was impossible to comprehend whether there were an expression of uneasiness, annoyance, or any other

feeling. But as if suddenly recollecting herself, she gave me her hand, saying in a soft voice, which was likewise tremulous with some strong emotion, "I never had an opportunity of thanking you for your brave—your generous—your noble conduct in saving me from the fire!"

"If your ladyship considers the service deserving of the slightest gratitude," I answered, firmly but respectfully, "the best manner in which you can show it, is by inducing Lord Eccleston to persecute me no more——"

But I stopped short; for her ladyship turned pale as death, and staggered as if about to fall. Mechanically I hastened to support her; and as she clung to me, she burst into tears,—exclaiming, "No, no, Joseph—fear nothing! fear nothing! Did you not save my life? My God! it was you—*you* Joseph, who were my deliverer then!"

Some such words as these she had uttered on the occasion referred to; and now she repeated them. They seemed strange indeed to my ears; and for an instant I knew not what sort of feeling it was which possessed me as I sustained her in my arms.

"Wherefore do you address me thus?" I exclaimed. "Is it because your ladyship is no stranger to the bitter persecutions I have endured from your husband through the medium of the miscreant Lanover?—and does your conscience reproach you when you reflect that I—the persecuted but the unoffending—was ordained by heaven to become the saviour of your life?"

Lady Eccleston was weeping bitterly; she was as pale as death; and she fixed upon me a look so full of a profound agony—so woe-begone—and yet with some still softer feeling blending with it, that I knew not what to think. It appeared as if my brain were whirling, and that I was in the midst of a dream. And during the minute or two that this portion of the scene lasted, I was continuing to sustain her in my arms: for she clung to me in such a way that I felt she would fall if I let her go.

"Clara!" said a deep voice speaking close behind me: and startled by the peculiar accent—as if an accent of warning, and solemnly adjuring her to beware—in which her name was thus spoken, I glanced quickly over my shoulder. Lord Eccleston was close behind me,—his countenance more ghastly pale than even that of his wife, and his looks full of a species of awful terror. When her name was thus thrown at her as it were in so warning a manner, she all of a sudden recovered her self-possession; and abruptly disengaging herself from my arms, she retreated a pace or two—exchanging with her husband looks that were doubtless significant enough for themselves, but utterly incomprehensible for me.

I knew not whether to withdraw, or to remain and see whether they had anything more to say to me. There was within my soul the secret sentiment that her ladyship longed to say something—but yet for the life of me I could not conjecture what. Evident enough was it that she stood in more or less terror of her husband, and that she had unwittingly betrayed feelings the flow of which he had suddenly checked by breathing her name in a manner that was almost equivalent to the warning adjuration of the word "Beware!" The suspicion floated vaguely in my



brain that though she was fully acquainted with all he had done towards me through the instrumentality of Lanover, yet her soul abhorred his conduct; and that a better feeling than he was capable of experiencing, prompted her to make me some amends. Methought too that there was in her demeanour a certain degree of kindness which longed to find vent in expressions of even a more marked and decisive character than those to which she had given utterance when, weeping and half-sinking, she was a few moments back sustained in my arms.

"Go, Joseph!" said Lord Eccleston, in a tremulous voice: "and fear nothing!—for I take God to witness that I will not harm a hair of your head!"

Unscrupulous and black-hearted as I believed the nobleman to be, there appeared nevertheless so unmistakable a sincerity in this assurance, that I could scarcely fancy human hypocrisy capable of an equivalent amount of stupendous dissimulation. I therefore said, "I believe you, my lord; and deeply do I hope that heaven has moved your heart towards one who never willfully or knowingly injured you!"

Lady Eccleston turned abruptly aside while I was thus speaking: but a sob which was only partially stifled, floated upon my ear; and I felt strangely moved towards that woman who evidently was not altogether unmoved towards myself. Then I hurried from the room; and as I retraced my way towards the hotel, I reflected in a strange mood of mingled sadness and perplexity, on the varied incidents of the scene which had just taken place.

## CHAPTER XCI.

### THE TWO APPOINTMENTS.

As I entered the street in which the hotel was situated, I encountered that Italian gentleman whom I had seen on the previous day in the gallery at the ducal palace. He accosted me with an arch smile,—exclaiming, "Well, Signor Englishman, is your mind still occupied with the image of your beautiful countrywoman? Ah! by that tell-tale blush I am certain that it is so!—and in good sooth you exhibit the most excellent taste. Step with me into this coffee-house: we will take a cup of chocolate and have a little discourse together."

I gladly accepted the worthy Italian's invitation: for I felt singularly dispirited by my interview with the Ecclestons, and I longed for anything that would divert my thoughts into another channel. We entered the coffee-house—or rather *café*: for it was one of those splendid establishments which of that kind are only to be found upon the Continent, and which are superlatively dishonoured and degraded in being represented by the English term which I have used. Seating ourselves at one of the little tables, we were speedily furnished with the refreshments called for; and the Italian, evidently taking me for a gentleman in his own position of life, treated me as a friend and as an equal.

"I know you were so deeply smitten with that

young lady's charms," he said, "that I do verily believe you heard not a syllable of the anecdote I related in respect to the Marquis of Cassano."

"Frankly speaking," I replied, "my attention was so much engaged with the splendid scene before me, that I must plead guilty to the discourtesy with which you have charged me."

"Oh! do not accuse yourself of discourtesy," he exclaimed: "because your inattention was natural enough—bewildered as your mind was with the beauty which had ravished you. But really if you did not hear my story concerning the Marquis of Cassano, it is worth while for me to repeat it and for you to listen to it."

"And by my attention," I smilingly answered, "my neglect of yesterday shall be amply atoned for."

"Good!" ejaculated the Italian, who was a kind-tempered man. "I told you that the Marquis of Cassano is the Grand Duke's nephew; and he occupied the exalted post of Minister of the Interior—or, as you would say in your country, Secretary of State for the Home Department. Rumours were rife that he was secretly fomenting an armed insurrection in an ultra-liberal sense: but nobody precisely knew whether to believe them or not. There was to be a grand reception; and it was whispered that something serious was likely to take place—but in respect of what its nature might be, opinions were likewise divided. Indeed, all was doubt and uncertainty—speculation and conjecture. I was present in the gallery at that reception; and it was even a more brilliant display than the one you beheld yesterday. All the Ministers were in attendance, as usual: and amongst them, as a matter of course, the Marquis of Cassano. Before the main ceremony commenced—and when the hall was crowded with a far more numerous assemblage than you witnessed yesterday—the Duke rose from his throne; and making a sign to the Marquis of Cassano to stand forward, he addressed him in these terms:—'Graceless and unworthy kinsman of mine that you are! your secret machinations are known to me; everything has been betrayed by one of your guilty accomplices; and were it not that the same blood which rolls in my veins flows likewise in your's, your life should pay the penalties due to your treason. But wickedness and ingratitude so great as your's, cannot go altogether unpunished. Here, then, in the presence of those who have assembled to display their loyalty towards their Sovereign, do I proclaim your degradation and disgrace. A decree is already drawn up appointing your successor in the Ministry of the Interior: another decree divests you of your titles and your rank, and confiscates your property. Depart! and carry with you into an eternal exile the bitter remorse which cannot fail to be the result of your crimes!'—Thus spoke the Grand Duke; and you may conceive, Signor Englishman, the profound sensation produced by the words of his Royal Highness."

"And the Marquis of Cassano," I said,—"how bore he his degradation? Did he throw himself at his uncle's feet—?"

"Nothing of the sort," answered my Italian friend. "He drew himself up with an air of the loftiest indignation—folded his arms across his chest—and was about to speak, when the Grand Duke made a sign—the guards seized upon him,

and hurried him away. But full certain am I," added the Italian, his voice sinking to a low whisper, "that the Marquis was followed by the sympathies of the great majority of the assemblage—and I know that he possessed mine."

"And what was the result of this extraordinary proceeding?" I inquired.

"The Marquis disappeared altogether," responded the Italian; "but it soon became known that when arrested in the way I have described, he was thrust into a post-chaise that was in readiness, and was hurried across the frontier, through the neighbouring States, and thus into the Austrian dominions, where he was consigned to a dungeon in some gloomy fortress. You must not be astonished that such was his fate: for you are doubtless aware that our Grand Duke belongs to the Austrian Imperial family; and the Government of Vienna sympathises with, and is ever ready to abet, all the tyrannical proceedings of the Tuscan Sovereign."

"And do you believe," I asked, "that the Marquis of Cassano in reality contemplated an insurrection—or that it was a plot to get rid of him?"

"I have no doubt he meditated a rebellion," replied my companion; and again lowering his voice, he said, "So much the better if he had succeeded! We groan under the ducal despotism—the weight of taxation—and all kinds of petty tyrannies. However, the unfortunate Marquis is languishing in an Austrian dungeon; and the people have lost their idol—for such he assuredly was."

"Your Grand Duke," I observed, "appears to be in some respects a strange character for a Sovereign. I have been told that on two occasions he has suffered the notorious bandit of the Etruscan Apennines to escape from a doom which he most righteously deserved."

"Ah! but have you likewise been told wherefore the Grand Duke has dealt thus leniently—or rather thus timidly with Marco Uberti? I can tell you all about it," continued my Italian friend: "for I have received my information from an acquaintance of mine, who occupies a high post in the ducal palace, and from whom I obtain the cards of admission to the gallery on reception-days. The truth is, Marco Uberti took away with him—when he fled from Florence a number of years ago—a packet of secret documents, being nothing less than a correspondence from the Austrian Emperor in respect to the occupation of Tuscany with the Imperial troops. If these documents were published, there would be an immediate rebellion throughout the Duchy; and this the Duke knows well. Now you comprehend how it is that Marco Uberti possesses in that correspondence the talisman of his own safety, and why the Grand Duke dared not suffer justice to proceed to extremes. But I can tell you more!" proceeded my communicative friend. "On the first occasion when Marco was captured, he bargained that if his life were spared he would restore the documents; and the Duke trusted to his honour. The honour of a notorious bandit!—the good faith of an unscrupulous plunderer!—only conceive such an idea!"

"It does indeed seem preposterous," I observed. "But on the second occasion how came the Duke

to suffer himself to be again deluded by the promises of the false brigand?"

"It appears that Marco Uberti," rejoined the Italian, "did surrender up a packet of documents on condition of his life being spared and liberty being afforded him: but the papers turned out to be only skillfully executed copies—and thus he retains the originals, to the infinite terror and annoyance of the ducal family. It is rumoured—but on this point I cannot speak with any degree of accuracy—that the Grand Duke has on several occasions said to those immediately about his person, that there is no boon which he would not grant to the individual who might obtain for him those important documents from the hands of Marco Uberti."

In this manner my Italian friend and I chatted together for upwards of an hour; and when we separated, I retraced my steps to the hotel. In the afternoon a note was put into my hand by one of the domestics of the establishment,—who informed me that the messenger that brought it had immediately departed again. It was addressed to me in a beautiful English female hand; and for nearly a minute I hesitated to open it, lest its object might have the tendency to beguile me away from my fidelity towards Annabel;—and with the bitter experience of Calanthe's fatal love, I was solemnly resolved never again to yield to such temptation. However, after some little reflection, I thought there would at least be no harm in opening the billet; and I found its contents to run as follow:—

"November 16, 1841.

"You are earnestly conjured to meet me at nine o'clock this evening on the bridge of Santa Trinitata. Fail not, I beseech you! You will have an opportunity, as Captain Raymond dines at this hotel. I need not observe that the strictest secrecy must be maintained.

"CLARA ECCLESTON."

Not for a moment did I hesitate about keeping this appointment. I knew perfectly well that her ladyship had not conceived towards me any feeling to which I might not respond: or at least I was morally certain in my own mind that such was the case. Methought that probably she purposed to enlighten me in respect to those mysteries which had so bewildered and perplexed my imagination; and I was naturally inspired by an earnest and solemn curiosity to learn wherefore I had been the object of those persecutions which this lady's husband had assuredly instituted against me. The interval between the receipt of this note and the hour specified for the appointment was passed in restless uncertainty and bewildering conjecture as to what the real object of it could be. And then, too, I at first wondered how her ladyship would be enabled to keep the appointment: for I knew that Captain Raymond was invited to dine with Lord Eccleston. But my doubt on this point was presently cleared up: for I heard from Lord Ringwood's valet that his lordship was likewise going to dine with Eccleston—but not the ladies; for it was a bachelors' party which the entertainer intended to give—not at the hotel where he was sojourning—but at a famous *restaurant* in another part of the town. I therefore now understood how Lady Eccleston's time would be at her own disposal: but I was still left to the feverish anxiety of con-

lecture as to what the purpose of the appointment might be.

It wanted twenty minutes to nine o'clock when I entered upon the bridge where I was to meet her ladyship; and I walked slowly to and fro, still giving way to my reflections. The night was dark and cold: a mist, hanging over the broad expanse of the Arno, threatened to deepen into one of those fogs which sometimes enshroud the fair city of Florence; and I was apprehensive that her ladyship might not keep the appointment. But scarcely had a neighbouring clock begun to proclaim the hour of nine, when I was accosted by a female form muffled in a cloak, and wearing a dark veil over her countenance.

"You are punctual," she said: and though her voice was low and tremulous, and was partially clouded too by the thickness of the veil as well as by the evident agitation of her feelings, I recognised it to be that of Lady Eccleston. "Let us walk this way," she added: "give me your arm—and we shall be enabled in a few minutes to converse more at our ease."

We proceeded to a somewhat secluded spot on the bank of the Arno; and there her ladyship, relaxing her pace, said to me, "You are doubtless surprised to receive such a communication as the one I sent you?"

"Not altogether surprised," I answered: "for it struck me during the singular and painful interview of the morning that you had something to say to me, but dared not give utterance to it in the presence of his lordship."

"Ah! you penetrated my thoughts thus far?" exclaimed Lady Eccleston. "But tell me, Joseph—what were your reflections after that scene to which you have alluded?"

"His lordship," I said, "denied that he was the author—or rather the instigator of the persecutions which I have endured at the hands of the miscreant Lanover: but every word he uttered—every varying expression of his countenance—in short, the entire scene convinced me that both his lordship and your ladyship are only too well acquainted with what I have undergone."

Lady Eccleston gave no answer: she remained silent for upwards of a minute; and as she proffered no denial of what I had just said, my suspicion was confirmed in respect to what I had advanced. Moreover, I felt her hand tremble as it rested on my arm; and methought my ear caught the sound of a very low and nearly stifled sob from behind the thick covering of the veil.

"If your ladyship purposes to make an atonement for the past," I said, at length breaking this silence which kept me on the tenter-hooks of suspense, "for heaven's sake prove your good feeling by telling me wherefore I incurred the bitter rancour of your husband, so that he even sought my life!"

A groan of anguish—low, deep, but unmistakable—came from the lips of Lady Eccleston; and she trembled so violently that I feared for a moment she would have fallen; but evidently recovering somewhat of her fortitude the next instant, she said,—though still speaking in a quick, agitated voice,—“No, no! you must not question me. It was not for this purpose that I gave you the present appointment.”

"Then for heaven's sake keep me not in sus-

pense!" I exclaimed. "You have some deep and solemn meaning—it was for no light nor frivolous purpose that you bade me meet you—"

"No, God forbid!" she ejaculated. "Listen, Joseph!"—but as she went on to speak, it was still in an agitated manner, and in a voice frequently broken, as if her ideas were confused and she knew not precisely what to say. "You were a great favourite with my poor father,"—and here I felt that she shuddered, as methought well she might at the recollection of his tragic end,—“and I know that if he had lived he never would have suffered you to be cast abroad upon the world. My husband did wrong at the time to abandon you to Mr. Lanover: he should have provided for you—he should have acted in the spirit of my father's intentions, even though those intentions were not formally expressed in any document he left behind him. I have more than once spoken to my husband about you—I have begged him to do something for you. At the time you called upon us in London to place in our hands the abstracted leaf of the Enfield register,—on that occasion I spoke to him most seriously after you were gone. Then again, when you so gallantly rescued me from a dreadful death, I earnestly conjured that he would seek you out and provide for you in a manner that should raise you to independence. For did I not owe you my life? and was it not natural that I should think of your welfare? And again this morning I reasoned with his lordship—Oh, long and entreatingly I reasoned!—but I regret to say with no better result than on the former occasions. And now therefore it remains for me to testify my gratitude to the saviour of my life—and that is the reason I penned the note which gave you this appointment.”

"Your ladyship testifies kind feelings towards me," I answered; "and I am deeply moved by them. But yet permit me to observe in all frankness, that there is within my mind a suspicion—though vague and indistinct—that your ladyship is not altogether sincerely explaining the motives of your conduct."

"Not sincere, Joseph?" she said, in a low tone, but which was full of gentle reproach.

"I will tell you what I mean," I responded. "You put the matter to me as if you were desirous to impress upon my mind that it is for your late father's sake, and likewise through a feeling of gratitude on your own part, that you wish to serve me: whereas my experience of the past whispers in my ear that you are really desirous to atone for deep wrongs which have been inflicted upon me. Oh, I beseech you to be candid!—I implore you to deal frankly with me! Tell me—tell me, wherefore was I persecuted? what motives existed some time back for that persecution? and why do they exist no longer? How could I, when a mere boy—obscure, humble, and friendless,—how could I, Lady Eccleston, I ask, have been an object of such terrible and fearful interest that it was sought to get rid of me?"

"You must not—indeed you must not question me on these subjects!" answered her ladyship, now violently agitated. "But listen to me, Joseph! We are rich—and I have the command of sufficient funds to be enabled to spare what will be a handsome income for you without his lordship

knowing it. I beseech you to follow the advice I am about to give—or I will put it as a prayer and entreat you to grant it! Leave Captain Raymond's service at once—go forth into the world as a gentleman—and regularly every six months I will pay two hundred pounds into the hands of a London banker, so that it may be receivable by you and to your order in whatsoever part of the world you may be."

"Lady Eccleston," I said, "you must be sensible of deep, deep wrongs towards me to make such an offer as this. I know not how to answer you. In the face of what appears to be a generous atonement, I dare not use harsh or severe terms: and yet you must be well aware that I cannot feel otherwise than a profound and solemn curiosity——"

"And that curiosity cannot be gratified, Joseph!" interrupted her ladyship emphatically. "I beseech you to be ruled by me. I can give no explanations beyond what I have already said. If you will persist in believing that there has been past rancour, enmity, or hate—at least ought you to have faith in present friendship. It is friendship that I proffer you: let me be your friend—and you will make me happy, while you are condescending to your own welfare."

"Lady Eccleston," I responded, "there are many considerations which weigh with me now. For instance, you spoke of certain wishes or intentions on the part of your deceased father:—am I to suppose that in his noble generosity he bequeathed me money, which your husband kept back—and that for fear I should discover the deception practised towards me, he originated all those persecutions which first aimed at my life, and afterwards at my liberty?"

"I take heaven to witness, Joseph," exclaimed Lady Eccleston, "that you are utterly and completely mistaken! Remember, my poor father——" and here again she shuddered perceptibly—"had only known you for a few weeks——"

"True!" I ejaculated: "and therefore *that* cannot be the reason of your present conduct. However," I abruptly added, "I am so bewildered that I know not how to address you! I am at a loss whether to thank you for what you have been saying at the present time—or whether to insist with sternness that you should deal explicitly in respect to the past. If it were Lord instead of Lady Eccleston who had given me this appointment, and who was speaking to me in these terms, I should demand the fullest explanations."

"But with me, Joseph," said her ladyship, in a soft and persuasive tone, "you will act otherwise?"

"No, my lady," I exclaimed: "my mind is suddenly made up! Tell me everything—or I accept nothing. Let me know the full nature, the reason, and the motives of the wrongs to be atoned for—or I cannot consent to receive the atonement. I will not go groping my way through the world in the dark, as the pensioner of your bounty: the gold I should thus accept from you, would never do me any good—I should enjoy nothing that it purchased! I would rather eat a crust earned by my own industry in the broad light of day, than live upon luxuries purchased by gold given to me for reasons so mysterious and for motives so ambiguous."

"I did not think I should find you thus difficult to deal with," said her ladyship, in a voice of the mournfullest reproach: "but for heaven's sake alter your decision! I dare not remain with you many minutes longer. Nothing but the urgency of the present business could have induced me to run such a risk of compromising myself, by stealing forth in this disguise from the hotel. And the worst of it is, I was compelled to let my own maid so far into the secret that she knows I have thus stolen out—though I told her not for what object. My very reputation is now in her hands: she will of course put the worst possible construction on my proceeding—and I dare not say a syllable to justify myself by enlightening her. How do I know that she will keep my secret?—and if she whisper a word of betrayal to Lord Eccleston, what can he possibly think? You see therefore, Joseph, the tremendous perils I am incurring—the dangers I am encountering—the sacrifices I am making—and all for your sake! Do not—do not, I entreat you, let me have done so much in vain!"

Lady Eccleston spoke with rapid and excited utterance; and I felt that I was yielding: but when she had finished, my resolve became fixed again; and I said, "All the arguments your ladyship has adopted to move me, constitute another convincing proof that you must be sensible of deep wrongs towards me—or else you would not incur such risks in the endeavour to make me an atonement. In a word, therefore, until everything be explained I will accept nothing at your hands!"

"Oh, this is cruel—most cruel!" she cried, with impassioned vehemence. "But your mind is not altogether made up? Reflect upon what I have said—take time to consider of it—and by some means or another, at any risk and at any peril, I will meet you at this spot again at nine o'clock to-morrow evening."

"No, Lady Eccleston!" I ejaculated: "whatsoever you may have done towards me, I cannot allow you to endanger your reputation——"

"Oh, but you endangered your very life on my account!" she vehemently interrupted me, thus alluding to the conflagration in Manchester Square; "and it is my duty to do as much—or even more for you. To-morrow evening—here, upon this spot!"—and with these words her ladyship hurried away, quickly disappearing from my view in the surrounding obscurity, and leaving me half stupefied by the suddenness of the proceeding.

As I slowly retraced my way to the hotel, I reflected on all that had taken place: but there is no need to chronicle my thoughts in detail—for they were such as were naturally inspired by a review of the colloquy that had so abruptly terminated.

Throughout the following day I found it impossible to make up my mind as to whether I would keep the second appointment or not,—until the hour was close at hand, when I decided in the affirmative. For I thought to myself that if I strenuously urged Lady Eccleston to enter into the fullest explanations with regard to the past—if I promised the completest forgiveness as well as the most inviolable secrecy—she could scarcely persist in refusing to yield to my demand.

"Besides," I reasoned to myself, "she is evidently so bent on making me an atonement, that

if I persevere in insisting upon previous explanations, she will rather give them than resign herself to the alternative of abandoning an aim which the qualms of conscience and the awakening of better feelings have evidently suggested."

While thus meditating upon my mode of procedure, and on the results which I expected it to produce, I reached that secluded spot on the bank of the Arno which was the place for this second appointment. The evening was darker and more gloomy with mist than the preceding one: it was exceedingly cold too—and my overcoat was buttoned across my chest. When I reached the spot, I was not kept many minutes waiting: for from the surrounding darkness a cloaked and veiled figure speedily emerged—and a voice which I immediately recognised, ejaculated, "Thank heaven, you have come!"

"Yes, my lady," was my answer: "I have come—but only to repeat——"

"Joseph, we have not a minute to waste in argument!" interrupted her ladyship, with passionate vehemence. "My husband has not gone out this evening—he has a friend with him—but if he should happen to seek me in my own chamber, to which on some pretext I retired—if he should thus be led to miss me, I say, oh! I shall be lost. I dare not tell him what I am doing with you——"

"I entreated your ladyship not to incur this risk," I exclaimed; "and you will have incurred it uselessly, unless you give the fullest explanations."

"You will not treat me thus cruelly?" implored Lady Eccleston, in accents which touched me to the very heart. "I have brought you money, Joseph—you must take it—you must leave Florence to-morrow——"

"Am I in any danger?" I demanded, as a sudden thought struck me. "Are those persecutions——"

"To be renewed? Oh, no! no!" ejaculated her ladyship. "As there is a heaven above us, you have naught to fear on that score for the future!"

"Then, Lady Eccleston," I at once rejoined—and I believe there was even menacing fierceness in my tone,—“you have just confessed that your husband and yourself were the instigators——"

"Oh, deal not harshly with me!" she exclaimed in a tone of wild and anguished entreaty: "do not catch up any inadvertent syllable that may fall from my lips! You know not what you make me suffer—or you would pity me!—yes, you would pity me! Good heavens, the time is flying—the peril I incur is dreadful—Oh! will you not be guided by my advice, Joseph?—will you not yield?"

"No, no!" I emphatically answered: "not as matters now stand between us!"

"Then you will drive me to despair!"—and it was in despairing accents that she spoke. "I pray and beseech you," she continued, her voice becoming low, deep, and earnest, "that you will not continue thus cruelly obstinate! There is but one way of making me happy—there is but one method of restoring to my soul a small portion of that peace which it has lost! Will you—will you grant my request?"

She laid both her hands upon my arms as she

thus spoke: she had thrown back her veil a few instants previously—and despite the gloom of the evening, I could behold her countenance plainly. It was of death-like pallor—but the trouble, the suspense, and the anxious terror that it expressed, constituted a spectacle which filled me with compassion and sympathy. Indeed, I can scarcely explain the feelings which then had possession of my soul—filling my heart with the strangest emotions, and agitating me throughout every nerve and fibre, to the uttermost confines of my very being! She spoke not another word—but continued to gaze up at me with that beseeching look;—and I do believe that in less than another minute I should have promised to be guided by her in everything,—when all in a moment a tall form emerged from the darkness; and striding close up to us, exclaimed, "Vile woman, I have caught thee, then! And you, the author of my dishonour——"

A low, half-suppressed shriek issued from the lips of Lady Eccleston: while Lord Eccleston—for it was he—stopped suddenly short on recognising my countenance. There was a deep silence for nearly a minute,—during which her ladyship stood gasping for breath—I with my arms folded, awaiting whatsoever might next take place—and Lord Eccleston a prey to the utmost agitation.

"What have you told him, Clara?" he at length asked, in a low deep voice as he turned towards his wife.

"Nothing! nothing!" she responded with a sort of nervous vehemence.

Eccleston gave a long sigh expressive of relief; and then he said, "But what has passed between you? wherefore on this second occasion have you stolen from the hotel to meet the young man?"

"I will tell you—and tell you frankly," responded her ladyship, still labouring under that excitement which displayed itself in the nervous quickness of her utterance. "I have offered to do that for him which on several previous occasions I had requested you to do——"

"And he has accepted your offer?" said the nobleman hastily.

"No—he has refused it!" was the response.

"Refused it! And wherefore, Joseph, have you refused it?" inquired Lord Eccleston, now turning towards me.

"Because," I responded coldly—for all the feelings which had so much moved me a few minutes back, had subsided,—“because I will consent to nothing until I know everything! My lord, there are fearful mysteries which you and her ladyship can explain, and which evidently have the closest reference to myself. Explain them therefore!—it is your duty! Conscience has already begun to perform its work: it has touched the heart of her ladyship—it will sooner or later touch yours——"

"Joseph," interrupted the nobleman, "this scene cannot last a minute longer! Do you, or do you not accept the proposition which her ladyship has made to you?"

"No, my lord—not under existing circumstances. I have experienced wrongs of which I have been too painfully conscious: but I cannot possibly fathom the motive for which those wrongs were inflicted. Therefore explanation must precede atonement; and ten thousand times rather would I receive that explanation than any atonement



which savours of a bribe on the part of those who proffer it, and brands with grovelling selfishness the one who under such circumstances would receive it."

"Clara, come with me immediately!" said Lord Eccleston: and compelling his wife to take his arm, he hastened her abruptly away—but not before I caught the look of mingled anguish and reproach which her pale countenance threw upon me at parting.

On the following day I accidentally learnt, from something which I overheard Captain Raymond say to Lord Ringwold, that the Ecclestons had abruptly taken their departure from Florence; and it was alleged that some pressing business called them elsewhere.

## CHAPTER XCII.

### THE HOTEL AT PISTOJA.

It was in the afternoon of this same day on which I learnt the departure of the Ecclestons, that as I was walking through the streets, I met the friendly Italian gentleman to whom I have already so frequently alluded. We got into conversation together; and after some little discourse, he said, "Ah! now I bethink me, the last time we met we were talking of that redoubtable bandit Marco Uberti: and within the last hour I have heard of a new exploit of his."

"And what may that be?" I inquired.

"He has made a superb capture in the shape of some wealthy English travellers. I do not think I can recollect the name of the gentleman—but it is very much like Ezzelin—or Ezzeline——"

"Heseltine?" I ejaculated, the wildest terror sweeping through my brain.

"Yes. But good heavens——"

"For God's sake, signor, tell me—tell me quickly how you obtained this intelligence!"—and I felt that I was as pale as death; while so dreadful was my excitement that I could have started away at once to run madly towards the Apennines.

"I see that the intelligence I have given you has afflicted your mind cruelly. The name is evidently familiar——"

"Yes, yes!" I said, literally writhing with the excruciations of suspense. "But tell me—tell me——"

"I will, without another word of unnecessary comment," answered the Italian, appearing partially to catch the infection of my own excitement. "It was a travelling-tarriage, containing a gentleman and two ladies—a valet and a maid sate outside—there were four post-horses—and it was in the evening, three or four days back, that the equipage was passing amidst the Apennines when it was stopped by Marco Uberti and his band. The postilions were ordered to dismount and go their ways as they thought fit—an injunction which they lost no time in obeying. Thus the entire equipage remained in the hands of the outlaws; and the postilions, having found their way back to Florence, brought the intelligence."

"And that is all you know?" I inquired, still with a most fevered and anguished excitement.

"All!—and enough too, I fear, my poor friend——"

But I waited not for the remainder of the sentence; and flew away from the spot with a speed that must have made the Italian think his narrative had goaded me to perfect madness. And it was indeed well nigh to such a state that it had driven me: for the thought that the adored Annabel should have fallen into the hands of that gang of miscreants, was sufficient to turn my brain and hurl down reason from its throne. It was back to the hotel that I flew; and on the threshold I met Captain Raymond. Utterly forgetful of the respect which I owed him as my master, I rushed by him; and in the same frantic manner ascended to my chamber to take the money which I possessed: for I had no other thought than that of setting off at once to the Apennines and doing something for the rescue of Annabel and her relations—though what that *something* was to be, I had not the remotest idea. Scarcely had I taken all my money out of my box and secured it about my person, when the door opened and Captain Raymond entered the chamber.

"Detain me not a minute!" I cried: and there was still the wildest excitement in my looks, my tone, and manner.

"Joseph, you must be calm," he said, placing his back resolutely against the door. "There is something unnatural in all this——"

"Let me pass! let me pass!" I frantically exclaimed. "At your peril keep me back! I am desperate—I am mad!"

"I see that you are," responded the Captain coolly: "and it is my duty to learn what it all means."

"They have taken her—I mean friends of mine—they are prisoners—let me go!"—and I

made a movement as if to push my master from the door.

"Come, come, be calm, Joseph," he said, grasping me forcibly by the arm. "Treat me as a friend—I am not playing the part of the master now—I see that something has occurred to drive you almost to frenzy—I can make allowances for you: and besides, I have not forgotten your noble conduct on a recent occasion."

I dared not strike my master, nor make use of violence; and I could not force a passage without doing so. His words calmed me somewhat; and seeing their effect, he hastened to add, "Whatever has occurred, cannot I am sure be amended, but is very likely to be rendered worse by such wild precipitation. Tell me everything, and rest assured that I will assist rather than thwart your purposes."

I was smitten with a feeling of gratitude towards Captain Raymond; and at the same time my eyes were opened to the folly of rushing in that headlong fashion upon an enterprise which did indeed require some serious deliberation,—without which it would fail, and involve myself in destruction, instead of enabling me to achieve the deliverance of those whose images were uppermost in my mind.

"Forgive me, sir," I said, "for my indecorous conduct towards you——"

"No apology is needful: the state of your mind is a sufficient excuse. But what has happened? Some persons in whom you are interested, have been captured——"

"Yes, sir—by those accursed *banditti!*" I responded with the bitterest vehemence.

"Ah! and you were going to rush off madly into the lion's den? If I admire your magnanimity," added the Captain with a good-humoured smile, "I cannot give you credit for prudence. Come, be reasonable! Whatsoever you meditate will not be marred by five minutes' rational discourse. Now tell me what plan you think of adopting—if indeed you have as yet got any scheme properly digested in your mind."

"I am resolved, Captain Raymond," was my firmly given answer, "to risk my life in the endeavour to rescue these persons. Pray do not ask me why—it is my secret——"

"And rest assured I shall not impertinently attempt to fathom it," responded the Captain, in a kind and encouraging manner. "But let us talk the business over, and see if I can assist with my counsel or otherwise. What do you propose to do in the first instance?"

I reflected for a few moments—and then said, "I shall penetrate into the midst of the Apennines under some disguise; and I shall endeavour to obtain an interview with"——I had it on the tip of my tongue to say "Signor Volterra," but instantaneously recollecting myself, I substituted the words—"that friendly bandit who assisted me on the former occasion."

"But what if you get captured in spite of your disguise? what if you fail to find the friendly bandit? or if finding him, what if he should refuse to peril his own safety by succouring you again?"

"All these are the risks I must encounter," was my response; "and I am fully prepared for them."



"You are brave enough to say that you are prepared to die," answered Captain Raymond; "but yours is a young life thus to imperil—"

"It will not be worth clinging to, sir, unless I succeed in this enterprise!" I exclaimed passionately.

"Well, well—I have promised not to penetrate into your motives: but let us think of the execution of your design. What disguise will you adopt? Remember, those brigands have good memories and keen eyes; and having once seen you, they will scarcely fail to recollect you again—unless your disguise is so admirable—"

"Let me reach the outskirts of the Apennines," I said, "and I will find some adequate disguise!"

"At least you will go well armed?" rejoined the Captain; "and my pistols are at your service. Really, however, I know not whether I ought to permit you to embark on this mad enterprise—"

"If I were held back, sir," I exclaimed vehemently, "I should go raving mad—I should lay violent hands upon myself!"

"And it is only because I see you in this state," observed Raymond, "that I can satisfy my own conscience in suffering you to persevere in your design. Indeed, I begin to think, now that I have calmed you down a little, that you must indeed trust altogether to circumstances—and that it is impossible to lay down beforehand any particular course of proceeding. Are you determined?"

"So long as I am a free agent," was my resolutely given response, "nothing shall hold me back!"

"Then depart—and may success attend you! I am half inclined to offer to accompany you—"

"I can do better alone, sir," was my hastily given answer: "for if it came to the crisis of standing on self-defence, *two* would have but little better chance than *one* against such numbers. Besides, the friendly-disposed bandit might possibly do for me—if in full confidence I seek him alone—that which he might hesitate to perform if I were accompanied by another."

"True!" remarked the Captain. "And now that I have detained you sufficiently to enable the effervescence of your feelings to subside into a more rational condition, I will not keep you any longer. There is that powerful horse of mine which I purchased the day before yesterday—it is at your disposal: there are my pistols, which you may take from my room: and here is a pecuniary subsidy—for money constitutes the sinew of war, and you may possibly find a use for it."

Thus speaking, Captain Raymond placed a roll of Florentine bank-notes in my hand; and I accompanied him to his own apartment. He rang the bell, and ordered his horse to be gotten in readiness,—informing the waiter that he was going to despatch me upon an immediate journey.

"We will not let all the world know on what a wild Quixotic expedition you are bent," he said, when the waiter had retired: "for news travel fast. For aught we know these banditti may have their spies and accomplices in Florence; and it would not do for the rumour of your enterprise to precede you on the way."

I sincerely thanked Captain Raymond for his

prudent conduct, as well as for the kind aid he was rendering me; and when, having secured the pistols about my person, I was ready to depart, he shook me warmly by the hand, wishing me success. I mounted his horse; and issuing forth from the city, took the road towards Pistoja,—which, as I said on a former occasion, was about twenty-five miles distant from the Tuscan capital. I will not trouble the reader with my reflections during the ride: suffice it to say that though when I left Florence it was barely five o'clock in the afternoon,—yet owing to the badness of the road, the deep obscurity of the evening, and the caution I was compelled to observe through fear of missing my way, it was past nine when I entered Pistoja.

Here I was resolved to remain for the night, and resume my journey with the very first scintillation of dawn. It was necessary to allow the horse a proper time to rest; and moreover I could not possibly find my way amidst the passes of the Apennines in the darkness of the night. I did not even know whether I should be enabled in broad daylight to retrace the route I had pursued when in company with Miss Sackville; and as for inquiring my way, unacquainted with the Italian language as I was—such a hope was altogether out of the question. I accordingly proceeded straight to the same inn at Pistoja where a relay of horses was obtained on the occasion above referred to.

The waiter at this hotel spoke French with fluency; and I was therefore enabled to make myself understood. I ordered refreshments; and while the man was attending upon me at supper, he said, "I believe you are a native of England—judging by your looks and your accent?"

"Yes," I answered: and thinking that the waiter had not made the observation from mere curiosity, I said, "Why do you ask me?"

"Because, sir," he replied, "there is a fellow-countryman of yours at the hotel, who met with a very severe accident the day before yesterday, and who in consequence is likely to remain here for some time."

"What is the nature of the accident?" I inquired.

"The gentleman was travelling post from Florence; and when within about a league of Pistoja, the chaise was upset, and he was thrown so heavily that it produced concussion of the brain. He was brought on to the hotel; and at first it was thought his skull was fractured: but the medical man says he may recover, though he will be some weeks on a bed of illness. He is still perfectly unconscious of everything that is passing around him; and the surgeon and landlord have been discussing the propriety of having his papers examined, so that his friends may be communicated with—because who knows the anxiety that may be experienced on account of his absence from whosoever he was expected to arrive?"

"To be sure!" I exclaimed: "his papers ought to have been looked into at the very first—"

"Ah! it is very easy talking, sir," interrupted the waiter; "but the contents of his pocket-book are all written in English, and there is no one here who can read them. That is why I took the liberty of asking if you were not a fellow-countryman of the unfortunate traveller."

"I shall have the greatest pleasure in rendering

him any assistance that lies in my power. I will presently make myself acquainted with so much of the contents of his papers as it is requisite to glean for the purpose; and then I will write to his relatives or friends, informing them of his condition. What is his name?"

"I heard it read from the passport which he had about him—but I forget it," replied the waiter. "The names of you Englishmen are not so very easy to recollect. When you have done your supper, I will inform the landlord of your kind readiness to render assistance in this matter."

I had a great mind to ask the waiter, in a conversational manner, as to what rumour prevailed at Pistoja in respect to the capture of the travelling-carriage and its freight in the Apennines: but I was so fearful of exciting a suspicion relative to the object I had in view, and thereby through any misadventure cause the failure of the enterprise,—that I held my peace. By the time I had concluded my supper,—of which however an intense anxiety of mind prevented me from partaking as heartily as might have been expected after my ride,—the waiter re-entered the room, accompanied by a little old gentleman, whom he introduced to me as the medical attendant that had been called in for the injured Englishman. The surgeon spoke French sufficiently to make himself understood; and he asked me to accompany him to the invalid's chamber. I signified my assent: we proceeded thither—a nurse was in attendance—and as I advanced towards the couch where the injured man lay stretched in unconsciousness, how ineffable was my surprise on beholding Mr. Lanover

## CHAPTER XCIII.

### THE POCKET-BOOK.

THE medical gentleman beheld the look of surprise which thus appeared upon my countenance; and he immediately exclaimed, "You know him?"

"Yes—I know him well," was my answer.

"So much the better!" responded the surgeon, not perceiving the slight tincture of bitterness that there was in my tone. "You are all the more fit to examine his private papers."

"He is a Mr. Lanover," I said, now determined to maintain the impression on the medical man's part that I was really a fit and proper person to examine into the private affairs of Mr. Lanover: for I had strongly suspected from the first moment I had heard of the capture of Sir Matthew and the ladies in the Apennines, that he was not altogether a stranger to it,—his mysterious conduct at Florence having led to this supposition, which was now more or less confirmed by finding him at Pistoja:—"he is a Mr. Lanover," I said, "and I have known him for several years."

"Yes—Lanover is his name. Poor man, he is in a bad state!" added the surgeon: "but when you write to his friends, you may tell them that I do not despair of his eventual recovery."

Mr. Lanover, at all times hideous, was now positively revolting in his looks,—so ghastly pale was his countenance, and so horrible did it seem as he lay with his eyes closed, and a white bandage,

saturated with some cooling fluid, over his temples. He was breathing heavily, and appeared to be in pain, though he was perfectly unconscious.

The landlord of the hotel now entered the chamber, he having heard from the waiter that I had come thither with the surgeon. The medical man explained to him that I happened to be well acquainted with the invalid; and the landlord, drawing forth a key from his pocket, opened a bureau whence he produced a capacious pocket-book. I opened it—glanced at the contents—and could scarcely avoid the betrayal of a sudden emotion on catching sight of a name which was terribly familiar to me. But fortunately retaining the mastery over myself, I intimated to the surgeon that it pained me too much to remain in that room with the spectacle of my injured fellow-countryman before me: for the truth is, I now wished to be alone in order to examine the papers more at my ease. The medical man thought it very natural that I should wish to leave the sick chamber; and he said, "Yes—you had better retire. I shall remain here a little while; and I will see you again before I leave the hotel."

The landlord accompanied me to the room where I had dined; and methought he showed an inclination to remain while I inspected the pocket-book,—which was indeed natural enough, as he was legally responsible for its safe custody—he knew not what papers of importance it might contain—and I was a stranger to him. But in a few minutes the arrival of a post-chaise with a party of travellers, demanded his presence; and he accordingly left me to myself.

The name which had so much struck me on first opening the pocket-book, was that of Marco Uberti; and it was appended to a letter written in English, in a vile scrawling hand, and the language so made up with foreign idioms that its meaning was in some places difficult to be fathomed. However, after carefully studying the document, I succeeded in making it out completely; and as it is necessary to introduce the letter into my narrative, I will give it—not in its original state—but corrected and amended, so as to be entirely comprehensible to the reader. It was directed to Mr. Lanover at Rome; and its sense ran as follows:—

"November 2, 1841.

"In answer to your last communication, I beg to state that I accept the terms you have offered; although you have sadly beaten me down from my original price. You must remember, good sir, that I have to share with my brave fellows; and thus the amount you propose is not so very liberal when it comes to be divided between so many of us. However, two hundred pounds—reckoning by English money—are not to be altogether discarded and as you say you are poor at the present time and that travelling in search of the old Englishman and the ladies has made inroads on your funds, I accept your terms. Let it be well understood, however, that all the ready money and valuables I may find upon them are to be my perquisite; and that it is only their persons which are to remain at your disposal.

"You tell me in your last letter that you found them at Rome; and that from certain inquiries you have been enabled to institute, you have ascertained that they will leave for Florence in a few days—and that thence, after a brief halt, they will be passing through my Apennine domain. So far, so good: but it rests with you to give me further information—and this must be of the most particular character, so that there may be no chance of the birds escaping me. You will of course watch them

from Rome to Florence; and immediately on their arrival in that city, you must despatch a letter to the post-office at Pistoja, directed to Signor Philippo, my worthy interpreter, who is now perpetrating this scrawl to my dictation. He shall be in Pistoja to look out for the letter, about the time you specify as that when the affair is likely to come off; and he will send you an intimation at what hour and place he will meet you in Florence for a few minutes, so that he may communicate verbally with you. This is absolutely necessary, for more reasons than one. In the first place, he must ascertain from you the precise time when Heselstine and the ladies take their departure from Florence, as well as the exact route they pursue; and these particulars you must manage to glean from some hostler or underling at the hotel whence they start. Be as particular as you can in respect to *time and route*; because I cannot keep my hand in an idle ambush for many long hours together. There is another reason why Philippo must see you personally; and that is in order to give you the pass-word by means of which you could *alone* penetrate in safety through the fastnesses of my domain, and thereby avoid the chance of being shot down or knocked on the head by any of my brave fellows whom you might happen to meet. When the birds are safe in my custody, I will lodge them in the tower; and you may rest assured that they shall receive decent attentions and honourable treatment,—always excepting, however, the surrendering up on their part of their money and jewels as my requisites. You may then make your appearance here as soon as ever you like, and drive your bargain with the old man as you think fit: but remember that the first thing to be done is to place in my hands the promised amount of two hundred pounds or a bank-bill for that sum.

“By the bye, I may as well observe that if it do not suit your purpose to come in person, and if you mean to employ some agent to carry out the business with the old man, all you have to do is to give him the pass-word and the money—(do not by any means forget the latter)—and your deputy will be as welcome as yourself. But don't omit the pass-word. So no more at present from your loving friend,

“MARCO UBERTI.”

This precious document, in which villany ran in a vein of flippant familiarity, gave me a complete insight into the execrable proceedings of Mr. Lanover; and if anything were wanting to complete the clue to his perfidious intentions, it was furnished by another document in the pocket-book and to which I will presently refer. But in respect to the letter I had just read, it showed me how Lanover had bribed Marco Uberti to capture Sir Matthew Heselstine and the rest of the party—to carry them to his tower—and to hold them prisoners there until he (Lanover) should have dictated his terms to the Baronet. I now comprehended that the man on horseback whom Lanover had met at a particular spot in Florence, could have been none other than Philippo, Marco Uberti's interpreter; and let the reader remember that this meeting took place on the very evening, and only a few hours after Sir Matthew Heselstine and his party had quitted Florence. It was moreover evident that Philippo, having received from Mr. Lanover the requisite information with regard to the travellers, must have sped back in all haste to Marco Uberti's head-quarters in the Apennines, so that the banditti might repair to a suitable ambush in order to waylay those whom they intended to capture. Amidst all the bitterest grief and indignation which I experienced on account of what had thus occurred, there was a single source of solace—and that by no means an

insignificant one: it was the assurance which Marco Uberti's letter afforded that no ill-treatment was intended on his own part towards the prisoners.

I did not however pause to reflect for many moments ere I proceeded to the farther examination of the contents of Lanover's pocket-book. The other document to which I have above alluded, was a deed evidently drawn up by an English attorney, and to the following effect:—that on condition that Mr. Lanover initiated no process for the restitution of conjugal rights in respect to his wife, and that he consented thenceforth to a complete separation from her, leaving her at the same time the whole and sole control over her daughter Annabel, Sir Matthew Heselstine was by that deed to guarantee the payment of one thousand pounds a year to the said Mr. Lanover for the remainder of his life; and Sir Matthew Heselstine was so to charge his estate that at his death the said annual payment of one thousand pounds should continue to be made to Mr. Lanover throughout the lifetime of the latter. The deed farther set forth that this arrangement was willingly and spontaneously entered into by Sir Matthew Heselstine—that it emanated from a proposition on his own part—and that no illegitimate suasion or coercion were used to induce him to sign it.

Here was another phase in Lanover's villanous proceedings. Doubtless he had hitherto failed to extort from Sir Matthew the unconscionably large income he sought to obtain; and he thus put in execution these detestable devices in order to accomplish his aims.

I continued my examination of the contents of the pocket-book; and I found a bank-bill issued by a firm at Florence, and for a sum which, reduced into English money, would be equivalent to two hundred pounds precisely. This therefore was the amount which Mr. Lanover had to pay to Marco Uberti; and in default of which payment there could be no doubt that the unscrupulous bandit would keep his prisoners in custody until they made arrangements to ransom themselves. In a word, their freedom could not be effected without this payment being made to Uberti. With my own money, and that which Captain Raymond had so generously placed in my hand, I had but one hundred pounds; and all this I should require for certain purposes. Not therefore for an instant did I hesitate to consign Mr. Lanover's bank-bill to my own pocket,—resolving that if fortune continued to favour my enterprise, this amount should go to its original destination. I felt confident that in the hasty examination which the landlord and surgeon had made of the contents of the pocket-book, they had overlooked the bank-bill: for it was enclosed in a letter which was itself contained in an envelope—and I argued that if the bill had been discovered it would have been taken possession of by the landlord or doctor for security's sake. However, whether I were right or not in my surmise, I chose to run the risk of this self-appropriation of the bank-bill. As for the other contents of the pocket-book, beyond those which I have enumerated and described, they were of no consequence. One thing struck me as extraordinary—that the name of Marco Uberti should have escaped the

notice of the landlord and surgeon when they had looked into the pocket-book: but such was evidently the fact—or else they would scarcely have treated the injured man with so much sympathy and consideration.

By the time I had finished looking over the papers, the surgeon and landlord made their appearance; and I explained to the former (the latter not speaking French) that the pocket-book contained documents of the highest consequence—that I had taken down the address of Mr. Lanover's friends at the place where he was to join them—and that I would write to them before I went to bed, so that the letter might be posted on the morrow. I suggested that as I was an intimate friend of Mr. Lanover, the pocket-book ought to be sealed up in my presence; and I offered to pay a sum in advance for the invalid's maintenance, if his own purse did not happen to be well filled. The surgeon interpreted all this to the landlord; and both admired what they were pleased to consider my "handsome conduct." The pocket-book was sealed up in an envelope and restored to the landlord's keeping; but I was informed that there was no necessity for me to disburse any of my own funds on Mr. Lanover's account, as the purse found upon his person contained a sum adequate to all the demands that were likely to be made upon him, if he lived—or to defray his funeral expenses, if he died. I was glad when I saw the pocket-book sealed up: for the circumstance set my mind completely at ease in respect to the bank-bill; and I retired to my chamber to ponder all that had occurred.

Thus far fortune had most wonderfully favoured my enterprise. I had obtained a complete clue to the whole ramifications of the villanous proceedings instituted by Lanover, and which had thrown those in whom I was so much interested, into the hands of Marco Uberti. I possessed the pecuniary means of liberating them: but there was one important particular in which my knowledge was deficient—and this was the pass-word that could alone prove to Marco Uberti that I was really delegated to act for Mr. Lanover. The bandit was wily and astute; and it was scarcely to be supposed that the mere production of the ransom-money, together with explanations showing that I was initiated into the affair, would suffice to convince one who by circumstances was naturally rendered so keenly alive to aught that was suspicious or treacherous. Therefore it became absolutely necessary for me to learn that pass-word, especially as the bandit-chief had in his letter so strictly enjoined Lanover to communicate it to a deputy if he employed one. But I did not despair of conquering this difficulty by some means or another; and my thoughts in this respect pointed to Angelo Volterra. A far greater difficulty still, in my estimation, was the disguise I had to assume when penetrating into the stronghold of the banditti.

Sleep stole over me in the midst of my reflections; and I slumbered on until one of the hotel servants called me an hour before daylight in pursuance of the instructions I had given ere retiring to rest. I rose—partook of a hasty breakfast—and when I paid my bill, gave the landlord a letter which I had prepared to keep up appearances, but which really contained no writing inside. It was simply addressed to Mr. Smith at Vienna; and the

landlord firmly believed that this was the friend whose anxiety was to be relieved on Mr. Lanover's account. I learnt that the invalid appeared to be a trifle better, according to the nurse's report; but he was still in a state of almost complete unconsciousness, and unable to give utterance to a word. I bade the landlord take all possible care of him; and mounting the horse which Captain Raymond had so kindly placed at my disposal, I rode away from the hotel.

On quitting the town of Pistoja, I took the route towards that village whither I had conducted Miss Sackville on our escape from the robbers' tower, and where we had obtained the old rattletrap vehicle that had taken us on to Florence. An hour's ride brought me there; and I halted at the inn which had furnished the equipage just alluded to. The landlord immediately recognised me; and I inquired whether the banditti had come that way in pursuit of us on the morning of our flight? He answered in the negative; and I next inquired what had been done with the horses which the banditti's stable had furnished us. The landlord said that the mayor—dreading the vengeance of Marco Uberti and his band upon himself and the whole village, if it should become known to them that the animals were detained there—had ordered them to be ridden some few miles along the road in the direction of the brigands' stronghold, and then turned adrift so that their instinct might guide them homeward. The landlord then began to question me in his turn,—inquiring what business had brought me back again to the village: but I had no intention of gratifying his curiosity, and accordingly devised some excuse to satisfy him. At the same time I said it was quite possible I might remain a day or two at his establishment—at which intimation he was greatly pleased.

Having seen that the horse was properly stabled, I rambled forth from the village, with the intention of searching amongst the woods for a particular herb which, as I had read, would produce a decoction affording a deep swarthy dye for the complexion, and which would last for several days in defiance of soap and water. Some particular anecdote which I had read in connexion with this herb, and which I had only that morning recollected again—but with which I need not trouble the reader,—had left in my mind the precise description given of it; and I hoped to experience little difficulty in finding it. It was then my purpose to procure in the village quite a different suit of clothes from the somewhat fashionable cut that I wore; and though the disguise would not after all be a very perfect one, yet I was resolved to put a bold face upon the matter and lose no time in prosecuting my enterprise.

Having passed three or four hours in the wood, searching in every direction for what I required,—and displaying as much exemplary patience as ever was manifested by the most inveterate gatherer of simples,—I found a herb precisely corresponding with the description which I retained in my memory. I culled a sufficiency for my purpose—and began to retrace my way towards the village: but when within about a quarter of a mile of my destination, I suddenly came upon a scene which made me pause to contemplate it. By the side of a streamlet which rippled and sparkled through a

hollow formed by rocks overhanging the place, two vehicles resembling the gipsy-carts one sees in shady lanes in England, were standing; and a couple of miserable-looking horses were nibbling away at the grass at a little distance. A fire was lighted upon the ground; and over it, by means of three upright poles, joining at the upper ends, was suspended a cauldron, also in the true gipsy-fashion. This however was no gipsy encampment: but three or four men, as many females, and a couple of children, were dressing themselves in the costume of itinerant mountebanks and morris-dancers. Without much regard to decency, they were thus performing their toilets in the open air—that place being a dressing-room with which nature had furnished them.

The moment I was desecrated by the troop, the two little half-naked children came running towards me; and in the French language they begged me to give them a few *sous*. One was a girl of about nine—the other a boy of seven; and both were nice-looking children,—their limbs displaying a marvellous elasticity and lightness as they thus bounded towards me. But when I gave them each a small silver coin, they cut such capers, turning head over heels, and curvetting in the air, that I was quite astonished at these specimens of what they were professionally able to perform. Expressing their thanks in joyous tones, they bounded back to the troop, to whom they displayed the pieces of money, which were evidently a perfect treasure in their estimation. A man, also half-dressed, now came hastening towards me with a bottle in one hand and a glass in the other; and speaking in French, he begged me to take a drop of brandy, which he proffered in order to display his gratitude for my kindness towards his children. He was a tall slender person, about forty years of age, with a well-knit frame, and limbs as elastic as those of a tight-rope dancer. I declined the proffered refreshment—but questioned him as to the pursuits of himself and his comrades. I learnt that they were a troop of dancers and mountebanks, as I had anticipated—that he and his family (consisting of his wife and those two children) were French—and that the rest of the party were Savoyards—that they travelled in this gipsy-fashion from place to place—and that they were now dressing themselves in their professional attire in order to pay a visit to the adjacent village. The man assured me that they experienced more sympathy and picked up more money in small hamlets than in large towns; and that they had been doing tolerably well for the last few weeks, during which their exhibitions were altogether confined to the Apennine villages. Having given me these particulars in a frank and ingenuous manner, he invited me to come amongst the troop, and see how they decorated themselves for their performance. I at first made some scruple on the score of the females: but he assured me that their toilet was now all but finished—and I accepted the invitation; for a certain idea was already floating vaguely in my mind—namely, that possibly I now had an opportunity of procuring a better disguise than I had as yet anticipated.

On arriving amongst the group, I was welcomed with smiles of gratitude for the money which I had bestowed upon the children; and as these

little ones began to renew their antics joyously and gleefully before me, I tossed them each a larger piece of silver, which enhanced their mirth into the most exuberant delight. Two chests containing the “properties,” were open upon the ground; and on the ground itself a portion of their contents were spread. There were articles of quaint costume, male and female—wigs of various colours—masks—boxes of rouge and pallets of paint. Pretending to be inspired by curiosity, I examined these articles,—especially directing my attention to the wigs. The French mountebank who had conducted me thither, fancying that I was deeply interested in their proceedings, opened a tin box and exhibited several pairs of false whiskers and moustaches, as well as an immense black beard; and he informed me that all these succedaneous articles were his own handiwork—for that he was properly a hairdresser by trade, but that being ruined by misfortunes, and having always had a taste for a roving life, he had taken to the pursuits in which I now found him engaged.

“And my wife too,” he added, indicating a good-looking woman of about two-and-thirty, who was apparelled in some fairy costume, and was now addressing herself to the completion of her children’s fancy toilet,—“my wife too is much happier than when we had the cares of a business that was never profitable: for to tell you the truth, sir, we were both too fond of frequenting the theatres and places of amusement ever to get on. Now we lead a merry life, and have no tax-collectors knocking at our door—no landlord coming for his rent. But pray examine these specimens,” continued the man, showing me the false whiskers and moustaches. “I flatter myself that no Paris *artiste* could turn out anything better. Excuse me for saying that your beardless countenance would be wonderfully improved by a pair of these whiskers: and if you were only to add the moustache, you would be perfectly irresistible amongst the ladies!”

“Do you think so?” I asked with a smile. “But could not any keen eye detect that they were false?”

“It all depends, sir, on the way in which they are put on,” replied the mountebank. “If you seriously thought of accepting the little present which I am desirous to make you in return for your kindness towards the children, I would fasten them myself in the first instance; and you would afterwards be enabled to do it for yourself with the utmost nicety and precision.”

“And what do these bottles contain?” I inquired, as I perceived three or four phials at the bottom of the tin box.

“Dyes for the complexion,” responded the Frenchman: “we sometimes use them in particular performances. They are mere decoctions of herbs that grow wild amongst these mountains—and here, for instance, are some!”

As he spoke he took from one of the trunks a quantity of the very same herb that I had been searching for, and with which my pockets were filled: so that I at once saw I might save myself the trouble of making my own brewing, by the purchase of one of these phials.

“These specimens of hair,” I said, “are really so excellent that I shall certainly avail myself of

this opportunity of supplying nature's deficiency with regard to my own countenance: but you must permit me to give you an adequate remuneration. I shall also take one of these phials, for curiosity's sake."

I placed a piece of gold in the Frenchman's hand; and he was so overjoyed as well as grateful that I might have walked off, if I had chosen, with the whole contents of the tin box—bushy beard and all. But I contented myself with a delicate pair of curling glossy whiskers, and a moustache that a Parisian dandy might have envied me the possession of: I also took one of the phials—and then I said to the Frenchman, "But you must not forget your promise to put them on for me."

"This moment, if you please, sir?" exclaimed the grateful mountebank: "or tell me where and when I can wait upon you—and it will afford me such pleasure!"

I looked at my watch, and found that it was two o'clock in the afternoon. I asked the Frenchman how long his performances in the village would last? After glancing around upon the troop, he intimated that they were now all ready to set off; and that as the village was close at hand, and their performances were generally limited to an hour, I might judge how soon he could place himself at my disposal.

"Well," I said, "come to me at the inn in the village a little before five o'clock. But you will of course make your appearance in your plain clothes; and you need not suffer it to be known that you are one of the professionals who will in the meantime have been exhibiting. Nor is it necessary to give any hint to your comrades as to the object of your visit. Attend to me faithfully in this matter—and I shall give you further proof of my bounty."

The Frenchman promised compliance with all my instructions; and taking leave of the group, I retraced my steps to the village. But while proceeding thither, I flung away the herbs which I had gathered, and which were now no longer of any service to me.

## CHAPTER XCIV.

### PROGRESS OF MY ENTERPRISE.

WHILE the mountebanks were exhibiting in presence of the villagers, I was partaking of a substantial dinner that was served up; and a little before five the Frenchman was ushered into the room where I awaited him. He was no doubt apparelled in his best garb—though it consisted of a somewhat threadbare brown coat with a rusty velvet collar, a faded silk waistcoat of a flashy pattern, and light blue trousers puffed out with enormous plaits or gathers from the hips to the front and descending almost into points at the boots over which they were tightly strapped.

"Now, my good friend," I said, "it is not here that you can perform for me the service that I require: but have the kindness to go and wait for me about half a mile beyond the village—and I shall not be long ere I join you."

I made him toss off a bumper of wine; and he

then left me. The moment he was gone, I summoned the waiter—ordered my horse to be saddled—and asked for my bill. The landlord was quite distressed to perceive that I intended to quit his establishment so soon: but I cheered him with the promise of revisiting him in a day or two; and having paid my account, I took my departure. A few minutes' ride brought me to the spot where the Frenchman was waiting for me; and I then explained to him that I not only required his assistance to affix the false hair on my countenance, but also to show me how to tint my complexion with the fluid in such a way that the keenest eye might not detect it. I bade the man ask me no questions, but proceed to work, and I should keep my promise by rewarding him liberally. Having stripped off my coat and waistcoat, the dye was applied to my face and to my neck—then to my hands and wrists. It speedily dried; and he assured me that the colour would be so natural in its appearance that no human being could detect it as artificial. It likewise had the quality of being so "fast," as linendrapers would say in respect to the prints of gown-pieces, that no soap and water would remove it for three or four days, when it would gradually disappear by the process of absorption, though without producing the slightest injurious effect. He then fastened on the whiskers and moustache; and when his work was so far accomplished, I gave him another piece of gold.

"But this is not all," I said. "We must change clothes—and I flatter myself that my suit is so little the worse for wear you will be no loser by the bargain."

The Frenchman joyfully accepted the proposition; and I was careful to remove from my own pockets my pistols and purse,—securing them about my person when dressed in the mountebank's seedy apparel. He asked no questions: I dare say he fancied I was some offender against the laws, having very good reason thus to disguise myself—but I cared little for his opinion: I was too much rejoiced at the fact of being so well disguised—so infinitely better indeed than I could possibly have anticipated when on the previous evening at Pistoja wondering how I should succeed in disguising myself at all.

We parted company; and remounting my horse, I rode along in the direction of the banditti's stronghold. It was about eighteen miles from the village; and be it remembered that I had yet a most important object to accomplish ere I could present myself with confidence to Marco Uberti. This was to obtain possession of the pass-word: and my aim now was to procure an interview if possible with Signor Volterra. But as I pursued my way, I could not help reflecting that though fortune had so singularly favoured me thus far, I must not be disappointed if she now failed to prove equally propitious. Volterra might be no longer with the band—or if he were I might vainly endeavour to meet him alone: or I might even be captured by the band in the attempt to fall in with him. But in this last-mentioned eventuality I was prepared how to act: I should demand to be taken at once before Marco Uberti, to whom I would boldly proclaim that I was Lanover's deputy,—affording such proofs as I had in my power to give, and declaring that a pass-word had been mentioned to me, but that it had entirely





slipped out of my memory. Such was my pre-arranged mode of proceeding in case of necessity: but I did not altogether flatter myself, for the reasons already stated, that this device would have the desired effect:—still it was the only course I could pursue in case of being captured.

Thus, being well disguised—well armed—and also having my mind made up for any casualty that might transpire,—with a stout heart, and a firm reliance on that providence which had already appeared so signally to favour my views in more ways than one,—I rode onward, while the shades of evening were deepening around me. I could not help wondering how I looked with my swarthy tinted complexion, my false whiskers and moustache, and the queer apparel in which I was clad: but I felt satisfied that my disguise was complete, even against such eagle-eyes as those of the banditti—the more so when it is remembered

that I was only seen clearly by a few of them on the night of my previous adventure in the Apennines, and then only for a few minutes by the comparatively dim light of a lantern in the hut. Before I resume the thread of my narrative, I may as well observe that it was my fixed intention to manage the whole matter, if possible, in such a way that Sir Matthew Heseltine, Mrs. Lanover, and Annabel should not learn who their deliverer was,—this being a secret which I fondly hoped I should be enabled to maintain until the arrival of the grand day appointed for my return to Heseltine Hall, when the explanation I should have to give would plead with additional force in my behalf as the claimant of the hand of the adored and lovely Annabel.

Musing on all these things, I pursued my way; and as the moon and stars arose high above the Apennine mountains, they threw sufficient light

upon my path to enable me to recognise occasional objects which I had observed during my ride along that same road, but in the contrary direction, with Olivia Sackville. I calculated that I must thus have ridden about fourteen miles, and was now within four or five of the banditti's stronghold,—when I heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs approaching towards me. My pistols were instantaneously drawn forth: I reined in my steed—and listened. It was evidently only one horseman who was thus advancing; and I resolved, if I were attacked, to use my weapons without the slightest compunction. The individual was coming on at a gentle trot: but that part of the road happened to be so obscure with the overhanging trees that even when he was within half-a-dozen yards of me I could not distinguish his features, nor how he was dressed. He called out something in the Italian language; and—Oh, joy! I at once recognised the voice of Angelo Volterra. The next moment I made myself known to him.

“And what on earth are you doing here?” he exclaimed, now addressing me in English. “The words I first spoke to you in Italian were a warning that you must be insensate, whoever you were, to rush on into the lion's den.”

“Thank heaven for this assurance!” I enthusiastically exclaimed, as I thought of the deep fervid love which Olivia Sackville bore for this man.

“And why do you speak thus?” he asked.

“Because your words have just sent the conviction to my soul that although I found you amongst banditti, you cannot possibly be a bandit yourself!”

Volterra made no immediate answer; and it was too dark on that spot for me to judge by his countenance what was the effect my speech had just produced upon him.

“But tell me,” he said, abruptly breaking that silence, “wherefore do I find you here?”

“I know that I can trust you,” I answered: “indeed, it was my intention to seek your succour. My object is to effect the liberation of those English prisoners——”

“But this is madness!” ejaculated Volterra. “Uberti will recognise you——”

“Let us advance into the moonlight,” I interrupted him; “and we will then see whether you yourself would have recognised me if I had spoken in a feigned voice, and if I had not declared myself.”

We advanced accordingly to a spot where the trees ceased, and where the moonbeams poured down upon the road: I took off my hat, and turned my face towards the light—while Volterra studied me with the most earnest scrutiny.

“Yes—your disguise is complete!” he said. “But this is only a small part of what is required: for I dare not—indeed I have not the means to render you any succour. Uberti himself keeps the keys of the rooms in which the prisoners are confined——”

“Are they well treated?” I anxiously inquired.

“Yes: on that score they have nothing to complain of.”

“God be thanked! And now, Signor Volterra, all the assistance I require from you is the password that will admit me into the presence of Marco Uberti.”

“That I can assuredly give you,” he responded: “but——”

“Then fear not for the rest!” I exclaimed. “Accident has led me to the knowledge of the whole ramifications of that conspiracy of which those prisoners are the victims. I have their ransom-money about me: I have the means of proving—or at least of making the bandit chief believe that I am an accredited agent from the prime mover in this conspiracy. If you think my disguise complete, and if you can give me the pass-word, I have no fear of failure—but on the contrary, every hope of success.”

“You are a brave young fellow,” cried Volterra; “and you deserve to succeed. I will ride with you a portion of the way—we must then separate—and I will regain the tower by a circuitous route.”

We rode onward together; and Angelo Volterra said to me in a low voice, “The incidents which took place on the last occasion that we met, succeeded each other with such rapidity, and there was such little time for either thought or speech, that I did not put to you a question which I might have asked, and which I more or less wonder that I did not. You remember,” he continued, after a brief pause, “that you imposed a condition upon me—a condition which I faithfully promised to observe. It was that I would not again see Miss Sackville. What made you impose that condition? what reason had you for believing that I could wish to see her again?”

I did not of course choose to inform Signor Volterra how accident had made me a listener to the conversation between himself and Olivia at the entrance of the pavilion in the garden of the village hotel; and yet it was absolutely necessary to give some response to a query so natural on his part: I therefore said, “Could I suppose, Signor, that you were actuated by any save the very strongest motives for risking your own life in order to liberate Lord Ringwold's daughter? She is beautiful—and you were continually thrown in her way for a period of some months. From these circumstances I drew a certain inference—and hence the condition which I imposed.”

“I will not deny that your inference is correct,” rejoined Volterra; “and the time may come when”——but abruptly checking himself, he asked, “How fares it with the Ringwold family? are they all in good health? and did they suffer from the outrage perpetrated against them?”

“No—they suffered not to any extent worth speaking of,” I answered: “they are all well, and still residing at Florence.”

“Ah, Florence!” cried Volterra, with a profound sigh, as if of regret at being absent from his native city. “You faithfully kept your promise?” he abruptly inquired: “you did not breathe to a soul that I was the liberator of Miss Sackville and yourself on that memorable occasion?”

“No—not for worlds would I have forfeited my pledge,” I answered, “so long as you kept yours. But now let me become the querist. Were you suspected of aiding in our flight?”

“Not in the remotest degree: the precautions I took were completely successful. That you should have been enabled to file through your chain, was not the subject of any particular wonderment on the part of the banditti,—as it was supposed that

you might by some very possible accident have had an instrument fitted for the purpose about your person, and which had escaped their notice when they rifled your pockets. But what *did* plunge them into the utmost perplexity, was the evident knowledge you had obtained of the whereabouts of the stables and the place where Miss Sackville was confined. Suspicion fell upon no one: but Marco Uberti chafed, and swore, and gave vent to the most violent rage when the flight was discovered. It is on this account that he himself now keeps the keys of the chambers in which the prisoners are confined."

"There are the old gentleman and the two ladies—the valet and the maid—are there not?" I inquired.

"Yes—the carriage too, and the four horses: but the postilions are sent about their business. Whatsoever the travellers had worth taking about their persons or in their boxes, has been seized upon by the unscrupulous brigand-chief: but in other respects, as I just now assured you, their treatment has been strictly compatible with propriety. The two ladies and the maid are in one chamber—the old gentleman and his valet in another."

At this moment the sudden galloping of horses broke upon our ears; and Volterra exclaimed, "The banditti! I must leave you!"

"But the pass-word?" I ejaculated eagerly.

Volterra mentioned some word—I caught it not—I cried out to him that I had failed to comprehend it—but his horse was dashing away from the spot with the speed of the whirlwind, and in a moment he was lost to my view. Nothing could exceed the poignancy of my disappointment, amounting almost at the instant to anguish and despair, at this sudden failure of one of the most vitally important details of my enterprise: but I had little leisure for bitter reflection, inasmuch as within a minute after Volterra had thus abruptly dashed away from me, I was overtaken and surrounded by half-a-dozen of the banditti who had thus galloped upon me from behind. All attempt at resistance was useless against such a number; and even if I had discharged both my pistols with effect, it would only have been at the instantaneous sacrifice of my own life. The robbers, perceiving that I remained quiet, offered me no personal violence: nor indeed was a hand laid upon me—and I ejaculated the words, "Marco Uberti! Marco Uberti!"

Then my eyes swept hastily round upon the ferocious group of horsemen, whose appearance was horribly picturesque, so to speak, in the flood of moonlight: but I did not recognise the terrible leader of the band amongst them. One of them addressed me in Italian; and I answered in French, "If any person knows the language which I am now speaking, let him discourse with me."

"I am your man for that purpose!" said an individual, also speaking in French, and whom I recognised to be the fellow who had acted as interpreter between Marco Uberti and myself when I was a prisoner in the hut: I therefore concluded him to be Philippo.

"I demand," I said, still speaking in the French language, and all along disguising my voice somewhat, "to be conducted into the presence of your redoubtable chief Marco Uberti: for I have busi-

ness to transact with him—and I am delegated by an Englishman named Lanover."

"Ho! ho!" cried Philippo, "this alters the question. You, then, perhaps, are an Englishman?—though you look more like a Corsican or a Spaniard for that matter."

"Yes—I am an Englishman," I answered, but still in the French language, as I of course was not presumed to know that my querist was conversant with my native tongue.

"So you come on the part of Mr. Lanover?" resumed the latter, now changing the language of his speech to the English one. "Of course you are able to give the pass-word?"

"The pass-word?" I repeated, as if with an abstracted air. "To be sure! Mr. Lanover mentioned the pass-word to me—but it has escaped my memory. For the life of me I cannot think of it at this moment!"

"Indeed it *will* be for the life of you if you do not recollect it," responded Philippo with brutal curtness. "Lanover is too shrewd and sensible a man to depute as his agent any mad-brained reckless fellow who was likely to let slip so important a thing as the pass-word out of his memory. Depend upon it the Captain"—meaning Marco Uberti—"will treat you as a spy, and your neck will become acquainted with a noose before you are many hours older."

Philippo then conferred with his comrades for a few moments; and I perceived that they all bent ferocious looks of suspicion and distrust upon me: but as I sate upon my horse in their midst, I studied to preserve the calm demeanour of confidence. I was nevertheless afraid lest they might determine on dealing summarily in regard to me without taking me before their chief at all.

"Conduct me into the presence of Marco Uberti," I said to Philippo; "and I will soon convince him that I am no spy—but on the contrary, that which I represent myself to be."

"Well, we will take you to the Captain," answered Philippo; "but if you are wise you will do your best in the interval to recollect the pass-word: for no earthly proof which you can furnish will counterbalance the omission of this indispensable formality. Ah, by the bye! were we right in our conjecture that you had a companion with you, and that he dashed away a few minutes before we came up?"

"No," I answered. "I was alone, as you found me."

Philippo said something in Italian to his comrades, several of whom gave utterance to angry and vehement ejaculations; and Philippo, again addressing me, observed in a stern voice, "You are deceiving us! One and all caught the sounds of a horse dashing away into yon defile; and if our own steeds were not jaded, some of us would have sped in pursuit. Matters are growing worse and worse for you; because if you came with honourable intentions, your fellow-traveller must have been equally straightforward—and wherefore, then, should he have run away? But if you are a couple of spies, it is easy to conceive how your comrade was suddenly smitten with fear—while you, endowed with a bolder hardihood, remained to brave it out. However, it is for the Captain to decide."

The party now moved onward—I remaining in

their midst. We soon entered the path which traversed the wood in the vicinage of the tower; and though Philippo spoke not another word to me, the banditti conversed amongst themselves—the tones of their voices sounding ominous to my ears. I felt that I was indeed in a most serious dilemma: my ignorance of the pass-word was invested with all the fatal importance which I had anticipated—and was indeed regarded in a more serious light still; while the unfortunate incident of Volterra's abrupt separation from me, had strengthened suspicion against me,—thereby so gravely augmenting my danger that I felt as if nothing but a miracle could save me. But if I were to die I should at least have the consolation in my last moments of knowing that it was in the endeavour to save the beloved Annabel my doom was thus encountered.

We proceeded onward—the tower was reached—I was ordered to dismount—and Philippo, with two others of the banditti, conducted me into the building. We entered by the door communicating with that little vestibule whence opened the chamber where I had found Olivia Sackville; and as the light of the iron lamp suspended to the arched ceiling of that vestibule showed me the heavy bolts which secured that door, methought that possibly they were drawn upon some of those whom I had hoped to save. Perhaps Annabel herself was there?—and if so, it was but the thickness of a door which separated us. Good heavens! were we soon to be separated for ever, by an ignominious and horrible death overtaking myself?

The brigands led me up a stone staircase, from the summit of which branched off a passage with an array of half-a-dozen doors; and now methought that it might be one of them which held Annabel captive. Philippo opened the first door; and I was led forward into a spacious room, where half-a-dozen more banditti were sitting at a table covered with bottles and glasses, and at the head of which the terrible Marco Uberti was lounging in an arm-chair. But on beholding some of his men enter with a captive, he raised himself; and emptying his glass, awaited with fierce looks until I was brought close up to him. From the penetrating way in which he regarded me, I trembled inwardly lest my disguise should be seen through: I saw that Philippo was also eyeing me with the most rigid scrutiny: I exerted an almost super-human power to maintain a demeanour of confidence—but as I happened to glance across the table, I saw that the man who sate on the captain's left hand was the very one who had fastened on my chain in the hut whence I escaped by Volterra's assistance. *He* also was contemplating me with a ferocious and dogged intentness. I reverted my looks—and now I beheld the countenance of the sentinel whom I had overpowered, gagged, and pinioned on that same memorable night!—yes, the countenance which even through the gloom of the hour I had seen convulsed with rage, and which had indicated the savage wish on the part of the miscreant at the time, that he had it in his power to murder me. The eyes of all these whom I thus recognised one after another, were rivetted upon me: I felt that my brain was swimming: but with another effort that was almost preternatural, I summoned up the presence of mind that was

failing me—and with an appearance of outward confidence I looked slowly around upon the ruffians.

## CHAPTER XCV.

### THE EXAMINATION.

PHILIPPO now addressed Marco Uberti in the Italian language: but though I comprehended not what was said, I knew very well that he was giving an account of my capture and all the circumstances attending it. This interval afforded me leisure to collect myself completely: for keenly and vividly aware was I that if there were a possibility of saving myself from death, it could only be by confidently playing the part of Lanover's accredited agent. The following dialogue now took place between myself and Marco Uberti, carried on through the medium of the interpreter Philippo:—

"You say that you are sent hither by the Englishman Lanover?"

"Yes," was my answer; "and I have the proofs—"

"One moment, if you please! Have you remembered the pass-word?"

"No. But," I added, with every outward display of a firm confidence, "I daresay I shall recollect it presently;"—though heaven alone could tell how I was to call to mind a word I had never known.

"What are the proofs that you consider sufficient to convince us of your sincerity?"

"In the first place," I said, producing my purse and taking out the bank bill, "here is the amount which Mr. Lanover agreed to pay for the business done on his behalf."

Marco Uberti took the bill and examined it: I watched his countenance eagerly, though without appearing to be so intent in my gaze. But there was nothing reassuring in his looks as he suddenly threw them upon me; and folding up the bill, he consigned it to his pocket. The examination was then continued through the medium of Philippo.

"What business is it which we have done for Mr. Lanover?"

"You have captured," I answered, "a travelling equipage, containing five persons. These persons consist of an English Baronet, Sir Matthew Heseltine by name—his daughter, Mrs. Lanover—and his grand-daughter, Miss Bentinck—their valet and their maid."

"And supposing that you are really Mr. Lanover's agent—what instructions do you bring?"

"It is necessary I should explain to you," I said, "that from a letter which Mr. Lanover found at his hotel on returning thither after his interview with a certain Philippo, on the night of the 15th instant, in Florence, he discovered that Sir Matthew Heseltine had granted him conditions which he could accept; and therefore he has despatched me to pay the amount agreed upon with yourselves, and to desire that the travellers be immediately allowed to pursue their way without further hindrance or molestation."

"Are you aware that they are penniless?"

"Certainly!" I responded. "I am aware, according to the tenour of Marco Uberti's letter, written in English by his secretary, the Philippo of whom I have spoken——"

"I am that Philippo. Go on."

"Well, as I was about to say," I continued, "the letter which you wrote to Marco Uberti's dictation, and which was directed to Mr. Lanover at Rome, specified that all monies and valuables found upon the persons of the prisoners, should become the perquisites of your band. For this reason I have brought a sum of money which is to be placed at the disposal of Sir Matthew Heselstine to bear his travelling expenses. Here is the sum:—and of the hundred pounds (speaking in English money) which my purse contained, I deposited eighty upon the table.

"Were you instructed to place this money in the hands of Sir Matthew Heselstine himself?"

"If you mean to inquire," I said, "whether I am instructed to have an interview with the prisoners, I answer in the negative. It is taken for granted that they have received no information from you as to the motives of their captivity; and you can very easily believe that under the altered circumstances which I have mentioned, Mr. Lanover has no desire for it to be known that he was the instigator of the treatment they have received. He has full faith in the honour of Marco Uberti in adhering to his compact; and he therefore trusts that you will afford me an opportunity of assuring myself that this money will be placed in Sir Matthew Heselstine's hand. Mr. Lanover may possibly have fresh dealings with you; and as he has acted in good faith, he expects the same to be shown on your side."

"Why did not Mr. Lanover immediately send or come, to order the liberation of the prisoners, after the amicable settling of his differences with Sir Matthew Heselstine?"

"He met with an accident," I answered; "and therefore could not come: nor could he immediately find an agent whom he chose to trust in so important a matter."

"You have seen the letter which was written to Mr. Lanover at Rome. Repeat its contents to the best of your memory."

I did so with an accuracy which told unfortunately against me: for when I had finished, Philippo sneeringly observed, "It is astonishing that one who possesses so excellent a memory for such an elaborate document, should have failed to retain the pass-word."

At this moment the door opened; and as I glanced round, I saw that it was Signor Volterra who entered. He sauntered with an air of careless indifference towards the head of the table; and taking a seat, filled a glass with wine, which he began to sip in the same negligent, idle way. As a matter of course no look of recognition passed between us: but yet somehow or another I felt slightly more comfortable now that Volterra was present.

"Will you persist," inquired Philippo, renewing the examination according to the terms which Marco Uberti dictated,— "will you persist in declaring that you had no one with you a few instants before your capture?"

"I have journeyed alone the entire distance," was my response, firmly given.

"And now, can you tell us what Mr. Lanover's object was in desiring the arrest and imprisonment of his relatives?"

"Certainly!" I exclaimed. "He wished to enforce certain conditions in respect to his father-in-law Sir Matthew Heselstine. He had a deed ready prepared for Sir Matthew's signature: but the letter which he received, as I have already stated, has rendered such a proceeding unnecessary."

Marco Uberti now spoke at some length in Italian to those immediately around him; and when he had ceased, three or four addressed him in their turns. They were evidently proffering their opinions,—which to judge by their looks, I considered but little favourable to myself: yet I still preserved a calm and collected demeanour,—not of mere vulgar hardihood—but of dignified manly confidence. When the bandit-chief had listened to the sentiments of his myrmidons, he addressed Philippo in a serious strain, but keeping his piercing eyes fixed on me the while. I knew that it was a judgment he was pronouncing; and the solemnly awful conviction was forced upon me that it was a death-sentence.

"Young man," said Philippo, now turning towards me to interpret his Captain's speech, "listen to the decree which has issued from the lips of Marco Uberti. There are circumstances which seem to tell in your favour: there are others which tell still more strongly against you. These latter weigh with us. We believe you to be a spy. Accident may have rendered you acquainted with Lanover's transactions with our chief: while himself, in a moment of confidence, and deeming you to be a friend, may have explained them. But if you really came as Lanover's accredited agent, you would have known the pass-word. It is an immutable law with us that any stranger penetrating into our midst *without* the knowledge of the pass for the time being, shall be treated as a spy and put to death. Right or wrong, this is our invariable course; and we do not feel inclined to deviate from it now. Thus your ignorance of the pass-word would be alone sufficient to condemn you: but there is a circumstance which inclines us to believe that in *your* case we are indeed acting rightly. I allude to the fact that you had a companion with you just now, and that you have persisted in denying it. This bespeaks your treachery: and how know we but that the individual who repairs to Florence for the purpose of procuring the money for the bank-bill which you have brought, will not be arrested the instant he crosses the threshold of the bank? In short, all things considered, it is Marco Uberti's decree that you at once prepare for death."

"How long have I to live?" I asked, with a certain tightening at the heart, although I lost not the firmness of my demeanour: "how long will you accord me to prepare my soul for its appearance before my Maker?"

"We are not accustomed to great delays," responded Philippo: "and where a man is condemned as a spy——"

"I deny that I am such!" I indignantly exclaimed. "If I had not unfortunately forgotten the pass-word——"

"Then everything would have been right!" ejaculated Philippo. "But——"



"And if I could recollect it now?" I said with some degree of eagerness.

"If even at the latest moment, before the noose tightens round your throat, your tongue can give utterance to that pass-word, you will be safe—and you will be regarded as that which you represent yourself. For in this case," continued Philippo, "the proper formalities would be fulfilled; and we should be inclined to look over the circumstance of your being in companionship with another. Indeed, if you thus far set yourself right with us, it would be well nigh sufficient to convince us that you had spoken truthfully when denying that you had a companion; and moreover, that instead of a treacherous falsehood existing on your side, it is an error which lies upon our's."

"If I recollect the pass-word, all will be well!" I exclaimed: and there was hope yet in my heart.

But whence sprang that hope? It was from the fact that Angelo Volterra, while affecting to sip his wine with an easy nonchalance, darted upon me a significant glance,—a glance that was as rapid and brief as the twinkling of an eye, and yet sufficiently intelligible for me. It seemed to afford me encouragement: it forbade me from yielding myself altogether up to despair.

"Come!" exclaimed Philippo fiercely: "all this bandying of words is merely to gain time—but uselessly: for it is out of the question that you will recollect a pass-word which you evidently never knew."

He then spoke a few words in Italian to Marco Uberti, who thereupon made a sign; and my arms were clutched by the strong hands of three or four of the banditti. Angelo Volterra at that instant sprang up from his seat; and with an assumed air of savage jocularly, he said something in his own native tongue to the banditti—whereat they all laughed.

"Our comrade here," observed Philippo, turning to me with a malignant expression of countenance—but it was to Volterra that he alluded,—"has been in your native country; and he has seen how a noose is tied by your hangman—what do you call him?"

"Jack Ketch, to be sure!" exclaimed Volterra, speaking in English: and turning upon me with a fierce aspect, he added in accents which seemed to be full of ferocious menace, "Detestable spy that you are! my own hands shall reeve you a noose as cunning as that which the Jack Ketch of your native land is wont to manipulate for his victims."

A stout cord was produced: Volterra took it—and quick as lightning his glancing eyes signified to me that I was to go down upon my knees. I did so: for I comprehended full well that he was working in my interest. Scornful expressions, as I could judge by the tone in which they were uttered, burst from the lips of Marco Uberti and his myrmidons; and Philippo said to me in a taunting voice, "Ah! now the courage which hitherto sustained you is failing at the sight of the cord!"

Meanwhile Volterra had formed a noose; and as I knelt upon the floor, with my hands clasped and my looks bent down, he stooped to adjust it round my neck. The ruffians who a minute back were holding me in their powerful grasp, had

withdrawn their hands when I sank down to my knees: for they were well assured that I could not escape from them. Volterra placed the running noose, as I have said, round my neck: he adjusted the knot under the left ear—he stooped lower still as if to convince himself that it was properly placed—at that very instant some brutal jest from Marco Uberti's lips raised a loud guffaw on the part of the banditti—and under the cover of that coarse din, Volterra rapidly whispered a word in my ear.

The next instant he drew back; and it was evident to me that he had so much faith in my presence of mind, my discretion, and my shrewdness, to be well aware that I should not at once proclaim the pass-word and thus raise the suspicion that he might have whispered it—but that I should let matters progress a little further, and then appear to be all in a moment inspired with the recollection of the word that was to save me. Again was I seized upon by the banditti: they hurried me towards the door,—the cord dangling from my neck. Down the staircase we went—out into the open air: Marco Uberti, Volterra, Philippo,—every one indeed who was ere now in the banqueting-room, accompanied me on my way to the nearest tree, to which it was intended to hang me up. Under the bough of a huge tree was I made to stop short: the rope was tossed over it—two or three of the ruffians caught hold of the extremity in order to drag me up—when I suddenly ejaculated the word, "*Fabiano!*"

Those who had just clutched the end of the cord dropped it in astonishment from their hands: ejaculations of surprise burst from the lips of Marco Uberti and some others:—then there was a hasty consultation amongst them—but I was not kept many moments in suspense—for Philippo said, "It is well! we are satisfied. But, by heaven! never was man so nearly suffering for the shortness of his memory!"

"When a man looks death in the face," I answered, "it is a spectacle sufficient to startle up whatsoever slumbering recollection might possibly save him."

"Come!" said Philippo; "as I helped to hurry you on towards the doom you've so narrowly escaped, the least I can do is to divest you of this uncomfortable neckcloth."

Hereupon he slipped off the rope; and now Marco Uberti shook my hand with a rough cordiality. We returned to the banqueting room: wine was proffered me—and I gladly accepted it; for, as the reader may suppose, I stood in need of such refreshment after the exciting, trying, perilous scenes through which I had been hurried.

"And now what are your wishes?" said Philippo to me. "Repeat them—and we are in readiness to fulfil them."

"Have the goodness," I answered, "to let the horse be put to the travelling-carriage—restore the prisoners to liberty—and afford me an opportunity of slipping the money which I have brought, into the hand of Sir Matthew Heseltine."

"But there are no postilions for the horses," replied Philippo.

"Sir Matthew Heseltine's valet," I rejoined, "will doubtless be only too glad to act in the capacity of postilion, when it is to convey the



family from the place of their prisonage. Only give him a hint as to the road he is to take—and leave him to manage as best he can. It will be sufficient for me that I can return to Mr. Lanover and report the faithful fulfilment of my mission."

"Well, be it so," answered Philippo. "But how do you propose to place that money in the old Englishman's hand?"

"When the carriage is in readiness, and he and his family are seated inside, let me know."

Philippo departed to execute my instructions; and I remained in the banquetting-room with the banditti. The bank-notes I had laid upon the table in the course of my examination, were still there. I took them—enveloped them in a piece of paper—and with a pencil which I had about me, I wrote on that paper, but in a feigned hand, the words—"Beware of Lanover: it is he who was the author of your captivity!"

I heard the sounds of the carriage and the horses being taken out beneath the windows of the tower; and in about twenty minutes Philippo re-appeared. I accompanied him from the room; and he informed me that everything was in readiness for the departure of the released prisoners—that the valet had undertaken to guide a pair of horses—but that he could not by himself manage the four—and therefore it was proposed that with this limited equipage they should proceed to the nearest posting-town. I asked Philippo if there were any lights to the carriage, or if any of the banditti had lamps or torches?—and he informed me that he had purposely taken care that there should be nothing of the sort. In a word, the man was now as courteously attentive and considerate as he had a little while back been ferocious and implacable.

We emerged from the tower, and through the obscurity of the night—for the sky had grown overclouded—I perceived the equipage at a short distance. Oh, how near I was to Annabel!—and yet not to be able to make myself known to her! The darkness was all but so complete that there was no fear of her catching a sufficient view of my countenance to enable her, with the penetrating eyes of love, to see through its disguise of artificial hair and darkening tint; and therefore without apprehension on this score, did I advance up to the carriage window. One of my objects in having stipulated for this proceeding, was that I might convince myself that all the prisoners were really released, and not one kept back: my other object was to have the certainty that the money reached Sir Matthew's hand and was not intercepted by the outlaws. Yes—and perhaps too there was another object, or rather a hope—namely, that of obtaining a glimpse, however dim, of the countenance of Annabel.

Disguising my voice by torturing it into the roughest accents it was capable of assuming, I said, "Here! your hand!"

Sir Matthew instinctively stretched it forth: I placed the packet in it: the piercing glance which I flung into the vehicle showed me that there were four persons—the Baronet and three females; and *one* I knew to be the adored Annabel. That the other two were Mrs. Lanover and the maid, I had no doubt. I stood hastily aside again; and in a low tone to Philippo, said, "Let them depart."

The word was accordingly given by the bandit; and the equipage rolled away.—Sir Matthew's valet acting as postilion. My heart leaped with joy at the idea of having thus achieved the emancipation of those in whom I was so much interested, and one of whom was so inestimably dear to me; and yet the next instant I heaved a long-drawn sigh at the thought of having suffered Annabel to depart without even exchanging so much as the pressure of a hand.

Philippo now offered me accommodation at the tower until the following day; but I thought that I could not too speedily get from the midst of that nest of hornets. I accordingly expressed my thanks—but assured him that I had faithfully promised Mr. Lanover to return with the least possible delay and report the results of my mission. My horse was therefore led out: I mounted the animal—and having taken leave of Philippo, rode away from the tower. I took the same route by which I had arrived, and which indeed was the only one known to me. I could scarcely believe that I was thus in complete security: I could scarcely believe that all which had happened during the last two hours, was otherwise than a dream. If I shuddered at the fearful risks I had run, infinitely greater was my rejoicing at the deed which I had accomplished. To have saved Annabel and her relatives—to have liberated them from that den—was an achievement well worthy of the most exulting self-congratulations. I did not choose to return to the village where I had halted during the day, as my horse was sure to be recognised even if I myself were not; and that circumstance would be fraught with suspicion. I therefore took another road, when some miles distant from the tower—and pursued it at random, with the hope of reaching some hamlet.

As I continued my way, I thought much of Angelo Volterra. A mystery that appeared to be impenetrable, hung around this man. I could not believe that he himself was a bandit; and yet I found him the companion of banditti. How was it, then, that this singular personage who was so ready to help, to liberate, and to save whenever he had the power, could consent to herd with a gang of outlaws?—how was it that he who in more instances than one, had displayed so much generosity, dwelt among these desperadoes? I did not see him after leaving the banquetting-room with Philippo to witness the departure of the carriage; and when in that room after my liberation from the threatening noose, he had afforded me no opportunity of thanking him, even by a glance, for the immense service he had rendered me. It was evident by all his actions that he was compelled to maintain the most scrupulous caution, and that he knew his life would not be worth an instant's purchase if he were suspected by the horde of ruffians of betraying or thwarting them in any one single thing. But again recurred the question—what was he doing there? ProFOUND was the mystery: would it ever be solved?

While thus occupied with my thoughts, I rode on in the darkness of the night; and I had achieved, as far as I could calculate, about a dozen miles, when I reached a little hamlet consisting of some twenty cottages. One was an inn—or what would be called in England an ale-house of the humblest description; and I halted at the door.

All the windows were dark: my summons continued for several minutes unanswered: I knocked louder still—a head was thrust from an upper casement—and a man spoke to me gruffly in Italian. Not being able to understand him, I answered in French: he was equally at a loss to comprehend me: but I could judge from his tones that he refused to give me admittance—though whether through fear, or whether because he had really no accommodation for myself and my horse, I could not conjecture. He closed the window; and I was bewildered how to act. Both myself and my animal were much jaded and stood in need of refreshment and rest. If I continued my wanderings in the darkness, I might encounter some accident—or I might penetrate into those wildest parts of the Apennines where no human beings dwell: I could not therefore willingly abandon the chance of obtaining accommodation in this hamlet. Selecting the best-looking cottage, as well as I could judge through the obscurity, I knocked at the door. A female presently answered me from the window; and, to be brief, I found there was no chance of obtaining hospitality there. Disheartened by my failure, I rode slowly away from the hamlet—and at a walking pace continued my journey for the next two hours. At the expiration of this interval I entered a village; and looking about for the inn—if there were one—I found the suspicion creeping into my mind that the place was not altogether unfamiliar to me: but when I discovered the house of entertainment that I sought, this suspicion was all in a moment confirmed. A circuitous route had brought me to the very village which I had intended to avoid!

The reader will comprehend that this in fact was the place where I had halted when on my way to the robbers' tower, and in the neighbourhood of which I had assumed my disguise by the aid of the friendly mountebank. I was too much exhausted to think of proceeding further; and moreover the continuation of my journey would have been a wanton cruelty towards the animal I bestrode. I accordingly knocked: and the door was presently opened by an elderly female domestic, whom I had not before seen. I addressed her in French: she could not comprehend me—but she made signs to intimate that I must act as my own ostler. With a light in her hand, she guided me to the stable; and when I had duly cared for the steed, I gave her to understand that I wanted refreshments for myself. She took me to the kitchen, where I speedily dispatched a very hearty meal; and then she conducted me to a chamber. Quickly disapparelled myself, I got to bed; and scarcely did I lay my head upon the bolster, when I sank into a profound sleep.

## CHAPTER XCVI.

### CAPTAIN RAYMOND.

I WAS awakened by a strange noise; and starting up in bed, found that it was broad daylight: but the little chamber was invaded by all the male domestics of the inn—consisting of the waiter, a couple of ostlers, and a gardener. The landlord

appeared behind them; and he was accompanied by an elderly man and an armed police-official. For the first few moments my thoughts were too much confused to enable me to form a conjecture as to what was the meaning of this intrusion: but as the truth presently flashed in unto my mind, I burst out into the merriest peal of laughter I had indulged in for a long time past. The posse gave vent to ejaculations of indignant surprise; as they naturally believed I was treating with a reckless bravado the crime of which they fancied me to be guilty. The police-official rushed in to seize upon me: but I called out in French for the landlord to stand forward.

"What does all this mean?" I asked, but still scarcely able to keep my countenance.

"That voice!—I ought to know it!" said the landlord, surveying me with an air of the most ludicrous bewilderment.

"What am I accused of?" I inquired: for I was in one of those kind of mischievous humours which made me enjoy the perplexity my disguise was occasioning.

"Of stealing the horse belonging to another traveller—and perhaps murdering that traveller:—but still the landlord, as he spoke, continued to regard me in a bewildered way.

"In plain terms, then," I said, "I am accused of stealing my own horse and of murdering myself!"

"Well, it must be you, sir, after all!" cried the landlord, in amazement. "But—but——"

"These whiskers—and this moustache," I said, laughing heartily; "and this tinted complexion, naturally puzzle you. The truth is, my good friend, my false hair will not come off without peeling away the skin, unless I use hot water; and I can assure you that on arriving here just now, I was too much fatigued even to think of it."

"The Mayor, sir," replied the landlord, indicating the elderly individual as he spoke, "will require some explanation—as the circumstance is suspicious."

"The explanation simply is that I chose to penetrate into the banditti's stronghold, to effect the liberation of some friends of mine; and in this I fully succeeded. As for my disguise,—if the mountebanks who performed here yesterday, still happen to be in the neighbourhood, there is one of them who can give you a satisfactory account."

"Well, sir, I am sure that it is all right," answered the landlord; "and I will be your guarantee to the Mayor. But you must confess that when your horse was recognized, and the female-servant assured me that it was quite a different person whom the animal bore hither, from the one who was here yesterday, it was natural I should acquaint the authorities with the circumstance."

He then spoke to the Mayor; and the posse immediately withdrew. I was still exceedingly tired—and remained in bed for some hours longer. When I arose I removed the false whiskers and moustache by means of hot water: but my tinted complexion defied the influence of soap. However, I knew perfectly well, from the assurances the friendly mountebank had given me, that in a few days my skin would be of its natural colour again; and as the secret was now known at the



village-hostelry, I determined upon remaining there until the artificial swarthinness produced by the herbal dye should have passed away. I wrote a letter to Captain Raymond, briefly acquainting him with the success of my enterprise, and informing him that circumstances which I would explain, prevented me from returning at once to Florence.

On the fifth day the tint had almost completely disappeared from my face, neck, and hands; and I was enabled to set out towards the Tuscan capital. I avoided Pistoja, as I did not choose to make my appearance at the hostelry there, for fear lest Mr. Lanover, having regained his consciousness, and learning from my personal description who it was that had examined his pocket-book, should in his rage and suspicion accuse me of having taken his bank-bill: though on my own conscience the matter rested very lightly indeed—for I had after all only appropriated the value to the same use

as that for which he had destined it. I reached Florence in safety, and was kindly welcomed by Captain Raymond. I gave him an explanation of my adventure, carefully suppressing however the name of Angelo Volterra: he listened with the most unfeigned interest, and applauded me for my perseverance, my skill, and my fortitude in carrying out my aim.

I now relapsed into a quiet mode of life once more; and six weeks passed away. During this interval I noticed that Captain Raymond was perceptibly increasing his attentions towards the Hon. Miss Olivia Sackville; and I pitied her,—for I could full well understand how distasteful they must be to her. In a conversation which I had with Lord Ringwold's valet, he said, "I have good reason to know that my lord and her ladyship are pleased with the Captain's attentions towards Miss Olivia."

"How so?" I inquired.

"Because," responded the valet, "Bessy, her ladyship's maid, happened to overhear her ladyship chide Miss Olivia yesterday for her coldness towards the Captain. Miss Olivia said nothing; and her ladyship went on speaking. She desired her daughter to observe that Captain Raymond is well off—that he belongs to an excellent family—that he has the certainty of becoming much richer than he even now is—and that he is not so very remote from the chance of inheriting a peerage. But still Miss Olivia continued silent; and her ladyship reminded her that her father's means are limited—that she is now past four-and-twenty—and that she ought not to discourage the attentions of one who would form an excellent match for her. Bessy heard no more; but you see, Joseph, it is quite clear that my lord and her ladyship are favourable to your master's pretensions—and I dare say we shall have a wedding soon."

"But if Miss Olivia will not accept Captain Raymond," I observed, "do you think that Lord and Lady Ringwold are capable of exercising their influence tyrannically?"

"No—I do not think they are," replied the valet: "but I have no doubt that they would go to the very utmost extent of persuasion."

A few days after this conversation, I was ascending the stairs of that compartment of the hotel which we inhabited,—when I perceived Captain Raymond issue from the Ringwolds' drawing-room; and the paleness of his countenance, as well as the agitation of his manner, convinced me that something had occurred. He did not notice me—but hastened across the landing, and entering his own sitting-room, closed the door violently. About a couple of hours afterwards I had a conversation with the valet; and he said "What do you think, Joseph? Captain Raymond has proposed to Miss Olivia, and has been refused!"

"Ah!" I ejaculated: for this announcement confirmed the suspicion which was already floating in my mind. "How do you know?"

"Bessy, her ladyship's maid, has just been telling me all about it," rejoined the valet. "She could not help overhearing something that took place after Captain Raymond had proposed to Miss Olivia and had been refused. It seems that the Captain had previously spoken to Lord and Lady Ringwold, and had obtained their assent: but Miss Olivia rejected him—and when pressed by your disappointed master, she frankly avowed that her affections were already engaged. She almost immediately afterwards informed her parents of the answer she had given; and her ladyship besought her to avow who was the object of her love. She did—and who, think you, Joseph, is the possessor of Miss Olivia's heart?"

"You must tell me," I said, affecting the completest ignorance upon the subject.

"Signor Volterra," answered the valet.

"Indeed!" I ejaculated.

"And after all, it is not to be wondered at," continued the valet: "for though your master is good-looking enough,—yet the Italian, you must admit, is far handsomer. Besides, Captain Raymond is in his thirty-sixth year; and Signor Volterra is only seven-and-twenty. To be sure, the Captain is no doubt richer, and he belongs to a fine old

family: but still all this has got nothing to do with the affections of a young lady's heart."

"And what said my lord and her ladyship," I inquired, "when Miss Olivia made that confession?"

"I cannot say," replied the valet: "for Bessy could overhear no more."

At this moment I was summoned to Captain Raymond's apartment: but I now found him perfectly calm and self-possessed, and with a demeanour expressive of that manly dignity with which he might naturally be supposed to cover the disappointment he had sustained.

"We are about to leave Florence immediately, Joseph," he said: "hasten the preparations—for in an hour we shall start."

I obeyed his orders without betraying that I comprehended wherefore they were issued: it was now three o'clock in the afternoon—and at four we took our departure in a post-chaise. For reasons known to the reader, I did not wish to pass through Pistoja in re-crossing the Apennines; and I was therefore pleased to learn that we were to proceed in quite a contrary direction—that we were to halt for the night at Dicomano, which was more to the east along the Apennine range—and that thence, on the morrow, our route was to be pursued towards Ravenna, from which city the Captain purposed to proceed to Venice.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when we entered Dicomano: and we stopped at the principal hotel. This was so full of guests that a private sitting-room was not to be had; and it was even with difficulty we could obtain the promise of sleeping-apartments. Captain Raymond was accordingly compelled to take his dinner in the coffee-room:—where there were several other travellers, belonging to different nations, and two or three English. It was about an hour after our arrival that I had occasion to enter the coffee-room to ask the Captain for the keys of his trunks, in order to take out such things as he required for his toilet,—when I heard one of the English gentlemen just alluded to, vehemently and wrathfully describing how he had been captured by Marco Uberti's band, and kept a prisoner at the tower for five whole days, until he had procured the ransom they insisted upon having. This was all I heard: but Captain Raymond gave me a significant look and a half-smile, as much as to imply that I also could tell a tale, if I chose, relative to that formidable bandit and his outlaw horde, whose deeds were thus evidently growing more and more daring.

It was about an hour later still, that as I was lounging in front of the hotel, Captain Raymond and the English gentleman of whom I have just spoken, came out to smoke their cigars. At that very instant an individual on horseback rode up to the hotel; and as the light of the lamp fell upon his countenance, I recognised Angelo Volterra.

"One of the brigands, by heaven!" vociferated the English gentleman. "Help! help!—to horse!"

"A brigand? nonsense!" exclaimed Captain Raymond. "He is an acquaintance of mine. But—ah! what does this mean?"

And well indeed might the Captain utter this latter ejaculation: for Angelo Volterra, suddenly urging his horse to its utmost speed, gal-

loped away from the front of the hotel. Such was the velocity of his flight that in a few moments the quick clattering of the hoofs upon the stones ceased to be audible.

"I tell you, my dear sir," vociferated the irritable English gentleman—and he gesticulated violently too,—“that this is one of the banditti. I saw him at the tower—I cannot be mistaken—he is a person too remarkable, even if seen only for an instant, not to be recognised again. Help, help! why don't they raise a hue and cry?”

Numbers of persons came rushing forth from the hotel—others stopped in the street—and the intelligence spread like wildfire that one of Marco Uberti's band had just been recognised, but that he fled precipitately. The excitement was immense: but, as it speedily appeared, there was no inclination on the part of any persons who collected on the spot, to take horse and pursue the fugitive. The town was a very small one, and had but two or three police officials, who were not to be found when they were wanted; and thus there was no pursuit at all.

Captain Raymond walked aside with the irascible Englishman; and they conversed together for nearly half-an-hour. During this interval I was agitated with the most painful thoughts: I felt assured that I should be questioned by Captain Raymond; and what could I say? I had pledged myself to Volterra to keep his secret on condition that he performed that part of the compact which I myself had proposed in reference to Miss Sackville; and moreover, I was bound by every tie of gratitude to shield and spare him—for I owed him my liberation on the first occasion of my presence in the bandits' stronghold, and my life on the last. Besides, I had the deep conviction, from the circumstances which had occurred, as well as from the expressions which had fallen from his own lips, that Volterra was not himself a bandit, though he consorted with those outlaws. Yes—this was my conviction, notwithstanding the deep mystery which hung around him. But, on the other hand, how could I undertake his defence—how could I say a word in his vindication?—for if I told all I knew, and if I confessed that it was through his agency Miss Sackville and myself escaped in the first instance and my life was saved in the second,—the tidings would inevitably obtain immense publicity—they would reach the ears of Marco Uberti and his band—and the generous-hearted Angelo Volterra would fall a victim to their rage.

All these reflections agitated and distressed me most cruelly during the half-hour that Captain Raymond and the irascible gentleman were walking apart together. I had no doubt that my master was gleaning every particular in respect to that gentleman's captivity at the banditti's stronghold, and that he was assuring himself by all possible means that there was no mistake as to the identity of Angelo Volterra with the personage whom he had seen amongst the outlaws in that place. At length their discourse ended; and the Captain, accosting me, said, “Joseph, I wish to speak to you.”

He led the way to his bed-chamber; and closing the door, he said to me in a firm, decisive voice, “You must tell me whether *you* also saw Signor Volterra at the banditti's tower?”

I could not look him full in the face and give utterance to a falsehood. I felt that such an untruth would be a most wilful one, and very different under all circumstances from that bold denial which I had given to the banditti in respect to whether I had a companion with me at the moment previous to my capture. I therefore thought—and the idea struck me all in an instant—that I had better trust entirely to the Captain's generosity; and I said, “I will reveal certain things if you promise me not to publish them to the world.”

For a moment Captain Raymond's countenance flushed with indignation at the idea of conditions being imposed upon him by his own domestic: but the next instant that glow of haughty anger passed away; and he said, “If you mean that I am to keep the seal of completest silence upon my lips, I will give no pledge of the kind: but if you mean that I am only to use guardedly and cautiously whatsoever you may reveal to me, I cannot hesitate to yield to your stipulation. Now, understand me! It has come to my knowledge that Miss Olivia Sackville has bestowed her affections upon this Angelo Volterra: I am a friend of her parents—but even if I were *not*, do you think that I would suffer any young lady under such circumstances to remain in ignorance of the character of him to whom her heart is given? Tell me the truth, Joseph:—it was Volterra who effected her release through your agency? and it was Volterra who assisted you in your own subsequent enterprise?”

“I cannot deny it—no, I cannot!” I answered. “And now I appeal to your generosity on behalf of that man who saved Miss Sackville from the horrible fate that was in store for her—that of becoming a vile outlaw's bride!”

“Yes—you shall not appeal in vain,” answered Captain Raymond. “I think I comprehend your motives. Were all this known, Volterra's life would be sacrificed to the rage of his comrades?”

“That is my motive, sir,” I rejoined. “But you should not call them *comrades*: for I will stake my existence that Angelo Volterra is no bandit!”

“You are of a romantic disposition, Joseph,” said the Captain, with a slight smile; “and you generously put faith in whatsoever florid and plausible representations the fellow has made to you. But I,” continued Raymond, resuming the gravity of his demeanour, “am a man of the world, and not to be similarly deluded. Indeed, without meaning to hurt your feelings, I must say that I should be insulting my own common sense, if I were to fancy for a moment that one who dwells with banditti is not a bandit himself. Ah! and perhaps it was he who gave such information to Marco and his horde which enabled him to attack our carriages when we were crossing the Apennines?—perhaps he intended that Miss Sackville should be carried off in order that he might have the credit of liberating her?”

“You forget, sir,” I answered, “that he kept altogether in the back ground—that he used me as the instrument of that liberation—and that up to this very moment Miss Sackville is in ignorance of who *the friendly bandit*—as I chose at the time to describe him—actually was.”

“True!” said the Captain. “However, he is

not the less a bandit for all this; and you must be perfectly well aware that though I will keep my promise in avoiding to give publicity to what I now know, I shall lose no time in acquainting Lord and Lady Ringwold with the character of this Angelo Volterra."

Having thus spoken, Captain Raymond dismissed me from his presence; and when I retired to rest, it was a long time before sleep visited my eyes—for I continued to be harassed with the most painful thoughts. Not that my belief in Volterra's integrity, despite all the suspicious circumstances which surrounded him, was at all staggered by Captain Raymond's utter incredulity on the same point; and as for my romantic notions, as he was pleased to call them, I flattered myself that I only took a common-sense view of the whole circumstances, considering the strong reasons I had to entertain a good opinion of Volterra, and to avoid being entirely influenced by certain appearances which seemed to tell against him.

At an early hour on the following morning, the hotel-porter came up to my chamber while I was dressing, and gave me a note. I opened it; and found that it contained the following words, written in English:—

"I am distressed almost to madness—and you can comprehend wherefore. I have now every reason to apprehend that a certain statement will be made in a particular quarter—and, Oh, the anguish that it will produce! But *you*, I am convinced, do not believe that I really am what I may seem to be! Were it not for the solemn pledge I gave you, I should at once endeavour to obtain an interview with a certain lady, and beseech her to suspend her judgment with regard to me. But I respect that pledge; and is not this another proof of honour and integrity which I am affording you? I therefore leave the matter in your hands. That Captain Raymond will lose no time in returning to Florence to state what has come to his knowledge, I feel convinced. You therefore will be soon in Florence again; and I trust to your good offices to procure that suspension of opinion for which I myself would plead were I not bound by my pledge to you. If I dare ask such a favour—if you can sufficiently suspend your own judgment concerning me,—the boon I would crave is that you will show this letter to the lady whom for prudence' sake I do not name. And, oh! I beseech that *her* opinion may be suspended with regard to me! In no sense am I what I seem. God grant that circumstances may so far prove favourable as shortly to enable me to render my meaning clearly intelligible, and fling away this odious veil of mystery which now envelopes me. Never would I have reminded you that you owe me your liberty and also your life, were it not that I am constrained to adopt all means to move and interest you in my behalf: therefore on those grounds do I now appeal to your generosity—your goodness!"

I was profoundly affected by the perusal of this letter; and when I had finished it, my first impulse was to show it to Captain Raymond,—trusting to his magnanimity to put the most favourable construction on its contents. But then I recollected that he was by no means an impartial person to judge of Angelo Volterra: for in the Italian he beheld a successful rival with regard to the affections of Olivia Sackville—and even with the most generous dispositions there is an aptitude for prejudice towards a rival—a readiness to catch up and use aught to his disparagement. Therefore I resolved to abstain from showing the letter to Captain Raymond: but equally deter-

mined was I to fulfil Volterra's behests to the utmost of my power.

Immediately on proceeding to the Captain's apartment, he informed me that we were about to return to Florence: but he said not another word in respect to Signor Volterra—neither did he appear to know that I had received any letter. I therefore concluded that Angelo had instructed his emissary, whoever he were, to bribe the porter of the hotel to deliver the note privately and secretly into my hand.

We retraced our way to Florence. I sat outside the post-chaise—and therefore had no opportunity of judging by my master's demeanour whether he now entertained any hope of being enabled to supplant Angelo Volterra in the affections of Olivia Sackville. So far, however, as I could judge from his looks before we started, I fancied that there was a certain degree of satisfaction—though scarcely perceptible—beneath the calm dignity of his bearing. Alas, poor Olivia!—and I said to myself that before the day was out her heart would doubtless have experienced a severe trial. But would she believe Volterra to be entirely unworthy of the love she had bestowed upon him? No—I could not think it: for when I recalled to mind the discourse that I had overheard between them in the garden of the village-hotel on the Modena side of the Apennine range, I said to myself, "Her love is too deeply seated to be thus readily destroyed!"

The post-chaise entered Florence at about noon; and as it drove up to the hotel, I felt my heart fluttering as much as if the whole proceeding intimately concerned myself in the keenest and most painful manner. The domestics of the establishment were surprised to see us return; and we were at once put in possession of the apartments we had left in the afternoon of the previous day. The valet and the lady's-maid attached to the Ringwolds were also astonished at my master's speedy and most unexpected revisit to the Tuscan capital: but I gave no explanation—I affected to be ignorant of his motives—and yet, with all the painful feelings that agitated in my breast, it was no easy matter to practise this little dissimulation.

## CHAPTER, XCIV.

### OLIVIA.

I HAD no opportunity for some hours of judging what took place,—as Captain Raymond, almost immediately after our arrival, sought an interview with Lord and Lady Ringwold, and remained closeted with them for a considerable time. Then he retired to his own apartment, to which I was not summoned during the rest of the day, he having no need for me. But between four and five in the afternoon, I encountered Lord Ringwold's valet, who said to me, "What on earth is the matter, Joseph? I am sure that you know something, but you will not tell me. Bessy says that Miss Olivia is overwhelmed with grief—that she has retired to her own chamber, and is giving way to her affliction."



"I daresay," I replied, "that Bessy will sooner or later enlighten you on the subject: but for my part I know nothing. The Captain suddenly made up his mind to return to Florence—and of course I obeyed without questioning him."

"To be sure," answered the valet: "but still I thought you might possibly know why he did come back, and that from motives of delicacy you hesitated to tell me. His lordship, when I saw him just now, seemed much cut up; and her ladyship is indisposed. That something has happened is evident enough."

At this moment the valet was summoned away; and soon afterwards Bessy, the lady's-maid, came and beckoned me aside into a room where we might be alone together.

"Will you promise, Joseph," she said, and she looked much distressed—"that you will not breathe to a single soul the words I am about to speak?"

"It all depends," I answered. "And yet I do not think I can have much hesitation in giving you such a promise."

"You know I would not ask you to pledge yourself to anything wrong," she replied.

"Well then, I promise," I said.

"Miss Olivia wants to speak to you," continued the lady's-maid: "but she is trembling lest you should think her request strange—or that you might happen to mention it to your master."

"Miss Olivia need not entertain either of those apprehensions," I rejoined. "If Miss Olivia require any information to which I can assist her, there is nothing strange in her sending for me; and as for my being a tell-tale, I am not aware that there has ever been anything in my conduct to justify such a suspicion."

"You need not speak so gravely, Joseph," answered the maid: "there was no intention to wound your feelings. Miss Olivia has made a confidante of me: she is dreadfully distressed—and if you could tell her anything to relieve her mind, I am sure it would be a perfect charity."

"When and where am I to see Miss Sackville?" I inquired.

"Now—and in the breakfast parlour," responded the maid. "There is no fear of interruption. Hasten you there at once!"

I accordingly proceeded to the room which she had mentioned; and I found Miss Sackville anxiously and tremblingly awaiting my presence. Her countenance was pale, and bore the traces of recent weeping. I closed the door gently and advanced towards her.

"You must think this step that I am taking most extraordinary," she said, evidently at a loss how to introduce the topic on which she desired to speak. "But no!—you will make allowances for me—"

"If I can render you any service, Miss Sackville," I answered, "I shall be only too glad."

She bent upon me a look of heartfelt gratitude; and then, with a mighty effort to stifle a sob that was convulsing her bosom, she said, "Tell me, Joseph—tell me—is it indeed true—that dreadful tale which I have heard? is it true, I ask, that Signor Volterra—"

Here she stopped short: for the convulsing sob burst forth, and she could not complete her sentence.

"Miss Sackville," I answered, hastening to relieve her from suspense, "rest assured that Signor Volterra will yet satisfactorily clear up this strange and dreadful mystery."

A cry of joy burst from Olivia's lips: she almost started from her seat, as if to rush forward and grasp my hand in token of the ineffable gratitude that she experienced for this announcement: but her feelings overpowered her—and clasping her own fair hands, she burst into tears. But they were not altogether tears of sorrow: no—there was delight in the emotions that were thus gushing forth; and her lips murmured a few words of thanksgiving for the hopeful assurance which had just greeted her ears.

"Will you be pleased to read this, Miss Sackville?" I said. "It was addressed to me"—and I placed Angelo Volterra's letter in her hand.

Oh, with what avidity did her eyes glance over its contents!—what anxious suspense, what mingled grief and hope, what strangely blended affliction and joy, were depicted upon her countenance, where the colour went and came in rapid transitions! When she had perused the letter, she hesitatingly, bashfully, and blushing proffered it to me again. I saw that she yearned to keep it, but did not dare ask my permission to do so; and I said, "Possibly, Miss Sackville, you might like to read it once more when at your perfect leisure: and you had better retain it."

She thanked me with an expressive glance; and again running her eyes over the contents of the billet, she secured it in the folds of her dress.

"Yes," she said, "opinion must indeed be suspended—But, no!" she immediately corrected herself: "it were an insult to his unquestionable honour to entertain a single doubt! You believe him honourable—the assurance you ere now gave me, convinces me that you do—and moreover, he has confidence in your good opinion—he regards you as a friend—he would not write to you thus unless he were confident that your judgment is favourable towards him!"

"And it is, Miss Sackville," I solemnly answered.

There was now a pause of a few minutes,—during which Olivia remained plunged in profound thought. She was evidently enjoying the deep silent luxury of that relief which her mind had experienced,—a luxury which was only impaired by the sense of those injurious suspicions which were harboured by others against the object of her love.

"He speaks in that note," she at length said, in a low gentle voice, "of a pledge which you exacted from him—a pledge which prevented him from coming personally to seek an interview with—me—"

and again was the blush of timid bashfulness upon her cheeks.

"I will give you every explanation, Miss Sackville," I answered.

"Captain Raymond," she observed,—and I saw it was with a species of mournful aversion that she thus alluded to my master,—"gave my parents to understand that it was in reality Signor Volterra who enabled you to effect my liberation—and that he has moreover assisted you to achieve a particular object which secretly led you to revisit the bandit-stronghold some weeks back—on which occasion too he saved your life."

"All this is perfectly true," I answered. "But with reference to the question you are now put to me, I will at once give you an explanation. On that night when our liberation was accomplished, Signor Volterra exacted from me a pledge that I would not name to you who our deliverer was: but on the other hand, I insisted—as the condition of this pledge—that he should not again present himself to your family after I had thus found him in the midst of banditti."

"Yes—it was natural that you should take that step," observed Olivia, in a musing tone: and then she relapsed into a profound reverie, her head drooping upon the swan-like neck which sustained it, like a flower upon its stalk. "I thought at first," she at length continued, slowly raising her looks, "that the tale which Captain Raymond told my parents, and which they repeated to me, was a wicked invention—nay, more, a detestable artifice—until I was assured that you yourself could corroborate it; and that you likewise could tell me how Signor Volterra fled precipitately last night from Dicomano when the dreadful cry was raised that he was one of Uberti's band. I was therefore resolved to hear the truth from your lips, whatever it might be: but I dared not anticipate that you would be enabled to give me such cheering assurances as those which with a generous readiness you have afforded."

"Miss Sackville," I replied, "as certain as it is that I have a soul to be saved, so sure am I that Signor Volterra's statement, contained in that letter which you have about you, is based upon the strictest truth. He says that he is not what he seems; and all his conduct proves that the assertion is correct. Listen to one incident! In the obscurity of the night I was riding towards the banditti's stronghold, when some one galloped towards me, with a warning not to run headlong into the lion's den. At that moment he knew not to whom he was addressing himself—"

"And it was Angelo—it was Signor Volterra?" exclaimed Olivia, with joy depicted on her countenance.

"Yes—it was he," I answered; "and therefore it is impossible he can be a bandit!"

Again did Miss Sackville clasp her hands in fervid gratitude for the additional proof thus afforded of her lover's integrity; and then she exclaimed, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, "But, Oh! what perils must environ him amongst that dreadful gang of desperadoes! If he have gone to their tower with the generous purpose of thwarting their projects—of rendering assistance to travellers or to captives where he safely may—and perhaps of eventually delivering the whole band up to justice, the most trifling incident may betray his object, and how fearful would their vengeance be!"

The unfortunate lady was again overwhelmed with grief: but I said all that I could to console her. I represented that Signor Volterra was evidently working out his purpose, whatever it might be, with the strictest caution, and that he conducted all his proceedings in a way the least calculated to excite the suspicion of the outlaws amongst whom he had thrown himself.

"At the same time," I added, "I can scarcely think, Miss Sackville, that you have fathomed all the aims which Signor Volterra has in view. If they were limited to the mere frustration of the

most diabolical parts of the outlaw's proceedings, and to the intention of seeking an opportunity to surrender them up to justice, he would not have hesitated to admit me so far into his confidence, and to have enabled me to explain that much to yourself. But there is a deeper mystery still—of this I feel convinced,—a mystery which for the present he dares not reveal, and which we cannot penetrate."

"Oh! let us hope," exclaimed Olivia, "that whatever his object be, he will succeed in its accomplishment—that no adverse circumstance may bring destruction upon his head—and that the time is not far distant when he will be enabled, as he himself expresses it, to fling off the odious veil of mystery!"

"I entertain every hope!" I answered confidently: "for Signor Volterra possesses all those qualities of firmness, prudence, perseverance, and magnanimity, which when combined, so seldom fail in the achievement of their end."

"I have no power to convey the deep sense of my gratitude for every cheering word you have uttered, and for every generous assurance you have given:"—and as Olivia thus spoke with tears in her eyes but with smiles upon her lips, she proffered me her hand.

I took it respectfully, and then quitted her presence. Bessy, who had been upon the watch in the passage outside, bent an inquiring look upon me; and I whispered to her, "Go to Miss Olivia: you will find that I have indeed been able to breathe consoling words, and to raise her up from the depth of affliction."

Not choosing to stand the chance of encountering the somewhat inquisitive valet oftener than I could help, I issued from the hotel to take a walk through the streets of Florence. After rambling for some time, I entered a reading-room—or rather a coffee-house—where English papers were taken; and I sat down to while away an hour with those journals. Presently the door opened: I mechanically looked up—and for the moment I was smitten with an uneasy feeling on encountering the hideous looks of Mr. Lanover. He stopped short upon the threshold for an instant: then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he came forward, and offering me his hand, said, "My dear Joseph, this is indeed an unexpected pleasure!"

"I do not think, Mr. Lanover," I answered, "that my presence ever afforded you any pleasure:"—and I did not take the outstretched hand of the miscreant who had consigned Annabel and her relatives—aye, even his own wife—to the custody of the lawless bandits.

"I should like to have a word or two with you," said Mr. Lanover, after a few moments' reflection. "Will you step out and walk with me along the street?"

"It is evening," I answered coldly and firmly; "and I trust myself not with evil-doers in those hours of darkness which are most favourable to their treacheries and atrocities."

"You cannot conquer this habit of bitter speaking," rejoined the humpback, with a malignant sneer: but that sardonic expression vanished instantaneously from his countenance—and he added with that air of cajoling friendliness which in his villanous hypocrisy he could so well assume, "Will you step with me into a private apartment?"

for it is necessary that we should have a few words together."

"Yes," I replied: I was anxious to learn what he had to say to me, and whether it were in respect to the incidents at Pistoja as well as those at the banditti's stronghold.

The waiter conducted us to a private sitting-room: I took a chair with a calmness which was intended to convince Mr. Lanover that I no longer shuddered and trembled in his presence as some time back I had been wont to do;—and he seated himself opposite to me. His countenance, always so revolting, was now more than ever hideous with the traces of a recent and very severe illness: I observed too that he was much emaciated, and that his garments hung loosely upon his ungainly, stunted, and deformed person. For upwards of a minute he surveyed me with his horrible eyes whence Satan himself appeared to be looking forth; and gradually as his lips wreathed themselves into a sardonic sneer, he said, "And so the young man who makes such a parade of his virtue, condescends to the meanest pilfering?"

"Now, understand me well, Mr. Lanover!" I answered, slowly rising from my seat, and advancing round the table close up to him: "if you dare address me in such terms, I will inflict upon you a chastisement that shall go far towards abridging your detestable existence."

"The immaculate Joseph Wilmot," replied the humpback, wincing only for a moment, and then again sneering with a horrible sardonism, "would not, according to his own very words, hesitate at murder."

"By heaven," I exclaimed, "there were little sin, methinks, in ridding the world of such as you!"—and I could scarcely restrain my indignation. "If a wild beast were known to be prowling about, ready to pounce upon any one whom he thought fit to make his victim,—all honour would be due to the man who should hunt down and destroy him. If it were known that a monstrous serpent lay coiled in a thicket, prepared to spring upon some innocent being,—immense would be the merit of him who should deal death to that snake. *You, Mr. Lanover, are the wild beast—you are the hideous reptile; and by heaven! there is no doom however terrible that you do not deserve!*"

"It is very easy, Joseph Wilmot," answered the humpback, who for a moment had become perfectly livid with rage, "to use strong and abusive language like this. But what if I were to give you into custody for pilfering a bank-bill from my pocket-book when I lay stretched upon a bed of unconsciousness at Pistoja?"

"And what," I exclaimed, "if I were to hand over to the authorities an individual, who, while living under the laws of the Tuscan Government, is allied with outlawed banditti? Now, Mr. Lanover," I continued, "how shall it be? Will you give me into custody? or shall I give you?"

"You know very well, Joseph," he answered, with a malicious grin, "that there will be no such thing as giving into custody at all."

"I know perfectly well," I rejoined, "that you will not dare use provocation towards me: for what tribunal, whether that of justice or of public opinion, would not at once acquit me of any illegal or dishonourable act in having used your

own money to procure the emancipation of the victims of your own treachery?"

"And if I dare not give you into custody," answered Lanover, accentuating the words with his disagreeable jarring voice, "neither will you so far incur my vengeance."

"And wherefore not?" I demanded.

"Because, if you did," he responded, with a diabolic expression of countenance, "I should write to Sir Matthew Heselstine, and to Annabel, and to her mother, mentioning certain little incidents wherein the name of Calanthe Dundas would figure."

My feelings had been so excited during this interview in the private room, that I had forgotten how much I was in the miscreant's power in that one fatal respect,—although during the six or seven weeks which had elapsed since the incidents at Pistoja, I had more than once had misgivings on the very point he had just specified. But not choosing to betray how much I dreaded him on that ground, I said with an assumed air of cool indifference, "Perhaps you have written already to Sir Matthew Heselstine, to Annabel, and her mother?"

"No—I have not," responded the humpback. "Of course I am well aware," he added, with another sneer, "that you will believe nothing I advance, unless I prove its truth by assigning reasons and motives: I will therefore tell you why I have hitherto abstained from wreaking vengeance upon you for your conduct towards me at Pistoja, and for the frustration of my projects with regard to Sir Matthew."

"Proceed," I said.

"Of course I had no difficulty, when regaining my consciousness," he resumed, "in comprehending, from the description given, who was the pilferer of the bank-bill from my pocket-book; and as soon as I was able to travel, I repaired to Marco Uberti's head-quarters. There I learnt what had occurred; and again I had no difficulty in understanding that the tall slender young Englishman, with the dark complexion, the whiskers, and the moustache, was your own delectable self in disguise. By the bye, how you obtained your knowledge of the pass-word is a matter which has so far excited my curiosity, that now the whole affair is over, you may perhaps be good enough to gratify it?"

"Waste not time with such trifles!" I said: and then, as an idea struck me, I added, "What if when you were in a state of unconsciousness, but just able to breathe a few incoherent words, you kept muttering *Fabiano*?—and what if I caught it up as the very word which I most wanted to learn?"

I spoke thus, because methought that if Lanover should again happen to see the banditti, he might just as well give an explanation which, appearing natural enough, would serve to avert all possible suspicion from Volterra, if any had indeed attached to him. And natural enough my ingenious device *did* appear to Lanover himself: for when I had so addressed him, he said in a musing tone, "Yes—that must really be the solution of a mystery which perplexed all the banditti as much as it did myself. On my soul, you are a cunning dog, Joseph!" he exclaimed, raising his hideous eyes to my countenance. "It is a pity

you have not allowed me to make something of you."

"I should doubtless have thriven with such teachings," I indignantly responded. "But pray continue your explanations. You were telling me why you abstained from writing on a special matter to Sir Matthew Heselstine, to Annabel, and Mrs. Lanover."

"From all that I learnt at Marco Uberti's headquarters," proceeded Lanover, "it did not appear that you held any communication with the Baronet or the ladies beyond stealthily slipping some money into Sir Matthew's hand; and from the tenour of your examination through the medium of the interpreter, it appeared as if you studiously sought to avoid all such communication with the Baronet and the ladies. Under these circumstances, I came to the conclusion that you had some reason for keeping them in ignorance of the real motives of their captivity. I knew not whether you considered that this silence on your part was a necessary consequence of the compact you made with me at the chateau where Calanthe died—or whether it was with the hope that I, hearing of your forbearance, should continue to keep your secret: but at all events I have kept it—and I resolved to do so until chance should throw us together again, when we might have mutual explanations."

The reader cannot suppose that I should have acted so foolishly as to admit to Mr. Lanover that he was altogether wrong—and that, indifferent at the time to whatsoever consequences might ensue to myself, I had pencilled a few warning words to make Sir Matthew Heselstine aware of who the detestable author of his captivity really was. I had assuredly no wish that Mr. Lanover should betray my unfortunate secret in respect to Lady Calanthe; and I was inwardly rejoiced to find from his explanations that he had not done so. My object therefore now was to leave him lulled in the belief that I had in reality been equally forbearing towards himself,—and yet to confirm this impression on his mind without giving utterance to a positive and downright falsehood from my own lips.

"Well, Mr. Lanover," I said, still in the same calm tone as before, "now that the explanations have taken place between us, and that we are mutually satisfied the compact made upwards of a year ago at the chateau, has been kept,—what more have you to say to me?"

"I am not aware that we have any further business to transact," he answered; "and yet perhaps it were as well I should ascertain how you intend to speak of me the next time you see Sir Matthew Heselstine?"

"It will all depend, Mr. Lanover," I responded, "upon the fidelity with which you keep your own portion of the compact."

"That is sensibly spoken," he said: "for it is evident that though in many respects you and I are as different as the poles are remote from each other, we have an identical interest upon one subject—namely, this mutual silence and this reciprocal forbearance. At Pistoja you investigated the contents of my pocket-book—you read all the papers—you know therefore that I have entertained certain views, and have intended to urge certain claims upon Sir Matthew Heselstine—"

"Stop, Mr. Lanover!" I exclaimed: "our compact relates to things which are past, and has no concern with others that may henceforth transpire."

"Well, be it so," said the humpback, after a few moments' consideration. "I shall know if you in any way prejudice the old Baronet more than he is already embittered against me; and if you do, rest assured that I shall in no way spare you."

"In that case, Mr. Lanover," I responded, "I should as a matter of course expect no mercy at your hands."

With these words I quitted the room,—leaving upon his mind the impression that I had already been careful, and should thenceforth prove equally guarded, in abstaining from making Sir Matthew Heselstine aware of the full extent of his iniquity. Leaving the coffee-house—it being now close upon nine o'clock—I began to retrace my way to the hotel. While proceeding thither, I reviewed all that had occurred between myself and Mr. Lanover; and I was pleased at having encountered him;—a serious apprehension which had recently been haunting me, was now removed: and I had the conviction that my unfortunate amour with Calanthe continued yet unknown to those from whom I chiefly wished it to remain concealed.

I had just entered the street in which the hotel was situated, when I became aware that I was followed—or at least fancied that I was—by two men who had been for a few minutes walking behind me. They had hitherto kept at precisely the same distance: they had stopped for a few moments when I had stopped to look in at some shop-window; and now they still kept in my footsteps as I turned into another street. I was resolved to confront them and ascertain what it meant: but as I looked round, they disappeared in some doorway. I therefore fancied that I must have been mistaken, and that they were individuals who happening to reside in that same street, had thus far taken the same direction as myself, but had now reached their home. I walked onward: but just as I was passing the entrance of a dark diverging lane, or alley—I was suddenly seized upon—a handkerchief was tied over my mouth—and lifted in the arms of four powerful individuals, I was borne hastily along that alley, notwithstanding the desperate efforts I made to release myself. I was thrust into a post-chaise that was waiting at the further extremity of the dark thoroughfare; and the equipage at once drove rapidly away.

## CHAPTER XCVIII.

### DANGER.

THREE of my captors had entered the vehicle with me: the other had leaped upon the box; and no sooner had the equipage started off, when the well-known voice of Philippo, speaking with deep ferocious rage in my ear, said, "We have got you at last—and no human power shall save you now! If you dare raise your voice, that moment you are a dead man!"

Candidly do I confess that a cold—the *coldest*



shudder swept through my entire frame, when I thus found myself—as indeed from the first instant I had suspected—in the power of the ruthless banditti. The handkerchief tied over my face, had not merely gagged my mouth, but also covered my eyes,—thus preventing me (even if the obscurity of the spot where the onslaught was made had not been sufficient) from catching a glimpse of the features of my assailants. I gave Philippo no answer, though he now removed the handkerchief from my mouth. What indeed could I say to him? To implore his mercy, were worse than useless: for I knew how bitterly enraged the outlaws must be against me, considering how I had once escaped from their hands, and how on the second occasion I had so completely outwitted them. The windows of the vehicle had been put up and the blinds drawn down, immediately after they had thrust me in and had entered themselves; and now Philippo, placing something which

felt like a cold metal ring against my forehead, said, “Remember what I have told you!—if you dare raise your voice, I blow your brains out—or I will send the butt of this pistol crashing against your skull!”

“I know you too well,” was my response, “not to be thoroughly aware that you have taken every precaution to accomplish your aim:”—and then I added, “I suppose this is the result of some treachery on Lanover’s part?”

“You are wrong, young man,” answered Philippo, sternly: “Lanover has nothing to do with it.”

He said no more upon the subject—and a little reflection convinced me that he had spoken truly: for if Mr. Lanover had devised this atrocity, he would not have taken the trouble to enter into such long explanations at the coffee-house and endeavour to wheedle me into silence with respect to his schemes towards Sir Matthew Heselstine.

But, alas! I thought to myself it indeed mattered little by whose treachery or vigilance, espial and watching, I had been plunged into the present snare: I was in the power of an unscrupulous set of miscreants—my hours seemed numbered—and this awful consideration was sufficient to engross my thoughts. What was to be done with me? Was I to be borne to the banditti's stronghold, there to perish ignominiously in the presence of the entire gang? or did my captors purpose to wreak their vengeance upon me so soon as the outskirts of the city should be cleared? Deeming this latter eventuality to be as probable as the former, I began to prepare my soul for its flight to another world: I prayed silently but fervidly in the depths of my heart—I thought of Annabel—I prayed for her likewise—and I felt the tears trickling down my cheeks.

But I hastily brushed them away: for though it was pitch dark inside the vehicle, I was ashamed to betray even to myself the slightest symptom of weakness. If I were to die, let me meet my fate with fortitude! That movement however, which I made to dash away the tears from my eyes startled the three banditti who were inside the vehicle with me: in a moment I was seized upon—and Philippo, with a horrible imprecation, vowed that if I moved thus again he would fulfil his threat of braining me. The other two men muttered something in their own native language, and in savage ferocious tones: but I comprehended not what they said.

The outskirts of the city were passed; and now that there was no longer any chance of lights flinging their beams into the vehicle,—a circumstance which, while we were still in the streets, would have shown me any favourable instant to cry suddenly out for succour,—the outlaws drew up the blinds and lowered the windows. The equipage went dashing on at a quick rate; and I saw that it was taking the road to Pistoja—for the stars were now shining brightly. Lonely places were passed: still there was no halt—and therefore I concluded that my destination—or in other words, the place of my execution—would be the head-quarters of the outlaws. Had I any hope to indulge in? The reader may be well assured that I forgot not Angelo Volterra: but yet dared I fancy that he would find means to succour me? Would not the banditti surround me with such precautions that there should be no chance of escape?—and indeed, would not my execution follow frightfully close upon my arrival in Marco Uberti's presence? Then how could I venture to hope?

The equipage pursued its course: it presently turned out of the main road, and proceeded through bye-ways. Now and then we passed a solitary house: but of what use were it to raise my voice and cry for succour, when the vehicle would be far away ere assistance could possibly be rendered, and when three desperate villains armed to the teeth, were ready to take my life on the instant? No—I was completely in their power: and I felt that Providence alone could save me, whether by Volterra's means or by any other of those seeming accidents through which its inscrutable purposes are worked out.

We had accomplished about a dozen miles, when the chaise halted at a lonely way-side inn; and

there the horses were changed. The landlord brought out liquor to the banditti, with whom he exchanged some remarks in a familiar tone; and thus perceiving that he was evidently leagued with them—or at all events entirely in their interest—I still saw the utter inutility of crying out for succour. The journey was resumed; and in another hour we began to enter upon the windings of the Apennine range. Here we stopped at another lonely inn; and Philippo ordered me to alight. It appeared that our previous mode of travelling was to be now abandoned: for saddle-horses were speedily brought forth. I was directed to mount one; and a cord was fastened to my feet under the animal's belly, after the same fashion which had been adopted on the very first occasion of my introduction to Marco Uberti's head-quarters. This time, however, additional precautions were used: for the end of the cord which thus bound my ankles, was held by Philippo as he mounted his own horse. In this manner our journey was continued; and as if the precautions already specified were not sufficient, Philippo savagely gave me to understand that his comrades who rode behind, had their pistols in readiness to shoot me down if I made the slightest attempt at escape.

All my worst fears were thus confirmed: the banditti were resolved that I should not have another chance of outwitting them. We rode along,—I maintaining a profound silence—Philippo occasionally levelling the bitterest taunts at me—and his three comrades in the rear conversing amongst themselves, or raising their voices in some uncouth attempt at a song. In the desperation of my circumstances I gradually began to revolve in my mind a project of escape, but which was quite as desperate as those very circumstances that initiated it. The reader will comprehend that I was riding side by side with Philippo—that he was holding the end of the cord which was fastened to my feet—and that the other three banditti were following behind. It was a moon-light night—but the defiles and windings of the Apennines were often shrouded in deepest gloom. The project I entertained was one which presented little chances of success: but by attempting it I could not possibly aggravate the dangers of my position: for how mattered it to me whether I were to perish by the bullets of the outlaws' pistols in the defile which we were now entering, or by the strangling noose a little later at the brigands' stronghold?

My resolve, then, was quickly adopted. The eye winks not with greater swiftness—the lightning flashes not with more suddenness, than was my movement executed. One strong and skilful jerk not merely tore away the cord which Philippo had retained by winding the end tightly round his wrist—but it likewise dragged him from his horse. He fell heavily, with a bitter imprecation starting from his lips; and away, away I galloped with the speed of the whirlwind. Crack, crack, crack, one after another in rapid succession sounded the report of the pistols which his three companion-outlaws fired: the bullets whistled about my ears—but fortunately none touched me: and through that dark defile I urged the steed onward at its utmost swiftness. It was veritably neck or nothing—and I knew it—I felt it—I compre-



hended it all, as I thus rode desperately along. If the defile were suddenly to terminate in a yawning chasm, I must plunge into it: if it were crossed by a deep river, therein likewise must I fall: or if its extremity were abruptly barred by a wall of rock, against it must we both madly dash ourselves, I and my horse! Yet was it needful to dare all these dangers in this desperate attempt to escape. Soon did I hear the sounds of horses' feet careering towards me from behind: but I urged my own animal forward—it was fleetier than those of the pursuers—and in a few minutes I no longer caught that clattering din coming from behind.

A glimmering light appeared far ahead: I knew it was the opening of the defile; and as I proceeded, the walls of rock grew wider and wider apart—the overhanging crags and stunted shrubs ceased to form an arch above my head—the moon was shining—the end of the defile was reached—and I had to choose between two diverging paths. Swift as lightning did the thought occur to me that so far as I could possibly judge from my former experiences in the Apennines, the banditti's stronghold must be upon the right hand; and I therefore struck into a path which branched off upon the left. I continued my way without slackening speed: for I could now pursue it in comparative safety by aid of the moonlight. For full half-an-hour I thus galloped onward, and then drew in the bridle for a few minutes, to unfasten the cord from my ankles, and also to listen whether any sounds were still coming from behind. But there were none—and I now felt as if I were indeed altogether in safety. I breathed a prayer to heaven in thankfulness for the result of my desperate venture; and I continued my way again with the utmost celerity of which the horse was capable.

Another hour thus passed, during which time I reached not a single inhabited spot: no village nor hamlet—not even an isolated dwelling, occurred upon my route: I therefore knew that I was in the very wildest part of the Apennine mountains. I had no idea of which direction I ought to take in order to re-enter the Tuscan territory: I slackened the horse's speed to a walking pace, and reflected what I should do. If I continued my way blindly, so to speak, it was equally probable that I should come within the precincts of Marco Uberti's stronghold as that I should gain a place of complete security. I was almost inclined to think that it were better if I halted at once to pass the remainder of the night on that spot: but a second thought told me that I should be no wiser by daylight as to the proper route to be taken than I now was in the semi-obscurity of that hour. I therefore continued to advance—but at a gentle pace—until in another half-hour I beheld a light glimmering at a distance. Methought it was in the window of some dwelling:—perhaps some lonely shepherd's cot? perhaps on the outskirts of a village?—and thither I bent my way. As I drew nearer, the light seemed to be shining from the side of a rock. Nearer I drew—and then it seemed to emanate from some concealed dwelling; for the door whence it shone, was evidently of a shapely form, and was not the mere rugged uneven mouth of a rude cave left as nature or accident had fashioned it. There was a

gradual ascent thither. At length I reached the spot; and found, as I had more or less suspected, that it was a habitation hollowed out of the rock, having a regular doorway, and the door itself now standing wide open.

I alighted from my horse; and advancing close up to the threshold, looked into the cave. It might be about sixteen feet square and six feet high. At a rude table in the middle a man was seated,—his eyes fixed upon a book which lay open before him, and which he was reading by the aid of a candle stuck into a lump of clay, which served as the candlestick. His elbow rested upon that table; and his hand supporting his head, shaded his countenance in such a manner that I could not immediately perceive it. He was not dressed in the humble garb worn by the poor dwellers in those mountains: but he had on a loose dressing-gown and black pantaloons, with a sort of French travelling-cap upon his head. I stopped short at the entrance of the cave to survey this individual, who seemed like a modern anchorite in his lonely mountain-hermitage. Who could he possibly be that had thus retired from the busy haunts of men to bury himself in this wild and savage seclusion? Was he a criminal shrouding himself from the grasp of justice—or a cynic who had fled in disgust from the society of his fellow-creatures? Plunging my looks more intently into the cavern, I discerned objects leading me to believe that the stranger was not altogether an ascetic: for there was a goodly ham suspended to a hook—other articles of provision appeared upon a shelf—and sundry case-bottles, which assuredly were not meant to contain water only, were heaped in a basket in the corner. On the opposite side of the cave, a mattress with suitable bedding was stretched upon a rudely constructed bedstead; and there was a trunk, the lid of which being open, disclosed some articles of apparel together with a few books.

As well as I can now remember, I stood for three or four minutes at the mouth of this cave, contemplating its occupant and the details of his little habitation. During this interval his form made not the slightest movement: so that at length a species of superstitious terror began to creep coldly over me, as the fancy stole into my mind that it was no living being whom I beheld there, but a corpse that for some unknown purpose, or else in hideous mockery, had been thus propped up on the rude three-legged stool whereon he was placed. But this apprehension—if indeed to such an extreme the feeling had reached—was all in a moment relieved when the individual deliberately turned over the leaf of his book; and as the light of the candle flickered upon the page, I saw that it was the Bible he was reading. But it was with his disengaged hand that he turned over the leaf,—the other still continuing to support his head, and also to veil his countenance. The form of the man was tall and lean, so far as I could judge, considering the posture in which he was seated and the looseness of the dressing-gown that enveloped him. Was he deaf that he had not heard the trampling of the horse's feet as I had approached his habitation? or was he so profoundly absorbed in his pious studies at this late hour of the night, as to have all his senses and faculties concentrated therein?

"Whoever you are," I at length said, speaking in French, "may I solicit your hospitality for a few hours?"

He evidently started as I thus addressed him; and therefore I at once perceived that he was *not* deaf.

"Enter, and be welcome," he replied, without moving his hand from his head, or changing his posture in the slightest degree. "I am an unhappy man who for many reasons has secluded himself from the world, and whose days—aye, and whose nights also, are occupied in atoning for the errors of an ill-spent life. Enter therefore, I say. You will find meat and drink, which I keep for wanderers and wayfarers such as you yourself are. There is a pallet whereupon to stretch your limbs: in an adjacent cave you may stable your horse; and all I demand in return for such poor hospitality as I may be enabled to afford, is that you will remain silent and interrupt me not in my avocations."

The anchorite spoke in French, but with a foreign accent which unmistakably denoted the Englishman: and as he continued to address me without for a single moment changing his posture, or removing his hand from his head, or looking towards me, the suspicion grew stronger and stronger in my mind that the voice was familiar to my ears. Holding the bridle of the horse, I advanced farther into the cave; and tapping the anchorite on the shoulder, said, "If I mistake not, it is Mr. Dorchester whom I thus find in the midst of the Apennine wilds?"

"Yes—it is that sinful and unfortunate man," was the response: and now slowly raising his countenance, he revealed to me the well-known features of him who had twice so infamously plundered me.

"And you are Joseph Wilmot," he said, with a look most mournfully contrite: there was shame, too, apparently blending itself in that expression of his face; and clasping his hands together, he bent his head down upon them as they rested upon the open Bible—and methought that the sound of a stifled sob reached my ear.

"Well, Mr. Dorchester," I said, "if you be truly penitent, it is not from my lips that you will hear reproaches."

"Penitent, Joseph?" he answered, again slowly raising his countenance and looking up into mine: "do you think that unless a man were sincerely sorry for the deeds of which he had been guilty, he would come to bury himself amidst the wilds of the Apennines?"

"But your sentence of imprisonment in France?" I said inquiringly.

"On account of my good conduct," rejoined Mr. Dorchester, "I was pardoned at the expiration of six months,—half the period of my condemnation being thus remitted. But *you*, Joseph,—can you indeed speak kindly to one at whose hands——"

"Enough, Mr. Dorchester!" I interrupted him: "I do believe that you are penitent—and let the past be buried in oblivion."

"Oh, generous-hearted young man, how could I ever have behaved so infamously towards you? Ah, I have often and often thought of you, Joseph—and in moments when the extremest bitterness of remorse has seized upon me, I have wept—I

have sobbed—I have beaten my breast at the idea of my black villany towards yourself!"

"Yes, I twice suffered cruelly, cruelly in consequence thereof," I answered, profoundly moved by Mr. Dorchester's words, looks, and manner: "but it is all gone by now—and let it be likewise forgotten."

He took my hand, pressed it between both his own, and shaking it for some moments, murmured in a broken voice, "God bless you, young man—God bless you! You know not what comfort you have infused into my soul. But tell me," he said, after a brief pause, during which the strength of his emotions appeared to have subsided; "wherefore are you a wanderer amidst these rude and savage mountain passes?"

"First let me stable my steed," I said: "then give me a morsel of food—and I will explain my position."

"For no other person but yourself, Joseph," answered Mr. Dorchester, "would I rise from the midst of these holy studies of mine until the dawn of morning glimmered over the eastern height. But for you it is different!"

Thus speaking, he lighted a lantern, and led the way to another cave about twenty yards distant, and hollowed out of the same frontage of rock. It was more spacious than that which formed his own habitation: but it had no door. There was a quantity of dried grass piled up within,—thus affording provender for the animal. A streamlet rippled nigh: Mr. Dorchester hastened to fill a pail with the limpid element, also for the steed's behoof; and a wooden bar fastened across the entrance of the cavern, closed it sufficiently against the horse's egress.

We then returned to the first-mentioned cave; and Mr. Dorchester bustled about to set upon the table such provision as was immediately available. I made a hearty meal, which I washed down with some spirits and water; and while I was thus engaged, Mr. Dorchester forbore from questioning me. The hospitalities of his strange mountain-habitation were proffered with every appearance of cordiality and good feeling, so that I felt even grateful to him for his attentions; and my assurance of the past being forgiven was not a mere verbal formality.

"And now, my young friend," he said, when I had finished my meal, "if you will permit me, under all circumstances, to denominate you a friend—pray tell me how it is that I find you thus wandering amidst the Apennines?"

"In the first place tell me," I exclaimed, "and this is a question that I almost wonder I did not ask at the very first,—tell me how far distant is Marco Uberti's stronghold?"

"What! that dreadful bandit?" ejaculated Mr. Dorchester, with a visible start: then lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, as if the very walls of his cave had ears, he said, "I am happy to inform you, Joseph, that it is one of my avocations, and therefore one mode by which I seek to atone for the past, to guide travellers in such a route that they may avoid falling into the hands of that execrable ruffian and his equally villainous myrmidons."

"Then are you indeed doing good service to the cause of humanity!" I exclaimed. "But you have not answered my question——"

"Ah, I forgot!" responded Mr. Dorchester. "The brigands' stronghold is some dozen miles distant in that direction,"—and he accompanied the words with a suitable indication; "while Pistoja is some five-and-thirty miles in that direction."

"I have special reasons for needing this intelligence," I observed: "for this very night I have escaped from the hands of a detachment of those brigands, who, by violence, brought me all the way from Florence."

"My poor young friend," said Mr. Dorchester, "how you must have suffered!—and how rejoiced I am that you have found your way hither!"

I know not how it was, but just at that moment a suspicion—vague, dim, and distant—began to take birth in my mind; and looking hard at Mr. Dorchester, I said to him, "Methinks that you have already given me up so much of that valuable time which you appear to devote to purposes of religious study and of prayer——"

"I shall only lie down to rest an hour later on that account," was his grave answer interruptingly given. "In the meanwhile, do you stretch your wearied limbs upon that humble pallet of mine."

"I thank you," I rejoined: "but as I have rested half-an-hour, and my horse is refreshed, I will pursue my way, now that I know in which direction lies the path to Pistoja."

"Do as you will, my young friend," said Mr. Dorchester: "but if you think fit to tarry until sunrise, I will myself escort you some two or three miles upon your way; so that from the point where I shall take leave of you, you cannot possibly fail to pursue the right road towards Pistoja."

I reflected for a few moments. Was the man sincerely contrite? or was all this merely another phase in his detestable hypocrisies? I feared the latter. Now that I had leisure for deliberation, and was recovered from the surprise into which I was at first thrown by finding him entombed in this cavern in the midst of the Apennines, I was not altogether credulous in respect to his days and nights of pious studies and religious readings. If he were a villain, then what was the nature of the villainy that was here cloaked under the seeming garb of anchoritism? Was he a villain on his own account alone? or had he accomplices near at hand? In a word, should I remain there till morning? or should I depart at once?—and if by adopting this latter course, should I avoid falling into any snare which he might otherwise be enabled to set for the achievement of my destruction?

I looked at him again; and methought that his eyes were instantaneously withdrawn from my countenance, as if they had a moment before been regarding me with a furtive scrutiny. Now I was almost completely convinced that he was still a scoundrel and still a hypocrite. Then, too, other little circumstances flashed to my mind. There was something most outrageously affected and indeed unnatural in the way in which he had continued to study his volume when I first approached the cave: it was not probable that however penitent and religious, he would have been so completely absorbed in his studies as to remain deaf or indifferent to the approach of a traveller. Moreover I remembered that he had started perceptibly when I first addressed him; and this was

no doubt because my voice, sounding familiar to his ear, was at once recognised; and the long speech of which he had immediately afterwards delivered himself, bidding me make myself welcome so long as I intruded not on his pious avocations, was to throw me off my guard and lead me to fancy that *not* having recognised my voice, he was speaking to me just as he would have spoken to any one who was really a stranger.

All these circumstances and recollections sweeping through my mind, brought me to the positive conviction that he still wore the garb of hypocrisy in order to conceal the darkest villainy of purpose. My decision was therefore to depart at once: but yet I thought it better not to suffer him to perceive that I suspected him,—unless indeed he had already fathomed, with his extreme shrewdness, the misgivings which had arisen in my mind.

"Thanks for the offer of your pallet and your escort in the morning," I said: "but I will take my departure now."

"Be it so," responded Mr. Dorchester, with an air so calm and with a look so completely innocent, that I was staggered, and was half-inclined to fancy that by my suspicions I had done him wrong. "Take up your hat," he continued: "perhaps too you will put that flask of strong waters in your pocket—it will refresh you in your ride during the rest of the night."

While he was thus speaking, he re-lighted the lantern; and I, still uncertain what to think—and consequently more than ever anxious to avoid the betrayal of my misgivings—chose not to hurt his feelings, if they were sincere, by the refusal of the flask of spirits. I accordingly consigned the flask to my pocket, and turned towards the pallet to take up my hat. As I looked around again, Dorchester was just passing out of the cave; and he was hurriedly closing the door upon me. I sprang forward—but too late: the door banged violently—and I heard a huge bolt closing outside. I threw myself with all my force against that door: I might as well have endeavoured to beat down the solid wall of rock itself: for the door was as massive and as firmly fixed in its setting as that of the strongest prison.

Still I did not at once abandon every attempt to effect an egress. The candle, in its clay supporter, had been left burning upon the table: I placed it upon the shelf—and using that table as a battering-ram, drove it with all my might against the door. It was a heavy table, rudely constructed, with little of the carpenter's art; and it made the door shake;—but beyond this effect none other was produced. I battered and battered away until breathless and exhausted—but all in vain. At length I was compelled to acknowledge unto myself the futility of these endeavours; and sitting down, I marvelled, amidst bitter reflections, as to what fate would now be in store for me.

Perhaps the miscreant Dorchester was himself in league with Marco Uberti's band? Ah, there was something frightfully probable in this conjecture! Had he not assured me that it was one of his avocations, and therefore one of his self-imposed expiations, to guide travellers away from those paths which would lead them into the lion's den?—but would it not now be far more rational for me to interpret the hypocritical villain's declaration by the rule of contraries? Yes: and

bitterly, bitterly did I reproach myself for having confided to him the fact that I had just now escaped from the hands of the brigands. Possibly if I had not been thus foolishly off my guard, he might not have thought it worth his while to send a solitary wayfarer, such as I was, into the lion's den; and he might have let me go my way. But under existing circumstances—with the knowledge that I had been captured in Florence, and that I had escaped from the captors—he would naturally attach importance to the incident, and would lose no time in handing me over again to the custody of those from whom I had fled. All this, however, depended upon the supposition that he really *was* in league with the banditti; whereas my conjecture might possibly be altogether wrong, and the scoundrel's villany might turn entirely upon some other pivot. But if so, of what nature could it be?

Alas! too clear, too clear indeed was it that if I had escaped from one danger, it was only to fall into another—and that whether connected with Marco Uberti's horde of miscreants or any other gang, the villain Dorchester meant me mischief. Was my life about to be sacrificed in that cave in the midst of the Apennine mountains? Ah, but I would sell it dearly—I would fight until the very last!—and inspired by this thought, I sprang up from my seat and began to look about for the most suitable weapons of offence or defence. I turned out the contents of Dorchester's trunk: there were no weapons of any kind: but on the shelf I found a knife—and this I clutched eagerly. Every nook and corner of the cave did I search in the hope of discovering fire-arms or a sword: but there were none. Again I went back to the trunk: I felt amongst the garments—but still unavailingly in respect to the hoped-for discoveries of better means of resistance than the poor weapon that I held in my hand. From amidst those articles of raiment a printed paper fell out: I picked it up: and though in a state of almost frenzied bewilderment at the horrors of my position, I nevertheless had curiosity sufficient to examine it. It was a small hand-bill, announcing the escape of Dorchester from the prison of La Force in Paris, and offering a reward for his capture. It was dated about six months back, and gave a minute description of his personal appearance. Ah, the villain! here was the detection of another falsehood! Instead of a portion of his punishment being remitted through good conduct, he had escaped from custody. Doubtless it was in some well contrived disguise—an art in which he was proficient, as I knew to my cost; and perhaps he had preserved as a trophy of the exploit the hand-bill which had subsequently fallen into his possession.

But all this was a mere trifle for the occupation of my thoughts in comparison with the horrors of my own position. I renewed my examination of the cave: it had no window—it was hollowed completely out of the solid rock—and it was merely by three small holes, each not larger than an orange, in the massive door that the air penetrated. Escape from such a place appeared to be almost impossible: yet again and again did I renew the battering process at that door—and still ineffec-

Once more too did I sit down, thoroughly ex-

hausted, to give way to my wretched, wretched meditations. Suppose that through Dorchester never came back? suppose that through vindictive malignity he had immured me there? or suppose that an accident should suddenly cut short his life while now on his way to execute any purpose he might have in view or to fetch thither whomsoever he had gone to summon? Oh, in either of these cases I should be left to die of starvation!—for the provisions which were there must in a few days be exhausted. The idea was horrible. A burning thirst came upon me: I drained the contents of the pitcher from which I had previously drunk when at my meal. I searched for more water—but there was none in the cave; and therefore if veritably immured there either purposely or through the result of the casualties previously supposed, I should not linger on for even so much as a few days, but should perish miserably of thirst long ere the provisions themselves would be exhausted!

I cannot now recollect all the horrible thoughts which kept trooping in unto my mind, when, exhausted with fatigue, I for the last time renounced the battering at the door. The atmosphere seemed to become oppressive, and even stiding: I felt as if I were in a coffin that was at first much too large for me, but the sides, the bottom, and the lid of which were gradually and gradually closing in upon me, and thus by sure degrees shutting me up in a narrower and narrower compass. For several minutes at a time, too, did I completely lose my presence of mind: my brain appeared to be reeling, or else to be goaded with frenzy; and I could have shrieked out.

“Oh, Annabel! Annabel!” I thought to myself; “after having liberated you from captivity, am I at the interval of a few weeks thus doomed to a more dreadful one?—a captivity too which can scarcely end otherwise than in a violent death!”

But at length I grew ashamed of myself for thus giving way to what I conceived to be a weakness; and I entered upon a train of more becoming reflections. I remembered how often I had been placed in circumstances of frightful peril, and how succour had come because God had willed that it should be so:—and wherefore should it not be his dispensation that help was to reach me again? I knelt down and prayed: and on rising up, I felt infinitely solaced and strengthened. Half-an-hour had now passed since I was left alone a prisoner there; and the candle had burnt down to its socket. I looked about for another: there was none. I therefore had to resign myself to the prospect of being speedily enveloped in total darkness. The darkness came—and never did it appear so intense. It was as if I were immersed in an atmosphere of ink, which though it hung upon me with an oppressive weight, yet stifled not my breath altogether. Thus another half-hour passed; and during this interval I did not again lose my presence of mind. I prayed frequently—I thought of Annabel—I resigned myself to die, if death were indeed approaching: but I also vowed that my young life should not be surrendered up without a desperate resistance on my part.

At length—when, as nearly as I could judge, that second half-hour had expired—I heard the trappings of horses' feet: they were rapidly approaching the cave—and I held my breath to listen. They stopped: then came the sound of

armed men leaping from their steeds, their weapons rattling and their heavy boots coming in strong concussion with the ground. Through the holes in the massive door I could catch the sounds of their voices likewise; and I recognised that of Philippo amongst them. Now there was no longer any uncertainty as to what my doom would be: I was about to be recaptured by those from whom I had escaped; and immense as their exasperation previously was against me, I knew that it must have been increased a thousand fold!

Firm was my resolve to make one desperate effort at escape; and without vanity may I conscientiously affirm that never was I more intrepid than at that instant. The heavy bolt was drawn back—the door was thrown open: brandishing the knife I sprang forward—but how uselessly, how vainly!—for in a moment was I surrounded, pounced upon, secured, and rendered powerless, in the grasp of half-a-dozen of the banditti. The swords of a couple were even raised to cut me down: but Philippo interposed, and my life was thus rescued—but I knew not then for how long. Philippo however was so bitterly, so ferociously irate against me, that he thrust his clenched fist into my face,—telling me in English, and with the most hideous imprecations, that I should assuredly be put to as horrible a death as Marco Uberti could devise.

This threat conveyed a piece of intelligence likewise: namely, to the effect that I was not to be deprived of life until the bandit-chief should have himself decided upon the means by which it was to be taken.

And now, from the rear of the group, the villain Dorchester came forward; and as the glimmering light which beamed from heaven fell upon the miscreant's countenance, I saw that he was regarding me with a malignant mockery of expression.

"Rest assured," I said, "the day will yet come when you, vile wicked man! will repent of what you have this night done. Never did you sustain the slightest injury at my hands. I have been your victim—and that is all. If I had proven your most relentless foe, you could not have shown a more demon-like implacability!"

The hypocritical scoundrel grinned in my face, as he led forward the horse from which he had just dismounted, and which I recognised to be the one that I myself had previously ridden. I was now again placed upon the back of the animal: again too was a cord fastened to my ankles beneath its belly; and my arms were pinioned. The banditti leapt into their own saddles: one of them took the reins of my horse—loaded pistols were kept levelled at me—I was surrounded by my captors—and in this manner the journey was resumed. We proceeded at a walking pace; but in half-an-hour the stronghold was reached; and thus I found that Mr. Dorchester had deceived me as to its distance from the cave. But trifling indeed was this falsehood in comparison with the full measure of his villainous hypocrisy; and little mattered the incident to me, considering the frightful dangers by which I was again surrounded.

## CHAPTER XCIX.

## THE DUNGEON.

THE banditti's tower was reached; and several of the brigands were evidently awaiting our arrival. I had consequently no doubt that Mr. Dorchester, on locking me up in his cave, had at once mounted the horse and sped off to the tower to convey the news of my capture: but as I was at the time using the table as a battering-ram against the huge door of the cavern, the noise of the departing horse's hoofs had been drowned in that din.

The moment I was descried in the midst of the party of my captors, those who were waiting in the vicinage of the tower began to hurl vehement imprecations against me in their own passionate Italian language: they gesticulated too, with menacing vehemence; and there was every indication of a ferocious desire—a savage, satanic, yearning to wreak a frightful vengeance upon my head. I swept my looks around; and for an instant they settled upon the form of Signor Volterra, who was apparently lounging with an air of easy indifference against the wall of the tower. But no sooner did I thus catch a glimpse of him, than my eyes were averted again: for a sudden hope had sprung up in my heart—and Oh! it was too precious to be frustrated or foiled by any indiscretion on my part. Immediately afterwards Volterra moved away from the spot where I had thus seen him: and passing round the angle of the tower, was lost to my view.

My cords were taken off; and I was forced to alight. Then, in the grasp of five or six iron hands, I was conducted round to the entrance of the tower; we passed through the little vestibule whence opened the room where Olivia Sackville had been incarcerated—up the staircase—and into the banqueting-hall, at the extremity of which Marco Uberti was lolling back in his arm-chair, close by the table. That table was covered with bottles, glasses, cigars, pipes, tobacco, and all the requisites for an orgie. This, too, had been prolonged up to that late hour of the night, or rather early one in the morning; and Marco Uberti was evidently so far advanced on the road of intoxication, that his ebriety was all but complete. He could just keep himself up in the chair, and no more: and this ability to sustain himself at all, no doubt arose from the fact that hard drinking was habitual with him, and that there was a certain point beyond which no stupefying influence could reach. Five or six other banditti were keeping him company, and had reached precisely a similar condition. But what at first astounded me for the moment, was to behold Angelo Volterra swaying to and fro in his chair, in the midst of these ruffians,—holding his glass high up, and vociferating forth a bacchanalian chaunt,—stopping abruptly, however, in the midst, to fill Marco Uberti a bumper, as well as to replenish the glasses of the other convivialists. But only for that single instant did my amazement last, inasmuch as the next moment I was struck by a thought which somewhat enhanced the hope wherewith Volterra's presence outside the tower had previously inspired me.

In the grasp of the ferocious ruffians who had

charge of me, I was conducted forward to the head of the table at which Marco Uberti sat; and Philippo addressed him in his own native language. But the bandit-chief only gazed up at his subordinate with a tipsy-leer, and then rolled his eyes in the same stolid vacancy upon me. He evidently recognised me not; neither did he comprehend what Philippo said to him. The ruffians who were drinking with him, were equally beyond the power of understanding what was passing; and Philippo, with an air of uncertainty amounting almost to bewilderment, turned to consult with his comrades who had brought me thither. Angelo Volterra, who had renewed his bacchanalian chaunt, and was again replenishing the glasses of the convivial bandits, now suddenly broke off his song and shouted out something to Philippo. It was evidently a piece of advice given in respect to myself; and equally apparent was it that Philippo deemed it expedient to be followed. He, however, again consulted with his comrades, who held me in their grasp: and I understood from their looks and manner that they assented to whatever had been proposed.

Philippo now accosted Marco Uberti, and unceremoniously dived his hand into a pocket which was inside the breast of the bandit-chief's frock-coat,—this garment, which he usually wore buttoned in the military style, being now thrown open in the negligence which pervaded his entire apparel. Uberti appeared for a moment to resent this intrusion on his pocket: he raised himself up in the chair, and repulsed Philippo's hand. Philippo seemed undecided how to act: but a brief ejaculation from one of the men who held me in custody, urged him on. He poured the contents of the glass down his chieftain's throat, and at the same time dexterously whisked out a key of moderate size from the frock-coat pocket. Volterra shouted out something, at the same time pointing significantly to Marco Uberti: Philippo nodded an assent; and I was led forth from the banquet-hall.

"Don't think, young fellow," said Philippo to me, when the door closed behind us as we reached the corridor outside, "that because you have got a respite of a few hours, it will amount to a reprieve. You were born to be hanged—and hanged you shall be! In the interval you will be kept in such safe custody, that if you can manage to get out,—on my soul! you will deserve your freedom."

I answered not a word—but assumed an air of dignified fortitude as I was conducted along the passage: a door at the extremity was opened; and one of the banditti having brought a light with him, I perceived that it was a small, but tolerably well furnished bed-chamber into which I was now led. Over the huge projecting chimney-piece hung silver swords, pistols, poniards, and rifles; there were several silver cups and vases on a shelf; and a cupboard door, standing half open, revealed three or four costumes suspended to pegs. The furniture was very old-fashioned: the velvet on the seats of some of the high-backed chairs was torn; and the whole aspect of the chamber was that of dirty slovenliness.

"You need not think, young fellow, that you are going to occupy these comfortable quarters," said Philippo, who appeared to take a malignant pleasure in saying every thing he could to menace

or annoy. "When you undertook to pit yourself against Marco Uberti and his band, you little thought of the odds you would have to encounter, and the chances which would be against you. You must not fancy that because the chief is somewhat in his cups to-night, and that therefore justice is delayed, it will be suspended altogether: for as sure as you are alive now, you will be dead at this time to-morrow!"

Still I gave no answer; because I saw that Philippo was most anxious to provoke me to an altercation or discussion, in the course of which he might find fresh opportunities of venting his bitter malignity against me. With the key which he had taken from Marco Uberti's pocket, he opened an inner door; and this led into a small place about six feet square, and having the appearance of a vault or tomb, only that it was not underground. It had no window: but the air was admitted by a grating set where the key-stone of the arched roof would otherwise have been. This grating was not above half a foot square: the walls gave an idea of tremendous massiveness; and the door of communication between the chamber and this living tomb, was even more ponderous than that of Mr. Dornester's cave. Besides, it was strengthened with pieces of iron and studded with huge nails of the same metal, like the doors of old-fashioned churches."

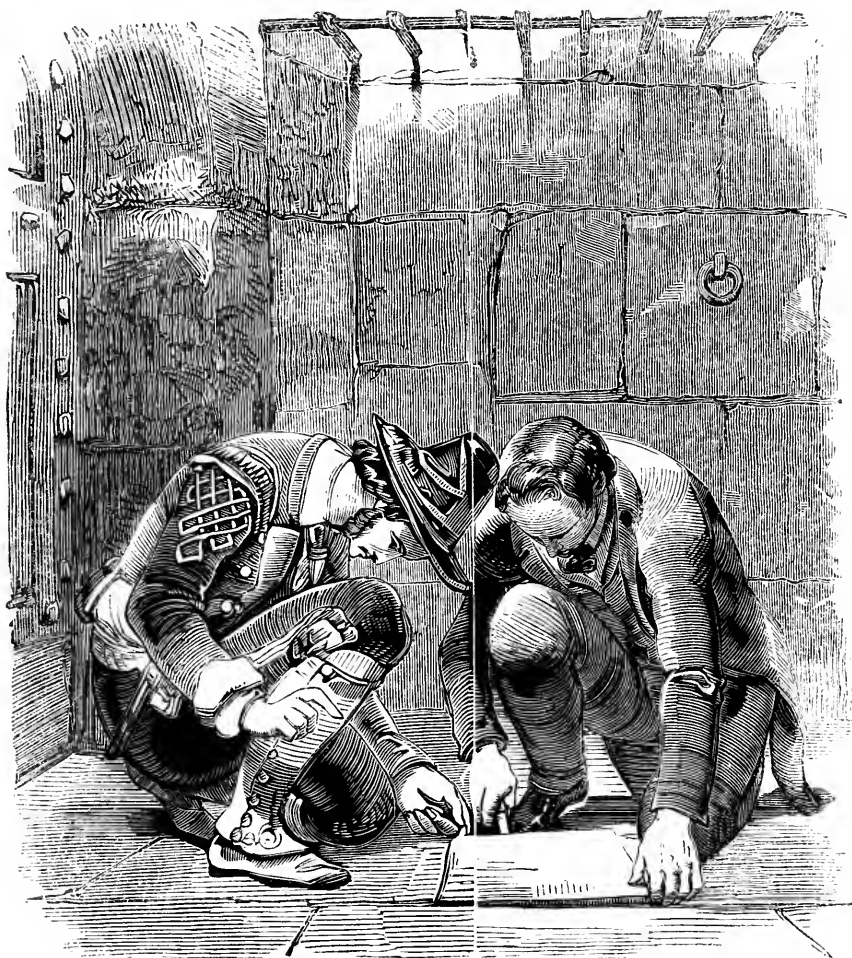
"There!" said Philippo, pointing to the interior of this dreadful place: "there are your quarters!"

At a signal which he gave, I was thrust rudely forward, so that I almost fell headlong upon the solid stone floor of the dungeon. The door was about to be closed upon me, when Philippo interposed for an instant; and he said, "You will do well to say all the prayers you can recollect: for no earthly power can now save you. Hanged you are destined to be—and hang you shall!"

These last words were still vibrating in the air, when the door was banged so violently upon me that it seemed to give my brain a concussion; and I staggered back against the wall. The key turned in the lock—a couple of huge bolts were likewise drawn outside—and thus was I a prisoner in that horrible place.

No article of furniture was there—not so much as a rug or a pile of straw whereupon to repose my weary frame. If I wished to lie down, it must be upon the cold pavement; and the place itself seemed to have the death-chill of the tomb. The air came in cold from above: the masonry, when touched, sent the blood congealing to the very heart. It was as if I were in a stone-coffin. If I stretched out both arms, a very little swaying of the form from side to side, enabled me to touch the opposite walls with the points of my fingers without moving from the spot where I stood. Escape thence was indeed impossible, unless by skilful succour from the outside; and then only could flight be achieved by means of the door. As for breaking through that solid masonry, even if provided with all requisite instruments, it was out of the question. But what hope had I that succour would come? From Volterra alone could it proceed: that he had the will to afford it, I had already comprehended: but how was he to find the power? Again and again, as on so many former occasions, did I repose my faith in heaven.





My thoughts during the first half-hour of my immurement in this dungeon were almost completely desponding, apart from their reliance on a supernal power. But by degrees I was led to reflect on two or three little circumstances which mitigated somewhat and slightly the darkness that hung around my soul. It was evident that to Marco Uberti's intoxicated condition I was indebted for this delay in respect to an execution which would otherwise have no doubt been summary enough. And had not Volterra himself been encouraging the bandit-chief to drink to that excess? Then, too, was it not at my secret friend's instigation that Filippo had consigned me to this particular dungeon? If the conjecture on my part were right, was it not fair to presume that Volterra had his own reasons for recommending this special place for my incarceration? Frightful as it now appeared to be—shut up in so narrow a compass of massive masonry without so

much as a stool to sit upon or straw to recline upon—the temporary hardship might nevertheless prove one of the first steps towards my deliverance.

Such were the more cheering reflections which gradually succeeded the previous desponding ones; and I clung to the hope which they set forth as a drowning man would to a straw. Scarcely stronger however in my mind was that hope than the feeble and only just perceptible glimmering of light through the iron grating on the arched roof of my dungeon. I could not close my mental vision to the fact that my existence hung to a thread. If Angelo Volterra should have miscalculated aught of his foreshadowed mode of proceeding—if Filippo should prove at all suspicious, or if not suspicious, should become more watchful and wary in his revengeful malignity than Volterra anticipated—or if Marco Uberti should regain a certain degree of consciousness

before Angelo had time and opportunity to act,—all would be lost for me! In a word, I saw that there were a thousand strong chances against me—but yet there was one for me; and even though this one was no brighter than the feeble and almost imperceptible glimmering of the moon-beams above, yet was it in the power of providence to make it expand into a light as luminous as the golden flood which the sun at noon-day pours upon the hemisphere.

Time passed—the dawn was beginning to peep in through the grating overhead—and hitherto I had remained leaning against the massive door: but now feeling utterly exhausted, I could no longer resist the influence of weariness—and I seated myself on the cold pavement. As I did so, it struck me that a particular stone on which my right hand rested as I thus sat down, moved somewhat to the pressure. I thought that it must be mere fancy; and yet for curiosity's sake I tried again. Yes—it was no delusion: the flag-stone *did* move: it was perceptibly loose in its setting. To a captive under such circumstances, everything is of moment: the slightest incident flashing in unto the comprehension, is fraught with a momentary hope of discovering the means of escape. Connected with old towers—the remnants of feudal fortalices of other times—there are ever thoughts and visions of strangely contrived trap-doors and secret staircases; and these ideas failed not to present themselves to my imagination now.

Again I felt the stone—and more carefully than before. I slowly passed my finger all round its edge to ascertain its dimensions; and I found it to be about a foot and a half wide and two feet long. I could unmistakably feel it move—but with a very gentle oscillation. I felt all the other stones forming the pavement-floor; and they were as firmly set as if they constituted but one immense solid mass. The light from above was much too feeble to aid me in this investigation: I was therefore resolved to pursue it to the utmost of my ability in the gloom which enveloped the place. I had a knife in my pocket: for the banditti had not rifled my person when making me their prisoner either in Florence or at Mr. Dorchester's cave: *that* plundering process had no doubt been so far a secondary consideration to the supreme one of vengeance that they were most probably reserving it until perhaps the last moment. Taking out my knife, I endeavoured to raise the stone; and in about ten minutes succeeded in lifting it from its setting. The reader may possibly be enabled to imagine the keen, the poignant, the breathless suspense with which I thrust my hand into the space beneath where the stone had been. But that hand of mine encountered the head of no secret staircase—touched no curiously-contrived spring opening any other trap-door: all that it grasped was a bundle of papers in a very narrow space beneath where the stone had been; and this space I presently ascertained by the touch to be the limit of a small tin-box sunk in the mortar under the stone.

At first there was a feeling of disappointment; but the next instant a strange thought electrified me. These papers, evidently concealed with so much care,—what could they be? Was it possible that they were the State-documents which Marco Uberti had purloined from the ducal archives at

Florence, and which constituted the talisman of his safety? Yes—I felt that the conjecture was most probably the true one: but of what use was that important correspondence to me? Only in case of an escape from the tower, were it worth while to devote another thought to the discovery I had made. I would not conceal them about my person—I would not even take possession of them; for I said to myself, “If by any possible accident the banditti should relent, and if they should be moved to spare my life, their better feelings would be instantaneously changed into a rancour more fierce and terrible than ever, were these papers found upon me.”

I therefore consigned them to the tin-box, and dropped the stone back into its setting.

Scarcely had I done this, when I heard the bolts of the door being gently drawn back: then the key was applied to the lock—it turned—and the door opened.

“Hush, my young friend—it is I!” said the well-known voice of Angelo Volterra.

“Oh! thank God!” I ejaculated, with a gush of joy in my heart.

“Hush, hush! Give not way to an excitement that may prove dangerous!” responded Volterra.

“Yet let me again thank God!” I murmured; for Angelo's presence seemed the herald of hope.

He came without a light—but our hands were immediately joined: and the grateful pressure which mine bestowed upon his, conveyed to him all I felt for whatsoever he might be attempting or effecting in my behalf.

“Pardon my selfishness,” he said in a hasty manner: “but only one word—one word! What of Olivia?”

“She believes you honourable,” I answered; “and the letter you addressed to me at Dicomano, is in her possession.”

Now it was my turn to receive an assurance of heartfelt gratitude conveyed by the warm pressure of the hand; and Volterra murmured in a voice full of emotion, “Millions of thanks, Joseph! Oh, I will save you—or I will perish in the attempt!”

“Is there really hope?” I asked—and the reader may suppose with how much breathless eagerness!

“Yes—but do not excite yourself——”

“Oh! tell me, tell me—is there indeed hope?”

“Yes—there is every hope,” he responded.

“Listen for a few moments. When that villain Dorchester came to announce that you were in safe custody at his cave, Marco Uberti was already far gone with wine. My first thought was to gallop away and to deliver you from that cave: but I feared to be suspected—for in *that* case, Joseph,” added Volterra, with solemn impressiveness, “I should have all in a moment seen the ruin of an object which is dearer to me than even my love for Olivia—dearer than even the bond of friendship which links me unto you! I was therefore compelled to act with caution. I knew that if Uberti continued even only just able to breathe a few words collectedly, your life when you were brought before him, would not be worth an instant's purchase. I therefore resolved to ply him well with liquor. I played a part which, God knows, I hate and detest. But, Oh! even that was comparatively

nothing to the violence I have had to put upon my feelings since I first became—But no matter! Suffice it to observe that I performed the part of the noisy, shouting, uproarious reveller: and you saw the result. Uberti was led on to drink until he was in that state when it was impossible for him to comprehend what was passing around. Therein existed your safety!"

"Oh, you must indeed have done violence to your feelings," I said, "to have joined in that loathsome orgie!"

"Do not interrupt me—but listen, Joseph," continued Angelo Volterra. "Perhaps you noticed that while shouting out a bacchanalian song I suddenly left off to give some hint to Philippo. I spoke as if I hated you as much as all the other banditti did; and I said, 'Thrust him into that stone-box behind the Captain's bed-room: for not so much as a rat could manage to escape thence!'—You might have seen how greedily the hint was caught up. I had my motive. To consign you to this dungeon, was to dispense with the necessity of placing sentinels over you: that was one point. A second was that I could obtain the key of this massive door from the person of the intoxicated bandit-chief at any moment which might seem favourable to my design. For you saw that it *was* kept in the miscreant's pocket with much care. I bade Philippo be sure to restore it there after your consignment here. The banditti are all now sleeping; the sentinel outside excepted—or at least I believe and hope so. I will leave you for a few minutes to go and see that the coast is clear; and then I will return to ensure your escape."

"Oh! suffer me not in the midst of a selfish joy," I said, fervently pressing Volterra's hand, "to be unmindful of your own safety. Will not suspicion fall upon you?"

"No—impossible!" answered Volterra. "When you escape, I return to the banquetting-hall—I restore the key to Uberti's person—I deposit myself upon the floor, where I just now pretended to fall down overcome by liquor—as the banditti arouse themselves I shall be seen sleeping, or at least appearing to sleep—I shall be one of the last to awake, and therefore one of the last to be suspected."

"Oh, Signor Volterra!" I exclaimed, still retaining his hand in my own, "when—when will you quit this dreadful place? when, when will you leave a companionship which so ill becomes you, and which I know that you so much loathe and hate?"

"My dear friend," answered the Italian, his handsome countenance wearing a solemn expression—for the dawn of morning now rendered the dungeon as well as the adjacent room sufficiently light for us to perceive each other,—“my dear friend,” he said, in a voice as solemn as his look, “I have imposed upon myself a task which I have vowed to accomplish or perish in the attempt. I have registered an oath in heaven to that effect—and it shall not be violated. Sooner or later I *must* succeed: but I have to fathom a secret which as yet dwells in the breast of Marco Uberti *alone*, and which not even in his drunken orgies has he ever betrayed. But that he will betray it, or that I shall by some means discover it sooner or later, I have the fullest faith. Already has he betrayed one secret to me: and wherefore not the other?"

I will show you what that secret is which he has thus betrayed. Yes—I will show you what it is. Look!—and learn the reason why the Captain keeps the key of this dungeon continuously about his own person!"

Thus speaking, Angelo Volterra pressed his hand against the wall of the stone-tomb in a peculiar manner; and a portion of the masonry to the extent of about a foot square, fell back like a little door opening. At first I could see nothing: but Volterra bade me stoop down and look in, or thrust my hand in and feel. I did the latter; and my fingers encountered a vast quantity of coins. I raised a few: they were heavy—and their chink told me that it was all a golden treasure concealed in that recess. I could now likewise catch a glimpse of it.

"It is his share of the booty, gained by years of plunder," remarked Angelo Volterra: and touching another spring, the door of masonry flew back into its setting. "Often and often has Uberti spoken of resigning the command of the band, and retiring to some foreign country to live upon his riches: but on second thoughts he has kept his position and persevered in his criminal avocation. Perhaps he has fancied that he is not as yet wealthy enough: or else he is so wedded to his stormy mode of existence that he cannot bring himself to abandon it. But I am wasting precious time here—"

"Ah!" I ejaculated, as a sudden thought struck me: "this treasure-place which you have just shown me, is not the only mystery of the dungeon."

"What mean you?" demanded Volterra eagerly.

"I mean," I answered rapidly—for a presentiment had sprung up in my mind to a certain effect,—“that accident revealed to me—"

"What, what?" asked Volterra, with the liveliest suspense.

"That beneath this stone a bundle of papers—"

"Papers?" echoed Volterra, as if in the wildest joy. "O God, I thank thee if it should be so!"

Without an instant's delay I drew forth my knife; and together we raised the stone. During the few moments we were thus engaged, Angelo's hand came in contact with mine; and I could tell by the touch that they were trembling with nervous suspense—while his short quick breathing proved that his excitement was great indeed. He clutched the papers—he flew to the window of Uberti's chamber—a glance at those documents was sufficient—and then with every demonstration of a wild and thrilling joy, he embraced me as if I were his brother.

"Oh! my dearest, dearest friend," he murmured, in a voice broken by his strong emotions, "you know not—you know not what happiness fills my soul! My task is accomplished—the secret is discovered—and I flee hence with you!"

My presentiment was fulfilled: it was indeed the discovery of those documents which was Angelo Volterra's aim.

"God himself," continued the grateful Italian, "threw you into the power of the banditti that all this might be accomplished. Oh, how inscrutable are His ways!"

He clasped his hands for a moment in the fer-

your of his grateful piety; and then securing the documents about his person, he said, "I will hasten away for a few minutes to assure myself that all is safe. I will return—and we will speed hence together."

For precaution's sake he again locked and bolted the door upon me; and I restored the stone to its setting. Ten minutes elapsed: they seemed ten hours. Oh, what anxiety I endured! what agonizing suspense! If anything should transpire to prevent Volterra's return—if his noble treason towards the brigands should be discovered—what earthly hope was there for either of us in the midst of that overpowering horde of ruffians? At length I heard footsteps approaching—the key turned in the lock—the door opened—and Volterra re-appeared. He had a cutlass by his side and a brace of pistols stuck in his belt: he carried another cutlass and another brace of pistols in his hands.

"Arm yourself, Joseph," he said: "for though all seems favourable to our purpose, yet peril may start up at any moment, like a snake raising its head from amidst its coils. If need be, you will fight?"

"To the very last drop of my blood!" I answered, buckling on the belt to which the cutlass was suspended, and then securing the pistols conveniently at the waist.

We shook hands as if thereby ratifying a compact which two men surrounded with dangers had formed to fight—and if necessary, die together: and then we issued forth. I judged from the precautions Volterra thus took, as well as from the solemn manner in which he had addressed me, and the way in which he had pressed my hand, that our position was almost a desperate one: but I was nerved to encounter any peril. The corridor was threaded—we reached the staircase, which we descended.

"Now for the sentinel in the usual spot!" said Volterra. "I do not wish to spill human blood unnecessarily, even though it be that of one of these ruffians; but if need be, I slay him! Remain you here in the vestibule for a few moments: but if you hear footsteps descending the stairs, hasten to me at once in front of the stable-door!"

Having thus spoken, Volterra walked away; and I remained in the vestibule—that same little place, he it recollected, whence opened the door of the cell where Olivia Sackville was incarcerated on the first memorable night of my acquaintance with the brigands. Volterra proceeded towards the angle of the building where the sentinel was posted: but ere he reached it, the sentinel himself, with shouldered firelock, and otherwise armed to the teeth, emerged from round the corner. I stood back in the doorway, so as to remain unperceived by him: but yet I myself could see what was going on. The man appeared by no means surprised to observe Volterra thus armed: nor indeed was it likely that he should discern anything suspicious in that fact, considering that he regarded Angelo as one of his comrades. Volterra stopped as if in an easy leisurely manner to exchange a few friendly words with the sentinel: but all in an instant—as quick as the eye can wink—he tore his musket from his grasp, and with the butt-end of it struck him down. The fellow lay senseless; and

just at that very same instant I heard footsteps descending the stairs.

I remembered Volterra's injunction, that I was at once to hasten to him in such a case: but that injunction was evidently given with the idea that the conflict between himself and the sentinel would take place round the angle of the building, at the stable-door, and consequently out of sight of any one emerging from that doorway where I stood. Now, therefore, whoever was descending could see what was taking place: he would be at once smitten with the conviction of treachery; and even though I tried to speed out of sight round the angle, he would raise an alarm. I could tell that it was only one person descending: the crisis was momentous—the peril was infinite—and my mind was made up how to act. I stepped forth from the vestibule, and planted myself against the wall just outside the doorway,—grasping my drawn cutlass in such a manner that its massive hilt might serve the purpose of a club. Only a few instants elapsed ere the footsteps reached the vestibule: then a foot was thrust forth upon the doorstep—then the individual himself appeared—and at the same moment I struck him down. It was Philipppo. He fell heavily with a low moan: my knee was instantaneously placed upon his breast—my hand upon his mouth. But these precautions were unnecessary: he was completely stunned—but I saw that he was not dead.

Volterra, who had beheld this proceeding, beckoned me to follow his example; and that was to drag my vanquished enemy round towards the stable. This I speedily did: both the banditti continued senseless—we dragged them into the stable—and Volterra exclaimed, "Bravely done, my young friend! Your presence of mind not less than your courage has saved us. Quick to get the horses in readiness!"

Without an instant's loss of time, we proceeded to saddle a couple of the animals—but keeping the while a good look-out, as we thought, upon the two banditti. The saddles and bridles were put on; and we were about to lead the horses forth, when the sharp report of a pistol sounded through the place—and my hat was knocked off by the bullet. With scarcely a second's interval, another pistol was fired—fortunately however without hitting either of us. Philipppo having raised himself to a sitting posture, had done this; and now he made a desperate effort to gain his legs and draw his hanger—but we overpowered him in a moment. A second blow from Volterra's weapon struck him down senseless again: his comrade, the sentinel, continued inanimate; and we made all possible despatch to get the horses out of the place.

But scarcely had we reached the open air, when we beheld Marco Uberti staggering towards us.

The quick excited glance which we both flung around showed us that the bandit-captain was alone; and then the looks which we the next instant exchanged, proved to one another that we were each simultaneously smitten with the same idea. The brigand-chief had stopped short in a species of drunken bewilderment at what he beheld, and which he could not understand. We precipitated ourselves upon him—we hurled him to the ground—I thrust my kerchief into his mouth—while Volterra with his own tied the ruffian's hands behind his back. Then we lifted him

across the front part of the saddle of Volterra's powerful steed, to which the latter sprang—while I leaped upon the back of the one prepared for myself. Our looks again sweeping round, showed us that the coast was still clear: and we galloped away. Oh, the wild exultation of that moment when we thus left the bandits' tower behind!

## CHAPTER C.

## VOLTERRA'S EXPLANATIONS.

MARCO UBERTI was for some minutes so completely stupified by all that had taken place, and the position in which he was thrown, that he lay like an inert mass across Volterra's steed. The animal, as already said, was a powerful one, and therefore at first bore his double burthen bravely: but it was quite evident that the journey could not be continued with fleetness for any length of time under such circumstances. When we were at a distance of about a mile, I suggested that the gag should be taken from the brigand-captain's mouth, for fear lest he became suffocated and justice thus cheated of its due. Volterra consented: it was accordingly done; and then Uberti, after several heavy gasps, began to speak. Angelo answered him sternly as well as menacingly; and he explained to me that the miscreant, now well nigh sobered by the complete sense of his position, was begging hard to be set free. Our journey was continued in the direction of that village where I on previous occasions had taken up my quarters; and during our progress thither the discomfited and crestfallen Uberti made numerous vain appeals for mercy to be shown unto him.

We reached the village; and, as the reader may suppose, immense was the sensation which was excited when it became known that the individual who hung like an inert mass across Volterra's steed was the hitherto terrible Bandit Marco Uberti. All the inhabitants—men, women, and children—flocked forth from their dwellings; and a little procession was formed to the inn. There I was at once recognized and welcomed by the landlord and the domestics—aye, and doubly welcome too when they found that I had been partly instrumental in capturing the formidable brigand. The Mayor speedily arrived; and as an attack on the part of the bandit-horde was apprehended, when it was learnt that they had not been dispersed by any means, but had been left at their tower, all the men of the village flew to arm themselves in the best way that they could. Pitchforks were seized upon—scythes were grasped—a few old swords were sharpened up—rusty fire-arms were burnished—all was bustle and excitement. Meanwhile the crest-fallen Uberti, now gloomy and sullen, was consigned to a room where half-a-dozen sturdy peasants mounted guard upon him; and Volterra and myself sate down to a hastily prepared breakfast, while a vehicle was being gotten in readiness. Never did I so much enjoy a meal! I was not merely happy—my feelings were those of enthusiastic exultation. In contrast with the hideous perils through which I had passed, I had the most joyous sense of life and

liberty: I had aided in capturing the formidable brigand; and Providence had led me to a discovery which enabled Angelo Volterra, whom I so much esteemed, to quit the loathsome companionship of those brigands whom he abhorred. Had I not every reason to be joyous and happy? And Volterra too,—he evidently experienced a kindred feeling: he assured me that he did—and the animation of his handsome countenance reflected the blissful glow which inspired his heart.

The vehicle was in readiness; and Marco Uberti, firmly bound hand and foot with strong cords, was thrust inside. Volterra and I entered afterwards; we were well armed—and we required no assistance to keep our prisoner in secure custody. The chaise drove out of the village amidst the enthusiastic cheers of the inhabitants.

Marco Uberti—perceiving that all entreaties were vain, and that we were resolute in handing him over to the grasp of justice—had shut himself up, as already stated, in a sullen reserve. He knew not that his valuable papers were in Volterra's possession; and he therefore probably flattered himself that they might once more prove the talisman of his safety. Angelo did not condescend to give him any explanation on the point; and the ruffian, lounging back in the corner of the vehicle, closed his eyes, and either slept or appeared to do so.

"You are doubtless anxious, my dear young friend," said Angelo Volterra, "to receive some explanations relative to my purpose in having consorted with the miscreants of whom this man was the chief. You have seen that my aim was to procure possession of these papers which I have about me, and which Providence has this day thrown into my hands. Yes—that was my aim in joining the banditti: but I had still another purpose to serve—a higher and a nobler one; and on this point you must suspend your curiosity for only a few hours, because I feel that there is *another* who is as much entitled as yourself—pardon me for saying *even more entitled*, under all circumstances—"

"Yes," I exclaimed, well able to enter into his feelings: "the first word of explanation on any dearly cherished point must be given to her whom you love!"

"Thank you, my dear friend, for this forbearance on your part," responded Volterra: "and rest assured that as I have the inclination so I also possess the means to testify all my friendship towards you. But let me continue to give explanations relative to that point whereon I may touch. This fellow"—glancing towards Uberti—"understands not the English language in which we are speaking; and even if he did, it would matter but little."

Volterra paused for a few moments, and then continued in the following manner:—

"Many months have elapsed since the idea first entered my head that I would throw myself amongst Marco Uberti's banditti, in the hope of obtaining possession of those State documents which I knew that he had purloined from the ducal palace at Florence. I adopted an assumed name—for that of Angelo Volterra is not my right one; and I went boldly to Marco Uberti's stronghold. I announced myself as a man who by some heinous crime had rendered himself an outlaw; and I offered

my assistance. I spoke with a hardy frankness, and assumed an air which was best calculated to make an impression upon the bandit-chief. I succeeded; and he appeared anxious to number me amongst his retainers. But I offered my services only in a particular way; I proposed that, availing myself of my appearance, my manners, and so forth, I should frequent the adjacent towns on both sides of the Etruscan Apennines—ascertain the hours at which travellers were to start—estimate whether they were worth plundering—and learn the precise roads they were to take,—all of which information I was with the least delay to carry to the tower. A spy of this kind was precisely what Marco Uberti wanted; and he readily accepted my proposals. You will understand that by the very duty I thus undertook—or rather was supposed to undertake—I was incapacitated from joining the band in their plundering enterprises, because, as Marco Uberti himself suggested, if I were recognised by postillions, guides, and *couriers*, it would speedily become dangerous for me to frequent the neighbouring towns. You may easily conceive that it was my study at the very outset to procure this exemption from a participation in the banditti's predatory proceedings; and by the course I adopted my purpose was served: namely, to procure a footing amongst them. I need not tell you, Joseph, that I never on any single occasion gave such information as led to the interception of travellers: but on the contrary, I availed myself of every opportunity to recommend the very roads which I knew might be most safely taken. In the case of Lord Ringwold's party some months back, I did all I could to put the banditti upon another scent—a false one, of course: but the outbreak of that storm caused a delay with your party which deranged all my calculations; and thus you fell into the hands of the brigands. Frequently would I ride forth from the tower by night, under the pretence of stopping lonely wayfarers—but in reality to warn away those whom I might encounter in dangerous proximity to the tower; and of this you had a proof on the memorable night that you came disguised thither. Indeed, it was soon seen that I brought no useful information from the neighbouring towns: but, on the other hand, I was continuously taking gold to the banditti, with the assurance that it was the spoil derived from plundered wayfarers. You will ask how I obtained these supplies? My dear friend, I am rich—and the intendant of my estates made me frequent remittances to Pistoja, or elsewhere, according to the instructions I sent him. But because I brought no useful information from the towns on either side the Etruscan Apennines, the banditti did not suspect my good faith: they supposed that I had a deficiency of aptitude for the business I had seemed to undertake: for on the other hand, those frequent sums of money which I poured into the general treasury, gave them the highest opinion of me, and made them look upon me as one who was as bold and successful in the avocations of a highwayman as he was imbecile in the capacity of a spy."

Here Marco Uberti opened his eyes, and looked from the chaise-window—doubtless to ascertain which road we were taking; and having satisfied himself, he sank back to slumber—or seeming slumber—again.

"By the means I have explained to you," continued Volterra, "I succeeded in establishing myself firmly in the confidence of the banditti. In every respect I sought to adapt myself to their tastes and customs—except with regard to apparel; for I always dressed as a private gentleman. I joined them in their orgies, and played my part so well that while in reality I drank with the extremest moderation, I appeared to plunge as deep into the revelry as they. I was always ready with a song: and when there was an opportunity to talk fierce and big, without inflicting actual harm on any one, I omitted not to do so. You can easily comprehend that on the three or four occasions when prisoners were brought to the stronghold, I was painfully compelled to abstain from aiding them, except in the cases of Miss Sackville and yourself. I dared not as a general rule render that succour which despite of all precautions would have laid me open to a suspicion not merely fatal to my life—for *that* I would have risked—but destructive of the lofty aim I had in view. Therefore, whenever prisoners were brought to the stronghold—and it was on rare occasions—I endeavoured to avoid being seen by them, for the natural purpose of preventing future recognition: but in the one case of the English gentleman who subsequently denounced me at Dicomano, I was by an accident thrown in his way for a few minutes. I hope that I shall meet him again that I may convince him of his error."

"I recollect him well," I observed; "and rest assured that should I ever see him, I shall not fail to disabuse him with regard to you."

"I have but little more to say," resumed Angelo Volterra, "with respect to my existence amongst the banditti. You can easily understand how odious such an existence was to me, and what efforts it must have cost me to repress my feelings of aversion at their vile language and their filthy orgies. I should remark that no deed of blood was perpetrated by them during the whole time I was in their midst: for rest assured that if the life of an unfortunate traveller, when imprisoned at the tower, had been at stake, I should have incurred any risk in order to save it."

"As you did mine!" I interjected, with grateful fervour. "Oh, I can indeed comprehend how terrible and revolting an existence amongst those banditti must have been!"

"And you may therefore suppose, my dear friend," rejoined Volterra, "that I was cheered and sustained by some strong hope, and that I had an end to gain for which that life which I thus voluntarily rendered so miserable should have been gladly given up. My purpose was paramount over all other considerations; and in order that from the very outset I might remain staunch to it, I registered an oath in heaven that I would never abandon my feigned name, nor resume whatsoever honour or distinction may be attached to my real one, until I had accomplished the solemn, sacred object which I had in view. You may judge that this object is solemn and sacred indeed, when even my love for an amiable and beautiful creature was made secondary thereto—when from *her* knowledge even has my real name been concealed—and when my character being at stake, I did not choose to pronounce the one word which



should have cleared it up in a moment, but was compelled to have recourse to your kind intervention through the medium of that letter which I addressed to you at Dicomano. But now, thank heaven, I stand on the very threshold of success; and when everything is explained, I believe without vanity that I shall experience the admiration and the approval of all within whose knowledge my romantic tale may come. In a few hours, Joseph, you will know everything; and then you will indeed rejoice that you placed confidence in my integrity, and that you lent me your generous succour when my reputation was on the verge of ruin in the eyes of Lord Ringwold's daughter."

As the conversation reached this point, the chaise entered a small town where we were to change horses: for Volterra had ordered the driver to take a more direct road to Florence than that by Pistoja—the latter being only preferred in general as being the better one of the two. In order to avoid excitement in the town, and equally to evade the necessity of giving explanations, it was determined to keep it secret that Marco Uberti was a prisoner in the chaise; and the driver being bribed with gold, faithfully held his peace upon the subject. Our journey was resumed; and it was yet early in the forenoon when we entered the vale of Arno, in the midst of which stands the beautiful city of Florence.

"I shall put you down at the entrance of the capital," said Volterra; "and you will forgive me if I suggest this arrangement. Think not, however, that it is my purpose selfishly to rob you of your due share of the honour of this villain's capture. You will see, on the contrary, that my behaviour towards you will be in every respect that of a sincere friend."

"Act according to your own discretion, signor," I replied: "for I am confident that you are inspired by the best possible motives."

"Thanks for this renewed proof of your trustfulness in me," responded Volterra. "You will return to the hotel: but I beg of you that my name may not be in any way mentioned—that no allusion may be made to me. I repeat that in the course of a few hours you will know everything!"

"Say no more, signor," I interrupted him; "your will shall be my law. And yet," I continued, as a thought struck me, "I shall have to explain how I was carried off by the banditti; and if Miss Sackville should privately inquire whether I have seen you——"

"Tell her *yes*, Joseph! Say what you think fit," replied Angelo: "but one thing you must not mention—and this is that I have accompanied you to Florence. I have my own reasons for keeping my presence a secret for a few hours; and after all you have said, I know that you will not seek to penetrate them."

The chaise had now entered the city; and Volterra commanded the driver to stop. I alighted; and Angelo shook me by the hand, saying, "Farewell for the present, my gallant young friend!"

Marco Uberti had opened his eyes and looked from the window when the vehicle thus stopped: but he threw himself back in the corner again with a kind of surly listlessness—and I walked away. The driver received some further instruction from Volterra; and the chaise rolled onward in another direction from that which I was taking.

As I proceeded to the hotel, I could scarcely believe that within a few short hours so many thrilling and astounding incidents had occurred: the space seemed infinitely too limited to encompass such a variety of transactions. Yet it was only since the preceding evening that I had been absent from Florence; and now that I was threading those streets again, it actually appeared as if I had merely been hurried through the shifting phases of a wild and fanciful dream. I had read in oriental tales of persons being taken up in their beds at night by good or evil genii—transported to some spot thousands of miles off—hurried through a rapid series of adventures—carried back to their own homes—and left to awake in the morning to marvel whether it were all a vision, or whether it had positively occurred. So it now seemed with me. My capture by the banditti—my journey into the Apennines—my escape from Philippo—my adventure with Mr. Dorchester in his cave—my removal to the tower—my imprisonment there—my discovery of the papers—my emancipation by Volterra's aid—the circumstances of our escape—the accident which threw the bandit-chief into our hands—our journey to Florence—and my safe arrival here,—it did indeed appear to be nothing but a wild romantic dream! The whole series of adventures have taken entire chapters to narrate them—life and death had hung in the balance—and yet but comparatively a few hours sufficed for the enacting of all this!

On reaching the hotel, the first person whom I met was Lord Ringwold's valet, and he said, with a sly laugh, "You are a nice young fellow, Joseph, to remain out all night in this dissipated way, and return here at such an hour. It is lucky for you that you have got a master who instead of being angry, is very uneasy—and instead of attributing your absence to a little piece of rakishness, proclaims his apprehension that some evil has befallen you."

"Let me at once assure you," I said, "that you are altogether wrong in jumping to a conclusion so little creditable to my character; and when you come to know all, you will be surprised enough."

"Then what *has* happened?" asked the valet, all his curiosity excited.

"I cannot stay to tell you now," I quickly responded. "You say that my master is uneasy—and I must speed to him."

I accordingly hurried up the stairs; and on the landing I met Bessy, Miss Olivia's maid—who with a cold look observed, "I am really astonished, Joseph, at your conduct. I gave you credit for being a steady, well-behaved young man. And Miss Sackville too, who held the same opinion, is very much grieved——"

"Then my master," I exclaimed, "is the only one who does not prejudice me harshly!"

"There! I'm glad you have said that!" rejoined Bessy, smiling. "I only made the observation and looked cool in order to draw you out at once; and I can tell you that Miss Sackville has all the morning expressed her conviction that some accident had befallen you. She is not ungrateful, Joseph—and I can assure you that she has been considerably agitated on your account."

"I am glad," I said, my countenance brighten-

ing up, "that you were not really disposed to think evil of me. I have met with the strangest adventures—but you shall know all presently."

Having thus spoken, I sped to Captain Raymond's apartment; and he sprang up from his seat with an exclamation of joy,—crying, "What on earth has become of you all this time? I have been to give information to the police: for I dreaded lest some evil had overtaken you."

I proceeded to explain to my wondering master how I had been carried off by the banditti—and how, after divers adventures, I had managed to escape. I so worded my tale that there was no necessity to mention Volterra's name; and the Captain did not make the slightest allusion to it. It was naturally a delicate and even a sore subject with him—though he doubtless suspected that Angelo had once again proved a good friend in need to me. He reiterated the assurances of his joy at my return; and I hastened up to my own chamber to perform my ablutions and make a requisite change in my toilet. Indeed, I felt so wearied that I could not resist the temptation to lie down to rest: and I slept soundly for about three hours.

When I awoke, and had performed my lavations as well as dressed myself in a suitable manner, I descended from the chamber,—wondering when I should again hear of Angelo Volterra, and what means he intended to adopt to convey the promised explanations to whomsoever they concerned. Bessy was on the look-out for me on the landing below: she hastily beckoned me to follow her—and I complied with the silent request. I was conducted into that same room where on a previous occasion I had imparted to Miss Sackville intelligence concerning her lover: she was now there, anxiously awaiting to see me. Bessy retired; and I remained alone with Lord Ringwold's daughter. I could not help thinking, as I contemplated her, with her light brown hair showering in myriads of ringlets upon her well formed shoulders—with her shape so symmetrically modelled, although upon a large scale—her blue eyes now full of the anxious suspenseful feeling which was no doubt making her heart flutter—and the red lips apart, revealing the pearly teeth,—I could not help thinking, I say, that she was one well deserving the love of that Italian who, I felt assured, would prove himself to be equally worthy by social position, as he had already convinced me he was by disposition and character, of that patrician lady's hand. I bowed on entering the room—but waited for her to question me.

"You have again experienced thrilling and startling adventures?" she said, addressing me as if speaking to an equal with whom she was on friendly terms. "Captain Raymond has told my father that much—and my father has mentioned it in my presence. But no allusion was made—"

"Before I speak upon that subject, Miss Sackville," I said, "permit me to express my gratitude for the good opinion you entertained of me—inasmuch as you were most kindly apprehensive on my account, and could not believe that I was absent through having been beguiled into dissipation."

"I certainly did entertain too high an opinion of you," answered Miss Sackville, "to suppose for

an instant that you had fallen into temptations; and most sincerely do I congratulate you on your escape from those fresh perils in which you have been involved. But is it possible that the dreadful brigand-chief is captured at last, and through your agency?"

"I certainly had some little hand therein, Miss Sackville," I responded: "but the principal credit was due to another:"—and I looked at her significantly.

"Another?" she murmured, instantaneously comprehending what I meant; and then in the same low voice, but with a holy animation upon her countenance, she said, "God be thanked!—this, then, is another proof that he is all honourable and upright!"

"Yes, Miss Sackville—of this rest assured," I answered fervently; "and I think I may go so far as to promise that the time is not now very remote when everything will be explained."

"Oh, that it may be so!" she murmured, with accents and looks of earnest entreaty, as if thus appealing to Heaven to give my promise a speedy fulfilment. "I do not mind telling you—no, I do not mind confessing that in one sense, Joseph, I am very, very unhappy. My father, hitherto so kind and so indulgent, has conjured—nay, more, he has commanded me to look upon Captain Raymond—"

She stopped short—and a blush of bashfulness suffused itself over her countenance, as if she felt that it was not altogether to one of my sex that such confidential revelations should be made.

"But surely," I said, in a mild and gentle voice, "Captain Raymond is not so ungenerous as thus to urge his suit when he has acquired the positive knowledge that his overtures are not welcome?"

"I am afraid," replied Miss Sackville, with downcast looks, and the blush still upon her cheeks, "that you in the generosity of your own heart are inclined to give Captain Raymond credit for more magnanimity than he indeed possesses. Yes—I fear that you judge him too well—at all events in this instance. I know that he has been speaking very seriously with my father—I know that he has, from the way in which my mother has been addressing me:"—then, after a brief pause, during which Miss Sackville evidently found it difficult to subdue the sobs which were swelling to burst forth, she added in a voice which was scarcely audible, "They insist that I shall marry him!—my parents are urging me now to accompany him to the altar—they seek to precipitate the alliance, doubtless fancying that when once his bride, I shall think no more of him—"

She did not mention the name: but I knew full well that her heart was full of the image of the handsome and well-beloved Italian.

"They cannot coerce you, Miss Sackville," I ventured to observe.

"No!" she exclaimed, suddenly raising her looks with an expression of most dignified resolve: "no power on earth can compel me to give my hand where my heart is not engaged! I know not how it is that I am saying all this to you—I feel as if I were speaking to a friend—to a brother. And yet it is natural enough! You are in Angelo's confidence—"

"Yes, Miss Sackville," I answered significantly,—"and now more so than ever."



"Ah, what mean you?" she exclaimed, gazing upon me with mingled joy and suspense. "I see that all you *do* know of him is really good—that your former favourable opinion has been confirmed, and not marred. Oh, doubtless all my former conjectures were correct—and he went amongst those bandits for the very best of purposes!—he went to save those who might fall into their hands—to baffle their fiendish schemes, and to disperse them at last. Tell me, Joseph—is it not so?"

"Much of what you have imagined, Miss Sackville, has been done," I rejoined; "and doubtless the dispersion of the banditti will follow close upon the capture of their chief. But at present I can say no more—unless it be to bid you cherish the assurance that all will yet be well."

At this moment the door opened; and Bessy entered with quickness, saying, "Messengers have arrived from the palace—Captain Raymond is in-

quiring for you, Joseph—my lord and her ladyship are asking for you, Miss Sackville."

Olivia flung upon me a look expressive of gratitude for the assurance I had just given her; and I hurried from the room. On ascending to my master's apartment, he said to me, "A singular message has just arrived from the ducal palace. I am commanded to proceed thither; and it is especially enjoined that you accompany me. Doubtless the object of this mandate is in connexion with the banditti of the Apennines. Lord Ringwold and his family are likewise summoned thither. Yes—it must be—my conjecture is the right one—it is to give evidence respecting the outrage we all experienced at the hands of Marco Uberti and his followers."

Having hastily put out the garments which Captain Raymond required, I ascended to my chamber, to make some little improvement to my own toilet; and by the time I had finished, Lord Ringwold's

carriage was in readiness to convey us to the ducal palace. Captain Raymond handed Olivia into the vehicle; and I observed that her manner towards him was coldly lady-like—distant without rudeness—reserved without unfeminine hauteur. I ascended to the box; and the equipage drove off. While it was proceeding towards the palace, I was lost in wonder at the proceeding which was now to develop itself. As a matter of course I fully comprehended that it had some reference to the affairs of Angelo Volterra, and perhaps to the captured brigand; but if the period had now come for Angelo's promised explanations, I was totally at a loss to conceive why they were to take place at the ducal dwelling, and not under those circumstances of privacy which their delicate nature would have seemed to render desirable. However, I had not much time for conjecture: for the equipage speedily turned into the court-yard of the ducal palace.

An usher immediately came forth—or was indeed already in waiting—to receive Lord Ringwold and his party; and with many profound bows he prepared to lead the way into the interior of the palace. I hung back somewhat, with a natural timidity lest in my position as a menial I should happen to intrude, or press forward at an earlier stage of the proceedings than that at which my presence would be really required. But the gentleman-usher, looking round, and observing that I hesitated to follow, at once accosted me, saying in French, "I presume that you are the young Englishman who bears the name of Joseph Wilmot?"

I bowed, and replied in the affirmative.

"Then you are to accompany the rest," the gentleman-usher at once said.

Having thus spoken, he continued to lead the way up a private staircase, into an ante-room,—where several noblemen with stars upon their breasts, officers in uniform, and other officials of the palace, were conversing together in groups. Two pages drew aside a superb curtain of purple velvet—gilded folding doors flew open on their noiseless hinges—and we passed on into a spacious and sumptuously furnished apartment, where the Grand Duke was seated at a table on which there were a great number of papers. Those gilded portals closed behind us: the gentleman-usher had stopped short upon the threshold—he had not accompanied us—and we five (Lord and Lady Ringwold, the Hon. Miss Olivia Sackville, Captain Raymond, and myself) thus passed on, unattended and unannounced, into the ducal presence.

The Sovereign of Tuscany rose from his seat, and with dignified affability bowed an acknowledgment of our salutations. He motioned us all to be seated on chairs ready arranged along the opposite side of the table to that where he himself was placed; and when I hesitated, he looked hard at me, but with a gaze of mingled kindness and curiosity; and speaking in French, said, as his usher before had done, "You must be Joseph Wilmot?"

I bowed: but feeling somewhat confused, gave no verbal answer.

"Be seated," said the Grand Duke: and with the most gracious affability he waved his hand towards the chair which, mindful of my menial position, I had been at first hesitating to take.

But still, after I had obeyed the ducal invitation, his Royal Highness continued to survey me for some few moments longer, with that same curiosity and interest which he had already displayed.

"I have requested your attendance here," he said, still speaking in the French language, and addressing us all collectively, without suffering his eyes to settle upon any one in particular, "because I have matters of certain importance to communicate. First of all however, let me put a case to you. If you were told that a man made every personal sacrifice—incurred the most terrible risks—for months and months continuously held his life in such jeopardy that the faintest breath of suspicion would have been enough to snap the hair which retained the dagger suspended over him,—if you were told that this man, accustomed to all the elegances and refinements of society, voluntarily threw himself into the midst of the refuse and the outcasts, the vilest and the lowest of that same society,—and if it were told you in addition that this man had incurred all those perils and encountered all those circumstances of loathing and of horror, for the sake of benefiting a relative who was most near and dear to him,—what, I ask you, would be your opinion of such a man?"

Lord and Lady Ringwold looked at each other as if totally bewildered what response to give, and utterly unable to comprehend the Grand Duke's aim and meaning. I perceived, however, that it was somewhat different with Captain Raymond: for by his looks he evidently had some vague presentiment or suspicion of to whom the Grand Duke's query related. But Olivia, with love's keen penetration, did not merely conjecture, but felt certain who the individual was that the ducal words thus pointed at—though she was still completely at a loss to imagine for what reason those great personal sacrifices had been made by the individual referred to. I in this same respect was equally in the dark.

"You do not answer me," continued the Grand Duke; "and therefore I must go on speaking. The individual to whom I have referred, is known to you all; and the loss of reputation in the eyes of at least some of you, has not proved the least of the many painful sacrifices he has had to endure in working out his noble aim. But now that this aim is accomplished—now that success has crowned that toil of self-martyrdom—his spirit, as sensitive as it is noble, chafes with impatience to clear up his character in the estimation of those who still continue to believe that he was really that which he has only seemed to be. Everything has been explained to me; and for many reasons have I taken it upon myself to become the medium of these communications unto you. Listen: I must tell you a tale. Some years ago documents of the utmost importance were abstracted from the ducal archives, and carried off by a man who has since rendered himself so terrible as the captain of banditti. This man is Marco Uberti. The documents which he thus purloined, were of such grave importance—no matter wherefore—that in my anxiety to repossess them, I often and often vowed in the hearing of my Ministers and courtiers, that to any man who should become the means of restoring them to me, I would grant whatsoever boon he might think fit to demand, with only such reservations as were proper and becoming to my

own honour and dignity. The individual to whom I just now alluded, and of whose noble self-sacrifices I have spoken, resolved to risk his life in the endeavour to obtain possession of the documents. For that reason he threw himself amongst the banditti of the Etruscan Apennines: he herded with them—he consorted with them:—but rest assured that he never became a party to their crimes! On the contrary, he was happily the means of frustrating much of the evil which they meditated; and in a word, he so bore himself that during the long months he was amongst them, he never was led into aught detrimental to his character, whatever he may have seen that was shocking or repulsive to his feelings. Now you can all full well understand to whom I allude: it is he whom you have known by the name of Angelo Volterra!"

The glow of mingled joy and feminine modesty—wild, thrilling, exultant joy, and virgin bashfulness—overspread the countenance of Olivia Sackville; and then, as the tears of joy likewise trickled from her eyes, she raised her kerchief to that blushing downcast face of her's. Captain Raymond looked surprised at all he had heard: and he flung a glance upon me—a glance which gave me to understand that the naturally generous feelings of his disposition, awakened by this romantic tale, had grown dominant over the selfishness and jealousy of his love. As for Lord and Lady Ringwold, they appeared to be not merely so amazed at what they had heard, but likewise so embarrassed by the awkward position in which they felt themselves placed, that they were perfectly bewildered how to act. With regard to myself, I need only say that I experienced a joy almost if not quite as lively as that which Olivia Sackville herself evidently felt: for if any confirmation of Angelo Volterra's tale had been wanting, it was now completely supplied by the unquestionable authority of Tuscany's Sovereign himself.

"Therefore," resumed his Royal Highness, "the aim of him whom you have hitherto known as Angelo Volterra, was to obtain possession of those State documents which were purloined from the palace. And he has succeeded. That excellent young man"—and here the Grand Duke bent his eyes upon me—"was no mean assistant, under Heaven's direction, in crowning with success the object of him who is and ever will be his friend. Those valuable papers are again in my possession; and what is more, the unscrupulous brigand himself is in the hands of justice. Think, you, therefore, that for a moment I have hesitated to grant the boon which has been demanded of me in fulfilment of my princely word? No—it is vouchsafed; and a messenger is by this time many miles on his way to Vienna to demand the liberation of my nephew, the Marquis of Cassano, from the Austrian fortress in which he is imprisoned,—that liberation to procure which so many noble self-sacrifices have been made by his loving and affectionate younger brother—also my nephew—the Count of Livorno."

Scarcely had any of us a moment's leisure to recover from the surprise with which this announcement of Angelo Volterra's real name, rank, and position threw us, when the Grand Duke agitated a silver bell which lay before him upon the table: a side-door opened; and the object of all

interest—Angelo Volterra now no more, but the Count of Livorno—a scion of the ducal family—wearing a handsome Court costume, with a glittering star upon his breast—made his appearance. Oh! love was potent *then*—that feeling was predominant over all other considerations: forgotten was the presence of parents and rival-claimant for her hand—forgotten too was all restraint which the presence of the Tuscan Sovereign might otherwise have imposed; and Olivia Sackville, with a wild cry of joy, bounded forward and was clasped in her lover's arms.

"My lord," said Captain Raymond, much moved by all that he had heard and by what he now witnessed,—“my lord,” he said, hastily addressing himself to Olivia's father—“and you likewise, my lady, I beseech you to see, as I do, that the finger of Providence is in all this. I am a man of the world—and a man of pleasure: perhaps I have never thought seriously enough of divine things, and of the duties which they teach: therefore when you hear such an one as I am declare the conviction that God himself has decreed that these two shall go together to the altar, it must have its weight with you!”

Captain Raymond's generosity was not lost upon Lord and Lady Ringwold; but perhaps likewise the little tinge of selfishness which certainly belonged to their dispositions, was thrown equally into the same scale. I mean that perhaps through their minds flashed the conviction that the Count of Livorno, a reigning monarch's nephew, was even a more eligible match for their daughter than an English commoner though with a peerage in the prospective. At all events they grasped Captain Raymond's hands: and thus, with a joyous bounding at the heart, I perceived that every barrier to the happiness of the lovers was broken down. Captain Raymond advanced towards the Count of Livorno, from whose embrace Olivia Sackville had only just disengaged herself, but to whose arm she clung trembling with happiness and hope, joy and suspense; and he said, “My lord, will you condescend to accept the hand of one who under certain circumstances has wronged you much?”

The Count of Livorno, who had not failed to observe that little scene betwixt his former rival and Olivia's parents, at once took the Captain's outstretched hand,—exclaiming, “Under the circumstances you were justified in putting the worst construction upon my conduct and character. Henceforth we will be friends.”

“Yes, friends!” added Captain Raymond emphatically, as if to assure Olivia that all rivalry between himself and the Count was now over. “And might I entreat for pardon,” continued Raymond, his looks settling more significantly still upon Olivia's countenance,—“might I venture to expect—?”

The generous-hearted young lady interrupted him by proffering her hand; and thus within a few moments all rivalries, animosities, rancours, and fears, in respect to the love of that tender couple, were set at rest. The Grand Duke, coming forward, said to Lord and Lady Ringwold, “Have I your permission to welcome your daughter as one who by marriage is to become my niece?”—and on receiving an affirmative response, the Tuscan Sovereign embraced Olivia Sackville, saying, “In ac-

companying my nephew to the altar, you will wed one on whom it will be my delight as well as my duty to shower dignities, honours, and riches even greater than those which he already possesses."

Again the silver bell was agitated: the Grand Duchess entered; and while her Royal Highness was welcoming and embracing Olivia as her future niece, the Count of Livorno hastily approached me.

"Come, my dear young friend," he said, fervently pressing my hand: "come! You and I have much to talk over with each other."

Thus speaking, and having whispered a few words to Olivia to the effect that he should not be long absent—having also shaken Lord and Lady Ringwold by the hand—the Count of Livorno conducted me into a small but elegantly furnished cabinet, which was the place whence he had emerged on the first sounding of the silver bell.

## CHAPTER C I.

### THE EXECUTION.

WHEN the door had closed behind us, and we were alone together, the Count of Livorno embraced me with as much warmth as if I were his brother; and was moved to tears, as he murmuringly said, "For all the happiness of this day, how much, how much, my dear friend, am I indebted to you!"

I congratulated him with the most heartfelt joy upon all that had occurred: and I could not help mentioning the generous atonement which Captain Raymond had made, and which I felt sure must in the eyes of the Count prove sufficient amends for his past conduct. The Italian nobleman expressed himself most magnanimously upon the same subject,—repeating what he had said in the adjoining room, that under the suspicious circumstances of the past Captain Raymond was fully justified in acting as he had done.

"It is most extraordinary," I observed, as I mentally reviewed much of what had taken place within the last few weeks, "that the history of the Marquis of Cassano should have been on two occasions almost obtrusively forced upon my attention: but never did I entertain the remotest idea that there was any connexion between that nobleman and yourself, nor between that history and the circumstances belonging to your career. It happened that the narrator—an Italian gentleman whom I casually met—never mentioned that the Marquis of Cassano had a younger brother: but even if he had specified the fact, I do not for a moment think that I should still have been any the wiser in respect to your lordship's proceedings—nor should I have suspected that under the name of Angelo Volterra the Count de Livorno was concealed."

"The tastes of my brother and myself," said the Count, "were from an early period of our lives quite distinct, although the bond of sincerest love has ever linked our hearts. On arriving at manhood, my brother displayed an inclination for the bustle and excitement of public life—while I was fond of the pursuits of literature, science, and art. I particularly took a fancy to medicine and

surgery: the study thereof became at one time a kind of mania with me; and I pursued it with avidity—though, as you may easily conceive, never with the intention of practising it professionally. It was under an *incognito* that I visited England, to examine into your hospital-system: there I became acquainted with your language—there also I improved that medical knowledge which enabled me to minister so successfully a short while back to Lady Ringwold. When my brother was called to the high post of Minister of the Interior, I was dwelling in the seclusion of my own chateau upon my estate in the neighbourhood of Leghorn—or Livorno—from the name of which city my title is derived. The intelligence of his arrest and expatriation came upon me like a thunder-clap: I proceeded to Florence with the intention of throwing myself at the feet of my uncle, the Grand Duke, and imploring his mercy on behalf of my brother. But the Duke—doubtless anticipating what my object was, and being bitterly irate against the Marquis of Cassano—would not see me. I was overwhelmed with grief: I loved that brother of mine with all the fervour to which the truest fraternal affection can possibly reach: I was resolved not to let him languish in an Austrian prison, if by any earthly means I could rescue him. At first I entertained the wild idea of proceeding to the place of his incarceration, and adopting measures to effect his escape; but I could not find out to which of the many Austrian castles he had been consigned: for all the proceedings in respect to his expatriation and his imprisonment had been conducted with as much secrecy as possible. Vainly did I endeavour to glean the requisite information from amongst some of the persons about the Court: no one could or would give it to me. In the midst of my distracting meditations, I recollected to have heard, on a former temporary visit to Florence, something relative to the purloined State documents and the pledge which the Grand Duke had given with regard to the conferring of a boon on the person who should restore them. I made secret inquiries; and on this point I was more successful. I learnt as a positive fact, that my royal uncle had indeed more than once proclaimed the vow, and that he had even very recently reiterated it. Then my mind was made up how to act; and you know the rest. Indeed, you have borne so considerable a part in helping me on to this successful issue, that I must again express my heartfelt gratitude in words before I proceed to exemplify it by actions."

"My lord," I said, "I require nothing more than this kindness with which you address me. Besides, can I forget that you have twice saved my life—"

"It was evidently decreed by heaven," interrupted the Count of Livorno, "that we should assist each other. And now, my young friend, I wish to speak seriously to you respecting your own circumstances. I have seen enough of you to be convinced that you were not born for a menial situation: you have been well educated—your manners are those of a gentleman—and whenever I have thought of you, I have often been as much astonished to find you in your present position as you must have been to discover me amongst the banditti in the Apennines. I have no impertinent curiosity—but I entertain a deep and affectionate



interest in your welfare. I am confident there is some mystery attaching itself unto you; and whatsoever you may choose to reveal, will be confided to the ears of a true friend."

I proceeded to give the Count of Livorno a rapid sketch of my history,—omitting all details that were irrelevant, or too delicate to be touched upon: but I made him acquainted with my love for Annabel—the circumstances under which Sir Matthew Heseltine had sent me abroad for two years—how I was robbed by that same villain Dorchester whom I had recently met in the Apennine cave—and how, after being thus despoiled of my little fortune, I had resolved to earn the bread of an honest industry during the rest of the probationary period rather than apply for fresh funds to the old Baronet. The Count listened with varied feelings of interest, astonishment, and commiseration to these rapidly sketched outlines of my eventful history: and he now understood wherefore I risked so much and was so deeply anxious to deliver Sir Matthew Heseltine and his party a few weeks back from the hands of the brigands. I had related to him also those incidents which are connected with Lord and Lady Eccleston; and this portion of my narrative was not listened to by him with less interest than the others. We discoursed for a long time on that as well as on divers other mysteries which were evidently connected with myself; but as we could do nothing more than suggest vague and uncertain conjectures, it is not necessary to trouble the reader with the details of our discourse.

"Now, my dear young friend," said the Count of Livorno, "if you wish to prove that this friendship is mutual, you must suffer yourself to be guided by me in what I am about to propose. You can no longer remain in a menial condition, for which you were evidently never intended, and above which your manners and your intellect raise you so highly. From this moment you must cease to serve Captain Raymond; and you will permit me to place at your disposal such a sum of money as will enable you to pass the remainder of your probationary period in the way which Sir Matthew Heseltine originally contemplated."

Having thus spoken, the Count of Livorno wrote something upon a slip of paper; and placing it in an envelope, he handed it to me,—saying, "If you refuse this, Joseph, I shall think that you do not consider me your friend."

"I accept it, my lord," I answered, pressing his hand with grateful fervour—and likewise with joy in my heart, "on the sole condition that if ever I have the means of reimbursing this loan, you will permit me to do so."

"Certainly: it is only as a loan that I offer it," responded the Count, thus delicately putting a salve upon my feelings in respect to that which he really intended as a gift. "And now, perhaps," he hastily went on to say, "for the purpose of turning the discourse into another channel, you will be anxious to learn whether any steps have been taken with regard to the brigands whom we last night, or rather this morning, left behind us at the stronghold. You are well aware that for particular reasons of a delicate character—I mean in respect to those abstracted State documents—my uncle the Grand Duke was always averse to adopt strenuous measures with regard to the

bandit-horde. Now that motive has ceased; and detachments of troops have already been despatched to penetrate into the Apennines—kill, disperse, or capture the brigands, as the case may be—and if they have already fled, destroy their stronghold and their little hamlet of cabins. They have received instructions, too, in respect to the villain Dorchester: but I am apprehensive that neither he nor any of the banditti will fall into the hands of the troops—for as this is the third time Marco Uberti has been captured, they can scarcely suppose he will be set free again, even though they should continue to believe that the State documents, hitherto the talisman of his safety, are still at his disposal. And entertaining the apprehension that his doom is sealed, they are certain to disperse in all directions."

"And what of Marco Uberti himself?" I inquired.

"To-morrow," responded the Count of Livorno, "he will be brought to trial, before the criminal tribunal; and there will be sufficient evidence against him without the necessity of you or me, or any one connected with us, standing forward to accuse him. Scarcely was it known a few hours back that the terrible bandit chief was a prisoner in the gaol of Florence, than a dozen citizens came forward to prefer their complaints against him."

"Does he as yet know," I inquired, "that the State documents are no longer available as a means of bargaining for his safety?"

"Yes," rejoined the Count: "I directed that this intelligence should be communicated to him by the governor of the gaol immediately after his consignment there. But let us now return into the adjacent room."

Thither we accordingly proceeded: the Grand Duke and Duchess both alike spoke to me with the most friendly kindness—they were pleased to compliment me on what they termed my "chivalrous bearing" throughout my various adventures in the Apennines—and they cordially thanked me for having been instrumental in the recovery of the documents and the capture of Marco Uberti. Meanwhile the Count of Livorno had taken Captain Raymond aside, and had acquainted him with the fact that I was now in a position to be no longer dependent upon the wages of a menial. The Captain presently accosted me—shook me by the hand—and congratulated me on my change of condition. Olivia Sackville likewise found an opportunity, ere we quitted the ducal presence, to express her congratulation—coupled with the assurance that she should ever regard me in the light of her truest and most generous friend.

We now retired from the presence of the Grand Duke and Duchess of Tuscany—the Count of Livorno accompanying the Ringwood family in the carriage to the hotel, where he was to dine with them. Captain Raymond and I departed together on foot,—both of us alike feeling that the lovers ought to be left as much to their own happiness as possible, with no other restraint than that of the young lady's parents. Captain Raymond encountered a friend in an adjacent street; and I accordingly left him. When at a little distance I examined the contents of the envelope which the Count of Livorno had placed in my hand; and I found myself to be the possessor of a sum which,

reckoning by the equivalent of English money, amounted to eight hundred pounds. It was now the middle of January, 1842; and it was until the 15th of November of the same year that my probationary period extended—an interval of ten months. I had therefore ample funds—thanks to the noble generosity of the Count of Livorno—for passing this period in the manner which Sir Matthew Heseltine had originally sketched forth. Deeply, deeply grateful was I to the Italian nobleman for the kindness which had thus placed me in a position of independence once more: I was that day supremely happy. I had seen the successful issue of a love-affair in which I had become more and more interested from the moment it first came to my knowledge—I found that I had been fully justified in placing confidence in Olivia's lover since I had begun to know him well—and I myself was rewarded for whatever succour I had rendered him.

I proceeded to the banker on whom the cheque was drawn—had the sum duly entered in my own name—opened a small account for my present purposes—and obtained a circular letter of credit available on presentation at the banking firms of all the principal cities and towns of Italy. I was resolved upon this occasion that I would not suffer myself to be again swindled by any such adventurer as the villain Dorchester: but I was now rejoiced rather than otherwise that I had fallen a prey to his duplicity in Paris upwards of a twelve-month back, inasmuch as I had thus gleaned experience and caution for the future. Before returning to the hotel, I made sundry purchases of articles, which were indispensable for that position of a gentleman to which I had once more risen; and then I deliberated what course I should now adopt. I did not choose to remain as a gentleman at an hotel where I had previously been regarded as a menial: neither did I intend to continue much longer in Florence. I knew that the Count of Livorno's good feeling, as well as that of Olivia Sackville—shortly no doubt to become his wife—would prompt them to regard and treat me as an equal: but I appreciated all the inconvenience that would arise from such a demonstration towards one who had recently figured as a gentleman's dependent. I therefore determined, as the result of these reflections, to remove at once to another hotel, and only to remain in Florence until I saw the termination of Marco Uberti's trial, and learnt the issue of the military expedition into the Apennines. Fortunately, on regaining the hotel where I had hitherto been living, I did not happen to encounter the garrulous valet attached to Lord Ringwold; and thus I was saved the necessity of much tedious explanations. But I did meet Bessy, who had learnt everything which had taken place at the ducal palace; and who with heartfelt sincerity congratulated me on my own change of position. She informed me that Captain Raymond, on returning to the hotel, had found a letter waiting for him, which necessitated his immediate departure from Florence on his way back to England—and I learnt that he had already set off. I was glad to hear this, although I thought the letter was a mere pretext to enable him to hurry away after the turn that matters had taken in respect to his love-affair: but I considered his conduct to be fraught with much delicacy and pro-

priety under the circumstances. In less than an hour I was installed in comfortable apartments at an hotel quite at the opposite extremity of Florence.

On the following day the trial of Marco Uberti took place. I was present, for two reasons: in the first place, because I was anxious to see how the forms of justice were conducted in the Tuscan tribunals—and in the second place, because I wished to observe how Marco Uberti deported himself. The court was crowded to excess: multitudes were gathered outside: the excitement was immense. I however obtained a good seat, and stayed throughout the proceedings, which lasted from ten in the morning until six in the evening. Witness after witness appeared against him, each detailing a history of outrage and plunder sustained at the hands of the prisoner and his bandit-horde. As for the culprit himself, his demeanour was that of a ferocious sullenness throughout: but sometimes his countenance relaxed into a grimly fierce smile at any particular salient point of the testimony adduced against him. He knew that the talisman of his safety was gone—he knew that his doom was sealed; and as he had lived recklessly, so had he evidently made up his mind to die with a brutal indifference as to his fate. At length a little before six o'clock in the evening, sentence of death was pronounced upon him; and when the presiding judge had finished a brief but impressive address, in which his doom was conveyed, Marco Uberti looked round him with an air of fierce defiance. He was conducted back to the gaol amidst the execrations of the assembled populace.

Three or four days afterwards some of the troops who had been despatched into the Apennines, returned with three prisoners—all the remainder of the banditti having contrived to escape: indeed these three prisoners were not captured at the stronghold, but were caught lurking amidst the fastnesses of the mountains: One of them was Philippo. As for Mr. Dorchester, his cave had been found deserted; and doubtless the villain had fled thence on the first receipt of the intelligence of Marco Uberti's capture. The tower and the adjacent huts had been razed to the ground by the Tuscan troops—so that the dispersed gang might not after a time reconstitute its formidable headquarters there.

Another trial now took place: but I did not attend it—I had sufficient of the former one. The result was the same as in Marco Uberti's case: namely, the condemnation of the accused to death. It soon became known that the execution of the four culprits was to take place in the great square on the fifth day after the second trial,—an appeal which the prisoners had made to some superior court having been rejected by the judges there after a deliberation of only a very few minutes. I at first hesitated whether I should become a spectator of the horrible scene: but I at length determined that I could witness it. It was not that I experienced what may be termed a mere morbid curiosity—much less was I desirous to gloat over the supreme fate of these wretches, even though they had twice meditated my own death: but the same feeling which had led me to attend at Marco Uberti's trial, decided me in being present at the execution of himself and his three followers. On

the morning fixed for the dreadful ceremony, a vast crowd was assembled in the great square; and the numbers of congregated spectators flooded likewise all the diverging streets up to the very remotest point whence a view of the scaffold could be obtained. All the windows and balconies of the dwellings which commanded the same prospect, were thronged with beholders, male and female: but I must candidly confess that there were none of those disgraceful scenes of drunkenness, quarrelling, and practical joking which, according to the newspapers, invariably characterize the ceremony of public executions in my own native country. The assembled multitude was the most orderly and the best-behaved I had ever seen: it appeared as if the gathered populace felt all the force of the moral example thus presented to their view. But I would not have it from this observation inferred that I am an advocate for death punishments:—quite the reverse. It is my solemn belief that man impiously usurps the authority of the Almighty when he assumes a control over the life of a fellow-creature. Society has no doubt a right to protect itself against evil-doers and those who would disturb its equilibrium or outrage its laws: but its means of repression as well as of punishment should not extend beyond incarcerating the offender in heinous cases for the rest of his life, and thus depriving him of the power of offending again. I believe also that no degree of punishment on the one hand for extreme crime, should exceed the power of man on the other hand to recompense the highest degree of virtue. From this premise I infer that as society cannot extend the life of any individual as a reward for the good he may do, neither ought society to abridge the life of an individual as a chastisement for the evil that he may perform. Besides, although individuals may be vindictive, yet society as a whole cannot possibly be imbued with a spirit of vengeance: it does not punish, therefore, to avenge itself—but to protect itself for the future; and this punishment should have a twofold object:—first, to prevent the offender from repeating his offence—and secondly, by the force of example, to deter others from outraging its laws. Incarceration for life would answer both these ends much better than capital punishment. And then, too, society ought to keep in mind the necessity of reforming the offender, and enabling him by penitence to win heaven's pardon for that soul which he has to be saved. If society slay the offender at a blow, both these objects are lost; and society has no right to destroy an individual mortally upon earth and eternally in the other world.

The reader will pardon this digression, inasmuch as I feel strongly upon the subject which has betrayed me into it,—and likewise because I do not think that I can be taxed with a very frequent digression in the course of my autobiography. I will now pursue the thread of my narrative. The great square and the diverging streets were, as I have already stated, thronged with an orderly and well-conducted multitude. I managed to work my way to the front of one of the ranges of buildings overlooking the square; and there, for some small fee, I obtained admission into an upper-room of a coffee-house. From the window there I had a full view of the entire scene: and what a sea of human heads it was that stretched out before me!

In the very centre of the square stood a high platform, against which a flight of steps was erected; and on this platform there were four chairs. While I was looking from the window a few minutes after having placed myself there, I perceived a sensation amongst the crowd at a point where the nearest street joined the square; and then my ears caught the sounds of a low solemn chaunt, commingled with the rumbling of wheels and the heavy tramp of horses proceeding at a walking pace. The other spectators in that room uttered ejaculations from which I by this time knew sufficient of Italian to comprehend that the fatal procession was advancing.

In a few minutes it entered upon the great square,—two lines of troops which conveyed it, making the people fall back on either side, so that its progress might not be impeded. It soon came within the scope of my view; and now I beheld Marco Uberti, Philippo, and the two other bandit-prisoners seated in a large rumbling cart with two high wheels, and in which they were jolted over the stones, though the pair of horses which drew the vehicle were proceeding at a very slow pace. The four prisoners were heavily ironed; and they were attended by as many priests, whose lugubriously solemn chaunt it was that had met my ears. For a few minutes the vehicle was so near the front of the coffee-house, that I had no difficulty in distinguishing the countenances of the prisoners. That of Marco Uberti wore the same air of gloomy ferocious sullenness which had invested it when the Count of Livorno and myself brought him as a captive into Florence: but ever and anon his eyes glared savagely around upon the multitude, and then settled for a moment with mocking scorn upon his own attendant priest ere they relapsed again into moody listlessness. It was different with Philippo: he was greatly altered, and appeared terrified as well as profoundly dejected. The other two brigands seemed to study as much as possible the air of their chief; and as they had faithfully obeyed him in life, so now they seemed determined to imitate him at the point of death.

The equipage passed slowly through the crowd towards the platform in the centre of the square,—the priests continuing their solemn chaunt—though every now and then one of them in his turn bent down to whisper a few words, no doubt of earnest exhortation, to the bandit unto whom he specially ministered in his ghostly capacity: and I must not forget to mention that throughout the scene a respectful silence, religious and awe-felt, prevailed on the part of the multitude. There were no yells nor execrations—no insulting words thrown at the captives—no looks of gloating triumph bent upon them: it appeared as if the populace thought they were sufficiently punished by the decrees of doom which the law had pronounced against them.

The platform in the centre of the square was reached; and there the heavy cart halted,—the soldiers forming a circle about the fatal spot. The four captives were conducted up to the platform by the police-agents who specially had them in custody, and who had hitherto walked by the side of the vehicle. The doomed wretches were compelled to seat themselves in the chairs which stood upon the platform, and which, as I subsequently

learnt, were tightly screwed down to the planks. In front of each prisoner stood the attendant priest,—each stretching out a small crucifix towards the lips invited to kiss the sacred catholic emblem. The police-officials quickly and deftly bound the criminals to their chairs in such a way that they were held almost completely motionless therein: for the cords passed round their forms and were fastened to the backs of those seats.

Then all of a sudden—as if in a moment evoked, by some rapidly uttered incantation, from the very bowels of the earth beneath—*another* figure appeared upon that platform. The effect of this sudden apparition was appallingly startling: but I subsequently learnt that the man had been hitherto concealed beneath the platform itself, the sides of which were all boarded round, thus rendering it a great wooden box. That man had a mask upon his countenance—and he wielded an enormous sword. There was no necessity to inquire who he was: his sinister appearance proclaimed the terrible fact—he was the public executioner.

The remainder of the fearful ceremony followed quick upon that man's appearance through the little trap-door in the centre of the platform. The priests stood back—but one and all raised their crucifixes high up with an air of solemn adjuration; while the sudden rolling of the military drums drowned from those who were at a distance whatsoever words these holy men uttered. Then there was a sudden glancing effect as if a gleam of lightning had flashed over the platform: it was the rapid sweep of the headsman's sword—and Marco Uberti's head rolled upon the scaffold. Another sweep of that terrible glancing weapon—another—and another; and they were naught but headless trunks which sate in those chairs.

A profound sensation of horror was evinced by the crowd—while I experienced so sickening a sensation that I felt as if I were about to faint. With an incredible rapidity the police-officials cut or loosened the cords—I could not precisely see which; for there was a dimness over my vision; and the remains of the four prisoners were tossed down the little trap-door,—to be placed, as I afterwards learnt, in the coffins that were in readiness beneath the platform to receive them. I betook myself away from the scene as quickly as I could, and hurried back to the hotel where I was staying,—angry with myself that I had become a spectator of the hideous ceremony at all.

## CHAPTER CII.

### DEPARTURE FROM FLORENCE.

ON the following day I despatched a note to the Count of Livorno, to the effect that as I intended to leave Florence I wished for an opportunity to pay my parting respects to his lordship; and I failed not in the same letter to express my grateful thanks for the sum of money which he had so liberally placed at my disposal. The messenger brought back a reply written in the kindest terms, and appointing the hour of noon for the Count to receive me at the palace. Thither I repaired—and was conducted to the suite of apartments which

his lordship occupied beneath the roof of the ducal dwelling. He gave me the warmest reception—but gently reproached me for having removed to another hotel without having made him acquainted with my new place of abode, and also for not having been to visit him during the fortnight which had by this time elapsed since the day of explanations at the palace.

"I can assure your lordship," I answered, "it was from no other motives than the most delicate ones: I was fearful of intruding—I knew likewise that your time must be very much occupied—"

"Never too much occupied," interrupted the Count, "to receive a valued and esteemed friend such as you are. But wherefore do you purpose to leave Florence. The bridal is to be celebrated shortly; and both Olivia and myself are determined that you shall be present. No excuses, my dear friend! I can perfectly understand the delicacy of your feelings: but in the first place, my dear Joseph, I have no pride overruling what is due in friendship—and in the second place it is not because you have been in a menial position for which by education and manners you were never intended, that you should bashfully keep aloof from the sphere in which you may now move, and which is properly your own. Rest assured too that Miss Sackville thinks precisely as I do upon this point."

"I know that your lordship is all generosity," I exclaimed, "and Miss Sackville likewise: but there are certain prejudices in other quarters—and against these I will not offend. It would be impossible for Lord and Lady Ringwold to welcome with sincere cordiality as an equal one whom they had seen in a menial capacity. You perceive therefore, my lord, that I should be exposing myself to a slight which I am sure that you would not have me encounter. Indeed my mind is made up—and I beseech you not to endeavour to divert me from my purpose. I sincerely wish you both all possible happiness: but I have come to bid your lordship farewell—for I leave Florence this afternoon."

The Count of Livorno was evidently saddened by this resolve on my part: he endeavoured to dissuade me from it—but I continued firm—and he at length agreed to suffer me to have my own way.

"Before you leave me, however," said the Count, "I have two pleasing duties to perform. The first is to present you with a slight token of the Grand Duke's gratitude for the share which you had in restoring to his Royal Highness the State documents, and also in capturing Marco Uberti."

Thus speaking, the Count of Livorno handed me a small casket in which there was a most beautiful watch set round with diamonds, and two rings of corresponding splendour and value. The gems were all of the first water; and the cost of the gift could not have been less than several hundred pounds. I expressed my warmest gratitude for this generous mark of the ducal approbation: but the Count of Livorno hastened to observe, "And now for the second duty which I have to perform. Follow me."

I obeyed; and he conducted me along a superb corridor, into a magnificently furnished apartment,—where a personage plainly dressed, and who appeared to be an invalid, was seated. He was



some thirteen or fourteen years older than the Count of Livorno—and therefore about forty. His countenance was pale, almost to haggardness: its look was melancholy and pensive, but indicative of a rare intelligence. He was by no means handsome—his form too was somewhat ungainly; yet there was naught coarse nor vulgar in his appearance—far from it. He was however a very different kind of being, so far as his exterior went, from the Count of Livorno: yet it was none other than the Marquis of Cassano to whom I was thus presented,—his younger brother informing me in a few hurried words that he had only arrived in Florence the preceding evening, but that everything was now forgiven between the ex-Minister and the Grand Duke.

The Marquis of Cassano gave me his hand; and addressing me in French, warmly proclaimed his acknowledgments for the share I had borne in those proceedings which had resulted in his libera-

tion from an Austrian castle, and his restoration to his native land. His voice was mild and pleasing: the interview lasted about half-an-hour; and when the Count of Livorno proposed to reconduct me from the apartment, the Marquis again pressed my hand cordially, assuring me of his everlasting friendship.

“And now,” said the Count, when we were once more alone together in his own room, “is there anything I can do for you? Whither do you purpose to travel?”

“It is my intention to visit Rome,” I answered; “and thence I shall proceed to Naples.”

“You will at least permit me,” said the Count, “to give you letters of introduction which may be serviceable to you; and at all events, my dear friend, when you reach those cities where none of your antecedents will be known, you must assume that position to which I feel convinced you were born.”

He sat down to his desk—penned a couple of letters—and placed them in my hand.

"I hope, my dear Wilmot," he at the same time said, "that when you have completed your tour in the centre and south of Italy, you will revisit Florence, so that I may be enabled to show you those attentions and hospitalities which you are at present determined I shall not have an opportunity of displaying."

I promised to avail myself of his lordship's kindness; and fervently he wrung my hand when the parting moment came. As I was retracing my way to the hotel, I encountered Bessy,—who had come out to make some purchase for her young mistress. She was delighted to see me, although she thought it necessary to assume a demeanour of respectfulness instead of that species of friendly familiarity which had been wont to subsist between us at the time when our positions were on an equality. I however soon placed her at her ease, by assuring her that as I had no false pride, I was pained rather than flattered by any alteration of bearing which might be shown towards me by those with whom I had been wont to associate in a humbler sphere;—and then I informed her that I was about to quit Florence in the course of an hour.

"But you will come and bid farewell to Miss Sackville?" exclaimed Bessy: "for she would never forgive you if you were to hurry off without doing so. I have frequently assured you that she possesses a most grateful heart—and no one is more rejoiced than she at this well-deserved prosperity which has overtaken you."

"But Lord and Lady Ringwold," I said,—“are they at the hotel at this moment? or do they happen to be out?”

"Truth compels me to admit that they are at home in their own apartments," responded Bessy, at once comprehending the motive of my questions. "But what matters that? I can easily call Miss Sackville out on some pretence?"

"No," I interrupted her: "I would rather not intrude where I might be unwelcome. You know that I do not allude to Miss Sackville: but her father and mother have their aristocratic prejudices—those prejudices which are as hereditary with our English patricians as their titles themselves; and I do not choose to throw myself in the way of, being treated with a slighting coldness. Will you inform Miss Sackville that you have met me, and that you heard me express the sincerest wishes for her happiness? That these wishes will be fulfilled, I have not the remotest doubt: for he who is to become her husband, is one of the noblest-minded of men. There is everything magnanimous in his disposition—everything estimable in his character. I have seen him under many varied and trying circumstances; and I can therefore speak thus confidently."

I shook Bessy by the hand; and we parted. On returning to my hotel, I at once ordered a post-chaise: and in less than an hour was beyond the precincts of Florence, on the road towards Rome. Reader, there was indescribable joy in my heart! Circumstances had replaced me in that position which Sir Matthew Heseltine had intended me to occupy: and unfeignedly did I rejoice at having abstained from enumerating my misfortunes to the old Baronet at the time when I was so cruelly

plundered by the villain Dorchester in Paris. I felt assured that when the period of probation should have passed, and all my adventures were recited to Sir Matthew Heseltine, he would see more to praise than to blame in the whole tenour of my conduct; and I flattered myself that I should not vainly aspire to the crowning reward.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when I reached the city of Arezzo—distant about forty miles from Florence; and there I passed the night. My journey was resumed on the following day; and I determined to perform eighty miles, which would bring me to the town of Magliano, whence an easy journey on the ensuing day would see my destination reached. As I have observed on a former occasion, it is not my object to devote unnecessary space to descriptions of scenery, habits, manners, or customs: I shall therefore pursue the thread of my narrative without any digression of this kind. Travelling post in Italy is but a sorry affair; and if eight miles an hour be accomplished it is considered excellent work. Thus, on setting out for this second day's journey (from Arezzo to Magliano) I had to make up my mind to ten hours' confinement inside a vehicle which did not possess the most elastic springs in the world, and therefore was not one well calculated to ensure the comfort of its occupant.

The dusk had closed in some time, and I was still at a considerable distance from Magliano—so that I was almost inclined to abbreviate this day's journey at the most convenient place and rest there until the morrow. While deliberating upon this course, I thrust my head forth from the window in order to ascertain if there were any lights visible ahead: for by the distance we had come since the last posting-house where the horses were changed, I thought the next could not be very far. And I *did* see lights glimmering feebly like far-off stars. In a few minutes I looked forth again: the lights were now plainer; but as the chaise drew nearer towards them, I was compelled to come to the conclusion that so far from belonging to the outskirts of a town, they were shining from the windows of some isolated dwelling. Nearer still the equipage approached, and now I could see sufficient to comprehend that it was a habitation of some size, and appeared to have a high wall enclosing spacious grounds: but the gloom of the evening was altogether too deep to enable me to observe the architectural features of the building. I however concluded that it was the mansion of some wealthy individual.

That part of the edifice which was nearest to the road was scarcely a hundred yards off; and as the chaise was passing along, I kept my eyes fixed in a sort of listless curiosity upon the place. All of a sudden a figure emerged from amidst the gloom: it was running rapidly—and by the direction whence it came, appeared to have issued from that building which the equipage was passing at the time. Almost at the same moment that I thus caught sight of the figure, it cried out, in a plaintively anguished female tone, to the postilion to stop. He at once reined in his horses at that entreaty, which was uttered in the Italian language; and then the female, coming up to the window where I was looking forth, addressed a few words to me in that same earnestly beseeching voice: but as she still spoke in Italian and with the rapidity



of a strong excitement, I could not understand her. This much I intimated in French—hoping that she might possibly comprehend the tongue I thus used. Nor was I disappointed.

“Oh, sir, whoever you may be,” she immediately said, with the agitated accents of an almost wild entreaty, “I beseech you to have compassion upon me and take me hence!”

I was confounded by the request, and knew not how to answer it. It was so dark, and the female's countenance was so shrouded by a veil which she had thrown *across* rather than altogether *over* her head, that I could not catch the faintest glimpse of her features: yet by her voice I judged her to be quite young. But to take up an unknown female in that strange manner—a female who might be fleeing from her friends, escaping from a lunatic asylum, or possibly from the grasp of justice itself—struck me as being no light matter: on the contrary, it seemed a somewhat serious one.

“In the name of heaven, I conjure you not to refuse me!” she hastened to say, with a wilder anguish of entreaty than before. “Oh, if you have a sister or any one who is very dear to you, and could wish that such a *one* might receive succour if escaping from relentless persecutors——”

“What do you require me to do? who are you? whence have you escaped? who are your persecutors?”—such was the torrent of questions that gushed forth from my lips in the excited bewilderment into which this strange incident threw me.

“Oh, save me! save me!” murmured the stranger: and she clung to the ledge of the chaise-door as if about to faint.

I could hesitate no longer; and I quickly bade her take encouragement, for that I would give her a seat in the vehicle. She burst into tears—evidently tears of wild delight as she tremulously gave utterance to a few words of enthusiastic thanks; and in another moment she was seated by my side in the chaise. I felt that she was shivering with the cold, or else with the agitation of her feelings; and I put up the windows.

“Whither are you going?” she asked me in a quick excited manner.

“My destination for this evening,” I replied, “was originally Magliano: but I have just been thinking that I should halt at the next town or village——”

“No, no!” she interjected with an almost frenzied vehemence: “you must press on to Magliano——Oh, I beseech and implore that you will do so!”

“You are afraid of being pursued and captured?” I said inquiringly.

“Yes, yes!” was the quick feverish rejoinder. “For heaven's sake promise that you will at least press on to Magliano—even if you cannot go farther still!”

“My ultimate destination is Rome,” I observed.

She uttered a cry of joy, exclaiming, “And I also must proceed to Rome! Oh, you will take me thither—you will take me thither with you—promise me that you will!”

Now that I was becoming composed and collected again, I did not half like the present adventure. Still however there appeared to be a certain artlessness and ingenuousness in the way in which

my companion put these strange entreaties, which disarmed me of that part of my suspicions which in the first instance had suggested the possibility that I should be aiding an offender to escape from the grasp of justice.

“If you will tell me,” I said, “whence you have escaped and under what circumstances, I shall be enabled to judge to what extent I may assist you.”

“I have escaped from bitter, bitter persecutors!” she replied in impassioned accents, which seemed to implore my confidence; “and I have now no friend but you—you whom God himself has sent to succour me! Oh, pray do not question me! and pray do not abandon me!”

There was a gushing pathos in the silver tones of her voice which again moved me deeply; and I thought to myself that at all events I must suffer her to get somewhat composed before I pressed her for explanations—and that the only way to enable her to tranquillise herself was to give an affirmative answer as far as I dared to her entreaties. During the few moments that I was thus reflecting, I heard her literally gasping in the agony of suspense: but as for seeing her, that was out of the question,—the interior of the vehicle being involved in total obscurity.

“Fear nothing,” I said. “If you indeed require the succour of a friend——”

“I do!—heaven knows that I do!” she exclaimed, in a tone of such earnest sincerity that I felt more assured than ever she was really the victim of some persecution and not of any fault on her own part.

“It shall be as you wish,” I answered. “I will at least take you to Magliano—perhaps——”

I was about to pledge myself to continue the journey on to Rome without stopping: but several considerations flashing to my mind in an instant, made me leave the rest of the sentence unsaid. The explanations I expected to receive when she became more composed, might be unsatisfactory: and then too, I was struck with the indiscretion bordering perhaps on indelicacy, of travelling at night-time with a female who was evidently young, and who might possibly be good-looking, but who at all events was a total stranger to me. She was not however to be put off by my half-uttered sentences: the sense of recent persecution, or whatever might be the motive of her flight—together with the cruel apprehension of being recaptured—and perhaps other feelings which I could not possibly fathom—rendered her keenly and feverishly alive to every syllable that fell from my lips. She seemed indeed as if her position would be altogether desperate unless I took the fullest amount of compassion upon her and yielded to whatsoever intercessions she might put to me.

“Perhaps? perhaps?” she eagerly exclaimed, thus echoing the word with which I had broken off.

“Perhaps,” I answered, modifying the intention I previously meant to express—“perhaps I will take you to Rome to-morrow, when you have convinced me that by succouring yourself I shall be doing no wrong towards others who may have a claim upon your duty and your obedience.”

“No one has claims upon either *there*—at that place from whence I have fled!” was my companion's quick response. “Oh I see that you mis-

trust me!" she cried: and I could feel by the movement of her form that she was wringing her hands in despair. "Good heavens! to think that one so young as I should have seen so much misery!—that one who never by thought or deed injured a fellow-creature, should have been so cruelly persecuted! And yet," she exclaimed, with another rapid transition from the bitter feelings of despair to an exultant joy, "you have promised to take me to Magliano—and I may yet be safe! Oh, yes—I will, I will ensure my safety—for I will walk throughout the entire night—"

"No—you shall not do that!" I answered, deeply affected: for I thought at the moment that if Annabel, for instance, had ever found the necessity of escaping from persecution at the hands of such a wretch as Lanover, how magnanimous would it have been in any one to succour her, and how cruel to insist upon formal and methodical explanations before consenting to render such assistance! "You shall not go forth as a wanderer—I will place confidence in you—I will trust to your good feeling not to deceive me, nor wilfully to lead me into embarrassment or peril by affording you all the assistance your require."

My companion could only give utterance to broken words in testimony of her gratitude, which was evidently most heartfelt: then she threw herself back in the corner of the chaise, and gave free vent to her emotions. I could hear that she was weeping: but being utterly unacquainted with the nature of her griefs, as well as with the reason why she should experience joy at her escape, I was unable to offer consolation, or do more than I had already done to soothe the agitation of her mind.

In a few minutes the equipage entered a small town, and drew up at the post-house. I was about to descend in order to put a hurried question to the postilion—to ascertain, if I could, what mansion or place it was in the neighbourhood of which I had fallen in with my unknown companion, and whence I conjectured that she had escaped. But at the first movement that I made to put down the window, she caught me by the arm, exclaiming, "For heaven's sake leave me not!—leave me not, I beseech you!"

There was such a wild terror mingled with such a deep earnest entreaty in her accents, that it would have been cruel to refuse acquiescence with her eager prayer; and moreover she was evidently reposing in me that supreme confidence which I could not feel it in my heart to shock with any rude rebuff. Her mind too was in such a state that I feared lest the least degree of an increased excitement should unhinge it altogether. It was impossible to avoid compassionating her deeply; and I therefore yielded to her entreaty by remaining in the vehicle. The fresh relay was harnessed—a new postilion came to the window to receive my instructions—I simply spoke the word "Magliano"—he mounted his horse—and on we went.

My companion continued silent for a long time; and I began to think it strange that she did not strive to compose her feelings sufficiently to vouchsafe some few words of explanation. I was casting about in my mind how to renew the discourse without appearing to be ungenerously availing myself of my position towards her for the purpose of extorting that which she did not seem inclined

voluntarily to give—when she abruptly broke the silence by exclaiming, "How admirable is your conduct! how nobly are you behaving! Tell me what is your name, and to what country you belong—that I may know how to speak of you in my prayers, and that I may evermore think well of a nation whereof you are so estimable a specimen."

I answered her questions; and gently added, "May I not expect the same degree of confidence from you?"

"I cannot reply," she responded in a low voice: and I felt that a shudder swept through her form as she sat by my side. "You think all this strange—you *must* think so—but there are reasons—Oh! for heaven's sake do not for an instant imagine that I have disgraced my name and therefore am ashamed to breathe it! It is as unsullied as when I inherited it on the day of my birth!"

These last words were spoken proudly, and carried with them the conviction of their own sincerity: or at least such was the impression they made upon my mind.

"If there were a living being," she almost immediately resumed, "to whose ear I could at this moment reveal all the circumstances which enmesh me, you are that person: for unto you do I owe a debt of gratitude that I can never pay. But for the present there is a seal upon my lips: it rests heavily and almost awfully there—it cannot be lifted until these circumstances to which I have alluded shall change—if they ever do!"

These few last words, uttered after a brief pause, were spoken with a solemn mournfulness; and then there was another interval of silence.

"You are too generous," presently resumed my companion, "to press me for explanations which I cannot give; and I therefore throw myself entirely upon your magnanimity. May the Holy Virgin grant that the day shall come when my lips will be unsealed—Oh, what happiness if my prayer should be vouchsafed! You said ere now that you were going to Rome—and I judge from a few words which you let drop, that you are travelling for your pleasure, and that therefore you are fully master of your time? Would you—Oh! would you take me straight on to Rome, instead of stopping for the night at Magliano, or any other intermediate place?"

"And when you get to Rome," I inquired, "whither shall you go? Have you a home to receive you?"

"Ask me no questions—at least not now!" abruptly exclaimed my companion in a paroxysm of feverish excitement. "Remember that those actions are most generous which are done in a blind confidence: and this much generosity I implore at your hands. Do I seek in vain? No, no—I feel that my prayer is granted! Myriads, myriads of thanks!"

And then I felt my hand suddenly seized, and pressed between two small ones: but only for an instant was it retained in that clasp: there was the bashfullest delicacy even in the midst of that enthusiastic expression of the stranger's warmest gratitude. What could I do? what could I say? Refuse to take her at once on to Rome? No—it was impossible. And then, too, methought that the sooner I parted from my companion, and thus extricated myself from a position more

or less equivocal, the better. It was preferable to sit in a carriage with her throughout the rest of the night, than to halt at an hotel with a female companion of whom I could give no account, and whom I did not even know how to address by name. My situation was an awkward one; and as the journey was now continued in silence, I could not help thinking that no sooner was I fairly out of one adventure than I was being dragged into the midst of another.

I now fancied that my unknown companion was asleep, as I judged from her slow and regular breathing. Perhaps she was exhausted mentally, if not bodily; and her highly wrought feelings, being relieved by a sense of safety, had experienced a reaction which thus deepened into slumber? Or perhaps she was only feigning to be asleep, in order to avoid further discourse? I knew not which it might be: but still I was inclined to the belief that she really slept—for there was an undefinable expression of artless sincerity flowing through her manner and her language, as well as in the silver tones of her voice, which seemed to forbid the idea that she would dissemble in any way.

Hours passed on in silence: the town of Magliano had been traversed and left far behind; the feeble light of the street-lamps there glimmering through the windows of the chaise, had merely shown me a form enveloped in some dark cloak or scarf, and with a veil over the countenance,—so that I was still without the ability to form the slightest conjecture as to the personal appearance of my companion. During these hours which thus elapsed, and which carried us deep into the night, she remained motionless,—continuing to breathe regularly as if she slept profoundly: but I myself continued broad awake the whole time, for the adventure was one which perplexed me to a degree that would not suffer me to obtain an instant's repose. At several of the posting-houses there was a delay in obtaining horses at those late hours; but while the chaise had to halt, my companion still remained motionless as if bound fast in the arms of slumber; and I was enabled to descend on two or three occasions to stretch my legs without being held back by her. The suspicion stole into my mind that when she had so passionately besought me to remain with her the first time the equipage stopped after she had become my companion, it was really to prevent me from putting any questions to the postilion in respect to that building which we had passed, and in the immediate vicinity of which I had first encountered her.

At length, as it got very late, I bethought me that she might need refreshments; and I reproached myself with neglect in not having questioned her on the subject before. But the truth is that as I myself was too much excited and agitated by the whole adventure to experience any appetite, it had failed to occur to me that it might be otherwise with my companion. Therefore at one of the villages where we halted to change horses, I addressed her in a gentle voice,—asking if she required refreshment. She started slightly, as if actually awakened from sleep; and replied in the negative,—at the same time expressing her thanks for my consideration. Our journey was pursued; and she asked me how far I thought we were from Rome?—and I replied that a couple of

hours more would according to my estimation bring us thither. She said not another word, but shifted her position somewhat, as if cramped by sitting so long a time in the vehicle—or as if composing herself to sleep again. I shifted my own quarters to the opposite seat, and asked her if she would like to have some fresh air, as we had been travelling all along with the windows up. She responded in the affirmative; and I lowered one of the windows. In a few minutes she began to breathe in a way which appeared to announce a relapse into slumber: and as it was somewhat troubled and uneasy, and as low sobs and moans from time to time escaped her lips, I became convinced that she did really sleep now: while for the same reason I was inclined to believe that she had only been dissembling before. Slumber gradually stole over me likewise; and as after a while I slowly opened my eyes again, the dawn of morning was glimmering into the vehicle.

For the first few moments I thought that all which had happened was a dream: but slowly I became aware that I was not alone inside that chaise. My looks gradually settled upon the sleeping form which was half-reclining upon the seat opposite to me. Either the gentle breeze or else some movement of her own had disturbed the veil which covered her countenance when the light of the street-lamps beamed into the chaise at Magliano; and the folds of the dark mantle that she wore, no longer completely enwrapped her figure. Still the glimmer of the dawn was too dim, vague, and uncertain to reveal her appearance to me all in an instant; and it came upon my vision by degrees and in detail. Tresses of the darkest shade, and with the richest natural gloss upon them, were floating in a dishevelled state beneath the veil which lay across her head; dark but delicately-pencilled brows over-arched the eyes that were closed in slumber; and the long jetty fringes rested upon the pale cheeks. The hue of her lips was of brightest scarlet—the chin was softly rounded—the countenance was a perfect classic oval: and then, as I caught the profile, it showed me its faultless outline—the features being delicately chiselled—the forehead high—the nose slightly Grecian. Her complexion was evidently pale naturally—but now paler still from recent grief and excitement: the skin was fine-grained and transparent, with that alabaster smoothness which belongs to such complexions when their pallor has a pure animation, and is not the sickly whiteness which characterises ill-health. From her countenance my eyes slowly wandered over her shape; and this was of an exquisite sylph-like symmetry. She was scarcely above the middle height of woman, even if she at all exceeded it; and her attitude—one of innocent unconscious abandonment—showed all the flowing outlines of her statue-like modelled shape. It was slender, but not to leanness. It had the becoming contours of a female of eighteen or nineteen—for such appeared to be the age of this beautiful unknown. Her apparel was mean and poor; and by the very way in which it fitted, was evidently never intended to be worn by her. Yet such was the perfection of her symmetry that the ungainliness of her dress marred it not. There is a beauty which nothing can disfigure; and such was the loveliness of her whom an extraordinary acci-

dent had thus rendered my companion and placed under my guardianship. There was a gentility about her—a certain well-bred air—the scarcely definable elegance and grace which belong to women who have been tenderly nurtured, that displayed themselves notwithstanding she slept and that therefore I could judge naught of what her manners and demeanour were. At all events I was impressed with the conviction that the poverty of her garb was a libel upon the social position which she ought properly to occupy.

She continued to sleep for upwards of a quarter of an hour after thus I began to contemplate her: and in the meantime the light of the morning became stronger. At length she slowly opened her large dark eyes, full of a soft lustrous sweetness and a semi-mourful pensiveness, like those of the gazelle: and now for the first time our looks encountered each other, though we had been so many hours in that vehicle together.

## CHAPTER CIII.

### ROME.

A MODEST blush overspread the countenance of the beautiful stranger, as she started up from her half-reclining posture to a sitting one; and her looks were immediately cast down. There was an unmistakable air of virgin innocence and maiden modesty about her; and I felt angry with myself for having, at the outset of our encounter, fancied for a single minute that she could have been in any way tainted with criminality. Yet this regret was of course ridiculous and most uncalled-for, inasmuch as when in total darkness I could form no conception how sweetly ingenuous my companion's aspect would prove to be.

Presently, as the blush died away from her cheeks, she lifted her eyes timidly and bashfully towards my countenance: but her glance only lingered there for a moment, which seemed sufficient to convince her that my looks did not falsify whatsoever assurances my words had given her some few hours back. I spoke gently to her—inquired if she were refreshed by her slumber—and on looking forth from the window, informed her that we were now within sight of the Eternal City. Yes: for there, in the distance, rose the great cupola—the mighty dome of St. Peter's, like a dark cloud hanging in the air.

"And I shall behold Rome once again!" said my companion in a voice that was scarcely audible amidst the emotions which evidently agitated her: while for an instant her small, white, beautifully-formed hands were clasped together.

"May I ask," I said, "to which particular quarter of Rome you desire to be taken? or whether I can in any way serve you on our arrival there?"

She looked at me with a sort of bewilderment in her gaze: distress and blank uncertainty were blended in her expression: her aspect struck me as that of one who painfully felt herself to be homeless, friendless, penniless—and yet to have some object more or less defined, but still difficult, in her view. It went to my very heart to behold such a look on the countenance of one so young

and so beautiful, and who evidently had not always been in a position teaching her the bitter experiences of the world's woes and cares.

"I can assure you," I went on to say, "that you may rely on my friendship; and you must not hesitate to mention how I can serve you."

"You," she observed, bending upon me for a moment a look of unspeakable gratitude, "are about to visit Rome for the first time?—and you will consequently be a stranger there?"

"Yes," I responded: "but that will not prevent me from doing whatsoever I can to serve you; for I have the command of ample pecuniary means—pray pardon the observation—and these are at your disposal."

"You are an Englishman—and therefore a Protestant," she murmuringly said, with another swiftly darted look of deepest gratitude; "and I who have been taught to regard Protestants—But no matter! I could say much——"

And here she stopped short, overcome by her feelings. For a few minutes she held her kerchief to her eyes; and when she withdrew it, I saw that she had been weeping.

"Yes," she said, "you can render me a service. Why should I not tell you the truth so far as to confess that the door of no home will be thrown open to receive me in that city which we are about to enter—that I have no friend who will give me an asylum? Or why should I be ashamed to add that I fled penniless from the midst of my persecutors? Ah!" she suddenly ejaculated, "there is one thing I must beseech of you—one boon that you must grant me in addition to the immensity of the obligation under which you have placed me! It is that you will not breathe in the ear of a living soul the adventure of the past night. No—not even to your dearest friend—not in the most confidential discourse——"

"Rest assured," I said, "that the adventure is not one of which I should wilfully make a parade: for without ungenerously seeking to penetrate the circumstances that surround you, it is evident on the face of them that they are of too delicate a nature to become the subject of idle gossip. And now tell me what can I really do for you? Shall I find you apartments in some respectable hotel, where you may be under matronly care——"

"No, no!" she exclaimed in an agitated and almost frightened manner: "let me seek the humblest lodging—some obscure place where I can bury myself for a time——"

"You yourself are no stranger in Rome," I observed: "I gathered this much from a remark you made just now. Tell me where I can seek for such lodgings as you require?"

She reflected for upwards of a minute: there seemed the anguish of bewilderment in her thoughts; and again I deeply, deeply compassionated her. At length, as a sudden idea appeared to strike her—and it seemed one full of joyous hope—she exclaimed, "There is perhaps a being who will receive me—a kind old woman—the nurse of my infancy—and if she be still alive, I shall find a home with her."

She mentioned the place where she wished the vehicle to stop; and in a few minutes more we were entering the Eternal City. She drew the folds of her veil thickly over her countenance, evidently to conceal it as much as possible; and

she enveloped her form completely with the capacious mantle. Looking forth from the window, I repeated to the postilion the address which my fair companion had mentioned: he appeared to be ignorant of it: she requested me to name some additional particulars—which I accordingly did; and now he comprehended whither he was to drive.

"It is but a poor neighbourhood," said the young lady; "and he might well be unacquainted with it in the first instance."

For a few minutes silence prevailed; and I was thinking to myself what course my companion would adopt, or what I myself could suggest, if she found that the old nurse was either dead or removed,—when she said, as she glanced forth at the aspect of a narrow and poor-looking street which we were just entering, "We are now about to part: for whether or not she whom I hope to find be still here, yet in this quarter shall I obtain a lodging that will suit me. What can I say to you? how express my gratitude? Words fail me!—but rest assured that until the latest moment of my life your noble generosity—the mingled magnanimity and delicacy of your conduct—will remain in my memory! Yes—Oh! yes—never, never shall I forget all you have done for me!"

Her voice was tremulous with emotions while she thus spoke; and as the vehicle stopped, she proffered me her hand. I took it,—at the same time asking, in terms as delicate as possible, whether she would not permit me to leave my purse in her possession? She at once declined; and descending from the chaise, the door of which the postilion had just opened, she disappeared from my view—but not without flinging upon me another look of fervent gratitude ere she crossed the threshold of the house which she was entering. I now named to the postilion the address of the hotel at which I intended to put up, and to which I was recommended by the proprietor of the hotel where I had last stayed in Florence. On arriving at that establishment, I was accommodated with apartments, though it was nearly filled with guests—chiefly French, English, and Germans. I at once retired to bed, for I was wearied by an unremitted travel since ten o'clock in the forenoon of the preceding day: but I could scarcely close my eyes in slumber—for my adventure with the fair unknown continued to haunt me like a wild fanciful dream.

I rose at about noon—partook of breakfast—and then issued forth to ramble about the city,—determined to postpone until the following day the presentation of the letters of introduction with which the Count of Livorno had furnished me. I experienced strange and solemn sensations while wandering through the streets of the city founded by Romulus so many, many centuries back. I felt that wherever I was walking, had trodden the feet of some of the greatest men whose names belong to any history whether ancient or modern; and that though the same buildings by which I now passed, had not met their view, yet it was nevertheless upon this same soil which their feet had pressed, and the same heaven overhead to which they had looked up. Methought that here, where I was pursuing my way, the Great Camillus, who delivered his native city from Brennus and the barbaric Gauls, might have walked in times far back

—that there Cæsar, the friend of the people, who fell a victim to Brutus and the haughty Roman aristocracy, might also have wandered in thought or proceeded in triumph—that Pompey, the great commander and the representative of the patrician orders, might have spurned the dust from his proud feet while rambling there. Many, many other memories, gathered from my readings of the past, moved in solemn array through my mind: but, as I have before said, it is not my purpose in this book to inflict unnecessary digressions upon the reader.

On the following day, and at a suitable hour, I thought of presenting my letters of introduction. One was to the Count of Tivoli—the other to Signor Avellino. They were both intimate acquaintances of the Count of Livorno—they spoke the English language, and were fond of the English people; and this was one of the main reasons that had induced the Grand Duke of Tuscany's nephew to commend me to their notice. Procuring a hackney-vehicle, I proceeded in the first instance to the mansion of the Count of Tivoli. The building was spacious and of antiquated architecture; but the apartments had been so beautifully modernized that on entering those handsomely furnished rooms the memory ceased to retain the impression of the comparatively rude and sombre exterior. There were numerous domestics in handsome liveries lounging in the entrance hall; and one of them conducted me through several apartments into a well appointed library, where the Count of Tivoli was seated at the table reading a book. He was a man of about fifty—of the middle height, but appearing taller than he really was from the dignified manner in which he held himself when in a standing posture. His countenance was pale, with a somewhat severe expression, yet with an air of pensiveness deepening at times almost into melancholy. His demeanour—though aristocratic, as already hinted—did not impress me with an idea of a cold hauteur, but seemed to be one that could easily unbend; while his manner, though reserved at first, was evidently susceptible of blandness and kindness. I presented him the Count of Livorno's letter: he motioned me to take a seat; and I saw that his countenance lost its expression of severity and reserve as he perused the contents of that epistle.

"A young gentleman who is so well recommended," he said, speaking in very good English, and proffering me his hand at the same time, "cannot receive other than a most cordial welcome from me. You have come to Rome, Mr. Wilmot, to see everything that is worth inspection, and to form an acquaintance with manners and customs in the Eternal City. In all these aims I will assist you. My son—my only son—the Viscount, is absent for the day: but to-morrow he will call upon you at your hotel. He will cheerfully act as your guide in taking you about the city; and in the evening you will dine with us."

I thanked his lordship for his kindness; and he then proposed to conduct me to his picture-gallery, which contained several works by the great masters. Thither we proceeded; and as the Count of Tivoli directed my attention to the principal features of attraction in each picture, he expatiated thereon with an excellent critical taste, and in so mild, off-hand, and well-bred a manner,

that there was not the slightest tinge of pedantry or dogmatism in his remarks. Another gallery contained some exquisite specimens of sculpture; and these also I inspected with the greatest pleasure. The Count then led me to an apartment where refreshments were served up; and as we were proceeding thither, I thought to myself that in one short hour I had learnt more of the sister arts of painting and of sculpture than ever I had dreamt of before. No wonder that Sir Matthew Heselstine had bidden me travel upon the Continent to improve my tastes, to enlarge my experience of the world, and to lead me to a just appreciation of the elegances and refinements of life.

I learnt, while seated with the Count of Tivoli at an elegantly served luncheon (to use the English term for the light repast), that the Countess had long been dead, and that he had only his son the Viscount residing with him. He asked me if I had brought letters of introduction to any other persons in Rome; and replying in the affirmative, I mentioned the name of Signor Avellino. He thought for an instant that his countenance assumed a strange look; but if so, it was so barely perceptible, and passed away so rapidly, that I immediately afterwards concluded I must have been mistaken. He continued to discourse in the same friendly urbane manner as before; and I made him acquainted with all the incidents in connexion with the Count of Livorno's sojourn among the banditti—the capture of Marco Uberti—the Count's love affair with Olivia—and the restoration of his elder brother, the Marquis of Cassano, to the Grand Duke's favour. I was necessarily led to mention the part which I had borne in all these proceedings: but in pursuance of the advice of the Count of Livorno, I abstained from suffering it to appear that I had ever filled a menial situation. The letter of introduction which I had brought, alluded to those adventures, and had desired the Count of Tivoli to request detailed explanations from my lips; and this was how I became led into the narration thereof. The Count of Tivoli listened with the utmost attention; and when I had concluded, he was in the midst of expressing his delight that all had ended so happily—but his remarks were interrupted by the opening of the door and the entrance of a domestic, who presented him a letter on a silver tray. The servant withdrew; and the Count—appearing at once to recognise the handwriting, as well as to be slightly troubled at that recognition—requested me to excuse him while he read it. He broke the seal; and as he began to peruse the letter, that slight trouble which his features had already displayed, immediately increased.

"Forgive me, Mr. Wilmot," he said, suddenly laying the letter down upon the table, and speaking in a voice the agitation of which he could not altogether subdue, though he evidently strove to recall his self-possession,—“forgive me for thus abruptly, and I fear discourteously breaking off an interview which has afforded me much satisfaction.”

"My lord," I said, "I am afraid that I have already intruded too long;"—and I rose to depart.

"No, no, Mr. Wilmot—do not entertain such an idea," said the nobleman, pressing my hand warmly. "You are indeed most truly welcome. I hope to see more of you."

I again thanked the Count for his kindness; and issued forth from his presence, having every reason to be gratified by my reception and thankful to the Count of Livorno for such an introduction,—but wondering what could possibly have disturbed the worthy nobleman in a manner which I conjectured to be more serious than he was willing to betray. Re-entering the hackney-vehicle, I gave the driver the address of Signor Avellino; and in about half-an-hour the coach stopped at the gate of a house of much smaller dimensions but of far more modern exterior than the palace of the Count of Tivoli. There was only one domestic in livery lounging in the hall; and I soon perceived that Signor Avellino was a man of limited means in comparison with the nobleman whom I had just left. I mean the reader to understand by this, that my impression was to the effect that where the Count of Tivoli possessed thousands Avellino could only boast of hundreds. At the same time, the dwelling of the latter wore an air of perfect comfort, and denoted an easy competency on the part of its occupant—while that of the Count of Tivoli indicated opulence.

The domestic led me up the staircase, and then along a corridor, at the extremity of which he threw open a door, announcing my name. I made two or three steps forward—it was an artist's studio which I was thus about to enter—and a tall handsome young man, in an elegant morning-gown, was employed with his brush at the easel. He instantaneously—indeed almost with startling abruptness—came forward with the air of one who was annoyingly disturbed in his avocations. I stepped back, struck with the idea that I had unwittingly been rendered an intruder. Signor Avellino came hastily out of the studio—locked the door—put the key in his pocket—addressed a few words in an angry tone of reproof (though I could not understand what they were) to his domestic—and then, with a courteous bow to me, led the way into a well-furnished sitting-room. I now presented him with my letter of introduction; and the instant he beheld the handwriting, he recognised it—for his countenance lighted up with pleasure; and he ejaculated the name of the Count of Livorno. With a manner of such well-bred courtesy that it contrasted strangely with what I conceived to be almost the rudeness of my first reception, he motioned me to a seat: and then proceeded to read the letter.

"My dear sir," he exclaimed, before he had half finished its contents, "can you possibly pardon what may appear to have been the grossest rudeness on my part? But I have so constantly charged that stupid servant of mine never to introduce any one to my studio—"

"Pray do not think it necessary," I interrupted him, "to offer any excuses;"—for he had grasped me so warmly by the hand, his manner was so frank and sincere, and his look so replete with vexation at the conduct for which he was apologizing, that I was instantaneously propitiated.

Indeed, the welcome which he now gave me, was most kind and warm; and he spoke my native language with almost as perfect a fluency as did his friend the Count of Livorno himself. He was not above four-and-twenty years of age: I have already said that he was tall—I will now add that his form was of a slender but manly and well-knit sym-





metry. His countenance was remarkably handsome: it had a certain classic delicacy of features—his complexion was a pale olive—his hair dark, luxuriant, and flowing in wavy masses down to the collar of his morning-gown. There was a deep pensiveness in the expression of his countenance when the features were at rest: but he was evidently a man of strong feelings—and those features became perfectly animated with the sincerest pleasure as he welcomed me. His voice—somewhat low, and also imbued with a certain indefinable mournfulness—was full of a rich masculine music; and methought that it was the kind of voice best calculated to give all the most pleasing effects to the golden harmony of the language of that sunny clime to which he belonged. Altogether, Signor Avellino was a young man who, when the first momentary impression of our somewhat uncomfortable meeting had passed away, was admirably calculated to interest and please me.

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“Most welcome indeed,” he said, again pressing my hand with warmth after he had glanced a second time at the letter of introduction, “is a friend of the Count of Livorno. You must not think, Mr. Wilmot, that because you found me in a studio, I am an artist by profession; and I beseech you to consider that it is because I am diffident in respect to my amateur achievements, I am angry when that thick-pated domestic of mine introduces any one thither. I practise the art of painting in the same way as the Count of Livorno has pursued that of medicine: namely, for amusement. But enough of explanations, which indeed are only intended to serve as apologies for that seeming rudeness on my part. We will now take luncheon and discourse at our leisure.”

“Thank you,” I answered: “but I have just been partaking of a *dejeuner* with the Count of Livorno.”

I made this remark with all the ingenuousness derived from its perfect truth, and without the slightest ulterior object: I was therefore both astonished and pained when I perceived how dark a shade suddenly came over Avellino's handsome countenance, and then how abruptly he turned as if to hide some powerful emotion. All in an instant I recollected that strange look which I had fancied to have transiently passed over the Count of Tivoli's features when I mentioned the name of Signor Avellino: I now perceived therefore that there was something of an unpleasant nature in connexion with that nobleman and with this gentleman—and! that thenceforth I must be upon my guard how I mentioned the name of either in the presence of the other. Indeed, I now felt especially embarrassed and awkward, inasmuch as Francesco Avellino had turned away towards the window, and there remained looking forth (or at least appearing to do so, though he might be gazing at vacancy for aught that I knew to the contrary) for two or three minutes. It seemed indeed as if he had forgotten my presence altogether; and therefore I conceived that by my unfortunate though innocent mention of the Count de Tivoli's name, I had stirred up some very strong and painful emotions in Francesco Avellino's breast. I could say nothing—I scarcely knew what to apologize for; and I felt that if I were to enter upon any such excuse, it would tend to aggravate the evil already accomplished.

"Again, my dear Mr. Wilmot," said Avellino, slowly turning away from the casement, "must I beseech your forgiveness for what may appear strange if not actually rude on my part."

His countenance was now very pale indeed: his eyes appeared as if tears had been trickling down them while he stood at the window: and it was evident that he was vainly struggling against a feeling of despondency that bordered even upon the profoundest dejection.

"I beg that you will offer me no apologies," I said. "I am afraid that I have inadvertently—"

"One word, my dear Mr. Wilmot," interrupted Avellino, laying his hand upon my arm, and looking with mournful intenceness upon my countenance. "I know that the Count of Livorno was as intimate with the Count of Tivoli as he was with myself: indeed it was at the Tivoli palace that I first became acquainted with the Grand Duke of Tuscany's nephew. But he knows not what has since occurred," continued Avellino, in accents that were low and full of the deepest mournfulness,—“or he would have forwarned you—however, I can easily understand that you have been furnished with a letter of introduction to the Count of Tivoli:”—and again interrupting himself, he asked, "Did you happen to mention my name in his lordship's presence?"

"I did," was his response: and I felt both pained and embarrassed by the turn which the conversation had taken.

Avellino reflected for upwards of a minute; and then said, but hesitatingly, as if diffident in putting the question, "And how looked his lordship when my name was mentioned?"

"To confess the truth," I answered, "it did strike me at the instant that there was something

strange—but only momentarily so—in the expression of his countenance; and as it passed so rapidly away, I fancied that I might have been mistaken in respect to that look."

"Well, my dear Mr. Wilmot," said Francesco Avellino, "one word more—and we will change the discourse. In future may I request—"

"I understand you," I interrupted him: "there shall be no inadvertence on my part either towards his lordship or in respect to yourself."

Avellino grasped my hand, and pressed it with a degree of fervour which seemed to ask my pardon for having so far inflected personal matters upon me, and which likewise conveyed his gratitude for the assurance I had just given him. Then assuming a gayer look—though I thought and feared that it was to a certain degree forced—he said, "And now what are you going to do with yourself for the remainder of the day? It is only three o'clock," he continued, looking at his watch: "we shall have plenty of time to visit one or two of the public buildings or galleries of art—and in the evening you must dine with me—unless indeed you have any other engagement—"

"No," I answered,—“not for to-day."

"I comprehend," rejoined Avellino quickly: "you must devote yourself alternately to those friends to whom you have been introduced, and each of whom will be anxious to make much of you not merely for the Count of Livorno's sake, but likewise for your own."

He issued from the room to make some change in his toilet; and in a few minutes he rejoined me. We passed the remainder of that day together; and when I took leave of him in the evening, after being handsomely entertained at his residence, I returned to my hotel, exceedingly well pleased with my new friend Francesco Avellino.

## CHAPTER CIV.

### THE VISCOUNT OF TIVOLI.

ON the following day, at a little before noon, the waiter brought me in a card on which I read the name of the Viscount of Tivoli; and I requested that this nobleman might be at once introduced. He entered; and I must confess that I beheld in the Count of Tivoli's son and heir a personage of a very different appearance from that which I had foreshadowed in my own mind. He was barely twenty years of age—of a stature so short as to be almost diminutive—very thin, but not ill-made, nor with any ungainliness of figure or limbs. He had red hair—a complexion that was very much freckled—small grayeyes—but a superb set of teeth. He was dressed in a very elegant manner—yet not with that extreme of fashion which transcended the bounds of good taste. He advanced into the room with a well-bred air of politeness; and proffering me his hand, said, "I am happy to make the acquaintance of a friend of the Count of Livorno."

He spoke the English language well; and though in his look and manner there was a certain blending of patrician pride and boyish self-sufficiency—a strange commingling of dignity and conceit—yet he was courteous enough, and appeared to have every

disposition to place himself at once on friendly and familiar terms with me. But I could not possibly take the same immediate liking to him that I had conceived for his father—much less that friendship which had so quickly sprung up in my heart towards Avellino. And as for the personal appearance of the Viscount of Tivoli, it was indeed very different from what I anticipated. I had expected to see the reflection of the father's good looks though in a more youthful form: whereas there was not the slightest family similitude between them.

"I believe my father," resumed the Viscount, "made an appointment for me to call upon you to-day, and act as your guide to whatsoever places you may think fit to visit. My carriage is at the door—and I am at your service. Although we now meet for the first time, let us throw off all restraint, and mutually deport ourselves as if we had known each other for a more lengthened period."

I made a suitable response; and there was an air of so much frankness, good temper, and cordiality in the way in which the Viscount spoke, that I was really angry with myself for not feeling as satisfied with him as he appeared to be with me. However, I resolved that whatever my feeling might be, my manner and discourse should reciprocate the friendliness of his own; and I said to myself, "Doubtless I shall like him much better when we get more acquainted."

There was an elegant equipage waiting in front of the hotel: we entered—and proceeded to view such places as I had not already seen. The Viscount talked a great deal, and evidently did his best to amuse me: but I profited nothing from his remarks upon the public buildings we visited, or the specimens of art which we inspected. He had not the critical taste nor sound judgment of his father—much less the refined appreciation of the beautiful or the awe-inspiring comprehension of the pure and sublime which had been manifested by Francesco Avellino. In some respects indeed he was shallow even to border upon the frivolous: yet I saw that he had been well educated, though from a certain degree of mental incapacity he had been unable to profit by those advantages of tuition. Moreover, from a few observations which he let drop I perceived that he was given to pleasure—and that if I had only said the word, he would have introduced me to scenes which, with the image of Annabel in my mind, I had no inclination to enter upon. I may add that he had a sort of supercilious way of alluding to the lower orders, and frequently expressed his contempt for everything that was not associated with gentility: but so far as his bearing towards me was concerned, it increased in cordiality and friendship. I could not however help thinking to myself, that if he knew I had filled menial positions and had not always been the gentleman in which character I now figured, I might have experienced very different treatment at his hands.

When our round was over, and the evening was approaching, he ordered his coachman to drive to the Tivoli palace; and during our way thither, he said, "You are to be my guest at dinner, you know—and when I say *my* guest, it is literally so: for my father enjoined me to make his apologies for his unavoidable absence. The truth is, he was

called away from home yesterday evening by a letter of considerable importance—I believe, by the bye, that the letter reached his hands at the time you were with him: but he awaited my return in the evening ere he set off—as he had to make certain communications to me—amongst which was the pleasing intelligence that I was to show every attention to a friend of the Count of Livorno."

By the time this speech was finished, the Viscount's equipage reached the Tivoli palace; and he conducted me to a sumptuously furnished drawing-room, where we sat and conversed until a domestic entered to announce that dinner was served.

"I have invited no one to meet you," said the Viscount, as we proceeded to another apartment, "because I thought that on the first occasion we would be *tête-à-tête*. My father told me that you understood but little of Italian—he had forgotten to inquire whether you spoke French—and therefore I was fearful of inviting guests whose language you might not understand. However, as you have informed me during our drive to-day that you *do* speak French, we shall take care on another occasion to have guests whom you may be pleased to meet; and as for your Italian, you will speedily pick that up, as I can very well judge."

The banquet to which we two sat down—for a veritable banquet it proved to be—was of the most elegant description, and was sumptuously served. A domestic stood behind each chair, ready to anticipate our slightest wants; and two others stood by the sideboard. The Viscount displayed a truly Apician appetite; and he drank copiously of the choice wines that were presented by the domestics. He seemed astonished at my moderation: but he was too well bred to press me to drink more than I chose—though on the other hand he appeared perfectly well inclined to drink enough for us both. When I took leave of him in the evening, truth compels me to state that he was something more than merely excited by his potations.

I have mentioned that the hotel where I had taken up my quarters, was much frequented by foreigners; and the coffee-room was well supplied with English, French, and German newspapers. While at breakfast on the morning after my entertainment at the Tivoli palace, I amused myself with an English journal: and my looks lighted on a paragraph announcing certain promotions which had recently taken place in the ranks of the British peerage. Amongst these I perceived the name of Lord Eccleston, who was raised to the degree of an Earl. The mention of that name vividly called back to my mind all the mysterious circumstances which had in any way brought myself in contact with those whom I must now call the Earl and Countess of Eccleston; and the scenes which had taken place at Florence were seriously reviewed by me over and over again. Would those mysteries be ever cleared up? should I ever learn why Lord Eccleston had been my bitter persecutor, and how in Lanover he had found so ready an agent for his atrocious machinations? And then too, I thought of those secret conversations which I had with Lady, now Countess of Eccleston, near the bridge of Santa Trinitata; and how she had offered to elevate me from a menial position and provide for me in a pecuniary sense for the remainder of my days.

I was ascending to my bed-chamber in the hotel, for the purpose of completing my morning toilet,—when, on the first landing, I encountered a gentleman and lady whom I at once recognised to be Sir Alexander and Lady Carrondale. The recognition was mutual: ejaculations of mingled surprise and joy burst from their lips; and my hand was quickly clasped in that of the Baronet. Then the beautiful Emmeline gave me her's; and they insisted upon my entering their sitting-room to converse with them. My appearance, as well as my presence as a guest at that first-rate hotel, had shown them in a moment that some signal change had taken place in my position since last they saw me: but even if it were otherwise, I am convinced that my reception would not have been one tittle the less cordial on their part. Both were looking exceedingly well—Sir Alexander handsomer than ever, Emmeline more eminently beautiful. They told me that they had only arrived in Rome on the preceding evening, and that on the following day they were to leave for Naples, where they proposed to pass a few weeks. I inquired after my old friend Mr. Duncansby; and learnt that he had very recently retired from business on a handsome fortune. Lady Carrondale then observed, with an arch smile, that Dominie Clackmannan and his friend Mr. Saltcoats were at this present time travelling in Italy—that they had seen them at Florence—and that probably I should fall in with them, as they were shortly coming on to Rome. No pointed question was put to me as to the origin of my own changed position: but I saw that both the Baronet and his wife entertained a friendly interest and curiosity upon the subject. I therefore of my own accord gave them a few hasty particulars; and sincere were the congratulations which they proffered me.

“I can assure you, my dear Mr. Wilmot,” said Sir Alexander, “that your abrupt disappearance from Scotland excited the profoundest grief on the part of those who were interested in your welfare. It may seem unnecessary now—but for my own sake, lest I might be deemed to have been ungrateful for all your generous kindness under certain trying and peculiar circumstances—I must observe that I had formed certain views for your welfare which I should only have been too happy to carry out. However, we will not dwell upon the past: suffice it for our satisfaction that we find you here in a position which we always considered you ought properly to fill. You must dine with us in the evening, if you have no better engagement.”

I accepted the invitation; and taking a temporary leave of my friends, ascended to my chamber. Having completed my toilet, I proceeded to visit Francesco Avellino, according to an appointment made when I had parted from him a couple of evenings back. This time the laquay did not conduct me to the *studio*—where however Avellino was engaged, as he informed me when he joined me in the sitting-room. We went forth together, and visited some buildings and institutions which I had not before seen. Avellino had the *entrée* to the picture galleries of several of the palaces of the Roman aristocracy; and to these he introduced me. As we were issuing from one of those palatial mansions, I beheld the Viscount of Tivoli just alighting from his equipage in front of the same

portal. The flush of scarlet suddenly suffused the young nobleman's countenance at the first glance which showed him who my companion was; and merely bestowing a friendly nod of recognition upon me, he walked into the mansion with an air of as dignified stateliness as his diminutive form would enable him to assume. I could not help at the same instant glancing towards Avellino; and I perceived that his countenance had become deadly pale—that his lips were literally white—and that he was agitated in the most powerful degree throughout his entire being. He took my arm without saying a word: but I felt that his hand was trembling violently as it rested upon that arm of mine. I was confused and embarrassed: for it was one of those scenes in which a person likes not to be mixed up.

“My dear Wilmot,” said Francesco, abruptly breaking that silence after it had lasted for some minutes—and he spoke in a quick agitated manner,—“after what you have just beheld, I must say one word—and only one word! Yes, for my own sake I must give you the assurance that there has never been aught dishonourable in my conduct which led to the breach between myself and the Tivolis—”

“I can assure you, my dear friend,” I answered, “such explanation is altogether unnecessary; and I beseech you not to inflict pain upon yourself by alluding to any subject of an unpleasant nature.”

“Yes—but after such a scene as that,” responded Avellino vehemently, “it was absolutely necessary that I should give you, for my own sake, the assurance which I *have* given. And now,” he added, suddenly becoming calm again, “not another word upon the subject!”

He however continued depressed and dejected, notwithstanding every attempt to rally his spirits, for the remainder of the afternoon; and when we separated, I wondered much what could be the cause of the severance between this young gentleman and the Tivoli family. I dined with Sir Alexander and Lady Carrondale according to invitation; and the evening was passed in a most pleasant and agreeable manner.

On the following day the young Viscount of Tivoli called upon me at about noon; and observing towards me the same frank and familiar bearing as heretofore, he said that he had come to take me to visit a few of those places which yet remained to be seen; and after chatting in a familiar easy way for about ten minutes, he observed, as if suddenly recollecting something, and speaking in a more serious manner, “My dear Mr. Wilmot, you must forgive me for not having stopped to shake hands with you yesterday—”

“Pray do not think that any apology is needful,” I hastened to interject, determined to put a stop as much as possible to any unpleasant allusions or reminiscences, whatever they might be, on the part of those to whom I had received letters of introduction but who were at variance amongst themselves.

“Nay—but an explanation is necessary,” persisted the young Viscount: and disregarding another attempt of mine to check him, he hastened to observe, “The fact is that my father and myself are not friendly with Avellino; and I could not possibly under such circumstances stop to speak to you when you were in his company. As a matter

of course our quarrel has got nothing to do with you; and we do not take umbrage that you should be intimate with Avellino, any more than he can slight you on account of your friendship with us."

"Now let us set off," I said, anxious to put an end to the topic on which the Viscount had turned the discourse. "I am desirous to visit those institutions to which you have alluded."

We accordingly descended from my apartment, and took our seat in the Viscount's elegant carriage.

"My father is not come back yet," he said, with an apparently careless manner, as the equipage drove off; "and he may be some few days still absent. I had a letter from him this morning, in which he tells me that he has not succeeded in the business which took him away from home. He was not unmindful of you in his letter—but charged me to show you every attention."

"I am exceedingly obliged to his lordship for thus recollecting me," I said; "and I deeply feel the kindness of you both."

After visiting a variety of places, we returned to the hotel,—where the Viscount accepted an invitation to dine with me; and I found that he was just as ready to pay his respects to the wines that were placed upon the board, as I had observed him to be at the Tivoli palace. As the juice of the grape took effect upon him, he seemed inclined to be familiarly confidential: in short he got into one of those maudlin humours when the individual cannot resist the temptation of speaking on the subject which is uppermost in his mind, though in his sober moments it is the very one he would chiefly avoid.

"You see, my dear Wilmot," he said, contemplating me with a tipsy gaze, "we all have our troubles and annoyances in this world—the highest and richest as well as the humblest and poorest. On my soul! they have excellent wine at your hotel—but you don't do justice to it."

"On the contrary," I said, "I am keeping you company"—although indeed he was drinking three or four glasses to every one of which I partook.

"Well, that's all right," responded the Viscount, filling his glass with a shaking hand: then drawing his chair closer to me, he said, "We were speaking this morning, you recollect about—you know who I mean—eh?"

"Let me ring for another bottle!" I exclaimed, anxious to give a turn to the discourse. "That was a splendid collection of pictures which we visited this afternoon at the Barbarini palace."

"Yes—the pictures were good enough," said the Viscount: "but if you found me at all abstracted, my dear fellow—"

"Not a bit of it!—you were highly entertaining. And that sculpture gallery which we afterwards—"

"The sculptures were good enough, too," interrupted the Viscount. "But, you see, my thoughts kept running on—on—Francesco Avellino—and when I reflected on his presumption—"

"Here is a fresh bottle!" I exclaimed, "let us fill our glasses—and you shall tell me about the grand ecclesiastical procession that is to take place."

"Oh! I remember—talking of ecclesiastical processions," said the Viscount, harping with tipsy

pertinacity upon the same string, "it was just about this time last year—on the day of a grand procession of that sort—that the terrific explosion took place with Avellino. You and I are friends, Wilmot—"

"You will give me a seat in your carriage on the day of the procession?" I exclaimed, with another effort to turn the discourse.

"Yes—a dozen if you like. But I was going to tell you—"

"The wine stands with you!" I somewhat vehemently interrupted him. "Shall we finish the bottle? or shall we go out for a walk?—or anything you like?"—and, I *might* have added, "so long as you leave off talking on this subject;" but I of course did not give utterance to words which would have constituted the grossest rudeness, although I was exceedingly averse to be perforce dragged into the necessity of listening to any details of a purely personal character—the more especially after the promise I had given to Francesco Avellino to avoid unpleasant allusions alike in his hearing and in that of the Tivolis.

"Yes—we will finish the bottle," said the Viscount, catching at that portion of my proposals which best suited his humour at the moment. "But between you and me, Wilmot—excellent wine!—it was a gross act of presumption—as clear as crystal!—a gross act for the plebeian Avellino to aspire to the hand of—of—my sister. I'll tell you how it was—eh?"

"Really, my lord—"

At this moment the door opened; and one of the waiters of the hotel entered to announce that a servant from the Tivoli palace had an important message to deliver to the Viscount. The young nobleman desired that the footman might be ordered to step in; and when the lacquey made his appearance, he spoke a few words in a low tone, and in the Italian language, to his young master. The Viscount, giving him a hasty response, motioned him to depart; and then rising from his seat, he said, "I am sorry I must leave you so soon—particularly in the middle of that bottle: but my father has come back—suddenly and unexpectedly, as you may suppose after what I told you in the morning about the probability of his absence being prolonged. He has something of importance to communicate—and I must go to him at once."

Having partaken of a draught of soda-water in order to get rid, as he said, of the fumes of the wine, the Viscount of Tivoli wrung my hand and issued from the room—but with a somewhat unsteady gait.

## CHAPTER CV.

### AVELLINO'S TALE.

I WAS sitting in my own apartment on the forenoon of the following day, thinking of the revelation which the Viscount of Tivoli had made to me on the preceding evening in respect to Signor Avellino's aspiration to the hand of his sister,—when a note was brought to me from Avellino himself. It was to the effect that he felt exceedingly unwell—that he should not be enabled to

call upon me—and that he hoped I would pay him a visit for an hour or two. I accordingly set out to walk to Avellino's residence, which was about a mile and a half from the hotel. On my way thither, I continued to reflect upon the revelation which had been made to me; and I wondered that the Viscount should have stigmatised as *plebeian* a young gentleman who had evidently been well-bred and well-educated—who was independent in his pecuniary means—who had visited at the Tivoli palace—and who was the intimate friend of the Duke of Tuscany's nephew. There seemed to be a contradiction between the facts just enumerated and the aspersion intended to be thrown upon Francesco Avellino. There is another point which I must mention; and this is, that the Viscount's revelation had for the first time made me acquainted that he possessed a sister at all: for though his father the Count had not exactly said that he had no other child but his son and heir, yet I had gathered this much from the phraseology which he had made use of at the time when he spoke of his wife having long been dead and of his living entirely alone with his son. But now the idea struck me that the young lady herself might be dead: for although the Viscount's words had represented her as being alive about a year back, yet if she had perished shortly afterwards, the time of mourning would have already expired, as this period amongst the aristocracy, on the Continent only lasts for six months, even when the sable garments were worn for the nearest relatives.

While reflecting on these topics, I reached Avellino's dwelling; and was conducted to an apartment where I found him reclining upon a sofa. He looked pale, ill, and careworn; and though he endeavoured to smile and to cheer up on perceiving me, yet I saw—and saw with pain too—that he was in reality a prey to a deep inward dejection.

"My dear friend," he said, "I am sorry that I could not call upon you to-day—sorry likewise that I feel myself utterly unequal to the exertion of accompanying you to some of those institutions which you experience so much pleasure in visiting. But I will deal frankly with you: that little incident of the day before yesterday—you know to what I allude—"

"Then wherefore allude to it?" I exclaimed: "why dwell upon a topic which is fraught with unpleasant feelings?"

"Because those feelings are stronger than myself," replied Francesco. "I hesech you to bear with me. Not for the world would I unduly obtrude my griefs or personal concerns upon anyone to his own annoyance: but from the very hour that you and I met, there has been so friendly an understanding between us—our dispositions to a certain extent appear to assimilate, if you will pardon me for saying so—"

"Yes—I experience a sincere friendship for you," I said, taking his hand; "and therefore it grieves me profoundly to see you brooding thus despondingly over your sorrows."

"And the source of those sorrows," said Avellino, looking with mournful earnestness on my countenance—"is it indeed altogether unknown to you? No—I see that it is *not*!—and I know the young Viscount of Tivoli well enough to feel assured that

after the incident of the day before yesterday he could not restrain himself, in his frivolous or his tipsy moods, from touching upon it."

"I will not attempt to mislead you," I said. "The Viscount dined with me last evening; and though most sincerely I pledge myself that I did all I could to divert him from a topic to which he persisted in recurring—"

"Yet you could *not*? No—I am confident you could not!" said Francesco: then, after a brief pause, he added, "But if he told you the tale—"

"No—he said but a few words," I interruptingly remarked. "But I beseech you to change the topic."

"If it be displeasing to you, I will," rejoined Avellino: "but if it be merely for my sake that you have proffered that entreaty, I would rather pursue the topic—because, in a word, you are my friend—there is comfort and solace in the friendship of such an one as you—and it will soothe me to breathe the tale of my sorrows in your ear."

"Remember, my dear Avellino," I said, "that I am also on friendly terms with the Count and Viscount of Tivoli—I have experienced their hospitality and their kindness—"

"Rest assured," interrupted Francesco, "that by listening to my tale you will not prove traitorous to your friendship towards them, even though you should be inclined to vouchsafe your sympathy to me. Indeed, I now feel that situated as you are with respect to them and with reference to myself—and likely as you seem to sojourn some little time at Rome—it will be better that you should know all. Since the occurrence of the day before yesterday, when I sustained that sovereign insult on the part of the Viscount, I have reflected deeply upon these things whereof I am speaking. You see how they have affected me—how they have preyed upon my mind—and even upon my health; and I have come to the conclusion to unbosom myself entirely. There is no breach of faith on my part in telling the tale, nor on yours in listening to it."

I could urge no further objection: and indeed I should be telling an untruth if I did not confess that I had all along experienced a curiosity to fathom that mystery which the Viscount of Tivoli had partially revealed on the preceding evening.

"My narrative," began Francesco Avellino, "requires some little introduction. My father was a merchant at Civita Vecchia; and I was an only son. He was rich; and he afforded me the means of receiving a good education—by which I hope I have not altogether failed to profit. When I was eighteen years of age my father experienced sudden reverses in his commercial pursuits—and—and—in plain terms he became bankrupt. The calamity preyed so deeply upon his mind that he sank under its weight—and in a few weeks was consigned to the grave by the side of my mother who had perished a few years previously. When his effects were realised, they afforded sufficient to pay only twenty-five per cent.: the name of my dead father was therefore in the commercial world tarnished and dishonoured. I was then adopted by an uncle,—who, though possessed of ample means, had sternly refused to assist his late brother at a time when such opportune succour would have



saved him from ruin, disgrace, and a premature death. My uncle sent me to England to take a situation in an Italian mercantile firm in London; and there I remained a couple of years, during which period I rendered myself familiar with the language of your native country. One day I received intelligence that my uncle was dead, and that I was the heir of his property. Hastening back to Italy, I arrived at Civita Vecchia, where my uncle had dwelt, and took possession of the fortune which I had inherited. Had I kept it all, I should have been exceedingly rich: but I lost no time in availing myself of the opportunity to rescue my father's name from obloquy and reproach. I assembled all his creditors, and paid them their due to the uttermost farthing,—together with interest for the time that the liabilities had been standing. This outlay was large; and I thus suddenly reduced myself from a state of opulence to that mere competency which I now possess."

"Oh, but what admirable conduct on your part!" I exclaimed, seizing Avellino's hand and pressing it with enthusiastic effusion.

"It was only the performance of a duty," mildly answered Francesco, though with a look he expressed his gratitude for the approval I had just conveyed. "I remained but a few weeks at Civita Vecchia," he continued: "and removing to Rome, took up my residence in this house. I soon formed acquaintances—soon made friends—and was introduced into the best society. Is it surprising that I did not proclaim myself to be the son of the deceased merchant of Civita Vecchia? Yet heaven knows it was not through any false pride that I forbore from the mention of the circumstance: it was simply diffidence on my part—or rather it was a desire to avoid announcing a fact which would have been tantamount to a boast of whatsoever honourable and good there might have been in the action which I had performed in respect to that deceased parent's liabilities. These were my motives for keeping the matter a secret—or rather for abstaining from making a parade of the incidents I have been relating to you. Thus, as time wore on, and no one had ever thought of inquiring relative to my parentage or to the origin of the competency which I possess, I found myself rapidly increasing the circle of my friends until the doors of all the first houses in Rome were open for my admission. Amongst the families with whom I thus became acquainted, was that of the Count of Tivoli. I am now speaking of exactly two years ago: at that period the Viscount of Tivoli was eighteen—and the Count's daughter Antonia was sixteen."

Francesco Avellino became deeply agitated as he thus mentioned Antonia's name—a name which I now heard for the first time; and I longed to ask whether the young lady yet lived?—but I thought I had better restrain my curiosity and suffer my companion to pursue his narrative in his own way. It was however some minutes before he could so far conquer his emotions as to be enabled to resume the thread of his history; and before he did so he took my hand, and pressed it, at the same time bending upon me a look of deep pathetic meaning, as what so to implore me to make allowances for whatsoever weakness he might thus display.

"Yes," he continued, "exactly two years have passed since I was first introduced to the Tivoli

palace. The Count received me with an urbane courtesy: for it was a nobleman of high rank who presented me on the occasion. The Count had not *then* that somewhat frigid seriousness of look and manner which, as I learnt, has of late marked him; and of all the Roman aristocracy no one was perhaps more affable or more hospitable in doing the honours of his dwelling than his lordship. The Viscount was what may be termed a precocious boy—vain, self-sufficient, and conceited—yet having borrowed by reflection, or having caught as it were just a sufficiency of his father's patrician dignity, to save himself from being thoroughly contemptible. I know not how it was, but I perceived at a glance that the Viscount entertained for me an aversion on the very first evening of our acquaintance: he looked upon me as if I were one who was eclipsing him in respect to the degree of attention received from the gay assemblage generally—though heaven knows that I never obtrusively thrust myself forward to court special notice or to become a prominent character in the scene. And now I must speak of Antonia. To her also was I for the first time presented on that particular evening of which I am speaking; and not to feel at once impressed with her ravishing beauty, would have been to prove unsusceptible of all that was best calculated to charm and to fascinate. You have never seen her, my dear Wilmot; and I dare not trust myself to a description of the style of her loveliness. I feel that if I were to enter upon such verbal delineation, the power of language would be insufficient to do justice to the subject, and I should be overwhelmed likewise by my emotions. Let it suffice therefore for you to learn that this charming creature of sixteen at once became the object of feelings on my part which I had never known before. If you ask me whether I loved her at first sight, I think that my response ought to be given in the affirmative: a spell appeared to affix itself upon my heart—a soft ineffable influence crept deliciously into my soul—her voice was the sweetest music ever wafted to my ears—her look seemed to open to my contemplation a paradise of feeling the existence of which in this world I had never suspected. Oh! if in consequence of the fall of our first parents, love were the lost Eden of the soul, heaven gave it back again to a human heart at length—and that heart was mine! Weeks passed away; and I was a frequent visitor at the Tivoli palace. The Count of Livorno was at the time staying at Rome: he likewise was a constant visitor there; and it was at that manion I formed his acquaintance. I almost blush to confess that when I beheld him so frequently within the walls of the Tivoli palace, I trembled lest he likewise should have surrendered up his heart at the shrine of love, and that Antonia was the goddess of his worship: but nevertheless I vowed that if it were so, no selfish feeling of jealousy should on my part chill that friendship which was rapidly springing up between the Count of Livorno and myself. However, in the course of time I was convinced that in the Grand Duke of Tuscany's nephew I possessed a sincere friend but no rival; and I was equally certain that I was not an object of indifference to the beautiful Antonia. You are already aware that I have a taste for painting; and the Count of Tivoli is a great admirer of the fine arts.

He is fond of contemplating the splendid pictures which he himself possesses; and it was a source of gratification to him to get me for an hour in the gallery to discuss the merits of the specimens which he has accumulated there. The Count of Livorno was often wont to join us; and I believe that from those intellectual conversations I rose considerably in the esteem of Antonia's father. He often endeavoured to induce his son to make one of the party, so that the young Viscount might profit by the discourse which we held together: but he infinitely preferred the billiard-table in the day-time, and the haunts of pleasure in the evening. I had perceived on several occasions that the Viscount was becoming dissipated; and that although scarcely beyond the sphere of boyhood, he was acquiring an attachment to wine. The father beheld it not—or perhaps he strove to blind his eyes to the conviction of his son's failings. I did not choose to speak to the parent on the subject; but I nevertheless considered it a deplorable circumstance that the young man should be thus losing himself for want of perhaps a little timely advice; and I resolved to take an opportunity of acting a friendly part towards him. I thought that one who was only about four years older than himself, might with greater facility warn him against evil companions, by representing that they only sought his society for what they could get out of him,—than if he were to receive a long lesson from the lips of his father. I therefore spoke to the young Viscount one day, with that frank ingenuousness and free off-hand manner which one young man may adopt towards another: but the Viscount insolently bade me look to my own affairs and trouble myself not with his proceedings. I saw that from this moment I had made a mortal enemy of the Viscount, and that the dislike with which he had hitherto regarded me was all in an instant enhanced into a malignant hatred. Still he displayed it not openly: for I stood too highly in his father's estimation to be easily damaged without some powerful cause."

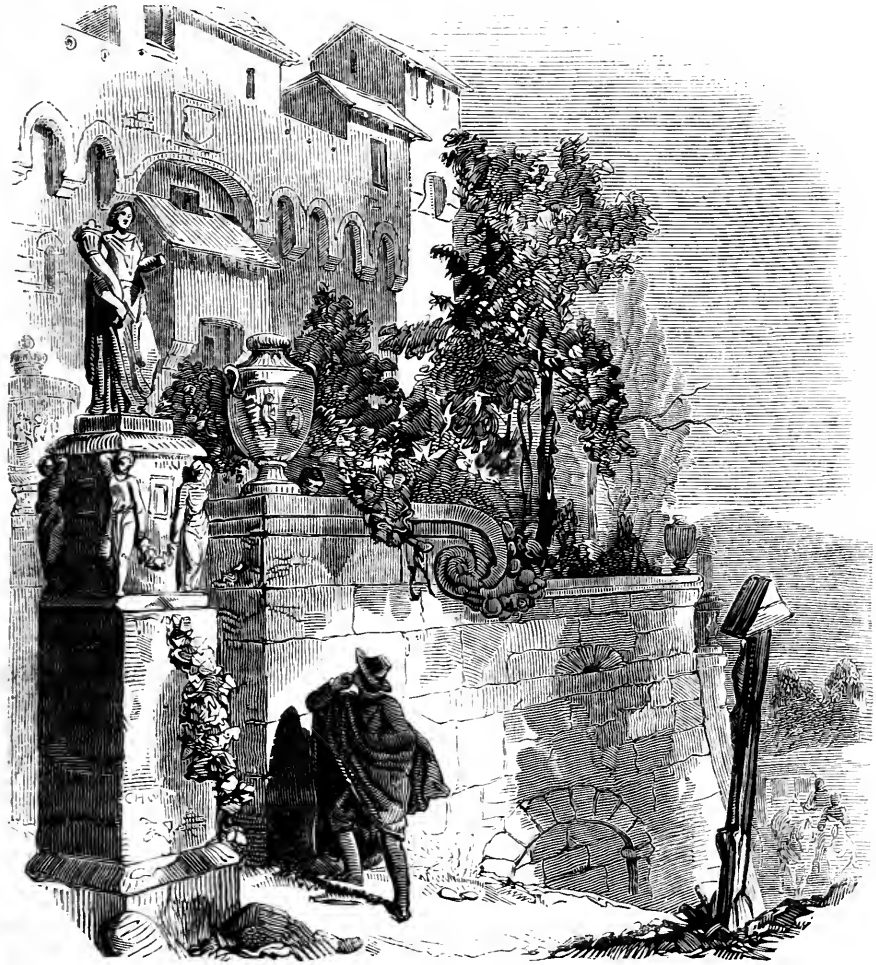
"I must confess," I here interjectingly observed, "that there was something in the Viscount's manner which I myself did not like at the very first moment of our acquaintance. I am not therefore much astonished to hear that his disposition has so little real manliness or amiability in it."

"Heaven is my witness," continued Avellino, "that I do not now speak of him in these terms through any rancorous feeling for what has occurred: but it is necessary for the full understanding of my narrative that I should thus allude to incidents which otherwise might seem trivial or that it would be ungenerous to mention. Therefore I must proceed to inform you that whenever the young Viscount had an opportunity of privately demonstrating his spite towards me, he never failed to make use of it; and his malignity was no doubt aggravated by the dignified indifference with which I treated those evidences of his hatred. Months passed away—no avowal of love had issued from my lips—but I was happy in the conviction that Antonia reciprocated the feeling which I experienced towards her. I was fearful of being too marked in my attentions:—not that I ever seriously deliberated with myself whether the Count of Tivoli would refuse me the hand of

his daughter; but methought that as she was so young, it were only delicate and prudent to suffer time to pass on before taking any positive step. I knew that she loved me; and that was sufficient. Besides, the dream itself was so delicious that I would not disturb it in any way; and I believe that I could have lived whole years as well as months in that paradise of feelings which I enjoyed. You may comprehend therefore how etherealized was the love which I cherished for Antonia—how high above the grossness of mere passion. I adored her as if she were an angel, and seemed not to covet the possession of her as a being of this world. When away from her, my mental vision was constantly riveted upon her image. But you will perhaps be surprised when I tell you that at that time I never sought to transfer it to canvass. No—it appeared to me as if an attempt on my part to create an inanimate representation of that animate beauty, would so completely fall short of the measure of justice due to the loveliness of the original, that I dared not enter upon such a task. Methought *then* that it would be an almost impious daring to attempt to depict with earthly materials that angelic countenance which reflected the beauty of heaven; and that only the boldest hardihood could essay to make the canvass reflect the sunny light which beamed in Antonia's eyes, or delineate the angelic sweetness of Antonia's smile. From all that I am now saying, you may perhaps obtain a further insight to the ethereal—the æsthetic—the sublimated nature of my love for the Count of Tivoli's daughter."

"Yes, I comprehend it," I answered, in a low voice: for Avellino's description had given me a fuller understanding than ever I had before experienced of that love which I bore for Annabel, and which was so different—Oh! so different from the insensate and transient passion with which the unfortunate Lady Calantha had at one time inspired me.

"After having remained some months at Rome," resumed Francesco Avellino, "the Duke of Tuscany's nephew took his departure; but before we separated, we exchanged assurances of the warmest friendship: for there was much in our dispositions that assimilated—much likewise in our tastes and in the tone of our intellects which had attracted us towards each other. The Count of Tivoli missed him much: and I became a more frequent visitor than ever at that nobleman's palace. Shortly after Livorno's departure, the young Viscount proceeded on a tour to Naples, whence he was to pass into Sicily—so that his absence from home was to be of some weeks' duration. I now saw more of Antonia than I had previously done; and the Count of Tivoli, as I have just said, encouraged my visits to his mansion. It frequently occurred that I found myself alone with his daughter; and on one of those occasions I breathed to her an avowal of my love. Need I add that it was reciprocated? Oh! at this instant every detail of that delicious scene is as vividly present to my memory as if it had occurred but yesterday. We were walking together in the spacious garden attached to the Tivoli palace; it was a serene and beautiful evening—the sun was sinking into the western horizon—the over-arching canopy of foliage shut out its fading beams—the atmosphere was fra-



grant with the perfume of flowers—a deep stillness prevailed: it was the mystic and the tender hour for such a scene as that. Though the conviction was previously strong in my heart that Antonia loved me,—yet when I received the avowal from her lips, I felt as if I could literally have cried out for very joy; and throwing myself at her feet, I pressed her hand to my lips, calling heaven to witness the sincerity of the vow which I then pledged, to the effect that never by word nor deed would I wound the heart which had sent up the softly murmured confession of love that had just fallen from her lips. It was the happiest hour that I had ever in my life yet known—although I had previously passed many and many a happy one in the society of Antonia. I remember that when I returned home, I sate myself down upon this very sofa, and asked myself whether it could all possibly be true, or whether I was wrapt in a delicious dream that was to be followed by the awakening of blank dis-

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appointment? I mistrusted my own happiness: I could scarcely bring myself to believe that I was so ineffably blest as to own the love of that bright and beautiful being. I recollect too, that I sate here totally immovable for upwards of an hour,—afraid to make the slightest motion—afraid to look around me—or even breathe too hard, lest I should dispel the elysian dream in which I was cradled. At length—when aroused from this delicious reverie, and convinced that it was all true, and that I was abandoning myself to no illusion—I knelt down and returned thanks to heaven for having bestowed so much happiness upon me. There was an enthusiastic fervour in my thoughts which I can only comprehend for myself, but cannot find language wherewith to convey it to the understanding of another. Not for a single instant was my bliss alloyed or marred by the thought that my fervid aspirations were doomed to disappointment, and that my exalted hopes

were to be cruelly blighted. And yet it has been so!"

Francesco shaded his brow with his hand; and half averting his countenance, remained silent for more than a minute—during which I contemplated him with a feeling of the deepest and mournfullest compassion. And, Oh! I thought to myself, if my aspirations were doomed to disappointment—if my hopes were destined to be blighted—what misery, what ineffable misery would remain in store for me! I shuddered at these reflections swept through my imagination; and it was a relief to my mind—an escape from an almost excruciating apprehension—when Francesco Avellino resumed his narrative in the following terms:—

"Two or three weeks passed after that mutual avowal of love which had infused so ineffable a bliss into my soul—and every day did I pass some hours with Antonia. I had now known her a year: she was seventeen—and I no longer saw any reason to prevent me from speaking to her father upon the subject that was nearest and dearest to my heart. I informed her that it was now my wish to communicate the secret of our love to the Count of Tivoli—if a secret it indeed were to him. With a blush upon the cheeks, and with downcast looks, Antonia breathed a bashful assent; and when she retired to her own chamber, I sought the Count of Tivoli in the drawing-room. I found him alone there: he welcomed me with his accustomed kindness—indeed, methought there was something more than usually kind in his manner; and I was therefore encouraged to unbosom myself to Antonia's father. I stated that I had loved her from the first moment of our acquaintance—that on account of her youthfulness I had suffered a year to elapse before I had avowed my attachment—that I had only recently given verbal expression to that feeling which had so long occupied my heart—that it was reciprocated—and that I had now come to beseech the paternal sanction to that engagement in which the happiness of us both was so completely wrapped up. The Count of Tivoli listened to me with a benevolent attention; and when I had finished, he took me by the hand, saying, 'My dear Francesco, I could not wish my daughter's happiness to be entrusted to better keeping than your own. But before I can venture to give you a response that is sacredly positive, there is one little formality to be fulfilled. Do not, my dear friend, let your heart suddenly sink within you—as I see by your looks that it has done: it is *only* a formality—and I will explain it. Perhaps you are aware that Cardinal Antonio Gravina is my daughter's godfather: he is exceedingly rich—and he has more than once given me to understand that all his wealth will devolve at his death to the possession of Antonia. Under these circumstances the Cardinal has a right to be consulted; and I must therefore speak to him. You see it is a mere formality: he will not disapprove where I approve. I have no doubt that his assent will be readily given when he listens to the representations that I shall make concerning you. His Eminence is at present absent from Rome: but he will return in a few days—and I will take the earliest opportunity to lay the matter before him. Meanwhile, as I am confident what the result will be, make your mind

easy, and visit at the house as usual.'—Thus spoke the Count of Tivoli; and I was completely reassured in respect to any transient misgiving which I had experienced."

Avellino paused, but only for a few moments; and then he said, "You may possibly be enabled to conceive, my dear Wilmot, the full amount of that happiness which was mine during the next few days. Antonia's father had accepted my suit: not a syllable had been uttered in respect to consulting the young Viscount; and it appeared that the reference which had to be made to Cardinal Antonio Gravina was a mere matter of form, there being no doubt as to the response that he would give. I passed hours and hours with Antonia: I became as intimately acquainted with her disposition as I know mine own: she was all artlessness, amiability, and unsophisticated goodness. She loved me deeply—fondly; and I felt that to possess such a being as my wife, would be to render this earth a perfect paradise in my estimation. But let me not extend my narrative to an unnecessary length: I now approach the fatal catastrophe. There was to be a grand procession of the clergy to St. Peter's cathedral, where his Holiness the Pope was to officiate in the pulpit on the occasion. The Count of Tivoli, who in the meanwhile had written to Cardinal Gravina, received a letter to the effect that his Eminence purposed to be at Rome for the procession, and that he would dine at the Tivoli palace in the evening. The Count invited me to dine there likewise, so that I might be introduced to the Cardinal, with whom I was previously unacquainted. The day came: I pass over all mention of the grand ceremony, except to state that I accompanied the Count and his daughter thither. When it was over, I returned home to change my toilet; and at the appointed hour I proceeded to the Tivoli palace. I knew that this was the evening which would decide my fate; and yet I felt not as if it hung in the balance at all. A certain fluttering of the heart I perhaps did experience: but it was rather that of joy at the anticipation of the final assent, than that of suspense as to what the result would be. I was happy even beyond the strongest hopefulness—because the term *hope* itself implies uncertainty and doubt; whereas I entertained the conviction that all would be prosperous. In this excellent frame of mind, I reached the palatial mansion, and was introduced to the drawing-room, where Cardinal Gravina, who had already arrived, was seated with the Count and Antonia. I had already seen his Eminence at the cathedral—but not sufficiently near to judge of the aspect of his countenance. I now found that it was grave and sedate—somewhat expressive of pride—but not without a tincture of benevolence. He was far advanced in years—probably approaching his eightieth; but still in the enjoyment of good health, and of the full vigour of his intellects. When the Count presented me, the Cardinal gave me a kind reception; and in a few minutes I began to think that the expression of benevolence transcended that of pride in the contexture of his looks. Dinner was speedily announced as being served up; and we proceeded to the banqueting-room. There were no other guests; and we four sat down to table,—I being placed next to Antonia. In my own mind I conceived that all that I

cared about was as good as accomplished; for the Cardinal treated me with the kind familiarity which might be shown to one who was about to enter the family in which he was so deeply interested. I however saw that his Eminence exercised the greatest influence over the Count of Tivoli,—which somewhat surprised me, inasmuch as I knew the Count to be a strong-minded man, and though religious, yet without fanaticism or superstitious bigotry. However, I entertained not the slightest misgiving: I even conceived it most probable that the Count had already conversed with the Cardinal on the one all-important topic, and that the assent had most likely been uttered from the lips of Antonia's wealthy and influential godfather."

Avellino heaved a profound sigh—paused for a few moments—and then continued as follows:—

"Shortly after the dessert had been placed upon the table, the Count of Tivoli made a sign for his daughter to withdraw; and when she had quitted the room, I thought to myself, 'The favourable decision is now to be formally announced to me!'—Nor was I mistaken: for the Count of Tivoli began to address me in the following terms:—'In pursuance, my dear Francesco, of the promise I gave I have taken the earliest opportunity of respectfully soliciting the sanction of his Eminence to your alliance with his god-daughter. I have represented to his Eminence that you are a young gentleman of unimpeachable character, moving in the best society, and therefore as a matter of course belonging to a family the pure blood and gentility of which enabled you to assume that position when entering upon life.'—At the very moment that the Count of Tivoli spoke the words *pure blood and gentility*, I started, and the coldness of an evil presentiment came quick upon me—not so much on account of the words themselves, but because the door opened gently at the instant, and Antonia's brother appeared upon the threshold. The proceedings which so nearly concerned myself, were temporarily interrupted while the father greeted his son, and the latter paid his respects to the Cardinal. There was something so unexpected in the Viscount's return—something so strange in his appearance at the very instant when a matter involving my life's happiness was on the *tapis*—that I was smitten with the cold presentiment to which I have just now alluded. Methought likewise that as the young Viscount—whose entrance was for a few moments perceived only by myself—paused on the threshold to catch the words that his father was uttering, a smile of malignity appeared upon his features; and my heart sank within me. Then too, when he had embraced his father and paid his respects to the Cardinal, he bent upon me a cold haughty stare, without even so much as acknowledging my salutation.—'What!' said his father, 'do you not shake hands with Signor Avellino, whom you will shortly hail as a brother-in-law?'—'I met Antonia on the stairs,' replied the Viscount, 'and my astonishment was only equal to the bashful artlessness with which she threw herself into my arms and told me to what length things had gone in my absence.'—The Count looked indignant, the Cardinal was surprised, and I felt most wretchedly uneasy.—'I thought, father,' continued the Viscount, 'that you would never bestow the hand of your daughter

upon any one who is not of genteel birth. I have recently voyaged from Sicily to Civita Vecchia; and at this seaport accident made me acquainted with something that it is now most opportune to name. But perhaps this person here' (and with an insolent look he indicated me) 'will be pleased to tell us whether or not he is the son of the bankrupt merchant of Civita Vecchia who died defrauding his creditors to a large amount?'—'Yes, my lord,' I exclaimed, springing up from my seat, and my countenance glowing with indignation, 'I am the son of the deceased merchant of Civita Vecchia; and instead of possessing a mere competency, I should be rich were it not that from my own resources I liquidated all my unfortunate father's debts to the uttermost farthing.'—'You see,' said the Viscount, superciliously tossing his head, 'that he admits his plebeian origin; and it is equally evident that he had not the candour to tell either his Eminence or your lordship who and what he is.'—Severe and stern was the look which the Count of Tivoli bent upon me; and I besought permission to enter into the fullest explanations. He said that there could be none to give—that he had heard sufficient to make him deeply regret having encouraged my visits to the house—and that he should even speak in stronger language, were it not that he considered himself in a measure to blame for having neglected to make the minutest inquiries concerning me on the day that I sought the hand of his daughter. Having thus spoken, he requested me to retire and leave the house. I was goaded almost to madness—I insisted upon being heard: the Count rejoined that I had been guilty of so total a want of candour in respect to the past that it was impossible he could trust to my frankness for the present. I became fearfully excited; and I have no doubt that I used intemperate expressions—to the effect that with all my plebeian blood, I held myself equal to the malignant coward who had come with so devilish a pleasure to vent his hatred upon me. Then the Count of Tivoli himself grew excited with passion; and he denounced me as an impostor who by some false or insidious means had worked my way into that society which stamped me with a seeming gentility to which in reality I had no claim. The young Viscount, under pretence of taking his father's side, covered me with abuse—levelled at me the bitterest taunts—and poured upon me the most poignant revilings. There was a moment when my hand was raised to strike him down: but I recollected that he was Antonia's brother—and with that thought the blow was stayed. The Cardinal now interfered, and observed that if I possessed any feelings of honour and delicacy I would no longer obtrude myself where my presence was disagreeable. I cannot recollect anything that followed—I know not how I rushed from the mansion—there was an interval of wild madness—and when my thoughts began to grow somewhat collected, I found myself lying upon this sofa—sobbing, beating my breast, tearing my hair, and giving vent to the fearful frenzy of my grief."

Again did Francesco pause; and I was moved almost to tears by that portion of the narrative to which I had just been listening with the deepest, tensest interest. For several minutes he was so agitated and excited by the recollections thus

vividly conjured up in his brain, that he could not resume his history: but at length conquering his emotions with a powerful effort, he continued in these terms:—

“Language, my dear Wilmot, is utterly incompetent to convey an idea of the desperate state of my mind, when my thoughts, beginning to collect themselves, showed me the frightful reality of all that had been previously haunting me like a nightmare. I felt that Antonia was lost to me for ever, if our union depended upon her father's consent. This was alone sufficient to drive me to despair: but in addition thereto, I had been covered with insults—denounced as a cheat and an impostor—accused of having passed myself off as a gentleman of good family, whereas a plebeian puddle filled my veins; and I had been thrust as it were like a felon from the threshold of the Tivoli palace. These insults I could not avenge. It was impossible to challenge Antonia's father or brother to a duel, because such a course would have displayed heartlessness in respect to her own feelings. Besides, they might shelter themselves behind that privilege which exempts patricians from crossing swords with plebeians. The insults I had received therefore must be endured: but at least, I thought within myself, the conduct of the Count and his son released me from any necessity to stand upon punctilious measures in respect to whatsoever regarded the accomplishment of my own happiness. I knew that Antonia loved me so fondly and devotedly that she would sympathise deeply with me under existing circumstances; and that she would not refuse to fly with me, that the blessing of the priest might join our hands with indissoluble bonds. These reflections inspired me somewhat with hope; and throughout the night which followed that terrible explosion at the Tivoli palace, I paced this room, meditating and settling my plans. When day came and I looked at myself in the mirror, I felt terrified by the ghastliness of my countenance: but, Oh! my feelings had been worked up to such an excruciating degree of tenseness, that it was a wonder I had not gone raving mad. I waited at home the whole of that day; and when dusk came, I muffled myself in an ample cloak, and repaired into the neighbourhood of the Tivoli palace. I had not waited long before I encountered the very domestic of the household on whom I had already set my mind as the agent to be employed for the purpose which I had in hand. He was a footman who had always treated me with the most assiduous attention, and on whom I had therefore bestowed liberal gratuities: his sister was the principal female-attendant about the person of Antonia. This man readily consented to convey, through the medium of his sister, a note to the Count's daughter. I had already written it; and I remained waiting in the neighbourhood for the response. In an hour the answer was brought: it was full of tenderness, and love, and grief; and I saw that I had not miscalculated the strength of Antonia's affection. The means of corresponding were now established; and in a second letter, received on the ensuing evening, I learnt that all her movements were as closely watched as they could be, by her father and brother. However, my plan for herescape was already arranged and settled in my mind: I promised to take the lacquey and his sister into my service

if they would assist me—and an assent was given. The footman undertook to procure the keys affording egress from the back part of the premises; and another exchange of notes with my beloved Antonia gave me the joyous assurance that she would fly with me. Accordingly, on the ensuing night, between twelve and one o'clock, I had a post-chaise and four in readiness near the gate of the garden-wall at the back of the Tivoli palace; and you may easily conceive the intense anxiety with which I awaited the instant that, as I hoped, was to give Antonia to my arms. It was arranged that the lacquey and his sister were to fly with us: we were to journey across the Roman frontier into the Tuscan States—a few hours would take us thither—a priest would quickly unite us—and then it was my purpose to bespeak the good offices of the Count of Livorno to effect a reconciliation with Antonia's father. But, alas! fortune was altogether adverse to my hopes and views. While waiting with feverish suspense near the garden-gate, a voice from the other side of the wall suddenly reached my ear: it was that of the lacquey, saying, ‘Are you there, Signor Avellino?’—‘Yes, yes,’ I replied, a prey to the wildest suspense.—‘Then hasten away, for all is discovered! everything is known! but it was no fault of ours! For heaven's sake depart!’—I called out to the man; but no voice responded to my entreaty that he would give me the least word of explanation: I therefore knew that he must have fled away from the spot on the opposite side of the garden-wall. I dismissed the equipage and returned home half distracted. On the following day, between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, the lacquey came to me here, at my own house; and then I learnt what had occurred. Antonia and her maid were ready dressed for flight—the lacquey had obtained possession of the requisite keys, and was waiting in his own room until his sister came to give him the signal that Antonia was in readiness: the young woman came accordingly—the lacquey crept down stairs to get the door open—but while tarrying there for a few moments, he suddenly caught the young Viscount's voice upon the landing above, upbraiding Antonia for her evident intention to take to flight: the next instant the voice of the Count himself was heard—and the lacquey, faithful to my interests, rushed across the garden to give me the announcement that all was discovered and all was lost.—‘The first thing this morning,’ added the lacquey, ‘Cardinal Gravina came to the Tivoli palace; and for more than two hours did he remain in consultation with the Count. Then the Lady Antonia was desired to proceed into their presence: I know not what took place; but shortly afterwards the carriage was ordered, and the Lady Antonia went away in company with his Eminence the Cardinal.’—‘But where? whither?’ I exclaimed, almost wild with despair and grief.—‘Ah, signor, I know not,’ responded the lacquey: ‘at least, all I know is, that the carriage proceeded to the Cardinal's palace; and there the Count's coachman and footman in attendance resigned their places to two domestics of his Eminence, the carriage immediately driving away again. But where it has gone, I am utterly unable to say.’—I was for some moments in such a frenzied state of mind that I could not question the lacquey farther:



but presently subduing the violence of my grief as well as I was able, I asked him whether he saw Antonia depart?—"Yes, signor," he replied; "but I could not discern her ladyship's countenance through the veil which she wore. She leant upon the arm of the Cardinal, who appeared to address her in soothing whispers. I fear, signor, by all appearances, that her ladyship was very, very unhappy!"—"My God, and she is thus taken from me!" I exclaimed, feeling as if I must lay violent hands upon myself.—The lacquey besought me to be calm; and he went on to say, "When her ladyship was gone, the Count sent for me and my sister into his presence, told us that he had no doubt as to our complicity in the intended flight, but added that he purposed to forgive us on condition that we mentioned the circumstances to no one. We of course promised obedience to the injunction, but I did not the less take the first opportunity to run off to you, signor, to tell you all these things."—I thanked the man, and liberally rewarded him. Hastily dismissing him, I went forth with madness in my brain to make all possible inquiries, with the last desperate hope of ascertaining in which direction Cardinal Gravina had taken off Antonia in the carriage. I sped to the Gravina palace—I lavished gold upon the porter and the lacqueys: but all to no effect! No one had heard the Cardinal give any instructions to his coachman: no one could surmise the destination of the equipage. I wandered about, asking everywhere if such an equipage had been seen to pass: but hours went by, and I obtained not the slightest clue to that which I sought to discover. I returned home with anguish in my heart and frenzy in my brain: a letter was awaiting me—it was from the Count of Tivoli. I tore it open: its contents were laconic and cold. They were simply to the effect that my most audacious endeavour to carry off the Lady Antonia had been discovered—that in consequence of my machinations it had been deemed advisable to send the young lady away to some relations in a foreign and distant country—and that previous to her departure she had acknowledged her disobedience to her sire, and had besought his forgiveness. The letter concluded by observing that if I possessed a spark of honour I would abstain from giving publicity to whatsoever related to an episode in which the Tivoli family was concerned. Now, my dear Wilmot, you know all. A year has elapsed since Antonia was lost to me; and never since have I seen her—never since have I heard of her. I am still in the completest ignorance of the place to which she was consigned: the family to whose care she was confided, may live, for aught I know, amidst the smiling districts of France, or amidst the wildest steppes of Russia. Yes—for thus long she has been lost to me: but her image—that beloved and cherished image—dwells in my memory: for in respect to *her* that memory of mine is immortal! But it does more than dwell in my memory; I have transferred it to canvass—"

"Ah!" I ejaculated, in the hope that Francesco Avellino would show me the representative of the idol of his heart's worship. "But methought that you had scruples on this point—"

"Yes—when she was still at her father's house, and when I could see her daily," answered Avellino, in a voice of profoundest melancholy. "But

when she was gone—after we were so cruelly severed—and when in the course of weeks and months my mind began to recover somewhat from the dreadful shock which it had sustained,—*then* methought it would prove a melancholy pleasure to exercise whatsoever little artistic ability I may possess, in depicting upon canvass that image which was so indelibly impressed upon my mind. I have worked at it, Wilmot, with the most painstaking attention: it has indeed proved to me a labour of love; and under this influence I have accomplished something which, poor as a specimen of art though it may be, is nevertheless a masterpiece of my ability; and I could not have achieved it half so well if it had been a task for which the whole wealth of the Indies were to be received as the price. And as I have progressed with that labour of love of mine, I have felt the mysterious influence of hope occasionally stealing in unto my soul: for I have said to myself that her love is as constant and as imperishable as my own—and that if heaven spares her life, and mine also, there may yet a brighter day arise to smile in happiness upon the union of two fond hearts. But there are other times, Wilmot," added Avellino, in a low deep voice, "when my soul abandons itself to despair, and when it appears to me as if the remainder of my existence is doomed to continue a sorrowful void—for that Antonia is lost to me for ever!"

"No, no!" I exclaimed: "no, no, my dear friend! do not abandon yourself to despair. Love itself is hope; and heaven will not punish you so cruelly—you, who have done naught but good deeds in your life! The afflictions we experience are often intended only to chasten us, and prepare us for the better appreciation of that happiness which we covet. These chastenings are therefore in themselves only temporary—the happiness comes at last—and the wise purposes of heaven are fulfilled."

Avellino listened to me with amazement and solemn attention; and pressing my hand, he said, "You have indeed infused hope into my soul. Yet how is it to be fulfilled? It is true that I do not believe—I never have believed, that Antonia recanted to her father a single syllable of the love-vows she had pledged to me—But again I ask, how is hope to be fulfilled?"

"To ask such a question," I rejoined, "is to expect that heaven will inspire you with the power of penetrating into that which is to remain inscrutable until its own good time shall come. Reflect for a moment, my dear friend—and your memory will doubtless furnish you with sufficient corroborations of what I am about to say. How often have incidents which at the time appeared the meanest and the most trivial, been subsequently found to convert themselves into a train of circumstances the development of which in such a form was little expected. Yet those very incidents which seemed so insignificant at the time of their occurrence, and which subsequent events proved to be of such vital importance, all entered into the methods by which heaven was working out its mysterious ways. If your love may appear hopeless to-day and enveloped in darkest clouds, the sunshine may be upon it to-morrow; and your heart may yet rejoice. Do not despair therefore—have confidence in heaven—and believe that love itself is hope and faith!"

"You speak, Wilmot, with an experience far beyond your years," replied Avellino, evidently, solaced and cheered by the words I had just been addressing to him. "Ah, I comprehend!" he added, as a light appeared to flash in unto his mind: "you yourself have loved—your own love was at first unfavoured—you had faith and hope—and now you possess the confidence that this trusting reliance of your's will be rewarded?"

"Yes—I have loved—I love—and I do indeed cling in confidence to the hope that heaven will not desert me. On another occasion, Avellino, I will tell you the history of my life; and you will see how wonderfully it has been chequered—you will see likewise how miraculously, as the world terms it, succour has been vouchsafed when human comprehension was utterly at a loss to conceive from what quarter such aid could come. But for the present," I added, "let us speak only of yourself and your affairs. You have accomplished your labour of love, you tell me——"

"Yes—and some day you shall see it. But not to-day; my dear friend—not to-day!—for all my most poignant memories have been already revived with too much keenness, and my soul can endure no more. You will not therefore press me upon that point? On another occasion, with cheerfulness will I introduce you to my studio. But this I may tell you—that on the day when you first presented yourself at my dwelling, I was engaged in putting the finishing stroke to the picture of my beloved Antonia——"

"And I interrupted you!" I exclaimed. "Oh, if I had known upon how sacred a task I was intruding——"

"Mention it not," interrupted Francesco. "I bless the day when you came—I have derived comfort from your friendship—and the language of hope and confidence in which you have just now addressed me, makes my heart rejoice that I should have poured my love-tale into your ears."

I pressed Avellino's hand,—and soon afterwards took my leave of him: for I could only too well imagine that after the excitement which his feelings had experienced by the narration of his history, he must be desirous to remain alone with his thoughts.

## CHAPTER CVI.

### OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

ON my way back to the hotel, I pondered deeply everything I had just heard from Francesco's lips. I now comprehended how immense was the distance between the haughty Roman aristocracy, and even that highest trading class which was included in the sphere called "plebeian." Yet, making all possible allowances for these prejudices, and remembering that the Count of Tivoli had been reared amongst them, I could not entirely blame him for his refusal to bestow his daughter's hand upon Francesco Avellino. But though I thus recognised certain extenuating circumstances on his behalf, yet on the other side how greatly should I have admired him, if rising superior to those prejudices, he had thought only of the high moral worth, the fine intellect, the polished manners, and

the elegant bearing of the suitor for Antonia's hand. In respect to his son the Viscount, I now held him in the profoundest contempt. He had not merely shown himself proud, but also spiteful—not merely prejudiced, but also malignant; and he had exhibited qualities which made me almost detest him. But what had become of Antonia? to what quarter of the world had she been consigned? and was it on account of separation from a dearly-loved daughter, that her father's demeanour had grown so seriously pensive during the year which had now elapsed since her removal from the paternal home?

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon, when I re-entered the hotel; and I proceeded to the coffee-room to look at the English and French newspapers. Just as I entered, a couple of waiters were proceeding to a table at the further extremity, at which two gentlemen were seated. One of the waiters was carrying divers bottles of Scotch ale and London porter, ample supplies of which were kept at the establishment for those British visitors who loved these beverages; and the other waiter bore a tray covered with dishes that sent forth an inviting odour. I did not at the first glance recognise the two guests—it was so rapidly cursory an one: but as the foremost waiter placed the malt liquors upon the table, I was startled by a well-known voice saying, "It's just that; and now, Saltcoats, let's see what sort of a tap they have at this place."

Yes: there was my old acquaintance Dominic Clackmannan—or, I beg his pardon, Mr. Clackmannan of Clackmannanachnish; and opposite to him sat his friend Mr. Saltcoats. The former, though now at least sixty-five, bore his years uncommonly well; and in no way was he altered since the day that I first beheld him at Inch Methglin. His wig, of curious fashion, was of the same flaxen tint—his countenance was broad and round—and the double chin concealed by overlapping his low white cravat. He was not a hair's-breadth thinner than when he used to feed so copiously at the Highland Chief's table: that is to say, he was as stout as ever. His look had the same sort of stolid seriousness; and when he took his pinch of snuff, he rolled lazily about like a great butt in his chair. His costume was likewise the same—clerico-scholastic—his suit being black, the dress-coat having large square tails, the waistcoat with capacious pockets—the knee-breeches and black gaiters. Nor was Mr. Saltcoats any different from what he was when I was first introduced to him at the hotel in London—unless indeed, it were that his face was of a deeper red and that his bald crown shone with a brighter gloss. His costume was likewise the same—pepper and salt garments—a felt hat—a gray neckcloth—gray stockings—gray gloves lying over the brim of that gray hat.

"My dear sir," I exclaimed, advancing towards Mr. Clackmannan, "I am delighted to see you! I learnt from Sir Alexander and Lady Carrondale that you were in Italy with Mr. Saltcoats——"

"It's just that," said the Dominic, grasping my hand with his characteristic good-nature, but gazing upon me with a kind of stolid uncertainty as to who I might actually be. "To be sure, my young friend—I recollect you now—you are Thomas Shankspindles, nephew of my old college

ehum the Laird of Tintosquashdale. And yet you can't be, when I think of it—you must be his uncle—you can't be his grandfather——”

“Nonsense, Dominie!” exclaimed Mr. Saltcoats, with a perfect roar of laughter. “This young gentleman is not much above twenty—and you would make him out a grandfather—Ho! ho!”

“It's just that,” said Mr. Clackmannan, taking a huge pinch of snuff. “I recollect now—this is the young gentleman who came to my assistance when those ill-mannered boys tied the tin kettle to the tail of my coat—it must have been the tail of my coat—it could not have been my pigtail, because I never wore one——”

“I am very much mistaken, Dominie,” exclaimed Mr. Saltcoats, “if this young gentleman is not the one whom I had the pleasure of meeting at the hotel in Holborn a little more than a year back. To be sure it is!”—and Mr. Saltcoats gave me so hearty a shake of the hand that for the next hour or so my wrist felt as if it were just recovering from a sprain. “Sit down, Mr. Williams—Wilmot—Ah, that's it—Mr. Wilmot!”

“It's just that,” said the Dominie—“Joshua Wilmot—And yet it can't be Joshua—because I never knew but one person named Joshua; and that was Joshua Drummaldernoch, who was put into the Tolbooth for sheepstealing—and I really don't think our young friend here looks as if he ever stole a sheep. No—now I recollect, it must be Joseph Wilmot—and you helped Mr. Duncansby to elope with Sir Alexander Carrondale.”

“Nonsense, Dominie!” vociferated Mr. Saltcoats; “your ideas are all in confusion——”

“It's just that,” said the Dominie; “and it's the very thing I told the Widow Glenbucket when she fell out of the window and the cat nearly tumbled out after her when looking to see where she had fallen. No—it wasn't just that—it was the cat that fell, and the Widow Glenbucket who was looking out of the window.”

“Come, Mr. Wilmot,” exclaimed Saltcoats, with another uproarious peal of laughter, “we shall make nothing of the Dominie with his Mr. Duncansby eloping with Sir Alexander Carrondale, when every one but his foolish old self knows that it was the beautiful Emmeline whose flight you so chivalrously aided. Sit down, and join us at lunch.”

“It's just that,” said the Dominie: “join us at lunch—it can't be dinner——”

“But it ought to be.” I observed with a smile: “for it has all the substantialities of one.”

“Dinner indeed!” vociferated Saltcoats: “it's only a sort of stop-gap for the appetite:”—and as he thus spoke his merry good-natured eyes wandered complacently over the various substantial and succulent dishes, as well as over the half-dozen bottles of ale and stout, which were spread upon the table. “Trust me, Mr. Wilmot, that when six o'clock comes, the Dominie and I shall be as ready for our dinner as we now are for our lunch.”

“It's just that,” said Mr. Clackmannan: “as I used to tell Sandie Macwheeble—no, it couldn't have been Sandie—it must have been my friend Baillie Owlhead of the Gallowgate, Aberdeen, when he used to come and dine with me at the Widow Glenbucket's, in the Grassmarket, Edinburgh

——But what is it that I used to tell him? I shall recollect presently:”—and with these words Mr. Clackmannan conveyed to his plate half the contents of a dish with the nature of which he was utterly unacquainted.

Yielding to Mr. Saltcoats' hospitable invitation, I sat down at the table and made a show of eating something, although I had but little appetite; for Francesco Avellino's tale was still uppermost in my mind. Mr. Saltcoats was soon deep in the incomprehensible mysteries of another dish of Italian cookery; and when he had partaken of about two pounds of substantial food, he found leisure to express his wonder what it was.

“It's just that,” said the Dominie, now likewise pausing to yield to a similar perplexity: “it can't be haggis—and I'm sure it's not collops—I don't think it's Scotch broth—and they have no stewed tripe in this strange country. It can't be a hashed sucking-pig, because you don't find it's tail—and I never but once knew a pig without a tail—and that was at the Laird of Tintosquashdale's. But I remember telling the Widow Glenbucket—it was the very day that the domestic cat was unaccountably missed, and she gave me fricasseed rabbit for dinner——But what did I tell her? I shall recollect presently:”—and the worthy Dominie, having refreshed himself with about a pint and a half of Scotch ale, which he drank at a draught, began to explore the mysteries of another savoury dish.

“How long have you been here, Mr. Wilmot?” inquired Saltcoats. “Several days, eh? Oh, we have only just arrived. Have they got any port and sherry in this hotel?”

“You have not yet, then, visited the grand Cathedral?” I asked.

“No—not yet,” replied Mr. Saltcoats. “But are the beds free from bugs?”

“You will be delighted with the ruins of the Colloseum,” I exclaimed, with a sudden access of enthusiasm.

“But can they at this hotel,” asked Mr. Saltcoats, “serve up an English plum-pudding?”

“And then the picture-galleries—the museums—the works of art!” I exclaimed, scarcely heeding his interruption.

“Have they got such a thing as Scotch whisky?” inquired Saltcoats; “and do they muster a warming-pan to warm the bed of a cold night?”

“It's just that,” said the Dominie: “the warming-pan is indispensable. But I should like to see the Pope—and also to taste one of their garlic ragouts. Yes—it must be garlic that I heard eulogised—and not onions; because the breath of the French traveller who told us, smelt so of garlic—and it put me in mind of something I said to the Widow Glenbucket one day when her breath smelt of gin——Ah! I recollect, Saltcoats, I found you with your face very close to the widow's one day—and I couldn't make it out. I have been thinking of it ever since—it was a matter of twenty years ago—I suppose you were putting your nose to her lips to see whether her breath really did smell of gin?”

“Something of the sort, Dominie,” exclaimed his friend, winking knowingly at me. “Come, Mr. Wilmot, you do not eat—and you have not yet emptied your first glass of stout. Perhaps

you will take wine? We will ring for a bottle of port, if they have got such a thing."

I had the greatest trouble to prevent Mr. Saltcoats from overwhelming me with his hospitalities; and I think that for a moment or two I sank somewhat in his esteem by assuring him that I never drank anything in the middle of the day. But he was too good-natured to look gloomy for many instants; and the affair was compromised by my taking a bottle of soda-water with a glass of wine in it. He was rendered quite happy so long as I consented to drink something.

After luncheon, I was just about to offer my services to escort Dominic Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats to some of the principal buildings,—when a French *courier* who travelled with them, and who spoke English well, made his appearance to receive their orders. I had been wondering how they had possibly got on while travelling in foreign countries of the languages of which they were both supremely ignorant,—when the presence of the *courier* solved the mystery; and this human appendage they could well afford to keep, inasmuch as the Dominic had been left tolerably well off and Mr. Saltcoats possessed a competency of his own. Finding therefore that they had a guide as well as an interpreter in the shape of a French *courier*—whose business it was to show them everything, explain everything, and help them through everything—I left my own proffer of service unsaid. Indeed, I was by no means displeased at this avoidance of the necessity of playing the amiable towards them: for I shrewdly suspected that instead of caring to see St. Peter's, they would be much more likely to look out for something to eat and drink—and that while gazing upon the ruins of the Colosseum, visions of bottled ale and stout would be running in their heads. Such companions were by no means those whom I should in preference have chosen; and good-natured though they were, their society for any length of time amounted to an infliction. I therefore abandoned them to the charge of the French *courier*,—having given them a sort of half promise that I would join them at dinner in the evening.

It was now three o'clock in the afternoon; and I strolled out by myself into the streets of Rome. I had no particular object in view—I did not purpose on this occasion to visit any institutions: I therefore thought that I would suffer my steps to guide me just as they listed,—in the same way that a traveller indifferent as to the route he pursues, throws the bridle upon the horse's neck and allows the animal to take him into any path he thinks fit. I wandered on through street after street—loitering at shop-windows—pausing to contemplate an old church or any curious specimen of house architecture; and thus after a while I literally lost my way. I really did not know, when I began to reflect on the subject, in which part of the city I was: but I cared nothing for this, being well aware that when I was tired I had only to call a hackney-coach, mention the name of my hotel, and thus be borne thither. But the streets grew narrower and narrower; and I found that my wandering steps were leading me farther into a very poor quarter of the city.

As I was passing a chemist's shop in a mean and wretched street,—the shop itself reminding me of that of the apothecary's in "Romeo and Juliet"—

my ear suddenly caught the sound of the English language, which, as well as the words which were uttered, riveted my attention and made me stop short.

"Well, Tom, if it is our last coin, don't let us hesitate—let us spend it in getting the poor creature the medicine. We can starve for a day without dying: but she, poor thing, must perish if nothing is done for her. Your wages are due the day after to-morrow—"

"Well, Jane, it shall be as you say," was the answer given to the appealing words thus spoken.

I looked at the speakers: they consisted of a man and woman, evidently in very humble circumstances,—the former having the appearance of a journeyman-carpenter: for he had on a loose flannel jacket, a paper cap, and an apron, and a rule peeped out of his trousers'-pocket. He was about forty years of age; and the woman—whom I at once took to be his wife—was about thirty-five. Though very poorly clad, yet her attire was neat and clean; and her countenance, if not good-looking, had that expression of benevolence which is far better than mere beauty. They were just about to enter a chemist's shop when I accosted them,—saying, "Pardon me for interrupting you—but I happened to overhear what just passed between you."

The man touched his cap—the woman curtsied; and they both seemed well pleased at thus meeting a fellow-countryman.

"Your words have interested me," I hastened to resume. "I have heard enough to convince me of your kind feelings—and I hope to be permitted not merely to recompense yourselves, but likewise to have my share in the work of charity on which you are evidently bent. Doubtless it is some fellow-countrywoman who is the object of your generous solicitude?"

"No, sir," answered the man: "she is an Italian."

"But that makes no difference," hastily interposed the female: "she is a fellow-creature if she is not a fellow-countrywoman."

I gazed upon that humble mechanic's wife with mingled admiration and emotion: indeed there was something profoundly touching in the fact of these sojourners in a strange land extending their Christian charity to a native of that land, and who was therefore an alien to their sympathies were it not that their natural philanthropy knew no distinctions of clime or country, but was cosmopolitan.

"And pray who is she?" I inquired; then suddenly recollecting that the case might be pressing, I hastened to exclaim, "We will order the medicine first, and you shall tell me all about it afterwards. Have you a medical prescription?"

"Yes, sir," answered the man: "we got a doctor to attend upon her out of charity—but the doctors in this country don't send out medicines as they do in England; so one has to go to the chemist's. But here is the prescription."

I took it and entered the little shop: the apothecary read it, and then spoke to me in Italian. I had by this time gleaned a sufficiency of the language to be enabled to tell him that I did not understand it adequately to converse, but still enough to inquire the price of the medicine. The journeyman-carpenter came to the assistance of



the colloquy—for he could speak Italian tolerably well. Thus in a few minutes the medicine was made up, and paid for out of my own purse—the journeyman observing that it was very lucky I had come up at the time, as the cost of the potion exceeded both his own expectation and means.

We passed out of the shop; and the carpenter said to me, “Perhaps you will come yourself, sir, to the place where we lodge. The poor creature is there, in the same house; and if it wasn’t that she had mentioned the name of some one who was known to the landlady, I am very much afraid she would have been turned into the streets or sent into the hospital directly she was seized with illness. And the Roman hospital, I can assure you, sir, is little better than a lazar-house. But here we are.”

The carpenter and his wife had stopped at the open door-way of a mean-looking house, but the aspect of which at once struck me as not being

altogether unfamiliar. The next instant a terrible suspicion flashed to my mind:—with lightning speed were my looks swept up and down that street—along the buildings to the right and the left; and as that suspicion became all in a moment changed into a conviction, I said to the mechanic and his wife, “Haste, haste—and let me see this invalid!”

They could not comprehend my sudden excitement: they did not however wait to question me—but quickly led the way along a narrow dark stone passage, up an equally dark staircase, to the second landing. There the woman gently opened a door; and as my looks plunged into a small and meanly furnished chamber, they settled—as I had only too fearfully expected—upon the countenance of the young and beautiful unknown whom I had brought with me in the post-chaise to the Eternal City.

“Good heavens!” I murmured: “is it indeed so?”

"Do you know her, sir?" inquired both the man and his wife, speaking as it were in the same breath.

"I know something of her," I answered,— "very, very little indeed—but still enough to augment the interest which even as a total stranger, I should experience for one in her pitiable condition. She sleeps—I will not disturb her;"—and I stepped back from the threshold of the room.

A few moments' reflection was sufficient to decide me how to act. During all the hours that we were together on the memorable night when I brought her to Rome, she had enveloped herself in mystery—she had not even mentioned to me her name; and when we parted it was evidently with the idea on her side that we should not meet again: indeed she had carefully abstained from saying anything that should give me the least encouragement to inquire after her subsequent welfare. It was therefore from delicate motives that I had hitherto abstained from seeking the place where she had alighted from the chaise; and, as the reader has seen, it was by the merest accident that my wandering steps had conducted me to that same street now. In a word, I concluded that when once I had brought her to Rome, it was her wish that I should see her no more; and I was resolved that she should not know—or at least not immediately—who it was that was interesting himself in her behalf. Such was the rapid conclusion to which I came after those few instants' reflection upon the landing.

"Do you attend upon her, my good woman," I said in a whisper to the mechanic's wife: "follow the directions which the doctor has given in respect to the medicine—and say nothing to her of my presence here. I am going to have some conversation with your husband—and everything shall be done that money can accomplish for the poor girl's well-being."

There was a window upon the landing; and I saw that as I spoke, the carpenter and his wife surveyed me with a growing suspicion, mingled with reproachfulness in their looks;—and no wonder, considering the agitation and excitement I had displayed from the moment that they had first brought me to the entrance of that house. I comprehended in an instant what was passing in their minds; and I hastened to say, "Your misgiving is natural enough—and I am not offended by it. But as there is a God above me, I am innocent of all wrong towards that young lady! Indeed, I would almost stake my existence that she has sustained no wrong of the nature to which your suspicions point—but that she is virtue itself!"

The countenances of the mechanic and his wife brightened up rapidly while I was thus speaking in a low but emphatic tone; and they both besought my pardon for the temporary suspicion they had entertained. I repeated my former assurance—that I considered their misgiving natural enough; and while the woman entered the invalid's room to administer the medicine, her husband conducted me into their own apartment, which opened from the same landing. It was very poorly furnished—but everything was neat and clean; and being in such humble circumstances, it was fortunate for the couple that they possessed no children—as I presently learnt was the case.

The journeyman-carpenter's tale in respect to

the young lady was soon told. She had arrived at the house very early in the morning about six days back: she had alighted from a chaise, which immediately drove off. It appeared that she inquired for an old woman whom she expected to find there: but this woman had removed some months back to a distant part of the country,—her services as nurse having been engaged in some family of distinction. The young lady was terribly afflicted on receiving this intelligence: and she besought that she might have a room given her, no matter how poor and humble. She gave no name, and would answer no questions. She was totally unknown to the landlady of the house: she had neither baggage nor money: but she promised that whatever debt she might contract, should be honourably paid. The landlady, convinced by her appearance that she was no common adventuress, consented to give her a lodging: but scarcely was she installed there, when she became exceedingly ill; and being overtaken by fever, grew delirious. The journeyman and his wife took compassion upon her, and rendered what succour they could,—Mrs. Blanchard (for such was the name of the worthy couple) attending her almost constantly day and night. At length, as the fever did not leave her—as she continued delirious—and there were no possible means of discovering whether she had any family or friends in Rome, the carpenter got a doctor to visit her from motives of charity; and the result was the prescription which had just been made up. In respect to the Blanchards themselves, the man had been some years in Italy, to which country he was originally brought by a London contractor who was engaged to fit up a villa which an English nobleman had taken in the neighbourhood of Rome. Blanchard had remained at Rome after the contract was finished, in the hope that the superior skill of an English artisan would ensure him good wages; and he had married a servant who was in the household of the contractor. Things had not however turned out as he originally hoped—work became scarce—and its wages fell lower and lower: so that the poor couple had no means to return to their native land; and they eked out an impoverished existence as well as they could. Nevertheless, even from their pittance they had generously spared something for the relief of the poor young lady.

Having listened to Blanchard's explanations, I volunteered none in respect to the circumstances which had made me acquainted with the fair stranger: but I bade him at once hasten off and fetch the doctor,—giving him the money to pay the fee in advance. In a few minutes he returned, accompanied by the medical man,—who having pocketed the fee, and knowing that it came from my purse, was all civility and attention. I begged him to inform me candidly what was the young lady's precise condition: and he said that she was in a high state of fever, no doubt brought on by some extraordinary mental excitement—but that with care and attention, there was every prospect of her recovery. I said that all such care and attention should be assuredly paid her; and then I asked whether it were safe to remove her to a hotel, or to better lodgings. The physician responded emphatically in the negative—as indeed I had foreseen he would. I thereupon requested that he would devote all his time and skill to the



patient,—intimating that he should be liberally rewarded: and thus our colloquy, which was carried on through the medium of the intelligent English mechanic, was brought to a conclusion. I however saw that the doctor was inclined to put some questions in order to gratify his curiosity with respect to the unknown young lady; but I exhibited an impatience which he took as a hint that he was at once to enter upon his professional ministrations towards her. I bade Blanchard enjoin him presently not to make any mention of me to the young lady when she should regain her consciousness: for I hinted that feelings of delicacy would render her uncomfortable if she knew that a young man who was almost a stranger to her was thus making her the object of his charity. I then sent for Mrs. Blanchard; and placing in her hands my purse—which was well filled—desired her to purchase without delay all things necessary for the comfort of the invalid. I told her even to go to the extent of re-furnishing the room so far as was practicable considering the dangerous state in which the young lady lay. The reader may rest assured that a portion of the contents of that purse was assigned to the care of the honest mechanic and his wife; and I gave them to understand that I should do much more for them. Having repeated my injunction that no allusion was to be made to me, when the invalid should recover her consciousness, I took my departure from the house; and entering a hackney-coach, returned to the hotel.

## CHAPTER CVII.

### AN ENGLISH PLUM-PUDDING.—AN ENCOUNTER.

THE mysterious circumstances which regarded this young lady naturally engrossed my thoughts; and more than ever did I marvel who she could be—what the nature of the place was whence she had escaped on the night that I brought her to Rome—who were the persecutors against whom she complained so bitterly—and how a young creature, evidently so well bred, of such good education, and such elegant manners, could be reduced to so painful a strait as this. Had she no friend on the face of the earth? was her sole reliance in the first instance placed upon that old nurse whom she had hoped to find, but who so unfortunately for her was absent elsewhere? And then, why that feverish anxiety on her part to arrive at Rome? I reflected that she must no doubt have had some special object in view; and if such were the case, it was by no means difficult to understand how the working-out of her purpose had been suddenly stopped by this severe illness which had overtaken her.

On alighting at the door of the hotel, I recollected my promise to dine with Dominie Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats: but I was really in no humour for the tedious platitudes of the former or the uproarious hilarity of the latter. I therefore resolved to hasten up to my own apartment—take my dinner by myself—and desire the waiter to deliver on my behalf an apology to those gentlemen. But as I was rushing up the stairs, I encountered the very personages; and Mr. Saltcoats,

catching me by the arm, roared out, “You will only just have time to wash your hands: for dinner will be served up in a minute. We were really afraid you were detained by business or pleasure somewhere else; and we were so sorry, for we had set our minds upon having you.”

“It’s just that,” observed the Dominie: “for my friend Saltcoats here took an hour’s trouble—was it an hour, it might have been a minute—But I will think over it, and let you know presently. And this reminds me of what I one day said to the Widow Glenbucket—”

“Nonsense, Dominie!” interrupted Saltcoats. “The fact is, my dear Mr. Wilmot, I have taken some little trouble to induce the people of this hotel to serve us up a regular English plum-pudding. But heaven have mercy upon them in their deplorable ignorance!—for the cook had no more idea of what the thing meant than the Dominie has of telling an anecdote without interrupting himself. However, the cook is a very decent fellow in his way, and promised to do his best. I had him up into my presence; and through the medium of our *courier*, explained how a plum-pudding is to be made. I told him how he was to take the raisins and the currants, the citron and the orange-peel, the sugar and the flour—and to mix up the whole ingredients—”

“It’s just that,” said the Dominie: “but I smell soup.”

“And here we are wasting our precious time!” exclaimed Mr. Saltcoats. “Run up-stairs, Mr. Wilmot—wash your hands—and be quick! We dine in the coffee-room.”

I could not very well refuse the invitation that was so kindly meant; and now—by one of those strange and capricious revulsions of feeling to which we weak mortals are liable—I thought that after all I would rather have society than not. Accordingly, having hastily made some little change in my toilet, I descended to the coffee-room. Dinner was immediately served up; and notwithstanding the copiousness of their luncheon, immense was the justice rendered by Dominie Clackmannan and his friend Mr. Saltcoats to this still more substantial repast. I will not attempt to describe the conversation which progressed simultaneously therewith: suffice it to say that the old Dominie was, if possible, more troublesome and stupid with his anecdotes than ever; and that the remarks of Mr. Saltcoats were principally confined to critical comments upon the viands and the drinkables. At length the time came when the plum-pudding was to make its appearance. Mr. Saltcoats rubbed his hands in gleeful anticipation of the luxury for which he himself had all the honour of catering; and the mention of the good old English edible reminded Dominie Clackmannan of at least a dozen things he had said to the Widow Glenbucket and others of his delectable acquaintances, but none of which anecdotes was he enabled to carry out to completion. At length, after a somewhat prolonged delay, the waiter entered with great solemnity; and both the Dominie and Mr. Saltcoats turned their eyes upon him.

“Halloa!” exclaimed the latter: “there must be some mistake here!”

“It’s just that,” interjected the Dominie: “he is bringing us the soup intended for another table. And that reminds me—”

"But perhaps," I suggested, as I now in my turn cast a look at the waiter, "the cook thought it better to serve up the pudding in a tureen."

"Well, it certainly has the orthodox odour," exclaimed Mr. Saltcoats, as the waiter, with all due solemnity, placed the tureen upon the table.

The lid was lifted off—Mr. Saltcoats plunged his looks into the tureen—and then sank back in his chair with such an awful groan and such a discomfited expression of countenance, that his habitual jolliness could not have more suddenly changed into downright wretchedness if the greatest calamity had all in a moment been communicated to him. Even the Dominie looked aghast; and so far from recollecting an anecdote of anything he had ever said to any person of his acquaintance, he was reminded of nothing. In respect to myself, I burst out into an uncontrollable fit of laughter: and no wonder—for it was a dark-looking washy soup which was served up to us, and with which the tureen was filled almost to its very brim. That laughter of mine acted like a spell upon Mr. Saltcoats,—who, suddenly regaining his own jocularly, gave vent to a tremendous peal of merriment, which re-acting upon Mr. Clackmannan, reminded him of something he had said to the Widow Glenbucket on some occasion when she did something which after all he could not for the life of him recollect. All in a moment a light broke in unto the mind of Mr. Saltcoats; and he remembered that though he had taken so much pains to describe the ingredients with the nicest details to the cook, through the medium of the interpreter, he had altogether forgotten to add the important fact that the pudding was to be boiled in a cloth. The consequence was, the cook had poured all his ingredients into the hot water in the saucepan, and had served up this precious mess accordingly.

The tureen was sent away: but Mr. Clackmannan and his friend Saltcoats managed to indemnify themselves for their disappointment, by a tremendous onslaught upon other sweets and dainties that were placed upon the table. The incident gave rise to a considerable amount of laughter: the dessert succeeded the course in which the unfortunate tureen had figured; and the bottle circulated freely under the auspices of the convivial Saltcoats—though I am afraid that I failed to do as much justice thereto as he could have wished.

We were in the midst of the dessert, when we heard a travelling-carriage drive into the courtyard of the hotel; and a few minutes afterwards one of the waiters ushered a portly dame into the coffee-room, requesting her in French to seat herself by the fire there for a few minutes until apartments were got ready for her reception. She answered him in the broadest Scotch,—to the effect that she did not understand his "lingo," but that she would wait there according to the recommendation her "gude-man" had just given her. She was a lady of about five-and-forty—exceedingly stout—with a very red face—and encumbered with all sorts of cloaks, shawls, and furs. Down she sat before the fire,—depositing herself in the chair with about as much ease and lightness as an elephant could be supposed to exhibit if performing a similar feat. But when I averted my eyes from this portly dame, and happened to

glance at Dominie Clackmannan, I was suddenly struck by his appearance. He was no longer lolling in stupid indolence in his chair, nor gazing stolidly upon vacancy: he was all alive with a keen and visible excitement—and his eyes were riveted upon the portly dame, towards whom he seemed inclined to rush from his seat.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Dominie?" asked Mr. Saltcoats, who was as much struck by his aspect as I myself was: then turning to me, Saltcoats added, "I'll be bound he's thinking of the Widow Glenbucket!"

"It's just that," exclaimed the Dominie: and springing up from his chair with as much alacrity as if it were an iron seat that had become suddenly red-hot under him, he rushed down the room in the same singular excitement.

The next instant his arms were thrown round the portly dame's neck—a hearty smack upon her red cheek, bestowed by his lips, resounded through the apartment: but, as if raising an equally audible echo, it was immediately followed by another sort of smack, which the dame bestowed on the Dominie's face—and with this trifling difference, that whereas *his* was given with the lips, *hers* was inflicted with the palm of her vigorous hand. The Dominie staggered back, confounded: the lady set up a shriek; and at the very same moment an elderly gentleman, as portly as herself, entered the coffee-room. He wore a travelling cap; and an immense shawl, tied round his neck, came up to his nose. He had on a great coat—and carried under his arm a cloak, a mackintosh, and a woollen comforter, as well as two umbrellas—one silk and the other cotton. But the garments and the umbrellas dropped upon the floor as the sounds of his wife's voice, expressive of some dire tribulation, met his ears; and the next moment he began to spar away like clock-work at the Dominie. Mr. Saltcoats and I rushed in to interfere; and while the former was assuring the lady that there was some mistake, I was proffering a similar representation to the Scotch gentleman.

"Don't mind him, ma'am," said Mr. Saltcoats: "he's as harmless as a child—"

"But he kissed me, sir!" vociferated the lady.

"Well, ma'am, and I don't think *that* could have done you much harm," responded Saltcoats: "for a handsome woman must be accustomed to receive proofs of the admiration she excites."

"Weel, sir—and there's just something in that," said the dame, now thinking it necessary to simper: "so my gude-man need not fash himself. But who could the gentleman have ta'en me for?"

"It's just that," said the Dominie, rubbing his cheek and displaying a most rueful expression of countenance. "If you ain't the Widow Glenbucket, I never saw such a likeness! You may be her ghost—and yet, when I think of it, you can't be—for there never was a ghost that dealt such a box on the ears."

"The truth is, my dear madam," Mr. Saltcoats hastened to observe, "my old friend is near-sighted, and may be a trifle owlsh after his dinner: but in his name I beg most sincerely to apologize."

"Ye need say nae mair about it," interrupted the dame, who was really a good-natured body: "there's nae such unco harm done."

"Well, I thought not!" ejaculated Mr. Saltcoats. "I never yet saw the lady who was killed by a kiss."

Meanwhile I had succeeded in pacifying the indignant husband: Dominie Clackmannan stammered out an apology—the waiter came to announce that the apartments were in readiness for the new-comers—they issued from the coffee-room—and we returned to our seats—the Dominie observing, "It's just my own stupidity: but *that* would have been the Widow Glenbucket—only that's she's dead."

Thus terminated an occurrence in which Mr. Clackmannan figured as the hero; and I soon afterwards retired to my own apartments.

On the following day, a little before the hour of noon, I was proceeding in the direction of the Tivoli palace, for the purpose of availing myself of a general permission I had received to inspect the pictures there whenever I thought fit; and on turning the corner of a street, I met the Count himself. He was on foot, and walking rapidly as if bent upon some urgent business. I raised my hat, and was about to address him in the wonted terms of respectful friendliness—when he suddenly drew himself up, bent upon me a strange peculiar look, in which haughty sternness appeared to mingle with reproach: and then he at once pursued his way. I remained riveted to the spot, overwhelmed with mingled astonishment and confusion. At length a suspicion rushed in unto my mind:—he had doubtless discovered that my position had recently been a menial one, and he was indignant at having treated me on terms of equality. This idea, which all in a moment seemed to account for his conduct, prevented me from running after his lordship to request an explanation and ascertain whether I had offended him. I felt deeply, deeply humiliated; and the reader may rest assured that I did not continue my way to the Tivoli palace. I turned off into another direction; and walking slowly along, endeavoured to cheer my spirits by saying to myself, "From all that I learnt through the medium of Avellino's history, I ought to have known that his lordship is as proud as Lucifer, and that he would treat me thus if by accident it ever transpired what my antecedents were."

But it was no easy task to recover from the deep sense of humiliation into which the occurrence had thrown me; and I wandered for the next hour about the streets of Rome, unable to subdue the bitterness of my vexation. At length I bethought me of visiting Signor Avellino, and endeavouring in discourse with him to divert my thoughts into another channel. As I was proceeding in the direction of Francesco's dwelling, I beheld the elegant equipage of the young Viscount of Tivoli approaching. My first impulse was to turn aside and affect not to observe it: but all in a moment I was inspired by a more manly feeling; and I said to myself, "I have never done anything to be ashamed of; and if having eaten the bread of an honest industry be accounted a stigma and a reproach, I must endure all these humiliations—or rather I must rise above them."

I accordingly walked on; and as the equipage approached, I looked the Viscount steadily in the face,—determined that if any recognition took place between us, it should emanate in the first in-

stance from himself. The instant the young nobleman caught sight of me, he started up from his seat in the phaeton, as if in a furious rage—snatched the whip from the coachman's hand—sprang forth upon the pavement—and with the handle of that whip dealt me a couple of blows with such rapidity that I had not time to prevent him.

"Hypocritical scoundrel! deceitful villain!" were the words which at the same instant thrilled from his lips: and his cheeks were crimson with rage.

All this was the work of a moment: but the very next instant I tore the whip from his grasp—seized him by the collar with my left hand—and broke the whip over his back with three or four smart blows dealt with the right. He flew at me like a tiger—I flung him from me—and tossed the fragments of the whip contemptuously at him. He dared not repeat the attack—he had experienced enough of my resoluteness as well as of my superior strength—and, white with rage, he staggered against the side of his phaeton. Several persons, who had witnessed the transaction, expressed by their words and looks a complete approval of the chastisement I had inflicted upon him who had been the assailant in the first instance; and I walked away in a leisurely manner, intending to show that if he thought fit to renew the encounter I was no coward who would flee from it. The Viscount however displayed no disposition to provoke further strife: but, as if actuated by a sudden impulse, he leaped into his carriage, which instantaneously drove away. A noble-looking Italian, about forty years of age—of handsome person and of elegant manners—hastened after me; and shaking me by the hand, spoke something with such volubility that I could not possibly understand his meaning, further than that he was evidently expressing his warm approbation of my conduct. Perceiving that I was at a loss to comprehend him, he spoke in French: and then by my looks I displayed my knowledge of what he was saying.

"Without for a moment inquiring into the merits of the case," he observed,—“and judging it only by what I myself beheld, I think that you courageously met and chastised your dastard assailant. But perhaps you may hear more of it: for I know that he is vindictive. In that case, hesitate not to send for me—and you shall have the testimony of one whose word will not go for naught.”

Having thus spoken, the Italian gave me his card; and again pressing my hand warmly, he hurried away,—thus cutting short the thanks which I was proffering him. I looked at the card, and found that my new friend was the Marquis of Spoleto. I did not now carry out my intention of visiting Francesco Avellino on this occasion: I reflected that if I did, he would see that I was troubled—he would question me as to the cause—and I knew that he would be pained to learn that I now had become, as well as himself, an object of animosity on the part of the Count of Tivoli and his son. I was exceedingly sorry for the incident which had just occurred, although it was so utterly unprovoked by me: but notwithstanding what I conceived to be the intolerable patrician pride of the Count, I was grieved that after having partaken of his hospitality, I should thus have been dragged into a personal conflict with his son.

Taking another direction from that which I was at first pursuing, I proceeded towards the street in which the fair unknown invalid dwelt, and which I was now enabled to find with but little difficulty. On arriving at the house, I ascended to the Blanchards' room; and on knocking at the door, was at once admitted by the mechanic's wife,—the man himself being at his work. She told me that the invalid lady was somewhat better—and that on looking around the room when she awoke in the morning, she appeared to be conscious of where she was—but that she continued unable to speak.

"It was with a kind of frightened bewilderment in her gaze, sir," continued Mrs. Blanchard, "that she thus looked around her; and no wonder—for thanks to your kindness, the poor young lady's chamber wears a very different aspect from what it bore this time yesterday. Almost everything is new, except the bed she lies on: but even that is changed with the curtains and the clean warm coverlid that I purchased. Yes—it was with an evident astonishment the poor thing looked about her, as if recollecting in what a miserable room she was when taken ill, and marvelling where she could now be. But then she seemed to understand that she was still in the same place, though it was much altered; and as if the action of thought itself were exhausting, she closed her sweet black eyes again. I sat up the greater part of the night with her—I have got a nurse for her now—and when I went into her room a few minutes before you came, she was in a calm sweet sleep. The doctor has visited her very often; and he says that all danger is past—that she will be quite conscious to-morrow—and that what with youth and a good constitution, she will soon be well."

I commended Mrs. Blanchard for her kind sympathy on behalf of the invalid, and placed an additional sum of money in her hands: but I had some difficulty in forcing her to accept one-half of it for her own use. She was very grateful; and I was pleased to see by the aspect of her own room, that my donation of the previous day had contributed to the comfort of the worthy couple. I said that I should call again on the morrow; and I then took my departure,—not forgetting however to renew my injunction that no allusion should be made to me when the young lady might be sufficiently recovered to ask questions.

I returned to the hotel: it was about three o'clock when I reached it—and just as I was entering the gateway, two sbirri, or police-officers, came up and took me into custody.

## CHAPTER CVIII.

### THE EXAMINATION.

I ASKED no questions—I said not a word to these officials: I was neither troubled nor astonished; for I perfectly understood what it meant; and indeed after the intimation given me by the Marquis of Spoleto, I was rather prepared for it than otherwise. But just at the moment Dominie Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats came up to the spot, attended by their *courrier*. The Dominie gazed with an astonishment so stolid that it was inde-

scribably ludicrous: but Mr. Saltcoats vowed with an oath, "that not all the police of Rome should carry off his young friend, who he knew must be innocent of anything that could be laid to his charge." He then, with a remarkable expedition, unbuttoned his gray overcoat, as well as his gray under-coat—and dashing his gray hat down upon his head with an air of fiercest resolution, clenched his gray-gloved fists, and was preparing to perpetrate an onslaught upon the sbirri.

"For heaven's sake be quiet, Mr. Saltcoats!" I exclaimed: "or you will injure my cause far more than you can befriend it."

"Well then, my young friend," he asked, "what can we possibly do for you?"

"It's just that," said the Dominie: "for if we had Bailie Owlhead here—he being a most worthy magistrate—"

"Will you have the goodness," I said, addressing myself to Saltcoats, "to let your *courrier* hasten to the Marquis of Spoleto's palace, and inform that nobleman I am arrested. It is merely for a charge of assault—in which however I was not the aggressor—the Marquis will know what to do in the business."

Several of the hotel servants had come out to the entrance—some of the passers-by in the street had stopped—all under the influence of a feeling of curiosity which was natural in such circumstances: but the *courrier*, on hearing what I had just said, quickly told them that it was for a case of alleged assault: and then taking the Marquis's card which I handed him, he sped away to execute my commission. A hackney-coach was at once procured: I entered it with the sbirri: my two friends, the Dominie and Saltcoats, insisted upon accompanying me—the former expressing his wonder whether I was going straight to the "Tolbooth"—and the latter vowing that if I were consigned to gaol, he would keep me company and brew such a bowl of punch as could not possibly fail to keep up my spirits. The sbirri behaved civilly enough—and all the more so after they had learnt that I had sent for the Marquis of Spoleto.

In about a quarter of an hour the hackney-coach stopped at the gateway of a private house; and I was conducted up a flight of stairs,—the Dominie and Mr. Saltcoats following. We were led into a small ante-room, where an old clerk was writing at a desk: one of the sbirri handed him a paper, which was no doubt the warrant for my arrest; the clerk regaled himself first of all with a good long stare at me—then with a pinch of snuff—and then he wrote some endorsement upon the warrant. The sbirri led me into an adjoining room, of no considerable dimensions, and which had not the slightest appearance of being a magisterial office—unless it were that it was intersected by a wooden bar, on the farther side of which a middle-aged, gentlemanly-looking man was sitting at a large writing-table. Near him sate the young Viscount of Tivoli; and his coachman was standing in that compartment of the room to which I was thus introduced. The Viscount darted a malignant look at me: but I flung upon him a glance of supremest contempt in return. One of the sbirri motioned me to advance up to the bar—so that in this position I faced both the magistrate and my accuser. A side-door now opened, at the summons of a hand-bell which the magistrate

rang; and a thin, mean-looking, shabbily-dressed little old man made his appearance. Addressing himself to me in tolerably good English, he said, "I attend here as an interpreter: for his lordship the Viscount has given the magistrate to understand that you are not proficient in Italian."

The clerk from the outer office now glided in; and having passed under the bar by stooping to do so, he administered the oath to the interpreter. I was on the point of intimating that I expected a material witness, when I thought that perhaps I had better allow the proceedings to commence: and indeed I was curious to know what complexion the Viscount and his coachman would give to the affair. The Viscount was not sworn; and he proceeded to state his complaint in Italian,—very little of which I was enabled to comprehend—indeed not sufficient so as to understand the statement that he made. His coachman was then called forward;—he likewise gave his testimony without being sworn—and it was as little understood by me as the tale of his master.

"Now, sir!" said the interpreter, "it becomes my duty to inform you of the details of the charge laid against you—so that you may give whatsoever explanation or answer you think fit." "One word!" exclaimed the Viscount, addressing me in English. "If you have a spark of honour in your whole composition, Mr. Wilmot, you will make no allusion to the circumstances which led to our dispute—you will merely deal with the dispute as it stands, and abide by the consequences."

"I pledge myself to nothing, my lord," I answered coldly: "but since you have thought fit to become my aggressor both by personal violence and by the machinery of the law, I shall consider myself justified in making any statement that may serve my cause."

"Beware how you disgrace yourself and the noble name of Tivoli likewise," rejoined the young Viscount in an impressive manner.

I said nothing more: but I thought to myself it was a strange proceeding for the Viscount to become my enemy because he had discovered that I had recently been in a menial position, and that now he should actually intimate the propriety of my abstaining altogether from any allusion to my antecedents. I certainly entertained at the moment a very extraordinary idea of Italian aristocratic pride, which seemed to be avenging an insult offered to it, and yet was fearful of having the nature of the insult itself made known. In other words, I fancied that though the Tivolis were deeply wounded at the idea of having admitted to their friendship a young man who had formerly filled menial offices, yet that they would not for the world have it known that such was the fact.

"The Viscount of Tivoli," said the interpreter, "has made his representation to the magistrate. He declares that you, Joseph Wilmot, are conscious of a wrong committed towards himself and his father—and that though all the while conscious of this wrong, you nevertheless had the audacity to court their friendship. But at length it was discovered by them what your true character is, and how grossly you were acting towards them. For this reason the Count of Tivoli passed you by with silent scorn and detestation in the street this morning. Soon afterwards you beheld the Viscount

in his carriage; and in order to display your brazen effrontery, you flung upon him an insolent look. He descended from his carriage to remonstrate with you on your entire conduct: you seized the whip from his coachman's hand, and inflicted upon the Viscount a brutal assault. This statement, so far as the assault is concerned, has just been corroborated by the coachman; and you have now to answer it."

"My answer is given in a few words," I said. "Have the kindness to inform the magistrate that the Viscount of Tivoli was the individual who seized the whip from the coachman's hand—that he therewith struck me first, at the same time calling me opprobrious names—that I wrenched the whip from his grasp and broke it over his back—as I should do again to him or to any one else who dared act in a similar way towards me."

The interpreter explained to the magistrate all I had just said; and in obedience to a direction from that functionary, he said to me, "You must be well aware that your tale cannot be held good unless proven by competent witnesses. It is supposed by the magistrate that these gentlemen who accompany you—"

"It's just that," interposed Dominic Clackmannan, now rolling forward to my side at the bar. "I have got something to say, which you can explain to the magistrate. I know this young gentleman well—his name is Joseph—and not Joshua—because I never knew but one Joshua, and he was taken up for sheep-stealing. But that reminds me of how the Baillie Owlhead, of the Gallowgate, Aberdeen, conducted his magisterial business: so you will just have the kindness to tell this magistrate of your's that if he will take the Baillie Owlhead as his example—"

But here the Dominic was suddenly checked: for Mr. Saltcoats pulled him back by the tails of his coat with such force as well nigh to upset his stolid old friend's equilibrium altogether. The young Viscount, who understood English well, was seized with amazement at the Dominic's confused jargon: while the interpreter, after staring in dismayed astonishment, shook his head as much as to intimate that he could make nothing of Mr. Clackmannan's speech.

"Hold your tongue, Domine!" said Mr. Saltcoats; "and let me speak in this matter:"—then addressing himself to the interpreter, he went on hastily to say, "Tell the magistrate, if you please, that I, Saltcoats by name—a gentleman of Scotland—stand forward to proclaim myself the friend of the accused Joseph Wilmot; and I will back his simple word against the oaths of all the Italian Viscounts that ever stepped. If the Viscount likes to fight it out, I'm his man—and the magistrate can be his bottle-holder. But my advice is that everybody shakes hands with everybody else; and then we will adjourn to the hotel, where I promise you such a jorum of hot punch that all animosity shall be steeped in it."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Saltcoats smiled blandly upon the interpreter,—who was however saved the trouble of explaining to the magistrate a single syllable of that speech, by the sudden entrance of the Marquis of Spoleto, followed by the *courier* who was sent to fetch him. The magistrate and the interpreter bowed most respectfully to the nobleman: while the Viscount of Tivoli was

seized with a visible uneasiness. Perhaps he had not noticed the presence of the Marquis on the theatre of our encounter in the street: or perhaps, if he had, it had never struck him that he would come forward. At all events the appearance of the Marquis was evidently most unexpected; and it was viewed by the Viscount, as I have just said, with an uneasiness that was plainly perceptible.

Bestowing a friendly bow of recognition upon me, and declining the seat which the magistrate offered him within the bar, the Marquis placed himself by my side, and began to address the functionary. I saw that during this speech the young Viscount turned deadly pale—bit his lip—and gave a start as if he were inclined to spring from his chair, either to proclaim a contradiction to what the Marquis was saying, or to cut short the proceedings by avowing that he had misrepresented the case. The tale told by the Marquis was not long—but it was evidently impressive. The magistrate looked grave, and said something aside to the Viscount. Then the coachman was summoned forward again; and I perceived that he stammered, hesitated, and fell into guilty confusion, when severely questioned by the magistrate.

“Perhaps I have gone too far,” suddenly exclaimed the young Viscount, springing up from his seat and addressing himself to me. “For this affair—taken by itself *alone*, and apart from all circumstances of grave provocation—I perhaps owe you an apology. At the same time you must admit that I had every reason to feel bitterly against you—However, the least said upon that business *here*, the better—and therefore to prevent the circumstances to which I allude from becoming the subject of idle gossip, I hope you will consent that the present proceedings shall be quashed at once?”

I scarcely knew what answer to give: but perhaps a little feeling of pride rendered me by no means unwilling to avoid any open allusion to my antecedents; and I therefore said, after some few moments' reflection, “Taking your lordship's speech in the sense of an apology for the outrage and for the wilful misrepresentation of the circumstances, I agree that the inquiry shall here terminate.”

The interpreter reported to the magistrate what I had just said; and the Marquis of Spoleto, turning to me, inquired, “Are you indeed satisfied with the apology made by the Viscount?”

“Yes,” I responded: “I have no wish to push the proceedings farther—although if they had occurred in my own native land, the magistrate himself would not have suffered them to be so hushed up after such wilful and gross misstatements as those made by the Viscount of Tivoli and his domestic.”

“I perceive,” observed the Marquis of Spoleto, “that there is in the background some affair of a delicate nature between the Viscount and yourself, and whence his angry feelings have arisen. What that may be I do not for an instant seek to learn: but such being the case, the most prudential course is evidently to let the matter drop where it is.”

“You are discharged, sir,” said the interpreter to me—thus translating the decision which the magistrate pronounced.

I expressed to the Marquis my warmest thanks

for the kind interest which he had exhibited on my behalf: but he cut me short by observing that he had only performed a duty; and shaking me by the hand, he took his departure. I returned to the hotel with Dominic Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats; and on arriving there I experienced the utmost difficulty in prevailing on the latter gentleman to excuse me from partaking of the bowl of punch which he was firmly resolved to brew.

At about noon on the following day I proceeded to inquire how the invalid young lady was getting on; and I ascended to the Blanchards' room. I found the mechanic and his wife seated at dinner; and to my mingled surprise and joy I learnt that the invalid had not only completely recovered her consciousness, but that she was so much better as to be enabled to converse. It however appeared that she had said nothing which could throw any light upon her own circumstances: she had neither mentioned her name nor made any allusion to family or friends. She evidently fancied that she was indebted entirely to the Blanchards for the attention bestowed upon her, as well as for the improvements which had been introduced into her chamber: for he it remembered that she was seized with her severe illness immediately after her arrival at the house, and therefore had no time to learn who her neighbours on the same floor were, or that by their own circumstances they were utterly incapacitated from doing all she now conceived they had done.

“But you know, sir,” added Mrs. Blanchard, “that the secret cannot be kept much longer from her: for I really have not the face to receive those warm expressions of gratitude which she pours forth in acknowledgment of bounties that my husband and I had it not in our power to bestow. What am I to do? what am I to say? Pardon me, sir, for offering my advice: but I really think that as you have already taken so much upon yourself, and have acted so kindly towards the young lady, you should go a step farther and endeavour to learn whether she has any friends who can be communicated with—”

At this moment the old nurse whom Mrs. Blanchard had hired to attend upon the invalid young lady, entered the room in evident agitation; and she said something in Italian to the carpenter and his wife.

“There!” exclaimed Blanchard: “the mischief is done—if mischief it really is. The old woman has inadvertently let drop something, although enjoined to the contrary—”

“What has she said?” I hastily demanded.

“Very little, it would appear,” replied Blanchard, “but still sufficient to give the young lady to understand that *we* are not the authors of all the bounties she has experienced, and that some young gentleman who has kept himself in the background—”

“Well, well,” I hastily interjected: “what says the young lady?”

“She is now in a feverish state of excitement,” answered the carpenter; “and the nurse fears that it may cause a relapse unless she is immediately quieted. She has put a thousand questions as to who the young gentleman is: but the nurse could give her no answer to any one of them—because, sir, this is the first time the nurse herself





has seen you, and she did not even know before to what nation you belonged."

"The woman's inadvertence," I said, with a sense of vexation, "has complicated the matter seriously:"—then, after a few instants' reflection, I added, "It is useless for me to preserve this mystery any longer. Go you, Mrs. Blanchard, to the young lady—go quick—tranquillise her—and in answer to any questions she may put, say merely these words—that it is Mr. Wilmot who has taken the liberty of interesting himself on her behalf."

Mrs. Blanchard accordingly proceeded to the invalid's room; and in about a quarter of an hour she returned, saying, "The young lady hopes you will not deem her request indelicate—but she begs that she may see you. I conjure you to go to her, sir: for she is very much excited—and I am afraid that it may be productive of evil consequences."

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"But you must accompany me," I said, having a regard for the reputation both of the invalid and myself.

"Yes," responded the mechanic's wife: "she told me that I was to come with you. She asked me if I spoke French—and I assured her that I did not: indeed I speak Italian so indifferently as to be scarcely able to make myself understood, though I comprehend it well enough."

I accompanied Mrs. Blanchard to the invalid's chamber. The curtains were drawn almost completely about the bed: but through a division in them a fair hand was extended towards me; and as I took it, the soft musical voice of the young lady—all the softer and more melodiously plaintive on account of her recent severe illness—said to me, "Mr. Wilmot, I had already conceived myself to be under the greatest of obligations to you—but now I find that I am ten thousand times more indebted to your goodness."

"You must not imagine, Signora," I said—and I should observe that we were speaking in the French tongue,—“that I was purposely making any inquiries concerning you—”

"No," she interrupted me: "from the worthy woman who is here present, I have just learnt under what circumstances you came to hear of my illness. But pray tell me, Mr. Wilmot—for it is this which is agitating me with the most nervous, anxious fears—tell me whether, since you thus learnt that I was ill, you have been instituting any inquiries with the hope of discovering my family or friends. If you have, it were only natural enough; but I beseech you to inform me."

"No, Signora—I have not," was my answer. "In the first place I was utterly devoid of a clue for the initiation of such inquiries; and even if I had possessed it, I should not have followed it up for fear that such a proceeding might prove disagreeable to you."

"Yes—you cannot forget the strange mysterious circumstances under which we met," remarked the young lady, who was evidently much relieved, judging from her tone, by the assurance I had just given her. "And you must forgive me, Mr. Wilmot," she continued, "if I observed so much mystery upon that occasion—but I was fearful that if I informed you what you were doing—I mean that if I had suffered you to learn from what place you were assisting my flight—you might have been alarmed—you might have insisted on taking me back again—Yet when once the Tuscan frontier was passed and the Roman States were entered, there was no longer any danger to yourself—but still you might not have known this—"

"But tell me, Signora," I said, strangely bewildered and perplexed by the vague manner in which she was thus speaking in agitated and broken sentences,—“but tell me, Signora, what place was it from which you escaped? I judged that it was from the building near which I received you into the chaise, and which I could only see dimly through the darkness which prevailed at the time."

"Ah! and you have not even conjectured?" said the young lady: then, after a pause, during which she was most probably deliberating within herself whether she should make the revelation, she went on to observe in a low, murmuring, tremulous voice, "It were ungenerous and ungrateful to withhold my confidence from you any longer. Mr. Wilmot, that building from which I escaped, and in my flight from which you so kindly succoured me—that building was—a convent!"

"A convent?" I echoed in amazement. "But you, Signora—were you—were you—a nun?"

"No, no—the Blessed Virgin forbid!" she quickly answered. "I was a novice: but in a very short time—in a few days more, my novitiate would have expired—and I should have been compelled to take the veil. Yes—*compelled*, Mr. Wilmot—for the Abbess and the nuns of that convent were cruel and merciless towards me. They knew that I had griefs continuously rending my soul—making my existence one prolonged agony; and yet the very sources of those griefs were seized upon by them as the grounds of incessant re-

proaches. Oh! I was wretched, wretched, beyond the power of language to describe!—so wretched that if it had lasted much longer I should have been goaded to frenzy or driven to lay violent hands upon myself. A female domestic in that Tuscan convent took compassion upon me—it was by her aid that I escaped—it was she who supplied me with the garments which I wore, instead of that raiment of a novice which would have betrayed me."

Here Mrs. Blanchard interposed—and respectfully but earnestly suggested that the young lady was speaking too much, and that the consequences might be serious. I felt that this was the truth; and though I longed to hear more in respect to the circumstances which had hitherto invested her with so much mystery, I put a curb upon my curiosity, and begged her not to continue her revelations for the present.

"Will you come to me to-morrow?" she inquired, in a soft plaintive tone of entreaty: "promise me that you will come to-morrow? I will then tell you everything—and perhaps—perhaps," she hesitatingly added, "you will consent to render me a service?"

"Yes—I will come to-morrow," I answered.

The fair hand was again stretched forth between the curtains: I pressed it for a moment with the warmth of a fraternal friendship; and then I took my departure. Throughout the scene which I have related, I did not behold the young lady's countenance, and was therefore unable to judge to what extent it might exhibit the effects of illness.

On quitting the house, I bent my way towards Signor Avellino's dwelling, for the purpose of passing an hour or two in his company. During my walk thither, I reflected upon all I had heard from the young lady's lips; and I wondered what the additional revelations would be that awaited me for the morrow. On arriving at Francesco's dwelling, I found that he was at home—and was immediately ushered to the drawing-room, where he was engaged in reading. He was pensive as usual—and, also as usual, he endeavoured to put on an air of cheerfulness when welcoming me. We conversed for a little while upon indifferent topics: and as he made not the slightest allusion to my encounter with the Viscount of Tivoli, I conceived him to be ignorant of it. I did not choose to acquaint him with the circumstance; for I was naturally delicate in referring to the name of that family at all.

"I promised you, my dear Wilmot," he presently said, "that I would show you the portrait which I consider to be the masterpiece of my humble ability—the portrait of her whom I love with so unchanging a devotion. Come, my friend—and feeble as the reflection of her natural loveliness may be upon that canvass, it will nevertheless convey to you some idea of the beauty of the original."

Having thus spoken, Francesco Avellino led me from the drawing-room, along the passage, towards his studio. He opened the door—and we entered. The room was a spacious one; and several finished pictures were suspended against the walls,—the very first glance at them proving that they exhibited a talent of a high order. I flung upon him a look of inquiry: and he informed me that they

were all his own work. Several unfinished pictures, in different stages towards completeness, rested upon easels scattered about the room: but I looked in vain amongst all these works of art for the object of my curiosity.

"It is here," said Avellino: and he opened a door leading into a small cabinet.

Upon an easel in this cabinet stood the finished portrait of the idol of his love,—that portrait which he had so faithfully painted from the image that dwelt in his memory. But the instant my eyes fell upon it, an ejaculation of wild astonishment burst from my lips: for in this exquisite representation of the countenance of Antonia di Tivoli, I at once recognised that of the young lady whom I had brought in the post-chaise to Rome.

## CHAPTER CIX.

### A NIGHT-ADVENTURE.

YES—the recognition was instantaneous; and as that cry of astonishment thrilled from my lips, Francesco Avellino started with a most natural wonderment, and riveted his looks upon me with the acutest suspense: for the idea doubtless flashed to his mind that I must have some knowledge of the charming original. Because it was not on my part the expression of mere admiring amazement either at the beauty of the countenance or at the talent of the artist: but it was the cry of one who beholds features which he has seen before.

"What is it, Wilmot?—for heaven's sake speak!" he said, deeply agitated.

"I have seen this young lady—I have met her—I know her," was my response, guardedly given: for I could not possibly at once proclaim the entire truth: but, oh! how suddenly had a light burst in upon all that was hitherto so darkly mysterious in respect to the beautiful unknown—yet unknown now no longer!

"You have seen her? you know her?" ejaculated Avellino, almost wild with delight. "Then she is at large in the world—she is not a prisoner—she cannot be under coercion! Oh, where—where dwells she? Tell me, that I may fly to her!"—but then, before I could give him a single syllable of response, a deep shade suddenly lowered over his countenance; and he said in a gloomy tone, "But, Oh! if she be her own mistress, how is it that she has not written to me? Is it possible that she loves me no longer? or have I been misrepresented and calumniated to her? Was her father's letter to me all but too true when he assured me that she had thrown herself at his feet imploring pardon for what she had done?"

"Reassure yourself on these points, my dear Avellino," I hastened to observe so soon as I had an opportunity of interjecting a syllable. "Make yourself happy—"

"Oh! thanks—thanks—a thousand thanks for what you have just said!"—and Francesco, well nigh overpowered by his feelings, sank upon a chair, trembling with hope, joy, and suspense, and with tears trickling down his cheeks.

I was profoundly affected: but I was rejoiced likewise to think that it should be in my power to

give hopeful assurances to this fond and faithful lover: then—in a few instants—I was smitten with sadness as I recollected that I had yet to make the painful revelation of Antonia's severe illness.

"Now I am calmer," said Avellino, after a pause: "I am prepared to listen to whatsoever you may have to tell me."

Gradually and cautiously I broke to Avellino the truth in respect to the Lady Antonia. I told him that she was then in Rome—that she had been suffering much—indeed, that she had been very ill—but that all danger was past—and if she were suffered to remain tranquil she would soon be convalescent. He wept anew on hearing of her illness: at one moment he gave vent to lamentations, and then to joyous thanksgivings,—displaying so much sincere and genuine feeling that I was again profoundly touched. So far from being calm and tranquil, as he had promised, he was carried through all the varied stages of excitement—which was only too natural under the circumstances. He besought me to take him to her at once: but he listened to reason when I gave him to understand that any sudden shock either of happiness or of woe, might prove fatal to the young lady in her present enfeebled condition. He besought me to tell him how I came to know her; and then I entered on that part of my narrative, which, though recited last, should in reality have come first. I explained the precise circumstances which had thrown her in my way, just as they are already known to my reader. I could not, from the very tenour of the history, avoid being led into the admission that my purse had been rendered available for her comfort during the last two or three days of her illness: and it was with a species of fraternal enthusiasm that Francesco embraced me,—calling me his dearest friend, and giving utterance to the most fervid expressions of gratitude.

He now knew all—and I besought him to be calm that we might deliberate upon the course which should be pursued. The convent from which she had escaped, was in the Tuscan dominions; and therefore the Roman law could take no cognizance of the matter either in respect to herself for having fled, nor with regard to me for having aided in her flight. But then there was the paternal authority which could exert itself,—having the power to claim and seize upon the young lady and dispose of her according to its discretion.

While we were deliberating upon these points, a recollection struck me.

"The day after my arrival in Rome," I said, "my first visit was paid to the Count of Tivoli; and while seated with him at table, he received a letter which agitated him considerably. Most probably that letter contained the announcement of his daughter's flight from the convent. There can be no doubt of it!—for in the evening of the same day he hastened off on some important business, as I learnt from the Viscount. And on what business could this be, if not to search for his daughter? Ah! and I remember too, when the Viscount was dining with me, he told me that he had received a letter from his father, who had not succeeded in the business which took him from home: but on that self-same evening the Count returned suddenly, and sent to my hotel for his son, to whom he had something of importance to communicate.

No doubt he had discovered some clue to the direction which his daughter had taken — Aye! and more too!" I ejaculated, as another light now flashed in unto my mind: "he must have learnt enough to prove to him that it was I who had travelled with her! No wonder that he shunned me—no wonder that the Viscount behaved to me as he did!—and this will now explain the extraordinary conduct of the latter when before the magistrate! How I was mistaken in his motives! how erroneously I interpreted his allusions!"

"What is all this, my dear friend?" asked Avellino, in perfect astonishment: for I was indeed talking in a strain that was perfectly enigmatical to him. "You speak of the Count's shunning you—of the Viscount's conduct to yourself—of scenes before magistrates—What does it all mean? Sincerely do I hope that you have not in any way suffered on account of your generous conduct, from first to last, towards my beloved and unhappy Antonia?"

I explained to Avellino the whole transaction in respect to the assault and the magisterial investigation; and I frankly informed him that for a certain period of my life until very recently, I had been compelled to earn my bread in a menial capacity. He grasped my hand with the same affectionate warmth as before,—assuring me that the avowal I had just made would rather strengthen than impair the friendship he experienced towards me.

"I now understand everything," I exclaimed, "in respect to that transaction of yesterday with the Viscount. I fancied all the while that the pride of the Tivolis was offended because they had by some means discovered that I was not always what I now am: whereas it is now clear as daylight that every allusion the Viscount made, and every appeal to my honour which he put forth, in reality pointed to the fact of my having aided the flight of his sister from the convent—and yet I was absolutely ignorant at the time that she was his sister! Yes—I can now make allowances for his conduct; and I can understand it in all its details."

"But it seems tolerably evident," observed Francesco, "that the Count remains in ignorance of the place of his daughter's abode: otherwise he would have proceeded thither—and, if it were practicable, he would have removed her to his own palace or elsewhere."

"Another idea strikes me," I exclaimed. "The Count and his son know that I am intimate with you: perhaps they now fancy that in my friendly spirit towards you I assisted the Lady Antonia to escape, and that it is therefore *you* rather than myself who are acquainted with her present abode."

"You have seen no one spying your movements and keeping a watch upon you?" said Francesco, in hasty inquiry.

"No—nothing of the sort," I answered. "And you?"

"I did not leave my house for two whole days," rejoined Avellino: "my feelings were too much excited after having revealed to you the history of my love. Nor to-day have I as yet been out. Possibly indeed—most probably there is a spy waiting to watch me—"

"Or it may be," I suggested, "that the Count

of Tivoli imagines that, under all circumstances, the precautions for the Lady Antonia's concealment are too well taken to be easily detected by espial through the medium of his own agent; and he may therefore be employing the secret police of Rome in the investigation."

"Yes—there is much reason in all that you suggest," responded Avellino.

"You perceive, therefore, the necessity," I added, "of observing the utmost caution. In a word, whatever plans you resolve upon—whatever intentions you harbour, must be carried out with the utmost delicacy."

"My intentions are to make Antonia my bride so soon as circumstances will permit," answered Francesco: "for can I doubt that she will consent to accompany me to the altar? Oh! did she not so entreatingly implore you to bring her to Rome after her escape from the convent, that she might make me aware of her presence in this city? And you say that she bade you return to her to-morrow, when she would have a boon to beseech at your hands? And what service could she thus have to demand of you, save and except that you would become her messenger to me? Yes, yes—Antonia's love is constant and faithful: she knows—she feels, that mine is constant and faithful also! To-morrow, my dear Wilmot, you must break to her the intelligence that you know me—that we are friends—and you must prepare her to see me with the least possible delay."

"It will be absolutely necessary," I suggested, "for us to assure ourselves, as well as we can, whether there be spies set upon our movements. You must come and dine with me at my hotel this evening; and during the walk thither, you can observe whether you are followed by any individual in a suspicious manner. If so, we must take our measures accordingly."

Avellino agreed; and I then left him. On issuing from the house, I carefully looked around to see if my movements were espied: but I beheld no indication that such was the case. I purposely took a circuitous route—rather a zig-zag one,—going up one street and down another, until I nearly lost myself—but still without perceiving that I was followed, or that any particular individual hung upon my footsteps. In this manner I reached the hotel. The Dominic and Mr. Saltcoats had not as yet returned from their own excursion through the city; and I therefore escaped an invitation to join my dinner with their's—which invitation they would have been sure to give, but which I could not have accepted. I bade the waiter tell them that I dined out: but on the other hand I ordered a repast to be served in my own private rooms. Avellino came, punctual to the appointed hour; and in respect to the espial which was deemed to be probable, he had the same account to give me as I had to render unto him: namely, that he had observed no indication of his movements being watched or his footsteps dogged. Nevertheless, we settled our plans for the morrow with all suitable precaution. He was to rise early in the morning and ride his horse to a village at some few miles' distance from Rome: there he was to hire a vehicle and return secretly into the city, which he was to reach by noon; and he was to wait for me in a private apartment at a coffee-house in the same street where Antonia lodged.

On my part, it was settled that I was to proceed, with all suitable circumspection, to the young lady's abode before noon, so that I should have time to break to her the intelligence that her lover was in the neighbourhood and was waiting to be introduced to her presence.

When it was time for Francesco Avellino to take his departure from the hotel, at about half-past ten o'clock, I offered to walk a portion of the way with him, in order that we might combine our scrutinising powers so as to ascertain whether there were any indications of espial. We set out accordingly; and as we issued from the hotel, it certainly struck us that a man, with a slouching hat, and whose countenance was completely shaded thereby, did move on in the same direction as ourselves: but when we again looked round, the individual was no longer to be seen. We walked on, slowly stopping every now and then as if discoursing earnestly on some interesting topic; but we still saw nothing more of the supposed spy.

"We must not, however," said Avellino, "lull ourselves into the completest security on this point: for the spies of the secret police have a marvellous ingenuity in tracking persons, they themselves remaining unseen—so that there is a superstitious belief amongst the lower orders that these functionaries have the power of rendering themselves invisible."

"We will adopt every precaution to-morrow," I answered, "when carrying out the plans which we have already settled."

Thus discoursing, Avellino and I continued our way—not failing to keep watch to see if our footsteps were dogged: but we perceived no farther indication that such was the case. When within about half a mile of Francesco's dwelling, I bade him good night; and we separated. I began to retrace my way towards the hotel; and I had to traverse three or four streets in a poor and somewhat suspicious neighbourhood. I, however, had no fear, although completely unarmed: for since I had been in Rome I had beheld nothing to warrant apprehension of outrage in the streets; and when I apply the term *suspicious* to the particular quarter to which I am alluding, I am referring to its aspect rather than to any known circumstances to justify the aspersions. But my experience of the Roman streets by night was now destined to become considerably enlarged; for just as I was entering one of the narrow dirty thoroughfares in the quarter which I had to traverse, my ears caught the sound of a scuffle—of voices speaking excitedly—and then of the heavy fall of a human form. It seemed as if wings were suddenly lent to my feet: I flew in the direction whence the sounds came: and through the almost total obscurity I could just distinguish a couple of men stooping over the prostrate form of a third, and evidently rifling his person. The villains no doubt fancied that I was some confederate thus speeding towards them: for they did not take either to the offensive or defensive until I was close upon them; and then, with sudden ejaculations, they sprang towards me. A dagger which one wielded, glanced miraculously away from my left arm, only tearing the coat-sleeve, as I subsequently discovered; and in an instant I wrenched the weapon from the ruffian's grasp. Quick as lightning I aimed at his breast: I struck him—and he

fell with a horrible cry. His companion flew at me the next instant with the fury of a tiger; and as I had scarcely time to act on the defensive after having levelled my first opponent, I have every reason to believe that my life would have been sacrificed, were it not that the second robber's foot tripped over his prostrate comrade's leg—and he fell heavily. I was upon him in a moment: but before I could disarm him, he dealt me a severe blow on the right shoulder with his sharp dagger; and in an instant I felt the warm blood gushing down my arm. I was terribly excited by that wound; and wrenching the dagger from his grasp, struck the handle with all my might upon his forehead. At that very instant a posse of *sbirri* came up to the spot; and when I endeavoured to rise from the prostrate form of the ruffian whom I had just stricken senseless, I was seized with a sudden faintness—my brain appeared to swim round—and consciousness abandoned me.

When I returned to my senses, I found myself lying on a sofa in my bedroom at the hotel, with Dominie Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats bending over me, and a third person—a gentlemanly-looking man, dressed in black—standing at a little distance. At first I thought that my adventure in the street must be all a dream, and that after entertaining Avellino at dinner, I had lain down and gone to sleep upon that sofa. But as I endeavoured to raise myself up, Saltcoats said something to prevent me; and then I became sensible of a pain in the fleshy part of my shoulder. The gentlemanly-looking man stepped forward, and made a sign for me to lie quiet. He addressed me in Italian: but finding I did not understand it, he spoke in French: for I should observe that there are few educated persons in Italy who are not acquainted with the latter tongue as well as with their own. He told me that I had received a wound which was severe in consequence of the quantity of blood I had lost; but that it was by no means dangerous—and that if I kept myself quiet, I should soon be well. I need hardly explain that this gentleman was a surgeon; and I was about to ask him who had brought me back to the hotel,—when he himself began questioning me as to the circumstances of the conflict. I recited them in the same way as I have already narrated them to my readers; and then I had to give the same story over again in English, for the benefit of my friends Mr. Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats.

"Well, the *sbirri* who brought you home," said Saltcoats, "told the servants of the hotel there had been some medley in which you had behaved yourself most courageously—the servants told it to our *courier*—and the *courier* told it to us: but the police-officers did not wait to give much explanation."

"And the gentleman whom I rescued from those ruffians?" I said: "what tidings of him? Was he murdered by them? or was he only stunned?"

"Oh! from the little we heard," answered Saltcoats, "he was not killed outright—but that is all we are able to tell you."

"And how did the officers know where I lived?" I inquired after a pause.

"It's just that," interposed Dominie Clackmannan. "Saltcoats, who is always telling me I

forget things—and that puts me in mind of what I one day said——”

“Nonsense, Dominie!” interrupted Mr. Saltcoats: “one would think you had enough of the widow Glenbucket after the precious scene in the coffee-room. But it is true, my dear Willmot, I *did* forget to mention something—which is, that one of the *sbirri* who brought you home, happened, as the *courier* told me, to be likewise one of the two that came to arrest you in the assault case.”

Here the surgeon, exercising his professional authority, interfered to prevent farther discourse; and by the aid of my friends I got to bed—for I felt very weak and faint. Mr. Saltcoats declared that he should sit up with me all night—a proposal that was seconded by the Dominie, who was thereby reminded of how he had once passed a similar vigil when his friend Baillie Owlhead broke his neck: and then he recollected that it could not have been his neck, or else he could scarcely have lived over twenty good years afterwards, and be still alive. I positively refused to keep the two gentlemen from their beds; and the matter was cut short by the entrance of an elderly female belonging to the hotel, and whom the surgeon had engaged to act as my nurse. The Dominie and Mr. Saltcoats accordingly retired—though with considerable reluctance: for they experienced the most friendly interest on my behalf. Sleep soon visited my eyes; and I slumbered tranquilly until about nine o'clock in the morning,—when I awoke so much refreshed that I could scarcely believe my wound was one-tenth part so severe as it actually was.

The surgeon came and examined it: I saw by his countenance that it was progressing most favourably; and I asked him if I might not get up. He replied positively in the negative: I was about to remonstrate, and to represent that I had urgent business requiring my attention—when I reflected how useless it would be to argue the point; for that he was sure to reiterate the decree that I must remain nailed to my couch—while I on the other hand was equally determined to leave it if possible. Having dressed my wound, and given some directions to the nurse, he went away,—intimating that there was no necessity for him to return until the afternoon; and he had not been gone many minutes when I was visited by the Dominie and Saltcoats. I wanted to be left to myself not merely to deliberate, but also to act if I could muster strength sufficient: I therefore pleaded headache and exhaustion—and thus managed to get rid of them. I then affected to sleep; and the nurse left me.

The instant I was alone, I got carefully out of bed to ascertain whether I was strong enough to stand upon my legs; and to my joy I found that I was,—although I certainly felt exceedingly weak. Then I lay down again,—having consulted my watch, which showed me that it was now ten o'clock. I reflected that it was much too late to send a message to Avellino; and, according to an arrangement of the preceding evening, he must have started two hours back on his ride into the country. Therefore, if I had wished to postpone the meeting with Antonia until the following day, I could scarcely have done so—or at all events not without causing Avellino to experience the most painful anxiety by not keeping my appointment

with him at the coffee-house. And then too the Lady Antonia herself would be perplexed and full of apprehension if I did not visit her according to promise. But I had really no wish to break these appointments, now that I had once found myself strong enough to stand upon my legs; and I was therefore resolved to keep them at any risk or peril to myself. But I determined to lie in bed another hour—then get up—summon the waiter, dress by his aid—and set off at once in a hackney-coach, in defiance of all the representations which the nurse or any one else might make to me.

Scarcely had I thus revolved all these things in my mind, when the nurse opened the door gently; and perceiving that I was not asleep, she introduced an individual whom I immediately recognised as the interpreter who had officiated at the examination at the magistrate's office. He made a low bow; and walking on tip-toe up to the bed, expressed a hope that I found myself better and that I should soon get over the injury I had sustained. I thanked him for his civility—and requested to be informed of the business which had brought him thither,—adding, “I presume you have been sent by the magistrate to receive whatsoever I may have to say in respect to the transaction of last night?”

“Not exactly, sir,” answered the interpreter: “for one of the ruffians—he on whom you bestowed a thrust with his own dagger—has saved you a world of trouble on that account by confessing everything.”

“Was the wound mortal?” I hastily inquired.

“No, sir,” rejoined the interpreter,—“though at the instant the fellow thought it was—I mean at the instant when he regained his consciousness—which was very soon after the *sbirri* came up to the spot.”

“And the other man?” I asked.

“Oh! he was merely stunned: but they are both in gaol now, and will be severely punished for their villany.”

I was glad to hear that neither of the miscreants had lost their life by my hand: for although it would have been the extreme of fastidiousness to reproach myself even if both had perished under such circumstances,—yet at the same time I felt more satisfied at not having caused the death of a fellow-creature, however much such a doom might have been merited.

“And now,” I said, “will you have the kindness to tell me how fares it with the individual, whoever he might be, that I was fortunate enough to save from being plundered—perhaps murdered—by those miscreants?”

“Excuse me, sir,” answered the interpreter; “but it would be better if I were to give you a hasty sketch of what took place upon the occasion, after the *sbirri* came up; and then you will all the more easily comprehend the purport of the mission on which the magistrate has sent me.”

“Proceed,” I said: “but use as few words as possible; for, as you may readily suppose, I am in no mood for the excitement of discourse.”

“I will be as brief as I can,” rejoined the interpreter. “It seems, sir, that a patrol of *sbirri* received information of two or three suspicious-looking men lurking about that particular neighbourhood last night: and they kept upon the



watch. They heard a loud cry, as if of mental agony——”

“Ah, I remember!” I interjected. “It was the cry of the ruffian who attacked me first, and whom I wounded with his own dagger.”

“Well, sir, upon hearing that cry,” continued the interpreter, “the police-officials rushed to the spot: but they found their work already done for them, inasmuch as both the ruffians were disabled and at their mercy. You endeavoured to rise—but you fainted on the spot. One of the *sbirri* produced his lantern; and he instantaneously recognised your features—for he was one who arrested you on the complaint of the Viscount of Tivoli. You were accordingly borne hastily away by two of the officers to your hotel; while the others remained upon the spot to perform such duties as might be required at their hands. I need hardly say that one of these duties was to take the robbers into custody—or that another was to render assistance to the personage who lay senseless upon the pavement. This personage was immediately recognized, as you yourself had already been; and he was conveyed to his abode. He continued in a state of unconsciousness until his dwelling was reached; and in that state he was consigned to the care of his domestics. A few hasty words of explanation were given to them: but there was no time for minute details, as the personage alluded to required immediate medical succour. Meanwhile the two villains were conveyed to the guard-house; and there the one who received the dagger-wound, fancying himself to be at the point of death, explained the whole transaction—thereby proving, sir, how gallantly you bore yourself——”

“Spare your compliments,” I interrupted the obsequious interpreter: “I only performed a duty.”

“A duty it may be, sir,” he exclaimed: “but it is not every one who, totally unarmed, will rush in to the defence of a fellow-creature’s life and property when odds have to be encountered and death is to be dared. However, I see that you are impatient; and therefore I will continue. About an hour back, the magistrate of the district received a written communication from the personage whom you so materially and chivalrously assisted last night. I must now inform you that the personage alluded to, has his own good reasons for not wishing it to be known that he was out at that late hour, and in such a neighbourhood—alone—and in disguise too—last night. He has therefore requested the magistrate to conduct the proceedings in such a way as to spare him the necessity of coming forward—and likewise to prevent his name from publicly transpiring. At the same time he is most anxious to display his gratitude towards the gallant individual who, as the *sbirri* informed his domestics, lent him such valuable assistance—perhaps saving him from being murdered, and certainly from being plundered by his ruffian assailants. That deliverer is yourself. And now for the object of my mission. You are to communicate through the magistrate,—I having the honour of serving as the medium of such communication,—in what particular way your interests can be advanced or your wishes be met. If you desire a sum of money, the personage alluded to will place an amount equivalent to a thousand English guineas at your disposal.

If you prefer a gift, it shall be of the costliest and richest description. If you fancy a lucrative situation, such as you may be able to fill, you have only to speak the word. Or if again——”

“Enough of all this!” I somewhat impatiently interrupted the interpreter: “the little service I was enabled to perform, is not to be recompensed by such means. I presume that the personage of whom you are speaking, intends that I also shall remain in ignorance of who he is?”

“I am bound to admit, sir,” answered the interpreter, “that such is the fact. Of course I know who the personage is—but I am sworn to secrecy.”

“I do not ask you to tell me,” I said: “I have no curiosity on the point—neither will I for a moment seek to induce you to violate your oath. What I meant to say was, that I would much rather the personage whom I risked my life to succour, would treat me with a frank and honest confidence, instead of enshrouding himself in all this mystery. I feel it as an insult. He ought to know that one who thus unhesitatingly dared death on behalf of a fellow-creature, would faithfully and honourably keep that fellow-creature’s secret, if it were desirable that such secret should be so kept. I am afraid, after all, my life was risked on behalf of one who was little worthy such consideration, and that he was engaged in no very creditable pursuit——”

“Hush, sir!” said the interpreter: “I beseech you not to judge thus by appearances: for the character of that personage is unimpeachable!”

I was about to make some incredulous and perhaps unkind response, when I recollected that it were perhaps unwise as well as dangerous to talk too freely or deliver opinions so glibly in a country where despotism prevailed, and where the authorities, interpreting the law according to their own convenience, found in the *sbirri* most ready agents to execute it. Besides, it was of no consequence to me to argue the point; and I had other as well as more important business in hand.

“Well,” I said, “let it be all as you have represented it: this personage may retain his secrecy and envelope himself in mystery. He is doubtless some great man—and therefore he will continue unknown to me: while perhaps, I being a humble individual, shall speedily be forgotten by him?”

“Not so,” responded the interpreter; “for his written communication to the magistrate contains a special desire that your name may be mentioned to him, so that he may treasure it up as one well worthy the remembrance, and that he may likewise know whom to speak of in his prayers. Your name, sir, will be therefore duly conveyed to this personage at the same time that the intimation be sent as to the particular mode in which you choose his gratitude to display itself towards you.”

“I gather, then, from your discourse,” I said, “that he is at present ignorant of my name?”

“It is even so,” answered the interpreter: “but this is not his fault. I have already explained that he was borne home by the *sbirri* in a state of complete unconsciousness, and that there was little leisure for them to give explanations to his domestics. Those explanations were therefore limited to the mere announcement that their

master had fallen in with evil characters—and that it would have gone hard with him were it not for the intervention of a gallant young foreigner who was severely wounded in the conflict. Thus, you see, sir, that if the *shirri* told the domestics no more than this, the domestics themselves could tell their master no more: and your name being omitted, it could not possibly be conjectured by him. Tax him not therefore with ungracious levity or ungrateful indifference in dealing with you: he is doing all he can under existing circumstances to display his sense of obligation—Ah! by the bye, I had forgotten something—and in my haste to acquit myself of my mission, because of the state in which I find you, I had well nigh left a small portion of it unaccomplished.”

“Proceed then,” I said; “and make your tale complete.”

“The written communication to the magistrate,” continued the interpreter, “specifies in detail certain recompenses or services which the personage leaves to your choice. But it further adds that inasmuch as he is unacquainted with your position and circumstances—and as you may be too opulent to require gold, too proud to accept gifts, and too independent to need a lucrative post—he leaves it to you to name such boon as you may think fit to ask at his hands, or which he with due regard to personal honour and delicacy may be enabled to grant. And if you require time to reflect thereon, by all means take it. I am at your orders—I will wait upon you again at your leisure—and in the meanwhile the magistrate will postpone his response to the written communication. One word more I should add—which is, that the personage referred to is somewhat highly placed; and he declares in his letter that if you ask a boon according to your own prompting, it need not be a small nor a scanty one—but he would rather that you should measure it according to the magnitude and importance of the service which you have performed. Now, sir, I think that you will not tax this personage with a churlish want of confidence—much less with ingratitude.”

“After all you have told me,” I responded, “I do indeed take blame to myself for having just now spoken somewhat hastily and lightly on the point. I beg therefore to recall those words, and to solicit as a favour that they may not be repeated elsewhere.”

“Rest assured, sir,” replied the interpreter, “that I am the last man in existence who would willingly make mischief—especially where so generous and brave a young gentleman as yourself is concerned.”

“I thank you for this assurance: and as for all you have been saying to me,” I continued, “I will take a little time to reflect upon it. Indeed, I cannot now continue the discourse. When I feel myself equal to renew it, I will send for you at the magistrate’s office. Have the kindness to give me that purse from the mantel-piece.”

The interpreter complied, bowing at the same time with the air of a man who knew he was about to receive a gratuity; and I made him a liberal present. He then retired; and the moment the door closed behind him, I looked at my watch. It was eleven o’clock: the nurse entered at the instant—and I understood sufficient Italian

to convey to her my wish that a particular waiter should be sent up to me.

## CHAPTER CX.

### THE APPOINTMENTS.

THE waiter for whom I had just sent, understood French; and I was therefore enabled to converse with him at my ease. He was moreover the one who usually attended upon me in my own private apartments: he was civil and obliging, and as little prone to curiosity as a hotel-official could possibly be.

“I have important business to transact,” I said; “and at any risk I must go and execute it. You can assist me in my toilet—not a word of remonstrance—you see that I am quite able to get up and walk about.”

The waiter hastened to obey my mandates: my toilet was soon accomplished—and a sling supported my disabled arm. I then bade him hasten and fetch a hackney-coach: he departed—and in a few minutes returned to announce that it was in readiness. The nurse came into the room, and began remonstrating vehemently in Italian: but I cut her short, and walked down stairs—slowly indeed—and supporting myself by the banisters: for the excitement of dressing had almost deprived me of the little strength I possessed. Two or three of the other domestics whom I encountered, looked surprised; and then I overheard them whisper to each other something about the magistrate’s office. This gave me a hint:—they evidently fancied I was going to furnish my testimony in respect to the transaction wherein I had received my wound. Accordingly, when seated in the vehicle, I told the coachman to drive to the magistrate’s office. On passing away from the hotel, I looked out of the windows of the vehicle to the right and to the left, to see if there were any indications of my movements being espied: but I could perceive none. When the equipage had passed through two or three streets, I pulled the check-string: the coachman stopped and alighted: I told him that I had altered my mind, and that he was to take me to such and such a street,—naming that in which the Lady Antonia lodged. It was my original intention, according to the plan settled with Avellino, to proceed in a variety of directions and change vehicles three or four times before repairing to my destination, so as to throw any spy off the scent: but this arrangement was made ere I was wounded, and when I had health and strength to execute the precautionary device. Now it was altogether different: there was no time to lose—and I was too weak and feeble to bear a protracted journey, or to shift from coach to coach. Therefore, at any risk, was I compelled to proceed straight to the street where Antonia dwelt.

I had mentioned no specific address; and therefore the coachman stopped at the entrance of the street. There I alighted—gave the man a liberal fee—and dismissed the equipage. I looked cautiously about—but could see no one following me: indeed, there were only two or three persons passing in that street, and their appearance forbade me to take them as spies. I



reached the chemist's shop—entered it to rest myself—and desired the apothecary to give me some strengthening cordial. This he did: I felt revived—and issuing from the shop again, glanced carefully along the street. My eyes, as they thus swept the narrow thoroughfare, settled on no one who seemed occupied with the affairs of other people; and I passed on to the house where Antonia lodged. On ascending to the Blanchards' room, I found the mechanic's wife preparing her husband's dinner,—he being absent at his work; and she gave vent to a cry of mingled alarm and astonishment on perceiving how pale I looked, how feebly I walked, and that my arm was in a sling. I gave her a few hasty words of such explanation as was necessary to account for my appearance, and then inquired concerning the fair unknown, as I still called her—for I of course did not choose to communicate to Mrs. Blanchard who the beautiful invalid really was. I learnt that she had improved

since the preceding day to a surprising degree—that she hardly looked like the same person—and that the physician himself was astonished at her rapid progress towards convalescence. I was also informed that she now anxiously awaited my promised visit, and that she was quite prepared to receive me. I accordingly bade Mrs. Blanchard lead the way into the invalid's chamber; and the old nurse having been previously fetched out of the room, we crossed the threshold.

The Lady Antonia was sitting in an arm-chair near the fire; and I observed at a glance that illness had by no means wrought the ravages that might have been expected. Indeed, upon perceiving me, a slight tinge appeared upon her cheeks: for she naturally felt some amount of fluttering agitation at the thought that she was about to make revelations which she little suspected to be no longer necessary. Her dark hair flowed in heavy tresses upon her shoulders and down her

back,—thus forming a pillow, as of a myriad ravens' wings, for the support of that beautiful head that reclined languidly there. She wore the same garb in which she had first become my travelling-companion—for there had been no opportunity to obtain her more suitable vestments; but the meanness of that apparel remained comparatively unnoticed as I contemplated its lovely and interesting wearer. Her large dark eyes had lost none of that soft lustrous sweetness which they possessed when first they opened upon me in the postchaise; and her lips parted with a smile of gratitude and friendly welcome as I made my appearance,—such a smile as a fond sister might bestow upon a kind and affectionate brother. But all in a moment that smile passed away from the lips, and that soft carnation tinge from the cheeks—while her whole form started with the same visible dismay that seized likewise upon her features, when she saw that my arm was in a sling; that I looked pale, and that I sustained myself feebly. In a few hurried words I explained the cause of all this—but without stating that I had been walking a part of the way home with Francesco Avellino when the adventure occurred to me. I felt the necessity of dealing most considerably with the invalid young lady, and of breaking to her with all possible caution the intelligence which I had to impart.

Mrs. Blanchard sat down by the window: I took a chair opposite to that which the Lady Antonia occupied: she gave me her hand—she gazed upon me with visible concern depicted on her features—she expressed a hope that my wound was indeed as little serious as I had represented it; and then she falteringly added, “But instead of coming to me to-day, you should have retained your couch—you should not have quitted your own chamber! And it is on my account that you are incurring these risks—Oh! it is too, too generous on your part—too, too selfishly exacting on mine!”

“I beseech you, signora,” I said, “not to agitate yourself nor render your mind uneasy on my account. I was quite strong enough to come to you—and rest assured that I shall suffer no ill effects from whatsoever exertion has been thus required to keep the appointment for this day and for this hour. It was of importance that I should be here now.”

The young lady fixed her eyes upon me for a few moments as if she thought that there was something significant in my tone and looks; and I, fearful of being misapprehended, hastened to add, “Believe me, signora, I feel in all that concerns you a brother's interest! For there is one in the world who is very dear to me—and if she were environed by circumstances that rendered her in want of fraternal counsel and succour—”

“Ah!” ejaculated the young lady with a perceptible tremor of the entire frame: “there is some meaning in your words!”—and then with downcast looks and blushing cheeks, she added, “Is it possible that you have penetrated my secret—or any portion of it?”

“I beseech you to tranquillize yourself,” I said, speaking slowly and guardedly. “There have been strange coincidences—accident has thrown me in the way of several personages—But not for a single moment have I stepped out of my

own path to gratify an impertinent curiosity or to institute inquiries—”

“Mr. Wilmot,” interrupted the beautiful invalid, speaking in a voice that was low but tremulously clear—and at the same time she exerted all her power to subdue the agitation of her feelings; “I see that you know who I am—Perhaps you know more—”

“Lady,” I responded, “compose your mind—tranquillize yourself—you have much more to hope than you have to fear—But I conjure you not to give way to any excitement that may cause a relapse! Yes, it is true I know all—and I am happy in being enabled to give you the assurance that he on whom your affections are fixed, is worthy by his own constancy of all this love of your's!”

Antonia did not speak: but her looks indicated the ineffable joy which my words had infused into her heart. They indicated likewise the gratitude which she experienced for the fraternal part I was performing towards her. A prolonged sigh of deep immeasurable bliss came up from her heart; and then, as tears expressive of a kindred feeling—or rather of many emotions all finding the same vent—trickled slowly down her cheeks, her hands were clasped fervently, and her lips moved in silent prayer. The scene was altogether a most affecting one. Mrs. Blanchard saw that some important communications had been made from my lips—though of their nature she was ignorant, for she did not understand the French language in which we were speaking. But she looked on with an earnest, deep-felt, friendly interest; and I could not help saying to the worthy woman, “Since I was here yesterday I have learnt something which enables me to communicate agreeable tidings to your fair patient.”

“How can I ever express the profound gratitude which I experience towards you?” asked the Lady Antonia in the softest and most melting tones of her melodious voice, which vibrated to her feelings like the music of an Æolian harp agitated by the evening zephyrs. “From the very first to the last you have proved my best friend! Oh, the longest life will not be sufficient to enable me to prove the true sisterly regard which I feel for you!”

“And I on my part, lady,” was my response, “am immeasurably rejoiced at having been enabled to render services, whether of greater or lesser importance, to her in whom my friend Francesco Avellino is so deeply, deeply interested. But I have something more to say. Can you compose yourself? will you exercise the strongest control over your feelings?—in a word, are you strong enough to bear an interview with *him* in the course of—of—to-day—or—or—to-morrow—if I take the necessary measures to bring it about?”

“Oh! can you ask me?” exclaimed Antonia fervently. “Regarding you as a brother, I may, without blushing in your presence, confess that to see Francesco would be giving me health and strength—because it would be filling my soul with happiness. But one word!”—and here a deep shade suddenly came over her countenance: “my father—my brother—”

“Your ladyship has already understood from my words that I am acquainted with them:—and

then I was about to explain how our brief friendship had been cut short; but I thought it better not to afflict her, nor yet to waste valuable time with statements which under existing circumstances were altogether unnecessary. I therefore hastened to add, "They are well in health—"

"But they have doubtless heard of my escape from the convent!" exclaimed Antonia with feverish anxiety. "Yes—the intelligence must have reached them! The Abbess, as much through a feeling of malignity as from a sense of duty, will have lost no time in writing to my father—"

"But for the present," I interrupted her, "there is a more agreeable topic on which to discourse with you. On leaving you yesterday, I proceeded to visit my friend Avellino:—in his studio I beheld a portrait—Need I say whose countenance it represented? or need I add that everything was comprehended by me in a moment? And now, Lady Antonia, it depends upon yourself how many minutes shall clapse ere Francesco is here."

It would be impossible to describe the animation of elysian bliss which overspread the beautiful countenance of the Count of Tivoli's daughter. No word from her lip was necessary to convey a response to the observation I had last made; and hastily entreating that she would compose and tranquillize herself as much as possible, I issued from the room. Mrs. Blanchard followed me—the nurse was sent back to the young lady—and I said to the mechanic's wife, "I cannot now pause to give you any explanations: but you have conducted yourself so admirably towards the invalid lady that it would be the deepest ingratitude to refuse you the fullest confidence hereafter. In process of time, therefore, you shall know all. In a few minutes you may expect to see me again; and I shall be accompanied by some one whose presence will infuse the liveliest joy into that young lady's heart."

Having thus spoken, I hastened away,—almost forgetting my enfeebled condition, so anxious was I now to bring together these two fond devoted lovers. I hurried into the street; and it was not until I was close by the door of the coffee-house where I was to meet Avellino, that I remembered the precaution of looking out for spies. The glances which I flung around, however, appeared to be satisfactory in their results; and entering the coffee-house, I was at once conducted by a waiter to a private apartment where I found Francesco expecting my arrival with feverish impatience. It was now his turn to be made acquainted with the occurrence of the preceding night; and in his generous friendship he even constrained his impatience to see Antonia, that he might put a thousand questions to me in order to elicit the assurance that my wound was not a severe one—that I incurred no danger by coming out to keep these appointments—and that the medical man had promised a speedy recovery? I hastily satisfied him on all these points; and we issued from the coffee-house together. No suspicious-looking persons appeared to be in the street: we reached the house where dwelt the object of my friend's devoted love; we gently ascended the stairs—and we entered the Blanchards' room. I desired the mechanic's wife to fetch out the nurse again from the invalid's

chamber: my command was speedily obeyed; and then I said to Avellino, "Go, my dear friend—this excellent Englishwoman will conduct you into the presence of your beloved. I shall await you here."

Francesco, wringing my hand with the most grateful fervour, accompanied Mrs. Blanchard; and as the door of the invalid's chamber opened, the ejaculations of joy which burst from the lips of the lovers reached my ears,—falling thereon like the most delicious music: for I said to myself, "Those same expressions of bliss will mark the meeting of the adored Annabel and myself!"

But scarcely had this thought traversed my mind, when my ear was suddenly smitten with sounds of a less welcome character: for I heard the footsteps of several men ascending the stairs; and on going forth upon the landing, I beheld Antonia's father and brother, accompanied by three or four *stirri*.

"At length we have traced you both, villains that ye are!" ejaculated the young Viscount, springing towards me.

"Keep back, my lord," I said: "or maimed though I be, you may experience a chastisement as little palatable as that which you so recently received."

The door of Antonia's room opened at the instant; and Francesco Avellino—who had heard the ominous steps and the sounds of voices—made his appearance. He was as pale as death; and he at once spoke earnestly to the Count of Tivoli; and as I subsequently learnt, the words which he addressed to his lordship in Italian, were to the effect that any disturbance or violence committed in the house might prove fatal to his daughter—for that she was only just beginning to recover from a severe and dangerous illness. The Count of Tivoli was evidently shocked by an announcement he had so little expected; and after a pause of a few moments, he said something to Francesco in a voice which he endeavoured to render coldly severe, but which was tremulous with the inward emotions that he could not altogether subdue. Avellino looked distressed as he glanced towards me; and I, at once fathoming the meaning of both himself and the Count of Tivoli, hastened to observe, "Yes—I understand you! In order to avoid a disturbance within these walls, I will accompany the *stirri* without the least attempt at resistance."

Francesco grasped my hand, hurriedly whispering, "Ever magnanimous and self-sacrificing, my dearest and best of friends!"

One of the police-officers at the same time put a question to the Count,—evidently demanding his further instructions. The nobleman hesitated for a moment; and then, as if suddenly making up his mind, he said to the *stirri*, "To the palace of Cardinal Antonio Gravina."

"My friend Mr. Wilmot and I, my lord," said Francesco, speaking in English so that I should understand him, "will solemnly pledge ourselves to proceed direct to the palace of his Eminence: under these circumstances it will be offering us the foulest affront to drag us through the streets like felons."

"I should hope that my father," said the young Viscount, "will not put faith in such as you!"

"Silence!" said the Count of Tivoli sternly, thus addressing himself to his son. "Yes, Signor

Avellino—yes, Mr. Wilmot—much and deeply as I have reason to be angered against you, yet I have no inclination to push the matter to extremes; and therefore have I directed that you be taken into the presence of the Cardinal instead of before the magistrate. I accept your *parole*—depart—and the officers of justice will follow at a suitable distance."

"I see, my lord," said Avellino, "that you purpose to remain here—at least for a little while—to have an interview with the Lady Antonia. I beseech your lordship not to deal harshly with her—or else within a few hours you may have no daughter to become the object of your resentment!"

The Count of Tivoli appeared to disdain a reply to these words that were addressed to him with so deep a pathos of entreaty; and Francesco, hastily passing his kerchief across his eyes, took my arm, and we descended the stairs together. We passed along the street in silence: for my companion was absorbed in his own distressing feelings—and I had not a syllable of consolation or of hope to impart. An empty hackney-coach soon overtook us: we entered it—and bade the driver convey us to the Gravina palace.

"Heaven grant that poor Antonia may survive this bitter, bitter disappointment!" said Francesco, at length breaking silence: and his voice was so mournful—Oh! so full of the profoundest despondency, that I felt the tears running down my cheeks. "The calamity is immense—the blow is terrific!"

"Of course," I said, "the Lady Antonia is aware of the cause which alarmed you, and which brought you forth from her apartment?"

"Yes," rejoined Avellino: "and for the moment she displayed the fortitude of a heroine—a fortitude of which I had scarcely expected her sensitive nature to be capable—and all the less so as she is enfeebled by illness. But, alas! that courage will not sustain itself—it is totally impossible—a reaction will take place—she will be overwhelmed by despair!"

Avellino covered his face with his hands; and for several minutes remained silent and motionless. His grief was too sacred to be intruded upon by any remark of mine; or else I longed to ask him for what purpose he thought we were being taken to the Gravina palace. This silence continued until the vehicle stopped in front of the entrance of the Cardinal's mansion. Almost immediately the *sbirri* were upon the spot: they exchanged a few words with the porter at the gate; and this functionary conducted us all across a spacious courtyard, into a waiting-room, where he left us. The *sbirri* grouped themselves in the window recess—Avellino threw himself, like one who was abandoned to despair, upon a seat in the corner—and I, accosting him, could no longer prevent myself from beseeching that he would exercise a manly control over his feelings. He only pressed my hand—but said nothing. I sat down by his side, and whispered in his ear such consolatory and hopeful things as began gradually to suggest themselves to my mind.

"You could not have failed to notice," I said, "that the Count of Tivoli did not appear to be so embittered against us as we might have expected to find him. He trusted to our *parole*—he re-

buked his son's spiteful and flippant impertinence—he has not handed us over to the civil power—but seems inclined to leave us at the disposal of one who can merely appeal to our feelings, but who has not the authority to punish or coerce us. Are not all these subjects worthy of your consideration, my dear friend?"

"Yes—indeed they are!" exclaimed Avellino, suddenly starting from his deep and mournful reverie. "It is unmanly of me to abandon myself thus to despair—I ought to feel inspired by my beloved Antonia's fortitude! Truly, it is strange that the Count should have desired us to come hither! I wonder that all which has just struck you should not have occurred to me likewise: but the calamity, falling like a thunderbolt upon my head, well nigh deprived me of reason. You are however wrong, my dear Wilmot, in supposing that Cardinal Gravina has not authority to deal with us. Know you not," proceeded Avellino, in a deep solemn tone, "of the existence of a terrible tribunal—a tribunal which still maintains its power in defiance of the civilization of the nineteenth century—a tribunal of which," added Francesco, in a still lower and deeper voice, "Cardinal Antonio Gravina is one of the supreme functionaries?"

"And that tribunal?" I asked quickly.

"The Inquisition!" was the fearful response.

## CHAPTER CXI.

### THE CARDINAL.

MY reading had certainly taught me that the tribunal of the Inquisition existed in the Roman States: but the fact had altogether escaped my recollection for a long time past; and never once since my arrival in Rome—no, nor during my entire sojourn in Italy, had I bethought myself of a tribunal the very name of which, when now pronounced by Avellino, was enough to make the blood curdle in the veins. Not that there were any of the worst features of the older Inquisitions retained in the present one—not that there were physical tortures with the rack, the thumbscrew, the steel boot, the balanced balls beating against the head, the horrible infliction of the cord and pulley, or the question by water: but there were fearful dungeons which might become living tombs for the captives consigned to them, and immurement in which was fraught with all those exquisite moral sufferings that rendered them earthly pandemonia. Thus, no sooner was the name of the dread tribunal breathed in my ear, than all these ghastly associations came trooping through my brain; and I shuddered to the uttermost confines of my being.

"Do you really suppose," I asked, in a subdued and dismayed whisper, when I was sufficiently recovered to regain the faculty of speech,—“do you really suppose that the Count of Tivoli would consign us, through the medium of his daughter's powerful godfather, to such a hideous fate as that?"

"My dear friend," replied Francesco, "if I be doomed to eternal separation from Antonia, it becomes a matter of perfect indifference to me



where I may pass what will assuredly prove a brief remnant of a wretched existence. But for you, Wilmot—on *your* account, my dearest friend, I am now sorely distressed! Not for worlds would I have you suffer through all your noble generosity towards Antonia and myself! Besides," exclaimed Francesco, the animation of hope suddenly appearing upon his features, "the whole truth shall be proclaimed—indeed, it is most probably already known to the Count: for Antonia could not fail to tell her father, with enthusiastic gratitude, how your purse succoured her during her illness and her poverty—how nobly and how delicately you behaved towards her!—and thus for *you*, my dear friend, there is every hope! Yes, yes—I see that there is!—for the Count of Tivoli, to do him justice, is an upright and an honourable man—aye, and generous too, where his prejudices and pride are not concerned. It consoles me, my dear Wilmot, to think that you are certain to escape from any evil consequences of your magnanimity: whereas, so far as I myself am concerned, I repeat that it becomes a matter of indifference what may be my doom."

The profound melancholy with which these last words were spoken, contrasted most strangely and most painfully with the animation that had marked the utterance of all those reasons which the generous heart of Francesco had suggested for my certain impunity.

"Why do you yield yourself to despair?" I asked: "why do you not summon to your aid that fortitude which on former occasions has inspired you, according to the incidents of the narrative which you recited to me the other day? Did you not ere now confess that it was unmanly on your part to yield to despondency? did you not likewise admit that you ought to take example from the Lady Antonia's own bearing? Forgive me, Avellino, for remonstrating with you thus—"

"Yes, yes, my dear friend, you are right!" said Francesco, seizing my hand and pressing it warmly: "I had forgotten those holy words which you breathed in my ear the other day, when you bade me recollect that it is often by incidents seemingly the most calamitous, that Providence works out its designs and leads everything on to a happy issue. Yes!—since I have recalled to mind those truths which you uttered, and which, as you assured me, have been illustrated by the experiences of your own life, I feel strengthened and soothed. You shall not have reason to blush for your friend again, nor to reproach him for his weakness."

Nearly an hour passed during which Avellino and I were kept in the waiting-room after our arrival at the Gravina palace; and then we were both summoned by a lacquey to another apartment. This room was most sumptuously furnished: but the draperies at the windows were so heavy, and were rendered so massive with their thick fringes of gold, as to exclude much of the broad light of day; so that the greater portion of that spacious apartment was involved in obscurity. The door was on one side of the obscurest extremity; and near it both Avellino and myself halted from a feeling of respect, when we beheld a personage whom we knew to be the Cardinal himself half reclining upon a sofa placed against the

wall on the opposite side. When I say that *we* knew him to be the Cardinal, I do not mean it to be understood that I recognised him as one whom I had beheld before—because never to my knowledge had I seen him at all: but it was by his dress that I discovered his rank. Another individual was in the room at the time we entered it; and this was the Count of Tivoli. His lordship was seated in an arm-chair near the sofa whereon the Cardinal was half-reclining: but the obscurity of the apartment—or rather of that extremity of it—prevented me from discerning the precise expression which the Count's features wore. As for his Eminence, I could scarcely perceive his features at all, on account of the manner in which his face was shaded by a canopy with heavy draperies which overhung the sofa where he lay.

"Sit down," said the Count of Tivoli, addressing us both in the French language: and throughout the interview it was in this tongue that the discourse was carried on—because it was known to me, and because while I on the one hand was ignorant of Italian, Cardinal Gravina on the other hand was unacquainted with English.

Francesco and I placed ourselves in chairs near the threshold where we had stopped short on entering that apartment; and for upwards of a minute there was a solemn silence,—a silence fraught with no small degree of suspense for us both. At length it was broken; and it was the Count of Tivoli who commenced speaking.

"I have had an interview with my daughter," he said, in a grave but melancholy voice: "it was necessarily a short one, inasmuch as I was compelled to hasten hither for the purpose of submitting all the circumstances to the wisdom of my august friend, his Eminence Cardinal Gravina. My daughter has told me everything: whatsoever faults she may have committed, and however grave those faults may be, yet well aware am I that her lips are incapable of giving utterance to aught but the truth. I have learnt, Mr. Wilmot, under what circumstances you brought her to Rome? I have therefore done you much wrong—but my suspicions were natural, and would have misled the wisest and the most far-seeing. Have patience while I enter upon a few details. Upon receiving the intelligence of my daughter's flight from the convent where his Eminence the Cardinal placed her about a year back, I proceeded thither to institute inquiries: but I could learn nothing beyond the mere fact of her flight. I prosecuted those inquiries in several directions; and I at length discovered, from a postillion who drove your chaise, Mr. Wilmot, during one of the last stages of your journey, that you were accompanied by a young lady who seemed fearful of being observed and recognised. Other little incidents evolved themselves to convince me that this young lady was my daughter; and I acquired the certainty that you had brought her to Rome—but I failed to discover whither you had borne her, or where she had taken up her abode. I could not help thinking that you were an older friend of Signor Avellino than you had chosen to admit when you first presented yourself to me: I thought likewise that you had planned and aided my daughter's escape from the convent, and that your visits to my mansion were purposed only to ascertain whether I suspected the truth so that you might report accordingly to Sig-

nor Avellino. Such were my impressions: and they were natural enough. You cannot therefore wonder that I passed you coldly in the street, or that I should even have made up my mind to await an opportunity for inflicting punishment upon you. But I strongly deprecated my son's subsequent violence—and still more his folly in summoning you before the legal authorities."

The Count of Tivoli paused for a few moments, and then resumed in the following manner:—

"I did not for a moment imagine that you continued to be a visitor at whatsoever place my daughter had taken up her abode: it was therefore upon Signor Avellino's movements that I employed police-agents to institute an espial. However, I am extending my explanations beyond the limit which I had purposed: and yet if I enter thus into detail, it is that I may the better excuse myself for the injustice which you, Mr. Wilmot, have experienced at the hands of myself and my son. My daughter has told me everything—the circumstances under which you brought her to Rome—the mystery with which she enshrouded herself—the delicacy of your conduct towards her—then the noble generosity which you displayed on learning that she was ill and in distress—and the fact that until yesterday you remained in ignorance of who she really was. That when accidentally learning this secret, and having been previously made aware of Signor Avellino's attachment for my daughter, you should have thought to befriend those with whom, at your age, you might naturally sympathize—cannot be held as a very great crime in the estimation of a just and reasonable man. At all events, I owe you so much reparation for the injustice done you by myself and my son—and I owe you so much gratitude for your magnanimous as well as humane and delicate conduct towards my daughter—that I dare not for another instant suffer your interference on Signor Avellino's behalf to weigh with me prejudicially against you. I therefore hope, Mr. Wilmot, that all the past will be on both sides forgotten?"

"With pleasure, my lord!" I exclaimed: "and truly delighted am I that I no longer stand as an object of suspicion in your eyes."

"Signor Avellino," resumed the Count of Tivoli, now addressing himself to my friend, "your own conduct must be viewed in a more favourable light since I have learnt everything from the lips of my daughter. Now that I find you were in no way privy to her escape from the convent—nor even the instigator thereof—but that until yesterday you were in total ignorance of everything that had occurred, I cannot continue to feel that same animosity which led me to set *sbirri* upon your track and provoke your arrest. I will even admit that it was natural enough for a young man to avail himself of the opportunity of obtaining an interview with the young lady whom he loves, and who for his sake alone has placed herself in a most peculiar position. But let me give you a few words of explanation as to my motive in deciding that yourself and Mr. Wilmot should be brought to the palace of his Eminence. I knew not whether a secret marriage might not have been solemnized between my daughter and yourself: I knew nothing—I could discover nothing—until the police-agents traced you just now to that obscure street where I at length found my daughter. It fortu-

nately happened that my son and myself were at home when the intimation was hurriedly sent off that you had secreted yourself in that poor coffee-house—that Mr. Wilmot had just been seen in the same street—and that there was consequently every reason to hope the search was upon the point of proving successful. Accompanied by my son, I sped into that neighbourhood: but I repeat that until I had seen my daughter and learnt everything from her lips, I was in total ignorance of how matters really stood. Therefore on falling in with you, I had to provide against any contingency that might possibly come to my knowledge; and hence my command that you should be brought to the palace of his Eminence, on whose wisdom I purposed to throw myself, and according to whose judgment I vowed that my own decision should be given. From all that I have said—from all the circumstances which have come to my knowledge—you can be at no loss to understand, Signor Avellino, that I think far better of you than I did before. Indeed, I must confess that the great fault is my daughter's—and the greatest amount of blame must rest with her. She has taken a step which threatens her reputation with ruin:—to this fact I cannot blind myself. I am bound likewise to acknowledge that I have been moved by her entreaties and her tears—moved also by the evidences of that fond, devoted, unchanging love which you bear for each other; and I can no longer shut my eyes to the truth that Antonia's happiness depends upon an alliance with yourself. I am now speaking frankly, as a father and as a man of the world. For my own part, I am at length willing to waive what may be a prejudice—"

"No, not a prejudice," interposed Cardinal Antonio Grayina, now speaking for the first time during the interview which had already lasted nearly an hour.

"That observation of his Eminence," said the Count of Tivoli, in a tone which was deeply mournful, "proclaims to you, Signor Avellino, the nature of the *one* obstacle which now bars your hopes of an union with my daughter. Henceforth neither yourself nor Mr. Wilmot must regard me as a stern implacable parent. I give my assent," continued the Count, with much emotion, "so far as the matter rests with me: but I have promised that Antonia shall never marry save and except with the consent of his Eminence, her godfather—and that pledge on my part must be faithfully kept. I have entreated his Eminence—I have reasoned with him—and alas! have failed to move him! But he agreed that this interview should take place in his presence; and I am not therefore altogether without the hope that he will yet in his natural generosity suffer himself to be moved. I have now no more to say: it is for you, Signor Avellino, to endeavour to win the assent of his Eminence."

"No," said the Cardinal sternly, "not a word from Signor Avellino's lips! Listen. It is true that I gave my permission for this interview and all these explanations to take place in my presence. But wherefore? You, Count of Tivoli, appear not fully to have understood my motive. It was not that I might place myself in the position of one who wished to be entreated or implored that he might either grant or refuse a particular thing according to that alternative which would afford

him the greater satisfaction : but it was because I would not have *you*, my lord, incur the risk of being accused of harshness towards your daughter by this young man, her suitor, after you had expressly assured me that you were willing to give your assent to their alliance. It is therefore a sacrifice of my own feelings which I am making for your lordship's sake ; and whatsoever justice there may be (if any) in an accusation of harshness, tyranny, or cruelty in proclaiming a refusal, it is I who will bear the brunt of all this. My decision is pronounced—the Lady Antonia must go back to her convent ! And now not another word—but let these young men withdraw !”

“Oh, my Lord Cardinal !” exclaimed Francesco, in a voice of most earnest appeal, “I beseech your Eminence——”

“Silence !—my judgment is pronounced !” interrupted Antonio Gravina in the sternest voice.

“Hush ! no more !” said the Count of Tivoli, advancing hurriedly towards Avellino and myself : “it is useless as well as indecorous to reason any farther with his Eminence. Deeply, deeply, under all circumstances do I deplore the issue of this interview—but it cannot be altered. My word is pledged to his Eminence—and it must be fulfilled ! Let there be no more rancour between us, Avellino !—And you, my dear Mr. Wilmot, accept my hand as a proof that we are again friends !—What ! the left hand ?” ejaculated the Count, starting back and drawing himself up haughtily.

“Pardon me, my lord,” I said—“but I am wounded.”

“By the Saints it is so !” exclaimed the Count : “your right arm is in a sling ! Why—how is this, that I did not notice it before ?”

“I mentioned that I was maimed, my lord,” I said, “when your son ere now threatened——”

“But in the excitement of the moment,” interrupted the Count, “I perceived it not. How happened this ?”

“Last night, my lord,” I rejoined, “there was a desperate outrage committed in a bye-street——”

“Ah !” ejaculated the Cardinal, suddenly raising himself to a sitting posture on the sofa. “Was it you, young man—*you*, Joseph Wilmot—But your name as my brave defender was not previously mentioned to me——”

“Is it possible ?” I cried : and then, as a sudden reminiscence flashed vividly in unto my mind, I sprang forward, exclaiming, “A boon, my Lord Cardinal !—a boon I implore—nay, demand at your hands !”

“A boon ?” echoed the high prelate, evidently smitten with the bitterest vexation at having betrayed the secret that it was he whom I had succoured on the preceding evening.

“Yes—a boon, my lord !” I repeated with fervid excitement. “Your Eminence has vowed that whatsoever boon I might demand at your hand——”

“Mr. Wilmot, you must be mad !” interrupted the Count of Tivoli, who comprehended not a single tittle of all this. “The excitement of today's scenes—perhaps the loss of blood, too, through the wound which you have received——”

“No, my lord,” I cried, “my brain is not turned—my reason is not affected, as you appear to imagine. I appeal to his Eminence——”

“Yes,” said the Cardinal, “this young gentleman speaks truly enough. The outrage of last night has been hushed up as much as possible by my special command : but in justice to myself I must explain to you wherefore. I was returning from the tribunal of the Inquisition, where a secret examination had been taking place : I was unattended—on foot—and also in disguise. My path lay through a neighbourhood but little famed for its morality : it was there that I was attacked—it was there that this young gentleman displayed his chivalrous valour—it was there that he received his wound in my defence. You can now comprehend why it was my wish to shroud the transaction from the public knowledge, and why Mr. Wilmot himself would have remained ignorant of the name and rank of him whom he succoured, were it not that a most singular combination of circumstances has thus brought us face to face.”

“But was not your Eminence aware of the name of your defender ?” inquired the Count of Tivoli, in astonishment at all he had just heard.

“No : it had not been communicated to me,” responded the Cardinal : “but no doubt in the course of this day I should have learnt it, through a certain channel with which Mr. Wilmot is evidently acquainted. Do not think ill of me, my dear Count,” continued his Eminence, “if I kept the circumstance unknown even to yourself : but so much scandal has of late years fallen upon the dignitaries of the Church, that it is impossible to exercise too much caution—and moreover, there was the fear that the real truth of my tale might be unjustly suspected——”

“At least not by me, my lord !” responded the Count of Tivoli, who seemed to be somewhat hurt at so much want of confidence on the part of his august friend. “The character of your Eminence stands high above all suspicion ; and a single word from your lips carries conviction with it.”

“Thank you, my excellent friend,” said the Cardinal warmly, “for these assurances on your part. Give me your hand—and be not offended with me. You can now understand, perhaps, wherefore I received you in this darkened room, and why I chose that all these proceedings should take place here. My forehead yet bears the marks of last night's rough treatment——”

“Oh, my lord ! if I had known it,” exclaimed the Count of Tivoli, “I should have indeed felt delicate in intruding so much upon your presence and your time this day. But here is Mr. Wilmot waiting for the response of your Eminence.”

“You crave a boon at my hands, Mr. Wilmot,” said the Cardinal ; “and I remember well—in fact, it would be most ungenerous not to reiterate the full extent of the promise which I this morning conveyed to you—that whatsoever boon you might ask that is consistent with my honour and dignity to grant——”

“My lord,” I said, sinking on one knee in front of the sofa, “I beseech your Eminence to yield your assent to the marriage of Francesco Avellino and the Count of Tivoli's daughter !”

“You unhesitatingly risked your life for me, brave and excellent young man,” said Antonio Gravina : “and I therefore dare not hesitate a single moment in granting the boon which you solicit. It is accorded ! Signor Avellino, kneel and receive my blessing !”

As I rose up from my suppliant posture at the feet of the Cardinal, Francesco for an instant caught my hand and pressed it with a most grateful fervour: he then sank down upon his knees—and the Cardinal solemnly invoked heaven's blessings upon his head.

## CHAPTER CXII.

### HAPPINESS.

WITHIN five minutes from the conclusion of this scene of mingled excitement and solemnity, I was being whirled along in the Count of Tivoli's own carriage to the house where Antonia lodged. I was the sole occupant of the interior of the vehicle: my heart was literally bounding with joy—I was charged with one of the pleasantest missions that I had ever in my life undertaken. When the equipage entered the obscure street in that poor neighbourhood, it did not drive up to the door of the house itself,—because its presence there might either have been regarded as a revelation of that which was to be broken cautiously—or on the other hand it might be taken as a sign for the prompt removal of the young lady to quarters where she would be completely separated from Francesco for ever.

On alighting from the carriage, I proceeded to the house; and ascending to the Blanchards' room, found the worthy mechanic and his wife in earnest and mournful deliberation upon those incidents which had occurred about two hours back. These incidents had revealed to them who the young lady was, and had given them a tolerable insight into the circumstances of her position. I was now enabled to relieve them from all apprehension: and in a few hasty words I explained the good tidings which I had brought for Antonia. I learnt that her interview with her father had left her full of anxious hope, mingled however with many fears; for though he had softened considerably towards her after receiving her frank explanations, he had left her without any hint as to the course which under those altered circumstances he might be inclined to adopt. The reader has seen that he had considered himself bound to consult Cardinal Gravina and leave the final decision in the hands of his Eminence: and no doubt entertaining a misgiving as to what that decision might be, the Count had not dared hold forth to his daughter a hope which might not be realized.

I requested Mrs. Blanchard to accompany me at once into the young lady's presence; and we accordingly proceeded to the invalid chamber. I found Antonia seated in the arm-chair; and the instant that I made my appearance, her eyes glistened with a wild excitement—she endeavoured to speak, but could not—she would have sprung up from her seat, but she sank back exhausted, palpitating and gasping with the agitation of her feelings. Nevertheless, there was far more of hopefulness than of apprehension in her looks: for in the first place the fact that I was no longer in custody struck her as a presage of good tidings—and in the second place the expression of my countenance was by no means calculated to send a chill to her heart.

"Lady," I said, "I come as the messenger from your noble father—the bearer of his forgiveness for all that has occurred. Yes—I am here to assure you that the home where you once dwelt happily, is now open to you again—and—and—But you must compose your feelings—"

"Oh, speak, Mr. Wilmot!" exclaimed Antonia: "anything is better than suspense! My father forgives me—"

"And henceforth, lady," I went on to say, "he will study to promote your happiness."

"Oh, is it possible?" she murmured: "dare I entertain the wild—the thrilling—the almost frenzied hope—"

"Cherish every hope, lady," I answered; "and believe that your cares and your afflictions are approaching their end!"

"Do you mean, Mr. Wilmot—Oh! do you mean—"

"I mean, signora, that there is nothing now to sadden or distress you: I mean," I continued, "that the clouds which hung upon your head have become suddenly dissipated: I mean that your noble father and the Lord Cardinal—But I beseech you to compose yourself!—they have given their assent—and every barrier to your happiness is removed!"

Antonia clasped her hands in fervid gratitude to heaven: there was for a moment the thrill of ecstatic excitement visibly quivering through her half-reclining form; and then she became suddenly motionless—her eyes bent downward—but with the tears trickling slowly upon her cheeks. It was evident that she felt she dared not give way too much to that sense of happiness which my words had infused into her soul; and I could even fancy that she said within herself, "I must remain profoundly tranquil, for at least a few minutes, in order to grow accustomed to a bliss which is so strange to me, and which even still appears to be naught but a delightful vision that the least movement—the faintest sigh—or a word spoken above a whisper, will in a moment destroy!"

And there was a pause of several minutes. At length I thought it better to break gently upon this silence, and to say something which should convince the young lady that it was indeed no vision in which she was beatifically cradling herself, but that it was a real and veritable happiness in which she might indulge, though but a few hours back so immeasurably remote from her anticipation.

"Your noble father, Lady Antonia," I said, speaking gently and guardedly, "honoured me by selecting me as his messenger to bear all this welcome intelligence. He was pleased to say that it is a reward which I merited—and I can assure your ladyship that the mission thus confided to me, is one of the happiest it has ever been my fortune to accomplish."

Antonia extended her hand; and for a single moment I raised it to my lips: for it was a true fraternal feeling which I experienced towards the young lady;—and with my heart full of the image of Annabel, as her's was of Avellino, I might be permitted to look upon the Count of Tivoli's daughter in the light of a sister, or of a friend in whose welfare circumstances had rendered me deeply interested. And now I explained to her all that had occurred at the Gravina palace; and she



listened with the profoundest attention. I next spoke of her removal to the paternal home; and I ventured to suggest that she had better continue to occupy her present apartment until to-morrow, so that in the interval she might compose her feelings after the excitement she had experienced, and thereby guard against a relapse. She assented. I then told her that her father purposed to come in the evening and pass an hour with her, when he would make arrangements for her return to the Tivoli palace on the morrow. Over and over again did she express her deep gratitude towards me for all the kind interest I had shown and was still showing on her behalf; and when I was about to take my departure, she said, hesitatingly and diffidently, "But all this while, Mr. Wilmot, you have not spoken of my brother?"

The tears again trickled down her cheeks; and after a brief pause, she went on to say, "He accompanied my father just now—after that dreadful

scene on the staircase: he upbraided me bitterly and it was even with difficulty that my father's authority availed to impose silence upon him. Indeed, my father insisted that he should leave this room and return home, while I gave those explanations which I at once and in all candour volunteered to make. Ah! Mr. Wilmot, it will be a drawback to my happiness if my brother should look coldly upon me—still more so if he should treat Francesco slightly!"

"Fear not, lady," I answered. "The Count went straight from the Gravina palace to his own mansion, in order to impart to your brother everything that had taken place; and I think I know enough of the young Viscount to be enabled to judge that he is so completely the creature of impulses—pardon me for speaking thus of your brother——"

"Oh! but your words, Mr. Wilmot," exclaimed Antonia, "are replete with consolation! Yes—he

is the creature of impulses; and it is therefore possible he may exhibit a noble generosity——”

“At all events, lady,” I interjected, “he is bound to be submissive to his father’s will; and when he finds that the Count’s determination is fixed in a particular sense, he will see the inutility of offering any farther opposition. Rest assured that your noble parent will be enabled to give you some cheering intelligence on this subject when he visits your ladyship in the evening.”

I then took my departure, and returned to my hotel—where I found Francesco Avellino awaiting my presence. I was now so overcome by exhaustion, after the excitement of the last few hours, that I was compelled at once to seek my couch: but Avellino sat by the side thereof, listening to all I had to impart relative to my interview with Antonia. I then enjoyed a sweet and refreshing sleep for several hours; and when I awoke, I found Francesco still by my bedside. He remained with me until an advanced period of the night—paying me all possible attentions; and it was even with difficulty he could be persuaded to leave me at length to the care of the nurse, and return to his own home.

I kept my bed throughout the following day; and my medical attendant insisted that I should be left as tranquil as possible, for fear lest the excitement I had gone through should lead to evil consequences. Avellino visited me several times: but Saltcoats and the Dominie were rigidly excluded. I learnt that the Lady Antonia was so much better she was enabled to bear removal to the Tivoli palace, and that between two and three in the afternoon she had once more crossed the threshold of the paternal home. I was furthermore informed that the young Viscount had suddenly shown himself in the most amiable colours—and that of his own accord he had besought Avellino to fling a veil over the past. I need scarcely add that my generous-hearted friend gave a suitable response.

On the following day I was so much better as to be enabled to receive the Dominie and Mr. Saltcoats—and likewise a visit from the Count and Viscount of Tivoli. The elder nobleman embraced me with as much affectionate warmth as if I were his son—declaring that I had proved an instrument in the hands of heaven, to bring back happiness into his house, and to open his eyes to the tyranny as well as the folly of the course he had previously pursued in respect to his daughter. The Viscount accosted me with an air of cordial frankness so evidently genuine that I could not possibly suspect its sincerity: and he expressed to me the same hope which he had already breathed to Avellino—namely, that whatsoever unpleasant belonged to the past might be forgiven and forgotten. The two noblemen remained with me for about an hour; and when taking their departure, they expressed a hope that I should be well enough on the morrow to dine at the Tivoli palace,—the Count volunteering to send his carriage for me. Avellino came to me again in the evening: indeed, he evidently felt that he could scarcely display a sufficient friendly assiduity on my behalf. He told me that the Blanchards were placed, by the Count of Tivoli’s bounty, in a position of complete independence for the remainder of their lives; and that they had therefore every reason to bless the

day when obedient to the promptings of their own generous natures, they had shown kindness to one who at the time appeared to be an utterly unfriended young lady, but whose angel-presence had brought joy and bliss to them as the reward and as the result.

“And now, my dear Wilmot,” said Francesco, “I cannot possibly help referring once more to the prophetic words which you uttered when you bade me recollect that those incidents which at the time appear calamities, may prove in the long run to have been the means by which heaven works out its own wise purposes. Your sufferings, my dear friend, have proved the source of all this happiness to me: the wound which you received in defence of Cardinal Gravina, was destined to serve as the talisman to that assent without which I never could have entered into the elysium of feeling which I now enjoy.”

We conversed together for some time in this strain; and if it were somewhat a solemn one, it was nevertheless fraught with satisfaction and happiness for us both.

The next day my health was so considerably improved that I received the physician’s consent to accept the invitation to the Tivoli palace. The young Viscount called upon me, bringing fruits and flowers from his father’s conservatories; and I failed not to recognise a feminine taste in the manner in which the *bouquets* were arranged. It was a delicate tribute of Antonia’s gratitude; and I was delighted to learn from her brother that she was almost completely convalescent. Dominie Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats entered my chamber while the young Viscount was with me: he immediately recognised them as the friends who had stood forward on my behalf during the examination before the magistrate: he shook them both by the hand with a marked cordiality; and when they rose to leave me, he accompanied them from the room.

By a quarter to six o’clock my evening toilet was completed: but I was still compelled to retain my arm in a sling. A waiter announced that the Count of Tivoli’s carriage was in attendance; and on entering the chariot, I was infinitely astonished on finding two persons already installed there. But the phrase of “It’s just that,” from the lips of one, and a boisterous peal of merriment from those of the other, left me not another instant in doubt who my companions were. It appeared that the young Viscount had most cordially pressed them to share with me the hospitalities of the Tivoli palace that evening; and this explanation of their presence in the carriage elicited another burst of merriment from the lips of Mr. Saltcoats, and reminded the Dominie of something he had said to the Widow Glenbucket, but which something it turned out that he could not for the life of him remember.

We arrived at the Tivoli palace; and I should observe that whereas Mr. Saltcoats was clothed all in gray on ordinary occasions, he was now dressed in a full costume of black; while the Dominie, instead of his gaiters, wore black silk stockings. We were conducted into a brilliantly lighted saloon, where we were cordially welcomed by the Count and his son. Avellino was likewise there; and the beautiful Antonia, looking infinitely better than I could possibly have expected to find her, though



necessarily somewhat weak and feeble, rose from her chair to greet us. It was a scene of perfect happiness; and nothing could exceed the well-bred good nature which the Count displayed when listening to the platitudes of the Dominic or to Mr. Saltcoat's history of the spoilt plum-pudding. In respect to the young Viscount, it was by no means difficult to perceive that his change of mood might be attributed to the very selfishness and egotism of his character: for I regret to be compelled to state that of natural magnanimity he had none. He was a young man of impulses: where he conceived a prejudice, he would act under its influence—as was exemplified in his conduct towards Francesco Avellino: but if circumstances transpired to divest him of this prejudice by making it better worth his while to pursue an opposite course, he would with equal readiness fall into the same. Thus, at the very instant he perceived that the tables were all completely turned—that his sister was to be forgiven, that Avellino was to be recognised as her intended bridegroom, and that I myself was to be received back again into the Count's arms of friendship—the young Viscount at once recognised the folly of standing moodily aloof and sulkily rebelling against that paternal will which he could not for a single instant control and which would operate in spite of him: and thus he yielded at once to the exigency of the circumstances, and endeavoured to carry off all the past by putting as good a face as possible upon the present. His cordiality towards us, therefore, was not the less sincere or genuine on that account: indeed he was evidently disposed to be as kind towards his sister and as friendly towards Avellino and myself, as he had previously been bitter and hostile. But what I want the reader to understand, is that this change in the young man's sentiments and deportment with regard to us, emanated not from a true loftiness of spirit, but from the simple fact that it was utterly useless for him to hold out in the maintenance of a different attitude.

In the course of the evening the Count of Tivoli took an opportunity of drawing me apart, and saying a few words in familiar and confidential discourse.

"Immediately after the incidents of the Gravina palace," observed his lordship, "I wrote a letter to a friend of mine at Civita Vecchia, making certain inquiries in respect to Signor Avellino. Not that I had any doubt in respect to his own version of the manner in which he dealt with his late father's creditors: but at the same time you can understand, my dear Mr. Wilmot, that it was more satisfactory to me as Antonia's parent, to receive the fullest and completest corroboration of everything which tended to the honour and credit of him who is to be my son-in-law. I this morning received a reply to my communication; and you may judge by the reception which I gave to Signor Avellino that the intelligence was pre-eminently gratifying. It is true, my young friend, that Francesco's conduct was most noble: he might have remained rich if he had chosen to leave his father's honour tarnished—but he rendered himself comparatively poor in order to establish the posthumous reputation of the author of his being. Deeply, deeply do I regret that I should ever have suffered a patrician

prejudice to overrule my appreciation of the merits of this excellent young man! But we cannot become wise on certain points all in a moment; and even the oldest of us have fresh experiences to learn in the world's affairs."

"It delights me," I observed, "to hear your lordship speak thus handsomely of Avellino, and thus frankly of yourself."

"It will be my care," proceeded the Count of Tivoli, "to make up to Francesco that deficiency of fortune which arose from his admirable conduct in respect to his deceased father's creditors: for I shall bestow as munificent a dowry upon Antonia as becomes the family to which she belongs and the wealth of her father. By the bye, I am reminded that I was charged by Cardinal Gravina with a message for you: he requests your presence at his palace to-morrow at two o'clock, as he has something to say to you;—and therefore I hope you will make it convenient to keep the appointment?"

I promised to attend to the Count's intimation; and I need say no more in respect to this particular evening than that it was passed in a most agreeable and pleasant manner.

On the following day, punctually at two o'clock, I presented myself at the Gravina palace, and was immediately ushered into the presence of the Cardinal, whom I found seated in a small but exquisitely furnished apartment, which evidently served him as a private retiring room, corresponding in respect to his own sex with what the boudoir is to ladies of rank or wealth—a privacy, indeed, to which only near relatives or most valued friends are admitted. His Eminence received me most kindly, and renewed the expression of his gratitude for the succour I had lent him on the occasion of the attack by the robbers. Luncheon was served up: it was a choice and elegant repast; and the Cardinal did the hospitalities of his table as if he had known me for several years instead of but for a few days. He inquired in the most delicate manner whether he could possibly be of service to me in any shape or way: but I assured his Eminence that I was already more than recompensed for whatsoever little service I might have done him, by the assent which he had given to the union of his god-daughter the Lady Antonia de Tivoli with my friend Francesco Avellino.

"I am one of those men," observed the Cardinal, "who do not perform things by halves. Perhaps, under different circumstances, I never should have assented to this alliance; and therefore I do not wish to take unto myself a greater amount of merit than I positively deserve. But, on the other hand, my assent being once given, is now cordially and warmly afforded; and I will do everything I can for the welfare of the young couple. I have long destined Antonia as my heiress: I am rich—I have not long to remain in this world—and I may as well bestow at the present moment some part of that which would otherwise soon devolve in that quarter. But Antonia will receive a handsome dowry from her father; and it is not suitable that a husband should be altogether enriched by means of his wife. Therefore I have determined that the matrimonial gift which I am now making, shall be to Francesco Avellino himself. This packet, Mr. Wilmot, con-

tains the necessary documents, which my notary has drawn up, for the settlement of a considerable sum upon Avellino. Here is another packet; and you will perceive that it is sealed with the pontifical arms—the Keys of St. Peter surmounted with a mitre-crown. But I must explain the object of this second packet. You are aware—indeed you have perhaps already seen too much of those prejudices which exist in Italy generally, and in the Roman States especially, with regard to patrician or plebeian birth. A title of nobility, however, at once supercedes that prejudice in respect to the latter; and indifferent though your friend Avellino may be to such titular distinction, I ask as a favour that he will not reject that title of *Count* which, at my intercession, his Holiness the Pope has been pleased to confer. Perhaps, Mr. Wilmot, you will have no objection to become the bearer of these two documents?"

"On the contrary, my lord," I answered; "it will give me the most unfeigned delight—and I thank your Eminence for confiding to me a mission which you foresaw would give me this pleasure."

Scarcely had I done speaking, when the door opened, and a strange-looking individual made his appearance upon the threshold. He was a man of about eighty: he carried in his hand a large clerical hat—he wore a black silk scull-cap, beneath the edge of which peeped forth his thin white hairs, having the effect of a silver fringe for that sable cap. He was attired in a black ecclesiastical costume of a peculiar fashion: he was of the middle height, somewhat stoutly built; and though he stooped with the weight of years, yet he walked with ease and even agility. His complexion was sallow: deep lines were traced across his forehead and about the eyes and lips: his features were angular, though in a more youthful period the profile must have been eminently handsome; and the general expression of the countenance was a combination of austerity, authority, and a sense of pious humiliation, if the reader can understand how all these could be thus blended.

This personage entered without any ceremony, as if he had the privilege of admission at pleasure into the Cardinal's presence. But on perceiving that his Eminence was not alone, the visitor stopped short; and at the same time the Cardinal rose and bowed with the profoundest respect. At once convinced that the austere-looking personage must be one of no mean rank or consequence, that a dignitary so highly placed as a Cardinal should thus salute him with a reverential deference,—I likewise rose from my seat. The ecclesiastical visitor pronounced the usual blessing: the Cardinal said something in Italian, which I could comprehend sufficiently to discern that it was a respectful invitation to be seated;—and the old man accordingly took a chair. I was now about to depart: but the Cardinal made a sign for me to remain. The elegant repast was still upon the table: Cardinal Gravina invited the visitor to partake of refreshments; and I now perceived that the latter was also addressed as "your Eminence." I wondered who he could possibly be. For an instant, on observing the Cardinal's reverential salutation, I had fancied that the austere-looking old man must be the Pope himself: but a second thought told me that the Sovereign-Pontiff would

not be thus dressed;—and now that titular appellation of "your Eminence" instead of "your Holiness," convinced me that this was not the Pope. But the term "Eminence," I thought, was only applied to Cardinals; and assuredly the visitor was not a Cardinal—for he wore not the dress of a member of the Sacred College. Then who could he possibly be?

In response to Cardinal Gravina's invitation that he would partake of some refreshment, the visitor broke off a small fragment from a roll, and filled himself a tumbler of water: he evidently only took this frugal luncheon in order to avoid what might seem an ungracious refusal to break bread at that hospitable table. Cardinal Gravina renewed the conversation in French, so that I might understand it; and he began discoursing on general topics. The visitor spoke the same language with the utmost fluency, though I did not think he was a Frenchman: his manner was well-bred and courteous, though permeated with an unvarying solemnity. On being informed that I was an Englishman, and was on a visit of pleasure to Rome, the "venerable father"—(for by this title as well as "Eminence" was the old man addressed by the Cardinal) at once began conversing with me in the English tongue; and I was astonished at the fluency, the accuracy, and the admirable taste with which he spoke it. He saw that I was thus surprised; and as a smile for a single moment relaxed the austere compression of his thin lips, he gave me to understand in a mild and even modest manner, without the slightest tinge of vanity or ostentation, that he spoke seven or eight languages with equal facility—but that he himself was a native of Holland. He inquired what buildings, institutions, and places of resort, I had visited; and on receiving my answers, he expatiated with the nicest critical taste and the soundest judgment upon the various pieces of architecture, the paintings, and the statues which had come within my notice. I was pleased with his conversation—and should have been fascinated, were it not that his language, his tone, and his manner conveyed the idea that he kept his mind incessantly under the yoke of self-humiliation, or mortification. The interview lasted nearly an hour—when the old man rose to take his departure—in doing which he laid his hand for an instant upon my head as he gave me his blessing; and Cardinal Gravina followed him as far as the threshold of the door.

"I kept you on purpose, Mr. Wilmot," said the Cardinal, when we were once more alone together, "that you might have an opportunity of studying, so far as was possible in so short a time one of the most remarkable men of the present age. Without being one of the recognised sovereigns of the world, he nevertheless wields a power which is more or less felt in every corner of the earth—a power which though often unseen and unknown, nevertheless makes itself felt in the councils of Ministers and in the cabinets of Princes—a power which is exercised through the secret instrumentality of blindly obedient agents. In all countries—the savage as well as the civilised, the remote as well as the near—there are subjects of the reigning monarch of those nations who yield an occult and implicit submission to the decrees or the instructions forwarded to them from that venerable

old man who has just quitted our presence. He has his viceroys and his lieutenants: the world is parcelled out into provinces, where the spiritual rule of that old man prevails, to a greater or less extent, through the medium of those deputies. He dwells not in a palace, but in a humble room partaking rather of the aspect of an anchorite's cell—he banquets not upon luxuries—the frugality which he just now observed was no exceptional affectation, but in accordance with a general rule and practice. He has enormous revenues at his command—and yet such is the life that he leads.”

“And who,” I asked, stricken with astonishment at all I had just heard,—“who, my lord, may be this venerable old man who wields a power so tremendous and yet so mysterious that it well nigh makes me shudder with a feeling of solemn awe? Who is he, my lord?”

“Father Roothan,” replied Cardinal Gravina,—“Father Roothan, the General of the Jesuits.”

### CHAPTER CXIII.

#### THE PRISONERS' CELL.

ON leaving the Gravina palace, I bent my way direct to Signor Avellino,—taking with me the two sealed packets which I had received from the Cardinal. I communicated to my friend the message with which I was charged in respect to those packets; and when I had finished speaking, Francesco reflected gravely for some minutes ere he gave me any response. I began to fear that these messages were not altogether palatable to him: and indeed I had previously apprehended that the one relative to the patrician title might possibly wound his pride. This idea had not struck me at the moment when I so gladly took charge of the Cardinal's messages and packets: but it had gradually dawned in unto my mind during my walk to Avellino's residence. However, this apprehension on my part was quickly dispelled: for Francesco's countenance suddenly cleared up—and its previous gravity was succeeded by the brightest animation.

“I was thinking for a moment, my dear friend,” he said, “that it was somewhat annoying to be told almost as plainly as actions can convey the sense of words, that being a plebeian, it is necessary I should be transformed into a patrician before I can lead the Lady Antonia to the altar.”

“But remember, Francesco,” I said, “that this intimation—if an intimation it be—emanates not from the Tivoli family——”

“That is the very thing which has just occurred to me!” exclaimed Avellino: “and, after all, it were ungracious on my part to feel vexed or indignant with Cardinal Gravina because he seeks to do the best for me he possibly can in a worldly point of view. As society is constituted, he is right in thus altering my social position before he gives me his god-daughter in marriage; and I was wrong to hesitate in accepting the honour. And then too, in respect to this settlement of a fortune upon me, it displays so much generosity on the Cardinal's part, that——But no matter, Wilmot! You understand me now well enough—and there is no

humbling of my own pride in accepting any of the bounties which his Eminence is pleased to shower upon me.”

“And in that case,” I said, “you *do* agree to accept them?”

“I do,” rejoined Avellino: “with gratitude likewise do I receive them—and with thankfulness also to you, my dear friend, for having become the bearer of the Cardinal's well-meant communications.”

“This being settled,” I said, “permit me, my dear Francesco, to be the first to greet you with felicitations as the Count of Arellino.”

The newly created patrician grasped my hand with his wonted fervour; and after some farther conversation, we separated,—he to repair to the Tivoli palace to visit his beloved Antonia—and I to return to my hotel. On arriving there, I found the little interpreter waiting for me; and I wondered what the bustling garrulous old man could now have to say. His business was speedily explained.

“You know, sir,” he said, “that the two villains who made the attack the other night, are in gaol; and it has been communicated to them by the magistrate in the course of a private examination, that the name of the young foreign gentleman who so gallantly interfered, is Mr. Joseph Wilmot. Upon hearing this, both the men seemed struck with astonishment; and on being questioned, they admitted that they had a previous knowledge of you——”

“The villains!” I ejaculated, indignant at the acquaintanceship which I supposed to be as falsely as it was insolently claimed.

“Stop, stop, sir!” cried the interpreter: “these fellows do not for a moment pretend that you are any way a friend of theirs: but the long and short of it is that they humbly beseech an interview, as they have something of more or less importance to communicate.”

At first I was inclined to give a positive refusal to see the men,—fancying that it might be a mere subterfuge to get me to visit them in order that they should have an opportunity of imploring my intercession on their behalf. But then I reflected that their object might possibly be of some importance to myself, although I could not at present suspect how; and I therefore concluded that it would be better to see them. At all events it could not possibly do any harm.

“Yes,” I said to the interpreter after this brief interval of reflection, “I will accede to the request of these men. But where is the interview to take place?”

“They are at this present moment undergoing another examination before the magistrates,” replied the interpreter: “when it is over, they will be consigned to a cell at the neighbouring guard-house until conveyed back with other prisoners to the gaol. If you will condescend, signor, to accompany me at once, you can see them.”

I assented; and a hackney-coach being summoned, we proceeded to the house in which the magistrate's office was situated. On arriving there, we found that the examination of the two culprits was just concluded; and that they had been conveyed to the guard-house close by. Thither we bent our way on foot, as it was only fifty yards distant. The interpreter spoke to the officer on duty,

who bowed to me with politeness and made a sign for me to follow him. We passed out into a little yard in the rear of the guard-house, and where a couple of sentinels with shouldered muskets were pacing to and fro. Under a low colonnade, there was an array of about half-a-dozen massive doors, studded with large iron nails, and communicating with the detention-cells. The officer was immediately accosted by a turnkey in plain clothes, to whom some instructions were given; and then the interpreter who had followed us thither, was spoken to by both officer and gaoler in their turns.

"I have to inform you, Signor," said the busy little man, "that these two ruffians whom you come to see, are of the most desperate character; and though they are heavily ironed, yet both the officer and the turnkey suggest the imprudence of your venturing alone into their cell——"

"Am I to go alone?" I asked of the interpreter. "I thought that you would have to accompany me to translate: for most probably the prisoners speak nothing but Italian."

"On the contrary, Signor," responded the interpreter; "they both speak French; they seem to know that you do also: and they moreover insisted upon seeing you alone. Besides, to tell you the truth, I do not think that I should be of any great assistance to you——"

"True!" I ejaculated. "But I have no fear of these men, if you say they are heavily ironed——"

"But those irons would constitute terrible weapons in their hands," said the interpreter; "and if they did happen to entertain a spite towards you——"

"Ask this officer," I quickly interrupted the little man, "to lend me a brace of loaded pistols; and then there will be no fear for my safety."

This request was speedily complied with; and carrying a pistol in each hand,—for I was now just enabled to remove my arm from the sling,—I was shown into one of the cells. The door closed behind me: but neither bolt was fastened nor key turned; and I heard the footsteps of one of the sentinels halting at a little distance. Thus I perceived that every precaution was being taken to guard against the consequences of any sudden attack which the two prisoners, if vindictively inclined, might make upon me.

I entered that cell, which was narrow but long: it was lighted by a grating in the roof—or rather, I should observe, was only redeemed thereby from total obscurity: for the gloom was so great that I could scarcely distinguish the countenances of the two men, though I could more easily trace the dark outlines of their forms as they sat together upon some straw at the farther extremity. The light transiently introduced by the opening of the door under the deep colonnade, had nevertheless shown them who I was; for recognising me in a moment, they both as in one breath ejaculated my name.

"I have come," I said, at once addressing them in the French language, "in compliance with a request you forwarded to me; and as my time is not to be wasted, I beg that you will proceed without delay to the point."

"We know, sir," answered one of the prisoners, "that you are brave as brave can be; and honour

always goes with true courage. We therefore mean to trust to your honour, by telling you a little secret in respect to ourselves; and then we shall tell you something that regards yourself: so that if the information is worth anything to you, you may perhaps be inclined to do us a service in return."

"Proceed," I said: and I had already racked my memory, but in vain, to recollect whether I had ever heard the speaker's voice before.

"In the first place, sir, the secret which regards ourselves," continued the same man "who had already spoken, "is neither more nor less than this—that we lately belonged to Marco Uberti's band, of whose breaking-up you were the principal cause."

"Ah!" I ejaculated: for at the moment those last words were spoken I heard the felons' chains clanking. "And you feel vindictive against me? But beware! I have a pistol in each hand; and if you attempt to leave the places where you now are, to make a sudden spring upon me——"

"We mean nothing of the sort, sir," interrupted the spokesman. "We have got ears—we know that the door has been merely closed, and not fastened—you can push it open in a moment—and the sentinels are nigh at hand outside the colonnade."

"Well," I observed, "I am glad that your intentions do not comprise treachery—although, with my former experiences of your bitter vindictiveness and your blood-thirsty instincts, I could scarcely do otherwise than let you know how completely I am on my guard. And now proceed. You have told me that you both belonged to Marco Uberti's band—And, ah! I recognise you now!"—for by this time my vision had become accustomed to the obscurity of the cell.

"Yes, sir—that is the secret which we had to communicate," resumed the one who acted as spokesman for them both.

"Why is it a secret?" I asked, my mind still full of suspicion. "You are certain to suffer death for the offence with which you are charged: your punishment therefore could not possibly be enhanced if it were known that you had formed part of the formidable gang which until recently infested the Appenines—and therefore you have no earthly interest in regarding that circumstance as a secret. Besides, these are the Roman States—and you cannot be here held amenable for whatsoever crimes you have committed in Tuscany, which is, so to speak, another country."

"The explanation, sir, can be easily and promptly given," replied the prisoner: and he spoke the whole time with the most respectful humility. "There is some reason or another, which we cannot rightly comprehend—unless it is that the old gentleman whom we attacked is some influential personage who wants to hush the matter up for certain reasons of his own——"

"Proceed!" I said, impatiently.

"Well, sir, to come to the point. Our examination has been conducted in private; and we are given to understand that if we sign a paper admitting our guilt, and thus throw ourselves on the mercy of the authorities, our lives shall be spared, but we shall be condemned to a long imprisonment. So far, so good: loss of liberty is not so bad as loss of life. But if it were known

that we had formed part of Marco Uberti's band, the authorities here—no doubt only too glad to get rid of us altogether—would send us straight off to Florence, by virtue of a treaty respecting criminals which exists between the two States. And if we were handed over to the grasp of the Tuscan law, I need not tell you, sir, that we should share the fate of Marco Uberti, Philippo, and others."

"All this may be well reasoned on your part," I said: "but still I cannot for the life of me comprehend wherefore you have revealed your secret to me."

"We trust, sir, in your honour," was the response.

"Good!" I ejaculated: "but still you must have a motive——"

"Why, you see, sir," resumed the prisoner, "as we are going to give you a particular piece of information which regards yourself, we could not very well help telling this secret in the first instance: for the very circumstance of our knowing certain persons concerning whom we are about to speak, would betray who we are, or rather *were*."

"Now I begin to understand," I said. "But for the information itself—and those persons——"

"You know your fellow-countryman Dorchester?"

"Ah! what of him?" I ejaculated.

"You know likewise your fellow-countryman Lanover?" continued the brigand.

"Yes—too well!" I exclaimed, now indeed becoming profoundly interested in the words of the bandit.

"Well, sir, a few days back," continued the man,—"just before I and my comrade arrived in Rome, we were lurking about in the town of Magliano——"

"I know it," I said: "it is at no great distance from Rome. Proceed."

"We were reduced to extremities," continued the brigand: "we were debating what we should do, when whom should we suddenly fall against but our old friend Dorchester—he who lived in the cave, you know, and who was the means of throwing many a traveller into our hands. We saw that he was in tolerably good feather—and we were rejoiced, for we flattered ourselves that his purse would be readily opened to us. We were deceived: not the smallest coin would he part with! On the contrary, he affected to treat us as beggars: he denied that his name was Dorchester, or that he had ever seen us before; and he spoke of the impudence of fellows like us who dared to accost a respectable gentleman who could produce papers to show who he was. Well, sir, there was no use in creating a disturbance: for we ourselves had no passports—and if the police had interfered, we should have got the worst of it. So we slunk away: but after a little deliberation, we resolved to follow Dorchester—dog his movements—and see whether he might not possibly be up to something that we might turn to our own advantage. And perhaps too, I may as well confess that we thought there would be no harm in revenging ourselves upon a fellow——"

"I understand your meaning," I said, impatiently. "Proceed!"

"We followed Dorchester without being observed by him; and at length we traced him to an

old ruin a little way outside the town. There we thought we had him safe enough for our purposes, when, on looking round, who should we see but that crabbed old humpback Lanover ascending a winding path that led towards the same ruin. Oh, ho! thought we: this is evidently an appointment! Without wasting time by describing to you, Mr. Wilmot, the situation or principal features of the ruin, it will be sufficient to state that we managed so to conceal ourselves as to be totally unobserved by the two Englishmen, or even to have our presence there at all suspected by them——"

"And what ensued?" I hastily inquired: for the conjunction of those two evil planets seemed ominously fraught with evil.

"Their discourse was a long one," continued the bandit; "and as they spoke in their own native language, we could not understand it. But we gleaned several names which they mentioned over and over again——"

"And those names?" I hastily ejaculated.

"Your's, Mr. Wilmot, was one; and I can assure you that it was spoken with vindictive bitterness of accent by both Dorchester and Lanover—particularly by the latter."

"Ah! and the other names?" I interjected.

"Heseltine was one," rejoined the bandit: "and let me see——"

"Eccleston was another," suggested the brigand's comrade, now speaking for the first time.

"And any other?" I asked, with feverish impatience.

"Yes—there was a singular and sweetly sounding name, though spoken by the jarring voice of the humpback——"

"And that name—that name?" I ejaculated, full of nervous apprehension.

"What was it?" said the bandit in a musing tone.

"Annabel," again suggested his comrade.

"I feared so!—the villain! But what else? what other name?"—and I was now full of the most painful excitement.

"We heard none other," answered the brigand. "But we are certain, from the way in which the two men spoke—I mean by their vehement accents—then their mysterious under-tones—and so forth—that they were devising plans of mischief against all those whose names they mentioned. But when we reflected, Mr. Wilmot, how Lanover had got Uberti's band to capture the old Englishman Heseltine and his family—and how you by your cunning stratagem, as bold however as it was astute, effected their freedom—how savage Lanover afterwards was too——"

"No matter what you thought," I impatiently interrupted the brigand. "Have you aught else to tell me? How ended that scene?"

"I have a little more to say, sir," proceeded the brigand; "and then the tale will be told. Just before Lanover and Dorchester separated, the former mentioned the name of Civita Vecchia—a town, you know, sir, at no great distance: and then Dorchester in a kind of chuckling humour said in French, 'Farewell, friend! we meet at Civita Vecchia on Monday fortnight.'"

"And what else transpired?" I asked.

"Nothing more, sir," replied the brigand: "for immediately afterwards Dorchester and Lanover

parted, and began taking different ways to reach the town. It was our firm intention to pounce upon Dorchester: but all of a sudden a party of gentlemen on horseback appeared close by——”

“And so you were compelled to let him escape?” I said. “Have you anything more to tell me?”

“Nothing, sir: but we thought you might as well know all this—and therefore when we learnt your name——”

“I understand you. You are confident that the words used by Dorchester were that Monday fortnight they were to meet at Civita Vecchia?”

“There was no mistake as to the words used,” answered the bandit: “for Dorchester spoke them in French—just as any foreigner after having talked a time in his own native language may throw in a phrase or a sentence worded in the language of some other country.”

“And the particular date?” I eagerly asked,—“the Monday fortnight thus spoken of——”

“It is for Monday next, sir, that the appointment stands good,” was the prisoner’s response.

“And this is Thursday!” I ejaculated: and to myself I muttered, “Thank heaven, there is plenty of time to institute an investigation into whatsoever new plot may be in progress:”—then again addressing myself to the banditti, I said, “What service is it that you demand at my hands, in return for the information you have thus voluntarily given me?”

“That little old man, sir, who acts as interpreter, and also as a sort of usher and messenger of the court, is a talkative person in his way; and he got chatting this morning with the *sbirri* who had us in custody at the forenoon examination before the magistrate. We overheard him speaking about you; and he dropped some hint to the effect that you were in high favour with great personages at Rome,—adding that he wished he was in your place, for he would not show any delicacy in asking for anything he wanted, because he would be sure to get it.”

“Well,” I interjected, “and acting upon this hint which the old man so indiscreetly threw out——”

“And which we caught up quick enough, sir,” rejoined the bandit, “although it was not intended for our ears,—we thought perhaps you might intercede for us and get some remission of our sentence. If you would, we should be very thankful——”

“You have certainly done me a service,” I interrupted the man, “and I hope and believe it is not in my nature to be ungrateful. At the same time, I am well aware that it is through no love of me you have made your present communications: but you are perfectly justified, under the circumstances, in doing the best you can for yourselves. I can pledge myself to nothing more than that I will certainly intercede for you—but the result must necessarily be in the hands of others.”

“We trust entirely, sir, to your goodness,” was the exclamation of the bandit who had all along been the spokesman; “and depend upon it that if you should be enabled to do anything for us, and if we, being ever again at large in the world, should happen to fall in with you, there is nothing we will not do to show our gratitude.”

“Once again I tell you that I will do my best; and if nothing should come of it, you must not conclude that I have neglected or forgotten you.”

Having thus spoken, I pushed against the door of the cell—it opened—and I issued forth,—a turnkey immediately coming forward to secure it upon the felon inmates of that dungeon. The officer was no longer in the yard: I gave the pistols to the interpreter, together with a liberal pecuniary recompense for his trouble; and appearing not to notice the look of anxious curiosity which he bent upon me, and which seemed to ask what the prisoners had communicated, I sped forth from the guard-house. Re-entering the hackney-coach, which was waiting at a little distance, I ordered the driver to take me at once to the Tivoli palace.

During the half-hour occupied in accomplishing the distance, I reflected profoundly upon all that I had heard from the lips of the bandit. That Lanover was meditating fresh mischief against Sir Matthew Heselstine, Annabel, and her mother, I could not doubt: that his iniquitous design either embraced myself, or that another and distinct project of rascality was directed against my own safety, was almost equally clear; and that Dorchester was now his accomplice, his agent, or his instrument, was still more evident. The reader will bear in mind that by my proceedings at Marco Uberti’s tower, when I was the means of delivering the old Baronet and his family nearly two months previous to the date of which I am now writing,—Lanover’s hopes of extorting a settlement of a thousand pounds a year from Sir Matthew, were destroyed. I had moreover on that occasion—by means of a few words hastily traced with a pencil on a scrap of paper—made the Baronet aware who the author of his captivity was. It was now therefore by no means difficult to comprehend how Lanover might have ever since found the Baronet deaf to whatsoever overtures or proposals the vile humpback had made to him: and hence, perhaps, the initiation of some new scheme of villany on Lanover’s part. And perhaps, too, he had discovered, since our interview in Florence (at which time he was evidently ignorant of it) that I really must have given Sir Matthew Heselstine some such intimation at the tower: and hence the revival of Lanover’s bitter hostility against me. As for Dorchester—I felt that he could have no very amicable feeling towards me, inasmuch as I had proved the principal means of uprooting the Uberti gang with whom he was connected in the Apennines. But, ah! while I was thus reflecting, another thought struck me: it was the reminiscence that according to the statement I had just heard in the prisoner’s cell, the name of Eccleston was mentioned by Lanover and Dorchester in the ruin near Magliano. Was that nobleman about to recommence his persecutions of me? was he again finding a too willing agent in Lanover? or was Lanover now playing another game—a game entirely on his own behalf—and dragging the Earl of Eccleston into the proposed iniquity?

“Clouds are gathering thickly,” I said to myself in sadness of spirit; “and the sky is once more lowering above my head. When will an un-interrupted heaven of peace smile upon my stormy





life? But let me not despond," I exclaimed aloud, with a sudden plucking up of all my fortitude. "That same ruling power which has guided me safely through so many perils, and has brought me to a happy issue from so many dangers, will not desert me now. I will save thee—Oh! I will save thee, my beloved Annabel, from whatsoever dark plot may be now menacing thee! Yes—I will save thee—and not only thyself—but likewise those who are near and dear unto thee; and my success will constitute another claim upon the consideration of Sir Mathew Heseltine when in eight or nine months hence I present myself before him and demand thine hand!"

The hackney-coach stopped at the entrance of the Tivoli palace: it was past five o'clock in the evening—I hesitated for a moment to intrude at a time which was close upon the dinner hour—but considering the urgency of my case, I quickly banished that hesitation. I was conducted up to

the drawing-room, where I found the Count of Tivoli, his son and daughter, and the Count of Avellino. Cordial was the welcome I experienced; and the Count of Tivoli expressed his pleasure that I should avail myself of the sentiment of friendship thus to drop in and join their circle at dinner. I hastened to assure him that I should not have thought of coming unasked; and I went on to explain that circumstances rendered an immediate, but I hoped temporary, absence from Rome absolutely necessary. Without betraying the banditti's secret in respect to their former connexion with Marco Uberti, I said enough to account for this suddenly necessitated journey on my part.

"And when do you propose to set off?" inquired the Count of Tivoli.

"This evening," I answered. "I believe that Civita Vecchia is little more than thirty miles from Rome——"

"You will do no good by arriving there late

to-night," rejoined the Count of Tivoli: "and you may therefore as well proceed on this journey early in the morning. To-morrow is Friday—it is not until Monday that the two persons of whom you have spoken are to be there; you will have ample leisure to lay your plans. It happens that a high authority in the town is an intimate friend of mine; and to him will I give you a letter of introduction. He will be rejoiced to afford you his hospitality, as well as his counsel and assistance. But you must take care," added the nobleman, with a smile, "that you do not lose your heart to his niece, who is a most lovely creature. However, my dear Wilmot, you must positively pass this evening with us—and to-morrow you shall see out for Civita Vecchia."

I could not do otherwise than assent to the hospitable nobleman's suggestions; and I accordingly remained to dine at the Tivoli palace. After dinner I took an opportunity of whispering to the Count the promise that I had made—or at least the hope I had held out to the two prisoners that I would exert on their behalf whatsoever little influence I might possess in any quarter. I represented to his lordship that they had done me a signal service by giving the information which was about to take me to Civita Vecchia; and he listened with a kind attention.

"Any persons who render you a service, my dear Wilmot," answered the Count of Tivoli, "must be held to have some claim upon me, so sincere is the friendship which I entertain towards you. Criminal though these men be, they shall have my good word to Cardinal Gravina; and a single syllable from him, whispered to the authorities, will procure such mitigation of their punishment as he may think fit to decree. And now I will retire to the library and pen the promised letter of introduction to my friend Signor Portici, who is the principal judge of Civita Vecchia."

Having passed an evening which was as pleasant as it could be, considering the drawback of the misgivings and apprehensions that haunted me, I took my leave, furnished with the promised letter of introduction.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE HANDSOME GREEK

I LEFT the Tivoli palace somewhat early that I might have time to order a post-chaise to be in readiness for me at an early hour in the morning, and also that I should be enabled to obtain a good night's rest previous to my departure: for I was still somewhat weak from the effects of the wound I had received. I did not chose to leave Rome without bidding farewell to Dominie Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats, each of whom entertained a friendship for me after his own peculiar fashion; and I therefore entered the coffee-room of the hotel to announce my intended departure to the two gentlemen, whom I felt pretty confident of finding there. Nor was I mistaken. The Dominie and his friend were sitting down to supper: for though they breakfasted and lunched well, and dined late, yet they never failed to indulge in that

meal to which I found them well prepared to do justice on the present occasion.

But they were not alone: they had found a companion, who, it appeared, was perfectly willing to join them at the supper-table. This was a gentleman of about five-and-twenty years of age, and perhaps one of the most remarkably handsome men I ever beheld in the whole course of my life. His profile was faultlessly Grecian,—the features delicately chiselled, with the short upper lip curling haughtily, and somewhat fuller than the lower one. He wore a moustache which may be described as finely pencilled—for it was slight, but of raven darkness. He had no whiskers and wore no beard,—all that part of his face being so smoothly shaven that even the traces of those masculine distinctions were scarcely perceptible. His hair, corresponding with his moustache in the depth of its sable shade and in its natural glossiness, floated in rich undulations over the collar of his coat, and hung in curls around his temples. His brows, finely pencilled also, like the moustache—were nobly curved and well divided. The eyes were large, dark, and of excessive brilliancy: yet there was nothing restless—no sinister vibration in their light,—which, on the contrary, burnt with a steady lustre, thus seeming to imply that the mind itself was completely at ease. His complexion was a clear olive; and this, together with the cast of his features, led me at once to take him for a denizen of Greece or of one of the Levant islands. He was not above the middle height—slender, and of a perfect symmetry: but that slenderness of the figure was combined with a liness and a willowy elasticity, together with a firm knitting of the limbs, which indicated no mean physical strength,—a strength, too, that might be employed, in case of emergency, to all the greater advantage on account of the activity that was evidently possessed by those supple limbs. He was apparelled with the most tasteful elegance; and in every respect appeared to be a polished gentleman. Such was the individual whom I found sitting down to supper with Dominie Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats.

"It's just that," said the Dominie, the instant I entered the coffee-room: "here's our friend Wilmot to make a fourth—which reminds me of what I said one day to my friend Shanks-pindles, when we went to see the three men hanged in the Grassmarket—And yet it could not have been Shanks-pindles—I don't think I should have told him to go and make a fourth—However—"

"Nonsense, Dominie!" interrupted Mr. Saltcoats: "you are in a fog again. My dear Wilmot, you must join us at supper—"

"Supper, my dear sir!" I exclaimed: "it is barely three hours since I dined."

"And that's just the period," responded Saltcoats, "that it takes to digest a meal. My maxim is never leave the stomach empty—"

"Well, I think it must be," I observed, with a smile, as I glanced towards the copiously spread table. "But really it is no use drawing me towards it—"

"Then sit down and see us eat!" said Mr. Saltcoats. "Next to the pleasure of eating one's self, there is nothing to my mind equal to that of seeing others enjoy themselves."

"It's just that," said the Dominie; "and it re-

minds me of what I remarked to the Widow Glenbucket one day, when after I had dined off roast goose and told her to put the rest away for supper, I happened to go into her kitchen and found her with it on the table before her—Yes, it must have been a roast goose—it could not have been a boiled sucking pig. However—”

“Nonsense, Dominic!” was Mr. Saltoats’ vociferated interruption as usual: “you are perfectly incorrigible with your Widow Glenbucket—”

“It’s just that, Saltoats,” retorted Mr. Clackmannan: “for talking of the Widow Glenbucket, reminds me that one day I found you with your face very close to her’s; and as I heard a hearty smack just at the instant I opened the door, I wondered what you were whispering about. It couldn’t have been a box on the ear she gave you, or that you gave her—And now I bethink me, it sounded just like a kiss—But it happened fifteen years ago, and I have been wondering every since—”

“Come, my dear Wilmot,” said the persevering Saltoats, “sit down with us and enjoy yourself. I tell you what,” he added, drawing me partly aside and speaking in a whisper, “there’s one of the nicest fellows I ever came across—an excellent companion—a fund of anecdote—speaks all kinds of languages—English, French, Italian, German, Latin, and Greek—Only conceive—Greek! my dear boy!”

“But he strikes me as being a Greek himself,” I answered.

“Ah, so he is—and therefore it’s not so very odd after all. He only arrived at the hotel about two hours ago,” continued Saltoats: “he came in a post-chaise from Naples, and is going on somewhere else—some town with a devil of a hard name—the first thing to-morrow morning. Let me see, what is his own name? However, no matter—he is quite the gentleman. The Dominic offered him a pinch of snuff when he first came in: so that led to a conversation—he took his wine with us—and agreed to join us at supper.”

All the time Mr. Saltoats was giving me these hurried explanations, the handsome Greek was listening with the most exemplary patience and with a consummate good humour to three or four unfinished anecdotes of the Dominic’s, in which figured all the hardest and most extraordinary names that he was ever accustomed to introduce into his conversation. I now perceived that the stranger was regarding me; and fearful he might think I was impertinently questioning Saltoats as to who he was, instead of having all my Scotch friend’s explanations forced upon me, I thought it best to cut them short at once by repairing to the table.

“A young friend of ours, sir,” said Saltoats, introducing me to the handsome Greek,—“a very intimate friend—Mr. Joseph Wilmot.”

“It’s just that,” said the Dominic,—“and not Joshua, who stole—”

“Nonsense, nonsense!” interposed Mr. Saltoats, somewhat impatient at the idea of a recital of the sheep-stealing anecdote. “Yes, this is Mr. Wilmot. And Mr. Wilmot my dear fellow, this gentleman is Signor Kan—Pan—Dan—”

But unable to recollect the name, Saltoats appealed with an entreating look to the gentleman himself.

“My name is Kanaris,” said the Greek, with a

smile,—“Constantine Kanaris, at your service, sir!”—and he bowed with well-bred politeness to me.

“Kanaris!” I could not help exclaiming, with a sudden glow of enthusiasm: “that is a noble and an honoured name, sir! Would it be impertinent in me to ask if you be a relative of the famous Greek naval commander?”

“Admiral Kanaris is my unelo, I am proud to say,” answered the handsome young man; and his eyes lighted up with enthusiastic admiration as he thus proclaimed a kinship of which he might indeed well be proud.

I was immediately attracted towards Kanaris: I felt as if I should like to form the friendship of one who bore a name which his relative had rendered so distinguished. I accordingly sat down to the table, and made a pretence of eating something. I found that my new acquaintance was indeed well versed in the English language; and before I had been half-an-hour in his society, I had every reason to admire the interesting variety of his information, and to be pleased with the frank unassuming manner in which he conversed. He appeared to take an equal liking to me, and presently expressed a regret that he was compelled to leave Rome early on the following morning, “as he should otherwise be rejoiced to cultivate the agreeable acquaintances which he had formed.”

“It’s just that,” said the Dominic: “and it puts me in mind of what I said to my friend the Laird of Tintosquashdale, when I one day took Baillie Owlhead, Mrs. Owlhead, and all the young Owlheads—eleven in number—to dine with him unexpectedly—Yes, it must have been unexpectedly—he could not have expected us all—for he had only a couple of mutton-chops for dinner—And I told him I knew how welcome the visitors would be. And that puts me in mind—”

“Nonsense, Dominic!” interrupted Saltoats. “But must you really go away to-morrow?” he inquired, turning to Constantine Kanaris.

“I must indeed,” was the response. “I have ordered a chaise for half-past eight o’clock—”

“Which reminds me,” I observed, “that I also have to order a chaise for to-morrow morning—”

“You?” exclaimed Saltoats, in a sort of consternation: “you going to leave us too?”

“Not for very long, I hope,” I replied: “but urgent business calls me to Civita Vecchia.”

“Civita Vecchia?” vociferated Saltoats, pronouncing it however in some extraordinary fashion: “why, that’s the very place—”

“Yes, it is my destination,” said Kanaris, with one of those smiles of masculine blandness which only lips like his could adequately express. “I am going to Civita Vecchia; and it is with unfeigned delight, Mr. Wilmot, I have just learnt that you also are bound for that sea-port. Perhaps—if you will not think it a liberty on the part of a stranger in making such an offer—you would accept a seat in my post-chaise?”

“I will cheerfully and gladly join you in the cost thereof,” I answered; “and it suits me all the more especially, inasmuch as it was my intention likewise to start early in the morning.”

“Then you and I, Dominic,” exclaimed Mr. Saltoats, “will turn out early likewise, that we may breakfast with our friends here.”

"It's just that," answered Mr. Clackmannan, taking a huge pinch of snuff. "And talking of turning out early, reminds me that when I was staying at the Widow Glenbucket's, I rolled out of bed uncommonly early one morning, and came with my head right into the foot-bath which I had been using over night—No, it couldn't have been my head—it must have been my heels—because people don't get out of bed headforemost—"

There was the usual interruption on the part of Mr. Saltcoats; and a few minutes afterwards I withdrew to my chamber,—having bidden my two old friends and my new one a cordial "good night."

Mr. Saltcoats and the Dominie kept their word in respect to rising betimes to join Constantine Kanaris and myself at the breakfast-table: the post-chaise was in readiness at the hour ordained—my Greek companion and I took our seats—and the equipage rolled away from the gate of the hotel, an uproarious vociferation of "best wishes" on the part of Mr. Saltcoats following us half-way down the street.

As I sat next to Kanaris inside the vehicle, my previous night's impression of his extraordinary personal beauty was fully confirmed by this daylight view; and I could not help thinking to myself that this was an appearance full well calculated to make an impression on the female heart. Only a few words were exchanged while the chaise was noisily rattling over the wretched pavement of the Roman streets: but when we emerged upon the broad road leading towards Civita Vecchia, we were enabled to discourse at our ease.

"I understand," said Kanaris, "from the most communicative of your two friends, that you are travelling in Italy for your pleasure?"

"Not exactly so on the present occasion," I answered: "for I have business of some little importance which takes me to Civita Vecchia."

"Have you ever been in that town before?" inquired my companion.

"Never," was my response. "But I understand it has a very picturesque site—contains some fine old buildings—and has more or less importance as a seaport. I presume it is likewise your first visit thither?"

"Not so," replied Kanaris. "I had been staying there for some four or five months until about three weeks back—when business suddenly called me to Naples; and that having been settled, I am now speeding back to Civita Vecchia."

"It must therefore have considerable attractions for you," I casually remarked: "or perhaps business—"

"No—not business exactly," exclaimed Constantine with a smile: and then suddenly becoming serious, he remained in a pensive reverie for upwards of a minute. "You must not think," he continued, suddenly resuming his wonted frank open-hearted manner, "that because I just now said I was called by business to Naples, I have either professional or mercantile avocations. Nothing of the sort. Fortune has in many respects been kind to me: for although I lost my parents when young, they left me not unprovided for. On the contrary: I inherited an ample fortune—and am therefore my own master to act perfectly as I choose."

"In every sense untrammelled?" I observed, again speaking in a casual manner, for conversation's sake, and without any particular meaning.

"No—not altogether untrammelled," answered Constantine Kanaris, after a few moments' silent reflection, and again with a certain degree of seriousness in his manner. "Even though the circumstances of the world constitute no trammels, Mr. Wilmot,—yet the heart's feelings often become chains: and though silken ones—aye, and gladly worn too—they are chains all the same!"

"I understand you," I said; and in return for the sort of confidential manner in which he had thus been speaking, I added, "Yes—I can comprehend you: for I myself have a similar experience!"

"Ah! you know what love is?" exclaimed Constantine, his handsome countenance lighting up with a sudden enthusiasm, and his voice swelling with that golden harmony of intonation which seems alone fitted to do justice to the sublimity and the power of the grand old epics of his native clime: "you know what love is? 'Is it not, then, to live in a world of one's own creating—a world which in itself is a seclusion from that other and greater world around us? Is it not to experience a thousand delights of the soul which were never known before? But is it not also,"—and here his voice suddenly sank into a low mournfulness that surprised and almost startled me,— "is it not to be tortured at times with apprehension and foreboding—with a mistrust for a duration of the very happiness itself which is being experienced? Is it not to awaken frequently from an ecstatic dream of bliss to a sense of the uncertainty of all earthly things?"

"I confess," was my response, "that my own love is more hopeful and trusting than your's, my friend, appears to be. Yes—for mine is allied to faith itself; and when I look amidst the circumstances of my own eventful life, methinks that I behold therein an assurance that heaven itself protects and guides me. With this belief my love is full of hope;—and yet I do not hesitate to admit that there *are* contingencies—But still," I added, in a firm and even joyous tone, "I have confidence in the issue!"

Kanaris regarded me with mingled astonishment and interest: methought likewise that he had some reason to envy that condition of feelings which I had just been explaining to him; for a partial shade appeared to come over his countenance—and it even struck me that he sighed.

"Perhaps," he said, speaking slowly and thoughtfully, "mine is one of those temperaments that are easily excitable, and which therefore at times torture themselves with groundless fears and baseless forebodings. But yet—but yet, it seems to me, my friend—or at least I had hitherto fancied, that there is no love without such occasional misgivings; and that even when assured of a reciprocal affection on the part of the adored one, there yet remains the apprehension lest some unknown obstacle should arise—lest some unsuspected barrier should suddenly spring up, and every hope should be blighted!"

"But where love itself is combined with faith and hope," I answered, "it is replete with a confidence which triumphs over such misgivings."

"Listen to me for a few minutes," resumed Kanaris. "Love in this world appears to me to be so like a dream—so like a visionary glimpse of paradise, as it were—that I cannot help treating it as such. Yes—and I am thereby led to assimilate it unto the dreams which we experience during our sleep. Have you never fancied in your slumber that you have been rambling in a beautiful garden—a soft sunlight playing upon the ornamental waters—setting forth the loveliest colours of all the flowers—and giving an effect to the trees as if gems were the fruitage of every bough? Then, has it not appeared to you as if some angelic form were advancing along the walk,—her white and azure robes floating gracefully around her—smiles upon her lips—a sunny glory upon her hair—and her alabaster feet glancing as with elastic tread she seems to trip airily between the parterres of flowers? Then, have you not felt transports of love and bliss and hope in your heart? and it has appeared to you that you went swiftly to meet the advancing beauty whose arms were already extended to welcome you in the fondest embrace? But then all of a sudden it has seemed as if your limbs grew heavy as lead: vainly have you sought to drag yourself forward—the sunny light of the garden has changed as abruptly into a gloom which goes on deepening and deepening—a yawning gulf suddenly opens at your feet—you find yourself separated for ever from the angel-presence on the other side of the chasm—and the next moment the black darkness of night falls upon the entire scene, entombing yourself, the fair one, and your own hopes beyond redemption! Yes—I have had such dreams as these, even if you have not; and it is to such that I cannot help assimilating the love which the heart bears for the living beauty of this world!"

It was now my turn to gaze with mingled astonishment and interest: and I did not once take my eyes off the countenance of my companion while he was speaking,—that countenance which expressed as it were an animation mournfully serious and singularly solemn. It would be impossible to describe the effect which his words produced upon me—and all the more so inasmuch as his language, filled with the loveliest flowers of metaphor, flowed with the richest and most tuneful harmony, as if it were that of the River Pactolus rolling between its own fabled shores of gold. But I could not help compassionating Constantine Kanaris: for I fancied that his love in its very enthusiasm had soared out of sight of all the ordinary rules by which the world's circumstances are governed—or that it had even become poetized into a morbid sentiment. I reasoned with him on the subject: but I will not inflict upon the reader the lecture of which I thus delivered myself. Constantine listened with an earnest attention and with the deepest interest: but still I saw that he was not altogether convinced—though he evidently struggled to satisfy himself that my view of the subject was the correct one.

There was now a pause in the discourse,—during which we each remained absorbed in our own reflections: for I thought of my beloved and beautiful Annabel—while he no doubt was contemplating the image of the object of his own devotion.

"Do you purpose to make a long stay at Civita

Vecchia?" at length inquired Constantine Kanaris, suddenly awakening from his reverie, and speaking with his wonted cheerfulness once more,—as if he sought to turn the conversation into another channel.

"I am totally at a loss how to answer the question," I observed: "for the business which takes me thither is one in which I do not altogether see my way clear—and, in a word, so much depends upon circumstances!"

For the reader may easily understand that though I had conceived a friendship for the Greek—and all the more so after that interesting though melancholy explanation of his feelings—yet I did not choose to enter more deeply into personal matters with a mere stranger—for such in reality he was to me. Besides, to have given any explanations at all, would have necessitated the recital of many incidents of my life, as well as to speak of the affairs of others: for instance, how I came to know Lanover and Dorchester—who they were—why Lanover had his own reasons for seeking to coerce Sir Mathew Heseltine—who Sir Mathew himself was—the circumstances under which I was travelling on the Continent—and a variety of other particulars into which I had no inclination to enter.

"I hope that we shall see each other often at Civita Vecchia," observed Constantine Kanaris, "during your residence there. If you mean to stay at an hotel—"

"That likewise depends upon circumstances," I answered: "for though I am the bearer of a very kind letter of introduction to a gentleman at Civita Vecchia, yet I am not sure whether I shall stay at his house—"

But at this moment my remarks were cut short by a spectacle which attracted the attention of us both. I should observe that the greater part of the distance from Rome to Civita Vecchia was already accomplished—the horses had been changed two or three times—and we were within ten miles of our destination. A turning in the road had suddenly revealed to us a horseman who appeared to be engaged in a somewhat perilous strife with the vicious animal which he bestrode. The horse was rearing right up at the instant this spectacle burst upon our view; and its rider, evidently more daring than experienced, was thrashing the animal unmercifully, as well as tugging hard at the bridle. The next instant he pulled the horse completely over; and it fell heavily upon him.

The postilions of our chaise reined in their horses in a moment: Kanaris and I sprang forth. The animal which had done the mischief, lay in apparent helplessness across its late rider's thigh: we therefore had some trouble in extricating him with suitable gentleness from his perilous position: for he shouted out something in a language which I could not understand, but which was at once familiar to the ears of Kanaris—who said to me rapidly, "He tells us that his leg is broken!"

We at length succeeded in drawing him from under the animal, which itself was so much injured that it could not rise up; and Kanaris, evidently well experienced in all matters regarding horses, speedily discovered that the poor brute's spine was broken. After exchanging a few rapidly uttered words with the disabled stranger, Constantine said "He agrees with me

that the steed must be put out of its misery—and this I will do at once. Attend you to the man himself?"

Having thus spoken, Kanaris took from under the seat of the postchaise a handsome rosewood pistol-case; and drawing forth one of the weapons it contained, and which were of most exquisite workmanship—he the next moment discharged a bullet point-blank at the animal's head, and which crashing through the frontal bone, put the brute out of its misery in the twinkling of an eye. He then joined me in attending to the stranger. It was indeed too evident that his thigh was fractured: we therefore lifted him into the chaise as carefully as we could. Kanaris remained with him inside the vehicle; and I took my seat on the box, as there was not room for all three in the interior in consequence of the position in which the injured man had to lie. I had of course preferred that Kanaris should remain with him, because they understood a language in which they were enabled to converse together.

Before closing this chapter, I may as well avail myself of an opportunity to give a brief description of the stranger whom we had thus picked up—inasmuch as I shall again have to speak of him in the course of my narrative. He was a man of about forty years of age, and by no means of prepossessing appearance. He wore a profusion of dark hair, which was exceedingly coarse: he had huge black whiskers and a bushy beard. His countenance was bronzed and weather-beaten: and his apparel was of a nautical fashion. He was short, stout, and thickset—and therefore had little the look of one who ought to have ventured upon the back of a vicious horse: for, judging by his whole exterior, his experiences were more connected with riding in a vessel over the waves of ocean, than on horseback over the hills of the earth. In a word, I set him down in my own mind as a captain or superior officer of some trading vessel: but I must add that there was a certain repulsive ferocity in his look which was much at variance with one's general idea of the blunt, frank-hearted, honest-minded mariner. He was however seriously injured—*this* was only too evident; and instead of entertaining a prejudice against him, I was well inclined to give him my warmest sympathy.

## CHAPTER CXV.

### CIVITA VECCHIA.

BETWEEN the spot where we took up the stranger and our ultimate destination of Civita Vecchia, there was no town nor village of importance enough to warrant the belief that a surgeon could be found of sufficient skill to be entrusted with so serious a case as that which the stranger's injury afforded. We accordingly made the best of our way to Civita Vecchia itself: but during the remainder of the journey I had no opportunity of any farther conversation with Constantine Kanaris,—a few occasional words in respect to the stranger being alone exchanged between myself on the box and the handsome Greek when he thrust his head from the window.

On entering Civita Vecchia at about noon, I found that the chaise passed completely through the town, until it at length drew up at a tavern near the port; and this was in pursuance of instructions given by Kanaris to the postilions. It was because the injured stranger himself had already taken up his quarters at this tavern; and with the utmost care on the part of ourselves and the domestics of the inn, he was lifted from the vehicle into the establishment. Kanaris and I saw him deposited upon the bed in the chamber which, it appeared, he was occupying at the tavern; and we waited also until the arrival of a couple of medical men, in order that we might ascertain the extent of the injury. This was quite as serious as we had anticipated: the thigh bone was broken: but we tarried while it was being set—an operation which the patient bore with the most stoical calmness. When it was over he thrust out his hand, first to Constantine, and then to me, with a certain sailor-like gratitude which seemed so genuine and sincere that it made me forget at the moment the savagely ferocious expression of his countenance. He spoke a few words to Kanaris; and then on receiving some intimation from that gentleman—evidently telling him in what language to speak to me—he addressed me in French,—which was however villainously bad, so that I could only just comprehend that he was thanking me for the succour I had helped to render him.

In the meanwhile I had an opportunity of looking around the apartment; and I perceived several articles of wearing apparel, all of a nautical fashion. Amongst them, I observed a coat with gold lace on the collar and cuffs—a pair of pantaloons with lace-stripes down the sides—and a cap with a broad gold band round it. I likewise observed a brace of very large pistols, a brace of smaller ones, a heavy cutlass, and a sword of a much lighter character, with lace too upon the polished leathern belt. There were several charts on the table in the room—a compass, and some mathematical instruments. All these articles convinced me that my first impression was correct, and that the stranger was a mariner—most likely, from the evidences scattered around, the captain of the ship to which he belonged.

Kanaris and I took our leave of him, promising to call next day to inquire after his health; and on descending into the street, my Greek companion said to me, "Our conversation was interrupted by that incident on the road; and therefore I am yet in ignorance of your plans. Whither are you going?"

"In the first instance," I answered, "I will proceed to the same hotel at which you yourself, as I think I understood you, purposed to put up."

"Good!" ejaculated Constantine: and having given the postilions his instructions, he leaped into the vehicle, I following him. "In case you do not receive an invitation," he continued, "to stay at the house for whose master you have a letter of introduction, you will find the hotel a very comfortable one."

"And I should be glad to remain there on your account," I responded. "But what make you of the individual whom we have just left?"

"Oh!" said Kanaris, "I had forgotten to tell you. His name is Notaras; and he is the captain of some vessel in the port yonder."



"A trading vessel?" I asked.

"I do not think he specified exactly what the vessel is," replied Constantine: "but it must of course be a trader. He is a Greek, as you have doubtless already surmised—but, I must confess, not one of the most flattering specimens of my nation."

"But if he be the captain of a trader," I observed, "what meant that handsome uniform which I saw in his apartment?"

"True! I noticed it myself," said Kanaris. "But now that I bethink me, I have observed that some of these captains of merchant-ships trading between the Levant and the Italian ports, or up in the Black Sea, sometimes parade a handsome uniform. There is vanity amongst them, Mr. Wilmot, as well as with other classes of society. But I was about to tell you that this atrocious-looking Captain Notaras, having only recently got ashore, took it into his head to have a ride on horseback; and his evil fortune mounted him on the most vicious animal which the livery-stables could produce. My fellow-countryman may be a very good seaman, for aught that I know to the contrary: but he is certainly a most execrable rider, as you yourself had an opportunity of noticing. The consequence was just what might have been expected: he received a serious fall—his leg is broken—he will be for some time incapacitated from going on board his ship—and he has got to pay for the horse into the bargain. It is altogether a somewhat costly morning's amusement; and I have no doubt it will be a long time before Captain Notaras will again mount on horseback. But here we are at the hotel."

We alighted: our trunks were conveyed into the hall—the post-chaise was dismissed—and it was agreed that we should take refreshments at once, as the journey had somewhat sharpened our appetites. During the repast we conversed on a variety of general topics; and when it was over, I said, "I will now go and deliver my letter of introduction: for until I have done so, I am unable to settle the precise routine of my proceedings."

"I also am going to make a call," said Constantine Kanaris; "and as I am perfectly well acquainted with every street in Civita Vecchia—whereas you, it appears, are a perfect stranger here—it will afford me much pleasure to guide you to your destination. What is the address—"

"This is it," I said, producing the letter of introduction which I had received from the Count of Tivoli.

"Signor Portici!" exclaimed Kanaris in astonishment: and for a moment—but only for a moment—an expression of annoyance appeared to flit over his countenance. "It is also to Signor Portici's house," he added, somewhat seriously, "that I myself am bound."

A suspicion instantaneously sprang up in my mind—with such suddenness indeed, that it might very probably have betrayed itself in my looks: for Constantine immediately said, "You now know, Mr. Wilmot, who is the object of that devoted love of which I was speaking during the early part of our journey."

I felt hurt for an instant at the recollection of the expression of annoyance which I had seen flit over his features: for it seemed to me that he had been suddenly smitten with a jealous sentiment—though he ought to have at once remembered how

I had so explicitly given him to understand that my heart was likewise engaged.

"Come," he said, with a look and in a tone of so much friendly kindness that I took it as an endeavour to efface whatsoever impression that transient discontent on his part might have left upon my mind: "come, let us proceed thither at once; and I flatter myself that your presence in my company will by no means damage the opinion which your letter of introduction would by itself be calculated to induce Signor Portici to form concerning you."

We issued from the hotel together; and arm-in-arm we proceeded through the streets in the direction whither he conducted me.

"Do not think, Mr. Wilmot," he said, with a smile, "that I am jealous of you: for you have already told me your heart is engaged to another. But were it otherwise—and were Leonora a different being from what she is—I might really dread the rivalry of one whose good looks are so well calculated to ensnare the female heart."

I could not help thinking that this was rather a singular compliment: for whatever pretensions I might have to good looks, Constantine Kanaris had certainly no reason to apprehend the rivalry of any human being on that score.

"You will see in Leonora," he continued, now speaking with all the characteristic ardour of his passion, "one of the most beautiful creatures that ever you beheld. Doubtless the object of your own love will seem more beautiful in your own eyes: but if for an instant you can throw a veil over the image of that cherished idol of your heart's devotion, you will admit that the palm must then be given to Leonora. Her mind is as well cultivated as her person is beautiful: she is highly accomplished—she possesses elegant manners—gay without levity, modest without prudery, and replete with feminine dignity without the slightest scintillation of undue pride. But I daresay that you think me very foolish to burst forth into this eulogy which may seem rhapsodical."

"On the contrary," I remarked, "you love tenderly and devotedly; and there is a manly frankness in this expression of your admiration for one who is evidently so worthy of it. I gather from your discourse that you are already the accepted suitor of the Signora Portici—and of course with the assent of her uncle. How can you possibly mistrust all this happiness which shines upon you so brightly? You are rich—you are your own master—you have no reason to be ashamed of your personal appearance and manners—you love and are blessed with a reciprocal affection—there can be no barrier to your union with this charming young lady—How, then, I again ask, can you doubt the permanence of that happiness which smiles like a sunlight upon you?"

Constantine Kanaris stopped suddenly short. The place was just beyond the end of a street: there were trees on either side—and no persons were observing us. He looked at me with a strangely mournful expression of countenance for an instant; and then raising his eyes, he gazed upward to the Italian sky of unclouded sunlight azure.

"Look!" he said, "the celestial canopy above is unmarred by even so much as a speck of fleecy

vapour: all is one wide expanse of unbroken blue. But will that smiling aspect of the heaven last for ever?—may not the winds arise and the storm-clouds gather, coming from heaven alone knows where!—and in how short a space may all be gloom over-head, with nature speaking in the mighty voices of the thunder or darting forth her angry looks in the lightning flashes! May not that sky which is at present so cloudless, so sunlit and serene, be taken as the type of human existence in this world? Think you therefore, Mr. Wilmot, that I can remain insensible of these facts?—or that knowing them, I can be utterly without apprehension as to their application to my own destiny?"

I really knew not how to answer Constantine Kanaris: indeed for the moment there appeared to be so much truth in what he had just said, that it came home unto my own heart, and gave me a shock as if some sinister sibylline tongue had whispered in my ear words presentient of evil. And when the recollection struck me, too, that a deep plot was evidently in progress on the part of the infamous Lanover against the peace and security of my well-beloved Annabel—a plot which, in spite of all my efforts, I might be unable to defeat—it was no wonder if Constantine's language should thus produce a sudden and startling effect upon me.

"Come," he said, smiling slightly, as if satisfied that he had at length thus touched me,—“we will dwell no longer upon mournful topics—we are close at our destination—and we must put on our best looks and our brightest smiles, wherewith to acknowledge the cordial welcome that we are certain to experience.”

The habitation which Constantine thus alluded to, was situated upon a gentle eminence just outside the town. The house itself was not large, but of pleasing aspect; and the gardens were crowded with evergreens. A low wall, surmounted by an iron railing, enclosed the grounds, which were beautifully laid out; and the site of the dwelling was all the more agreeable, inasmuch as from the drawing-room balcony a complete view was obtained of the harbour, with the numerous vessels moored therein; and beyond the mole the blue expanse of the Mediterranean was seen stretching far as the eye could reach. Although the year was no older than the month of February, yet the Italian clime appeared to be rejoicing in an early spring: for the heaven, as already intimated, was of cloudless azure—and the earth seemed to be basking happily in the sunny smiles that played with kisses upon it from above.

As we entered the grounds of Portici Villa, Constantine Kanaris directed my attention to the conservatories, through the glass sides of which might be seen the choicest flowers, the finest fruits, and the rarest plants,—some of which were indigenous to Italy itself, and others evidently belonging to the tropics: so that I observed to my companion, “Either Signor Portici or his niece—but perhaps both—must have an exquisite taste for the floral beauties and the natural products whereof we thus catch a glimpse.”

“The judge himself,” responded Kanaris, “has such a taste as you describe: but it is the Signora Leonora who is most attached to the rare and varied contents of those conservatories.”

Our summons at the front door was answered by a footman in a neat, tasteful, but by no means rich, much less flaunting livery; and he bowed not merely with respect on beholding Kanaris, but likewise with the air of one who was glad to welcome again at the dwelling a young gentleman who was evidently a general favorite there. We were shown into a drawing-room, which, if not sumptuously furnished, nevertheless had all its appointments characterised by an elegant taste. A piano and harp, and the choicest specimens of Italian music lying in an open portfolio, indicated the taste and proficiency of the young lady in that fascinating art. There was another portfolio upon a side table, and which Kanaris opened in order to show me the exquisitely executed drawings in pencil, in chalk, and in water-colours which it contained. I could not help admiring the fervid yet manly pride which Kanaris displayed in thus affording me such varied proofs of Leonora's elegant accomplishments: indeed every word and action on the part of my new friend, when bearing the slightest reference to the Judge's niece, convinced me more and more of the profound unfathomable depth of that love which he experienced for her.

As the reader may have gathered from all I have been saying, we at first found ourselves alone in the drawing-room to which we were thus introduced: but not many minutes elapsed before a young lady made her appearance. She had evidently been told that Constantine Kanaris was not alone; for instead of bounding into the room with that joyous fervour which her own ardent disposition would have otherwise led her to display, she entered with the more subdued demeanour of one who knew that she was about to meet a stranger. Nevertheless Constantine sprang forward to greet her: their hands were clasped in that warm close pressure which did indeed convince me how truly reciprocal was the love of which the handsome Greek had spoken; and I had no difficulty in discerning that in the impassioned ardour of disposition and character—in the depth of affection and in the warmth of feeling which Constantine had already displayed in my presence, he was well matched by the object of his adoration.

Yes—and not only in sentiment was there this remarkable fitness in the contemplated alliance of the pair, but also in their personal beauty. Leonora was a brunette, but with a clear transparency of skin, and not with that opaque olive which in Italian complexions often serves as a veil to prevent the warm blood from being seen mantling through; and that delicate duskiness of the complexion was relieved or embellished, according as the reader may choose to consider it, by the rich redness of the full lips, the jetty pencilling of the well-arched brows, the corresponding darkness of the eyes, and the length of the thick but silken ebon fringes. And yet it must be understood that the lips, though full, were very far from coarse; the mouth was small, and in a statue would be pronounced faultlessly chiselled: but they were slightly pouting lips. And then the eyes too,—if so dark in colour, they were full of a soft lustre—a lustre not so brilliant as that which irradiated the orbs of the handsome Greek himself, but a light more subdued by feminine reserve, chastity, and innocence. Leonora was tall: her figure was of sylphid slenderness, with that graceful though



slight undulation of motion which one could fancy the best female statues of Grecian and Italian art would possess if animated with a Prometheus fire, or enabled at the prayer of some modern Pygmalion to become instinct with the sense of life. Her hair, of the darkest shade which night itself could give to that luxuriant mass, was arranged in bands,—thus setting off, as it were, the complete oval of the faultless countenance; and it was gathered up in a Grecian knot at the back of the well-shaped head. When Leonora's lips parted in the smiles that welcomed her lover's return, they revealed teeth of pearly enamel and faultlessly even. Her voice had that flute-like flow of melody which was so well calculated to give the most pleasing effect to the rich language of her own native clime. Constantine Kanaris had said that if I could possibly for a moment throw a veil over the image of Annabel and put her altogether beyond the range of beauty's competition, while mentally considering

all other lovely claimants to the palm whom I might have ever known, I could not possibly avoid bestowing that palm upon Leonora Portici; and I had scarcely time to obtain one glance at this beautiful being, before I inwardly confessed the justice of my Greek friend's predictive assurance.

Before I continue the thread of my narrative, I may as well observe that Leonora was the daughter of the Judge's brother, and that both her parents had died in her infancy. Her uncle, the Judge, had never been married: he had adopted his niece from the moment she became an orphan: he looked upon her as his daughter—he cherished her with all the affection he would have bestowed upon a child of his own—he had reared her with the most constant care—had provided the best masters and preceptors for her education—and had been most strict (although without the slightest exercise of tyranny, for of *this* there was no necessity for the affectionate and dutiful Leonora)

in regulating the friendships or the acquaintances which she might form. Thus, at the age of one-and-twenty, Signora Portici was a being of whom any relative might be proud as well as fond—whose love it was happiness for any admirer to win—and whose hand might have been counted an honour for even a prince to possess. Happy, then, I thought should Constantine Kanaris deem himself to be; and in the love of such a divine being it appeared almost sinful to doubt that the divine blessing would be wanted to render that happiness complete.

I may now pursue the thread of my tale. When the first warm greetings were exchanged between Leonora and Constantine, the latter—addressing the young lady in the French language, in order that I might understand what was said, for she herself spoke it with a most perfect fluency—observed, “This is my friend Mr. Wilmot; and he will become a friend of yourself, my dearest Leonora, and of your excellent uncle likewise, not only for my sake, but likewise because he is the bearer of a letter of introduction from an influential nobleman at Rome.”

“Mr. Wilmot is truly welcome here,” said Leonora, addressing me with that well-bred ease which, without undue familiarity, is equally without formal constraint. “My uncle will be here in a few minutes; and he will repeat the welcome which I have thus given.”

I expressed my gratitude to the young lady for her kindness; and placing my letter of introduction upon the table, intimated that it was penned by the Count of Tivoli.

“His lordship,” said Leonora, “is an old and intimate friend of my uncle, who will therefore be all the more delighted to show Mr. Wilmot every possible attention—But here he is!”

This remark was elicited by the entrance of an elderly and venerable-looking gentleman. Signor Portici was evidently on the other side of sixty; but his tall upright form, erect as in his youth—his firm step—his countenance comparatively un-wrinkled—his clear blue eye—and his well-preserved teeth—all indicated the man whose life had been regularly and temperately passed, who had known but few cares beyond those which are inseparable from the lot of humanity in general, and who was endowed with a contented and cheerful disposition. He possessed a sufficient dignity to be suitable to the high judicial office which he held, without suffering it to rise into hauteur: his manner was calm, yet benevolent—it may be described as blaudly cordial and honestly frank. There was nothing in this gentleman which at all savoured of that crabbed mistrust, morose irritability, or eccentricity of humour, which are too often allied with an advanced age; he looked not with a jaundiced eye upon young persons, nor with contempt upon their inexperience, nor with cynical dislike upon their pursuits: he was tolerant, kind, and just. But of course the reader will comprehend that I did not discover all these attributes in the first few moments of our acquaintance—though there is always something in the demeanour of a person which at first sight conveys an impression that serves as a key, so to speak, to the reading of his entire disposition.

The welcome which the Judge gave to Con-

stantine Kanaris, was that which became the excellent feeling experienced by a fond uncle towards the accepted suitor for the hand of a much-loved and cherished niece. Then, turning to me—on learning my name, and on being informed that I brought a letter of introduction from the Count of Tivoli—Signor Portici shook me by the hand, and repeated that welcome which had been already given by the amiable and beautiful Leonora. After some little conversation on general topics, the Judge proceeded to peruse the letter which I had laid upon the table; and when he had finished it, he asked me to accompany him into another room—adding with a smile, “I have no doubt these young people have much to say to each other after their separation, comparatively brief though it has been.”

Leonora’s countenance was suffused with a modest blush—Constantine surveyed her with the fondest love—and the judge led me to his library, which looked upon a lawn at the side of the house. I should observe that he had all the time been speaking in French—which, as I have stated in a previous chapter, is well understood by all Italians of education. Bidding me take a chair near him, Signor Portici said, “The Count of Tivoli’s letter informs me, Mr. Wilmot, that you have come to Civita Vecchia upon business of no ordinary importance—indeed of a most delicate character, and requiring much prudence and foresight. I need hardly assure you that whatsoever help I may be enabled to render, shall be cheerfully afforded and perhaps my judicial capacity will place me in all the better position, by giving me the full command of police-agencies, to further your views.”

I expressed my thanks to Signor Portici for his goodness; and soliciting his patience, proceeded to unfold enough of everything which related to myself—to Sir Mathew Heseltine, his daughter, and granddaughter—as well as to Mr. Lanover and Mr. Dorchester, to make him comprehend the position of those affairs in which I was now mixed up, or in which I was resolved to interfere. I explained likewise how I had received such special and important information from the prisoners at Rome; and how Lanover and Dorchester were to be at Civita Vecchia on the ensuing Monday (this being the Friday of which I am now writing). I forgot not to add that it suited my purpose to remain, if possible, so far in the back-ground as to be an unseen assistant of Sir Mathew and the two ladies; but that of course this must depend entirely on circumstances, inasmuch as I should rest upon no punctilios of that sort if events took a turn compelling me to appear conspicuously and prominently in the matter.

The Judge listened to me with the kindest patience; and when I had finished speaking, he said, “I understand, Mr. Wilmot, that as you have thus admitted me to your confidence, I am to reveal to others as little as may be of all these circumstances;—and it shall be so. But in the second place I must ask you a few questions. How long ago was it that you delivered Sir Mathew Heseltine and his family from the banditti in the Appenines?”

“Nearly three months,” I answered.

“And when they departed thence,” continued the Judge, “had you no notion of the direction they intended to pursue?”

"None," I replied.

"You therefore cannot form the least idea of whether they purposed to return into central or southern Italy? You do not know whether they intended to pay Civita Vecchia or its neighbourhood a visit?"

"I cannot speak with any degree of certainty upon the point," was my answer: "but still it would be singular if after going in a northward direction—which they were certainly doing when, proceeding from Florence, they began to traverse the Appenines—they should have afterwards altered their plan and taken a southerly course. It must however be borne in mind that their time is entirely their own—that Sir Matthew Heselstine is somewhat an eccentric character——"

"In this case," interrupted the Judge, "we must not act upon surmise—we must go upon certainties—and to whatsoever these certainties are we must endeavour to find a clue. You say that the name of the Earl of Eccleston was mentioned in a sinister manner by Lanover and Dorchester at their conference in the ruin near Magliano—and that from antecedent circumstances, it is quite possible this nobleman may harbour evil designs against yourself, though you cannot comprehend wherefore he should experience any interest in succouring Lanover in a coercive scheme with respect to Sir Matthew Heselstine. Now, I tell you what I will do," proceeded the Judge, after a few moments' reflection: "I will at once take measures to ascertain whether Sir Matthew and his party are anywhere in this neighbourhood: I will adopt the same course in respect to the Earl of Eccleston; and I will order the strictest watch to be kept, so that the instant any such persons as may answer to the description of Lanover and Dorchester set foot in Civita Vecchia, the fact may be communicated to me. But I will do more—I will at once write off to many of the principal towns of Italy, to learn if possible where Sir Matthew Heselstine and his party may be. In a word, my dear Mr. Wilmot, everything shall be done which human foresight can suggest, and which lies in my power to accomplish, in order to unravel the sinister mystery—to baffle the iniquitous plot which is no doubt in progress—and to carry out your aims to a successful issue."

I warmly and sincerely thanked the Judge for his kindness; and he then said, "Under different circumstances, it would have afforded me the utmost pleasure to receive you as a guest at my house during your residence at Civita Vecchia: but if it were known to Lanover and Dorchester that you are on terms of intimacy with me—if it were even suspected by them that you are acquainted with me at all—it would only excite a suspicion that their designs are more or less fathomed: they would in this case redouble their precautions, and thereby render it all the more difficult for us to keep a continuous watch over their proceedings. On the other hand, if our acquaintance be unsuspected, they will regard your presence in Civita Vecchia as a mere coincidence; and they will be all the more completely thrown off their guard. Rest assured that no injury shall occur to you from any deep-laid villainy on their part. Take up your quarters at a different hotel from that where Signor Kanaris is lodging: it will not even be wise for you to be seen on in-

timate terms with him—as it may be known that he is intimate here. In a word, Mr. Wilmot, the utmost caution must be exercised."

I thanked the Judge for the counsel which he had thus given me, and which I faithfully promised to observe.

"As a great deal of what we have been speaking involves private and personal matters," proceeded Signor Portici, "I presume that you do not intend to be communicative even to your new friend Constantine Kanaris; and therefore as he might possibly think it strange or feel hurt that you do not purpose to reside at the same hotel where he is staying, you had perhaps better leave it to me to give him a suitable hint upon the subject."

To this proposition I likewise readily assented; and the Judge then led the way back to the drawing-room, where he had left his niece and Kanaris. In consequence of the beauty of the weather, the casements were open; and the Judge invited me to step forth upon the balcony to admire the fine view which could thence be obtained. He pointed out to me several villas as picturesquely situated as his own; and directing my attention to the port, he bade me observe the numerous vessels which were lying there, and which belonged to many different nations. Taking a telescope, Signor Portici examined the shipping through that medium for some minutes—and then passed it to me.

"They are all trading vessels, I presume?" I said, after a brief pause.

"Yes," was the response. "We had an Austrian frigate here the other day—and I was just looking to see if she were in the anchorage still: but I find that she is gone."

"I am not a very good judge of nautical matters," I presently said: "but it appears to me that there is a very beautiful vessel lying yonder by itself. Its hull is completely black: but there is something so graceful in its shape—there is such an elegance in its tapering masts, and such a neatness in its rigging, that even to my inexperienced view it is distinguished from all the other vessels there."

"Yes," remarked the Judge: "I have myself observed that vessel of which you are speaking. It is rigged as a schooner—its masts have a peculiar slope, or what seamen would call a *rake*—and as you justly say, a very beautiful craft she is. I beheld her enter the port when she arrived about a week back; and I had intended several times to ask what she is—but I have always forgotten to do so when in the town."

"What flag does she carry?" I inquired. "I do not recognise it."

"Our friend Constantine Kanaris," answered the Judge, with a smile, "would speedily tell you what flag it is: for that banner is one which his own uncle——"

"Ah, then, I comprehend!" I ejaculated: "it is the Greek flag which this beautiful vessel bears? I certainly should not have taken her for a trader. Indeed, if she bore the English flag I should suppose her to be some nobleman's or gentleman's yacht. Perhaps she belongs to the Greek Government?"

"No," answered the Judge: "for in this case she would carry a pennant—whereas you perceive she has none. Kanaris, my dear friend," continued

Signor Portici, thus summoning his niece's suitor from the drawing-room; "have you had the curiosity to ask what that beautiful vessel is which bears the flag of your nation?"

"You forget, my dear sir," answered the young Greek with a smile, "that I have only just returned from Naples, after an absence of three weeks from Civita Vecchia."

"True!" observed the Judge; "and this schooner only arrived a week or ten days back. Is she not a charming vessel?"

Constantine took the telescope, and examined for some minutes the object of the Judge's eulogy. He then said, "Yes, she is a beautiful model; and if I mistake not, she is one of those fast traders that run up into the Black Sea. I remember my uncle explaining to me one day that vessels trading to the ports in that sea are built in a peculiar manner, so as to enable them to resist the sudden squalls which at particular seasons sweep over the Euxine. Yes—she is a Black Sea trader—there can be no doubt of it."

Leonora had in the meantime joined us upon the balcony—where we all remained conversing for a little while longer; and then the Judge proposed that we should visit the conservatories—adding that he intended to keep us to dinner.

"For now that you are here, Mr. Wilmot," he whisperingly observed to me, "I shall not part with you until the evening;—and when once the matters which we have in hand are settled and disposed of to your satisfaction—as I hope and trust they will be—I shall do my best by all possible hospitalities to make up for the interval during which you will have to absent yourself altogether from the villa."

"You are tolerably confident, Signor," I said, cheered by his words, "that we shall succeed in this most unpleasant business?"

"I do not like to promise anything rashly," answered Signor Portici: "but I will go so far as to bid you not be cast down."

We visited the conservatories; and the time was pleasantly whiled away until the dinner hour. During this repast I had a better opportunity of judging of the intellectual qualities of Leonora, inasmuch as the conversation now was general, whereas it had previously been chiefly distributed between the young lady and her lover on the one hand, and the Judge and myself on the other hand. I have already said that Leonora spoke French with perfect fluency; and I soon found that Constantine's eulogy of her mental accomplishments had not been in the least degree exaggerated. She was altogether a very amiable young lady: her disposition was characterized by the deep impassioned fervour which distinguishes Italia's sons and daughters: but her soul was all innocence and purity—her love was a refined sentiment—and though capable of such ardour, was nevertheless sublimated beyond the tincture of earthly grossness. It was indeed an interesting spectacle to behold this tender pair,—that young Greek realizing all artistic ideas of manly classic beauty, and that charming Leonora presenting so exquisite a type of Italian loveliness!

Shortly after ten o'clock in the evening Kanaris and I took our leave,—the Judge whispering to me as he shook me by the hand at the gate, "I

shall adopt some means of conveying to you any communication that I may have to make in private: but I hope the day will soon arrive when you may in all security, in peace, and in happiness, revisit my abode."

## CHAPTER CXVI.

### COSMO.

KANARIS and I walked on together in silence for two or three minutes after leaving the Judge's hospitable villa,—the young Greek no doubt absorbed in tender reflections on all that had taken place between himself and Leonora, and I pondering in my mind the chances of success in the endeavour to frustrate the nefarious schemes of Mr. Lauover. At length Kanaris observed in the same tone of friendly frankness in which he had all along addressed me, "Signor Portici has informed me that private affairs will compel you to take up your quarters at another hotel from that where we stopped to-day; and he has likewise hinted that for some little while we must not expect to see much of you. Now, understand me well, my dear Mr. Wilmot. Though young, I have yet seen just enough of the world to be convinced of the propriety of divesting myself of all undue curiosity in respect to the proceedings of others: therefore you need not experience the slightest uncomfortable feeling at being unable to give me any explanation relative to the necessity of this temporary severance. At the same time I will observe that if under any circumstances you should require the succour of a friend—no matter how difficult the emergency—you have nothing to do but to send for Constantine Kanaris, and he will serve you with cheerfulness and enthusiasm."

I was deeply touched with the generosity of my new acquaintance; and I warmly expressed my gratitude for the assurances he had just given me. Hastily turning the conversation into another channel, he asked me whether my opinion of his Leonora realized all he had previously said in her favour—or whether I considered that in the romantic ardour of his affection he had been led into hyperbolical extravagance? I assured him that according to my thinking he had every reason to felicitate himself in possessing the love of a being whose personal beauty was only equalled by the amiability of her disposition and by her mental accomplishments; and I concluded by asking if he did not now feel himself supremely happy? He replied in the affirmative. The word was spoken with a gushing enthusiasm of tone; and yet I was surprised—nay, almost startled—when the very next instant a sigh was wafted to my ear. It was one of those sighs which the utterer endeavours to subdue but cannot altogether succeed in keeping back; it was not a sigh of pleasure—not the sigh of deep ineffable bliss; but it was a sigh which too plainly told how some sudden anxiety, misgiving, or foreboding, had supervened upon that gush of feeling with which the assurance of perfect happiness had an instant before been given. Yes—I was astonished: and my profoundest sympathies were again excited on



behalf of this young man, who, apparently with every reason to rejoice in one of the most favoured lots that a mortal creature could know, was nevertheless haunted and pursued by a constantly recurring mistrust of his own favoured position.

We reached the hotel, and bade each other adieu for the present. Signor Portici had mentioned to me the name of another inn where I should find comfortable quarters; and thither I accordingly removed that very night: for I was resolved to follow the worthy Judge's counsel in all things, and to adopt every precaution that might be necessary for the carrying out of the plans in which I was embarked.

On the following day—which was Saturday—I was about to stroll out after breakfast, when the waiter said to me, “I believe, sir, that you have been making inquiries for a valet to attend upon you during your residence in this town?”

I was about to give vent to an ejaculation of astonishment, when it instantaneously struck me that it might not be altogether a mistake, and that there was some significance in the circumstance. I accordingly said nothing; and the waiter proceeded to observe, “Because, if such is the case, sir, here is a person waiting for the honour of an interview; and he bade me be sure to tell you that he bears excellent recommendations from a gentleman of your acquaintance.”

I ordered the waiter to show the individual to my apartment; and in a few moments a middle-aged man, of sedate appearance, but with an inscrutable expression of countenance, was ushered into my presence. The waiter retired; the applicant took the precaution of seeing that the door was closed behind him: and then accosting me, he said in French, “Signor Portici recommends me, sir, to your service—for the present.”

“And no better recommendation could possibly be needed,” I answered. “You are——”

“An officer of the secret police,” responded the man, in a low voice and with a significant look.

“I thought so. But in that case,” I added, “are you not well known in this town?—will not the people of the hotel recognise you? will it not be thought strange——”

“Rest satisfied, Mr. Wilmot, upon all these points,” interrupted the officer. “I do not belong to Civita Vecchia: I have only been here a few days—and no one in the town except Signor Portici, and yourself of course, is aware of who or what I am. I belong properly to Ostia—a Roman town, as I need scarcely inform you, which is situated at the mouth of the Tiber. I came to Civita Vecchia on a certain business concerning which I need give no explanation: but late last night, after you had left the Portici villa, I considered it necessary to seek an interview with the Judge himself—and he then instructed me to attach myself to your person for the present. His object is twofold—in the first place to establish a safe medium of communication between himself and you, and in the second place that you may be protected in case of any active development of the treachery of those whose nefarious plans you have only too much reason to suspect. I answer to the name of Cosmo; and you must treat me in all respects as if I were actually your valet, so that not the slightest suspicion may be entertained at the hotel that I am

ought else than what I seem to be. One word more, sir,” added Cosmo: “you will do well not to venture out of an evening unless previously notifying your intention to me, so that I may follow you at a respectful distance, and thus be at hand for any emergency that may transpire.”

“Whatever counsel you may give me,” I responded, “rest assured that I shall follow it. Moreover you may rely upon my liberality in recompensing you for any services you may be enabled to render me.”

Cosmo bowed—and proceeded to say, “The particular business which has brought me to Civita Vecchia, allows me to devote my time likewise to you, sir: or, to quote a saying which prevails in all countries and in all languages, I may kill two birds with one stone. But perhaps you will be surprised when I state that you yourself may possibly be enabled to render me assistance in the business which originally brought me to Civita Vecchia.”

“Indeed?” I exclaimed. “And in what manner?”

“Pardon me, sir,” rejoined Cosmo, “if I am not more communicative at present. You are very young——”

“And you fancy, perhaps, that I am incautious and imprudent?” I interrupted him somewhat sharply: and I felt the blood mantling on my cheeks.

“Very far, Mr. Wilmot, was it from my intention to insult you,” replied Cosmo calmly but respectfully. “When you come to know me better, you will appreciate that caution which a long experience has rendered habitual on my part. But I beg your pardon, sir—you were about to walk into the town when I was introduced to your presence. Perhaps you will allow me to attend upon you? I have already seen enough of the place to be enabled to point out everything that is at all worth your inspection. The weather has changed since yesterday: it threatens rain—I will carry your upper coat and this umbrella.”

I at once saw that Cosmo was a man of cool head and that he was thoroughly self-possessed, shrewd and far-seeing, and had a motive for everything he said or did. I perceived also that he was not an individual to be diverted from any course which he had to adopt; but that he would pursue it steadily and methodically—indeed in that manner which was best calculated to ensure success. Signor Portici's recommendation of such a man was alone sufficient to inspire me with the fullest confidence, not merely in his integrity, but also in his ability and intelligence. At the same time I could not conceal from myself that there was a certain dogmatic air of command about Cosmo,—as if having taken my affair in hand, he felt himself perfectly justified in defining the course that I also was to pursue, and in guiding my movements according as he might think fit. But I did not, under existing circumstances, consider it at all consistent with policy or prudence to assert an independent spirit, though I was somewhat wounded by the idea that Cosmo had no very high opinion of my own judgment—or at all events that he had made up his mind to know me better before he thought fit to become more communicative. There was a certain dictatorial air, and yet perfectly respectful, in which he had almost bidden

me go out for my intended walk and be followed by himself. I however, as above intimated, saw the necessity of leaving myself in his hands; and I inwardly vowed that by no folly or indiscretion on my part should there be a chance of marring those plans that were in progress for baffling the contemplated schemes of Lanover and his accomplices.

I walked forth from the hotel—Cosmo following with my overcoat and umbrella, which he had evidently undertaken to carry that he might the better assume the character of the dependant. He escorted me to the public buildings, in the inspection of which two or three hours were passed—until at length I found myself near the port and close by that tavern where Captain Notaras had established his quarters. I was thus suddenly reminded of the promise I had given on the preceding day to call and see the injured mariner: but it struck me that there might be some imprudence in the step, as it was possible I should there encounter Constantine Kanaris, whose society I was for the present to avoid.

"You appear to hesitate at something, sir," said Cosmo, approaching me and touching his hat with that air of becoming respect which a menial exhibits towards his master. "I think I can conjecture what is passing in your mind: you are deliberating with yourself whether you shall call upon Captain Notaras?"

"Precisely so," I exclaimed, wondering how Cosmo could have possibly fathomed my thoughts.

"The incident relative to Captain Notaras was yesterday mentioned to Signor Portici," Cosmo went on to observe, with his wonted calmness of speech and demeanour, "either by yourself or Signor Kanaris; and the Judge mentioned it among other things to me last night. There can be no harm, sir, in your calling upon the injured man."

"In that case I will do so," I observed. "You can await me here: I shall not be many minutes:"—and I was moving away towards the tavern when Cosmo touched me on the arm as if to detain me. "What is it?" I asked.

"You might take the opportunity, sir," returned my attendant, "to proffer a bouquet of flowers—or some fruit—or a jelly—or any little delicacy which this tavern is not likely to be able to supply, but which your hotel could at once furnish."

"And why so?" I inquired: "why should I proffer these things?"

"Through civility to an invalid," rejoined Cosmo: but his eyes glanced significantly on me for a moment, and I at once comprehended that there was a deeper meaning than his mere words had seemed to convey, and that he had some ulterior purpose to serve.

"It shall be as you have suggested," I said: and no longer detained by Cosmo, I at once entered the tavern.

I was conducted to the chamber of Captain Notaras, who welcomed me with that sailor-like bluntness to which I have before alluded, and which seemed replete with a good-humoured cordiality considerably at variance with the naturally ferocious expression of his countenance. He was of course lying in bed; and being unshaven as well as unkempt, his look was even more savage and repulsive than on the preceding day: but still I

endeavoured to put his appearance out of the question, and to regard him only with the compassionate sympathy that seemed due to one who had been so seriously injured. He cursed, with many bitter imprecations, his folly in having taken it into his head to go on horseback, being almost totally unaccustomed to such a means of conveyance: yet it was with no small difficulty I could discover his precise meaning, so execrably bad was the French that he spoke: I inquired what the medical attendants had said of him this morning: he answered that he was getting on as well as could possibly be expected—but broke out into fresh anathemas against his own folly, "which had thus waterlogged him at a moment when he ought to be in readiness to hoist all sail and take advantage of the first favourable wind."

"Will your vessel have to wait in the port," I inquired, "until you are able to resume your command? or will she have to go without you?"

"Ah! that all depends upon circumstances," responded Notaras, with another prolonged and heavy curse.

"And which is your vessel?" I asked, moving towards the window, which commanded a view of the entire harbour.

"Run your eyes, my young friend, along all that shipping," said the captain,—"single out the one which you fancy to be the loveliest model there—never mind the colour—don't be led away by the painting of some of those flaunting-looking barks—but consider well which looks the likeliest vessel to skim swiftest through the water——"

"In that case," I interrupted him, "I have no difficulty in signaling the schooner with the black hull and the raking masts. Indeed, I was admiring it yesterday——" and I was just on the point of adding, "from Signor Portici's balcony," when I remembered that I was by no means to mention to a soul my intimacy with the Judge: and I felt convinced too that Kanaris had received a hint from the same quarter to abstain from coupling my name with that of Signor Portici.

"Then that very schooner you so well describe," exclaimed Notaras, "is the ship that I have the honour to command. Did you ever see a lovelier craft?—does she not float like a bird upon the water? With her sharp-pointed bow a trifle higher than the stern—her masts tapering with so much elegance and grace—and all the tracery of her rigging standing out as it were in such relief against the background of the sky, it's just like a ship in a picture! Aye, and its enough to make even a rude uncouth brute such as I am, poetical to think of that lovely craft!"

"You may indeed felicitate yourself upon commanding a beautiful vessel," I observed. "I presume you trade into the Black Sea?"

"Yes—and at times to the Italian ports," answered Notaras: "or else she would not be here now."

"Has Signor Kanaris called upon you to-day?" I inquired,—"your fellow-countryman, I mean—the gentleman who was with me yesterday——"

"Oh! his name is Kanaris, is it?" said the Captain. "Then I suppose he must be a relation——"

"Of the famous Admiral of the same name," I added: "and proud may he indeed be of such distinguished kinship."

"No—he has not called yet," answered the Captain: "but I suppose he will presently. It is cursed dull, I can tell you, to be cooped up here in this place instead of pacing the quarter-deck of that noble vessel of mine. But it can't be helped!"—and notwithstanding this philosophical conclusion to which the Greek captain had just come, he gave vent to another bitter imprecation.

"Will you excuse me," I said, "for offering to render your apartment a trifle more cheerful by sending a few flowers? I think I can procure some from a conservatory in the town. I can promise some fruit likewise; and as the larder of this tavern may be better supplied with substantial than with delicacies, I shall use the privilege which one may exercise in respect to an invalid's chamber by forwarding a jelly, or some little trifle of the sort, at the same time."

"Thanks for your courtesy," was the Captain's response; "and though I care little enough for kick-shaws of that kind, yet it would be rude to reject what is so handsomely proffered."

"I shall call and see you again at my leisure," I said—and then took my departure.

On rejoining Cosmo, he asked, "How fares the invalid, sir?"

"As his accident occurred but yesterday," I responded, "there has been no time for much progress towards convalescence. The fellow's temper is irritable; and methinks that his impatience will keep him back. Look! It is that beautiful vessel yonder, which is moored all alone—apart from the other shipping—which owns him as commander."

Cosmo threw a glance of what appeared to be complete indifference towards the schooner—and immediately said, "Did you bear in mind, sir, the suggestion which I offered?"

"Yes—and I was almost sorry that I made the proposal," I replied: "for though accepted, it was nevertheless in a half brutal, half churlish manner—"

"Never mind, sir," interrupted Cosmo: "these mariners are rude uncouth beings—but they sometimes appreciate an act of kindness more than they outwardly appear to do. You seem to admire that vessel, sir—your gaze is fixed upon it?"

"Though unable to view it with a seaman's eye," was my answer, "I nevertheless comprehend its beauty as a model—"

"And perhaps you would like to go on board her?" said Cosmo, inquiringly. "We have plenty of time—for I shall wait for the dusk ere I visit a certain house"—alluding to Signor Portici's—"in order to procure the fruits and flowers which you have promised that Greek captain."

"You ask me," I said, "whether I should like to go on board that beautiful ship; and I confess that I have the curiosity—but perhaps the permission will be refused?"

"Scarcely, sir, I should think," answered Cosmo: "it would be the height of discourtesy for the officer who may be in command during the captain's illness, to refuse you admission to the vessel. At all events we will try."

Cosmo did not wait for any further signification of my assent—but at once hailed a boatman, who was lying along some pieces of timber on the wharf and kicking his naked feet up and down in

the air. In an instant he flew to his boat,—I and Cosmo following, but at a somewhat more moderate pace. We took our seats: the boatman pushed off—and betaking himself to his oars, he began pulling vigorously therewith, so that the light gondola-shaped wherry cut rapidly through the water. The nearer we approached the schooner, the more was I impressed with her elegant build, as well as the admirable neatness which characterized her rigging, and in contrast with which that of all the other vessels in the harbour was clumsy, slovenly, and negligent to a degree. The reader must recollect that I was not a complete stranger to a fine-looking ship,—in proof of which I need only remind him of my terrible adventure on board the emigrant-vessel to which Lanover's treachery had consigned me: for though I was only for a few hours an inmate of that ill-fated ship, yet all the scenes connected with it were only too well calculated to rivet its entire aspect—hull, masts, cordage, sails, everything—in my memory.

The boat ran along the schooner's side; a sailor with a blue jacket and a red fez, or Greek cap, looked over the bulwark and put some question, but it was in his own native language. Cosmo spoke to him in Italian: he shook his head, but made a sign for us to wait in the boat,—having done which, he disappeared. Four or five other sailors, similarly dressed, and all fine-looking fellows, with dark complexions and bright eyes, stared at us in a cool listless manner over the ship's side; and as I ran my eye along the bulwarks, I said to Cosmo, "I am very much mistaken if this vessel does not carry guns: for though the port-holes are closed, yet I can distinctly perceive their square outlines—or rather, the places where the lids, or whatever you call them, are shut down."

"Indeed," said Cosmo, but with an air of such apparent indifference that I did not choose to continue the conversation.

In about a minute a smart-looking officer appeared at the gangway, and addressed us in Italian. Cosmo answered him, at the same time looking towards me: so that I had no difficulty in comprehending that he was explaining my wish to go on board the vessel. The officer appeared uncertain how to act; and then Cosmo boldly assured him that I was a friend of Captain Notaras, whom indeed I had only just left. Still the officer did not give an immediate assent—but conversed for a few moments with another, evidently his junior, who had come forward to see what was going on. Another question was now put to Cosmo: and I understood a sufficiency of Italian to comprehend that it was an inquiry as to who he himself was. This he answered by declaring that he was my domestic; and after a few minutes' more hesitation, the senior officer of the two made a sign for us to ascend to the deck.

Although on approaching the vessel I was impressed with the idea that her dimensions were far greater than I could possibly have anticipated when viewing her from the shore, or even through Signor Portici's telescope,—yet I was perfectly astonished on setting my foot upon the deck, at the sweeping length of the schooner as well as her breadth of beam. A first glance showed me also that my conjecture relative to her being an armed vessel was correct: for she carried eight carronades on her quarter-deck; and these were now drawn

in from her port-holes,—the ports themselves being closed. As there was no chequered streak of white along the ship's sides, as is usual with vessels carrying guns—but all the exterior was one uniform unbroken surface of black—it was no wonder that the schooner on being viewed from the land, should have utterly failed to excite the suspicion that she was armed. I beheld no merchandise: not a single bale of goods, nor sack of corn, nor crate of wine was visible upon the deck: neither were there any signs of that activity and bustle which generally prevail in traders: the entire equipment was as neat, as perfect, and in an order as good as if it were a vessel in the naval service of some first-rate maritime Power. The deck was scrupulously clean; and the smart, neatly-dressed, cleanly-looking sailors were lounging about as if they had no earthly thing to do. The officer, who at first addressed us, and who was evidently the one now in command in the captain's absence, bowed with a sufficient politeness to me, when, followed by Cosmo, I set foot upon the deck: but he did not offer to conduct me over the vessel—he stood still, looking as if he had much rather that I had not come thither at all. Cosmo was not however the man to see me baffled in my desire to inspect the ship—at least not without making another effort on my behalf. He addressed a few words to the officer,—who thereupon turning to me, said, “Ah! I understand you speak French? Your valet should have told me so before.”

“Yes—I speak French?” was my answer given in the language itself. “I am very much afraid that my curiosity to view this beautiful vessel of your's, has put you to some inconvenience or has infringed some rule——”

“You are an Englishman, sir, your serrant has told me,” interrupted the officer,—“and travelling in Italy for your pleasure. Is it so?”

I answered in the affirmative: and methought that he eyed me in somewhat a searching manner.

“You are acquainted with Captain Notaras?” continued the officer.

“Your captain can tell you the next time you see him, whether when he met with his accident, he was not assisted by an English gentleman of the name of Wilmot. Indeed, I have just been to call on him at the tavern yonder.”

“And why did you not ask him for a written order to visit the schooner?” was the next question.

“Simply because I did not think of it at the time: my idea of visiting your vessel at all was an after-thought. But really, sir,” I added, somewhat indignantly, “if I could have foreseen that I should be putting you to all this inconvenience——”

“Not another word, sir!” interrupted the officer, who was evidently hurt and chagrined at having conducted himself in a way which began to border on downright discourtesy. “I owe you an explanation. The fact is, Captain Notaras is very particular and will not allow strangers to board his vessel. I am now temporarily in command, it is true—but the captain is a severe man——”

“And you are afraid,” I exclaimed, “of the responsibility which you are incurring by admitting me and my domestic on board? I will therefore at once, sir,” I added coldly, “retire to the boat.”

“Not so!” rejoined the officer quickly: and I

may observe that he was about five-and-thirty years of age, of gentlemanly demeanour, and with manners naturally polite. “I owed you an explanation—and have given it: I now owe you an apology for the seeming rudeness of my behaviour—and I beg you to accept it. Do me the favour to follow, and I will show you the vessel.”

His manner had now become so truly courteous, and he appeared so anxious to efface whatever unpleasant impression his former bearing might have left upon my mind, that I hesitated not to accept his invitation.

“You see we are obliged to carry guns,” he said, glancing in a sort of careless way towards the carronades: “but unfortunately, sir, there are a set of unprincipled villains belonging to our nation who do not hesitate to prey upon their fellow-countrymen as well as upon foreigners——”

“You mean pirates, I presume?” I interjectingly observed.

“Exactly so,” was the response. “And as we trade chiefly in the Levant or in the Black Sea——”

“But,” I exclaimed in astonishment, “I thought the days for piracy had gone by—and that French and English ships-of-war were always in sufficient force in the Mediterranean to keep it clear of corsairs?”

“Not so, sir,” rejoined the officer. “And then, too, those infidel rascals, the subjects of the Bey of Tunis, do not mind now and then sending out an armed ship to prey upon vessels of our nation,—just as if they bore letters of marque fully justifying them in pouncing upon Greek traders.”

“You astonish me!” I observed. “I should have thought that the Sultan would have forced his vassal Bey to observe all suitable terms of peace towards your country.”

“The Turks never will forgive us,” continued the Greek, “for having succeeded in shaking off their yoke. But pray step down into the cabin; and perhaps, sir, I shall be enabled to find a flask of Cyprus by way of refreshment.”

The stairs leading down into the cabin, were of polished wood and had handsome brass handrails; and the cabin itself was exceedingly well furnished with ottomans, stools, tables, carpets, draperies, &c., I must confess that for a trading vessel I was astonished at the evidences of luxury which now met my view. The door of one of the state-rooms, or smaller side-cabins, stood open; and a glance flung therein showed me as comfortable and indeed as elegantly appointed a couch as could be met with in an English gentleman's yacht. The officer begged me to be seated; and he indicated a camp-stool for the accommodation of Cosmo,—who, somewhat obtrusively and inconsistently for his character of a valet, had followed us down into this cabin. I saw that the officer looked rather annoyed: but as he was now evidently bent on making an atonement for his former discourtesy, he quickly banished that expression of surprise from his countenance. A flask of wine was speedily produced, together with a filigree basket of cakes; and when the officer had filled our glasses, he poured out a third, motioning Cosmo to take it.

As I looked around the cabin, I was enabled to comprehend by its shape as well as by its position, that it did not extend completely to the stern of



the vessel, and that therefore another cabin most probably lay beyond. This idea led me to glance behind at the partition against which I was sitting; and I perceived a door.

"I have not yet taken you half over the ship," said the officer with a smile—for he was now all politeness: and rising from the ottoman he opened the door in the partition.

I followed him, and now found myself in a still larger cabin, fitted up in a sumptuous manner—indeed with a true oriental luxury. Upon a small beaufet there were several articles of plate: a silver lamp was suspended to one of the beams overhead; and this cabin had the advantage of three small windows in the stern. But these windows, I saw, could be likewise rendered available for another purpose; inasmuch as there were three brass cannon, not more than two feet in length, but of great width of bore, ready to serve as stern-chasers in case of need. The mainmast

penetrated through the decks just within the partition which separated the two cabins; and round it was a stand of muskets, all in beautiful order.

"This," I presume, "is the captain's cabin?" I said to the officer, after admiring the aspect of all I beheld.

"Yes—this is the captain's cabin," he answered: and methought that it was indeed no matter of surprise if in the comparatively poor and mean chamber at the tavern, Captain Notaras should regret his comfortable quarters on board his ship: the wonder to me now was that he should ever have exchanged these quarters at all for the cheerless and sordid room at the inn.

Cosmo had followed us into this cabin; and yet he did not seem to be inspired by any of the curiosity which animated myself—for he stood in a sort of listless indifferent manner, without taking even an ordinary notice of anything he beheld. The officer invited me to continue my

inspection in the other parts of the ship: we accordingly ascended to the deck again; and proceeding forward, visited the compartments occupied by the sailors. I had previously seen some half-dozen upon deck: I was now astonished to find at least eighteen or twenty more below—for I thought that such a crew was far more numerous than was necessary for a mere trading vessel. The officer appeared to penetrate my thoughts: for he observed to me, "You must remember what I have told you; we are always prepared to resist the Tunisian or Greek corsairs."

I asked permission to leave with the men a gratuity to enable them to drink my health; and the officer smilingly assented, though at the same time assuring me it was by no means necessary. I placed in the hands of the foremost seaman a sum which would be equivalent to a guinea in England; and I must confess that I thought my donation was rather coolly and indifferently received. I then turned to follow the officer, who was leading the way back to the deck. All this time I had not seen the slightest evidence corroborative of the idea that the vessel was a trader; and I therefore said to the officer, "I presume you have discharged all your cargo, and are waiting to take in another?"

"Yes—in a day or two," he answered; "and then we shall be all life, bustle, and activity indeed. But we are the less hurried now on account of the accident which has befallen Notaras."

While proceeding towards the gangway, I could not help fancying that as I passed a couple of the Greek sailors, they scowled upon me for a moment—and then, as my eyes were bent more searchingly upon them to assure myself that such was the case, they instantaneously averted their looks and affected to be jesting with each other. I thanked the officer for having shown me over the vessel: he again apologized for his reluctance in the first instance, and shook me by the hand as I prepared to descend into the boat.

"And what think you of that schooner, sir?" inquired Cosmo, when we were at some little distance from the beautiful craft whose long, low, gracefully sweeping hull lay so still and bird-like upon the water.

"Were it not for the officer's singular behaviour in the first instance—but for which he however apologized, I should have every reason to be gratified with my trip."

"She carries a number of guns," observed Cosmo, with what struck me as a certain dryness.

"Yes—but you heard the explanation which was given by the officer?" I exclaimed.

"I heard it, sir," rejoined Cosmo.

I looked at him with a sudden and peculiarly awakened attention: for it struck me that there was something still more singular than before in his tone: but his countenance was calmly inscrutable as was its wont. Then I looked back towards the schooner; and as I beheld her between the two massive stone piers, lying in her dark beauty upon the water, with a certain air of mysteriousness if not mischievousness about her, I could not help feeling the influence of a certain vague misgiving—a suspicion of something which I scarcely liked to define unto myself, for fear I should be doing an act of injustice towards persons who merited a better opinion. Cosmo said

nothing more: we gained the quay—the boat was dismissed—and we retraced our steps to the hotel.

## CHAPTER CXVII.

### THE HOTEL.

IN the evening Cosmo paid a visit to Signor Portici, and returned with some of the produce of that gentleman's conservatories. In addition to these he procured a few little delicacies from the larder of the hotel; and after giving me an intimation that he was going out for an hour—and which, though respectful enough, nevertheless sounded upon my ear something like an authoritative hint for me to be sure to keep to my own quarters the while—he sallied forth. I remained in my apartment at the hotel, endeavouring to while away the time with a book, but thinking of all that had occurred during the day, as well as of the adventures in which I was engaged. In the midst of my reverie a familiar voice speaking in the passage outside, suddenly caught my ear; and I started up—for it was the voice of the Earl of Eccleston.

My first impulse was to rush to the door for the purpose of hastening forth and presenting myself to his lordship: but a second thought made me stop short—for I knew not whether I was justified in taking a single step without the concurrence of Cosmo, who had been appointed by the Judge to counsel and assist me. I therefore contented myself with merely opening the door gently to the width of about an inch, so that I might ascertain, if possible, whether the Earl intended to stay at the hotel, or whether his visit was a mere passing one.

"My suite of apartments will do very well," I heard him say; and then the well-known voice of his wife responded in the affirmative. "Make haste, Thomas, and see that all the luggage is brought up," he continued, evidently addressing one of his own domestics.

"Yes, my lord," was the reply: and I caught the sounds of retreating footsteps.

The Earl then said something in Italian, of which I comprehended sufficient to perceive that he was giving orders to the waiter relative to the immediate serving-up of dinner; and then I heard the sounds of doors closing on the opposite side of the landing. I resumed my seat, and reflected. That the Earl and Countess of Eccleston had come to take up their quarters at the very same hotel where I had established mine, was evident enough: but was it accidental? or was his lordship actually engaged in some new plot against my own peace? I knew not what to think, and was full of anxious suspense. I looked at my watch: it was just eight o'clock—Cosmo had as yet been absent for only half-an-hour on his visit to Captain Notaras—and though in another half-hour he might return, yet I knew not how to restrain my impatience. Nevertheless I suffered the next half-hour to elapse—Cosmo did not return—another half-hour dragged its slow length along—my impatience now became intolerable: I felt a feverish anxiety—indeed the strongest necessity to obtain an interview with the



Earl of Eccleston. I accordingly rang the bell; and when the waiter made his appearance, I gave him my card, bidding him take it to his lordship. Two or three minutes elapsed, during which conflicting and painful were the feelings that I experienced: but at length the door opened, and the Earl of Eccleston made his appearance.

I rose up to receive him: he seemed confused and embarrassed; but, mingled with that expression, there was a certain degree of surprise on his countenance, as if at the position in which he found me, and which was so much superior to that which I occupied when last we met, in Florence.

"You wish to speak to me, Joseph?" said his lordship, speedily recovering his outward air of self-possession, although from a slight tremulousness of his accents I felt, certain he was still inwardly agitated.

"I have only to ask you, my lord, a single question," was my response: and my own voice trembled with the excitement of my feelings. "It is a question which——"

"Proceed, proceed!" said the Earl petulantly: "what question is it that you have to ask?"

"Judging from many painful antecedents," I rejoined, "the fear has been raised in my mind that your lordship is renewing, or sanctioning the renewal of those mysterious and unaccountable persecutions——"

"Always this subject! always these accusations!" muttered the Earl, a dark and gloomy look suddenly overspreading his handsome countenance. "What is it that you mean *now*?"

"I can give no explanations, my lord," I answered. "Suffice it to say that my suspicions have been cruelly re-awakened——"

"Did I not assure you in Florence," asked the Earl, in a tremulous voice, "that I would not harm a hair of your head?"

"You did, my lord; and the assurance made a deep impression upon me—all the more so," I continued, "because it was emphatically reiterated by the Countess."

"Then, what more would you have?" inquired the Earl, somewhat impatiently: but as his looks suddenly assumed a different and milder expression, and as his tone altered likewise, he said, "Pray tell me, without farther hesitation, why you have thus levelled another accusation against me? Is that man Lanover——"

"Yes, Lanover!" I exclaimed, in a paroxysm of excitement,—"Lanover whose iniquities are again harassing me!"

"Then listen, Joseph," said the Earl, laying his hand upon my arm, and looking me steadfastly in the face, as if he were intent upon perusing every lineament of my countenance. "I take heaven to witness that your suspicions in respect to myself are utterly unfounded! It is true that I have seen this Mr. Lanover since you and I met in Florence—I saw him indeed about three weeks back at Leghorn: but our meeting was altogether accidental——"

"And my name was not mentioned, my lord?" I said, fixing my eyes searchingly upon the nobleman.

He looked confused—he trembled visibly: I felt my cheeks turning pale and then flushing, from the effect of the suspicions that were flaming up in my mind once more: but the Earl of Eccleston,

again recovering his self-possession, said with an air of frankness, "Yes, your name was mentioned—but I declare most solemnly—by everything sacred—that no hostile instructions were issued from my lips—no hostile intentions were hinted at by Mr. Lanover!"

"My lord," I asked, "is that man indeed my uncle?"

"Does he not persist in saying so?" ejaculated the Earl abruptly.

"He does, my lord," I responded: "but there is a secret voice within me which tells me that he is *not*!—and this same secret voice whispers that your lordship is enabled, if you choose, to clear up the hideous mystery which envelopes everything that concerns myself!"

The nobleman turned aside for a few moments, during which he remained silent; and then abruptly reverting his eyes upon my countenance, he said, "You will not tell me upon what ground you just now accused me——"

"And your lordship has not told me," I interrupted him, "what took place between yourself and Mr. Lanover when you met at Leghorn."

"I have yet to learn," replied the nobleman, drawing himself up haughtily, "that I owe you an account of my proceedings."

"Enough, my lord!" I said coldly. "You may choose to remain silent upon that point—but you cannot prevent me from judging of you by your antecedents. However, there is a superior power which has hitherto protected me, and which will protect me still! Moreover, as I told your lordship in Florence, if Mr. Lanover dares to prosecute his machinations against me, I will invoke the aid of the law——"

"Where is Lanover?" demanded the Earl abruptly. "I declare that I am ignorant of all that he is now doing: but if a word from me—if you think, I mean, that I could be of service to you in disarming that man, I will do all that lies in my power to shield you. Yes—by heaven, I will! Tell me where he is to be found—and he shall not hurt a single hair of your head!"

I was about to observe that his lordship had just confessed the power to exercise a considerable influence over the humpback; but there was so much apparent sincerity in the assurances he had just given me, that I did not choose to revert to an angry strain, nor to adopt a satirical one. I therefore simply said, "I know not at present where Mr. Lanover is."

"I will tell you exactly why Lanover sought me at Leghorn," resumed the Earl, after a few minutes' reflection. "I repeat—and solemnly repeat my assurance, that our meeting was at first quite accidental in the street. He then called upon me at my hotel, and asked me to lend him a sum of money. I had not about me the amount he required; and it was then too late in the evening to procure it from a banker on the circular letter of credit with which I invariably travel. Lanover could not wait until the following day—he was compelled to go elsewhere at once on pressing business, as he told me. What his business was he did not explain. He asked me to make him a remittance to some town in the Papal States—Ah! it was Magliano—I remember!"

"Magliano?—yes!" I ejaculated. "Proceed, my lord."

"I complied with his request; and on the following day remitted to Magliano the money for which he had asked me. That is all I know. And if, Joseph," added the nobleman, in a grave, serious voice, "I have given you these explanations, it is with a hope of disabusing your mind completely of the idea that I have any farther connexion with Mr. Lanover than you are now aware of."

I had studied the Earl's countenance while he spoke, but had detected nothing to make me doubt his sincerity; and I reflected profoundly for a few moments without making any observation. It was at Magliano that Lanover had met Dorchester: the name of the Earl of Eccleston was certainly mentioned between them—but it might really after all have been only in reference to the remittance made to that town by his lordship. That the Earl could have any interest in forwarding the humpback's nefarious designs with regard to Sir Matthew Heseltime, could scarcely be imagined; and if therefore his lordship had no intention to renew his persecutions against me, it was tolerably evident that the tale of his accidental meeting and of the money-business with Lanover, might be substantially correct.

"Are you satisfied now, Joseph?" asked the Earl: "will you not believe that however strong your prejudices may be against me on account of the past, yet that for the present and likewise for the future I can only wish you well, instead—"

He stopped short; and I answered, "Yes, my lord—I do most sincerely wish to persuade myself that all you have been telling me is in strictest accordance with truth!"

"Ah! you wish to think well of me if you can?" said the nobleman in tremulous accents; and it appeared as if at the instant he was speaking involuntarily. "But tell me," he hastily added, "how is it that I find you in a position so different—so improved—the very position indeed, in which I could have most wished to find you?"

"I am not without kind friends in the world, my lord," I answered: and then, as a variety of strange feelings and vague undefinable ideas—but feelings and ideas which were far from strange to me, for I had often and often experienced them before since my encounter with the Ecclestons in Florence,—as these, I say, arose within me in tumultuous agitation, I exclaimed, "Oh, my lord! are the mysteries which surround me never, never to be cleared up? Oh, why does not that word of revelation which something tells me might be uttered by your lips—why is that word not spoken?"

At the instant I first broke forth in this paroxysm of vehement utterance, the Earl of Eccleston had turned deadly pale—a strong tremor had visibly shaken his entire form—and he had gazed upon me with an air which I can only describe as one of perfect consternation. But never did calm more suddenly succeed a storm—never did a perfect lull more quickly take the place of a sweeping squall, than was the recovery of the nobleman's self-possession. His look became severely cold; and he said in a corresponding tone, "It is not the first time I have found myself compelled to assure you, Mr. Wil-

mot, that you are labouring under some strange delusion."

A sensation of disappointment seized upon me—a sad and sickening one—plunging me all in a moment into deepest dejection and despondency; and the Earl, taking my hand, said in a voice that had changed again—for it was once more tremulous,—“Nevertheless, Joseph, I sincerely wish you well—Believe me, indeed I do!”

"Thank you, my lord," I faintly replied,—“thank you!” Then as a sudden reminiscence struck me, I said, "Permit me to inquire respecting the welfare of Mr. and Mrs. Howard: for never, never can I forget the kindness I experienced from the latter, when, as a poor miserably outcast, I found a home at her father's mansion, and when she was still Miss Edith Delmar."

"Mr. and Mrs. Howard," responded the Earl, in a grave voice, "are well, rich, and prosperous."

"Rich and prosperous?" I exclaimed, all my own former feeling of dejection being suddenly absorbed in a sense of sincerest joy at this announcement.

"Yes," rejoined the Earl—and methought that he now eyed me in a very peculiar as well as somewhat furtive manner; "Mr. and Mrs. Howard are in possession of Delmar Manor. I made the estate over to them shortly after my accession to the title and property of Eccleston."

I was just on the point of ejaculating, "Thank heaven! the deceased Mr. Delmar's original intentions, as I heard them expressed in the library at the Manor, are thus more than fulfilled!"—but I checked myself in time, and merely gave utterance to an expression of joy that the Rev. Henry Howard and his amiable Edith should have at length been placed in a position of such affluence.

"Yes," continued the Earl; "when my brother's death gave me riches, it was my care as well as my pleasure to enable my sister-in-law and her husband to partake of my prosperity. And not only did I make over to them the Delmar estate, but likewise a considerable sum of ready money. I know that from sentiments of gratitude you are interested in everything which concerns Mr. and Mrs. Howard; and therefore I am happy at having had an opportunity of making you acquainted with these particulars."

I could not help thinking that there was a certain strange significancy in the accents and the looks of the Earl of Eccleston as he thus spoke: but I knew not how to account for it, unless by regarding it as an affectation of the best and kindest feelings towards Mr. Howard and Edith,—though from a few things I had heard on previous occasions, as the reader will recollect, my mind had retained the impression that the young clergyman and his wife had experienced little reason to estimate the friendship or affection of their relatives at a very high value. But then methought that if the Earl and Countess had altered their demeanour, however tardily, towards Mr. and Mrs. Howard, the old adage of "better late than not at all" would powerfully apply.

"Again I wish you well, Joseph," said the Earl of Eccleston; "and again I assure you, in the most solemn, sacred manner, that never will I seek to injure a hair of your head! Did you not save the life of the Countess? And can I—can *she* forget it?"

He once more pressed my hand, and then hurried from the room,—leaving me to reflect upon all that had thus occurred between us. Not many minutes, however, had I for such meditation: for the door soon opened, and Cosmo made his appearance.

“The Earl and Countess of Eccleston are beneath this roof,” I at once said.

“I know it, sir,” responded Cosmo, in his usual quiet manner; “and I was about to communicate the intelligence. They arrived during my absence with the little presents for Captain Notaras.”

“Yes—and I have seen the Earl,” I resumed; “and I am almost confident—indeed I am completely certain that his lordship is *not* leagued in the present instance with Lanover.”

“Did you voluntarily seek an interview with this nobleman?” inquired Cosmo authoritatively.

“I did. It was absolutely necessary that I should ascertain without delay —”

“Well, sir,” interrupted the Italian coldly, “you are the best judge as to the amount of faith to be put in Lord Eccleston’s word: for I myself know nothing of him. If you are satisfied, so much the better: it is all your affair—not mine. But permit me to observe that if through this proceeding on your part any evil should arise —”

“Enough, Cosmo!” I ejaculated somewhat impatiently. “As a general rule I shall not act without your counsel and assistance: but it may happen that circumstances will arise, as in the present case, to afford me an opportunity of obtaining peculiar information by myself. Did you see Captain Notaras?”

“I did, sir,” answered Cosmo; “and in his own blunt sailor-like fashion he expressed his thanks for the presents you sent him.”

“Did he seem to be aware that I had visited his ship?” I inquired.

“He knew it,” was the Italian’s answer: “but he said little more than simply to ask what you thought of it? I assured him, sir, that you were greatly delighted —”

“And did you add,” I exclaimed, “that I sincerely hoped we were not guilty of any obtrusive indiscretion —”

“I did not think it worth while, sir, to touch upon the point,” answered Cosmo; “inasmuch as Captain Notaras himself did not appear to attach any importance to the proceeding.”

Cosmo then retired from my apartment; and I plunged again into my reflections. The longer I thought of what had taken place between myself and the Earl of Eccleston, the more was I satisfied that he had really nothing to do with Lanover’s present proceedings. I had not forgotten how emphatically the Earl had denounced Dorchester as a villain when I placed in his lordship’s hand the abstracted leaf of the Enfield register; and I could not therefore easily suppose that the Earl would now make use of Dorchester as a tool, or that he could be mixed up with any affair in which that man was concerned. I therefore came to the conclusion that the Earl of Eccleston’s name had been mentioned by the delectable pair, in the ruin near Magliano, simply in allusion to the pecuniary remittance made to that town. Other ideas—but more vague and indistinct—of quite a different character and relative to far different subjects—came stealing in unto my

mind; and they occupied my attention until the arrival of the hour at which I usually retired to rest.

It was a little before eleven o’clock when I sought my bed-chamber: and slumber stole in upon me in the midst of my reflections. I had been thinking of the mystery which hung over my birth—I had been wondering whether the cloud of this mystery would ever be dispersed—and whether it were destined for me to be ever clasped in the arms of parents: and I have no doubt that these meditations which I had pursued when awake, imparted their complexion to my dreams. In those visions it appeared as if a female form bent over me as I lay slumbering there—that she murmured fond endearing words—that her lips touched my cheek lightly, as if in fear of awaking me—and that still more lightly upon that cheek fell a tear-drop from her eye. Methought that this continued for some minutes—I mean that the female form continued thus long bending over me: but I could not distinguish her countenance—there was a general though vague impression in my mind that it was a beautiful one—such an impression as was peculiar to dreams, and which appeared to have no positive reason for its existence, inasmuch as not one single feature of the countenance itself could I distinguish. Then all in an instant it appeared as if the countenance touched my own again—the kiss was imprinted with a more perceptible warmth upon my cheek—and it was not one tear-drop only, but several that fell upon my face. I started up, wildly extending my arms to clasp the form of one who it seemed to me had a maternal right thus to lavish her endearments upon me, stealthily bestowed in the deep midnight though they were: but these arms of mine only embraced the empty air. The chamber was involved in deep obscurity: yet it seemed to me as if for a moment I caught the fluttering of some white drapery, and that as it disappeared the sound of the door gently closing reached my ear.

I was all so bewildered that I sat up motionless in bed; and at least a minute elapsed ere I thought of springing forth and hastening to the door. I looked out into the passage—all was dark and all was silent. I had the means in the room of procuring a light; and with the aid thereof I consulted my watch. It was one o’clock in the morning. I returned to my bed, powerfully excited; and I said to myself, “Could it have been a mere vision? was it indeed all a dream?”

I lay meditating. On the one hand my mind suggested that it was really naught but a dream: on the other a secret voice appeared to be whispering in my soul that it was all stamped with reality.

“And yet how foolish!” I said to myself. “Was it not natural that the subjects on which I had been thinking, should give their tone and expression to my dreams?—and is it not ridiculous on my part thus suddenly to grasp at the visions of the night as substantial facts? And yet—and yet that fluttering of the drapery—that sound of the door gently closing—and the moisture too which I felt upon my cheeks!—But no! I myself might have been weeping in my slumber—Alas! I fear that it was all the imagination! Nevertheless—”

But I will not trouble the reader with any more of the reflections, so varied and conflicting,

which kept trooping through my mind, until sleep gradually stole upon my eyes again: and I slumbered uninterruptedly until the morning. Then I again meditated upon the occurrences of the past night: but I had now so comparatively an indistinct notion of them, that it was not until I discovered the traces of having procured a light, I could even assure myself that I had so much as risen from my bed at all.

## CHAPTER CXVIII.

### THE SCHOONER.

It was eight o'clock when I thus rose from my couch; and my toilet being performed, I strolled forth into the town to court the fresh air before breakfast.

It was Sunday morning; and the church-bells were ringing. I walked towards the port, unattended on this occasion by Cosmo—to whom I had not mentioned my intention of issuing from the hotel: and seeking the quay, I stood to gaze upon the Greek schooner which was moored near the little island that lies between the two pier heads. Presently I perceived a boat putting off from the side of that vessel; and manned by six smart rowers, it shot in towards the landing-place exactly fronting the tavern where Captain Notaras lay. I could not help admiring the fine athletic forms of the half-dozen Greek sailors—the man-of-war's-man-like regularity and precision with which they pulled their oars—and the speed with which they sent the boat skimming over the water. As it neared the steps, I observed that the younger of the officers whom I had specially noticed on board the schooner, sat at the helm; and if it were not for the Greek cap which he wore, I should have taken him, by his apparel, for an officer in the undress-uniform of some regular naval service. The boat touched the foot of the stairs; and four of the sailors, accompanied by the officer, hastened up to the wharf. They at once perceived me. I considered it nothing more than an act of becoming courtesy to bow to the officer: and I must confess that I was both surprised and hurt at the cold hauteur with which he acknowledged my salutation. The sailors themselves flung upon me looks which appeared fraught with dislike or mistrust, and which reminded me of the regards the two seamen on the deck of the schooner itself had furtively bent upon me when I was about to leave that vessel on the preceding day.

I was so astonished by this conduct on the part of the Greeks—especially on that of the officer—that I was riveted to the spot; and I gradually found the strange, dim, and vague misgivings of the previous day reviving in my mind. Was there anything really wrong about this vessel?—and could it possibly be supposed by those on board that I had enacted the part of a spy? My looks, turning away from the sailors and the young officer, fixed themselves upon the schooner; and as I contemplated her long, low, beautifully shaped hull—her tapering spars—her masts so mischievously raking—the web-like tracery of her rigging—and as I remembered how its side might suddenly be made to bristle with cannon, I could

no longer put away from my mind the idea that there was something wicked in the aspect of that vessel. I turned to glance in the direction of the sailors and the young officer who had quitted the boat; and I caught sight of them just as they were entering the tavern where Captain Notaras lay. I was about to take my departure from the wharf, and retrace my way to the hotel,—when, as I looked again towards the schooner, my eyes settled upon a speck upon the hitherto black uniformity of her side; and a moment's steadier gaze convinced me that one of her ports was now open. I was certain that until this last instant it had been closed, as the others on the same side were; and I lingered there to see whether these would likewise be now made to display their ordnance. But no: that one port-hole alone remained open.

Again I was turning to depart, when I caught sight of a boat coming away from the pier on the right hand; and the beams of morning glistened on the bright points of bayonets. It was a barge of considerable size; and there might be at least thirty soldiers in it—so that it moved slowly, though ten seamen plied the oars with their strong nervous arms. It was impossible at first to conceive the destination of this boat and its freight. It might be intended for the pier opposite the one where it had started: the object might be to make a sweep round the vessels which lay as it were in a moored mass together, and thus gain the mouth of the harbour with a view of passing out: it might be bound for the citadel: or it even might be to visit the schooner which lay between the little island and the opposite pier just referred to. I stood contemplating this barge for some minutes as it toiled heavily through the water; and then, as I happened to glance down at the schooner's boat, which lay at the bottom of the steps, I perceived the two sailors who had remained in it, standing up and both evidently watching the course of that barge. Then I looked round towards the tavern; and I now beheld a species of litter, which was being borne forth on the shoulders of the four Greek sailors who had proceeded thither—the young officer walking by the side. It did not require a single moment's conjecture to make me aware that the litter contained Captain Notaras, who was about to be conveyed on board his ship. I had now another reason to tarry on the quay: namely, to inquire after the wounded man's health; for despite what my growing suspicions suggested, he was a fellow-creature—and besides, it was quite probable that these suspicions might be utterly erroneous after all. Moreover, I was determined by the frankness of my manner to disabuse those men, if possible, of any unjust construction which they might have put upon my visit to their ship on the previous day.

The litter approached; and on the head of the steps being reached, it was deposited on the quay, so that the sailors might alter their hold upon it previous to carrying it down into the boat. Notaras lay therein,—his naturally repulsive visage looking still more hideous with the ghastly expression which illness and pain had left upon it, and which the presence of a beard of two days' growth did not by any means mitigate. I advanced towards the litter; and it was now impossible to be deceived in respect to the dark scowling looks of

the Greek mariners, or the glance of mingled hate, scorn, and defiance which shot from the eyes of the young officer. Nevertheless, perfectly calm and collected, I advanced towards the litter; and appearing as if unconscious of the ominous regards thus bent upon me, I said to Captain Notaras, "You are changing your quarters somewhat early after so severe an accident."

"Too early do you think?" exclaimed the Captain with a grim malignant smile: and then he gave some hasty command to the men in his own native language.

"I see that I am viewed with mistrust," I said, proudly: "but you are doing me a rank injustice. This assurance I give you, because whatever you may be," I added emphatically, "I would not have it supposed that I sought a miserable subterfuge to go on board your ship for a sinister purpose. I repeat the curiosity which alone prompted me to do so; and am equally sorry to think that I should have taxed in any manner the courtesy of your subordinate in command."

Captain Notaras gave another grim smile—but made no verbal response: his men and the young officer looked very much as if they would have liked to hurl me into the sea, or string me up to the yard-arm of their schooner: but disdaining any further attempt to vindicate myself, I walked away. I did not turn my head to fling another glance upon the litter or those who were conveying it down to the boat; and in two or three minutes a pile of huge blocks of stone, employed for mending the harbour, became interposed between us. Just as I was passing the further angle of that pile, I heard myself called by name; and looking round, beheld Cosmo. He was evidently concealed in this spot; and he at once said, "How could you be so foolish, sir, as to go forth alone after the warning I gave you."

"Are you aware, then," I quickly demanded, "that I incurred any danger?"

"Danger," replied Cosmo, in his sedate quiet manner, "may come from more quarters than one, and may be directed against you by different individuals having different purposes to serve."

"Then you were not just now alluding," I said, "to Mr. Lanover and his accomplices, whoever they may be?"

"No sir—not precisely at that moment."

"Perhaps you were alluding to these Greek mariners?" I observed inquiringly.

"I was," responded Cosmo.

"But how could you possibly be aware——"

"I did not think, sir, for a single moment," he interrupted me, "that you incurred any danger when you visited their ship yesterday: or else I should not have taken you on board. But to-day it is different!"

"And why is it different to-day?" I demanded, astonished and impatient at the ambiguity of the man's speech.

"Because yesterday, sir," rejoined Cosmo, "the Greeks took you only for a mere visitor impelled by curiosity: whereas to-day they take you—pardon the plainness of my speech—for a spy."

"A spy!" I ejaculated, recoiling in disgust from the term, although its announcement only corresponded with the idea that had previously been passing in my mind—I mean in respect to the opinion which the Greeks had formed of me.

"Yes—it is but too true! How do you know it?"

"What is your opinion now, sir, of that ship?" asked Cosmo, as if evading the question which I had just put: and he led me a little way forward, so that the schooner was again brought within the range of our vision.

"I think," I answered, though somewhat hesitatingly—"I think that judging from all I beheld yesterday, and from the suspicious conduct of these men just now—I think, I say, that your schooner is a pirate."

"And I know it," was Cosmo's quiet response.

I could not help trembling for a moment at the risk I had run in going aboard the vessel on the previous day: and then, as something flashed in unto my recollection, I exclaimed in a tone of indignant reproach, "And you knew it all along?"

"I have suspected it for a long time—I mean for some weeks," replied Cosmo: "but I only knew it for a certainty yesterday."

"Yes—and now your conduct is intelligible enough!" I exclaimed, still more angrily and indignantly reproachful than before. "You told me on Friday night, when you first introduced yourself to me, that my services might be rendered available in advancing some object you had in view—and this is the object! You induced me to visit the schooner in order that you might accompany me—you bade me promise fruits and flowers to her invalid captain on shore, in order that you might become the bearer of them——"

"All this is perfectly true, Mr. Wilnot," answered Cosmo, perfectly unruffled: "and I scarcely think you can stretch your ideas of honour to such an extraordinary degree of punctiliousness, as to regret any slight assistance you may have rendered towards the unmasking of the true character of that vessel."

"The mischief is done, and cannot be undone," I answered, still with a certain degree of vexation: "but I do not like being led to play such a part even against pirates. How came they to suspect you—or rather us, as I suppose I ought to say?"

"In the first place," answered Cosmo, "they liked as little as could be, our visit to the ship yesterday, as indeed you could have had no difficulty in observing. Then, I suppose, the circumstance of my taking the little presents to Notaras last night——"

"And perhaps the way in which you may have questioned him," I exclaimed; "added to the circumstance that men whose proceedings are lawless, and who are conscious of wrong, are ever keenly alive to the merest trifle that appears suspicious——"

"No doubt, sir," answered Cosmo. "But you must not be offended with me for what I have done. I saw enough of your disposition the first moment we met, to be convinced that you would not voluntarily lend yourself to succour my project: pardon me therefore for adding that I was resolved to make use of you in spite of yourself. I, as an Italian, could not have obtained admission on board the ship if I had gone thither alone: but you, as an Englishman travelling for your amusement, obtained that admission—and I, as your valet, accompanied you. Then too, accident had made you acquainted with Notaras; and here again I procured that access through your agency

which I could not have obtained by myself alone. However, suspicion has been excited earlier than I thought; and Notaras is having himself conveyed on board his ship."

"But what is now your purpose?" I inquired. "Have you given information to the authorities? do you propose to give it?"

"It is useless," responded Cosmo. "Observe that schooner, sir—she is moored in such a way that the guns of the citadel, if fired upon her, would send their shot through all that forest of masts belonging to the mass of shipping there. She knows she is therefore safe from that quarter: or even if fired upon, you observe that a very few moments would enable her to place her hull completely under that rocky island—and then a few minutes would suffice for her to set her sails and run out of the harbour. She rides at a single anchor; and if she had not time to heave it up, her cable could be slipped, and away she goes!"

"But what means that barge full of soldiers?" I inquired. "From the first moment you assured me yon schooner was a pirate, I had made up my mind that the troops in that barge meditated an attack—"

"Which the pirates would only laugh at, sir," answered Cosmo. "The instant the barge got under the ship's side with a visibly hostile purpose, a weight would be tossed in from the schooner's deck, and she would go to the bottom."

"For the last quarter of an hour," I observed, "she has kept one of her ports open."

"Yes," replied Cosmo,—“as a gentle intimation that if the barge attempts to cut out the boat conveying Captain Notaras, it will be sunk in the twinkling of an eye. But really the soldiers in that barge have no such intention: they are merely conveying a posse of refractory galley-slaves from the prison to the citadel. Look, Mr. Wilmot! the barge now takes the curve necessitated by the line of shipping yonder—and the boat containing Captain Notaras, proceeds tranquilly towards the schooner. Let us return to the hotel. Those fellows on board the corsair will only be detecting us with their glasses; and their suspicion—for after all it can be nothing more than bare suspicion on their part—will be strengthened. They are desperate men—and a rifle-ball is soon sent whizzing about one's ears.”

"I confess that after all you have told me," I observed, as we walked together in the direction of the hotel, "I am totally at a loss to conceive how you purposed to act, even if suspicion had not been thus prematurely aroused. Doubtless you came from Ostia in the first instance to watch this ship?"

"Precisely so," answered Cosmo. "She has been cruising for some few weeks near the Italian coast; and she was boarded a little while back by an Austrian frigate—"

"They fought?" I said inquiringly.

"Oh, no!" responded Cosmo. "The Austrian merely fired a gun to bring the schooner to—and then sent a boat to take an officer on board and see her papers. These were all correct enough; and though the officer had his suspicions, yet there was nothing to warrant a capture."

"Being ignorant of all matters of this sort," I observed, "but yet being interested in the present

one, I wish you would give me some more detailed explanations; for you only vouchsafe comparatively concise answers to my questions."

"I will endeavour to satisfy you, sir," answered Cosmo. "The officer on board the schooner yesterday told you truly enough, that corsairs occasionally appear in the Mediterranean—chiefly in the Levant. For the last two years those waters have been scoured by one more terrible than all others that for many a long year have been known. It has however been principally in the night-time that trading vessels have been boarded, ransacked of everything worth carrying off, and then suffered to proceed on their way. Suppose, for instance, a trader of Greece, Turkey, France, England, Spain, or any other country, pursuing its way to some port on the Levantine or neighbouring shore,—it perceives during the day-time, or usually towards sunset, a schooner painted in gay colours and which approaches nigh enough to hail it. If the trader be a Turk, the schooner runs up the colours of Greece: if the trader be a Greek, the schooner displays the Turkish colours—and then they separate."

"But wherefore this difference of colours for each varying occasion?" I inquired.

"Because the Turkish sailors know very well," replied Cosmo, "that there is no such elegant-looking schooner engaged in their own trade: but they have not the same knowledge in respect to Greek vessels. Therefore when the schooner hoists Greek colours, they set it down as a Greek, and are satisfied. Reverse the description—and it applies equally to the hoisting of Turkish colours to a Greek vessel, or of French colours to an English one—and so forth. The consequence was that for two whole years—indeed until very lately—the gaily painted schooner was never suspected to be anything but an honest trader, wherever it was met. No matter that it was never heard of as discharging or taking in a cargo at any particular port where legitimate commerce is carried on: vessels that traded to one port were told by those on board the schooner when hailed at sea, that she traded to another port."

"Then the schooner has only been recently painted black?" I observed.

"She is constantly changing her hues like a chameleon," answered Cosmo. "I will illustrate what I mean. Suppose a Turkish trader bound from Constantinople to Candia:—when off the coast of Asia Minor, she falls in, we will say, in the afternoon, with a schooner with red and white stripes along her sides, and with beautiful white canvas spread. The Turk is hailed, and answers that she is bound for Candia: the schooner runs up Greek colours, and replies that she is for Alexandria. They separate: the schooner is the best sailer—she tacks—and is soon out of sight. In the middle of the night, as the Turk is pursuing its way, a vessel comes within hail: she is rigged as a schooner—but her hull is jet black; and instead of beautiful white canvas, she has dingy tan-coloured sails flowing from her spars. The work of piracy is effected—the plunder is accomplished,—the sailors of the schooner all wearing black masks, so that their countenances are completely concealed. She bears away; and the unfortunate Turkish captain scarcely dares suspect in his bewilderment that he has been victimised by





the elegant-looking schooner that hailed him in the afternoon."

"This sounds exceedingly like a romance," I observed. "How is it possible that the schooner can so alter its appearance in the space of a few hours?"

"Did you not observe," inquired Cosmo, "that there are at least two dozen men on board that schooner which lies in the harbour of this town? Think you not, therefore, that with the aid of so many hands fresh sails can be bent in a comparatively brief space—or that in the course of an hour the tar-brush can efface all the beautiful paint streaking the sides from stem to stern, and which paint may be renewed on the morrow with an almost equal rapidity?"

"But the captains of vessels thus plundered," I said, "would have sooner or later compared notes with each other——"

"And this is precisely what they have done,"

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interrupted Cosmo,—“until at length it has been taken as a strange coincidence that the appearance of the beautiful-looking schooner during the day should be the certain herald of a piratical attack by a dark gloomy-looking vessel of the same rig at night. Thus suspicion was excited; and as an Austrian trader from Trieste to Smyrna was plundered by the corsair-schooner in the way that I have described, about two months back, his Imperial Majesty’s frigate, the Tyrol, was sent to look out for the cunning but audacious pirate. The Tyrol had not been long at sea, when it fell in with a schooner painted completely black, and answering precisely to the description of the gaily painted one, save and except in reference to that gaudy painting itself.”

“And the sails?” I observed.

“It had its beautiful white canvass set,” answered Cosmo; “and nothing but the streaks of paint were wanting to make it correspond with

the suspected schooner: while, on the other hand, the absence of the dingy-coloured canvass prevented it from corresponding with the corsair-vessel that was wont to attack the traders by night."

"In fact, therefore, the schooner with which the Tyrol fell in," I said, "corresponded precisely with neither—or rather, I suppose I ought to say, with neither of the phases which the *one* corsair was accustomed to assume when playing the part of *two* distinct and different vessels?"

"The matter stood precisely as you have put it, Mr. Wilmot," responded Cosmo. "Well, the Tyrol fired a gun for the schooner to bring to; and she brought to accordingly, at once running up Greek colours. An officer from the Tyrol boarded her as I have already explained to you: and he saw Captain Notaras. In reply to the questions put, Notaras answered that his schooner was named the *Athene*—that she belonged to a respectable Greek firm at Athens—and that she was on her way to the Italian ports to take in a cargo of merchandise. Notaras displayed all the requisite papers to prove that his statements were correct; and when asked why he carried eight carronades, the reply that he gave was as natural as it was ready:—he was armed to protect himself against the formidable corsair-schooner. This interview took place on the schooner's deck: and Notaras did not invite the Austrian officer to descend into his cabin. It was this circumstance which rendered the officer suspicious; but still he had no power to demand that as a right which, if accorded, would have been a mere act of courtesy. In a word, as the papers were all in order—the explanations of Notaras were plausible, and were given in a straightforward manner—and as the seamen of one country are always delicate in dealing with the flag of another—the Austrian lieutenant was compelled to return to his ship to report matters to his commander. The consequence was the *Athene* was suffered to pursue her way."

"And as you are now certain," I said, "that the vessel in this harbour is the *Athene*, you think that she is veritably the formidable pirate itself?"

"Listen, sir," replied Cosmo, "to the progress of my explanations. The Austrian frigate, the Tyrol, on parting with the *Athene*, cruised round upon the western coast of Italy with the intention of watching that schooner's proceedings as far as was possible; and the Tyrol came up as far as Civita Vecchia, where it lay for a little while—"

"I remember Signor Portici telling me," I exclaimed, "that an Austrian frigate was here a short time back—and that must have been the one?"

"The very same," replied Cosmo: "but the Judge did not *then* know for what reason the Austrian frigate was here."

"And did the *Athene* make her appearance at Civita Vecchia during the same time?" I asked.

"No," rejoined Cosmo: "there was a terrific storm soon after she parted from the Tyrol; and, as it was subsequently learnt, she ran first into a Sicilian port—and subsequently anchored for a week or two in the Bay of Naples. Then she proceeded to Ostia at the mouth of the Tiber—whither indeed she was driven by another storm."

"And Ostia is the place where you dwell," I said.

"And where I first saw the *Athene*," answered Cosmo. I will now be very candid with you, Mr. Wilmot," he continued; "for I begin to know you and like you better than at first. There is a large reward offered, by means of a subscription on the part of several mercantile firms in Italy and the Levant, for any one who shall become instrumental in procuring the capture of the pirate that for upwards of two years has been the terror of all the eastern part of the Mediterranean. With the permission—and indeed at the instigation of the chief of the police of Ostia and its district, I determined to embark in the enterprise. I learnt that the *Athene* was coming to Civita Vecchia: hither therefore I came. I was here an entire week, watching the vessel and the proceedings of its crew, without finding myself one single step advanced. At length I resolved to call upon the Chief Judge, Signor Portici, and consult him on the subject. This happened to be the night before last, just after you and his young Greek friend had left the villa. Signor Portici then learnt for the first time how grave were the suspicions which existed against the *Athene*; and I learnt, also for the first time, how powerless the authorities were to make a bold stroke to capture the vessel and hold her till the fullest inquiries could be made of the Greek firm at Athens to which she pretends to belong. Signor Portici bade me use all possible caution;—and he then mentioned your affair to me. I undertook to serve you,—having the idea at the time that I might also, through you, serve my own special end."

"And you have done so," I said. "But how, by a visit to that ship, were your suspicions confirmed that she is really the corsair-schooner?"

"Were those luxuriously fitted cabins appropriate for a simple trading-vessel?" asked Cosmo: "was that hesitation to admit us first of all on board the ship itself, and then down into those cabins, consistent with a calm conscience on the part of Notaras's lieutenant? or was it likely that a simple merchant-captain could afford such luxuries as splendid ottomans, filagree baskets, brocades, silks, velvets, a silver lamp, and the various articles of massive plate which we beheld in that cabin? Or could a mere trader afford to maintain such a numerous crew?"

"And all the while you were so seemingly apathetic when on board," I said, "you were keenly observing—"

"Everything!" answered Cosmo,—"even to the indifference with which men who are accustomed to have their pockets lined with gold, received the drinking-gratuity that you bestowed upon them—aye, and even to the scowling looks that were flung upon you as you passed. All these circumstances cleared up my doubts—if doubts indeed I had previously entertained."

"And your visit to Captain Notaras in the evening, under the pretext—"

"Ah! the fruits and flowers? Well, sir," continued Cosmo, "that was with the hope of leading him into conversation and fathoming his designs—ascertaining his plans, if possible—how long he meant to remain here—or any other little thing that he might have let drop while fancying that he was in discourse with a mere stranger having no special motive to question him. But he had heard of our visit to the ship and was

evidently suspicious. This was another reason for convincing me that I had arrived at a positive certainty with regard to the true character of the *Athene*."

"And now," I said, "there is, I think, but one question more which I have to ask you: and that is—having satisfied your mind that the *Athene* and the corsair-schooner are identical, how do you intend to proceed in order to ensure its capture?"

"When I went for the fruits and flowers last evening to Signor Portici's house," answered Cosmo, "I duly communicated everything to him; and he at once despatched couriers to the different sea-ports off any one of which it is probable that the Austrian frigate *Tyrol* may be cruising—to give her commander the information which will justify him in acting less punctiliously than on the former occasion—in a word, Mr. Wilmot, that he may take prompt and effectual measures for the capture of the schooner. I have now treated you with the utmost candour: it was a duty I owed you in return for the use which I made of your services. You will religiously keep the secret until there shall no longer be a necessity for retaining it;—and I on my part will not leave you until I have done all that man can do to aid you in baffling your enemies."

"Your secret shall be kept," I answered; "and under all the circumstances you have mentioned, I can no longer regret that I was rendered an instrument—though an unconscious one at the time—in furthering your designs against this execrable pirate. But think you that Captain Notaras has not gone on board for the purpose of weighing anchor and running out to sea?—think you not also that should he again spy the *Tyrol*, he will give it a wide berth?"

"The *Tyrol*," answered Cosmo, "is a fast-sailing frigate—these waters are comparatively narrow—and it is not so easy for one ship to elude another as if they were on the bosom of the broad Atlantic or the wide open Pacific. Rest assured, Mr. Wilmot, the *Athene* is a doomed vessel, and that I shall obtain a reward which will grant me a competency for the remainder of my life.—But see!" he said, stopping short at a point in the upper part of the town which commanded a view of the harbour—"there lies the schooner still—so tranquil in its treacherous beauty—not a man upon its yards—not a seaman upon its rigging—no preparation making for departure! Yet the wind is fair; and if Notaras, influenced by his suspicions relative to ourselves, intended to betake himself off, he would already have his sails fluttering loose from their spars and his anchor would be up. But there she lies between the island and the lower pier, just where we saw her from the quay half-an-hour back: she has not moved an inch! It was therefore a mere precaution on the part of Notaras in going on board, so as to be prepared for any eventuality; and this hardihood on his part in keeping his vessel here, will render her capture all the more certain and the more speedy."

"Doubtless," I observed:—and I was about to say something more, when all of a sudden I started—clutched Cosmo by the arm—and hurriedly whispered, but in an excited voice, "Mr. Lanover!"

The vile humpback was just emerging round the corner of an adjacent street; and before he had time to notice me, I had dragged Cosmo under an archway forming the entrance to the mansion of some wealthy personage.

## CHAPTER CXIX.

### SUNDAY EVENING AT THE HOTEL.

ON returning to the hotel with Cosmo, I learnt that Lord and Lady Eccleston, with their dependants, had abruptly taken their departure immediately after an early breakfast, and therefore during the interval that I was walking upon the quay. This sudden movement on their part must no doubt have seemed strange to the people of the hotel: but I could very well guess the reason:—the Earl chose not to remain any longer within the same walls as myself. I however saw in this departure a confirmation of the solemn assurance he had given me, to the effect that he was neither engaged in any plot against me, nor implicated in Lanover's present proceedings: or else he would certainly have remained at Civita Vecchia, if only to lull me the more completely into a false security.

As I was sitting down to breakfast, the waiter handed me a note, with the intimation that he had received it from the Countess of Eccleston's maid, and that he was enjoined to give it me privately. I knew the handwriting; and hastily opening the billet, found that its contents ran as follow:—

"You have nothing to fear, Joseph, on the part of the Earl: you are wrong to suspect him any longer. I invoke heaven to attest the truth of the avowment I now make, to the effect that he will not harm a hair of your head. When you recall to mind every thing that took place in Florence, and the anxiety which I there displayed to be of service to you—when you remember likewise that to you am I indebted for my life—you cannot suppose that danger or mischief threatens you from any quarter where *my* voice could be heard or *my* influence exercised. The Earl is indeed totally at a loss to conceive why Mr. Lanover should propose to molest you—if molestation he really meant. We sincerely hope that you are mistaken. But in case you should be only too well informed on the point—or that your suspicions should be only too well founded—why not at once leave Civita Vecchia? why not proceed to some distant place?—for you are evidently now your own master—you are prosperous; and unfeignedly do I rejoice that such is your improved condition.

"You must not marvel, Joseph, that I take all this interest in your welfare. I repeat what I have before said:—can I ever forget how chivalrously you saved my life at the fearful risk of your own? I need scarcely say the Earl is unaware that I pen this note. Burn it, Joseph, the instant you have perused its contents;—and though circumstances compel me to write thus stealthily, and to express my feelings thus guardedly, yet your welfare is not the less dear to

"CLARA ECCLESTON."

This billet established my convictions beyond the least remaining possibility of doubt, that the Earl of Eccleston had really nothing to do with Lanover's present proceedings. I burnt the note according to the wishes of the Countess: for I considered that I was bound to do so, although I experienced a longing inclination to retain pos-

session of it. Its contents gave rise to many, many reflections: but with these I will not trouble the reader, lest he should imagine that my aim is to extend this narrative to an unnecessary length.

I had promised Cosmo, after we had caught sight of Lanover, that I would not leave the hotel, unless acting by his counsel—and at all events not until he should have ascertained certain requisite particulars with regard to Mr. Lanover's place of abode, his passport, and so forth. Accordingly, after breakfast, I remained in my own apartment, from the window of which I could obtain a view of the port; and of the Athene, which still continued perfectly tranquil in its position between the island and the lower pier. In about a couple of hours Cosmo made his appearance; and I awaited with a considerable degree of suspense the information he might have to give me.

"I have discovered," said Cosmo, "that Mr. Lanover arrived late last night at Civita Vecchia, and that he has taken up his abode at a small inn, or coffee-house, in that very street whence we saw him emerge. I have further ascertained that he travels with his passport duly made out in the name of Lanover—that he uses no fictitious name—and that his passport is altogether in such good order it would be impossible for the police-authorities of the town to raise a quibble upon it: otherwise we might have caused him to be suddenly arrested, and thus frustrate his schemes at once."

"And what do you propose to do?" I inquired.

"It is now my intention," answered Cosmo, "to leave you temporarily—I dare say it will only be for a day or so; because to-morrow, according to the appointment made in the ruin near Magliano, Derehester is to meet Lanover in this town. I shall strip off the livery," proceeded Cosmo, "which I assumed to give a colour to my connection with yourself; and resuming my plain clothes, shall go and take up my quarters at the coffee-house where Lanover is lodging. You must remain in-doors until you see me again."

This injunction I promised to obey; and Cosmo then took his departure. The hours passed wearily enough: for my mind was for many reasons too unsettled to allow me to sit down quietly to read; and I do verily believe that during those slowly passing hours I reviewed over and over again every incident of my adventurous life.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when the waiter entered my apartment, to announce that a gentleman desired to see me. A card was handed to me; and I read the name of Constantine Kanaris. I at once bade the waiter admit the visitor: for it struck me that he had come with a message from Signor Portici—because if it were otherwise, he would not have disobeyed the hint he had received from the Judge to keep away from me for the present. Kanaris entered, enveloped in a handsome dark blue cloak lined with sables; and in contrast with which his red Greek cap appeared picturesquely striking. The wind was blowing strong and chill; and it was therefore no wonder that he should have thus shielded himself against it by means of that warm and ample garment.

Having cordially shaken me by the hand, Kanaris let the cloak fall from his shoulders—tossed away his red fez—and sat down with me in front of the cheerful fire that was burning in the grate. The wind had imparted a glowing flush to his cheeks; and he appeared handsomer even than when we first met.

"I hope, my dear Mr. Wilmot," he said, "that there is no indiscretion in my intrusion at such an hour?—and I must at once put you at your ease with the assurance that it is not merely with Signor Portici's cognizance, but also with his consent, that I am here."

"Do you bring any note or message from the worthy Judge?" I inquired.

"Nothing," replied Kanaris, "beyond his kindest wishes—and also everything properly complimentary from my Leonora."

"Do not for an instant suppose, Signor Kanaris," I said, "that there is any unwelcome intrusion on your part. On the contrary, you are most welcome. I was sitting dull enough by myself here—and was longing for companionship of any kind. Signor Portici is under existing circumstances one of the best judges as to whether it be expedient for you to visit me; and since he has given his consent, there need be no more said upon the subject."

"I must frankly avow, my dear Mr. Wilmot," answered the young Greek, "that it was not without much intercession on my part I obtained the consent of Signor Portici to this visit. I assured him—and most truly assured him—that I had conceived a friendship for you—a friendship which I flattered myself to be mutual—and that I therefore longed to see you again. Besides, in my own imagination I pictured you just as you have described yourself, and just as I found you—sitting all alone, in no particularly good spirits—nay, more, feeling yourself a complete stranger in a strange country, and not knowing how to while away the time under these dispiriting influences. The Judge admitted the force of all my reasoning, and at length gave his assent that I should visit you, on condition that I did so under circumstances as cautious as possible. So I left the sweet society of my Leonora an hour earlier than I should have otherwise done, in order to pass this hour with you."

There was an off-hand kindness—a frank cordiality, together with a genial warmth in the tone and manner of Constantine Kanaris, as he thus spoke, which more than ever made me rejoice in having formed the friendship of one who appeared to combine the most amiable disposition with the loftiest sentiments and noblest thoughts. His friendly behaviour naturally disposed me to exhibit the utmost confidence towards him; and I was just upon the point of explaining all the circumstances of my position in respect to Lanover and his plans, when I bethought me that perhaps Signor Portici himself might possibly have given him some hint on the subject,—which could not have been deemed a breach of confidence, considering that Kanaris was soon to be so closely connected with himself, and that he exhibited so much sincere friendship towards me. I therefore said, "Perhaps our mutual friend the Judge has afforded you some insight into the affairs which have brought me to Civita Vecchia?"

"No, not in the least degree," replied the young Greek, with the most open-hearted frankness. "The Judge never talks of the affairs of others, unless they be the subject of common conversation. Do not misunderstand me, my dear Mr. Wilmot," Constantine hastened to add: "I come not hither through any motives of impertinent curiosity—"

"No such assurance is necessary!" I ejaculated, pained at the idea that he should think it was: and then I was about to give him the fullest explanations, when it suddenly struck me that I really was not a free agent in the matter. I had in the first instance sought Signor Portici's counsel, and he had advised me to maintain the utmost caution and reserve. Cosmo—the intelligent Cosmo—was working for me; and I felt that I ought to do nothing without his concurrence. I remembered likewise how dissatisfied he was at the step I had taken in seeking an interview with the Earl of Eccleston without his previous knowledge,—notwithstanding that the result of that interview was the clearing-up of one point desirable to be ascertained. As these considerations flashed through my mind, I resolved to hold my peace, even though Constantine might look upon my reserve as savouring of an unfriendly want of confidence.

Kanaris however seemed to have no thought upon the subject—but at once began discoursing on general topics with the well-bred ease and readiness of one whose sole object was to render himself agreeable. I rang the bell and ordered up wine. Kanaris then produced his cigar-case,—saying with a smile, "I presume these being bachelors' quarters, may be treated as such."

"Certainly," I responded, accepting one of the cigars for companionship's sake, although indeed I very seldom smoked.

"And what on earth have you been doing with yourself all yesterday and to-day, in this dull town?" inquired Kanaris after a brief pause in the conversation.

"To-day I have not been out since the morning," I answered: "but yesterday—"

"Ah! by the bye, yesterday I heard of you," interjected Constantine: "for according to promise I called upon that poor fellow who broke his leg with his rash and inexperienced horsemanship."

"Yes," I responded, suddenly colouring deeply at the idea that Notaras had since taken me for a spy: "I visited him yesterday."

"And you most kindly proffered him a few little elegancies and delicacies which his own poor tavern could not furnish. He mentioned the circumstance," added Constantine, "when I called upon him—which was about an hour after you had been with him."

"And have you seen him since?" I inquired, studying the young Greek's countenance: for I felt that not for the world would I have him think that I had been consciously and willingly enacting the part of a spy, or aiding another to do so.

"No, I have not seen him since," answered Constantine, who was smoking his cigar in a manner of careless leisurely ease which led me to infer that he was treating the topic as a mere casual one;—so that my mind was instantaneously at ease. "I called at his tavern again this forenoon," proceeded Kanaris; "but I learnt that he had gone on board his ship—and as I was too

anxious to see my Leonora I did not think it worth while to follow him thither. Not but that as a fellow-countryman of mine, I would show him every attention: but I naturally concluded that if he were well enough to suffer himself to be moved, it would be little more than an idle compliment for me to take so much trouble to inquire after his health."

I was just on the point of stating that I myself had been on board the schooner, when it struck me that such an announcement might give a turn to the conversation trenching upon the sanctity of the secret with which Cosmo had entrusted me; and therefore I held my peace. But this necessity of keeping a guard over my conduct and weighing every word ere I gave utterance to it, made me feel awkward and embarrassed, and excited a sensation as if I were maintaining a cold and unfriendly reserve with one whose behaviour and demeanour towards myself were of such a very opposite character.

"I think however," said Kanaris, continuing the strain of his discourse, "I shall go and call on Notaras to-morrow, for two reasons—in the first place to ascertain how he progresses under the serious injury he has sustained, and in the second place to have an opportunity of seeing that vessel of his. Are you astonished, my dear friend," exclaimed Constantine, laughing, "that I should exhibit this much curiosity?"

"No, no," I said, somewhat confusedly: "but—"

"I think I told you," proceeded Kanaris, who did not appear to have noticed my interjection, as he was lighting another cigar at the time,—"that I may boast the relationship of the great Greek commander; and as I have often and often been on board my uncle's ships, I have somewhat of a fancy for nautical matters. I was looking at that schooner yesterday; and it certainly strikes me to be a beautiful model of a vessel—"

"There can be no denying," I said, "that it is one of the most beautiful ever seen."

"Perhaps you will accompany me on board?" observed Kanaris carelessly, as he threw himself loungingly back in his seat. "But, Ah! I forgot that we must not be seen together for the present. Well, I must go alone then to-morrow—in the forenoon—before I pay my usual visit to the Portici Villa."

"I have already been on board that schooner," I said, now perceiving how useless it would be to suppress a fact which Constantine was sure to ascertain on the morrow,—and the suppression of which, moreover, would naturally appear most strange and suspicious in his eyes.

"Ah—indeed!" he observed. "And when? Notaras did not tell me that he had sent you on board his vessel to visit it—and, now that I bethink me, he was not courteous enough to make me a similar offer. But is she really worth seeing?—or is she crammed to the very hatchways with merchandize—and belying, with the dirt, dust, and confusion of her interior, the cleanliness, beauty, and elegance which seem to characterize her externally?"

"I think you will be much surprised," I answered, not choosing to avoid the topic pointedly, although by the listless conversational manner in which Kanaris was pursuing the theme, it seemed

as if it were easy to direct his attention to any other topic,—“I think you will be much surprised with the general appearance of the vessel. It is exceedingly neat in all its appointments—superior too for a trader—But then I am no judge,” I added, assuming an indifferent off-hand manner to the best of my ability. “I have never been on board more than two or three vessels in my life—including the steamer which conveyed me from England to France when I first came upon the Continent.”

“And I cannot profess to be anything of a sailor,” observed Kanaris. “I am sorry to say,” he added with a sigh, “I inherit very little indeed of my uncle’s enthusiasm for the sea.”

“I could tell that you were no very great judge,” I observed smiling, “with regard to those subjects: because you spoke of that schooner being probably filled with merchandise to its very hatchways—whereas if it really were, it would not lie so buoyant upon the water—but its gunwale would be much deeper down.”

“Ah—true!” said Kanaris carelessly, as he knocked off the ashes of his cigar. “Why, you are even better versed in nautical matters than I am,” he exclaimed, laughing. “After all, though, I wonder that Captain Notaras should have exchanged his comparatively comfortable room at a tavern for a wretched, narrow, cheerless cabin on board a merchant-vessel.”

“I think you will be somewhat surprised,” I said, “at the dimensions and the comfort of the quarters in which you will find Captain Notaras to-morrow. But there is one point,” I added, “on which I really must touch, since the conversation has taken the present turn: for I would not for the world be unjustly prejudiced in your estimation—”

“Prejudiced, my dear friend?” exclaimed Kanaris, with astonishment depicted on his countenance. “What on earth can you mean?—who could prejudice you in my eyes?—who would undertake such an impossible task? Pray, for heaven’s sake, let us change the topic at once.”

“Not so,” I rejoined. “A thousand thanks for your kind opinion of me; and I hold it not so lightly that I choose to run the risk of losing it.”

“But really, my dear Mr. Wilmot,” said Kanaris, with an air of the most friendly concern, “it is so absolutely unnecessary—so painful to my feelings—”

“Bear with me for a few minutes,” I interrupted him; “and you will see that I have sufficient reason for speaking thus.”

“Then proceed,” said Kanaris, but with a deprecating smile, as much as to imply that if I were wilfully bent upon having my own way, it was useless for him to offer farther remonstrance and I must therefore have it.

“A few words,” I said, “will convey the entire truth. Yesterday, after having called upon Captain Notaras, I was loitering on the quay admiring the schooner, when a domestic whom I had taken into my service, proposed to call a boat that I might go on board. This was done; and I visited the vessel,—impelled, as heaven is my witness, by curiosity only. Yet this morning when I went forth to breathe the fresh air before breakfast, and chanced to behold Captain Notaras as he

was being conveyed to a boat—and when too I accosted him with all becoming courtesy—I found myself rudely treated by himself, scornfully regarded by one of his officers, and scowlingly looked upon by his men. But whatsoever suspicion those persons may have entertained—”

“And what possible suspicion could they have entertained?” asked Kanaris, fixing his eyes upon me with an air of bewildered astonishment.

“All that I wish you to understand, my friend,” I rejoined, “is that whatsoever sinister motives may be imputed by Captain Notaras, when next you see him, to my visit to his vessel, are utterly and totally false.”

“And is this all you have to say, my dear Mr. Wilmot?” inquired Constantine. “It really was not worth so many words on your part to justify yourself against a misrepresentation which has not yet been made to me—which perhaps never will be made—but which, if made at all, would at once be repelled with scorn and contempt. But, by the bye, I think you said that you had a valet with you? Did he in any way misconduct himself? was he impertinently prying and curious, as valets are apt to be sometimes—”

“So far from it,” I answered, “that my valet appeared to be perfectly indifferent as to all he saw.”

“Ah, well!” cried Kanaris, “you know the man doubtless—he is steady and respectable, I hope—because, my dear friend, I have had a little experience of these Italian domestics, and some of them are terrible deceitful fellows.”

“This man, I can assure you,” I interjected, “was most strongly recommended to me by a gentleman of position, rank, and distinction.”

“Then all we can say is that my Greek fellow-countrymen of the schooner,” observed Kanaris, “must have laboured under some egregious misconception. But when I think of it,” he added, after a few moments’ silence, “it is possible that Notaras may do a trifle in the smuggling way. I do not pledge myself, you know”—and he laughed good-humouredly as he spoke—“for the integrity of the captain of any Greek trader, although he be a fellow-countryman of mine. If the surmise which has thus suddenly struck me be correct—and if Notaras deals in the contraband—it will at once account for the suspicious circumstances you have mentioned.”

“And if he dealt in contraband or anything else,” I observed, “could he suppose that I should purposely seek his vessel with a view of espying or betraying his proceedings?”

“It is simply preposterous—indeed it is laughable,” ejaculated Kanaris; “and if you have taken so much trouble to disabuse me of a prejudice which could not possibly be inculcated, it was a sad waste of words indeed. However, as I see that you choose to stand right with everybody, I will tell this to Captain Notaras to-morrow—if I do take it into my head to visit his ship, which is barely probable, after his rude boorish conduct towards you,—but if I do, I say, I will take very good care to speak my mind on the subject. And now, having trespassed thus long upon you, and extended my visit to two hours instead of one,” he added, looking at his watch, “I bid you farewell for the present.”

Constantine Kanaris resumed his cloak and fea



—lighted another cigar—shook me warmly by the hand—and took his departure. I was more than ever pleased with my Greek friend; and I could not help congratulating myself on the manner in which I had succeeded in conducting my discourse relative to the schooner without in the faintest degree trenching upon the sanctity of Cosmo's secret, or betraying my knowledge of the mysterious character of that vessel.

"Kanaris himself," I thought, "is totally unsuspecting of the real nature of that vessel; and it is therefore evident that Signor Portici has breathed not into his ear a single syllable of whatsoever he himself may have heard from Cosmo upon the subject. The judge is a shrewd man: for not even to the intended husband of his niece does he discourse on matters which prudence recommends him to keep within his own breast."

## CHAPTER CXX.

### THE COFFEE-HOUSE.

THE following day was Monday—that Monday on which Mr. Lanover and Mr. Dorchester were to meet together in Civita Vecchia. In pursuance of Cosmo's injunctions, I remained carefully secluded in my own apartments at the hotel. I rose early—for I was full of suspense in respect to what the day might bring forth: the breakfast passed away almost untasted; and scarcely conscious of what I was doing, I presently found myself posted at the window which commanded a view of the port. There lay the Athene, just in the same position as that in which I had before seen her: not one single inch did she appear to have moved—and not the slightest sign was there of any intention to set sail.

The hours passed; and it was not until about three o'clock in the afternoon that Cosmo made his appearance. He entered hastily; and with far more excitement than he was accustomed to exhibit, he exclaimed, "Come, sir—quick, quick! there is not an instant to be lost! Come and all will be well—or at least I hope so."

I snatched up my hat and hastened to accompany Cosmo: he said not another word—indeed there was no time for explanation, with such speed did he hurry me off. We passed out of the back of the hotel, where there was a private gate; and he led me through several bye-ways and alleys,—his intention evidently being to avoid the principal streets. At length we reached a small mean-looking tailor's shop, which we entered. The tailor himself was at work upon a pair of pantaloons which already appeared too ancient and too well pieced to endure much more patching. The moment we made our appearance, he flung the garment aside—nodded significantly to Cosmo—and at once led the way to an inner room. Thence a door opened into a little back-yard, whither Cosmo bade me follow him; and as he passed by the tailor, who stood at the door, he dropped a piece of gold into his hand. I therefore understood that this was the fee for the service which he was performing—though what its precise nature was, I could not immediately divine.

A few instants, however, showed me. Cosmo

leaping upon an inverted tub, quickly sealed the low wall which separated the tailor's yard from the one at the back of another house; and I as quickly followed. The back door of this second house was standing open: a woman immediately made her appearance—and by her significant looks I saw that she likewise, as well as the tailor, was in Cosmo's interest. She said a few words to him; and turning to me, he observed, "We are in plenty of time."

The woman then led us up a staircase, into a small back parlour on the first floor—where she left us.

"Look!" said Cosmo; "there is but a thin wainscot between this room and the next. Place your ear against it—I will go into the other room and speak in a conversational tone. See if you can catch what I say."

He did as he intimated; and I could plainly hear every syllable he uttered. He returned to me; and I told him that such was the fact.

"We may now sit down and converse," he said, "until we hear footsteps ascending the stairs. But by the bye, we will take this precaution:"—and he locked the door.

"Now, what does all this mean?" I anxiously inquired. "Are we, as I surmise, in the coffee-house—?"

"Yes—where Lanover is residing, and where Dorchester has also taken up his temporary quarters."

"Ah! then Dorchester has arrived?" I ejaculated.

"Listen to what I have to tell you," rejoined Cosmo. "Mr. Lanover occupies the adjoining room as his parlour. He was out nearly the whole of yesterday; and as I had not been able to follow him in the first instance, I did not think it worth while to go searching after him—perhaps uselessly; and I therefore remained here laying my plans. As you have seen, I succeeded in winning over—with little trouble indeed—the woman of the coffee-house, and the tailor in the adjacent dwelling: for I foresaw the necessity of securing a safe means of ingress and egress for yourself when the proper time should come. You understand wherefore? I do not comprehend English; and it is of course in their own native tongue that Lanover and Dorchester will converse: so that you must be the listener. Lanover returned to his lodging at an early hour last evening; and he soon went to bed. This morning, immediately after breakfast, he told the landlady that an English gentleman would come to the house in the course of a few hours—and that if he (Lanover) were not in at the time, the woman was to say he would be certain to return between three and four o'clock. He then went out. I arranged with the woman everything that was to be done. It was a little before three that the Englishman arrived, giving the name of Dorchester. He inquired for Mr. Lanover; and the message was delivered according to Lanover's instructions. Mr. Dorchester then said that he should leave his trunk here, as he might stay a day or two, or he might be off immediately after his interview with Mr. Lanover—it was quite uncertain. The landlady showed him to a bed-room, apologising for not being able to give him a parlour: and this she did in order that the interview

between the two plotters must necessarily take place in Lanover's room, so that you and I might have possession of this one. Dorchester said he should go out to look at the town for half-an-hour or so, as he had never been here before; and then I instantaneously hurried off to fetch you."

"And so Mr. Dorchester," I said, "is passing under his right name, the same as Lanover is with his own?"

"Yes—these men are evidently wary enough," replied Cosmo. "Perhaps we shall have leisure and occasion to ascertain whether Dorchester's passport is all correct—And yet the inquiry can be scarcely worth the trouble: for, as I have just observed, men of his character usually adopt every precaution to keep themselves beyond the reach of the passport laws."

"And Dorchester, too," I added, "is well acquainted with the Continent. I have already told you the trick that he played me in Paris, and how I subsequently found him dwelling like a hermit amongst the Apennines—but a very dangerous sort of anchorite, though; for he was in league with Marco Uberti's band."

"Ah!" said Cosmo, "if we could only manage to find the scoundrel within the limits of the Tuscan States, we would hand him over to the strong grasp of the law. However, in carrying out our present business, Mr. Wilmot, it is to be hoped that we shall catch both Lanover and Dorchester tripping—in which case the Roman law will not spare them. By the bye, you had a visit last night from the young Greek gentleman who is engaged to be married to Signor Portici's niece?"

"Yes—I was going to tell you of it at our leisure," I answered. "But," I added, with a smile, "you must not chide me on this occasion—"

"No," responded Cosmo, "for I am aware that Signor Kanaris visited you with the Judge's full consent. I called at the villa last evening, when I knew that Lanover was safe in bed; and Signor Portici informed me that he had stretched a point in your favour in respect to that visit on the part of Signor Kanaris. There could indeed be no harm under the circumstances: for the only objects in keeping you secluded, were to prevent you from being seen by Lanover or Dorchester—or, if seen, to prevent them from having any reason to suspect that you were in any way acquainted with the Judge or with his friends. For of course it was impossible to conjecture in the first instance what ramifications Lanover's plot might have—who were his acquaintances at Civita Vecchia—or who his spies. For when people are working in the dark—as is comparatively the case with us—they have to take a thousand precautions, many of which may eventually prove to be needless ones, but none of which ought to be neglected."

"All you say is perfectly correct," I remarked.

"As for Signor Kanaris," continued Cosmo, "he would no doubt cheerfully lend you his aid if it were required; inasmuch as from all I can learn from Signor Portici's lips, he is a young gentleman of the noblest disposition, the kindest heart, and the most honourable sentiments. He has moreover conceived the utmost friendship for you; and therefore Signor Portici permitted him to break in upon your lonely dullness."

"But I can assure you," I said, "I was perfectly discreet, and spoke not of my private affairs to Signor Kanaris."

"You were right," answered Cosmo. "Never in personal matters make a confidant unnecessarily—especially on a short acquaintance. The evils which arise from an over friendly communicativeness are incalculable; and even when dealing with so honourable a man as this young Greek, it is better to be on the safe side and maintain a suitable reserve. Such is the course which Signor Portici himself invariably adopts, as he has assured me; such too is my own policy—and therefore, Mr. Wilmot, I hope you will excuse this long lecture which I am taking the liberty of giving."

"I more than excuse you—I thank you," was my response. "Indeed, when casting a retrospective glance over my own career, I find illustrations of the truth of your maxims. I behold instances in which if I had exercised a little more reserve instead of being too prone to frank and friendly communicativeness—if in a word I had been less confiding, I should have escaped several calamities. My adventures with the villain Dorchester himself furnish cases in point—"

"Hush!" suddenly ejaculated Cosmo: "footsteps are ascending!"

I listened; and in a few moments whispered, "I know those footsteps—they are Dorchester's!"

Almost immediately afterwards we heard Mr. Dorchester enter the adjoining room; and he put some inquiry in Italian to the landlady of the coffee-house—for I should observe that he spoke the Italian language with ease and fluency. The woman answered him; and Cosmo whispered to me, "He is merely asking whether Mr. Lanover is yet returned; and she has just replied in the negative. But here he is."

Again we heard footsteps ascending: I knew them to be the heavy stamping tread of the villainous humpback; and I at once took my position against the wainscot which divided the two rooms so that I might be ready to catch whatsoever tragedy spired between the two plotters. We heard the door of the next apartment was carefully shut by Lanover; and then his harsh jarring voice said, "You are faithful to your appointment."

"Where there is money to be earned," responded Dorchester, "I am not likely to be found wanting. May I hope that you received the remittance which you expected at Magliano, and of which you spoke to me?"

"Yes, yes," replied Lanover: "Lord Eccleston kept his word. If he had not, I should have found myself utterly unable to prosecute this enterprise. The former one, as you are well aware, was altogether ruined by that young scoundrel Joseph Wilmot—"

"Ah, young scoundrel indeed!" ejaculated Dorchester. "Only think that he should have been the means of breaking up that glorious band—"

"Well, well," interrupted Lanover impatiently; "we have not met here to discuss past occurrences, but to carry out present enterprises. What have you to tell me?"

"On parting from you at Magliano," responded Dorchester, "I proceeded at once, according to your instructions, to Leghorn—"

"I suppose that you were well disguised?" in-



terjected Lanover: and now his harsh jarring voice sent forth a chuckling sound.

"Trust me for that!" ejaculated Dorchester. "Who knows the art of disguise so well as I do?—and furnished with three or four different passports to suit the various disguises which I am thus able to assume—those passports likewise being all made out in different names——"

"But do come to the point!" interrupted Lanover. "What did you do?"

"Everything you told me," answered Dorchester. "I went to Leghorn—found all the birds there—took up my abode at the same hotel—got acquainted with them—made myself most agreeable to the old gentleman——"

"And they are there now?" cried Lanover eagerly.

"Yes—there now," returned Dorchester.

"And how long will they stop?" demanded Lanover.

"Only a few days more—and then they propose to return to England. If it had not been for Sir Matthew Hoseltine's illness after that affair with Marco Uberti's band, they would have proceeded straight to England at once. But his sickness was, as you are aware, most dangerous: and the physicians ordered him to Leghorn——"

"I know all that," observed Lanover impatiently. "Now, answer me a few questions. You say you have got on pretty friendly terms with the old Baronet?"

"Excellent," answered Dorchester.

"And Mrs. Lanover—and Annabel?"

"They are rather reserved towards all strangers—but still courteous enough to me——"

"And did you walk or ride out with them at all?" proceeded Lanover: "did you plan excursions? For remember, I told you to be particular on these points——"

"And I was," rejoined Dorchester. "Several

times I accompanied the Baronet and the ladies for an airing in their carriage: on two occasions, when the weather was exceedingly fine, I proposed a boating excursion, assuring Sir Matthew that the sea air would do him a world of good. We went—and the old Baronet invited me to dine in the evening.”

“Nothing can be better!” exclaimed Lanover gleefully: “you have indeed acquitted yourself well. And now answer me candidly—do not for an instant overrate the amount of influence you have acquired with Sir Matthew and those ladies! Do you think, when you go back to Leghorn, that you will be enabled to pursue the same game—and induce them, for instance, to accompany you on an excursion?”

“No doubt of it!” responded Dorchester. “I have no hesitation in speaking thus confidently.”

“Good!” said Lanover. “And now, in reference to that young reprobate Wilmot—have you heard anything of him since we parted?”

“Nothing,” returned Dorchester. “I had not forgotten your instruction to keep a sharp watch as to whether he maintained any correspondence with Sir Matthew, Mrs. Lanover, or Annabel Bentinck——”

“Ah! they have given the girl her proper surname,” exclaimed Lanover, with a scornful chuckle: “as is if I cared one single straw on that account! But go on. Did you discover any indication of such correspondence?—did Annabel herself receive no letters secretly?”

“Nothing of all this,” answered Dorchester. “I constantly watched the arrival of the postman, who deposited all letters at the porter’s lodge in the first instance; and I was invariably there to look over them, under pretence of being anxious about certain missing correspondence of my own. From all the supervision I was thus enabled to exercise, I can confidently answer that the Baronet and the ladies received no letters from Joseph Wilmot.”

“Good!” again ejaculated Lanover. “I fear that young marplot more than anything else.”

“So you informed me at our place of appointment at Magliano,” observed Dorchester; “and considering the way in which he previously baffled you when the Baronet and his family were so nicely in the power of Marco Uberti, it is really no wonder you spoke so bitterly against young Wilmot. But how is it, friend Lanover,” inquired Dorchester, now assuming a chuckling laugh in his turn, “that you have such influence with the Earl of Eccleston as to be enabled to draw upon his purse for so fine a sum as a thousand pounds at one time?”

“Look you, friend Dorchester!” answered the humpback, with stern fierceness: “I did not bid you meet me here to become the questioner, but to give me an account of the matters in which I am employing you.”

“Oh, very well,” ejaculated Mr. Dorchester, in his most conciliatory tone: “pray do not be offended—it was merely a little venial curiosity on my part.”

“Well, well,” said Lanover, more mildly, “the excuse is sufficient. But if I told you, when we met at Magliano, that I was expecting that remittance from the Earl of Eccleston—and if I so specifically mentioned the sum—it was only to convince you that I had ample means to remunerate

you liberally for the important services I then required and may still need at your hands. I think we have now little more to say——”

“Little more to say?” ejaculated Dorchester, in a tone of astonishment. “But your instructions as to what next I am to do——”

“These are given in a very few words,” replied Lanover. “You may get back to Leghorn as fast as possible——”

“Then surely,” interrupted Dorchester, “a letter from Leghorn in the first instance, acquainting you with all I have just been saying by word of mouth, would have sufficed?”

“I am surprised at you!” ejaculated Lanover. “What! trust to the post-office such important matters as these?—risk everything to the thousand and one accidents which constantly befall written correspondence?”

“Well—perhaps after all,” said Dorchester, “too much caution cannot be used.”

“All the incidents of my life,” rejoined Lanover, “have more and more shown me the necessity of caution. This is perhaps the last opportunity I shall have of compelling old Sir Matthew to make suitable concessions; and I am not going to throw it away foolishly. When once he gets back to England, there is an end of every hope, unless the blow be struck beforehand. Things can be done on the Continent which if only put into a novel or romance in our own native country, would be deemed preposterous. But we are wasting precious time in these unnecessary comments. It is now half-past four o’clock—and I have got another appointment for five.”

“Here?” asked Dorchester.

“Yes—here,” replied Lanover, “in this room. Therefore now, without another word of useless parley, listen to my instructions. As soon as you have got your dinner, you must start off again for Leghorn. Return to the same hotel—render yourself more agreeable than ever to Sir Matthew and the ladies—and be prepared to obey whatsoever instructions may in the course of a few days be conveyed to you in a note from me. And now you will understand one of the reasons why I deemed it expedient that we should have a personal interview here. I have arranged a mode by which we may communicate in cypher, or secret writing, and which I had not time to combine and adjust when we met at Magliano: for, as you are aware, I was then in all possible haste to get off to Naples on important business. This is the cypher I have arranged for our purpose—another precaution, you perceive, against the evils resulting from the miscarriage of letters. If I and Marco Uberti had only corresponded at the time by such means, that young marplot Joseph Wilmot would never have found out my proceedings when he examined the contents of my pocket-book at Pistoja.”

Lanover and Dorchester now conversed together for some minutes in so low a tone, that I could scarcely catch a word they said. I only heard enough to prove to me that the humpback was explaining to his companion the particular cypher to be adopted for their secret correspondence; but I obtained not the slightest clue to the comprehension thereof. Vainly did I keep my breath suspended—fruitlessly did I exert all the keenest powers of my auscultatory faculty: I could

not gather that which it would have been of so much importance to learn.

"And now you understand?" said Lanover, his voice again becoming completely audible.

"A child may understand it," answered Dorchester, "after the explanation you have given: but without such explanation the astutest genius will fail to penetrate the secret of a letter written in this cypher."

"Good!" said Lanover. "And now our conference is at an end. Lose no time in setting off for Leghorn; and in the course of a few days—indeed, as early as possible—you will receive a letter written in that cypher and conveying instructions which you must carefully follow out. Here is a further supply of money for your expenses—and here, too, is an additional earnest of what my liberality will be when the work is completed."

The sounds of gold ringing upon the table in the adjacent room met the ears of Cosmo and myself; and then I heard Dorchester say, "Rest assured, friend Lanover, you may rely upon me to the utmost. If it be in my power to crown your project with success, it shall be successful."

They then separated,—Dorchester issuing from the room and descending the stairs—Lanover remaining behind in the apartment. I made a sign to Cosmo to intimate that the information I had obtained was most important: and almost immediately afterwards we heard other footsteps upon the staircase which Dorchester had just descended. These were ascending; and the landlady of the establishment, throwing open the door of Lanover's room, introduced some male visitor. She then retired; and I heard Lanover say in French, "You are most welcome—I was expecting you. Captain Notaras promised that you should be with me at five punctually."

"And we are always punctual, Mr. Lanover," was the response, "when business is to be done."

The individual who thus spoke, was none other than Notaras's lieutenant, or mate—whichever his title were—who had shown me and Cosmo over the *Athene*: for I recognised his voice in an instant.

## CHAPTER CXXI.

### FARTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLOT.

I PASS over for the present a description of all the varied feelings that were excited within me by the conversation which had taken place between Lanover and Dorchester: but I must pause for an instant to remark how immense was my astonishment, coupled too with a species of stupefying terror, on hearing the name of Captain Notaras thus suddenly mentioned. The pirates and everything relative to the schooner were as far away from my thoughts at the instant as if they were not in existence at all: and when they were so abruptly brought back to my recollection, I was stricken with wonderment and dismay at the idea that those terrible corsairs were indubitably mixed up in the nefarious plans of Lanover. For what else could I think than that the villain who was capable of consigning Sir Matthew Heselstine, his daughter, and

granddaughter to the power of Marco Uberti's ferocious band, was equally capable of invoking the aid of a horde of detestable pirates in order to carry out his views? All the interest which had been excited within me by that vessel of dark treacherous beauty, now appeared in the light of a presentiment, though utterly uncomprehended at the time. When the first influence of wonderment and dismayed terror had in a few moments passed by, I shuddered to the deepest confines of my being—throughout every nerve and fibre—to the uttermost extremities of my form, at the bare thought that my beloved Annabel, with those who were near and dear to her, should be handed over to the power of a gang of lawless freebooters!

Cosmo,—who was now enabled, as well as myself, to comprehend what was passing in the next room, inasmuch as Lanover and the lieutenant were conversing in French—the vile humpback, be it observed, not understanding the Greek tongue nor Italian either,—Cosmo, I say, had expressed his own astonishment by a slight start on hearing the name of Captain Notaras mentioned. He was evidently as much amazed as myself at the fact that the pirates should thus suddenly become in any way mixed up with Lanover's affairs; and it must also have stricken him as most singular that the two objects which had originally brought himself and me from distinct parts of Italy to Civita Vecchia, and which objects had hitherto appeared so totally unconnected, should now all in a moment meet at the same point and become as it were amalgamated. But while I am giving range to these comments I am losing sight of the conversation which was taking place between Lanover and Notaras's lieutenant in the adjoining room. With respect, however, to Notaras himself, the very first portion of the discourse which Cosmo and I were now listening to, placed the real rank and position of that individual in a new and different light—or rather in a new and diminished phase, though under the same sinister light,—and which Cosmo had hitherto no more suspected than I myself had.

The reader will recollect that when the lieutenant entered the adjoining room, Lanover at once observed that the visitor was expected according to the promise of Captain Notaras, whereupon the lieutenant, had made a brief but suitable reply; and Lanover requested him to be seated.

"You have just spoken of Captain Notaras," said the Greek visitor; "and I am aware that you have all along imagined Notaras to be the captain of the *Athene*—"

"And is he not so?" exclaimed Lanover, in a tone of astonishment. "When I saw him in the Bay of Naples he appeared to be in command of the ship—the same too yesterday and to-day when I visited him on board—"

"Yes—truly," answered the officer, "Notaras was in command of the ship when you saw him in the Bay of Naples—and he is in command still. He has exercised this command for the last few months, inasmuch as the true and rightful captain of the *Athene* has been enjoying a holiday—to which he was well entitled after eighteen months' indefatigable attention to his responsible duties."

"Then who is your captain?" inquired Lanover "and why was I not told of all this before?"

"I will answer your last question first," responded the officer. "It is our custom to be as little communicative as possible—to keep our discourse invariably to the point—and not to enter into any particulars which have no reference at the time to the topics on which we may be addressed by strangers. In your own case, it sufficed that when, provided with a proper credential, you came on board the *Athene* in the Bay of Naples, there was an officer in command who had authority to hear your overtures, listen to your proposals, and give thereto whatsoever answer he thought fit. So much for your second question. Your first was—who is our captain?—and the time has now come when it is necessary to give you some explanation on that head."

"The credential which I bore," interjected Lanover, "and which was given me some few weeks back by a Greek member of Marco Uberti's dispersed band—"

"Yes—that Greek served under our flag at first," remarked the lieutenant; "but not liking the sea, he took to the land, and was led by a variety of circumstances to find his way to the Apennines, where he joined Marco Uberti."

"I was about to observe," resumed Lanover, "that the credential or letter of introduction, which this Greek gave me in case I should ever have need of the services of the brave crew of the *Athene*—was addressed to Captain Durazzo. But when I visited your vessel in the Bay of Naples and presented my credential, Notaras at once opened it, so that I naturally conceived that he was Captain Durazzo himself. Perhaps too I thought that as the good ship *Athene*," added Lanover with a chuckle, "assumes a variety of colours, her commander might deem it expedient to assume a variety of names."

"Durazzo is really the name of our legitimate captain," answered the officer,—or at least the one which he has chosen to bear since he first equipped the *Athene* for the sea. Notaras is his first lieutenant—I have the honour of being the second—and an honour it indeed is, Mr. Lanover," added the officer emphatically; "for a braver captain never trod the deck of a gallant vessel than Durazzo!"

"You said just now," remarked the humpback, "that the time had come when this explanation must be given to me. Do you mean me to understand that I am to be put in communication with Captain Durazzo—or that he objects to the treaty agreed upon between Notaras and myself? Or perhaps you have come to arrange finally with me on the subject?"

"This last is my purpose," responded the second lieutenant of the *Athene*. "When Notaras intimated to you this forenoon that he would give you a decisive and conclusive answer this evening on all points, and that he would send some one to meet you here with that answer—it was because Captain Durazzo was expected very shortly to resume his command, and therefore Notaras was compelled to consult him before another step could be taken in your business."

"Now I comprehend," said Lanover; "and I am glad that Captain Durazzo is in the same mind as Notaras with regard to this affair. Was not Captain Durazzo previously acquainted with t?"

"Some few words had been hastily spoken to him on the subject," answered the second lieutenant; "but as he chose not to be troubled with business at the time, he left it in the hands of Lieutenant Notaras. It is only this day that Captain Durazzo has been rendered fully and completely acquainted with your views and with the terms you offer."

"And those terms," said Lanover hastily—"were they deemed suitable by your captain?"

"Perfectly so," was the officer's reply. "Reckoning according to your English money, you are to give a sum equivalent to five hundred pounds for the transaction itself—the half to be paid in advance, as an indemnity under any circumstances for the valuable time lost and the risk incurred by remaining on these coasts—the other two hundred and fifty pounds to be paid when the work is done—and twenty-five pounds per week all the time—"

"Enough!" ejaculated Lanover: "those are the conditions on which I agreed with Notaras. And your Captain accepts them?"

"He does," replied the second lieutenant.

"And when will the vessel sail?" asked Lanover eagerly.

"In the middle of to-morrow night," was the rejoinder. "You will of course come on board and proceed with us: for that, I believe, was a part of your proposition?"

"Yes," said Lanover: "it is necessary that I should accompany you for several reasons. At what time shall I be required to embark to-morrow evening?"

"Captain Durazzo," answered the officer, "has notified that he will be on board precisely at midnight. It were perhaps as well that you should join us a couple of hours earlier. At ten o'clock, therefore, to-morrow evening a boat shall be in waiting for you at the usual landing-place—and see that you are punctual. Between this and then no further communication must take place between yourself and the ship. It is now of the utmost consequence that during the brief time we remain here no suspicion should be excited as to our true character: for the Austrian frigate *Tyrol* is on the coast—we have this day received private and special information that she was yesterday seen off Ostia—and therefore we must be upon our guard. She boarded us once; and though I must confess that Notaras faced the officer in a manner worthy of Durazzo's second in command,—yet it would not by any means be agreeable to be boarded by her a second time."

"But think you," asked Lanover, in a somewhat affrighted tone, "that there will be any danger of falling in with her when our business is accomplished?"

"There is always danger," replied the second lieutenant coolly, "to such a vessel as the *Athene*—and therefore to all who may be found on board of her. At the same time," he added, "when once Durazzo stands again on the deck of that schooner—"

"I understand—I understand!" said Lanover, more cheerfully: "his skill and his bravery infinitely diminish that danger and all other casualties?"

"There can be no doubt of it," returned the officer. "Notaras is a good sailor: but he cannot



handle a ship with the same exquisite skill—he cannot make her do so much and so completely develop all her fine qualities as Captain Durazzo. The commander of a vessel is to his ship what a rider is to a horse: some can manage both better than others—one man can make the ship achieve marvels upon the sea, as another can do the same with a horse upon the land. There are peculiar capacities and qualities which a consummate skill can cause a vessel to display, in the same manner that the expert rider elicits the finest mettle of the steed. So it is with Durazzo. Besides, Notaras is disabled with that unfortunate accident of his; and he would not have gone on board his ship so speedily if he had not at the time some reason to imagine that a suspicion of its true character was entertained and that spies had been on board."

"Ab, indeed!" ejaculated Lanover. "Captain—I mean Lieutenant Notaras mentioned nothing of all this to me."

"Have I not already informed you," asked the officer, "that it is not our custom to touch upon matters that are irrelevant to any dealings which at the moment we may have with strangers? But now, since you are coming amongst us, there is no necessity to conceal these things from your knowledge. We are straight-forward in our way; and I am thus explicit with you, Mr. Lanover, that you may not be kept in the dark as to the risks which you will possibly have to encounter in coming on board the Athene."

"But what reason, then," inquired the hump-back, "had Notaras for his suspicions?"

"Accident so ordained it," was the officer's explanation, "that a young Englishman should be thrown in the way——"

"A young Englishman?" ejaculated Lanover eagerly. "And what was his name? But, pshaw!—the thought is ridiculous! Why should my head always be running upon——"

"His name," said the officer, "is Wilmot."

"Wilmot!" vociferated Lanover: and I heard his clenched fist violently striking the table in the adjoining room. "By heaven, it is the same!"

"How?—what?" exclaimed the lieutenant: "is he indeed a spy after all?"

"A spy—yes!" answered Lanover,—"a spy upon everything that does not concern him!—a veritable marplot if ever there were one!—a fellow capable of all kinds of mischief——"

"But is he a spy?" again demanded the officer: "for we really have excellent reasons for believing that he is nothing of the sort—at least so far as our vessel is concerned. It is true that he has come to Civita Vecchia on some private and important business, and that he brought letters of introduction to Signor Portici the Chief Judge: but Portici himself has no suspicion in respect to the Athene—or at least if he have," added the officer in a gravely musing tone, "he keeps it so well to himself—But no! All things considered, it is impossible! Yes—I declare emphatically, it is absolutely impossible that Portici can suspect!"

"But what about this Wilmot?" asked Lanover suddenly.

"He visited our ship, attended by his lacquey," answered the lieutenant; "and after some considerable hesitation I showed him over it. I believed

then, as I believe now, that he was influenced only by curiosity——"

"And yet you said," observed Lanover, "that suspicions were excited?"

"Yes—after the visit," said the lieutenant: "but then something occurred to disabuse our minds in that respect. Indeed, though we have been utterly unable to learn what the object of his presence at Civita Vecchia can be, we are all but convinced that it can really have no reference to ourselves. He came from Rome, where he had been staying some little time——"

"Then, depend upon it," exclaimed Lanover, in a tone of fierce rage, "he has got some inkling of my proceedings, which he has every motive to thwart and baffle. Where is he now?"

"In Civita Vecchia at this very moment," answered the lieutenant,— "or at least to the best of my knowledge."

"Then, by heaven!" ejaculated Lanover—and I could hear him start up from his seat, his heavy shoes stamping upon the floor of the adjacent room—"by heaven, I'll——"

"Patience, my good sir!" interrupted the second lieutenant: "let us see what all this means. Who is this Joseph Wilmot? is he not a young Englishman of property travelling for his pleasure?"

"He is an Englishman—and he has got property somehow or another," replied Lanover. "I have only known him for a few years—but during this time he has given me a world of trouble. He believes me to be his uncle—but there is really no more relationship betwixt him and me than there is between myself and you. And therefore I should not mind if a stone were tied round the young rascal's neck, and he was dropped over the side of your schooner into the sea. What say you?—shall it be done?—shall it?"

"Mr. Lanover," answered the officer, with stern accents, "we are not murderers of that stamp: we never take life in cold blood. It is enough to be compelled to do so in self-defence and in the heat of a fairly fought fray."

"No, no!" ejaculated Lanover, "I was wrong to make such a proposal: but I was goaded into a violent passion! Forgive me, sir—make allowances!—for that young fellow crosses and thwarts me at every turn! The worst of it is I am more or less in his power—perdition seize him!" continued Lanover, rather in a musing way than addressing himself direct to the officer—as I could tell by the vehement ejaculatory intonations of his voice. "I have done so many things to him, that whenever I set foot in England again he could compromise me seriously—yes, seriously, seriously—and as a matter of course it does not suit me to shut out my own country altogether against myself. Or else—or else I could wreak a crushing vengeance upon him—I could write anonymously to Sir Matthew, revealing all the affair of Lady Calanthe—But no! he would instantaneously suspect who was the author of that mischief making—and then—Besides, after all, the old baronet might forgive him——"

"Really, Mr. Lanover," interrupted the lieutenant, "you are speaking of matters which are perfectly enigmatical to me; and yet you continue talking as if you thought I understood them as familiarly and intimately as yourself."

"I am driven almost beside myself!" exclaimed

the humpback. "Forgive me all this vehemence—"

"It is tolerably clear," interrupted the officer, "that this Joseph Wilmot merely regards yourself personally, and has nothing to do with us—But, ah! when I betlink me, answer me one question, Mr. Lanover. Have you confided to a single soul the nature of the treaty you have been negotiating with us?—have you suffered it to transpire? For in *that* case—if you *have* been so imprudent, and if it should have oozed out to Wilmot's knowledge for what purpose we are on this coast,—*then* might we indeed account for his visit to our ship—our opinion would be altered—and we should really take him for a spy. Come, Mr. Lanover—do not deceive me! If you have unguardedly compromised us, deal candidly with me at once—and there will be an end of the entire matter. We should decline the execution of the treaty; and you would have to look out for some other means of executing your purpose:—but candour *must* characterize all your dealings with us—otherwise it were dangerous —"

"Most positively and sacredly do I assure you," answered Lanover, "that I have neither done nor said anything to compromise you. You know not how cautious I am. I have not even as yet developed my intentions to the agent Dorchester whom I am employing: in a word, I have breathed a syllable to no man in respect to my compact with you. No—it is impossible that Wilmot can suspect aught of all this!—and if I just now denounced him as a spy in respect to the Athene, it was in the heat of passion. Some inkling he may have obtained of my proceedings in a certain quarter: but that he can for an instant form a conjecture as to what they are to lead, it is absolutely impossible!"

"In this case," observed the officer, "I must leave him entirely to your management: it forms no part of our compact that we are to interfere with him."

"Yes, yes—leave him to me!" said Lanover, in all the bitterness which the malignity of his disposition was but too capable of throwing into the tones of his harsh jarring voice. "But tell me—do you know where he resides?"

"Yes," answered the officer: and he named the hotel at which I was living. "But now I think we have little more to say to each other. You have to pay me two hundred and fifty pounds at once; and to-morrow night, at ten o'clock, you will be at the landing-place in readiness for the boat to take you on board."

Immediately afterwards the chinking of gold upon the table in the adjoining room met the ears of Cosmo and myself; and some few minutes elapsed while Lanover was telling down the money and the officer was counting it afterwards.

"I will now bid you farewell," said the latter.

"Stay! I will go out with you," responded the humpback: "my way lies partly the same as your's—for I must go and reconnoitre the hotel where that young marplot lives."

"No," said the lieutenant; "it will not do for us to be seen together. Let me depart first: you can issue forth in ten minutes—and whatsoever scheme you may resolve upon in respect to this enemy of your's, will perhaps be all the better executed for a little serious meditation. Once more farewell."

The second lieutenant of the Athene then took his departure; and a few minutes after he had gone, Lanover rang the bell, which summons was answered by the landlady. He inquired whether Mr. Dorchester had taken his departure?—and she replied in the affirmative, adding that he had been gone about a quarter of an hour.

"Enough!" said Lanover. "I myself have to go out again. See that between nine and ten o'clock you have a good hot supper for me."

The landlady withdrew; and for the next ten minutes Lanover was heard pacing to and fro in the adjoining room, like a wild beast chafing in his cage. Then he abruptly issued forth, and descended the stairs with his great heavy footsteps.

I now hastily translated to Cosmo everything that I had overheard between Dorchester and Lanover in the first instance: for, as the reader is aware, the police-spy himself had listened as well as I to the discourse between the humpback and the lieutenant.

"What is to be done?" I inquired when I had finished speaking. "Shall we have Lanover arrested?"

"That is not for me alone to decide," answered Cosmo: "we must do nothing inconsiderately. It is now time to take Signor Portici's advice. There is no longer any reason why you should abstain from visiting him. Hasten you therefore to the villa—I will speed to the hotel—I shall get there before Lanover—and if he makes any inquiries concerning you, I will take care that they be answered in a sense to throw him utterly off his guard—so that in the meanwhile we may take the Judge's advice and act accordingly."

"But Sir Matthew—and Mrs. Lanover—and Annabel!" I exclaimed; "ought I not at once to fly to Leghorn—"

"Patience and calmness!" interrupted Cosmo: "there is plenty of time. I will bring a post-chaise with me to the villa, so that you can speed off so soon as we have conferred with Signor Portici. And now hasten you thither!"

With these words Cosmo hurried precipitately from the room; and by the time I was in the back yard again, he had sealed the wall and had disappeared through the tailor's house. I retreated by the same route; and proceeding rapidly, bent my way through the streets in the direction of the villa. But though I walked onward with the utmost celerity, I did not outstrip my thoughts; and these were of a varied and conflicting character. How many things had I heard within the last two hours! Dorchester had insinuated himself into the society of Sir Matthew Heselstine and the ladies at the hotel at Leghorn—he was Lanover's agent in a deep and devilish plot—he was evidently conducting it with all the consummate skill of a thorough intriguer—and he was now on his way back to prosecute the task entrusted to him. And what was the object of these ramified machinations? Could I doubt that it was to inveigle Sir Matthew, my beloved Annabel, and her mother, into the power of the pirates—so that Lanover might be enabled to dictate those terms into which the contents of his pocket-book had afforded me such an insight at Pistoja? But there was one thing which I had learnt that at the time sent a thrill of wildest delight through my entire frame,

and would have continued to fill me with the same exuberant joy were it not for the many anxieties I now experienced. This was the knowledge—the certain knowledge which I had acquired, that Lanover was *not* my uncle! As the reader is aware, I had for a long, long time—aye, even from the very first, doubted that he could be: but still it was only doubt—and now I had the conviction that he was not! Here was one great mystery connected with myself cleared up; and I thanked heaven for the relief afforded to my mind on thus discovering that the villainous monster could claim no kinship with me.

But there were other matters on which I reflected as I bent my way with rapid steps towards Signor Portici's villa. How was it that the Greek pirates knew more of me, as they evidently did, than I could possibly have anticipated? how was it they were aware that I was acquainted with Signor Portici? how knew they that I had private and important business in hand, the nature of which they had vainly sought to fathom? and how since the previous day had they learnt something to forbid their original suspicion that I was a spy upon their actions? Ah! a thought struck me!

"Kanaris" I said to myself, "has doubtless visited Notaras to-day, according to his intention as expressed last night: and likewise according to the assurance he gave me, he has said enough in my favour to convince his fellow-countrymen on board the *Athene* that I am not a spy. Yes—and he may have told them too, as a proof of his assertion, that I have come to *Civita Vecchia* on private and secret business on my own account: but is it possible that he could have been indiscreet enough to mention my acquaintance with Signor Portici? Who else could have made the pirates aware of that fact? It is true that no harm has been done, so far as I can see: but what mischief might have been accomplished! I am surprised at the indiscretion of Kanaris—especially after receiving a hint from the Judge himself. But still he may have done it with a good motive, and to afford a proof of my respectability: for he saw how anxious I was to set myself right with this Notaras. And then too, he evidently suspects not the desperate character of those on board the *Athene*: he takes them for smugglers—and he pities his fellow-countryman Notaras on account of the injury he has sustained. Ah, if he knew the danger of venturing on board that ship! But he must be informed—I will insist to-night that Cosmo shall tell him—it is a duty I owe the noble-minded and generous-hearted young Greek! What would become of his Leonora if he were suddenly snatched away from her? And these miscreant pirates are capable of detaining him on board their vessel in the hope of procuring a splendid ransom! Yes—assuredly Constantine Kanaris must be warned to-night! It is a duty which is owing to himself—a duty to Signor Portici, who has accepted him as his niece's suitor—a duty also to the beautiful and affectionate Leonora!"

And then I reflected that even if Lieutenant Notaras might have any compunction in laying violent hands upon the young Greek, on account of the kind assistance rendered him when he met his accident,—Captain Durazzo, the veritable commander of that beautiful but treacherous craft,

might entertain no such generous feeling. The generosity of pirates indeed!—who in his secrets would trust to it?

I moreover reflected, as I pursued my way to the villa, upon every detail of the entire circumstances connected with Lanover's present proceedings. From his conversation with Dorchester I had gathered an additional confirmation of the Earl of Eccleston's assertion that he had nothing to do with the humpback's present plans,—although his lordship's name had certainly been mentioned in the ruin near Magliano; and that the brigands, who gave me the information at Rome, were so far correct. Equally correct likewise were they in their statement that my own name had been mentioned by Lanover and Dorchester at the same time and in the same place: but as Lord Eccleston's had only been alluded to in respect to the money-transaction, so mine had only been mentioned in bitterness by the vindictive Lanover and his accomplice Dorchester.

And now to take measures to save Annabel—her mother—and her grandfather likewise—from the hideous treachery which was being practised against them!—Oh, to save them!—and thereby would be constituted another claim upon the generous consideration of the old Baronet when the eventful day should come, and when I might hope to be crowned with my reward notwithstanding whatsoever spiteful revelations in respect to my youthful indiscretion the vindictive Lanover might choose to make.

These reflections, as hurried almost as my own pace, brought me to the gate of the Portici villa.

## CHAPTER CXXII.

### THE JUDGE.

I was at once introduced into the presence of the Judge and his niece, who were awaiting the announcement of dinner. Kanaris was not there. Signor Portici naturally concluded, the moment I made my appearance, that something important had taken place; and I gave him to understand that such was the fact.

"And Cosmo?" asked the Judge.

"He will be here presently, to confer with your Excellency," I replied.

"Then we have just time to get our dinner," said Portici, "before we sit down to hold a council of war. Besides," he added with a smile, as he glanced affectionately towards his niece, "I never talk of business in the presence of ladies. Not that I mean to pay an ill compliment to my Leonora, or throw a doubt upon her discretion—very far from it!—especially as—"

"But my uncle, Mr. Wilmot," said the young lady, also with a smile, and with a look of grateful love thrown upon her venerable guardian, "is habitually so reserved and cautious that he would not mention before one intimate friend any matter of business regarding another intimate friend."

"Such has been my course through life," observed the Judge; "and I have found it altogether consistent with a sound and wise policy."

At this moment a domestic entered to announce that dinner was served in an adjoining room; and

thither we proceeded. Leonora's manner was at first somewhat abstracted—her air too, was, methought, the least thing preoccupied; and once or twice I observed that she regarded her uncle with an expression of most affectionate sadness. But she soon rallied, and entered more freely into discourse. Her conversation was characterized by good sense: she could exhibit gaiety without frivolity and shrewdness without sarcasm. Endowed with such mental accomplishments, as well as with so much personal beauty, she was a veritable treasure of a woman, and in every sense adapted to constitute the happiness of him who had won her heart. Such was the reflection I made while sitting next to her at the dinner-table; and her demeanour towards me was that of a frank, ingenuous, well-bred friendliness. Shortly after the dessert was placed upon the table, Leonora left the room, no doubt for the purpose of affording her uncle and myself an opportunity for that private discourse, upon which he would not enter in her presence. But ere she disappeared she embraced him affectionately; and he caressed her with a paternal fondness.

I now related to his Excellency everything that had occurred during the last few hours—or rather, I should say, all that I had overheard at the coffee-house. The Judge listened with the profoundest attention; and when I had concluded, he deliberated for some minutes without making any comment.

"We had better wait till Cosmo comes," he at length said; "for whatsoever discussion we might hold now, would only have to be repeated in his presence. It is however tolerably evident that you must leave this night for Leghorn, in order to unmask the villain Dorchester—and indeed hand him over to the grasp of Tuscan justice—no matter what decision we may come to in respect to Lanover and these abominable pirates."

Scarcely had the Judge finished his observations, when a domestic entered and presented him with a letter—which, it appeared, had just arrived by the evening mail. He opened it; and having perused its contents—which were brief—he said to me, "If you had not already discovered, by the conversation that you overheard at the coffee-house, that Sir Matthew Heseltine, Mrs. Lanover, and Miss Bentinck are at Leghorn, I could now have given you the information. You remember I promised to write to the principal towns of Italy, to make certain inquiries; and here is one result. I am informed by a correspondent at Leghorn that Sir Matthew and the ladies have been staying there for some weeks. Ah! by the bye, and I should add—but you already know it—Lord and Lady Eccleston were likewise there recently—"

"I saw the Earl at my own hotel the day before yesterday," I interjectingly observed.

"Yes—I know it," said the Judge. "Cosmo made me acquainted with that circumstance: otherwise I should have sent to inform you, through him, of his lordship's presence in the town. I was likewise informed yesterday morning of Lanover's arrival: for the circumstance was notified to me from the Passport-office: but I learnt from Cosmo that accident had already made you aware of Lanover's presence in Civita Vecchia."

I sincerely thanked the Judge for all the trouble he had taken on my account, and likewise for hav-

ing recommended me so astute an assistant as Cosmo.

"In respect to these pirates," Signor Portici presently observed, "I most sincerely hope and trust that their capture is not far distant. I had sent off couriers to the principal sea-ports to invoke the aid of the Austrian frigate Tyrol, wherever she might be found; and now I have learnt through you that she was off Ostia when the pirates last heard of her. The wind is at present dead against her—but it may change—and then the run would be short."

"And you have not force enough," I said inquiringly, "to make a bold attack upon the Athene?"

"At the first hostile demonstration she would be off," responded the Judge. "It is now all the better for our purpose that she should remain here until to-morrow night: for if in the interval the Tyrol does not arrive, she at all events will not be very far off."

After a little more discourse upon these subjects, I availed myself of a pause to observe, "By the bye, I have to thank your Excellency for having permitted Signor Kanaris to call upon me last evening—"

"Ah! I am truly sorry," interrupted the Judge, his countenance becoming grave, "that you are compelled to leave to-night—as I fear indeed that you must: for yielding to the urgent intercessions of Kanaris, I have given my assent for the bridal to be celebrated to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" I ejaculated in astonishment: for I had seen little in the manner of the old Judge to indicate that the time was near at hand when he was to part from his niece.

"Yes—to-morrow," responded Signor Portici, a real unmistakable cloud of sadness now for the first time during this interview coming over his features: but instantly dispelling it, he smiled benignantly,—adding, "But the separation between myself and Leonora is not to take place immediately. It appears that Signor Kanaris this morning received an urgent letter from his uncle the Admiral, calling him back to Athens on most important family business. This summons Kanaris dares not disobey; and he will accordingly depart from Civita Vecchia to-morrow evening. He calculates that his absence will not extend beyond six weeks; and in the interval Leonora will remain with me. The bridal of to-morrow will therefore prove rather a solemn betrothal sanctified by the blessing of the priest, than the actual nuptial ceremony to be followed by the bearing away of the bride. You have seen how Leonora sustains her spirits:—it is through a kind consideration that she may not sadden me—although I know that the affectionate girl looks forward with pain to the coming of the day when she must be separated from me: for it is natural to suppose that Kanaris will wish to take his bride to his own native land and present her to his relatives. Nevertheless, my dear Mr. Wilmot, the feelings of a young lady on the eve of that day which is to link her indissolubly with the object of her heart's choice, have pleasure blended with their pain—it is natural, I say—it cannot be otherwise—and thus therefore is it with Leonora."

"I presume," I said, "that Signor Kanaris could not endure the idea of this separation from your



amiable niece, unless previously assured that she has become linked to him by indissoluble bonds, as you have expressed it?"

"It is so," answered the Judge. "Not that for an instant Kanaris is capable of insulting my niece by the idea that she is capricious—that she would forget him when absent—or that she is capable of encouraging the advances of any other suitor: but amongst the customs of his own native country these betrothals, or espousals, previous to an unforeseen and suddenly necessitated separation, are, as he informs me, common enough. He therefore pleaded hard that the same ceremony might take place here: he assured me in impassioned language that my assent would alone enable him to endure the separation with even an ordinary degree of patience; and I yielded to his entreaties. Methought indeed, that if the bridal were celebrated at once, and Leonora was yet left to me for a few weeks ere the day of complete

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severance should arrive, my own mind would be enabled all the better to tutor itself for that final separation. And perhaps, my dear Mr. Wilmot," added the Judge, "still more selfish considerations influenced me in giving that assent—No, not selfish!—but considerations, I should rather say, bearing upon Leonora's welfare. I do not mind opening my heart to you. Leonora has no fortune of her own; and at my death a very moderate competency would await her. Kanaris is rich—he belongs to an excellent family—his position is eminently respectable: of all this he has given me proofs—the whole tenour of his conduct has been characterized with candour and frankness—and such a suitor for my much-loved niece must not be trifled with, even though there may seem something whimsical if not foolishly superstitious in this aversion on his part to set out on his journey before his hand shall have been united with that of Leonora. To-morrow's cere-

monies will be conducted privately, without ostentation or display: there will however be a few friends—and I regret that circumstances will prevent you from forming one of the number.”

I thanked the Judge for his kindness, and expressed a sincere wish for the happiness of the young couple. I was by no means astonished, on mature reflection, at this proceeding on the part of Kanaris: his anxiety to have the nuptials solemnized previous to his departure, was in precise accordance with the opinion I had formed of his disposition. The conversations we had held together during our journey from Rome to Civita Vecchia, recurred to my mind: nor less did I remember that discourse, so tinged with superstitious apprehension, to which the young Greek had given way when first introducing me into the neighbourhood of the Portici Villa. I knew him therefore to be an individual who always mistrusted his own happiness so long as it was merely prospective, and who always laboured under a vague dread lest some unforeseen accident should occur to open a sudden chasm between himself and the realization of his hopes. For all these reasons, therefore, I was not surprised that Kanaris, though without jealousy in respect to Leonora—but, on the other hand, yielding her all that confidence and faith which belong to sincerest love—should nevertheless seek to make her indissolubly his own previous to entering upon this journey to which he was so abruptly summoned.

“When the day comes for the final separation between Leonora and myself,” continued the old Judge, “it will be a painful one—it will be a trying ordeal for me. But my own selfish feelings must be overruled, for the sake of that dear girl’s happiness. And then too I am not without the hope,” added Signor Portici, “that Constantine Kanaris, when having borne his bride to Greece and presented her to his relatives, may return to Italy and fix his abode in this neighbourhood. Indeed, he did drop some promise of the sort: Leonora herself is cherishing it—and I am buoying myself up with the hope that it may be fulfilled.”

The domestic again entered the room; and this time it was to introduce Cosmo. The Judge bade him be seated; and he proceeded to account for his prolonged detention in the town—for it was now half-past eight o’clock in the evening.

“On separating from you at the coffee-house,” he began, addressing himself to me, “I proceeded to the hotel, and soon learnt that no such person as Mr. Lanover had as yet made any inquiry concerning you: nor indeed had any one asked for you at all during your absence. I gave a particular cue to the domestics of the establishment: I proceeded to pack up all your effects, with a view to their being placed in the post-chaise which is to convey you to Leghorn—for I knew that his Excellency Signor Portici would agree in the propriety of your proceeding thither this night. I have ordered the equipage to be here at ten o’clock, so as to allow some little interval for deliberation amongst ourselves. Having effected all these arrangements, I strolled out in the neighbourhood of the hotel; and presently Lanover passed me. I watched him—and saw that he was lurking about with the air of one who was totally undecided how to act. I was resolved to keep my eye upon him for as long a time as I could in pro-

priety spare, considering the different matters I have in hand;—and at length feeling convinced that he would end by calling at the hotel,—perhaps to see you in the hope of gleaning the object of your presence at Civita Vecchia—perhaps merely to make some inquiries concerning you,—I re-entered the establishment, where I affected to be lounging about in the gateway. Presently Mr Lanover made his appearance, with the air of one who had come to a fixed resolve; and stepping up to the porter’s lodge, he asked for Mr. Wilmot.—‘There is Mr. Wilmot’s servant,’ said the porter, pointing to me.—Lanover eyed me with a searching scrutiny: I bowed with the profoundest respect, and assumed an air perfectly corresponding with the part that I was enacting. Mr. Lanover asked, ‘Is Mr. Wilmot in-doors?’—I said, ‘No, sir, Mr. Wilmot is dining out; but he will be here presently, as we are to leave Civita Vecchia this evening.’—‘Indeed!’ he ejaculated: ‘and whither, may I ask, is Mr. Wilmot going?’—‘The little business,’ I rejoined, ‘which brought him to Civita Vecchia is settled, and my master returns to Rome to-night.’—Lanover’s countenance at once brightened up; and the porter, who had previously received his cue from me, threw in a word to corroborate my statement. ‘I am very intimately acquainted with Mr. Wilmot,’ continued Lanover; ‘as indeed he will tell you. May I hope that the little business that brought him to this town, has been settled to his satisfaction?’—‘Completely so, sir,’ was my response: ‘it was merely to recover some money from a runaway scamp who had swindled him—a fellow countryman of his—and he has succeeded; but not without a little trouble, and after the exercise of the utmost caution.’—‘Well,’ exclaimed Mr. Lanover, ‘I am glad to hear that he has succeeded: it was merely a friendly visit I meant to have paid him, and just to inquire whether he had heard anything of some mutual friends of ours, the Heselstine family. Perhaps you can answer the question?’—‘I have not been very long in Mr. Wilmot’s service,’ I said, with a most respectful bow; ‘but I have certainly heard him mention that name. Ah, I recollect! Sir Matthew Heselstine was the gentleman whom he helped out of some dilemma in the Apennine mountains a short time back; and I believe, sir,’ I added, ‘that the gentleman and his family have returned to England. That is all I have heard on the subject.’—‘Ah, well,’ observed Lanover, ‘that is sufficient. I myself am going out to dinner; so I shall not be enabled to call again. You can give my compliments to Mr. Wilmot; and here is something for yourself as a recompense for your civility.’—He gave me a silver coin, and hurried off with an expression of countenance unmistakably indicating his satisfaction at the intelligence he had received. Lanover is thus lulled into perfect security; and the field is open for whatsoever operations we may now, aided by his Excellency’s wisdom, decide upon.”

“It is now,” said the Judge “by no means difficult to decide upon a particular course of action. Your skill, foresight, and ingenuity, Cosmo, have placed matters in the most suitable train for a successful issue. In the first place, my dear Mr. Wilmot, it is settled that you depart presently for Leghorn,—where you will fully expose the treachery of the villain Dorchester, and hand him



over to the Tuscan authorities as one of the accomplices of Marco Uberti's recently formidable band."

At this moment there was a loud ring at the front door; and on the summons being answered by the servant, the Judge and myself both recognised the footsteps of Constantine Kanaris as they entered the hall.

"He will go up to the drawing-room to my niece," observed Signor Portici.

"Ah! and I must not forget," I exclaimed, "that I have presently a suggestion to make in reference to Signor Kanaris. But pray proceed, your Excellency, in defining the plans which are now to be adopted."

"In the first place, then," continued Signor Portici, "it is settled that you, Mr. Wilmot, set off in the post-chaise presently for Leghorn. In the second place, Lanover being lulled into complete security, it will be advisable to leave him in this comfortable state of mind until to-morrow evening. We will then take care that he shall be arrested just as he is stepping into the schooner's boat; and the sailors in that boat, as well as the officer who may be in command, shall likewise be arrested. By this proceeding one object will be certainly gained—and another may possibly be accomplished. The object to be thus gained," added the Judge, "will be that of keeping the schooner for at least another twenty-four hours in the port of Civita Vecchia—during which interval the Austrian frigate will either arrive, or else be very near. The object which we may hope to gain is that by the capture of a subordinate officer and some of the sailors of the Greek pirate, we may induce at least one amongst them by the promise of a free pardon and a reward, to furnish such information as may lead to the arrest of Captain Durazzo, the leader of the pirate horde. Such are my views: what is your opinion, Cosmo?"

"I had in my own mind sketched the very self-same line of policy," was the police-spy's response. "There is no more harm that Lanover can now do by being left at large until to-morrow night, inasmuch as Mr. Wilmot will proceed to Leghorn to put Sir Matthew Heselstine upon his guard, under whatsoever circumstances may subsequently transpire. On the other hand, if Lanover were arrested at once, the pirates would hear of it—they would see that the game was all up—they would at once sheer off—and thus precipitating their departure, they might possibly elude capture by the Austrian frigate. And then, too, be it recollected that Captain Durazzo has decided upon embarking to-morrow night at twelve o'clock. If he be not already in the town under some disguise, he must of necessity arrive at Civita Vecchia in the course of to-morrow; and it will indeed be of the utmost importance to ensure his capture. Therefore I fully coincide with your Excellency's opinions."

"And you, Mr. Wilmot?" said the Judge, turning towards me.

"While expressing my thanks," I answered, "for the flattering compliment your Excellency pays me in asking my opinion, I can most conscientiously declare that your views seem based on the soundest policy."

"And now," said Signor Portici, "in respect to the suggestion which, as you intimated you had to offer?"

"Ah! relative to Signor Kanaris," I exclaimed,

"Your Excellency—and you likewise, Cosmo—are acquainted with the circumstance which first threw Signor Kanaris and myself in the way of the man Notaras. Kanaris, with the kindest motives of sympathy, has visited Notaras at his tavern—and I have no doubt on board his ship likewise. Now, although Signor Kanaris is about to leave Civita Vecchia, he may be contemplating fresh acts of kindness towards Notaras: he might even think it his duty as his fellow-countryman to snatch half-an-hour early to-morrow morning to make a farewell call on board the Athene; and I hold it to be our duty to warn him against such a proceeding, and to make him acquainted with the true character of the fellow Notaras."

"Yes," observed the Judge, "the same idea had also struck me: but I considered that the secret was not altogether my own"—and he looked at Cosmo.

"There cannot be the slightest objection," said the individual thus significantly appealed to, "to the communication of the secret to Signor Kanaris. I just now learnt from your Excellency's servant that the espousals are to take place to-morrow; and connected as Signor Kanaris will therefore be with you—introduced as it were into the very bosom of your family—linked to you and your's by indissoluble ties—it will indeed be proper and becoming to guard him from again incurring a serious risk by venturing on board that pirate vessel."

"It is agreed, therefore," said the Judge, "that the intimation shall be given to Constantine. The suggestion was your's, Mr. Wilmot: it is now for you to carry it out. Cosmo and I have some little arrangements to settle in respect to the proceedings of to-morrow evening:—do you ascend to the drawing-room, and tell Kanaris what you think proper. You can at the same time take leave of him and my niece, as the hour approaches for the arrival of the post-chaise."

In obedience to the Judge's wishes, I issued from the dining-parlour and ascended to the drawing-room, where I found Constantine and Leonora seated together. There was the modest blush of the heart's happiness upon the maiden's countenance: the animation of a lover's hope was on the features of Kanaris. The latter at once rose on my entrance, and greeted me with even more than his wonted cordiality, as if already expressing his warm gratitude for the congratulations which he knew full well I should offer him. Leonora, thinking that I might have something private to say—or perhaps being filled with a maidenly confusion, as she must have seen that by this time I was acquainted with the approaching nuptials—glided from the room.

"My dear Kanaris," I said, "I felicitate you with all the most friendly warmth on the happiness which awaits you!"

"I knew that you would be rejoiced—as I am!" responded the young Greek, returning the fervid pressure of my hand: and though the animation of the heart's happiness appeared still to flash from his eyes, yet I was pained and even startled by hearing those seemingly rapturous words of his instantaneously followed by a sigh.

"You surely, my dear Kanaris, do not mistrust your happiness now?"—and I spoke in the gentlest accents of remonstrance.

"No, no!" exclaimed the young Greek: but as he at the same moment averted his countenance, I caught upon it an expression so strange and apparently so full of a real anguish, that I was now both shocked and afflicted.

"I am come to bid you farewell," I said: "but before I leave——"

"What!" he ejaculated, suddenly turning again towards me: "you are going to quit Civita Vecchia?"

"Yes——this very night. I have business elsewhere——"

"But surely Signor Portici has invited you——"

"Yes—to be present to-morrow at a ceremony," I answered, "which I hope and trust will be a happy one! But this business on which I am bent, admits of no delay—or else, rest assured, my dear Kanaris, that I should be only too happy in accepting the Judge's invitation. Oh! why, my friend, torture yourself with these gloomy forebodings which nothing seems to justify?—why afflict your mind with apprehensions so completely visionary?"

"You think it unmanly on my part?" said Kanaris, his countenance suddenly glowing and his eyes flashing fire—yet not, methought, in anger against myself, but in the quick assertion of that masculine dignity and fortitude which properly became him. "Rest assured, my friend," he added, "that if it were a question of displaying that courage which circumstances of difficulty or danger render necessary, Constantine Kanaris never would be found wanting! But I confess that in respect to this love of mine I sometimes experience the weakness of a child—aye, more than a woman's weakness! But enough of this! You cannot understand me!—And now, Wilmot," he quickly added, "let us talk of yourself. May I hope that nothing unpleasant has transpired to precipitate your departure from Civita Vecchia?"

"My hurried departure," I responded, "is connected with the business that originally brought me hither. But I have a revelation to make to you. It is my duty to put you on your guard how you exhibit too much kindness in a certain quarter——"

"What mean you?" asked the young Greek, with an air of astonishment.

"You have exhibited much generous sympathy towards your fellow-countryman Notaras," I continued: "but he is in every way unworthy thereof—unless, indeed, even the vilest of human beings, when experiencing a serious injury, deserves some kind consideration. However, in a word, the truth is that Notaras is a detestable pirate!"

"A pirate?" ejaculated Kanaris, whose countenance became suddenly crimson.

"Ah! you may well express that deep indignation!" I cried: "for Notaras is assuredly a pirate—and that vessel to which he belongs is none other than the celebrated corsair which for the last two years has spread dismay through the Levant."

"The villain! If I had known it," exclaimed Constantine—"if only the barest suspicion had been excited——"

"I knew you would be thus indignant," I said. "But fortunately measures are in progress to insure the capture of the vessel.—Ah! and I for-

got to mention that Notaras is not its commander—the name of its veritable captain is Durazzo—and at midnight to-morrow he will doubtless be in the hands of justice."

"You astonish me!" exclaimed Kanaris. "Ah! what discredit do these lawless men bring upon the nation to which I belong! But how know you all this?"

"To tell you the real truth, Kanaris," I answered, "I was acquainted with the character of that schooner when you visited me last night. But the secret was not *then* mine own: it is however through my suggestion that Signor Portici, and an active agent from Ostia who is now with him, agreed that you should be warned of the true character of the Athene and the desperadoes on board."

"By heaven, I have run some risk, then," ejaculated Constantine, "in visiting that vessel! I was there this morning; and I assured the man Notaras that you had no sinister intention in going on board his ship."

"Thanks for that vindication of my character against the charge of being a spy! It is now a duty which I owe to you as well as to myself, to declare that you were not deceived by the assurances I gave you last night—nor have you spoken untruthfully in vindicating me to the man Notaras. In one word, the individual who personated my valet, is a member of the secret police of Ostia: and he made use of me at the time to get admission to the Athene. He was attached to my service on account of the special business which brought me to Civita Vecchia, and which now takes me to Leghorn."

"Ah! you are going to Leghorn?" said Kanaris: "I was in hopes that your route might possibly be the same as mine will be to-morrow, and that you would be induced to delay your departure——"

"It is impossible!" I ejaculated. "I have this day discovered that the object which originally brought me to Civita Vecchia, is strangely and threateningly blended with the business which has led the pirate vessel to this coast: and I go to Leghorn to thwart the detestable machinations that are now in progress."

"Can I be of any assistance to you, my dear Wilmot?" inquired Kanaris, warmly grasping my hand. "If so, command me! The friendship I have proffered you, existed not in words which cool the instant they are thrown forth to the air."

"I know it—I know it," I said: "but there is nothing you can do for me. Thanks to the ingenuity of Cosmo—the police-agent of whom I have spoken—my course is clear enough now. As for the pirates, the Austrian frigate Tyrol has been sent for; and should the wind change in the least degree favourably, she will be off the coast to-morrow. As for Captain Durazzo, it is positively ascertained that he is to embark to-morrow night: he will therefore be in Civita Vecchia to-morrow—even if he be not already—and the Judge is now arranging plans with Cosmo to ensure his capture."

The sounds of an approaching equipage at this instant reached our ears; and I said, "This is the post-chaise that is to take me to Leghorn. Farewell, Kanaris——"

"Nay, my dear friend," he interrupted me, "will at least see you safe off."

Leonora now returned to the room; and she was amazed to hear that I was on the point of quitting Civita Vecchia; but there was no time for explanations. I bade her farewell—my looks conveying those congratulations and sincere wishes for her happiness which a sense of delicacy prevented me from giving formal utterance to in words; and I descended to the dining-room, accompanied by Kanaris. At the same instant that the post-chaise drew up at the gate, a mounted courier galloped up to the front door, and delivered to the servant a letter with the intimation that it was a private document for Signor Portici. The footman bore it into the dining-room, which I and Kanaris also entered. The Judge nodded with affectionate familiarity to the accepted suitor of his niece, and proceeded to open the letter.

"This is most important," he said, when he had perused its contents. "It is from the captain of the Tyrol. The Austrian commander informs me that he will lose no time in beating up to Civita Vecchia so soon as the wind permits; and he further states that he has despatched one of his officers by land to make me an important communication. He has by some means become possessed of an exact personal description of Captain Durazzo, the veritable commander of the piracy; and he has deemed it expedient to send one of his own officers to confer with me on the best means of effecting the capture of Durazzo in the town, so that his crew being left without the benefit of his presence, may be all the more disconcerted and surrender without resistance to the Austrian flag. The officer may be expected to-morrow morning early; and he will bear with him the promised description of Durazzo. Such is the purport of the despatch I have just received."

"It is indeed of the first importance," said Cosmo—an observation which was echoed both by myself and Kanaris.

"And now that I have heard all these good tidings," I said, "I will take my departure. To your Excellency," I continued, "I feel all the gratitude that is due for the kind feelings you have demonstrated on my behalf. I have already declared to the amiable Senora how immense is the obligation I experience towards your Excellency, and how infinite will be my delight to pay my respects at the Portici Villa when all these complications shall have ended. You, Cosmo," I went on to say, addressing myself to the police-agent, "shall hear from me in a substantial manner the instant I arrive at Leghorn and have leisure to write. Meanwhile accept my sincerest thanks for all that you have done; and may the speedy capture of the Greek pirate afford you a much nobler recompense than I shall possibly be enabled to offer. My dear Kanaris, to you now——"

But I stopped short when turning round to address myself to the young Greek: for he had left the room.

"He has only this moment stepped out," said Signor Portici; "and doubtless awaits you on the threshold."

I shook hands with the worthy Judge, and likewise with Cosmo, who had been of such material assistance to me. I then left the apartment, and traversing the hall, reached the front door—whence, by means of the hall-lamp, I perceived

Kanaris standing close to the equipage that was to bear me away.

"I have been examining the horse-flesh," he observed, as I at once joined him; "and I think you have every chance of completing the first stage with rapidity—for these animals, as far as I can judge by the chaise-lamps, appear of a better sort than those which we generally find on Italian roads."

"The sooner I arrive at Leghorn, the better," I answered. "And now farewell, my dear Kanaris:—and then I added in a lower tone, "And when next we meet, I hope to receive from your lips the assurance that you are supremely happy!"

"A thousand thanks, my dear Wilmot!" rejoined the young Greek in accents that expressed the warmest sincerity. "And may you fully succeed in the enterprise which takes you to Leghorn!"

Our hands were pressed—I leapt into the chaise—the door was closed—the postilion cracked his whip—and away went the equipage from the front of the Portici Villa.

## CHAPTER CXXIII.

### A PITCHY DARK NIGHT.

THE town of Leghorn—or Livorno, as it is properly denominated—belongs to the Tuscan States; and its distance, as the crow flies, is about one hundred and thirty miles north of Civita Vecchia: but as the road follows the sinuosities of the coast, another fifteen miles might safely be added to that number in order to make up the length of the journey which lay before me. Travelling with four horses, the road being good, and my well-filled purse enabling me to give handsome gratuities to the postilion, I might reckon on proceeding at the rate of about ten miles an hour: so that in fourteen hours I hoped to find myself within the precincts of Leghorn. Dorchester had the start of me by four or five hours: but that was of little consequence, considering that the pirate-ship was not to set sail until the middle of the following night; and thus,—even putting out of the question the hope and chance of its capture in the interval by the Austrian frigate, or as the result of the other plans which Signor Portici had in view,—I must arrive in Leghorn long before the appearance of that schooner off the Tuscan coast. Besides, if Dorchester were not travelling with four horses, I should most probably overtake and pass him; and I made up my mind that the very instant I caught sight of the hypocritical scoundrel within the limits of Tuscany, I would hand him over to the care of the authorities. He might assume whatsoever disguise he thought fit: but I felt persuaded that guided by past experience, I should penetrate it.

Such were the reflections which were passing through my mind during the first few minutes after the equipage had driven away from Signor Portici's villa,—when all of a sudden I felt that the chaise was whirled out of its equilibrium—it went all on one side as if the wheels on the other side had run up a bank—and at the very same instant it occurred to me that a loud shrill peculiar

whistle rang through the air. But in the twinkling of an eye the chaise was upset—and I was stunned with the violence of the shock.

As I slowly came back to consciousness, it appeared to me as if I were altogether in a dream, both as to what had just occurred and to what was now taking place. The night was as dark as pitch; and I was being borne along by three men—two supporting the upper part of my body, and one my feet. We were descending some slope; and the saline freshness of the wind, which was blowing strong, appeared to indicate that we were drawing near to the sea. I did not immediately give utterance to a word, even when I felt that the faculty of speech had completely returned to me along with my other senses: for I still fancied that I must be in the midst of a dream. But when I felt an aching pain in my head—the effect of the concussion produced by the upsetting of the vehicle—the conviction that *that* part of the proceedings was at least a reality, led to a similar impression as to the transactions now in progress. Yes—I was assuredly being borne onward by these men; and two or three others were walking by our side, all in profoundest silence—a silence that seemed as ominous as the pitchy darkness of the night itself. An idea struck me:—I had doubtless been picked up either as one killed by the accident or else as in a most dangerous condition?

Mustering all the little Italian I could command, I spoke a few words, expressive of my thanks for the attention which I fancied myself to be receiving: but no syllable was vouchsafed in reply. A cold unknown terror seized upon me; and with a sudden effort I disengaged my legs from the individual who was bearing them—so that I regained my feet. Still not a word was spoken by these men: but quick as thought a cord was whipped over me—it was drawn tight ere I could make a single effort further on my own behalf—my arms were pinioned to my sides—and I was urged onward by those who thus had me in their custody.

Such was the dismayed terror which, as I frankly admit, I experienced—in the power of these unknown persons—being borne I knew not whither, through the deep darkness of the night—and with a crushing sense of all the frightful mischief that would ensue to my beloved Annabel and her relatives at Leghorn if I were detained a prisoner for even a few hours—I could not immediately give utterance to another word: my lips appeared to be sealed as if with a paralysis of the faculty of speech. Nevertheless, I strained my eyes, to endeavour, if possible, to discern the personal appearance of the individuals in whose custody I was: but so black was the night that I could only see them as shapes darker than the darkness. Indeed it was such a night of more than Egyptian gloom that the eye could not have discerned a hand held up twenty inches from the face.

I spoke again—first in Italian—then in French—and then, in the increasing agony of my terror, I had recourse to English—conjuring these men to tell me who they were, what they wanted with me—how I had injured them—and whether it were not all some fearful mistake on their part? But still not a word was spoken—still all was profound silence.

Then a horrible suspicion flashed to my mind;

and I made one desperate and tremendous effort to release myself from my captors, so that I might take to my legs, and trusting to my swiftness, hope to escape through the pitchy obscurity which prevailed. But they were hands of iron which clutched me—which held me as if in a vice—and which even tightened their grasp upon me at the very moment as if from an instinctive knowledge of the attempt I was about to make. I saw that it was useless; and as one of the individuals who had his strong sinewy gripe fixed upon me, made a movement as if drawing something from his side, there was just a sufficiency of a pale yet scarcely perceptible gleaming to make me aware that it was a weapon he had taken from its sheath—no doubt to cut me down if, perchance, by any sudden effort I should succeed in releasing myself. More and more did I strain my eyes to contemplate these men, and either confirm or disabuse myself of the frightful suspicion that had arisen in my mind: but everything was wrapped in a gloom so deep that it appeared as if night's sable pall, instead of remaining suspended overhead, had sunk down to cover all things on earth itself.

Thus a few more minutes passed, during which I was a prey to such fearful anxieties—such mental excruciations, on account of others who were dear to me, and not on account of myself,—that I could not collect my thoughts for any settled and continuous deliberation. At length the sound of the waves began moaning low and hollow within hearing; and in a few minutes more their noise was completely audible above the continuous gushing of the wind. I had observed from Signor Portici's balcony on the first day I called at his villa, that the great northern road to Leghorn passed along a range of heights running parallel with the sea-coast, and down to the shore of which there was a gradual slope such as that which, as I felt, we were now descending. All things considered, therefore, it was obvious we were advancing towards the sea; and my horrible suspicion was all but confirmed. In a few minutes more the margin of the waters was reached: I was placed in a boat—and the cord which had hitherto confined my arms only, was now likewise fastened round my lower limbs—so that even the desperate alternative of a sudden plunge into the sea was thus guarded against.

Not a syllable was spoken by the men in whose power I was. There were two in the boat when we reached it; and one of those who had brought me thither, took his seat at the helm,—he being evidently the officer in command. As he stepped past me, an ample cloak in which he was muffled, brushed against my form. Without a single word of command from him, the boat put off: the oars scarcely raised the faintest sound—they were no doubt muffled. The boat shot away from the land; and as complete a darkness hung over the sea, as upon that land which we had just left.

Nevertheless there is scarcely any gloom so profound that the eye does not sooner or later get more or less accustomed to it; and thus I gradually—but only very gradually—found the shapes of the men getting more distinct, and standing out as it were in a darker relief against the darkness itself. Methought I could recognise certain dresses that were not altogether unfamiliar to me: but

when I strained my eyes still more, I could not establish a conviction on the point. I saw their countenances—but was equally unable to form a positive conclusion with regard to their aspect. Still the suspicion already entertained was strengthening more and more in my mind.

The boat appeared to be proceeding straight away from the shore for a considerable distance; and gradually the lights of Civita Vecchia became apparent, like stars struggling into a misty and feeble existence through a length of gloom. I now became aware of some objects at the bottom of the boat close by my feet: I touched them with those feet—and found that they were my boxes, which Cosmo had packed at the hotel and consigned to the vehicle. I had not hitherto bestowed upon them a single thought; and the noiselessness with which they had been put into the boat, was in perfect keeping with the whole proceedings of those who constituted its mysterious but terribly suspicious crew. Now I began to perceive—judging by the lights of Civita Vecchia—that the boat was making a curve; and I felt tolerably well assured it was turning in towards the harbour, after having by a circuit given a wide berth to the upper pier. Oh! was it indeed possible that my destination was what my terrors suggested it to be?

I looked back towards the individual who was seated behind me at the helm, and who guided the movements of this boat with its silent crew. All I could perceive was the dark muffled form, with just the least appearance of some mistily pale hue where his countenance might be, and a similar indication to mark the place of his hand upon the tiller. I looked again in the direction of the town: the lights were growing more and more distinct—and those at the heads of the two piers now stood out stronger, bolder, brighter than the rest. The course of the boat was evidently towards some point between the piers:—alas! I could not doubt as to what its destination was!

More and more did my eyes get accustomed to the darkness; and just as I discerned sufficient of the costume of the rowers in the boat to confirm all my worst suspicions, I likewise caught a glimpse of two tall spars, slightly inclining, and shooting up into the air. Then, as the boat drew nearer still, the light at the head of the lower pier brought out into a certain degree of relief the long, low, dark hull from which those masts were up-reared taperingly and rakingly: Though all this was nothing more than I had anticipated,—yet when once the conviction became established in my mind that it was really so, I was so overcome with dismay that I could not give utterance to a syllable: I could not put forth a prayer for mercy at the hands of those who had me in their power—even if the prayer itself would have proved of the slightest avail! On went the boat; and gradually, though dimly, all the web-like tracery of the rigging of the schooner stood out in delicate relief against the horizon formed by the town, the countless lights of which diminished the darkness in that quarter. A few minutes more, and the boat touched the black hull of the pirate-essel.

Now for the first time the officer who sate in the stern, broke the long and almost fearful silence which had hitherto prevailed: he issued some

order to his men; and I recognised the voice of the second lieutenant of the *Athene*,—the same who had shown me over the vessel—the same whom I had heard in conversation with Lanover at the coffee-house. A couple of the sailors hastened to unbind the cord from my limbs; and the officer, addressing me in French, said in a cold voice, "The treatment you will experience, Mr. Wilmot, depends entirely on your own behaviour. I need not tell you how useless would any attempt at resistance be; and therefore if you are wise, you will not make such an endeavour."

"But tell me," I exclaimed, "for what purpose—"

"Silence!" he ejaculated in accents of sternest command. "I obey the mandates of a superior. Ascend the ship's side, sir."

I did as I was ordered: of what avail would remonstrance be?—and as for resistance, it was obviously altogether out of the question. My feet touched the deck: all was dark there, save and except where the skylight of one of the principal cabins sent forth a feeble glimmering through its thick ground-glass panes. I could however discern several of the sailors standing about near the gangway: but not a single syllable was spoken; and whatever feeling my presence as a captive might have occasioned, there was no outward demonstration thereof.

"Follow me, sir," said the second lieutenant, who was close at my heels as I stepped upon the deck.

He led me towards the after-cabins: we descended the staircase with the polished brass hand-rails; and we entered that first cabin which I have described on a former occasion. No one was in the cabin itself: but the door of one of the adjoining state-rooms—or smaller sleeping-cabins, as I may term them—stood open; and it was thence emanated the light which glimmered through the glass overhead. And from that same state-room came the sound of a voice, evidently asking some question: it was the voice of Notaras. The second lieutenant, having hastily thrown off his cloak, now doffed a sort of slouching hat that he wore on the present occasion; and advancing with a respectful air into the state-room, he spoke a few words—which I could not however comprehend, as he and his superior were adopting their own native tongue. An ejaculation from the lips of Notaras unmistakably indicated either astonishment or joy—it might be both—at the intelligence of my capture; and then he added something in the language of command. The second lieutenant rejoined me; and lighting a taper which stood in a silver candlestick, he opened the door of another state-room exactly facing that where Notaras lay. Motioning me to enter, the officer placed the candle upon a little round table formed of a beautiful rosewood; and then he addressed me in the following manner:—

"This is your berth; and you are on no account to leave it without permission. It may be as well to inform you that a sentinel with a drawn cutlass will be stationed on the deck close by the head of the staircase; and his orders are to cut down any one who may ascend that staircase without proper authority. The men on board this vessel, Mr. Wilmot, never hesitate to obey the commands of their superiors. I have already intimated that the

treatment you will experience, depends upon your own conduct: there is no desire on our part to use unnecessary harshness:—see that you do not provoke it. As for your life—But I will not insult myself, nor those whom I serve, nor those whom I command, by giving you any assurance on *that* point! Your repasts will be regularly served up; and your berth is not without the means of enabling you to while away the time.”

Having thus spoken, the lieutenant bowed slightly and distantly, and withdrew,—closing the door upon me. He did not however secure it on the outside; of what avail, indeed, would such a precaution have been where escape was in every way so impossible? In a few moments the door opened again, and one of the sailors made his appearance, bringing my boxes,—which having deposited in the most convenient corner of the little state-room, he retired without uttering a word.

The state-room was a complete square, being about six feet either way: and it was beautifully fitted up. A luxuriously arranged ottoman, with a velvet coverlid, served as a sofa by day and as a bed by night. There was the little table in the middle of the cabin; and in one corner a small but elegantly carved piece of rosewood furniture had the appearance of a stand for a vase filled with flowers: but when the lid was raised, it presented a basin, ewer, and all the conveniences for ablutions. A looking-glass was let into the bulk-head, or partition separating the state-room from the adjoining one. A shelf contained several books in the French, Italian, and Greek languages; and a violin was suspended to a peg in one corner. The door had its upper half fitted with ground-glass panes, so that in the day-time it admitted quite a sufficiency of light from the larger cabin without being transparent to be seen through from either side. There was a round hole, or opening in the side of the vessel, just beneath the deck above, and which admitted the fresh air as well as some additional light; and this hole could be closed with a massive water-tight lid when circumstances rendered it necessary or inclination prompted. The painting, the gilding, and the carving of the cabin were all of the most finished description: in a word, if the vessel were a pleasure yacht, and if I had visited it with my own free-will, in the companionship of friends, I felt that I could have made myself perfectly comfortable in this well appointed and beautiful little berth.

I have at once given a description of the state-room in its completeness, before continuing my narrative—although,—as the reader may easily imagine, it was not all in a moment that I thus discovered the minutest details of its fittings and arrangements. Immediately after the seaman who brought my boxes had quitted the cabin, I thought me to feel about my person to ascertain if it had been rifled during the interval that I remained in a state of unconsciousness after the upsetting of the chaise. No—nothing had been taken from me: my watch, my purse, my pocket-book containing my circular letter of credit and my reserve of bank-notes,—all were safe. I sat down upon the ottoman to ruminate on my condition, on the circumstances attending my capture, and on all the consequences to which it was likely to lead. I need scarcely state that my feelings were painful enough—nay, more than painful,

they were poignantly harrowing. But I must repeat it was not on my own account that I was thus mentally tortured. I could not suppose my life to be in danger: the motives of my capture and detention were too obvious to excite any more serious apprehension than that of a term of incarceration on board the ship until Lanover's atrocious schemes should have been fully carried out. Besides, I had overheard the very officer who had brought me thither indignantly repudiate, when in discourse with Lanover, the notion of committing murder in cold blood; and he had ere now half repeated, or at least intimated precisely the same thing to myself. For my life therefore I had no fear: but, alas! what fatal consequences might arise from the loss of my liberty! No warning voice would now whisper in the ear of Sir Matthew Heseltine; and I shuddered as I contemplated the idea of himself, his daughter, and the beautiful Annabel falling into the hands of these desperate corsairs.

That Lanover had by some means or another learnt that Cosmo's tale was false, and that instead of being bound for Rome I was about to proceed to Leghorn,—appeared to be beyond all doubt; and I therefore concluded that taking his measures promptly, he had succeeded, during my fatal delay at the Portici Villa, in inducing the pirates to lay an ambush for me. At first I thought that accident had singularly served them in causing the upsetting of the post-chaise: but when I suddenly recollected the shrill peculiar whistle given by the postilion, it instantaneously struck me that he was an accomplice in the design against my liberty. The overturning of the chaise was therefore intentional and not an accident: the man might have done it in order to give a colour to the tale which he would have to tell when returning into Civita Vecchia. Yes—the longer I thought of all this, and the more I reflected upon the circumstances of the seeming accident—the more I was convinced that it was no accident at all, but the result of the iniquitous postilion's complicity.

And now all Cosmo's fine schemes on my behalf were scattered to the winds! Would his own designs in respect to the pirate-vessel be equally frustrated? would it escape the Austrian frigate? would the measures to be adopted on the ensuing night, for the arrest of Lanover and the capture of Durazzo, equally fail? I confess that I entertained the most serious apprehensions on these heads: I had no longer as much confidence in the manœuvring capacities of Cosmo as I was compelled to have in the shrewdness and keen sagacity of Lanover and the pirates to outwit him. But still there was *one* hope: the lieutenant of the Austrian frigate Tyrol was to be at Civita Vecchia early in the morning—he would furnish Signor Portici with an exact personal description of Captain Durazzo—this individual would be arrested, if already in the town, or else the instant he set foot in it; and his capture might possibly—indeed most probably lead to important results. I pictured to myself that in order to save his life from the scaffold, or from the yard-arm of the Tyrol, he might surrender up the Athene: in which case a fatal blow would be in an instant dealt at Lanover's schemes in respect to Sir Matthew Heseltine.





This hope, gradually dawning in upon my mind through the dark clouds which surrounded it, raised my spirits somewhat; and indeed I was in that condition when *any* hope, even the slightest, is clutched at—just as drowning men grasp with desperate greediness at a straw. I endeavoured to rivet my ideas upon it; and certainly the longer I contemplated that hope, the more palpable did it become—the more favourable did its aspect grow.

Presently the door opened: and a Greek youth, of exceeding personal beauty—habited in a garb fantastically picturesque, but yet perfectly consistent with good taste and even elegance—made his appearance with a massive silver salver covered with refreshments. There were two or three sorts of wine—a savoury-looking pie—cakes and confec-

tionary—silver forks and spoons—an embroidered napkin—and beautiful cut-glasses. The youth, whose age could not exceed sixteen, pointed to a silver bell which was likewise upon the tray, and gave me to understand that he would ever be in readiness to attend its summons. He then withdrew. I partook of some slight refection—for I was well nigh worn out in mind and body; and it was merely that one hope to which I have alluded that sustained me.

My repast being ended, I rang the bell: the youthful page quickly appeared—and as I pointed significantly to the tray, he removed it. Then, still buoying myself as much as I possibly could with the *one* hope, I sought the luxurious couch; and sleep, wooed by exhaustion, soon fell upon my eyes.

## CHAPTER CXXIV.

## THE ATHENE.

I KNEW not how long I had slept, when I was suddenly awakened by the harsh jarring sounds of a voice chuckling in the large cabin adjoining. At first methought that it was merely the prolonged idea of something which had naturally enough been haunting me in my dreams: but that hideous chuckling continued—there was no longer any doubt or mistake as to its reality—and I therefore knew that Lanover himself was now on board. I heard the second lieutenant say something to him, preceded by a hasty and impatient “hush!”—then the door of an adjoining state-room opened; and I caught Lanover’s voice, saying, “Good night!”

But what the second lieutenant himself had previously said, I had totally failed to hear.

A taper was burning in my room: I consulted my watch—and found that it was one o’clock in the morning. I had not therefore slept more than an hour: for it was midnight when I sought my couch. And now Lanover was an inmate of the Athene!—a mere thin partition of mingled mahogany and painted panels, separated his cabin from mine! But as well might an entire ocean have divided us, so far as my present ability to thwart his schemes, to reproach or to chastise him with any effect, was concerned.

And now what argument was I to deduce from the fact that Lanover had come on board the pirate-ship this night—evidently, too, to take up his quarters there—instead of adhering to the original understanding, which was that *he should embark on the ensuing night at ten o’clock*? Was it because having heard that I was a captive in the vessel, he had nothing further to detain him in the town of Civita Vecchia?—or was it that the measures devised by the Judge and Cosmo for his capture at the place of embarkation for the next night, had by some means or another come to his knowledge, and he had deemed it prudent to lose no time in placing himself within the protection of the pirates? And if this were so, then might the scheme devised by the Judge and Cosmo for the capture of Durazzo, have also transpired?—and alas! alas! there was an end of the only hope with which I had been buoying myself up. For two long hours did I lie awake, torturing myself with all these reflections and apprehensions; and when at length slumber once more came upon my eyes, my sleep was troubled, uneasy, and haunted by hideous dreams.

When I awoke the light was penetrating, but dimly, from the adjacent cabin—the taper had gone out—and my watch told me that it was six o’clock in the morning. I rose and dressed myself; and then was it that for the first time I discovered that circular air-hole—or scuttle, as the technical term is—which I have described. I opened it; and the fresh air entering freely, fanned my feverish countenance. In about an hour I agitated the silver bell: the youthful Greek page at once appeared; and the instant he saw that I was up and dressed, he vanished again. But in about a couple of minutes he re-appeared, bearing the massive silver salver; and on this an elegant breakfast

was spread. Almost immediately afterwards the second lieutenant entered my cabin; and saluting me with sufficient respect, but still with the same cold distant reserve as on the preceding night, he intimated that if the refreshments served up were not to my fancy, and if I were habituated to others, they should at once be supplied. The veriest epicure in the universe could not possibly have quarrelled with the materials for breakfast which were spread upon that tray; and I expressed myself to a similar effect. The officer and the page retired; and soon afterwards I heard Mr. Lanover issue forth from the adjoining state-room. It was about eight o’clock when I again rang the bell as a summons for the page to clear away the breakfast-things; and so soon as he had done this, the second lieutenant again visited me.

“You appear disposed, Mr. Wilmot,” he said, with a slight unbending from the former cold haughtiness of his manner, “to observe on board this vessel a demeanour suitable to your condition as a captive. I have already assured you that there is no desire on our part to display unnecessary harshness: indeed, I will go further and declare that our orders are positive to that effect. Therefore, if it be agreeable, you are welcome to take an airing upon the deck—under such restrictions as it may be deemed expedient to impose.”

I bowed an acknowledgement of this permission; and followed the officer to the deck. Sure enough, as he had led me to anticipate, there was a sailor with a drawn sword in his hand, and a couple of huge pistols in his belt, pacing to and fro near the head of the staircase. The lieutenant intimated that I was free to walk about from stem to stern, but that should any boat approach the schooner on the one side, I was at once to pass over to the other; and that if I ventured to cry out anything to the persons in such boat, the privilege of open air exercise would be at once taken away from me. He likewise observed that I must not be astonished if, under existing circumstances, a seaman followed me about the ship; and then the lieutenant immediately added, “But you may contrive to forget, Mr. Wilmot, that such is the fact: for his conduct shall not be obtrusive, and shall have as little the air of a guard as possible.”

I bowed coldly—and turned away. I soon saw that the seaman who was armed in the manner I have described, left the head of the staircase and kept within half-a-dozen paces of me: and I had no difficulty in comprehending that this precaution was adopted in order to prevent me from taking a leap into the sea and trusting to my powers of swimming to carry me to the steps of the lower pier, or to the rocky island, against which two or three boats were moored.

Almost the first circumstance which now struck me, was a certain difference between the present aspect of the sweeping deck of the Athene from what it was on the occasion of my former visit. Then the port-holes were closed, and the cannonades were run in and turned round so as to be parallel against the bulwarks: now the ports were all open, and the cannon were run out. Round the lower part of the masts there were stands of fire-arms—two circular arrays of long burnished muskets thus perpendicularly bristling. Quantities of cutlasses, pistols, hatchets, boarding-pikes, and grapnels—besides large cases evidently

containing ammunition—all these gave a terribly warlike appearance to the vessel. I could not help stopping short as my eye wandered over the formidable arrangements; and I thought to myself, "Is it possible that the Athene would fight the Tyrol if they happened to encounter?"

My eyes met those of the second lieutenant at the moment. He was lounging in a negligent way against the bulwark on the opposite side: but I felt convinced that he fathomed what was passing in my mind—for a slight smile of what might be termed playful haughtiness and scorn, mingled with a sense of confidence, for an instant wreathed his lips. It was only transient, however: and when I glanced at him again, he had a telescope to his eye, and was sweeping the coast beyond the lower pier, and therefore to the south of Civita Vecchia. This was the direction from which the Tyrol might be expected to come; and my first impression was that the lieutenant was looking to ascertain if any sail were visible which might at all correspond with the Austrian frigate. But another moment's reflection told me that such could not be his object: for he never once swept the glass seaward—it was along the shore in the direction which I have named that he continued looking.

I perceived about a dozen of the common seamen loitering silently on the deck, chiefly in the fore part of the ship; and as I was well aware that the crew consisted of double this number, I fancied that if the remainder were not below, they must be absent on some service. I paced to and fro, inhaling the fresh breeze, which still blew steadily from the north, and consequently in a completely adverse direction from that which the Tyrol had to take to come up from Ostia, and likewise against that which the schooner would have to pursue in order to reach Leghorn.

"Heaven grant," I thought to myself, "that the wind may continue in this adverse quarter: for even though it keep back the Tyrol from advancing to the capture of the Athene, it will likewise prevent the Athene from running on to Leghorn—and who knows what the chapter of accidents may turn up if only the delay of a few days be gained?"

Scarcely had I thus mused within myself, when on turning to retrace my way along the deck, I suddenly encountered the looks of Mr. Lanover. He was on the opposite side, and was advancing slowly in the contrary direction—his hands behind him, and his hideous countenance animated with the expression of a sardonic joy. Obedient to an irresistible impulse, I was rushing across the deck to upbraid him for his manifold villainies—when a hand was laid upon my shoulder—I stopped short—and the voice of the second lieutenant, speaking in my ear, said, "Mr. Wilmot, it is one of the restrictions placed upon you that you are not to enter into discourse with any one on board this vessel unless first spoken to."

"I feel in every sense that I am a prisoner, sir," I answered bitterly.

"And your imprisonment may be rendered infinitely worse," rejoined the officer calmly, "unless you pursue that same quiet, gentlemanly conduct which you have hitherto adopted."

I made no reply—but walked onward. A glance however which I threw across the deck

at the humpback, showed me that he was no longer paying any attention to me, but was slowly pursuing his way towards the head of the vessel. On turning again in my walk, I noticed that Mr. Lanover was now standing on the point where the bulwarks met just above the figure-head; and that with one hand shading his eyes, he was intently gazing towards that same part of the coast which the second lieutenant had been sweeping with his glass. Thitherward I also instinctively looked; and now methought I could perceive a black spot upon the sea in the distance and in that same direction. A few minutes afterwards I looked again; and I had no longer any difficulty in discerning that it was a boat propelled rapidly by several rowers. I felt convinced that this boat was the object for which the lieutenant and Lanover were looking; and thinking that it might probably involve some new phase in the proceedings of the pirates, I hoped that I should be allowed to remain on deck to observe the result.

To avoid however having the appearance of a curiosity that might displease, I affected to be gazing about me in every other direction. I now noticed that the younger officer whom I had seen on the first occasion of my visit to the Athene—and who, as I subsequently learnt, was the mate of the vessel—ascended the rigging of the foremast; and with a telescope he gazed for some minutes in the direction of that boat of which I have spoken. On descending from the foretop, he accosted the second lieutenant, and made some report, which evidently produced considerable satisfaction. Lanover immediately afterwards joined them; and the stealthy look which I bent upon his countenance, showed me that his features were animated with a kindred glow, but far more hideously expressed—for the two officers, on the other hand, were exceedingly well-looking men.

I continued pacing to and fro, without receiving any hint that it was time my walk should end. I observed that the Athene had several anchors, all of which were carefully stowed in their proper places; and I saw likewise that the vessel was riding at only a single anchor, though it was at the mouth of the harbour—and the current, driven by the wind, was running in with amazing strength, as I could tell by the strain upon the cable. For be it understood that it is quite a mistake to suppose that over the entire surface of the Mediterranean there are no perceptible tides. In a word, from every indication about the Athene, I could comprehend, with even a landsman's eye, that she was ready to run out of the harbour at a minute's warning, as she was equally ready from her warlike aspect to offer a terrible resistance if assailed.

Gazing upward—still though with only a landsman's eye—I could not possibly help admiring the exquisite nicety of the rigging, the graceful beauty of the tall raking masts, and the symmetry of the long tapering spars,—all in such perfect keeping with the admirable model of the vessel's hull itself, as it lay motionless there, like a bird upon the water. The Greek ensign was flying: but I well knew that the Athene would hoist any other colours that might suit her purpose. Looking again upon the deck, I could not help admiring its extreme cleanliness; to use a common expression,

one might have eaten off it. Nothing was out of place: there was not a scintillation of the slovenliness, often bordering on confusion, which prevails on board trading-vessels. Everything in the Athene—everything belonging to her, wherever the eye settled, was in the same perfect order as that which reigns on board a man-of-war. The sailors were all orderly and well-behaved: there was no noise; and when either of the officers issued a command, it was acknowledged by the wonted touch of the hat which denotes the respect exhibited towards a superior on the quarter-deck of every well-conducted vessel. In a word, I could not help thinking that Captain Durazzo, all pirate though he were, had succeeded in establishing a remarkable discipline amidst a crew of lawless men, where the regular maritime law of no nation could be by the usual means enforced.

About three quarters of an hour passed from the first instant I had descried the boat in the southern direction; and now it was rounding, with a tolerable wide range, the head of the lower pier: for it was compelled to make this sweep in order to prevent the current from dashing it against that mass of masonry. I could soon discern amidst the boat's crew an individual whose appearance was different from that of the rest, and who certainly seemed not to belong to them. He was dressed in plain clothes, and was enveloped in a travelling-cloak: his fair complexion and light hair contrasted with the swarthy faces and dark hair of the Greek sailors in that boat.

Still without betraying the curiosity which inspired me, and affecting to pace to and fro in a manner as if I were occupied with reflecting on my own affairs, I kept a strict watch on the present proceedings. The galley ran along the schooner's side; and the boatswain who was in command, quickly ascending to the deck, was followed by the fair-haired individual to whom I have alluded. On a closer survey he proved to be of genteel appearance; and his countenance expressed a lofty scorn, mingled with indignation; so that I had little difficulty in comprehending that he was a prisoner. But who could he be?—and for what object was he brought on board the vessel? These were questions which I could not possibly answer to myself; and therefore I presumed that the affairs of the pirates must have wider ramifications than those which circumstances had brought within my knowledge.

The second lieutenant advanced towards the fair-haired stranger with a cold haughty salutation, which the other did not acknowledge; but folding his arms across his breast, he put a sternly uttered and peremptory question in a language which I could not understand, but which I nevertheless knew to be German. The second lieutenant appeared to be equally ignorant of this language: for he said in French, "If you speak to me, sir, in the tongue in which I am now addressing you, I shall be enabled to comprehend your meaning."

"I demand, then," said the fair-haired stranger, now speaking in very excellent French, "by what right your ruffians—playing the highwayman on shore, as they are detestable corsairs on sea—have dared to step me on my journey, rifle my person, and bring me hither as a captive?"

"Before I answer you a single question," replied the second lieutenant, "you will do well to abate

that air of insolent superiority which you are affecting to adopt. Remember, sir, you are no longer on board the Tyrol: you stand upon the deck of the Athene—"

"I know that I stand upon the deck of a pirate-ship, and in the presence of pirates!" responded the Austrian officer: for such I now knew him to be.

"And remember, sir," coldly rejoined the second lieutenant, "that the distance is short from the deck to the yard-arm, and that a running noose with a whip will soon punish whatsoever insolence may be exhibited towards me or my comrades."

"Your threats, sir, do not intimidate me," replied the Austrian with a dauntless expression of countenance. "I am in your power—and you can deal with me as you think fit. But as nothing can prevent me from denouncing you all as a gang of detestable pirates, so nothing will save you in the long run from the reach of that chastisement which is due to your crimes, and which will avenge any outrage that is offered to myself. Where is your captain? for I know by his personal description that I am not now addressing him."

The second lieutenant of the Athene did not deign an answer to the Austrian's imperious speech: but stepping aside, he conversed for a few minutes in whispers with the boatswain who had charge of the galley that brought the prisoner on board. The boatswain produced several articles, which he handed to the lieutenant; and amongst which was a sealed packet.

"Here, sir," said the lieutenant, turning to the Austrian, "are your watch and purse, your keys, your pocket-book, and a few other trifles that were taken from about your person."

"And that packet," exclaimed the Austrian, "which is addressed—"

"To his Excellency Signor Portici," said the lieutenant, coolly breaking the seal of the envelope, whence he drew forth a letter, over which he ran his eyes.

"You have dared to violate the sanctity of private correspondence!" said the Austrian, his countenance flushing with indignation. "But what else could I have expected—"

"Nothing else," answered the second lieutenant, in the same haughtily cold manner as before. "Deeply laid as your plots and plans have been, you see that we are enabled to outwit them. Our gallant captain Durazzo will not fall into your hands—neither will the Athene have to haul down her flag to the Tyrol. And now, sir," continued the pirate-officer, "you may proceed to the cabin which is to be assigned to you during the period that it may suit the will and purpose of my superior to detain you a prisoner on board this vessel."

The Austrian evidently saw that his indignant remonstrances and his lofty language were utterly ineffectual, while resistance was altogether out of the question. He accordingly followed the young mate, whom the second lieutenant directed to lead him to the state-room he was to occupy; while one of the sailors carried the Austrian's portmanteau which had just been brought up from the galley. Scarcely was this scene over, when a signal was run up to the mainmast; and there was no doubt in my mind that this was an intimation to Captain Durazzo that the emissary of the commander of the Tyrol had been arrested and was safe on

board the pirate-vessel. Durazzo was therefore already in Civita Vecchia; and the last chance of his capture being effected by means of the projects of Signor Portici and Cosmo, seemed to be all in an instant scattered to the winds.

I remained on deck, the armed seaman following me at a short distance; and immediately after that scene with the Austrian officer, it struck me that Lanover, whose looks I happened to encounter, leered upon me with a triumphant malignity. But I affected not to perceive him: indeed, throughout that scene I had carefully avoided any betrayal of the painful interest with which it had inspired me. And now, as I continued to pace to and fro upon the deck, I had leisure to reflect on this new phase in the progress of circumstances which so nearly concerned myself. I was stricken with a species of consternation at what I might term the omniscience of the pirates. They were evidently acquainted with everything that could in any way prove dangerous to their security; and step by step had they baffled and were still baffling every detail of the arrangements made by the Judge, Cosmo, and myself. There was I, instead of being on my way to Leghorn, a captive on board the *Athene*:—there was Lanover, instead of waiting until the evening for embarkation, already under the protection of the pirates and safe from the ambush that was to be laid for him:—there was the Austrian officer a captive in the corsairs' hands, instead of proceeding to the Portici Villa to place the personal description of Durazzo in the hands of the Judge;—and as for Durazzo himself, instead of there being the faintest probability that he would now fall into the power of the authorities of Civita Vecchia, there was every likelihood of his coming in safety on board his vessel at whatsoever hour he might think fit. Though tortured with the intensest anxiety in respect to Annabel, her mother, and her grandfather—and though bitterly deploring the failure of all Cosmo's fine schemes—it was impossible to avoid admiring the skill and ingenuity with which the pirates had step by step baffled those projects in detail and scattered them as chaff is dispersed to the winds of heaven.

I remained walking upon deck for several hours, until about one o'clock, when the elegantly attired page came to inform me that refreshments were served in my state-room; and though I experienced not the faintest appetite, yet I deemed it prudent to submit in all respects to the arrangements that were made on my behalf. I accordingly descended to my cabin, where I found an excellent luncheon served up; and an hour passed before my solitude was broken in upon. Then the page re-appeared, with a respectfully conveyed intimation that I was at liberty, if I thought fit, to ascend to the deck again until dusk. I availed myself of this license; and, still followed by the armed seaman, walked about the deck until the shades of evening began to close in around,—when I was again accosted by the page, who informed me that my dinner was now in readiness. During all this time, since the morning, nothing fresh at all worthy of note had taken place: nor did I again see the Austrian officer. He was kept a close prisoner in his cabin: or else he declined to avail himself of the permission to walk on deck.

A choice repast was served in my state-room;

and the youthful page remained in waiting while I partook of it. He did not speak a single unnecessary word; and I forbore from questioning him on any point, for fear that by a display of undue curiosity I should only be bringing down on myself the curtailment of the little privileges I was enjoying. It was my policy to retain all the freedom possible while on board the *Athene*, so as to acquire an insight into everything that happened, in the hope that favourable circumstances might yet turn up.

After dinner I remained seated in my cabin, endeavouring to while away the time by the aid of a book: but it is scarcely necessary to observe that I had little inclination for reading, and that my thoughts kept travelling to subjects far different from those involved in the printed page before me. Slowly enough passed the time; and my watch showed me that it was only ten o'clock when I had expected it must be near midnight. I did not think of going to bed, at least for the present. It was at midnight that Captain Durazzo, according to previous arrangement, was to come on board; and immediately afterwards the schooner was to set sail. There was just the faint hope in my mind,—yet scarcely a hope—it was only a sense of a very distant probability,—that Durazzo *might* be arrested, and that in this one instance the Judge and Cosmo might triumph. I was therefore most anxious for midnight to come that I might see the result.

I will not dwell upon the reflections which occupied me during the tediously passing hours: suffice it to say that my watch at length showed me it was close upon midnight. All appeared still within the ship: but I had not as yet heard Lanover retiring to his state-room which adjoined my own. Precisely as the hands of my watch marked the hour of midnight, the boatswain's shrill whistle rang through the scboom; and almost immediately afterwards the noise of the capstan heaving up the anchor reached my ears. These sounds were followed by the quick trampling of feet upon every part of the deck overhead, as the sailors were busily and actively preparing for the *Athene* to put out to sea. Two or three persons descended into the large cabin, from which the state-rooms opened; and they conversed together in voices so low that I could scarcely catch their tones. Then, after a brief interval, some one tapped at the door of my cabin; and I started up from my seat, with the idea that I was about to receive a visit from the terrible Captain Durazzo. For that he had come safely on board—that the last scintillation of hope was extinct—and that every one of Cosmo's schemes had now been frustrated, I could not possibly shut out from my own conviction.

I bade the person enter—the door opened—and a wild cry of joy thrilled from my lips as I sprang forward to welcome Constantine Kanaris.

The handsome young Greek was dressed in a travelling-costume, and his countenance was flushed with a glow of triumph, which methought was the unalloyed happiness he now at length experienced on being enabled to call the beautiful Leonora his own. And the cold breeze of night, too, had probably enhanced that glow with its healthful briskness. Certain it is that never had Constantine Kanaris seemed so remarkably handsome—so

Apollo-like in his exquisite personal beauty, than at this moment. My impression was that by some means or another he had come to save me: for he looked not as if he were there as a prisoner and to share my captivity.

"My dear Kanaris," I exclaimed, bounding forward, as I have above said, "most welcome—Oh! how welcome are you to your persecuted friend! But let me not be so selfish as to think of my own affairs before congratulating you—as I hope I may——"

"Yes—you may congratulate me," answered Constantine in a tone of exultation: "Leonora is mine!"

"And now, Kanaris, you are completely happy?" I said, pressing his hand warmly; "and I rejoice unfeignedly! But tell me—how learnt you of my captivity? have you the power to save me?—or may I even hope that the authorities are at length in possession——"

"Of the Athene?" he exclaimed. "It is by no means probable, my dear Wilmot, that such will ever be the case. You have fared well on board?" he added, glancing around the state-room: "every attention has been shown you?"

"Yes," I ejaculated: "but such politeness becomes a hideous mockery when offered to a captive. The sense of the wrongs I experience, is not to be alleviated by the presence of dainties served upon silver——"

"Your captivity need not be of long duration," interrupted Kanaris. "Of this you may be assured."

"Ah!" I said, the chill of disappointment smiting me, "then you have not the power to rescue your unfortunate friend? Nevertheless, my dear Kanaris, it is most kind of you to incur so tremendous a risk by visiting me here!"—and then, as a sudden thought struck me—for I felt that the vessel was in motion, I exclaimed, "But, good heavens! how will you get away in order to prosecute your journey in obedience to your uncle's summons?"

"Think not of me, my dear Wilmot?" responded Kanaris. "If I can read your thoughts aright, you are anxious to see Captain Durazzo——"

"He is on board, then?" I exclaimed. "But yes—I thought as much!"

"He is on board," rejoined Kanaris; "and he will doubtless give such explanations as you may seek. Come with me! You shall speak to him on the quarter-deck of his own gallant vessel——"

"But I may not leave this cabin without permission," I hastily observed.

"Yes—you already have Captain Durazzo's leave and license," answered Kanaris, "to ascend to the deck. Come quick! You will know him at once from the profound respect which all will testify towards him: for Durazzo is a king on board the Athene! Come quick, I say!"

I had not leisure for a moment's reflection—but hastened to follow Kanaris from the state-room. We found the large cabin unoccupied as we traversed it: we ascended the stairs, Kanaris leading the way. On reaching the deck, the first glance thrown upward, showed me that the snowy white canvass was bent to the spars, and that the beautiful schooner was gliding away from the mouth of the harbour of Civita Vecchia. A second glance

flung along the whole range of the deck, showed me that the sailors were full of all the bustle, activity, and life which are wont to prevail on board a ship proceeding to sea; and then a third glance, flung hastily around the spot where Kanaris and myself were standing, had the lightning-flash effect of a thrilling revelation. Every look on the part of the grouped officers was bent with profoundest respect upon my companion; and the sailing-master of the Athene stood, hat in hand, awaiting orders. For Constantine Kanaris and the formidable corsair-chief Durazzo were one and the same!

## CHAPTER CXXV.

### DURAZZO.

IF a bomb-shell had suddenly exploded at my feet—if I had felt the schooner herself soaring up into the air like a balloon—or if the whole town of Civita Vecchia had come across the waves to surround us,—indeed if the wildest impossibility had taken place, I could not have been more completely seized with mingled wonderment, consternation, and dismay, than I was on the abrupt revealing of that astounding mystery. I remained absolutely rooted to the spot—riveted status-like to the deck—petrified—and with my looks fixed upon the form of him whom I must now call Captain Durazzo. On his part there was the glow of the proudest triumph: his figure was drawn up—not stiffly—but with an elegant hauteur and a graceful dignity: there was nothing pompous, nor arrogant, nor vain-glorious in his appearance—it was a species of chivalric pride which thus animated him as he stood revealed to me the commander of that beautiful vessel. Nor was there anything in his look or manner that seemed indicative of exultation over myself: neither was there a diminution of the friendliness of the way in which he regarded me. I remember full well that in the consternation and surprise which first seized upon me, all other feelings were lost: but when I gradually began to emerge forth, as it were, from that stupefying sensation, I was smitten with a wild horror on Leonora's behalf, and with a profound sadness to think that one so handsome and so elegant, so accomplished in mind and so fascinating in manners as this young Greek could possibly be the chieftain of a lawless horde!

"In a few minutes," said Constantine Durazzo—for that Christian name was really his own,— "we will discourse together: for the present I have a few orders to execute. Remain here, or go below, just as you think fit—you are your own master in everything excepting your freedom."

I stood aside in melancholy and sadness; and just at that instant, by the light of a lantern which was flaring on the deck of the vessel, I encountered the hideous mocking looks of Mr. Lanover. The keen eye of Durazzo fell upon those features at the same instant; and never shall I forget the lofty pride—indeed the Apollo-like dignity with which the young pirate-chief addressed the humpback.

"Look you, Mr. Lanover," he said; "it is no reason because there is a compact existing between



you and me, that you should by your mien or manner offer provocation to any one in my ship: nor is it any reason because circumstances have rendered Mr. Wilmot a captive here, that he should experience annoyance of any unnecessary kind."

Lanover retreated in utter discomfiture, and was lost to my view amidst the darkness which prevailed farther along the deck beyond the sphere of the glaring lamplight. I was much too dispirited, too sad, and too desponding to thank Durazzo even with a glance for this kind intervention on my part; and the young corsair-captain, having thus gotten rid of Lanover, began to issue his orders to those about him. The sailing-master received certain instructions, and hastened off to carry them out: the second lieutenant and the mate received their orders likewise: and the effects of all these commands, issued with a tone and air of lofty authority blandly exercised, were quickly visible in the direction given to the ship and the unfolding of more canvass from the tapering spars. The night was dark—the wind was blowing strongly, but not violently: it had shifted somewhat within the last hour or two; and though still far from being completely favourable, was less adverse than it previously had been. The sails were all of anow white-ness; and the vessel, bending gracefully to the breeze, was borne along with an astonishing rapidity. The lights of Civita Vecchia were rapidly waning into a misty twinkling, until they disappeared altogether; and whichever way the eye now glanced around, obscurity circumscribed its gaze.

Durazzo—having spoken a few more words to the second lieutenant, who received his superior's orders with a salutation in which respectfulness was mingled with a miration and affection—turned to me, saying, "Now, Mr. Wilmot, we can have some little discourse together. Be so kind as to follow me."

We descended the stairs; and Constantine Durazzo led the way to that inner cabin which I have already described as being more exquisitely furnished and fitted up than the first one, and which had the windows with the stern-chasers. These ports were now closed—for the sea was running somewhat high: the silver lamp suspended to the ceiling and swinging to the motion of the vessel, flooded the cabin with a brilliant lustre; and Durazzo rang a bell, which summons was immediately answered by the picturesquely-attired page. An order couched in a few words, but these kindly spoken, was given; and the page withdrew. In a few moments he reappeared, bringing wine and other refreshments; and in the meanwhile Durazzo had thrown himself with a sort of elegant ease upon one of the richly-appointed ottomans—affably requesting me to be seated likewise. My manner was cold and distant, but tinged with a profound sadness, for the reasons which I have already described.

"I can understand full well, Mr. Wilmot," said the young corsair-chief, when the page had withdrawn, "everything that is passing in your mind. You have ere now experienced a surpris which has overwhelmed you; and I have seen enough of your generous disposition to be aware that you compassionate me while you tremble for Leonora."

"I do, I do!" was the exclamation which pealed from my lips in accents that were excited and ever passionate. "Oh, I would give much for both your sakes to find that it was all a dream—that you were still the Kanaris whom I looked upon as a friend—"

"And is it impossible," asked Durazzo, over whose countenance a transient expression of anguish had flitted—that very same expression which on two or three previous occasions I had seen for a moment ruffling those features of such exquisite classical beauty,—“is it impossible for us still to continue friends?”

I gazed upon him for a few instants with deep sadness in my looks; and then I said, "Would to heaven that you could show me how it were possible!"

"That I am the captain of the Athene," he responded slowly at first, but quickly assuming a warmer tone, "is most true; and that she is engaged in lawless and desperate pursuits, is likewise true. But so far from being ashamed of my position in *one* sense, I glory in it; and I have loved this ship of mine with a pride and an infatuation which seemed to forbid the thought that I could ever admit into my heart another and a different love! Yet it has been so—and Leonora has eclipsed the Athene! Mr. Wilmot, I hope and trust that this will be my last voyage, and that at the expiration thereof I may be enabled to retire from a life which until recently was full of an excitement that I adored, but which I hesitate not now to confess has ceased to be compatible with the new sentiments that inspire my soul."

"This is at least some consolation to me," I exclaimed: "for notwithstanding I am your prisoner, I cannot help experiencing somewhat of my former friendship towards you—And, Oh! Captain Durazzo, tell me at once that you will not aid that hideous humpback Lanover in carrying out his nefarious plans with respect to those who are so dear to me! Need I tell you that Annabel, the granddaughter of that Sir Matthew Hezeltime, whom—"

"I know that you are enamoured of her," interrupted Durazzo; "and at once receive my assurance that though bound to carry out the compact with Mr. Lanover, not a hair upon the heads of those who are thus dear to you shall be injured—no more than any injury shall be done unto yourself!"

"This assurance," I exclaimed, "testifies that you do indeed possess some generous feelings: but can you controul the lawless passions of your crew? My Annabel is beautiful as an angel—"

"If the word, Mr. Wilmot, go forth from my lips," interrupted Durazzo proudly, "there shall not be so much as a look thrown upon your Annabel that may bring up a blush to her cheeks! But put that topic aside for a few minutes—and let me give you some little explanations; for the time has passed when it was needful to maintain a mystery with you. For upwards of two years have I been the chief of this corsair-band and the commander of this gallant vessel—"

"And I need not ask," I said, "whether you be in reality related to the great Admiral Kanaris?"

"I am no relative of the great Greek com-

mander," replied my companion: "but my name is in reality Constantine Durazzo Kanaris—though for a long interval I had renounced the name of Kanaris, and resumed it only when visiting Italy for my pleasure. This resumption of that surname, however, was fortunate; inasmuch as on becoming introduced to the Judge and his beauteous niece, it helped as well as suggested the fiction of my kinship with the Greek Admiral—a fiction which at once appeared to guarantee my respectability."

"And that journey to Naples which you recently took, was doubtless for the purpose of holding intercourse with the Athene?"

"Yes," responded Durazzo; "and I will continue my explanations frankly. My love for Leonora amounted to an infatuation—a madness—an irresistible sentiment. To have lost her, would have been death; and yet I knew not how to make her my bride, standing as I perpetually was upon a mine which any accident might cause to explode. I had left the Athene for a few months' recreation, and likewise because I was ill and suffering at the time. I had longed to visit Italy; and I ordered the Athene to put into the Bay of Naples at a certain time, that it might take me on board again. Little had I foreseen, when I left my ship to travel in Italy, that on arriving at Civita Vecchia I should be spell-bound by the eyes of beauty. Yet it was so; and as I have already stated, I dared not dally too long in my courtship, for fear lest some sudden accident should unmask and expose me. I was not generous enough—or at least my love was too strong to permit me to resign Leonora for ever; and I saw too that she loved me so deeply in return that her own happiness would be wrecked at the same time that mine own was destroyed. I besought her uncle to assent to a speedy marriage—but he demurred; and I feared lest with characteristic prudence he might address a letter to Admiral Kanaris, in order to obtain guarantees not so much for my respectability—because in *that* the Judge implicitly believed—but of my pecuniary ability to maintain a wife in a suitable and becoming manner. I therefore saw the necessity of acting with promptitude, and even with vigour. In a word, Mr. Wilmot, I formed the desperate intention of carrying off Leonora either by fair means or by foul; and trusting to her love to forgive me, as well as to accept her destiny as a corsair's bride—"

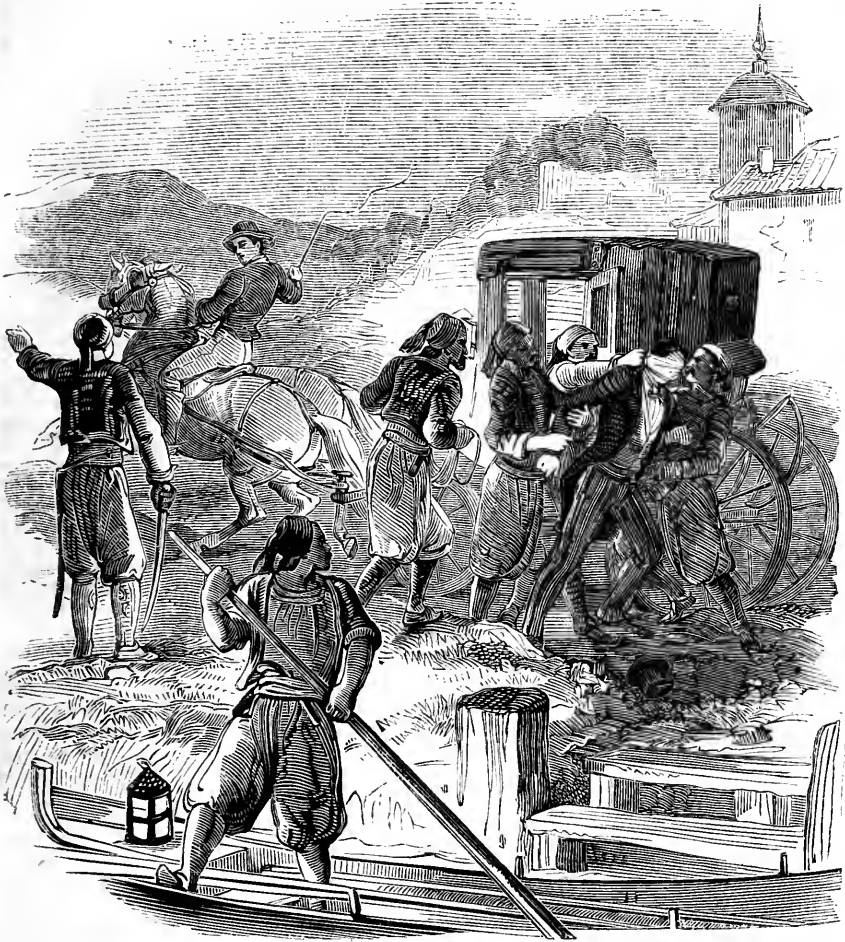
"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, recoiling in horror from this portion of the young Greek's confession; "and you would have thus consummated the misery of her whom you pretended to love."

"Pretended!" ejaculated Durazzo, with a sudden fierce flashing of his splendid eyes and a crimson flushing of his marvellously handsome countenance: "by heaven it was the tremendous reality of that love of mine which led me to the formation of a project so extreme—so desperate! But I can pardon you the observation: it is natural enough—For *you*!" he added, with a sudden sinking of the tone and with a corresponding dejection of look, "are differently situated in respect to your own love!"

"Thank heaven, I am!" I murmured, but without the intention of being overheard; for I did not wish, neither was it my policy, to wound or irritate the feelings of the young Greek.

Nevertheless he did catch what I said: for he exclaimed with bitterness, "Yes, you may indeed

thank heaven that it is so!"—then instantaneously resuming his natural look and tone, he went on to observe, "Having formed the extreme and desperate resolution of carrying off Leonora, I proceeded to Naples—not to rejoin my ship—but to order her up to Civita Vecchia. While at Naples, I learnt from my lieutenant Notaras that this northward cruise along the Italian coast would serve a double purpose: namely, mine own, and that of a man named Lanover, who had made him a certain proposition by which a considerable sum of money was to be obtained. I was too much occupied with my own affairs to have a great deal of curiosity at the time for those of Mr. Lanover; and I therefore left Notaras to manage that business as he might think fit. The Athene set sail from the Bay of Naples; and I set out by land on my journey back to Civita Vecchia. Some little business compelled me to take Rome in my way; and there I fell in with you. Utterly ignorant that you were even so much as acquainted with Lanover, and therefore totally unsuspecting of the object for which you were journeying to Civita Vecchia—but conceiving a liking for you—I agreed to become your travelling-companion. I need not remind you, Mr. Wilmot, that you were so guarded and discreet in your conversation on the road, as to leave me still under the impression that your affairs and my own were no more likely to clash than that the poles themselves should come in collision. Nor need I remind you under what circumstances we fell in with Notaras. Quick as lightning the glance which I threw upon him, as I sprang forth from the chaise to his assistance when he was thrown from his horse, conveyed to him my desire that he and I should seem strangers to each other. All the rest can be succinctly explained. We arrived in Civita Vecchia; and on learning that you were about to call on Signor Portici, my feeling was merely one of astonishment at the coincidence—and nothing more. Even when I received a hint from Signor Portici that you had come to Civita Vecchia on private business which could not be explained, but which rendered it necessary for you to seclude yourself, I was still without a suspicion that your affairs and mine would in any way become entangled. But when I learnt from Notaras that you had been on board the Athene, and that there was some reason to suspect you were a spy, I was startled, and resolved to fathom your purposes, if possible. That was my motive for obtaining Signor Portici's permission to call upon you on Sunday evening. You remember the discourse which took place between us. I affected to be indifferent as to the private business which had brought you to Civita Vecchia, lest I should excite any suspicion in your mind; but you said enough to convince me that you were not really a spy. This assurance I conveyed to the officers of my crew with the least possible delay after my interview with you. I must now proceed to explain, that on my return from Naples to Civita Vecchia a conversation which I had with the Judge, convinced me that he had *not* written to Admiral Kanaris, and that he was perfectly satisfied with certain documents which I showed him to prove my respectability, as well as the excellence of my position in a pecuniary sense. I saw likewise that a temporary separation had strengthened, if



possible, the love of my Leonora; and therefore I resolved upon a sudden change in my tactics. Discarding the extreme measure of a forced abduction, I proposed an immediate marriage, pleading as an excuse the necessity of a sudden journey into Greece. To my joy the Judge yielded to my wishes—his objections were overruled—and Leonora gave her assent. Everything appeared to progress favourably until last night, — when I heard from my second lieutenant that you were well known to Lanover, by whom you were as much hated as dreaded. This information he received yesterday afternoon from Lanover, when meeting him for the purpose of privately arranging—

“I know it all!” I interrupted Durazzo: “for I overheard the entire conversation at the coffee-house between your lieutenant and that vile hump-back.”

“Ah!—and your man Cosmo likewise must have

been a listener?” ejaculated Durazzo, a light breaking in upon him. “Now I understand everything! But let me continue. Ignorant of the extent to which danger might threaten myself—indeed uncertain as to whether there were any real peril at all—but nevertheless conscious of the possibility of Lanover’s affairs leading to the complication of mine own, I determined to be upon my guard, and to take my measures in a manner calculated to meet any emergency. I ordered a band of my men to be in readiness near the Portici Villa, with the understanding that they were to act in accordance with certain signals—such as a shrill peculiar whistle or the report of a pistol. The latter was to be regarded as a proof that I was unmasked and arrested at the villa; and they were to rush forward to my rescue. But in rescuing me under such circumstances they would at the same time have carried off Leonora. These were my precautions—these my instruc-

tions; and when all was settled, I boldly took my way to the Portici Villa, hoping that everything would continue to glide on smoothly—but on the other hand, prepared for the worst. On my arrival I learnt that you and Cosmo were in private conference with the Judge; and I confess that it was with a beating heart I hastened up-stairs to Leonora. Her reception of me was loving and affectionate as usual. You speedily joined us in order to bid us farewell; and you then, with the generous purpose of warning me against a supposed danger in respect to my visits to this vessel, made important revelations. I thus learnt that I myself was still unsuspected, but that the character of the ship was known, and that schemes were in progress for the arrest of Lanover and myself. Then, as you remember, I was present in the dining-room when Signor Portici announced the expected arrival of an officer of the Tyrol, furnished with a personal description of myself. My mind was at once made up how to act. True to my compact with Lanover—or rather the one which Notaras had made on my behalf—I considered myself bound to frustrate your project of proceeding to Leghorn and warning Sir Matthew Heselstine. Hence your capture by my men—which was effected through the connivance of the postilion, into whose hand I thrust some pieces of gold while you were taking leave of Signor Portici. But I had another reason for making you my prisoner; and this I must explain hereafter. All the rest of my measures were promptly taken: Lanover received a warning which brought him without delay last night on board the Athene—and a party of my men intercepted this morning the Austrian officer on the road to Civita Vecchia. In the forenoon of this day the bridal took place:—Signor Portici and my beloved Leonora believe at this moment that I am already some miles on that journey which I pre-*texted*. But here I am secure and free, on board my own gallant vessel! Ah, and I should observe that I was accompanied by another whose temporary prisonage suits the new plans I have formed and the altered projects which I have in view. That man is Cosmo.”

“What!” I ejaculated, “is it possible? Cosmo a captive on board the Athene?”

“Yes,” rejoined Durazzo: “the police-spy of Ostia, who made use of yourself as his tool, is a prisoner in the forepart of this vessel. But now you may wonder, Mr. Wilmot, why I have given you all these minute explanations? I will tell you.”

“I need not ask,” I said, “whether Cosmo is well treated? I think I know you well enough—”

“To be assured that I am incapable of inflicting unnecessary harshness or useless cruelty? I do not blame Cosmo,” continued the corsair-chief, “for having studied to ensnare myself and to capture my vessel. It is his avocation to do these things, and accomplish what the world calls the law and justice, as it is mine to enact the part of free-booter on the seas. Nevertheless, Cosmo having fallen into my power, must submit to whatsoever conditions I choose to impose—or he will have to meet the fate of a spy.”

“And those conditions?” I asked.

“We will discard that topic for the present—so

far as it relates to Cosmo,” rejoined the pirate-chief. “Do you not acknowledge, Mr. Wilmot, that I have given you frank and candid explanations?”

“Your candour, Captain Durazzo, has cost you nothing,” I answered somewhat coldly: “for there was no longer the slightest necessity to maintain a mystery towards me.”

“And you think Mr. Wilmot,” said Constantine, now himself adopting a certain air of haughty reserve, “that we can never be friends again? You are silent,” he added after a pause: “you do not answer me. You feel that you are in my power—you do not choose to say aught that you fear might irritate me towards you: while on the other hand you will not compromise your own self-esteem and personal dignity by giving utterance to anything that is insincere. Can you not understand that I admire such a character as yours? or do you fancy that I am lost to every noble and elevating sentiment?”

“I observed just now,” was my response, “that you evidently possess many generous feelings. But can you ask for my friendship at a moment when your vessel is proceeding towards a destination where your object is to carry out the nefarious—the diabolical views of such a wretch as Lanover?”

“I dare not fly away from my compact with that man,” answered Durazzo. “There are certain immutable laws as well as fixed principles that constitute, so to speak, the very foundation of the authority which I myself wield on board this schooner—”

“If it be a matter of a few hundred pounds,” I indignantly exclaimed, “let me at once give you a draft, or hand you a letter of credit—”

“If it were merely *that* matter,” interrupted the young Greek, “I would cheerfully from my own resources fling the amount into the common stock and have done with Lanover and his affairs for your sake. But the compact must be carried out! There is not a man now under my command who would not rebel against me if I placed it in the power of Lanover to proclaim that the pirate-chief’s word to him was broken. Therefore argue this point no farther; and rest satisfied with the assurance that no harm beyond a mere loss of liberty for a period, shall befall those in whom you are so deeply interested.”

I remained silent for upwards of a minute,—reflecting painfully on all that Constantine Durazzo had just said; and then I remarked, “You were just now on the point of explaining wherefore you entered into such elaborate details to account for your past conduct?”

“I informed you, Mr. Wilmot,” proceeded the pirate-chief, “that I hope this present voyage will be my last. I do not mean the mere cruise up to Leghorn—but a six weeks’ or two months’ scouring of the Levant; so that I may be enabled to double or treble the resources I already possess. If fortune thus far favour me, it is my purpose to abandon for ever a lawless life—to return to Italy—and to bear away my bride to some far-off clime, where we may thenceforth dwell in a peaceful and happy seclusion. That is my aim—that is my hope; and all the explanations I have given you, were intended to lead you to the comprehension of this project which I have formed. Will you mar it?”

"I scarcely understand you," was my answer.

"I will explain myself fully and completely," rejoined Constantine. "I told you at the outset that it was not merely to prevent you from proceeding to Leghorn that I caused you to be taken captive. There was another reason. I knew that under *any* circumstances you must shortly discover that Constantine Kanaris and the pirate-captain were one and the same individual, and therefore——"

"I comprehend!" I said. "Apart from the iniquitous affairs to be achieved at Leghorn, you hold me your prisoner in order to prevent me from making any disagreeable revelation to Signor Portici and his niece?"

"Precisely so," rejoined Durazzo, with a calm firmness. "In all probability the cruise with Sir Matthew Heseltime and the ladies of his family will be of short duration: for the English Baronet will doubtless prove but too eager to yield to Lanover's demands, in order to regain liberty for himself and those who are dear to him. Let us suppose therefore all this to be accomplished—let us suppose that Lanover being satisfied, Sir Matthew Heseltime and his family are set at freedom,—what course would *you* adopt if I gave you freedom at the same time?"

"Let me ask, Captain Durazzo," I said, "what course you yourself would adopt if you were in my position?"

"You have no right, Mr. Wilmot, to beg the question thus," answered Constantine with a stern severity,—the expression of his countenance at that moment fully illustrating the power of this mere youth with his delicately chiselled features, to assume the air of command which was necessary for the control of the lawless crew that with such evident willingness and admiration served under him. "Answer for yourself," he added; "and do not speak evasively, nor seek to compromise me by an appeal to feelings which, situated as I am, I cannot—dare not understand. In one word, supposing at the end of a week or a fortnight, or within a few days, as the case may be, I put you on shore wheresoever you may choose to be thus landed,—would you proceed straight to Civita Vecchia to proclaim my secret to the Judge and his niece? or would you pledge me your solemn word of honour as a man and a gentleman that you would keep this secret inviolable?"

"Of what use," I asked, "would be such a pledge from my lips, when others might betray you?"

"Ah!" ejaculated the young chieftain, petulantly; "again you speak with an evasiveness which surprises me on the part of Joseph Wilmot! But I will answer you in every detail—so that there may be left no excuse for your avoidance to come to the point. Lanover will not betray me—his own interests forbid the idea: I have already told you that Cosmo must yield to the conditions which I shall impose—namely, to serve amongst my crew for a certain period—in short, for so long a time as he might be dangerous if restored to liberty. Then there remains the Austrian officer. He also shall be detained on board the Athene until the time be passed when he would have the power to injure me. You now understand my

policy and my intentions, Mr. Wilmot; and you will give me credit for the desire to spare you that lengthened prisonage which is reserved for the others."

"And if I pledge my word to the effect you demand," I said, "what guarantee have you that I should keep it?"

"Because I have confidence in your honour," rejoined the pirate-chief. "All this hesitation and evasiveness on your part confirm my previously conceived opinion of your trustworthiness. A man who precipitately gives the pledge that is demanded of him, would as readily break it: but the man who hesitates at thus solemnly committing himself, deals not lightly with an oath and looks upon it as too sacred to be broken."

"There is one point which you appear to have lost sight of," I remarked, as a thought struck me.

"It is not probable," said Durazzo, with a slight smile, which was as much as to imply that he was not wont to be thus deficient in caution.

"The commander of the Tyrol," I rejoined, "possessed a personal description of you: the written document containing that description, is now in your hands, as I have every reason to believe—but still the captain of the Tyrol may communicate it verbally to Signor Portici—and the Judge will at once recognise the identity!"

"The Tyrol," answered Durazzo, "will not tarry an instant at Civita Vecchia when a signal from the port conveys to it the intelligence that the Athene has sailed. She will spread all her canvass for the chase; and I promise myself the pleasure of leading her such a dance over the waters of the Mediterranean that her time shall be fully occupied for weeks and weeks to come. Unless indeed——But no matter! Come what will, I reck not for the Tyrol! In a word, my plans are all so well arranged—my proceedings so carefully settled—that *you* only are the object of my concern; and it is from motives of friendship towards yourself that I leave you the alternative of pledging me the oath I have described, when the time shall come—instead of finding myself under the necessity of detaining you a prisoner on board the Athene for a lengthened period."

Durazzo ceased speaking: he awaited my answer—but I gave him none. I reflected profoundly. I felt it to be a paramount duty that the first use I must make of liberty, whenever obtained, would be to reveal the astounding secret to the worthy Judge and his amiable confiding niece, so as to open their eyes to the precipice on which the fabric of their happiness was tottering. But on the other hand it were most impolitic on my part to make an immediate enemy of Durazzo by revealing what my intention was; and the only course at present open to me was by gaining time ere I gave any decided response, so as to trust to whatsoever the chapter of accidents might turn up.

"I see," said the pirate-chief, with an air of coldness, which was no doubt assumed to veil his disappointment and annoyance at the failure of his design to extract an immediate pledge from me,— "I see that you require time, Mr. Wilmot, to reflect upon all that I have been saying. And indeed, when I come to think of it," he added, now changing his look to a listless one, and assuming a carelessness of manner, "there is no earthly hurry.

You will have ample leisure for mature deliberation."

There was a momentary silence; and then Durazzo said, "It is now late—and you may possibly wish to retire. My duties demand my presence for a while on deck."

Thus speaking, Constantine Durazzo rose from his seat, and bowed with a haughtily dignified coldness. I returned the salutation with mingled reserve and sadness; and issuing from the elegantly appointed cabin, repaired to my own state-room.

## CHAPTER CXXVI.

### THE TYROL.

AFTER a few hours of uneasy and troubled repose, I quitted my couch. On consulting my watch, I found it was eight o'clock in the morning; and my toilet being accomplished, I rang the silver bell, not merely for the purpose of procuring breakfast, but likewise to ascertain, through the medium of the page, whether I still possessed the privilege of taking an airing upon deck. The youth quickly made his appearance, with the materials for an excellent repast, if I had humour and appetite to enjoy it—which I assuredly had not: but he said nothing, and I did not choose to question him, at least not for the present. On returning, however, to remove the tray, the elegantly attired page intimated that I was at liberty to take an airing on the deck whenever I thought fit.

I at once availed myself of this permission. On ascending the stairs, I observed that the armed seaman was no longer mounting sentinel on the deck—nor was I followed about the schooner as on the previous day. There was indeed no necessity for any such precaution. We were far away from land, which was only just perceptible as a thread-like streak in the eastern horizon: but its position, and that of the schooner, enabled me at once to comprehend that the wind had shifted to the south, and was therefore completely favourable to the progress of the Athene towards Leghorn. It was blowing strong—the sea was rough: but as the gallant bark bent to the breeze under a press of canvass, it glided lightly and with incredible swiftness over the rolling waves.

Near the helm'sman stood the pirate-chief. He was now clad in an elegant uniform: the flush of pride was upon his cheeks—a kindred fire flashed from his superb dark eyes, as he watched the progress of the Athene over the waters of the Mediterranean. Young though he were, he nevertheless seemed to be fitted for command; and that slight, elegant, youthful form evidently contained a soul possessing all the attributes necessary for the exercise of the loftiest authority over his crew. In every sense he *looked* the chief; and I could not repress a sudden feeling of admiration as I beheld him there at his post.

He saluted me with a courtesy in which the dignity of a commander was mingled with a recollection of our recent friendship; and I acknowledged it in a suitable manner. My demeanour was just sufficiently cold and distant to prove my sense of the altered terms on which I stood towards him—but at the same time sufficiently polite to

avoid the chance of coming to an open rupture. The second lieutenant and the mate stood at a little distance, ready to catch the first glance of their commander's eye at any moment that he might be about to issue a fresh order; and the sailing-master presently joined them. But no one ventured to address an observation to Captain Durazzo unless first spoken to by him, or unless it were to report something with regard to the duties which they respectively had to perform. I looked along the deck to see if Cosmo, or the Austrian officer, or Lanover were likewise taking the air: but I beheld none of them.

"No," said the pirate-chief, evidently divining my thoughts, "they are all three below in their respective berths. Cosmo, unaccustomed to the sea, is suffering from sickness—Lanover is in the midst of his breakfast—and the proud Austrian disdains to come upon deck, for the simple reason that it required my permission for him to do so. Let him enjoy the solitude of his state-room!—he will perhaps have the further gratification of presently beholding an exciting spectacle through the air-hole of his cabin!"

A peculiar light flashed from Durazzo's eyes as he gave utterance to these last words; and the colour heightened upon his countenance. For a moment indeed his features were radiant, as if with the presage of a triumph that he was confident of achieving. I could not understand what he meant; and I gazed upon him in silent astonishment.

"See you that sail, Mr. Wilmot?" he asked, slowly turning towards the stern of the schooner, and directing my attention to an object in the southern horizon. "The Tyrol must be crowding all its canvass upon its masts—for it comes more quickly than I could have anticipated. I do not affect any mystery with you—it is now useless, and would therefore be puerile. I thought to have accomplished the business at Leghorn before the Tyrol could be within sight: but she is a better sailer than I had been taught to imagine her."

The idea flashed to my mind that Captain Durazzo meant to fight the Tyrol: but I instantaneously discarded it as a notion too wild and impossible to be entertained. I had heard that the Tyrol was a thirty-two gun frigate: I knew that the Athene had only eight carronades on her deck, besides the three small brass stern-chasers in Durazzo's cabin; and therefore, as a matter of course, a second thought made me feel astonished at myself at the apparent madness of the idea that the corsair-chief, however desperate, would think of engaging such a formidable enemy. I looked towards the sail in the horizon; and then, as I again glanced at the young Greek, I was more than ever struck by his aspect. Without any exaggeration there was the stamp of a god-like heroism upon his features: his form appeared to dilate—his eyes shone with a supernal lustre—he seemed taller than he really was, in such a manner was his figure drawn up; and he stood upon the deck of his vessel with the mien of a man who felt that he was capable of every thing. Back to my mind rushed that idea which I had just discarded—back it came, stronger, more palpable than at first; and it no longer seemed as if I were thinking of the wild and impossible.

The young Greek appeared perfectly to compre-



hend all that was passing in my thoughts: for he said in a calm quiet tone, yet with a slight haughty curling of his upper lip, "Perhaps, Mr. Wilmot, it may not be so insane and frenzied a proceeding as you at first imagined?"

"You mean, Captain Durazzo," I said eagerly, "to fight you ship?"

"Well, I think it will be the better course," he answered, with a marvellous coolness—indeed with so listless, careless, and indifferent an air that for a moment it appeared like a silly affectation, considering the stern gravity of the circumstances. "You see, Mr. Wilmot," he continued, a trifle more seriously, "it would be easy enough for me to run away from the Austrian: and if I had no special object in view at a particular place, I should certainly do so. A man is an idiot who risks a gallant vessel and a fine crew in bootless strife. But it is otherwise with us—with me, I mean," he added, correcting himself, while he bowed slightly as if to invoke my pardon for having seemed even for an instant to include myself within the scope of the circumstances to which he alluded. "If I were to run on to Leghorn, the Tyrol would be upon me in a few hours, and the interval might not be sufficient to do Lanover's business. And then I should have to fight the Tyrol off Leghorn as an almost inevitable necessity. Just as well fight her here in the open sea, where, if a certain result ensues, no one at Leghorn nor any where else need know what has happened till I choose to proclaim it."

"You reckon, Captain Durazzo," I said, "at obtaining an easy victory over that frigate?"

"Not an easy one, Mr. Wilmot," he answered gravely. "I am no idle boaster—nor am I such an idiot as to blind myself to the danger which is to be run. The most despicable fool in this world is the man who cheats himself; and that part I shall never play. It was my intention—as I told you last night—to lead the Tyrol a dance that might employ her for weeks to come: but I candidly confess that I knew not she was so swift a sailer. Nevertheless, even last night I had some faint presentiment that it might possibly prove necessary to exchange shots with her; and now this presentiment shall be fulfilled."

I remembered that in one part of a speech on the preceding night, the young Greek, after speculating on the dance he might lead the Tyrol, had used the phrase "Unless indeed—" and then he had cut himself short. I therefore saw that his present demeanour was not one of mere braggadocio assumed for the purpose of carrying off a real terror in the presence of a grave emergency; but that it was entirely consistent with a sagacious prescience that was all along calmly prepared for any eventuality. I dare say that my looks expressed more satisfaction than otherwise, though not the less blended with astonishment, at the idea that he positively proposed to engage the Tyrol; and again Durazzo fathomed what was passing in my mind.

"It is quite natural," he said,—"and I do not blame you! You hope that a crisis is now at hand the result of which will be to give freedom to yourself and release those at Leghorn in whom you are so interested, from any farther peril on the part of the corsair-vessel. Well, it may be so: and yet—"

"Listen to me, Captain Durazzo!" I ex-

claimed vehemently. "I should hail with the most unfeigned joy—and you have admitted that it is natural—my own prompt emancipation from captivity here, and the abrupt cutting short of those projects which the demon Lanover has initiated. But, on my soul, I should grieve if anything fatal were to happen to yourself: for I have yet the hope that society may recover one who though now lost to it, might, if he chose, prove one of its worthiest members!"

Durazzo flung upon me an unspeakable look of mingled gratitude and friendship; and I saw that his lip quivered despite all his efforts to keep down the swell of his emotions.

"You have spoken with the noblest magnanimity," he said: "you have given utterance to more than I could have expected—to more perhaps than I deserve! Would to heaven that I could in any way alter the course of events as they relate to yourself or to those in whom you are so much interested! But I cannot."

With these words the young corsair-chief turned abruptly away; and the next instant he was gazing through a telescope at the Tyrol in the distance. I noticed that the officers who stood near, and several of the sailors at a little distance, contemplated their youthful commander—while even the man at the wheel furtively studied his countenance—all with the eager anxiety of suspense as to what his decision might be. He himself was once more the resolute, strong-minded, calmly exultant being that I had just now seen him, before giving way to that transient betrayal of softer emotions: and handing the telescope to a boy who stood near, he turned towards the group of officers, with whom he consulted for a few minutes. I saw by their features that the proposition—or rather, perhaps, the intimation of his own views—excited the liveliest satisfaction; and the conviction struck me that the combat was to be fought.

Then calm, firm, and clear pealed forth the voice of Constantine Durazzo—a voice full of masculine harmony, and yet conveying all the authority with which he was invested—for he was a king, as he himself had expressed it, on board the Athene: and the order which he thus gave, was promptly executed. Several of the seamen sprang up the rigging of the two tall tapering masts—on to the yards and the booms: and a quantity of the canvass was promptly taken in. The course of the vessel was altered somewhat: it curved and stood out farther from the land, which in a few minutes ceased altogether to be visible. Then a fresh command was issued—the sails were still farther reduced—and it was evident that the Athene lay waiting for the Tyrol.

"Now you perceive, Mr. Wilmot, that I am really in earnest," said Durazzo, once more accosting me.

"I have not doubted it, since you gave me the assurance," I answered.

"Over yonder lies Elba," continued the corsair-chief, pointing in a westward direction; "and it would be easy for me to run past that island, continue my course round the north of Sardinia, and thus fly away from the Tyrol. But under existing circumstances I choose to fight her."

He again took the telescope; and having studied the distant canvass—for the hull of the frigate was not even yet visible—he said to me, "Wa-

have yet a few minutes for private discourse: have the goodness to step down with me into my cabin."

I followed Durazzo thither; and on gaining his beautifully appointed dwelling-place, he at once addressed me, in a low but firm voice, to the following effect:—

"Amidst the chances of strife I may fall, Mr. Wilmot; and it is also probable for the moment to arrive when it may seem that the Athene must become a prey to the Austrian. But whatsoever may happen to me, that catastrophe cannot occur to the ship:—for there is a solemn compact amongst us that we are *never* to surrender. A spark to the powder-room is the alternative to be adopted. Should that moment come, yourself, the Austrian prisoner, and Cosmo shall be duly cared for. A boat can be rapidly lowered; and into this shall ye all three be put. To this effect will I issue orders to those next to me in command. And now—I mean in the case which I have supposed, but which I flatter myself is little likely—nevertheless, if it *should* occur, you must do my last behest towards Leonora. You may tell her all the truth. Better for her to hear it delicately and considerably broken from your lips, than vauntingly proclaimed by the unfeeling Austrians! Say what you will of me: but fail not to give her the assurance that I loved her—nay, adored her unto the very last; and that whatsoever glory might be gained by such a desperate deed as this, I craved it only that it might render my name all the less odious in her eyes. For there is something, Wilmot, in a feat of dauntless daring that compensates for much of the iniquity of a life such as mine!"

"I swear that I will do your bidding!" I answered: and I must confess that I experienced at the instant no inconsiderable degree of emotion. "But in the provision which you made for the safety of some of us, you included not Lanover——"

"Ah! the worthless lump of carrion!" ejaculated Durazzo, with the most unfeigned disgust. "I hate him—hate him, for your sake! But I see that your merciful disposition would intercede on behalf of even a wretch such as he, and despite his iniquities towards yourself and those whom you love. Well, be it so! If the emergency should happen, you shall find him amidst those who are to be consigned to the boat."

"And that young page?" I said: "*he* seems at least to be innocent of any active co-operation——"

"Ah! I had forgotten him!" rejoined Durazzo. "Yes—he, poor boy, must be saved. He is an orphan—he was a schoolfellow of mine—and he attached himself to me as if he were a younger brother. But plead for no more—or there would be none left to blow up into the air along with the good ship Athene!"

I recoiled from these concluding words, which struck me as being uttered with a horrible mocking flippancy: but Durazzo, penetrating my thoughts, said hastily, "Do not think me cruel—do not think me ferocious. I am not naturally so. But a man may speak lightly of casualties which are the most horrible: or he perhaps would not be enabled to look them calmly in the face. And now I must return to the deck. But you, Wilmot——"

"With your permission I will accompany you," I answered.

"Shall you witness the combat?" inquired Durazzo, gazing on me with astonishment.

"I think," I responded, "that I have sufficient curiosity for that purpose."

"Be it so," rejoined Durazzo: and then he added in an impressive tone, "But beware how you touch a rope, or approach a gun, or even succour a wounded man! For if from the deck of the Austrian you be seen taking part, however slightly in the conflict, the story you have to tell would not for a single instant avail you: and if the worst happened, you would be picked up in the boat only to be hanged at the yard-arm as a pirate!"

Thanking Durazzo for his advice, I followed him to the deck. On reaching it, I looked at once in the direction of the Tyrol; and as for the last twenty minutes the schooner had been lying to, the Austrian frigate had approached considerably nearer than when I saw her last. Her hull was now completely visible; and she came on under a press of canvass. The Athene continued to remain quiet; and in a few minutes more, the streak of white paint, dotted with the black ports, which indicates a man-of-war, was plainly perceptible along the side of the Tyrol.

"Now, Mr. Wilmot," said Durazzo to me, "the period of excitement is at hand. I am about to give the order to clear the ship for action; and I should advise you to go down below."

"Not for the present, at all events," I answered,—“at least if I have your permission to remain on deck?"

"Follow your own inclinations," rejoined the young corsair-chief; "and whatever may happen within the next few hours—if death should be my doom—think in after-life as leniently as you can of one who could have wished to have gone on performing throughout a friendly part towards you!"

Without waiting for a reply, Durazzo turned abruptly away from me; and again his calm clear voice went pealing forth in its full tide of manly harmony, issuing the command for all hands to clear the Athene for battle. Then arose from the deck of the corsair-vessel such a tremendous shout of joy, that it went rolling over the sea as a prelude to the thunder-voice in which the ship itself was presently to speak. That shout lasted but for a few instants: then all was still once more, so far as men's voices were concerned,—though the liveliest activity now prevailed from stem to stern throughout the long sweep of the schooner's deck. Several of the sailors too sprang up into the rigging to make such preparations as might there be necessary, and to sling the yards in chains as a precaution against their being easily shot away if merely sustained by their ropes.

It was in the midst of all this bustle and excitement—but a bustle and excitement in which no confusion could be discerned—where every man knew his place as well as his own specific duty,—that happening to glance towards the top of the staircase, I perceived the countenance of Lanover peering forth upon the scene. Never shall I forget the look which that countenance wore. It was hideous: while the face itself was ghastly with the mingled bewilderment, terror, and dismay that it expressed. The man appeared scarcely able to believe the evi-

dence of his own senses. And well might he have been thus smitten with consternation and incredulity: for it was natural that he should think of the possibility of a shot reaching himself—equally natural that he should doubt whether the corsair-chief could be serious in engaging the Tyrol. Durazzo, with an exclamation of disgust, waved his hand imperiously for Lanover to go down again; and the vile humpback quickly disappeared from my view.

## CHAPTER CXXVII.

### THE FIGHT.

THE scene was now becoming vividly exciting. On came the pyramid of snowy canvass, with the Austrian flag floating high above all: but hitherto the Athene had shown no colours. The command to clear the deck for action on board the corsair, had been executed with a wondrous promptitude: rammers, sponges, and all the tackle requisite for the carronades had been put in their places—ammunition was brought up from below with marvellous despatch—and yet, as I have already said, there was not the slightest confusion in the carrying out of these sinister preliminaries. The young Greek commander—in his elegant uniform, with massive epaulettes on his shoulders—and his belt sustaining a sword of somewhat formidable dimensions for so slight a hand to wield, and likewise now furnished with a pair of double-barrelled pistols—issued his mandates with the calmness and clearness which indicated perfect self-possession. A single glance which I flung over the busy active crew, was sufficient to convince me that they placed the utmost reliance in the experience of their commander, and that they were content to perform their duty with an automaton-like docility as if it were impossible that he who directed their movements could for a single instant err.

Quantities of boarding pikes and tomahawks figured amongst the terrible weapons so profusely amassed in the proper quarters for the struggle that was about to take place; and Captain Durazzo, making the tour of the deck, carefully inspected the guns, the stands of arms round the masts, and all the various accessories that I have enumerated. Then he descended with four of his men, who were laden with the deadly implements of war, to his own cabin; and though I followed him not thither on the present occasion, yet I comprehended full well that the stern-chasers were not forgotten amidst the other preliminaries for the approaching conflict. The young Greek commander speedily returned to the quarter-deck: another mandate issued from his lips—and now I became the witness of a singular proceeding.

A strong pulley was rigged to a convenient spar belonging to the foremast; and nearly all the hands on board the schooner addressed themselves to the work about to be achieved. Then slowly from the depths of the vessel a long and formidable piece of ordnance was raised; and this was fixed upon a pivot on the deck, between the two masts, sufficiently high to have its range above the bulwarks, and thus in a position to swing and sweep round in every direction. This was a mystery connected with the pirate-vessel which was hitherto perfectly

unknown to me; and it afforded a new theme for wonderment at the extraordinary resources possessed by those who were about to be engaged in so deadly a strife.

On came the Austrian frigate; and as she was running before the wind, the lofty pyramid of canvass inclined gracefully towards the schooner—which, now proceeding on the other tack, heeled slightly and still more gracefully over on the opposite direction. I saw that in a few minutes the hostile vessels would be within gun-shot range of each other—but still I had no inclination to descend to my state-room: I experienced an intense curiosity to behold the conflict; and I likewise thought that there was scarcely more danger on the deck of the schooner than in a small cabin where a shot crashing through the side, might send the splinters flying perilously about.

All of a sudden a single flash from the side of the Tyrol heralded the roar of a gun: the thunder voice of that cannon spoke—and the white wreathing vapour rolled slowly away over the sea. A command went forth—clear, loud, and distinct—from Durazzo's lips; and a black flag—the invariable corsair-symbol of Mediterranean pirates—floated in the twinkling of an eye above the Athene.

On came the Tyrol; and it was now sufficiently near for us to catch the sound of the Austrian captain's voice of command pealing through the speaking-trumpet. Durazzo knew that it was the order for a broadside to be fired. Quickly but firmly his mandate was issued to the steersman,—so that the Athene, obedient to her helm as the docile steed is to the rein, moved in such a manner as to receive that broadside with the least chance of injury to herself. The terrific roar of the Austrian cannon crashed with a deafening sound: there were numerous and simultaneous splashes in the sea—there was the gushing sound of a ball a little above my own head—and scarcely had I recovered as it were from the startling sensation thus produced, when the artillery poured forth its thunder from the dark side of the schooner. The instant the smoke cleared away, I glanced towards the Tyrol, and perceived that its main and fore topsails were fluttering all loose to their yards. A second glance, flung upward amidst the exquisite tracery of the Athene's rigging, showed me (so far as I could judge) that nothing was injured. This impression was instantaneously confirmed by the look of triumph which Durazzo cast around him, when his own eye had swept with all the keenness of experience over every detail of his gallant vessel aloft.

Quick as lightning was the sweep which the Athene now made in obedience to her helm: the huge piece of ordnance swinging on its pivot, vomited forth its flame, its shot and smoke; and with fatal accuracy had it been discharged—for the fore-topmast of the Tyrol fell, with all its upper gear, over the frigate's side. The Athene swung round like a fairy vessel—its stern-chasers poured forth their deadly charge—and before the Tyrol seemed capable of executing another manœuvre, the other broadside of the pirate-ship was fired into her. Immense was the damage done to the frigate: but as yet not a spar was injured—not a rope was cut on board the Athene!

It requires little skill in nautical matters to en-

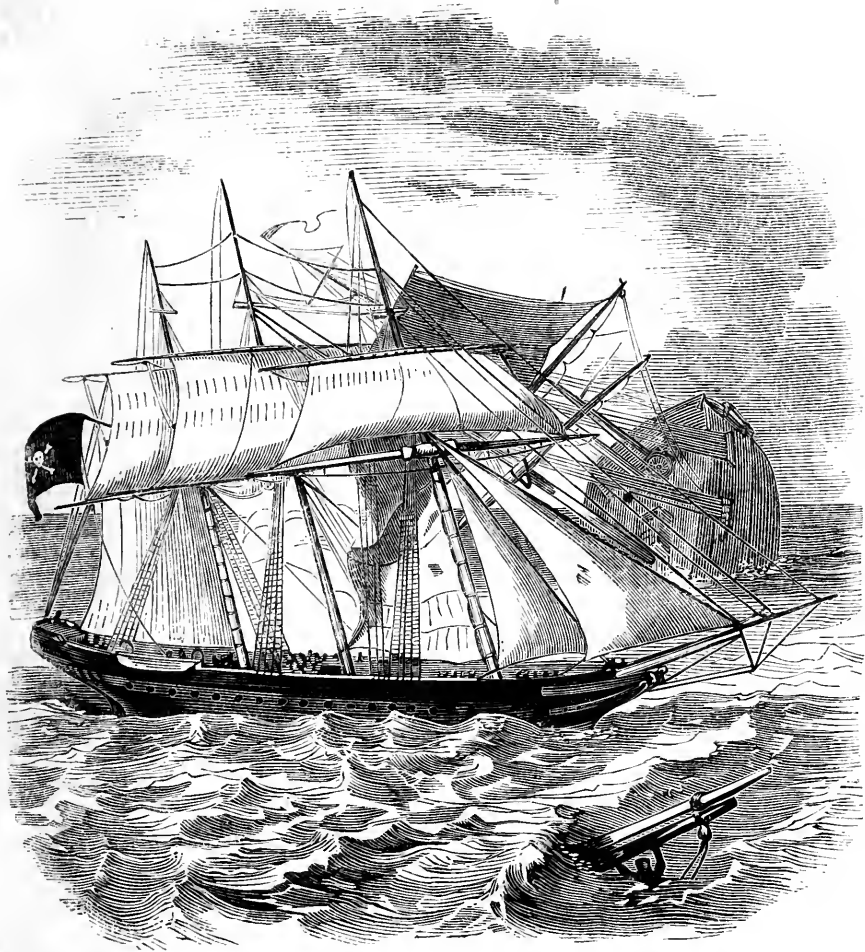
able the reader to comprehend that the Tyrol was thus at the very outset deprived of much of the advantage which her superior power and calibre gave her over the Athene. The damage done to her masts, her sails, and her rigging, prevented her from getting about in time to avoid being raked by the Athene the instant the artillery of the latter vessel was reloaded. Incredible was the swiftness with which the manœuvres of the pirate-schooner were executed: it seemed as if the slightest touch of the wheel sent her sweeping and curving and dashing round or onward in any direction, just as a man may cause the most tractable and clever steed to wheel in obedience to the rein. Running straight in towards the bows of the Tyrol, the Athene poured in another broadside: she veered again—Durazzo himself pointed the long piece of ordnance which swung upon its pivot—and the discharge was followed by the fall of the maintop-mast of the Tyrol. The stern-chasers did their work once more: round went the corsair-vessel—and the remaining broadside raked the Austrian, which lay well-nigh disabled and powerless, so far as manœuvring went, upon the bosom of the Mediterranean. I was stricken with perfect astonishment at the marvellous successes thus obtained by a vessel which was but as a skiff in comparison with the huge fabric that floated at a little distance.

There was a triumph depicted on the countenance of Durazzo—but not a vain-glorious exultation. To do the young Greek adequate justice, it was the glow of a noble heroism. But still the day was far from being his own: for though the Tyrol was disabled in all that concerned the manœuvring requisite for acting on the offensive,—it floated there, a formidable battery for all defensive purposes. A sudden change in the wind filling its remaining sails, assisted the helm sufficiently to give such a movement to the huge fabric that its broadside was again poured forth upon the Athene—and this time with better effect: for the din of the cannon was instantaneously followed by the sound of crashing wood near to the spot where I remained standing on the deck. The splinters flew about my ears; and the smoke from the Tyrol's side, rolling in a huge dense volume over the corsair-vessel, prevented me from immediately ascertaining the amount of damage done. The cloud cleared away: a glance thrown upward, showed me that the two tall tapering masts were uninjured—but a sail was fluttering and flapping violently—and several ropes, also cut by the Austrian shot, were streaming like pennants in the breeze. A look cast along the deck instantaneously made me aware that more serious consequences had there resulted from the last Austrian broadside: two of the Greek sailors lay dead; and another, dangerously wounded, was being carried away by his comrades. The shot too had pierced the hull in several places: but with incredible despatch Durazzo learnt the extent of these casualties, and gave his orders, still calm, clear, and firm, in accordance therewith.

Half-a-dozen of the Greek seamen were speedily up in the rigging: the fluttering sail was caught and made fast again to its spar—some ropes were spliced—new ones were deftly rove where the necessity was urgent—and simultaneously with all these proceedings the reloading of the artillery went on. Incredibly exciting was the whole scene!

After a brief pause—during which the Athene stood rapidly away from the Tyrol—a mandate went forth from Durazzo's lips; and an immense brazier, or portable furnace, was brought upon the deck. Into this a shot was placed: but scarcely was the proceeding thus far accomplished, when the thrilling interest of the scene presented a new phase—or rather a new episode. All in an instant some one rushed up the stairs from the cabins below; and brandishing a cutlass, he darted towards Durazzo. This was the Austrian officer,—who, as I subsequently learnt, had abruptly attacked and overpowered the sentinel mounting guard upon him at the door of his state-room. The young Greek captain might at the instant have discharged one of his pistols at his assailant; but chivalrously disdaining to take such an advantage of his unequally armed foe, he drew his sword from its sheath. There was a rush of several men towards the Austrian to seize upon him; but quick and peremptory was the command issued from Durazzo's lips—and by its effect I comprehended its nature. The men all fell back in a moment: and his weapon clashed violently with that of the Austrian. But not a minute did the combat last: the young Greek was as skilful in wielding his sword as he was experienced and intrepid in commanding his gallant vessel: the Austrian could not touch him—and goaded with maddening rage, he sprang forward to close with his active enemy. At that instant there was another discharge of cannon from the Tyrol: the dense volume of smoke rolling to windward, enveloped the corsair-vessel; and when it cleared away, I beheld the Austrian officer stretched a corpse at the feet of Durazzo, who was calmly wiping his sword ere returning it to its sheath.

The fight went on for another half-hour: but little damage was sustained by the Athene—while terrible havoc was committed on the remaining rigging of the Tyrol,—lying, as she was, unable to manœuvre, and therefore presenting a comparatively easy target for the gunners of the corsair. The shot in the brazier was now red-hot: Durazzo himself directed the discharge of the ordnance on the pivot: and great though the sentiment of curiosity naturally was amongst the crew, they were too well disciplined to pause in the midst of their own proceedings. The shot was fired—the smoke enveloped the Athene—the roar of the gun was quickly followed by so terrific a din that it seemed as if a huge volcano had burst forth in the very midst of the sea, or as if ten thousand pieces of the heaviest artillery had poured forth their thunder-voices all at the same instant. The very brain appeared to be riven with the sound—almost likewise produced an effect so stunning, almost stupefying, that I staggered back and should have fallen were it not that I encountered the seat above the raised skylight of the cabin. Methought that through the smoke I beheld the quick glancing of flames in the direction of the Tyrol: and no doubt I did—for I subsequently learnt that the blaze was seen by others on board the Athene. There was the falling of a shower of myriads of splinters; and when I looked in the place where I had last seen the Austrian frigate, there was nothing but a quantity of blackened timbers floating on the sea,—but a terrific cloud of portentous blackness rolling away overhead!



I sank down upon the seat in consternation: I felt as if I were in the midst of a stupendous dream. The Tyrol existed no longer!

From the deck of the corsair-vessel went up to heaven a shout of triumph, far more exulting than that which had commenced this memorable combat. Again and again it rose, that pealing shout!—it rolled in waves of mightiest sound—it sustained the deafening sensation produced upon me by the tremendous explosion constituting the awful catastrophe. At length that continuous huzzah of triumph ceased—those peals of exultation died away: and I beheld Durazzo leaning against the mizen-mast receiving the congratulations of his officers.

The event seemed scarcely credible. Here was this little vessel floating in safety upon the Mediterranean—her tall tapering spars uninjured—the ominous black flag waving high above her: while that superb stately ship had ceased to be! Well

indeed might the pirates triumph—well indeed could I comprehend the feeling which sent up a glow of exultation to the handsome countenance of their chief, animating him with a god-like beauty. Oh, if it had been a just and a good cause in which this magnificent victory was obtained, I could have sprung forward—I could have caught him by the hand—I could have fervidly congratulated him on his splendid success! But it was far otherwise. My soul was exceeding sorrowful—my heart sickened within me; and moreover I was dismayed and appalled at the triumph of the lawless band. My last hope in respect to the safety of Annabel and her relatives, was scattered to the winds: it had exploded along with the Tyrol itself. It appeared at the instant as if the celestial powers themselves had withdrawn their countenance from the side of innocence and right, so as to allow the fiends of darkness to ensure triumph to the cause of guilt and wrong-doing.

My head sank upon my breast: I heard myself called by name—but had not the heart nor courage nor curiosity to look up. A second time was my name spoken; and then, as I slowly raised my eyes, I beheld Durazzo standing before me.

"Mr. Wilmot," he said in a grave tone, "I know that your sympathies were with the Austrian frigate—and naturally so. Think not therefore for a single moment that I am capable of exulting over you, or that I can ask you to share in the feeling of triumph which inspires every one else on board the *Athene*. I should not even now intrude upon your reverie, were it not that I have a communication to make."

"A communication?" I said, with all the listlessness of apathy: for I felt so numbed and stupefied that it seemed as if every connecting link between myself and the affairs of the world, had been suddenly severed.

"Yes—a communication," repeated Durazzo, "and which I am afraid will still farther afflict you. But it is better you should hear it at once——"

"Still farther afflict me?" I ejaculated, with a suddenly reviving sense of interest. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," was the young Greek's response, "that Cosmo has ceased to exist!"

"What!" I exclaimed, starting up from my seat with the blood boiling in my veins: "have your men in the flush of victory——"

"Silence, sir!" ejaculated Durazzo, in the sternest tone and with the haughtiest air of indignation. "If any one else had ventured to insinuate——But no matter!"—and thus checking himself, he went on to observe solemnly and gravely, "Cosmo was killed by a splinter caused by a shot which penetrated the fore-cabin, where he was confined."

"Cosmo dead!" I murmured, shocked at the intelligence: then instantaneously recollecting the imputation I had thrown out, I said, "Pardon me, Captain Durazzo—I confess that I was wrong——"

"Say not another word upon the subject!" interrupted the young Greek, with frank generosity. "I can make every allowance for your feelings—and you see that I am doing so."

I descended to my state-room, where I shut myself in to reflect in mournfulness upon everything that had occurred.

## CHAPTER CXXVIII.

### THE YOUNG PAGE.

AT one o'clock the youthful page brought me in my luncheon; and I saw that he regarded me in a peculiar manner, as if with a deep compassionate interest, and likewise as if he were desirous to speak to me, but did not like to initiate a conversation. I was therefore determined to break the ice in this respect.

"Were you alarmed," I inquired in a gentle voice, "at the conflict which took place just now?"

"Oh, no—not alarmed!" ejaculated the youth, his dark eyes flashing with a sudden fire. "I would have borne my part in it—but the captain

says I am too young. Besides, it is not the first time——"

"But is it possible," I asked, "that your mind is already settled upon leading the existence of a pirate?"

"Wherefore not?" demanded the youth quickly. "It is a life of heroism—a life of daring and of glory; and one such deed as that which Durazzo has this forenoon accomplished, is sufficient to hand down his name to posterity!"

"Yes!" I said, in a tone of grave remonstrance: "but is not the renown a tarnished one? is it not an ignoble glory? and are you not setting up a false idol for your worship?"

"In your eyes it may seem so," responded the youthful page; "but in mine it is different. Oh, in my estimation the existence of Durazzo is an enviable one!—to be the commander of this beautiful vessel—to stand upon her deck with the consciousness of the supreme authority which he exercises—to issue his mandates with the certainty that they will be obeyed—to know likewise that his name is terrible, and that the deed which he has this day accomplished will give him a formidable renown so soon as he may think fit to publish it to the world,—all this constitutes an existence that is enviable indeed!"

The youthful figure dilated before me, as the naturally soft musical voice thrilled with the exultation of the heart's feelings: his eyes flashed still brighter fires—and while I pitied and was even shocked, yet I could not help admiring at the same time. Methought, too, that if this were a specimen of the materials which lay in reserve to fill up gaps amongst the corsair-crew, it was indeed no wonder that the *Athene* was so formidable or that such feats should be performed as the one which I had within the last few hours witnessed.

"I wish to speak to you, sir," continued the youthful page after a pause, "for the purpose of expressing my thanks for your considerate kindness——"

"In what respect?" I demanded with astonishment.

"Captain Durazzo failed not to inform me," continued the picturesquely attired young Greek, "that even amidst the excitement of your own feelings and affairs this morning, you bestowed a thought upon me, and stipulated that if a particular eventuality occurred I was to accompany you in the boat. For this, sir, accept my sincerest thanks. Though I be imbued with sentiments utterly repugnant to your sympathies in many respects, yet I am not unsusceptible of the feeling of gratitude."

"You have known Durazzo," I said, "for a long time?"

"Yes—I was at school with him," responded the youth. "He is a few years older than myself; and he protected me at the seminary against the ill-treatment which the elder lads were wont to display towards the younger. From the very first I conceived a brother's attachment for Constantine. At school he was not like other boys: he never used his strength to tyrannize over the weak—but he protected them. Endowed with a rare intelligence, he excelled not in his proficiency—but took a pleasure in assisting the laggard mind to master difficult lessons. His ideas were the noblest and the loftiest; and yet blended therewith was ever a



gentle tone of romantic thoughtfulness—if you understand what I mean.”

“I do. But continue,” I said: “your description interests me. Would it be too much to inquire—”

“How Constantine became a corsair?” exclaimed the youth. “Oh, no! it is not too much—for I am not bound to secrecy upon the point. He was intended for the bar: but when he learned how the vilest chicaneries entered into Greek jurisprudence—how counsels sold their clients, and gloried in the shame that gave them wealth—he turned from the thought of the forum with loathing and disgust. The death of his parents when he was only nineteen left him his own master with a small fortune. He fancied a roving life—he loved the sea—but not having the patience to enter the navy and toil through the various grades until he could arrive at a position of rank and command, he resolved to render himself the master of a vessel in a moment. He purchased a small trader—freighted it with merchandise—and sailed for Alexandria. In the Levant he was boarded by a pirate—a cruiser from Tripoli, and was plundered of all he possessed. His vessel was taken from him: he and his crew were landed on a barren part of Syria—and thus were they left. They had to work their passage—Constantine himself as a common sailor—back to Greece. On his arrival at Athens, he learned that by the death of some distant relative another small fortune had become his heritage. His resolve was promptly taken. The most celebrated shipwrights in Greece had just completed the *Athene* by order of the Government; and it was intended as a cruiser to protect the commercial marine from pirates. King Otho’s treasury was bankrupt: and the shipbuilders refused to accept the valueless paper money for their beautiful vessel. Constantine was informed that if he purchased it and fitted it out as cruiser, the government would give him a roving commission, with a lieutenant’s rank, that he might carry out the purpose for which the *Athene* was originally designed. Under these representations, Constantine embarked the whole of his newly acquired fortune in the purchase of the *Athene*. No sooner had he done this—or rather I should say no sooner was it equipped and manned—when the government authorities came on board to claim and seize the vessel as one belonging to the King. Durazzo remonstrated—but all in vain. He was told that he might take, in the valueless paper money, the price of his ship; but that he must leave it, as a captain in the Greek navy—a nephew of one of the corrupt Ministers—had already been appointed to its command.”

“This was truly infamous!” I exclaimed.

“Ah! you acknowledge,” cried the youthful page, satisfaction beaming in his eyes, “that the provocation was immense? Listen to what followed. Constantine Durazzo was about to obey the mandate of tyrannical authority—when his crew gathered around him, and plainly intimated that they only awaited his orders to fling the Government officials into their boat and thus leave him master of the *Athene*. Some of this crew were the sailors who had previously served under him, and who had experienced the generosity of his character. They loved him; and the new men were already imbued with the same spirit. The opportunity was irresistible—the temptation was

immense. Constantine gave the signal—the Government authorities who came to seize the ship, were sent adrift in their boat: the *Athene* spread her canvass, and sailed majestically out of the port. But by that deed,” added the youthful page, “Constantine Durazzo in a moment became an outlaw!”

“Ah! I exclaimed; “I always thought that there must have been some cogent reason in the first instance to set Constantine Durazzo at variance with the laws of his country!”

“The laws of our country,” continued the youth bitterly, “are precisely those which are best adapted to render men lawless!—they are conceived in despotism and executed with tyranny! It were enough to make one ashamed to be a Greek, were it not for such noble exceptions as that which Constantine Durazzo presents to the view. But I will finish what I have to say about him. Having been plundered by a corsair, and then unjustly outlawed by an infamous government, it was no wonder if Durazzo should take a suggestion from his first calamity. Indeed, no other course remained open to him. The avenues of all legitimate trade were closed against him; and even if it were otherwise, he had no capital left whereby to freight his vessel. He had a number of mouths to feed, and could not be inactive. His resolve was accordingly taken; and on sailing away from the coast of Greece, Durazzo became a pirate.”

“Were you amongst his crew in the first instance?” I asked.

“No,” replied the youth: “I was then only fourteen. It was a year afterwards—and consequently something more than about a twelve-month back—that being left an orphan, and almost penniless—without a friend too in the whole world to assist me—at least as I thought at the time—I went to Smyrna, with the hope of obtaining a clerk’s situation there. At Smyrna I met Constantine: his vessel was in the port, where its true character was totally unsuspected. Mutual explanations ensued; and I came on board the *Athene*. About a fortnight afterwards we fell in with that very Tripolitan corsair vessel which had proved the ruin of Durazzo’s first venture. A terrible battle ensued: it lasted for five or six hours, at the expiration of which the ships fouled, and Constantine boarded the enemy at the head of his men. The victory was complete: half the Tripolitans fell in the encounter—the survivors were landed on precisely the same spot where Durazzo and his crew had formerly been placed ashore; and the cruiser of Tripoli was scuttled. That was the vengeance which Constantine took upon the authors of his ruin; and his extraordinary daring—as well as his skill, his calm intrepidity, and his perfect self-possession in the engagement—riveted the bonds of respect, confidence, and admiration which attached his crew unto him.”

The youthful page, having finished his interesting narrative, was compelled to withdraw for the performance of his duties elsewhere; and I remained alone to ponder upon the tale I had just heard. I saw that the greatest allowances were to be made for Durazzo; and I was not altogether displeased with the impression thus made upon my mind. I recollected likewise the terms of dis-

gust in which he had spoken of Lanover, and the visible loathing with which he had imperiously waved him back into his cabin, when his hideous countenance peered above the staircase just before the engagement.

"Surely," I said to myself, "Durazzo, with his generous feelings, will not persevere in carrying out the designs of a wretch whom he despises and abhors? I will again appeal to him! After the exploit of this day he must stand higher, if possible, in the estimation of his crew; and they will be all the more ready to take the law from his lips—no matter how their usual regulations may otherwise affect the question. Yes—I will appeal to Durazzo!—I will appeal to him once again! It is in the hour of victory that men of noble natures are most likely to perform generous deeds."

I ascended to the deck—where as much activity and bustle, though of a different kind, now prevailed as before the fight. The Athene had been lying to ever since the conflict, that the requisite repairs might be accomplished: there were several men in the rigging—the sounds of the carpenters' hammers were heard coming from the fore-part of the vessel, where the shot had penetrated—and others were similarly restoring the bulwarks through which two or three cannon balls had crashed. But this was not all. Over the sides planks were suspended in several places; and those men who could be spared from other avocation, were busy in painting the exterior of the vessel. Durazzo superintended in person everything that was going on; and both himself and his crew appeared as calm as if nothing extraordinary had taken place. The long piece of ordnance, whose red-hot shot caused the explosion of the Tyrol, had been lowered into the hold again: the carronades were all in order; and the evidences of the conflict were already as much as possible effaced from the deck. The black flag no longer waved above the Athene: the Greek colours floated in the place of that sinister emblem.

Upon the deck lay four ominous-looking objects—human forms enveloped in banners ready for sepulture in the deep waters of the Mediterranean. These were the Austrian officer, the unfortunate Cosmo, and the two Greek sailors who fell in the conflict. I heaved a sigh as I thought of poor Cosmo, who, instead of obtaining a competency for life by bringing about the capture of the terrible pirate, had been himself captured by that pirate, and had met his death in the very vessel which he had studied to hand over to others!

Almost immediately after I had ascended to the deck, a muffled drum beat; and the men came flocking from every part towards the spot where Durazzo stood. The youthful page made his appearance from the cabin—Lanover likewise crawled up from below—and this time was not rebuked by the corsair-chief. The humpback's hideous countenance showed by its expression that he had not passed a very comfortable forenoon: he seemed cowed and abashed; and instead of leering at me with his former malignity or insolent triumph, he studiously avoided meeting my gaze.

The drum had beaten as a signal for the obsequies of the four individuals who lay upon the deck enveloped in the nautical banners. Durazzo doffed his red fez—an example which was instantaneously

followed; and every head was in a moment bared. Then the corsair-chief read from a book the funeral service according to the ritual of the Greek Church: and though I could not understand the language of those prayers, yet I failed not to comprehend the deep impressiveness of the tone in which they were recited. At a certain part towards the close, a dozen of the crew took as many muskets; and when their two slain comrades were consigned to the deep, they discharged the volley in honour of the dead. Quickly did they reload; and three volleys of blank cartridges completed that portion of the ceremony. The parting prayers were read for the Austrian lieutenant as well as for Cosmo: but when their corpses were lowered over the vessel's side, no musketry was discharged on their account. Throughout the whole proceeding the deportment of the Greek crew was in every way consistent with the religious solemnity of the scene.

When it was over the men dispersed again to their different avocations—the page retired to the cabin—and I was about to accost Durazzo, when the movement was anticipated by Lanover. I was naturally anxious to hear what the vile humpback had to say to the pirate-chief; and turning my back towards them, I affected to be looking over the bulwarks at the sea.

"May I ask, Captain Durazzo," said Mr. Lanover, "wherefore your demeanour is so cold and distant towards me? In a word, if you think I have given any offence—"

"Offence?" echoed the young Greek scornfully, as if disdaining the bare idea of being sufficiently moved as to take offence at any thing which the humpback could do. "No, sir! I am not offended with you. Perhaps I may not altogether relish the business which is being undertaken on your behalf;—perhaps if I had been applied to in the first instance I should have rejected the overture. But I had voluntarily abdicated my command for a season to my first lieutenant Notaras: and therefore it was not for me subsequently to overrule a compact which he had thought fit to make. It is true that possessed of supreme power as I am, in certain respects, I *might* have set aside that agreement: but I did not choose to interfere with the delegated authority which Notaras exercised in my absence. Therefore, having once given my assent, the compact becomes inviolable according to the laws which rule our little community. If I have entered into these explanations, Mr. Lanover," continued Durazzo, "it is for the purpose of relieving you from any alarm as to unfair dealing towards yourself—but at the same time to make you clearly understand that though the treaty shall be carried out to the very letter, I like it as little as a man who is accustomed to grand and lofty exploits might be supposed to relish a transaction of a meaner and baser character. Now, sir, you have your response."

With these words, the corsair-chief turned haughtily upon his heel, and as I at the same instant looked round from over the bulwark, I beheld the humpback retreating towards the stairs of the cabin. I could not help thinking that Durazzo had purposely given Mr. Lanover those elaborate explanations with the knowledge that I should overhear them, and for the purpose of forestalling any request I might proffer in the form of a renewed appeal to his generosity. My heart had

sank within me—the hope which had led me upon deck gradually died out of my breast, while the corsair-chief was addressing himself in such audible tones and with such measured precision to the humpback. For a few instants I was utterly discouraged: but as the image of the beloved Annabel rose up before me, I resolved to try one last effort.

“Captain Durazzo,” I said, approaching the pirate-chief, “may I without a single syllable of preface express the hope—”

“Mr. Wilmot,” interrupted Constantine, “I am willing and delighted to converse with you on any subject, save that *one* which admits of no farther argument. You have heard,” he continued significantly and impressively, “what I have just said to Mr. Lanover; and I can assure you that I have spoken the truth. It is therefore my wish”——he paused for an instant, and said, “You will not compel me to use the word *command*, that this topic be no more touched upon between us.”

I knew not what further to advance: I was a prisoner and powerless. Had I been in a different situation—free and unshackled—I should have burst forth in violent denunciation of the false notion of honour which seemed to prompt Durazzo to keep faith with the detestable humpback. But, alas! I was not in a position thus to give vent to my feelings—while policy forbade me from coming to a useless rupture with the corsair in whose presence I was.

In the evening I had another conversation with Constantine Durazzo on the deck of his vessel; and some portion of which it may be necessary to lay before the reader.

“You see, Mr. Wilmot,” observed the young corsair-chief, after some discourse on indifferent topics, “the accidents of battle have singularly favoured my views, and the events of a few brief hours have swept away many obstacles from my path. The Tyrol which menaced me in more ways than one, has ceased to exist: those who on board might be enabled to give a description of the terrible pirate-captain, are no longer denizens of this world. The Austrian officer who was on board the Athene, and whom I should have been compelled to retain my prisoner for several months, until my cruise was completed, and also until I had been back to Italy to fetch my bride and bear her far away—that officer has gone down into the deep. Cosmo—who, if set at large, could equally have done me a mischief—is likewise numbered with the dead: and who now can tell the tale of what I am or what I have been to the ears of Signor Portici and Leonora, unless it be yourself?”

I remained silent: I knew not what response to give; but I confess that I was much tempted to propose a compromise and swear to inviolable secrecy with respect to his antecedents, if he on the other hand would renounce the cause of Lanover. To this proceeding I was all the more inclined after the narrative I had heard from the lips of the young page, and which had certainly tended to place Durazzo in the more favourable light of society’s victim instead of in that of a wilful offender against society’s laws. But still there was the damning fact that Durazzo was a corsair—and though perhaps a glorious one, yet embellished only with a tarnished renown!

“I am not pressing you for a decision, Mr. Wilmot,” continued Durazzo, “with respect to the conduct you may hereafter pursue in reference to myself. I have merely sought to direct your attention to the facts which I have enumerated, in order that you may include them amongst the subjects for your deliberation when the time shall come that your decision must be given.”

“You are resolved, therefore, Captain Durazzo,” I said, thinking to make a new appeal to him through the medium of his pride,—“you are resolved that the great, and I may even add the brilliant exploit which you have this day achieved, shall be followed up by an enterprise of the meanest, the paltriest, and the most cowardly description?”

“Mr. Wilmot!” ejaculated Constantine, stopping suddenly short, and fixing his burning regards upon me, while his face was as pale as a sheet, and his lips were quivering—“you are the first person who has ever dared to address the pirate-chief in such terms as these upon his own quarter-deck!”

“If the time should ever come, Captain Durazzo,” I responded, firmly yet calmly, “when you would have to tell to Leonora the history of the past, would you include amongst its details the exploit of carrying off a feeble old man and two innocent inoffensive ladies? Would you confess this, I ask, to your Leonora at a moment when circumstances might possibly render all explanations necessary, and when you would doubtless wish to stand before her in a light as little unfavourable as possible?”

“You have put the hypothesis to me,” answered Durazzo: “let me in my turn put one to you. If by accident you were led in your wanderings to a habitation where dwelt a happy and a loving couple—and if you were in possession of some secret relative to the husband which was unknown to the wife, but the knowledge of which would suddenly destroy the fabric of her bliss, and perchance deal her a death-blow—would you, I ask, Mr. Wilmot, be guilty of such useless cruelty as to reveal that secret?”

“Assuredly not!” I unhesitatingly exclaimed. “But permit me to remind you that the case you have supposed is not a fair parallel with your own. You should have asked me what I would do if I beheld a young and confiding woman about to quit the happy home of her relative, to mate herself with one whose real character was unknown to her——”

“But what if this one,” suddenly interrupted Durazzo, “intended, as soon as circumstances would permit, to renounce his lawless proceedings and endeavour by all the rest of his life to atone for the past?—what if it were his purpose to devote himself to the sole duty of ensuring the happiness of a beloved and loving one—in *this* case, Mr. Wilmot, what would you do?”

I gave no response: but I again confess that my inclinations urged me to propose a compromise with Durazzo. I walked silently by his side—my looks bent down upon the deck—my mind absorbed in its reflections. Darkness had gathered around the vessel—a lamp was flaming above the cabin skylight; and as we were passing it, I happened to raise my eyes towards Durazzo’s countenance, as I was about to make some observation. I saw that he was regarding me with a

peculiar earnestness; and he said in a low deep voice, "I think, Mr. Wilmot, it must be acknowledged that we have made an impression upon each other?"

"Frankly is the avowal made on my part," I eagerly ejaculated, "that you have made an impression upon me! Can I hope that I have done the same with reference to yourself?"

Constantine Durazzo gave no immediate answer: it now appeared to be his turn to reflect profoundly, and mine to study his features the while.

"Wilmot," at length he said, again speaking in a low deep voice, "I cannot forget the friendship I conceived for you during the first period of our acquaintance. Neither can I forget the generous way in which you spoke to me this morning before the fight. You yourself may judge what is my opinion of that vile intriguing humpback: you can perhaps understand also how great is my regret that I in the first instance assented to the compact which Lieutenant Notaras made with that man. I had gone too far to retreat when I wished to do so. But—however," he suddenly interrupted himself, "I can say no more for the present. I feel that this conversation has again brought us nearer to each other than we were before—and I rejoice!"

He grasped my hand—shook it warmly—and hastened away to another part of the vessel. I descended to my state-room in a somewhat happier frame of mind than I had previously experienced. Hope had arisen within me: the heart of Durazzo was touched—that appeal which I made through the medium of his pride was not without its effect. I considered that there was now indeed a prospect of Lauover's scheme being ultimately baffled through the medium of the very one by whose agency he had hoped to carry it out. In this improved condition of mind I passed the remainder of the evening: and retiring to rest, slept soundly and tranquilly.

## CHAPTER CXXIX.

### THE ATHENE OFF LEGHORN.

ON awaking early in the morning, I speedily performed my toilet; and ascending upon deck, found, as I had anticipated, that the Athene was anchored off the town of Leghorn. This flourishing Tuscan seaport possesses two harbours,—the outer one being of considerable size, with a pier nearly a mile in length, and capable of accommodating vessels of tolerable burden—but the inner harbour being only fit for the reception of small craft. The roadstead is admirable for safe anchorage; and there is invariably a considerable amount of shipping both there and in the harbours. The Athene might easily have run into the outer harbour, considering the depth of water she drew: but it suited Durazzo's purpose to drop his anchor in the roadstead. There were three vessels of war lying there at the same time; namely, a sloop and frigate belonging to the French navy, and a frigate with the English colours flying. I naturally thought that the Athene had come into a very dangerous neighbourhood: and scarcely had this idea passed through my

mind, when Durazzo's well known voice falling upon my ear, said, "All suitable precautions are taken."

I turned round, and gazed upon the pirate-chief: I could not understand the precautions to which he alluded.

"We belong for the nonce," he said, smiling, "to the Royal Navy of Greece—and we are upon the Italian coast in search of a terrible pirate-vessel called the Athene. But come," he added, again smiling: "and you shall see what I mean."

A mandate was issued: the boatswain's pipe rang through the vessel—half-a-dozen of the sailors, who I now perceived were dressed completely as man-of-war's men, sprang into a boat by the side of the schooner: and Durazzo beckoned me to accompany him. We entered the boat; and as it was pulled away from the Athene, I perceived that her hull, which I had previously known as completely black, was now painted in a way that utterly disguised her. The long broad white streak dotted with the black ports, denoted the man-of-war: above this streak there was a narrower line of an orange yellow; and below the streak there was a line of red. This combination of colours imparted to the Athene a lively appearance, as well as delineating the gracefully sweeping outlines of her shape.

"This is the way," said Durazzo to me "that Greek vessels of war are painted. But behold!" he added, as the boat shot under the stern of the schooner: "the Athene has changed her name for the time being—and she is now the Otho!"

Sure enough, the name of the King of Greece was painted on the stern of the Athene,—which had otherwise undergone a transmogrification, so far as colour went: forasmuch as instead of being now altogether black, it had a great quantity of white, red, and yellow fancifully laid on. The Greek colours were floating above the ship; and as the pirate-chief surveyed it with looks of pride, he said to me, "Think you that you ships-of-war will take us for what we are?"

"And if the news of the destruction of the Tyrol should reach them," I said,— "may not suspicion be excited?"

"Who can tell that tale except ourselves?" asked Durazzo. "Where is the Tyrol? where are those who were on board it?"

Without waiting for a response, Constantine signalled to his men to pull round to the opposite side of the Athene from which we had started; and we speedily stood upon the schooner's deck again. Almost immediately afterwards the men were ordered to their guns; and the roar of artillery soon swept over the sea. The Athene was firing a salute of twenty-one in compliment to the flags of England and France.

"Now," said Durazzo to me, when the thunder of the guns had ceased, "we shall see whether any suspicion be entertained on board those ships. If so, they will send boats to us before acknowledging our salute, to ascertain who we are—or, in other words, to become more intimately acquainted with us. But if we have lulled them into a complete absence of suspicion—Ah! it is all right! there goes the salute!"

As the corsair-chief gave utterance to these last ejaculatory words, a wreath of smoke suddenly burst forth from the side of the English frigate;

and the din of the cannon thundered over the water. The French ships commenced their salute almost immediately afterwards; and Durazzo's countenance expressed a calmly exultant satisfaction.

Scarcely were the salutes finished, when Mr. Lanover made his appearance upon deck, with a sealed letter in his hand.

"I think, Mr. Wilmot," said Captain Durazzo, addressing me with a certain air of formality which I knew full well to be assumed, "your breakfast is by this time ready."

I took the hint, and descended to my state-room, where the young page was in prompt attendance upon me. I was at no loss to conjecture what missive it was that Mr. Lanover had brought up in his hand: it no doubt contained his instructions to his confederate—or rather instrument Dorchester—and was written in that cipher which the humpback had shown him at the coffee-house in Civita Vecchia. I now felt that matters must be coming to a crisis, and that Durazzo would speedily have to decide whether he intended to continue succouring the projects of Lanover, or whether he would by some means or another contrive to baffle them. I felt very, very anxious; and I thought it quite probable that the day would not end without relieving me from suspense either in respect to the best or the worst.

Having finished my breakfast, I returned to the deck: but Durazzo was no longer there—neither was Mr. Lanover. Had the corsair-chief gone on shore? had he volunteered to become the bearer of Lanover's missive? and did he intend to keep it back, so as to favour my hopes and aspirations? I felt exceedingly anxious; and the longer I thought upon the whole subject, the less did I comprehend how Durazzo, if he meant to prove friendly to me, could frustrate the designs of Lanover without suffering the humpback to perceive that he was thus purposely treated. While I was in the midst of my meditations, the corsair-chief made his appearance upon the deck: he had not therefore gone to the town. Without immediately entering into conversation with me, he busied himself with such details as necessarily fell under his supervision as the commander of the ship.

I walked about, wondering how everything was to end,—endeavouring to buoy myself up with hope, yet trembling lest I should be disappointed: and thus another hour passed. It was now about eleven in the forenoon; and Durazzo came and rejoined me in my walk. He spoke only of indifferent matters,—until at length I began to fear that the impression made upon him on the previous evening had passed away, and that he was once more resolved to observe his compact with Lanover. He seemed to penetrate what was passing in my mind; and stopping short, he looked over the bulwark in the direction of Leghorn,—pointing thither likewise, as if desiring me to note particular objects of interest.

"I have not forgotten, Wilmot," he said, "what took place between us last evening; but I have a difficult part to perform. Lanover has written his instructions to the agent whom he is employing in that town; and I was compelled to send the letter on shore. We must trust to the chapter of accidents. Frankly speaking, I hope

Lanover will be baffled: but it must not appear as if I plotted against him. Great as the confidence is which my officers and crew now repose in me, they would become equally full of suspicion—they would think that if I were capable of proving false to a compact so solemnly made, I might even to suit my own interest betray them should an emergency arise."

"A thousand thanks," I answered, though cautiously avoiding any outward betrayal of excitement, "for the hope which you have given me!"

"Let as not be seen too much together?" said Durazzo. "Lanover is as wily as a serpent—and he already wonders wherefore I so frequently converse with you."

Taking the hint, I walked away to another part of the vessel; and for the next hour Durazzo went below again. It was about mid-day when a boat, which had been sent ashore, returned to the Athene; and I perceived that the mate, who was in command, was dressed entirely in plain clothes. I therefore concluded that he had been the bearer of Lanover's despatch to Mr. Dorchester. As I looked over the ship's side towards Leghorn—the Athene being about two miles distant from the buildings of the town itself, though barely a mile from the entrance of the mole—I said to myself, "How short a space separates me from my beloved Annabel! What if at this moment she be looking upon the sea, and contemplating this vessel? Ah, how little can she suspect that I am here a captive for the present—but strenuously labouring, or at least yearning for the assurance of her safety! Perhaps one of the very buildings which I am now regarding, may be the hotel where she and her relatives reside?"

And then I again wondered how everything was to terminate. Presently I perceived a galley coming from the direction of the English frigate, and evidently pulling towards the Athene. As it drew nearer, I distinguished an officer seated in the stern; and by the single epaulette on his shoulder, I knew him to be a lieutenant. As the galley approached, the second lieutenant of the Athene descended into the cabin, evidently to announce the circumstance to Captain Durazzo: for the corsair-chief immediately afterwards came upon deck. He wore his handsome uniform, which was that of a Captain-Commander in the Greek service: but on the present occasion the red fez with its purple tassel, was discarded—and a cocked hat with gold tassels, was now worn in its place. He beckoned me towards him; and in the presence of his lieutenant, said with a cold formal air of authority, "Mr. Wilmot, an officer from the English frigate is coming on board, doubtless for some purpose of courtesy on the part of his commander. It will be sufficient if you solemnly pledge your word to remain profoundly silent, and to keep at a distance during our interview. Otherwise I shall be compelled to consign you to your state-room, under the guard of a sentinel."

While thus speaking with that air which I knew to be necessarily assumed in the presence of his lieutenant, Constantine Durazzo seized an opportunity to make me a rapid sign, to the effect that I was to give the pledge demanded of me as a proof of my continued docile resignation to the thralldom in which I was placed.

"Although," I accordingly answered, assuming

a certain spirit of haughtiness on my own part, "I should assuredly avail myself of any means which circumstances might opportunely seem to present, in order to effect my own aims,—yet in the presence of the alternatives which you have placed before me, I can only say that preferring the fresh air of the deck to the close atmosphere of my cabin, I accept the condition which leaves me in the enjoyment of the former."

Durazzo bowed with seeming coldness; and I retired completely to the stern of the vessel. In about five minutes the galley came alongside: the English lieutenant ascended to the deck of the *Athene*; and Captain Durazzo, attended by his own officers, went forward to receive him. The lieutenant's behaviour was most courteous; and I was therefore persuaded he entertained not the slightest suspicion of the character of that ship on whose deck he stood. That he likewise spoke a language which was intelligible to Durazzo, was evident from the fluent and facile manner in which they at once began conversing together. The English officer looked about him on all sides: he swept his glances along the deck—he bent his gaze upward amidst the web-like tracery of the rigging—and I could judge from the manner in which he addressed Durazzo, that he complimented him upon the elegant as well as seaman-like appearance of his vessel.

The party advanced slowly, conversing the while, towards the stern of the *Athene*; and now I learnt that they were speaking in French.

"But you have not as yet given me, Captain Kanaris," said the English lieutenant, "an answer to the invitation which I bear you from my commander, Captain Herbert of the *Apollo*. Your company to dinner, and that of whomsoever of your officers you may choose to bring with you, either to-day or to-morrow at five o'clock—"

"It must be for to-morrow," replied Durazzo, who, as I understood from the English officer's mode of address, had resumed for the time being his surname of Kanaris: "for to-day I have business that requires my attention."

"Be it then for to-morrow," rejoined the lieutenant of the *Apollo*: "and I hope you will allow this officer"—alluding to the second lieutenant of the *Athene*—"to be included in the invitation. I am sorry that your first lieutenant should be disabled by an accident: otherwise Captain Herbert and the ward-room officers of the *Apollo* would have been glad to see him."

Durazzo made suitable acknowledgments—and then said, "Perhaps you will do me the pleasure of taking some refreshments in my own cabin."

The party descended to below; and I easily comprehended how Durazzo could have no objection to display the elegance and the sumptuous richness of the cabins to the lieutenant, now that the *Athene* was passing as the *Otho*, and that she was likewise represented as a ship belonging to the Royal Navy of Greece,—the circumstances being very different from what they were when the corsair passed as a trading-vessel in the harbour of Civita Vecchia. They remained below for about half-an-hour—at the expiration of which time the party ascended again to the deck; hands were shaken—and the English officer descending into his galley, took his departure from the schooner, the terrible character of which he evidently little suspected.

Scarcely had this incident occurred, when another appeared to be transpiring. A beautiful yacht, rigged as a cutter, and coming from the direction of Leghorn, was sweeping along before the wind and about to run between the *Athene* and the *Apollo*, as these vessels lay at a distance of about three hundred yards from each other,—when the English lieutenant in the galley was hailed by some one who stood on the deck of that yacht. The Englishman raised his hat with the most respectful politeness; and for a few minutes a running conversation was exchanged between the galley and the pleasure-vessel. The result appeared to be an alteration in the course of the yacht: for instead of continuing to stand out to sea, she tacked and made direct for the *Athene*.

I watched this proceeding from my place at the stern of the corsair-vessel—while Durazzo with his second lieutenant and mate contemplated it from a little distance. It was as yet impossible to distinguish the persons in the yacht, farther than to perceive that a gentleman dressed in black, and a lady with white furs on, were two of the most conspicuous characters. Nearer and nearer came the yacht: I shifted my position in order the better to survey its graceful advance; and this movement on my part brought me closer to the spot where Durazzo was standing. He immediately joined me, and said, "We are about to have fresh visitors. As for the English frigate there, the captain has sent to invite me—"

At this instant an ejaculation issued from my lips—an ejaculation of such mingled surprise and joy that I could not possibly restrain it: for the yacht had now drawn sufficiently near to enable me to recognise in the gentleman in black the tall handsome person of the Count of Livorno!

"Ah!" said Durazzo, "it is some one whom you know?"

"Yes," I at once replied: "it is the nephew of the Grand Duke of Tuscany—Ah! and that lady must be his bride Olivia!"

"Mr. Wilmot," said Durazzo, "if they come on board—"

"Oh, that I could speak to you for one instant alone!" I interrupted him as a sudden idea flashed to my mind.

"It shall be so," he quickly rejoined: then again glancing towards the yacht, he said, with a sudden resumption of a cold stern air, and speaking loud enough for his officers to overhear him, "Mr. Wilmot, I must thank you to descend to your own state-room for the present. I accept your parole that you will not issue thence until you receive permission; and I will therefore spare you the ignominy of placing a guard over you."

I bowed, and descended to my cabin,—my heart throbbing violently, for I felt persuaded that Durazzo was indeed friendly disposed towards me. My state-room was on the opposite side from that which the yacht had been approaching; and consequently I could not, through the air-hole, perceive what was going on. About ten minutes elapsed; and at the expiration of that interval Constantine Durazzo made his appearance.

"Now, Wilmot," he said, "quick, quick with whatsoever you may have to communicate! But speak low—for Lanover is in his own state-room adjoining."





"Is the Count of Livorno on board?" I eagerly asked.

"Yes," responded Durazzo. "The English lieutenant, who is acquainted with his lordship, informed him that the Greek vessel was well worth visiting—the course of the yacht was accordingly altered—it has run alongside the Athene—the Count requested permission to come on board—and my lieutenant is now parading his lordship and his beautiful wife round the deck."

"The Count of Livorno is a friend of mine," I quickly said: "he knows something of Sir Matthew Heseltine and his family—he knows also how deeply interested I am in them! He will do anything to serve me!"

"And what would you propose?" inquired Durazzo. "Remember! the secret of the ship's character—"

"Shall be kept inviolable by me," I instaz-

taneously added, "in any communication you may permit me to make to the Count of Livorno."

"And that communication?" demanded the corsair-chief.

"Simply the request that he will take an immediate opportunity of putting Sir Matthew Heseltine on his guard against the villain Dorchester."

Durazzo reflected for a few moments; and then he said, "Be it as you suggest!—there are no other means!"

I wrung Durazzo's hand with the most fervid vehemence, while tears of gratitude streamed down my cheeks.

"But if Dorchester be unmasked," suggested the young Greek, "he will be captured. Of that no matter, however!" he immediately added. "You must devise some means for the Count of Livorno to communicate the result, so that we may

learn it on board the Athene and have due leisure to speed away ere pursuit can take place, supposing that Dorchester when arrested should betray us."

"See what I will do!" I exclaimed: and taking writing materials which were in the cabin, I sat down and hastily penned the following letter:—

"On board the Otho.

"My dear Count of Livorno,  
"You will doubtless be astonished to behold my signature to this billet; but there is not an instant's leisure for explanation. I have a boon to beseech, and which I am confident your lordship will grant. Sir Matthew Heselaine, his daughter, and grand-daughter are at one of the principal hotels at Leghorn. They incur the most perilous risk from a certain quarter; and an Englishman who lives in the same hotel, is betraying them under the mask of friendship. That Englishman will perhaps be recognised by you through his disguise:—he is the villain Dorchester!

"In whatsoever you may do, my dear Count, be careful not to mention my name—nor the Otho—nor make any allusion to this billet. It is moreover of the highest consequence that your lordship should let me know *by some means* what the result is. Pardon the liberty I take in suggesting what these means may be. The instant Dorchester is arrested and Sir Matthew is warned, your lordship might send off a present of fruit or aught else for the table of Captain Kanaris:—I cannot fail to observe that such a gift has arrived, and I shall comprehend the signification thereof.

"Wishing you, my dear Count, all health and happiness in your union with the object of your love,

"I remain your lordship's most faithful servant,  
"JOSEPH WILMOT."

This letter I penned in French in order that Captain Durazzo might be enabled to read it, so as to be assured of my good faith in promising to say nothing that should compromise himself or his crew.

"I am satisfied," he said. "But I cannot become the bearer of the letter!"

Thus speaking, he rang the silver bell: the youthful page made his appearance—and Durazzo spoke to him a few words in the Greek tongue. The page received from my hand the letter which I sealed and addressed; and he glided from the cabin.

"Remain you here," said Durazzo: "you must not be seen by the Count of Livorno."

"You have just done for me," I said, "something which demands my eternal gratitude. Never will I forget it, Durazzo my friend—for such I may again call you!"

"Wilmot, I am indeed your friend!" responded the Greek chief, with a voice and look full of emotion; and the next instant he disappeared from my presence.

I was again alone—but Oh! in how different a frame of mind from that which I had recently experienced. I felt that my labour was accomplished—that the work was as good as done—that Sir Matthew Heselaine, Annabel, and her mother were now in security. I was almost wild with exultation: it appeared as if the impossible had been achieved! At this same time on the preceding day, shortly after the defeat and destruction of the Tyrol, I was almost reduced to despair:—but how circumstances had changed! and how generously, how nobly was Durazzo acting in the long run! I will not however dwell upon the ecstatic

state of my feelings: suffice it to say that I was enraptured with the thought that through me Annabel and her relatives would be again rescued from immense peril.

Nearly an hour passed,—at the expiration of which interval the youthful page came gliding into the state-room; and with an unmistakable air of being pleased in having rendered me some service, though its nature was unknown to him, he said, "It is done, Signor Wilmot—it is done! I took an opportunity of slipping the note into the Count of Livorno's hand, whispering to him these words: '*Start not—show no excitement—but read this when again on board your yacht.*' His lordship took it, making me a rapid sign of intelligence; and thus my task was accomplished. He and his beautiful wife are gone: the yacht is already at some little distance from the schooner; and Captain Durazzo intimates through me that at your pleasure you can go upon the deck again."

I thanked the page for the information he gave me, and hastened to avail myself of the permission to return to the deck. There I perceived Durazzo watching the beautiful yacht as it glided gracefully over the bosom of the blue waters: but he did not appear to bestow the slightest notice upon me. As I glanced around, I caught the hideous countenance of Lanover peering above the top of the staircase,—hideous, but ominous to me no longer; for I felt convinced that the villain's aim and hopes would be completely baffled.

## CHAPTER CXXX.

### THE YACHT AND THE CUTTER.

WHILE watching the progress of the yacht, which was taking the direction of Leghorn, I noticed another small craft advancing from the harbour of that town. Its white sail was filled with the wind; and it came at a quick rate. In a few minutes the yacht and this small craft passed each other, with an interval of perhaps two hundred yards between them; and it seemed as if the smaller vessel were coming direct towards the Athene—or the Otho, as it was called for the nonce. Happening to glance round, I saw that Lanover was looking through a telescope in the direction of the two vessels; and then it suddenly struck me that there was something peculiar in his hideous countenance. I surveyed him more attentively, without appearing to have my eyes fixed upon him at all; and now I perceived that a fiend-like expression of satisfaction and triumph was expanding over the features of the humpback. A half-subdued ejaculation of joy escaped his lips; and turning quickly away from the bulwark, he accosted Captain Durazzo, to whom he made some hasty communication.

The truth flashed to my mind. That small craft which was advancing towards the pirate-schooner, doubtless contained Sir Matthew Heselaine, Mrs. Lanover, and Annabel,—together with the villain Dorchester. A boy stood near with a telescope in his hand: I requested him to lend it me for a moment; and without betraying any particular excitement, but assuming the air of one who was

merely using the glass from a motive of curiosity, I examined the smaller vessel by its aid. I could distinctly perceive two gentlemen and two ladies seated in the stern-sheets of the little cutter:—now I recognised Sir Matthew—and now I beheld the countenance of Annabel also! Were it not that I was exercising the strongest control over my feelings, an ejaculation would have burst from my lips, as the thought struck me that those whom I had laboured so hard to save, were now actually rushing into the lion's mouth, and that Durazzo himself would have no power to save them if they once set foot on the deck of his vessel!

Oh! would the Count of Livorno perceive them ere it was yet too late? That he knew them by sight, I could hardly hope: for when they were imprisoned at Marco Uberti's tower, I believed, to the best of my knowledge, that he had not set eyes upon them. But might he not now discern the features of the villain Dorchester, whom he *did* know and whom he *had* seen?—or was that cunning individual's disguise too deep to be thus penetrated, especially at such a distance? Yet again, if the Count of Livorno should observe that the small craft was making direct for the schooner, might he not be smitten with a suspicion, if he had already perused my note, that the danger therein alluded to lay somewhere in *that* quarter? But on the other hand, how could he suspect it? how could he possibly fathom the meaning of the peril so hastily and dimly glanced at in my note?

All these conflicting thoughts swept through my brain in the space of a few moments,—although it has occupied several minutes to record them here. Meanwhile I kept my eyes riveted upon the two vessels; and, Oh! what a thrill of anxious hope vibrated in my heart, as I perceived the course of the Count's yacht now altering almost immediately after it had passed the little cutter containing those in whom I was so deeply interested. The cutter itself, doubtless on being hailed by those on board the yacht, altered its own course; and then it lay to. A few instants more brought the vessels together; and with an inward voice that was full of exultation, I said to myself, "They are saved!"

"But what will you do if they turn back?" were the excited words which suddenly fell upon my ear; and I recognised the harsh jarring voice of Mr. Lanover.

I glanced around; he was appealing energetically to Captain Durazzo; and his back was towards me, so that he observed not that I was a listener and a looker-on.

"What will I do?" said Durazzo coolly: but methought he spoke in a voice somewhat louder than was requisite for the mere behoof of Mr. Lanover alone, and that therefore he was intentionally conveying his words to my ears. "You do not think it possible that I can send out a boat to seize upon the persons in that cutter, when those on board the ships-of-war would perceive the outrage? We are lying within the range of their guns, Mr. Lanover; and though the Athene beat the Tyrol, I am not mad enough to risk my vessel and my crew in the presence of those two frigates and that sloop."

"Then what is to be done?" demanded Lanover petulantly.

"That is your business, sir," answered the

pirate-chief. "I have fulfilled my compact: I have brought the Athene hither: but it was for you to lure, through the means of your agent, those persons into my power. If the vessels-of-war were not there, the cutter should be speedily captured: but you cannot ask me to achieve impossibilities, or to incur a peril which none but a madman would encounter."

Lanover turned away from the pirate-chief; and at the same instant I averted my countenance. I looked through the telescope again; and I perceived a conference going on between those in the yacht and those in the cutter. More than ever did I feel that Sir Matthew and the ladies were now safe. A sidelong glance flung towards Lanover, showed me that his looks were replete with the anxiety of suspense; and I could full easily comprehend what was passing in his mind. It was a matter of the utmost moment to him whether the cutter should continue its way to the Athene, or whether it put back into Leghorn.

"But if they *do* come on board," he suddenly demanded of Captain Durazzo, "you will keep them?"

"Most assuredly," answered the young corsair. "A few minutes would suffice to spread our sails—the wind has changed—it is favourable for us—and we would glide quickly away. Those men-of-war yonder would fancy it was merely a little cruise that we were taking; and when once beyond gun-shot range, they might think anything else they liked. Now, Mr. Lanover, are you satisfied that I am prepared to do everything in all fairness? and will you, as a reasonable man, comprehend that I cannot achieve impossibilities?"

"Yes, yes!" ejaculated Lanover: and then he again turned to look at the two vessels.

At that very instant the cutter was putting about; and keeping in the vicinage of the Count of Livorno's yacht, it was evidently taking its way back to Leghorn. Annabel and her relatives were saved!

I could not venture now to look towards Lanover again: I felt that if I did, he would perceive such a glow of animation upon my countenance, he might suspect that the Count of Livorno's visit to the Athene had not passed without some communication between his lordship and myself.

"They have escaped us! they have escaped us!" ejaculated Lanover, in a tone of the bitterest vexation: and then, as I *did* venture to glance around at the instant, I perceived him whispering to Durazzo.

"No, sir—it was impossible!" answered the pirate-chief aloud. "I myself consigned him to his state-room the whole time."

I knew full well that this response regarded myself, and that Lanover had put a query to Durazzo in respect to me.

"Perhaps," continued the humpback, still addressing himself to the pirate-chief, "the Count and Countess of Livorno may have recognised Sir Matthew and the ladies—and they have gone back together for the exchange of courtesies at Leghorn. To-morrow, therefore, Dorchester may succeed—But, Ah! if Dorchester himself be found out!"

"Is there any chance of that?" inquired Durazzo: "for if so, Mr. Lanover, it will behove me

to look to the safety of my ship, my crew, and myself. If your agent Mr. Dorchester be arrested—who knows what information he may give?"

"No, no—he would not betray the ship!" ejaculated Lanover. "Indeed he knows not what you really are: I merely told him in my letter that if he could possibly contrive a boating excursion to-day, he was to propose a visit to the beautiful schooner carrying the Greek colours."

"Well," answered Durazzo, "we must be guided by circumstances. We will of course wait till to-morrow—or even several days—provided that nothing occurs to render a precipitate departure expedient."

"Ah! you will wait several days?" ejaculated the humpback joyously. "This is indeed most honourable on your part—and there is yet hope!"

He appeared in the excitement of his feelings to forget that I was standing nigh and could therefore overhear all that he said. But of course believing that no secret counter-plot had been set in motion to baffle his schemes and frustrate his views, he doubtless considered it a matter of no consequence whether I overheard anything or not. He must have looked upon me as a prisoner on board the *Athene*, and therefore powerless for any interference in his projects.

The yacht and the cutter continued their way to Leghorn; and soon entering the harbour, were lost to the view. I descended to my state-room to revel in the luxury of feelings which I now experienced; and Oh! how fervidly in my heart did I thank the generous-minded Constantine Durazzo for the change which he had suffered to come over himself, and for the assistance he had rendered me. A couple of hours passed; and the dusk now began to close in. I did not during that interval reascend to the deck: I was fearful of betraying aught by my countenance that would lead Lanover to suspect that the pirate-chief had not too faithfully adhered to his compact. At the expiration of that period the young page entered my state-room, bearing the massive silver salver, on which were dishes of oranges, grapes, and confectionary.

"Captain Durazzo," said the youth, "begs your acceptance of these trifles. The Count of Livorno has just sent off his yacht with huge hampers containing fruits, wines, and other things, as a present for the Captain, in acknowledgment of the courtesy his lordship and the Countess experienced on board the schooner to-day."

The page retired: I understood full well what his mission to me meant. Most kindly and faithfully had the Count of Livorno attended to the request contained in my letter; and the gift sent to Durazzo was intended as a signal for me that Sir Matthew and his family were safe, and that the villain Dorchester was arrested.

Another hour passed; and then Durazzo himself entered my state-room. I at once grasped him warmly by the hand,—expressing my fervid gratitude for the services he had rendered me.

"I have persuaded Lanover," said the corsair-chief, "to go on shore with the idea that by some secret means he may obtain an interview with his agent Dorchester. I have represented to him that with the exercise of the most ordinary caution he can prevent his temporary presence in Leghorn from being suspected by Sir Matthew Heselstine

and the ladies. He yielded—and he is gone. He will learn that all his schemes are baffled and that Dorchester is arrested: for such was the intimation which the Count's present to me was doubtless intended to convey."

"And think you that Lanover will return on board the *Athene*?" I inquired.

"I know not," responded Durazzo. "Such a return will be useless so far as his projects are concerned: but on the other hand, he may think it advisable to avail himself of the schooner to get away with all expedition from the Tuscan territory. Another hour will doubtless show: for by that time the boat will come back. I will make you acquainted with the result."

Durazzo then left me in a somewhat hurried manner, as if to prevent me from renewing the expressions of my gratitude for the services he had rendered. The page shortly appeared to spread the cloth for my dinner; and I partook of the repast with a better appetite than I had as yet experienced on board the *Athene*. In about an hour Durazzo returned; and he entered hastily, saying, "Lanover is arrested! Either he or Dorchester—or perhaps both—must have made revelations: for it is evidently known that this is the *Athene* and that it is a pirate-ship. We are off at once!—there is not even leisure to put you ashore!"

With these words Constantine issued from my presence; and then I became aware of the hasty tread of many feet upon the deck overhead, and of all the evidences of that bustle and activity which denote that a ship is about to get under weigh. The anchor was heaving up; and words of command soon issued rapidly from the lips of Durazzo. Then all of a sudden the roar of a gun, booming through the air, rolled upon my ear.

I hastened on deck: the sails were already filling to the breeze; and I felt the motion of the vessel as she was moving onward. Another gun was fired: it was from the English frigate; and a shot splashed in the water scarcely half-a-dozen yards from the starboard side of the ship. Durazzo's voice went on issuing order after order with a calm firmness; and each successive mandate was with alacrity obeyed by his well disciplined crew. Shot after shot was fired at the *Athene* from the frigate, which was likewise spreading its sails; and I perceived also that the French sloop was getting under weigh. I remained at a distance from Durazzo: and I saw that he was too much occupied in giving his orders to have any immediate leisure for discourse with me. He evidently did not think it worth while, at least for the present, to waste time or ammunition in returning the frigate's shot; and as the *Athene* was now running rapidly away from the dangerous neighbourhood of the French and English vessels-of-war, not one of those shot inflicted the slightest injury on the schooner. The dusk had closed in some time—the darkness was deepening—the wind was strengthening—and the aspect of the heavens portended a tempestuous night.

Every stitch of canvass which the *Athene* could carry, was displayed to the wind; and almost incredible was the speed with which the beautiful fabric skimmed over the water. The French sloop—evidently a very fast sailer—was visible through the night-glass: but the English frigate was no

onger to be seen. Nearly an hour had now passed since the Athene sped from her anchorage off Leghorn; and Durazzo at length consigned the care of his vessel to his second lieutenant, while he descended to his cabin to snatch some hasty refreshment. He took the opportunity of passing by the spot where I was standing; and he hastily whispered, "In about five minutes go down below."

Suffering that interval to elapse, I descended to my state-room,—where the youthful page almost immediately made his appearance, with a request on Captain Durazzo's part that I would join him in his cabin to take a glass of wine. Thither I at once repaired; and the corsair-chief desired me to be seated.

"I had not till this instant found leisure," he said, "to hold any farther conversation with you: but you are doubtless anxious to learn the details of what took place at Leghorn. I sent Lanover on shore in my boat—and bade the mate accompany him in plain clothes, with a view that he might follow at a distance when they were in the town, and judge whether anything happened to Lanover himself. The mate beheld the arrest of Lanover suddenly effected by a posse of police, by whom he was borne off. Still the mate followed at a distance—and remained outside the police-court to which Lanover was conducted,—until thinking it was of no earthly avail for him to linger there, he began to retrace his way towards the boat. The foolish fellow however nearly suffered for the delay which he so incautiously adopted after Lanover's arrest. For scarcely had he reached the boat, when a body of police-officers rushed down to the landing-place; and a conflict ensued between them and my men. The *sbirri* were beaten off: my men escaped unhurt, and put back with all possible speed to the Athene. Now you know everything. As for Lanover," added the young Greek, with a look of supreme disgust, "I can scarcely be sorry for his arrest, whatever the particular charge be that is brought against him."

"Rest assured, my dear Durazzo," I answered, "that he righteously merits any fate that may be in store for him. But, Oh! how can I sufficiently——"

"Not another word of gratitude!" interrupted the young Greek. "We are friends once more—and that is the essential."

"Yes—but it is not all that I have to say!" I exclaimed: "for I must give you a proof of my friendship. Constantine Durazzo, you have rendered me a service which I never can forget, and which I can never adequately repay. You have faith in my honour—and you will believe my word. Solemnly therefore do I stake that honour—as solemnly too do I pledge this word of mine—that never, never from my lips shall go forth a syllable that in any quarter may militate against your interest. No—I am incapable of ingratitude!—and heaven knows that you have my sincerest wishes for your happiness!"

Constantine seized my hand, and pressed it fervidly: but he could not immediately give utterance to a syllable—his heart was too full of emotions to allow him to speak. But his eloquent eyes conveyed the joyous gratitude which he in his turn experienced; and then he at length murmured, "We are friends for evermore!"

"We are," I responded: "and——"

"And the day may come," he answered, "when you may even forget that I have been a corsair-chief—or at least you will do your best to banish it from your memory. But now let us change the subject. We are chased, as you have perceived, by a sloop and a frigate: the latter we have already distanced—the former we may not run away from with the same facility. Nevertheless, there are nine chances in our favour to one against us. And if that one should happen to overrule all the rest—well, we must do as we did in respect to the Tyrol. But understand me well, my dear Wilmot:—the moment there is a fitting opportunity, you shall be landed—and my sincerest wishes for your happiness and prosperity will follow you. I must now go upon deck to see that my brave ship does its duty; and if you purpose to walk there again this evening, you can come up in a few minutes. We must not seem to have too good an understanding with each other—for fear lest suspicion might be engendered that the frustration of Lanover's schemes was not altogether the result of accident."

By the time I returned to the deck, the wind had got up considerably, and the waves were crested with white foam. Still the Athene held on under all her canvass: but the French sloop was still visible through the night-glass—for she too had crowded all sail. The night was dark—clouds of ominous blackness were rolling high over head; and I felt convinced that we should be visited by a storm of terrific wind—perhaps a hurricane. Within another half hour it blew with such violence that Durazzo ordered sail to be shortened: yet still the Athene glided through the water at a tremendous rate. Another half hour—and the wind came on with such a gush that methought for a few instants the gallant schooner would be upset, or that her tall topmasts would be split in twain: but she rose gracefully after inclining towards the sea—and the corsair-chief commanded more sail to be taken in.

In another hour the French sloop was no longer visible: but it now blew the perfect hurricane which the aspect of the heavens had portended; and the sea was lashed up into tremendous billows. The spray dashed over the deck—so that I was soon completely wet through; and Durazzo advised me to go below. I felt somewhat apprehensive of danger; and methought there was more chance upon the deck of escaping from its consequences, than if I went and cooped myself up in my state-room. I therefore assured the young Greek that I would much rather remain where I was.

"It will be a boisterous night," said Durazzo: "it is already blowing a hurricane—and in another hour we shall not be able to show a single stitch of canvass. The Athene has however weathered many a worse storm; and I entertain no fear."

"But there must be always danger," I observed, "amidst the various casualties that may happen at sea."

"There is danger everywhere," responded Durazzo, "both on land and on water. But with a gallant vessel like this—and with plenty of sea-room—with a well-disciplined crew also——"

"And with a skilful captain," I suggested, "the chances of peril are considerably lessened?"

As Durazzo had prophesied, another hour beheld us scudding along with bare poles; and we went

at a tremendous rate. The waves were literally mountains high: the white foam gleamed ghastly through the darkness of the night: the prospect was as if a churchyard were teeming and heaving, swelling and sinking all around—tossing its white gravestones about, like feathers upon the surface, in every direction. Durazzo again accosted me: and I now learnt that we were running between the island of Elba and Corsica—a course which he preferred to the channel between Elba and the main land of Italy.

The pumps had been rigged—the well of the vessel was frequently sounded—and it was about midnight when the second lieutenant reported something to Durazzo which made the corsair-chief betake himself to the pumps. A presentiment of danger hurried me thither also; and I soon ascertained that the schooner had sprung a leak. It proved to be a serious one too, and the pumps had now to be kept vigorously at work. Durazzo frequently descended to his cabin to examine the chart: for, as I afterwards learnt, the present cruise was the first occasion on which the Athene had ever been in that part of the Mediterranean. After the discovery of the leak, I volunteered to render my assistance at the pumps; and though the corsair-chief assured me that he had men enough for all the purposes of the vessel, I insisted on doing that which I conceived to be my duty. I began working with all my energy—a proceeding which I could well judge by various evidences, raised me considerably in the estimation of Durazzo's officers and crew.

It must have been about one in the morning when the Athene experienced a sudden shock which was felt throughout the whole fabric, making her quiver from stem to stern, and throwing down several of the crew by its violence. The vessel seemed to reel for an instant—then it passed on—but its stern gave a tremendous bump on the sunken rock or shoal over which it had just gone. The man at the wheel was hurled down with terrific force; so that he was stunned for upwards of a minute,—and in the meanwhile it was ascertained that the ship's rudder had been broken off. The effect was immediately visible by the manner in which she began to toss and heave about, with no certain guide for her course; and Durazzo, who was in his cabin examining the chart at the instant the accident occurred, came rushing upon deck. I may as well observe here what I did not however learn until afterwards, that the shoal or rock—whatsoever it were—was not marked in the chart; and therefore no fault could be attributed to the seamanship of the corsair-chief or any of his crew.

In the midst of the grave circumstances which now surrounded us, Constantine did not for an instant lose his presence of mind. His orders were quickly but calmly and steadily given: he had all his wits completely about him. A sail was set to steady the ship, and preparations were made for rigging some substitute for the lost rudder. But scarcely had half-a-dozen minutes elapsed after the accident, when a loud ejaculation from a man in the fore-part of the vessel rang through the gale upon our ears; and Durazzo hastily exclaimed to me, "Prepare for the worst, Mr. Wilmot! We are lost!—there are breakers!—we are rushing upon them!"

Scarcely were the words out of his lips, when the loud roaring of the breakers confirmed the horrible truth of the intelligence. A glance over the ship's side showed me that we were now being hurried on through a mass of foam; and then the Athene suddenly stopped short with a crash and with a shock as if she had run against a wall of massive masonry rising out of the sea. The waves broke over her: desperately did I clutch at a rope—but I missed it—and the next instant I had the suffocating sensation of being immersed in the water. Thus washed off the deck, and left to battle with the fury of the billows, my case was even more desperate than when borne by the raging waters from the emigrant-ship off the Kentish coast. I swam with all my energy—all my power. I looked about me for the Athene—but beheld it not: there was a light however glimmering at a distance—and I naturally concluded it was on board that vessel. I swam towards it—if swimming it could be called, which at one moment was immersion, and at another being hurried along with racehorse speed by a billow that seemed rolling in to dash itself madly upon the sunken rocks—then being hurled back again and nearly sucked down into the abyss by the retreating wave. All of a sudden my feet touched the bottom: a mighty billow was pursuing me into that shallow water, the surface of which was however as white as if it were a seething cauldron. I ran on—the wave broke just behind me—on, on I went—until there was no longer any doubt that I had reached land of some sort; and I sank down senseless through exhaustion, just beyond the limit of the water.

When I regained my consciousness, some one was bending over me; and I had an idea that a voice was speaking kindly to me—but I could not instantaneously recognise it. At length I knew it to be Durazzo's; and scarcely had this conviction dawned in unto my mind, when I found that there was another person near me—and this proved to be the youthful page. But the rest of the crew—where were they? And the gallant vessel—the beautiful Athene—where was it? Alas! Constantine Durazzo had every reason to believe that the only survivors were there grouped together in the persons of us three! As for the Athene, it was gone—broken up by the breakers: it was then floating in countless fragments upon the bosom of the billows—or else being dashed up in shatters upon the shore. And we ourselves were upon the island of Corsica.

I knelt, and returned thanks to heaven for my deliverance: Durazzo and the page imitated my example; and when we had finished our devotions, we bent our way towards the light which I had seen from the waters and which was shining at about a distance of a quarter of a mile. During our walk thither, I learnt that the young page was indebted to Constantine for his life; and never shall I forget the terms of affectionate gratitude in which the juvenile Greek addressed his elder fellow-countryman. Durazzo was sombre and melancholy: he deeply felt the loss of his crew that had loved him so well—the loss of the ship in which he took such pride! I could understand also that the incident was a terrible blow for Constantine Durazzo; inasmuch as it had ruined in an instant the bright hopes he had formed of



realizing by the next cruise sufficient to afford him a competency for the rest of his life.

We found that the light proceeded from a small farm-house, the occupants of which were an elderly couple, with three sons and two daughters. The moment the door was opened, the wretched plight in which we made our appearance—the water dripping from our clothes—no hats or caps on our heads—and our saturated hair all in wildest disorder—at once led to the impression that we had been shipwrecked. This we stated to have been the case; and all the members of the family displayed the most cordial zeal to render us such succour as was in their power. Clean linen was furnished us, and the wardrobes of the three sons supplied us each with a suit. While our toilets were being performed, the daughters superintended the preparations for a good meal; and this, together with some wine and spirits, helped still more to comfort us. Durazzo represented that his vessel was a Greek trader, to which he gave some name very different indeed from that of either the *Athene* or the *Otho*. We were conducted to bed-chambers, and there we reposed for a few hours.

In the morning, before breakfast, we descended to the shore on which we had been cast; and we found it strewn with the fragments of the wreck. By a singular accident a piece of the stern—the very piece on which the name of “*THE OTHO*” had been painted—was amongst these relics of the *Athene*. Durazzo at once dug a hole and buried it: for if he cast it back into the water, it might have been thrown up again. But it was not merely with remnants of the ship that the shore was strown: no less than five dead bodies, swollen and bloated, lay there; and amongst them was that of *Notaras*. No articles of any value—no chests—no clothes—had been thrown upon the strand; and there was not so much as a single spar standing on the spot where the *Athene* had struck the hidden rocks. With folded arms, *Constantine Durazzo* gloomily surveyed the scene: I saw that he was profoundly moved—though his features were rigid and no tear moistened his cheek.

We dragged the corpses all to one place, where we ranged them in a row; and we covered them with a sail which had been washed ashore along with the spar to which it pertained. As we retraced our way towards the hospitable dwelling of the worthy Corsican farmer, *Durazzo* said in a low melancholy voice, “We must tarry here long enough to see the obsequies performed for those poor fellows. And then—”

But he stopped short, as if in utter ignorance of what his own proceedings would subsequently be. I delicately hinted to him that I had ample funds at a banker’s in *Florence*,—any portion of which should be cheerfully placed at his disposal.

“A thousand thanks, my dear *Wilmot*,” he responded: “but I am far from being in need of such succour. Fortunately at the instant the accident occurred I had in my pocket a purse well filled with gold: but all my other treasure has gone down with the *Athene*. It is not on account of my immediate purposes that I am at all embarrassed: but candidly, *Wilmot*, for the future—You know what I mean!”—and he wrung my hand with a sudden convulsive violence; for his heart was evidently full of anxious thought on account of his *Leonora*.

“It is not for *Constantine Durazzo*,” I said, “to be depressed!”

“No—you are right, *Wilmot*!” he exclaimed: “it is cowardly to give way to despondency in such circumstances. I must carve out some new fortune for myself!”

I may here pause for a few minutes to observe that the part of the island on which we had been thrown, had a singularly barren and desert appearance—save in respect to perhaps about a hundred acres in the vicinity of the farm-house; and this tract of land bore evidences of a very tolerable agriculture, so far as I could judge, and considering the season of the year. About a mile distant, there was a little hamlet, consisting of not more than a dozen of straggling and detached huts or cottages, with the spire of a church peeping up in the midst. In another direction—about three-quarters of a mile from the farm—there was a somewhat vast pile of ruins—the building having once been a monastic institution, and of which I shall soon have more particularly to speak. There were very few trees within the range of our vision; and those which we did see, were chiefly upon the farm.

On arriving at the farm-house we found an excellent breakfast prepared for us; and when the repast was over, *Durazzo* conferred with our hospitable host relative to the burial of the corpses left upon the strand. The farmer at once sent off to the village to solicit the attendance of the priest holding the little curacy; and the reverend man promptly complied with the summons. No coffins were provided for the dead,—*Durazzo* merely wished to have them interred in consecrated ground; and this in the course of the day was accomplished,—the corsair-chief, myself, and the youthful page attending the obsequies.

## CHAPTER CXXXI.

### THE MONASTERY OF ST. BARTHOLOMEW.

It was the evening; and we were seated with the farmer’s family in their comfortable parlour,—when the conversation turned upon the ruins to which I have already alluded.

“It was once the largest monastic establishment in this island,” said the farmer. “Indeed, the monastery of *St. Bartholomew* was not merely celebrated in *Corsica*—but it had an European fame, for the richness of its endowments and the hospitality which all way-farers experienced within its walls. If you were to stand upon the highest point of land near those ruins, and to glance all around, the whole tract of territory which the eye would thus embrace once belonged to the monks of *St. Bartholomew*. The Lord Abbot was a feudal peer as well as a high church dignitary; and as some centuries ago *Corsica* was frequently invaded by bands from *Italy* or *France*, and even *Spain*, the Lord Abbot maintained a considerable military force for the defence of his estates. Tradition moreover tells us that there was many a Lord Abbot who in time of emergency put off the mitre and threw down the crozier, to don the helmet and grasp the sword. In the times of the crusades, the monastery of *St. Bartholomew* sent to the

Holy Land a body of two hundred men; and this contingent to the Christian armies it maintained at its own cost, until King Richard of England made peace with the Sultan Saladin."

"No wonder," I observed, "that the monastery of St. Bartholomew was so celebrated. But how happened it to fall into ruin?—for inasmuch as your religion is Roman Catholic, surely so splendid an establishment could have maintained itself in existence?"

"The tradition is well preserved amongst us," replied the farmer; "and if I weary you not with my explanations, I will give you the legend as it has been handed down in my family."

I assured the farmer that I experienced the greatest interest in whatsoever details were connected with so remarkable an establishment. Fresh logs were heaped upon the fire—another flask of wine was produced—and our hospitable host continued as follows:—

"The Genoese were the worst oppressors whose iron rule was ever known to the Corsicans. I need not tell a young gentleman of education, as I perceive you to be, that the little Republic of Genoa once exercised immense maritime influence in the Mediterranean, and was even at times able to cope with the Turkish fleets themselves. For several centuries the Genoese occupied Corsica, and maintained themselves amongst us as much by corrupting our leading men with their gold, as by the power of their arms. There used to be an ancient castle—indeed the ruins still remain—about five miles hence; and the domain attached to it joined the patrimony of St. Bartholomew. That castle and estate belonged to an old Corsican family bearing the name of Monte d'Oro. Very powerful were the Counts of Monte d'Oro; and greatly had they signalized themselves in the wars of the Crusades, as well as in the earlier periods of Corsican history. I must direct your special attention to the end of the 17th century. At that period the Count of Monte d'Oro was a man infamous for the depraved and debauched life which he led. It was notorious that he was largely bribed by the Genoese to help them in maintaining their supremacy in the island. But if all the treasures of the universe had flown into Monte d'Oro's exchequer he would have dissipated them in his profligate pursuits. He was therefore always in want of money; and he scrupled not to ride forth at night with a posse of armed ruffians, to carry off the flocks and herds from the domains of his neighbours. These neighbours were all, with one exception, too weak to resist the formidable Count of Monte d'Oro:—the Lord Abbot of St. Bartholomew seemed alone able to cope with him. Sometimes when the Count made an inroad upon the ecclesiastical domain, he was encountered by the Abbot's armed retainers; and several sanguinary conflicts ensued. For these and a variety of other circumstances the Count of Monte d'Oro conceived a violent hatred against the Lord Abbot of that time; and being of a temper as violent and vindictive as he was debauched and profligate, he resolved by some means or another to revenge himself against his mitred foe."

"You are depicting a truly formidable character in this Count of Monte d'Oro," I observed.

"It is said," answered the farmer, "that even

Satan himself is not so black as he is painted: but it would be impossible to depict the Count of Monte d'Oro in hues too deep. By his abominable conduct he drove a young and beautiful wife to a premature grave; and his only son, when at the age of nineteen, was so disgusted with his father's depraved conduct, and felt the paternal tyranny to be so intolerable, that he suddenly fled from the castle—and whether he were ever again heard of, seems to be a matter of doubt. But on that point I shall have something to say presently. In the mean time I resume the thread of my narrative."

The farmer refreshed himself with some wine, and then continued in the following manner:—

"I was saying that the Count of Monte d'Oro determined to be revenged on the Abbot and the entire community of St. Bartholomew. The Genoese authorities established in the island of Corsica, were at that time very much in want of money: for their power was already tottering, and their only method of maintaining it was by keeping the great native chiefs well bribed. Until the period of which I am speaking—namely, the year 1697—the monastic institutions had been left untaxed: for the Genoese were afraid of goading the Corsicans to desperation if they displayed their tyranny against their religion or their ecclesiastical establishments. Besides, the Genoese were also Catholics themselves: and there was thus a religious sympathy which had guaranteed the monastic institutions of the island from the taxes which weighed so heavily elsewhere. The Count of Monte d'Oro conceived a project which he hoped would enable him to achieve a two-fold purpose: namely, to replenish his own treasury and to wreak his vengeance on the community of St. Bartholomew. He suggested to the Genoese authorities that the monastic institutions should be taxed, and that the imposts should be levied in divers ways,—upon each monastery or convent according to its extent and the number of inmates—according to the value of its endowments, whether of lands or revenues—and according to the worth of the gold and silver plate possessed by each community. The Count, as wily as he was vindictive, knew that this mode of taxation would, in its complex details, press more heavily on the monastery of St. Bartholomew than on any other ecclesiastical institution on the island. The Genoese authorities consulted the other leading Corsican chiefs, who willingly gave their consent to the scheme, on being promised that they themselves should exercise the functions of assessors and collectors in their respective districts. The Count of Monte d'Oro's object was now gained—or at least he fancied it was; and he returned in triumph from Ajaccio, the seat of Government, to his own castle. The instant the intelligence of the newly decreed mode of taxation reached St. Bartholomew's, the Abbot and his monks sate in solemn conclave to deliberate upon the course they were to pursue. I must tell you that the monastery possessed gold and silver plate of enormous value: indeed it was supposed that the table of no monarch in Christendom could display an equal sumptuousness or amount of wealth in that respect. The endowments were rich—the revenues were great; and under the paternal auspices of the good fathers, the tenantry had rendered the monastic



estates the most fertile and productive in all the island. Doubtless the Abbot and his monks felt it very hard that they should now be subjected to so outrageous a plunder under the fiction of a legal taxation. They knew full well that whatsoever they might pay in the form of impost, would not be conducive to the purposes of legitimate government—but that the greater portion of the collected taxes would be intercepted by the rapacious hands of their sworn enemy, the Count of Monte d'Oro."

"And to what resolution did they come?" I inquired, much interested in the tale.

"The holy father saw no possible means of evading or resisting the payment of such taxes as might be levied upon them according to the newly-published tariff. They had shown themselves quite able, by means of their armed retainers, to resist the predatory incursions of the Count of Monte d'Oro: but they now knew full

well that if they attempted resistance against the levying of the tax, he would invoke the succour of the Genoese troops—in which case an overwhelming force would be brought to bear against the community of St. Bartholomew. The Lord Abbot and his monks therefore resolved to submit to a certain extent."

"How to a certain extent?" I asked, not comprehending the phrase in the sense in which it was now used.

"They made up their minds," returned the farmer, "to surrender up as little as possible to the rapacity of the Count of Monte d'Oro. They assembled their principal tenants—to whom they granted leases on terms so exceedingly moderate as to be far below the real value of the lands so apportioned; and thus they reduced their rent-roll by one-half. They pulled down a number of out-buildings which could be easily spared; and thus they reduced the dimensions of the edifice. As

for their sumptuous plate, which would have had to bear the heaviest taxation of all, they melted it down into bars of silver and gold:—every article of it, save and except the holy vessels of the altar in their cathedral-church, did they thus make away with. Being now prepared for the visit of the Count d'Oro, they calmly awaited the result. The feudal lord was not long in paying this visit. One day he arrived at the gate of the monastery, attended by a posse of his retainers: admittance was at once afforded him—and he was received with an air of cold courtesy. A surveyor whom he brought with him, gave an account of the size of the edifice—reporting likewise the destruction of a part of it. The Count examined the rent-roll, and found it had been reduced to one-half its former proportions. He demanded to inspect the monastic plate: he was told that with the exception of the sacramental vessels and the ornaments of the altar, there was no plate within the walls of St. Bartholomew. Each successive disappointment aggravated the Count's rage; and this last one rendered him furious. He vowed that he would search everywhere for the plate which it was notorious the monastery possessed—or that if it had been melted down he would appraise the ingots. But neither the bars of gold nor of silver were to be found. The Count was maddened: he struck the venerable Lord Abbot, and tore him from his high seat in the council-chamber. The holy father rose bleeding from the floor, and excommunicated the Count upon the spot. Then ensued a frightful scene. Forth from its sheath flashed the Count's weapon; and the venerable Abbot was stricken dead at his feet. The monks gathered round, with horror on their countenances and lamentations on their lips: but the ferocious Monte d'Oro was resolved upon the sack and plunder of the edifice, for which he conceived he had sufficient warrant on the ground that the taxation had been resisted. The holy fathers were expelled—everything of value was seized upon—and the monastery was given to the flames. But nowhere could the bars of gold and silver, nor the treasures which the monks were supposed to possess,—nowhere could they be found! The tenants and the armed retainers of the community gathered in a mass when the flames began to ascend from the venerated monastic pile: they attacked the Count of Monte d'Oro and his ferocious band: but they were defeated with an immense slaughter. Then the lands were ravaged and laid waste: misery was carried into homesteads that were recently the scenes of happiness: habitations were burnt—families were driven out to perish in the long cold night of winter. Their flocks and herds were driven away; and the patrimony of St. Bartholomew became a desolate waste. The poor families who survived all these horrors, migrated to other parts of the island; and the expelled monks, fleeing afar from the deadly vengeance of their persecutor, sought refuge in other sanctuaries—some perhaps in other climes. This farm was tenanted by an ancestor of mine: but he had the good fortune to be spared—for he was a very old man, and took no part in the conflict with the Count. His lands were however ravaged—his sheep and cattle driven off. He died of grief: but his son, by dint of strenuous toil, restored somewhat the ruined fortunes of the family. A

few years after the frightful occurrence at the monastery, the Count of Monte d'Oro died a violent death: his horse ran away with him when out one day engaged in the chase—and both rider and steed fell over a precipice. Their mangled bodies were subsequently discovered on the beach below. The son never appeared to claim the castle and the estates—the title became extinct—the castle itself has fallen into ruins—the domain of Monte d'Oro has been parcelled out and has thus got into other hands. But it was said at the time that the young Count—as he might be called, though if it were really *he*, it was striven by an assumed name to conceal his identity—was seen in the neighbourhood for a single day after the old Count's death, and that he instituted inquiries into all past events with the air of one to whom they were previously known but dimly by mere rumour. At all events, if this individual were really the young Count who had been long abroad in foreign climes, it was supposed he departed again immediately,—horrified no doubt at his father's crimes—afraid to assume a title to which a curse might be attached—and preferring to sacrifice the estate itself rather than proclaim himself the son of such a man.

"And the melted plate," I said, "has never been heard of?"

"Never," responded the farmer. "Various ideas, according to the tradition, were rife at the time. Some said that the treasures were buried in a place the secret of which was known to the Lord Abbot alone, and that therefore it perished with him. Others declared that the bars of silver and gold and all the treasures of the religious community were shipped on board a vessel for Italy, and that the holy fathers secretly entertained the intention of repairing thither to re-establish a new ecclesiastical home, and thereby escape from the persecution of their Genoese oppressors as well as from the rancour of the Count of Monte d'Oro. Indeed it was an opinion with a few that some of the holy fathers, the youngest of the community, *did* proceed to Italy, and obtaining possession of their exported treasure, *did* establish themselves in a new monastic home, while the very aged fugitive monks took refuge, as I have said, in other Corsican sanctuaries. I know not which of all these speculations was likely to be true: but certain it is that soon after the tragedy there were numerous seekers amongst the ruins of St. Bartholomew for the wealth that was supposed to be buried there; and if the treasure were even discovered, the fortunate individual kept the secret so well that it never transpired."

"I should rather fancy," I observed, "that the holy fathers had really sent away their wealth, and that the hypothesis of the Italian emigration on the part of the youngest and most hale of the monks was the correct one. But nothing more was ever heard, I think you said, of the heir to the title and estates of Monte d'Oro?"

"Nothing," was the response.

"And the patrimony of St. Bartholomew," I asked, "has ever since continued a waste? and hence the origin of the cheerless aspect of the land in this part of the island—save and except with regard to your farm, and the little village where the dead were interred to-day?"

"The lands of the patrimony continued so long uncultivated," replied the farmer, "and there was

the certainty that whosoever might take a lease of them from the persons afterwards claiming to possess them, would be involved in litigation with other claimants, that no one has chosen to risk his capital on such an enterprise. If you and your companions will honour us with your presence for a few more days, you may possibly experience some little pleasure in visiting the ruins of the monastery and of the castle."

"I should certainly like to do so," was my answer; "unless"—and I looked at Darazzo.

"I did think of leaving to-morrow morning," observed Constantine: "but I am not so selfish, my dear Wilmot, as to hurry you away thus precipitately. We may visit the ruins of both castle and monastery in the course of to-morrow; and the day after we can take leave of our hospitable entertainers."

It is unnecessary to detail any more of the conversation which took place on the particular evening of which I am writing; and on retiring to our respective chambers, I reviewed all I had learnt from the lips of the worthy farmer before sleep visited my eyes.

Immediately after breakfast on the following morning Durazzo, the page, and myself set out to visit the ruins of the monastery of St. Bartholomew. The farmer was too much occupied with his own avocations to accompany us: he offered to send one of his sons—but we knew that the young men had each their duties to perform; and we would not therefore take either of them away from the scene of their industry. Moreover the ruins were close at hand—there was no need of any one to show us the way; and when once there, a guide was equally unnecessary.

Ten minutes' walk brought us to the ruins; and the first impression was that of a large space of ground, nearly half an acre, covered with mouldering masses of masonry, overgrown with weeds, grass, and creeping plants. Here and there portions of walls still remained: the eastern end of the cathedral-church was in better preservation than the rest; and we had little difficulty in discerning some fine sculpture upon the remnants of the stone framework of the oriel window. But I have always found that however grand the ideas previously conceived in respect to a ruin, they invariably experience disappointment when the visit is paid; and on departure there has been a sense of exaggeration on the part of the fancy, or else on that of the book or the tongue which had previously described the scene thus inspected. Such was the disappointment I felt in the present instance, so far as the actual appearance of the ruins themselves were concerned: for after floundering about for nearly an hour amongst the huge blocks of masonry which encumbered the ground, and through the long dank grass, we scarcely succeeded in tracing the outlines of more than two or three of what had once been apartments in the monastery.

Nevertheless, imagination was busy, at least on my part, in restoring that edifice to what might have been its former condition, and in peopling it with its ecclesiastical inmates. Methought I stood in the midst of the vast cathedral-church—tall shapely columns supporting the roof—and sculptured shafts of stone forming the frame-work of the painted windows. Methought I beheld the

altar standing on the summit of a noble ascent of steps; and that the priests in their robes were performing their holy functions there. In another place methought that where mere fragments of walls now existed, a spacious and comfortable refectory stood; and that at a long table I could see the holy fathers doing justice to the substantial fare. I stood before the mouldering remnant of a cell; and methought that therein was an enthusiast lacerating himself with a scourge, and hoping to cleanse himself of his sins by cruellest self-martyrdom. Perhaps one of the most definable portions of the ruin was that where a cloister once had been, and where it had bordered the grave-yard of the monastery. Methought that it was all restored—it was a cloister once again—a wall on one side, pillars on the other—the colonnade supporting a groined roof—and the pavement formed of immense heavy flagstones. And methought that I could behold two or three darkly clad individuals—monks in their gowns, with their hoods drawn over their countenances—slowly pacing that cloister, and telling their beads. In another part of the ruins there were assuredly the remnants of a large stabling establishment, adjoining what had once been a paved court-yard. But even to distinguish all this, the closest scrutiny and the keenest discernment were requisite. Then I pictured to myself the portly Lord Abbot being assisted into the comfortable saddle on his quiet-going mule—with perhaps a menial standing near, bearing a massive silver tray with a flagon and drinking cup upon it, that his reverend lordship might refresh and cheer himself with a stoup of wine previous to going forth upon some pastoral avocation. In a word, there was scarcely an end to the vagaries and conceits which my roving imagination thus permitted itself, as I wandered for an hour amidst those ruins.

I may here observe that the mood of Durazzo continued mournful, if not absolutely sombre, despite his exclamation of the preceding day that he would not despond. He had certainly listened to the farmer's tale of the previous evening—but only listened. I do not think it could be said that he had experienced any interest in it: for he had asked no question—he had made no comment. And now he certainly accompanied me and the youthful page amongst the ruins of St. Bartholomew: but it was with a preoccupied air and in an abstracted manner. When I directed his attention to any particular object, he rallied himself with a sudden start, and endeavoured to display an interest therein. But I saw that he only did this for my sake, and to render himself as companionable as he could—for that in reality his thoughts were far away. And no wonder! Could I blame him? How altered was his position from what it so recently had been!—his ship and his crew were gone—the means of rapidly obtaining a competency were taken from him—and the proud, gallant, skilful, daring pirate-chief was an outcast on a strange island, knowing not when he should again see his bride Leonora, and perhaps unable to settle his mind to any particular course for the immediate future. I chose not to question him on the point—I knew how painful it must be: but from the very bottom of my soul I pitied him. As for the young page, he also looked melancholy,

because he sympathized so deeply with Constantine, whom he loved; but he nevertheless displayed considerable interest in the ruins which we were visiting.

We had been about an hour amongst those fragments and dilapidated remnants of a once vast and no doubt magnificent cloistral edifice,—when, as we were retracing our way through that sort of enclosure which I have alluded to as having doubtless been the grave-yard of the monastery, the earth suddenly gave way beneath my feet; and I disappeared from the view of my two companions. It was not however that I had fallen so far underground as that my head had gone below the level: but it was that we were making our way at the time through a quantity of high rank grass and noxious weeds, which reached up to the waist. Therefore, when being a few yards in advance of Durazzo and the page, the giving-way of the earth took me down about three feet, I was suddenly lost to their view. They rushed forward in affright—but were infinitely relieved on discovering that the accident was not more serious. I had however experienced a considerable shock—and was bruised too in the lower limbs; for several fragments of stone had fallen in with me.

“It must be a grave,” I said, “that has given way—for this is evidently the resting-place of the departed fathers of an olden time.”

While thus speaking, I had my eyes fixed upon the hole from which I had emerged; and it struck me that I beheld some indications of a descent of steps. Stooping down I examined the place more carefully. The giving-way of the earth had left an aperture about two feet and a half square; and it was a complete square in shape which the opening thus formed. I thought this strange; and it occurred to me that the earth in that spot might possibly have concealed a trap-door of wood or stone, the sudden yielding of which beneath my feet had carried down with it just the quantity of soil that was on the top, and had thus left that square configuration of the aperture. My conjecture relative to the steps was right; there was assuredly a descent of narrow stone stairs in that particular place.

Pointing the circumstance out to Durazzo and the page, I lay down flat on my stomach, and thrust in my hands to the bottom of the hole. I brought up some pieces of wood and stone: and to one of the fragments of wood there were iron hinges, very much worn by the effect of time, and a mass of rust.

“It was evidently a trap-door concealed by the earth,” I said; “and most likely fitted into a stone setting. It could scarcely be the opening of a tomb: for no coffin of any size could pass down the aperture. What,” I added with a smile,—“what if we were destined to find the long-lost treasure?”

“I am afraid,” answered Durazzo, “that when Fortune wrecked the Athene and gave my gallant crew to the waves, she turned so completely against me that her wrath has not yet had time to be appeased.”

“Treasure, or no treasure,” I exclaimed, “this is a very curious discovery we have made; and as we have nothing better to do, we may spend half an hour in exploring it.”

By the time I had spoken, I was again in the

hole; and squatting down, so to speak, as much as the limited range of the aperture would permit, I endeavoured to remove with my hands the earth that had fallen in and amassed itself at the top of the flight of steps, the summit of which indeed it only just left barely visible. For upwards of ten minutes I made little impression upon the aggregated soil: but all of a sudden it gave way—and I was enveloped in a cloud of dust. I distinctly heard the sounds of masses of earth or stones rolling down the steps into some cavernous place below; and when the dust cleared away, I perceived that it was indeed the entrance to a subterranean at which I found myself.

The young page had all along witnessed my proceedings with considerable interest; and Durazzo now began to bestow upon them a more marked attention than at the outset.

“Here is certainly a subterranean,” I said; “and whether it should prove a treasure-chamber or not,” I added, laughing, “let us explore it.”

A farther examination of the aperture showed that it might be widened to the full range of the vaulted masonry; and by the aid of a pointed piece of wood I broke away several masses of earth. At length there was an opening amply large enough to admit the descent of either of us with ease: but obscurity prevailed in the cavern—and I hesitated to go down for fear lest it should prove to be a well, or that some accident might befall me. We had no means of obtaining a light: but while we were hesitating what course to adopt, I recollected that on descending into dark places the eye gets accustomed to the obscurity; and as I had vowed to explore the cavern, I did not choose to shrink altogether from my pledge. Durazzo volunteered to descend first: but I would not draw down upon myself the imputation of cowardice; and therefore I decided on taking this venturesome initiative.

Providing myself with a very long stick, or rather pole, I began the descent,—thrusting the pole downward in order to assure myself that there was no abrupt cessation of the steps. I went down gradually; and having descended about a dozen steps, I stopped for two or three minutes to habituate my eyes to the gloom which enveloped me. I now began to perceive that I was descending into a deep cavern-chamber, about sixteen feet square, and on one side of which there was some projecting black object which methought must be a sarcophagus. The pole informed me when I was close upon the bottom,—which I found to be of damp slimy earth. I advanced towards the dark object; and discovered it to be a small structure of black marble, of tomb-like shape, built against the wall—about three feet high, and six feet long.

Retreating towards the steps, I informed my companions of the nature of the place in which I found myself; and Durazzo immediately descended, leaving the young page to keep watch and give us notice in case any one should appear amongst the ruins. By the time Durazzo had joined me in the subterranean, my eyes had become so accustomed to the obscurity that I could now examine the marble structure with comparative ease; and though it certainly bore every appearance of being the monumental resting-place of some long-departed one, the suspicion was nevertheless float-



ing in my mind that it originally had some other purpose to serve and that it was not altogether what it seemed.

"Here is the tomb," I said to Durazzo, with the view of ascertaining what opinion he himself would express.

"Yes," he replied, "it is doubtless the last home of some long defunct authority of St. Bartholomew's; and you, my dear Wilmot, have had all your trouble and incurred all this risk to be rewarded with nothing better than the discovery of a marble monument in an underground sepulchre."

"I told you from the very first," I replied, laughing, "that I addressed myself not as a treasure-seeker to this exploring enterprise. But to speak seriously," I added,—and I *did* at the same time grow serious,—“I do not think this is a mere sepulchre for the dead.”

"How?" ejaculated Durazzo, with a sudden start as if some wild hope had thrilled through him. "You believe then——"

"I have scarcely ventured to form an hypothesis," I interrupted him, "as to what the real use and purpose of this place might have been; but I have no hesitation in declaring that I do not think it was intended as a sepulchre. Doubtless there was a crypt—or at all events there must have been several vaults belonging to the cathedral-church, and in which defunct dignitaries of the monastery were placed with all befitting obsequies. Why, therefore, this cavern in the midst of the church-yard? and why the mystery of its entrance? It is evident that many, many long years must have elapsed since this place was last visited, and that accident alone has unsealed it to our knowledge to-day. The tomb of some sainted deceased one, or of some venerated monastic official, would not be thus concealed."

"You are right, Wilmot—you are right!" exclaimed Durazzo. "What if that legend which we heard last night, and to which I confess that I paid but indifferent attention at the time,—what if it were every word true——"

"I never for an instant suspected its truth," I said: "but I certainly thought it far more probable that the monks had escaped with their treasures to Italy or elsewhere, than that they should have left them behind, no matter how well contrived the place of concealment. But after all, it is quite probable that the Lord Abbot alone knew where those treasures were deposited; and that his sudden death therefore interred the secret in his own blood-stained grave."

"In a word, Wilmot," ejaculated Durazzo, his voice thrilling with a wild anxious suspenseful joy, "you believe it to be possible——"

"Do not excite yourself, my dear friend," I said; "and do not ask me to express any opinion, which, if refuted by facts, would only stultify me egregiously. We will examine this marble structure, if you will, and if we can find the means——But come!"

As if anticipating my purpose, Durazzo placed himself at one end of the large slab which covered the tomb-like marble masonry; and I took my position at the other. But all attempts to lift, or even to move it, were utterly vain.

"I wish we had a light," exclaimed Durazzo. "Could we not on some pretence——"

"Return to the farm for the means of procuring a light? No!" I said: "we must manage without—at least for the present. Ah!" I ejaculated at the instant: "what is this? An iron knob!—perhaps a secret spring?"

The object which had elicited this ejaculation from my lips, was, as I had said, an iron knob—not exactly projecting beyond the surface of the marble, but let into a hollow at that extremity of the tomb-like structure against which I stood. My hand, on quitting the edge of the slab, had accidentally encountered it. I now pushed it—then I endeavoured to draw it out—next I strove to turn it: I exerted all my power to move it in one way or another—but to no effect. And yet the conviction was strong within me that it *was* made to move: indeed I believed that we were standing upon the threshold of discoveries more important than I had chosen to admit to be within the range of my belief.

Durazzo now took his turn at examining the knob—or rather of feeling it with his hands; and while he was thus engaged, I strained my eyes to examine the appearance and all the details of the marble structure as well as I was able. I found another knob similarly let into a recess at the other angle of the same extremity. I proceeded to examine the opposite extremity or end of the structure; and there I found corresponding knobs. Having imparted the discovery to Durazzo, I said, "These contrivances are to give an uniform appearance to the tomb, or whatever it be; but you may rest assured that in one of these four knobs lies whatsoever secret or mystery there may be. And here it is!"

For scarcely had I given expression to the idea, when one of the iron knobs at the extremity where Durazzo had previously attempted to lift the marble slab, yielded to my hand. I had been pushing and pulling, and then turning—when lo! this particular knob *did* turn—but with the utmost difficulty, as if it were much rusted. It kept on turning: the movement soon grew quicker; and I became aware that it worked on a screw—for it was gradually coming farther and farther out from the little hollow or recess in which it had been fixed. At length it came off in my hand, leaving a thick iron screw projecting about an inch from the marble. I pushed the screw, and endeavoured to move it in several directions—but all to no effect. It was utterly motionless.

"There is no secret nor mystery of any kind attached to *that*," said Durazzo, when I had explained to him what was done. "These knobs are mere ornaments—and they have been fixed on with screws."

"It may be so," I answered: "but I have a strong conviction to the contrary."

I now passed back again to the other extremity of the tomb-like structure; and I endeavoured to move the iron knob which corresponded in position with the one which I had succeeded in unscrewing. For several minutes all my efforts were vain; and I was on the point of abandoning them, when suddenly the knob gave way, and I fell backward. There was a clang as of a bar of iron striking against the marble;—and such indeed proved to be the fact: for I had drawn out a long rod the end of which came in contact with the projecting base of the marble structure.

"What is it?" exclaimed Durazzo: "have you hurt yourself, my dear friend?"

"Not in the faintest degree," I answered. "But I am very much mistaken if a portion of the mystery is not already solved."

I showed Durazzo what I meant. The iron rod which I had drawn out passed completely through the marble masonry by means of a hole drilled lengthways for the purpose: the iron knob which I had first succeeded in unscrewing, kept the rod tight; and the uniform contrivance of four of these knobs was naturally calculated to prevent suspicion that they were intended for any other purpose than that of ornament.

We had got thus far: and now we addressed ourselves to the task of ascertaining to what results the removal of the iron rod would lead. We again attempted to raise the flat slab covering the structure—but all in vain.

"Now, Durazzo," I said, "let us see if the front of this marble coffer, tomb, or whatever it may be, will move: for that the rod is intended as a fastening I am well conceived."

Constantine assisted me in the way that I had just directed; and behold! the solid slab of marble, forming what may be termed the perpendicular front of the coffer, yielded to our hands and fell forward with a heavy sound on the damp slimy floor of the cavern. An ejaculation of joy burst from the lips of Durazzo; and I must confess that my own feelings were fraught with a wild and indescribable suspense. It was indeed natural that I should be impressed with the conviction that a discovery of the highest importance was at hand; and for a few instants I experienced a dizziness of the brain—a vertigo that made me stagger. As for my companion, the ejaculation which had burst from his lips bore ample testimony to the intoxicating thrill of hope that had suddenly glowed through his entire frame.

"See what the contents are, my dear Wilmot!" he exclaimed. "I was lately a chief elsewhere—but you are the chief of this exploring enterprise; and you have a right to be the first to ascertain its results!"

I introduced my hand into the marble coffer: my touch encountered a small pile of objects which sent another thrill of strangest, wildest sensations through me. I lifted one: its weight, its form, its touch confirmed my hope—so that for a few instants I felt as if intoxicated to such a degree that I could not give utterance to a syllable.

"Durazzo," I at length said, rising up from my crouching posture, "do not excite yourself: but—but—you have no reason to regret the loss of the Athene, so far as the ship itself is concerned—for you will now be rich—ten thousand times richer than in your wildest dreams you ever could have anticipated!"

"Oh, it is not for myself!—it is for my Leonora's sake!"—and the young Greek, throwing himself into my arms, wept upon my shoulder.

## CHAPTER CXXXII.

### THE CASTLE OF MONTE D'ORO.

I MUST explain to the reader the contrivance of this coffer. He has doubtless already compre-

hended that through the upper part of the front an iron bar passed lengthways from end to end. The front itself, consisting of a single marble slab, was made to open downward, by means of massive iron hinges at the bottom. From the top part of the inner side of this moveable slab, three stout pieces of iron projected. These irons had holes through them; and thus when the slab was closed, the iron rod being thrust through those holes and fastened with the knob that screwed on at the other end, constituted a bolt as strong as it was mysteriously contrived. I need scarcely again repeat that the fact of each extremity of the coffer displaying two knobs in corresponding positions, and thus giving them the appearance of mere ornaments arranged with a due regard to uniformity—was full well calculated to avert the suspicion that any secret belonged to either of these knobs.

The coffer was found to contain a quantity of bars of silver, with a much smaller proportion of bars of the more precious metal. There were also four jars full of gold and silver coins; and there was a fifth—a smaller jar—containing several articles of jewellery, such as gold chains, crosses, rings set with diamonds, and other valuables of exquisite workmanship, as they subsequently proved to be. The youthful page, who all this while had been watching near the mouth of the subterranean, was now made acquainted with the important discovery which had rewarded our exploring enterprise; and his joy knew no bounds. It was not however a selfish joy—nor because he hoped to share in the fruits of the discovery: but it was a sincere and disinterested joy on Durazzo's account and on my own. On Durazzo's account—not because the page knew of his love for Leonora or his union with her—but because of the Athene being lost and the apparently hopeless condition in which it had left him. On my account—because the young page had conceived the greatest friendship towards me. Wild indeed was his delight: but that of Constantine Durazzo was almost equal to it. As for myself, I experienced a profound happiness—an almost illimitable satisfaction—but not on my own account; it was entirely on that of the two Greeks—for my mind was from the very first instant made up how to act in reference to the treasure. As to what its value might be, I could scarcely form an idea: but even before I had spoken to Durazzo on the subject, I had the vague notion that it could not possibly be less than fifty or sixty thousand pounds—and perhaps much more. It was a long time ere we could all three address ourselves soberly and deliberately to the discussion of this or of any other point.

"You may now understand," I at length said, when the first gush of joyous congratulations and wondering emotions had somewhat subsided, "wherefore I counselled you that the inmates of the farm should be in no way led to suspect aught that we were doing here. If the discovery of the treasure became noised abroad, it would be seized upon by the authorities or else by the present claimants to the patrimony of St. Bartholomew,—none of whom would have so much right to it as we who have succeeded in disinterring it. And now listen to me! For while recommending that measures of the utmost caution should be observed

in removing this treasure, I must emphatically and deliberately add that it is all your own. I give ye both my share——”

“Impossible!” cried Durazzo: “we would not and could not avail ourselves of such extraordinary generosity. No!” he exclaimed, “rather let the treasure remain here in this subterranean for ever——”

“We will argue the point presently, my dear friend,” I interrupted him. “In the meanwhile let us use all possible despatch to conceal the treasure effectively, until a suitable opportunity presents itself for its removal.”

Durazzo at once acceded to the propriety of this step; and after a brief deliberation, it was decided that the treasure should be left in its cunningly contrived coffer, and that we would close the mouth of the subterranean in such a way that the mystery should escape the eye of any person who might happen to wander amidst those ruins previous to the removal of the wealth which we had discovered. This proceeding we adopted. We placed a huge stone at the summit of the flight of steps: we then filled with earth the place which had first given way beneath my feet: we trod it down; and then we dragged some pieces of masonry over it in such a manner that no one could have suspected the mystery which was there concealed.

Having thus completed our task, we sauntered forth from the ruins: but there was such a perfect intoxication of joy expressed in the eyes of Constantine Durazzo and the youthful page, that I said to them, “Beware, my friends! your looks will betray you.”

“Let us walk as far as the ruins of the castle of Monte d’Oro,” said Durazzo. “Before we left the farm this morning we intimated that it was our intention so to do; and it might seem strange if we limited our excursion to the ruins of the monastery, where indeed we have already stayed so long. Besides, during this new jaunt we may converse at our ease; and we may also gain time for the sobering down of our exalted feelings.”

“Yes—let us repair to the ruins of the feudal castle,” I said. “It is a good long walk—about five miles distant: but to us who are young and with active limbs, it is nothing.”

As we proceeded in the direction of the ruined castle of Monte d’Oro, I renewed the subject which had been so abruptly broken off amidst the ruins of St. Bartholomew.

“My dear Durazzo,” I said, “my determination is unalterably fixed in respect to my share of that treasure. Pray do not interrupt me—but grant me your attention. I have enough for all my present purposes—ample to last me for a few months longer, until November next, when my fate will be decided, and I shall either be crowned with happiness and wealth, or else shall be reduced to that condition of despair in which no wealth would afford the slightest balm. But understand me well! Though I explain these alternatives of which my destiny is susceptible, I have every hope of the former and no apprehension of the latter. But in either case, you see, Durazzo, that I need not wealth obtained from such a source; for even if I myself were to take advantage of this opportunity to acquire riches, Sir Matthew Heselstine would not for an instant suffer me to retain them; and more-

over the fact of my taking possession of them would perhaps ruin me in his estimation.”

“You conceive it therefore, Wilmot, an immoral act,” said Durazzo, “for any of us to take possession of that treasure?”

“Let me explain myself,” I answered. “It is doubtless an illegal act: for all treasure thus discovered in any country, goes to some particular quarter indicated by the law. Then comes the consideration whether my position is such as to force me to commit an illegal act in order to enrich myself. It is not. But on the other hand your’s is. Now I am not so rigid a moralist nor so particularly straight-laced—indeed, to speak frankly, I should consider it the most miserable affectation of a puritanical fastidiousness, were I to counsel you to let that wealth slip between your fingers. Properly speaking—morally speaking—and rightfully speaking, that wealth belongs to no one except the finder. Still the law declares it is *not* the finder’s: and therefore legally it belongs to some one in some other quarter. But I do not hesitate to declare, Durazzo, that were I in your position I would take possession of it—though with me it is a consideration not to commit an illegal act.”

Durazzo listened with deep attention, and walked on by my side in silence for several minutes. He was reflecting profoundly. At length he said, “I must insist, my dear Wilmot, that you receive at least your share of this immense wealth. At the lowest computation the treasure cannot be worth less than sixty thousand pounds, reckoning in your English money. Will you in a moment abandon that share which in itself constitutes a fortune? Sir Matthew Heselstine need not know that you possess it: you can convert it into gold—you can place the amount in some foreign funds: it will be always a resource to fall back upon in case of necessity.”

We continued to argue the point until the ruins of the castle of Monte d’Oro broke upon our view: but I will not place on record all the reasoning that was advanced for or against my making over my share of the treasure to my companions. It would only weary the reader, without serving the purposes of my narrative. Suffice it to say that by the time we reached the castle ruins the point was not settled,—myself being firm on the one hand to renounce my share, and Durazzo being equally resolute on the other hand to enforce my acceptance of what he regarded as my due.

“And now let us drop the subject, at least for the present,” I said, as we entered amongst the ruins: “for I have a fancy to inspect these remnants of Corsican feudal grandeur in the olden time.”

The ruins of Monte d’Oro covered, like those of St. Bartholomew, a large space of ground; but Time had not worked its ravages here so effectually as in the other case. The dilapidations, though great, did not approach so closely upon a consummation of the work of destruction as in respect to St. Bartholomew’s. Large portions of the walls, with their battlements, still remained: one round tower was left unscathed so far as the solid masonry was concerned,—though floors and roof and flights of stone stairs had disappeared; so that when standing on the damp ground inside that tower,

and on looking upward, naught was seen but the circular shell—naught to impede the view of the sky above.

On three sides the moat remained, and was filled with stagnant water. What once had been an inner paved court-yard, was now a perfect wilderness of wild plants. It was by no means difficult to trace, by the remnants of the walls, what had once been the configuration of the entire castle. A drawbridge had led to a gateway protected by two round towers—one of which still existed so far as I have above described it. The ramparts had formed nearly a square—or rather a parallelogram: there had been ranges of buildings adjoining the gateway and stretching into the interior of the inclosure—in the midst of which had stood the Castle Keep or Donjon. Of this last-mentioned edifice a portion of a wall, containing a doorway and windows, still remained; and a glimpse might be caught of the dark depth of a subterranean—probably once containing the dungeons of the fortalice—but the entrance to which was now almost completely choked up by fragments of masonry overgrown with weeds.

As in the case of the monastery of St. Bartholomew, my imagination was enabled to restore the Castle of Monte d'Oro to its original condition, and to people it with those who belonged to its various compartments in an age that was past. I could fancy that I beheld steel-clad warriors thronging upon the ramparts, and could hear the clank of their armour and their martial weapons. Methought that from the Keep—that Keep which imagination had restored to its grey old sombre-looking massive completeness—I beheld some proud bearer of the title of Monte d'Oro issue forth, clad in a gay hunting-costume, which was warlike also—and mounting a grandly caparisoned steed, to go forth to the chase. Then methought the courtyard was crowded with a gay company—knights and ladies, and countless attendants; and that the pavement sounded with the pawings of impatient steeds and of graceful palfreys. I could fancy the huntaman surrounded by his dogs—the deep-baying Corsican hounds which would track men as well as deer—the falconer with a bird upon his wrist—and the crowds of light-hearted young pages who were as eager as their superiors for the sport. Or on the other hand my imagination could depict darker and sterner scenes—scenes in which the red blood was flowing in deadly strife, and where the horrid din of battle was roaring up to heaven. I could fancy swarms of desperate besiegers clinging to the very walls like bees—and then smitten down by the defenders on the ramparts, to perish in the moat, or else to return to the assault again.

But here I must stop short, lest the reader should fancy that I suffered my imagination to riot and revel too extensively in these vagaries: and I must fall back into the sober truthfulness of my autobiography. Durazzo and myself, together with the young page, wandered amidst the ruins for upwards of an hour; and at length we sat down to rest. It was now two o'clock in the afternoon: we had partaken of no refreshment since the morning—our rambles had been long—our toil at the monastic ruins had been wearisome—and we felt both hungry and thirsty. No habitation was near; and I observed to Durazzo, "As for water, we may obtain it at the rivulet which we crossed about half

a mile hence: but as for food, methinks we shall obtain none until we get back to our quarters."

At that moment a figure emerged round the angle of a ruined wall; and we at once became aware of the presence of a gentleman of commanding appearance. He was tall—at least six feet high—perfectly upright—with a graceful carriage of his well-knit form, which was slender and symmetrical. His age might be about forty: his complexion was of a dusky olive—his dark eyes were keenly bright—his jetty brows strongly pencilled. Handsome he assuredly was: but he had a look that was either careworn or dissipated—methought the former—and yet I was not sure that it might not have been both. He was well dressed; and a handsome cloak with velvet collar was thrown loosely over his shoulders, and only just retained by its braided black silk cords, which terminated in tassels. His appearance was aristocratic; and he accosted us with a manner that was characterized by kind urbanity and polished courtesy.

I had spoken in French to Durazzo; and the stranger now addressed us in the same tongue.

"I need scarcely proffer an apology," he said, "for having been an unwilling listener to the remarks which one of you gentlemen were making; and if you will permit me, I shall cheerfully share that luncheon with which I took care to provide myself before coming to inspect these ruins."

Thus speaking, the gentleman produced from beneath his cloak a small basket, the contents of which he speedily spread on a white napkin—a large stone serving for a table. There was a cold pie, with a small loaf; and these were to be washed down by a bottle of wine—although he observed, smiling, that we must all be contented to share the same glass, for he had not foreseen that he should be honoured with company to his little banquet amidst the lonely ruins of the castle of Monte d'Oro. Durazzo and I expressed our acknowledgments for his courtesy; and neither we, nor the page, experienced any embarrassment in availing ourselves of it: for he was a personage whose manners were calculated to place even the most bashful and diffident immediately at their ease. He appeared to be thoroughly good-natured as well as a man of the world and accustomed to good society; for he did the honours, so to speak, of his table in a manner which rendered the little entertainment as agreeable as it was welcome.

"I need scarcely ask," he said, "whether you be strangers and therefore mere visitors in these parts; for I see that you are not Corsicans. You, sir, I presume," he continued, addressing himself specially to me, "are either a German or an Englishman?"

"I am an Englishman," was my answer.

"I know your country well," proceeded the stranger, now addressing me in English, which he spoke with fluency. "I have visited it on more occasions than one, and have lived in London for several years. Your companions I take to be Greeks?"

I gave an affirmative response; and the stranger at once addressed Durazzo and the page in their own language—thus proving that he was a good linguist. Almost immediately afterwards he re-adopted the French tongue, and went on conversing with all the ease of manœver, the urbanity, and



the absence of pretension, which denoted the polished gentleman. He asked us no questions respecting whatsoever business we might have in that part of the country : but on his own side he gave us to understand that he was travelling for his pleasure, and that he had been led by curiosity to visit the ruins of a building which was connected with the memory of a fearful legend. In the course of his observations it transpired that his name was Turano, and that though a Corsican by birth, he had lived chiefly in foreign countries, his independent means enabling him to gratify his taste for travelling. I asked him if he had visited the ruins of the monastery of St. Bartholomew ?-- and he replied in the affirmative, stating that he had passed several hours there a week back, when he had made a sketch of whatsoever remained of the old monastic pile. This sketch he showed ; and it was executed in a manner which indicated that a proficiency in drawing was amongst the

number of the accomplishments possessed by our new acquaintance.

In return for his confidence, we explained to him that we had been shipwrecked on the island, and that we had been hospitably entertained at a farm-house near the scene of the catastrophe. He had heard of the shipwreck, and felicitated us on our escape. It farther transpired, in the course of his own observations, that he intended to leave that part of the country in the course of the day ; and he politely expressed the hope that we should meet again. We separated from our new acquaintance, much pleased with the urbanity of his manner, and grateful for the generous kindness he had exhibited in so hospitably inviting us to partake of his repast.

During our walk homeward, Durazzo revived that topic which had been interrupted by the inspection of the ruins of the castle of Monte d'Oro and by our falling in with Signor Turano. Con-

stantine besought me to reconsider my decision in respect to the treasure: but I remained firm; and having reiterated my former arguments, earnestly begged that the subject might be dropped. But Durazzo persisted in reasoning with me on the point he urged everything that his generous nature could suggest—he was profoundly vexed and grieved at the resoluteness with which I adhered to my first decision. He even fancied that I should regard it as a slur upon himself that he took what I refused to make use of, and that it was nothing but the most punctilious propriety of feeling on my part which prevented me from availing myself of such a golden opportunity. I said all I could to induce him to assent to the arrangement I had suggested—or I should rather say that I advanced everything to enforce my decision and put an end to the topic: but he returned again and again thereto, until our arrival at the farm-house necessarily put an end to it.

It was dusk when we reached the hospitable homestead; and on entering the cheerful parlour, we found a stranger there. This was a young man who appeared to be about my own age, and who was dressed in the most elegant fashion. He was by no means good-looking: but there was something interesting in his countenance and pleasing in his manners. His hair was light—his complexion fair; and at the first glance I took him to be a fellow-countryman of my own, or at all events a native of a more northern clime than that in which we thus met. Nevertheless, as I presently learnt, Corsican blood flowed in his veins; and he bore the name of Leone. It appeared that he had arrived in the neighbourhood on horseback, attended by a valet; and that for reasons which will be presently explained, he had sought the hospitality of the farm-house.

I may as well detail in a narrative form that which came to my knowledge through the medium of conversation: but in order to render this explanation clear, I must go back to those circumstances which relate to the monastery of St. Bartholomew, and which have been laid before the reader. It was the custom, on the election of an abbot, for the whole ecclesiastical patrimony to be duly invested in him: he was a temporal Baron as well as a spiritual prelate; and thus whosoever wore the mitre of St. Bartholomew was for the time being as much the owner of the monastery and domain as any other nobleman or gentleman was the possessor of his own family estate. The last Abbot of St. Bartholomew was cut off by a violent death in the manner already described; and as the monastery was reduced to a ruin and the monks were dispersed, no other Abbot was elected. The last of that series of mitred Prelates thus died in virtual possession of the whole domain of St. Bartholomew. He left behind him a brother—a weak, imbecile, and time-serving man, who had not the courage nor the magnanimity to take any steps to avenge the Abbot's death or to punish his murderer the Count of Monte d'Oro. The brother thus alluded to, and who lived at Ajaccio, bore the name of Leone; and he had for the greater portion of his life been engaged in mercantile and financial pursuits. He was married and had a family: but becoming an object of persecution on the part of the Genoese authorities, despite the servile zeal he displayed in endeavour-

ing to conciliate them, he fled from his native island and fixed his abode in France. This was some little while after the murder of his brother and the destruction of the monastery. In subsequent years the Leone family migrated from France to England, where in process of time they formed matrimonial connexions; and their Corsican blood thus became blended with that of the English. The young gentleman whom I now found at the farm-house, was the last living scion of that family of Leone, and was therefore the only existing representative of the race to which the murdered Abbot had belonged. Upwards of a century and a half had elapsed since the date of that terrific tragedy; and thus did I find myself in the presence of one who reckoned the venerable victim of the crime amongst his ancestry.

I need hardly remind the reader that the rule of the Genoese had long ceased in Corsica, and that it now belonged to France. The troubles which the island had at various times experienced, the distracted state into which it had been frequently thrown, the arbitrary decrees of one set of rulers altering and upsetting the territorial grants and landed apportionments of a previous set, had necessarily led to an almost interminable confusion as well as to constant litigation on the part of the holders, claimants, and pretenders with respect to different estates. Sanguinary feuds and family hatreds, terrific animosities and appalling reprisals, as well as those hereditary *vendettas*, or revenges, which have proved so dark a stigma upon the Corsican character,—all these were amongst the natural consequences of those disputes which I have been describing in respect to the land. At length the French Chamber of Deputies took the subject into consideration; and a measure passed the two bodies of the Legislature at Paris for the regulation of what was termed the Corsican Land-question. The result was the institution of a Special Commission at Ajaccio, to examine into the grounds on which disputed estates were held by present occupants, as well as into the foundation on which the pretensions of claimants were based. The appointment of such a commission naturally produced the utmost excitement in Corsica; for many holders of estates were stricken with alarm, while many hitherto hopeless claimants were inspired with joy. There was a sufficient military force to suppress any disturbance that might arise; and thus the Commissioners were enabled to proceed uninterruptedly with the important business that came under their jurisdiction. Being thoroughly able and upright men, they conducted this business not merely with despatch but also with the most rigid adherence to the justice of each special case; and I must farther observe that the Commission had already been in existence a twelvemonth at the time when shipwreck threw me and my Greek companions upon the Corsican shore.

It may be easily conceived that the result of the Commissioners' labour was to effect considerable changes in the distribution of Corsican lands. Families which had long held estates on no better ground than the maxim "that possession is nine points of the law," found themselves dispossessed and were forced to make way for the legitimate owners: the wealthy became poor—the poor became wealthy; and thus a complete revolution of



a legal and peaceful character was going on in the island. It was this circumstance which had brought the young Leone to Corsica, and which led him now to visit the patrimony that he claimed as the only living male descendant of the family to which the murdered Prelate of a century and a half back had belonged.

This young gentleman was an orphan, and had only just come of age. His father was a lineal descendant of the old Corsican family of Leone: his mother was an English lady. He had inherited a decent fortune: but he had no objection to augment his wealth, if possible, by the recovery of the domain of St. Bartholomew. Until within a few months of the period of which I am writing, Leone had resided in England: but on attaining his majority, and on hearing of the existence of the Land Commission at Ajaccio, he had set off to advance his claims. The lawyers whom he employed found the question a complicated one. Archives were searched, old registers were referred to, and the decrees of the Genoese authorities at the time they held the island had to be investigated. It was found out that most of the families that had held portions of the patrimony of St. Bartholomew since the destruction of the monastery, had really no right whatever to the possession of them: while others appeared to have better claims, which would of course be all the more difficult to dispute. The greatest difficulty of all lay, however, in the belief that the Genoese authorities had at the time of the destruction of the monastery, made over the lands to that Count of Monte d'Oro who was the author of the tragedy; and though no documentary evidence had as yet been discovered to corroborate the belief, yet it was held not merely possible, but even probable that some such musty old parchment would be found to have existence—in which case it would be for Leone to show that the family of Monte d'Oro was extinct, and that there was no lineal representative of that race to dispute his claim. Herein lay the great difficulty of making good that claim: for although it seemed morally certain that the family *was* extinct, it was nevertheless a far from easy task to substantiate the fact by positive proof. Leone's lawyers at Ajaccio were however actively employed in preparing the case; and in the meanwhile the young gentleman himself had journeyed to the patrimony of Bartholomew, not merely to visit a property which he claimed and which he had never seen before, but likewise in the hope of picking up some traditional intelligence that might be rendered available in the prosecution of his case. Therefore, on arriving in the neighbourhood, he had addressed himself to the farmer, whose family had so long resided upon the estate; and he was at once invited to partake of the hospitalities of the homestead.

Such were the circumstances which my Greek companions and myself now learnt on our return to the farm, and which I hope I have been enabled to render perfectly intelligible to the reader. Leone was an amiable young man; and we soon found ourselves on friendly terms with him. We stated that we had been visiting the remnants alike of the monastery and of the castle: we mentioned our meeting with a gentleman named Turano who like ourselves had been led by curiosity to inspect the ruins of Monte d'Oro; but we said nothing

with reference to the discovery of the treasure in the subterranean of the cemetery at St. Bartholomew's. We sat up conversing till a somewhat late hour; and on retiring to our chambers, I carefully reviewed all that I had heard during the evening.

## CHAPTER CXXXIII.

### AJACCIO.

If for a single moment I had hesitated in respect to the course which I should adopt concerning the mysteriously discovered treasure, that uncertainty would have been at once dispelled by the appearance of a claimant to the patrimony of St. Bartholomew. I could not possibly have satisfied my own conscience that I was justified in self-appropriating any portion of that wealth. At the same time I did not feel disposed to prevent Durazzo from acting as he might think fit. Leone's claim, if ultimately established, could only be pronounced good through a mere legal fiction, and not from any moral or natural right that he had to the patrimony of St. Bartholomew. The investment of that patrimony in the person of his ancestor the murdered Abbot, was never intended with a view to its traditional bequeathment to any members of the Leone family—but was only a requisite form that was adopted with regard to each successive Abbot. Therefore I did not consider Leone's claim to be of such a nature as to impose upon me the moral obligation of making him aware of the existence of that treasure: I felt that my own conscience would be satisfied by allowing the matter to take its chance, so long as I washed my hands of it. This consideration—together with the pertinacity, well meant though it were, with which Durazzo had returned again and again to the subject—decided me on the course I should now adopt,—which was to take my departure from the farm immediately after breakfast on the following morning.

But whither should I go? I had yet several months to pass ere the arrival of the day on which I was to present myself at Heselstine Hall. After a little consideration I resolved on returning to Italy. I was desirous to learn what became of Lanover and Dorchester at Leghorn, and also personally to thank the Count of Livorno for the kind fidelity with which he had executed the request contained in my letter. I was moreover anxious to return to Rome to see my friends there, and to be present at the bridal of the Count of Avellino with Antonia di Tivoli. But on the other hand, now that I was once in Corsica I did not feel disposed to leave it without visiting the capital city of Ajaccio, which I already knew was only about fifty miles from my present temporary quarters. Thither I therefore resolved to proceed in the first instance, and thence pass back to Italy.

At breakfast-time in the morning I stated, in the presence of the farmer and his family, as well as in that of Leone and my Greek companions, that I purposed to take my departure as speedily as convenient for Ajaccio,—advancing as a pretext the alleged necessity of sending off letters to some friends in England. Durazzo and the page looked

surprised: but I hastened to say to them, "You, my dear friends, have nothing to precipitate your departure; and we may soon meet again."

I then inquired of the farmer as to the best means of getting across to Ajaccio. He offered that one of his sons should drive me in their chaise-cart to the nearest inland town, which was about seven miles off, and where I could procure a post-chaise to convey me for the remainder of my journey. This proposal I thankfully accepted,—adding that I was prepared to start so soon as the vehicle itself could be gotten in readiness.

On leaving the breakfast-table, Durazzo followed me; and drawing me aside into another room, he said with mingled sorrow and reproachfulness, "Your departure, my dear Wilmot, is exceedingly precipitate."

"I will deal with you frankly, Durazzo," I answered. "Your generosity incessantly revives the *one* topic on which I am decided; and I go hence to leave the field completely open for your proceedings. To one of your experience it would be almost insulting to proffer any advice relative to the caution which must be used in removing the treasure: but if you permit me——"

"By all means, Wilmot, favour me with your advice," said Durazzo. "How would you counsel me to act?"

"I should advise you to remain here until tomorrow morning, when you can leave at about the same hour as that at which I am now going to take my own departure. You had better name Bastia as your destination: for if you said Ajaccio, it would naturally seem strange that we did not all leave together. The chaise-cart can convey you to the nearest town on your route: there you can remain for the day; and in the evening, when the dusk has set in, you can retrace your steps to the ruins of the monastery. I merely throw out these hints for your consideration: but perhaps your own experience and judgment may enable you to improve upon the plan."

"No—I shall adopt your counsel," answered Durazzo. "But once more, my dear Wilmot, and for the last time——"

"I entreat you to recur not to the topic on which my resolution is so unalterably taken! And now, my dear Durazzo," I continued, "as we are about to part, let me with the utmost sincerity wish you all possible health and happiness!—may prosperity attend upon you—and may your future career be one of uninterrupted bliss in the possession of your Leonora! We may perhaps meet again: but if not, remember that I shall always be glad to receive tidings from you. Between this and November next I know not well where you can write to me, inasmuch as during this interval I shall most probably be a bird of passage over the Continent. But *after* November, if you will direct your letters to me at the General Post Office in London, they will be sure to reach me. And now, my friend, farewell!"

"Farewell, Wilmot—farewell, my dear friend!" answered Durazzo, embracing me. "Never shall I forget you! As for my future career, rest assured that it shall be one calculated to atone for the past. Farewell, Wilmot!—and may heaven bless you!"

We were both deeply moved as we thus exchanged our adieux; and the chaise-cart being now

ready, the instant of separation had arrived. I bade a friendly farewell to the young page: I expressed my most grateful thanks to the farmer and his family for their hospitality: and I likewise took leave of Signor Leone. I ascended into the vehicle, which the farmer's eldest son was to drive to the nearest town; and thus I took my departure from that homestead. In about an hour we reached the town, where I separated from the farmer's son,—who resolutely but respectfully refused the remuneration I would have forced upon him: but I made up my mind to remit from Ajaccio some token of my gratitude to the lad's family. I procured a post-chaise, and in the afternoon reached the Corsican capital in safety.

I took up my quarters at the principal hotel; and my first care was to go forth and make such purchases as were absolutely necessary. The circular letter of credit had been so well secured in my pocket-book at the time of the shipwreck, that though it had got wet by my immersion, its contents were far from obliterated on its being dried at the fire at the farm-house. I was thus enabled to procure a supply of ready money at a Banker's in Ajaccio; and my orders were speedily given to such tradesmen as it was necessary to deal with for the re-equipment of my wardrobe. I also purchased some presents for the farmer and his family; and despatched them by the readiest means of conveyance. In the evening, at the hotel, when dining in the coffee-room, I got into conversation with an intelligent Corsican gentleman; and from motives of passing curiosity, I questioned him relative to the Land Commission that was sitting in that capital. I casually mentioned that I had recently fallen in with Signor Leone, the claimant to the patrimony of St. Bartholomew: but I did not however say where I thus met him. The Corsican appeared to be well informed in respect to the merits of the case, so far as it could be yet known.

"That Signor Leone will succeed in establishing his claim," observed the gentleman, "there are conflicting opinions. It is perfectly certain that the Commissioners will decide according to the legal evidence, and not according to what may be termed the actual merits of the case. Thus, if the Monte d'Oro claimant shall be enabled to prove that the Genoese authorities veritably and actually granted the St. Bartholomew estate at the time to his fierce ancestor, the Commissioners will not dispute the justice of that grant: they are not appointed to judge the equity of the question, but merely to decide according to the documents placed before them. Thus any record of such grant that can be ferreted out, will be held as possessing the validity of a title-deed; and the case will be given against Signor Leone. But if on the other hand no such record can be discovered, then the Monte d'Oro claimant will lose the cause."

"But I am given to understand," I said, "that the family of Monte d'Oro has become utterly extinct—that there is no living representative——"

"On the contrary," interrupted the Corsican gentleman: "there is every reason to believe that the lineal descendants of the Count of Monte d'Oro are still in existence."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, with some degree of astonishment. "Signor Leone assured me the

very contrary—it was only as recently as last evening—”

“It may be so,” responded the Corsican; “because it was only this morning that a statement of a particular nature was made to the Commissioners. What the precise terms of that statement might have been, I cannot tell you, because they have not transpired: but I happen to be acquainted with one of Signor Leone’s counsel, who informed me this afternoon, in the course of conversation, of what *had* come to his knowledge. As you may suppose, the existence of the Commission has furnished active employment to all the attorneys and advocates of Ajaccio; and it has done even more. It has put a number of enterprising agents and men of business upon the scent to ferret out pedigrees, to trace genealogies, and to examine into musty title-deeds. Some of these individuals, more speculative than the rest, have taken the trouble and gone to the expense of sending agents to foreign countries to search out those who may now claim Corsican estates: and wherever the slightest clue has been obtained to the residences of such possible claimants, these agents have set themselves to work. I must now inform you that there is a keen shrewd man of business at Ajaccio, named Castelli; and this person has been more active as well as more successful than any other in ferreting the descendants of ancient families who years and years back had their estates forcibly taken from them or otherwise unjustly alienated. It was not to be supposed that so fine a domain as that of Monte d’Oro, together with the possibly contingent claim on the patrimony of St. Bartholomew, would escape the notice of so shrewd and enterprising a man as this Castelli. By some means or another he discovered a clue to the lineal descendants, as he believes, of the last Count of Monte d’Oro: he has spared no expense in following up this clue, with the hope that a successfully conducted suit will be productive of an ample gain to himself; and it was to some far-distant country that he despatched a trusty agent. That agent returned to Ajaccio last evening by a vessel from a foreign port; and this morning, as I have already told you, Signor Castelli made some important private announcement to the Royal Commissioners. At this point my knowledge of the case stops: but it is rumoured that the researches of Castelli’s agent have been successful, and that a lineal descendant of the last Count of Monte d’Oro will at some early day be forthcoming.”

“These will be evil tidings to Signor Leone,” I observed. “He is however well off—But,” I said, interrupting myself, “it does not follow that because a claimant to the Monte d’Oro title and property should be forthcoming, he will likewise be enabled to claim the patrimony of St. Bartholomew.”

“Certainly not,” remarked the Corsican gentleman. “It is however Castelli himself who declares that the patrimony of St. Bartholomew was made over at the time by the Genoese authorities to the Count of Monte d’Oro—”

“And yet,” I interrupted my informant, “there does not appear to be any tradition that the Count of Monte d’Oro assumed the lordship of the patrimony of St. Bartholomew. On the contrary, the ecclesiastical domain was suffered to become a

waste, save and except with regard to some few portions—”

“True,” remarked my Corsican informant: “but it is understood that Signor Castelli explains away the difficulty which has just suggested itself to you as it has suggested itself to others. Castelli says that such was the indignation which prevailed in that part of the country at the time, in consequence of the murder of the Abbot, the destruction of the monastery, and the dispersion of the monks, that the Count of Monte d’Oro, ferocious and determined though he were, dared not immediately incorporate the ecclesiastical property with his own estates; but that he bided his time until the lapse of a few years should have smoothed down the memory of his fearful crimes. It is further alleged that he was about to exercise his rights—if rights they may be called—when he met his death by falling over a precipice.”

“All this is ingenious enough on Signor Castelli’s part,” I said; “and it is no doubt speciously reasoned. But the Commissioners will require proof—”

“Assuredly!” answered the Corsican; “they will require the documentary evidence that the Genoese rulers of the island *did* really at the time make over the ecclesiastical lands to the Count of Monte d’Oro. If this proof be forthcoming, Castelli’s explanation of why the Count did not at once assume possession of those lands, becomes stamped with truth.”

“And how can he even pretend,” I asked, “to explain matters which occurred upwards of a century and a half ago?”

“From the simple fact,” responded the Corsican, “that Castelli’s is an old-established legal agency; and his ancestors managed the concerns of the Counts of Monte d’Oro.”

“Ah, that is different;” I ejaculated. “At all events, if a Monte d’Oro claimant should come forward, the case will be one of extraordinary interest.”

“Such is the general anticipation,” replied the Corsican gentleman. “For myself, I have no more personal concern in it than you yourself appear to have: but yet it’s a case in which one feels considerable curiosity.”

Our discourse soon afterwards terminated; and I retired to rest. Throughout the following day I amused myself by walking about Ajaccio and viewing whatsoever was worth seeing. Nothing of any consequence occurred; and in the evening I dined alone in the coffee-room, for the Corsican gentleman had some other engagement.

After breakfast on the ensuing morning I rambled forth again: and thus passed three or four hours. I wondered within myself whether Durazzo and the young page had followed my counsel in respect to the removal of the treasure during the past night: and I was almost sorry that I had not asked Constantine to write to me from Bastia, informing me what he had done. However, as I could not possibly contemplate any obstacle to his complete success, I took it for granted that he had succeeded; and that he was by this time in the possession of an immense fortune. It was about two o’clock when I returned to the hotel to partake of luncheon; and the moment I entered the coffee-room, the Corsican gentleman, whom I found there, started up from a table at which he was

seated, exclaiming, "Have you heard the intelligence?"

"I have heard nothing particular," was my response. "What has happened?"

"Signor Leone—the unfortunate young man," replied the Corsican,—“a mere youth—Oh, it is horrible—he is murdered!”

"Murdered!" I echoed, starting back in horror. "What? that amiable young man who seemed incapable of injuring a soul!"

"Yes—he is murdered!" ejaculated the Corsican gentleman. "He was found at a late hour last evening amidst the ruins of St. Bartholomew——"

"Amidst the ruins? Good heavens!"

"Yes—but thank God, his assassins are discovered!" was the Corsican's quick response. "They are two Greeks——"

"Two Greeks?"—and such a deadly chill smote me that I might have been knocked down with a straw.

"Ah! you may well be horrified," continued the Corsican, "when you think that one whom you so recently saw in the enjoyment of vigorous life, has been thus suddenly cut off by the hand of assassination!"

"But two Greeks?" I faltered out: for I was well nigh lost in mingled horror, distress, and amazement. "Are you sure that they are two Greeks?"

"There is not a doubt of it," replied the Corsican. "They had been shipwrecked—they were staying at the same farm-house as Signor Leone——"

"Good God! is it possible?" I ejaculated: and I was just on the very point of proclaiming that I had been shipwrecked with them, when the thought suddenly flashed to my mind that it was possible I might be unpleasantly questioned in respect to the character of the lost ship and of the Greeks: I therefore withheld the precise words I was about to utter—and said, "But I was staying a day or two in that very neighbourhood! It was there that I met Signor Leone; and the two Greeks themselves are likewise known to me. From all that I have seen of them I should consider it impossible——"

But then I stopped short, as a sickening idea that it must all be too true arose in my mind. What if Durazzo and the page had been interrupted by the presence of Leone in the midst of the process of removing the treasure? what if Leone had threatened to expose them, or even to give them into custody? and what if Durazzo, goaded to desperation by this sudden recurrence of evil fortune, had dealt the young man an assassin-blow? Alas, it did indeed seem as if circumstantial evidence were damning against him, and that his faithful—perhaps *too* faithful dependant had become implicated in the crime! Yes, the idea was both horrible and sickening: for what would now become of the wretched Leonora?

"Do you know the circumstances," I inquired, in a tone full of mournfulness—and I felt that my looks were of a kindred expression,—“do you know the circumstances of this most terrible tragedy?"

"I know nothing more than the few details I have given you," answered the Corsican. "The tidings were brought to Leone's lawyers by a messenger from the town that is nearest to the scene

of the tragedy. We shall know everything in the course of the day; because the prisoners will be conveyed in chains to Ajaccio."

"And yet it appears to be a dream!" I said: "for those Greeks are quite young—one indeed a mere boy; and it seems absolutely impossible——"

"I am afraid," answered the Corsican, "that you will find it all too true. It must indeed appear astounding as it is horrible that of three persons with whom you have lately been thrown in contact, one is murdered and the other two are his murderers."

I was indeed both horrified and astounded. I felt the necessity of being alone for a short period to compose my feelings, if such composure were possible: I accordingly withdrew to my chamber, and satte down to reflect on everything I had heard. Durazzo a murderer! Ah, though he had been a pirate, I could scarcely reconcile it with my ideas of his character that he should now become an assassin!—though he had spilt blood in the midst of battle, I could barely comprehend how it was possible he could have taken life as a murderer! And yet how could I doubt the tale which had reached my ears? Alas, alas! I thought within myself, that Durazzo should have come to this—that for the sake of gold he should have yielded up his soul to Satan—and that the mere boy of a page should have become implicated in so terrible a deed of turpitude!

## CHAPTER CXXXIV.

### THE MURDER.

AN hour afterwards I found myself walking in the street; and I really had no recollection of how I got thither. I could not for the life of me remember coming forth from the hotel—much less of inwardly expressing the volition to issue from my chamber. I was under the influence of a sort of consternation: a stupendous dismay appeared to sit upon my soul. To think that that young man, Constantine Durazzo Kanaris, who presented such a perfect model of masculine beauty, should be doomed to the axe of the guillotine—that he should die branded with the foul crime of murder—and that he should leave his Leonora to the heart-breaking misery that must be her lot—all these appeared eventualities the bare contemplation of which stupefied and appalled me.

I was proceeding slowly along a street without taking the slightest notice of any single object—as much alone as if rambling amidst the awful solitude of a desert—when all of a sudden I heard many loud ejaculations; and I was startled into a degree of consciousness of what was passing around me. I perceived a crowd collecting in the street: a glance at the houses showed me that the casements were thronged with faces; and all eyes were turned towards the extremity of the thoroughfare. There were the trappings of steeds and the sounds of weapons, mingled with the heavy rumbling of wheels; and behold! seated in a post-chaise were Durazzo and the young page, together with a couple of *gendarmes*; while a *picquet* of the same police rode by the side of the vehicle. I averted

my countenance, and stepped back: I could not look again upon that spectacle. The equipage passed—the crowd swept by, following it to the police-court; and I was now left alone on the pavement in that part of the street. In a few minutes another post-chaise came rolling on from the same direction as the former; and the closed blinds at once enabled me to comprehend that this second vehicle contained the corpse of the deceased. Upon the box two persons were seated; and these I instantaneously recognised to be the farmer and his eldest son. This recognition was mutual. I sprang forward; and calling to the postilion to stop, exclaimed to the farmer, “Is it possible that they have done this?”

“Alas, sir,” was the worthy man’s response, “it is only too true; and I shudder when I think that such wretches were ever in my house. As for you, sir, we have the greatest respect for you: we are well aware that there could have been nothing in common as regards character and feelings between yourself and those infamous young men.”

“But tell me all about it!” I hastily said, in a state of feverish excitement: “it appears to me incredible——”

The farmer spoke to his son, who forthwith descended from the box to join me: the equipage then continued its way. I conducted the farmer’s son to my hotel: for I would not converse with him on such a subject in the open street, although I was full of a horrible suspense to know the details of the frightful crime.

“And now tell me everything,” I said to the young man when we were alone together in a sitting-room at the hotel.

“It seems, sir, that after you left the farm,” he commenced, “in the morning of the day before yesterday, Signor Leone went out for a ramble; and he took the path leading to the ruins of the monastery. This was while I was driving you over to the town. The instant Leone had said he should go and look at the ruins, my father saw what he took to be a peculiar look exchanged between the two Greeks; and then they immediately set out likewise. He did not think anything more of that look at the time: it was only afterwards that he was led to attach importance to it. He, however, observed that the two Greeks hastened after Leone—overtook him—and accompanied him to the ruins. They had not returned to the farm by the time I got back from the town, after driving you over: but they made their appearance shortly afterwards; and then Leone said that he was very much indebted to the young Greek gentlemen for having borne him such pleasant companionship during their ramble and while inspecting the ruins. For the rest of that day nothing peculiar took place. On the following morning—that was yesterday morning, you know, sir—the elder of the two Greeks intimated to us that he and his companion were going to take their leave, and that they purposed to repair to Bastia. I was asked to render them the service which I had the pleasure of affording you: namely, to take them for the first stage in the chaise-cart. I readily assented: they took their leave of our family and Signor Leone; and away we went. We reached the town; and I parted from them.”

Here the farmer’s son paused for a few mo-

ments; and then continued in the following manner:—

“In the afternoon the postman who goes that road on horseback, stopped at the farm to say that a box which had arrived by the night-coach was waiting at the town to be fetched to the farm; for that it came from Ajaccio and was directed to my father. I put the horse to the cart again, and drove over to the town to fetch the box. This was about four o’clock yesterday afternoon. I received the box; and as I was driving away from the coach-office, whom should I see but the two Greeks whom I had left in that town at ten in the morning, and when they had assured me—or rather the elder one did—that they were going straight on to Bastia at once. However, there they still were; and I saw them. They observed me also, and could not help stopping to speak: but it struck me that there was something strange in their manner as if they were vexed at being found still tarrying there. I told them I had come across for a box; and the elder Greek made an excuse for having remained in that town by saying that there were no post-horses to be had. I thought it strange—but did not say so, and again bade them farewell. On the outskirts of the town I met the post-master, whom I happened to know very well; and I asked how it was he had no horses to supply the travellers? He at once said that he had plenty of horses in his stable, for that not a single pair had gone out that day, and that nobody indeed had applied for any. I thought this stranger still: for if the Greeks chose to remain a few hours—or even as many years in that town, what was it to me? why should they look vexed or confused at being seen there by me? and where was the necessity of descending to a falsehood in such a trivial matter? All these questions I asked myself as I drove homeward. But during my absence something else had occurred that was still more suspicious.”

“Ah! what was that?” I inquired.

“You know, sir,” continued the farmer’s son, “that large pieces of the wreck had been washed on shore; and my father had ordered a cart to be sent down for the fragments to be collected and used as firewood. The carter had found no time to obey this order until yesterday afternoon; and while he was collecting the wood, a small man-of-war came as close in shore as it dared. A boat put off, and an officer landed. The man-of-war was a French sloop: it was the one, sir, that chased the vessel you were in on the night it was wrecked——”

“Ah!” I exclaimed. “But——”

“Enough, sir,” said the farmer’s son: “we know that you were not one of that gang.”

“But how——”

“Please to suffer me to proceed, sir. The officer of the French sloop landed, and hastily inquired what vessel it was that had been wrecked off the coast? The carter could not tell; all he knew was that two Greeks and an English gentleman were the only survivors, and they had been staying at the house. The officer asked some other questions; and presently he perceived a piece of wood sticking out of the ground, where it appeared to have been buried, but the action of the waves had laid it half bare again. The officer examined it, and found that it was a piece of the stern, with

the name of 'The *Otho*' painted upon it. He evidently considered this to be a most important discovery, and hastened up to the farm-house. There he informed my father that the ship which had been wrecked was a famous Greek pirate known as the *Athene*, and which for some time past had been the terror of the Levant. My father was naturally indignant at the idea of having had three pirates at his house: but the officer at once assured him that the young English gentleman—meaning yourself, sir—was no pirate, that you were a highly honourable person, and an intimate friend of the Count of Livorno, nephew of the Grand Duke of Tuscany. While the officer was still at the house, I returned from the town in the chaise-cart; and on hearing all that was said, I gave information that the two Greeks were still in that neighbouring town. The officer speedily resolved upon the plan that was to be adopted. He enjoined us all to the strictest secrecy—borrowed a suit of plain clothes, as well as a horse—and rode over to the town, to ascertain whether the authorities would give up the Greeks to him as prisoners, or whether he should bring his crew from the boat and come and take them. In the meantime the box was opened; and it was found to contain the handsome presents which you, sir, were kind enough to send us—”

“It was only a small tribute of my gratitude,” I said, “for the kind hospitality I experienced beneath your roof. But pray proceed with your narrative.”

“Well, sir, the officer came back in a short time. He had seen the Mayor of the town, who considered that he had no authority to give up the Greeks, as no act of piracy had been proved to have been committed by them against any French vessel, nor was even alleged to have taken place: but he had offered to render all possible succour in enabling the officer to capture the Greeks if he would take upon himself the responsibility of the proceeding. The boat's crew were summoned; and we provided them all with weapons—for they had brought none from the ship. I must now tell you that before the officer's return from the town to the farm, Signor Leone had intimated his intention of rambling again to the ruins: for he said that as the moon would rise early, he had a fancy to view their effect by that light. We thought nothing of it at the time, beyond remarking to ourselves after he was gone that we thought him a somewhat sentimental young gentleman: for all our attention was absorbed in the affair of the two Greeks. Well, sir, Signor Leone set off; and a few minutes afterwards the officer came back. Then it was that his crew were summoned and armed; and just as they were ready to issue forth, a man on horseback galloped up to the house. He was a police-spy from the town, and had been set to watch the movements of the two Greeks. It seems that they had hired a small vehicle—a sort of chaise-cart like our own: they would not have anybody to drive them—and they had left a deposit to cover the value of the horse and the vehicle. The spy had managed to follow them at such a distance that they were not aware of their being so followed; and they had driven to the ruins of the monastery. The spy had tracked them thither; and he came quickly on to the farm to inform us. Then we thought of Signor Leone

and the worst misgivings seized upon us. Had those Greeks before leaving the farm, made an appointment, under some specious pretext, to lure him thither at a particular hour for an evil purpose? The officer and his men, the spy, myself, and my father, hastened off towards the ruins; and we divided ourselves into two parties. The party to which I belonged, entered the ruins from the eastern side; and we had not advanced many paces, before the moonlight revealed to us the form of a man stretched upon the ground. This was the unfortunate Leone. Life was extinct; and no wonder, good heavens! for it subsequently proved that he had been stabbed in half-a-dozen places: but the weapon with which the blows were inflicted was not to be found. His person had not been rifled; and as his corpse was still quite warm, we naturally concluded that the dreadful deed must have been perpetrated within the last few minutes, and that the assassins, alarmed by the sounds of our advance, had fled precipitately. The French officer, with the men of his own party, had entered the ruins by the western side, and had at once succeeded in capturing the two Greeks, whom they found stealthily creeping along in the act of escaping towards the spot where the chaise-cart was subsequently discovered.”

“And thus they were taken prisoners?” I observed in horrible musing. “But what said they? Did they protest their innocence—”

“You shall hear, Signor,” responded the farmer's son. “When the two parties met—when the murder was made known—and when the crime was at once charged against the Greeks, their conduct was very different. The younger one gave vent to a terrific cry, and sank senseless upon the ground. But the elder—Durazzo, the corsair-chief, as we now know him to be—assumed a demeanour so haughtily and scornfully dignified, at the same time mingled with what appeared to be such an expression of horror, that never in the whole world could conscious guilt have tutored itself to look so much like real innocence.”

“Ah!” I ejaculated. “But go on! go on!”

“Durazzo,” proceeded the farmer's son, “protested with a tone and look of the haughtiest indignation against the charge: but it was of course useless—circumstances were damnable. We bore the prisoners off to the town; and they were examined before the mayor. The French officer advanced no claim to their persons: he was content to leave them in the hands of that law against which they had so flagrantly offended;—and thus the charge of piracy was not entered into.”

“How bore they themselves in the presence of the magistrate?” I asked.

Durazzo was still dignified; but his indignation had given way to what I may term an intrepid calmness. As for his youthful companion—he seemed almost stupefied, and barely to be conscious of what was passing around. He clung to Durazzo, who frequently whispered something in his ear: but what it was, I know not. On those occasions the youth would gaze up for an instant with a brightening countenance; and then sink into the apathy of consternation again. Durazzo denied the charge: but when asked to explain wherefore he and his companions were in the ruins at the time, he remained silent. No explanation of any sort would he give: he contented himself





with a mere denial, which of course went for nothing. The examination was brief: the Mayor ordered the prisoners to be committed for trial; and they were lodged for the remainder of the night in a proper place of security. In consequence of certain papers found upon Signor Leone's person, a messenger was sent off to his attorneys at Ajaccio, to convey the sad intelligence of his death. The Mayor bound over me and my father, amongst the other witnesses, to appear on the day of trial; and we have come to Ajaccio for the purpose of giving a complete statement of the case to the Judge of Instruction, who will have to draw up the indictment. Oh! Signor Wilmot, it is shocking to think that we ever harboured such men beneath our roof! But that they could be guilty of such a dreadful crime, is indeed astonishing! Their youth—their appearance—their manners—all were so little consistent with an idea of such ferocity! Durazzo is

barely five-and-twenty: the other is but sixteen or seventeen—And yet, as they have been pirates and are inured to bloodshed, one ought not to be astonished at any enormity which they might commit. And do not you shudder, Signor Wilmot, when you reflect how you have been in their company—”

“I am appalled—I feel as if under the influence of some dreadful consternation! It appears to me,” I added, “as if I should presently waken up and find it all to be a dream.”

“Alas! it is no dream,” rejoined the farmer's son: “for never, never can I forget the feelings of horror which seized upon me when I beheld that corpse stretched amidst the ruins. But I must now leave you, Signor Wilmot; for the Judge of Instruction may require my presence.”

The farmer's son then took his leave of me; and I sat in my apartment deliberating—no, not deliberating, because *deliberation* means the

sifting of many ideas: I should say that I sat in my apartment with my thoughts riveted in horrified dismay upon the *one* idea that Constantine and his young page were murderers!

Two or three hours elapsed while I thus kept to my apartment, until aroused from my deep and terrible reverie by the entrance of the waiter to receive orders for dinner. My first impulse was to dismiss the man peremptorily from my presence: but a second thought made me comprehend that if I betrayed too deep a feeling in respect to what had occurred, I myself might get talked about and be questioned by the functionaries of justice as to the circumstances which had led me on board the pirate-ship. I was by no means anxious to reveal private affairs, or have to explain my motives in taking so deep an interest in the safety of Sir Matthew Heseltime and his family; and therefore it was my object to keep myself as much on my guard as possible. I accordingly answered the waiter's questions; and soon afterwards I descended to the coffee-room.

There I met the Corsican gentleman to whom I have before alluded; and he gave me to understand that he was led by curiosity to be present at the examination of Durazzo and the young page before the proper magistrate at Ajaccio. He said that the demeanour of the elder Greek was firm, but that his countenance was all the while of a deadly paleness. As for the page, he appeared to be so overwhelmed with distress that he looked as if he were every instant ready to throw himself upon his knees, confess everything, and implore the mercy of the tribunal. I asked the Corsican a few particulars: but I had nothing more to learn beyond what the farmer's son had already told me—unless it were the fact that blood had been discovered on the garments of Durazzo.

"And did he attempt to account for it in any way?" I asked.

"Yes," replied the Corsican gentleman: "he said that he had accidentally cut his hand yesterday afternoon; and though he certainly displayed some slight scratch, it was too insignificant to account for the large spots of blood that were found upon his garments. Besides, even without that evidence at all, there is sufficient to stamp them both with the crime charged against them."

"And when will the trial come on?" I inquired.

"In about three weeks," was the response,— "unless Durazzo himself should seek to postpone it by means of legal technicalities."

"Were he and his companion represented by counsel?" I asked.

"No: there was not time for them to consult any legal adviser," rejoined the Corsican; "and moreover you must remember that it was a mere preliminary examination which they underwent immediately upon their arrival this afternoon. As usual there were a number of harpies of the law prowling about the court, ready to slip their cards into the hands of the prisoners as they came forth from the presence of the Judge of Instruction. If the prisoners have money, they will find plenty of legal advisers and defenders: but if they happen to be penniless, the Court will appoint some respectable advocate to undertake their defence. The general impression however seems to be that the younger of the two prisoners will plead guilty when finally arraigned; and if so, all the lofty as-

sumption of the other will avail him nothing. The excitement in the city is immense. If this Durazzo were now in custody on a charge of piracy alone, I feel convinced that he would become an object of immense sympathy, and even of admiration; for his appearance is marvellously prepossessing. But accused as he is of a deed so dark and horrible, he is looked upon as a demon wearing the beautiful shape of an angel."

I sighed profoundly as I listened to these remarks; and I could not help thinking that never again must I judge by personal appearances—for that the most venomous snakes have often the loveliest skins. But who, I said within myself, can fathom the human heart—dive deep down into its mysteries—and ascertain what fearful capacities for evil may be latent there? The more I saw of human nature, the more I was astounded, and the more deeply was I impressed with the necessity of enlarging my experiences as much as possible. I felt that for one of my youthful years to be presumptuous enough to judge of human nature, and to define the instances where virtue and vice should have their limits drawn, were as preposterous as for the human intellect, when standing on the shore of Time, to contemplate the great ocean of Eternity, with the hope of discovering an horizon in the far-off distance.

## CHAPTER CXXXV.

SIGNOR CASTELLI.

I WENT to bed that night with very sad and sorrowful reflections. That Durazzo and the page had perpetrated the murder—or at least that the former had, the latter being with him at the time—I could not entertain the slightest doubt. It was however evident that many circumstances which had really told against the prisoners, could be otherwise explained. The impression now was—and naturally so—that the murder was a premeditated one,—that they had lingered in the town, hired the cart, and sought the ruins for the purpose of accomplishing it,—they having by some means, previous to quitting the farm in the morning, induced Leone to meet them amongst those ruins at a specified hour in the evening. But all those circumstances in reality admitted of a very different interpretation. To me it was clear enough that the Greeks had lingered in the town and retraced their way to the ruins in order to obtain possession of the treasure; and therefore I felt assured in my own mind that Leone's visit to the ruins at the same time was an accidental coincidence—and that falling in with the Greeks, he met his death at the hands of Durazzo.

Such was my impression. But yet there were some little difficulties to get over—some gaps to be filled up. Why, I asked myself, should Durazzo have assassinated Leone? The place where the corpse was found, was at a distance from the cemetery in the midst of which the treasure was buried; and it was very far from appearing that Durazzo and the page were disturbed while penetrating into the subterranean. Indeed, it would seem that they could only have just arrived amongst the ruins at the time of the tragedy,

and that they had not so much as commenced the important work which brought them thither. For if the mouth of the cavern had been disturbed, researches would have followed by the parties invading the ruins, and the treasure would have been discovered: whereas not a whisper had been circulated that any such discovery was made at all. Then where the necessity for that fearful crime? Alas! was it that Durazzo, greedy of the precious ore, trembling with suspicion lest anybody should wrest it from him, and desperate in his tenacious clinging to this last hope that remained to him,—was it under such influences that he had stricken down the unfortunate youth whose visit to those ruins he might have dreaded? Yes, this seemed to be the only solution of the mystery: but without perplexing myself with such details, I could only look upon the guilt of Durazzo and the complicity of his page as too certain.

While I lay awake reflecting upon all these things, the thought occurred to me that if the intelligence of Durazzo's turpitude reached Leonora's ears all in a moment—if when totally unprepared, the unfortunate young lady should be doomed to receive the double tidings that her affianced husband was a pirate and a murderer, she would either be smitten dead upon the spot or else shriek forth her agony in the wild ravings of a maniac. What was to be done? Would it not be performing a true Christian part for me to hasten to Civita Vecchia and gradually break the awful news to Signor Portici in the first instance, so that he might use his own discretion in communicating them to his unhappy niece? But then, on the other hand, I had faithfully pledged myself to Durazzo to abstain from giving any information concerning him to the Judge and Leonora. Nevertheless, had not circumstances altered? And then too, perhaps Durazzo himself would now gratefully accept the friendly service which I felt disposed to render on the occasion. I almost made up my mind to visit him on the ensuing day: but while I was yet bewildering myself with reflections and reasonings on the point, slumber stole upon me.

When I awoke in the morning, everything I had learnt on the preceding day appeared to be the faintly lingering recollections of a horribly wild fantastic dream. But not many moments elapsed ere its reality dawned upon my convictions; and hastily reviewing the arguments I had held with myself on the previous evening, I decided upon visiting Durazzo, or at least communicating with him by letter, if the prison regulations would permit. On this point I thought of consulting the Corsican gentleman; and my toilet being finished, I descended to the coffee-room.

I found this gentleman about to sit down to breakfast; and I joined him in my own repast at the same table. He directed my attention to a paragraph in that morning's impression of the Ajaccio newspaper; and I read that Signor Castelli had been retained to conduct the defence of Durazzo and the young page. It was therefore tolerably clear that there was no design to make a confession of their guilt—or at least not on the part of Durazzo himself; and I felt pretty sure that no matter how great the remorse or the mental agony of the youthful page might be, he would remain faithfully staunch to his elder fellow-

countryman in all things. This Signor Castelli, I must observe, was the same individual who had been interesting himself so actively and so extensively in respect to the claimants of disputed estates, especially in the case of the Monte d'Oro property. I represented to my Corsican friend that being acquainted with persons who were deeply interested in Durazzo, I thought it would be a friendly act to anticipate the rude tongue of public report and hasten to break to them the distressing intelligence of what had occurred: but I added that I did not feel disposed to behave too officiously in the matter, and that I should therefore like to obtain Durazzo's consent; for notwithstanding the heinous crime laid to his charge, his feelings were not to be placed beyond the pale of due consideration—and moreover it was a good moral maxim that every one should be considered innocent until proved guilty. The Corsican recommended me to apply to Signor Castelli—observing that he would show me the way to his office after breakfast.

We set out together when the repast was ended; and as we were proceeding along the street, I beheld a gentleman advancing whom I thought I knew; and the next instant I recollected that it was Signor Turano who had so politely shared his luncheon with myself and the Greeks amongst the ruins of Monte d'Oro castle. He stopped and shook me by the hand—inquiring how long I had been at Ajaccio? I answered the question, adding, "I presume you have heard of the dreadful circumstances which have happened, and in which those two Greeks whom you saw with me the other day are so deeply implicated?"

"You surely cannot mean that dreadful murder," said Signor Turano, with an air of astonishment, "of which some vague report has just reached my ears?—for I only arrived at Ajaccio late last evening."

"I do indeed allude to that shocking crime," was my response. "Accident had thrown me in the way of those Greeks: but you will believe me when I declare I considered it impossible they could have been capable of such an enormity."

"I can most readily believe you," answered Signor Turano, "because I myself am lost in astonishment at the thought that those two young men—one indeed a mere boy—could have done such a deed. But is it possible that they are the Greeks of whom rumour is speaking?"

"They are accused of this crime," I answered; "and I am sorry to add that the circumstances of the case scarcely admit a doubt as to their guilt."

"Good heavens! can it be?" exclaimed Turano. "Little as I saw of yourself and those young men on the recent occasion when we met, I was considerably prepossessed in their favour. I thought them both interesting and well-mannered: there appeared to be about the elder a certain chivalrous heroism of character totally forbidding the idea that beneath so promising an exterior was hidden the capacity for an assassin's deed! Good heavens, I can scarcely believe it even now!"

Signor Turano appeared much distressed as well as amazed at the intelligence which I had imparted to him; and he spoke in so feeling a manner that my previously conceived good opinion of him was considerably enhanced. He told me where he was staying—namely, at an adjacent hotel—and invited

me to visit him there. I promised that I would if I remained at Ajaccio; and we parted. The Corsican gentleman now conducted me to the office of Signor Castelli,—where he left me, he having business to transact in another part of the town.

I entered an outer office, where about a dozen clerks were engaged in various occupations connected with their master's business; and after waiting an hour, I was ushered to an inner room, where I found myself in the presence of Signor Castelli. He was an old man, with a remarkably aghred expression of countenance—a keen piercing eye—and a certain quickness of manner which showed that as a thorough man of business he valued his time and expended it not unnecessarily. The instant I gave him my card, he said, “Ah! I have heard of you, Mr. Wilmot; and I am at no loss to conjecture what melancholy affair has brought you hither.”

I explained my business in terms as concise as possible; and Signor Castelli said, “Had you not come to me now of your own accord, I should have sought after you in the course of the forenoon. Durazzo has spoken to me of you. He had reason to believe that you might be at Ajaccio: he thought that perhaps you would render him the very service which you have so generously proposed to undertake.”

“Most willingly will I do so,” I said. “Does he wish to see me before I depart?”

“He wishes it—but it will not be advisable,” responded Signor Castelli. “It would cause a delay of two or three days; and this delay might frustrate the very object which both he and yourself have in view:—the intelligence might reach Civita Vecchia before you could get there. For in order to see Durazzo, it would be necessary for you to have an order from the Judge of Instruction; and he has gone to Bastia on some matter of business. Durazzo has told me everything in respect to yourself—how he made you a prisoner on board his ship—how generously you have behaved towards him; and he thought that he could reckon upon your good feeling to break this intelligence in a quarter where it cannot possibly be long concealed, but where it is desirable that the blow should not fall with too fearful an abruptness.”

“Is there any hope,” I asked, “of weakening the evidence which weighs so terribly against Durazzo and his accomplice?”

“Ah! then you believe them guilty?” said Signor Castelli.

“How can I possibly believe otherwise?” I asked. “But you yourself—”

Castelli shrugged his shoulders,—and said, “It is an ugly case—a very ugly case! Durazzo and the page persist in declaring their innocence; but to confess the truth, Mr. Wilmot, no mortal jury could be persuaded thereof. Nothing but a miracle can save them!”

“And such a miracle will not be wrought,” I mournfully observed: “for perhaps never was circumstantial evidence so strong. I presume Durazzo has afforded you some grounds on which to establish a defence?”

“Yes—but they are weak enough,” answered Castelli. “He says that in consequence of a legend which he heard related by the farmer—in fact, the well-known legend of the monastery—he

was resolved to search amongst the ruins in the hope of finding the treasure; and that for this purpose did he and the page return thither in so stealthy a manner after having given the farmer's family to understand that they were going straight on to Bastia. He further says that as he and the page were groping their way amidst the ruins, they heard the sounds of footsteps; and thinking that other persons might have come thither for a similar purpose, he and his youthful companion were anxious to avoid them; and hence their stealthy retreat towards the place where they had left the hired vehicle. But all of a sudden they found themselves surrounded and arrested by a party of men under the command of a French Lieutenant, who accused them of piracy. A few instants afterwards another party came up to the spot; and then was proclaimed the still darker accusation of murder!”

I listened with the greatest attention to Signor Castelli's rapidly sketched statement,—from which I gleaned that Durazzo had suppressed the circumstance of the treasure having been already discovered. Good heavens! did he cling to the hope that his life would be saved—that he would recover his freedom—and that the day would therefore come when he should be enabled to revisit the ruins of St. Bartholomew and thence bear away the hidden treasure? Did he, in a word, expect that heaven would vouchsafe that miracle which, as Signor Castelli had so well expressed it, could alone save him? I must confess that I was astonished at Durazzo's infatuation,—until it suddenly occurred to me that he cherished the idea of an escape, and that he might probably, with his natural sagacity, already perceive the means of accomplishing it.

“And so you believe that they are guilty?” observed Signor Castelli. “But of course you do! It were preposterous to suppose otherwise! Nevertheless Durazzo said to me more than once when I saw him last evening, ‘My friend Wilmot will not for a moment believe me guilty: I am sure that he will not, despite all the evidence which seems so damnable against me!’—Thus he spoke.”

“Would to heaven that I dared think him innocent!” I exclaimed. “I would give much and would make large sacrifices,” I added vehemently, “to be enabled to regard him as the victim of one of those marvellous combinations of circumstances which the criminal annals of all nations have certainly displayed.”

“You speak generously, Mr. Wilmot,” answered Castelli: “but I repeat what I ere now said—it is impossible for you to believe him innocent! I am morally convinced of his guilt: but I shall leave no stone unturned to get up the strongest possible case for his defence. I have already retained the most eminent counsel in the island—”

“And if by any accident,” I interjected,—“if, something little short of a miracle should transpire to procure an acquittal—or if the case should break down through any flaw in the indictment—what becomes of the charge of piracy?”

“There is none preferred against these Greeks,” replied Signor Castelli; “and even if there were, it could not be taken cognizance of in our Courts, inasmuch as it does not appear that piracy has been practised towards a French or Corsican vessel. But you will excuse me for cutting this interview

somewhat short. As you may perceive, I am up to my very neck in business—”

“I have been informed,” I observed, “that you are deeply engaged in sifting the claims and rights of persons to particular estates—and that the world is shortly promised a most interesting case in respect to the Monte d’Oro domain.”

“Indeed it will be interesting,” remarked Signor Castelli, with a dryness which methought was intended as a rebuke for any little curiosity which he fancied I might have displayed by the observation I had just addressed to him. I therefore began to apologize: but he cut me short by saying, “You have mistaken my meaning, Mr. Wilmot: I meant no rudeness—as I am convinced you are capable of none. I simply intended to convey the idea that the Monte d’Oro case will prove even more interesting than the world generally expects. Why, sir, two hours have not elapsed since a claimant started up. He came to me—I had never in my life heard of him before; but he has put me in possession of facts which render me inclined to believe that he has an excellent chance.”

“Indeed?” I exclaimed: “then the affair is growing complicated?”

“I have just five minutes more to devote to you,” said Signor Castelli, looking at his watch. “I knew that there were two lines of descendants from the last Count of Monte d’Oro; and I have incurred great expense in following up that clue. From the researches made I was led to believe that one line was extinct: but now it suddenly seems to be as much in existence as the other. But to revert to Durazzo’s case. I must beseech you to lose no time in departing for Civita Vecchia: there is a steamer from Ajaccio to that port this very afternoon: and in twenty-four hours you may be at your destination. I need not tell you, Mr. Wilmot, how you will break the intelligence: a young gentleman who would conceive so magnanimous an idea, will not be at a loss how to carry it out. There is however one thing which I must not forget. Durazzo begged that in case he could not see you beforehand, you would convey to his Leonora and her uncle the solemn protestations of his innocence in respect to the foul crime charged against himself and his youthful companion.”

“It is a mournful task,” I observed: “but I will execute it to the best of my endeavour.”

I then took leave of Signor Castelli; and proceeding to the port, secured a berth in the splendid steam-vessel which was bound for Civita Vecchia. Then returning to the hotel, I packed up my trunk—bade farewell to the Corsican gentleman—and at two o’clock in the afternoon embarked on board the steamer. At precisely the same hour I landed on the following day at Civita Vecchia.

## CHAPTER CXXXVI.

### CIVITA VECCHIA AGAIN.

ENTERING a public vehicle which plied at the harbour of the Roman seaport; I deposited my luggage at the same hotel where I had sojourned on the previous occasion of my visit to that town; and I conversed with one of the waiters for a few minutes in order to ascertain whether the tidings of the

tragic occurrence in Corsica had already reached Civita Vecchia. I was satisfied that they had not; and I was well pleased with this discovery. Returning to the hackney-coach, I ordered the driver to take me to Signor Portici’s villa.

During the ride thither, I could not help reflecting on the many varied and startling incidents which had occurred since I was last in this town. How much had I gone through—what anxieties of mind had I experienced—what adventures had I seen! A sojourn on board a pirate vessel—a terrific naval combat—a shipwreck—the discovery of a treasure—and the accusation of my two Greek companions of the horrible crime of murder,—these were incidents that might have served as sufficient experiences for a whole lifetime; whereas with me they had all been hurriedly grouped together in a few short days. And now on what a mission was I bent!—how terrible was the task which I had undertaken! Oh, to plant a dagger in the bosom of the beautiful Leonora—it was dreadful!

My heart experienced a sickening sensation—it seemed to shrink, contract, and wither in my breast, as the vehicle drove up to the front of the Portici Villa. I descended—I reached the front door: the Judge had seen me from his parlour-window—he came rushing forth to meet me. Most cordial was the welcome which I received from him: but I was struck by his careworn looks, and by the expression of anguish that blended with the animation of his countenance as he fervidly pressed my hand. Then tears rolled down his cheeks: I saw that something was known—and anxious to learn how much, but almost too full of painful suspense to be able to put the question at full length, I simply said, “Your niece?”

The venerable Judge shook his head with a despairing look, and hurried me into the parlour, the door of which he at once closed. Leonora was not there. Signor Portici bent his eyes upon me; and seeing how much I myself was distressed, he said, “Have you ought more to tell me than I already know relative to that unhappy young man?”

“How much do you know?” I tremblingly and shudderingly asked.

“Oh! too much—too much for my own happiness and that of my unfortunate niece!” replied the Judge, in a tone of anguish:—“I know that Kanaris and Durazzo are one and the same person! Oh, when the tidings reached me from Leghorn, I felt as if I could lay violent hands upon myself—and this is a dreadful thing to be avowed by an old man having one foot in the grave! But, Oh! the terrible ordeal through which I had to pass, and which nevertheless could not be avoided!—I mean the revelation of the awful truth to my niece. Poor Leonora! it was a frightful blow for her—But you are weeping bitterly? What is it, my dear Wilmot? In the name of heaven, if you have tidings still more terrible to impart, tell me the whole truth at once—keep me not in suspense!”

I was indeed weeping bitterly: for the spectacle of that old man’s anguish was more than I could endure. He saw that I had indeed something more to tell; and all of a sudden assuming a calm demeanour, he said, “Now, my dear Wilmot, I am prepared—I have fortified myself with a true

Christian resignation. What is it? Has that unhappy young man experienced a violent death?—or is he in the hands of justice? Tell me, I beseech you: for it is only what myself and the wretched Leonora must sooner or later be prepared to hear."

I know not how I managed to break the distracting truth: my own anguish was so great—my own feelings were so highly wrought—my thoughts were in such confusion, that I could afterwards acquire no distinct remembrance of the words that I used in conveying the hideous, horrible tidings. But I *do* recollect full well that at the same instant the unhappy old man threw himself back in his chair with a moan of deepest anguish, another moan from the opposite side of the door reached my ears; and then there was a sound of something falling heavily. A startling suspicion flashed to my mind: I rushed to the door—tore it open—and behold Leonora stretched upon the mat. The wretched young lady—aware of my arrival, and smitten with the hideous presentiment that I had some fearful intelligence to impart in respect to her betrothed husband—had been unable to restrain her torturing suspense; and she had listened at that door. Yes—she had listened; and she had heard that Constantine—the object of her still all-devoted love—was in a felon's gaol, branded with the accusation of a cold-blooded murder!

Lifting her in my arms, I bore her into the parlour—placed her upon the sofa—and sprinkled water over her countenance. Her uncle knelt by her side, moaning and sobbing piteously. I was anxious to avoid, if possible, the necessity of summoning the servants: but it became requisite to do so. Leonora's swoon was trance-like: she continued pale and motionless as a marble statue. I was afraid that life would ebb away unless other ministrations were afforded; and therefore I at length rang for her female dependants. She was borne up to her own chamber: medical aid was called in; and when animation returned, the unhappy young lady came back to life only to rave in the delirium of fever.

I remained until evening at the villa, doing my best to persuade the unhappy uncle to bear up against his misfortunes; and I succeeded in soothing his wounded spirit into a state of Christian resignation. I gave him the particulars of everything that had occurred since I parted from him when setting out on my intended journey to Leghorn—that journey which was so summarily cut short by my capture and conveyance on board the pirate-vessel. Signor Portici begged me not to leave Civita Vecchia immediately—but to visit him again on the following day; and I promised that I would.

Having dismissed the vehicle on my arrival, I returned on foot towards the hotel, meditating in mournfulness upon all that had taken place. I felt exceedingly dull and low-spirited: for the anguish of the venerable Judge and the effect produced upon his mind had pained me profoundly. On reaching the hotel, at about eight o'clock in the evening, I entered the coffee-room to read the newspapers, or in the hope of finding some one with whom to converse: but scarcely had I crossed the threshold, when I heard a well-known voice saying, "It's just that;"—and this was instantaneously followed by a boisterous shout of laughter.

The next instant I stood in the presence of my friends Mr. Clackmannan and Mr. Salcoats.

"My dear Wilmot," vociferated the latter, rushing towards me and grasping my hand with the most cordial warmth, "what have you been doing with yourself? and why didn't you come back to Rome? As you did not return to us, we came to look after you."

"It's just that," said the Dominie, shaking my other hand; and in his joy at seeing me, he worked my arm up and down as if it were a pump-handle. "When Mahomet would not go to the mountain, the mountain went to Mahomet—No, that's not it—it was the mountain that would not go to Mahomet—And that reminds me of what I one day said to the Widow Glenbucket when I rang the bell and she did not answer it: so I went down myself into the kitchen—and there I found her lying under the table fast asleep—and I recollect there was a bottle on the table—but it could'n't have been *that*, because it was empty. However——"

"And do you really mean to say," I asked my two friends, "that you came to Civita Vecchia on purpose to look for me?"

"Indeed we did!" exclaimed Mr. Salcoats. "And why not? You did not come back—you did not write to us——"

"It's just that," said the Dominie, rolling himself back into his chair and taking a huge pinch of snuff. "And that puts me in mind of young Shankspindles, who used to write to me every week once upon a time—till I lent him twenty pounds—and after that he never answered my letters. That was thirty years ago. I couldn't understand it at the time—I can't understand it now. I've been thinking of it ever since."

And here, as if to refresh his memory, the Dominie filled himself a bumper which he began deliberately to drink.

"Come, sit down," cried Salcoats, "and we'll be so jolly! I'm so glad we've fallen in with you again: I could do anything to give vent to my spirits—drink an extra bottle of wine—brew a bowl of punch—or stand on my head, if you like."

"It's just that," said the Dominie. "When I was a boy I often used to stand on my head—I don't know whether I found it more convenient: but it must have been something of that sort. And this reminds me, Salcoats, that you and the Widow Glenbucket were one day measuring which was the tallest: but you didn't stand back to back as people generally do—you were nose to nose, if I recollect right—because I came in suddenly at the time—and I remember too there was a loud snacking noise, just for all the world as if you had given the widow a kiss—But of course you hadn't."

"Come, come, Dominie, hold your tongue," interrupted Mr. Salcoats, with a jolly laugh and a mischievous twinkling of his merry blue eye. "Pass the bottle, Dominie—and let our friend Wilmot here have a chance of getting a glass of wine. When did you come, my boy? and where do you spring from?"

"It's just that," said the Dominie: "I remember once asking the same question of a fellow with a great stick who seemed to spring out of a hedge: but I don't know whether he answered it—for I



recollect that he knocked me down—I was stunned—and when I came to myself I found that the fellow was gone, and my purse along with him. So I supposed he had taken it—but I never knew the rights of the matter. And that reminds me of what I one day said to my friend the Laird of Tintosquashdale—“He wasn’t the Squashdale who was hanged for child-murder,” added the Dominie, giving this little piece of information for my special behoof: “that fellow was Squashdale without the Tinto—which was just the same as if he had a coat without any tails to it.”

“Do hold your tongue, Dominie,” exclaimed his jolly friend, “and let us hear what Wilmot has got to say for himself. Ah! by the bye, what has become of that nice young Greek whom you travelled with?”

I did not think it worth while to enter into a long narrative of all that had occurred to me in consequence of my acquaintance with Durazzo Kanaris; and so I simply said that he had got himself into some trouble in Corsica.

“It’s just that,” said the Dominie: “I thought when we first met him he would get into trouble—because he wore such a tight-fitting frock-coat; and that young scapegrace Piercie Ganderbiggin, nephew of the Widow Glenbucket, wore just such a coat—which reminds me of what I said on one occasion to Sandio Owlhead, the Baillie’s seventh son, when the chinney fell down—”

“And when did you arrive here?” I asked of Mr. Saltoats.

“Last evening,” was the reply. “We inquired if you were known here: they said yes—that you had stayed three or four days, and had then gone away. We little thought we were destined to meet you this evening—But if you don’t like that wine, have some rum-and-water. They’ve got capital rum at this place: the Dominie drank three tumblers last night.”—and Mr. Saltoats winked slyly at me.

“It’s just that,” said Mr. Clackmannan: “the rum must be very good: for when I awoke this morning I did not recollect having taken any at all. And it’s very strange—but I can’t think how I got to bed last night. I just remember that the stairs seemed dreadfully rickety—but that’s the way with a cat when it has got walnut-shells on its feet.”

“Why, Dominie,” exclaimed Mr. Saltoats, laughing uproariously, “you know you were drunk last night—drunk as a fiddler!”

“It’s just that,” said Mr. Clackmannan, rolling himself round in his chair and taking three or four huge pinches of snuff successively: but he did not appear to comprehend the extent of the accusation to which he had just given his assent. “I remember once, when I was dining with—No, it could not have been dining—”

“What news have you in Rome?” I inquired.

“Nothing particular,” answered Saltoats. “The Count of Tivoli sent his carriage to fetch us to dine with him the evening before last. There was a large party—and the Dominie sate next to an old Dowager Marchioness with the paint all daubed over her parchment skin. And what do you think he did? Instead of asking her to take wine, he presented his box and proposed that she should take a pinch of snuff with him.”

“It’s just that,” said the Dominie: “she was a

nice old lady. And this puts me in mind of a certain old tabby cat—”

But Mr. Saltoats at once cut his friend short for fear of the infliction of another anecdote; and very soon afterwards the Dominie fell fast asleep in his chair. I remained talking with Saltoats until a little past ten o’clock,—when I retired to rest, having with difficulty escaped from his pressing invitation to join him in a bowl of punch.

On the following morning, after breakfast, I managed to get away from my two friends and proceeded to the Portici Villa. I found that Leonora was still in a very dangerous state: and the medical attendants predicted a long illness. The worthy Judge was deeply afflicted: but there was this consolation—that his unfortunate niece was, for the time being, ignorant of the dreadful woes which had fallen upon her head. She was at intervals plunged into a deep stupor—at others she was raving in the delirium of fever; and, as Signor Portici informed me, the name of Constantine was incessantly upon her lips in the midst of those ravings. He asked me whether anything could possibly be done for Constantine’s benefit: for notwithstanding everything that had happened, the old man could not forget that he was the affianced husband of his niece. I assured him that Durazzo was not without funds to conduct his defence—for that if he had been I myself should have supplied them. I intimated my intention of returning to Ajaccio by the time the trial came on; and the Judge expressed his satisfaction at this assurance.

“I know,” he said, “that nothing will convince Leonora of his guilt. I can read her disposition as plainly as the print in a book; and though she could not resist the overwhelming evidence which proved him to be a pirate,—yet certain am I she will never give her belief to the idea that he could become—I shudder to pronounce the word—a murderer! Therefore whatever may happen in respect to him—and should she survive this illness of her’s—she will bless you, my dear Wilmot, for any kindness you may now show towards Durazzo.”

In consequence of these representations I determined to hurry my departure to Ajaccio—and informed the Judge that I should leave Civita Vecchia by the next steamer that started. I ascertained that this would not be for three days; and I therefore remained at that seaport for this interval. I divided my time between Signor Portici and my two Scotch friends,—the society of the latter being really a relief to me, dispirited as I now felt. I wrote to the Count of Livorno, thanking him for his kindness in attending to my letter penned on board the pirate-vessel; and I requested information relative to Sir Matthew Heseltine and his family, as well as in respect to Lanover and Dorchester. I begged his lordship to address his answer to me at Ajaccio,—fearing lest I might leave Civita Vecchia before a reply could reach me there.

On the third day Leonora was out of danger, though still very ill, and still deprived of the right use of her senses. I took an affectionate leave of the old Judge, and bade farewell to my Scotch friends,—for whom I was obliged to invent some pretext to prevent them from accompanying me; as it was evidently a matter of perfect indifference to them whether they travelled and where they

took up their quarters, so long as they found ample supplies of eatables and drinkables.

I arrived once more at Ajaccio; and forthwith proceeded to Signor Castelli's office. I saw this gentleman, and reported to him the severe illness of Leonora. He informed me that Durazzo was most impatient for my return or for the reception of some tidings from me; and remembering my promise to the Judge to do whatsoever I could for him, I resolved to see him. Castelli promised me an order to that effect for the following day. It was agreed between us that the full extent of Leonora's illness should if possible be concealed from Durazzo, as there was no necessity to add to the mental tortures which he must already endure.

On repairing to my hotel I found a letter from the Count of Livorno,—the contents of which gave me all the information which I had sought. It appeared that after reading my note which the young page had slipped into his hand on board the Athene, he had been smitten with some vague and distant suspicion that I was not altogether a free agent in that vessel, and that there was consequently something strange and peculiar relative to the vessel itself. But as I had so earnestly enjoined secrecy in respect to the Otho, as the Athene was called for the nonce,—he had determined to follow my injunctions in all respects. Encountering the cutter in which Sir Matthew Heseltine, the ladies, and Dorchester were proceeding towards the schooner,—he had hailed it; and instantaneously recognising Dorchester, even through the deep disguise that he wore, the Count requested a few minutes' private conversation with Sir Matthew Heseltine, to whom he was previously unknown. A word of warning was sufficient; but my name was not mentioned: the warning was directed simply against Dorchester himself. The cutter put back to Leghorn in company with the yacht,—Dorchester sitting uneasily the while; for Sir Matthew contemplated him with a grim sternness. The instant the cutter reached the landing-place in the harbour, the Count of Livorno gave Dorchester into custody on a charge of having been connected with Marco Uberti's band. Sir Matthew Heseltine and the ladies naturally suspected that Lanover was at the bottom of all this meditated treachery towards themselves; and their suspicion was speedily confirmed by Dorchester's own confession. Having expressed their warmest thanks to the Count of Livorno for the information he had given them, they at once took their departure from Leghorn in order to return to England,—Sir Matthew assuring his lordship that his experiences of a Continental tour were already quite sufficient.

Yes—it appeared that the instant Dorchester was arrested for a capital crime, his fortune forsook him, and he avowed the whole plot—or at least so far as Lanover had chosen to confide its details to him. It will be remembered that Lanover had assured Durazzo he had not mentioned to Dorchester that the schooner was a pirate-ship; and in this Lanover had spoken truly. But Dorchester produced Lanover's letter written in cipher, and explained its contents. These were to the effect that he was to lose no time in inveigling Sir Matthew and the ladies on board the vessel. The police-authorities to whom Dorches-

ter's confession was made, were now convinced that the Otho could not be what it seemed; and when once suspicion was excited a positive conclusion was speedily arrived at. It was determined to watch the schooner's movements well: information was sent off to the English and French men-of-war—but accompanied by private letters from the Count of Livorno, making special and most honourable mention of myself. Lanover landed, as the reader will recollect; and he was arrested on the double charge of having formerly held communication with Marco Uberti's band, and for having now sought to inveigle into some jeopardy an English family residing at the time under the protection of the Tuscan laws. The reader is aware how the attempt to seize upon the pirate crew of the boat failed on the part of the Leghorn authorities—and likewise how the Athene escaped from the pursuit of the vessels-of-war. As for Dorchester and Lanover, they had been removed to Florence to undergo their trial there; and as it would take place in the course of six weeks, the Count of Livorno's letter requested me to attend on the occasion, as my evidence would be requisite. He concluded by expressing the kindest wishes, both on his own part and on that of the Countess, for my welfare and prosperity—desiring me when I visited Florence to make their house my home—otherwise they should think that I valued not their friendship.

And thus Mr. Lanover was caught at last!—thus was it that he was lying in a felon's gaol, with a capital charge hanging over his head! His evil career was evidently now drawing to a rapid close,—as was also that of the villain Dorchester. I did indeed purpose to repair to Florence when the time should come for those offenders to be placed at the bar of justice: for I had a presentiment that when under that death-sentence which must inevitably be pronounced, Lanover might be led to make some important revelations in respect to those mysteries which seemed so especially to concern myself, and which were likewise connected with the persecutions I had endured at the instigation of the Earl of Eccleston.

## CHAPTER CXXXVII.

### THE PRISON.—THE SPECIAL COMMISSION.

ON the following day, at about noon, I received an envelope from Signor Castelli, enclosing an order for my admittance to the town gaol. Thitherward I proceeded; and it was with a heavy heart that I looked forward to the interview with the once bold and dashing corsair-chief. It was painful to think that I should soon stand in the presence of one whom so recently I had deemed to be the possessor of many admirable qualities notwithstanding the lawless life he had led, and whom I must now look upon as a cold-blooded murderer. It was painful likewise to reflect that I must talk to him of his Leonora, whom perhaps he would never, never see again!

While thus giving way to my sorrowful meditations, I reached the entrance to the gloomy-looking gaol; and on presenting the order, I was conducted through a wicket in a large iron grating; and the



turnkey who escorted me, opening a massive door at the end of a stone passage, said, "You will find the prisoners there."

It was a small court-yard which I now entered; and its only occupants were Constantine and the young page. They were standing in the middle of the place; and they did not immediately perceive me. Durazzo was addressing his youthful companion, evidently in an earnest manner: the page clasped his hands and looked up into Durazzo's countenance with the air of one who placed all his hope in what the other was saying. Then I beheld Durazzo pass his hand caressingly over the curling masses of the youth's hair; and I knew that whatsoever crimes might be laid to the charge of Constantine, there was no falling off of affectionate friendship in his feelings towards the sharer of his misfortunes. All of a sudden an ejaculation of

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joy burst from the page's lips, as he caught sight of me; and then Durazzo, glancing quickly round, noticed my presence.

Constantine hastened towards me: but the young page, after advancing a pace or two, stopped short, covered his face with his hands, and began to sob violently. The momentary joy which my appearance had occasioned, thus vanished as abruptly as it had sprung up; and if a doubt had remained in my mind as to the guilt of those two, this conduct on the youth's part would have dissipated it. It seemed to bespeak a remorseful shame which dared not look me in the face.

"This is kind of you—most kind!" said Durazzo, hastening towards me: and he was about to seize my hand, when suddenly recollecting something, he stepped back—and folding his arms

across his chest, said with a sort of mournful coldness, "But I had forgotten! Signor Castelli told me that you believed me guilty!"

"I do not ask you to make me your confessor," I replied far more sadly than he himself had spoken, and with none of the same haughty coldness in my own voice or manner: "but at least, Durazzo, I expect that you will not adopt an air of useless and ill-becoming bravado."

It would be impossible to describe the brilliancy of the lightning which flashed from his eyes, nor the look of scornful rage that for an instant swept over his countenance: but the next moment his mien so completely altered that I was at a loss to conceive his features had expressed that lofty haughty anger at all. His air became so sad—Oh! so sad; and he bent his eyes with such deprecating mournfulness upon me that I felt my heart was weeping inwardly.

"And my Leonora?" he said. "You have seen her—and Castelli, who visited me last evening, prepared me to hear tidings of her illness. But he assured me that it was not severe—and you are come to confirm me in that belief?"

"The medical attendant upon the judge's niece has no fears as to the result," was my cautiously worded response.

"Heaven be thanked!" exclaimed Constantine fervidly. "But tell me—and, oh! tell me truly—does she—does she believe that I am guilty?"

"The judge assured me," I answered, "that although it were impossible for his niece to resist the evidence that you had been a corsair-chief, yet that never, never would she believe you guilty of this crime which is imputed to you!"

A wild cry of joy thrilled from Durazzo's lips; his strikingly handsome countenance became animated with a kindred expression; and clasping his hands together, he said with a world of feeling in his looks and voice, "Oh! may heaven shed its choicest blessings upon the head of my worshipped Leonora!"

I was profoundly affected: I hastily passed my kerchief across my eyes; and now I perceived that the young page had glided towards us. He listened with a deep and evidently heartfelt interest—but without amazement at what was said; and I therefore comprehended that he was now entirely in Durazzo's confidence in respect to all that concerned his love for the judge's niece.

"And Signor Portici himself?" said Constantine inquiringly. "But no—I need not ask you! He considers me guilty? Ah! but never, never will he infect the trustful Leonora with the same belief! I may go out of this world branded with a crime which I never perpetrated: but still there shall be one heart that will throb with the holy conviction of mine innocence. Yes!—the rank grass may grow over my grave in some unhallowed spot: but yet may a single flower peep forth from the midst and shed its perfume around, like sacred frankincense over the tomb of the mouldering dead!"

For a few moments Durazzo fell into a deep reverie; and as I glanced towards the page, I perceived him studying my countenance with a timid anxiety. For an instant his looks fell: then he glided towards me; and laying his hand lightly upon my arm, he said in the soft sadness of his musical voice, "Oh! it is worse than anything

that you, Mr. Wilmot, with your generous heart should believe us guilty!"

I was staggered by this species of appeal, which was conveyed with a look and tone of perfect innocence; and turning quickly to Durazzo, I said to him, "Would to heaven that I could believe you innocent! But would it not be believing in that which unfortunately is impossible?"

"Wilmot," answered Constantine, "I feel—I know that naught but a miracle can prove my innocence, and that of this youth whom I love as if he were my brother. I know likewise that in all ages and in all countries of the world men have succumbed beneath the overwhelming weight of circumstantial evidence: in some instances their innocence may never have transpired—but in others it has been made apparent—and so it may in mine!"

While he was thus speaking, I was smitten with the recollection of how an innocent person was first of all accused of the murder of the Duchesse de Paulin, and how the evidence had taken a turn to bring the crime fearfully home to the Duke himself. But, alas! a second thought showed me that the circumstances were here very different; and the hope that Durazzo might be speaking the truth died quickly out of me.

"I see that nothing can shake the conviction which is in your mind," proceeded Constantine mournfully; "and everything considered, I ought not to blame you. Yet hear me, Wilmot! If I cannot convert you, you may at least listen to the few words I have to say upon the subject. I have been a corsair-chief; and you yourself know whether I have hesitated to fight in a bold and open cause. But on the other hand I am as incapable as yourself of becoming a cold-blooded assassin. What was that poor youth's life to me? We saw him not in the ruins at all; and even if we had—But it is unnecessary," he suddenly interrupted himself, "to add another syllable! It is unnecessary, because it is useless! I believe me guilty; and I repeat, I dare not blame you."

"Rest assured, Durazzo," I answered, "that no one in the whole world—no, not even your Leonora herself—would with greater joy hail the proof of your innocence!"

At this moment the door of the court-yard opened; and the turnkey made his appearance, to intimate that my stay had been long enough.

"I do not ask you to visit me again," said Durazzo: "indeed I would rather that you should not, since you believe me guilty. Where there has been such friendship, there would now be a proportionate constraint. Yet if you receive any tidings—"

"I know to whom you allude," I interrupted him; "and rest assured I should not fail to come and impart any such intelligence. It is my purpose to remain awhile at Ajaccio; and if I can be of service to you—"

The turnkey grew impatient; and I was compelled to hurry away,—neither of the Greeks offering to take my hand, but both following me with mournful looks; for I perceived them thus gazing after me as I glanced back on gaining the massive door. When outside the prison, I walked slowly away, reflecting sadly upon the interview. How was it, I asked myself, that they both so

earnestly asserted their innocence in my presence when they *must* have known that their case looked blacker in my eyes, on account of the hidden treasure, than even it did in the eyes of the world at large?—and yet that world at large entertained not a single doubt of their criminality! Then, how could I? Nevertheless, I felt uneasy on the subject: I strove to believe in even the bare possibility of their innocence: I turned the whole case over and over again in my mind; but the longer I reflected upon it, the more damnatory seemed all its details.

As I was returning in the direction of my hotel, I met Signor Turano—who, with that gentlemanly courtesy which so eminently characterized him, shook me by the hand and glided into a conversation on general topics. He turned to walk with me; and perceiving that my demeanour was melancholy, he inquired into the motive with an air of friendly concern. I informed him that I had been to see the two young Greeks on some little matter of business; and he said, “Ah! it is a shocking case. Castelli, who is charged with their defence, tells me that they have not a hope.”

“You are acquainted, then, with Signor Castelli?” I observed.

“Yes, I know him slightly,” responded Signor Turano. “But this visit to the prison has dispirited you: and though our acquaintance has been so brief, yet you will perhaps pardon me for saying that I feel interested in you. Will you dine with me this evening? Perhaps we shall be acting with a mutual charity: for you are all lonely here—and I am the same.”

I accepted the invitation; and we separated for the present. The Corsican gentleman, whom I have before alluded to, was no longer at the hotel where I was staying; and thus I really had no one to speak to, and was by no means sorry to form the acquaintance of so accomplished, gentlemanly, and engaging a man as Signor Turano. Accordingly, at the appointed hour I repaired to the hotel at which he was living; and he received me with the most courteous welcome. We sat down to dinner; and I soon found that my idea of his conversational powers fell short of the extent to which they could reach. He had travelled much—he had evidently mixed in the best society—he had a fund of anecdote—and yet there was nothing pedantic in his discourse; nor had he the air of monopolizing the conversation. If I had not certain things hanging heavy upon my mind, I should have spent an exceedingly pleasant evening.

About three weeks passed away, during which interval nothing of any consequence occurred. I received a couple of letters from Signor Portici, to the effect that Leonora was slowly recovering—that her consciousness had returned—that she was still confined to her bed—and that, as he had predicted, she would not hear of Constantine’s guilt. Twice did I again call upon Durazzo in the prison, to communicate the tidings of Leonora’s improved health: but on neither of these occasions did another syllable emanate from his lips in the shape of argument or assurance relative to his innocence. I saw Castelli two or three times: but he was generally in too great a hurry to have any leisure for discourse. Turano I met frequently: we sometimes dined together; and the more I saw of him,

the more I liked him. By the way, it will be as well to observe that I learnt in the course of conversation that he had some important business which was detaining him at Ajaccio.

The day for the trial of the two Greeks was now close at hand; and, as the reader may suppose, the case excited a very great sensation at Ajaccio. By a singular coincidence the Special Land Commission found itself called upon to consider the claims to the Monte d’Oro title and property on the very same day as that appointed for the trial of Durazzo and the page. This arose from the fact of the Commissioners taking the cases in the order in which they were originally entered in their books. Castelli was engaged in both the criminal and the civil case: but this produced him little inconvenience, for the reasons which I will immediately explain. In the first place, in respect to Durazzo and the page, it was merely his duty as a lawyer to prepare the brief for their defence, which was to be conducted by able counsel retained for the purpose. Therefore Castelli’s presence in the criminal tribunal was scarcely needed. In the second place, the Land Commissioners sat in a hall next to the criminal tribunal itself—all the law-courts of Ajaccio being beneath one roof, the building itself bearing the usual French denomination of the Palace of Justice. Thus Signor Castelli was enabled to step from one Court into another, according as his presence might be needed in either.

Previous to the unfortunate affair in which the two Greeks were involved, I had experienced a deep interest in the Monte d’Oro case in consequence of all I had heard from the Corsican gentlemen whom I met at the hotel when first at Ajaccio. But the other and far graver case had lately absorbed all the curiosity I had felt in the former,—of which indeed I had lately ceased to think. But when the day came for the hearing of the two cases, I entered the Court in which the Land Commissioners sat: for the Monte d’Oro case came on at ten o’clock in the morning—whereas the trial of the prisoners was not to commence until eleven, on account of some mistake in notifying to the farmer and his son the precise period when their presence would be again required at Ajaccio as witnesses.

In the Court of the Land Commissioners I met the Corsican gentleman, who informed me that he had only returned that very morning from a visit to France. The Court was much crowded: but I had no doubt that the greater portion of the audience would flit away at eleven o’clock to the criminal tribunal adjoining. Signor Castelli, with two barristers, was seated at the table,—having a vast pile of papers before him; but there did not appear to be any other counsel present to assert the pretensions of any opposing claimant. The Deputy-Procurator Royal, or Sub-Attorney General, was however in his place to watch the proceedings on the part of the Crown, as is usual in all the Courts in France and under French jurisdiction. The proceedings took place in French: and therefore I had no difficulty in comprehending them. There were three Commissioners, who were robed as Judges, and who sat upon the bench; so that the appearance of the Court was perfectly judicial.

“This is a case,” said the Clerk of the Court,

"in which the Royal Commissioners are called upon to adjudicate in respect to the domain of Monte d'Oro, the possession of which confers the style and title of Count. It likewise appears that the Royal Commissioners are to be called upon to adjudicate in respect to the estates bordering upon those of Monte d'Oro, and which were wont to be known by the collective title of the Patrimony of St. Bartholomew. No opposition is entered on the part of any persons at present holding divers portions of the lands about to be claimed for other individuals."

Here the Royal Procurator rose, and said, "I have been consulted by many of the persons now holding such portions of the lands of the two domains; and I have felt it my duty to recommend that they should leave the case in the hands of myself as the representative of the Crown, and in that of the Royal Commissioners. For in respect to the parties now appearing by counsel to claim those domains jointly or severally, it will be for us to consider whether their claim be good or not. If it be rejected, there is necessarily an end of the case; and those who now hold the lands will remain in undisputed possession of them. But if, on the other hand, the claim be made good,—then, by the mere fact of an adjudication in that sense, the present holders of the lands become at once dispossessed thereof; and according to the terms of the Act of the French Legislature appointing the Royal Commission, the said holders must deliver up immediate and peaceable possession to the claimant or claimants whose rights shall have been confirmed by a judgment in their favour."

The senior of the two counsel whom Castelli had retained, now rose and addressed the Commissioners in the following manner:—

"Gentlemen, as a necessary preliminary to the case which is about to be submitted to your consideration, it is for us to prove that the same claimant whom we shall presently put forward to the domain and lordship of Monte d'Oro, is likewise the claimant to the patrimony of St. Bartholomew. We will prove by incontestable documentary evidence that at the time when those fatal incidents to which I need not more especially allude, occurred a century and a half back at the monastery of St. Bartholomew,—the entire patrimony of that monastery was duly conveyed, assigned, and made over by the Genoese authorities to the Count of Monte d'Oro. The keeper of the archives of the chancery at Bastia will presently be in attendance with a register, and with two other documents, which will prove the facts I am stating. Signor Castelli is likewise prepared to produce the exact copies of the entry in that register and of the conveyance-deeds, which after a long and tedious search he discovered amongst a number of mouldering documents in some obscure corner of his establishment. Those copies bear the attesting signatures and the seals of the regularly constituted authorities of the period to which I am alluding;—and that these signatures and seals are correct and genuine, will be proven to you by the registrar from Bastia, who has brought with him a number of other deeds and documents of the same period and with the same signatures and seals. It is necessary for me to mention that Signor Castelli's law-agency establishment has

been in existence for two centuries and a half; and the present respected proprietor thereof has by his character rendered himself worthy of the honourable name transmitted to him by his ancestors. It would appear that for many years the Castellis—the progenitors of him who is now present—were the legal advisers and conveyancers for the Monte d'Oro family,—the connexion only ceasing when the last bearer of the proud title of Monte d'Oro met a sudden and violent death. I submit these particulars to you, gentlemen, in order to explain how it is that any documents connected with the Monte d'Oro family should have been found in the establishment of Signor Castelli. I now beg to call the registrar of Bastia, who will place before you the various evidences to which I have alluded,—and which, I feel convinced, will satisfy the Royal Commission as well as the learned gentleman representing the Crown, that the patrimony of St. Bartholomew must merge into and become amalgamated with the domain of Monte d'Oro."

Here the barrister sat down; and my Corsican acquaintance whispered to me, "I told you that Castelli was a shrewd keen man of business, and knew perfectly well what he was about."

"But why does not the claimant to these estates make his appearance?" I asked. "I have looked around over the crowded assemblage; and though I perceive a deep interest expressed on many a countenance, yet I fail to detect that peculiar anxiety of suspense which would serve to indicate the particular one who is now playing for so large a stake."

"Depend upon it," responded the Corsican, in a whisper, "Castelli has good reasons and motives for everything that he does."

I know not how it was—but at that instant a strange suspicion struck me. This Corsican gentleman who had all along appeared to be so well acquainted with the matter,—might he not be the claimant who had so deep an interest in the question now at issue? I looked at him stealthily though earnestly: but his countenance was calm, and afforded no indication to justify my suspicion. Still that suspicion was not destroyed within me; and on that very account I grew all the more interested in the case that was progressing. As I looked around, I now perceived a little old man making his way through the crowd, followed by a boy carrying a huge dingy volume with massive brazen clasps, and a large roll of musty parchments tied round with tape. The old gentleman, who was of most respectable appearance, ascended into the witness-box; and on bowing to the Commissioner and the Procurator, his salutation was acknowledged by them with a sort of friendly familiarity which showed that he was an old acquaintance.

This was the registrar of the Corsican chancery, or dépôt of archives, at Bastia—which town, in the time of the Genoese rule, was the seat of the insular government and the capital of the island. Having been sworn, he produced the various evidences described by the learned counsel; and these were most carefully inspected by the Royal Commissioners. Signor Castelli then handed up the deeds to which allusion had likewise been made: and these also underwent the most rigid scrutiny on the part of the Commissioners. The huge regis-



ter and the pile of documents were then handed over to the Deputy-Procurator, by whom they were subjected to another examination; and the registrar was asked a variety of questions, to all of which he responded in a manner that tended favourably towards the issue at which Castelli was aiming. The Deputy-Procurator expressed his opinion that the evidence was altogether satisfactory; and the three Commissioners deliberated amongst themselves for a few minutes.

"Considering all that has now been laid before us," said the senior commissioner, "we feel ourselves competent to pronounce our decision on this first question which has arisen concerning the claims to the Monte d'Oro property and lordship. We therefore decree, and be it solemnly and finally decreed, that the patrimony of St. Bartholomew merges into and becomes amalgamated with the domain of Monte d'Oro. We are now ready to proceed to the next stage of this most important case."

When the Clerk of the Court had duly recorded the judgment just rendered, the second of the two barristers, whom Signor Castelli had retained, rose and addressed the Royal Commissioners in the following manner:—

"It now devolves upon me, gentlemen, to solicit your attention to the facts which I am about to lay before you. I must go back to that time when the last bearer of the title of Monte d'Oro was in existence. That nobleman had a son—an only son—who was consequently his heir. Of the existence of that son, whose Christian name was Pedro, the most incontestable proofs will be laid before you—which proofs have emanated from amidst the mass of documents relative to the Monte d'Oro family which Signor Castelli has discovered in his office. The Count of Monte d'Oro's son Pedro was driven from the paternal home by the tyranny, the cruelty, and the vices of his sire. From letters which the young man addressed to the Signor Castelli of that day, and which will presently be produced, it will be seen that he possessed the noblest disposition, the most generous sentiments, and a lofty appreciation of all that was correct, moral, and honourable. It is not therefore surprising that such a young man as Pedro should have been shocked by the character of such a father—and that after he had quitted home, subsequent events should have made him loathe the idea of assuming at his sire's death the blood-stained title of Monte d'Oro. Under an assumed name Pedro repaired to Italy, where he married a German lady who was travelling at the time with her father in that country. He accompanied his bride and her parent to their native Hanoverian clime, where he entered the military service of that Electorate. But it is necessary to observe that Pedro's marriage took place before his father's death;—and when some vague rumour of that sire's tragic end reached the son's ears, he proceeded to Corsica under a strict *incognito* to ascertain the whole truth. This *incognito* was thrown off only towards the Signor Castelli of that day; and it would appear, by a memorandum recently found in the Castelli establishment, that Pedro, though heir to the title and domain of Monte d'Oro, positively and resolutely abjured his heritage. He said that he had married into an honourable family, and that he wore the sword of

an honourable service—that he should therefore consider he was disgracing that family and that sword by taking possession of an estate which he could only claim by assuming the blood-stained title of Monte d'Oro at the same time. He bound Castelli to secrecy in respect to his visit to Corsica and all that had taken place between them at this interview. But the Castelli of that day, though faithfully keeping his pledge of secrecy, made a memorandum of all these particulars; and this memorandum, on being recently disinterred from amidst a mass of other documents, furnished the Signor Castelli who is now present in the Court with a clue to the family into which the self-sacrificed and self-exiled Pedro, heir of Monte d'Oro, had married."

Here the learned counsel paused; and the audience was for a few moments relieved from the breathless state of suspense in which this deeply interesting speech had held every one present. I again glanced at my Corsican friend; and methought that I discerned a peculiarity of expression in his features—a something more than the mere passing interest of curiosity: but the next instant his countenance had the same look as it habitually wore.

"Gentlemen," resumed the learned counsel, "having directed your attention to a few necessary preliminary facts, I now pass on to the important statements which I have to lay before you. When the Act of the French Legislature was passed for the regulation of disputed Corsican lands, and when his Majesty Louis-Philippe issued his Royal ordinance appointing the present Commission,—Signor Castelli, who is now present, be thought himself of mooted the question in respect to the real ownership of the Monte d'Oro estates. And let me assure you, gentlemen, that Signor Castelli was not alone inspired by the hope of profit in the exercise of his professional avocations: but as an honourable man he considered that if there were any descendants of the Monte d'Oro family now in existence, they ought to seize this opportunity of doing themselves justice and acquiring their legitimate rights. Signor Castelli reasoned with himself that inasmuch as one generation is not responsible for the misdeeds of its progenitors—and that inasmuch as more than a century and a half had elapsed since that date to which the crimes and the retributively tragic end of the last Count of Monte d'Oro belonged—there need be no false shame nor fastidiousness now in any of his descendants coming forward to claim that which is their due. In a word, Signor Castelli, availing himself of the clue furnished by the memorandum left by his ancestor, and of which I have spoken, employed active agents to institute inquiries in Germany. After a world of trouble, and a considerable pecuniary outlay, it was discovered that Pedro, the only son of the last Count of Monte d'Oro, had left behind him a numerous family, the issue of his marriage with the German lady. It was further discovered that of this progeny two only were sons: the others were daughters. It therefore became necessary to trace, if possible, the career of those two sons. The elder was named Hermann—the younger Karl. It was found that Hermann, the elder, had migrated from Germany to Italy, where he had married, and for certain pecuniary reasons

had adopted the surname of his wife's family. It would farther appear that he had actually come to Corsica and lived awhile at Bastia; although there is no reason to suppose that he had the slightest idea of the existence of any connection between his own especial interests and any circumstances that had occurred in this island. His eldest son married a Corsican lady at Bastia; and the next that is heard of this branch of the family, is that they migrated to France. There all trace was suddenly and abruptly broken off, so far as concerned the researches which Signor Castelli's agents were enabled to make."

Here the learned counsel again paused: but in a few moments he resumed his interesting narrative in the following manner:—

"Having spoken of the elder branch—namely, that of Hermann—I now come to the younger one: namely, that of Karl. In pursuing this portion of the clue, Signor Castelli's agents at first experienced far more difficulty than in the other case: but when once they got upon the right track, they were enabled to prosecute it far more satisfactorily. They discovered that Karl had proceeded from Hanover to England—the Electors of the former country having become Kings of the latter. Karl entered the English navy—attained a high rank—and died, leaving one son. This son married an English lady; and the issue of this marriage was a daughter. Here I must observe that the Monte d'Oro property is not a male fief only: and therefore the existence of female descendants does not break the lineal claim to the heritage. This daughter married an Armenian merchant, who was visiting England at the time on some particular business; and she accompanied her husband to the East. The history, names, and circumstances of their descendants have been fully traced out by Signor Castelli; and until very recently, Signor Castelli entertained the firm conviction that it was the last of these male descendants who might be brought forward as the lawful claimant to the title and property of Monte d'Oro. Indeed, I believe that not more than a month has elapsed since Signor Castelli made a communication in that sense to the Royal Commissioners—his firm impression being that the *elder branch* (namely, that of Hermann) was utterly and totally extinct."

"We have a note to this effect," said the Senior Commissioner, referring to a book which lay upon the desk before him.

"Suddenly however, and most unexpectedly," proceeded the learned counsel, "a gentleman presented himself to Signor Castelli, declaring that he was a lineal descendant of the elder branch: namely, that of Hermann. Signor Castelli had no preference in the matter: all he sought was that justice should be done and that the rightful claimant should be put in possession of whatsoever titles and estates might legitimately belong to him. He therefore at once investigated the claims of the gentleman who thus presented himself; and after a careful study of the matter, he arrived at the conclusion that the pretensions were valid and that the gentleman alluded to is the undoubted legitimate descendant of Hermann. In the first instance the claimant proved that he had always borne that Italian name which Hermann had adopted on his marriage with the

Italian lady; and he placed in Signor Castelli's hands a number of documents to substantiate his descent from that same Hermann. These, and other minuter details, will presently become the subject, Gentlemen Commissioners, of your investigation. The claimant who is about to appear before you, has for some weeks past been residing in Corsica: but he has thought it fit to retain a strict *incognito* so far as his claim to be recognised as the Count of Monte d'Oro is concerned; for in consequence of the excitement produced by this most remarkable case, he has chosen to avoid rendering himself the object of public curiosity. I believe that he is now in court—or at all events he is close at hand; and is prepared to present himself before the Royal Commissioners."

The learned counsel ceased; and again did I glance towards my Corsican companion. For a moment I felt convinced that my suspicion was correct, and that he was really the claimant, on account of the expression of deep interest which his features assumed. But he did not step forward—he said not a word: he only looked quickly, and mewithought anxiously, around. I was bewildered, and knew not what to think.

There was now a sensation amongst the audience: the crowd was dividing to make way for some one who was entering the court: but I could not immediately see who the individual was, as I was completely hemmed in by the throng. The barrister who had last spoken, caught sight of the entering personage before I did; and he said, addressing himself to the Commissioners,—“Here, gentlemen, is the claimant to the title and estates of Monte d'Oro.”

I stood upon tiptoe: I now obtained a view of him; and it was with difficulty I could repress an ejaculation of surprise on beholding Signor Turano. He advanced towards the table at which the barristers and Signor Castelli were seated; and with that elegant courtesy which so eminently characterized him, he bowed to the Commissioners and to the Deputy-Procurator.

“This gentleman,” said the barrister who conducted the latter portion of the case—and he politely indicated the claimant who had stepped forward,—“is Signor Alberti Turano; and *Turano* was the family name which his progenitor Hermann adopted on espousing the Italian lady.”

At this moment my Corsican acquaintance stepped forward—rapidly worked his way through the interreing portion of the crowd—and laying his hand upon Signor Turano's shoulder, he said, “You are my prisoner: I arrest you for forgery!”

## CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

### THE STILETTO.

It would be impossible to describe the sensation produced by this extraordinary and most unexpected incident of the drama which was progressing. For myself, I was seized with such a degree of astonishment that for a few instants I could only regard it all as a dream. When I began to recover my self-possession,—which through amazement I temporarily lost,—I observed that Signor Turano

was as pale as death, that his lips were ashy white, and that he was gazing with a perfect agony of dismay, so to speak, upon the Corsican who had just arrested him, Signor Castelli was evidently as much stricken with astonishment as myself: in short, such a turn was given to the proceedings that I do verily believe every one totally forgot the other remarkable trial which had by this time commenced in the adjoining Court.

The idea that Turano should be a forger—that mild gentlemanly personage whose manners were so prepossessing, whose conversation was so delightful, and for whom I had begun to conceive a feeling bordering upon friendship—it seemed to be something incredible! And yet it was all true. There they stood,—the accused and the accuser; and the former ventured not to breathe a single word of denial to the charge thrown out against him by the latter. For two or three minutes there was a complete suspension of the business of the Special Commission,—until the Deputy-Procurator Royal rose and said, “This individual is accused of forgery. Does his accuser mean that he has forged documents which in any way bear upon the present case?—for if so, you, Gentlemen Commissioners, will at once take cognizance of the offence. But if on the other hand the charge of forgery has no reference to the business now engaging our attention, the prisoner must be removed and taken before the proper criminal magistrate.”

“The forgeries of which Turano is guilty,” said the Corsican, “have reference to the present case. I am one of the chiefs of the department of the Secret Police in Paris; and here is my authority for the step which I have just taken.”

Thus speaking, the Corsican handed the document to the Clerk of the Court, who passed it up to the presiding Commissioner, by whom it was attentively read.

“It is perfectly formal,” said this functionary; “and we will proceed with the investigation of the case.”

“I demand,” said the Corsican, “that whatsoever documents Turano may have placed in the hands of Signor Castelli, be at once impounded.”

“I will save the Court the necessity of issuing an order to that effect,” observed Castelli: “for I at once hand over to the Deputy-Procurator whatsoever documents the prisoner may have placed in my hands.”

While this colloquy was progressing, Turano sank down upon a seat just behind the barristers’ table, and thus concealed himself from the view of the great bulk of the audience. From the position which I occupied, I could obtain a partial view of him: I saw that he was covering his face with his hands, and that his posture indicated the deepest mental dejection. The deeds being handed over to the Crown lawyer, the Corsican proceeded to give the following explanations:—

“Many years ago an individual bearing the name of Turano was tried before a Paris tribunal for various acts of swindling; and he was sentenced to the galleys for a period. He accomplished his term of penal servitude at Toulon; and thence, it is believed, he passed in the first instance to England. There he lived as a mere adventurer,—his plausible manners obtaining many dupes. From England it is supposed that he returned to

the Continent, where he travelled about through many countries, living in the same disreputable manner as before. At length, some few months back, he reappeared in Paris,—doubtless hoping that in the long interval which had elapsed since his previous adventures there, he was altogether forgotten. But information was given to the police; and a watch was set upon his actions. It was ascertained that he was well supplied with money, and that he was living creditably so far as the payment of his bills was concerned. But in the course of time something transpired to excite suspicion that he was playing a deep and nefarious game. He made inquiries at the shop of a law-stationer for some blank legal forms bearing the Government stamps of several years back. These forms he succeeded in procuring. The purpose for which he required them still remained a mystery; and although I felt convinced he had an unlawful object in view, yet without further evidence I could not possibly interfere with him. A continuous watch was however kept upon his proceedings: but all of a sudden, a few weeks ago, he disappeared from Paris—and no trace could be obtained of the direction which he had taken. It was however believed that he had returned to England; and amidst the pressure of other business he and his affairs were forgotten. Very shortly afterwards I was charged with a secret mission to Ajaccio—a mission which was specially entrusted to me as I myself am a Corsican by birth. What this mission was, it is unnecessary for me to mention, inasmuch as it has nothing to do with the present case. Suffice it to say that this mission brought me to Ajaccio; and I had not been in the town many days, when accident threw me in the way of Signor Turano. I was walking through the streets with a young English gentleman, when we met Turano,—with whom it appeared this English gentleman had some slight previous acquaintance. I should observe, to prevent misconception, that the English gentleman—whom I need not name—is of the highest respectability; and I am convinced that he was totally ignorant of the real character of Turano. Turano knew me not: but I resolved to ascertain for what purpose he was at Ajaccio. I soon succeeded in discovering that he had called at Signor Castelli’s office; and then it suddenly occurred to me that he might possibly be asserting a claim to the estates of Monte d’Oro. Knowing that some little time would elapse before this case would come on for hearing—and having found out that Turano had been in Bastia and other parts of the island before coming to Ajaccio—I determined to follow up the clue thus afforded to me. I repaired to Bastia—but could learn nothing there, beyond the fact that Turano had arrived in the first instance by the Marseilles steamer. I proceeded to Marseilles; and there I obtained information which induced me to hasten on to Paris. On instituting inquiries in the capital, I found out a scrivener in very humble circumstances, who had been employed by Turano to fill up certain documents in the wonted law-style of writing and with the proper legal phraseology. I likewise discovered, beyond all possibility of doubt, that this Turano—though bearing the same name—is in reality no connexion of the elder branch of the Monte d’Oro family: neither is his Christian name really Alberti. It is

therefore evident, gentlemen, that availing himself of the identity of surnames, he was resolved to play a bold stroke for the acquisition of a title and a fortune; and I am prepared to show that the deeds which he placed in Signor Castelli's hands, and which are now impounded by the Court, are forgeries. They were written by the old scrivener from copies furnished by Turano,—their object being to prove his descent from a family to which he does not belong, and to support the claim which without any legitimate ground he has dared to put forward. Having satisfactorily arrived at the knowledge of these details in the French capital, I hastened back to Ajaccio,—arriving here only just in time for the opening of this Court to-day. I should at once have given the necessary information to Signor Castelli, and have taken the forger Turano into custody; but you may comprehend, gentlemen, that it was necessary I should allow the proceedings to go to a certain length in order to acquire the positive proof that Turano would really make use of the forged documents, and would really stand forward to assert his claims to the Monte d'Oro property. In conclusion, gentlemen, I would observe—”

At this moment the Corsican's speech was cut short by the abrupt opening of the folding-doors of the Court, and the entrance of a couple of *gendarmes*, conducting between them an elderly female who by her dress appeared to belong to the peasant class. But before I continue this portion of my narrative, it will be necessary to give some few explanations of what had in the meanwhile been taking place in the other Court.

As I have already said, the trial of Durazzo and the young page was not to commence until eleven o'clock; and precisely at that hour the two prisoners were placed in the dock. From all I subsequently learnt, the demeanour of Constantine Durazzo Kanaris was calmly firm, and precisely that which an innocent person might have been supposed to wear. The young page was much dejected: but still he seemed to cling with a sort of blind confidence and brotherly reliance to his elder companion. The Chief Procurator Royal appeared to prosecute on behalf of the Crown; and the indictment was read by the Clerk of the Court. Two able counsel, who were retained by Signor Castelli, appeared on the prisoners' behalf. The first witness summoned was the farmer's son; and he detailed all those facts which have been previously laid before the reader. These, as a matter of course, appeared to tell terribly against the prisoners: but the farmer's son wound up by making a statement which took everybody who heard it with the utmost surprise:—

“I have already said, and it is also specified in the indictment”—thus the farmer's son spoke—“that the weapon with which the fearful deed was committed, could not be discovered at the time. When I attended before the Judge of Instruction about a month back, I was informed by that functionary that notwithstanding the strength of the evidence against the prisoners, it was nevertheless desirable to make a search for the weapon; and as I live close by the spot where the murder took place, I volunteered to make that search. Several times during the past month have I visited the ruins of the monastery to search for the weapon: but without success, until yesterday afternoon. I

was on the very point of finally abandoning that search as a useless one, when happening to tread amongst some long grass between the masses of fallen masonry, my foot struck against something in so peculiar a way that I was induced to stoop down and pick it up. It was a long dagger or stiletto. I at once hastened home to the farm,—where I found that during my absence a messenger from the Court had been to summon my father and myself to be at this tribunal at eleven o'clock to-day. The messenger had taken his departure; and I could not therefore communicate to him the discovery I had made. It was then about six o'clock in the evening. My father and I resolved that we would perform half of our journey—namely, twenty-five miles—in our own chaise-cart last night—that we would rest at the midway town—and come on to Ajaccio, also with our own vehicle, this morning. We set out, taking the dagger with us. In the neighbourhood of the ruins of Monte d'Oro Castle live an old couple who are distantly related to our family. The cottage they inhabit being on our road, we halted there for a few minutes to rest ourselves and the horse. The conversation naturally turned upon the business that was taking us to Ajaccio; and I showed the old couple the dagger which I had discovered. To our astonishment they at once seemed to recognise it: they examined it closer—the recognition was complete. They then told us circumstances which at once seemed to give such an altered complexion to the whole affair, that we decided upon bringing the woman with us to Ajaccio: for her husband is too much of an invalid to leave his own dwelling. On account of an accident which happened this morning to our horse, we only succeeded in reaching the Court after the indictment had been read and at the very moment I was summoned as a witness by the usher:—otherwise I should have made these facts known to the counsel for the prisoners. I now produce the dagger: and the female relative whom I have brought hither, is present in the Court to tell all she knows.”

It may be more easily conceived than explained how great was the sensation which the narrative of the farmer's son produced amongst the crowded auditory, as well as in respect to the bench, the bar, the jury, and the prisoners. As I subsequently learnt, Constantine Durazzo was seen to snatch the young page's hand and press it feverishly—while the youth himself murmured some words of thanksgiving to that heaven which at the eleventh hour was working out so marvellous a change in the circumstances that environed his companion and himself. The stiletto was handed to the judges—and by them to the Royal Procurator. Be it observed that not a syllable had been said proclaiming the innocence of the two Greeks: but from the tenour of the language held by the farmer's son it was evident enough that some important revelations were to be made, *which would give an altered complexion to the whole affair.*

The old peasant-woman was placed in the witness-box, and duly sworn. She spoke as follows:—

“About six weeks ago, as near as I can recollect, a gentleman called at our cottage and asked if he could be accommodated with a lodging for a short period, as he felt much interested in th:



scenery in that part of the country, and he also wished to make some sketches of the ruins of Monte d'Oro. We agreed to receive him; and he took up his abode with us. He seemed a very nice gentleman; and both my husband and myself liked him much. He had brought a small carpet-bag with him: he came on foot; and I do not know by what means of conveyance he first of all arrived in our neighbourhood. He used to be constantly talking of the old tales and legends connected with the family of Monte d'Oro and also with the Patrimony of St. Bartholomew; and I often thought he was singularly particular in making me and my husband recollect dates and other minute matters in connexion with all those tales as we ourselves had originally heard them from our parents. One day, when he was out, I must confess that I had the curiosity to look into his carpet-bag, which he happened on that occasion to have left unlocked; and there I perceived

a long stiletto of very peculiar workmanship, as well as a pair of pistols. I showed these things to my husband—but it was only as a mere matter of curiosity; for we did not think it at all strange that a gentleman who travelled about in the lonely parts of Corsica, should be thus armed. I remember that on the night of the murder the gentleman did not return home until late: but we thought nothing of this either at the time or afterwards, as he had stayed equally late on three or four previous occasions. The next day he left us before the tidings of the murder reached our ears: but not for a single instant had we any suspicion against our late guest, because we were told at the same time that the actual murderers had been arrested, and that they were two Greeks.<sup>7</sup>

It was at this stage of the proceedings in the criminal tribunal, that a rumour circulated rapidly amongst the audience to the effect that an extraordinary scene had just taken place in the Court

of the Special Commission, and that a certain Signor Turano had been arrested as an imposter and a forger. The name of Turano happened to reach the ears of the old peasant-woman; and she at once cried out that it was the name of the gentleman who had lodged with her. The sensation was now immense; and the presiding Judge commanded the ushers to keep the doors of the Court closed, so that no one should go forth to give any intimation of what had just occurred.

"Take this witness," said the presiding Judge, "into the next Court; and let her there point out to you the individual of whom she has been speaking—if she should recognise him."

It was under these circumstances that the old peasant-woman was brought by the *gendarmes* into the Court of the Special Commission; and it was their entrance which so abruptly cut short the concluding observations which the Corsican was making. It will be understood that I was at that moment in utter ignorance of everything that was taking place in the criminal tribunal; but I was just thinking of proceeding thither at the instant the peasant-woman was ushered in by the police-officers. That some fresh phase in the forenoon's singular proceedings was about to develop itself, I felt convinced; and such was evidently the impression of every one else: for the crowd instantaneously made way for the old woman and the *gendarmes* to pass in the midst. Though ignorant of what was to ensue, I was at once stricken by the horrible ghastly look of dismay with which Turano, who had started nervously up from his seat, recognised the old woman; and she, pointing her finger towards him in an excited manner, exclaimed, "'Tis he! 'tis he!"

Oh, what a scene then ensued!—what a groan of anguish came from the lips of the wretched man!—for he understood in a moment what the presence of the woman meant there: his guilty conscience told him that he was unmasked and discovered. Never shall I forget the unutterable agony that was expressed in his countenance when that moan had ceased and he had no longer the power to send forth a sound from his lips. The *gendarmes* seized upon him, exclaiming, "You are our prisoner for murder!"

Murder!—good heavens! this was the first intimation which I had of the horrible charge now pressing against him; and I was still in a bewildered state what to think, when the wretched man suddenly cried out, "Avant, avant, Leone!—come not near me with those ghastly gaping wounds!"

A thrill of horror shot through the entire audience—a thrill that might be seen as well as felt—the rapid electric influence of feelings painfully startled. But to me what a revelation! Turano the murderer of Leone! Then Durazzo and the page were innocent! They were innocent—and I had all along believed them guilty! Such a dizziness came over me that I felt as if I were about to faint; for joy itself was sickening in the excess of its bewilderment. Little short of a miracle, had it been said, could manifest itself in order to prove Durazzo and the page completely innocent; and this miracle had been wrought—but as yet I knew not how!

The wretched Turano, more dead than alive, was conducted—or rather carried out of the Court,

by the *gendarmes*; and he fainted when the threshold was reached. He was conveyed to a private room in the Palace of Justice; but none of the crowd were permitted to follow thither. I endeavoured to get into the Criminal Court: I was anxious to be amongst the very first, if not the first, to congratulate the Greeks upon this change of circumstances that had been wrought in their favour: but I found it absolutely impossible to make my way amidst the mass that thronged the place; for the living tide had poured in from the Court of the Special Commission. I was compelled to wait for the present in the great hall whence the Courts opened.

In a few minutes I perceived one of the *gendarmes* who had borne Turano to the private room; and I spoke to him. He informed me that the prisoner had come back to consciousness; and that thoroughly dejected and broken down, he had volunteered a confession of his crime. The Judge of Instruction had just been sent to him. I may as well relate here those particulars which I did not however learn until later in the day.

It appeared that Turano had a few months back fallen in with Signor Leone in London, just at the very time when the unfortunate young gentleman had heard of the sitting of the Land Commissioners at Ajaccio. From Leone's lips Turano heard all the particulars of Leone's claim to the patrimony of St. Bartholomew; and the circumstances connected with the Monte d'Oro family of a bygone period necessarily involved themselves in Leone's explanations. It was then that Turano learnt for the first time that there were such lands to be claimed; and by a singular coincidence he at about the same period discovered that he himself bore the very identical surname of the elder branch of the Monte d'Oro family, which had become extinct at Marseilles, in France. This latter discovery he made not through the young Leone, who was himself ignorant of the fact; but it instantaneously set the active mind of Turano to work. He repaired to Paris, where, as we have already seen, he arranged the requisite forgeries for the support of the claim which he purposed to advance; and after a while he set out for Marseilles—thence passing over to Corsica. On his arrival in the island he first of all repaired to the vicinage of the ruins of Monte d'Oro, in order to glean as many traditional facts as he possibly could, so that he might render every detail of his own statement completely consistent with past events. It would appear that while rambling about in that vicinage, and penetrating near to the ruins of St. Bartholomew, he suddenly encountered Signor Leone. This was in the middle of that memorable day in the evening of which the murder was perpetrated. The meeting was most unexpected,—Turano little dreaming of finding Leone in that neighbourhood. But all of a sudden it struck him that if he did not at once mention that he himself was a claimant to the Monte d'Oro property, and perhaps (according to circumstances) a claimant to the patrimony of St. Bartholomew likewise, Leone would think it strange when subsequently finding him stepping forward as such a claimant. Turano therefore announced his pretensions. Leone, who had all along been apprehensive lest a member of the supposed extinct family of Monte d'Oro should suddenly make his



appearance, haughtily derided the pretensions of Turano; and bade him recollect that only a few months back he was evidently ignorant of all particulars respecting the two estates until he had heard them from his (Leone's) own lips. Turano at once saw that he had a dangerous adversary to deal with; and he was indiscreet enough to propose to waive every claim to the patrimony of St. Bartholomew, provided that Leone would pledge himself not to breathe a syllable to injure him in his pretensions to the Monte d'Oro title and estate. Leone must have at once perceived that he was dealing with a villain, an impostor, and a cheat; and he indignantly refused to effect any such compromise. Then Turano besought him to observe the strictest silence as to everything that had passed,—promising to leave Corsica the very next day and abandon all his pretended claims. He exhibited such contrition that Leone, naturally generous-hearted, was moved towards him; and he promised to throw the veil of secrecy over all that had occurred, provided Turano would faithfully fulfil his promise. The villain bound himself by an oath to that effect: but he inwardly resolved to remove Leone from his path. He hastened to his lodging to procure his weapons: he armed himself—he stole back into the neighbourhood of the farm-house—he watched—and at length dogged Leone in his evening visit to the ruins of the monastery. Stealing in amidst those ruins, he suddenly rushed upon Leone with his stiletto, and struck him down. To make sure of his deadly work, he inflicted numerous stabs: but scarcely was the murderous deed complete, when it struck him that he heard the sounds of the wheels of a vehicle and of a horse's hoofs somewhere amongst the ruins. This must have been the moment of the arrival of the two Greeks in the cart which they had hired to carry off the treasure. Stricken with a wild affright, and afraid every moment of being arrested, the murderer flung away the poniard; so that the evidence of his crime should not at all events be found upon him; and he succeeded in making his escape from amidst the ruins.

Having laid before the reader this explanation, I may resume the thread of my narrative. I waited perhaps for about half-an-hour in the hall of the Palace of Justice,—when the crowd came pouring forth from the criminal tribunal; and presently I was rejoined by the Corsican Chief of the Secret Police at Paris. This gentleman informed me that Turano had confessed everything, and that the two Greeks had been consequently set at liberty.

“But I have no time for explanations now as to all that Turano said,” added the Corsican: “for Castelli has begged me to return into the other Court to hear the progress of the case before the Special Commission. I do not know what he means—But come along with me!”

“No,” I answered: “I have no longer any interest in that case. I must see the two Greeks—I must congratulate them—”

“They are gone into the advocates' private room,” interrupted the Corsican: “they are with Castelli and the counsel who were engaged in their defence. You shall see them presently. Let us get out of this crowd—Castelli himself told me to look for you and keep you with me.”

“That is different,” I said. “The Greeks will perhaps presently accompany him:”—and I now suffered myself to be led by the Corsican back again into the Court where the Special Commissioners sat.

These functionaries were at the moment resuming their seats upon the bench, after a temporary retirement to their own private room: the Deputy-Procurator Royal was also returning to his place; the crowd was collecting once more; and in a few moments Signor Castelli re-entered the Court. He was unaccompanied by the Greeks; and hastening towards him, I asked where they were: for I was burning with the desire to proffer them my joyous congratulations on the turn which circumstances had taken.

“They will be here in a few minutes,” responded Signor Castelli; “they are taking some little refreshment in the barristers' robing-room; and I have told them to follow me hither, as I knew that you would be anxiously waiting to see them. Pray curb your impatience—I must get on with this case; for the Commissioners will not wait.”

Having thus spoken, Castelli hastened to the table where his two counsel were already arranging their papers; and for a few minutes he gave rapid whispered instructions to one of them.

“Gentlemen,” said the barrister just alluded to, rising from his seat to address the Commissioners, “we now resume the case which has already been brought before your notice.”

“But it seems to me,” said the presiding Commissioner, “that it is at an end; and we only resumed our seats in order to allow the pleas to be formally withdrawn.”

“I pray your attention, gentlemen,” said the advocate. “First of all, I am instructed to inform you that the very researches which the Chief of the Secret Police of Paris made with a view to fathom the proceedings of that wretched man whose numerous crimes have this day been so providentially brought to light—those very researches, I say, accidentally furnished the proof that the real family of Turano—the elder branch of the Monte d'Oro race—is utterly extinct. This certainty the Chief of the Secret Police acquired at Marseilles, where it would seem that Turano, the forger and murderer, instituted certain inquiries previous to his coming to Corsica—those very inquiries which gave the Chief of the Secret Police the clue that took him to Paris and enabled him to find out the scrivener. Well, then, gentlemen, the elder branch of the Monte d'Oro family—that of Hermann—is extinct. But the younger branch—the descendants of Karl—is *not* extinct. A lineal representative is in existence. Signor Castelli possesses the most incontrovertible evidence to prove this statement. Had that wretched man Turano made out his alleged claim as the representative of the elder branch, it would never have been necessary to mention the name of him who is the lineal descendant of Karl, and consequently the living representative of the younger branch. It is only within the last quarter of an hour that the individual thus alluded to has learnt his good fortune, and had the happy tidings communicated to him that he is indeed the inheritor of a noble title and the possessor of the united estates of Monte d'Oro and St. Bartholomew. Gentlemen, I beg to introduce him.”

Thus speaking, the advocate made a sign to an usher who stood at a private door near the extremity of the judicial bench: the usher opened that door—and Constantine Durazzo came forth, followed by the youthful page.

The Court of the Special Commission was again crowded; for the rumour had spread that the proceedings in the Monte d'Oro case were not brought to a conclusion, but might possibly be reopened with an increased degree of interest;—and this interest was now excited to the very utmost when the two Greeks made their appearance. But what words can depict the sensation which ensued when Signor Castelli, hastening forward, took Durazzo by the hand,—saying, "Permit me to be the first publicly to congratulate you—as I was twenty minutes back the first privately to announce to you, that within the hour which is passing a solemn decree of this tribunal will recognise you as the Count of Monte d'Oro and owner of two vast domains."

Yes—it was so!—and that young man who so lately had been a corsair-chief, and later still branded by an accusation of murder, now found himself the bearer of a proud patrician title and the inheritor of immense wealth. The evidence was gone into—the decree was given in his favour—and the audience in that crowded court welcomed the new Count of Monte d'Oro with a tremendous cheer, which under the peculiar circumstances of the case the ushers did not attempt to repress. But I hasten over this portion of the proceedings of that memorable day, in order that I may lose as little time as possible in recording those incidents that will be found in the ensuing chapter.

## CHAPTER CXXXIX.

### WOMAN'S DEVOTION.

I WAS seated with the two Greeks in my own apartment at the hotel. We three were alone together. My first congratulations had already been proffered at the Palace of Justice; and now they were as fervidly renewed. I cannot possibly explain the amount of joy which I experienced at the issue of two remarkable cases which had been coincidentally taken cognizance of by a civil and a criminal tribunal respectively. Equally impossible is it to describe the joy of the two Greeks,—though that of Constantine Durazzo Kanaris was of a more solemn nature than that of the young page, whose delight was full of youthful wildness.

Never shall I forget the scene that took place the moment after the two Greeks had entered my apartment with me and the door was closed. They embraced each other—they embraced me—and then Constantine, advancing towards the window, remained there for a few instants with his back towards us; and though he appeared to be gazing forth upon the passengers in the street, yet I knew full well that he saw nothing there—that all his attention was turned inward—and that he was silently breathing a prayer to heaven for having so marvellously made his innocence manifest, and for having at the same time given him wealth and honours. It did really seem as if Providence had purposely steeped that young man for a while in

the bitterest misfortunes, that his soul might be purified and chastened in respect to whatsoever was corrupt—and that at the very instant he issued forth from the ordeal, the means should be provided to furnish the opportunity for a perseverance in a good and virtuous course.

But, as I have said, we were now all seated together: the first gush of feelings was over—we were becoming comparatively calm; and we could speak deliberately upon all those topics which naturally entered into our discourse.

"I assured you, my friends," I said, "that there was no one in the whole world who with greater delight would hail the manifestation of your innocence. But you must not blame me if for a time I believed you guilty. You were wronged by such a belief—but heaven knows I wronged you not lightly nor wilfully!—there was a weight of terrific circumstantial evidence pressing upon my mind, and crushing all the endeavours that I made to believe you innocent."

"We do not blame you, my dear Wilmot," replied the Count of Monte d'Oro—for such is the title by which Constantine must now be recognised. "There was certainly a moment on the occasion of your first visit to the prison, when I felt hurt and indignant, because the soul chafes terribly when conscious of its own innocence, and when one's dearest friend brands it with guilt. But it was impossible that you could entertain any other opinion!"

"Yes, impossible!" added the young page. "But I can assure you, Mr. Wilmot, that Constantine never spoke of you otherwise than in terms of the sincerest friendship."

"This is true!" exclaimed the Count of Monte d'Oro; "and henceforth, Wilmot, nothing can prevent us from being friends. You yourself have given me so many, many proofs of the sincerest friendship, that never, never can I forget them! Even when a prisoner on board my vessel—your own soul chafing there as mine has lately chafed within the circuit of prison-walls—you could not hate me: your generous nature inspired you with other feelings. And when the Athene was about to engage the Tyrol, you promised with so much kindness of manner to fulfil the mission I confided to you in case I should fall in the conflict! The other day you abandoned to me the whole of that treasure which we found in the ruins: and what other human being than yourself would have resisted the golden temptation? And then too, though believing me to be a foul assassin, you nevertheless undertook—nay, more, you volunteered to do that towards my Leonora which was intended to smoothe down the bitterness alike of her own anguish and of mine;—and you came to me in prison. I cannot help summing up all these things, Wilmot, though you are listening to me with impatience: but I repeat that they are proofs of friendship which never, never can be forgotten!"

"Never, never!" murmured the young page: and he surveyed me with looks expressive of the deepest gratitude.

"And now, my dear Wilmot," resumed the Count of Monte d'Oro, "you will no longer object to take your share of that wealth which you indeed were the means of discovering: for it was your perseverance on the occasion which fathomed

the mystery of the buried treasure. Apart from that wealth, I am now rich: vast estates have become mine; and as it will be my pleasure as well as my duty to bring into cultivation those tracts which have suffered from neglect, the revenues which the estates at present produce are as nothing in comparison with what they may be made to yield. And remember, Wilmot, I can now without the least hesitation dispose of that treasure which lies buried amongst the ruins of St. Bartholomew: the whole estate is mine, as well as the domain of Monte d'Oro!"

I suffered the Count to finish his speech, although from the very first my mind was made up how to act.

"Let us not argue the point," I said; "for I am resolute. I will receive none of that wealth; and once more let me remind you of my own prospects. If all should go well with me a few months hence, I shall become enriched by other means: but if I be doomed to disappointment in all that concerns my fond<sup>est</sup> hopes, I shall fly to some remote quarter of the world—there to carve out a career and a fortune for myself, or else to perish in obscurity. My dear friend, let us not say another syllable on the subject of that treasure: there must be no argument now to interfere with the joy which we are experiencing."

At this moment one of the hotel domestics entered the room, and said to me, "Your instructions have been obeyed, sir. There is no regular packet leaving Ajaccio this day for Civita Vecchia: but a sailing-vessel has been hired for your use—and in another hour it will be ready to depart."

The message which was just delivered to me, must be explained. I need hardly say that the moment Constantine's innocence was made apparent, and he likewise found himself the legally acknowledged heir to a proud title and to vast estates, he was naturally most anxious to convey all these tidings to the charming and well-beloved Leonora. But he himself dared not proceed to Civita Vecchia; for having previously been there as the captain of a corsair-ship, he had rendered himself liable to the Roman laws of piracy. I therefore immediately volunteered to hasten off to Civita Vecchia; and the proposal was gratefully accepted. But after the scene in the Palace of Justice the enthusiastic crowd had gathered round the young Greeks; and as I had then joined them, there was an utter impossibility for us to repair to the harbour in order to inquire concerning the immediate means of transport to Civita Vecchia. We had therefore entered a hackney-coach, and had proceeded straight to my hotel—whence I despatched a waiter to make the arrangements for my voyage to the Roman seaport. The result was the message which had just been delivered to me.

Scarcely had the waiter left the room when he re-appeared with the intimation that several persons wished to proffer their congratulations to the Count of Monte d'Oro and his youthful companion. They were admitted; and they proved to be the worthy farmer and his son, the old peasant woman who had given such important information, the Chief of the Secret Police at Paria, and the governor of the prison in which the Greeks had been confined. The Count received them with the most friendly urbanity; and to the old woman he

promised such a reward as should place herself and her husband in the most comfortable circumstances for the remainder of their days. When the party had retired, I intimated to my Greek friends that it was now time I should make my preparations for proceeding to the harbour to embark: but I suggested that they should not accompany me to the port, as they would only find themselves the objects of disagreeable curiosity, if appearing publicly in the town so soon after the incidents at the Palace of Justice, which had produced such great excitement. Scarcely had I thus spoken, when the door was flung open—a wild cry of delight thrilled through the room—and the next instant Leonora was embraced in the arms of the Count of Monte d'Oro. Almost at the same instant my hands were fervidly grasped by those of the worthy Judge: but several minutes elapsed ere a syllable was spoken in that room:—the hearts of all present were too full—Oh! much too full for the utterance of what was felt.

But I may here explain how it came to pass that the Judge and his niece thus found their way to Ajaccio. As Signor Portici had foretold, and as the reader is already aware, Leonora would not for a single instant believe that Constantine could have been guilty of murder. That he was the captain of a gallant pirate ship and of a bold lawless band, she had indeed heard; and this she could not disbelieve—but that he was a cold-blooded assassin—no, impossible! Though gifted with a rare intelligence, and almost the last being in the world to shut her mind against the pressure of overwhelming evidence—yet in this instance she had a holy faith, a sublime confidence, which soared high above the intricate weavings of earthly circumstances; and though she could not perhaps comprehend how it was possible for Constantine to be innocent in the face of that evidence, still she deemed it far more impossible that he could be guilty. This belief of his innocence no doubt assumed in her mind the nature and aspect of a religion which believes without asking why it believes, and whose faith being established on a rock, cannot be shaken by even the most portentous waves which the ocean of infidelity may hurl against it. No—never for a moment did Leonora's faith waver in that respect: and the mere fact of finding her betrothed husband accused of so heinous a crime of which she felt certain he was innocent, threw completely into the shade that other fact—namely, that he had been a pirate-chief—and made his antecedents in this respect dwindle down into comparative insignificance.

Her uncle, on the other hand, was as morally convinced as I had been of Constantine's guilt: but from considerate motives he held his peace in Leonora's presence. He respected her feelings—he deeply commiserated her position—he sought not to argue against that sublime belief which had become with her a religion and a worship. At length she was so far restored to health, that she insisted upon repairing to Ajaccio. There was a strong presentiment in her mind that heaven by its own inscrutable means would work out the manifestation of Constantine's innocence; and she was determined to be there to congratulate him on the result. But it on the other hand, as she had said to her uncle, her fond fervent hopes should be doomed to disappointment—if that trustfulness

which she was reposing in heaven should prove to be the vain and baseless enthusiasm of her own exalted feelings—if, in a word, the very worst should happen and Constantine should be condemned to perish ignominiously on the scaffold,—then, in this case, was it equally her duty to be present on the spot that she might solace, strengthen, and encourage him in his last moments. Signor Portici, devotedly attached to his niece—profoundly compassionating her—tenderly anxious to consult her feelings in every respect—and admiring the noble magnanimity which made her cling to that sublime belief in which he himself however could not share,—yielded to her solicitations and embarked with her for Ajaccio. They arrived in the port to hear, the instant they landed, of the wildly wondrous and affectingly romantic turn which the whole proceedings had taken—how the innocence of the two Greeks was so unmistakably made manifest—how the real assassin of the unfortunate Leone was discovered—and how Constantine, as if to be rewarded by heaven for all he had gone through, suddenly found himself the acknowledged heir to vast domains and the possessor of a proud patrician title.

The history of the female sex affords many grand and affecting illustrations of the devotion with which woman's heart clings, through all circumstances, to the object of its love—how it hopes on in despair's despite—and how firmly it believes in all that to the rest of the world seems stamped with the wildest impossibility. There are instances of this kind which have become immortalized in the pages of history, and have formed the subjects of oral traditions and of written tales: but there are countless others which never having obtained such wide publicity, are confined to the knowledge of that limited circle in the midst of which they occurred. But of all these examples, whether thus loudly and widely bruted by the trumpet of fame, or whether shadowed in comparative obscurity, none perhaps was ever more noble or more affecting than that which belongs to the episode I am engaged in narrating. And, Oh! can it not be well understood that if there were a moment when more than at any other Constantine had reason to rejoice in the possession of wide domains and of a lordly title,—it was now that, thanks to this sudden showering of riches upon his head and this placing of a coronet upon his brow, he could bid Leonora become the sharer of his prosperity, and could whisperingly remind her that the antecedents of the pirate-chief would be all absorbed and forgotten amidst the lustre pertaining to the new name that he now bore.

The remainder of that day constituted one of the happiest periods of my life. Never shall I forget how bright were the looks of all as we sate together round the dinner-table in the evening! The young page took his place with us—but as a page now no longer: it was as the bosom friend of him whom he had loved as a brother, and to whom he had remained so faithfully attached. When I looked at Leonora, and beheld the colour again upon her cheeks, and joy dancing in her beautiful eyes, and smiles playing upon her lips, I thought to myself that love and happiness were after all the best physicians—and that they in a few hours had accomplished those healing effects for both body and mind, which the appliances of

the medical art for as many months could not have achieved.

The Judge and his niece were accompanied by a valet and a lady's-maid; and a separate suite of apartments was taken for the accommodation of their party in the hotel. Leonora was already the bride of Constantine by virtue of the ceremony which had taken place some weeks back at the Judge's villa: but, from a variety of motives of delicacy, it was determined that the nuptials should be again solemnized, and that the Count of Monte d'Oro should receive Leonora as his Countess at the altar of a church in Ajaccio. In the evening I had some private conversation with the Judge. We discussed all the circumstances pertaining to Constantine's antecedents as a pirate-chief. There were four States to the laws of which he had indubitably rendered himself amenable. These were his own native Greece—Rome—Tuscany—and Austria. With regard to Greece, we flattered ourselves that if a full statement of all the circumstances which had originally driven Constantine to piracy, were addressed to King Otho, a full pardon might possibly be obtained; so that no one should ever thenceforth be enabled to hurl a taunt at the Count of Monte d'Oro for being an outcast from his native land. In respect to the Roman States, I hoped that the Judge's influence joined to my interest with the Counts of Tivoli and Avellino, and with the Cardinal Antonio Gravina, would be effective in obtaining from the Vatican a pardon similar to that which we expected to procure from Athens. In the same sense would the interest of the Count of Livorno, if exerted at my instigation, avail with the Tuscan Court—and, through the Tuscan Court, with the Austrian Government likewise. All these hopes seemed the more easy of realization, inasmuch as the Count of Monte d'Oro was no longer an obscure or humble individual, but had become a man of wealth and rank, possessing the rights and able to claim the protection of the powerful French Government.

On the day following the memorable incidents which I have been describing, Signor Castelli called at the hotel with all the legal documents confirming Constantine in the possession of his heritage, and which were duly signed and sealed by the Special Commission. Now, therefore, my Greek friend was the undisputed owner of the domain of Monte d'Oro and the patrimony of St. Bartholomew. He at once instructed Signor Castelli to grant leases on most favourable terms to those who had hitherto held any portion of the lands as the possessors thereof, but who now by altered circumstances had become the young Count's tenants. To the husband of the peasant-woman whose evidence had given that wondrous turn to the criminal proceedings, a liberal sum of money was presented: the cottage and the little garden were likewise assigned to the old couple as their freehold. I may here as well observe that until the instant Castelli had acquainted Constantine, at the Palace of Justice, with the fact that he was the lineal representative of the family of Monte d'Oro, the young Greek had never dreamt of the existence of such a connexion,—his progenitors having from various circumstances lost sight of their origin.

Immediately after Castelli's visit to the hotel, I and the young page set off in a post-chaise for the ruins of St. Bartholomew, in order to take

possession of the concealed treasure in the name of the Count of Monte d'Oro. On arriving in the vicinage of our destination, we proceeded to the farmer's house, where we distributed numerous handsome presents with which Constantine had charged us for this special purpose. We then unfolded to the family the object of our visit to that part of the country. As the reader may suppose, the tale of the hidden treasure having been discovered by us, was listened to with the wildest astonishment: but the farmer and his sons readily volunteered their assistance. To the ruins we proceeded. We carefully avoided the fatal spot where the unfortunate Leone had met his death: none of us experienced a morbid curiosity to cast eyes on the scene where a fellow-creature's blood had been spilt. On reaching the place where the treasure was concealed, I was at once satisfied that everything remained just as I had left it some weeks previous—and that the precautions taken at the time to conceal the subterranean, had proved fully effective. We removed the fragments of masonry which we had piled over the opening—we descended into the vault; and this time I had no difficulty in speedily opening the coffer. All the treasure was there: the farmer and his sons contemplated it with the utmost curiosity—but not with greediness. The gold, the silver, and the valuables were removed to the cart which the farmer had brought with him for the purpose; and in this vehicle they were transferred to the homestead, where they were safely packed in the post-chaise. In addition to the gifts sent by Constantine, and those which I had on a former occasion despatched on my own account from Ajaccio, I thought it right and proper to add some further recompense now; and I accordingly distributed a few of the jewels which formed part of the treasure, amongst the members of the worthy family. They were highly delighted to possess these memorials of the long-hidden treasure of the monks of St. Bartholomew; and when the young page and myself took our departure we left grateful hearts behind us.

It was not however until the ensuing morning, immediately after breakfast, that we left the farm-homestead: for I did not choose to travel by night with so costly a treasure in my charge. I had also taken the precaution to be well armed: but we performed the journey without the slightest molestation, and without any incident worthy of note. According to previous agreement with the young Count of Monte d'Oro, I ordered the post-chaise to drive straight to the principal banker's at Ajaccio; and there the treasure was deposited.

A piece of intelligence of a somewhat shocking character awaited me on my return to the Corsican capital; Signor Turano had put an end to his existence during the previous night, by opening a vein in his arm and suffering himself to bleed to death. It appeared that when the turnkey entered the cell in the morning, he found the wretched criminal still warm; and the surgeon who was immediately fetched, declared that life had not been many minutes extinct. Thus perished a man who, with all the personal and mental advantages which he possessed, might have proved a veritable ornament to society—but who, by dissipated habits acquired in his early youth, and through want of that real moral stamina which can alone preserve men against the blandishments

of temptation, had become a fallen object; and having for years led the life of an adventurer, he at length played the bold but desperate stroke which on the one hand might at once enrich and ennoble him, or on the other hand plunge him into a felons' gaol and brand him with dishonour.

A few days afterwards the nuptials of the Count of Monte d'Oro and the judge's niece were solemnized at Ajaccio. The wedding was a private one,—Signor Castelli, his wife, and his two daughters being the only persons present in addition to our own party. Never did the young Greek look handsomer: never did Leonora seem more exquisitely beautiful. Her hair, dark as night, clustered in luxuriant masses beneath the bridal veil: the superb symmetry of her form was set off to the utmost advantage by the dress of virgin white. The old Judge looked a dozen years younger than he actually was—so joyous were the feelings which inspired his soul. A splendid mansion, ready furnished, and situated in the vicinage of Ajaccio, had been hired as the temporary abode of the newly-married pair: for it was the resolve of the Count of Monte d'Oro to build a large and suitable house on the site of the ruins of his ancestral castle—so that he and his lovely Countess might in due time dwell upon their own domain and in the midst of their tenantry, that the possession of riches might in their hands become the means of working out extensive benefits to their fellow-creatures.

Almost immediately after their establishment in their temporary home in the vicinage of Ajaccio, the Count and Countess of Monte d'Oro were visited by all the principal families of the city and neighbourhood,—the very Judges who had presided in the criminal court on the occasion of the trial, setting the example. The attention thus shown the young couple, conveyed its moral lesson. It was to the effect that whatsoever might have been the antecedents of Constantine, it was considered that an adequate atonement had been made by the horrible ordeal through which he had been dragged; and moreover that for the sake of the charming and devoted creature who was now his wife, his misdeeds might be over-looked. In the visits of those families there was likewise a homage paid to the irreproachable character of Signor Portici himself; and thus, when once the leading personages of the district had paid their respects from the best of motives to the Count and Countess of Monte d'Oro, all the other families of that class who are ever ready to worship the rising star of an individual's prosperity and riches, flocked to the mansion.

The page—no longer a page however, as I have before said—but regarded by Constantine as a brother—took up his abode at that mansion; as did likewise the venerable judge. The latter resigned his situation at Civita Vecchia,—retiring on a handsome pension: for he had made up his mind to pass the remainder of his days with his dearly beloved niece and her husband. I remained a week in Corsica after the marriage; and then I took my temporary leave,—promising to return thither again shortly. It now wanted but about a fortnight to the trial of Mr. Lanover and Mr. Dorchester at Florence; and according to the desire expressed in the Count of Livorno's letter to

me, I resolved to be present on the occasion. I took an affectionate leave of my friends at the mansion near Ajaccio; and embarked once more in the steamer for Civita Vecchia.

## CHAPTER CXL.

### ANOTHER BRIDAL AND ANOTHER TRIAL.

My object was to proceed first of all to Rome: for I had plenty of time on my hands previous to the trial taking place at Florence. On arriving at Civita Vecchia, I inquired at the hotel relative to my friends Mr. Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats, whom I had left there about a month previously; and I learned that they had taken their departure a few days after I myself left:—but it was not exactly remembered in which direction they had proceeded, though it was believed for Tuscany. I therefore thought that it was very probable I might soon fall in with them again. I only remained for a few hours at Civita Vecchia—where I had undertaken to make the necessary arrangements for the sale of the judge's villa, furniture, and carriage—and whence I was to despatch to Ajaccio the servants who had remained at that dwelling. Having given the requisite instructions to a man of business relative to the property, and having fulfilled my promises in respect to the servants, I proceeded to Rome.

Reaching the Eternal City late in the evening, I postponed until the following morning the visits that I had to pay. My first call was then made at the Tivoli Palace,—where I found the Count, the Viscount, Antonia, and Avellino. The welcome I experienced was a most cordial one; and the happy Francesco Avellino speedily took an opportunity of whispering to me aside that I had just arrived at Rome in time, for that the morrow was to behold him the husband of his much-loved Antonia. I now narrated everything that had occurred to me since my departure from Rome about six weeks back: for there was no necessity to observe the slightest secrecy in respect to the affairs of Constantine, inasmuch as they had already been bruited abroad by the thousand tongues of rumour, and the intelligence had been waited upon the wings of the newspaper-press. But still all those circumstances which so closely and intimately regarded myself, had escaped such publicity; and I now detailed them to the ears of my friends. They listened with the deepest interest; and when I had concluded, the Count of Tivoli said with a benignant smile, "In whatsoever matters you are mixed up, my dear Wilmot—dark and ominous though they may appear for a time—yet does your presence assuredly lead to a happy change of fortune."

I comprehended that this was a kind, well-meant, and delicate allusion to the happiness which I had been instrumental in diffusing throughout the Count de Tivoli's own domestic circle; and I was pleased to find that the part I had played in this respect continued to be thus appreciated.

I invoked the aid of the Count of Tivoli towards procuring the pardon of the Papal Court on behalf of the Count of Monte d'Oro, for having brough

his pirate-vessel to a Roman seaport. As no act of piracy had been perpetrated towards any vessels sailing under the Roman flag, the Count gave me every hope that the object I sought would be easy of attainment. I had brought letters from Signor Portici to the Roman Minister of Justice; and these I proceeded to deliver—the Count undertaking to introduce me to the Cardinal holding that Ministerial office. I was well received by that high functionary, who promised to use his interest with the Chief Minister on the point which I had at heart. The Count then took me to the Cardinal Gravina's palace; and here again I was warmly received.

On the following day the bridal took place. Does the reader recollect the description which I gave of the Lady Antonia's beauty? If not, let him refer to the concluding passage of the hundred and second chapter of these memoirs. I may now say of her ladyship as I so recently said of the Judge's niece, that never did she seem so exquisitely beautiful as when arrayed in the bridal garb. And the bridegroom—the happy Francesco Avellino—how handsome did he look on this occasion! The wedding was a sumptuous one,—many of the highest and richest families of Rome being present. Cardinal Gravina himself bestowed the nuptial benediction: and a numerous crowd, gathered in front of the church, saluted the young Count and Countess of Avellino with enthusiastic acclamations. A grand banquet took place at the Tivoli palace; and I may without vanity assert that amongst the numerous guests assembled, I was very far from being the least considered.

A few days after this happy event the Count of Tivoli placed in my hands a sealed packet containing a full and complete pardon for whatsoever offences Constantine Durazzo Kanaris, now Count of Monte d'Oro, might at any time have committed against the Roman laws which specially regarded piracy. I expressed my gratitude to the Count for the interest he had taken in the matter; and having now nothing more to keep me at Rome, I took leave of all my friends there, and set out in a post-chaise for Florence. As I passed by the convent from which Antonia had escaped, all the circumstances connected with that young lady were vividly brought back to my mind. I looked back with satisfaction on the part that I had performed towards her; for I had now left her happy at Rome, allied to him who had so long been the object of her devoted love. Within the space of a fortnight I had been present at two bridal:—not many months more were to elapse ere I was to return to Heseline Hall and know my own fate! Would that return be soon after followed by a bridal? Oh! if it were—if it were, what happiness!—but if otherwise, what misery! Yet very far was I from yielding to despondency on the point—much less to despair. There was but one incident in my life on which I could not retrospect with satisfaction; it was my youthful—I may even call it my *boyish* amour with the unfortunate Lady Calanthe. But if this by any means—through the malignity, perhaps, of Mr. Lanover—should come to the knowledge of Sir Matthew Heseline, would he not be generous enough to make allowances? and would he not be grateful enough to place it out of the question when he should come to learn the services I had





been instrumental in rendering him, at the banditti's tower in the Apennines and more recently still at Leghorn?

It was very late in the evening when I reached Florence; and my first inquiry was in respect to the trial of Lanover and Dorchester. I learnt that it would take place in a few days; and I was glad that I had thus arrived so timely. I had taken up my quarters at an hotel; for notwithstanding the invitation conveyed in the Count of Livorno's letter to me that I should make his house my home, I did not think it proper to proceed thither in the first instance—especially as I had reached Florence so late. But soon after breakfast on the following morning, I proceeded to the splendid mansion where the Count of Livorno and his lovely Countess dwelt; and I experienced the most cordial welcome. They both chided me for not coming at once to their house; and the Count sent off a domestic to the hotel to fetch

my luggage. I learnt that Lord and Lady Ringwold had gone to England a few weeks previously; and on inquiring after the Count's elder brother, the Marquis of Cassano, I was told that being again in high favour with his uncle the Grand Duke, the Marquis was now filling the post of Tuscan Envoy at Vienna.

I had to repeat to the Count and Countess of Livorno that narrative of my adventures which I had so recently given to my friends in Rome. The Count readily undertook to procure from the Tuscan government a document similar to that which I had obtained from the Papal Court: he moreover wrote off that very day to his brother the Marquis at Vienna, explaining all the circumstances of the Count of Monte d'Oro's case, and desiring the favourable intervention of the Marquis on his behalf with the Austrian Government. I should observe that the affair of the Tyrol was by no means generally known—the impression being

that the Austrian frigate had foundered at sea. Thus there was nothing on that point to prejudice the Austrian Ministry's implacability against the Count of Monte d'Oro.

I now endeavoured to ascertain what was the department of Lanover in his prison; and in furtherance of this object the Count of Livorno introduced me to the governor of the gaol where the humpback and Mr. Dorchester were confined. I learnt that they were in separate cells; for Lanover was most bitter against Dorchester for having, as he termed it, so pusillanimously confessed every thing at Leghorn. Dorchester, it appeared, was completely spirit-spoken: but Lanover maintained a dogged, brutal sullenness. I further ascertained that Lanover had written several letters since his incarceration; and notes had been taken of the addresses to which they were sent. On looking in the book where the memoranda were entered, I perceived that the letters were to the Earl of Eccleston, to Sir Matthew Heseltine, to Mrs. Lanover, and to Miss Annabel Bentinck. The one to the nobleman was directed to the mansion in London: those to the Baronet and the ladies were addressed to Heseltine Hall. These letters had been suffered to go to the post without the inspection of their contents by the prison authorities, inasmuch as black though the case was against Lanover, he could nevertheless only be treated as a criminal when the process of a trial should have duly stamped him as such. That Lanover had at length betrayed my secret relative to Lady Calanthe, in the letters he had penned to the Baronet and the ladies, I was indeed apprehensive—unless, on the other hand, he had boons to ask, and with the exquisite cunning of his disposition had abstained from anything disagreeable or savouring of vindictiveness, so that by the appearance of a grovelling contrition, he might gain whatsoever point he was striving after.

The day of the trial dawned; and I accompanied the Count of Livorno to the tribunal. The Court where the Judges sate was crowded to excess: for everything that regarded the late formidable band of Marco Uberti was still fraught with a deep interest for the Florentines. I sate next to the Count on a cushioned bench placed at the end of the platform where the Judges themselves sate; and I quickly became the object of general interest, as the rumour was whispered that I was the young Englishman who had assisted the Count of Livorno in taking Marco Uberti prisoner and breaking up his formidable horde.

Shortly after the Judges had taken their seats a side-door opened; and amidst a guard of sbirri, or police-officers, the two prisoners were led in. Dorchester was fearfully changed: he looked a miserable, broken-spirited, wretched old man: his form, that he was wont to maintain erect, was bowed; and he seemed to quail shudderingly from the contact of his hideous hunchbacked companion. As for Lanover,—he was evidently careworn; but his looks otherwise denoted that mood of dogged sullenness which the governor of the gaol had described. They were both placed in the dock,—the sbirri standing behind them.

One glance only did Dorchester fling around the Court:—for a single moment his looks encountered mine—and then his eyes were bent down. It was different with Lanover. Armed with a

brazen effrontery, his hideous countenance scowled with a dark malignity as he deliberately surveyed the audience, the barristers, the jury, and the Judges; and then his horrible stare was fixed with a still more bitter malignity upon myself. I calmly averted my looks: I did not choose to gaze in a manner which should have the appearance of triumphing over the wretch in his downfall: neither did I choose him to think that I was abashed, cowed, or overawed by the fiend-like glaring of his eyes. When next I glanced towards him, he was taking out a sheet of paper and a pencil from his pocket, as if intent on making memoranda of the proceedings. But of what avail could this be for a man who was already doomed by the blackness of the case to be brought against him? It was however one of the means by which he doubtless endeavoured to assert the bold hardihood and cool effrontery of his character.

The Clerk of the Court read the indictment,—which was to the effect that the two prisoners were charged with having been at different times in correspondence with Marco Uberti's outlawed band. This accusation was general in its application to them both. A separate count proceeded to charge Dorchester with having, on his own confession made at Leghorn, been in direct league with the banditti; and having for this purpose occupied a cave amidst the Apennines, that under the pretence of warning travellers away from the vicinage of Marco Uberti's tower, he might all the more readily urge them into the snare. Another count in the indictment charged Lanover with having by bribes, or promises of bribes, induced Marco Uberti and his gang to carry off and imprison in their tower a certain English family travelling at the time through the Tuscan States, provided with Tuscan passports, and therefore under the protection of the Tuscan laws. There was a second indictment against the prisoners; and this was also read. It accused them of having devised means of inveigling and beguiling the English family aforesaid into the hands of a gang of Greek pirates. A special count in this indictment charged Lanover with having himself been on board the pirate-ship, which, under false colours, or with a false semblance, had anchored within the range of the Tuscan waters; that this offence came under the operation of the laws against pirates; and that therefore the said Lanover stood accused of piracy in addition to the other offences charged against him. The indictment concluded by reciting the various statutes under which the prisoners were brought to trial, and the penalties which they enacted in case of guilt being proven. These penalties were capital, though a certain discretionary power was left to the judge:—Lanover and Dorchester were therefore, according to the tenour of the indictments, about to take their trial for life or death!

When these terrible announcements were made, Dorchester sank down, crushed and overpowered upon a seat: while Lanover flung upon him a look of the most malignant hatred, scorn, and contempt. Indeed it appeared for an instant as if the miscreant were about to spring at the unfortunate wretch, and thus wreak his diabolic fury upon him: but a police-officer instantaneously placed himself between the two, to protect the miserable

Dorchester from any sudden access of frenzied rage which might seize upon the humpback.

The two indictments having been read, the presiding Judge proceeded to what is termed the interrogatory—that is to say, the questioning of the prisoners. He first bade Dorchester stand up and reply to the queries which he was about to put to him: but observing that the unhappy man was completely crushed by a sense of his awful position, the Judge intimated that he might keep his seat while undergoing the interrogatory.

“Prisoner,” said the Judge, “do you confirm or recant the confession which you made to the police-authorities at Leghorn?”

“I confirm everything, may it please your Excellency,” replied Dorchester, in a tremulous voice. “I throw myself on the mercy of the Court; and if it be possible that my miserable life can be spared, even on the condition of immurement in a gaol for the rest of my days—”

“We will take all this into consideration presently,” interrupted the presiding Judge. “You confess that you were recently an accomplice of Marco Uberti and his band?”

“I confess it,” answered Dorchester, still in a voice which quivered and quaked with the influence of his miserable feelings.

“And you have also been employed,” continued the Judge, “by your fellow-prisoner Lanover for the purpose of inveigling a certain English family of distinction on board a pirate-ship?”

“This is also true, your Excellency,” responded Dorchester: “every syllable of the confession which I made at Leghorn is perfectly correct!”

I should observe that this portion of the interrogatory took place in Italian, with which language Dorchester was acquainted. But when Lanover was about to be questioned, the proceedings were conducted through the medium of an interpreter, and now took place in French. First of all everything that Dorchester had just said was explained to Lanover; and terribly ferocious was the look which he flung upon his accomplice.

“You have heard,” said the Judge through the medium of the interpreter, “that your fellow-prisoner has just admitted. Do you choose to say anything on your own part before the witnesses are summoned?”

Lanover maintained a dogged silence; and the Judge directed the case to proceed in the regular manner.

I was now requested to stand up and be sworn: I was not asked to enter the witness-box;—it was sufficient that I appeared in the companionship of the Grand Duke’s nephew the Count of Livorno, in order to ensure the most distinguished treatment on the part of the tribunal. I did not choose to look towards Lanover:—as I have already said, I would not be thought to triumph over him: but at the same time I had a duty to perform—and I was resolved to accomplish it firmly and faithfully. I was asked, through the means of an interpreter, what information I could give in respect to Lanover’s connection with Marco Uberti and his band. I at once proceeded to narrate all the details of my adventure with Mr. Lanover at Pistoja a few months back,—how I had examined his pocket-book—how I had found Philippo’s letter revealing the whole plot in respect to Sir Matthew Heselstine and the ladies—and how I had likewise

found the bank-bill which was intended for the payment of Marco Uberti’s services. I then explained how I repaired to the tower—gave the bank-bill to Marco Uberti—and effected the deliverance of Sir Matthew Heselstine and his family by representing myself as Lanover’s agent specially employed for that purpose. When I sat down, the Count of Livorno rose and said that he was enabled to corroborate the greater portion of the statement which I had just made. I now happened to glance towards Lanover; and I saw that his countenance was white as a sheet,—looking hideously ghastly with the effect of the feelings of rage and despair that were tumultuously agitating in his breast. But still he spoke not a word.

A police-officer from Leghorn was the next witness examined; and he stated the particulars of the arrest of the two prisoners in that town,—also corroborating the details of Dorchester’s confession as he had heard it at the time from this individual’s lips. The letter written in cipher, was produced: Dorchester explained to the Court the key to the unravelling of the epistle; and its contents were accordingly read aloud by the clerk of the tribunal.

The Judge now asked Dorchester for what reason Mr. Lanover had endeavoured to inveigle Sir Matthew Heselstine and the ladies on board the pirate-vessel: but the Count of Livorno ventured to suggest that it would be inexpedient to enter into an inquiry involving the private affairs of the Heselstine family. The Judge did not therefore persevere in putting the question. No counsel appeared for Dorchester,—the course which he had adopted being tantamount to what in England would be called “pleading guilty:” but a barrister rose to address the Court on behalf of Lanover.

This learned gentleman said that having been from the very first acquainted with the fact of Dorchester’s confession, he had seen the inutility of endeavouring to struggle against the weight of evidence which would be brought forward in respect to his own client—that therefore he had abstained from cross-examining any of the witnesses—he had contented himself by recommending Lanover to remain completely silent and leave the case in his (the counsel’s) hands. It must be admitted (continued the learned gentleman) that the two main facts of the indictment were fully proven: namely, that Lanover had employed Marco Uberti’s agency for the arrest and temporary imprisonment of the Heselstine family—and that he also sought to inveigle that same family on board a pirate-ship. But he (the learned counsel) trusted the Court would view these matters in their true light. According to the rigid application of the law, any one who connived with banditti—no matter for what purpose—was held to be himself a bandit; and he who held correspondence with pirates, was himself a pirate. That was the law: but in a moral point of view the present case was quite different. Lanover had not connived with banditti for the sake of plunder: nor had he connived with pirates for the sake of piracy. He (the counsel) would admit, that Lanover’s object was no doubt coercion and intimidation in respect to Sir Matthew Heselstine, and with regard to family matters. Such conduct could not be defended, much less justified: but

still it was widely distinct from purposes of direct robbery and plunder. Bad as Lanover's behaviour had been, he (the learned counsel) must nevertheless declare that it fell far short of those grave and deeply serious offences for the punishment of which the laws against brigands and pirates were instituted. He therefore begged to invoke the mercy of the Court on Lanover's behalf,—suggesting that society would be sufficiently vindicated and justice would be satisfied if a lengthened period of imprisonment were substituted for that extreme penalty which, if the law were strictly adhered to, might certainly be pronounced.

The above is a mere outline of the barrister's speech,—which the Count of Livorno whisperingly assured me at the time was a most able and ingenious one. I glanced towards Lanover when his legal advocate sat down; and I saw that the dogged rigidity of his countenance had somewhat relaxed, and there was a slight gleam of hope upon it. It was tolerably evident that he had not anticipated the nature of the defence to be raised on his behalf—or rather, I should say, the extenuating plea that was put forward: but the interpreter who stood near him, had hastily whispered a description of the prominent features of that address.

The Judge now summed up to the jury. He complimented the counsel for the defence on the line of argument which he had chosen. As for himself, he was perfectly willing to admit that it was far from being altogether unreasonable: but at the same time it had not the full force with which the learned gentleman's eloquence had sought to invest it.

"Let it be granted," continued the Judge, "that Lanover connived not with the banditti for the actual purpose of plundering the persons of that English family: let it equally be granted that he joined not the pirates for the sake of piracy on the high seas. But still we have the fact before us that he employed the agency of outlaws and corsairs for the most unjustifiable purpose. Without seeking to sift family matters, it is incontrovertible that Lanover sought to intimidate and coerce Sir Matthew Heselstine into doing something which of his own free will he would not do. Suppose, for instance, it was to obtain money—or a signature to some particular deed—or a renunciation of some right. It would be difficult for any just man to persuade himself that either one of these objects was not as nefarious as the direct purpose of vulgar robbery. It is so in a legal point; and in a moral point of view the shade of guilt is well-nigh as deep. In stating these as my opinions, I am directing your attention, gentlemen of the jury, to the legal view of the case principally: but I am likewise affording you my sentiments on the moral view. You have first to consider whether the prisoner Lanover be guilty of the charges preferred against him; and if so, whether there be extenuating circumstances. In respect to the other prisoner, you have only to return a verdict in accordance with the confession which he himself has made."

The jury did not deliberate many minutes before their decision was given. It was a written one, and to the following effect:—

"We unanimously find the prisoner Lanover guilty of the charges preferred against him: but

while considering that he merits a severe punishment, we recommend him to the mercy of the Court for the reasons specified by his advocate in the speech delivered on his behalf. We pronounce the prisoner Dorchester guilty."

When this verdict had been read by the Clerk of the Court, and duly interpreted to Lanover, a profound silence reigned throughout the justice-hall for upwards of a minute. Brief though the interval were, it was one of awful solemnity. The Judges then deliberated together: they spoke in whispers—and their decision was speedily arrived at.

"Prisoners," said the Chief Judge, "I am about to pronounce upon you the sentence of this tribunal. First with regard to you, Dorchester,—the Court has taken into consideration the confession you have made, the contrition which you have exhibited during your imprisonment, and the fact that by giving your evidence you have materially aided to bring your fellow-prisoner's guilt home to him in respect to his connexion with the pirates. Therefore the extreme penalty of the law will not be inflicted upon you: but inasmuch as your acknowledged complicity with the brigands of the Apennines merits a severe chastisement, the sentence of the Court is that you be exposed in the pillory for the space of two hours, and in some public place—and that you be imprisoned in some gaol or fortress for the remainder of your life."

The wretched man gave a deep hollow groan, and fell down senseless in the dock. Thence he was conveyed forth by the sbirri; and when the sensation attendant on this painful incident had subsided, the Judge proceeded to pass sentence on the humpback.

"Prisoner," said the high functionary, "the Court has taken into consideration the merciful recommendation of the jury; and therefore the extreme penalty of the law will be spared in your case likewise. Your guilt however demands a severe chastisement. It was not only an aged gentleman whom you consigned to the power of banditti, and whom you also sought to inveigle into the hands of pirates—but your nefarious machinations likewise included two inoffensive ladies. The sentence of the Court is that you be condemned to a period of twenty years' imprisonment in a gaol or fortress; and may you during your captivity repent of your misdeeds, and by your demeanour testify this contrition."

One of the sbirri immediately laid his hand on Lanover's shoulder, and hastened him out of the dock. Thus terminated the trial; and I need hardly add that from motives of humanity I was rejoiced that the extreme penalty of the law had not been put in force against the prisoners.

## CHAPTER CXLI.

### THE PRISON.

THE proceedings of the tribunal had lasted until about three o'clock in the afternoon: the Count of Livorno was now compelled to repair to the palace to pay his respects to his uncle the Grand Duke; and I roamed by myself through the streets of Florence, pondering on all that had occurred. I

was walking along in a profound reverie, when I suddenly heard my name mentioned; and the next instant my hand was being violently shaken by Mr. Saltcoats. Then the worthy Dominie likewise shook me by the hand; and producing his snuff-box, he said, "It's just a pinch of Scotch: but I don't know whether you like tobacco in this form—I remember that you were always accustomed to smoke a clay pipe."

"What nonsense, Dominie!" ejaculated Saltcoats: "I'll be bound our friend Wilmot never smoked a clay pipe in his life."

"It's just that," said Mr. Clackmannan: "but Dickon Owlhead did; and therefore it comes to precisely the same thing. And that reminds me of what the Widow Glenbucket one day told me when she was in the middle of frying sausages——"

"My dear Wilmot," interrupted Saltcoats, "where have you been since we parted from you at Civita Vecchia?—where are you staying now?—and what has brought you to Florence? We ourselves have only just arrived—scarcely an hour ago. We come from Leghorn. So we just had a little bit of lunch—a couple of chickens and some ham, a meat pie, a tart, and a few other nick-nacks; and now we are out for a stroll to get an appetite for dinner."

"It's just that," said the Dominie: "but if the cook at the hotel can't make us a dish of collops, I shall go back to Scotland to-morrow; and assuredly on my arrival in Edinburgh I should take my old lodgings at the Widow Glenbucket's——only that she's dead, poor creature! But this reminds me of a little anecdote—it was one day that the Widow was sousing a pig's cheek——"

"Come, you will dine with us, Wilmot," cried Saltcoats, taking me by the arm. "By the bye, we have just heard something about two Englishmen who have been tried to-day——Why, what makes you start so?"

At the instant Mr. Saltcoats put this rapidly ejaculated question, I caught sight of a personage hastening along on the opposite side of the street, and whom I instantaneously recognised—although he evidently did not observe me; for he was apparently pre-occupied with his own thoughts. This was the Earl of Eccleston.

"That gentleman—or rather nobleman," I said,—"I know him—I should like to speak to him——"

"To be sure—Lord Eccleston!" said Saltcoats. "He is staying at the same hotel as we are: his carriage entered the court-yard almost at the very same instant as the postchaise which brought me and the Dominie."

"It's just that," said the gentleman last alluded to. "But I wish, my dear Saltcoats, you would not call me the Dominie. I am Mr. Clackmannan of Clackmannanachnish——and if my predecessor considered himself honoured by being called the Great Donkey of Clackmannan——"

"Why you must inherit all his titles, to be sure!" vociferated Saltcoats; "and a jolly old fellow you are into the bargain! Wilmot is going to dine with us; and if he wants to speak to Lord Eccleston, he can take the opportunity this evening."

"Did you observe," I asked, "whether his lordship was travelling alone?"

"He had a lady with him," replied Saltcoats,—"and a very handsome one too."

"It's just that," said the Dominie; "and it puts me in mind of what I thought to myself one day when I saw my friend Baillie Owlhead walking with his grandmother up the Gallowgate. The good old lady was ninety-seven——"

"But as handsome, think you, as the Countess of Eccleston?" asked Saltcoats, with a merry laugh: "for I have no doubt it *was* the Countess whom we saw just now in the carriage with his lordship. But come, Wilmot—you agree to dine with us?"

I was determined to have some conversation, if possible, with the Earl of Eccleston; and I thought it would be more expedient to have the appearance of meeting him by accident than to visit him with an avowed and settled purpose. I therefore accepted the invitation just given: but I requested my friends to walk with me as far as the Count of Livorno's mansion, so that I might leave word there that I was going to pass the evening at a particular hotel. We walked about till six o'clock—every word that was spoken by Saltcoats and myself reminding the Dominie of something he had said, thought, or done at some former period of his life. I asked my friends how long they purposed to pursue their continental tour?—and I judged from their responses that they would soon return to Scotland: for Mr. Saltcoats at once assured me that he was longing for a Finnan haddock, while the Dominie had a corresponding yearning for a dish of collops, neither of which luxuries could they procure for love or money at any hotel in Italy. In respect to the Earl of Eccleston, I felt tolerably well assured in my own mind that he had come to Florence on behalf of Mr. Lanover; and I experienced a sort of suspenseful awe, as if I were already touching upon the threshold of some important revelations which were to clear up the mysteries of the past.

At six o'clock we repaired to the hotel at which my two Scotch friends had established their quarters; and notwithstanding the copious luncheon of chicken, ham, pie, tart, and "other nick-nacks," of which they had partaken so very recently,—notwithstanding, too, their enormous discontent at the absence of Finnan haddocks and collops from all Italian bills of fare,—Mr. Saltcoats and the Dominie did ample justice to the dinner that was served up. We dined in the coffee-room: but there was little chance, I fancied, of seeing Lord Eccleston there; and I began to puzzle my brains for the means of throwing myself in his way without having the appearance of doing so.

I had left word at the Count of Livorno's mansion where I intended to dine; and scarcely had the dessert been placed upon the table, when one of the Count's domestics entered the coffee-room, bearing a note addressed to myself. The footman whisperingly intimated to me that on account of the quarter from which it had come, the Count fancied it might be of importance, and he had therefore sent it on to me at once. The lacquey withdrew: I begged my friends to excuse me while I read the letter; and on opening it, I beheld the signature of Mr. Dorchester. The writing indicated that tremulous indeed was the hand which had guided the pen; and the contents of the note, though brief, were appealingly earnest. They besought me to favour the writer with a visit on

the following day, as he wished to speak to me on some matter of importance. The note indicated the hours at which visitors might call according to the prison-regulations; and I need hardly add that my mind was at once made up to comply with the request. But what could its object be?—and was it the initiative step towards the development of those mysteries that for some years past had seemed to hover like dark clouds around my destiny?

I have said that Dorchester's note was delivered to me shortly after the dessert was placed upon the table at which I was dining with my two Scotch friends. Not many minutes had elapsed after the reception of the note, when the door of the coffee-room opened, and the Earl of Eccleston made his appearance. He held a letter in his hand—which he gave to the waiter with some instructions; and I comprehended Italian just sufficiently to understand that his lordship was desiring the waiter to despatch the note to its destination by the hotel-porter. The Earl was about to quit the room, when happening to glance towards our table, he recognised me. I perceived in an instant that a certain degree of trouble seized upon him, and that an expression of annoyance passed over his countenance: but quickly regaining his self-possession, he hastened to accost me.

"Mr. Wilmot," he said, taking me by the hand, "I did not expect to find you here. I presume that you are still travelling about for your recreation?"

"Not exactly, my lord," I answered: and then fixing a significant look upon him, I added in a lower tone, "You can scarcely be at a loss to conjecture the business which on this occasion has brought me to Florence."

"Yes—I have heard that your evidence was needed—But would you favour me with a few minutes' private conversation?" asked the Earl, thus suddenly breaking off from the former portion of his speech.

"Certainly," I responded: and then turning to my two friends, I begged them to excuse me for a brief space.

The Earl of Eccleston did not conduct me to the private suite of apartments which he and the Countess occupied in the hotel: but he desired the waiter to show us to a room where we might converse together for a few minutes. The waiter at once complied; and again was I alone with the Earl of Eccleston. He now appeared to be at first seized with embarrassment, as if scarcely knowing how to open the private conversation which he desired to have with me; and I was resolved to wait for whatsoever he might have to say. He looked at me anxiously, as if seeking to judge by my looks whether there were anything more in my mind than he had as yet fathomed: but I maintained a demeanour which was outwardly calm, though inwardly I was much agitated by a variety of conflicting thoughts.

"Are you staying at this hotel?" inquired his lordship, at length breaking a silence which was too awkward for him to maintain any longer.

"No," I answered: "I am staying with the Count and Countess of Livorno—and I am here, at this hotel, simply as the guest of those gentlemen in whose company your lordship saw me."

"And do you purpose to make a long sojourn in Florence?" inquired the Earl.

"It depends upon circumstances, my lord," I rejoined.

"And those circumstances?" he said, with a perceptible anxiety in his tone.

"I cannot have the slightest hesitation," I answered, "in explaining what they are. I have received a note—But here it is."

I produced Dorchester's letter: the Earl snatched it from my hand with some degree of avidity; and as he hastily ran his eyes over its contents, I saw that the colour left his cheeks, and for a few instants he became exceedingly pale. Then he seemed to reflect profoundly for nearly a minute; and at length he said, "Is there nothing else which will detain you in Florence?"

"Although I might, as a matter of course, dispute your authority thus to question me," I said,—"especially as you asked me to accompany you hither for the purpose of private conversation, which I might naturally suppose was to assume the shape of communications to be made, and not of questions to be put—yet will I again satisfy your curiosity. It is my purpose, Lord Eccleston, to see Mr. Dorchester to-morrow—and also to see Mr. Lanover to-morrow. For something tells me that the time is now at hand when all those mysteries which have hitherto enveloped me, and which have shrouded the principal circumstances of my life, are to be cleared up. I have already ascertained, beyond the possibility of doubt, that Lanover is *not* my uncle, as he so often represented himself to be—"

"Not your uncle, Joseph?"—and the Earl literally staggered as if stricken by a blow, when I made this announcement.

"I mean what I say, my lord," I answered firmly and emphatically: "Lanover is *not* my uncle! And I thank God for it. I should shudder indeed at the idea of being so closely connected with such a wretch. But it becomes all the more interesting to me to discover wherefore he ever played the part of a relative towards me—at whose instigation and for what purpose he made his appearance in the first instance at Delmar Manor to assert a kinsman's claim upon me and to exercise a kinsman's authority over me. Situated as he now is, I can scarcely suppose that he has any longer an interest in concealing from my knowledge those circumstances which led him to perform the part of a tyrant and a persecutor under the guise of a kinsman—Unless indeed, my lord," I added, bending upon the Earl a look of mingled significancy and earnest appeal, "you yourself consider that the time has now come when your hand may lift the veil? For that you *can* lift it, there is no more doubt in my own mind than that I am now standing in your presence."

The Earl listened to me with a sort of troubled and anxious attention: once or twice his lips wavered and he made a gesture as if about to interrupt me—but he did not. When I had finished speaking, he slowly turned aside—bent over the mantel-piece, with his hand supporting his head—and remained for two or three minutes thus buried in profound thought. At length he raised his countenance; and looking towards me, said in a low tone, "How learnt you the intelligence which you have just imparted?—I mean, what reason have you for supposing that Lanover is not really your uncle?"



"I have the best possible reason, my lord," I answered. "From his own lips was the intelligence wanted to my ear."

"What! Lanover told you that?" gasped forth the Earl: and I could perceive that the words were almost unconsciously spoken, though uttered with such an effort; and I was also satisfied that the nobleman was endeavouring with all his might to prevent the betrayal of whatsoever feelings were agitating in his breast.

"I will deal frankly with you, my lord," I said, "in the hope that my conduct may be rewarded with an equal candour. Mr. Lanover knew not at the time that I overheard the assurance which he gave to another, to the effect that I was not his nephew: and therefore it is indisputably stamped with truth."

"Well, Mr. Wilmot," said the Earl, suddenly drawing himself up, as if having totally regained his firmness and his self-possession, "these are, after all, matters which do not regard me—"

"Which do not regard you?" I exclaimed. "Then wherefore seek to penetrate into my affairs?—why bring me hither for a private interview?—why express a wish for a few minutes' conversation? In a word, my lord, why hear with emotion—I may even say with vexation and annoyance—my knowledge of the fact that Lanover is not my uncle? Think you not that there are many, many circumstances which dwell in my memory, and which often and often make me think of your lordship—"

"I will see you to-morrow, Wilmot," interrupted the Earl hastily: "I will see you to-morrow—I will write to you at the Count of Livorno's to make an appointment."

Thus speaking, the Earl of Eccleston wrung my hand and hastened from the apartment. I remained there for a few minutes to reflect upon what had passed, and then I slowly retraced my way to the coffee-room, where I had left Mr. Saltcoats and Dominic Clackmannan. I did not however remain much longer in their company: Saltcoats noticed that I was pensive and pre-occupied—I pleaded indisposition, and took my leave early of my two Scotch friends. As I have already said, I firmly believed that I was standing upon the threshold of incidents gravely important to myself: I was therefore full of suspense—I felt nervous and restless. I roamed about the streets of Florence after quitting the hotel: I had no inclination to return immediately to the Count's mansion and seek my bed-chamber. Many and varied were the reflections and conjectures now passing through my mind; and especially did I wonder what course the Earl intended to adopt on the morrow at the promised interview—or whether he would even keep his word by sending for me at all?

It was now about half-past ten o'clock at night; more than an hour had elapsed since I left the hotel—I began to feel wearied, and therefore resolved to return to the hospitable habitation where I had taken up my quarters. I had wandered about in such a thoughtful mood as scarcely to notice the direction I had been taking; and I now found that my wayward steps had unconsciously brought me into the very street where the prison was situated, in which Lanover and Dorchester were confined. I passed by the gloomy wall,

—thinking to myself that wretched indeed must be the mental condition of those two men who by their crimes had thus brought themselves to such pain and ignominy. I was slowly turning the angle of the building,—when the gate, which was in the street I was now entering, closed with a heavy din, and some one hastily descended the flight of steps. This person sped past me without taking the slightest notice of my presence there: but I instantaneously recognised the Earl of Eccleston.

I was riveted to the spot with astonishment, and likewise with a suddenly smiting suspicion that his visit to that goal had not been in accordance with my own hopes or interests. It was not till he had disappeared from my view in the obscurity of the long narrow street, that I thought of hastening after him: but I did not succeed in overtaking his lordship. I was almost inclined to return to the hotel and demand another interview with him: but I reflected that the hour was too late for such a purpose;—and I therefore took my way to the Count of Livorno's mansion.

On the following day, at eleven in the forenoon, I rang the bell of the prison entrance, and requested to see Mr. Dorchester. The turnkey who answered my summons, at once conducted me to a cell, in which I found the object of my visit. He had no irons on his limbs—but he wore a felon's garb; and he was lying outside his pallet, with the appearance of one whose physical constitution was destroyed, and who was weighed down by a sense of languor and weakness that would soon merge into complete prostration, to be speedily followed by death. On the other hand, his look was far less dejected and careworn than when I had seen him in the court on the previous day: it struck me too that there was not merely the gleam of some sinister hope in his eyes, but even a flickering-up of that effrontery which he had at one time so well known how to assume. The instant I thus beheld him, the misgiving already existing in my mind was strengthened; and I thought to myself, "The Earl has been with you—and he has succeeded in changing, or at least weakening the purpose you entertained towards me when you penned that note!"

Raising himself up to a sitting posture, Dorchester motioned towards a bench; and as I sat down, I was still more completely convinced by his manner that the sense of contrition had been weakened in his mind. Without however betraying any feeling of disappointment, I said, "You wrote to me, Mr. Dorchester—and I am come according to your request."

"I was very nervous and excited yesterday, Mr. Wilmot," he answered distantly and coldly; "and I took a step which was inconsiderate enough, and which in reality could lead to no consequences—"

"Mr. Dorchester," I interrupted him, "you will pardon me for saying that this is equivocation or prevarication on your part. Surely, surely your experiences have been bitter enough to prevent you from recurring to a system of duplicity and deception which can no longer benefit you. That you have something important to communicate, I feel convinced!"

"Be convinced therefore, if you will!" said the prisoner curtly: "but at all events, if I ever had

anything of importance to tell you, I have changed my mind."

"Do you not reflect, Mr. Dorchester," I asked, in a voice of gentle remonstrance—for I was determined not to afford him an excuse for coming to an open rupture with me after the letter he had written,—“do you not reflect that more than once you have wrought me the most serious mischief—at Oldham—in Paris—and last of all in the Apennines—on which occasion my life narrowly escaped becoming sacrificed to the vindictive rage of the handitti?—and do you not owe me some little atonement? I am not here to reproach you: on the contrary, I will cheerfully forgive you all the past—and perhaps, too, I may even become the means of serving you. To-morrow,” I added, “you will be exposed under the most ignominious circumstances to the public gaze: but if you will only now fulfil the promise contained in your letter, I pledge myself to exert all the interest I may possess with the Count of Livorno to obtain from the Minister of the Interior a remission of that part of the sentence.”

Scarcely had I thus spoken, when the door opened, and the governor of the prison made his appearance. Dorchester stood up with an air of the most servile respect; and the governor bowed to me—for I had been previously introduced to him by the Count of Livorno, immediately after my arrival in Florence, when I sought information relative to the demeanour observed by the humpback and Dorchester in the prison. The governor, addressing himself to Dorchester, spoke for a few minutes in an impressive tone; and as it was in the Italian language, I could not altogether comprehend what he said: but I recognised the phrases of “British Envoy,” “Tuscan Minister of the Interior,” and “Earl of Eccleston.” I saw likewise that the communication afforded Dorchester the utmost satisfaction: for the tears ran down his cheeks as he took the governor’s hand and pressed it between both his own for nearly a minute:—though whether all this display of feeling were wholly genuine or whether it were partially assumed with the revival of the man’s powers of dissimulation, I was really at a loss to tell. The governor again bowed to me, and quitted the vaulted chamber—closing the massive door behind him.

“Your offer of exerting your interest with the Count of Livorno on my behalf,” said Mr. Dorchester, “is now unnecessary: but at the same time I must thank you for it. That portion of my sentence to which you just now alluded, has been remitted, through intercessions made in another quarter.”

“As a fellow-countryman—yes, and as a fellow-creature,” I said, “I do unfeignedly rejoice that you have been spared this terrific ignominy, great though your misdeeds have been! You must not for an instant suppose that I came hither to triumph over you in your downfall:—you have never found me vindictive. But I beseech you, Mr. Dorchester, to carry out the intention which you entertained when writing that billet last evening—”

“I really do not wish to show any bad feeling towards you, Mr. Wilmot,” said Dorchester: “on the contrary—perhaps your proffered forgiveness of the past is not quite so indifferent to me as you

may fancy. But I have nothing more to say. Whatsoever feeling or motive instigated me in penning the note last evening, has now ceased to exist; and I beseech you not to persist in arguing with me—for I am very, very ill.”

“And it is because this illness of your’s should warn you, Mr. Dorchester,” I said, “that death cannot be very far distant,—it is for this very reason, I repeat, that you ought to endeavour to make your peace fully with whomsoever you may at any time have injured. And your own conscience must tell you that on more occasions than one, you have seriously injured me!”

“Mr. Wilmot, I beg that this interview may terminate,” said the prisoner, resuming a cold and distant demeanour.

“Let it be so,” I answered, rising from my seat. “But think not that I am for an instant deceived as to the motives which have rendered you thus changeful. Last evening you fancied that you could selfishly utilise the interest which I possess with the Count of Livorno, in order to procure a remission of a part of your sentence; and therefore you wrote that billet which in an appealing strain sought an interview with me. But afterwards the Earl of Eccleston visited you—Ah! you see that I am no stranger to what has occurred?—and his lordship promised to do all that you required on condition that you should place the seal of silence upon your lips in respect to the promise held out in your note to me. The Earl has kept his word: he has lost no time—he must have worked late last night, or very early this morning, in order to render the interest of the British Envoy at Florence available with the Tuscan Minister of the Interior. And now that you no longer need my services, you refuse to make me the only atonement which it is in your power to afford for the past! I see that my frankness with the Earl of Eccleston amounted to an indiscretion: I was foolish—I was acting against my own interests: but the evil is done! It is in the duplicities, the perfidies, and the machinations of the evil-disposed that honest-minded men gain their principal experiences.”

Having thus spoken, I waited a few moments to see if Mr. Dorchester would vouchsafe me any reply, and likewise in the lingering hope that he might be moved by the speech I had addressed to him: but he said not a syllable—and I issued from the cell. In the corridor I met the turnkey lounging about: he bolted the door of Dorchester’s dungeon—and I asked if I might be permitted an interview with Mr. Lanover.

“Not without the consent of the prisoner himself, sir,” answered the official.

“Then have the goodness to see Mr. Lanover upon the subject,” I said, slipping a fee into the turnkey’s hand.

He forthwith entered a cell in the same passage, and almost immediately reappeared with the intimation that Mr. Lanover would see me. I was thereupon ushered into the humpback’s presence. He rose up from the chair in which he was seated at the time: he looked at me for an instant in a way which made it impossible to conjecture what was passing in his mind or how he felt towards me. I experienced the hope that the sense of his position had mitigated, if not altogether subdued the vindictive ferocity of his disposition—until I



perceived a dark sardonic look stealing over his countenance; and as it expanded into a savage grin, he said in the harshest tones of his jarring voice, "Ah! you are come to know whether I have kept your secret relative to Lady Calanthe—or whether I have betrayed it? Well then, I have betrayed it. Sir Matthew, Mrs. Lanover, and Annabel know all about it."

"I am not without the hope, Mr. Lanover," I said, though in a trembling voice, for I had just experienced a severe shock, "that my good conduct in all other respects will compensate for that one fault of mine. I am sorry to perceive that adversity has not rendered you more merciful towards others. Still vindictive!—unhappy man! what harm have I ever done you that you would persecute me even unto the death?"

"What harm have you done me?" vociferated Lanover, his horrible countenance livid with rage: "what harm have you *not* done me? Have you

not thwarted my plans? have you not constantly crossed my path? Did you do nothing to me at Pistoja? and was it not your ill-omened presence which by some means or another—though I know not rightly how—led to the failure of that last project of mine in respect to the Athene? Durazzo was either a traitor or a fool—but perhaps both: for he was all the while far too intimate with you. And now, have you not appeared against me in a court of justice? have you not given evidence against me? did you not help towards my condemnation? And then, with a cool impudence you ask what harm you ever did *me*?"

"Will you reflect, Mr. Lanover," I said, "that if I have seemed to cross your path, it was not I who placed myself in it. It was you who first sought me under the false pretext of being my kinsman——"

"Ah! I know that by some means or another

you have discovered that it *was* a pretext:”—and the wretched humpback grinned at me fiercely, chuckling horribly with his harsh jarring voice at the same time.

“Then Lord Eccleston has been with *you* likewise!” I exclaimed; “and the work of deceit and treachery is still progressing, though that of persecution be over. Mr. Lanover, I *did* venture to entertain the slight hope that I should find you in a better condition of mind. When you think of all you have ever meditated or done towards me, you ought to shrink from the idea of your own astounding wickedness; and you ought also to be amazed at the immensity of the forbearance which I have shown you. How many times could I have invoked the aid of the English law against you!”

“Yes, yes,” grinned and chuckled the humpback; “but you loved Annabel, and for her sake you would not injure me. Do you think I was not secure and safe in that conviction? As for Lady Calanthe’s secret, I kept it as long as it suited my purpose, according to the compact which you and I made some time ago: but the other day, when I cared no longer what Sir Matthew Hezelatine might know in respect to myself, I wrote and told him all your villainy in that quarter.”

It was with a fiendish pleasure that Mr. Lanover reiterated this painful intelligence—for he saw that I winced under it: but I exclaimed, “Villany, sir? No! I was not guilty of villany! My conduct was the indiscretion—the weakness—the folly of an inexperienced boy. But enough of that! I regret that even for an instant I should have sought to justify myself at the expense of the deceased young lady’s memory.”

“No doubt you are full of consideration in that respect!” interjected Lanover ironically.

“I know not what advantage Lord Eccleston can have promised you,” I said, “in keeping the veil of mystery hung over the past: but if ever there were a moment, Mr. Lanover, when you ought to relent towards me, it is now that you yourself experience the pressure of misfortune’s iron hand, and that your conscience ought to seek to soothe itself by performing an act of justice. I know that there are mysteries enveloping me,—mysteries which, judging by all the circumstances of my life and by the conduct of others towards me, must be of a very extraordinary character. That the day will sooner or later come—”

“Never, Joseph—never!” ejaculated Lanover with the most violent emphasis and the fiercest expression of countenance. “If you could show me ten thousand advantages in telling you all I know, I would not do it—because I hate you! For I tell you that you have crossed my path; and since the day I first knew you all my schemes have failed—all my projects have gone wrong. I am doomed to imprisonment: but you shall be doomed to the continued ignorance of that which you would give half your life to know. Tell me,” he demanded abruptly, “can you procure me a full pardon? have you interest sufficient with the Count of Livorno to obtain that decree which shall throw open these prison-doors?”

“Not for worlds would I make such an unreasonable request!” I exclaimed. “What! for my own selfish purposes should I seek to obtain the reversal of a sentence which has vindicated the

outraged laws of an entire community? Besides, the Count of Livorno himself—”

“You need say no more,” interrupted Lanover, with a scornful bitterness of tone and look. “I full well anticipated what your answer would be. Think you therefore that while you refuse to do that which lies in your power, I will breathe a single syllable which shall be a revelation to your ears? Not so. Depart—leave me! You find me in a dungeon: but my spirit is still the same as you ever knew it. And now begone!”

I waited not for another bidding to leave the wretch’s presence, but I at once issued forth from his cell, as much grieved and pained at the thought that human nature could display so much rancorous wickedness, as at my own utter failure in making upon the man any impression conducive to my views or interests. He had said that though immured in a dungeon, his spirit was still the same. How true indeed were his words! He was a toad sealed up in a block of marble, existing upon its own venom!

I walked away from the prison exceedingly dejected. My worst apprehensions were in every sense confirmed. From Dorchester I had gleaned nothing: Lanover was less than ever inclined to draw aside the veil that covered the origin and sources, the reason and the motives of all those circumstances which so intimately concerned me; and the only intelligence I had obtained was the confirmation of my fear that my secret in respect to Lady Calanthe was betrayed. As I walked through the streets, pondering gloomily upon all these things, I experienced so sudden an indisposition that I felt the necessity of entering a shop for the purpose of sitting down. It happened to be a chymist’s establishment which I thus entered; and bethinking myself of the necessity for some excuse, I asked for a bottle of soda-water. There was a vertigo in my brain—a dizziness in my vision; and I did not therefore immediately recognise a personage whom the chymist was serving with something at the counter. But on hearing my voice, he turned abruptly round; and then I perceived that accident had thus thrown me in the way of the Earl of Eccleston.

This circumstance quickly recalled me to myself: but the Earl had taken my hand before I had an instant to deliberate how I should behave towards him. Then he snatched up—with exceeding precipitation, methought—a small bottle which the chymist had that moment wrapped in paper; and he consigned it to his waistcoat-pocket. I asked for the soda-water; and the beverage refreshed me considerably. The Earl remained in the shop: I saw that he meant to wait until I left in order to have some conversation with me; and I was anxious to know what explanation he would give of his conduct in respect to Mr. Dorchester.

We issued from the shop, and walked along the street together,—a dead silence existing between us for the first few minutes. At length the Earl said, “You looked exceedingly ill and pale and careworn when you entered the shop.”

“And no wonder, my lord,” I answered: “for I again find you enacting the part of a persecutor,—that part which both yourself and the Countess vowed should never more be performed towards me!”

“What mean you, Joseph?” inquired the Earl,

endeavouring to assume a look of mingled deprecation and astonishment.

"I mean, my lord," I responded, "that you took a most unworthy—I might even say a dishonourable and ungentlemanlike advantage of my confidence towards you last evening. In all frankness did I show you Dorchester's letter: I certainly hoped to inspire you with an equal degree of candour towards myself;—but I have been grossly deceived. You have bribed Dorchester to silence: you have purposely put a seal upon his lips in respect to whatsoever he originally intend to reveal to my ears."

"Mr. Wilmot," said the Earl of Eccleston, drawing himself up haughtily, "you allow your tongue to use towards me a license which is far from seemly or proper. Hitherto supposing you to labour under a species of unfortunate monomaniac belief in respect to myself, I have dealt kindly and considerately by you—"

"My lord," I exclaimed vehemently, "this is intolerable! Do I not know that you have persecuted me—?"

"Hush, Wilmot! we must not collect a crowd around us. Remember," added the Earl, in a tone of gentle entreaty, "that this is the open street. But let us turn into this avenue: we can converse more at our ease. I beg you to listen to me. You have just accused me of having acted ungenerously and dishonourably towards you in respect to the man Dorchester: but a few words of explanation will prove how unreasonable you are. Many years ago, when Dorchester was living in respectability and affluence at Enfield, I was well acquainted with him. You yourself have seen, by that leaf in the register which you were some time ago the means of placing in my hand, that he pronounced the nuptial benediction on myself and her who is now Countess of Eccleston. Think you therefore that I had not some little regard for the unfortunate man—?"

"Regard for the man who, having for some reason or another tampered with the sanctity of a parish register, all but destroyed the proof of this very marriage of your's for the solemnization of which you appear to entertain such grateful feelings towards him! My lord, this is a piece of sophistry—"

"No, Wilmot," interrupted the Earl, "it may be an eccentricity on my part: but it is nothing more. In the presence of the dreadful calamities which that man Dorchester has brought down upon himself, I could afford to look lightly over the past in respect to the register: I pitied him—I exerted my interest on his behalf—"

"But not before your lordship had read the letter I showed you last night! And how is it," I continued, "that it was only since you saw Dorchester that his mind altered in respect to myself? You must take me for an idiot, my lord, if you suppose that I do not discern in this silence the result of a compact between himself and you. You saved him from the pillory—and he keeps a secret which in some way affects yourself. Ah! I could say much harsher things to you, my lord, were it not that—"

But I stopped short: for there was a tumult of ineffable feelings swelling within my soul, and I began to weep like a child. Fortunately the Earl had conducted me into a secluded spot, so that no one

but himself beheld the agony of affliction which thus seized upon me. He seemed frightened and concerned: he besought me to calm myself: he took my hand—and pressing it, he said, "Do not give way to these foolish hallucinations, whatever they are, which seem to be uppermost in your brain. If you want a friend who will do anything for you—"

"I do not want a *friend*, my lord," I answered in a low and tremulous voice: "but I want to discover—you know what I mean—the secret of my birth!"

"Mr. Wilmot," said the Earl, all in an instant becoming coldly formal and haughtily reserved again, "I cannot possibly submit to become the object of these hallucinations. It is going much too far!"

"Yet rest assured, my lord," I exclaimed, "the mystery shall be one day cleared up! It is a frightful state of incertitude—it is a horrible condition of suspense; and there are times when I think of it that it almost drives me mad. My happiness depends on the elucidation of this mystery; and my life has not been so criminal that heaven will perpetuate my present misery! Therefore, my lord, despite all your strugglings and batlings to sustain this mystery—despite all your unwearied efforts to build up a wall of adamant at the entrance of the maze into which I seek to penetrate, the moment of your defeat must come—and at an instant when perhaps both you and I least expect it, heaven will furnish me the clue whereby to enter into that labyrinth!"

With these words I hurried away; and without once reverting my looks, I sped onward until I reached the Count of Livorno's mansion.

## CHAPTER CXLII.

### THE VILLA IN THE VALE OF ARNO.

ON arriving at the mansion, I inquired for the Count, and learnt that he was in his library. Thither I repaired—and explained to him everything that had taken place. He was already well acquainted with every incident of my life; and I had no secrets of whatsoever kind from him. Indeed, as I have said on a former occasion, we had discussed intimately and deliberately, when I was last in Florence, all the mysteries which appeared to hang around my destiny. He now reflected for several minutes; and I felt assured that whatsoever counsel he might give me would be salutary and good.

"My dear young friend," he said, "I have no doubt that in respect to Sir Matthew Heseltine, he will pardon you your weakness with Lady Calanthe Dundas. Human nature is fallible—and chiefly so in the years of inexperienced youthfulness. The man who conditionally promised you his granddaughter, and sent you abroad that you might enlarge the sphere of your mind, is in his heart generous and magnanimous, and in his opinions liberal—no matter how great the eccentricities which may seem to encrust and even conceal his good qualities. Such a man is sure to make allowances on your behalf; and therefore let

not this subject be a source of trouble and annoyance unto your thoughts."

"I view the character of Sir Matthew Heselstine in exactly the same light," I said: "and therefore I am full of hope on the point to which your lordship has been alluding."

"Now, in respect to other topics, Wilmot," continued the Count of Livorno, "it seems to me perfectly clear that both Dorchester and Lanover—and especially the latter—have it in their power to make you important revelations. That these revelations may affect the Earl of Eccleston, is to be more than conjectured: it is to my mind beyond all possibility of doubt. Granting, therefore, that such is the case, the Earl of Eccleston will adopt every possible means to prevent Lanover and Dorchester from making those revelations. Perhaps he will promise them to intercede still farther in their behalf with the Tuscan authorities;—but to that I will put a stop. He is moreover certain to remain here upon the watch to prevent you from taking any effective steps to induce those men to give you the information you require. What if we were to meet stratagem with stratagem?—what if by your playing a certain part we might ascertain what *his* mode of action would be?"

"I will follow your lordship's counsel in all things," I answered. "What is it that you would suggest?"

"Pretend to take your departure from Florence," responded the Count of Livorno; "and conduct the proceeding in such a way that the Earl of Eccleston may fancy you have abandoned in despair any farther attempt to fathom these mysteries. When once he deems himself secure, he may leave Florence—he may cease to trouble himself with the affairs of Lanover and Dorchester. *Then* will be the time for us to act,—*then*, when we can impress the two criminals with the belief that they are deserted by their noble patron, we may probably succeed in turning their disappointment or their rage to your advantage. We may hold out hopes, which through my influence may be more or less fulfilled; and we shall have got rid of him who would frustrate our proceedings by his machinations."

I expressed my satisfaction at the plan thus proposed; and the Count of Livorno continued in the following manner:—

"There is a friend of mine who possesses a beautiful little villa in one of the most pleasing parts of the vale of Arno: it is about two miles from Florence, situated on the bank of the river and with delightful grounds attached. This friend of mine is absent in France: there are but two or three servants left in charge of the villa—and it is completely at my disposal. Will you take up your abode there for a few days or a few weeks, according as circumstances may require? The grounds are extensive enough to afford you ample space for exercise: they are surrounded by thick hedges of evergreens—and you may completely conceal yourself from the view of all passers-by. The fidelity of the domestics can be relied upon: it will be sufficient for me to intimate that it suits your purpose to pass a brief interval in retirement there, in order that my wishes shall be thoroughly respected. The Countess and I will visit you occasionally to while away an hour which would otherwise hang heavily upon your hands; and

everything shall be done to ensure your comfort. The sooner you depart the better, as the Earl of Eccleston will be doubtless watching your proceedings with the deepest anxiety in order that he may know how to shape his own course."

I accepted the Count of Livorno's proposition in every respect; and he at once commanded his horse to be gotten in readiness that he might ride across to the villa and give the domestics the necessary instructions. I then repaired to the hotel where Mr. Clackmannan and Mr. Salteats were staying, and where the Earl and Countess of Eccleston had likewise taken up their quarters. I found my two Scotch friends lounging together in the gateway, and contemplating two or three handsome equipages which were standing in front of the hotel establishment. Just at the very instant I joined the Dominie and Mr. Salteats, I caught a glimpse of the Earl coming from a side door in the gateway: but affecting not to perceive him, I said loud enough for him to overhear me, "My dear friends, I have come to bid you farewell: I leave Florence to-night or to-morrow morning."

"Leave Florence?" ejaculated Salteats. "Why, I thought you meant to sojourn here for at least another week or two."

"It's just that," said the Dominie, lazily taking a pinch of snuff; "he is sick of the Italian kitchen: he is longing for collops, and Finnan haddocks, and Preston Pans beer. And that puts me in mind——"

"Nonsense, Dominie!" interrupted Salteats: "Wilmot is not a Scotchman, and cares nothing for all the Preston Pans beer that ever was brewed. Something fresh has turned up——"

"It's just that," said the Dominie: "he has perhaps heard that the Widow Glenbucket is not really dead—and he is going off to see. And this reminds me——"

"You must forgive me, my friends," I said, "if I have not very long to remain with you now: but as it is most probable I shall leave Florence this evening——"

"And where are you going to?" inquired Salteats, quickly.

"I purpose to visit Vienna," was my answer: then, as a glance showed me that the Earl of Eccleston was loitering at a little distance without the appearance of listening to what was being said, though I felt assured that he was drinking in every word—I added, "My friend the Count of Livorno will give me letters of recommendation to his brother the Marquis of Cassano, who is the Tuscan Envoy at the Court of Vienna, and with whom I have already a slight acquaintance."

"Then if we come to Vienna," exclaimed Salteats, "we shall be sure to find you out."

"It's just that," said the Dominie: "we can send the bellman round—or we can put an advertisement in the paper——"

"Or what is better still," interjected Salteats, "we can inquire for our friend Wilmot at the Marquis of Cassano's. But why do you hurry off like this?"

"I am disgusted with Florence!" I exclaimed, as if speaking with passionate vehemence. "But, no!" I immediately added, "I ought not to say that—I will qualify my observation by stating that things have occurred here which render it unplea-



sant for me to remain in the Tuscan capital any longer."

"It's just that," said the Dominic: and lazily thrusting his hand into his pocket—as I thought to take out his snuff-box—he drew forth his purse. "I suppose, Wilmot," he continued, "you are afraid of a bailiff——"

"Well, and it's quite natural," exclaimed Saltcoats, "for a young gentleman to outrun the constable. Here, Dominic, let me manage this little business: I have a roll of bank-notes in my pocket-book that I don't know what to do with; and if Wilmot would only just take charge of them for a twelvemonth or so, he would be doing me a service and saving me a world of anxiety and trouble."

I was deeply affected by these instances of generosity on the part of my well-meaning, simple-minded friends: and I hastened to assure them that pecuniary difficulties formed no part of the motives which induced me to leave Florence.

"On the contrary," I continued, "I have an ample supply of ready money—far more than is requisite for my wants. The affairs to which I allude, are completely private. But my gratitude is not the less vivid towards you, my friends, for your kind intentions. And now farewell."

I wrung the hands of Dominic Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats, and hastened away,—having all the while affected to be unaware of the proximity of the Earl of Eccleston. I returned to the Count of Livorno's mansion, satisfied that accident had enabled me to impress the Earl with the belief that I was really about to leave Florence through disgust at recent circumstances. Shortly afterwards the Count of Livorno came back from his visit to the villa,—where, as he assured me, everything would be in readiness for my reception whenever I thought fit to shift my quarters thither. It was resolved that I should leave the Count's mansion in the evening in his own travelling-chariot, which might be kept at the villa until the following morning, so as to create the impression (in case the Earl should watch my movements) that it had taken me a considerable distance on my road from Florence.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when I took a temporary leave of the Count and Countess of Livorno, and ascended into the travelling-chariot. As the equipage rolled out of the courtyard of the Count's mansion, I caught a glimpse of a cloaked individual standing a little way off, on the opposite side of the street; and by his height my suspicion was confirmed that he was the Earl of Eccleston. The chariot continued its way through the city; and when the outskirts were reached and we entered upon the broad open road, I looked anxiously from the window to see if we were being followed by any other vehicle. But we were not; and I therefore concluded that the Earl had satisfied himself, by what he had seen, as to the reality of my departure. The villa was soon reached; and I was received with the utmost respect by the domestics who had charge of it.

It was not however until the following morning that I was enabled fully to appreciate the beauty of the spot on which my temporary home was situated. The villa itself was entirely a modern edifice, of light architecture, commodious, and elegantly furnished. It stood at a distance of about

a hundred yards from the bank of the Arno—an immense grass-plot, dotted with borders of flowers, sloping gradually down to the water's edge. There were delightful gardens and pleasure-grounds attached to the villa,—the little estate being bordered by a thick hedge of evergreens, as the Count of Livorno had represented it. There were numerous shady avenues, and gravel-walks embowered in verdure; so that it was easy to take plenty of exercise, and enjoy all the beauties of those grounds without being observed by any one passing on the outer side of the boundary-screen of foliage. The front of the villa, as the reader will understand, faced the Arno; and the grounds belonging to the edifice formed a complete parallelogram of an oblong form, about two hundred yards wide and a quarter of a mile in length. On the right hand of the grounds was another little estate, with a picturesque villa in the midst, but which was for the present untenanted. On the left hand there was a large cemetery.

Start not, reader! it was not a gloomy, mournful churchyard, with sombre yew-trees throwing their dark shade over the graves, nor with the tombstones gleaming white and ghastly through the dusk of evening or the starlit glory of night. It was a true Continental cemetery,—the resting-places of the dead being marked with iron crosses, some bronzed—some gilt. The scene was dotted with mausoleums embowered in verdure: the bright gravel walks meandered amongst parterres of flowers; and all the trees and shrubs appeared to indicate that the taste of the projector had selected those of the liveliest and tenderest green instead of those of deep and sombre hues. This cemetery undulated like a rolling landscape over an extent of about three square miles; and on the highest eminence in the midst a picturesque chapel was situated. I should observe that many, if not most of the crosses were hung with garlands of flowers and *immortelles*—those touching and grateful tributes which an affectionate piety pays in foreign countries to the loved and perished ones. The abodes of death were there devoid of gloom and horror: they were cheerful, interesting, and picturesque: they seemed almost emblematical of the brighter worlds to which the good had passed away from this one which is too oft so sad and dreary for the oppressed spirit of the living.

Yes—it was a cheerful scene; and therefore, when I found that the old housekeeper in charge of the villa had assigned to me a bed-chamber which had a bow-window on the left side of the edifice, and looking straight over the hedge towards the gently undulating landscapes of the cemetery, I felt by no means inclined to contradict her as she assured me that it was the most pleasant sleeping-apartment in the whole house: nor did I for a single instant hesitate to occupy it.

I found a good library at the villa,—containing many French and English works, besides Italian ones; and there was a small gallery of good paintings:—for what well-appointed house in Italy is without some masterpieces of the kind, or at least excellent copies of them? I did not therefore entertain any apprehension of being dull, through want of occupation, during my sojourn at the villa—unless indeed my own thoughts should lead to dejection in consequence of the very motive which had induced me to fix my temporary abode at that

place. But I resolved in my own mind to combat as much as possible against any such feelings, and to resign myself to the course of events as it might be ordained by Providence that my destiny should be fulfilled. There were beautiful conservatories in the garden,—some having superb vines which produced grapes of an incredible size—and others being filled with choice plants and rare exotics—for although the Italian climate is in general respects so favourable to such productions, yet may they also be forced, as in more northern countries, to a degree of perfection proportionately greater than if left in their natural state. The Arno meandered through the immense vale to which it gives its name, and which was everywhere dotted with buildings—chiefly neat villas and noble suburban residences—with the exception of the space occupied by the cemetery which I have already described.

In the evening of the second day after my arrival at the villa, the Count and Countess of Livorno arrived in their carriage to pass an hour with me; and I learnt two pieces of intelligence. The first was the Earl of Eccleston was still in Florence: the second was that Mr. Lanover had already begun to suffer very much from the effects of imprisonment, as he had been attacked with indisposition. I was much alarmed on hearing this latter announcement; for I thought that if Mr. Lanover should die without making any revelation of past mysteries, one great chance of my ever being enabled to fathom them would be annihilated. The Count of Livorno however informed me that from all he had learnt there was nothing serious to be apprehended from the humpback's illness; and his lordship promised to make frequent inquiries in a private and indirect manner relative to the progress of the malady. The Count and his amiable wife took their leave of me; and when they had departed, the villa for the first time appeared lonely even to gloominess.

On the following day I roamed for hours about the grounds,—being unable to settle my mind to the perusal of the books which at any other period, and under any other circumstances, I should have so greedily studied. I experienced a nervous restlessness,—that kind of feeling which appears to be a presentiment of something unpleasant about to happen. I felt assured that if circumstances rendered it expedient for me to remain for several weeks at my present abode, I should scarcely be enabled to make up my mind to such a necessity. That day passed: the Count of Livorno did not make his appearance; and I endeavoured to persuade myself that Lanover must be better, on the strength of the old adage “that no news are good news.”

I was just sitting down to breakfast on the following morning at nine o'clock, when I perceived the Count of Livorno on horseback entering the grounds. I was at once smitten with the certainty that something had happened; and I hastened forth to meet him. He came unattended by any domestic of his own; and therefore the man-servant belonging to the villa hastened out to take charge of the horse. The Count did not choose to say a word before that domestic,—not knowing how far the man might be acquainted with other languages besides his own; and, therefore, full of torturing suspense for me were the few

minutes that elapsed ere the Count and I were alone together in the breakfast-parlour. His lordship's face wore a grave expression; and my apprehension was consequently strengthened to the effect that something very serious had occurred. Indeed the conviction was deep in my mind that Lanover had ceased to exist.

“I see that you anticipate the intelligence that I have to impart,” said the Count of Livorno. “Lanover expired during the past night—or rather, at an early hour this morning.”

“Then all my hopes in that quarter are destroyed,” I said, with a profound mournfulness. “And yet perhaps,” I eagerly exclaimed, as a thought flashed in unto my brain, “he may have repented in his last moments—he may have made some confession, or left some papers behind him?”

“No, my dear Wilmot,” responded the Count of Livorno: “you cannot buoy yourself up with that hope. The governor of the prison, to whom I had given certain private instructions, came to me about an hour back, and afforded me full particulars of the humpback's illness and death. As I had previously told you, he was seized with indisposition the day before yesterday; and the prison-surgeon expressed his opinion that it was caused by the excitement of the trial and by the horror of a life-long incarceration. Yesterday Lanover appeared to get better; and from the intelligence which I received, I was very far from apprehending a fatal result. But it appears that in the middle of last night, the turnkey who was ordered to enter his cell frequently, found him so much worse that he hastened to summon the surgeon. Lanover sank rapidly—his last hours were spent in utter unconsciousness—and between four and five o'clock this morning he breathed his last.”

“Do you think, my dear Count,” I inquired in horror and haste, as a sudden recollection arose in my mind, “that the wretched man could have perished by suicide?”

“No—there is not the slightest ground for such a suspicion,” answered the Count of Livorno. “The surgeon declared that Lanover's death had arisen from natural causes which were easily explained. I know what was passing in your mind; but it does not appear that the Earl of Eccleston has revisited the prison since the evening when you observed him issuing thence.”

The reader will remember that when I had entered the chymist's shop after my interview with Dorchester and Lanover, I had again encountered the Earl of Eccleston; and on this occasion he was purchasing something which he hastily concealed about his person. I had mentioned the fact to the Count of Livorno, and it was to this circumstance that his lordship had just alluded.

“There is now scarcely any reason,” I said, in a tone of deep dejection, “for me to remain at this villa?”

“Does not Dorchester still live?” asked the Count: “and is he not evidently acquainted with something the revelation of which would be highly important to your interests? How know you to what extent he may have been initiated in Lanover's secrets?—or how can you estimate the value of any clue which Dorchester might afford you to the elucidation of all these mysteries in which the Earl of Eccleston is undoubtedly mixed up?”

"Then you would advise me to remain here for the present?" I said.

"Unquestionably, my young friend!" responded the Count of Livorno. "When Lanover's funeral is over, and when the Earl of Eccleston shall have left Florence, I will myself see Dorchester——"

"Be it as you say, my dear Count," I exclaimed; "I will follow your advice in all things. When and where will Lanover be interred?"

"All interments take place, in this country, within three days after death," replied the Count: "but in respect to criminals dying in prison I believe that the interval between death and burial is even shorter. The coincidence is strange——"

"What coincidence?" I asked.

"That you should have come to reside for a period close by the very cemetery to which will be consigned the remains of one who in his lifetime evidently exercised so strong an influence over many of the circumstances of your own career. The portion of the cemetery which joins the grounds belonging to the villa," continued the Count of Livorno, "is specially allotted for the interment of those who die in the hospitals or the prisons. The resting-places of the poor are not however confounded with those of the criminal: the two compartments are separated by a thick hedge of evergreens; and in that which is allotted to the unfortunate dead, you may perceive a few crosses which surviving relatives have by dint of hard saving been enabled to place there. But in the adjoining compartment no memorials of the dead are to be seen. *There* the criminal lie without a sign to mark their resting-place. Their names may survive in the country's annals of crime: but in that peaceful cemetery they are consigned to oblivion. It is in the criminal compartment of the vast burial-ground that the remains of Lanover will be interred; and there they will repose in a nameless grave."

"You spoke truly, my dear Count," I said, "when you observed that the coincidence was a singular one. From the window of my bed-chamber may I mark the interment of that man who has done me so much injury; and when I lie down to rest, there will only be an interval of two or three hundred yards between my downy couch and the cold damp bed in which the shrouded slumberer will be laid! Yes—the coincidence is strange!"

The Count of Livorno proceeded to observe that Lanover's death might probably produce upon the mind of Dorchester an influence favourable to the views which we entertained; and now that one hope was completely destroyed, I clutched at the other,—thus resigning myself to a continued sojourn at the villa. The Count promised to return and see me shortly; and he took his departure. Again, as on the preceding day, did I roam restlessly about the garden; and I could not shake off a feeling of deep dejection which Lanover's death had occasioned. Strange was it that by the force of circumstances I should thus have to deplore the demise of a man whom I could not possibly love—who had been my bitter enemy—and whom I should have cordially hated if my soul were capable of so intense a feeling of malignity!

On the following morning, when I was engaged in my toilet, I looked towards the cemetery, a complete view of which was commanded by the

bow-window of my chamber; and I perceived a couple of men busily engaged in digging a grave. They were pursuing their occupation in a corner of that compartment which was specially appropriated for the interment of deceased criminals; and I had no difficulty in conjecturing that this was the grave intended for the reception of the remains of Lanover. It was in an angle formed by two hedges of evergreens; and a tree with bright emerald foliage stood at the point where the two hedges thus joined. The boughs of that tree, so cheerful in its verdure, would therefore hang over the grave of the vile humpback; and the birds would sing amongst the branches above the last home of the criminal.

Such were the reflections which passed through my mind, as for a few minutes I watched the proceedings of the grave-diggers from the window of my chamber. I descended to the breakfast-parlour: but the repast which was served up, though consisting of delicacies well calculated to tempt the appetite, was left almost untouched. I went forth to walk in the grounds: but every half hour—or perhaps oftener—I was impelled by an irresistible curiosity to ascend to my chamber to see if the obsequies of Lanover were as yet taking place. It was about two in the afternoon when I at length beheld that for which I had thus with so morbid a feeling been looking out. First I caught a glimpse of something white moving amidst the shrubs and evergreens in the distance: then as the object drew nearer, I recognised the surplice of the priest. He advanced in front of the coffin, which was borne upon the shoulders of four men; and I need scarcely add there were no mourners. I saw the little procession approach towards the grave which had been hollowed in the corner of the criminal division of the cemetery; and there it halted. The service was not a long one; and I watched the proceedings until I beheld the coffin lowered into the grave,—when the priest hurried off, and the sextons began hastily to throw in the soil.

"And such is the end of Lanover!" I said to myself, as I descended into the garden to resume my mournful, restless wanderings. "He who was once a wealthy banker—one of the financial princes of the city of London—has thus found a nameless grave in a nook of the criminal compartment of a foreign cemetery! Heaven be thanked that he was not the father of Annabel, as I at first believed him to be!—heaven be thanked likewise that accident revealed to me the important truth that he could claim no kinship with me! He has left not behind him a single soul on the face of the earth who will deplore his loss. Oh, it is shocking to die thus!—shocking to reflect that a fellow-creature had so alienated every heart that none sorrows for him when he is gone!"

It was with these and similar reflections that I continued to roam about the gardens belonging to the villa, until the dusk was closing in and it was time to sit down to dinner. I had however scarcely more appetite for that meal than I had experienced for the breakfast in the morning; and when it was over I repaired to the library, where I endeavoured to beguile my mind from its mournful reflections. In this I somewhat succeeded, as I chanced to take up a book of a vivid and enthralling interest.

## CHAPTER CXLIII.

## THE CEMETERY IN THE VALE OF ARNO.

It was a little after ten in the evening that I ascended to my bed-chamber; and I took the volume with me, that I might keep it by my bedside in case I should find myself unable at once to woo the presence of slumber. On entering my room, I experienced not the slightest inclination to retire to rest: I accordingly sat down and read for some time: and the interesting character of the book made the interval pass rapidly enough. I finished the perusal of the volume; and when I laid it down, my watch informed me that it was half-past eleven o'clock. As I was winding up the watch, methought that the sounds of some equipage advancing from a distance reached my ears. I listened: the rolling of wheels and the trampling of horses' feet grew more and more audible: it was impossible to mistake the nature of those sounds. The idea struck me that something fresh had occurred, and that the Count of Livorno was coming to impart it. I drew aside the window-draperies and looked forth: but how different was the night from what several preceding nights had been! The darkness was intense: the pitchy blackness seemed to hang like a funeral pall against the window: but the advancing sounds grew more and more distinct. At length they suddenly ceased: and I felt convinced that an equipage of some kind had stopped at no great distance in the road—or rather the shady lane which separated the grounds of the villa from the cemetery.

What could this mean? The lane terminated on the bank of the Arno: there was no habitation at which it could have stopped: there was no apparent destination to which it could have been bound, when coming along that lane, except the villa where I dwelt. Perhaps some accident had occurred? Perhaps the axle-tree had broken? If so—and if it were the Count of Livorno who was coming to me—a few minutes would suffice to bring him to the villa on foot. But no: a quarter of an hour passed—no one came—and no farther sounds indicated any movement on the part of the equipage. It was evident that this equipage had halted for some purpose:—and what could that purpose be? It was natural enough that, considering the state of my mind, I should be irresistibly led to connect every circumstance with myself, however vague and dim the actual reason might appear for such association. Nevertheless it was so. I therefore remained at the window, though I could see nothing beyond the glass-panes—yet with a strange and unaccountable presentiment that by thus gazing in that direction I should see something that would lead to the gratification of the deep suspenseful curiosity which I experienced.

Upwards of a quarter of an hour had I thus been standing at that window, when I fancied that I beheld a light glimmering in the distance. It appeared to be moving about, though in a very limited circumference; and at first I conjectured that it must be a will-o'-the-wisp. But if so, a second thought assured me that it would flit about with eccentric wanderings, and presently disappear altogether. It was not so in respect to the light

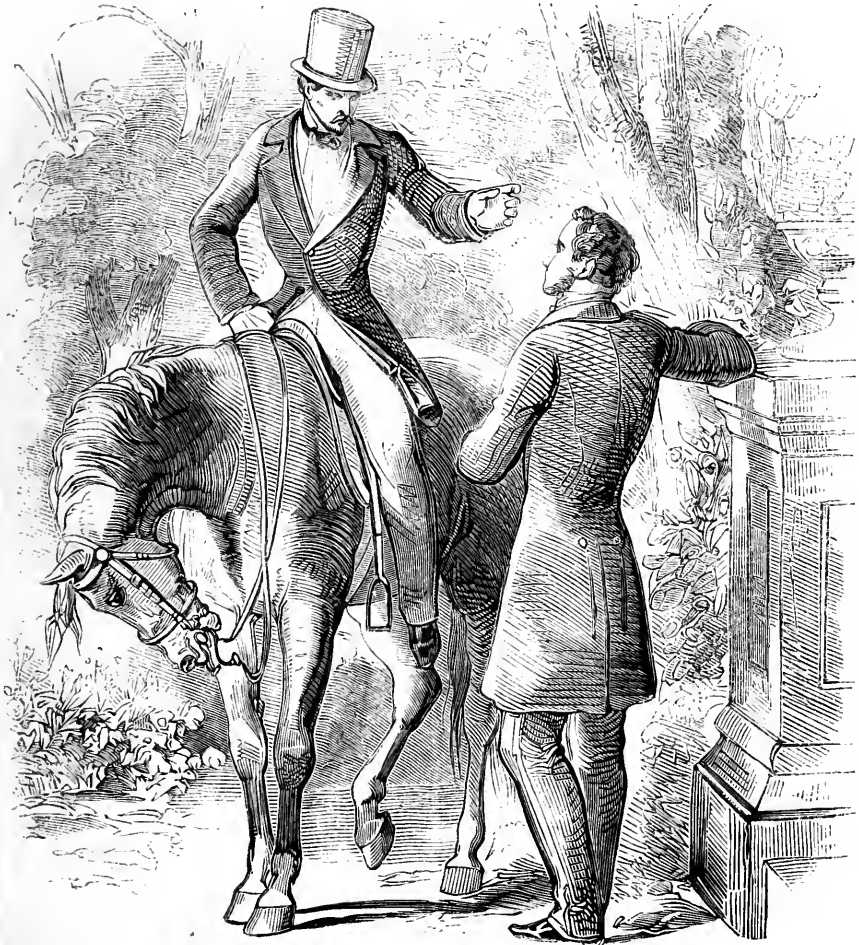
that I now beheld: it became stationary: my eyes were riveted upon it—and I was now convinced that it was no *ignis fatuus*, but a lantern carried by a human hand. All of a sudden it vanished: and then the idea gradually stole into my mind that the spot where I had seen it could be at no great distance from the place where Lanover was buried, even if it were not that very place itself.

Resurrectionists! Such was the horrible thought that now smote me. Criminal though Lanover had been, my soul recoiled from the idea that his remains should be thus desecrated. Even were he a murderer *in fact* (as he once was *in intention* with regard to myself), his remains should be left to repose tranquilly in their last home. My blood boiled with indignation, while my imagination was appalled with horror; and snatching up the taper, I hastened from the room. Rushing up-stairs to the storey where I knew the man-servant slept, I knocked at his door,—purposing to take him with me in order to prevent the final desecration of the deceased one's grave. But no answer was given to my summons; and the housekeeper, thrusting forth her head from another room, informed me that the lacquey had gone to pass the evening with his father in Florence—that she had given him permission to sleep out for the night, on condition that he would return early in the morning; and she begged to know whether I was ill, or required anything in which her ministrations would suffice?

I at once saw the inutility of alarming the housekeeper and the other female servant, by stating any suspicions in respect to the recently buried criminal: I therefore made some excuse to satisfy her mind—bade her good night—and descended the stairs. I had a pair of rifle-pistols in my portmanteau: these I hastily charged—secured them about my person—and noiselessly issued forth from the house, taking with me the key of the front door in order that I might be enabled to return with the same degree of caution. In a few moments I was in the lane which, as I have before said, separated the grounds of the villa from the long skirting hedge of evergreens which bordered the cemetery.

Notwithstanding the pitchy darkness of the night, I had no difficulty in finding the exact spot whence diverged the hedge which separated the compartment of the poor from that of the criminal. I had sufficiently observed the arrangements of the cemetery from my chamber-window to be aware that the point whence the hedge thus diverged at right-angles with the hedge skirting the lane, was precisely opposite the side-gate opening from the carriage-drive of the villa-grounds.

With as much caution as possible I forced for myself a passage through the hedge separating the lane from the cemetery; and then I found myself—according to my intention—in that compartment which was allotted to the poor. My eyes were now getting accustomed to the darkness; and I could distinguish objects, though only dimly visible, through the deep obscurity. I hastened along by the side of the diverging hedge which separated the pauper ground from the criminal division of the cemetery; and as I drew nearer to the spot where to the best of my conjecture I had seen the light, I advanced with all suitable caution.



My feet trode over a soft turf; and thus my steps were noiseless. As I advanced my ear caught the sound of men at work with their spades; and when a little farther on, methought that I heard their voices speaking in low and hasty tones.

"Yes," I said to myself; "they are assuredly resurrectionists—doubtless men of desperate characters; and I am alone here to contend with them!"

No habitation was near except the villa which I had just left; and that only contained two females: so that in case of emergency, vainly might I cry out for succour!

This consideration made me stop short for a moment—but only for a moment. Ashamed of what I conceived to be cowardice on my part, I continued my way,—summoning all my fortitude to my aid. I felt convinced that a foul deed was being done—the sanctity of a grave was being violated; and though infamous the character of

the criminal who lay buried there, I was resolved that not even the remains of such an one should become the prey of body-snatchers without an attempt on my part to prevent the consummation of the hideous act. But still it was important for me to proceed with caution, to ascertain how many men there were present, and thus learn the odds against which I had to contend. With my pistols in readiness, in case of my proximity being suddenly detected, I continued to steal along the side of the hedge.

At length, through the obscurity, I began to distinguish a tree at a short distance: it seemed to shoot up from the hedge itself; and from the previous observation made from my chamber-window, I knew that this must be the tree a portion of whose branches overhung the spot where Lanover had been interred. And now too, as the sounds of the grave-digging implements and of the earth being thrown up were close by, not a

doubt (if I had previously entertained any) remained in my mind as to the particular grave which was thus being violated. I crept onward—and in a few moments stopped short beneath that tree which overhung the angles of the pauper ground and the criminal compartment.

The hedge did not reach higher than my breast; and therefore, when standing upright, I could easily look completely over it. Two men were at work in the grave, as I could tell by the way in which the earth was thrown up: and there was a third standing motionless at a little distance. This last-mentioned individual appeared to be enveloped in a long muffing cloak, so far as I could at first distinguish through the deep obscurity which prevailed. Scarcely had I thus satisfied myself that there were only three persons present at the work of desecration—and just as I was about to spring through the hedge at all risks, with my pistols in my hand—the two men in the grave said something to each other; and one of them leapt out. I paused to observe what was now to be done: when the individual who had thus emerged from the pit, suddenly opened a lantern, which sent its light completely down into the grave. The cloaked individual stepped forward and bent over the grave, as if to ascertain how far the work had progressed. Again was I on the very point of darting forward—when a sudden movement of the man who held the lantern threw the light upon the countenance of that cloaked person. Good heavens! was it possible?—the Earl of Eccleston!

How it was that no ejaculation burst from my lips—that no start convulsed my frame, I cannot conjecture; unless it were that I was suddenly petrified, paralysed in every limb—struck motionless as a statue—transfixed to the spot in utter astoundment. The lantern was darkened again: I appeared to be awakened from a dream of stupendous horror. But any doubt that began to hover in my mind, was quickly dispelled: for the cloaked individual said something in Italian, in a quick impatient tone, to the two men. It was the voice of the Earl of Eccleston!

I was bewildered how to act: horror sealed up all the purposes of my soul. That this was no ordinary case of body-snatching by mercenary hands for the anatomist's uses, was now plainly evident. Then what could it mean? of what tremendous drama was I a witness? A suspicion flashed in unto my mind—a suspicion so wild and startling that I thought I must at once renounce it as impossible: but the next instant it came back with greater strength—it established itself with form, shape, and consistency in my mind:—I had the deeply-seated presentiment that it would be realized! Half-appalled—yet at the same time burning with the intensest curiosity—with an interest so awfully thrilling that I can scarce describe it—and yet remaining motionless the while—I continued to watch those proceedings which I no longer thought of immediately interrupting.

The man who had issued forth from the grave, took some implements from a basket which lay upon the ground; and these he handed to his companion who remained in the pit. Then I heard the sounds of the coffin-lid being wrenched off; and, Oh! what a thrill of horror swept through me. But still I continued motionless, gazing with my strain-

ing eyes over the hedge,—the deep black shade which was flung by the tree, completely concealing me from those on the opposite side of that hedge. But my brain was growing dizzy; and I have never since had a very clear recollection of how the tenant of the coffin was drawn up. From the instant that my ear caught those wrenching sounds, until that when I beheld an ominous white object lying on the soil heaped up by the side of the grave, there is a misty interval, as if during that period a dimness had come over my vision and I had seen nothing distinctly. But all of a sudden I regained the vivid keenness of my faculties; and there I beheld the form of Lanover, in its winding-sheet, by the side of that grave! I did not cry out—I did not move a limb, even so much as a hair's breadth: a tremendous consternation rested upon my soul: I was appalled—petrified with an awful horror.

The Earl of Eccleston, who was now pacing impatiently to and fro, said something in a quick tone to one of the men: and the lantern was instantaneously opened again. First its light was shed upon the features of the Earl himself, as he bent down over Lanover; and I could perceive that the nobleman's countenance wore a ghastly and horrified expression, mingled with intensest anxiety and suspense. Again he ejaculated something in an impatient voice, at the same time looking around as if with his straining eyes he strove to penetrate the circumjacent obscurity. Then an ejaculation of satisfaction burst from his lips; and the next moment a fourth person, emerging from the darkness, appeared upon the scene.

The Earl petulantly asked him what had made him so long?—and the new-comer curtly replied that he had missed his way. They spoke in Italian: but I understood just enough to catch the meaning of the rapidly-put question and its answer. I saw by the light of the lantern that the new-comer was a young man, not above five or six-and-twenty years of age, and well-dressed. He instantaneously set himself to do the work for which he had come thither: he produced a sort of unfolding pocket-book, in which numerous bright objects glittered in the rays of the lantern: it was a case of surgical instruments—and this man was evidently a surgeon.

The grave-clothes were stripped off the form of the humpback: his countenance was now revealed to me. It was of death-like whiteness—but serene as if he were only sleeping: all the hideous and harsh lines which that countenance possessed when animated, were now softened and subdued by the repose that was upon it. I saw the surgeon apply a lancet to Lanover's arm—then take a bottle from his pocket and pour some of its contents down the humpback's throat, for which purpose the mouth was forced violently open. A fellow-creature was being resuscitated:—could I at that instant rush forward to interfere with the work that was in progress? No, impossible!—and even if I had possessed the inclination, I had not the power; for I was still held in statue-like immovability by the awful interest which attached itself unto this strange and fearful scene!

I beheld the blood slowly trickling down Lanover's arm; and in a few minutes he gave visible signs of life. Oh! then I recollected the circumstance of Lord Eccleston having made a purchase



at the chymist's: and I at once naturally associated that incident with Lanover's trance—this death-like trance from which he was being revived! Good heavens. I saw it all!—I comprehended everything! His alleged death was a fiction: but Oh! to what a state of desperation must the man have been either reduced or elevated—I know not which term to use—in order that he should have consented to pass through the hideous ordeal from which he was now awakening!

Ah! and never shall I forget how fearful was the groan which slowly came forth from his lips, as life began to struggle successfully over death, and nature asserted her strength against the power of dissolution. It was a groan which methinks I can hear now as I pen this description,—a groan which was deep, hollow, and ghostly, as if coming up from the caverned breast of a corpse itself!

But few words were exchanged between the Earl of Eccleston and the surgeon, while the two grave-diggers looked on in speechless astonishment. Doubtless they must have very well known for what purpose their services had been retained: but still they could hardly believe their own eyes at thus beholding the dead as it were brought to life. But that groan—that long, deep, sepulchral groan stole upon me with a sensation of such awful horror that a dimness once more came over my vision—my brain once more grew dizzy—and though I moved not, nor fell down senseless, yet was I like a somnambulist who had come to a full stop in the midst of his fearful night-wanderings. And thus for several minutes was I almost completely unconscious of the progress of the wild, the wondrous, and the astounding drama, until I slowly became aware that Lanover was being borne away from the spot. Yes—the Earl, the surgeon, and one of the grave-diggers were bearing him off amidst them,—his form enveloped in the cloak which the nobleman himself had worn. The other grave-digger continued on the spot, and began rapidly to shovel back the earth. I was utterly bewildered as to what course I should adopt—or more correctly speaking, I had not the power to deliberate within myself. There was still a sense of appalling consternation in my soul—of overwhelming dismay, paralysing all my faculties. Again have I but an indistinct idea of the interval which followed upon my consciousness of the bearing-away of the resuscitated Lanover. I know not what impulse it was that made me creep stealthily off from the vicinage of the grave: but the next distinct recollection which I have of the incidents of that stupendous night of strangeness and wonder, is that I found myself stealing along by the side of the hedge with the same caution that I had exercised when first making my way to the scene of that awful drama. And then all of a sudden I was startled by the sounds of an equipage dashing rapidly away: and then—Oh! then I knew that it was too late for me to take any step in the matter.

I stole back into the villa: the taper which I had left in the hall was still burning: I entered the dining-room—filled a tumbler with wine—and drank the contents at a draught. I ascended to my bed-chamber: but instead of undressing to retire to rest, I sat down to think. I could scarcely persuade myself that it was all a reality—and not a fiction, as fantastic as it was horrible,

conjured up by my own imagination. When however I could no longer doubt that it was all a reality, I began bitterly to blame myself for the part I had enacted—or rather for my abstinence from enacting any positive part at all.

“Oh! if I had rushed forward and surprised the Earl of Eccleston in the midst of his proceedings—or Lanover at the very moment when he was awakening to consciousness from that terrific trance—I might have enforced such confessions and revelations as it is so important for me to learn! But no! Fool that I am! Those who had gone to such lengths would not have hesitated to take my life in order to screen themselves!—and had I proclaimed my presence, I might now be lying a corpse in that very grave from which Lanover was disinterred!”

This idea was so full of horror that it effectually put a stop to my self- vituperations; and I now thanked heaven that my conduct was such as it had proved to be. I retired to rest; and my mind being exhausted with the powerful vicissitudes of emotion and feeling through which I had passed, I sank off into a profound slumber.

To say that when I awoke in the morning, I had again some difficulty in convincing myself that it was not all a dream, would be to declare that which the reader has already supposed. I had not completed my toilet when I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs approaching down the lane; and I looked forth from the window, which I had opened for the purpose of letting in the fresh air to fan my feverish temples. The Count of Livorno entered the grounds: for he was the horseman whose advance I had thus heard. Before retiring from the window, I looked across into the cemetery:—I could scarcely believe that the spot on which the sun was now shining gloriously, could but a few hours back have proved the scene of that astounding drama which haunted my imagination like a horrible fantastic vision.

I hastened down stairs; and on joining the Count, I instantaneously perceived that he was dismayed by my appearance. And no wonder!—for my mirror had told me that I was as pale, haggard, and careworn, as if only just recovering from a long and severe illness.

“Good heavens, my dear Wilmot! what is the matter with you?” asked the Count of Livorno.

“First of all tell me,” I said, “what has brought you hither so early?”

“The object of my visit is soon explained,” responded the Count. “Last night the Earl of Eccleston took his departure in his own travelling-chariot; and at an early hour this morning the Countess of Eccleston went away in a post-chaise. There seems to be something singular in such arrangements on their part: but nevertheless, the Earl is gone—he has left Florence—of that you may be certain.”

“Yes,” I said: and I felt that I had a strange bewildered air—perhaps too with a wild vacancy in my gaze,—“and I can account for all that seems singular in those arrangements. The Earl has gone—and Lanover has gone with him!”

The Count of Livorno started, and gazed upon me as if he feared that I had become mad.

“I can assure you, my dear Count,” I said, “that I have not lost my senses—although it is natural enough for you to fancy that I have.

Listen—and I will tell you a tale which transcends every thing ever imagined by the writer of the wildest fictions.”

I then proceeded to explain to the Count of Livorno every thing that had taken place during the past night; and I need hardly say that he at first listened to me with an expression of countenance which showed that he was still far from being satisfied that my brain was not turned. But when he perceived the seriousness of my manner, the consistency of my narrative, and the lucidity—the painful lucidity with which I proceeded in all the details, he could no longer doubt the truth of the amazing history, nor question the sanity of him who was thus relating it. For several minutes after I had concluded he sate speechless:—he himself experienced a consternation—a dismay—a sense of horror almost as great as what I myself had felt when witnessing the tremendous drama of the past night.

“Now at least, my lord,” I said, “there is no necessity for me to remain any longer in this villa?”

“No, my dear friend,” replied the Count. “It appears to me that you have two things now to do—and in both of which I will assist you to the utmost of my power. The first is to see Dorcheater and ascertain how far we can influence his mind: the second is to institute a search after the Earl of Eccleston and Lanover—*both*, if they be together—*each* if they be separate; and with the knowledge of this astounding secret, some good may possibly be effected. Ah! and a thought strikes me!” continued the Count of Livorno. “From all that you have told me at different times, it is evident that the Countess of Eccleston is acquainted with her husband’s secrets, and is no stranger to the motives of his mysterious proceedings in respect to yourself. If it were possible for you to obtain an interview with her ladyship—alone—and when she is not under her husband’s coercive influence—you might by the possession of this wondrous, this awful secret of the cemetery, so work upon her mind as to elicit all that you require to know.”

I thanked the Count for his excellent advice; and then I said to him, “But what in reference to the incidents of last night?”

“I think, Wilmot,” answered his lordship, “that I shall be best consulting your views and interests by regarding all that drama as a profound secret. Nevertheless, there is one course which we might adopt,” continued the Count thoughtfully; “and this is to ascertain whether the gaol-surgeon can give any additional particulars that may be at all serviceable to us. You say that the medical man who resuscitated Lanover last night, was tall and slender, about six-and-twenty years of age—?”

“Yes—so far as I could judge amidst the horror and amazement, the wonder and the suspense, which held me enthralled upon the spot.”

We continued to deliberate some little while longer; and when the Count rose to take his departure, I said to him, “Let us walk together into the cemetery. The tale I have told you is so astounding that there may still be more or less incredulity floating in your brain—”

“Think you, my dear Joseph,” interrupted the Count, “that though I might have been incred-

ulous at first, yet that if I had not ended by believing you, I should have sate down to deliberate thus seriously on the various courses which ought to be pursued?”

“To tell you the truth, my dear Count,” I said, “for my own satisfaction’s sake I should like to walk into the cemetery. All the time that we have been discussing these affairs, I have had a sensation half-stupefying, half-bewildering, as if I were speculating on the vague phases of a dream—as if I were striving and straining to give shape and substance to the mere shadowy outlines of a vision! Therefore it would be satisfactory to me to assure myself that it was all a reality—to discover some signs of my midnight visit to that cemetery—and likewise some evidences of the fact that all I beheld was not the horrible phantasm of somnambulism.”

“For these reasons,” said the Count, “and not for any incredulity on my own part, we will visit the cemetery.”

We accordingly walked forth together; and first of all I distinguished what appeared to be the break in the hedge where I had forced a passage through into the pauper-ground. As we skirted the diverging hedge, which separated this ground from the criminal compartment adjoining, I could discern many footprints upon the grass; and these exactly fitted my own steps. We reached the spot where the tree of emerald verdure shadowed the grave: but on looking over the hedge there was not the slightest indication that the turf had been disturbed. At this I felt somewhat staggered: but the Count of Livorno at once said, “Rest assured, my dear Wilmot, that the sextons for their own sake would not have quitted the spot until they had restored its surface to its former condition.”

A short circuitous walk brought us into the criminal division of the cemetery; and we approached the place where I had beheld the tremendous incidents of the past night. The turf was all flat and uniform above the grave: but it had recently been watered—for the damp now showed itself upon our boots. The sun was shining brightly; and as I contemplated the scene, my eye caught a glimpse of something glittering amongst the grass. I picked it up: it was a surgical instrument.

“Ah!” I ejaculated: “this must have dropped out of the medical man’s pocket-case last night! I am glad I have found it:—it is to my mind an evidence that all I beheld was a reality!”

We walked away from the spot; and crossing the criminal division of the cemetery, we bent our steps towards the gate by which it was entered from the lane. Just as we reached that gate, we perceived a gentleman advancing along the lane for the direction of Florence.

“It is the surgeon!” said the Count quickly: “this is most opportune! Give me that instrument. He speaks French—I remember that he does: for I have some little knowledge of him. I will address him in that language in order that you may fully understand what passes.”

The surgeon had been advancing with rapid steps when first we caught sight of him: but on perceiving us he slackened his pace—no doubt with the hesitation of a guilty conscience, which made him tremble to proceed lest he should en-

counter those who would accuse him of his complicity in a nefarious transaction. But still he *did* advance, and when near enough, the Count of Livorno addressed him by name. He raised his hat in respectful salutation of the Grand Duke's nephew: but as he came a little nearer, it was easy to perceive that there was the glitter of uneasiness in his eyes and that he had not the air of one who was comfortable in his mind.

## CHAPTER CXLIV.

## THE GAOL-SURGEON.

THE Count of Livorno leant over the gate: I remained standing close by—and the surgeon approached us.

"Your avocations, signor," said the Count, "seem to permit you to enjoy the recreation of a lengthy ramble?"

"Yes, my lord," was the response: and I saw that the surgeon endeavoured to summon up all his self-possession. "Although this be the resting-place of the dead, the scenery is nevertheless cheerful."

"And perhaps you are a frequent visitor to the cemetery?" said the Count, but with that careless air of indifference which one would have when speaking merely for a purpose of courtesy, and not with any settled or deliberate aim.

Nevertheless the surgeon gave a visible start, as if for a moment he felt—or rather fancied that there was something significantly pointed in the observation: but again recovering his self-possession, he said, "No, my lord—I do not often visit this cemetery. And now, with your permission—my time being somewhat short—"

He laid his hand upon the fastening of the gate for the purpose of opening it: but the Count of Livorno did not draw back; and still maintaining his lounging attitude against the gate, he said, "Perhaps, signor, if you are coming here for any purpose, it is in my power to save you the trouble of a further walk."

The medical man started even more perceptibly and with a more sudden galvanic impulse than before: his looks travelled quickly from the nobleman's countenance to mine; and then, with a visible effort to recover his self-possession, he faltered out, "What mean you, my lord?"

"Simply," replied the Count, "that if you be in search of anything which you have lost, I am enabled to restore it. Behold!"—and he produced the surgical instrument.

The face of the medical man became ghastly white: he trembled from head to foot: he endeavoured to give utterance to something—but he could not: his words were choked by the painfulness of his emotions.

"We know all—everything!" said the Count of Livorno, now quitting his lounging position and drawing himself up to his full height, at the same time that he spoke in a stern voice. "It is useless for you to attempt a denial! There was a witness last night—a witness in the cemetery——"

"Holy Virgin protect me!" groaned the wretched man: and never shall I forget the look of mingled

horror and entreaty which he first bent upon the Count, and then turned upon me.

"The way in which you will be dealt with," the nobleman proceeded to observe, "depends upon the answers you give to my questions. Beware how you attempt to deceive me! What was the extent of the bribe that you received for your iniquitous complicity in a proceeding which has given liberty to a branded criminal?"

The surgeon mentioned a sum which in Italian money was about equivalent to two hundred and fifty guineas of British currency. He appealed in the most piteous terms for mercy: but the Count cut him short by saying, "Yes—you shall have mercy shown you, if you reveal everything."

"I will tell your lordship all that I know," answered the surgeon: "I will frankly confess all the details of my complicity. Your lordship is aware that according to the prison regulations the gaol-surgeon is bound to visit every captive at least thrice a week. The Englishman Lanover, as well as his accomplice Dorchester, was for some weeks an inmate of the gaol before his trial. On those occasions when according to my duty I visited Lanover, it appeared to me that he was a coarse, rough, brutal man; and as his disposition seemed so completely to assort with the hideousness of his exterior, I conceived a deep aversion towards him. I am now about to speak of the day of his condemnation to twenty years' imprisonment in a fortress. I visited him in the evening—and to my surprise found that he was all civility and courtesy. He induced me to sit down and converse awhile with him: he questioned me relative to my salary, my position, and my prospects. I do not know what it was that led me to speak openly and frankly to such a man: but thus it nevertheless was. I told him that I was poor—that I was married and had a young family—and that the mere fact of being surgeon to the gaol operated as a barrier against the extension of my practice outside the walls. To be brief, my lord, Lanover dropped some hint which amounted to a temptation. I listened—he grew plainer in his speech: his plan was developed. I was astounded at its boldness——"

"But you fell into his views?" said the Count of Livorno. "Proceed."

"Lanover explained to me that there was an English nobleman—the Earl of Eccleston—who would go to any lengths to serve him. I offered to do this much—that I would name a particular sporific which would produce a trance-like effect for at least forty-eight hours: but I refused to have anything to do with assisting at the disinterment. Lanover would not listen to this limitation of the part which I was to perform: he insisted that if I entered into the scheme at all, I should take the full share according to the course which he marked out.—'I am about to submit,' he said, 'to a terrible ordeal and run a fearful risk, which nothing but the horror of a twenty years' incarceration would induce me to encounter. But if I were to trust to the Earl of Eccleston *alone*, to superintend my disinterment, look at the hideous chances I should have against me! He himself might die suddenly; he might be taken ill; or his heart might fail him at the last moment, and he might leave me to my dreadful fate. But if there be two of you; *both* having a knowledge of the secret; *both* sworn to act

honourably, truly and faithfully: each fearing to act treacherously on account of the other; then should I feel myself safe, because it would be downright murder to leave me to perish in the grave to which I should be consigned!—In this sense was it that Lanover spoke, though at far greater length and using other arguments to enforce his view of the case. And then too, he offered that bribe, the amount of which I have already specified to your lordship. And I yielded!"

"You yielded," said the Count of Livorno; "and then doubtless you were put in communication with the Earl of Eccleston himself?"

"Yes, my lord," responded the surgeon. "That very same evening the Earl of Eccleston visited the prison; and the whole plan was finally settled in Lanover's presence. It was easy to perceive that Lanover had some powerful hold upon the Earl—though what its nature might be, I know not. However, all was arranged; and Lanover compelled both myself and the Earl to take oaths of the most awful solemnity—oaths which I shudder to think of, but which not for worlds would I have violated!"

"Proceed," said the Count of Livorno. "Pass over that fearful portion of your narrative: we can full well comprehend that a man of a desperate disposition would not commit himself to such a hideous ordeal without taking every guarantee for his eventual security."

"I have little more to say, my lord," continued the surgeon: "a few words will suffice to explain the rest. I myself would have nothing to do with the making-up of the soporific: I was so fearful of detection! But I told the Earl of Eccleston what he was to ask for, at what chymist's he could procure it, and the pretext he was to make for requiring such a drug. Then, in pursuance of the pre-arranged plan, Lanover affected to be taken with indisposition: I attended upon him: I conveyed to him the drug which the Earl had procured; and it produced the desired effect. It was for me to pronounce an opinion upon his death—or rather his apparent death; and I declared that it arose from natural causes."

The surgeon stopped short: there was a silence of nearly a minute: and then he added in a low deep voice, "Your lordship has told me that there was a witness to last night's proceedings; and therefore I need not explain how the entranced Lanover was brought back to life."

"No—it is unnecessary," replied the Count of Livorno.

"There is however something which I must add," continued the surgeon. "First of all it was the temptation of a heavy bribe which led me into this plot; but when once embarked in it, all the speculative interest of a mind devoted to science and the medical profession became enlisted therein. Of this I solemnly assure you! But I have still something more to say: for I have promised to tell you everything. The Earl of Eccleston came to me yesterday afternoon, and threw out hints to the effect that it was dangerous to carry the plot any farther. I listened in silent horror. He intimated that his purse would enrich me if I would consent to fall into his views. Then was it that the horror of my soul burst forth in wild ejaculations. That execrable English nobleman would have made me a murderer!—he would have left

the wretched Lanover to perish miserably in the coffin wherein he was sealed up! No, no—I could not do it! If all the world's wealth had been placed at my feet, I would not have consented to become an accomplice in so hideous a treachery. I felt that it would be as much murder as if I had taken a knife and plunged it into the prisoner's breast—or as if I had prescribed a deadly venom instead of a soporific the trance-like effects of which would in time pass away."

"All that you have just told us," said the Count of Livorno, "disposes me to deal most leniently with you. Proceed. Have you aught more to say?"

"Nothing, my lord," responded the surgeon, with a brightening-up of his countenance at the merciful assurance which he had just received,—"unless it be that the Earl of Eccleston, finding I was firm in my resolve to remain faithful to my oath, and that I shrank in horror from the hideous perfidy at which he had hinted, endeavoured to make me believe that I had misunderstood him. I chose not to prolong the conversation; and all took place according to our pre-arranged plans. By accident I lost one of my instruments last night: my present object in coming hither was to search for it, or to ascertain from the gravediggers whether they had discovered it:—but your lordship has produced it as an evidence that all the proceedings of the past night are indeed known unto you."

It would be impossible for me to describe the fearful interest with which I had listened to this narrative—still more impossible to convey an idea of the sickening horror which I felt at that portion which revealed another phase of such infernal blackness in the character of the Earl of Eccleston. Oh, how cold ran the blood in my veins!—or rather, how it stagnated into glacial freezing there! And I observed too that it was almost with an equal sensation of horror that the Count of Livorno listened to the same episode: but on my part, to this feeling of horror one of poignant distress was superadded. I was compelled to regard the Earl of Eccleston as a very monster of iniquity, capable of the blackest crimes, and without a single redeeming quality!

"I promised," said the Count of Livorno, after a brief interval of silence which followed the surgeon's concluding speech,—"I promised to deal mercifully with you, and my word shall be kept. If you were handed over to the grasp of justice, the galleys for the remainder of your life would be your doom. But to this extremity I will not proceed. Yet guilt such as your's must not go unpunished. For it is guilt—and of a deep dye! You have proved the means of cheating justice of its due: you have given liberty to a man whom the law had stricken with its righteous vengeance. And such a man! It is the same as if you had liberated a ravenous tiger from its den, or a venomous serpent from its cage. For whatsoever crimes this wretch may hereafter commit against society, you are fearfully responsible. But you have done even more! You are horrified at the idea of becoming a murderer, even indirectly: and yet circumstances might have rendered you a murderer! What if the suggestions of your scientific skill had failed? what if you had caused to be given a drop too little or a drop too much of

that soporific drug? In the former case the wretch might have awakened from the trance before the time you estimated, and he would have perished in the awful agonies of suffocation. On the other hand, if the dose had been too powerful, instead of plunging him into a temporary trance, it might have steeped him in the slumber of death. These were the risks which you incurred. Do not interrupt me!—I know what you would say. You would tell me that with an awful sense of your tremendous responsibility, you calculated to the millionth part of a drop the proper quantity to be administered; and you would point to the result as a justification of the argument. But in all candour you must confess—and at least in the depth of your own conscience you must acknowledge, that the chances you incurred were frightful, and that circumstances have developed themselves marvellously in your favour. Considering all these things, it is impossible that you can be left altogether unpunished. Therefore the golden temptation to which you succumbed, shall be taken from you. Hasten and bestow it upon some charitable institution; and when you bring me the treasurer's receipt, proving that you have thus disposed of the ill-earned lucre, I will pledge you my solemn word that your secret shall be kept. Depart!"—and the Count of Livorno waved his hand imperiously.

The surgeon bowed with an expression of countenance that denoted a deep gratitude mingled with a sense of utter humiliation: and as he hastened away, the Count of Livorno turned a look upon me as if to ascertain whether I were satisfied with the judgment that he had just pronounced upon the guilty accomplice of the Earl of Eccleston. I signified my fullest approbation: indeed, for more reasons than one, I did not wish publicity to be by any means given to those proceedings wherein the name of the Earl of Eccleston would be so fearfully mixed up, and the dishonour thereof would redound upon the head of his Countess.

There was no longer any necessity for me to remain at the villa: the Count and I proceeded on foot to Florence, which was only two miles distant; and thence he despatched a couple of his domestics to bring back his horse, and likewise to fetch my baggage. We resolved to lose no time in seeing Dorchester; and at about two o'clock in the afternoon of that same day, we presented ourselves at the prison-entrance. The turnkey at once admitted us; and we were introduced to the cell where Dorchester was confined. We found him lying on his pallet—for he was weak and ill: but he at once sat up on recognising the Count of Livorno, and he was evidently much surprised to see me.

"Do not rise," said his lordship, adopting a conciliatory tone: "we are not here to reproach you—but we have come with the endeavour to make an impression upon your mind."

"For what purpose?—for what purpose?" asked Dorchester nervously.

"You have something to reveal which may interest my young friend Mr. Wilmot," continued the Count of Livorno; "and inasmuch as it cannot in the slightest degree benefit you to withhold it, it may be to your advantage to make it known."

"I thought Mr. Wilmot had left Florence?" said Dorchester.

"No," responded the Count: "he remained here until the Earl of Eccleston took his departure—for he is gone!"

"I know it—I know it," said the prisoner. "But——"

"You stop short," resumed the Count. "I know what you would say. The Earl of Eccleston is gone: but he has left behind him the promise that he would use his influence on your behalf. Yes, you see that these are no mysteries for me. Perhaps I can tell you more. The Earl visited you only once since your condemnation: but he has sent reassuring messages to you through some other channel. Is it not so?"

"It is, my lord—it is true!" said Dorchester. "But what of that? The Earl has known me for many, many years: is it not natural that he should interest himself on my behalf?"

"If he possessed the power," answered the Count of Livorno. "Ah! I know that it was at his intercession the British Envoy exerted his influence with the Tuscan Secretary of State to procure a remission of the ignominious portion of your sentence. But think you that my interest with the Tuscan Government is not greater still?—know you not that I am the nephew of the Grand Duke, and that a Ministerial post was offered unto myself—but that I declined it? Think you, then, if I had foreseen that the Earl of Eccleston's interest was to be used in your behalf, I could not with a single word have nullified it if such had been my object? And now, can you possibly flatter yourself that the interest of all the Earls of England could avail you against my expressed wish and desire?"

"I know that you are powerful, my lord," said Dorchester, trembling nervously and with a frightened look: "but surely, surely you will not use your authority to crush a wretched being like myself?"

"No," answered the Count: "nothing wantonly cruel nor unnecessarily harsh am I capable of accomplishing. But let me repeat that if trusting to any promises which the Earl of Eccleston held out, you prefer remaining faithful to his interests instead of serving those of this young gentleman whom I regard as a brother, you will act most unwisely: for rest assured that the Earl's intercessions shall not again avail you—whereas if you show yourself deserving of mercy, it is through my interest alone that it can be granted."

Mr. Dorchester seemed to be profoundly smitten with the truth of these observations: but he was cunning and wily—and notwithstanding his dejected condition, his natural artfulness did not desert him.

"Without meaning to give any offence to your lordship," he said after some little reflection, "you must permit me to remark that these are mere words, and you have held out no inducement to render it worth my while to desert the interests of Lord Eccleston. In the absence of some specific pledge on your lordship's part, it were better for me to continue to trust to the good offices of the Earl of Eccleston, which the chapter of accidents may enable to develop themselves."

The Count of Livorno now reflected deeply in his turn; and I was the prey to an acute suspense:

for I saw that it all depended on the extent of the promise which the Count might choose to make whether Mr. Dorchester would state what he knew or not.

"You are condemned to imprisonment for the remainder of your life," the Count of Livorno at length spoke; "and your age must be past sixty. You cannot possibly hope that the Tuscan government, even at my intercession, will liberate so guilty an offender as you are until you have at least passed a certain term of imprisonment. On the other hand, at your age and in your debilitated condition of health, you can scarcely expect to live beyond such a period as the Tuscan government may deem the very least amount of punishment that ought to be inflicted. Now therefore, the next consideration is—where and how this term of imprisonment shall be passed. Shall it be in a fortress amongst other felons?—or shall it be in a *maison de santé*—one of those establishments to which criminals, in particular circumstances, are allowed to be transferred under the fiction of insanity, but where they are permitted the enjoyment of all reasonable comforts?"

"Yes, my lord!" exclaimed Dorchester eagerly clutching at the hope thus held out. "But a criminal can only be consigned to a *maison de santé* when he possesses private friends who will pay an income for his maintenance there?"

"It is true," answered the Count coldly, "that you possess no private friends: your misdeeds must have long ago alienated any whom you did possess. Nevertheless, the same motives which would induce me to serve you, would likewise prompt me to guarantee the payment of this sum which is requisite for your maintenance in an asylum for the insane. Remember, Mr. Dorchester, that in such an establishment you would be treated as a gentleman, you would enjoy comforts bordering even upon luxuries—you would be enabled to take exercise in spacious pleasure-grounds—and you would scarcely miss the more extended range of freedom. Does this offer tempt you?"

"It does, my lord—it does!" exclaimed the prisoner: then, as a shade suddenly came over his countenance, he asked hesitatingly, "How do I know that the government would yield to your lordship's intercession, even if you were to proffer it on my behalf?"

"Sir," responded the Count of Livorno sternly, "I am not in the habit of promising more than I can perform. I pledge my word as a nobleman and a gentleman—as one in whose veins flows the Royal blood of Tuscany's reigning family—that if you can really give my friend Mr. Wilmot any information which is serviceable to him, I will within three days obtain an order for your transfer to a *maison de santé*. Are you satisfied now?"

"I am, my lord—I throw myself upon your mercy!" rejoined Dorchester.

At this answer I felt relieved from a torturing amount of suspense; and a feeling of intense curiosity thrilled through my veins, while the same cause produced a sensation of awe at the heart.

"Joseph Wilmot," said Mr. Dorchester, addressing himself to me, "from something which that wretched man the deceased Lanover let drop in my hearing a short time ago,—when first he engaged me in his schemes relative to Sir Matthew

Heseltine and the Athene,—I was first led to suspect that you had sustained persecutions of a particular character at the hands of the Earl of Eccleston."

"It is true—most true!" I murmured in a tremulous voice, my whole frame quivering with anxious suspense. "Yes!—as Mr. Mulgrave was he a bitter persecutor of mine; and recent occurrences have shown that as Earl of Eccleston he is far from being my friend."

"The other day," resumed Dorchester, "when I saw you in Court, I bethought me of what Lanover had thus let drop. From other circumstances which were within my knowledge, I was led in vulgar parlance to put two and two together; and a suspicion arose in my mind—a suspicion that it was in my power to throw some light on facts which I knew must be still full of mystery for you. Your intimacy with his lordship the Count of Livorno"—here Dorchester bowed to the nobleman—"suggested something to my mind. I penned that brief billet which asked for an interview, and which I was subsequently surprised to learn you displayed to the eyes of the Earl of Eccleston. My object was to impart my suspicion in respect to yourself—to reveal to you the grounds thereof—and thus to afford you a clue which it would remain for you to follow up. In return, it was my purpose to stipulate that you should use your influence with my Lord Count who is now present, towards obtaining the remission of the infamous portion of my sentence. But that very same evening the Earl of Eccleston came to me: he told me that you had shown him the note—and he promised to do all I required if I would remain silent in respect to what I intended to communicate to your ears. He fulfilled his pledge: my object was gained; and hence the manner in which I treated you, Mr. Wilmot, when you called on the following day. But that very proceeding on the Earl of Eccleston's part confirmed the suspicions which had previously entered my mind!"

"And that suspicion?" I exclaimed in breathless suspense.

"Listen," said Mr. Dorchester; "and I will tell you a narrative which belongs to many years ago."

Then the prisoner proceeded to unfold a tale to which both the Count and myself listened with the deepest, deepest interest. It is not, however, my purpose to incorporate it with this portion of my narrative: it will be more appropriate to reserve for a future occasion the important revelations which were thus made to my ears. Suffice it to add that when we rose to take our departure, the Count renewed his promise of procuring the transfer of Mr. Dorchester within three days to a *maison de santé*, and of paying a liberal pension for his maintenance in that establishment.

"And if we never meet again, Mr. Wilmot," said Dorchester, whose heart appeared to have been touched by the scene, as well as by the kind way in which the Count of Livorno had now spoken to him, "you will perhaps consider that whatsoever good these revelations may accomplish on your behalf, will have atoned for much of the evil that on former occasions I have done you?"

"I declare, Mr. Dorchester," I exclaimed, "that I forgive you!—from the bottom of my heart do I forgive you!"





“And I will promise even more than that to which I have already pledged myself,” said the Count of Livorno: and then he added emphatically, “If the communications you have this day made to my friend Wilmot shall prove instrumental in working out that aim which must now be his object, I declare that your term of imprisonment in the *maison de santé* shall be considerably shortened.”

Dorchester went down upon his knees to thank the Count of Livorno for this generous assurance; and the old man sobbed like a child. We raised him up: we both shook hands with him, for we felt convinced that the period of remorse and penitence had now veritably begun. We issued from his cell; and when in the corridor, the Count of Livorno embraced me, saying, “My dear Wilmot, you will succeed—rest assured that you will succeed! There is justice in heaven; and providence by its own inscrutable means is gradually though

surely conducting you onward to an issue from all the dark clouds of mystery which have hitherto enveloped your destiny.”

On our return to the generous nobleman’s mansion, we held a long consultation together. In the evening he presented me a packet which he had just received from the Tuscan Prime Minister: it contained a full and complete pardon for all offences which Constantine Durazzo Kanaris, now Count of Monte d’Oro, might at any time have committed against the maritime laws of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. On returning to my chamber I wrote letters to the Count of Monte d’Oro and to Signor Portici, stating that urgent business would prevent me rejoining them in Corsica at as early a day as I had promised: I enclosed the Roman and the Tuscan State-documents; and I added that the pardon of Austria would likewise be speedily obtained—when it would be transmitted by the Count of

Livorno. I likewise wrote to my friends in Rome; and then I made my preparations for a journey on the following morning.

After an early breakfast, I took a most affectionate leave of the Count and Countess of Livorno, and entered the post-chaise which was to bear me away from the Tuscan capital.

## CHAPTER CXLV.

### MILAN.

I WAS in total ignorance of the direction which the Earl of Eccleston's carriage had taken on leaving the neighbourhood of the cemetery the night but one previous: but the Count of Livorno had managed to ascertain for me that the post-chaise hired for the use of the Countess, was to convey her ladyship to Milan, whence it was to be sent back to the hotel at Florence. I had therefore resolved to proceed to Milan; and though my mind was intent on business of the utmost importance, yet was I by no means sorry to have an object in visiting the capital of Lombardy. The distance from Florence to Milan is about a hundred and seventy miles; and thus at the rate of Italian travelling, and allowing for stoppages—but by journeying all night—I felt that I might calculate on reaching my destination on the following morning.

At the two or three first stages out of Florence I made inquiries relative to the Earl's chariot and the post-chaise in which the Countess travelled; but I could hear nothing of either of those equipages. I can scarcely aver that I was disappointed at this—inasmuch (as I have said in a former part of my narrative) there were three or four roads from Florence to the Apennines, which had to be crossed in order to reach Lombardy. It was therefore quite probable that the equipages just alluded to had taken a different route from that which I was pursuing. At all events, I regarded it as a certainty that the Countess of Eccleston's destination was really Milan; and I therefore concluded that she must be going thither to rejoin her husband, or that she would in that city receive tidings concerning him.

I experienced no adventure worth relating during my journey from the Tuscan capital to Milan; and I reached the latter city at an early hour of the morning which followed the day of my departure from Florence. My plan of proceeding was settled in my mind, so far as circumstances would permit. I knew that I had a deep game to play and that I must exercise the greatest caution; for that if the Earl of Eccleston should by any accident discover I was on his track, and likewise suspect the motive, he might spirit away Lanover to some place whither I might never be enabled to trace him. Therefore, on arriving at Milan, it was absolutely necessary to avoid the chance of putting up at the same hotel where the Earl might have already taken his quarters,—supposing that he was really there. I concluded that he would go to a first-rate hotel: I therefore resolved to stop at an inferior one. But even when the chaise drove up to the door of a hostelry of such a nature as I had explained to the postilion, I did not alight until

the landlord had come forth to speak to me. I affected to be particular only in ascertaining that he could afford me comfortable accommodation: but I managed to elicit from him that no guests of any importance were staying at his house. I then quitted the vehicle, and took up my quarters at the establishment where I thus alighted.

When I had partaken of breakfast, I sent for the landlord, and said to him, "I am a perfect stranger at Milan; and I have a little business to manage of somewhat a private and delicate nature. I need the services of some one who is trustworthy, active, intelligent, and discreet. I care not what I pay in the shape of wage for such an individual."

"My own son, Signor," replied the landlord, "will gladly and faithfully serve you. Though not more than twenty, Leo has a rare intelligence for his age. As for his discretion, Signor, if you enjoin him to silence relative to any business you have in hand, he will not breathe a syllable even to his own father and mother."

"These are good recommendations," I observed; "and you may rest assured that your son shall be liberally rewarded. I may perhaps remain some little time at your house—"

"Enough, Signor!—you shall have no reason to complain of your accommodations. Speaking of Leo, you will find him a veritable treasure: for he understands French perfectly—he has a smattering of English—"

"Indeed!" I exclaimed: "then he will be all the more useful:"—for it occurred to me at the instant that Leo would possibly have to insinuate himself amongst the Earl of Eccleston's domestics, in order to prosecute his inquiries. "Let him come to me at once."

The landlord retired; and in a few minutes Leo made his appearance. I found him to be a good-looking young man, of middle stature, and slightly made. His countenance was remarkably intelligent: his manners were agreeable. I spoke to him in French, and discovered that his father had by no means exaggerated the fluency with which he conversed in that language. Having delivered myself at some length in respect to the fidelity and the zeal which I expected to characterize his services—having also given him a few gold coins as an earnest of my liberality—I addressed him in the following manner:—

"It suits my purpose to discover whether the Earl and Countess of Eccleston are now sojourning in Milan. This you must first ascertain. If they are, you must endeavour without loss of time, to learn their intentions and their future proceedings,—how long they are going to stay here—whither they are next going—and likewise whether they have any one travelling with them besides their servants. Especially is it important for me to discover whether there is at Milan, either with the Ecclestons or elsewhere, an Englishman of whom I will give you the minutest description."

I then proceeded to describe Lanover: but I did not mention his name—for I felt assured that wherever he might be he was travelling under a false one. Leo listened to me with the greatest attention: I gave him a few more minute details in respect to the task which he had to perform; and he then left me. I should explain that my object in seeking to learn whither the Ecclestons

were going when they left Milan, was in order that I might follow them if in the meanwhile I should fail to find out how the Earl had disposed of Lanover. I thought it very probable that Lanover's destination might be England, where he would perhaps hope to renew his persecution of Sir Matthew Heselstine. If the Earl continued to travel separately from the Countess, it would be a good reason for believing that Lanover was travelling with him; and although they might not have taken up their quarters at the same hotel, yet might they depart from Milan in the same vehicle: for I did not see how Lanover could possibly have a passport of his own; and I therefore suspected that the Earl would find it necessary to smuggle him through the Continent under the protection of the general passport which included all the members of his retinue. As for my own proceedings in respect to the Earl, I felt that I must be guided by circumstances: but according to the plan I had already laid down, my first object was to obtain an interview with Lanover before I took any steps in reference to the nobleman.

I remained close in my own room at the hotel, and endeavoured to while away the time with some French and English newspapers which the landlord lent me. But my mind was too anxious and too restless to settle itself to such a pursuit; and when three hours had passed away after Leo had set out upon his mission, I thought that at least double that time must have elapsed—so slowly did it drag itself along! At length Leo reappeared; and I at once saw by his countenance that he had something to communicate.

"The Earl and Countess of Eccleston are at Milan," he said. "They arrived separately with an interval of about a dozen hours. The Earl came in his travelling-chariot—the Countess journeyed in a post-chaise. They are not staying at any hotel—but are living at a house in a retired spot in one of the suburbs."

"And that house?" I said: "whose is it? Is it a private habitation?"

"It was to let ready furnished," answered Leo; "and it seems that the Earl must have known something of it before—for he wrote from Florence to the proprietor, who is a large wine merchant in Milan, engaging it for a period—but I have been unable to ascertain for how long. I have walked as far as the house: I loitered a little in the neighbourhood in the hope of falling in with one of the Earl's domestics—but I did not succeed; and apprehensive that if I remained there too long suspicion would be excited, I came away. This is all that I have to impart at present."

"And what you have told me is already most important," I said: for I thought within myself that the Earl of Eccleston would not have taken that secluded habitation unless it were for the purpose of concealing Lanover within its walls: and I moreover conjectured that the wretched humpback might possibly be ill and unable at present to bear the fatigues of farther travelling.

"I now purpose," continued Leo, "to adopt some means of getting into conversation with the domestics of the Earl of Eccleston. If I could only become intimate with one of them—"

"Ah! if you could," I exclaimed, "you might soon manage to learn additional intelligence of importance. Spare not money—treat the men-

servants to wine—or bribe them—do anything for the purpose of ascertaining whether the humpback whom I have described to you, is within those walls. Ah! an idea strikes me! It may be that he is ill; and if so he will need medical attendance."

"Trust to me, Signor," responded Leo: "I will succeed by some means or another."

The indefatigable young man then again left me. Hour after hour passed: but I was less nervous and anxious than before: for the initiative had been taken—and the important intelligence that the Ecclestons were really at Milan, was obtained. I dined at about five o'clock; and it was a little past seven when Leo made his appearance.

"I have succeeded in doing but little more, Signor," he said: "for when I endeavoured to get into conversation with one of his lordship's men-servants, as he was issuing forth on some message, I met with a rude repulse. But there is some one ill in the house: for a surgeon who dwells in the neighbourhood, has called there; and shortly afterwards his boy went with some bottles of medicine."

"This is more or less important," I observed: "but still it is absolutely necessary to ascertain who this invalid really is, and whether he be the humpback—whether, in a word, the humpback is in that house?"

"There is a plan, Signor, which might be adopted," said Leo thoughtfully: "but perhaps it were better for me to see whether I can wheedle anything out of the surgeon first of all."

"And that plan of yours, Leo?" I said inquiringly.

"I will explain it to-morrow, Signor," he responded. "It will be time enough to think of it, if by other means I should fail in ascertaining the particular point on which you are so anxious to be enlightened."

Nothing more was done that evening: for Leo was afraid of being seen loitering too much in the vicinity of the secluded house, lest suspicion should be excited. I retired to rest soon; for I was exceedingly tired in consequence of having travelled the whole of the previous night: but I awoke at an early hour in the morning completely refreshed.

After a brief interview with Leo, he went forth again; and at about noon he returned.

"I have done all that I could in respect to the surgeon," he said; "and I have failed. First I got hold of the boy who carries out the medicine: but he could tell me nothing. I questioned him so guardedly and with so much precaution, that he could not suspect I had any ulterior object. After he had entered his master's shop, I watched till he went forth again; and then I myself walked into the surgery. I consulted the medical man upon all sorts of imaginary pains and ailments; and I gave him a liberal fee. Under the pretext of resting myself, I remained to get into conversation with him; and without vanity I may say that in a dexterous manner I began talking of the large, gloomy, sombre-looking house standing in the midst of grounds completely inclosed by a high wall. The surgeon was polite, but short and dry in his answers: he said not a word about having a patient there. It is evident, signor, that he finds his account in holding his tongue."

"Yes—doubtless he is well bribed," I observed; "and some specious tale has been told him to account for the necessity of his secrecy."

"I made another effort," continued Leo, "to get into conversation with one of the Earl's servants—not the same to whom I spoke yesterday—but a far more civil man. He answered me politely enough; but when I began to touch gently on the subject of the family that he served, he gave a brief response and hastened off. In the same way, signor, that the surgeon has been bribed, so have the domestics been enjoined to silence. That it is not the Earl himself who is the invalid—nor the Countess—I am tolerably well convinced; for I saw them both issue from the mansion together in the carriage: I recognised them easily by the description you had given me. I followed the equipage; it drew up at a mercer's shop in a neighbouring street: the Earl assisted the Countess to alight; and then he strolled away on foot. I lingered no longer—but came to tell you what had been done."

"You hinted at some plan last night, Leo," I said: "and now it seems that we must fall back upon it. Explain yourself."

"If I hesitated, signor," answered Leo, "it was because the proceeding which I would suggest, is somewhat a hazardous one; and I reserved it as a last resource."

"And what is it?" I anxiously inquired.

"You know, sir," replied Leo, "that Lombardy groans under the yoke of Austria, and that Milan is the seat of the tyrant government. On the slightest pretence the Austrian police invade the sanctity of private dwellings and burst into the most respectable houses, for the purpose of ascertaining if proscribed persons are harboured there. There is likewise a swarm of informers and spies of every description: for the system of despotism which crushes my native Lombardy fosters all these iniquities. I am treading on dangerous ground, signor—"

"Not with me!" I exclaimed. "In the first place my political ideas are liberal enough to make me detest despotism of every sort—especially that of Austria; and in the second place I am incapable of breathing a word to the prejudice or injury of one who is now so zealously serving me. Proceed—and explain your plan."

"It is two-fold, Signor," resumed Leo: "or rather I should say it may be carried out in either one of two ways, according as you may think fit. I will explain the first method. If I were to go to a police-officer and whisper to him that some proscribed patriot is concealed at that house in the suburbs, he would immediately proceed with two or three of his officials to examine the premises; and I might easily go with him. The Earl of Eccleston's authority would avail nothing. Saving your presence, signor, the Austrians hate the English: for they look upon England as the refuge of exiles and the focus where Continental insurrections are planned. Well then, not a room, not a chamber, not a nook nor corner of the house would escape the most scrutinizing search; and the Austrian officials would even take a delight in annoying the Earl of Eccleston, simply because he is an Englishman. As a matter of course, the proscribed patriot whom I should name would not be found at that house: but I should have accom-

panied the officials, and should be able to come back and tell you whether the humpbacked Englishman is within those walls. As for the officials themselves, one of those gold pieces which you have given me would appease them for their disappointment in not finding the object of their search."

"This plan at the first glance appears good enough," I said: "but what is the other proceeding which may be adopted?"

"The same, signor," rejoined Leo,— "but to be enacted with a different set of characters. I mean that instead of playing the game so seriously, I and two or three of my friends might dress ourselves up so as to resemble officers of the secret police; and in this guise we might visit the mansion."

"Think you not," I asked, "that the Earl of Eccleston would demand the warrant for such proceedings?"

"In good sooth, signor," responded Leo, "the Austrian officials themselves would conduct their proceeding without any other warrant than that which despotism affords to their discretionary use; and therefore it is now for you, signor, to decide how this plan is to be carried out."

I reflected for several minutes: an idea was stealing into my mind. What if I myself were to dress up as a police-agent and accompany the party? No harm would be done if Lanover were not found in the house: but on the other hand, if he were really there, who could tell what important results might ensue? As to the possibility of assuming an effectual disguise, I had no cause to despair on that score, when I recollected how well the mountebank's costume had served me a few months back amidst the Apennine mountains. I knew of course that it was a serious breach of the law to assume an authority which one did not possess: but there were not the slightest moral grounds on which I should hesitate at such a stratagem; and as for the fear of exposure, would the Earl of Eccleston dare raise his voice against me? All things considered, I was not very long in making up my mind.

"I have decided on the latter alternative which you have suggested," I said to Leo. "But what is more, I myself will accompany you."

"Ah, signor!" he exclaimed; "this will indeed be the better course to pursue; and had I dared, I should have so proposed it."

"You must be sure to obtain the assistance of discreet persons," I said, "and who will know how to play their part well. It were better if we are tolerably numerous: because I know what the English disposition is—and it is by no means improbable that the Earl of Eccleston and his domestics may take it into their heads to resist the proposed incursion by force and violence."

"Trust me, signor, they will not do it," answered Leo. "I have learnt that it is not the first time the Earl of Eccleston has been in this capital; and he knows the arbitrary laws of Lombardy. However, you may rest assured, signor, that all my measures shall be discreetly taken. But for your own disguise—"

"I must trust to you, Leo, to procure me all the requisites," I responded. "Whiskers and mustachios are the invariable ingredients of a good disguise: and these may be of rather a formidable character, inasmuch as I am to play the

part of an Austrian police-official. Some dye too for my complexion: any chymist will furnish it. As for the costume, I leave it entirely to your judgment."

I gave the faithful Leo a fresh supply of money: and he left me for the purpose of making his arrangements. The hours passed away; and at seven o'clock in the evening I ascended to my chamber to achieve the toilet for my disguise. Leo succoured me. He had procured a dye which imparted a faint duskiness to the complexion, and which could be easily washed off: a formidable pair of whiskers and moustachios gave me a look of ferocity which even astonished myself. He had obtained for me a suit of plain clothes of somewhat shabby appearance and Italian fashion; for he intimated that there was no necessity for any of the party to appear in the uniform of the Austrian police-officials.

It was about eight o'clock when we set off. Besides Leo and myself, there were three powerful men whose services he had engaged, and on whose discretion he could rely. He had made no attempt to disguise himself; for inasmuch as he had lurked about the premises and had questioned some of the domestics, those very circumstances would tend to stamp him as a police spy, and therefore give a colour to the whole proceeding on which we were about to embark. The landlord—Leo's father—was to a certain extent in the secret; and he therefore was enabled to prevent the hotel-servants from peering too closely into the proceeding when we set out. A chaise belonging to the establishment received myself and the three hired assistants,—Leo riding on the box by the side of the driver.

## CHAPTER CXLVI.

### THE SEARCH.

ABOUT half-an-hour's drive brought us into the suburb where the house was situated; and as we drew near, I saw that it justified the rapidly sketched description which Leo had given of it: namely, that it was a sombre, gloomy-looking mansion situated in the midst of grounds enclosed by a high wall. In this wall there was a great gate consisting of folding-doors, in one of which a wicket was contrived. A lamp burnt over the gate; and a little window at the side showed that there was a porter's lodge.

Leo caused the vehicle to stop close under the wall, at a distance of about half a dozen yards from the gate; and thither we all proceeded in a body. The bell, as it rang, appeared to awaken gloomy echoes within the enclosure; and I must confess that for a few moments I rather repented—though I scarcely knew why—of the course that I was adopting. However, I had gone too far to recede; and now the wicket gate was opened by the porter.

The eldest of the three hired assistants was to play the part of spokesman, and therefore to act as the chief of the posse. He said to the porter, with a short, stern, commanding manner of authority, "We belong to the secret police: you will do well to act submissively."

The porter was an Italian: he had charge of the

house previous to the arrival of the Earl; and he did not therefore belong, accurately speaking, to his lordship's domestic retinue. The mere mention of the word "police" was evidently enough for the man: he turned deadly pale, as the lamp over the gate showed; and he faltered out, "I am innocent of whatever is wrong."

"It may be so—and I dare say it is," observed our spokesman, in the same well assumed tone of police-officialism as before. "Be discreet—and nothing shall happen to yourself. How many persons are there inside the house?—and who are they?"

But just at this moment a couple of men-servants appeared at the front door of the mansion itself, which stood about a dozen yards within the gateway: and our spokesman—or our chief, as I had better call him—deemed it advisable to press forward at once, the rest following close. Leo put himself prominently in advance, so as to be recognised by the two footmen: for they were the very identical same whom he had sought to draw into conversation, as already described.

"My good men," said our chief, addressing the Earl's lacqueys in English, for his knowledge of which Leo had selected him; "we are police-officers, and we are come to search this house."

I saw that they both look confused and uneasy for a moment, as they evidently recognised Leo: but recovering their self-possession, they demanded, as if speaking in the same breath, "What for?"

"Where is your master? and we will explain ourselves. Do you two," continued the chief, addressing himself to the other hired assistants, "go round and keep the back premises. The firing of a pistol will be a sign that resistance is offered, and we shall know how to act."

Our two adjuncts who were thus addressed, sped away to execute the instructions they had thus received; and our chief was about to push his way into the hall, when one of the English lacqueys cried out to the other, "I say, Ned, are we to put up with this? or shall we polish these fellows off?"

"Well, I rather think we had better see what my lord says," responded the other. "Ah! here is his lordship."

A side-door in the hall opened; and forth came the Earl of Eccleston, with excitement visibly depicted upon his countenance.

"What is the meaning of this altercation?" he demanded.

"Please, my lord," replied one of the lacqueys, "these fellows say they belong to the police, and that they mean to search the house."

"The police? search the house?" echoed the Earl of Eccleston faintly: and I saw that for an instant he staggered as if stricken a blow.

Leo hastily nudged me: the same idea had occurred to us both at the same instant: we regarded the Earl's trouble as a proof that the object of our search was really within those walls.

"Yes, my lord," answered our chief; "we come here with authority, and you had better tell this impudent knave of your's who talked of resisting us, that he had better be upon his guard how he interferes with the officers of the law. Besides, if you compel us to use violence, we shall soon

convince you who is the stronger party. Two of our men have gone round to the back of the premises; and we have half-a-dozen more who have clambered over the wall into the grounds, and are therefore at hand to obey a signal when given to them."

While our chief was making this speech, the Earl of Eccleston was evidently exerting himself to the utmost to regain his self-possession. By this time we had entered some paces into the hall; and as I glanced towards the door of the room whence the Earl had emerged, I beheld the Countess standing just within the threshold—for that door was ajar. Strange emotions seized upon me: but I might not give way to them!

"Where is your authority," inquired the Earl of Eccleston, "for this present proceeding? Not that I mean to dispute it: only it were as well for me to know on what ground so arbitrary a course is adopted towards an English nobleman of high rank."

"We are given to understand, my lord," said the chief, "that you harbour within these walls a certain proscribed Italian, whose seditious practices have already produced trouble and disturbance in the city of Milan."

"I harbour a political refugee!" exclaimed the Earl haughtily: "the idea is preposterous! Rest assured that I do not mix myself up with the political affairs of this country. And even if I did," added the nobleman, still more scornfully, "it is not to the disciples of sedition that my sympathies would be given."

"We are glad to hear your lordship speak thus," said our chief: "but nevertheless mere assurances go for nothing. We have our commands, and must execute them. Your lordship appears to be a lover of order; and therefore you cannot possibly object to this proceeding."

"I object to it on the ground that it presupposes me capable of harbouring a political agitator," said the Earl haughtily. "There must really be some mistake. You had better withdraw—or I shall write to the English Ambassador at Vienna to-morrow——"

"And we shall perform our duty to-night," said the chief curtly. "My lord, we will parley no farther. Every room must be searched: but the task shall be executed with as much delicacy as possible; and it depends upon the commands you issue to these lacqueys whether I first of all summon more of my men."

"No—that at least is not necessary," replied the Earl.

"I thought there was something wrong, my lord," observed one of the lacqueys, "the moment I perceived this young fellow"—pointing to Leo—"amongst the posse: for he tried very hard to get into discourse with me yesterday—and the same with Edward this morning."

"Well, well, enough!" interrupted the Earl. "It is my command that you do not offer any molestation to these police authorities. They appear inclined to do their duty with delicacy and forbearance; and they will speedily discover the error under which they labour."

"That remains to be proved, my lord," said our chief.

He then turned to Leo, whom he ordered to remain in the hall; and he beckoned me to follow

him. He was making straight towards the room from which the Earl had emerged,—when his lordship said to him, "My Countess is there! I pledge my honour as a nobleman and a gentleman——"

"I am exceedingly sorry, my lord," interrupted the chief; "but the proceedings must take their regular course."

I saw the Countess of Eccleston glide away from the threshold of the door that was standing ajar; and the chief entered,—I closely following. The Countess was now standing on the hearth-rug: she was somewhat plainly dressed; and methought that she looked careworn. She was pale: her face was thinner than when I had seen her last: but her form preserved all the grandeur of its beauty. There was a mingled hauteur and uneasiness on her countenance. She first bent a look of blended disdain and trouble on our chief: but the instant her eyes settled on me, it struck me that her gaze became more serious, as it certainly was more steadfast; and it had a certain expression of interest in it. For a few moments I felt confused and afflicted: then I turned hastily away, and affected to be busy in looking behind a screen and likewise behind the draperies.

"We are sorry to have disturbed your ladyship," said the chief: and then he issued from the room,—I still following close behind. A lacquey was in the hall with a taper ready to guide us: but the chief said, "If you please, we will search for ourselves: and do you remain here."

Thus speaking, our chief took the taper from the lacquey's hand; and we proceeded to examine all the other rooms on the ground-floor—but without finding any one in them. As we returned into the hall, and were about to ascend the staircase, I heard the Earl say in a low impatient tone, "Do keep back, Clara! It is not fitting that you——"

"Pardon me, Augustus," interrupted the Countess: "I cannot consent that such a scene should be in progress while I——"

"Well, well—have your way!" said the Earl. "But what good will you do? for you see there is no harm—there is no danger of any sort——"

All this I heard plainly enough: for circumstances rendered me keenly sensitive in every faculty. The Countess made no reply to her husband's last observations; and as I glanced back, while ascending the stairs, I fancied that she was lingering at the bottom as if more than half inclined to follow, yet not exactly liking to do so. I felt convinced that there was some suspicion—although perhaps a vague and indistinct one—floating in the mind of the Countess in respect to myself; and I trembled nervously. On reaching the summit of the stairs, I again glanced downward—and perceived that her ladyship was still at the bottom, with one foot on the first step as if preparing to ascend, but yet hesitating to do so. The Earl was now close by her; and they were whispering together.

The chief and I proceeded to examine all the apartments on the first-floor: they consisted of drawing-rooms and parlours. I need hardly say that our examination was superficial enough; for when a glance showed us that there was really no inmate in these rooms, it was sufficient.

But now we began the ascent of the stairs lead-



ing to the landing where the bed-chambers were situated; and it was in one of these that I expected to find Lanover, if he were indeed in the house at all. While mounting this second flight, I looked over the balustrads: the Earl and the Countess were ascending the lower flight together.

We reached the landing. The chief, who carried the candle, opened the nearest door: it was a bed-chamber—and now I felt my heart palpitating even more violently than before, at the hoped-for probability of finding myself speedily in the presence of that man who could, if he chose, make me the most important revelations. I know not how to describe the tremulous, suspenseful, anxious feeling which I then experienced: the reader must imagine it. The chamber door was opened—the chief looked in first—the next instant my own regards were plunged into that room:—there was no one. Glancing round, I perceived the Countess of Eccleston nearly at the last step approaching the landing: the conviction smote me that there were trouble, and anxiety, and the agitation of strengthening suspicion depicted on her features. Ah! my conduct was thus distressing her—my proceeding was filling her bosom with torturing sensations! But how could I help it? I at once averted my looks: for now all in a moment it occurred to me that there was something like an earnest, a deeply pathetic expression of appeal and entreaty infusing itself into her regards.

The second chamber was opened: no one was there. The chief was approaching the next door:—I was rapidly following without casting another look behind me, when my ear caught the quick rustling of a dress. The next instant a hand was laid gently upon my arm; and a well-known voice, speaking in low earnest tones—but tones of a peculiar significance—said, “It is you, Joseph!—yes, I know you!—it is you! You cannot deceive me!”

And the last few words were uttered with a singular emphasis, accompanied by much emotion.

“This door is locked!” at the same instant exclaimed the chief, but without immediately turning round.

“Joseph! what, in heaven’s name, do you mean by this?” asked the Countess rapidly, but whisperingly.

“It is locked—and it must be opened!” cried the chief, now turning round. “My lady, I beg your pardon—But where is his lordship?”

“Joseph, put an end to all this!” whispered the Countess vehemently. “You do not speak—you are silent—but you do understand me! You are no Austrian—Oh! no—no! Full well do I recognise you despite this disguise of your’s!”

“Madam—Countess of Eccleston—my lady,” I faltered forth, “I will not deny—But the door *must* be opened—it must indeed!”

“One word more, Joseph—one word!” she said, in a voice that was exceeding tremulous. “What is your object?—what do you suspect?—or rather, what do you *know*?”

“Shall I force this door?” demanded the chief, now affecting considerable impatience.

“No!” murmured the Countess appealingly to me.

“Yes!” I exclaimed, mustering up all my courage.

The next instant the chief forced open the door

—a faint scream burst from the lips of the Countess—I rushed into the room: Lanover was there in bed! A light was burning in the chamber—an elderly nurse started up from a seat in dismay: an ejaculation of terror escaped from Lanover’s tongue—but he evidently suspected not who I was. No—neither the Earl nor he had penetrated my disguise: the keen eyes of the Countess had alone discovered that secret! But now the Earl himself came quickly upon the scene, followed by the Countess, who had doubtless just whispered to him that which she had previously hesitated to reveal: namely, her suspicion of who I was.

“Joseph—Mr. Wilmot—my dear Wilmot,” said the Earl, fearfully agitated; “for heaven’s sake one word with you!”

“Wilmot? Joseph Wilmot?” cried Lanover, who had caught the words: and then, a light breaking in unto his mind, he ejaculated, “What does this mean? This disguise—?”

I made a sign for the chief to withdraw—the Countess sent away the nurse also—and then I said, “All is known to me, as you may full well understand!”

“But how—my God! how?” shudderingly asked the unhappy Countess, clasping her hands together. “Ah! yes, I see that all is indeed known—?”

“How? how?” demanded the Earl.

“Joseph, you are ever on my track!” murmured Lanover, raising himself painfully up in the bed. “Why do you pursue me thus?”

“I do not pursue you without cause,” I answered. “You were first the pursuer: now you are the pursued! I have vowed to learn all that so closely regards me—My lord—and you, my lady—leave us—leave me with Mr. Lanover!”

“For what purpose?” asked the Earl, utterly bewildered what to say or how to act, as I could plainly perceive.

“Who are these men?” demanded the Countess abruptly. “Are they really the officials of the law?”

“You must leave me with Lanover!” I answered vehemently. “Can you not all of you comprehend that it is dangerous to trifle any longer with one who is so resolute as I am now showing myself to be?”

“But Joseph—?”

“Joseph! Joseph!”

The first ejaculation burst entreatingly from the lips of the Countess: the second from those of the Earl;—and then Lanover himself faltered out, “My God! what new misery is in store for me? Have I not already endured enough?”

“Then you will not leave me alone with this man?” I passionately exclaimed, addressing myself to the Earl and Countess. “Well, then—hear me! I repeat, everything is known to me! Yes—everything! The surgeon of the prison has confessed—?”

“To whom?—to whom?” demanded the Earl and Countess in the same breath. “To whom has he confessed?”

“I have kept the secret so far as I could,” was my response: “but I will not remain silent unless all these mysteries be cleared up to my knowledge! Dorchester—?”

“Dorchester?” echoed the Earl.

“Dorchester?” re-echoed the Countess—the

former speaking with a quick anxiety, and the latter with a shuddering nervousness.

"Yes—Dorchester has told me much—*very much!*" I rejoined; "and it is here that I am determined to know the rest. Yet why should I keep you in any suspense as to the mode in which I discovered the tremendous cheat—the awful drama that was enacted in order to cheat justice of her due, and restore this man"—pointing to Lanover—"to the enjoyment of liberty! Know, then, that I was an inhabitant of the villa near the cemetery—"

Here the wretched humpback gave a hollow groan and literally writhed in the bed, as if in an appalling horror which smote him at the bare recollection of what he had gone through.

"Yes," I continued; "I was an inmate of that villa near the cemetery—I beheld the light in the burial-ground—I stole forth—I drew near the spot—I saw you, my lord, in your cloak—I saw the whole proceeding—the exhumation—the surgeon's arrival—the succour he lent—Oh! yes, I saw it all!"

Lanover again groaned heavily; and the Countess, sinking upon a seat, wrung her hands as if in utter despair. The Earl stood motionless—deadly pale, ghastly, his eyes fixed upon me. It was a scene that I never, never, can forget.

"But why did you conceal yourself in that villa?" asked the nobleman at length breaking silence. "What did you suspect? what clue had you? Tell me, Joseph—"

"I have already told you enough!" I ejaculated vehemently. "It is now for you to speak!—your turn has come! Tell me everything! Farther delay is useless—my resolve is taken—nothing can alter it—nothing can now arrest me in the investigation of all the circumstances which so intimately regard myself!"

"Will you dismiss those men?" asked the Earl suddenly: "for I no longer believe them to be police-officials. They are persons whom you have engaged to help you in this matter. Is it not so?"

"Pardon me, my lord," I said, "for refusing to dismiss those persons until I learn all that I seek to know. But yet—but yet—Ah! my lord, it is as well to inform you that I have a powerful friend—a friend who has aided me most generously—most effectually—"

"The Count of Livorno?" said the Earl in the quick tone of anxious inquiry.

"The same: there is no necessity to deny nor conceal it. And," I added significantly, "he is acquainted with my proceedings—though absent, he has his eye upon me—he watches over me—"

"Good heavens, Joseph!" ejaculated the Countess, starting up wildly: "do you—do you suspect that any one would seek to injure you here?"

"No, no—he does not suspect it!" cried the Earl, with a nervous movement.

"I have a right to suspect everything," I said, "at the hands of *him* at least;" and I pointed towards Lanover.

"He is powerless—you see he is!" cried the Countess: "he is ill—he is prostrate—and where I am, Joseph—"

"Hush, Clara—hush, I command you!" interrupted the Earl, suddenly recovering his self-possession—or at all events, the courage of

desperation. "What care we for his discovery of the secret in respect to Lanover? Is not this another State? The Austrian authorities cannot take cognizance of what occurred in Tuscany!"

"Nor have I threatened you on that score!" I answered. "Good heavens! I seek not to do you harm! My only object is to right myself! If I meant mischievously or revengefully towards you, my lord, I might long ago have said and done things which would at least have covered you with shame, even if they had not absolutely endangered you! Ah, and in England—under the English law—"

"In a word, Joseph," interrupted the Earl of Eccleston, now assuming all his hauteur, "you have got some wild crochets in your head—"

"Will you say the same?" I asked, almost bitterly, thus addressing myself to the Countess. "No, no—you dare not! Nor you, sir—no, nor you!" I added, now flinging my looks upon Lanover.

"As for what Dorchester may have told you," continued the Earl, quickly, "it is valueless! He is an unprincipled man who will serve any one's purposes—flatter any one's hopes—delude any one's mind, just as it may suit him at the moment! I tell you, Joseph Wilmot, that if you persist in these visionary schemes—these idle notions—"

"My lord, one word in your ear!" I suddenly ejaculated: for I was now well nigh goaded to desperation—and yet I wished to save the feelings of the Countess as much as possible—or else I should not have yielded to this long, this distressing, this most painful parley. "Step aside with me for a moment."

The chamber was spacious; and the Earl suffered himself to be drawn by me into the corner that was remotest from the bed in which the humpback lay, and near which the Countess had sank back again upon a seat. I saw that the Earl of Eccleston's countenance now exhibited a fresh anxiety, as if he were full of torturing suspense to learn what new thing I had now to communicate.

"My lord," I said, in a low deep whisper, "that man Lanover—that miscreant whom you have so long and so often used as the instrument of your dark persecutions against myself,—that man, I say, once strove to take my life—yes, to murder me!—and you know it!"

Nothing could exceed the awful, horrible, ghastly look which the Earl of Eccleston bent upon me as I thus addressed him;—and I kept my eyes riveted on his countenance, as much as to imply, or to make him understand that I had no doubt as to the truth of the statements I had just proclaimed in that low deep whisper.

"Joseph," said the Earl at length,—and his voice was scarcely audible,—"it is impossible to contend against you. But hear me!—hear me, I beseech!—and do what I implore of you! Will you promise me this?"

"Proceed, my lord," I said: "I can pledge myself to nothing, until I learn what your intentions—or rather," I hastily corrected myself, "what your *proposals* are. But I am not unreasonable—Oh! you can well understand *why* I am not unreasonable—and why, notwithstanding all the past, I am anxious to spare you—and *her*"—glancing towards the Countess—"as much as possible!"



"Listen, Joseph," continued the Earl. "Everything shall be as you say—everything shall be revealed! Yes—the time for mystery is gone by—I see that it is! But all that I have to tell you must be supported by documentary proofs—and these proofs I have not here! They are in England. Will you leave us now? will you return to England? will you meet me in London three weeks hence? I then pledge myself that everything shall be revealed—all shall be made known to you—and all, moreover, shall be verified and established by such papers as it will *then and there* be in my power to produce."

I hesitated what answer to give: I almost felt that if I responded in the affirmative, and agreed to the course thus suggested, I should be letting an advantage slip out of my hand.

"It can make no difference to you," continued the Earl, "beyond the mere prolongation of your uncertainty and suspense. You have discovered

all that has been done in respect to Lanover—and you can proclaim my complicity in that deed—yes, you can proclaim it as well in England as in Lombardy, if I deceive you. Do you not therefore see that whatsoever power you *here* exercise over me, will be equally available for your purpose in our own country? And even more so—because I might better defy you abroad, in a foreign land, than I could at home. I ask but this delay of three weeks—I have now no object to gain—no ulterior one I mean. But I would rather speak on the spot where all my explanations can be backed by documents, than speak here, in a foreign city, where I have no proofs to lay before you. Now Joseph—your decision?—what is it?"

Still I hesitated—for still the thought was in my mind that if I consented to the Earl's proposition, I should be letting an advantage slip out of my hand—an advantage which being already gained, might not, if lost, be so easily recovered. But at

that instant I perceived the Countess gazing upon me with looks of the most earnest entreaty,—looks so full of a plaintive appeal that my heart was moved; and I said in a whisper to the Earl, “If her ladyship will echo your pledge and repeat the assurance you have just given me, I will assent to the proposition.”

The Earl of Eccleston beckoned his wife towards us; and as she drew near, the colour went and came in rapid transition upon her face: she now looked at me with the glitter of uneasiness and uncertainty in her eyes: she was full of agitation and suspense.

“Clara,” said the Earl, “I have pledged myself to Joseph that if he will now take his departure and create no farther scandal in respect to the presence of Lanover in this house—and if he will in due course proceed to England, whither we ourselves shall be shortly bound—we will there meet him, and we will there give him all explanations. I have said that a delay of only three weeks need take place ere this be done; and Joseph requires from your lips a reiteration of the assurance which has thus emanated from mine.”

“Yes, Joseph,” said the Countess, trembling with nervous agitation; “so far as it depends upon me, this arrangement shall be carried out. Oh, I pledge myself that it shall!”

“In that case,” I responded, “the proposal you have made me, my lord, shall be accepted. But, Oh! wherefore not say one word—only one word——”

“Yes, one word,” murmured the Countess, looking appealingly to her husband.

“Let the proposal which has been made and accepted, stand precisely as it is,” said the Earl. “Three weeks will soon pass away; and then shall everything be made known, Joseph. But Ah! by the bye, tell me where you are to be found in London; so that I may lose no time, on our own arrival there, in intimating that the moment has come for you to call upon us and receive the fullest explanations.”

I named the hotel in Holborn where I had stayed on former occasions; and the Earl wrote the address down in his pocket-book. The business was now completed: but still I lingered—still I tarried in that chamber: I wanted to say more—my mind was full of ineffable feelings: it appeared as if an invisible hand were holding me back when I was about to take my departure. I looked at the Earl: his countenance was calm and mournful. I looked at her ladyship: her countenance was indicative of deep inward agitation. Then I looked towards Lanover: but the shade of the bed curtain prevented me from catching the precise expression of his features at the moment.

“Joseph,” whispered the Earl, “every instant that you remain here only adds to our embarrassment and perplexity! And remember that my domestics will think strangely of all these proceedings——”

“You have his lordship’s pledge, Joseph,” murmured the Countess; “and you have mine—yes, mine also,” she emphatically added, at the same time proffering me her hand.

I took that hand with eagerness—aye, with rapture; and I pressed it warmly. Then the Earl gave me his hand: and I took it likewise. Ah, reader! you may start that I should have done so

after all the persecutions, the unkindnesses, and the treacheries which I had experienced from him: but perhaps you cannot guess what was passing in my mind.

I had no farther excuse for delay; and I hurried from the room without flinging another look upon the miscreant Lanover—that wretch who so to speak had been resuscitated from the grave!

Our party was soon collected; and we returned to the hotel. There I liberally rewarded my assistants in the memorable expedition: but especially towards the landlord’s intelligent son Leo was my bounty displayed. As for explanation, I simply informed him that I had succeeded in my object; and the faithful young man was well pleased at this intelligence. I retired to rest: but it was long before sleep visited my eyes; for heaven knows I had sufficient to think of, and the topics of my thoughts were replete with a vividly interesting variety.

On the following day I wrote to the Count of Livorno a full narrative of all that had occurred,—adding that I was about to return to England, and naming the hotel in Holborn where I purposed to take up my quarters, and where I should be delighted to receive a letter from him. I then set out on my journey towards my own native country.

## CHAPTER CXLVII.

### THE SCOTCH LADY.

It was on the tenth day after leaving Milan that I reached Paris; and as I had still plenty of time on hand before the lapse of the three weeks specified by the Earl of Eccleston, I resolved to remain for a few days in the French capital. I took up my quarters at Meurice’s Hotel; and on thus installing myself there, I could not help reflecting with feelings of astonishment on the rapid succession of startling incidents which had occurred since the first occasion of my setting foot in that establishment. There I had arrived, on that first occasion, with a considerable sum of money in my pocket: there was I swindled by Dorchester—and thence was I compelled to pass into a menial position in the service of the Duc de Paulin. Now I returned to this same hotel—again with ample funds at my command—and with my mind so enlarged by the experiences gleaned in the interval, that I felt as if all I had at first known was sheer ignorance in comparison with the view which I was now enabled to take of the world at large and of the human character.

On the first day of my arrival at Meurice’s Hotel, I dined at the *table d’hôte* at five o’clock; and, as usual, the company, to the number of about fifty, was composed of about two-thirds English and one-third French. I happened to sit next to an elderly lady who had a younger one with her; and this younger one I presently discovered to be the toady or companion of the first-mentioned dame. The latter was elderly, as I have already said: but to be more explicit, she might be about fifty. She was exceedingly stout; and it was not difficult to imagine that the buxom beauty of an earlier period had expanded into the somewhat

obese *embonpoint* of matured womanhood. She had certainly been good-looking in the face: but her features were now somewhat coarse, and her cheeks had a redness which seemed to imply that if not actually intemperate, she was not altogether a teetotaler. She was very gaudily dressed—had a profusion of jewellery about her—and her manners, if not absolutely vulgar, were certainly not particularly polished. But she was very good-humoured in her conversation, and was evidently of a good-natured disposition. I should observe that she spoke with an unmistakable Scotch accent: she laughed a great deal; but this was probably to display a set of teeth that were particularly well preserved.

Her companion, whom I have denominated a toady, was about twenty years younger—that is to say, about thirty; and in many respects she reminded me of that abominable Miss Dakin of whom I have spoken in some of the earliest chapters of my narrative, and who behaved so spitefully towards me when I was a humble page in the service of the Tivertons. Miss Cornwall, the Scotchwoman's companion, was a little thin ugly creature, pitted with the small-pox, and having a very red nose. She evidently strove to flatter her mistress as much as possible; and as the elderly dame was somewhat conceited and vain, Miss Cornwall's homage and adulation were by no means unwelcome to their object. At the very outset of the conversation which I overheard between them, while sitting next to them at the *table d'hôte*, I gathered that the toady's name was Miss Cornwall: but it was not until the lapse of a day or two, as the reader will presently see, that I happened to learn the name of the elderly Scotch lady herself.

"And pray, sir, how long have you been in Paris?" said the Scotch lady to me, after I had rendered her some little attention in the intercourses of the dinner-table.

"I only arrived this morning," was my answer: "but it is not my first visit to the French capital. Indeed, I am well acquainted with Paris."

"And so are you, my dear madam," observed Miss Cornwall, affecting a half-whisper, but speaking in such a way that I should overhear what was said. "Let me see? This is our fourth visit to this gay city during the last ten years. Dear me! Only fancy! For ten whole years have I benefited by your kindness and profited by your example! Ah, my dear madam! what should I have been without you?"

"Well, my dear Miss Cornwall," replied the Scotch lady, "you have been very kind and attentive to me—and prevented me from feeling lonely."

"Lonely, my dear madam?" interjected Miss Cornwall, deprecatingly: "how could one like you possibly feel lonely? Excuse me for what I am going to say—because you know I never pay compliments—I hate flattery—but really you must admit that your fascinating manners, your pleasing conversation, and your beauty too—"

"Ah, my beauty, my dear Miss Cornwall," said the elderly dame, laughing: "the time for *that* has gone by."

"How can you say so, my dear madam?" interrupted Miss Cornwall, as if almost indignantly. "I am sure that you may hold up your head

along with the best and proudest of our sex; and excuse me for observing that a finer set of teeth—"

"Well, well, Miss Cornwall, I have taken care of myself, you know," said the Scotch dame.

I thought very likely that she spoke the truth; inasmuch as she was certainly taking care of herself on the present occasion; for she ate with enormous appetite, and was doing most ample justice to soup, fish, flesh, fowl, and sweets; while the colour on her cheeks was heightening under the influence of sundry glasses of bordeaux and champagne.

"Of course you take care of yourself, my dear madam," said Miss Cornwall. "A lady with six hundred a year"—and here the toady glanced towards me to see if I overheard what was being purposely said for my special behoof—"and the sweetest, prettiest, charmingest villa in the fashionable neighbourhood of Brompton—with a whole host of friends too—gentlemen of rank and ladies of quality—three female servants—and the loveliest little pony-phaeton that ever was seen—"

"Well, well, my dear Miss Cornwall," interrupted the Scotch dame, with another joyous laugh; "I certainly have a sufficiency of worldly comforts."

"And you might say without boasting, my dear madam," interjected the toady, "that if you have not again changed your name, it has not been for want of good offers. You know I do not flatter—but there was Sir Simon Tadcaster, the dashing Baronet—"

"Ah, poor fellow!" said the Scotch dame; "it was a great pity he should have turned out to be no Baronet at all."

Here I noticed that Miss Cornwall became quite red in the face; and a quick "Hush!" reached my ears: for the Scotch dame, most probably in her unsophisticated truthfulness, had thus let out something which destroyed the grand effect that Miss Cornwall had intended to produce upon myself and one or two others who were within the range of hearing.

"You know, my dear madam," the toady hastened to say, "it always was my conviction that this was a mere malignant report got up by Sir Simon's rivals. I always suspected Lord Hoaxley to have been at the bottom of it: for you know I never flatter—but his lordship was desperately enamoured of you at the time. And don't you remember the picnic he gave us in the wood adjoining his beautiful little mansion at Twickenham?"

"Ah! it was a nice house—a very nice house," said the Scotch lady. "Poor Hoaxley! he must have felt the change to the Bench very much."

"Let me help you to some dessert," said Miss Cornwall, speaking very sharp and very quick, and her face again becoming red with confusion, as there was a titter amongst the guests in her immediate neighbourhood: then she whispered something in a hasty manner to her stout patroness.

"Well, my dear Miss Cornwall," observed the dame, "you know it was the truth that I said; and it was too bad of Lord Hoaxley to put the hundred pounds I lent him into his schedule—or whatever they call it—when he went through the Insolvents' Court."

In this manner did the conversation between

the two ladies continue until they rose from the table, "to take a box," as Miss Cornwall audibly proclaimed, at one of the principal theatres. At first the ludicrous idea had struck me that they were husband-hunters, though the age of one and the appearance of the other might certainly militate against the success of such speculative enterprises. But as the discourse had progressed, I felt assured that I was mistaken; inasmuch as the Scotch dame, by her somewhat unnecessary frankness, so completely neutralized the silly attempts of Miss Cornwall to show her off in very fine colours. The elderly lady was vain and loved flattery; but she was evidently too honest and blunt in her disposition, and likewise too stolidly explicit, to let her toady's adulation always flow unchecked in its channel. I therefore came to the conclusion that I had been thrown in the way of a foolish old dame, tolerably comfortable in her circumstances, and possessing a toady whose great ambition it was to shine in the borrowed light wherewith she strove to invest her patroness. I was half inclined to ask one of the waiters who the elderly lady was; but the idea of exhibiting any curiosity on the point struck me as something too ludicrous; and I therefore abstained from any such inquiry.

On the following day I beheld the dame, the toady, and a flauntingly dressed maid, going out in a hired carriage, evidently on a tour to visit the "lions" of Paris. In the evening of that second day, I again beheld the ladies at the *table d'hôte*: but I was careful not to take a seat near them—for I was tired of the silly discourse of Miss Cornwall.

It was at the *table d'hôte* in the evening of the third day, that I happened to sit next to an old Scotch gentleman, who had arrived in Paris in the morning on some professional business; for in the course of conversation he informed me that he was a writer to the signet. On this occasion we sat near one extremity of the long table, while the Scotch dame and her toady sate at the other end. Thus the routine of the dinner had nearly passed before my new Scotch acquaintance had particularly noticed the two ladies just referred to. But all of a sudden I observed that he began to eye them—or at least one of them—with great attention: he leant forward—he put up his glasses—and then he muttered to himself, "Well, surely it must be the same?"

"Do you recognise any one whom you know?" I asked. "There is a countrywoman of yours at the other extremity of the table—"

"Ah! then she is a Scotchwoman?" said the old gentleman inquiringly.

"Yes: *that* I can positively declare she is!" was my response: "for I sate next to her the day before yesterday."

"And what is her name?" asked the Scotch gentleman quickly.

"I really do not know," I replied. "But whom do you take her to be?"

"Well," rejoined the Scotchman, "even if I recognise her personally, I cannot for the life of me recall the name which she used to bear: and it is very probable that she now passes by another."

"Then let us ask one of the waiters," I suggested; "and we shall learn in a minute—"

"No, no!" interrupted the writer to the signet: "we will do nothing of the sort:"—and then he

added, more in a musing tone to himself than as if actually addressing himself to me, "Even if my suspicion be correct, I will let the matter rest: for she behaved honourably enough to us all."

I was about to ask the gentleman whether the elderly dame was a suspicious character: but I thought that I had no right to exhibit an impertinent curiosity—though I must candidly confess that I had become more or less interested on the point; and I could not prevent myself from gazing upon him with a look of inquiry.

"I see," continued the Scotch gentleman in a whispering tone, "that I have inadvertently said too much—and I must not therefore purposely say too little: for if so, I may leave unpleasant impressions on your mind with regard to that lady. I feel convinced that you are a young gentleman of honour; and therefore you will regard as confidential what I am about to tell you. Besides, I am by no means sure that this lady is the same as the woman to whom I am about to refer; and therefore my uncertainty on the point must be another reason for the exercise of discretion."

"I can faithfully promise you," I answered, "that whatsoever you tell me, shall be regarded as perfectly confidential."

"The story is brief enough, and has something ludicrous in it," proceeded the Scotch gentleman. "Several years ago, in Edinburgh, there was a woman—I can't for the life of me recollect her name—who kept a lodging-house. It was a very respectable house; and she at the time was a buxom, good-humoured, bustling widow. The longer I look at that lady there, the more I am convinced—Well, but never mind!—let me continue my story. I have already told you that I am a lawyer; and whatsoever little law business the lodging-housekeeper might have to transact, was done by me. In a word, I was her solicitor. She was thrifty—but too good-natured, and too much inclined to believe any tale that was told her. By dint of economy she accumulated a matter of some five or six hundred pounds; and I placed it out at interest for her. On an evil day she fell in with some designing speculator, who under the fiction of projecting a new canal, was fleecing the good people of Edinburgh. Dazzled by the brilliant promises which he held out—twenty per cent. for money advanced, and all that sort of thing—the widow was determined to entrust her little capital to the speculator. I knew not at the time that he was a rogue; and therefore I remonstrated but feebly against the course which she sought to pursue. She confided to him the whole of her savings; and one fine morning the speculator vanished. The widow came to me in the utmost tribulation. Things had been going wrong with her. On the faith of the speculator's promises, she had taken a larger house and had furnished it handsomely: then a tide of ill-luck had set in against her—her apartments remained unlet—her upholsterer's bills were unpaid—she was in arrears with rent—and all her tradesmen had reason to complain that the widow, once so punctual, was now unable to satisfy their demands. Having full faith in her integrity, I advanced her a hundred pounds: but things, after being temporarily patched up, went wrong with the widow again: and one fine morning she likewise vanished—"



"As the speculator had done before her," I interjected.

"Just so," continued the Scotch gentleman. "Well, I of course gave up my hundred pounds to be as good as lost—and all the more so, when at the expiration of a few weeks, it was rumoured that the poor widow had died of a broken heart and in great distress at Glasgow. The whole matter slipped out of my memory in process of time—until perhaps five or six years afterwards, when I received a letter—and who do you think it was from? It was from the widow herself. It was dated from London, and contained a bank-bill for my hundred pounds, with all the arrears of interest liberally computed and added on. The widow informed me in this letter that on leaving Edinburgh she had taken refuge with a poor relation at Glasgow, and that in consequence of one day espying a couple of her Edinburgh creditors walking through the streets of the other city, she was so desperately frightened that she had got her poor relation to write to another relative of their's in Edinburgh, to spread a report of her death,—a proceeding which appeared the only means of saving her from the horrors of a debtors' gaol. That relation at Glasgow became unable to keep the widow, who accordingly repaired to London to seek her fortune in the British metropolis. She obtained a situation as companion to an elderly lady, who had once lodged with her for a considerable time in Edinburgh. Thus a few years passed—at the expiration of which the elderly lady dying, and having no relative in the whole world, left her property to the widow,—who, we may suppose, had rendered herself very agreeable and had ministered most kindly to her patroness. The very first use the honest widow made of this remarkable turn in the wheel of fortune, was to remit me the whole amount of my claim, in the manner I have described."

"I do not therefore wonder," I observed, "that if that lady at the end of the table be really the same, you should so considerably abstain from making any inquiry which, if it reached her ears, would seem to threaten exposure of the past. But pray continue your narrative: it interests me."

"The letter I received from the widow," said the writer to the signet, "and which contained the remittance, requested me to ascertain who of her creditors were still alive, in order that she might settle their claims: but as the report of her death had been originally circulated, she did not wish to brand herself with the fraud of having been a party to that deceptive rumour. In making my inquiries, therefore, amongst the surviving creditors, I merely said that a relation of the deceased widow felt disposed to liquidate her liabilities. I sent her a list thereof: she at once remitted me the amount—and thus her debts were honourably settled. Now, my dear sir, you have my story; and if there be something ludicrous in the idea of the rumoured death, there is also something highly creditable to the widow herself in her subsequent conduct."

"Do you think," I inquired, "that if the lady at the other end of the table—"

But I stopped short: for as I glanced in the direction where the Scotch dame and her toady had hitherto been seated, I now observed that they were gone.

"I saw them leave the room a few minutes back," said my Scotch acquaintance: "and the elderly lady did not recognise me: but I am more than ever sure that she is really the same as the widow of whom I have been speaking."

At this moment a gentleman with whom my Scotch friend was acquainted, and relative to whose business he had come to Paris, entered the *table d'hôte* room; so that our conversation was cut short—and I went away to beguile an hour or two at some theatre. It was about half-past ten when I returned to the hotel; and on entering the coffee-room, whom should I behold seated at a table copiously spread with dishes and bottles, but Dominic Clackmannan and Mr. Saltcoats? The latter flung down his knife and fork, and began shouting and clapping his hands in such an uproarious style, that all the other guests in the room were startled with astonishment; and one nervous old gentleman was nearly frightened into a fit. As for the Dominic,—he first rolled himself lazily about in his chair, taking three or four pinches of snuff in succession; and then he observed, "It's just that. I had a presentiment that we should meet young Owlhead here this evening."

"Nonsense, Dominic, with your Owlheads!" vociferated Saltcoats. "It is our friend young Wilmot, who left us the other day at Florence; and I'm right glad to meet him again. How are you, Joseph my boy?"

"It's just that," said the Dominic, now proffering me his hand in his turn. "I knew it was Joseph, because the shape of his nose is so different from young Owlhead's. And that reminds me of something the Widow Glenbucket said one day to a beggarman, who had no nose at all, and who asked her for a penny to buy snuff—No it couldn't have been snuff; because if he had no nose, snuff would have been useless to him—as I would undertake to prove to any reasonable man in the course of an hour's argument."

"Come, sit down with us, Joseph," exclaimed Saltcoats: "there's lots of good things upon the table."

"You know, my dear friend," I said, "that I never take supper."

"Then it's the very best reason for your turning over a new and a better leaf!"

"It's just that," said the Dominic. "If it wasn't for suppers I don't know what would become of the London beggars: for I'm credibly informed that they never eat dinners, but reserve themselves altogether for the suppers. And that reminds me of something which happened at the Laird of Tintosquashdale's—"

"How strange it is, Joseph," cried Mr. Saltcoats, "that we are always falling in with you in this manner! The Dominic, you see, got heartily sick of Italy—"

"It's just that," said Mr. Clackmannan: "for one couldn't always be eating dishes that one didn't know the name of. It's the next worse thing to having no dishes at all. But you don't happen to have a Finnan haddock in your pocket, Joseph—do you?"

"How absurd you are, Dominic!" exclaimed Mr. Saltcoats, with an uproarious laugh.

"It's just this, that I am *not* absurd," responded the Dominic: "for wasn't that idle vagabond Archie Goosegreese always going about the Aber-

deen markets filling his pockets with haddocks, until he was brought up before my very particular friend Baillie Owlhead of the Gallowgate, who sent him to the Tolbooth? And that reminds me of what the Widow Glenbucket—”

“Eat and drink, Dominic,” interrupted Saltcoats, “and leave the Widow Glenbucket to repose quietly in her grave, where she has been for so many years. I do believe that you are in love with her image!”

“It’s just that,” said the Dominic; “and when I inherited my ancestral property the other day, I should certainly have offered her a pinch of snuff—I mean my hand—only she is dead. Of course I didn’t mean the snuff—because she never took it. And that reminds me—But I forget what I was going to say—I know it was something good—and I will tell you presently.”

Meanwhile Mr. Saltcoats had resumed his place at table, and I had likewise sat down—but not to join in the banquet. A waiter now entered the room, and brought me a small parcel of some goods which I had purchased at a neighbouring shop before returning to the hotel. I had ordered the bill to be sent round, as I had not change enough in my purse at the time to liquidate it. I begged my friends to excuse me for a few minutes; and I hastened up to my chamber to procure the requisite money. On descending, I paid the tradesman his demand; and he was signing me the receipt in the porter’s lodge, when a carriage entered the court-yard of the hotel. It was a hired equipage; and from it alighted the Scotch dame and her toady, who were returning from the theatre. The toady came to the porter’s lodge and asked if there were any letters. The porter took down several from a shelf; and saying, “There is one,”—presented it to Miss Cornwall.

Without intending to be impertinently curious, without indeed having any ulterior purpose in view—but simply in a listless mechanical manner, I happened to glance at the address on the letter thus handed to the toady; and what was my surprise on perceiving that it was directed to “Madame Glenbucket.” I started with sudden amazement: the Scotch lawyer’s tale came rushing back to my memory; and darting from the porter’s lodge, I flew to the spot where the Scotch dame was waiting at the foot of a staircase for the return of her toady.

“A thousand pardons, madam,” I said, “for the seeming impertinence of the question: but have I the honour of addressing Mrs. Glenbucket?”

“To be sure, sir—that is my name,” she answered, good-humouredly.

“And may I inquire whether you once lived in Edinburgh—and whether—”

But I stopped short: for I perceived that the widow’s countenance, already rubicund enough, became redder still; and I was at once made aware that I had rushed precipitately upon delicate ground, instead of approaching it gently and cautiously.

“Well, sir,” she said, somewhat tartly, in spite of her habitual good-humour, “and what if I did once live in Edinburgh?—what then?”

“Simply, madam,” I responded, “that I may be enabled to introduce you to some old acquaintances. Pray do not look offended: all that I know of you is far more to your credit than otherwise—”

“Well, sir,” said the widow, brightening up, “but who—Dear me, Miss Cornwall!” she continued, now addressing the toady who had just joined us; “I am so flurried! If I had but a *lectle* drop of bran—water, I mean! This young gentleman—”

“For shame of you, sir!” cried the toady, darting a fierce look upon me. “How dare you say anything improper to a lady who has the highest connections? If you mean what is fair and honourable, sir—”

“Don’t scold him, Miss Cornwall,” interrupted Mrs. Glenbucket: “he meant no harm. What he was saying was only natural enough—”

“To be sure, my dear madam!” hastily interposed the toady. “How could he be otherwise than struck by your appearance? And as for choosing the bottom of a staircase communicating with the court-yard of an hotel for popping the question, it’s the most romantic thing I ever knew in all my life. But what is the young gentleman’s name?”

“I really don’t know his name,” answered the Widow Glenbucket, laughing good-humouredly at the error into which the toady had evidently leapt. “But as for popping the question—”

“Oh dear me, no! it has really nothing to do with the name!” said Miss Cornwall. “Of course it’s all natural enough: we shall know his name by and bye. I have no doubt it is a pretty one—Plantagenet or Jones—Tudor or Smith—Cavendish or Simkins.”

“Miss Cornwall had been rushing on in her parlance with exceeding volubility; and I could not help smiling at the consummate art with which she prepared her mistress and herself to admire my name, whatever it might be—whether belonging to aristocracy’s highest range of nomenclature, or whether to the commonest plebeian order. But I now managed to slip in a word edgewise; and with a smile I said, “I can assure you, Miss Cornwall, that there has been no popping the question at all to Mrs. Glenbucket.”

“Then, my dear sir,” said the toady eagerly, and affecting much tender confusion, “if you have been speaking to my dear patroness on my account, and proposing for me to her—”

“I can assure you, Miss Cornwall,” I interrupted her, half-good-humouredly and half-ironically, “however much I might be flattered by the prospect of such an alliance, I am not in a condition to aspire to it.”

“Now don’t be foolish, Miss Cornwall!” said the Widow Glenbucket: “but do hold your tongue and let me hear what this gentleman has to say.”

“May I venture to ask,” I continued, “if you remember a gentleman named Dominic Clackmannan—and another named Mr. Saltcoats?”

“Do I remember them?” exclaimed the widow, in a perfect ecstasy of delight. “Oh, yes—that indeed I do! What? the Dominic with his snuff, and his anecdotes, and his hard names? And Mr. Saltcoats who used to be so jocular and so funny—and who ate and drank so much?”

“And would you like to see them, Mrs. Glenbucket?” I inquired.

“Is it possible that they are here?” asked the widow quickly: then as a sudden shade came over her countenance, she added in a mournful voice, “But I am afraid—”

"Do not be afraid of anything," I rejoined. "I am almost certain," I went on to say in an undertone, "that they are ignorant of the precise circumstances in which you left Edinburgh and on account of which your death was reported: for I never heard either of them make the slightest allusion to those circumstances. At all events I will pledge my existence that they will be delighted to see you. The Dominie is now comparatively a rich man: Saltcoats, you know, is well off: they have both for some time past been travelling on the Continent—and they just now arrived at this hotel."

"Oh! yes. I will see them! I shall rejoice to see them!" exclaimed the widow.

"Where is your sitting-room?" I inquired.

"Up this staircase, on the first-floor above the *entresol*," was the widow's response. "Bring them up! I will order wine—punch—spirits—everything of the best!"

"Well," I interrupted her, "hasten up-stairs and I will bring them to you presently."

As I was turning away I saw that Miss Cornwall flung at me a very spiteful glance, as if she considered that she had been cruelly wronged and outraged by my refusal to offer her my hand in marriage; and perhaps she was likewise alarmed lest the introduction of old friends to the Widow Glenbucket might somewhat impair her own influence with the dame. For a toady invariably seeks to sustain a gulf between her patroness and all persons who are likely to become intimate with her: she conceives she has the exclusive right of monopolizing all the smiles and favours of that patroness; and she consequently looks upon any friendly approach on the part of others as an unwarrantable intrusion on her own property. However, little recked I for the spiteful wrath or the selfish jealousy of Miss Cornwall; and I hastened back to the coffee-room, anticipating a strange scene from the meeting that was about to take place.

"Your two or three minutes are rather long ones," vociferated Saltcoats the instant I made my appearance: and he shouted out the words with such uproar that the nervous old gentleman already alluded to, gave a convulsive start, and spilt half the contents of a tumbler of reeking punch over his smallclothes.

"I met somebody who particularly wishes to see you both," I said. "Come quick!"

"It's just that," said the Dominie: "I had a presentiment that Bailie Owlhead, Mrs. Owlhead, and all the little Owlheads would arrive at the hotel this evening. But as the Bailie is particularly fond of haggis and tripe—and I never saw any in France—I should think he would go back again the instant he finds there is none. And that puts me in mind of what I one day said to the Widow Glenbucket——"

"Ah! the Widow Glenbucket," I observed with a sly smile. "You are always thinking of her! But come quick, I repeat! It is an old friend of your's whom you will both be rejoiced to see."

The Dominie rolled himself off his chair; and Mr. Saltcoats vociferously expressed his opinion that I was playing off a hoax upon himself and his friend of some sort or another—but that if it were so he would mercilessly mulct me in a bowl of punch. I have not the slightest doubt the nervous

old gentleman was infinitely relieved and delighted when we issued from the coffee-room. I led the way across the court-yard to the staircase leading up to the widow's apartment; and on reaching the door I thought I had better give my two friends some little preparation for the surprise they were about to receive. I accordingly said, "It is really no jest which I am playing off upon you: it is a truth! But when it bursts upon you it will fill you with amazement as well as with delight."

"It's just that," said the Dominie: "he has provided us a treat of haddocks, and collops, and haggis, and tripe: and now I am sorry I ate those three platefuls of Strasbourg pie and the half of that chicken, to say nothing of the cold veal, down stairs in the coffee-room. But if the Widow Glenbucket was alive, I would tell her——"

"And she is!" I exclaimed, throwing open the door of the apartment. "She is alive—and she is here!"

The effects produced upon the Dominie and Mr. Saltcoats by my announcement, were as different as could be well conceived. The Dominie said, with his usual stolid imperturbable drowsiness, "It's just that. I always knew she wasn't dead:"—while Mr. Saltcoats at first seemed startled with affright—but the next instant he burst into an uproarious shout of glee. The former rolled lazily into the room: the latter rushed capering in; and it was with a veritable shriek of delight that the Widow Glenbucket waddled forward to receive them. Let me here observe that the Dominie had no real reason for expressing his belief that she was not really dead: it was only one of the phases of the manner in which his mind adapted itself, with characteristic idiosyncrasy, to whatsoever circumstance might occur.

Nevertheless, the worthy Mr. Clackmannan now seized upon the widow's hand; and with more quickness of speech than he was wont to display, proceeded to ask divers ridiculous questions and make sundry equally stupid comments.

"It's just that," he said: "I knew you would come. But how long have you been dead? and when was it you came alive again? How fat and well you are looking!—twenty years younger than when I saw you last! But where have you been ever since you died? and why didn't you write and let me know that you were not dead at all? And that reminds me of what I said to you the very last time we met——"

"I remember all about it, Dominie!" said the Widow Glenbucket, warmly pressing the old gentleman's hand. "And how do you do? And you too, Mr. Saltcoats? Oh, fie for shame!"

These last ejaculations were evoked from the widow's lips just at the instant that the said lips were about to be pressed by those of Mr. Saltcoats. Then Mr. Saltcoats, having thus far relieved his feelings by embracing the widow, rushed forward like an ecstatic madman and embraced Miss Cornwall likewise: then he flung his hat up to the ceiling, and as it descended, playfully used it as a football—kicking in the crown, and ruining that grey felt beaver beyond redemption. Thus he went on capering and leaping, and performing a thousand antics about the room—giving vent the while to ejaculations of uproarious exultation—until after an ineffectual attempt to vary these proofs of exuberant joyousness by standing on his

head, he at length sank down exhausted on the sofa where Miss Cornwall was seated.

In a little while something like order and tranquillity were restored in the apartment: the Widow Glenbucklet rang the bell for wine—Saltcoats ordered punch—the Dominie mentioned bottled stout—Miss Cornwall suggested brandy-and-water—and I was the only one present who ordered nothing. The waiter who had answered the summons, evidently thought that the best way of escaping from the species of Babel bewilderment into which the multifarious mandates plunged him, was to bring up everything which had been named: and therefore the table was soon spread with as varied an assortment of drinkables as there were tastes to gratify. The widow poured herself out wine—Saltcoats began lading out the punch—the Dominie raised a tumbler of foaming London stout to his lips—I myself took a glass of wine—and Miss Cornwall drank a bumper of the punch by the aid of one hand while she mixed herself a stinging glass of hot brandy-and-water with the other. I whispered a hint to Saltcoats not to question the widow as to the origin of the report of her death some years back; and whenever the Dominie began to approach the subject, I managed to turn his thoughts into another direction.

I can assure the reader it was a very jovial party; and the best proofs to be afforded that it was so, are to be found in the facts that when we broke up, the Widow Glenbucklet (who, to do her justice, was *almost* quite sober) had to carry off Miss Cornwall in her arms to the bed-chamber—a couple of waiters had to do the same by the Dominie—while I myself (*quite* sober, gentle reader) had the greatest trouble in the world in persuading Saltcoats to go to his room instead of descending into the courtyard of the hotel and challenging any half-dozen Frenchmen to fight it out. But what there was to fight out, did not very plainly appear.

On the following day I confidentially told Saltcoats the widow's history; and he expressed his admiration of her honourable conduct towards her creditors.

"I tell you what it is, my dear Wilmot," he added: "there shall be a wedding here before long: the Dominie shall marry her as sure as my name is Saltcoats!—and you must wait for the nuptials."

"I am sorry that business will take me off tomorrow," I responded, laughing: "but if you really intend to have a wedding, the Dominie will of course bring his bride to England, and then I shall have the pleasure of congratulating them on the happy event. But what will you do with Miss Cornwall, I asked? Will you take compassion on her, so that there may be a double wedding?"

"Not I, indeed!" exclaimed Saltcoats; "and from what little I saw of her last night, I don't think she'll remain long in her present situation. She is an artful hussy—and for a woman, much too fond of punch and brandy-and-water."

On the ensuing day I took leave of my friends at Maurice's Hotel, and set out on my journey to London.

## CHAPTER CXLVII.

## TWO VISITORS.

I ARRIVED in the British metropolis, and proceeded to the hotel which I had named to the Earl of Eccleston. I was now once more in the capital of my native country after an absence of a year and a half; and though the entire period of two years for which Sir Matthew had recommended that I should be absent, had not elapsed, yet had I the weightiest reasons for thus hastening my return to England. Was I not about to receive those explanations which were of the most vital consequence to me?—was I not standing upon the threshold of the completest solution of the mysteries which had so long enveloped me, and which in many respects had often cost me so dear? I hoped so: for three or four days had to elapse ere the interval of three weeks, specified by the Earl of Eccleston, should be accomplished.

It was about noon on the day after my arrival in London—and I was thinking of repairing to Delmar Manor in order to call upon Mr. and Mrs. Howard—when a waiter entered my sitting-room with the intimation that a gentleman wished to see me. I at once desired that he might be introduced; and I found that my visitor was a middle-aged person—short and stout—dressed in black, with a white cravat—and his whole toilet indicating the most scrupulous neatness. He carried a handsome gold-headed cane; and a massive chain with numerous seals depended from his fob. His grey hair and whiskers were brushed sleekly in a forward direction: he had a mild benevolent look; and I was at once prepossessed in his favour. I rose to receive him: he entered with a sort of quick gliding elastic step; and at once taking my hand, said, "Allow me to introduce myself, my dear Mr. Wilmot. I am charmed to make your acquaintance. My name is Olding; and I am an intimate friend of the Earl of Eccleston."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, rejoiced at this announcement—and all the more so, inasmuch as the cordial manner in which the self-introduction was accomplished, appeared to be indicative of the Earl's sincerity in keeping towards me the promise made at Milan. "You are doubtless come, Mr. Olding, to tell me that his lordship awaits my presence?"

"That message, my dear Mr. Wilmot," responded Mr. Olding, "will doubtless follow close upon our present interview. But as a friend of the Earl—and being engaged for him professionally——"

"His lordship's solicitor, I presume?" was my interjected remark.

"I have been requested by his lordship," continued Mr. Olding, not heeding the interruption, "to call and see you in the first instance——"

"Has his lordship returned from the Continent?" I inquired, becoming more and more fascinated with the friendly—I might indeed almost say the paternal kindness of manner which Mr. Olding exhibited.

"My lord and her ladyship returned home yesterday," was the answer; "and according to the promise so solemnly and sacredly made you at



Milan, they have, as you see, lost no time in sending to communicate with you."

"Then they have doubtless told you everything?" I exclaimed, judging that such was the fact from the observation just made by my visitor.

"Assuredly, my dear Mr. Wilmot, I am completely in the Earl's confidence," replied Mr. Olding. "Ah! I am sorry," he continued, shaking his head solemnly, "that you should have reason to think—I am alluding, you know, to certain persecutions:—and he eyed me with a significant fixity of the gaze.

"My dear sir," I exclaimed, beginning to be tortured with impatience, "pray, for heaven's sake, come to the point at once!"

"To be sure! I am reaching it as quick as I can!" exclaimed Mr. Olding with his blandest smile. "But still it is necessary that we should talk a little of the past——"

"Wherefore of the past," I ejaculated, "when

all that has occurred will be forgiven by me—yes, no matter to what extent those persecutions may have gone, nor how terrible their object!"

"You possess an excellent heart, Mr. Wilmot," said Mr. Olding, now looking at me with a renewed benevolence of gaze. "I think you have been wandering a great deal about the Continent of late?"

"I have, sir. But what in the name of heaven has that to do——"

"With our present business? It was only a remark incidentally thrown in by me, and which was to lead to the additional observation that your experiences are very greatly enlarged by such extensive acquaintance with the world."

"They are indeed!" I exclaimed. "I can safely say, Mr. Olding, that though ever since I was fifteen my life has been, so to speak, a perfect panorama of crowded adventures—yet that during the period I have been upon the Continent, some

eighteen months or so, these adventures have swept upon my career like a hurricane!—they have succeeded each other with whirlwind rapidity!”

“And you so young!” said Mr. Olding, with a sigh which might be either taken for mere commiseration or for admiring wonder. “About twenty-two years of age, I should guess? And have you always had this spirit of adventure?”

“Always had the spirit of adventure?” I exclaimed, marvelling at the expression. “You misunderstand me—you seem to think that it is I who have sought the adventures——”

“Well, well,” said Mr. Olding, “they forced themselves upon you?—they overtook you?—they involved you as it were in their own storm and whirlwind?”

“This is indeed but too true,” I ejaculated. “But pray, my dear sir——”

“My dear Mr. Wilmot,” interrupted my visitor, “do let us have a little quiet discourse together, so that I may know you well before we enter on the vitally important matters——”

“Oh!” I exclaimed, now fearfully excited with suspense; “then you *have* come to me relative to such matters? I will endeavour to control my impatience—I have no doubt you have excellent reasons for the course you are pursuing——”

“Excellent reasons, my dear Mr. Wilmot. I believe these persecutions which you have, alas! so continuously sustained at the hands of the Earl of Eccleston, have spread themselves over several years?”

“Several years,” I responded. “Sometimes they ceased—then, when I saw the Earl, he would solemnly pledge himself that they should not be renewed—he would even quote arguments to prove that I might consider myself thenceforth safe: but still they nevertheless invariably recommenced!”

“And the Countess, Mr. Wilmot?” said Olding inquiringly.

“I have every reason to suppose,” I rejoined, “that her ladyship has all along been more favourably inclined towards me.”

“You may speak frankly, Mr. Wilmot,” remarked Mr. Olding: “I know everything; and if I am thus questioning you on various points, it is for a motive which will be hereafter explained. You will then see how natural it was—and—and, I believe, my dear Mr. Wilmot, that you will find me prepared to act as one of your best and staunchest friends.”

“I thank you, my dear sir, for this assurance,” I said: and though I was still burning with feverish impatience to ascertain the precise motive of his visit, yet I deemed it to be only consistent with propriety and courtesy to add, “If I have exhibited any little excitement, I beseech you to pardon me.”

“Not a syllable of apology, my dear Mr. Wilmot—not a syllable!”—then drawing his chair still closer towards mine, Mr. Olding said, “Let us continue the discourse were we broke it off. We were speaking of the Countess——”

“Has she told you everything?” I inquired, locking earnestly at my visitor.

“Everything!” he answered. “There have been no secrets with me—as there are likewise to be none with you! Indeed, I wish that you would touch upon whatsoever points you consider to be

the most important, and also the most confidential, in connexion with your own career—in connexion likewise with the behaviour of the Earl and Countess towards you: so that there may be all the less difficulty and embarrassment in approaching them and in treating of them.”

“Yes—I see that you are indeed in the confidence of the Earl and Countess,” I said, impressed as much by the kind benevolence of Mr. Olding’s manner as by the words that issued from his lips. “Did the Countess tell you how she gave me appointments in Florence?”

“To be sure,” replied Olding: “and how—— But pray proceed in your own way.”

“And how she conjured me to quit the menial service which I was then in—how she offered me a handsome income——”

“Which, of course you declined,” interjected Olding,—“having higher and loftier claims?”

“Yes!” I ejaculated, and even with a certain degree of vehemence; “because I was resolved never to barter for gold the right which I possessed to learn everything from the lips of her who thus sought to bribe me.”

“And very properly reasoned,” said Mr. Olding. “It is impossible to avoid admiring your fine spirit. But doubtless on some other occasion Lady Eccleston——”

“Behaved towards me in a way which is ever treasured up in my own memory!” I ejaculated. “Yes—I see that she has told you *that* likewise—how at the hotel at Civita Vecchia——”

“The very point to which I wished you to come!” said Mr. Olding. “You met the Earl and the Countess there, you know, at the time you were engaged in the affair of the Greek pirates—eh?”

“And the Countess has therefore told you,” I continued, carried on as it were by a gushing current of the fullest confidence, “how she entered my chamber while I slept—how she bathed my cheeks with her tears—how she imprinted kisses upon them——”

“It was indeed an incident, my dear Mr. Wilmot,” said Olding, speaking in a tone of most sympathizing friendliness, “which was only too well calculated to make a powerful impression upon your mind. And you never thought it was a dream——”

“Perhaps at first, sir,” I answered, “there were doubts floating in my mind: but subsequently the fact settled itself as a conviction there—and as such has it remained. But have you not now questioned me enough?”

“Pray be not impatient, my dear sir,” said Mr. Olding: “we are beginning to know each other—we shall soon understand each other. The time of persecution has gone by—and you are about to enter on the knowledge of those mysteries——”

“Oh, at once! at once!” I ejaculated vehemently. “You know not what pain and torture it gives me to be thus compelled to restrain my impatience!”

“And yet, my dear sir,” said Olding, “having passed through so many perilous and fearful adventures, you must surely have learnt to discipline your feelings.”

“Yes—in all other respects but *this*!” I exclaimed: “and *here* it is impossible! Do you know, sir, that on many an occasion has my life



been in danger—at the hands of man, and on the part of the elements,—in London—amidst the Apennines—and on the ocean—aye, and I may even add in duel and in battle!”

“Ah! battle indeed?” said Mr. Olding, with an air of the deepest interest. “Of that incident I certainly was ignorant.”

“And I let slip from my tongue more than I had intended,” I said: “it was in the heat of discourse. Nevertheless, that which I stated is a fact. No matter where or how, I have been in the midst of a terrible conflict where cannon-balls and bullets were raining their iron shower around.”

“Alas, my young friend! you make me shudder,” said Mr. Olding: then rising from his seat, he added, “I must bid you farewell for the present.”

“Bid me farewell?” I ejaculated, half in disappointment, half in indignation. “It is impossible! Was this discourse to lead to nothing?”

“It is to lead to everything, my young friend,” replied Olding, taking my hand and pressing it with a fervour which seemed truly paternal. “I have been teaching you a lesson of patience. You are soon to hear things which must not burst upon you all of a sudden. Remember that three or four days are yet to elapse before the expiration of the interval fixed by the Earl of Eccleston. But you are not to be kept longer in suspense than is deemed absolutely necessary. To-morrow—at this same hour—either myself or an equally confidential friend of the Earl of Eccleston will call upon you; and then you will know more. Meantime, my dear Mr. Wilmot, farewell—and remember my assurance that I entertain the liveliest interest in your behalf.”

Thus speaking, Mr. Olding wrung my hand with even still greater warmth than he had previously displayed; and he took his departure. I remained alone to reflect on all that had taken place. It appeared to me as if there were a certain degree of considerate kindness being observed towards me: I was to receive revelations of a stupendous import and I was being prepared for them. Even if the Earl himself had been incapable of suggesting the propriety of such a proceeding,—yet in that proceeding might I recognise the tender consideration of the Countess. It was thus I reflected; and though certainly disappointed at not having received the revelations which I fancied were to follow close upon that discourse of Mr. Olding, yet I nevertheless said to myself, “It is all an additional proof that the Earl is at least sincere in respect to the promise he gave me at Milan!”

I remained for some hours in my room at the hotel, thus abandoning myself to my meditations; and when I went forth to walk, it was too late to visit Delmar Manor. I retired to rest at my usual hour,—anxious for the morrow to come, and wondering what it would bring forth.

The next day dawned: I rose early—but would not leave the hotel even for an instant, for fear lest the expected visitor should for any reason anticipate the time fixed by Mr. Olding for his arrival. As twelve o'clock approached, I grew exceedingly anxious, and my mind was full of suspense. At length, when the clocks were proclaiming the hour of noon, the waiter opened the

door of my apartment, and announced a Mr. Joyce. This was a gentleman of about forty years of age—dressed in pretty well the same style as Mr. Olding—namely, a suit of black with a white neckcloth. But his features were sterner and harsher—his look was more demure; and if there were nothing of the dissenting parson about him, there was a great deal of professional gravity and solemnity of some sort or another.

Advancing towards me with a slow pace, and making a bow which was more respectfully courteous than absolutely friendly, he however took my hand, and said in a voice that was deep and measured, “Permit me, Mr. Wilmot, to introduce myself to you as a confidential and very particular friend of the Earl of Eccleston.”

“You are most welcome, sir,” I answered. “Perhaps I have the honour of speaking to one of the same legal firm whom Mr. Olding yesterday represented?”

“Not exactly the same firm,” answered Mr. Joyce: “but Mr. Olding and I frequently meet together and consult on matters of importance; and now, as both of us enjoy the honour of the Earl of Eccleston’s friendship, we are desirous to aid that nobleman to the best of our power in those matters which concern yourself.”

“And you are therefore come, Mr. Joyce,” I said, “to—”

“To have a little conversation with you,” he responded.

“More conversation!” I ejaculated, quivering with impatience and suspense. “I beseech you to understand me, my dear sir, when I declare that I am now fully nerved and prepared to receive any communication which there can possibly be to impart. Oh! I comprehend full well the kind considerateness which is thus seeking to temper my feelings, as it were, and attune the state of my mind for the reception of that announcement which is so important to myself. But does not the Earl understand—does not the Countess understand, that I have long suspected—and indeed that for some time past I have almost fully known—Yes, yes!” I interrupted myself, growing exceedingly excited, “you have but to speak out at once, Mr. Joyce—and rest assured that the announcement will not strike me as a blow!—it will merely set my agitated feelings at rest!”

“Pardon me, Mr. Wilmot,” said the visitor, gravely seating himself; “I am older than you, and understand the world better than you. You have recently been hurried through so many startling adventures—”

“I hope, my dear sir,” I interrupted him, “that we are not going to travel the same ground as that which Mr. Olding took with me yesterday.”

“I know nothing sir,” responded Joyce,—“I know absolutely nothing,” he emphatically repeated, “of what took place between yourself and Mr. Olding yesterday. Indeed I have not seen Mr. Olding for two days past. It is at the express desire of my Lord Eccleston that I now call upon you.”

“May I ask, Mr. Joyce,” I said, “whether you also are a professional adviser of the Earl?”

“Yes—assuredly,” was the answer given with a sort of phlegmatic dryness. “His lordship often consults me.”

“And are you now come, Mr. Joyce,” I im-

patiently inquired, "to make certain communications to me?"

"Not so fast, Mr. Wilmot, if you please!" interrupted Mr. Joyce in a tone of authority. "You and I are going to have a little discourse together—quite in a friendly way, you know—"

"Indeed, I should hope," I exclaimed, "that the Earl would not send any one to me except in a friendly capacity!"

"Of course not," answered Mr. Joyce. "You have suffered a great deal, Mr. Wilmot, at the Earl's hands—have you not?"

"Much, sir—much!" I replied,—"but not too much to be forgiven!"

"And perhaps forgotten?" said Mr. Joyce suggestively.

"A man may so far control the feelings of his heart," I answered, "as to vouchsafe a sincere forgiveness. Besides, other circumstances—you doubtless know to what I allude—may assist him in thus influencing his heart. But to exercise a power over the memory, and compel it to forget,—that, you know, Mr. Joyce, as well as I can tell you, is absolutely impossible! But, Oh! hasten and make me those communications with which you are charged—or let me go at once with you to the Earl!"

"Pray control your impatience, my dear young gentleman," said Mr. Joyce: and taking my hand he grasped my wrist as I thought in a somewhat peculiar manner: but the incident was too trivial to dwell in my memory; and he went on to say, "You are very young, and have passed through so many adventures—to have seen so much of the world—"

"For heaven's sake, my dear sir," I ejaculated, starting up from my seat; "do not torment me thus! Think you that if I have passed through painful adventures, it is kind on your part or agreeable on mine to have the recollection of them thus revived? Or again, think you that if I have known pleasant adventures in my time, I am now in a humour to feast upon those sources of happiness? In a word, Mr. Joyce—"

"You excite yourself, Mr. Wilmot, to a very unnecessary degree," interrupted my visitor, who was himself as calm and imperturbable as a statue—and would have looked like one too, were it not that he had the faculty of speech. "But let us approach the main point. Stop! it is for me to guide you thither—and not for you to leap precipitately onward in your own fiery haste."

"Well, sir—then I will be calm: for now that you promise to come to the point, I am satisfied:—and thus speaking, I resumed my seat.

"I am informed, my dear Mr. Wilmot," continued Mr. Joyce, his look and his manner now becoming more bland and urbane, "you consider that the Earl and Countess of Eccleston are in a certain way—at least to some extent—"

"No doubt of it!" I exclaimed, anticipating, as I thought, the query he was about to put to me. "But I am not the less impatient for the frank avowal to be made and for the promised documentary evidence to be shown me. Are you come prepared to do all this on the Earl's behalf?—have you brought the papers with you?"

"Patience, patience, Mr. Wilmot!" interrupted my visitor: "we shall never get on at this rate. Let me put one question to you—and do try and

answer it without excitement. You have, I believe, with a sort of chivalrous enthusiasm constantly mixed yourself up in the affairs of other persons,—seeking to succour those who were in difficulty or embarrassment—seeking also to punish, or at least to frustrate the schemes of those who you conceived to be doing wrong?"

"What in the name of heaven does this tirade mean?" I exclaimed, with a sort of bewildered indignation. "At the moment I expected you were about to question me on some point intimately connected with the hopes and aspirations which are dearest to my heart—at least, if not dearest," I added, thus correcting myself, as I thought of the lovely Annabel, concerning whom everything was really *the dearest*.—"I may say *very dear*, you fly off to an utterly different subject!"

"It is because, as the Earl of Eccleston's friend, I experience an interest in everything which concerns you," answered Mr. Joyce. "Those persecutions—"

"Persecutions again!"—and I literally groaned in despair at what I considered to be the pertinacious dogmatic obstinacy of this most annoying individual.

"Well, well, Mr. Wilmot," he said, "if you do not choose to give me any information with regard to those persecutions, I must positively take my leave of you."

"But if, as you have led me to believe, you are in the secrets of the Earl of Eccleston," I exclaimed, "you must know everything!—and of what earthly use can it be to make me recapitulate matters which are infinitely painful, and which for so many reasons I would consign to oblivion if it were in my power? Persecutions? Yes—I have experienced them!—such persecutions as *no one ever before experienced!* Now, sir—is that sufficient?"

"Quite, Mr. Wilmot—quite," was Mr. Joyce's answer, given with a most singular look and manner. "I am really and truly sorry to have thus been compelled to vex and annoy you: but I must now take my leave."

"Take your leave?" I ejaculated. "But you have told me nothing!"

"Ah, I forgot!" said Mr. Joyce. "This evening, at five o'clock, either myself or some other friend of the Earl will come to conduct you to his lordship—and then, Mr. Wilmot—"

"If you had told me this at first," I interrupted him, "you would have satisfied my mind. Nevertheless, I now thank you for the intelligence. You are sure that this promise will be kept, and that without any farther delay, preparation, or evasion—"

"I can promise you, my dear Mr. Wilmot," answered Mr. Joyce, "that this evening at five o'clock you will be waited on by some one who will conduct you to the Earl of Eccleston: and then—"

"And then," I joyfully cried, "everything will be made known!"

"Be it so, my dear sir. I shall anxiously await the hour when this important interview is to take place."

Mr. Joyce then shook hands with me, and quitted the apartment.

"At length," I said to myself, when the door closed behind him, "I am standing upon the

threshold of the most important incident of my life. It is impossible that I can be mistaken! Were not my conjecture strictly correct—and were not Dorchester's surmise exactly consistent with truth—all these preliminaries would not have been adopted by the Earl and Countess to prepare me for the final event. Ah! I was wrong to exhibit so much petulance when the subject of my persecutions was mentioned to me! I understand it all! One of the objects of these professional visits on the part of Olding and of Joyce was to discover the precise frame of my mind towards the Earl and Countess—to see whether I could really forgive the past, and whether I could even strive to forget it! Oh, could they doubt it?"

I was now so agitated and so excited by the varied feelings which filled my soul, that I experienced an absolute necessity for some vent for the emotions of my surcharged heart,—some means of infusing calmness into my mind. I at first thought of walking out into the streets to while away a few hours: but I felt that the din and bustle of London would only add to the turmoil of my soul; and I accordingly sat down and penned a letter to the Count of Livorno, in answer to a very kind one which I had that morning received from his lordship. I explained to him the full particulars of these two visits which I had received, and which I regarded as the preliminaries to the crowning interview which was to take place at five o'clock in the evening. I assured his lordship that I now felt certain I was at length standing upon the threshold of the elucidation of all past mysteries; and I promised to write again on the morrow and communicate whatsoever might have occurred. Having finished my letter—and now feeling myself much more calm than I previously was—I walked forth to take it to the post, in order that I might have an object for this ramble. The reader may however be well assured that I returned to the hotel somewhere before five o'clock, to be in readiness there for the appointment to which I attached so solemn an importance.

The clock was striking five when the waiter entered my apartment, and introduced a gentleman whom he announced as Mr. Granby. He might be about fifty years of age—somewhat stout—with an exceeding red face, showing myriads of little purple veins beneath the skin, as if the generous port-wine to which he was attached had secreted itself there. He wore gold spectacles; and his small green eyes—somewhat bleared—twinkled through the glasses. Like Messrs. Olding and Joyce, he was dressed in black: but instead of having a white cravat, he had a black neckcloth, somewhat negligently tied. He came with a sort of half-gilding, half-rolling gait into the room; and first making me what I thought a somewhat obsequious bow, he said, "I believe I have the honour of speaking to Mr. Wilmot?"

I answered in the affirmative.

"Mr. Joseph Wilmot?" continued Mr. Granby, accentuating the Christian name.

Again I replied in the affirmative; and I was trembling with a nervous suspense, for fear lest some further delay should intervene ere I was conducted to the Earl of Eccleston.

"You expected me, Mr. Wilmot?" resumed my visitor inquiringly.

"Yes—I was prepared to receive you. And you are come to take me to the Earl of Eccleston?" I said.

"Just so," rejoined Mr. Granby. "My carriage is waiting at the door; and if you will accompany me——"

"Oh, at once!" I joyfully ejaculated, snatching up my hat and gloves.

We descended the stairs together; and on emerging from the hotel, I perceived a handsome equipage stationed at the door. The coachman and footman were dressed in elegant liveries; and the carriage was drawn by a superb pair of horses. Mr. Granby made me enter first; and I found another person seated inside. He appeared to be a strong, powerfully built individual, of about forty—plainly but respectably dressed—though by his looks I could scarcely take him for a gentleman.

"It is merely a friend of mine," said Mr. Granby as he followed me into the carriage.

The footman having closed the door, leaped up to his seat by the coachman's side; and the equipage drove off. It proceeded along Holborn and entered Oxford Street,—Mr. Granby keeping up an incessant discourse the while, which however he had almost completely to himself—for I was too much occupied with my own thoughts to be interested in his common-place remarks; and as for his friend on the other seat, he appeared to be of a taciturn disposition, contenting himself with now and then interjecting a brief comment. I threw myself back in the carriage, and exerted all my power to lull the agitation of my feelings and prepare myself thoroughly for the expected interview. The equipage rolled rapidly along until at length I began to think that it had missed the proper turning from Oxford Street towards Manchester Square; and I glanced forth from the window. On the left I beheld the railings of Hyde Park; and I said to Mr. Granby, "Your coachman is going wrong, sir: this is not the way to Manchester Square!"

"Ah! I forgot, my dear sir, to mention," said Mr. Granby's response, "that the interview is to take place at my house—that of a mutual friend, you know—because, as the matter is a delicate one, it was deemed expedient to make this arrangement."

"Have we far to go?" I inquired, being full of a nervous impatience, notwithstanding my endeavours to lull the tumult of my emotions.

"A very little way farther," replied Mr. Granby, —adding, "My house is at Bayswater."

"And the Earl will be there?" I asked.

"Most certainly," responded Mr. Granby. "He is anxiously waiting——"

"And the Countess?" I said in a low tremulous voice.

"Her ladyship will likewise be there," was the rejoinder.

In a few minutes Bayswater was reached; and the equipage turned to the right, into a road diverging from the main thoroughfare. On either side there was a range of newly built villas: then there was an unoccupied space for about a hundred yards—and then the carriage stopped at a gate in a wall evidently enclosing spacious grounds and premises. The footman, leaping down from the box, rang the bell—the folding leaves of the gate were at once thrown open—and the equipage turned

into an avenue intersecting a lawn, and leading up to a mansion of considerable dimensions. I therefore supposed that Mr. Granby must be a gentleman of fortune.

"Now, Mr. Wilmot," he said, stepping forth as the footman opened the carriage-door, "have the kindness to follow me."

I was trembling all over; for I said to myself, "In a few moments I shall doubtless stand in the presence of those who are now in some sense the arbiters of my destiny!"

My heart beat violently: I was agitated with that suspenseful sensation which seizes upon an individual when believing himself to be on the threshold of an important crisis in his existence. I followed Mr. Granby into a spacious hall, where two porters in handsome liveries were stationed; and the unnamed friend who had accompanied us in the carriage, entered immediately after me. Mr. Granby led the way into a well furnished parlour and requested me to be seated. He sat down at a short distance—while his friend, placing himself still farther off, took up a newspaper, with the contents of which he appeared suddenly to become deeply interested. But the Earl and Countess of Eccleston were not in this apartment.

"My dear Mr. Wilmot," said Granby, "you have friends who take a very great interest in your welfare—"

"You mean the Earl and Countess?" I said, in a tremulous voice: for I conceived this to be another considerate preparation for the crowning event.

"Friends who take a very great interest in your welfare," repeated Mr. Granby. "They have enlisted my sympathies on your behalf—"

"It is exceedingly kind of you," I said, "to take all this trouble—"

"No trouble, my dear sir!" interjected Mr. Granby: "it is to a certain extent a duty."

"Doubtless your friendship for the Earl has led you to regard it in this generous light:"—and I continued to speak with the feverish agitation of suspense.

"In me you behold a friend," proceeded Mr. Granby; "and I have therefore invited you to pass a short time with me at my residence—where every attention will be shown you, and where you will find ample means for recreation and amusement."

"Is it the Earl's wish that I should remain here for awhile after the interview which is now to take place?" I inquired with a strange sense of bewilderment.

"Yes—by his express wish," replied Mr. Granby. "Now pray don't excite yourself: but I think we must postpone for a few days that interview to which you have just alluded—"

"Postpone it!" I ejaculated, struck by the conviction that I was now being trifled with: and I started from my seat.

At that instant a cry so wild and terrible rang through the entire building; and though evidently coming from some remote part of the premises, it pierced the walls of the room in which I found myself, as if they were of paper. That cry, so wild and mournful, rang through my brain, and struck terror to my heart. I flung a rapid look of inquiry upon Mr. Granby: but to my astonishment he appeared utterly unmoved—while

his unnamed friend went on reading the newspaper with as much calmness as if nothing strange nor unusual had occurred.

"Pray sit down, Mr. Wilmot," said Granby: "it is only an unfortunate friend of mine—an invalid—a—a—"

"One word, sir!" I exclaimed. "Are the Earl and Countess of Eccleston here?"

"I thought I had already given you to understand—"

"That they are *not*?" I ejaculated. "Then, sir, I decline accepting the home with which they have sought to provide me; and I am sorry that you should have had all this trouble."

Thus speaking, I bowed and turned towards the door: but to my surprise and indignation, I perceived that Mr. Granby's friend, having glided from his seat, had posted himself with his back against that door.

"Stand aside!" I exclaimed. "You shall not bar my passage!"

"Mr. Wilmot," said Granby, "it is useless for you to excite yourself. Here you are—and here you must remain for the present. Any violence on your part—"

"Good God!" I exclaimed, as a sickening, maddening suspicion flashed in unto my brain—and I reeled beneath its withering, blighting influence. "Where am I? for heaven's sake tell me where I am?"

"Where you will be taken care of," responded Granby, "and the state of your mind improved."

"A lunatic-asylum!" I murmured in a dying voice: and staggering towards the sofa, I burst into tears.

## CHAPTER CXLIX.

### THE LUNATIC-ASYLUM.

EVERYTHING was now plain to me: I saw that I had been made the victim of a fearful, hideous, diabolical treachery. Those two men—Olding and Joyce—whom I had taken for lawyers, were in reality medical practitioners; and they had signed the requisite certificate which was to plunge me into a mad-house. They had been led to believe that I cherished delusions with regard to the Earl and Countess of Eccleston— that without the slightest cause I had fancied that I was the object of their bitter persecution—that I wandered about the world in a state which unfitted me to be thus at large—that I insensibly plunged into adventures of all sorts—and that I regarded myself as a modern Quixote whose duty it was to redress wrongs and frustrate the schemes of evil-doers. Ah! now I comprehended full well wherefore Olding and Joyce had questioned me in the way which they had done; and I could not blind myself to the fact that my excitement on the occasion of their visits must have seemed to corroborate the assurance previously given to them that my brain was unsettled on particular points. And then, too, I recollected the peculiar manner in which Joyce had held me by the wrist:—it was in order that he might feel my pulse. Good heavens! had I by my own unguarded conduct and folly thus aided the designs of the Earl of Eccleston who had resolved to immure me in a mad-house?

And why was it that I flung myself upon the sofa in that desolation and forlornness of the soul?—why was it that I burst into tears and gave way to an agony of weeping? Because I was smitten with the conviction that resistance was indeed vain—that violence would avail me nothing—that Granby had the law upon his side,—cruel, abominable, and atrocious though that law were which thus afforded the wicked an opportunity of carrying out their detestable designs! In a word, I knew myself to be powerless, and that I was as completely at the mercy of Granby who sat calm in his chair, and of the keeper who had planted his back against the door, as if I were restrained by bolts and bars within the walls of Newgate. This was why I sank down overpowered with my horrible feelings: this was why my energies were paralyzed: this was why I burst into tears!

“Come, Mr. Wilmot,” said Granby, at the expiration of a few minutes—and he spoke in a somewhat stern, authoritative voice,—“it is no use to make yourself miserable: you will be treated as well as your own conduct will allow us to treat you. Your friends are very considerate, and have agreed to allow a decent revenue for your maintenance. You shall have a chamber to yourself—I keep an excellent table—and the grounds are spacious enough for you to take plenty of exercise. Be a good young man—tractable and docile—avoid giving unnecessary trouble—and you will find yourself as happy here as the day is long.”

“Mr. Granby,” I answered, with deeply dejected manner, “I know my own thoughts and my own mind as perfectly as you are the master of your’s. I have never cherished a delusion—I have never pursued phantoms—”

“We will not argue the point, if you please,” interrupted Mr. Granby. “Once for all, it is of no use for you to talk in this strain to me.—Tom,” he added, addressing himself to his man, “open the door and I will take Mr. Wilmot to the dining-room—for dinner must be ready—Indeed we have kept it waiting nearly an hour!” added Mr. Granby, looking at his watch.

“I should esteem it a favour,” I said, “if you will permit me to retire to the chamber which is to be allotted to me. I have no appetite—I require no dinner—”

“Pooh! pooh! cheer up your spirits!” said Mr. Granby. “It is the very worst thing to give way to melancholy. I will introduce you to Mrs. Granby—”

“Suffer me to retire now to my chamber,” I said, in a tone of almost abject entreaty,—for I felt thoroughly crushed and spirit-broken. “Tomorrow I shall be better.”

“Well, be it so,” replied Mr. Granby. “I will send you up some dinner—and you must do your best to maintain your spirits. Tom, show Mr. Wilmot to his room.”

The keeper—for such he was—opened the door; and I followed him from the parlour. He lighted a taper in the hall, and conducted me up a handsome staircase to a long corridor on the second-floor, with an array of numerous doors on each side of this passage. He showed me to a good-sized and well-furnished chamber; and having lighted a couple of candles, he left me, with an intimation that a tray with some dinner should be shortly

sent up. He did not lock the door upon me: but I only felt too well assured that this was no neglect of a precaution, but that other means were adopted to prevent the possibility of escape.

I sat down in a dreadful state of despondency. Not only was I deprived of my liberty and consigned to a lunatic-asylum—but I keenly felt the bitterness of this new persecution on the part of the Earl of Eccleston. Oh, how grossly had I been deceived!—how infamously treated! Fool—idiot that I was to yield up the advantages which for a moment I had obtained at Milan, and assent to a compromise which was after all nothing but a snare to entrap me! And was not the devilish ingenuity of Lanover visible in the hideous treachery which had now enmeshed me?—had not that man been resuscitated as it were from the dead, in order to pursue me with fresh rancour? But the Countess of Eccleston,—was *she* an accomplice in this foul plot?—could she who had wept over me at the hotel at Civita Vecchia, and who had imprinted kisses upon my cheeks,—could *she* have given her adhesion to this last and most terrible persecution?

And now a strange and horrifying thought began stealing in unto my mind. Was there really any ground for my immurement in a lunatic-asylum? Had I been all along cherishing delusions in respect to the Earl and Countess of Eccleston? Was the idea of those kisses and those tears at Civita Vecchia a mere phantasy?—was Dorchester’s supposition as baseless as my own? In a word, had I from the first been cradling myself in idle dreams and airy visions! I pressed my hand to my brow, and sought to deliberate with myself as calmly as I could. But my thoughts were falling into confusion: I could not collect them; and I said to myself in anguish of spirit, “Just God! if I be really going mad!”

The door now opened; and a livery servant entered, bearing a tray which he placed upon the table. His manner was completely respectful; and when I found that he treated me thus, my mind was relieved: and now I said to myself, “No, no—I am not mad: and all these people know it!”

The domestic retired, having intimated that he should return in half-an-hour to see if I required anything more. A very excellent repast was thus sent up to me; and there was about half-a-pint of wine in a small decanter. I could eat nothing except a morsel of bread: but for the first time in my life it was with avidity that I drank the wine; for I needed a stimulant to cheer my spirits. I however soon fell into a painful reverie again: my heart kept swelling with emotions as I thought that but a short time back I was in the enjoyment of freedom—whereas now I was a captive in a place which after all was only a superior kind of prison. Oh, if Annabel knew that I was here! And, ah! distressing, maddening idea! what if the machinations of my enemies should succeed in prolonging my captivity? what if when November came I should be unable to present myself at Heseltine Hall? and, Oh! what would be thought if no tidings were there received of me? Would Annabel deem me faithless? No: but it would be believed that I was dead—that I must have perished obscurely in some foreign part, without leaving a trace behind me!

The reader will not consider me weak if I confess that I again wept bitterly: but those tears relieved me somewhat; and I endeavoured to fix my looks on the brighter side of the picture. Had I not friends who, on my sudden disappearance from the world, would make inquiries concerning me?—would not the Count of Livorno, for instance, be in time rendered uneasy on my behalf, if a prolonged silence were maintained?—would not the Count of Monte d'Oro think of me?—would not Sir Matthew Heseltine himself seek to learn my fate?—and might I not even expect something favourable at the hands of the kind-hearted Saltcoats? Yes, yes—it was impossible I could be left to linger out a wretched existence there! My captivity must assuredly be brief! But then, on the other hand, came the sickening thought that all those whom I have just mentioned might fancy that for reasons of my own I had purposely broken off all communication with them; and they would trouble themselves not with the affairs of one who to all appearances had ceased to remember former friendships.

It was with a heavy heart that night I sought my couch: but I soon slept through sheer exhaustion of mind and body. When I awoke in the morning, I could scarcely believe that everything which first struck my thoughts was otherwise than a dream. But, alas! I beheld bars at the window; and, Oh! the conviction smote me that it was no dream. Looking around the room, I perceived all the luggage which I had left at the hotel; and it must therefore have been placed in my chamber while I slept. I rose, and opened my boxes. Everything was safe, even to my papers and letter of credit: nothing had been abstracted; and my hotel bill, duly receipted, lay on the top of my clothes just within one of the trunks. I performed my toilet; and then, trying the door of the chamber, found that it was unlocked. I felt the want of fresh air; and I was moreover anxious to ascertain to what extent my range of freedom reached. I accordingly issued from the room. In an adjacent one, the door of which stood wide open, I beheld the man Tom and another individual (also a keeper, as I subsequently learnt) seated together at a table, partaking of their breakfast. They respectfully bade me "Good morning;"—and I descended the stairs without interruption. On reaching the hall, I found the front door standing open: one of the porters was seated in his large leathern chair; and I passed out of the hall, still without the slightest hindrance.

I have already said that the mansion was an extensive one; and it stood in the midst of about an acre and a half of ground, laid out in lawns and gardens. But on the inner side of the four walls which completely enclosed the place, there was a line of *chevaux-de-frise*, or long iron spikes fixed upon revolving bars; so that it was impossible to climb the wall. At the entrance-gate there was a porter's lodge; and the gates themselves were kept locked. In addition to these precautions, there were three or four gardeners so interspersed about the grounds that every part of the premises could be thus watched by them; and I may farther observe that during those hours when the inmates of the asylum were principally accustomed to take exercise in the garden, three or four keepers

were roaming about likewise. In respect to the *chevaux-de-frise*, they were not visible to passers-by outside the walls: the projecting irons which supported them, were about a foot and a half from the top—and, as I have already said, on the inner side. In each angle of the walls there were quantities of iron spikes, four feet in length, which came bristling down in a slanting direction from the masonry in which they were set; and these were in addition to the *chevaux-de-frise*.

It was about eight o'clock in the morning when I thus came out to walk in the grounds; and the gardeners (who were also keepers) were already at their work, in which they seemed so busied as to have no thought for anything else. Besides these gardeners I at first beheld no one: but at the expiration of a few minutes I perceived an old gentleman emerge from a sort of shrubbery. He was dressed in black; and his toilet indicated the utmost neatness and precision. I wondered for a moment whether he were one of the unfortunate inmates of the place—or whether he were some official—or again whether he might not be a friend of Mr. Granby. He had a most respectable as well as venerable appearance; and there was something exceedingly kind and benevolent in his looks. He courteously bade me "Good morning;" and I returned the salutation. I surveyed him steadfastly in the hope of ascertaining which of my conjectures was the right one: but I quickly came to the conclusion that at all events he could not be one of the deranged inmates of the place, for his full clear blue eyes were expressive of completest lucidity.

"Enjoying the morning air, sir, before breakfast?" said the old gentleman, now joining me in my walk.

"I am certainly taking the air," I answered somewhat bitterly: "but as for enjoying it,—that, alas! is impossible when it is the air of captivity which I breathe!"

"What?" ejaculated my new acquaintance, now stopping short and gazing upon me with astonishment depicted upon his countenance. "You do not mean me to understand that you are imprisoned here?"

"Alas, indeed I do!" was my mournful response. "And yet——"

"Why, you are no more mad than I am!" cried the old gentleman, with an indignation which suddenly inspired me with hope. "This shall be seen into at once! If my friend Granby has been imposed upon——"

"He has, my dear sir—he has, I can assure you!" I exclaimed. "My case is a most cruel one—Oh, so cruel!"

"How often are these mistakes to occur!—these villainies to be perpetrated!" exclaimed my new friend. "But heaven be thanked! I have frequently proved the means of liberating those who were unjustly confined within these walls."

"Oh, my dear sir!" I cried, my heart now thrilling with the most fervid hope; "whoever you are, if you would assist me——"

"That I will assuredly do, my poor young man," interrupted the old gentleman, "if I find your statement correct. Granby is an intimate friend of mine; and I am on a visit to him. He is a well-meaning, kind-hearted man—but perhaps not so well fitted for his avocation as he might be.





He wants discrimination; and through the absence of that quality, has sometimes received gentlemen as inmates who ought never to be here at all. Of course it is difficult for him to act otherwise, when he sees the certificates——”

“My dear sir,” I exclaimed, full of the most feverish suspense, “for heaven’s sake use your influence at once—and you know not what an amount of good you will be doing! Restore me to liberty—and night and morning will I pray for you!”

“Come with me,” said my new friend, his looks melting with compassion, and his lips quivering beneath the influence of the emotions which my words had excited. “We will see Granby at once. I am glad that I happened to be here—and to tell you the truth, I have prolonged my visit more than I originally intended, in order to make myself thoroughly acquainted with the workings of these institutions: for though Granby’s is cer-

tainly one of the best in the whole country, yet of I have already told you, the most conscientious as men may occasionally be led into error. However, come with me—and we will soon put this matter right!”

I took my new friend’s hand and pressed it with a joyous effusion. There was so much mild benevolence in his looks, his words, and his manner, that I already felt a deep regard towards him.

“Come,” he repeated: “I cannot bear to see a young man like you thus made the victim of mistake or persecution. Within the hour that is passing you shall be free: for if by any accident my influence should not avail with Granby——”

“What would you do for me?” I inquired with feverish impatience. “Oh! what could you do in *that* case?”

The benevolent old gentleman took me by the button-hole; and fixing his eyes with solemn impressiveness upon me, he said, “If my friend

Granby do not listen to the words of reason and justice, I will at once write to my friend the Emperor of China and get him to send over an army of four millions of men!"

Nothing could exceed the shock of disappointment which I thus suddenly sustained. All my hopes were annihilated in an instant: I had been listening to the nonsense of a madman! My soul, elevated on the pinion of that wild hope to the high regions of heaven, sank suddenly down, drooping and crushed, upon the earth. I groaned in anguish; and with a feeling of petulance for which I was afterwards sorry, I broke savagely away from the unfortunate old gentleman and hastened to the farther extremity of the grounds. There I beheld a young man, scarcely two years older than myself, and elegantly dressed, leaning against a tree—with his arms folded across his chest, and with a smile upon his countenance. He had evidently been watching the elderly gentleman's proceedings with me; and he said, "Ah! I suppose, sir, old Cooper has been palming off some of his nonsense upon you? He is as mad as a March hare: but he is perfectly harmless and gives us no trouble. Indeed, my uncle likes the old man very much."

"I presume, therefore," I said, "that I am addressing Mr. Granby's nephew?"

"Yes—and to tell you the truth, I came out to put you on your guard against being deceived by Mr. Cooper's absurdities: for the instant he gets hold of a new-comer, he proffers his assistance and vows to effect his immediate emancipation. My uncle spied you from the window, and sent me out to speak to you: but you were already deep in conversation with Mr. Cooper—and I could not therefore wound the poor old gentleman's feelings by interfering. Thus I was compelled to leave you to your fate; and you will pardon me if I smiled——"

"Oh, yes—I can forgive you!" I exclaimed: "for were I in the mood, I could laugh at my own folly in allowing myself even for an instant to be deluded by such a hope."

"The best advice I can give you, Mr. Wilmot, is to avoid putting faith in anything you may hear from these unfortunate men. You will be astonished at the extraordinary delusions under which some of them labour."

"You, I presume," I said, "are now thoroughly accustomed to them?"

"Yes," was the answer: "I have been with my uncle for about two years: but I am getting rather sick of it—However," he interrupted himself, as if thinking that he was saying too much; "come with me, sir, and let me show you the grounds. I have been recommending my uncle," he continued, as we walked along together, "to make a conservatory in this spot: but he is afraid that one or two of our patients who are rather mischievously inclined, would pull the place to pieces. Not that they ever interfere with the flowers—Ah! here are our melon-frames. I make these my especial care."

Thus conversing, my guide pointed out such objects in the garden as he thought would interest me—until at length a bell rang; and then he said, "We must now go in to breakfast."

"Are there many inmates?" I inquired.

"About four-and-twenty in all," was the re-

sponse. "We think of taking additional premises in the neighbourhood, as we have lately been compelled to refuse a considerable number. Ah! it is a shocking thing, Mr. Wilmot——"

But here he stopped short; and methought that he flung a compassionating look upon me. The idea for the moment struck me that I would endeavour to enlist his sympathy: but a second thought made me ask myself, "What hope have I at the hands of the nephew of the proprietor of this place?"

"You shall sit next to me at the breakfast-table," he said at the expiration of a few moments: then suddenly flinging an appealing look upon me, he added, "But I beg and entreat, my dear friend, that if you do see me turn into a muffin, you won't hold me too close to the fire while you toast me, nor yet smother me too much in butter!"

It was almost with a feeling of rage that I found myself thus duped a second time: for I had verily and seriously believed that this young gentleman was precisely what he had represented himself—namely, the nephew of Mr. Granby. Oh! what an ineffable loathing—what a sickening at the heart did I experience at the idea of being thus shut up in the companionship of such men!—beings who had enough of rationality to deceive me for a time, but who all in a moment were impelled to lay bare the hideous ruin of their own shattered intellect! Ludicrous though the last self-exposure was, yet I could not laugh at it:—it filled me with pity and horror instead of provoking my mirth. I continued walking by the unfortunate young man's side till we reached the dwelling; and there, in the hall, we met Mr. Granby, who with a sufficient degree of courtesy, if not kindness, bade us "Good morning."

I was now conducted into the breakfast-parlour, where I found about twenty of the inmates assembled,—their ages ranging over various periods from twenty to sixty, and their minds doubtless affording as many varied phases of hallucination. At the head of the table—which was well spread with an excellent repast—sate a lady in the glorious *enboulpoint* of about five-and-forty, and who, still a handsome woman, retained all the traces of a beauty which must have been of no common order. She wore a coquetish French morning cap with pink ribbons; and this gay head-dress, so far from concealing, rather invited attention to the fact that her hair, once dark, was now streaked with grey. She had a matronly air of mingled authority and hospitality; and while she enacted the part of mistress of the establishment, she blended therewith the attention of a hostess towards numerous guests. This was Mrs. Granby; and to her was I now presented by her husband.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Wilmot," she said, giving me her hand: "we feel honoured that you should have come to pay us this visit—and we will endeavour to make your sojourn as agreeable as possible."

"If I were really like the rest, madam," I answered in an under-tone, "you might treat me as you do them, and endeavour to make me believe that I am in reality only a guest here. But——"

"This is your place, Mr. Wilmot," said Mrs. Granby, now interposing: and for a moment he

bent upon me a stern look. "It is sufficient for Mrs. Granby to find you here, in order to induce her to treat you with courtesy; and if she be generously disposed to gloss over the circumstances in which yourself and other gentlemen are placed within these walls, it is scarcely polite or generous of you to seek to argue the point with her."

I felt that there was more or less justice in this reproof: for the simple fact was that the Granbys kept an asylum for the insane, and if persons were legally consigned to their care, they had a perfect right to receive them without previously investigating the true circumstances of each individual case. Perhaps too Mrs. Granby might really have thought that I laboured under some peculiar hallucination, as did each of the others around her; and it was therefore kind of her to treat me as a sane person, though in her heart having the conviction that my mind was really diseased.

All these reflections swept rapidly through my brain in consequence of that reproof which Mr. Granby had addressed to me; and without another syllable I took the place which he indicated at the table. I found that both himself and his wife studied to sustain a cheerful conversation on general topics,—dexterously and carefully avoiding those particular ones which might be connected with the hallucinations of individuals present; and if a stranger, ignorant of the nature of the place, had been suddenly introduced there and invited to breakfast he could not possibly have suspected from anything which occurred, that he was in the society of a number of persons nearly all of whom had a mental disease of some kind or another.

I am not going to spin out this portion of my narrative with unnecessary details: but still some few explanations are necessary. At first I could not help thinking that there were within those walls many unfortunate beings who, like myself, had been placed in confinement without any just cause: but as weeks passed away, I found out that such was not the fact. Sooner or later I discovered that every one laboured under a delusion of some sort; and which, though for the most part it remained as it were latent, yet would in an instant flame up if the spark were inadvertently set to a particular train of ideas. In nearly all instances I ascertained too that this delusion was of a nature which really incapacitated the individual from the management of his own worldly affairs, and rendered it desirable that he should be consigned to some peaceful seclusion where he would be removed from the influences which had in the origin operated with such fatal effect upon his mind. Thus, for instance, there was one individual who believed that he had discovered the longitude—and who had spent half his fortune in publishing treatises on the subject, or advertising his arguments throughout whole columns of the newspapers, and for which he had to pay most dearly. He had likewise haunted the Government officers and the lobbies of the Houses of Parliament, in the hope of finding patrons for a discovery which really was no discovery at all. He had gone mad upon this one subject: while in respect to all others he was perfectly sane. His friends had interfered to prevent the total ruin of his fortune, as well as to save him from the effects of those indiscretions into which his pertinacious

haunting of the public officers had led him; and thus was he placed in an asylum where he enjoyed every comfort and luxury—where he was kindly treated—and where his mind was undergoing a steady but gradual improvement.

I must here observe that Mr. Granby did not seek to detain his patients beneath his roof one week longer than was absolutely necessary. As a general rule it was his pride to restore them to their relatives or friends with the least possible delay, in order that his reputation might be enhanced; and thus, if for a moment he lost an inmate from whose presence he derived a good revenue, the vacant place was sure to be filled speedily, while recommendation brought him others in addition.

I was one day the witness of a singular circumstance. I was walking in the grounds, when the bell at the entrance rang—the porter opened the gates—and a handsome carriage and pair drove into the enclosure. A well-dressed gentleman, of about thirty, leapt out; and meeting Mr. Granby at the moment, he shook him cordially by the hand, exclaiming, "Here I am, my dear sir, once more. I feel the old delusion returning: I am haunted by all kinds of evil spirits—and I am come for you to cure me:"—then coolly turning round to his coachman, he added, "Come back again in three months, John, and fetch me. I shall be all right by that time."

"Very good, sir," replied the coachman, touching his hat: and the equipage drove off.

"Now let me go and pay my respects to Mrs. Granby," said this hallucinationist who had thus voluntarily confided himself to a lunatic asylum: and he hastened into the house with a degree of happiness which evidently arose from the conviction that by a short sojourn there he would be cured of those horrible thoughts which he knew to be a delusion, but which he had not strength of mind sufficient to triumph over of his own accord.

There were between twenty and thirty patients in the establishment,—the greater portion of whom belonged to the class I have already described: namely, those who were merely mad upon one point and sane upon all others. But there were six or eight whose intellects were far more unsettled, and who at times were even dangerous. These were not permitted to take their meals with the rest—but were kept in their own rooms; and they only took exercise when attended by their keepers. It was one of these unfortunate beings who had sent forth that wild and mournful cry which so horrified me on the first night of my introduction to Mr. Granby's establishment.

## CHAPTER CL.

NOVEMBER, 1842.

IT was in the middle of May, 1842, that I was consigned by a hideous treachery to the lunatic-asylum; and therefore, as the reader will recollect, it wanted exactly six months to that date in the ensuing November when I was to present myself at Heseltine Hall. And you will start, gentle

reader, when I inform you that nearly the whole of these six months were spent in that asylum!

Yes—it was so: but I am in duty bound to admit that on the whole I was treated with great kindness by Mr. and Mrs. Granby. At first I would frequently implore of them—sometimes separately, at other times when they were together—to give me my freedom; and then only was it that Granby spoke with sternness and severity. At length, perceiving the utter inutility of thus interceding with them, I desisted, and fell back upon my hopes that the friends whom I had made in the course of my career would not desert me for ever. I studied every means which I fancied might lead to the accomplishment of an escape: but I found that they were impracticable. I offered a heavy bribe to the porter to open the gate of the grounds: he not merely rejected it—but acquainted Mr. Granby with the circumstance. The consequence was that I received a severe reprimand from that gentleman; and I found that during the night, my ready money and my letter of credit were abstracted from my chamber. Mr. Granby informed me in the morning that this had been done by his orders—but that my property should be given up to me whenever I quitted his establishment.

I procured writing-materials, and penned a letter, imploring the passer-by into whose hands it might fall, to appeal to a magistrate on my behalf—for that though perfectly sane, I experienced a forcible detention at that lunatic-asylum. This letter I flung over the wall: but an hour afterwards the gate-porter, with a grin on his countenance, showed it to me,—observing that it was a very stale trick on the part of gentlemen confined there, and that as a matter of course no one who picked up such a letter on the outside of the establishment, would take any notice of it, unless it were to place it in the hand of some official connected with the institution. Finding that this project failed, I wrote no more letters. Several times I asked Mr. Granby, whether it were the intention of the Earl of Eccleston to keep me immured there as long as he possibly could: but I only received evasive responses—and Mr. Granby never would admit at all that he had any knowledge of his lordship. On other occasions I asked whether he did not think that the general tenour of my conduct would warrant him in representing to those who had placed me there that it was no longer reasonable nor just to detain me. But here again I received vague and unsatisfactory replies: for I found myself an exception to that general rule to which I have above alluded, and according to which Mr. Granby endeavoured to restore the patient to freedom so soon as he could in safety do so. In a word, as the reader may full well suppose, I left no means untried to procure my emancipation—but in vain; and for nearly six long months was I an inmate of that place.

The state of my feelings during this long incarceration can be better imagined than described. My mind was in a condition of almost incessant restlessness and fever, with a few occasional intervals of deepest dejection and despondency: but on the whole I did not abandon the hope which I cherished, that circumstances would sooner or later take a sudden turn in my favour: much less

did I yield myself up to complete despair. Often and often did I reflect that from amidst the many troubles in which during my career I had been plunged, the hand of providence had raised me up; and as I had faith in that providence, the general tone of my mind was one of confidence that the power of heaven would sooner or later manifest itself on my behalf. But still, as I have said, I experienced a continuous restlessness—an increasing hatred for the place in which I was confined, and a stronger yearning to welcome the day of freedom.

It must not be supposed that the incidents of the great world were shut out from the knowledge of those within the circuit of the asylum-walls. We had newspapers and periodicals in abundance; and often against my inclination did I force myself to read the current topics of the day—so that when restored to liberty, there should not be a gap in my knowledge in that respect. I constantly searched for some paragraph which might inform me of the movements of the Earl and Countess of Eccleston: but my curiosity on this point was never gratified. Often and often did I miss particular newspapers from the table in the reading-room: but I knew that they all underwent a rigid examination on the part of an official of the establishment, so that nothing might be placed before the patients which was at all calculated to act upon the particular ideas or hallucinations which had been the cause of their confinement within those walls. Thus, after a while, when I began thoroughly to comprehend the routine and arrangements of the place, I felt convinced that if any newspaper contained a paragraph relative to the Earl of Eccleston, it would be kept back from the reading-room on my account—just the same, for instance, as any journal making mention of the longitude would be withheld on account of him who laboured under the hallucination that he had solved this great mystery.

For the first few weeks of my incarceration I was haunted by the fear that if it were prolonged I should go mad in reality: but this feeling gradually wore off—not only on account of the natural strength of my mind, but likewise because I was constantly saying to myself that it was necessary that I should buckle on the armour of all my fortitude, self-possession, and mental calmness, in order to envisage my position in its worst details—to examine all surrounding circumstances—and to be ready to take advantage of any favourable opportunity which by possibility might present itself for the accomplishment of an escape. And then too, the longer I staid beneath that roof, the more intimately acquainted did I become with the phases and peculiarities of the hallucinations possessed by those around me; and so far from incurring the risk of being drawn into the vortex of any of these mania, I was filled with too great a compassion for the victims of the delusions to be otherwise influenced by them.

I have said that I will not dwell unnecessarily on the circumstances of this episode of my life: I have said too that nearly six months elapsed while I was an inmate of Mr. Granby's establishment. The month of November had now arrived,—that month to which I had so long looked forward as to one in which my future destiny was to be determined! Good heavens, was it to pass and behold

me still an inmate of that dreadful place? Was the day of appointment to go by without being kept by me!—would there be eyes looking out and hearts beating with suspense on the fifteenth of that month—but all in vain!—for I the expected one was not to make my appearance! Oh, now I grew fearfully excited as I thought of all this: and I felt that it was impossible to endure my position any longer. I must escape—Oh, I must escape! But how? Had not I fruitlessly been seeking and pondering the means for six months? and had I found the slightest avenue open for my egress? No—alas, no! How therefore could I now hope that success was all in an instant to crown my wish, simply because that wish had grown more excruciatingly poignant, if possible, than ever?

One morning an idea struck me: or rather I should say it seized upon me with a greater strength than ever it had put forth before: for it was not the first time that I had contemplated it. But I now resolved to make the attempt at any risk. I have said that the entrance-gates were kept constantly closed and locked; and that there was a porter's lodge close by. The porter himself was a man of herculean stature and strength—one who had evidently been chosen for this particular duty on account of his great physical powers. I had ascertained that he had a stout staff as well as other weapons in his lodge; and he could not therefore be attacked with impunity. I knew likewise that if I did venture on such an attack and if I were to fail in it, I should at once be looked upon as a violent lunatic—a dangerous madman,—and that the straight-waistcoat would be put upon me. It was the awful horror which I entertained of this hideous coercive punishment, that had kept me back when on former occasions I had thought of playing a desperate game and endeavouring by force to clear for myself an avenue of escape. But now the eighth of November had arrived: it wanted only a week to the date fixed for my appearance at Heseltine Hall.—I felt my position to be desperate—and at all risks I was determined to make the attempt to which I have alluded!

I had lain awake the greater portion of the preceding night, tossing restlessly and uneasily on my feverish pillow; and I rose at a somewhat early hour in the morning in a state of mind which could not possibly maintain an artificial serenity. In short, I felt that I must do something desperate in order to escape from the lunatic asylum. It was a dull, miserable, misty morning, with a chill that went to the very marrow of one's bones; and though at one moment I felt myself shuddering with the cold and my teeth clattering, yet at another instant I was all in the glow of a fever-heat. After my toilet was performed in the dark, I had to remain in my chamber till the dawn should glimmer; for I knew that any attempt to issue from the house at an unreasonable hour would at once excite suspicion. It was not therefore until past eight o'clock that I thought it prudent to descend from my room. On reaching the hall, I found one of the domestics unlocking and unbolting the front door; and he said to me, "It is a nasty raw morning, Mr. Wilmot: I should advise you not to go out, sir—you may catch cold."

"You know," I responded, "that whatever be the state of the weather, I always take a certain amount of exercise—without which I could not keep myself in health."

The man offered no farther remonstrance; and I passed out into the garden. I took two or three rapid turns in the grounds,—not merely to give a natural glow to my frame, and thereby nerve me for the struggle in which I was resolved to engage—but likewise that I might assure myself whether circumstances were favourable for the venture. Two of the gardeners were at work,—one in front, the other in the rear of the dwelling; and the former was not more than fifty yards distant from the porter's lodge. I anxiously hoped that he might remove himself somewhat farther off: but on completing my third round, I perceived that he was still near the same spot;—and I saw that it was useless to delay my enterprise any longer.

I accordingly began to saunter, as if in a leisurely manner, about the neighbourhood of the porter's lodge: I affected to be examining the evergreens, and also the few flowers which still survived the decline of Autumn. The door of the lodge stood open as usual; and the porter was preparing his breakfast—for he was an unmarried man and lived all alone in that lodge. I gradually drew nearer to the door; and through the little window I now at length observed that he was kneeling down upon the hearth, blowing the fire with a pair of bellows. This was my opportunity. A quick glance flung at the gardener, showed that his back was towards me; and I glided into the lodge. The noise of the bellows prevented the porter from hearing my footsteps: I sprang upon him—hurled him upon his back—wrenched the bellows from his grasp—placed my knee upon his chest—and gripping him by the throat, threatened to throttle him if he offered any resistance. At that very moment my keen look showed me that he was about to cry out for succour, and also to make a desperate effort: but mercilessly did I tighten my fingers around his throat, until the unfortunate wretch began to grow black in the face. He made one tremendous convulsive movement to shake me off: but I felt that I had the strength of a thousand; and I continued to maintain my ascendancy—I proved that I could overpower him. One knee was on his chest—the other, keeping down his right arm, held it powerless: my left hand firmly grasped his left wrist—my right hand was at his throat: and thus we were—the altogether at my mercy so long as I retained that position. But if I moved, then might the cry for succour go forth from his lips—and I should be lost! Fool that I was—I had left the door standing open!

"Unless you swear," I said, clutching at the idea of coercing him by terror, "that you will let me pass out in freedom, I will strangle you!"

"Go along with you, for heaven's sake!" murmured the man, speaking with difficulty: "do what you like—but let me get up."

"You swear?" I said, with the sternest expression of countenance.

"Yes, I swear," he responded.

"You take God to witness?" I demanded.

"I take God to witness!" he rejoined, as he felt the pressure of my fingers again tightening; about his throat in a most menacing manner.

Quick as lightning I sprang up to my feet; and clutching the gate-key with my left hand (for it lay upon the table), with my right I snatched a pistol from over the mantel. It had a percussion lock; and a moment's examination showed me that a cap was upon the nipple—whence I inferred that it was loaded.

"Dare to cry out—dare to molest me," I exclaimed, "and I fire—by heaven, I fire!"

From the gloomy sullenness and dismay of the porter's countenance, as he slowly raised himself up from the floor, I felt assured that I was not deceived as to my conjecture that the pistol was loaded; but in order not to give him an instant's unnecessary advantage, I kept my front towards him as I retrograded towards the door. He said not a word: but his looks were full of apprehension—until all in a moment, just as my heels touched the threshold, and I was about to spring back in order to make a rush towards the gate. Then, quick as the eye can wink—quick indeed as the lightning flashes through the sky—was I seized upon from behind; and my right hand, which held the pistol, was struck violently in an upward direction. With a cry, or rather a howl of savage exultation, the porter sprang forward: it was the gardener who had assailed me from behind—and between them both I was thus overpowered all in an instant. Two or three keepers were speedily upon the spot. Mr. Granby came rushing forth—his wife followed—and several of the insane inmates also made their appearance.

"You have triumphed over me," I said, with feelings of such bitterness and rage that I never before experienced; "but my turn will yet come. Do with me now what you like! From this day forth I proclaim war against you! Unhand me!"

"Yes, I should think so indeed!" said the porter, giving me a terrific shake as he held me by the coat-collar.

The insolence of the man's words and looks as well as the brutality of the action itself, goaded me to desperation, and armed me for the moment with a preterhuman power. Indeed, my strength would have appeared incredible, were it not that we may suppose that the keepers finding themselves in sufficient force to master me, were holding me less tightly than they otherwise would have done. Certain it is, however, that I burst completely away from them; and with one blow felled the ruffian porter to the ground.

"Seize upon him!" shouted Mr. Granby: while his wife gave vent to a loud scream.

And the next instant I was seized upon by half-a-dozen vigorous hands; and again was I completely powerless. I felt that there was the hue of animation on my cheeks, with the sense of satisfaction at having at least inflicted some sort of chastisement upon that insolent porter; and instead of being cowed or overawed, I flung around me looks of defiance.

"Yes!" I exclaimed, "do with me what you will: for henceforth I stand upon no terms with you. You know, Mr. Granby, that I am not mad—and the day of retribution will come—rest assured that it will!"

Mr. Granby did not however condescend to make any answer: but he beckoned the keepers to lead me into the house. I knew what my fate would be: I foresaw that the straight-waistcoat

would be placed upon my limbs: but at that instant my feelings were too powerfully excited to allow me to care very much for anything that might happen to me—and I was moreover far too proud to beg for mercy. In this manner we reached the house! and instead of being conducted to my own chamber, I was led to a room in a remote part of the building, and which was denominated the strong-ward. Massive iron bars were at the window: the fire-place was protected by a curious sort of fender, also formed of iron bars, and the upper part of which arched over towards the mantel, where it was fastened by a padlock. The walls were lined with matting,—the space between being stuffed with some soft substance; so that the immured victim might not in his ravings dash out his brains against the masonry. A humble bedstead, a table, and a chair constituted the only furniture in this cheerless room.

Thither was I conducted by the keepers and Mr. Granby,—his wife and the lunatic spectators of the scene in the garden, having remained below. One of the keepers followed us with an ominous-looking object—a garment of coarse material, which I knew to be the straight-waistcoat; and now I shuddered as I beheld it. I felt that my countenance grew as pale as death—that my lips were quivering convulsively; and I had it on the tip of my tongue to implore that this crowning ignominy might be spared me. But no!—even then my pride came back to prevent that prayer from being uttered; and I assumed a demeanour of dignified defiance as I slowly glanced around upon those in whose power I was.

I know not whether my manner somewhat overawed the keepers—or whether it were that they in their hearts knew that I was not mad, and either pitied me or else fancied that Granby was going too far: but certain it was that they hesitated to put on the straight-waistcoat and they glanced inquiringly as well as dubiously towards their master.

"Proceed!" said Mr. Granby with decisive look and tone.

"Beg pardon, sir," one of the keepers whispered to him: "but don't you expect one of the visiting Commissioners to-day or to-morrow?"

"Yes—and this is all the better," replied Granby. "Proceed!"

Notwithstanding that these remarks were whisperingly exchanged, my ear caught them; and for a moment a thrill of joy swept through my heart at the idea that a prospect of emancipation was probably opening itself before me. Granby's demeanour was now doggedly stern and decided: he looked savage, ferocious, and vindictive:—I knew that at last I beheld the man in his true character. I now understood perfectly well what his observation had just meant: he considered that my attempt to escape, and the violence which had accompanied it, were fortunate circumstances, inasmuch as they afforded him a pretext for putting me under restraint, and thus giving a colour to the allegation of my madness. The keepers, no longer hesitating—no longer looking dubious, proceeded to strip off my coat and to put on the straight-waistcoat. For an instant the blood seemed to turn to ice in my veins: then the next moment it appeared to boil with fever heat; and



I could scarcely restrain myself from bursting forth into one last desperate, deadly, mortal struggle. But I *did* exercise that strong coercive power over my feelings: I submitted,—yet it was only with the hope that the visit of the Commissioner might be attended with good results. A fire was lighted in the grate; and then I was left alone.

Alone—and in a straight-waistcoat! Scarcely had the door of the chamber closed behind Mr. Granby and his myrmidons, when I perceived a little trap in that door open, and some one looked through at me. I knew it was a keeper who was to remain on the watch outside of that door: but I cared nothing for the circumstance. It was insignificant indeed in comparison with the horribly ignominious position in which I now found myself. The straight-waistcoat is a long close-fitting garment of coarse material, the sleeves of which are sewn tight down to the sides; so that the arms are retained immovably there. I sate upon the pallet, giving way to the most painful reflections—and now feeling that if I were to be made the victim of a series of persecutions of which this was the commencement, it was indeed quite possible to drive me mad in reality!

Half-an-hour passed; and some breakfast was brought up to me. The keeper who bore it, offered to place the food to my lips: but I indignantly rejected the proposal.

“Come, young gentleman,” he said, adopting a soothing manner, “don’t be so foolish: take this nice tea and bread-and-butter—for the more tractable you are, the sooner this thing will be taken off you:”—and he glanced towards the straight-waistcoat.

“I am sick at heart,” I replied: “I cannot touch food. You look as if you pitied me,” I continued, gazing steadily at the keeper. “You know that I am *not* mad?”

He made no reply: but turning towards the window, appeared to be looking through the panes.

“Yes—you know that I am *not* mad!” I exclaimed: “and if you would assist me—if you would help me to escape, I would give you a large reward: for I have got many rich and powerful friends.”

“Come, young gentleman—come, Mr. Wilmot, do take your food!” said the man, again turning towards me.

I made no answer. The conviction struck me that he *did* think I was mad; and therefore my assertion relative to my rich and powerful friends appeared in his estimation to be only the cunning device or else the boastful hallucination of a diseased brain. Good heavens! it was dreadful to reflect that though knowing and feeling myself to be perfectly sane, every one around me should believe that I was a madman! Perhaps Granby himself thought so, and therefore had all the less compunction in treating me as he was doing.

“Well, sir,” said the keeper, now speaking severely, “if you don’t choose to take your food you can ask for it when you are hungry; and I can tell you that it is no use to sulk in this manner with your victuals. And there’s another thing too, which I may as well tell you,—which is that the more obstreperous you show yourself, the

longer you will wear that straight-jacket. When once Granby orders it to be put on—”

But the rest of the sentence was lost in mutterings; and taking up the tray, the keeper issued from the room.

Another hour passed,—during which my feelings alternated between excitement and despondency; and these transitions grew more and more rapid. Oh, that I should have failed in my attempt at escape! But no wonder. Could anything have been worse managed? I had undertaken it in a state of mental excitement which had prevented me from pre-arranging how I was to dispose of the herculean porter when once I had overpowered him. Alas! it only wanted one week to that date which I had once hoped would prove alike a memorable and a fortunate one in my career; and what if it were to pass without being thus signalized? There was madness in the very thought! O Annabel, how I called upon your dear name!—how I invoked your image as that of a good genius and of a guardian angel! And then I passionately demanded why the Count of Livorno had neglected me? why the Count of Monte d’Oro interested himself not in me? why the Count of Avellino, who was indebted to me for his happy marriage with Antonia di Tivoli, had never sought me out? And I wept—Oh! I wept, reader!—bitterly, bitterly did I weep! And if, reader, you have been interested in all the past incidents of my narrative—if from the first you have experienced sympathy for one who as a poor friendless boy was at the outset introduced to you—if whatsoever good you have found me doing has won your admiration—I am convinced that at this portion of my tale your heart will be moved, when to yourself you picture me seated in that cheerless chamber—under the cruellest and most ignominious restraint—the gloom of a November mist resting against the barred casement—the very atmosphere itself leaguings as it were with my foes and oppressors in order to make my soul sink into the despond of a veritable melancholy madness.

Thus another hour passed, I have said; and then I heard footsteps approaching along the passage. The door was opened; and a tall elderly gentleman, with grey hair, sallow complexion, and sharp angular features, entered the room,—followed by Mr. Granby, who appeared all obsequiousness.

“Who is this, Mr. Granby?” inquired the gentleman, whom I at once suspected to be the visiting Commissioner or Inspector, whichever denomination he bore.

“Joseph Wilmot, sir,” replied Granby. “Oh, Joseph Wilmot,” said the visiting official: and he wrote my name down in his pocket-book, which he carried in his hand on entering the room. “This is the young gentleman of whom you were speaking to me just now, and who was guilty of such dreadful violence this morning?”

“The same, sir,” answered Mr. Granby. Though the Commissioner spoke aside to Mr. Granby, yet I plainly heard both the question and the answer; and I said, “The violence of which I was guilty, sir, had nothing savage nor vindictive in it; and it was only used for the purpose of effecting my escape.”

“But have you anything to complain of within these walls?” asked the Inspector: “any ill-treatment—”

"I candidly admit," I responded, "that up to the present occasion I have had nothing to complain of beyond the privation of my liberty. But feeling that I am unjustly incarcerated here—on false pretences, and to serve the base ends of my oppressors—I naturally endeavoured to recover my freedom."

"Well, young man," said the Commissioner, "you now see that you were wrong to use violence. You admit that you are well treated——"

"Good heavens, sir!" I exclaimed, almost in despair; "do you likewise believe that my brain is turned?"

"Come, come, my young friend," said the Commissioner, patting me upon the shoulder, "tranquillize yourself—and then, you know, this disagreeable garment shall be taken off you. Be a good young man: look upon this worthy gentleman"—and he glanced towards Granby—"as your best friend: consult him when you are restless and unhappy—follow his advice—and believe me, he will not lead you astray nor prove unkind to you."

I saw that the Commissioner was talking to me as if I were a child, and endeavouring to soothe me as if my intellect were really of a childish standard and that I was susceptible of such consolation. For an instant I felt boiling with impatience: but the next moment a reaction came, and the tears trickled down my cheeks. Every one believed that I was mad. Good God! was it possible that their opinion might be correct?

The Commissioner, again patting me upon the shoulder, and saying a few more kindly-intentioned and well-meant words, turned away and was about to issue from the room, followed by Mr. Granby,—when one of the livery-servants of the establishment hastily appeared upon the threshold; and presenting a card to Granby, he said, "If you please, sir, this nobleman demands to see you immediately. He has insisted upon following me in search of you—Ah, here he is!"

Granby looked at the card: I sprang up from the pallet on which I was seated, with a wild and thrilling presentiment that the matter might relate to myself; and the next instant the nobleman to whom the footman had alluded, appeared upon the threshold. An ejaculation of joy pealed from my lips; and in a moment I was clasped in the arms of my faithful friend the Count of Livorno.

## CHAPTER CLI.

### FREEDOM.

I WEPT upon his breast; and my ear caught the sound of the sobs which were convulsing his own heart at the position in which he found me. But suddenly turning round towards the group assembled near, and dashing away the tears from his eyes, the Count demanded, "Which is Mr. Granby?"

"I have the honour of thus announcing myself to your lordship," said that individual, stepping forward and bowing obsequiously.

"Then here, sir," exclaimed the Count, with the loftiest and most dignified indignation, "is an order for the immediate release of this cruelly-

injured young gentleman"—and instead of handing the document, his lordship almost flung it at Granby.

Almost overcome by my feelings,—feelings of such wild joy that I cannot possibly describe them,—I sank upon the pallet. The Commissioner, who had remained in the room, made a quick sign to the keepers; they rushed forward—and in the twinkling of an eye the straight-waistcoat was stripped off me. Then the first use I made of my liberated arms was to seize the hand of the Count and press it in gratitude to my lips. Again he embraced me—he wrung both my hands with most fervid congratulation: were he my brother he could not possibly have exhibited more truly fraternal emotions.

Meanwhile Granby had glanced his eyes over the document; and turning to the Commissioner, he said in an appealing tone, "It is only too evident that my Lord Count of Livorno appears to consider that I have unjustly detained his friend Mr. Wilmot here: but you, sir, can bear me out in asserting the legality of his detention——"

"Enough, sir!" interrupted the Count of Livorno sternly: "it is but too true that you have the law upon your side! But it is impossible that during a period of six months you could have continuously laboured under a mistake as to Mr. Wilmot's perfect sanity. No, sir—you knew that he was sane!—but selfishness induced you to blind your eyes to the fact; and for the sake of a large revenue you drowned the scruples of conscience—you detained within these walls a young gentleman who, as you knew full well, had no right to be here!"

"I think, my lord," said the Commissioner, "that you are somewhat severe upon Mr. Granby——"

"I learnt from his domestics, sir," responded the Count, still speaking with indignant sternness, "that Mr. Granby was engaged with an inspecting official; and I therefore presume that you are he. Did you listen, sir, to whatsoever remonstrances Mr. Wilmot could scarcely have failed to address unto you? Did you order his liberation? No!—you were leaving the room at the instant I made my appearance: you were abandoning him to that cruel, that ignominious, that horrible position in which I found him! Your inspection, sir, is a mockery—your official visit a delusion! The country to which you belong boasts of its freedom—whereas I belong to a country which, alas! can make no such boast. Yet there is at least one point on which I may rejoice in the superior civilization of Tuscany over that of England,—which is that it is impossible under the rule of my uncle the Grand Duke for any such atrocity to be perpetrated as that of which my young friend has been made the victim. But enough! Come, Joseph—come, my dear Wilmot—and shake off the dust from your feet at the threshold of this horrible prison-house!"

"It would afflict me much, my lord," said the Commissioner, "if you and Mr. Wilmot were to depart with an evil impression——"

"And I am sure," immediately added Mr. Granby, with a look and tone of fawning servility, "that I hope there will be forgiveness—at least allowances made——"

"Let us depart, my dear Count!" I said en-



treatingly, as I hastily slipped on my coat: "for to breathe the air of freedom——"

"Come then, Joseph!"—and the Count of Livorno, giving me his arm, made an imperious gesture for the group to stand aside.

"What! not one word of farewell, Mr. Wilmot?" said Granby, who looked not merely crestfallen, but also frightened: "not one syllable after all the kindness——"

"Touch me not, sir!" I ejaculated: for he had placed his hand upon my arm.

He stepped back a pace or two, utterly discomfited; and I saw likewise that the Commissioner himself had a look of uneasiness: but tarrying to behold no more, I accompanied the Count from the room. Oh! what language can describe the wild pulsations of joy with which my heart now throbbed, as I descended the stairs in company with this faithful, kind, and devoted friend of mine! The instant we reached the hall,

Mrs. Granby came advancing towards me with a half-smirking smile upon her countenance, but also with a certain look of uneasiness; and proffering her hand, she said, "Will you not permit me, Mr. Wilmot, to wish you good bye?—for I have already learnt from my Lord Count of Livorno that you are going to leave us."

"Madam," I answered coldly, and not appearing to notice her proffered hand, "I am only too much pleased to bid you farewell."

I then passed on with the Count,—who merely bestowed a distant salutation upon the lady. An equipage was at the door; and I immediately recognised it to be the Earl of Eccleston's: but though full of the most impatient curiosity to receive explanations of how all this fortunate turn in my circumstances had been brought about, I could not at that moment put any questions—for Mr. Granby came rushing after us; and with another obsequious bow, he said to the Count, "Will

not your lordship remain a few minutes while Mr. Wilmot's boxes are being packed up?"

"Not a minute!" responded the Count of Livorno sternly. "This is not a place, where men tarry of their own accord."

"But I have money belonging to Mr. Wilmot," urged Granby, still fawning and obsequious, notwithstanding the rebuffs he experienced.

"Send everything to the Earl of Eccleston's in Manchester Square," rejoined the Count curtly.

We then entered the carriage; and though Mr. Granby remained hat in hand on the steps of his front door to see us off, we did not bestow another look upon him. The equipage rolled away: my heart leapt with joy: I could scarcely believe it possible that I was verily and actually about to quit that asylum. Oh, to think that I was departing from that edifice within whose walls I had endured so much mental anguish!—to think that the gates at which I had often and often looked so wistfully, should now be standing open to give me freedom! And as the carriage passed through the grounds, the emotions seemed to swell into my very throat as I marked spots where retrospective memory conjured up recollections of especial anguish. There, on one occasion, had I leant against a tree overcome with grief as I had asked myself whether I should ever again see Annabel? There I had plucked a forget-me-not flower, and had wept bitterly over it—for it was a flower that spoke of love; but with ineffable sadness at the time I had asked myself whether *my* love would ever be blessed? There in thrilling hopefulness I had listened to the plausible but delusive representations of poor old Cooper. There, again, I had yielded with an equal credulity to the statements of the younger madman who had represented himself as the nephew of Granby. And now we reached the gates. There was the spot on which only some three hours back I had engaged in the struggle with the porter in the hope of escaping. Oh! little had I foreseen at the time that my deliverance was so near at hand—or else I could have waited! And there stood the porter himself, cap in hand, as the carriage rolled past his lodge: but I only glanced at him for an instant: I was anxious—words can scarcely tell *how* anxious, to obtain the earliest glimpse of the road outside those walls; for to me it was the path of freedom!

And now I was really free: I was beyond the precincts of the asylum. There was no chance of its being all a dream!—no risk that I should waken up from some sweet vision of freedom to find that it was a delusion, and that the morning's light glimmered upon my eyes through the bars of a mad-house! O heaven! how often and often had I experienced such dreams in my chamber at that place!—how elated had been my soul while they lasted—how despondingly it sank when they ended! Now all was exultation; and there was no despondency. I was like a child escaping from the terrors of a stern pedagogue and hastening home for the holidays: I was like the long imprisoned bird let loose from its cage to soar on light triumphant wing up to the very vault of heaven. And again and again was my gratitude poured forth to the Count of Livorno—though as yet I only knew the one fact that I had to thank him for my liberation; but I continued utterly

ignorant of the circumstances in which it had been brought about, and how he himself had become the instrument of that joyous consummation.

"My dear Wilmot," said the Count, as the carriage rolled along, "this is a day of excitement for you: but you must exercise all your fortitude—you must arm yourself with all your self-possession—so that with as much calmness as possible——"

"You have important things to tell me!" I exclaimed, fevered with curiosity.

"Now, my dear Joseph, do tranquillize yourself!" said the Count: "speak as little as possible—avoid putting abrupt questions—and let me talk to you after my own fashion. We are going to Manchester Square—and Joseph, it is to a house over which waves death's sable wing!"

"Death?" I repeated, with a sudden start. "Tell me—the Countess——"

"No, Joseph—the Earl himself!" rejoined the Count. "It is he—pray tranquillize yourself—it is he who is dying!"

"The Earl dying!" I murmured: and here I cannot explain the ineffable feelings which seized upon me.

"Yes, my dear friend—the Earl of Eccleston is at the point of death!" proceeded the Count of Livorno. "He may live a few hours: it is scarcely possible that he can live for another day. You will see him, Joseph—and now prepare yourself! Yes, my dear young friend, all that you and I have at times dimly speculated upon—all that we have conjectured—all that Dorchester proclaimed to be his conviction of the truth—all is true!—and within the hour that is passing you will receive that assurance from the lips of the dying man."

I sauk back in the carriage, and abandoned myself to the thoughts which these words conjured up. Though everything which for some time past I had anticipated was about to be realized, yet still it had the effect of something which took me by surprise—of something which I had never thought of before; and therefore it almost overpowered me. Tears too trickled down my cheeks: but, Oh! for how different a cause wept I now, from that for which I had wept so bitterly a few hours back within the walls of the asylum!

"And this illness which is to prove so fatal?" I at length falteringly asked: "whence arose it? what is its nature?"

"It was an accident, Joseph," answered the Count of Livorno: "and the Earl of Eccleston is doomed to be cut off in the prime of life——"

"But the accident?" I anxiously demanded.

"He was yesterday thrown with violence from his horse," responded the Count: "the injuries are most serious—they are internal—he cannot possibly survive them. And it was only yesterday, Joseph, that I arrived in London. Listen to me: I will tell you how it was. Nearly six months have elapsed since you and I parted in Florence. You were then setting off for Milan. Thence you wrote to acquaint me with everything which had occurred in that city. The next letter—which was also the last—was dated from London. You therein informed me that the hour was approaching when all mystery was to cease—when certainty was to take the place of doubt—and when

the Earl of Eccleston's promise, made to you at Milan, would be fulfilled. I anxiously expected another communication. Days and days passed—they grew into weeks—and still I heard nothing from you. I must candidly confess, my dear Joseph, that I felt hurt—”

“Oh, could you suppose me guilty of such ingratitude!” I exclaimed.

“Forgive me: I misjudged you,” answered the Count. “And yet you will see that I was scarcely to blame: for your last letter, written from the hotel in Holborn, was so positive in its assurances that you were at length touching upon the realization of all your hopes, that I could not fancy you were deceiving yourself. Besides, I calculated that if it were otherwise, you would write to announce your disappointment and to explain the reasons of your failure. But, on the other hand, I thought to myself that you had succeeded—that you had therefore suddenly entered upon a new career—and that amidst all the varied avocations and under all the different influences thereof, you could not immediately find leisure for a lengthy correspondence. Then, as time passed by and weeks grew into months, I certainly felt hurt and annoyed, because I had formed so high an opinion of you that I felt assured you could not be unmindful of old friendship.”

“No, never—never, my dear Count!” I exclaimed, pressing his hand with effusion. “Oh! you know not how often I have thought of you!—how often I have cried out in the loud voice of my agony, calling upon your name and beseeching you to come to my succour! And I too on my part fancied that you had abandoned me—”

“But now you are convinced otherwise, my dear Wilmot,” interrupted the Count of Livorno. “Let me however proceed in my explanations. After the lapse of some months I received a letter from the Count of Monte d'Oro in Corsica, representing how uneasy he was at your long silence, and entreating me to inform him if I had recently heard from you. I should observe that the Count of Monte d'Oro had on a former occasion written to me, to express his grateful thanks for the interest I had displayed in procuring the pardon from the Tuscan and Austrian Governments. I hastened to reply to the Count, explaining my astonishment, which was now also growing into uneasiness, concerning you. At about the same time I received letters from the Counts of Tivoli and Avellino,—all entreating me to give them some information relative to your proceedings if it lay in my power to afford it. But this was not all: I was waited upon by a Scotch gentleman—”

“Salteoats?” I exclaimed, at once comprehending who this visitor must be.

“Yes—the same,” rejoined the Count of Livorno: “and though naturally such a jovial-looking happy man, yet was he now perfectly miserable and greatly distressed concerning you. He said that he had often heard you speak with joyous feelings of your friendship with me; and that therefore he had come to ascertain if I could afford him any intelligence concerning you. He told me that when last you saw each other in Paris—which must have been soon after you left Milan—you gave him the address of an hotel in Holborn whither you were about to repair. He had inquired for you there, and had learnt that

you left it with exceeding suddenness: he even suspected that there was some disinclination on the part of the people of the hotel to be as explicit as they had it in their power to prove. The kind-hearted man, it appeared, had gone hunting for you everywhere; and at length, after the lapse of many months, he resolved to address himself to me. Finding, therefore, my dear Joseph, that none of your friends knew anything of you, I resolved to come to England and institute every possible inquiry. My preparations were soon made; and it was about a fortnight after Mr. Salteoats' visit that I set out for London. I arrived here yesterday: I went to that hotel in Holborn; and I insisted upon knowing under what circumstances you had left the establishment some six months ago. The people of the hotel at first positively refused to answer any questions,—pretending that they were not accountable for the actions or proceedings of gentlemen who had at any time lodged with them. I then told them who I was,—that I was the Count of Livorno, the Grand Duke of Tuscany's nephew—that I should invoke the aid of the Tuscan Ambassador at the British Court—and that the British Government would render me every assistance in carrying out the object which I had in view. The hotel people grew frightened; and they at length became explicit. I then learnt, to my mingled horror and indignation, that your friends had found it necessary to place you under restraint; but that the people at the hotel had been enjoined, for family reasons connected with yourself, to keep the matter profoundly secret.”

The Count of Livorno paused for a few moments; and then continued in the following manner:—

“I felt convinced that this was a piece of treachery on the Earl of Eccleston's part, or else on that of Lanover. I comprehended it all! You had disappeared at the very time the Earl's promise was to have been fulfilled; you had been taken from the hotel, as the books of the establishment showed, on the very same day on which you had penned that last letter to me. Your subsequent silence was thus most completely though most painfully accounted for; and, Oh! my dear Joseph, how I reproached myself for having suffered so long a period to elapse ere I interested myself on your behalf!”

“Blame not yourself, my dear Count,” I said: “you could not possibly foresee nor fathom all the cruel treachery that was thus making me its victim! But pray proceed—”

“I will, Joseph,” continued the Count of Livorno. “Having learnt as much as I could glean from the people of the hotel—who, I should observe, were perfectly ignorant of the place to which you had been consigned—I went straight to Manchester Square. I demanded an interview with the Earl of Eccleston. This was at about three o'clock yesterday afternoon. He was out riding on horseback; and the Countess was out visiting in her carriage. I said that I would wait. And not long I waited before I found myself destined to be the witness of a sad spectacle—a spectacle in which the hand of retributive justice seemed only too apparent. For in a hired vehicle the Earl was brought in an almost lifeless state—that nobleman still quite in the

prime of life—so handsome—and of such commanding presence! As I have already told you, he had been thrown from his horse. The Countess soon afterwards returned; and she was seized with the wildest grief. I could make no inquiries then amidst those distressing circumstances;—and I departed. But at nine o'clock this morning I was at Eccleston House again. I saw the Countess: she was overwhelmed with grief—but she conducted me to her husband's chamber. There I learnt from his lips where you were. I will tell you no more what then took place—unless it be that an order for your release was speedily drawn up, and the Earl signed it, the Countess guiding his hand. Then, Joseph, I lost no time in repairing to Bayswater to effect your liberation.”

The moment this narrative concluded—and before I had time to express my deep gratitude for all the generous and affectionate interest which the Count of Livorno had displayed on my behalf—the equipage rolled up to the front of Eccleston House in Manchester Square. I cannot now describe the feelings which took possession of me. That I was at length standing upon the very threshold of the confirmation of all I believed and hoped, I could no longer doubt. There was no possibility of any perfidious treatment nor of any treacherous machinations now! The presence of the Count of Livorno was a guarantee that I had nothing to apprehend, and that everything which I dared anticipate would be fulfilled. Oh! how my heart beat—how my heart beat! Reader, here I am compelled to lay down for a few moments the autobiographic pen: for the memories of that occasion come rushing in unto my brain—they surge up in it—my soul is filled with ineffable emotions. But let me tranquillize myself: let me resume the thread of my narrative.

“Joseph, my dear young friend, calm yourself,” said the Count of Livorno, taking my hand and pressing it with a true fraternal warmth, as the carriage thus stopped at the door of Eccleston House in Manchester Square.

That door was immediately opened: a footman came forth—and we alighted from the carriage. We were conducted up-stairs to a back drawing-room, where the Countess of Eccleston rose to receive us. Yes—she rose from her seat—but it was to fold me in her arms!

Reader, you will perhaps think I am about to deal capriciously with you, inasmuch as it is my purpose to leave at this point a gap in my narrative,—but a gap which will be shortly filled up, and then you will learn everything. You will acknowledge too, kind reader, when the moment of fullest explanation shall come, that for the purposes of my narrative I am adopting the wiser course in thus temporarily deferring the elucidation of many mysteries. Suffice it for the present to say that the Count of Livorno left me alone with Lady Eccleston; and after a brief space I was conducted to the chamber of his lordship. The Earl was at the point of death. During the interval while the Count of Livorno was effecting my liberation from the lunatic-asylum, the Earl had broken a blood-vessel internally, and his physicians had no power to save him. His life was ebbing away while I knelt by his bed-side; and Oh! it was amidst torrents of tears and convulsing sobs that I not merely murmured forgiveness

for all that I had endured at his hands, but that I breathed prayers to heaven that mercy might be shown unto the soul that was about to wing its flight thither. He retained his consciousness almost to the last; and it was precisely at the hour of noon, on the 8th of November, 1842, that the Earl of Eccleston breathed his last.

It is here that the great gap in my narrative is to take place,—a gap however which, as I have already said, shall be filled up in due time. The funeral took place on the 13th of November; and it was conducted with as much privacy as could be observed under the circumstances. On the morning of the 14th I set out by an early train on my journey northward. I travelled alone: I was bent upon an expedition which was of all-absorbing interest for myself: I required to be in the complete possession of all my own thoughts, without the necessity of devoting them to a companion. The Count of Livorno, fully comprehending that such was the state of my mind, had not offered to accompany me; and when, impelled by a feeling of friendship and gratitude, I had asked him whether he would not go with me on that occasion, he had said, “No, Joseph: you must proceed alone! There is in every respect a species of sanctity connected with this incident of your life, which must not be disturbed or intruded on, even by your best friend—as I am proud to call myself, and as I know that you regard me!”

Thus was it that I was travelling alone; and fortunately I had a compartment in the railway carriage all to myself from London to Manchester. I cannot here describe the entire state of my feelings, because that would be to anticipate the elucidation of those matters which I have purposely reserved for a future chapter. But this much I may tell the reader—that the image of Annabel was never once absent from my mind. Did I experience any suspense—any anxiety—any apprehension as to what the decision of Sir Matthew Heseltine would be? No!—in this respect I was full of hope; and I had moreover received the assurance that those whom I was about to visit were in good health. This assurance had been considerably obtained for me by the Count of Livorno from Mr. Tennant, Sir Matthew's solicitor in London—that same solicitor, as the reader will recollect, at whose office I had first discovered how closely connected Mrs. Lanover and Annabel were with the Westmoreland Baronet. And now I was on my way into Westmoreland;—after having passed through so many adventures, I was about to keep the appointment which two years back Sir Matthew Heseltine had so definitely and expressly made. Oh! the long-wished for day was now close at hand!—and I felt that it was to be one of the most important, and at all events, the most dearly interesting in the course of my chequered career. Good heavens! what a marvellous history was mine!—how fraught with the wonders of romance—yet all so true! And now Annabel—thou whom I had so long and so tenderly loved—thou whose image for seven years had ever been uppermost in my mind—thou whose azure eyes had ever seemed to shine upon me like guiding stars of tenderness and hope amidst all that I had gone through—thou whom I had looked upon as the good genius whose image could raise me up from despair at those times when my



soul was sinking into the abyss of despondency—thou, beauteous creature, an angel in loveliness as well as in disposition—it was thou, Annabel, to whom I was now speeding!—thou whose hand I was soon to claim as that of my bride!

It was about five o'clock in the evening that I arrived at Manchester; and I proceeded to the very hotel where Sir Matthew Heseltine had put up on the occasion when I accompanied him in his journey from Reading to the home of his ancestors. Ah! the last time that I had crossed the threshold of this hotel, upwards of two years back, it was as a dependant and a menial: but now how altered were my circumstances! By a strange accident I was shown to the very sitting-room which Sir Matthew had occupied during our brief sojourn at that hotel on the occasion to which I have just referred. It almost seemed to me as if I could select the very chair in which he sate in that room, when I stood in his presence and he bade me take whatsoever advantage I chose of a few hours' leisure in that city. As I thought of the difference between my position *then* and what it *now* was, my feelings overpowered me and the tears trickled down my cheeks. Was it all a dream? could it possibly be a reality? Oh yes it was a reality!—and I was there, in that hotel—in that very room—enabled to say unto myself that the circumstances of the world and the mysterious dispensations of providence had indeed worked marvels for me!

I dined at the hotel: that is to say, I ordered dinner for form's sake—and I sate down to it: but my heart was too full of a variety of emotions to allow me the enjoyment of appetite. The repast was therefore soon disposed of; and I then proceeded to call upon my friends the Rowlands. It was upwards of two years since I had seen them; and then they had received me most kindly. I felt it to be my duty to pay them this visit now, although I would have rather deferred it to a future occasion when I might give them all those explanations which at present I could not give, inasmuch as I was resolved that first of all the intelligence which so intimately concerned myself should be communicated to the inmates of Heseltine Hall.

I reached the Rowlands' house: the door was opened by the tall footman, who was delighted to see me. I remembered his kindness of a former day, when a wretched, houseless, and starving wanderer, I had sunk down exhausted on that very door-step where I now stood; and I was rejoiced that I at length possessed the means of exhibiting my gratitude.

"Are your master and mistress well, Thomas?" I inquired.

"Perfectly, sir," he responded: "and they will be very glad to see you. Walk this way——"

"One moment, Thomas!" I said, detaining him in the hall. "Do you remember how we first met? Do you recollect that when you found me lying upon your door-steps, you spoke kindly of me to your master and mistress?—and you said that I was no common mendicant. Never have I forgotten those words!"

"But why speak of them, Mr. Wilmot?" asked the good-natured footman, his lips quivering with emotion. "Did you not turn out everything that was excellent and good?—and was I not rejoiced

when about a couple of years back, you called here and I learnt that your position had greatly changed and you had become a young gentleman? And you know very well, sir, that I was not jealous when I saw you sitting down with master and mistress at that very table——"

"Where I had once waited as a menial, Thomas," I added, with much emotion. "No! you were not jealous—you took an opportunity to congratulate me——"

"And you forced a bank note into my hand, Mr. Wilmot, when you went away," added Thomas; "and I was sorry you did it, because it seemed as if you wished to pay me in money for any little act of Christian kindness I had on a former occasion been able to render you."

"It was a kindness, Thomas," I said, "which I never could forget. Circumstances have improved with me: I am still better off than I even was on that day to which we have just referred. Now be not offended at what I am going to do! It is not that I seek to acquit myself of my obligation to you—because *that* is impossible. I am merely testifying my gratitude. You must accept this as a proof thereof. Not another word, Thomas! You will pain me if you refuse."

I thrust into his hand a banknote for a hundred pounds; and then I hastened on to the parlour,—that well-known parlour in which Mr. and Mrs. Rowland were accustomed to sit when I was in their service. And there they now were, at the tea-table—the blaze of a cheerful fire playing upon their benevolent countenances. They both gave utterance to ejaculations of joy on recognising me; and then a shade came over their features as they simultaneously perceived that I was in deep mourning.

"Ask me no questions, my kind friends," I said, "relative to *this*." and I glanced down at my black dress. "I can give no explanations now. In a short time I shall see you again—and then you shall know everything. I have but a few hours to spare in Manchester; and it was alike a pleasure and a duty to come and visit you."

With what cordial warmth were both my hands wrung by Mr. and Mrs. Rowland!—how kindly they spoke to me!—how they welcomed me to their house!—and how annoyed they were that I had not made it my quarters instead of sojourning at a hotel! I sate down to tea with them; and it appeared as if this worthy couple could not make too much of me. I suffered them to understand that since I had last seen them, another and most important change had taken place in my condition, and that I was now totally independent of the world. But more than this I said not; and they did not press me for those explanations which they concluded I had very excellent reasons for postponing. Yet it was with the most unfeigned sincerity they congratulated me upon this new improvement in my condition; and they gazed upon me with compassionate interest—for they naturally associated the improvement to which I referred with the mourning garb which I wore. I inquired concerning their nephew Stephen and his bride, the patrician Gertrude: I learnt that they were both well, and that their union was one of completest happiness in every respect. It appeared that the old Marquis of Chillum had died some time back; but as his end approached, he had re-

pented of his harsh conduct towards his daughter—that a complete reconciliation with her family had taken place—and she was handsomely remembered in her father's will. I expressed the pleasure with which I received this intelligence; and after passing a couple of hours with the worthy old couple, I returned to the hotel.

## CHAPTER CLII.

THE 15TH OF NOVEMBER.

THE morning of the memorable 15th of November, 1842, dawned; and though it was the month for fog, and mist, and gloom, yet was this day as bright a one as if Autumn himself had forgotten that he was so close upon extinction, or as if Winter had omitted as yet to make an approach towards claiming the allegiance of the season. I heralded the sunbeams which glinted through the murky atmosphere of Manchester, as the emblems of that hopefulness with which the day began to dawn for me, and the harbingers of the happiness which at a later hour I was to experience. I started by an early train; and it was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon when I alighted at the station at Kendal in Westmoreland. I left my trunk there, with the intimation that I would send for it presently; and I set out to walk to my destination.

The weather was indeed beautiful: the sun was shining brightly—the atmosphere had a healthful freshness, totally distinct from misty dampness. It was such a breeze that was well calculated to brace the physical energies, and thereby cheer the spirits. But I walked slowly along the broad road leading to Heseltine Hall: the distance was only a couple of miles—and I had resolved to fulfil Sir Matthew's injunction to the very letter: namely, to present myself before him precisely at the hour of noon on this memorable day. Oh! what ineffable feelings filled my heart as each step brought me nearer to my destination, and as I recognised object after object along that road! To use a vulgar yet very expressive term, my heart appeared to come up into my very throat: I could scarcely prevent myself from sobbing with joy; sweet tears of bliss and hope were constantly starting into my eyes as I walked along that road. But, oh! how can I describe what I felt when I caught the first glimpse of the tall chimneys of the old mansion peeping above the trees which had well nigh lost all their foliage? That was the home of Annabel: beneath that roof dwelt the beloved being: thither was I proceeding—that was my destination. Oh! joy supreme! Was the last hour of the prescribed period of self-exile from that mansion now passing? was the clock full soon to proclaim the moment when I was to find myself once more in the presence of the charming and well-beloved Annabel? What a reward for all I had suffered! what a recompense for all I had gone through!—and I may perhaps be pardoned if during those lapsing minutes of blissful expectation, I felt not that the recent circumstances which had occurred at Eccleston House in London retained upon my mind that heavy and dismal impression which they had hitherto made.

Nearer and nearer I approached to my destination. Forgive me, reader, if I am thus minute in the details of my feelings and emotions on this eventful day. Perhaps you yourself can appreciate the luxury of those feelings: peradventure your own heart can enter into all that constituted those emotions. If so, you can understand how it was that I halted and leant against a tree for support when I reached a spot whence I could command a full view of Heseltine Hall. And here I wept delicious tears; and having dried my eyes, I continued my way. Another ten minutes' walk, and I reached the entrance to the estate. The great iron gates stood wide open; and yet there was no equipage in sight—none that had just passed in—none that was just coming out. Oh! was it for me that these gates were thrown open? was it a symbol of the welcome that I was to receive at that mansion which stood on the gentle eminence a quarter of a mile distant?

All in a moment I found myself confronted by a happy group. The old porter, his daughter Phoebe, his son-in-law Reuben, and their four children (they had only three when I left the Hall two years back) came forth from the lodge with smiling countenances, evidently to welcome me. They were all dressed in their holiday apparel; and their eyes were beaming with joy and delight. I accosted them: I endeavoured to speak—to make inquiries concerning those in whom I was so deeply interested at the Hall: but my words could not find utterance—my voice was choked with the emotions that surged up from the depths of my heart. And now a soft melancholy shade came over the countenances of the old man, his daughter, and her husband, as they observed for the first time that I was in deep mourning.

"Have you lost some one, Mr. Wilmot," asked the old porter, in a low voice and with hesitating manner, "who is dear to you?"—then, as he perceived the tears trickling down my cheeks, he added, "Whatsoever this loss may be, it is not known at the Hall; and therefore perhaps—under existing circumstances—and considering the preparations made—my Reuben here had better run up in advance—"

"No, no, my good old man!" I said, taking him by the hand and pressing it with fervour; "let everything remain as Sir Matthew has decreed it! I see—Oh! I see from what you have said, it is indeed to be a day of happiness—"

But I stopped short: for again my emotions suffocated me.

The old porter, dashing away the tears from his own eyes, pointed through the open door into the lodge; and I beheld the table covered with a snowy napkin, and with decanters of wine upon it—while the numerous vessels upon the fire and the hobs indicated an extraordinary degree of festive preparation in that humble tenement.

"There will be a little banquet here to-day, Mr. Wilmot," said the old man, "as there will be a grand one up at the Hall. And your health, sir, will be drunk with joyous welcome beneath this roof. Yet if your own heart is sad—"

"No, no!" I exclaimed: and then in the effusion of my feelings, I grasped the hands of the adults, and I caressed the children. "Be happy—be happy, my good people! It is a day which God himself has sent for us all to be happy here!"

With these words I burst abruptly away from the little group; and I hurried up the avenue towards the house. For some moments I could only see the mansion indistinctly through the dimness of my tears. I am searching for language, reader, to convey an idea of the emotions which I experienced: but I cannot find words to express my feelings. Oh! I thought within myself, that though I came clad in mourning-apparel, yet would it be the most miserable of affectations to pretend that my heart was in utter mourning likewise! Therefore there must be no damp thrown upon whatsoever welcome was prepared for me!—there must be no saddening influence shed upon the souls of those whom I was about to meet! For the words of the porter had vividly recalled to my recollection the parting promise of Sir Matthew two years back:—"Then come, Joseph! be sure to come!—and rest assured that you shall be received with open arms. Yes—there shall be festivities and rejoicings—and God grant that I may be alive to welcome the wanderer home!"

And God had granted the old Baronet's fervent wish: he was alive—and he was well: and not merely the half-uttered hints of the porter, but my own heart told me, that his arms would be extended to receive me.

On I went: nearer and nearer I drew to the house. I looked up towards the windows: but not a single countenance did I behold there. A momentary chill of disappointment seized upon me: but, O heaven! how quickly was it dispelled—with what swiftness did it turn into a thrill of gushing emotions—when at the very moment the old clock on the summit of the Hall began proclaiming the hour of noon, a band struck up its superb harmony; and forth from the portals of the venerable mansion poured Sir Matthew's tenantry, with their wives and little ones, all apparelled in their gaudreses. I staggered—I reeled—I felt an intoxication of the brain: it was a wildness of happiness—an ecstasy of feeling—a paradise of thrilling emotions, which even these words which I am using are puny and insignificant to describe!

Loud rang forth the grand harmony in strains of pealing welcome; and now upon the threshold I caught sight of a group whose presence all in a moment gave wings to my feet—and on I sped. There was Sir Matthew Heseltine: there was Mrs. Lanover: and there was Annabel,—Annabel, the angel of my idolatry—the joy of my heart—and O heaven, how beautiful! A cry of wild delight rang from my lips as I thus bounded forward. And the old Baronet's arms were open to receive me; and they closed around me—and as I sank sobbing upon his breast, he said, "Welcome, my dear boy!—ten thousand welcomes greet thee to thy home!"

And the music pealed forth its kindred strains; and then Annabel was folded in my embrace. Yes, before all the assembled tenantry did I embrace her thus: for I no longer saw that crowd—I heard not their cheers—I had no eyes nor sense for anything except the *one* object of my long devoted love—the darling of my heart, the bright and beautiful Annabel! Nor did her mother chide me that I should have thus poured forth my gushing feelings in respect to her daughter, before giving any attention to herself: and it was with a voice full of deepest emotion that Mrs. Lanover, when I at length

turned towards her, said, as she folded me in her arms, "God be thanked! you are returned, my dear boy—and Annabel is your own!"

I was conducted up towards the great drawing-room: but on the way thither, the old Baronet and the ladies suddenly observed for the first time that I was in mourning; and Sir Matthew, stopping short, said, "Joseph, what means this?"—at the same time glancing at my vesture.

"Ask me not for explanations now, my dear sir," I responded. "You, see that I am happy—Oh, I have every reason to be happy!"—and I carried the hand of Annabel to my lips.

The Baronet said no more on that occasion with regard to the mourning; and we entered the drawing-room. There we all four sat down—not for immediate conversation—our hearts were too full for discourse. We looked at one another,—a thousand delightful things being expressed in our eyes; and not for a single moment did the Baronet display any of those eccentricities which had been wont to characterize him during the former period of our acquaintance. I sat next to Annabel,—her delicate white hand clasped in my own—that hand which I knew would be mine, and that by it I should lead her to the altar! I have already said how beautiful she looked: her appearance was absolutely ravishing. An ineffable joy shone in her large azure eyes; but there was the blush of maiden bashfulness upon her damask cheeks. The rich masses of her golden hair floated upon her ivory shoulders: a half smile of bliss, which parted her vermilion lips, disclosed the pearly teeth within. Her figure—tall and exquisitely symmetrical—was only just so much expanded from the more sylphid slenderness of an earlier period as to take the developments proper to her age: for she was now in her twenty-third year. This was likewise my age; and presently, when our tongues began to unlock themselves, and our feelings allowed us to give utterance to our thoughts, I was complimented by Sir Matthew and Mrs. Lanover on the improvement, as they were pleased to term it, which had taken place in my own appearance. Indeed, during the two years of our separation, I had lost that boyishness of look which had characterized me at the time of my self-exile; and my mirror had told me that I had acquired a more manly air.

As for Annabel, I cannot help again referring to her matchless, her wondrous beauty. The lithe, slender, fairy-shaped girl who seven years back had burst like a charming vision upon my sight on the first day of my introduction to Lanover's house in Bloomsbury, had now expanded into the lovely and well-developed young woman. Yet still she looked younger than she really was: for there was a certain halo of girlish innocence, so to speak, investing her with its pure light and holy animation; and it was easy to read in her looks that she was the same artless, unsophisticated, chaste-minded being that she was at the time we first became acquainted. She knew more of the world, it is true—but only to profit by that experience in a good sense, and to have none of the first freshness of her youthful feelings marred by that more extended knowledge.

When once we had begun to discourse, we all four of us soon got on to talk more quickly: we had so many things to say! But when I spoke of

all that I had gone through since we parted, and of the marvellous adventures which I had to relate, I perceived that Sir Matthew Heseltine smiled significantly: Mrs. Lanover smiled likewise: and when I looked at Annabel, she said in a low voice, but one that was full of deepest emotion, "We know, my dear Joseph, how much we are indebted to you for your gallant behaviour in the Apennines—likewise for the chivalrous magnanimity with which you plunged into danger on our account in respect to the Greek pirates!"

"You know all these things?" I exclaimed in astonishment. "How did they reach your knowledge?"

"Come, I see, Joseph," said Sir Matthew Heseltine, rising from his seat, "that the sooner you and I have a little discourse together, the better. I am sorry to separate you even for a few minutes from your Annabel: but when once this little private interview is over, you will be at full liberty to enjoy each other's presence to your heart's content. Yet, my dear boy," added the Baronet, while a shade came over his countenance, "you have yet to tell us for whom this mourning garb is worn—"

"Ah! I see," I interrupted Sir Matthew, "that there are still certain points on which you have explanations to receive from my lips. But they shall be given presently."

"Come then," said the Baronet; "come then—and let us be alone for a few minutes together. Annabel my dear girl," he added with a smile, "I will not long detain Joseph from you."

The beautiful maiden blushed with modest bashfulness as her grandsire thus addressed her; and when she turned to proceed to the door, I seized the opportunity to snatch another embrace of my intended bride. I followed the Baronet to the library. Now once again I entered the place where two years back he had enunciated his intentions in respect to myself and my hopes of possessing Annabel. Annabel was to be mine—this was most certain!—but was my unfortunate amour with Lady Calanthe Dundas known to the Baronet? If not, I resolved to deal frankly with him, and make him acquainted with every detail of that mournful episode of my life.

Sir Matthew sat himself down, and pointed to a chair immediately opposite to him. I took it:—was it possible that two years had elapsed since he and I last sate together in that same room, and in that same position, face to face?

"My dear Joseph," he said, "you remember the words that I spoke to you in this library, exactly two years ago? I gave you to understand that if during your period of probation you were guilty of aught which would leave a stain upon your conscience, you were not to return to me; but that if when this day arrived, you felt yourself to be the same well-principled, pure-minded young man that you were on taking your departure from Heseltine Hall, you were assuredly to come back. You *have* come—you are here: and therefore I am to presume that it is in the pride of conscious rectitude you have made your appearance before me?"

"I see, Sir Matthew Heseltine," I answered, "that whatsoever information you may have obtained in respect to my more recent adventures in Italy, there is at least one episode of my life with

which you are unacquainted; and this I will immediately proceed to narrate."

"Go on, Joseph," said Sir Matthew Heseltine, not exactly with coldness, but with a sort of reserved, business-like, matter-of-fact look and tone which reminded me somewhat of his peculiarities of former times.

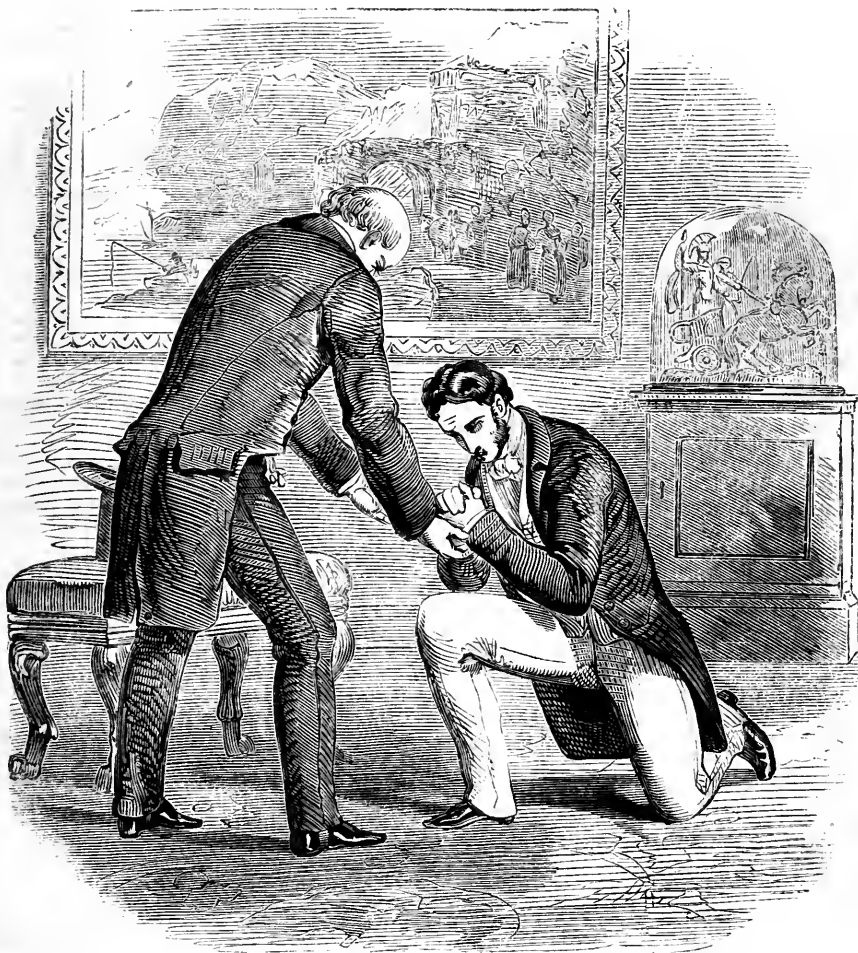
I at once, with the utmost candour and frankness, began to explain everything which related to the unfortunate Lady Calanthe Dundas,—how I had first of all met her when a mere boy at Mr. Tiverton's house in Devonshire—how she had subsequently obtained the post of governess at Mrs. Robinson's in the Isle of Wight, in order that she might be beneath the same roof with myself—how the strength of her passion had rendered my own resolves weak, and how we were guilty—how we were separated by her father—and how some time afterwards I fell in with her again in so extraordinary a manner at the Shackelfords' near Bagshot. Then I proceeded to describe how on finding that I had become a father, I was prepared to make any sacrifice as an atonement for my weakness—how I yielded to the dictates of honourable feeling even so far as to resolve upon resigning my hope in respect to Annabel, that I might do justice to the ruined Calanthe and give a father's name to my child. I went on to detail the circumstances under which Calanthe and I were again separated; and when I had finished this portion of my narrative, I said, "And it was then, Sir Matthew, that I entered your service at Reading."

"Proceed," observed the Baronet, in a colder voice and with more rigid looks than before.

I felt somewhat uneasy for a few instants: but speedily inspired by the confidence which arose from the very fact of the frankness of my dealing with the Baronet, I proceeded with my history. I described how after parting from him at Heseltine Hall two years back, I had repaired to France, where I again encountered Calanthe at the old Chateau on the road to Paris. I described the circumstances of the unfortunate lady's death, which followed so speedily upon that of our child; and I stated how they were buried in the same grave.

"And now, Sir Matthew Heseltine," I added, "I have candidly and ingenuously given you every detail of this episode in my life,—the only one on which I need retrospect with remorse—the only one which has left a guilty pang in my heart. Yes, Sir Matthew—I can look you in the face—I can unflinchingly meet your gaze—while I declare that in no other instance have I swerved from the path of virtue—not another deed have I done which I blush to avow! I do not seek to palliate my conduct in respect to poor Lady Calanthe, more than it palliates itself when the circumstances of my extreme youth are taken into consideration. But at the same time I may observe that my life has been as pure and as stainless in every other respect as could best satisfy the most rigid moralist."

All the time that I had been speaking, Sir Matthew Heseltine eyed me with that keen penetrating scrutiny which I so well remembered, and to which I had so often been subject during the former period that I was with him. He appeared to look me through and through: his eyes were never once taken off me: it seemed as if he were



bent on detecting any wilful omission that I might possibly make in my narrative. It was not the Sir Matthew Heseltine who had just received me with open arms, that I now beheld before me: it was the Sir Matthew Heseltine—inscrutable, stern, and overawing—whom I had known in former times. When I had ceased speaking, that piercing gaze still continued riveted upon me. I grew frightened—Annabel seemed slipping as it were out of my arms—the golden bowl of hope appeared ready to be broken; and sinking upon my knees, I said, “Sir Matthew, am I not to be forgiven?”

“Forgiven? Yes, my dear boy!” he exclaimed, raising me up and folding me to his breast. “Forgiven?—to be sure! Excellent young man! would to God that all the world were as pure-minded as you—and what a paradise would it be! Every detail of this story was known to me

before: and if I have made you repeat it now, it was only to obtain another proof—the *last* proof that is necessary—of your frankness, your candour, and your truthfulness!”

“You knew it all?” I exclaimed in astonishment: then, as a sudden and dismaying thought struck me, I anxiously asked, “And Annabel?”

“No, no, Joseph!” quickly rejoined Sir Matthew: “she suspects it not.”

“Heaven be thanked!” I ejaculated with fervour. “But Mrs. Lanover?”

“Yes—she knows it,” responded Sir Matthew; “and though she deploras—as I also do—in one sense, the tragic end of poor Calanthe, yet is my daughter a woman of the world, and she judges you not too harshly. Some few years hence, Joseph, when you have been awhile married to Annabel, you must tell her the tale or suffer her to learn it

from the lips of her mother, for fear lest the intelligence should some day burst upon her in a ruder mode."

"And how learnt you that circumstance?" I asked.

"The villain Lanover, some six or seven months ago, from his dungeon in Florence, wrote letters to myself, to my daughter, and my granddaughter."

"I expected as much!" I exclaimed.

"Fortunately," continued Sir Matthew, "the letter intended for Annabel passed through her mother's hands—or I should rather say it was intercepted by them the moment the handwriting was recognised. Thus was it that Annabel was saved from the shock which her pure mind would have otherwise received, and which that vindictive monster Lanover intended to occasion."

"My dear Sir Matthew," I vehemently exclaimed, "will you believe my solemn assurance that though during the period of my probation I wished not that incident to become known to you, lest it should cause a prejudice to settle, take root, and grow in your mind,—yet that I all along resolved to avow everything with frankness in the end?"

"Of the truth of this assurance I also have the fullest certitude," responded Sir Matthew. "I knew that you would deal thus frankly with me; and that was one of the reasons which made me furnish you the opportunity of justifying this belief,—a belief not merely founded on my knowledge of your character, but likewise arising from positive information conveyed to me."

"By whom?" I asked, in bewildering astonishment.

"By your friend the Count of Livorno," rejoined Sir Matthew. "Ah! and a nobler friend you possess not, Joseph, on the face of the earth! You should see the terms in which he writes of you! Not that he says a single syllable more than you deserve: but in this world it is a rare thing for one man to give another credit for his deserts."

"And the Count has written to you?" I said inquiringly.

"Yes: I received his letter this morning. It appears that you have made him acquainted," continued Sir Matthew, "with all the incidents of your life. He saw my solicitor in London—"

"Yes—I recollect—two or three days ago. He considerably went to inquire whether you were all well, and whether you were still at this mansion."

"Yes: and doubtless," interjected Sir Matthew, with one of his peculiar smiles, "the Count of Livorno learnt from Mr. Tennant that I am—or at least used to be, a very strange sort of character; and so the Count probably thought that my reception of you might not be as welcome as *you* hoped and *he* wished it to be. He accordingly wrote me this letter, explaining how you had so nobly perilled your life for us in the Apennines—how you had done the same in order to save us from the treachery designed by Lanover and to be carried out through the medium of the Greek pirates. In addition to these statements, the Count of Livorno gave me the assurance that he had seen you under many trying circumstances—he has well studied your disposition and character—and the result is, my dear Joseph," added Sir Matthew, pat-

ting me on the back, "that his lordship the Count is ready to stake his existence upon your integrity and honour."

"Generous friend that he has been to me!" I exclaimed, my heart melting with emotions as I thus fervidly spoke.

"I was pleased to receive his lordship's letter," continued Sir Matthew; "but it made not the slightest difference in the course which I was prepared to adopt towards you: my arms were ready to open to receive you—and," added the worthy Baronet, his lips quivering and his voice shaking with emotion, "perhaps you yourself, Joseph, have not more deeply longed for the coming of this day than I myself have!"

I expressed my gratitude for Sir Matthew's kind words; and after a few moments' pause, I said, "Then it was the Count of Livorno's letter which made you acquainted with all the details of Lady Calanthe's history, as he had at different times received them from my lips: because there were certain points on which Lanover himself must have been ignorant."

"Yes—the Count gave me the fullest details in his letter," answered Sir Matthew,—"not to betray you unnecessarily, but in order that in case Lanover should have sent me a falsely coloured account, I might be put in possession of the exact truth by the time of your arrival here to-day."

"And beyond the facts to which you have alluded," I said inquiringly, "the Count of Livorno has given you no explanations in reference to other circumstances which intimately concern me?"

"None," answered Sir Matthew. "But the time is now come, Joseph, when you must begin your explanations. And first of all, my dear boy, in reference to this mourning garb which you wear—"

"A few words will explain it!" I interrupted the Baronet: "but they are connected with an arowal which must be made in the presence of Annabel and her mother. It is a piece of intelligence which I have to impart—something which concerns myself—But one word, Sir Matthew?" I ejaculated. "You give me your consent to claim Annabel as my bride?"

"Yes, my dear boy—yes!" responded Sir Matthew. "Have you not already comprehended as much? And I will make you rich too—I will give you a fortune—"

"Oh! infinitely more rejoiced," I exclaimed, "am I that all this should be addressed to me as the humble and obscure Joseph Wilmot than—But come, Sir Matthew!—come!" I cried, now full of the excitement of wild joy: and seizing the Baronet by the hand, I began to drag him towards the door.

"What does all this mean, Joseph?" asked Sir Matthew. "But no matter! it is natural enough! Joy has its fever and its madness as well as grief. Come, my dear boy!—we will speed to the ladies, as you wish it—and you shall claim Annabel as your bride."

I know not at what terrific speed I dragged Sir Matthew up the stairs: but I can positively affirm that he was not the least annoyed or vexed: on the contrary he seemed fully disposed to let me do with him precisely what I thought fit. I burst open the door of the drawing-room with an abruptness that startled Annabel and her mother: but



their momentary alarm yielded to other feelings, when Sir Matthew exclaimed, "Come, Annabel, my dearest girl!—come my beloved grandchild—and give your hand to Joseph in token that he shall receive it at the altar!"

And the beautiful Annabel—with blushes on her cheeks, with smiles upon her lips, and with the tears which varied emotions drew from her eyes to trace their pearly path down her angelic face—advanced and gave me her hand. I pressed it to my lips—and I pressed it to my heart: I endeavoured to speak—but for upwards of a minute was my voice choked with the strength of the feelings which I now experienced.

"Annabel, dearest Annabel!" at length I said, "you confer upon me a bliss such as no monarch could bestow! And, Oh! if I have reason to rejoice in the change which has taken place in my circumstances, it is that I am enabled to convince you how disinterested and how sincere has been my love! For I come, not to claim your hand because you are the heiress of the wealthiest Baronet of Westmoreland; I have come only because I love you, Annabel!—and if you were the poorest and the humblest, this day would have seen me here all the same! Ah, you all three gaze upon me in astonishment?—you think that joy has turned my brain?—And heaven knows that to possess this dear hand were almost sufficient to render me wild with delight! But I know what I am saying—I have a revelation to make—this mourning garb—"

I paused for a few moments, and wiped away the tears from my eyes. Annabel looked up with the sweetest and the tenderest interest into my countenance: Sir Matthew and Mrs. Lanover drew nearer.

"Yes," I continued; "this mourning garb—I wear it for my own father! And start not—I am Joseph Wilmot no longer—my birth is cleared up—and I, dearest Annabel—yes, I—I am the Earl of Eccleston!"

## CHAPTER CLIII.

### EXPLANATIONS.

I AM now about to redeem that pledge which I recently made to the reader: the gap which I left in my narrative is to be here filled up. It is a complete history of the past which will appropriately fit into this place: it is an explanation in a consecutive form of those incidents and mysteries which have interwoven themselves so intricately with all the preceding portion of my narrative.

It was at the beginning of the year 1820 that the Hon. Augustus Mulgrave first became acquainted with Clara, one of the daughters of Mr. Delmar, a rich widower residing at Delmar Manor. Mr. Mulgrave was at that time just entering his twenty-second year: he was a younger son, and totally dependant upon his father Lord Eccleston, as he was subsequently dependant for a considerable time on his elder brother when the latter succeeded to the title. Augustus Mulgrave had been a very wild young man, and the source of much distress and vexation to his

family. He had been expelled from College, and had thus cut himself out from following any one of those honourable professions to which a young scion of the aristocracy might have devoted himself with so many admirable chances of success. He was remarkably handsome, and possessed an elegant figure: his manners were fascinating—his conversation was agreeable. Clara Delmar—then entering her seventeenth year, without a mother's guidance, and totally inexperienced in the ways of the world—became deeply enamoured of Augustus Mulgrave. She heard that he had been wild, reckless, improvident, and extravagant: but it was so easy for a lover to persuade a fond confiding girl that the mutual affection which thus subsisted would be a sufficient motive to induce him to follow a right path for the future. But Mr. Delmar discouraged the attentions of Augustus Mulgrave towards his daughter from the very moment that he first perceived them. Vainly did the young gentleman throw himself at Mr. Delmar's feet: vainly did Clara beseech her sire to have faith and confidence in the object of her love. The father, though in all other respects a kind and an indulgent one, was on this point inexorable; for the character of Augustus Mulgrave had been represented to him as that of one who was inveterately and radically bad. He therefore commanded his daughter to think no more of Augustus, whom he peremptorily forbade the house.

But however just were the reasons on which Mr. Delmar's decree was founded,—it assumed, through the representations of Augustus, the aspect of an injustice and of a tyranny in the eyes of Clara. The lovers met clandestinely,—their secret meetings being aided by a lady's-maid in Mr. Delmar's household. A private marriage was agreed upon; and it was solemnized at Enfield,—Mr. Dorchester being the officiating clergyman. A bribe secured the co-operation and the secrecy of this unprincipled man: but his conduct was all the more reprehensible, inasmuch as he had received many marks of friendship from Mr. Delmar. In the course of time Clara discovered that she was in a way to become a mother; and after a consultation with her husband, it was determined that they should throw themselves at Mr. Delmar's feet and confess everything. But as a necessary preliminary to this proceeding, they first of all sought to obtain a certificate of their marriage, which they had either neglected to do at the time, or else the copy which they had received was lost: but which of the two circumstances it was I cannot assert with accuracy. The faithful lady's-maid was despatched to Enfield, which is at no great distance from Delmar Manor, to procure the certificate: but on arriving there she learnt that Mr. Dorchester had recently fled in order to escape from arrest by sheriffs'-officers who were in pursuit of him. The clerk who had witnessed the marriage ceremony, had since died: but the lady's-maid, little suspecting what was so shortly to transpire, addressed herself to the new clerk, and asked for the certificate. The register was referred to: but the leaf on which the entry had been made was gone! Its extraction from the book was visible: and there could be no doubt that Dorchester, for some reason or another, was the author of the deed.

What was now to be done? Not for an instant would Mr. Delmar believe the tale of the marriage: the only person who could stand forward as a witness was the lady's-maid,—and he would naturally argue that if she could have been an accomplice in deceiving him in respect to that clandestine marriage, it was still more likely that she would now corroborate a manufactured tale to account for his daughter's disgrace. The project of confessing everything to Mr. Delmar was therefore abandoned. Shortly afterwards Clara received an invitation to stay with an old maiden lady at some little distance in the country; and this invitation was accepted, as it appeared to promise the means of enshrouding Clara's calamitous position in secrecy. The lady's-maid accompanied her on this visit; and without entering into unnecessary details, Clara became a mother under circumstances which shielded her from all suspicion. The lady's-maid then quitted the service of her young mistress—but only to serve her in another and equally necessary way: namely, to take care of the child which had thus come into the world. And that child was myself!

Living in the strictest seclusion, and at a considerable distance from the neighbourhoods where she was known, the lady's-maid took care of me for a period of about two years. But getting wearied of that monotonous kind of life, she at length intimated her desire that other arrangements should be made on my behalf: and Mr. Mulgrave furnished her with the means of consigning me to the care of Mr. and Mrs. Nelson at the seminary near Leicester. *She*, therefore, was the veiled female of whom I had overheard Mrs. Nelson speak to Mr. Jukes on the memorable day when I listened to the conversation which was taking place between the widowed schoolmistress and the heartless individual just named. An arrangement was made for the half-yearly remittances to be made through the medium of a London banker; and as the reader has seen, these payments were duly effected until the last year of my residence at the Nelsons'.

But I must not hasten on too rapidly in the details of this narrative which I am now putting upon record. I must here observe that a short while after the lady's-maid had consigned me, under the name of Joseph Wilmot, to the care of the Nelsons near Leicester, she met with some accident which led to a malady that speedily terminated in her death. Thus the only witness whose testimony could be rendered available, in case of need, to prove the marriage of my parents, was taken from the world—unless indeed Dorchester himself should at any time have come forward again.

There can be no doubt that Augustus Mulgrave was much attached to Clara; and his affection, though it had *not* been strong enough to make him resolve that they should both dare everything so that they might acknowledge their offspring, was nevertheless sufficiently potent to render him faithful to her. And perhaps too the belief that Clara would inherit a considerable share, if not the bulk of her father's wealth, might have been a great temptation for an extravagant and dependant individual such as Augustus Mulgrave. He certainly became more steady after his secret marriage with Clara; and thus four or five years

passed,—Mr. Delmar remaining utterly unsuspecting of what had taken place—unsuspecting likewise that Clara and Augustus kept up clandestine meetings. At length Mr. Delmar again met Augustus in society; they encountered at the house of mutual friends; and Mr. Delmar was moved by the language which Augustus addressed to him. He made inquiries; and he learnt that the conduct of his daughter's lover had been for some time past characterized by steadiness and propriety. Mr. Delmar likewise ascertained that his daughter's attachment still continued—as how indeed could it be otherwise? for was not the object thereof her husband, although Mr. Delmar suspected it not! The father of Augustus was now dead: his elder brother bore the title: and he was making Augustus the handsome allowance of fifteen hundred a year. Lord Eccleston interceded on behalf of Augustus; and the result was that the Hon. Mr. Mulgrave was again permitted to visit at Delmar Manor. Although in reality a husband, yet was it only in the light of a suitor that he visited Clara at the Manor;—and in the year 1826 Mr. Delmar gave his consent to their union. Thus was it that precisely six years after the private and unknown marriage, the public one was solemnized with all the ceremony befitting the rank and wealth of the families which were thereby brought into connexion.

My mother, the Hon. Mrs. Mulgrave, would now have gladly proclaimed her first marriage and acknowledged me to be her offspring: but her husband represented that there were the gravest objections to such a course,—indeed all the objections which had previously existed, and which were in no sense mitigated, but rather strengthened, by the fact of the second marriage. For inasmuch as the *first* could not be proven, the assertion of such marriage would naturally seem to be flatly contradicted by the ceremony of the *second*. My legitimacy could not be established: and my mother's reputation would therefore be destroyed if I were acknowledged. The Hon. Mr. Mulgrave was proud and sensitive on such a point. His brother had a large family of daughters—but no son; and thus my father was heir presumptive to the title of Eccleston. He could not endure the idea that the wife, on whose brow a coronet might possibly descend, should be shunned by society as a woman who had committed a false step some years previous to her marriage. Thus, for all these heartless reasons of expediency, was I sacrificed—was I ignored—consigned to obscurity—abandoned to the care of strangers! Truth compels me to state that my mother was a worldly minded woman: she was fond of society—she was fond of pleasure: it gratified her vanity to shine as a star in the brilliant saloons of fashion;—and therefore, when Mr. Mulgrave represented to her that she would have to resign all these enjoyments if she yielded to her maternal yearnings, she suffered herself to be overpersuaded—she surrendered the point—she fell into her husband's views!

After their marriage—I mean his second and public one—my father and mother took a house in Grosvenor Square, where they soon launched out into extravagancies. Mr. Mulgrave's necessities drove him in course of time amongst bill-discounters and money-lenders; and what with the lavish profusion of his mode of life and the exor-

bitant interest he had to pay for loans, he found it more and more difficult to keep up the payments for my board and education at the Nelsons' academy. At length he suffered one half-year to lapse—then another; and this being done, he began to harden his mind to the idea that it was better he should discontinue the allowance altogether. He reasoned with himself that he had done enough for me—that I was now old enough to shift for myself—and that it would be even safer in respect to the secret itself to let me go forth into life at once and become speedily lost as it were or absorbed and engulfed in the great vortex of the busy world. He did not see the advertisements which Mrs. Nelson inserted on my account: nor, on the other hand, did his wife, my mother, know that he had discontinued the payments.

The reader will recollect that when I was fifteen years of age, Mr. Nelson died; and his widow resolved to give up the academical establishment. For the past twelvemonth no remittances had been received on my behalf; and Mrs. Nelson endeavoured to dispose of me by getting Mr. Jukes, the Leicester grocer, to take me as an errand boy into his service. He however declined—and recommended the workhouse. Mrs. Nelson—though compassionating me somewhat—was nevertheless of too selfish a disposition to maintain me through charity; and as the advertisements which she had inserted in the papers on my account had failed to bring any response, she looked upon me as being utterly abandoned by whomsoever might have been previously interested in my welfare. She had therefore resolved to consign me to the doom of a workhouse; and I need not remind the reader how by a precipitate flight from Mr. Jukes I avoided that hideous destiny.

And now, when the reader retrospects over all that happened to me after my flight from Leicester,—will he not be struck by the conviction that the finger of providence began to make itself visible in the occurrences which were from that point to flow gradually and slowly onward until they eventually wafted me into the haven where all the mysteries were to be cleared up? For I had not been long in London before accident led me to the dwelling of Mr. Delmar, my own grandsire! But how little did he—the excellent gentleman!—suspect that when he took compassion on the poor, trembling, half-starved boy at his gate, he was bestowing his bounty on one in whose veins flowed the blood of his own family! He received me into his house: he clothed me—he fed me; and his daughter Edith—the amiable and beautiful Edith—treated me with kindest sympathy. It was her own nephew whom she thus pitied—and who then as a mere boy learnt to love her—not as Annabel was subsequently loved—but as a nephew might veritably love an affectionate aunt!

It will be recollected that I had not been long at Delmar Manor when Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave called. Mr. Mulgrave gave me some little errand to perform for him; and, struck by my appearance—though at the moment utterly without a suspicion of who I might really be—he put the question to a footman. Then was his ear smitten with the name of Joseph Wilmot. Joseph Wilmot! his own son beneath that roof! It was a marvel that Mr. Mulgrave could keep his countenance at all in the presence of his informant. And

no wonder that, as I observed at the time, he studied me with attention when I returned from executing his errand! He hastened off to warn his wife of what was in store for her. She—alas! truth compels me to be explicit—had now for so many years learnt to regard the utter ignoring of myself as a condition absolutely necessary to the maintenance of her own standing in society, that she exhibited far more fortitude, self-possession, and presence of mind than her husband could have possibly hoped or anticipated. From her father both she and her husband heard the incidents which had brought me beneath that roof: they heard likewise a repetition of all that I had told Mr. Delmar of my antecedents—those antecedents which were not altogether unknown to them beforehand! Ah, when I entered the drawing-room on that day—habited as a menial, and to do menial offices—my mother felt a tightness of the heart:—she has since assured me that it was so! Yes—and she experienced ineffable feelings, despite her fortitude, her self-possession, her worldly-mindedness. And, Oh! did I not observe at the time that she looked upon me in a peculiar manner?—and methought it was mere sympathizing compassion on my behalf!

Then came the scene with Mr. Mulgrave in the garden,—when he sought to persuade me to leave his father-in-law's service and enter as a page into his own. He was frightened at the idea of my being beneath that roof: he fancied that the slightest accident might betray everything. Alas! his guilty conscience suggested that this betrayal might be more easily brought about than there was in reality any chance of its being so developed. His object was to get me into his own service, if possible; and then, under pretence of taking an interest in my welfare, he would have sent me off to some remote part of the world to fill a humble Government situation, which through the interest of his brother Lord Eccleston he might easily have procured. But while believing that his motive was all generously compassionate and kind, I refused to leave Mr. Delmar's service. This refusal on my part filled Mr. Mulgrave with terror; and from that moment he was resolved to use measures of coercion, or else of perfidy, to accomplish his aim and effect my removal from a mansion where my presence was so ominous in his eyes. The reader will recollect that while apparently referring quite in a careless off-hand way to some details of the narrative which he had learnt from his father-in-law,—Mr. Mulgrave asked me where dwelt the man Taddy who had so recently been my patron and companion. I mention the name of the court from which Taddy and I had so recently been expelled—that vile court in a vile neighbourhood; and little, little did I think at the time that it was any other than a sentiment of the most fleeting curiosity which had prompted Mr. Mulgrave's inquiries.

The next important incident to which it is requisite that I should refer, was the scene in the library,—that scene of which I became an unwilling ear-witness from the circumstance of being engaged in the little museum adjoining. Then I heard Mr. Mulgrave speak of his difficulties, and Mr. Delmar mildly remonstrate with him on his extravagancies:—then likewise I heard Mr. Delmar explain how he had left all his property in

equal portions to his daughters Clara and Edith; and in the course of his speech he declared that he had made his will,—adding “*That desk contains it!*” On the same occasion Mr. Mulgrave requested Mr. Delmar to let him have me as his page: but my kind and generous benefactor would not consent to part from me; and he expressed his belief at the time that the mystery enveloping my birth must some day be cleared up. It is important that the reader should bear all these things in his mind: for, as it may be easily supposed, they made a considerable impression upon Mr. Mulgrave, my wretched father—and influenced him most deplorably in his subsequent proceedings.

Acting upon the information I had given him—or rather which he had succeeded in extracting from me—Mr. Mulgrave went to that vile neighbourhood of Saffron Hill to make inquiries after the man Taddy. He wanted some unscrupulous and unprincipled agent under existing circumstances; and from all he had learnt, he had every reason to believe that Taddy might serve his purposes or else recommend him to some one who would. I should remark that Mr. Mulgrave had already written to Jukes at Leicester,—desiring him to come up to London on secret but important business, and sending him a bank-note for a handsome amount to defray his expenses. It would seem that Mr. Taddy, having by some means or another got possession of a little money since he parted from me, returned to his old haunts on Saffron Hill; and he was thus easily ferreted out by Mr. Mulgrave. On hearing certain hints cautiously and darkly dropped, Taddy declared that he was acquainted with the very man who in all respects would answer Mr. Mulgrave's purpose;—and he named Mr. Lanover. Lanover was soon communicated with: an interview took place between Mr. Mulgrave and the humpback; and it was agreed that the latter should play the part of my uncle at Delmar Manor. Jukes was to accompany him; and in his capacity of Poor Law Guardian for Leicester, he was to back the demand that I should be given up. The reader will recollect the scene which ensued at Delmar Manor—how my kind benefactor defied Lanover to take me away without producing documentary evidence of his relationship—and how Edith herself befriended me on the occasion. Nevertheless, Lanover's tale was plausible enough: he alluded to the advertisements which Mrs. Nelson had inserted in the papers; and as it was not for a moment suspected that he had received his information from Mr. Mulgrave (who had previously heard the repetition of the whole tale as I had given it to his father-in-law), it was no wonder that Mr. Delmar should have been impressed with the opinion that Lanover was indeed my uncle, although he so generously protected me against the authority which he conceived to be truthfully asserted.

And now I come to an awful episode in this chapter of explanations. Would to heaven that I could suppress it! But, alas! I cannot. I have taken it upon myself to give my history to the world; and it must be truthfully given. But, Oh! how cold runs the blood in my veins, and what dread feelings oppress me, as I approach the awful, the appalling subject. The failure of the visit of Lanover and Jukes to Delmar Manor drove

Mr. Mulgrave to desperation. His guilty conscience made him tremble lest his father-in-law knew more of me than he had hitherto chosen to admit, and that thence arose his resolve to keep me with him and to protect me against every one who might seek to take me away. And then Mr. Mulgrave reflected that if Mr. Delmar should actually discover all the past, he was capable of dis-inheriting his daughter Clara altogether—or at all events he would take such steps as should prevent his unprincipled son-in-law from exercising any control over the wealth that he would leave behind him. And again, that will which Mr. Delmar had made, and which equally apportioned his property between his two daughters! What if that will could be annihilated?—and what if another could be substituted—a forged one, bequeathing everything to Clara? Ah! in this case he—Mr. Mulgrave—my wretched father—would be rich!—he would have five thousand a year, besides the noble estate!—he would be enabled to relieve himself of all his embarrassments!—he would have ample funds for the purpose of his extravagancies and his pleasures! There were many aims to be achieved: but one blow would accomplish them all. And that blow—Oh! how can I guide the pen which is to write the words that will brand my father—my own father—the author of my being—as—

But, no—I cannot do it! I cannot pen that *one* word! It is the most awful in the English language: it is one which to breathe it even in reference to a stranger makes one shudder from head to foot: but only to *think* of it in connexion with one so nearly, so closely allied!—Ah! this is more than mortal nature can endure! Let me therefore hasten as quickly as I may over this hideous portion of my narrative. Mulgrave spoke to Lanover: he soon found that he had not to beat about the bush—nor to drop vague hints—nor to imply half he meant by means of significant looks; for Lanover at once boldly and hardily met him half-way. Everything was arranged: that stupendous crime was resolved upon: its details were settled. But this I must hasten to observe,—that Mrs. Mulgrave, my mother, remained in utter ignorance of the turpitude that was in contemplation,—though, alas! she had been no stranger to the scheme which had been devised for removing me from Delmar Manor, but which scheme had so signally failed!

The reader will recollect how at night, on returning from a long walk with the porter's son, I was somewhat alarmed by beholding the forms of two men moving, suspiciously as I thought, from the servants' entrance of the premises belonging to Delmar Manor. Those two men were Lanover and Taddy. They were doubtless making their observations at the time, and arranging the where and the how they should effect an entry at a later hour. And when that later hour came, the miscreants forced open a shutter of one of the lower back windows, and entered the house. Murder's work was soon done; the admirable, the high-minded, the generous-hearted Delmar was assassinated in his slumber! Then not merely to give such a colour to the deed that it might seem as if perpetrated by mere burglars without any higher instigation or ulterior purpose,—but also that the miscreants might remunerate themselves in addition to the

price of the crime paid by the wretched Mulgrave, the work of plunder was commenced. The bureau in the victim's chamber was broken open, and its contents abstracted: the drawing-room was entered, and several valuable nicknacks carried off: the sideboard in the drawing-room was forced; and whatsoever plate was found in the butler's pantry, was likewise self-appropriated by the murderers. And all this while the instigator of the crime—my wretched father, for the welfare of whose soul I sincerely, devoutly pray—was entertaining a brilliant assemblage at his house in Grosvenor Square, so that it was utterly impossible to suspect next day that he had the slightest complicity in the tremendous tragedy of that foul night.

Nor next day, when the horrible intelligence was conveyed to that mansion which the Mulgraves at the time tenanted in Grosvenor Square, did my mother entertain the thought that her husband had instigated this crime. If subsequently, when at Delmar Manor, she recovered her fortitude more speedily than her sister Edith, it was that being more worldly-minded, her feelings were far less sensitive; and moreover, even in the depth of her real affliction, the idea would force itself that by her father's death she was relieved from an incessant source of apprehension with regard to her past conduct. But her husband—my father—was not many hours at Delmar Manor before he found an opportunity of taking his victim's legitimate will from the desk in which it was deposited, and there substituting a forged one which had been carefully drawn up by himself and Lanover.

When the funeral was over, Mr. Lanover once more made his appearance to fetch me away. Oh! with what deep, deep dissimulation was the part enacted between my father and the humpback. Mr. Mulgrave pretended to be curt and haughty towards Lanover: while on the other hand the humpback affected to be insolent and defiant towards Mulgrave. Then the latter in his turn affected to be compassionate towards myself; and, as the reader will recollect, he thrust money into my hand. It was thus that I left Delmar Manor; and my father now felt that he could breathe more freely—for he had dreaded lest the empire of maternal affection on my mother's part should be asserted, and that in some moment of weakness she would betray that I was her son.

The next incident to which it is requisite I should refer, was one that took place at Mr. Lanover's house in Great Russell Street, Bloomsbury Square. He listened to a certain conversation which was one day taking place, between Annabel and myself. We were speaking of the Delmars; and I mentioned to Annabel that the amiable Edith would be well off, inasmuch as her murdered father's will had been made equally in favour of both his daughters. Then with what rage did Lanover burst into the room!—but there was doubtless terror mingled with his fury, though I suspected it not at the time. He insisted upon knowing how I had learnt the fact I had just mentioned in respect to the will; and I confessed the truth—namely, that when in the museum adjoining the library of Delmar Manor, I had been unintentionally rendered a listener to what took place between Mr. Mulgrave and the late Mr. Delmar.

This scene with Lanover was speedily followed by one of brutal violence on his part towards Annabel; and I struck the wretch down. I was then confined to my room. All those circumstances the reader will recollect. Then, it seems, away went Lanover to communicate to Mr. Mulgrave everything that had occurred. Great was the consternation of my wretched sire. The revelation of all that I had heard between his father-in-law and himself in the library a short time back, might create suspicions—might lead to investigations—might prove that the will produced after the funeral was a forgery! And if this will were a forgery, would not the immediate inference be that the forger of the will was the instigator of the murder which gave that will such speedy effect? The forged will had conveyed the entire property to Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave, to the exclusion of Edith; and this was a circumstance which could not fail to excite all those suspicions that were to be apprehended if only one word from my lips gained publicity: namely, that word which would declare that there had been a previous will enjoining a very different distribution of the property. In short, my wretched father and the vile humpback beheld destruction staring them in the face—the gibbet looming before them; and as one crime generally begets another in order that the first may be concealed, so was it now resolved that for the purpose of averting suspicion in reference to Mr. Delmar's death, *my* death must be next accomplished. Hence that murderous project on the part of Lanover and Taddy which my beloved Annabel discovered, and from which the magnanimous girl enabled me to escape. And here I must observe that my mother Mrs. Mulgrave remained in ignorance of what was in progress; and it was not until a long time afterwards that she was led by circumstances to suspect that by the complicity of Lanover her husband's persecutions against me had gone to the extent of even aiming at my removal from this earthly sphere.

And now I will mention a little incident which fits in this place on the score of chronological order. The reader will recollect my meeting with Annabel at Exeter, at the door of a haberdasher's named Dobbins. It will also be borne in mind that it afterwards came to my knowledge (when I was at Dr. Pomfret's at Salisbury) how Annabel had been introduced to this Mr. Dobbins, and how Lanover had appeared at the time to have some motive which Annabel could not possibly understand. Dobbins was a rich man; and Lanover endeavoured to tempt him with a view of the beautiful girl whom he passed off as his daughter, in the expectation that the amorous old haberdasher would propose to take her as his wife. But Dobbins was too wary to be beguiled into an alliance for which—however tempting on the score of the young lady's inimitable beauty—he nevertheless saw full well he should have to pay dearly enough to the vile humpback. He therefore gave Lanover to understand that he was not a marrying man, but was content to remain a widower; and thus Annabel was saved the painful shock of a proposal which she would have rejected with abhorrence, even if she had not resented it with scorn and indignation.

After a while, and when next I found myself in London, it will be remembered that I met the Rev.

Mr. Howard and Edith close by the General Post Office. I mentioned to them what I had heard about the will at the time I listened to the conversation between the late Mr. Delmar and his son-in-law, Mr. Mulgrave. Mr. Howard observed "that it was remarkable, even if it were not actually important;" and his beloved wife Edith was profoundly affected by the various memories which the conversation conjured up. But after leaving me, they took no further notice of the intelligence they had thus received: or at least they did not make any communication to Mr. Mulgrave on the point: they themselves were too pure and good to harbour the suspicion that a lawful will had been destroyed and a forged one substituted by one who, however unkind his conduct towards them had been, was nevertheless so closely connected with them by marriage. On that very same day, and indeed within the same hour that I thus met the young clergyman and his wife, I again encountered Lanover. My presence in London renewed all the horrible alarms which some time back had instigated the crime he purposed to commit on the occasion that I escaped from his house. He saw no safety for himself nor for my father, Mr. Mulgrave, except in my destruction. He lured me to a dungeon: he conveyed me on board an emigrant ship. The reader knows how I escaped from the calamity which engulfed that vessel—and how after a long series of adventures in Scotland, at Manchester, at Cheltenham, at the Shacklefords' near Bagshot, and subsequently with Sir Matthew Heseltine, I again found myself in London. Then it was that I called at Delmar Manor, and for the first time learnt that the estate had been in possession of Mr. Mulgrave ever since the late Mr. Delmar's death, so that there had been no division of property with Edith. I likewise learnt that Mr. and Mrs. Mulgrave had very recently become Lord and Lady Eccleston, and that their town-house was now in Manchester Square. I called there to give them the leaf of the register—that leaf which had at one time so much regarded them, and the abstraction of which had caused me to endure so much misery, and them to commit so many misdeeds!

But, ah! on the occasion of that visit, how utterly incapable was I of comprehending the strangeness of the ejaculations which burst from their lips, or the peculiarity of the looks which they bent upon me. Nor could I conceive why Lady Eccleston, clasping her hands with so much emotion, murmured something—nor why her husband so sternly warned her, or else recalled her to herself, by the significant utterance of her name, "Clara!" Oh! it was that they perceived how much could have been spared them—how much misery and misdeed—aye, and misery for myself likewise—if they had acted otherwise from the very first: for providence itself had intended that the abstracted leaf should sooner or later transpire! Ah, and it was with a deep maternal yearning too that my mother—the whom I suspected not at the time to be my mother!—asked me if I were prosperous?—and when I retired from that interview, my memory retained for a long, long period the strangeness of the look—its dim yearning melancholy—which she shed upon me!

How soon after that interview were we to meet again,—when, on my return to London after my

last interview with Sir Matthew Heseltine at the Hall, I plunged into the midst of the burning building in Manchester Square, and rescued Lady Eccleston at the peril of my life. Ah! well might she have said when coming back to consciousness, "Good God! you my deliverer!" And well too might Lord Eccleston himself have been moved towards me—yes, even he with—alas, that I should be compelled to say it!—all his implacable hardness of heart towards me!

The next occurrence to which I must direct the reader's attention was the discovery of that little scrap of a letter at the chateau in France, and which ran as follows:—

"very fortunate that you let me know whither you were going previous to your leaving London. I therefore lose not a moment in writing to enjoin that nothing more is to be done in respect to Joseph. Should accident throw him in your way, I charge you to leave him unmolested. When next I see you I will give such explanations as will satisfy you that this resolution"

A few words will explain how the letter containing this paragraph came to be written. Lady Eccleston was so deeply, deeply touched by the consciousness of owing her life to me, that she had felt as if the finger of providence was in it; and she besought her husband to acknowledge me—to publish to the world the circumstances of their first marriage—and to appeal to the restored leaf of the register as a proof. But his lordship was inexorable. It was not now so much for fear that his wife's honour might be branded, as that he trembled to bring me in contact with the other members of the family—Mr. Howard and Edith—for fear lest by mentioning the library scene, suspicion should be aroused, inquiry instituted, a clue obtained, the track followed up, and everything brought to light! But while refusing to acknowledge me as his son, Lord Eccleston promised her ladyship to write to Lanover at once and bid him thenceforth spare me from persecution. This he did; and the scrap which I discovered at the chateau, was a portion of his lordship's letter to the humpback.

But as the reader will bear in mind, it was not until a considerable time afterwards that an accident revealed to me (when I was in Captain Raymond's service) that Lord Eccleston was the writer of that letter to which that fragment had belonged. This occurred in Florence; and there did I have an interview with Lord and Lady Eccleston. The former was much moved: the latter, again referring to the circumstance of her deliverance by my hands from the conflagration, wept bitterly as I supported her in my arms. But again, by one word significantly thrown at her as a warning, did her husband recall her to herself; and as I was about to retire he gave me the most solemn assurance that he would never thenceforth harm a hair of my head. This promise it was at the time his firm intention to keep: but subsequent circumstances compelled him, as I shall presently explain, to violate his pledge. I use the word *compelled*, because when once a man has entered upon the path of misdeed, his very crimes constitute a destiny: they form as it were the necessities of his position, and he is irresistibly hurried on in the same evil course notwithstanding the veritable inclination and the real unfeigned craving that he may have to retract and amend. Oh! from this sad, sad tale con-





nected with my own father, let every reader take warning and avoid the first downward step from the straight pathway of rectitude. He may fancy it is but *one* step he is about to take—he may reason within himself that he will descend no lower—and, on the contrary, that he will do his best to regain the higher ground from which he has departed: but, Oh! when too late he will discover the miserable sophistry with which he has cheated himself—he will see that when once the line of demarcation is passed, incalculably difficult is it to step back again within the boundary of virtue's sphere!

Notwithstanding all that was strange and peculiar in this interview of mine with Lord and Lady Eccleston at Florence, I began not at that time to entertain the slightest suspicion that they were my father and mother. Indeed I was too much bewildered to form any conjecture at all—unless it were that they had a positive knowledge of the

mysteries attending my birth, but also had some reasons (to me unaccountable) for keeping the secret to themselves. That interview was speedily followed by my meeting with Lady Eccleston, at her own request, at the bridge of Santa Trinitata. The circumstances of this meeting—the secrecy with which it was conducted on her part—the tenour of her language—the interest she evidently took in me—and the pecuniary proposition she made, excited for the first time in my soul a certain suspicion,—but so dim, so vague, and uncertain, that I scarcely comprehended it. And yet it was a suspicion, mistily and hazily foreshadowing all that was to eventually transpire! Subsequently, when I related everything to the Count of Livorno, we suggested vague and uncertain conjectures together: but we found it impossible to define any specific conclusions which we might regard as certain, or even probable.

The next occasion when I met my father and

mother, was at Civita Vecchia; and there my suspicions assumed a more definite shape: they were strengthened though still far from being confirmed. It was on this occasion that I heard for the first time that Mr. and Mrs. Howard had been put in possession of the Delmar estate,—a proceeding which his lordship had adopted on acquiring riches by his accession to the title and wealth of his deceased brother; for he naturally calculated that if anything unpleasant should ever transpire on account of my knowledge of the library scene, as I may term it, he might hope to stifle all inquiries from the very circumstance that Mr. Howard and Edith were at length put in possession of their rights. If the reader will turn to that page of my narrative in which I record how the Earl of Eccleston made me acquainted with the altered position of Mr. and Mrs. Howard, when he made over to them that estate which his own necessities no longer compelled him to cling to,—it will be seen that I was struck at the time by a certain strange significance in the accents and looks of his lordship while he was speaking. I knew not how to account for it *then*: but it is now no longer difficult to comprehend that while giving me that information, he must have had vividly uppermost in his mind that very library scene to which I have so often referred. But it was not merely my interview with the Earl on that occasion at Civita Vecchia which strengthened the suspicion previously so vaguely and dimly formed: it was also that dream-like scene at night, when the female figure entered my chamber at the hotel and covered me with kisses and with tears. Oh! need I say that it was my mother?—need I explain that in one of those irresistible and ineffable moments when the yearning of nature's instinct rises superior to all worldly selfishness, my mother longed to embrace me—longed to pour forth her feelings by my side when I slept? Yes—it was so: and if the circumstance itself did not at the time convince me, beyond the possibility of further doubt, that the mystery of my parentage was closely connected with everything I had known in respect to the Earl and Countess of Eccleston, it was because when awaking in the morning, and when subsequently pondering the incident, I could not satisfactorily convince myself it was aught but a dream.

I now pass on to those circumstances which occurred at Florence immediately subsequent to the trial of Lanover and Dorchester. It was these circumstances which induced, or rather compelled my wretched father to renew his inhuman behaviour towards me. My unguarded conduct—or rather my foolish confidence, in exhibiting to him that note wherein Dorchester requested me to visit him in prison, filled my father with frightful apprehensions. His guilty conscience made him picture to himself that I was getting upon a new track—following up the course of another clue, which unless abruptly broken, might lead me on to the elucidation of all past mysteries. He therefore silenced Dorchester, as he hoped, by procuring the mitigation of his sentence, and by holding out promises for the future. He aided in Lanover's liberation that he might keep him also chained to his own interests; and then he flattered himself that he had once more effectually baffled me.

The reader must have borne in mind that second

interview which I had with Dorchester in his dungeon, and when the Count of Livorno accompanied me thither, the day after I had witnessed the awful, the tremendous scene of Lanover's internment and resuscitation in the cemetery. Dorchester then explained to me the reasons which had induced him many long years back to abstract that leaf from the marriage register. The cause of the abstraction had nothing to do with the entry of the marriage of my father and mother. But on that same leaf another marriage was recorded; and, without going into particulars, it suited the object of some wealthy and unprincipled person that the record should disappear altogether. Dorchester at the time was overwhelmed with debts: he accepted a bribe—he tore the leaf from the register—and he fled. Little did he suspect—little did he foresee the amount of crime and misery which the deed was to engender in quarters totally distinct from the one where its influence was alone intended to be felt. But he had kept that leaf as a means of extorting at any future time fresh sums of money from the wealthy individual who had bribed him to abstract it; and on many and many an occasion had it proved the means of replenishing his purse—until he inadvertently threw it amongst his waste-papers previous to his flight from Oldham at the time he so grossly swindled me.

But the explanation relative to the leaf of the register was the most trivial portion of the communication made to me by Dorchester, when, in company of the Count of Livorno, I paid him that second visit in the prison of Florence. He said that he perfectly well recollected that the entry of the marriage of Augustus Mulgrave and Clara Delmar was on the abstracted leaf; he knew that they had become the Earl and Countess of Eccleston; and from something Lanover had said in the course of conversation, Dorchester learnt that I had been the object of his lordship's terror and persecution. Thus, to use his own language, he had been led to put two and two together; and he had come to the conclusion—or at least he entertained a very strong suspicion that I must be the offspring of that union which he himself had solemnized in 1820. This was the communication he made to me in the gaol at Florence; and it appeared to confirm all the suspicions which had hitherto been floating in my mind. And it was under this impression that previous to my setting off for Milan, the Count of Livorno embraced me with such fervour—expressing his conviction that everything which I hoped and anticipated would be fulfilled.

When, personifying a police-official, I obtained admission to that house in the Milanese suburb where Lanover was concealed, my mother—with the keen eyes of a parent—at once penetrated through the disguise that I wore; and the reader will recollect the scene which took place. As for the Earl—he was filled with the cruellest apprehensions: he who had so long persecuted me, began at length to look upon me as the persecutor of himself! A horrible thought struck him at the very time I was following up, as I fancied, the advantages I had gained. If he could only get me to England, he would consign me to a madhouse! Hence the appointment which he made for a meeting in London, on which occasion the fullest and completest

revelations were promised. What more need I say upon this subject? My wretched father's stragem was effectually carried out; and for six months did I languish in a lunatic asylum. My mother at first knew not where I was: but she entertained the direst misgivings—for it had long since come to her knowledge that her husband had carried his persecutions to such an extent as to menace my life. When therefore—after the return to London—she heard no more of me, she besought the Earl for explanations; and he at length gave her to understand that I had veritably and truly gone mad, and that I was the inmate of an asylum. Bitter, bitter were the tears she shed: terrible were the pangs of remorse which she experienced!

At length heaven itself appeared by a terrific blow to be commencing the work of retribution. My father was flung from his horse; and in a dying state was he borne to his home. During the night he confessed to his horrified, agonised wife those darkest crimes of which he had been guilty, and which she had never before suspected to be associated with himself. It was not all in a moment that this confession was made: it was throughout a long night of agony,—agony of limbs for the injured and dying Earl—agony of mind for both himself and his Countess:—but at intervals and in a few broken words he thus gradually drew aside the veil from the horrible past. He—her husband—was the instigator of the assassination of her own father—a murderer by complicity if not in fact!—a forger likewise! My mother felt as if she must go mad, or as if her heart must break: but she nerved herself with all possible fortitude for my sake. She felt that she had a duty to perform—to acknowledge me as her son—to put me in possession of my rights—and when the breath should have left my father's form, to proclaim me to the world as the Earl of Eccleston. And I have said, reader, that when liberated from the asylum I knelt by my father's couch—I forgave him all the past—I implored heaven to forgive him likewise: for I had previously heard from the lips of my unhappy mother the dread revelations which during the night had been made unto herself!

Reader, the gap which I had left in my narrative is now filled up; and all the mysteries of the past are elucidated.

## CHAPTER CLIV.

### THE SCHOOL.

It is more easy to imagine than to describe the effect which was produced upon Sir Matthew Heseltine, Mrs. Lanover, and Annabel, when with feelings of ineffable emotion I proclaimed my rank and announced myself to be the Earl of Eccleston. Explanations were quickly given; and I told them sufficient of my wildly romantic history to make them comprehend that I was labouring under no delusion, but that I was dealing with facts. At the same time I spoke not a word of that most horrible incident of the tale,—the incident which branded my own father as a murderer! Suffice it to say that years elapsed ere this dark tragedy was made known, as I shall presently have to describe;—and if such publicity had not thus been subse-

quently given to it, the reader may be well assured that a secret so fearfully associated with my own sire's memory, would never have been revealed through the medium of his son's autobiography.

But to resume the thread of my narrative. Sincere indeed were the congratulations which I received from Sir Matthew Heseltine and Mrs. Lanover on that wondrous accession to lofty rank and the possession of large estates: but *their* congratulations were conveyed in words—whereas those of my Annabel were mutely though far more eloquently expressed by means of her looks. Oh! will the reader blame me that I could be happy *then*?—will he think the less of me if I avow that I was enabled to put away from my mind all the dark terrific shadows which recent revelations in respect to my sire had thrown upon it? I had seen so much of the world's cares—I had known so much of life's misfortunes that I felt I had a right to be happy on this day which had crowned all my long cherished hopes. I felt likewise, as I had said to the old porter at the entrance-gates, it was a day which providence had marked out to be a happy one!

And there was I, the wanderer who had returned home!—but I had come back, not the obscure unknown youth I had gone forth from that Hall precisely two years back—I had returned the possessor of rank and fortune, and enabled to give to my Annabel the surest and most signal proof of the disinterested sincerity of my love. Not that she, the amiable, the confiding, the pure-minded being, had required such proof. Judging me by herself, she had known that my love was worthy to be reciprocated by her own; and if I had come to claim her hand as the obscure and humble Joseph Wilmot whom she had expected, it would have been conferred upon me with as much true devotion as that with which it was now stretched forth to the Earl of Eccleston!

Sir Matthew considerably whispered a proposal that as I was in mourning for a father's death, the festivities which he had decreed to take place, should be either abridged or suppressed altogether: but I besought him to permit everything to take its course. There would have been a selfishness associated with my own mourning garb, if I had allowed it to throw its dark shade upon the minds of others; and moreover it would have been a miserable affectation on my part not to have enjoyed the happiness which I experienced. Therefore was it speedily notified unto the domestics of the household and unto Sir Matthew's assembled tenantry, that by the development of certain extraordinary and romantic circumstances I had ceased to be the humble Joseph Wilmot, and must now be recognised and spoken of as the Earl of Eccleston. And the band again pealed forth its music—and the assembled tenantry cheered in front of the old Hall—and when by signs rather than by words I had expressed from the window my gratitude for this welcome reception, I turned to meet the tender, loving, bashfully sweet looks of my adored and worshipped Annabel.

Presently I retired to the chamber which was provided for my reception, and to which my trunks had been by this time fetched from the station at Keudal. I had represented that I had two or three letters to write; and although this was strictly true, yet was it likewise for the purpose of

giving unrestrained vent to my feelings that I sought that half-hour's solitude. The dream of years was now fulfilled: the hope for which I had subsisted through misfortunes, trials, and vicissitudes of every kind was now accomplished! I had received the assurance that Annabel was to be my own. The tears of joy coursed each other down my cheeks; and frequently, frequently did I ask myself whether it could all be possibly true, or whether it were a vision? And as if to convince myself that it was indeed all true, I sat down to pen letters to those whom I knew to be most anxious to learn the issue of my journey into Westmoreland,—although not for a single moment had they doubted what that issue would be. I wrote to my mother:—for need I here say, reader, that I had forgiven her—Oh! I had forgiven her for whatsoever cruelty there might have been in her former conduct towards me? I had forgiven her, because my heart had yearned towards the authoress of my being—because I looked upon her as the victim of circumstances which had ruled her with an almost irresistible empire—and because I never, never could forget the kisses which she had bestowed and the tears which she had shed on that memorable night when she sought my chamber—the chamber of her son—at the hotel at Civita Vecchia. I wrote also to the Count of Livorno, who was then staying at Eccleston House in London; and I begged that he would communicate to the kind-hearted Mr. Salcoats the tale of the happiness which had awaited me at Heseltine Hall.

The grand banquet which Sir Matthew had ordered to be prepared, took place at five o'clock. Several of the leading families in the neighbourhood had been invited, that all possible honour might be done to me as the wanderer who was welcomed home! But little had Sir Matthew Heseltine foreseen, on issuing these invitations, that when the festive day should come, it was as the Earl of Eccleston that he would have to present me to his guests! Much more agreeable to me would it have been to dine only in the society of Sir Matthew, Annabel, and her mother: but, as I have already said, it was not for me to throw a damp upon the happiness of this memorable day, nor to contravene any of the well-meant arrangements made by Sir Matthew Heseltine.

Two days afterwards a valet from Eccleston House arrived by the train,—my mother having sent him down that I might have attendance suitable to my rank. I had promised Sir Matthew—no, I should rather say I had promised my beloved Annabel to remain a fortnight at Heseltine Hall; and gladly would I have remained there longer, were it not that I had business of importance to attend to in London—and moreover I could not stay too long away from my mother, to whom recent events had given a shock which would have been fatal were it not that there was a counterbalancing influence in the fact that she was at length enabled to acknowledge me as her offspring. But inasmuch as there was every probability of my being kept in London for some time, in order to go through the necessary ceremonies in proving my right to the title and estates of Eccleston, Sir Matthew declared that it would be cruel to separate Annabel and myself for so long a period, and that therefore he would shortly follow me to the

metropolis with the ladies, and that they would all pass the winter in London. I begged that Sir Matthew would make Eccleston House his home; but he said, “No, my dear boy—for so I think I shall ever henceforth call you! Her ladyship your mother is an invalid—death has lately been in that house; and it would therefore be unseemly for us to take up our quarters there. I will write to Mr. Tennant by this day's post, to instruct him to hire a house for us with the least possible delay—And perhaps,” added the Baronet, with a significant smile, “I shall tell him that it must not be too far distant from Manchester Square.”

The fortnight of my sojourn at Heseltine Hall elapsed—a fortnight of unalloyed happiness—a fortnight during which the unchanging beauty of the weather enabled me to enjoy frequent rambles with Annabel throughout the spacious grounds. At length the morning of departure came; and much of the sadness which would otherwise have been experienced, was toned down by the certainty of meeting in London in the course of a week or ten days. Sir Matthew's carriage took me from the Hall to the Railway Station; and I proceeded to Manchester. There I remained for the rest of that day in order to call upon my esteemed friends the Rowlands: for now there was no longer any necessity to observe towards them the mystery which I had maintained on the previous occasion. I announced to them that title which altered circumstances had given me; and I received their sincerest congratulations that providence should have placed wealth in my hands—for they were pleased to declare their conviction that I should use it worthily.

From Manchester it was my resolve to pass by Leicester, and to tarry for an hour or two there, that I might visit the scenes which were so familiar to my boyhood. On alighting at the Railway Station at Leicester, I ordered William my valet to repair to an hotel, which I named; and I bade him give directions to have refreshments provided for me by a particular hour. I then set out, and walked in the direction of that academical establishment where all the earliest years of my life had been passed. I saw at a distance that sinister looking building—the Workhouse!—and it seemed to me as if it were but yesterday that the stern-featured Jukes had led me up to that door and had told me the name of the place! Ah, my circumstances were indeed changed now! What marvels had happened during the few years which had elapsed since that date! And as I advanced towards the school which I soon beheld at a little distance, I recognised many and many an object which had been familiar to me in my boyhood; and my heart swelled with emotions—the same as when a few days back I was walking along the road from Kendal to Heseltine Hall. Ineffable are the feelings conjured up by thus revisiting in manhood the places that were familiar in boyhood: indescribable are the emotions with which the spots that were memorable in other days are thus gazed upon. There was the playfield—and there was the very bench on which I had often and often sat, wondering why I was never visited by kind friends as other boys were—wondering likewise who my parents might have been—aye, and weeping too, as my young heart thus pondered the neglect, the utter abandonment which I experienced

—the total absence of any who could love me or be beloved by me!

I paused at a gate opening into that field: the sun was shining brightly, although it was the beginning of December; and all of a sudden I beheld a troop of happy laughing boys rushing into the meadow. Oh! now how vividly did old times come back to my memory! It seemed as if I were a schoolboy once again—as if all that had passed during the interval of a few years were naught but a dream! And again were the tears trickling down my cheeks,—thus affording a vent for the emotions of my surcharged heart. I advanced towards the school: a baker's cart was standing at the gate—that very gate where Mr. Jukes had received me into his own cart on the day that I left the school. A buxom-looking woman-servant, of about twenty-seven, was now receiving the quantities of bread which the baker was delivering: but upon perceiving me, she came forward and respectfully inquired if I wished to speak to her master or mistress?

"No," I said,—“not immediately. Finish what you have to do.”

The young woman looked at me for a moment, as if she thought there was something strange in my manner; and she went on with her task of receiving the loaves and conveying them into the house. I stood by, watching the proceeding with a sort of childish interest, and with feelings that continued to be deeply affected: for how often and often during the years I was at school there, had I beheld the same process—that delivery of the numerous loaves for the consumption of the scholars! At length the task was accomplished: the baker drove away with his cart; and the woman-servant remained standing at the gate, in the evident expectation that I should now communicate whatsoever business it was that brought me thither.

“Who keeps this school now?” I inquired.

“Mr. and Mrs. Matthewson, sir,” answered the female-servant.

“Have they had it long?”

“Five or six years, sir. They took it some little while after Mrs. Nelson gave it up at her husband's death—and then I came back into service here—”

“What!” I exclaimed: “then you were at this school at the time of the Nelsons?”

“Yes, sir,” replied the domestic. “But did you know the school?”

“Yes,” I rejoined: and gradually did the recollection of the woman's features come back into my mind, although they had been altered by the lapse of years, and her form from a more graceful slenderness had expanded into the buxom *embonpoint* which it now possessed. “I was once a pupil here,” I continued: “it was in the Nelsons' time.”

“Indeed, sir!” said the female, staring at me fixedly, but evidently without recognising me.

“Let me ask you one or two questions,” I said, with difficulty keeping down the emotions that were swelling into my throat. “Do you recollect a certain Joseph Wilmot?”

“Oh, dear me! that I do, sir!” cried the woman. “A sweeter and a nicer boy there never was! He used to be called ‘Pretty Joe,’ because he had such beautiful teeth, such fine hair, and such a slim genteel figure; and he always used to

keep himself so neat and clean. Ah, poor boy! well do I remember the day he left—”

“And you wept on that occasion—you wept,” I said, “as you bade him good bye—and—and—”

But here I stopped short: for the tears were raining down my cheeks at the tide of reminiscences which surged up into my brain. The servant looked at me in astonishment: then a light appeared to flash in unto her memory; and as tears trickled down her own cheeks, she said, “Oh! sir, is it possible? Are—are—you—”

“Yes, my good woman,” I replied; “I am that same Joseph Wilmot for whom you wept tears of sympathy.”

“I have often thought of you, sir,” said the good creature, deeply affected. “I wondered what had become of you—I heard something from Mr. Jukes at the time which made me very sad—”

“You heard,” I interrupted her, “that it was intended to consign me to the workhouse: but I fled from the door of that hideous place—”

At this moment a short, stout, elderly gentleman, dressed in black, with knee-breeches and gaiters, and having altogether an old-fashioned look, came forth from the school.

“Oh, Mr. Mathewson, sir!” exclaimed the servant, running towards him: “here is a young gentleman who was brought up in this place in the time of Mr. and Mrs. Nelson! It is that very same Joseph Wilmot I have so often told you and mistress of—”

“Indeed! Joseph Wilmot?” ejaculated Mr. Mathewson. “Why, what was I reading about just now in the local paper? Ah, I recollect!”—and taking off his hat, the schoolmaster made me a profound bow,—saying, “My lord, I am highly flattered—But here is Mrs. Mathewson!—Mrs. Mathewson, my dear, you will be astonished! This is Lord Eccleston who has condescended to pay us a visit.”

The wife—a portly good-humoured dame, with a very red face—bustled forward and bade me welcome. Nothing could exceed the surprise—the utter bewilderment, in short, of the servant-woman on thus learning my present rank, the announcement of which I had not entertained the slightest intention of making. The Mathewsons invited me to walk in; and I at once complied with their request. I went all over the house: need I repeat that phrase which during the last few pages of my narrative I have so often had to place on record—that my emotions swelled strongly within me! I went into the school-room: I sat myself down in the very place where, as a forlorn and friendless boy, I was wont to sit when a scholar there; and I wept *now* at the recollection of the weepings in which I had so frequently been immersed at the time over which I was thus retrospectively! I went up into the bed-room where I had slept. There was the corner in which my pallet had stood: there was the spot where at night I had so often and often lain awake, wondering and weeping because I felt myself to be friendless and neglected! Oh, what scalding tears had I shed in that very room where I had slept alone during the vacations, when all the other boys were gone full of glee to their happy homes—and I the only one who was left behind!

The Mathewsons attended me over the house: I did not attempt to conceal from them the feelings which I experienced: I saw that they were kind and worthy people—and I was not ashamed that in their presence tears should thus bedew my cheeks. When the inspection of the premises was over, they besought me to partake of refreshments; and I accepted their invitation, because I saw that it would afford them pleasure. I told them how their good-hearted servant had wept when I left that house a few years back, and under circumstances so forlorn that it appeared incredible how they could have engendered *other* circumstances which should have wrought this wondrous change in my position. I learnt from Mrs. Mathewson that the good-hearted creature who was the subject of our present discourse, had been for some time engaged to a small struggling tradesman in the town: but that inasmuch as he had found himself compelled to combat against misfortunes, they had not yet dared to venture upon marriage. I learnt that the man was of an excellent character; and my mind was made up how to act: but on this point I said not a word to the Mathewsons at the time. On rising to take my leave, I begged that for the following day there might be an entire suspension of studies—or, in other words, that the scholars might enjoy a “whole holiday.”

On departing from the school, I bent my way into the town of Leicester. There I at once proceeded to the shop of the tradesman who has just been referred to. I concisely told him the motive I had for wishing to ensure the happiness of a good-hearted woman who had displayed her generous sympathy on behalf of a poor friendless boy, as I once was. I left with the man a hundred guineas; and I rushed from the shop in order to escape the expressions of that gratitude which was so wildly joyous. I will here add—although it is not precisely its place—that I subsequently learnt the results of the boon I had thus conferred. By the aid of that money all the tradesman's difficulties vanished: it was to him a fortune: the marriage was solemnized with the object of his affections—the alliance has proved a happy one—and there is not at this moment a more thriving tradesman in the town of Leicester than he to whom I allude.

But let me take up the thread of my narrative at the point where I for a moment dropped it. I rushed away from that grateful tradesman's shop; and I proceeded to a pastrycook's,—where I expended many pounds in the purchase of all the cakes and confectionary which I deemed most suitable for the regalement of the boys at the school on the following day. All these articles I ordered to be sent up to the Mathewsons'. I then proceeded to the hotel; and thence I despatched a quantity of wine to the same destination,—together with a note to Mr. Mathewson, requesting that his pupils might be allowed to accept the little banquet thus furnished them by one who in former times had been a schoolboy at the same place.

Having partaken of the refreshments which William my valet had ordered, I proceeded in a hackney-vehicle to the railway station. When the “fly” drove up to the entrance, a wretched-looking man, clothed almost in rags, hastened forward to

open the door in the hope of receiving a few pence for his officiousness.

“Now then, you feller, stand back!” said a railway porter, in whose charge my luggage had been left at the station, and who had therefore seen by the cards which my valet had placed upon the trunks, who I was. “Don't you see his lordship has got his own servant here?”

The wretched man shrank back; and just at that instant I caught a full view of his countenance. Good heavens! was it possible?—was the once stout burly form reduced by misery to this emaciation? and had that harsh sternness of countenance which had once so terrified me, become changed into an expression of mingled misery and dissipation? Yes—it was he! I was shocked beyond measure: though it could not be supposed I entertained much sympathy for one who had leagued himself amongst my enemies. I hastened onward into the station, with the intention of sending out a few shillings by my valet to the miserable mendicant.

“Here's your luggage, my lord,” said the railway porter.

I took out my purse; and on glancing round, perceived that the mendicant had followed into the booking-office, and that he was now stooping down to read the card upon one of the boxes.

“Now then, you be off!” exclaimed the railway porter; “or it will be the worse for you, my man.”

“Do not speak harshly to him,” I said: and then turning towards the wretch, I looked him fixedly in the face,—inquiring in a low tone, “Do you know me?”

He took off his battered old hat; and being evidently astonished at the question, he stammered forth, “I know your lordship is the Earl of Eccleston—but what your lordship means—”

“I know *you*!” I interrupted him. “Your name is Jukes.”

He started and looked at me with a bewildered air, with which the grovelling entreaty of the mendicant was visibly and painfully blended.

“You do not recognise me,” I continued. “No matter! Take this:”—and I placed a sovereign in his hand. “I at least have the satisfaction of returning good for evil.”

At that instant a light broke in unto the man's mind; and he exclaimed, “Is it possible? You, my lord—Joseph—an Earl—”

“Enough!” I interrupted him. “You see that heaven's justice eventually fulfils itself. You, from comfort and competency, have come down to want and beggary: I from that friendless wretchedness which excited not *your* compassion, have been raised up to what you now behold me.”

Jukes, in a whining, snivelling tone, began a story about “unavoidable misfortunes:” but I turned my back upon him: I had relieved a fellow creature in distress—but I had no sympathy for the individual himself. He was about to follow me out upon the platform: but the railway official ordered him back; and this time I did not interfere on his behalf. I entered the train; and in a few minutes was being whirled rapidly away from Leicester.



## CHAPTER CLV.

## MORE MEETINGS WITH OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

I was the sole occupant of the compartment which I had entered, until the train reached Rugby. This was at about seven o'clock in the evening; and it was consequently at that season of the year quite dark. The gas was lighted at the station: the usual oil-lamp threw its sickly glimmer from the roof of the compartment itself. The train waited for about a quarter of an hour at Rugby; and I stepped forth to take a turn or two upon the platform.

While I was thus engaged, I beheld a very tall man-servant, in a shabby livery, with tarnished gold lace, carrying an enormous French poodle under each arm. Those arms were evidently very much cramped by the burdens which they thus sustained; and he looked the very picture of wretchedness—so rueful was the expression of his countenance! I knew him at once: there could be no possibility of mistake. This was John Robert, footman in the service of Mr. and Lady Georgiana Tiverton. Though some years had elapsed since I last saw him, he appeared but little changed—unless indeed it were that he had grown thinner in form and more lugubrious in countenance: while on the other hand he had to carry a much fatter pair of poodles than those which he was doomed to take care of at the time when I was a still humbler menial in the same household as himself. I was about to accost him, to inquire concerning his master and mistress,—when I perceived them hastily approaching; and at the same instant the bell rang for the passengers to take their seats.

I returned to the compartment in which I had hitherto travelled: but scarcely had I settled myself in my place, when one of the railway officials hurried up to the door—bobbed in his head—then turning abruptly round, shouted out, "There's plenty of room here, sir!"

The next moment, who should come up to the very compartment but Mr. Tiverton and Lady Georgiana?

"Where is John Robert?" inquired her ladyship, in that half languid, half severe tone which I remembered so well. "Those poor dear pets will catch their very death with cold——"

"Here I am, my lady," said the miserable footman, coming up to the door—bobbed a dog under each arm. "The poodles, my lady——"

"Now don't answer me, John Robert," interrupted Lady Georgiana. "You know very well that I can put up with anything except being answered. Let the dear little pets lightly and gently down into this carriage——"

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," said the railway official, "but dogs are not allowed inside the carriages——"

"Dear me!" exclaimed the indignant lady: "what is the world coming to? A person of my rank——"

"Please, my lady," said the footman, evidently rendered desperate by having the care of the dogs, "if these dear little pets ain't taken into a nice warm place where there's a carpet, I'm certain sure they'll be starved with the cold."

"Pray my good man," said Lady Georgiana to the official, "do—do, if you have the heart of a Christian, let these dear little amiables come into this carriage."

"Yes, pray do," said Mr. Tiverton: and he displayed a half-crown between his finger and thumb.

"Well, sir," said the railway official, "I have no objection. But perhaps that gentleman yonder"—now looking at me—"might be annoyed by the dogs——"

"No," I said: "do not consider me in the case."

"In with them, John Robert!" exclaimed Lady Georgiana vehemently, as if she were afraid that the permission just awarded might be thought better of and recalled.

I saw John Robert's countenance become as much animated with joy as such a rueful face could possibly expand from its wonted lugubriousness: and first he let one obese poodle gently down into the carriage—and then the other.

"Dear pet!" said Lady Georgiana, patting one brute: "dear little love!" she added, patting the other: then suddenly bethinking herself of other things, she exclaimed, "Run, John Robert, and see that all the luggage is safe. There's that green trunk without the hinges——"

"And there's the carpet-bag without the padlock," interjected Mr. Tiverton.

"And the great black box with the broken lid," continued Lady Georgiana.

"And the small deal box with the bottom half out," said Mr. Tiverton.

"And the two handboxes, already smashed——"

"But my lady," interposed John Robert, "the porter took care of them all when we changed carriages——"

"Now don't answer me, John Robert," interrupted Lady Georgiana. "You know that I can put up with anything except being answered——"

"Do run, John Robert!" cried Mr. Tiverton.

"Take your seats!" echoed through the station: and the cry was followed by the locomotive whistle—and then by the slamming of doors all along the train.

"Get to your seat, my man," said the railway official, who was waiting at the door of our compartment—for a purpose which was obvious enough.

"Hah! hem! It's very kind of the man to let us have the dogs inside—isn't it my dear?" and as Mr. Tiverton thus spoke, he quietly returned the half-crown to his waistcoat pocket.

The disappointed official gave the door a bang which resounded throughout the station; and the train was almost immediately in motion.

I had now leisure to observe that though age had aggravated the thinness of Lady Georgiana and had added to the wrinkles on her husband's countenance, in other respects they seemed by no means altered. Her ladyship had on an old lavender-coloured silk gown: and I could almost have sworn it was the very same she used to wear when I was at Myrtle Lodge. As for Mr. Tiverton, he seemed to be apparelled in precisely the same suit as that which he likewise wore at that time—except with an increased degree of shabbiness and seediness, if possible. I perceived that they in their turn were now examining me,—Mr. Tiver-

ton somewhat furtively—but Lady Georgiana with a more fixed scrutiny of her cold pale blue eyes. Gradually I had noticed that her ladyship's countenance grew more and more animated: she was gathering her reminiscences: the ideas were at work that were tending towards complete recognition. At length I saw her nudge her husband, and whisper something in his ear: whereupon his scrutiny of me became more marked and positive.

"Ask him, Mr. Tiverton—ask him!" I now heard Lady Georgiana impetuously whisper to her husband.

"I think," said this gentleman, leaning towards me,—“I think, if I am not mistaken, that you must be a certain Joseph Wilmot, who was once in my service?”

"I was once in your service, Mr. Tiverton," I answered in a somewhat cold manner.

"And in a first-class carriage!" said Lady Georgiana, heaving a profound sigh, as if the very idea were enough to make her faint. "Well, I'm sure! what will the world come to next? If John Robert, an old servant, rides in a second-class carriage——"

"Hush, my dear," said Mr. Tiverton: "don't you see how well Joseph is dressed, although it is mourning?"—and notwithstanding he spoke in a whisper, his words were perfectly audible.

"Dress indeed!" said Lady Georgiana, without attempting to lower her tone: "every young man apes the gentleman now-a-days!"—and then she pursed up her mouth as if in deep disgust of what she conceived to be my audacious conduct.

There were a few minutes' silence; and then at last Lady Georgiana said, as she darted a spiteful glance at me, "Even if you have the impudence to travel in a first-class carriage, you ought to be ashamed of yourself to remain in the same place with so near a relation to the late unfortunate Lady Calanthe Dundas."

"Lady Georgiana Tiverton," I said, in a solemnly mournful voice, "that is indeed a topic which ever smites my heart with woe: but I beseech that no unavailing discussion may be raised upon it. Your ladyship will however please to observe that I did not force myself upon the society of yourself and your husband. Had I foreseen the probability of becoming your travelling-companion, I should have endeavoured to avoid it."

"Pray don't answer me, sir," interjected Lady Georgiana: and it was a wonder she had heard me to even such a length. "You ought to know, as you were once in my service, that I can put up with almost anything except being answered. I must however inform you that if you did not exactly force yourself into the same compartment as that which Mr. Tiverton and I occupy,—yet by the fact of not knowing your proper place, and by this presumption on your part which makes you travel first-class instead of third-class, you have brought about a meeting and a companionship which are so little agreeable."

"Madam," I answered, "at the next station where the train stops, I will change into another carriage."

Lady Georgiana bowed very stiffly—but gave no response.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Tiverton presently, "I shall be very glad when we are in London.

Really we have become quite gay! First staying with our friends at Stafford—now going to other friends in the metropolis——"

"And I also shall be very glad to get to London, Mr. Tiverton," interrupted Lady Georgiana, "for the sake of these dear sweet pets:"—and she patted first one obese poodle, and then the other.

"I understand there's a nobleman in the train," observed Mr. Tiverton, after another pause. "I overheard one of the officials say at the Rugby Station that the Earl of Eccleston——"

"That must be the new Earl of Eccleston," said Lady Georgiana. "The former one, you know, died three weeks or a month back. Indeed, I believe he was killed by a fall from his horse. But I never knew he had a son——"

"I did not read any particulars respecting his lordship's death," observed Mr. Tiverton.

"Nor I either," added Lady Georgiana. "I only heard some one talking on the subject at the party the other night at Stafford. But the new Earl, I understand, must be quite a young man——"

"I dare say we shall see him presently. We will get one of the officials to point him out to us at the next station where the train stops. But no doubt we shall be introduced to him in London."

"Of course!" interjected Lady Georgiana. "With my connexions I have only to say the word in order to be introduced to whomsoever I think fit, and have whomsoever I think fit introduced to me."

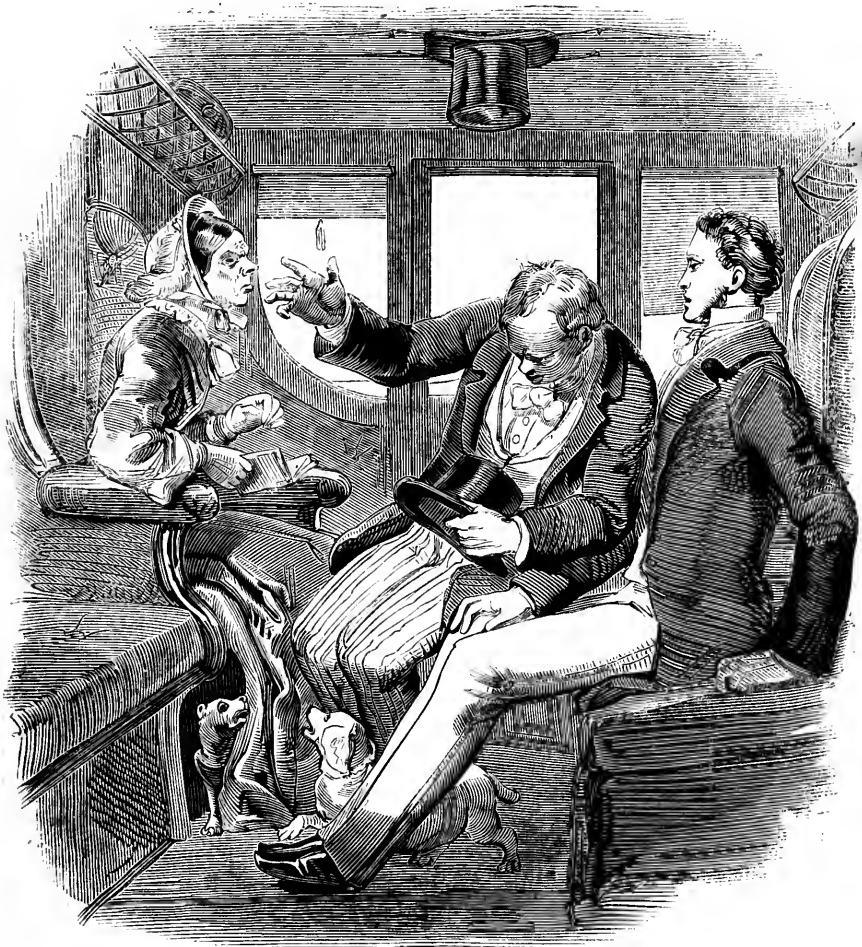
"Of course! no doubt, my dear!" said Mr. Tiverton.

At this moment the locomotive's whistle screeched forth its warning note; and in a few minutes the train stopped at Wolverton. I immediately beckoned to a railway official, who came forward and opened the door. As I passed Lady Georgiana, I raised my hat with that courtesy which was due to a lady—though perhaps to her especially it was scarcely due at all.

"Stop!" said her ladyship, as a sudden idea seemed to strike her. "I think you had better remain where you are, young man. If you ask to change your carriage, the officials will set it down to annoyance at my beautiful pets; and therefore you will perhaps do me the favour to resume your seat."

It was only on account of the dogs that her ladyship thus spoke with a sort of civility, and used the word "favour:" but I did not choose to do anything purposely to vex her; and I therefore again bowed and returned to my place. Perhaps, too, I may add without incurring the imputation of vanity, that I wished to punish her ladyship as well as her husband for the supercilious manner in which they had treated me; and therefore I was all the more inclined to remain in their company to observe what their conduct would be when a certain discovery should be made in respect to myself. There were five minutes to wait at Wolverton; and Lady Georgiana's husband, availing himself of the leisure, issued forth from the carriage—I could guess very well for what purpose.

I beheld him accost the guard of the train and speak to him for a few moments. Then the guard swept his eyes along the train, as if in search of



some particular carriage. But at this instant my own valet came to the door of the compartment where I and Lady Georgiana had remained seated; and with the habitual tone of respect, at the same time touching his hat, he said, "Can I procure your lordship any refreshment?"

"No, I thank you, William," I answered: whereupon he again touched his hat, and withdrew.

I should observe that at the very instant he addressed me by my patrician title, Lady Georgiana gave so sudden a start that she either kicked or put her foot upon the tail of the great fat poodle which was wheezing and dozing at her feet: so that the unfortunate brute gave a howl of pain. But so lost in bewildered astonishment was Lady Georgiana, that she did not appear to take the slightest notice of the accident—though under any other circumstances she would have immediately begun petting, caressing, and condoling with her

injured favourite. She continued to gaze upon me in that same vacant manner, as if utterly at a loss what to think; and then I perceived that she pursed up her mouth and tossed her head contemptuously, as if she had suddenly arrived at the conclusion that she must have misunderstood what was said, and had for a moment suffered herself to be beguiled into a belief which she now scorned to entertain.

But almost at the same instant that this pursing up of the mouth and tossing of the head took place, a glance from the window towards the platform showed me that the guard and Mr. Tiverton had just halted in front of my compartment,—they having doubtless taken a rapid walk alongside the array of carriages until the guard was enabled to point me out to his curious querist. Then away sped the guard—the bell rang—there was the bustle of the passengers flocking back to their seats—doors were slamming—and Mr. Tiver-

ton re-entered the compartment where Lady Georgiana and myself were seated. I saw plainly enough that the gentleman was in a complete state of bewildered astonishment,—incredulous as to what he had heard, yet not knowing how to disbelieve it—but equally puzzled how to believe it. As for myself, I maintained my composure with as much serenity and self-possession as if nothing peculiar were going on.

Mr. Tiverton's place was exactly facing mine; Lady Georgiana's seat was in the middle, on the same side as her husband's. Stumbling over the great fat poodle which lay at his wife's feet, Mr. Tiverton fell heavily against me; and instantly confounding himself in apologies, he said in the most impressive tones, "A thousand pardons, my lord—I beseech your lordship's forgiveness—I would not for the world—I am sure, my lord, you must see that I did not mean it—very far from it, my lord—I—"

Disgusted with the man's sycophancy, I said in a cold voice and with reserved manner, "No farther apology is necessary, sir."

"Dear me, is it possible?" said Lady Georgiana, now becoming all amiability; "is it possible we should have this honour—that we should be so fortunate—and that such a very extraordinary event should have occurred? I am sure, my lord, if I just now said anything that was disagreeable—"

"I can only repeat, madam, what I have just said to your ladyship's husband," I coldly interrupted her, "no farther apology is necessary."

"Yes—but my dear Earl," said Lady Georgiana,—"for your lordship must really permit me to claim the privilege of old acquaintance to assert the right of a friendly feeling at the present time—you must positively forgive us both—We could not possibly conceive—I am sure if I had known it, we never would have had these nasty dogs in the carriage! They are the plagues of my life; and that lazy good-for-nothing fellow John Robert should have taken care of them."

"I can assure your ladyship," I said, "that the dogs do not annoy me in the least. I am only afraid that Mr. Tiverton trod rather heavily upon one."

"Oh! Mr. Tiverton is the clumsiest and most awkward of men!" exclaimed her ladyship, darting an angry glance at her husband, as if he were the cause of all the misunderstanding which had taken place. "I'm sure, my dear Earl, nothing gives me greater pleasure than to see you looking so well. You are so altered—but still I knew you again."

"Hush, my dear," said Mr. Tiverton: "we need not make any allusions that refer to past matters. I can assure your lordship that it shall never go forth from our lips—"

"That I was once a menial in your service?" I said, with a sort of calm and quiet contempt. "Really, Mr. Tiverton, I do not see that I have any reason to be ashamed on account of having at one time of my life eaten the bread of honest industry. In respect to titles, rank, and riches, I believe that they are too often possessed by persons whose character and intelligence will not for a moment bear comparison with thousands and thousands of those honest and enlightened sons of toil who from their youth to their old age eat

the bread which is earned by the sweat of the brow."

"Those are admirable sentiments, my dear Earl," said Lady Georgiana; "and I perfectly agree with them."

I made no answer; for I knew she was telling a falsehood, and that in the prejudice of her own heart she looked upon everything that was noble by title to be ennobled also by character; and that on the other hand the real nobles of nature—the worthy ones amongst the sons of toil—were regarded by her as something less than the dirt beneath her feet.

"Well, truly, my lord," said Mr. Tiverton, after a brief pause—and evidently fidgeting about for some means of reopening the discourse,—“this is a very extraordinary circumstance. When the guard just now pointed you out to me, you might have knocked me down with a feather. I never was so astonished in all my life—"

"And I never was so pleased," said Lady Georgiana. "I am sure his lordship shares the feeling: for this encounter is in all respects so agreeable—so pleasing—so gratifying—But dear me! my lord, if it is not indelicate, pray do tell us how all this came about."

"Your ladyship perceives that I'm in mourning," I said; "and from your conversation with Mr. Tiverton I have gathered that you remember how recent is the paternal loss that I have sustained. Your ladyship will therefore excuse me—"

"Oh, certainly, my dear Earl!" she ejaculated, being now full of vivacity and animation: "we can make allowance for your lordship's feelings. But of course we shall see something of you in London? May we without indiscretion venture to call upon you and the Countess your mother?"

"My mother," I responded, "has experienced a dreadful shock on account of my father's sudden and dreadful death: she cannot therefore receive visitors. As for myself, I shall have a great deal to occupy my attention—"

"Oh, of course! we can very well understand that," interjected Lady Georgiana: "but we shall no doubt see something of you, as we shall be in London for several months. We are going to stay with our friends Sir Jeremy and Lady Jessop; and then we are going to pass some time with my father Lord Mandeville—"

"I have no doubt, my lady," I answered, "that I shall have the pleasure of meeting yourself and Mr. Tiverton again."

In this manner I continued to fence with a sort of cold courtesy, against her servile civilities, until the train reached the station in the metropolis. Then John Robert made his appearance at the door of the compartment, apparently to receive the obese poodles: but at a glance it was quite evident that some potent fluid had been at work to disturb the tall domestic's equanimity. In plain terms, John Robert was drunk.

He could scarcely sustain himself upon his legs: he swayed to and fro,—endeavouring to hiccup out something; and nothing could exceed the mingled mortification and rage of Lady Georgiana Tiverton when the conviction burst upon her that the "faithful dependant," who had suffered himself for so many years to be bullied and half-starved in her service, was now so completely dis-

guised in liquor that she scarcely knew John Robert at all! Nevertheless her ladyship was determined to make one effort to arouse the lacquey to a sense of his duty; and she therefore said in her sternest tone, "Take off your hat, directly, John Robert! Do you know in whose presence you are standing? This is the Earl of Eccleston."

But John Robert mutteringly vowed that he would see himself at the hottest place he could think of before he would take off his hat to any living being. He then proceeded to pour forth a volley of imprecations against the eyes and limbs of the two unfortunate poodles,—winding up his tirade by threatening to punch the head of his master, "old Tiverton," as he called him.

For this purpose John Robert was beginning to take off his coat,—when I ordered my valet, who had just stepped up to the spot, to get the intoxicated man into a cab: but John Robert became furious,—vowing that nothing would satisfy him but that "he must pitch into old Tiverton." A crowd collected; and Lady Georgiana declared that she was about to faint. It was very kind and considerate of her to give this timely warning of her intention, inasmuch as it afforded me the opportunity of hastily whispering to her that perhaps she had better not, for fear lest some mischief should happen to the poodles. She accordingly followed my advice; and turning to her husband (they both being still inside the carriage, and I having stepped out), she said very sharply, "Come Mr. Tiverton—don't remain dawdling here! Take these nasty tiresome brutes up in your arms. It was all your fault that I brought them!"

One of the railway police-officers had now got hold of John Robert, who thereupon grew perfectly frantic; and throwing about his long lanky legs and lean arms like a windmill, he vociferated, "Who starves their servants? who makes them sit down to bones with no meat on 'em? Old Tiverton and his wife! Let me punch the old rascal's head! I'll take the shine out of him! I've nursed it in my buzzim for years!"

"Take him to the station-house," shrieked out Lady Georgiana; and the miserable John Robert was borne off accordingly.

I bade my valet render what assistance he could to Mr. and Lady Georgiana Tiverton; and overwhelmed with mortification, they packed themselves in a cab, poodles and all. They drove off amidst a general titter on the part of the crowd assembled on the platform; and then I proceeded without further loss of time to Manchester Square. On my arrival at Eccleston House, I was affectionately embraced in the arms of my mother, and most warmly congratulated by the Count of Livorno on the happy result of my visit into Westmoreland.

## CHAPTER CLVI.

### AT HOME.

ON the following day my friend Saltcoats called according to an appointment; and sincerely did I thank the worthy man for all the kind interest he had exhibited on my behalf. Dominic Clack-

mannan and his wife, the late Widow Glenbucket, had for some months past been in Scotland, whither Saltcoats was about to repair in order to rejoin them: but he had remained in London in order to welcome me on my return from Westmoreland. I made him pass the entire day with us; and I exacted from him a promise that after spending a few months with his friends in Scotland, he would come and pass a month with me. I charged him with letters for the Dominie as well as for Mr. Duncansby in Edinburgh; and we parted with renewed assurances of friendship.

The Count of Livorno remained with us a few days: and then he likewise took his departure—but with a thorough understanding that he was to bring his Countess over to England in the Spring to pass a few months with us. Need I say that before we separated I renewed the expressions of all that gratitude which I experienced towards this excellent nobleman for the many kindnesses which I had received at his hands?

The dreadful secret connected with the late Mr. Delmar's murder remained locked up in the breast of my mother and myself: not a syllable on the subject did we breathe to Mr. and Mrs. Howard, whom we now contently saw. How rejoiced was I to be enabled to claim as a near and dear relative that Edith who had sympathized so generously with me when as a poor friendless boy I was thrown by accident upon her father's bounty! From motives of delicacy both she and Mr. Howard forbore from asking for any further explanations of the past than these which my mother and myself thought fit to give them; and when once the subject had been disposed of, it was touched upon no more. I had other relatives with whom to make an acquaintance; and these were the daughters of my father's elder brother—that elder brother whom he had succeeded in the title. I found them to be amiable and beautiful girls: with the most unaffected joy did they welcome me as their cousin and recognise me as the head of the family.

According to promise, Sir Matthew Heseltine came with the ladies to London, and took possession of a commodious handsomely furnished house which Mr. Tennant, the solicitor, had hired for them in Portman Square. Never shall I forget the day on which the beautiful Annabel was first presented to my mother! The meeting was both joyous and affecting. Annabel beheld for the first time the now widowed authoress of my being: and for the first time likewise did my mother contemplate the loveliness of her who for years had been the object of my heart's devotion. Indeed, it was with a gushing enthusiasm that my mother folded Annabel in her arms, and welcomed her as the one who was to be her daughter-in-law. Nor on Mr. Lanover's account was there the slightest repugnance on my mother's part towards Mrs. Lanover: indeed if there had been, the amiable disposition, the sweet manners, and the purity of character which combined to render Annabel's mother so estimable a being, could not have failed to produce their effect upon my own parent. As for Sir Matthew,—the worthy old Baronet shed tears of happiness on the occasion of that first meeting with my mother.

When Parliament met in the first week of February, in the year 1843, I was enabled without

the slightest difficulty to take the oaths as a Peer of England and my seat in the House of Lords. Thus my title being fully recognised, and there having been no opposition from any quarter to my inheritance of the vast estates of Eccleston, I had no farther business of a legal character to engage my attention. My mother was beginning somewhat to recover her spirits—but only partially: for, alas! on that night of awful revelations by the bed-side of her perishing husband she had received a shock which it was evident she could never completely surmount. Yet for my sake she exerted every effort to raise her spirits; and she insisted that I should have all those in whom we were interested, as often at the mansion as possible. Indeed, unknown to me she would frequently send and invite her sister Edith and Mr. Howard, my cousins, Sir Matthew, Mrs. Lanover, and Annabel, to dinner at Eccleston House; and she was constantly asking me when I expected from foreign parts any of those friends whom I had so often mentioned to her.

In the Spring we had a large party of visitors. There were the Count and Countess of Livorno, who according to the promise of the former had come to spend some time with us. There were the Count and Countess of Avellino, who joyously congratulated me in words, as they had previously done by letter, on the marvellous change in my position. They bore likewise kind letters from the Count of Tivoli—and from the young Viscount a much warmer one than I could possibly have anticipated from such a source. There too were the Count and Countess of Monte d'Oro, and Signor Portici, who were equally fervid in their congratulations as all the rest of my friends. I failed not to inquire after the young page—though a page no longer; and the Count of Monte d'Oro told me with a smile that he also would have come to London to pay his respects to me, were it not that he was enchained in Corsica by the spells existing in the superb dark eyes of a young lady—an heiress indeed—at Ajaccio. I must not forget to add that the worthy Mr. Saltcoats was likewise a guest at Eccleston House at the same time with my other friends; and I could scarcely help smiling when on alighting from the cab which brought him hither from the railway, he made his appearance in a complete new suit of grey from the very hat on his head to the stockings on his feet!

We gave no large parties at this time, nor was there any dancing in the house, because not many months had elapsed since my father's death. But, on the other hand, it was a happy party. Mr. Saltcoats became an universal favourite; and I remember how great was the worthy gentleman's delight when Annabel one day presented him a beautiful bead purse which she had made on purpose for him. His unvarying good-nature endeared him to everybody; and my mother was careful that there should every day be three or four of his favourite Scotch dishes upon the table, and that he should never sit down to breakfast without finding a dish of Finnan haddocks, served in the Scotch fashion.

I must here observe that I wrote to a solicitor at Liverpool, whom my own lawyer mentioned to me,—requesting him to make inquiries for a certain Mrs. Nelson who had once kept a school in

the neighbourhood of Leicester. In a few days I received an answer to the effect that Mrs. Nelson had for some years past been living with a maiden sister at Liverpool—but that through many unforeseen circumstances, they had fallen into extreme poverty. I wrote a letter to Mrs. Nelson, to tell her who Joseph Wilmot had turned out to be, and remind her that at the time I parted from her a year's payment on my account was due. I sent her a cheque for two hundred guineas,—bidding her apply to me at any future period in case this remittance should not enable her to lay the foundation for a comfortable livelihood for herself and her sister for the remainder of their days. The response which I received was of a most affecting character; and I am happy to be enabled to add that the money which I thus sent her had the effect of placing herself and sister in a position which rendered it unnecessary to make any future application to my bounty.

I must here relate a little incident which occurred during the time we were entertaining that large circle of friends at Eccleston House. I was one day passing through the hall, from one room to another, when I perceived a woman, very indifferently clad, talking to the hall-porter. She looked about fifty years of age—though subsequent recollections made me aware that she could not in reality be more than one or two-and-forty. Her appearance was poverty-stricken: a poor cotton gown, a scanty shawl, and an old straw bonnet were the principal articles of her toilet. She was miserably thin—with a haggard, careworn, half-starved countenance. I should not have taken such particular notice of her, were it not that I heard her say in such a tone of piteous entreaty that it quite went to my heart, "Oh! do let me see the housekeeper! Perhaps she would take me?"

"Really, my good woman," the hall-porter responded, "I know it is of no use: a younger person is required. But here is half-a-crown for you, since you are in distress——"

Here the hall-porter stopped short: for he caught sight of me.

"What is it, James?" I inquired: and methought I had a dim recollection of the features of that wretched-looking woman.

"Please my lord," replied the hall-porter, "there's an under kitchen-maid wanted; and this poor woman was told of the place on inquiring at the baker's."

"Well," I said, "you had perhaps better suffer her to see the housekeeper: for if she be in such distress, and if she be honest——"

"Oh, my lord!" cried the wretched woman, tears streaming down her haggard cheeks, "pray do have mercy upon me! I am starving—and this very morning have I been turned out of the wretched little lodging which I occupied! I have seen better days—I have lived in genteel families—I have become reduced—and now to earn my bread I would take any situation, however menial!"

While she was thus speaking, those recollections which were at first so vague and dim, grew stronger in my mind—until at length the recognition was complete. I knew this wretched woman: but I did not betray by my countenance that I thus recognised her—while I perceived that she entertained not the remotest suspicion of my identity with any one she had known before.



"Step this way," I said: and I conducted her to the nearest unoccupied room.

When we were alone together, I looked her very hard in the face; and I said, "Do you know me?"

"I presume I have the honour of speaking to the Earl of Eccleston," she responded, half-bewildered by my question: "but I never to my knowledge beheld your lordship before."

"If I am about to make a revelation unto you," I said, "it is from no motive of idle vanity—much less to have the appearance of triumphing over one who is fallen in the world. On the contrary, it is my intention to give you some little relief: though as for receiving you into this house, it is impossible. My object is to convince you that there are people in the world who can return good for evil—"

She stared at me with a stupid astonishment: it was still evident that she was utterly unsuspecting of the fact I was about to reveal to her.

"Your name," I said, "is Dakin—and you were once companion to Lady Georgiana Tiverton at Myrtle Lodge."

"Yes—it was so, my lord!" she answered, becoming troubled. "But you, my lord—No, it can't be! it is impossible!"—and there was a wild surprise in her looks. "It is utterly out of the question!"

"It is as you begin to suspect," I said. "In me you behold that same Joseph Wilmot whom—but I will not torture you by reference to the past—No, nor did I mean this!"

For the unhappy woman had sunk down with a stifled scream at my feet; and there she began weeping and sobbing piteously.

"Rise," I said; "rise! I will not reproach you. I see that you have suffered enough from the adversities which have overtaken you. As for myself, I may entertain the hope that all the calamities of my life are past. Heaven, you see, is just!"

Miss Dakin rose up from her suppliant posture: but some minutes elapsed before she could in any way tranquillize herself. She besought my forgiveness for her vile wicked conduct of a past period; and I assured her that she was forgiven. I then thrust a bank-note into her hand, and bade her take her departure. She dried her tears: and with renewed expressions of gratitude as well as of contrition, she went away. I never saw her afterwards, nor heard of her again.

A few days subsequent to this incident a card was one afternoon placed in my hand: and I read the name of Sir Alexander Carrondale. I flew to the drawing-room to which Sir Alexander had been shown; and I found that his wife was with him. Delighted were they both to see me: delighted was I also to see them. I had previously received letters from them congratulating me on my change of position; and now they verbally renewed those congratulations. I inquired after Mr. Duncansby, and learnt that he was expected in London in a few days. Next I inquired after the Chief of Inch Methglin,—when Sir Alexander replied, "The Chief and Lennox are already in London: they arrived with us yesterday. They only await your permission, my dear Lord Eccleston, to pay their respects to you."

"Nay," I responded, "it is for me to go and call upon the Chief first—and this I will do with-

out delay. I will engage him and his son to dine with me to-morrow. You and her ladyship must be of the party: my mother the Countess will be delighted to receive you. We have several friends staying with us; and I need hardly say that Sir Alexander and Lady Carrondale will not be the least honoured amongst them."

The invitation was accepted; and before the Baronet and his wife took their departure on the present occasion, I introduced them to my mother. Then, ere I set out to the hotel where the Chief of Inch Methglin and Mr. Lennox Vennachar were staying, I penned a note of invitation to leave for them in case they should not be at home. Nor were they: I therefore left my card and the note, and returned to Manchester Square. As I was alighting from the carriage, whom should I behold with his hand upon the knocker but Dominic Clackmannan. I greeted him warmly; and from amidst the mass of stolidities to which he began giving utterance, I gathered the intelligence that his wife, the late Widow Glenbucket—now Mrs. Clackmannan of Clackmannanachnish—was passing a few weeks with some friends in a midland county: so that the Dominic had resolved to come on to London, to see Saltcoats and myself. I bade him make my house his home, and at once sent a domestic to fetch the Dominic's carpet-bag from the hotel where he had left it. The Dominic accordingly became another amongst the guests assembled at this time at Eccleston House. His meeting with Saltcoats was perfectly characteristic: for although they had known each other for years—and, as the reader has perceived, had been bosom-friends—yet did Mr. Clackmannan mistake him first of all for the Baillie Owlhead—next greet him as the Laird of Tintosquashdale—and then, on eventually being convinced it was he, Saltcoats himself, the Dominic began wondering whether it were ten or twenty years since last they met. To the guests generally the worthy old gentleman was an object of much amusement: but for my sake, as well as on account of his own good nature, he experienced the utmost kindness.

On the following day, punctual to the hour named in my note, the Chief of Inch Methglin and his son Mr. Lennox Vennachar arrived at the mansion. Though nearly four years had passed since I last saw the Chief, the lapse of time appeared not to have made the slightest alteration in his aspect. He was now in his sixty-fourth year: but his form was perfectly upright,—that fine tall form which had so much dignity in its carriage! His complexion was as florid as ever—his teeth as well preserved: his dark eyes had not lost their brightness. How well did I remember that haughtily handsome profile, and that look in which the pride of birth would have amounted to arrogance, were it not attempered by the feelings of the polished gentleman. Lennox was now about twenty-seven years of age; and setting aside the disparity of years, as well as the greyness of the hair on the part of the Chief, he was the exact likeness of his father.

"I am glad to have the honour of paying my personal respects to the Earl of Eccleston," said the Chief, advancing towards me, and courteously proffering his hand. "Your lordship bears a very old and honourable title, and one to which you yourself do honour."

This was a very great compliment for the Chief of Inch Methglin to pay; and I felt that he intended to hint, after his own well-meaning fashion, that whatsoever I might have once been was lost sight of and absorbed in the rank which I now bore. Lennox was also exceedingly courteous, and grasped my hand with a generous cordiality which I felt to be sincere. I presented these guests to my mother; and as she herself had visited Scotland, she was enabled to converse with the Chief and his son on the wild beauties of the northern country. The Dominie however speedily pressed forward to pay his respects to Inch Methglin and Lennox, while I advanced to meet Sir Alexander and Lady Carrondale who were just now being announced.

When dinner was served up, and we had all repaired to the banqueting-room, it chanced that the Dominie sat next to the Chief of Inch Methglin. From the opposite side of the table Mr. Saltcoats gave the Chief to understand that Mr. Clackmannan had committed matrimony, and that he had married a certain widow Glenbucket, of whom he had been always talking. For an instant Mr. Yennachar drew himself up somewhat haughtily at this intelligence: but the next instant he unbent again; and with smiling condescension expressed a hope that he should some day have the pleasure of being introduced to Mrs. Clackmannan of Clackmannanauchnisch.

"It's just that," said the Dominie. "I was thinking of paying a visit to Inch Methglin when we go back to Scotland. But dear me! I forgot! We must be in Scotland now; for assuredly that is a dish of collops in front of Saltcoats—and I remember this morning there was a dish of Finnan haddocks on the breakfast-table."

"Nonsense, Dominie!" exclaimed Saltcoats: "you are at our friend Lord Eccleston's; and there is Sir Matthew Heseltine challenging you to a glass of wine."

"It's just that," said the Dominie, as he handed his glass to the footman to be filled with champagne. "I remember being challenged to fight when I was a schoolboy at Dr. Drumthwacket's: but it's much more agreeable to be challenged to take wine. And now I bethink me, Inch Methglin," continued the Dominie, when he had bowed to Sir Matthew, "I hope you have made that little improvement which I several times suggested—"

"Improvement, Mr. Clackmannan?" interrupted the Chief, drawing himself up somewhat haughtily. "If you mean an improvement at Inch Methglin, you must decidedly be wrong: for neither in the house nor in the grounds is there the slightest need for an improvement of any kind."

"It's just there that you are mistaken, Inch Methglin," responded the Dominie, who had now been taking a glass of wine with another guest—and this time it was the Count of Livorno. "There's that loch of your's in a very unfinished state—or at least it must be the loch—it can't be the sea itself: for what I mean is a bridge to span it—"

"A bridge across my loch!" exclaimed the Chief, laying down his knife and fork, and eyeing the Dominie with the most disdainful scorn. "It is totally impossible you can be serious: for if

coming from any other man, I should take it as an insult."

"It's just that, Inch Methglin," said the Dominie, with the most imperturbable gravity: "you would be perfectly right—and if you were to knock him down, it would be of no great consequence—because—because—he would pick himself up again, you know. And this puts me in mind of what I one day said to young Stephen Owlhead when he nearly ran over me in the tax-cart—It must have been a tax-cart—if couldn't have been a locomotive, because it wasn't on a railway—"

"Come, Mr. Clackmannan of Clackmannanauchnisch," said the Chief, again recovering his good humour; "let us take a glass of wine together."

"It's just that," said the Dominie. "But about that bridge, Inch Methglin—we must discuss the bridge business. If you had had a bridge it would have saved me from tumbling into the water that day when I was reading a tremendous long letter from the Laird of Tintosquashdale. Yes, it must have been from the Laird—it couldn't have been a letter I had written to myself; because it would be foolish to correspond with one-self and go to the expense of paying the postage. But about that bridge, Inch Methglin?"

I saw that the Chief did not admire this perpetual recurrence to a scheme which he regarded as one calculated to effect a most unheard-of innovation upon the grand beauty of his Highland home; and therefore I interfered by giving the conversation some turn. Matters then passed off pleasantly enough; the Dominie forgot all about the bridge—and the Chief of Inch Methglin seemed likewise to forget that his temper had been for a moment ruffled by the introduction of such a topic.

It was midnight; and the party had broken up. Those of the guests who lived elsewhere, had taken their departure: those who were visitors at the house had retired to their chambers. My mother had likewise withdrawn; and I was lingering in the drawing-room for a few minutes,—thinking of my Annabel, and how exquisitely beautiful she had looked on this particular evening—more ravishingly beautiful, methought, if possible, than ever,—when I heard a ring at the front door bell. A few moments afterwards one of the footmen came up to inform me that a woman wished to speak to me.

"At this time of night?" I exclaimed in astonishment. "Who can it possibly be?"

"I do not know, my lord," answered the footman: and then, after a little hesitation, he added, "She seems a dreadful low woman, my lord—and a little the worse for liquor. But she says she must see your lordship on very important business."

I accordingly made up my mind to descend and ascertain who she was. On reaching the hall, I was shocked by the horrid-looking appearance of the woman who thus asked for me. She was past sixty years of age, with grey hair hanging loose and in disorder from beneath a very dirty cap with a large frill, and an old battered straw bonnet. Her countenance was of a flaming red; and she smelt most disgustingly of liquor. Her whole appearance indicated mingled poverty and dissipation. Indeed, she was a loathsome creature; and yet at the very first instant I set eyes upon her, methought that I had seen her countenance before.

"Who are you? and what do you want with me?" I inquired.

"Are you Lord Ecclestone?" she asked, eyeing me with a tipsy vacancy.

"I am. What do you require?"—and gradually, as a moonbeam struggles through a cloud, did a glimmering of light steal in unto my mind relative to this loathsome, shocking-looking hag. Yes—I had indeed seen her before: she was the woman who kept the house in that low court on Saffron Hill where I had dwelt with Taddy on my first arrival in London,—the same woman who had seized the little furniture and turned us out of doors—which proceeding on her part had led to those wanderings of ours that had thrown me in the way of Mr. Delmar.

"What do I want with your lordship?" said the woman, who evidently did not recognise me to be the same whom a few years back she had known as a poor miserable boy. "I want you to come along with me. There's a person dying at my house which wants to see you."

"A person dying?" I exclaimed, shuddering at the thought of any human being taking leave of this world in such a den. "Who is this person?"—for by the way in which the woman spoke, I could not tell whether she alluded to one of the male or the female sex.

"Never do you mind, my lord—but come along with me," she responded. "The poor man hasn't very long to live—a matter of an hour or two perhaps; and I promised to be sure and fetch your lordship, for he seems to have something very heavy on his conscience."

"But who is he?" I demanded—though I was instantaneously smitten with a presentiment of who the individual would prove to be.

"Well, I don't mean to say, my lord," she replied, doggedly. "You can come if you like—or you can leave it alone. It's no business of mine. I've done my duty."

"Stop! I will go with you," I said. "Depart—and wait for me at a little distance in the Square."

There were none of the servants in the hall when this colloquy took place: I had beckoned the footman to retire immediately on descending from the drawing-room. The woman went forth; and I, hastening up to my own chamber, secured a pair of pistols about my person; for the thought struck me that it was just possible treachery might be intended; though on the other hand I could scarcely imagine that such was the case. Having bidden the hall-porter sit up for me, I issued from the mansion.

It was a beautiful night in the month of May; and the stars were shining brightly. I speedily rejoined the old woman; and putting a sovereign in her hand, I said, "Tell me precisely where it is that you live—and I will speedily be there. You can take a cab—get back with the least possible delay—and tell the dying person, whoever he may be, that I am coming."

"I suppose your lordship is afraid," said the old woman, with a sneer, though her eyes had glistened on taking the money; "and so you are going to put the police on the scent. Well, you may do it if you choose: but I can tell you, my lord, that there is no reason—for I'm sure I don't want to hurt you; and as for that poor unfortunate

man—Howsoever, your lordship can do as you like."

I did not choose to tell the hag that I was not going to take any such precaution as that to which she had just alluded: I thought there was no harm in leaving her to the contrary belief. I accordingly hastened away—having learnt from her the address of her abode, which I found to be precisely the same as that where I had dwelt with Taddy. It bore, as the reader will recollect, the hideous, loathsome denomination of Ragamuffin Court, Saffron Hill. I entered the first cab that I found plying for a fare; and I bade the driver take me up to the end of Hatton Garden. There I alighted; and dismissing the cab, bent my steps towards the wretched abode which was my destination. Oh! how well I recollected with what feelings I had accompanied the man Taddy thither on that night when he rescued me from starvation in the streets. How often with an aching heart and sensations of hideous loathing, had I walked by his side in that neighbourhood when we went forth to distribute at the low lodging-houses and beer-shops, the circulars which he had made me pen. And then, too, with what forlorn and desolate feelings had I threaded that neighbourhood when we were ejected at the time as houseless wanderers from the miserable abode which we were even too poor to keep. And now how altered was my position! what wealth had I at my command! what a host of friends to bless me with their affection! what brilliant hopes for the future! And I thought, too, that there was now scarcely a day which passed without developing some incident to remind me of bygone occurrences, and force upon my contemplation the contrast of what I once had been and what I now was!

I pursued my way: I entered the court: my pistols were ready for use in case of need—but I had scarcely any apprehension lingering in my mind that they would be required. I had purposely walked slow after alighting from the cab, in order that the woman might have leisure to get home before me. And such proved to be the case: for on knocking at the door, it was speedily opened by the harridan herself.

There was a noisome fetid odour in the house: the candle which she carried, showed me that it was dirty and poverty-stricken. She was poor when I had lodged with Taddy there: she was now evidently poorer still. The wretch had gone down in the world,—doubtless from her dissipated, drunken habits. She gave a sort of smile of satisfaction on beholding me: she closed the door—and began leading the way up the narrow dirty staircase. She paused for a few moments at the door of a back room on the second storey; and as we heard low moanings coming from within, she whispered to me, "Ah! how the poor man suffers!"

"Is he not attended by a surgeon?" I asked, also in a low whisper.

"Yes: but it's of no use. The doctor said when he came at ten o'clock to-night, that he couldn't live many hours longer——"

"Come, let us enter!" I interrupted her: and I could scarcely prevent myself from recoiling perceptibly from the loathsome pestiferousness of her gin-poisoned breath.

She opened the door: and by the rays of a feeble

light which glimmered in the wretched chamber, I beheld—stretched upon a miserable pallet—the very individual whom my presentiment had told me that I should see—for it was Lanover!

## CHAPTER CLVII.

### A DEATH BED.

IN the wretched poverty-stricken chamber, faintly and dimly burnt the light: but yet its beams were sufficient to enable me to embrace with a glance the misery and destitution which characterized the place,—the scant articles of furniture, the dirty carpetless floor, the blackened walls, and the broken panes with rags thrust through to keep out the night air. Sufficient likewise were those beams—and in their sickliness appropriately suited likewise—to show the haggard, ghastly, wan, and death-stricken countenance of him who in his time had been one of my bitterest enemies.

Yes—it was indeed Lanover,—Lanover who lay upon the verge of that gulf which separates mortality from eternity—that dark abyss, unfathomable to human eyes, which divides things terrestrial from things celestial—that mighty ocean, formed of the waters of oblivion, over which the soul when loosened from its earthly tenement is wafted from the known shore that lies on this side to that unknown shore which lies beyond!

I made a sign for the woman to retire: I closed the door; and I approached the couch. How can I describe the look with which Lanover gazed up towards me? It was no longer one of fiend-like malignity, nor of diabolic hate: no, nor of hypocrisy and dissimulation: it was one of contrition, deprecation, and appeal. There is a light in which all the sharp jutting ridges and all the deep-shaded chasms, all the asperities and the harshnesses, of a rude and savage mountain-region may look less terrible, less repelling, than on former occasions they seemed to the eye which is familiar to the scene:—and so it was with Lanover's features now. Over all the rigid lines—over all the marks which the world's fiercest passions had traced—over that countenance where the influence of the worst and darkest feelings had passed as if with a searing-iron,—there was the purer and holier light which true penitence can shed even upon the most ill-favoured and repulsive of the human lineaments. I knew that I was standing by the couch of a murderer,—by the couch of a man to whom crime had for years and years been familiar: but amidst the awe which filled my soul, there was blended a certain sympathy which I irresistibly felt. For I could not help remembering that for years had Annabel and her mother known no other protector than this man—and that however brutal his demeanour, however tyrannical his conduct, he had at least given them bread. And then, too, I was moved at the spectacle of how the hard flinty rock was at length smitten, and how the living waters of hope were gushing forth: for the tears were streaming from the eyes of the dying wretch. He sobbed convulsively; and ere a word of any other kind passed from my lips, or from his, I sank down upon my knees and began praying audibly. He joined me

in that prayer; his voice that was wont to be so harsh and jarring, was toned down by illness, suffering, and feebleness, to comparative mildness and meekness,—typical, I felt convinced, of the state of his own heart!

For several minutes we thus prayed together; and then slowly rising from my knees, I sat down upon a wretched broken chair by the side of his pallet. Lanover raised himself somewhat up on the bolster—in such a manner that while his elbow rested thereon, his hand supported his head; and looking at me with his hollow eyes, he asked, “Can you forgive me?”

“You have besought forgiveness of your God,” I responded; “and you entertain the hope that He will pardon you. It is not therefore from me that you must vainly ask for forgiveness. Yes, Mr. Lanover—I forgive you! from the bottom of my soul do I forgive you!”

The tears gushed forth afresh from the dying sinner's eyes: for an instant he made a motion as if he would have taken my hand; but then, as if inspired by a second thought, he held back his own.

“Here is my hand, Mr. Lanover,” I said, “as a proof that I forgive you.”

He took it—and again he sobbed. I also was deeply affected: but still I was unconscious that the tears were trickling down my cheeks, until made aware thereof by something which Lanover now said.

“You weep for me, my lord!—you weep for me, Joseph!” he murmuringly faltered: “and wretch though I am, I love you at this instant as much as even in my vilest moments I have hated you! But do you—do you know the full extent of my iniquities?” he shudderingly asked.

“I know all, Mr. Lanover!” I answered solemnly. “My unhappy father on his death-bed revealed everything—yes, *everything!*” I added emphatically, in order to give him to understand that even that darkest crime which was evidently uppermost in his harrowed, tortured conscience, had been conveyed to my knowledge.

“And yet you can forgive me?” he said, in a scarcely audible voice: “you can forgive me—although, as you now look upon me, you know that it is the gaze of a murderer which you meet!”

“Speak not in a manner which may aggravate the agonies of this death-bed, Mr. Lanover,” I said. “It is enough that the deeds themselves produce a sufficient impression upon your mind, to inspire you with a sense of all that you owe to heaven, to the world, and unto yourself, in the form of contrition.”

“Yes, believe me—Oh! believe me,” exclaimed the wretched man, “I am indeed contrite! Would to heaven that I could recall the Past! I should not then experience so awful a Present—nor tremble so terribly at the Future! It is a solace—Oh, you know not how great a solace, to receive the assurance of forgiveness from your lips. For a long time past, Joseph, I have been an altered man. That terrible process through the medium of which I escaped from the prison in Florence, left a frightful impression upon my mind. I had passed through the very grave itself: I had looked Death as it were face to face! I have shuddered ever since at the thought that all that was *then* transient, must sooner or later become permanent,



with a more hideous, awful reality! It was not so much physical suffering as mental horror which prostrated me on that bed of sickness on which you found me at Milan. Yet even then my mind was not completely moved: it was however deeply touched—and the change has since taken place. But it was chiefly when I some months afterwards heard of your father's death, occasioned by so fearful an accident, that the conviction struck me awfully, appallingly, stupendously, that circumstances were changing—that right was coming uppermost—and that the day of heaven's retribution was arriving for the wrong-doers!"

Mr. Lanover stopped and sank back upon the bolster, in such a state of exhaustion that I thought the vital spirit was on the point of flitting away to the realms of eternity. I gave him water to drink: I was hastening to the door, too, to bid the woman speed and fetch the surgeon,—when, divining my intention he called me back.

"No—I am past all medical aid," he faintly murmured, and speaking with a visible effort. "It is useless for you to summon such assistance—I beseech you to remain here with me for a few minutes longer—and let us continue thus alone! I have not much more to say: but still there are a few explanations I would yet give—there is a boon likewise that I would ask—"

Lanover's voice grew stronger as he thus spoke; and again did he raise himself up in the couch to that posture by which he was enabled to support his head upon his hand. He then discoursed upon the past; and he mentioned many little details which have enabled me to give greater completeness to the particulars of that recent chapter by which the gap in my narrative was filled up. Thus, for instance, he explained his object in taking Annabel to Exeter, on that occasion when I saw her there at the door of Dobbins the haberdashery.

dasher's shop. The explanations he thus gave me, on this and other points, were mingled with sincerely expressed regrets for his misdeeds—those that were intended, as well as those which were actually perpetrated. He asked me respecting Annabel and her mother; and I told him that in a few months Annabel was to accompany me to the altar.

"Were I a man," he said, "who dared give issue to a blessing from his lips, I would bless you both! But believe me—Oh! believe me when I declare that you have my heartfelt wishes for your happiness. And that ye will be happy, I have no doubt!—for after a life of intrigue, machination, plot, and crime, my experiences have brought me to this result—that I am impressed with the conviction of God's justice, recompensive and retributive; and that even in this world there may be foretastes alike of heaven and of hell."

There was another long pause; it seemed to me that Lanover's countenance was growing ghastlier, and that the heralding symptoms of death's approach were becoming more and more visible: but with another effort he prepared himself to speak.

"It is upwards of six months since your father died," he continued; "and during that interval I have dwelt in this wretched den. The direst poverty overtook me: but I made not an effort to emancipate myself from it. I appealed to no one for succour: I accepted it as a chastisement inflicted by heaven;—and in enduring it, methought I was making at least some little atonement for the past. I have parted with my garments to procure food: the mercenary wretch who brought you hither, would have sent me to the workhouse or the hospital, had I not given her the assurance that you in your generosity would liquidate whatsoever I may owe her. And now, as for the boon which I have to ask—if indeed I dare ask a boon at your lordship's hands—"

"Yes—Oh, yes!" I exclaimed. "What is there I can do to serve you?"

"It is that I may not have a pauper's grave," replied Lanover. "There will be no mourners for me—*this* I know full well: but let my grave be dug in some suburban cemetery, that the grass may grow green above it. This may appear a weakness—a foolish phantasy—call it what you will: it is nevertheless an evidence of that change of mind which I have experienced!"

"All you have asked of me shall be fulfilled," I responded. "Is there aught else which I can do for you?"

"Nothing, nothing, my lord," rejoined Lanover, again weeping. "Your conduct towards me—the forgiveness you have vouchsafed—the assurances you have just made me,—all, all have touched me deeply. It is strange, this balm which you have infused into my soul! Oh, would that I dared bless you! But God himself has blessed you; and in my penitence I shall die with the consciousness that you are surrounded with all the elements of prosperity. And now leave me."

"No—I shall not leave you, Mr. Lanover," I answered: "we will again pray together. It is my duty as a Christian to behave thus towards you—my duty likewise to smooth the dying pillow of a penitent fellow-creature."

I knelt therefore and prayed; and Lanover's voice joined audibly with my own. Suddenly he

broke forth into the most piteous lamentations,—declaring his conviction how impossible it was that he could be forgiven—that God, with all his mercy, could not pardon so deeply-stained a criminal as he—that hell was yawning for him—and that close behind advancing Death, approached the awful form of Satan likewise. I said all that I deemed fitting in such circumstances—all that I considered suitable to be urged upon the mind of the dying man. He grew consoled—he was strengthened with hope once again. In this better frame of mind I kept him,—until at about three o'clock in the morning, when the light was flickering in its socket, and the grey dawn was peeping through the window, the spirit of Lanover fled for ever.

All was thus over. I had cheered and comforted the last moments of him who for years past had been my mortal enemy. Issuing from the chamber of death, I descended the stairs, and found the woman of the house seated with a female lodger in a room on the ground-floor. They had not as yet retired to rest: they were waiting until I should take my departure. I told her that Lanover was dead; and I left a sum of money which must have far more than acquitted any liability due from the deceased. I also intimated that the obsequies would be conducted by some one whom I should charge to undertake them; and I issued from the house. Slowly and thoughtfully did I wend my way on foot towards Hatton Garden; and as I was proceeding thither I passed a shop, whence, from within the closed shutters, came the sounds of hammers. It was an undertaker's. I knocked: the door was opened—and I asked to see the master of the establishment. He was at work inside; for it appeared, from something which was said to me, that three or four recent deaths had rendered him thus unusually busy, and had compelled him and his men to rise betimes on this particular morning. My business was speedily explained: I entrusted the undertaker with all the details of the funeral; and as I placed a liberal sum at his disposal, he asked no questions as to who I myself might be. I thence proceeded into Holborn,—where I soon found a cab which conveyed me home.

Neither my mother nor any of the guests staying at the house knew that I had thus been for hours absent: but after breakfast I took an opportunity of being alone with my mother, in order to acquaint her with what had taken place. In the course of that day, too, I narrated the same facts to the Count of Livorno,—he being already aware of so much of my former history and of how large a part Lanover had played therein. It was not however until after the funeral,—until after the remains of the deceased had been consigned to a grave in a suburban cemetery,—that I mentioned his death and its circumstances to Sir Matthew Heseltine, Mrs. Lanover, and Annabel. Sir Matthew was now determined to execute a design which he had for some time past formed; and this was that his daughter should thenceforth renounce the name of Lanover and resume that of her first husband—namely, Bentinck. Mr. Tenant, his solicitor, received the requisite instructions: some pretext in respect to property was alleged; and by payment of the usual fees, the Royal permission was obtained for Mrs. Lanover



from that time forth to bear the name of Ben-tinck.

Weeks went by; and the friends who had assembled in London, separated to return to their respective abodes. The Count and Countess of Livorno were to accompany the Count and Countess of Monte d'Oro and Signor Portici, as well as the Count and Countess of Avellino, as far as Marseilles—from which port the three families would take the vessels bound for their respective destinations. We parted, with mutually interchanged assurances that we would all avail ourselves of opportunities at no very remote period to meet again. Dominie Clackmannan and Mr. Salt-coats went off together, to take up the former's wife on their way back to Edinburgh—where they proposed to settle down for the present. The Chief of Inch Methglin and Lennox accompanied Sir Alexander and Lady Carrondale on their journey northward—the Vennachars having agreed to pass a few months with the Baronet and his wife at Carrondale Castle. And now, too, Sir Matthew Heseltine decided upon returning with the ladies into Westmoreland, in order that preparations might be made for the nuptials of An-nabel and myself—which, according to agreement, were to be celebrated at Heseltine Hall. As only three or four months were now to elapse previous to that happy day, the separation was not a very painful one—and all the less so, inasmuch as Sir Matthew himself reminded me that I could come down into Westmoreland in the interval and pass a week or two at the Hall.

Eccleston House was now comparatively quiet once more; and I devoted myself to the most sedulous attentions towards my mother; for her health was falling—slowly, it is true, but perceptibly to my eyes. One day—when she had insisted that I should go out and take some exercise—I was riding on horseback through the Park; and I encountered Captain Raymond. He also was on horseback: he instantly reined in his steed and saluted me with mingled courtesy and respect. He was kind to me when in his service; and, as the reader will recollect, he had behaved generously on the occasion when I set off on my expedition into the Apennines to effect the liberation of Sir Matthew Heseltine and his family. I was therefore now glad of an opportunity of displaying civility towards this gentleman. We rode together; and I invited him to the house. I learnt that he had recently married—having triumphed over his love for Olivia, the Countess of Livorno. It was a daughter of a good family whom Captain Raymond had led to the altar; and he had obtained a considerable fortune with her. A few days afterwards I called upon Captain and Mrs. Raymond; and from that time forth they became numbered among the circle of my friends.

There is another little incident which I will mention in this place. I was one day walking down Regent Street, when I happened to observe the name of "LINTON, *Wine-merchant*," over a very handsomely fitted-up shop. At that very instant an ejaculation of joy fell upon my ears; and Charles Linton himself issued forth. Obedient to the first impulse of friendly feeling, he seized my hand and wrung it with cordial warmth: then suddenly recollecting the great social difference there was between us, he shrank back somewhat abashed.

"My good friend," I exclaimed, "you wrong me by thus through your own conduct imputing an undue pride to one who really possesses it not—"

"Ah! this is so like you," exclaimed Charles Linton, much moved by the manner in which I had just spoken to him. "You are fit to be what you are!—and yet I can only think of you— But here I am growing familiar again!"

"You can only think of me as in former times you knew me," I interrupted him; "and this is precisely how I wish you to regard me. Come! to prove that it is so, I will ask after my old friend Charlotte."

"Would your lordship walk in?" said Linton, again assuming an air of profoundest respect.

"Yes," I answered, "if you dispense with all ceremony and endeavour to make me feel at home."

Linton now looked pleased again; and he conducted me through a warehouse amply stored with wine, to a side door opening into a passage—thence up a carpeted staircase, to a handsomely furnished room, where his wife was seated.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, on immediately recognising me; "is it your lordship who has honoured us—"

"Nonsense, my dear Mrs. Linton!" I responded, shaking her cordially by the hand: "there is no honour in the matter—but a great deal of pleasure, at least on my side, thus to encounter old friends."

"Oh, pleasure indeed!" cried Charlotte, her handsome countenance being animated with the most lively joy: and then, as she glanced around, to assure herself that everything was neat and tidy in the room, she perceived that one leaf of the partition folding-doors was standing half open.

"Ah! you are about to sit down to dinner," I said, as I caught a glimpse of the table that was laid in the room with which the larger apartment communicated by means of those double doors. "Now, that is exactly what I want. I am exceedingly hungry; and I intend to dine with you. Remember! when we met at Reading about three years ago, you gave me a general invitation."

"Ah! if your lordship would condescend to partake of our humble fare," said Charlotte, looking half pleased and half embarrassed, "how happy should we be!"

"My dear friends," I replied, "I not only intend to partake of your fare, but also to do justice to it. Ah! here is a fine little fellow:"—and as a chubby-faced boy of about two years old came toddling into the room, I hastened forward, caught him up, and kissed him on each rosy cheek.

"Dear me!" cried Mrs. Linton, blushing; "to think that Charley should be such a figure!"

"Such a figure?" I exclaimed: "why, you must have the best of nursemaids, as the boy's appearance indicates. See! he is not frightened at me—the rogue laughs!"—and I now fondled him on my knee.

Almost immediately afterwards I heard a servant enter the back room and place dishes upon the table. Mrs. Linton glided into that dining-room, no doubt to see that all was right; and her husband, begging me to excuse him for a few

minutes, left the sitting-room—I knew very well for what purpose. It was that he might descend to his warehouse and fetch up some of his choicest wine; and I did not attempt to keep him back: I was resolved that these worthy people should have the pleasure of entertaining me; for I knew that it *would be* a pleasure. The little boy remained with me quietly enough until his parents returned; and I saw that they were both infinitely delighted at the notice I took of him. How easy it is in this world to gratify the feelings of our fellow-creatures if we would but seize upon the opportunities and adopt the right course! A caress and a kind word bestowed upon a child, are more flattering to the hearts of its doting parents than the costliest gifts presented to themselves could possibly prove;—and this is but one illustration of those thousand nameless little attentions which, if more constantly practised, would give a marvellous impulse to the sincerity of good fellowship, and scatter abroad myriads of those amenities which, taking root in the proper soil, prove the good seed in the parable, and bring forth fruit to perfection.

Dinner was announced by a neatly dressed servant-maid; and Mrs. Linton said, “I hope your lordship will be enabled to make at least a luncheon of the meal: for I know that three o’clock is much too early an hour for one who no doubt habitually dines at six or seven.”

“But you forget, my dear Mrs. Linton,” I answered, “that for the greater portion of my life I have dined at one o’clock—and not always in a parlour either. Come, let us sit down—for I can assure you I am prepared to do justice to your good fare.”

The fact is, I had taken luncheon at one o’clock, and had not the least appetite: but when we sat down to table, I suffered Charles Linton to give me a plate with several slices of sirloin, and his good-hearted wife to heap it up with Yorkshire pudding; and then I addressed myself to the despatch of these viands with every appearance of a keen appetite. Linton produced some excellent champagne; and by my manner I succeeded in inducing himself and his wife to throw off everything that savoured of formal constraint.

“And now tell me,” I said, when the cloth was removed and a copious dessert was placed upon the table, “how you came to leave Reading; though I can easily understand that the removal was a good one—for I need not ask how you are getting on in London.”

“Business prospered with us very well in Reading,” answered Linton; “for my customers in the wine-trade increased—”

“And I plied my needle as a dressmaker to considerable advantage,” interjected Charlotte.

“True enough!” exclaimed Linton, who was a fond and affectionate husband, without being too sentimentally uxorious: “but you should have left me, my dear, to sing your praises,” he added, laughing good-humouredly,—“which I was about to do to a very pretty tune.”

“Then I suppose,” I said, “that by your united industry—”

“Oh! our industry was great enough,” said Linton: “but still by itself alone it would not have raised us to such a position as this in so short a time. The fact is, a somewhat singular coin-

cidence occurred. A brother of mine—who was much better off in the world than I, and who was a bachelor—died suddenly; and I inherited his property. Then pretty nearly at the same time, an aunt of Charlotte’s died,—leaving her five hundred pounds; and thus all of a sudden we had a pretty little windfall of upwards of a thousand. We thought it very likely that if we removed to London, we might obtain some customers amongst the good families in which we had both lived as servants; and this, my lord, was the origin of the present establishment. We have been here eighteen months: our hopes have not been disappointed—and, thank God! everything prospers with us!”

“Yes, my lord,” interjected Charlotte, with a fondly coy glance and smile at her husband: “but Charles did one very naughty thing, for which I hope you will scold him. On our removal to London he insisted I should give up the millinery business: he said he would not have me work my eyes out—”

“And this you call naughty?” I exclaimed, laughing. “I think I understand my friend Linton’s reasons well enough. You were in a position which rendered it unnecessary for you to have the cares of a double business; and you, my dear Mrs. Linton, with your household duties have enough to occupy you.”

“Exactly so, my lord,” exclaimed Linton. “And besides, we have a little family—”

“What! are there any more?” I asked, looking towards the rosy-cheeked child, who, on my intercession, had been allowed to remain in the dining-room, where he was now playing about.

“Yes—there’s a baby,” replied Linton, while Charlotte smiled and blushed.

“Then let me see the baby,” I exclaimed: and then Mrs. Linton hastened with a mother’s pride to fulfil my request.

The nurse-maid was summoned—the baby was exhibited—and a very fine one it was. I remained until close upon seven o’clock with the happy couple; and on taking leave of them, I requested Linton to give me a few of his cards. Three or four days afterwards I sent him an order for a considerable quantity of wine, with an intimation that my butler had received instructions to deal entirely with him thenceforth. I despatched one of the cards to Sir Matthew Heseltine, with a note explaining wherefore I was interested in Charles Linton; and the worthy Baronet likewise sent a large order. As I shall not again have reason to mention the Lintons in my narrative, I will here observe that they continue to enjoy a great and still increasing prosperity—that wealth is pouring in upon them—but that the possession of riches in no way changes the excellence of their hearts; and that their marriage has proved one of the happiest of all the matrimonial alliances that have ever come within the range of my knowledge.

Weeks and months passed on: November arrived—and it was now a year since the death of my father. The time for my own nuptials had come; and these were to be celebrated at Heseltine Hall. My mother accompanied me into Westmoreland,—as did also Mr. and Mrs. Howard of Delmar Manor, and two of my cousins—the Hon. Misses Mulgrave. These young ladies were to act as bridesmaids to Annabel: but there were

likewise to be two others—young ladies belonging to the first families in Westmoreland. The reader perhaps will not expect that I shall enter into many details relative to the wedding: but yet his curiosity may be gratified by the assurance that all the arrangements at Heseltine Hall were of the most splendid description. And on the bridal morning, what happiness filled my heart! It is true that I had not very many years to look back upon: but still, in flinging my retrospective glance through the vista of those past periods of my yet youthful life, I could not help thinking that heaven was indeed now blessing me and rewarding me most munificently for whatsoever suffering and calamities I had endured. And Annabel—how exquisitely beautiful did she appear in her bridal dress! She was a being of whom any mother might be proud; and it was with a natural and laudable pride that Mrs. Bentinck surveyed her lovely daughter;—and there were smiles upon Mrs. Bentinck's lips and tears in her eyes, as she accompanied that beloved, loving, and lovely offspring to the altar. Sir Matthew Heseltine had bestowed a splendid dower upon his grandchild; and he himself appeared supremely proud of the young and beautiful relative whom he was bestowing upon me. And again, I say, that if there had ever been a moment when I rejoiced more than at another in my patrician rank, it was at the instant when the ceremony being over, I imprinted the bridal kiss upon Annabel's cheek and hailed her as the Countess of Eccleston.

## CHAPTER CLVIII.

### VISITS.

Two years elapsed after my marriage with Annabel—two years of happiness that would have been as utterly unalloyed as the purest gold, were it not that the conviction grew painfully stronger and stronger in my mind that my mother's health was declining and that she had not long to live. She dwelt with us altogether—either at Eccleston House in London, or at the beautiful country seat which we possessed in Hampshire; and she had likewise accompanied us on the occasion of two or three visits which we paid to Sir Matthew Heseltine and Mrs. Bentinck in Westmoreland. She loved Annabel as dearly as if she were a daughter; and my sweet, my beautiful Countess loved her equally in return. My mother did her best to conceal the ravages which illness was working within her: but I observed them—Annabel likewise perceived them; and this was the only circumstance which threw the slightest shade upon those first two years of our wedded life. A son blest our union; and the heir to my title and estates was only a few months old, when the blow at length struck the grandmother to whom the child was as much endeared as to its own parents.

The Dowager Countess of Eccleston lay upon her death-bed: Annabel and myself were there—Mr. and Mrs. Howard likewise. But, thank heaven, the last moments of my mother were serene: she had fully made her peace with the world: she had lived long enough to witness the prosperity and happiness of that son whom for

years she had ignored, but by whom she had been so sincerely and unfeignedly forgiven. With her parting words she blessed us all; and it was without pain—without physical agony at the last, that dissolving nature yielded up the spirit which had animated it.

After the funeral, Annabel and I proceeded with our beloved child to pass a few months in seclusion at Heseltine Hall. Grief becomes mellowed down into pious resignation; and so it was with us. In our own love there was a soothing balm—a solace ineffable: and Oh! I am proud to place it upon record that every amiable quality which I had for years known in Annabel as the virgin whom I had courted, was fully developed in the endearments which were shed upon me by that same Annabel as the wife whom I had wedded.

When many months had passed after my mother's death, we received an invitation to spend a few weeks at Inch Methglin. This invitation from the Chief included Sir Matthew and Mrs. Bentinck: but the worthy old Baronet was becoming too infirm to travel—and his devoted daughter would not leave him. Annabel and I accordingly proceeded to Inch Methglin,—taking our child with us, and accompanied by several domestics. Some years had elapsed since I last beheld that picturesque portion of Scottish scenery; and the reader will recollect under what circumstances I had left it. It was when in the night-time accomplishing the escape and flight of Emmeline that she might become the bride of Sir Alexander Carrondale.

It was at about four o'clock on a beautiful afternoon of a Spring day, that the travelling-carriage in which we travelled with our suite, brought us within view of the picturesque little village of Methglin. What emotions swelled within me as I caught the first glimpse of the spire of the rural church; and as I took my Annabel's hand and pressed it to my lips, I could not help saying to her, "Little thought I when I last beheld yon spire, that the next time my eyes rested upon it I should be so happy as I now am!"

Annabel was well acquainted with all the incidents that had attended the wooing and the marriage of Sir Alexander Carrondale; and as we approached the shore of the loch, I said to her, "You will now see the very spot where Sir Alexander—after having been known in the neighbourhood only as a humble tutor—alighted from his carriage amidst the cheers of the villagers and the Chief's assembled tenantry. Ah! from this point we ought to behold that spot."

We looked forth from the carriage-windows; and Annabel said to me, "There is a crowd assembled in that place now!"

And there was so: and as the carriages rolled up to the vicinage of the jetty on the bank of the loch, I was received with precisely the same ovation which had greeted Sir Alexander Carrondale on the memorable day to which I had been referring. And who was there to greet us but Sir Alexander himself, accompanied by Lennox? Warm and cordial were those greetings which we received; and a beautiful Scotch lady came forward to receive our little Joseph from the attendant nurse. This lady was Lennox Vennachar's wife; and a most amiable person she proved to be.

Amidst the cheers of the Chief's assembled tenantry we entered the state-barge; and as Sir Alexander Carrondale took his seat by my side, he whispered, "You know, my dear Eccleston, how the Chief clings to all ancient usages and customs; and therefore you must not think it discourteous that he has not come across the lake to welcome you in person. It is a traditional custom for him to receive his visitors on his own ancestral territory—the Inch itself. And there he stands on the opposite pier, with my Emmeline leaning on his arm, and with friends in attendance whom you will be glad to meet!"

Ah! how many memories of the past did everything I now beheld conjure up,—memories of that period when I was a menial at the mansion to which I was now proceeding as an honoured guest,—memories of the time when I used to wonder whether, as I thought of Annabel, I should ever become her happy husband! And I could not help saying to myself, "It was good that all the earlier part of my life should have been spent in obscurity, in order that I might bear my present rank without undue pride or vain-glory! It was good also that I should have known so much suffering, as it has enabled me all the better to appreciate so much subsequent happiness and prosperity!"

We landed at the pier belonging to the Inch; and most cordial was the welcome we received from the Chief who was stationed there to receive us. Lady Carrondale, looking as handsome as ever, embraced my beautiful Countess with a true sisterly affection. Then two fine handsome youths pressed forward to greet me and be introduced to my Countess;—these were Ivor and Lochiel, the Chief's sons who had thus grown up. Ivor was the one whom I had been fortunate enough to save from drowning on the day when the accident occurred to the boat at the jetty of the Inch; and the noble-minded youth failed not now to mention it in most grateful terms. There was Dominie Clackmannan—there was Mr. Saltcoats in a complete new suit of grey—and there was Mr. Duncansby, who was overjoyed to see me. The excellent writer to the Signet was but little changed since last I had seen him: he had the same round, red, good-natured face that had first prepossessed me in his favour: and if there were any alteration at all in his personal appearance, it was that he wore a wig of a somewhat lighter brown and with somewhat more youthful curls than that which he had been wont to sport.

"I came to Inch Methglin on purpose to see you, my dear Lord Eccleston," said Mr. Duncansby, as he presently drew me aside. "You and I will seize an opportunity to talk over all the past: for it is pleasant to discuss such things when one's present position enables one to look back with a smile upon all bygone adventures. Your lordship has not been to Inch Methglin since you helped the fair Emmeline to elope? No, never? Well, you see it is not a bit altered—everything is precisely the same——"

"And even the Chief himself," I added, "does not appear to have grown any older."

"God bless you, my dear Earl!" exclaimed Duncansby. "Older? Why, I do believe he considers himself younger! There are to be such festivities—and all in honour of yourself and your beautiful Countess; and I'll be bound the Chief

will open the ball with her to-night. 'Pon my soul, your lordship is a lucky mau! Lady Carrondale is eminently handsome—Mrs. Lennox Venachar is also very beautiful—and there is a pretty sprinkling of young ladies, all relations of the Chief, who are grouped yonder. But not one of them can compare with the Countess of Eccleston!"

"It's just that," said the Dominie, who came rolling up to us at the moment, taking three pinches of snuff consecutively: "but now that you are here, my lord, I hope you will use your influence with the Chief to have that bridge built across the loch. Yes, I must mean across the loch—and not over the garden. I have already been telling him about it——"

"And you nearly put the Chief into a passion at breakfast-time," said Mr. Duncansby with a smile, "by going on about that bridge."

"It's just that," said the Dominie. "And now that Baillie Owlhead—I mean the Laird of Tinto-squashdale—no, I mean the Earl of Eccleston has come to revisit the place, he must set the Chief to work at once about that bridge——"

"All in good time, my dear Mr. Clackmannan," I answered: "but for heaven's sake leave the bridge alone for the present. And pray tell me, where is Mrs. Clackmannan? and how is she?"

"It's just that," answered the Dominie. "The Widow Glenbucket—I mean Mrs. Clackmannan would not on any account leave Edinburgh. I don't think any one had tied her fast to the bed-post, or walled her up in her room—because she saw me safe into the post-chaise along with Saltcoats—and she told us to recollect that there was a cold meat pie and plenty of bottled ale under the seat. But it's just this,—that she's wedded to her present abode and wouldn't leave it. And this reminds me of what I one day said to my friend Baillie Owlhead of the Gallowgate——"

"Nonsense, Dominie!" vociferated Saltcoats, who joined us at the moment. "Come and see the Earl's beautiful little boy, the young Lord Mulgrave."

"It's just that," answered the Dominie. "I paid my respects to the rosy-cheeked rogue just now, and offered him——let me see, what did I offer him? It must have been a pinch of snuff."

The whole party now began moving up towards the mansion,—where, in front of the principal entrance, the Chief's full-plumed piper was stalking to and fro. As we drew near, he sent forth a shrill scream from his Highland music; and however barbaric the sounds, they nevertheless conveyed a welcome to Inch Methglin. In the evening there was a sumptuous banquet served up in the old baronial hall, to which I have alluded in a former portion of my narrative, and the walls of which were decorated with banners, weapons, antlers, and numerous other memorials of warfare and of the chase. Guests from the entire neighbourhood for miles around, had been invited to this festival; and without any figure of speech it may be said that the board groaned beneath the sumptuous display of plate and the good cheer that was crowded upon the table. Afterwards there was a ball in the State drawing-rooms; and the festivities were kept up to a late hour.

On the following morning I took Annabel for a ramble before breakfast through those grounds

every inch of which was so well known to me; and I indicated to her different spots which were connected with the salient occurrences of the time that I was attached as a menial to the Chief's household. It was, as Mr. Duncansby had said, a pleasure to reflect upon all those incidents in which, humble though I was at the time, I had borne no inconsiderable part; and my amiable Countess was deeply interested in everything that I told her.

Presently we were joined by the youthful Ivor; and addressing Annabel, he said, "Your ladyship must know that to the Earl I am indebted for my life. This was the spot where he brought me ashore—Ah! how often and often have I thought and spoken of it since!"

It was thus that the grateful youth expressed himself with a degree of fervid emotion which brought tears into Annabel's eyes; and I should observe that throughout the period of six weeks which we spent at Inch Methglin, no one was more delighted to play with our little boy (then upwards of a year old)—none more rejoiced to fondle and caress him, than Ivor Vennachar. And throughout that period all the hospitalities of Inch Methglin were displayed in a princely style. There was a constant change and succession of guests invited to meet us—there were banquets and balls, riding parties and boating parties—expeditions to the most picturesque or remarkable spots within a range of twenty miles—entertainments given to the Chief's tenantry, that they might have holidays to celebrate our presence at the mansion;—in a word, the Chief provided an endless variety of recreations and amusements to make the time pass as happily and cheerfully as possible.

When we took leave of this hospitable abode, it was for the purpose of passing a similar period at Carrondale Castle, at the earnest desire of Sir Alexander and his amiable wife. Thither we were accompanied by Mr. Duncansby, Mr. Saltcoats, and Dominic Clackmannan; and there we were entertained with a hospitality as perfect as that which we had experienced at Inch Methglin,—though perhaps a little more devoid of antiquated usages, and a little more characterized by the elegant refinements of the present age. The six weeks of this visit passed away happily enough; and from Scotland we returned into Westmoreland. I had received numerous letters from my friends on the Continent, inviting me to visit them; and we resolved upon a tour for this purpose. We accordingly set off, with only a limited number of attendants, in order that we might be as little as possible hampered with ceremonies; and we first of all proceeded to Paris. There I pointed out to Anabel the mansion where the frightful Paulin tragedy had taken place; and where the window of the room itself had been blocked up. From Paris we journeyed to Marseilles; and thence we passed over into Corsica.

Upwards of four years had now elapsed since those occurrences which related to the Count of Monte d'Oro; and his ancestral castle was now completely rebuilt: that is to say, an edifice in a more modern style had been erected upon its site. Money had been freely lavished to accelerate the progress of the structure; and hence the rapidity with which it was brought to a completion. The

Count and Countess of Monte d'Oro, with the two children that had blessed their union—together with Signor Portici, and a numerous retinue of domestics—had removed into their new mansion a few weeks before our arrival. The castellated edifice had an appearance that was exceedingly picturesque, and would have been imposing likewise, were it not for the evident newness of the masonry. It was sumptuously furnished, chiefly in the style of Louis the Fourteenth; and the grounds were beautifully laid out. I need hardly say that we were received with the most cordial welcome, and that during our sojourn of several weeks we were entertained in the most hospitable manner. The young page had married the Ajaccio lady, and had proceeded with her to his native Greece on a visit to that country: so that we did not on this occasion see him. We repaired to the ruins of the Monastery of St. Bartholomew, which were totally unchanged since I was last amongst them: but all the surrounding district, which once constituted the Patrimony, and was now incorporated with the domain of Monte d'Oro, was being rapidly brought into cultivation under the auspices of the Count. We visited likewise the farm-house where myself and my two Greek companions had experienced so hospitable a reception after our shipwreck; and we found that the family was more prosperous than ever, thanks to the Count of Monte d'Oro's bounty.

From Corsica we proceeded to Florence: to pass a few weeks with the Count and Countess of Livorno. We were frequent guests at the table of the Grand Duke of Tuscany; and my beautiful Annabel was the star of universal admiration in the Florentine capital—as I am proud to say she was whithersoever we went. The reader will recollect that Italian gentleman who on the day of the grand reception at the ducal palace, was so enthusiastic in his praises of Annabel's beauty, and who subsequently gave me the information of the capture of Annabel and her relatives by Marco Uberti's band in the Apennines. This gentleman I met: and making myself known, informed him that the very lady whom he had so much admired, had since become my wife. He dined with us; and I then mentioned how greatly he had served us at the time by giving me that information to which I have just alluded.

I have now to speak of Dorchester. True to the promise made to him in the gaol at Florence, the Count of Livorno exerted his influence at the time to procure his removal to an asylum for the insane. It required an income of three hundred a year (speaking in English money) to maintain him in that place; and this was at first paid by the Count. But very shortly after my accession to the title and estates of Eccleston, I had made a provision for the regular payment of the quarterly stipends; as I could not possibly allow the Count to disburse his own money on behalf of an individual for whom he himself entertained no personal sympathy, and to whom he lay under no obligation. Dorchester was still living; and I visited him at the asylum, which was about twelve miles from Florence. I found him in a miserable state of feebleness and decrepitude, and with health so shattered that he evidently had not long to live. He nevertheless retained full possession of his intellects: he was penitent for his past misdeeds: he

had no desire for any farther liberty than that which he enjoyed in the spacious gardens attached to the asylum; and if an offer had been made for him to remove elsewhere, he would have rejected it. The Count of Livorno had acquainted him at the time with my change of position, my acknowledgment by my parents, and my accession to my rights: he knew also of Lanover's death and the circumstances in which he had perished. He was overwhelmed with his feelings on beholding me: it was with a visible sincerity that he proffered his congratulations on the turn that circumstances had taken in my favour; and he expressed his heartfelt gratitude for my bounty in making the allowance which maintained him at the asylum. I never saw him afterwards:—within the year he died, and was buried in some adjacent cemetery. There, in a nameless grave, he reposes; and let it be hoped that the penitence of his latter days was sincere enough to obtain heaven's mercy for the misdeeds of a long and ill-spent life.

From Florence we journeyed to Rome, to pass a few weeks with the Count and Countess of Avellino. Cardinal Gravina had died about two years back, and left all his vast property to his god-daughter Antonia; so that she and her husband were now immensely rich. During our stay in Rome, we were frequent guests at the Count of Tivoli's palace: the Viscount had married—and his conduct was in every way calculated to afford his relatives and friends the utmost satisfaction. After an absence of about six months, we returned to England, to settle down for the present at Eccleston House.

Three or four years passed away without any incident worthy of note—unless it be that during this interval Annabel presented me with another son. The next occurrence which I have to mention is the death of Sir Matthew Heseltine. The intelligence of his extreme danger was one day conveyed to us very suddenly by means of a telegraphic message. He had caught a severe cold, which led to inflammation internally; and in a few short hours his life was considered to be in the utmost peril. On receiving this message, Annabel and I at once set off for Westmoreland by special train; and we arrived at Heseltine Hall just in time to receive the old man's dying benediction. He was perfectly sensible up to the last; and it was in his daughter's arms that he expired. When the funeral was over and his will was opened, it was found that he had left his daughter (Mrs. Bentinck) the Hall and estate for her lifetime, with a provision that at her decease the property was to devolve upon us. To Mr. and Mrs. Leslie—better known to the reader under their long assumed name of Foley—the worthy Baronet had bequeathed the sum of ten thousand pounds; for their conduct since they emigrated to a foreign clime, had been such as was calculated to afford the utmost satisfaction to all who were interested in them. To Annabel and myself Sir Matthew Heseltine left the sum of fifty thousand pounds in ready money, besides, as I have already said, the reversion of the Westmoreland domain. But all these handsome bequests could not compensate for the loss of him who beneath so many eccentricities had concealed the faculty for so much real goodness; and deeply did we deplore his loss. Mrs. Bentinck did not feel

disposed to dwell at the Hall by herself; and earnestly as well as cheerfully did I second Annabel's entreaty that she would thenceforth abide altogether with us. To this she assented. She lives with us still; and the goodness of her disposition throws an additional halo round a hearth where all the elements of earthly happiness are united to an extent which it seldom falls to the lot of mortals to experience.

## CHAPTER CLIX.

### THE INN.

THE incident which I am now about to relate, occurred some twelve or fifteen months after the death of Sir Matthew Heseltine. I must preface it by a few words of explanation. The law of primogeniture, as the reader is aware, will give my title as well as the hereditary portion of my estates to my eldest son, Lord Mulgrave. I have now three children,—the two eldest being sons, the youngest a daughter. My revenues from various sources are very large; and although we live in a manner befitting our position, we do not expend more than two-thirds of our income. The remaining third is devoted to the purpose of making a provision for our two younger children; so that the boy, on growing up, may not be compelled to accept the degraded position of a State-pauper, foisted, like too many scions of the aristocracy, upon the taxes produced by the hard industry of the toiling millions. Neither in respect to our daughter—whose Christian name is Annabella—could Annabel and myself endure the idea that when she grows up to a marriageable state, pecuniary considerations should enter into the mode in which she may be matrimonially settled. We seek to give her a fortune which may place her in complete independence of such base speculations, and leave her richly provided for should anything prematurely occur to ourselves. There will be the Westmoreland estate which we shall be enabled to dispose of, and which is of course unhampered by the trammels affixed by the law of primogeniture to my hereditary domains: but in addition to that splendid reversionary property, we apportion, as I have already said, one-third of our large income to make an adequate provision for our younger children.

An immense sum of ready money had thus accumulated at the time when the incident occurred which I am now about to relate. I had heard of a splendid estate to be sold in the neighbourhood of a town in a Midland County; and I resolved to inspect it, with a view to its purchase if it suited. Attended by only a valet, I proceeded by railway to the town which was nearest to the estate; and arriving there at about five o'clock in the evening, I took up my quarters at the principal hotel, with the idea of visiting the property on the following morning. The hotel to which I allude, was by no means a first-rate one—but still very comfortable; and it was patronised by the commercial travellers visiting that town. A fair was being holden in the town at the time: the hotel was full; and on first inquiring for a private sitting-room, I was informed that I could





not have it. My valet stepped forward, announcing who I was; and then the landlady, full of confusion and of apologies, expressed her conviction that the family occupying the principal sitting-room would cheerfully give it up for the Earl of Eccleston. I positively declared that I would have nobody disturbed on my account: the landlady entreated and implored—but I remained firm, alleging moreover that it was not probable I should remain at the hotel for more than a single night. I therefore ordered my valet to see that dinner was presently served up to me in the commercial room; and I proceeded to inspect my bed-chamber. It was on the second storey, at the back of the house, and had the stable yard under the window.

"Your lordship can never sleep here!" said my valet, who had attended me with the carpet-bag: and he looked round the room with indescribable disgust.

"It will do very well," I answered: "it is only for a single night—and besides, I am not fastidious. The place is small and homely, it is true: but still everything has an air of perfect cleanliness. Put out my things from the bag; and go and see about my dinner, as I have already ordered you."

William did as I commanded; and when I had performed my ablutions, I repaired to the commercial room. Two individuals were seated at the centre table, each drinking brandy-and-water. One immediately started up and made me a most profound bow: for it appeared that the waiter had already officiously informed every one in the house who I was. The person who thus rose and saluted me, was Mr. Henley, that commercial traveller whom, as the reader will recollect, I had first encountered at Bagshot when on my way to the Shacklefords at Heather Place. It was this same Mr. Henley, too, who had wounded Foley—or rather Leslie—when so iniquitously performing

the part of a highwayman. Nor less did I remember how mercifully Mr. Henley had dealt in respect to that individual when his trial came on at the Reading Assizes. I therefore took him by the hand,—saying, “You and I, Mr. Henley, are old acquaintances.”

The commercial traveller was evidently much pleased by my demeanour towards him; and we conversed together on the leading topics of the day. The other person who was seated at the table, presently joined in the discourse; and I now noticed that he was a repulsive-looking old man, with a very sinister cast in one of his eyes. Presently I heard Mr. Henley address him by the name of Mr. Dobbins; and almost immediately afterwards they spoke of Exeter. I thus acquired the certainty that this repulsive-looking old man, with the ominous cast in the eye, could be none other than that haberdasher at Exeter at whose door I had encountered my Annabel at the time I was about to enter the service of the Tivertons at Myrtle Lodge. It was likewise to this Dobbins that Lanover had endeavoured to dispose of Annabel in marriage; and as the ill-looking old man had certainly entered into the negotiation at the time, though he subsequently broke it off—as I have already explained to the reader—I could not help conceiving a certain degree of aversion towards him. There was something loathsome in the idea that such a man should ever have even dreamt of sacrificing to his passion so bright and beautiful a creature as my Annabel.

My dinner was presently served up at one of the side-tables; Mr. Dobbins went out—to see a friend, I think I heard him say; Mr. Henley remained sipping his brandy-and-water; and we continued to discourse. Presently the door opened somewhat violently; and a man burst in, exclaiming, “Hang me if I don’t make these railway people suffer for this!”

“What! have you not yet succeeded in obtaining your luggage, sir?” asked Mr. Henley: and I observed that he made a quick sign for the new-comer to avoid creating such a disturbance by slamming the door and talking so vociferously.

“Obtained it? No!” ejaculated the individual. “A trunk, a carpet-bag, and a band-box—all with my name upon it—sent right on, no doubt to Leeds or York—or to the devil knows where! But I’ll make ’em smart for it—hang me if I don’t!”

“It’s no use putting yourself in a passion, sir,” said Mr. Henley in a tone of remonstrance. “The same accident has on two or three occasions occurred to myself—always through my own carelessness, I am bound to admit: but my luggage has never been lost—it has always been sent back in the long run.”

“Well, that’s a consolation, at any rate!” said the individual: and he proceeded to ring the bell. “Glass of hot brandy-and-water,” he said, when the waiter made his appearance. “And I say, let the porter go down to the station for the ten o’clock up-train—because it’s quite possible my luggage may come by it: it has been telegraphed for—Or stop! all things considered, I will run down myself at ten o’clock. There’s nothing like looking after one’s own business,” he added, turning towards Mr. Henley.

The waiter disappeared to fetch the brandy-

and-water; and in the meantime I had begun to survey the new-comer with an increasing attention. He was tall and somewhat inclined to thinness: his complexion was sallow—but he had a very red nose, evidently from the effects of drinking. His whiskers and beard were all shaved clean off: but he had a bountiful crop of hair upon his head; and this was of a deep black—but of that peculiar hue, inky and dull, which excited the suspicion that it was dyed. He had lost all the front teeth from his upper jaw: and his lip consequently falling in, gave him a marvellously ugly profile. His eyebrows were very dark and shaggy: methought that they were dyed likewise: or at all events if his hair were, I was convinced that his brows must be also. His looks were far from being prepossessing; and there was something singular in them—for he had no eyelashes—not a single lash to either the upper or the lower lids: so that I conjectured they must have fallen out through disease. My opinion that he had weak eyes appeared to be very speedily confirmed; as he had not been many minutes in the room—where the gas was now lighted—before he drew forth a pair of spectacles with blue glasses, which he wiped and put on. As for his age, it was by no means easy to conceive: he might be forty, or fifty, or even sixty—for the loss of his teeth and the almost certainty which I entertained that his hair was dyed, admitted the belief that he might even be as old as the last-mentioned period. As for his apparel, he was tolerably well-dressed—certainly with no show nor pretension on the one hand, nor with shabbiness on the other. Yet there was something about this person which I did not altogether like; and there was the vague and dim idea in my brain that it was not the first time I had met him: but for the life of me I could not recollect where we had met before, even if I could make up my mind that we really had so encountered each other.

I continued my dinner: and as I happened to turn round to say something to Mr. Henley, I perceived that the waiter was whispering a few hasty words in the ear of the person to whom he was now supplying the brandy-and-water. I guessed what the waiter was saying to him: he was telling him who I was; for immediately after he moved away, Mr. Smithson—as I presently heard him called—surveyed me with attention through his blue glasses. He did not however speak any more for some little while; and then it was in a very low and deferential tone. In about half-an-hour he quitted the room—muttering something about his luggage—but what it was I did not hear.

“Who is that person?” I asked of Mr. Henley.

“I don’t know, my lord,” was the commercial traveller’s response. “He arrived at the hotel yesterday afternoon, and was in a towering rage about his luggage. His name is Smithson: but I don’t think he is a bagman, for he does not converse upon those matters which are familiar to commercial rooms; and he has done nothing but lounge about the town all day. I rather think, from something he said, he expected to meet a friend at this hotel, but that he has been disappointed. His manners are not over-polished; and now and then he lets drop some queer expressions from his lips: but still he rattled on in a good-humoured

way when dining with four or five of us at this table a couple of hours back—and he drank his wine pretty liberally.”

I recollected no one of the name of Smithson; and therefore I fancied that I must be mistaken in my idea that I had met this individual before. Mr. Henley had said nothing against him; and I now felt vexed with myself that I should have been prejudiced by whatsoever was unprepossessing in Mr. Smithson's looks: for at first I had certainly liked him as little as could be. Mr. Henley now took an opportunity to express his regret that I should find such poor accommodations as the commercial room: but on the other hand he intimated that for his own sake he ought to feel rejoiced at the circumstance, inasmuch as it had thrown us together. I assured him that I was very glad to meet him again; and I gave him to understand that the Mr. Leslie, or Foley, in whom he had interested himself a few years back, was now a thriving and even wealthy man in another part of the world.

In the midst of our discourse, Mr. Smithson returned; Mr. Dobbins soon afterwards reappeared: and two other commercial travellers came lounging in. A most respectful appeal was made to me as to whether I objected to tobacco-smoke; and I assured the company that though I very rarely smoked myself I had not the slightest objection to it. The bell was accordingly rung: orders for spirits and cigars were given to the waiter; and I sat slowly sipping my glass of claret, while occasionally conversing with Henley, or listening to the discourse which was going on amongst the rest. At about a quarter to ten Smithson again went out, muttering something about his luggage; and at a quarter past ten he returned, complaining bitterly of the negligence of the railway officials in prolonging the delay with respect to the restoration of his missing property. Mr. Henley good-naturedly offered to accommodate him with the use of any articles his own portmanteau might afford: but Smithson said, “Oh! as for a clean shirt and those sort of things, I've just been out to buy them. But it's the annoyance of being kept without one's traps—And then too, if a certain friend of mine whom I expect to meet here, happens to come late to-night, he will want me to start with him in the morning for another place.”

“It is one of those inconveniences,” said Mr. Henley, sipping his brandy-and-water and smoking his cigar with the most philosophical coolness, “which will happen to persons in life—but which are scarcely worth any extraordinary degree of passion or impatience. What do you think, my lord?”

“I am inclined to be of your opinion,” I responded.

“Well, since his lordship says so,” observed Mr. Smithson, now throwing himself upon a seat in a corner with an air of fatigue, “I will complain no more about it. I dare say it will be as right as a trivet in the long run.”

Mr. Henley glanced at me as this vulgarism issued from Smithson's lips: but the latter remained comparatively silent for the next hour, during which we all sat together in the commercial room. The conversation presently turned on a very severe accident which had happened to a poor working man in the town, and in consequence of

which his life was despaired of. It appeared that he had a wife and large family totally dependent upon him—and that they were now reduced to a state of destitution. The circumstance was mentioned by a merchant of the place who came into the commercial room to speak on business to Mr. Henley; and we were informed that the inhabitants were getting up a subscription for the relief of the poor family. Henley proposed to start a subscription in the commercial room for the aid of the general fund: and he commenced it by laying down a sovereign. I begged to be permitted to contribute five guineas; and on a reference to my purse, I found that I had not a sufficiency for the purpose. I therefore took out my pocket-book, in which I had a considerable quantity of bank-notes; and I paid my subscription accordingly. The other commercial travellers followed Mr. Henley's example with the utmost readiness, and to the same amount which he himself had contributed. Mr. Dobbins muttered something about the badness of trade and the hardness of times; and with much evident reluctance drew forth five shillings—a miserable contribution for a man who was exceedingly well off.

“Here's my half-guinea!” exclaimed Smithson, starting up from his corner, and depositing the money upon the table: “I would cheerfully give more—but I left my pocket-book containing a quantity of notes, in the trunk that is strayed or lost. However, if I get my things to-morrow, I'll come down a deuced deal handsomer than this.”

The merchant took charge of the subscriptions; and when this little affair was finished, Mr. Smithson, bidding us all “good night,” left the room.

“Well, he is not a bad-hearted fellow, with all his peculiarities,” said Mr. Henley. “He gave what he could afford; and that is more than some people do,” he added, with a glance at the Exeter haberdasher.

A few minutes afterwards I rose and bade the company “good night”—it being now past eleven o'clock. I had rung for my chamber candle; and on the landing I found my valet waiting for me.

“This way, my lord,” said William, conducting me towards a passage branching off from that landing, instead of leading up the next staircase towards the room originally assigned to me.

“My chamber is not in that direction,” I said.

“I beg your lordship's pardon,” replied William: “but I represented to the landlady that it was impossible for your lordship to sleep in that hole of a chamber upstairs. She accordingly succeeded in making some change with one of the gentlemen staying in the house; and the result is that your lordship has now a chamber fit for your reception.”

“I am sorry you should have done this, William,” I answered, “because I positively assured you that I would have no one disturbed or put to an inconvenience on my account.”

“The landlady declared, my lord, that she could manage the matter with the greatest ease—and she has done so.”

I said no more; for I knew that my valet had been inspired only by the very best intentions. He conducted me to the chamber which he had thus succeeded in obtaining for me; and its aspect certainly promised a very great improvement on the one originally allotted for my reception. I

speedily dismissed William for the night—and got to bed. I did not know how long I had slept, when I awoke under an oppressive influence as if I was suddenly passing out from the maze of an unpleasant dream—though of what nature it had been I had not the slightest recollection. There was no light in my room; and it was pitch dark. I could not therefore consult my watch: but I lay awake for some while, and heard the church-clock proclaim the hour of one. I therefore found that I had not slept very long before I was thus awakened. There was certainly a feeling of vague uneasiness in my mind—a something for which I could not possibly account. I had nothing to make me unhappy nor to affect my spirits; and therefore I could form no other conjecture than that which I have already placed upon record—namely, that I had awakened suddenly from some troubled dream. Methought that I heard the sounds of light footsteps in some part of the house overhead: but in an hotel where people retired at all hours of the night, I attached no importance to that circumstance. Sleep gradually stole upon me once more; and I slumbered tranquilly on until eight o'clock in the morning—when my valet called me, according to instructions given him on the preceding night.

My toilet being accomplished, I proceeded to the commercial room, where I found Mr. Henley and Mr. Smithson seated together at breakfast. I bade them “good-morning;” and my own repast was speedily served up. Scarcely however had I commenced it, when unusual sounds reached our ears—cries of alarm, ejaculations which seemed full of horror, and the hasty running up and down of footsteps. Then a waiter burst into the commercial room, giving vent to exclamations, which, though very wild and incoherent, nevertheless made us aware that something dreadful had taken place. The appalling truth was soon made known:—Mr. Dobbins, the Exeter haberdasher, had been murdered during the night!

It may be easily supposed that every one in the hotel was painfully excited by this discovery—and all the more so, inasmuch as the deed appeared to be enveloped in a dark mystery. The local police authorities were speedily on the spot; and I will now proceed to describe those particulars which first transpired.

It appeared that my valet William had represented to the landlady how impossible it was for me to inhabit what he termed the dog-hole of a chamber which was originally assigned to me. She was at first completely at a loss how to make better arrangements—her house being full and her means of accommodation limited. She however bethought herself of mentioning the circumstance to Mr. Dobbins, who was in possession of the best bedroom in the house. She was anxious to show me every attention, even though at some pecuniary loss to herself; and knowing that Mr. Dobbins' weak point was his griping meanness in money-matters, she hinted that if he would surrender up his chamber to me she would charge him nothing for his own lodging as long as he might remain at the hotel. The old man snapped at the proposal: his chamber was given up to me; and he himself took possession of the one which it was originally intended I should occupy. I ought to observe that this ar-

range ment was effected when the unfortunate Dobbins entered for the night at about nine o'clock. It further appeared that he had ordered himself to be called a little before nine in the morning. Accordingly, at the specified time, the chambermaid took up his hot water and knocked at the door. Receiving no answer, she knocked again and again, each time louder and louder. Still there was no response: the girl grew afraid; and descending, mentioned the circumstance to the waiter. At that moment the postman came in; and amongst the letters which he delivered, was one for Mr. Dobbins. Availing himself of this excuse, the waiter ascended to the chamber, with the letter in his hand; and opening the door, he entered. On approaching the bed a hideous spectacle presented itself: the sheets were deluged with blood—the unfortunate man lay with his throat cut literally from ear to ear! The waiter raised an alarm; and hence the ejaculations and the hasty tread of footsteps which had reached the ears of Henley, Smithson, and myself in the commercial room.

At first however we could glean but few coherent particulars in respect to the tragedy. I myself was stricken speechless with horror: Smithson broke out in ejaculations expressive of a kindred feeling: Mr. Henley at once recommended that nothing in the room should be touched or in any way disturbed until the local police-officers made their appearance. These functionaries were soon upon the spot; and an investigation of the scene of the tragedy took place. Henley, Smithson, and several other persons staying in the house, accompanied the officers to the chamber of the murdered man: but I had no morbid curiosity for encountering so ghastly a spectacle. It appeared that nothing was found to have been disturbed in the chamber: there was no evidence of the luggage of the deceased having been ransacked, nor that any struggle had taken place between himself and his assassin. That he had committed suicide, was not for a moment to be thought of—for two distinct reasons. In the first place the weapon with which the deed was done, was not to be found in the room; and in the second place, the surgeon who was called in, declared it to be impossible that the deceased could have inflicted so deep a wound upon himself. Besides, from the medical report it would appear as if the deceased must have been sleeping on his left side, and that he had turned partially round upon his right at the very instant the assassin-deed was perpetrated. It was consequently supposed that the deceased had been suddenly disturbed by some noise in the room; and that at the very moment he turned round to see what it was, the razor, knife, or whatever the weapon were, must have been drawn across his throat. That the mortal wound was inflicted with a razor, or else with some instrument of equal sharpness and keenness of edge, the surgeon likewise felt convinced. Death must have been instantaneous,—so instantaneous indeed, that though there was evidently an accompanying convulsive movement of the arms, yet the unfortunate victim had not even time to put his hands up to his throat to grasp the weapon which was doing murder's work with such lightning rapidity.

The most careful search was instituted through-

out the room; but no trace could be discovered as to any other proceedings on the part of the assassin. There were no blood-stains anywhere save in respect to the one vast sanguine dye which covered the bed-clothes: there were no proofs that the murderer had wiped his weapon or his hands upon anything in that chamber. Yet that he must have done so before leaving it, was to be inferred from the fact that there was not a mark upon the handle of the door. The clothes of the deceased had not been put out to be brushed, but were lying on a chair just in the same way as they might be supposed to lie after being put off and carelessly thrown there. The purse, containing some seven or eight pounds in gold and silver, was in the breeches'-pocket: a pocket-book was in the breast of the coat; and though it contained no bank notes, yet there was no reason for believing it had been disturbed, as all the papers lay methodically arranged in it without any sign of haste or hurry in their disposal, and with no blood stains either on the book itself or the lapel of the coat. But no one in the hotel appeared enabled to state whether Mr. Dobbins had, or had not, any bank-notes in that pocket-book:—therefore it was inferred that if the pocket-book had been really rifled, the assassin must have done his work with a marvellous degree of composure and presence of mind. The deceased's watch was upon the dressing-table, as well as a gold ring which he was accustomed to wear: but neither of these articles were of any great value. Finally, according to the surgeon's report, the deceased must have been dead several hours: and it was therefore in the middle of the night that the horrible deed was perpetrated.

It will be recollected that when I had retired from the commercial-room to seek my chamber, I had left the deceased with Mr. Henley, the other two commercial travellers, and the merchant who belonged to the town. It now appeared that almost immediately after I thus left, the unfortunate man himself had retired for the night; and that, the merchant taking his leave, Henley and the other travellers had sought their own respective apartments. The front door of the hotel was closed for the night at about twelve o'clock—at which hour the landlady and the domestics repaired to their own rooms. Could the assassin be one of the inmates of the house? or had he stolen in and hidden himself somewhere until he deemed it safe to perpetrate his crime? This latter hypothesis was held not to be altogether impossible, inasmuch as a door in the back part of the premises was found in the morning to be merely closed, and not locked or fastened inside, as it usually was and as it ought to have been. The porter of the hotel positively proclaimed his distinct recollection of having secured that door before he retired to rest. But on the other hand, it was argued that the man might be mistaken as to this fact, though he honestly fancied that he had in reality performed that duty. Still it was possible that the assassin might be a person from the outside, and that having perpetrated his crime, he let himself gently out of the premises by means of the door above referred to, and which communicated with the stable-yard, whence there were easy means of egress by means of a leap over a comparatively low wall. Nevertheless no signs of footsteps of a

suspicious nature affording a clue to such escape, could be discovered; and after the most careful investigation the police-officials gave it as their opinion that the assassin was some one inhabiting the hotel at the time. But on whose head did suspicion alight? On that of no one:—but all was bewilderment and perplexity.

I failed not to mention how I had awakened in the middle of the night and had fancied I had heard footsteps overhead. The chamber of the deceased was on the storey above that where I had slept: but it looked on the back of the house—whereas the windows of mine were in front. The room of the tragedy was not therefore immediately above mine; yet in the midst of the silence of the night it seemed quite probable that the sounds of the assassin's steps might have reached my ears. And there was another thing which was the source of much conjecture with many in the hotel—but of especially painful speculation within my own breast. Was I first of all the intended victim? and had I been saved simply by that change of apartments which the representations of my valet had succeeded in accomplishing? I could not help thinking that such was the case; and I shuddered at the idea of having experienced so narrow an escape.

During the first hour after the discovery of the murder, all was confusion and excitement in the hotel; and a crowd was assembled outside. The Mayor and two local justices-of-the-peace made their appearance, and intimated that every person staying at the hotel was necessarily expected to remain there until the Coroner's Inquest should be holden. This desire was very plainly expressed in reference to all with the exception of myself: but to me it was conveyed in the respectful form of a request. I at once repudiated the idea of having any particular homage paid to my superior condition; and I declared my intention to remain at the hotel so long as there was any necessity for the other guests to tarry there likewise. The Mayor then proceeded to take down the names of the several inmates of the establishment; and this business was transacted in the commercial room. While we were giving our names, addresses, and such other particulars as were required, it was noticed that Mr. Smithson was absent. But scarcely was the fact mentioned, when the waiter stepped forwards and said, "Mr. Smithson has merely gone down to the railway station to identify his luggage which arrived early this morning by the up-train from York. A porter from the station came about a quarter of an hour back to intimate the arrival of the goods."

"But no one ought to have been allowed to leave the hotel in such circumstances," said the Mayor angrily.

"Mr. Smithson consulted me upon the subject, your worship," said the Superintendent of the local police: "but I at once gave him permission to proceed to the station,—merely intimating that for form's sake he must allow one of my officers to accompany him, as I could part with nobody in the hotel until this dreadful business had been thoroughly investigated."

"You acted rightly, Mr. Superintendent," said the Mayor; "and I withdraw the vituperative remark which I just made."

"Here is Mr. Smithson, your worship," said the

waiter, as the individual himself at the instant made his appearance.

"Your name, if you please, sir?" said the Mayor.

"Henry Smithson," was the immediate response.

"Your business, trade, calling, or avocation?" continued the municipal authority.

"Gentleman—living on my means," was the answer.

"Your usual residence, sir?" proceeded the Mayor, putting the same questions which he had addressed to the other individuals staying at the hotel.

"My usual residence? Oh! Stamford Street, London, when I'm at home:"—and Mr. Smithson mentioned the number of a house in that street.

"An inquest will doubtless be held in the evening," said the Mayor: "and I must beg that every one now present will remain at the hotel until it is over. The Earl of Eccleston has already given his assurance of his intention to do so; and no one else can therefore consider it a hardship."

"Hardship? not a bit of it!" exclaimed Mr. Smithson. "It is a duty which I myself should have suggested."

The authorities now withdrew; and I remained in the commercial room, with Henley, Smithson, and some six or seven other male guests who were staying at the hotel.

"I have got my luggage at last," said Smithson, addressing himself to Mr. Henley: "but not, as you have seen, without a great deal of trouble."

"Really, Mr. Smithson," replied the commercial traveller, in a tone of grave rebuke, "the petty affairs of individuals sink into utter insignificance in the presence of this appalling tragedy which has just taken place."

I withdrew to my own chamber to write a letter to Annabel, and acquaint her with what had happened; so that she might not receive the intelligence suddenly by reading it in a newspaper; for I knew perfectly well that she would be much affected on learning that such a terrible incident had occurred beneath the same roof where I myself was staying. As for the authorship of the deed, I was totally unable to record even so much as the faintest suspicion; for it appeared to be wrapped up in a mystery as deep as its own circumstances were in every way stupendously appalling. I need hardly say that I thought no more for the present of the estate which I had come down into this neighbourhood to inspect: for even if I had deemed it consistent with propriety to issue forth from the hotel previous to the inquest, I had not the heart to enter upon any business-matters in the presence of circumstances of so peculiarly fearful a character. I did not even like to discuss them with the other guests at the hotel; and I therefore remained for several hours in my own chamber, until the waiter came to announce that the Coroner had just arrived to hold an inquest.

## CHAPTER CLX.

### THE INQUEST.

I RETURNED to the commercial room,—where I found the principal guests in the hotel assembled; and they were still discussing the horrible event, as they had doubtless been during the hours of my absence. I inquired in a whisper of Henley whether anything new had transpired, or whether any circumstance, however insignificant, had come to light to afford a clue to the detection of the assassin? But he answered that everything continued as unsatisfactorily mysterious as at the outset; and this response corroborated what I had very recently heard from my own valet William. I need hardly say that in the town the event had produced an immense sensation; and ever since the morning the street had been thronged by people eagerly on the alert to catch anything fresh which might transpire, and fraught with a morbid curiosity to gaze up even at the walls which enclosed the place that had proved the scene of so hideous a catastrophe.

In respect to my companions in the commercial room, their demeanour was precisely what might be expected under such circumstances,—grave, solemn, and mournful: their looks were sombre—their discourse was carried on in half-hushed voices, as is the case with men when a weight sits upon their souls. Even Smithson himself was no longer an exception to the rule: for though there appeared to be naturally a certain levity about him, as well as a self-conceited anxiety to make a parade of whatsoever circumstances regarded himself,—yet methought that he now shared in that gloomy despondency—that awful sense of horror, which had taken possession of all the rest.

The coroner had arrived: the jury were empanelled and sworn. The proceedings commenced,—the coffee-room of the hotel being chosen for the seat of the investigation. One after another the witnesses were called in; and depositions were made according to the circumstances which are already known to the reader. Thus the matter progressed; and still not an incident transpired to afford the slightest clue to the elucidation of the mystery. Suspicion fell upon no one: or at least so it appeared to me from what I heard passing around. I myself indeed was utterly without a suspicion: I knew not on what point to concentrate it. To think that any of the guests had perpetrated the crime, appeared to me monstrous—preposterous. The only conjecture I ventured to hazard was to the effect that the assassin must be one of the hotel-domestics: but even here I blamed myself for suffering my ideas upon the subject to narrow themselves into any range where a foul injustice might be done to the character of the innocent.

I was not asked to give any evidence as a witness—for indeed I had nothing to communicate. Mr. Henley was however examined—because he had been three or four days at the hotel, as Dobbins had likewise; and thus the commercial traveller was questioned as to whatsoever knowledge he might possess in respect to the pursuits of the deceased during his brief residence in that town,



Henley declared that he had not seen much of Mr. Dobbins—that for the greater part of each day the deceased had been out, visiting the manufacturers with whom he already dealt, or with whom he wished to open dealings—that he had once or twice seen him consult the contents of his pocket-book—but whether it contained bank notes or not he was utterly ignorant. Furthermore Henley deposed that to the best of his knowledge Dobbins had no persons visiting him at the hotel; and he was positive that on the preceding night, when retiring to rest, the unfortunate man had not dropped the slightest hint of having an appointment with any one for business-purposes at that late hour.

On returning to the commercial room after his examination, Henley acquainted us all with the nature of the questions which had been put to him. I was presently informed that my valet William was to be examined; and I repaired to the coffee-room where the Coroner and jury sat, to hear this examination,—though I was at no loss to conjecture its nature and object. William accordingly presented himself; and he was questioned in respect to the change of rooms which had been brought about on his representations. I really fancied for an instant,—and the idea caused me unspeakable pain,—that my valet's active intervention on my behalf relative to that change, had excited a suspicion against him; and that it might be supposed he had purposely manoeuvred to get the deceased Dobbins assigned to a particular chamber where it would be most easy to perpetrate a crime previously resolved upon. But William gave his answers so frankly, and his evidence was so completely corroborated by the testimony of the landlady,—that if such a suspicion had for an instant existed in the heart of the Coroner, it was completely dispelled. For it was shown that he really did not even know who the individual was that had consented to make the exchange of rooms on my behalf.

The examination of William was over; and the Coroner was about to sum up to the jury, when a man in the dress of a railway porter entered the room, and delivered a note to the presiding functionary. The Coroner opened it; and every one watched his countenance with considerable anxiety and suspense: for it was naturally supposed that every incident which now occurred, bore upon the case. The Coroner perused the note, and then displayed it to the Superintendent of Police, who was present. When this latter functionary had read it, he whispered something to the Coroner, and quitted the room.

"We will suspend the proceedings for a few minutes, if you please, gentlemen," said the Coroner; "and you will perhaps learn the reason presently."

Suspense was now excited to its most feverish point; and every one was doubtless as busy with his conjectures as I was in respect to the turn which was evidently taking place in the proceedings. The Superintendent of Police was absent for about a quarter of an hour; and on his return to the room, he again whispered to the Coroner, as well as to the Mayor, who had just entered. The result of this whispering was that the Superintendent again left the room; and again were we all plunged into a state of the utmost suspense.

This did not however last very long on the present occasion: for at the expiration of a few minutes the Superintendent reappeared, accompanied by Mr. Smithson. I at once perceived that Smithson's countenance was of a deadly pallor; and it was with a sort of sudden galvanic start that I said to myself, "Good heavens! can it be possible that suspicion has fallen in this quarter?"

Still Smithson did not appear to be in custody: the Superintendent had no hold upon him; and for a few moments the most breathless suspense again prevailed. Smithson was directed to proceed to the spot where the former witnesses had stood; and I perceived that he fidgetted a great deal with his handkerchief and had an air of uneasiness. He wore his blue spectacles; and his upper lip, which sank in on account of the loss of his teeth, was quivering—as indeed was his lower one also.

The Coroner asked him his name, his avocation, and his address; and he gave precisely the same answers which he had previously given to the Mayor: but it struck me that he glanced anxiously towards myself—though I could not be sure, as his eyes were concealed by his spectacles. Henley and the other persons who had hitherto remained in the commercial room, had followed the Superintendent and Smithson into the apartment where the investigation was being held; and Henley, coming up to me, asked in a whisper, "Has anything transpired, my lord?"

"Something, evidently," I replied: "but what it is I am at a loss to conjecture."

"The Superintendent came into the commercial room," continued Henley, "and informed Smithson that he must go before the Coroner. Heaven forbid that I should prejudice any one!—but it certainly struck me that Smithson's manner was very peculiar, and that his countenance turned in a way that I shall never forget."

"Hush!" I said, "the proceedings are being renewed!"

"Something has transpired," resumed the Coroner, still addressing himself to Smithson, "which will be immediately placed in evidence, and for which I am justified in seeking explanations."

The railway porter who had brought the note, was now desired to stand forward; and on being sworn, he deposed as follows:—

"That gentleman"—indicating Smithson—"has been several times to the station to inquire about his lost luggage. It was telegraphed for; and some luggage which had gone on to York came back by an up-train early this morning. It consisted of a trunk, a carpet-bag, and a leather hat-box. The label had come off the trunk; and by some accident the cord itself got unfastened. I was lifting the trunk by the cord, when it came completely off: the trunk fell—the lock was broken by the shock—and the lid flew open. I looked to see whether anything inside was damaged,—when I was surprised to see what its contents were. Thinking, however, it was no business of mine—and being afraid of an accusation that I had forced open the box for improper purposes—I immediately corded it up again, and said nothing of the accident to any other person at the station. The gentleman was then fetched from the hotel to identify his luggage. Ever since the morning I have been

thinking on the subject: it made an impression on my mind: I felt uneasy—and at length I went and told the station-master everything that had happened. He at once directed me to come here and give the information: but first of all he wrote down in a book what I communicated—and he sent a copy in a note to the Coroner."

The railway porter stood aside: and the Superintendent of Police then stepped forward.

"In consequence of the information contained in that note," he said, "I have been up-stairs to the room occupied by Mr. Smithson in the hotel; and I have examined his luggage. The trunk contains nothing but rubbish—hay, old rags, and a few logs of wood for the purpose of giving it a certain weight. The carpet-bag contains some very mean and wretched apparel, inserted therein to stuff it out and make a show. The hat-box—which was fastened with a padlock, as was also the carpet-bag—contains nothing."

The evidence of the Superintendent produced a great sensation, and certainly tended to confirm the suspicion which had naturally been floating in my mind from the moment that Smithson was brought into the room. He seemed very much confused—held down his head—and fidgeted more and more with his handkerchief.

"Perhaps," said the Coroner, "you may choose to volunteer some explanation: but you are not compelled to do so. It is however my duty to state that if you speak, whatsoever you say will be taken down to be used as circumstances may direct."

"I have nothing to say," answered Smithson: "I decline giving any explanation."

The Superintendent whispered to a couple of his constables, and immediately quitted the room. The two constables placed themselves near the door; and I therefore felt convinced that Smithson was for the present a prisoner. The Coroner conversed in whispers with the Mayor: the proceedings were again suspended. Twenty minutes thus elapsed—during which Smithson's uneasiness continued despite the visible efforts he made to regain his self-possession. At length the Superintendent came back to the room; and he was accompanied by the medical man who had already given his evidence, but who had left the hotel immediately afterwards. Walking straight up to Smithson, the Superintendent laid his hand upon his shoulder, saying, "I now formally arrest you on suspicion of being the murderer in the case under investigation."

Smithson gasped, as if to recover the breath which was departing from him: he staggered and sank upon a seat. The announcement that he was a prisoner was nothing more than was anticipated under the circumstances: but still it produced a certain sensation.

"I have made another and closer inspection of the prisoner's room," said the Superintendent; "and I have discovered an object which decided me upon taking him into custody. It is this."

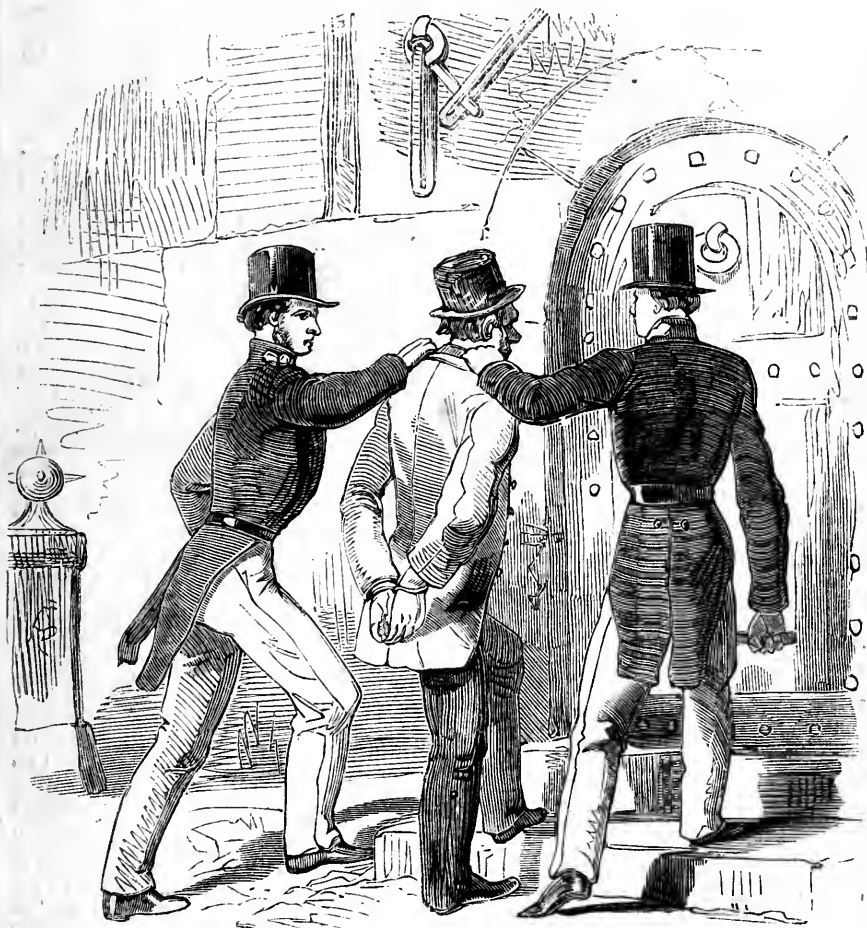
He produced a razor from a piece of paper in which it was wrapped; and he handed it to the Coroner,—while a shudder swept through the frame of almost everybody, I believe, who caught a glimpse of the weapon; for there was something horrible in looking upon the instrument by which a human life had doubtless been so cruelly taken away. The medical man deposed that the stains

which were visible inside the handle, were recently created, and that they were those of human blood. The edge of the weapon was also completely turned, as if it had been drawn over some hard resisting substance—no doubt the bone of the deceased victim's neck.

It appeared from what the Superintendent now proceeded to explain, that he had found the razor up the chimney in the prisoner's room: he had cleansed off the soot, and had submitted the weapon to the examination of the surgeon, who had easily recognised the blood-stains, which were too extensive to have been produced by any little flow that there might have been from cutting the chin during the process of shaving. Besides which, it was natural to suppose that no one would close a razor after that process without wiping it. The superintendent desired the coroner's permission to conduct the prisoner to an adjoining room to undergo a personal examination; and Smithson was accordingly removed. During his absence, which lasted about a quarter of an hour, the coroner and the mayor conversed with Henley and myself on the turn which the proceedings were taking; and we were informed that a telegraphic message had been sent up to London that it might be ascertained whether the prisoner really dwelt at the address which he had given. On Smithson's re-appearance he looked most dreadfully crestfallen; while the countenances of the Superintendent and the constable denoted that facts of additional importance had been ascertained. I will explain what these were, without having recourse to the formal manner in which they were described by the chief official. The prisoner, on being removed to a private room, was ordered to strip himself; and in spite of his remonstrance, he had to undergo the process. It was found that he had on two shirts—the upper one being clean and perfectly new, and which he admitted to have bought on the preceding evening: the under one was saturated with blood. It was evident that he had not merely wiped his hands upon this under-shirt after having accomplished the dreadful deed, but that the blood of his victim must have spirted over it. In the fob of his trousers bank-notes to the amount of nearly ninety pounds, were discovered; while in his purse he had but a few shillings.

Such was the evidence now tendered by the Superintendent; and the coroner demanded of Smithson whether he had any questions to ask the witness. The prisoner did not however speak; the Coroner inquired what were the relative situations of the prisoner's room and that chamber where the tragedy had taken place. He was informed that the two apartments opened from the same passage, with three other small rooms between them.

The landlady now sent in an intimation that she wished to make a certain statement; and she was accordingly introduced to the room. She was a middle-aged woman; and was much affected and horrified by the tragedy which had taken place within the walls of her establishment. She said that on the previous evening, before the exchange of rooms was resolved upon, the prisoner had strolled into the bar as if for the purpose of chatting; and he remarked, "So you've got the Earl of Eccleston here? Where the deuce are you going to put his lordship?"—The landlady an-



swered that unfortunately she had only one room vacant at the time when I arrived at her hotel, and she specified its number and situation. The prisoner then talked on other matters—and shortly afterwards withdrew from the bar to ascend into the commercial room.

Such was the deposition made by the landlady; and it seemed to afford a horrible confirmation to my previous suspicion that I had been marked out as the villain's intended victim. Perhaps, however (I thought to myself) it was really only through curiosity at the time that he sought to learn from the landlady where I was to be located; but that the subsequent display of all the bank notes in my pocket-book when I gave my subscription to the fund for the destitute family, had put into the miscreant's head the devilish idea of murdering and robbing me.

The Coroner now proceeded to sum up; and in the course of his address he stated the grounds on

which the jury might, if they thought fit, deliver a verdict against the accused.

"If seeking to follow the prisoner in the execution of a murderous purpose," said the Coroner, "we may suppose that he issued from his own chamber with nothing on but the single garment which has been found saturated with blood: and that this was a precaution which he took to avert the chance of detection. For that chance would have been great if he had gone in his clothes, and if they had received those sanguine marks which would have spoken in murder's loud tongue against him. He knew not how to dispose of the stained garment: he feared to disapparel himself of it and consign it to his carpet-bag; and therefore he kept it upon his person—and he covered it with the clean linen which concealed it."

When the Coroner had ceased, the jury did not deliberate many moments before a verdict of

"Wilful Murder" was returned against the prisoner,—who was at once handcuffed and removed to the town gaol.

On the following morning he was taken before the Mayor for a further examination. All the evidence of the preceding day was recapitulated; and additional testimony was produced. It was discovered that the bank notes found in his fob had actually belonged to the deceased Dobbins, who had procured them from the bank in that town the day after his arrival. An answer had been received to the telegraphic message sent up to London; and it was to the effect that no such person was known at the house in Stamford Street which the prisoner had named. A Bow Street detective had come down by an early train, on account of something peculiar which had struck him on hearing a description of the prisoner's personal appearance: for such a description had been sent up to the metropolitan police-authorities immediately after Smithson's committal on the Coroner's warrant.

I was not present at the examination before the Mayor: I had already seen enough—indeed far too much of the diabolic murderer. I had the painful knowledge that I had been for some time in his company after he had committed the deed. But what took place before the Mayor, was subsequently communicated to me; and I now proceed to lay it before my readers.

It was towards the close of the examination that the Bow Street detective arrived from London. He at once repaired to the Guildhall, where the Mayor sat; and approaching the dock, took a view of the prisoner.

"Do you know him, officer?" inquired the Mayor, when the detective had announced himself.

"Yes, your worship," was the immediate response. "I know him in spite of his disguise. He is a bad character—long known about London, and also in the provinces. His right name is not Smithson: it is Thomas Taddy."

Yes, reader—the murderer of the unfortunate haberdasher was none other than Lanover's accomplice in the assassination of poor Mr. Delmar. No wonder that when I first saw the false Smithson at the hotel, I should have fancied that we had met before: but on the other hand it was not astonishing that I should have been so utterly unable to establish the identity in my mind. The hair of the man, naturally of a dirty sandy whiteness, had been dyed black—his eyebrows likewise: he had lost his lashes by disease—and this circumstance, added to the loss of his upper teeth, had so changed the expression of his countenance as to render it all the more difficult to be recognised. Then too, the patches of sandy whiskers which he used to wear, were shaven completely off: while the blue spectacles constituted an additional barrier against detection's keenest glance. But still, as the reader has seen, I had at first a glimmering notion that I had seen this man before—although, as I have just said, the change in his appearance was so great as to have prevented a complete recognition. His voice had altered with the loss of his teeth; and all the time he was at the hotel from the first moment he recognised in me the one whom he had known a few years back a poor friendless boy in the metropolis, he had

spoken in subdued accents and had done his best to disguise his voice.

But there was one incident on which I could not help looking with a species of solemn awe. It was that when I awoke in the middle of the night of the murder, I had experienced that depression for which I could not account—that despondency which I could not shake off; and at the same time the foul deed of assassination was being accomplished! What mysterious influence could this have been that was thus shed upon me? I could not explain it to myself: but doubtless there are certain persons to whom, in particular circumstances, heaven concedes a greater susceptibility as it were of feeling the unknown and incomprehensible effects of deeds that may be simultaneously taking place elsewhere.

The wretched murderer was committed for trial; and his victim was buried in the churchyard of the town where he thus met his death. I was anxious to escape from that atmosphere of crime; and I decided that I would not—at least for the present—think anything more of the property which I had come thither expressly to see. I returned to London, and narrated to Annabel the details of the frightful event, which I had however previously mentioned in the letter I had written to her from the hotel. She was sufficiently acquainted with all my earlier history to know who the murderer was when the name of Taddy was mentioned: but as yet, be it understood, she was ignorant that this wretched creature and Mr. Lanover had been the iniquitous authors of the death of my benefactor Mr. Delmar.

The murderer's trial took place in due course: the evidence against him was conclusive—and he was sentenced to death. The particulars I am now about to give, were gleaned from the newspapers. It appeared that when in Court the wretched man looked utterly dispirited, and his demeanour was that of a fearful dejection. When the awful sentence of the law was pronounced against him, he clasped his hands in mental agony, and then fell down senseless in the dock, whence he was borne away by the officers who had him in custody. A few days afterwards he made a full confession of all his crimes to the chaplain of the prison; and in his fearful narrative was included the murder of Mr. Delmar. According to the chaplain's account, he became completely penitent: but on the morning of his execution so completely was he overcome by an appalling terror, that it was literally necessary to carry him to the spot where the fatal gibbet was erected. Almost lifeless was the state of the wretched murderer when the last hideous preliminaries for his death were accomplished; and it might be said that from a swoon he passed into the world which lies beyond the limit of this mortal existence.

When I first read in the newspapers that the man's soul was yielding after the trial to so mortal a terror, I foresaw that he would make a confession of his past iniquities, and that the moment was near at hand when the mystery attending the late Mr. Delmar's murder was to be cleared up to the world. I therefore took precautions to enable me to break that hideous tale as delicately as possible to those whose ears it would appal and whose hearts it would shock. I sent a trusty agent to the town where the murderer lay in gaol at the

time, with instructions to my emissary to hasten back to me the very moment he should have learned that such a confession was made. By these means I was enabled to forestall the newspapers as it were, and thus prevent the horrible revelation from bursting suddenly on the knowledge of Annabel as well as on that of Mr. and Mrs. Howard. My messenger came: he reported to me the fact that the confession had been made; and I at once entered on my painful task. I told Annabel how my own father had instigated Lanover and Taddy to accomplish that dreadful deed; and my amiable Countess was afflicted and shocked at what she thus heard. But throwing her arms about my neck, she said, "It is painful and horrible, my dearest husband, to reflect that the author of one's being could have yielded to so much guilt: but no dishonour redounds upon yourself—nor will the world think the less of you on account of your father's crime. If the sins of the sires are visited upon the children, *you* at least, in the misfortunes which for a period of your life you experienced, were held by heaven to be sufficiently chastened: for prosperity and happiness have since been your lot."

Annabel said many other tender and consoling things; and I felt how exquisite is the comfort which the love of a devoted wife can impart. I embraced her fondly; and entering my carriage, at once proceeded to Delmar Manor. There I found Mr. and Mrs. Howard; and I broke to them the intelligence in the same way that I had just been imparting it to Annabel. Edith was painfully afflicted at this vivid conjuring-up of all the horrible circumstances which attended her father's death years back; and for awhile she was unable to give utterance to a word. But at length she grew more composed; and then both she and her husband addressed me in terms similar to those which had been used by Annabel. They both thanked and applauded me for having hitherto kept a secret which it was so painful to reveal; and Edith said, "No wonder that my poor sister should have proved an altered being from that memorable night when she learnt the appalling fact from her husband's lips, until the moment when she surrendered up her breath for ever!"

These painful duties being discharged, I very speedily proposed to Annabel another visit to the Continent: for after the frightful publicity given by the newspapers to a crime which cast such a stigma upon my own father's memory, I was anxious to leave England for awhile. My amiable Countess comprehended my motive, and at once signified her assent. We accordingly repaired to France: but without making any stay in the French capital, we visited the principal cities and towns of the southern Departments. We journeyed on into Italy, to spend a few weeks with the Count and Countess of Livorno—at whose mansion, I need scarcely add, we experienced the kindest and most welcome reception.

## CHAPTER CLXI.

## THE VISCONTRESS CENCI.

I WAS one day riding on horseback in company with the Count of Livorno, and we had just entered one of the most beautiful avenues in the vale of Arno—when an elegant open carriage, drawn by a pair of beautiful horses, came in sight. An old gentleman of very venerable appearance, and a lady of about six and twenty, were the occupants. The coachman and footman, seated upon the box, were clad in elegant liveries: there were two outriders; and the entire equipage was one which could not fail to arrest the attention. The lady to whom I have alluded, was remarkably handsome—with a splendid figure, somewhat inclined to *embonpoint*. She was evidently an Italian: her complexion had the delicate duskiness, and her large dark eyes the fire, of the sunny south. Her strongly marked brows and a certain expression about the lips, appeared to denote a masculine decision of character. She was superbly dressed; and at the first glance it was easy to perceive that she was proud of the commanding beauty of which she was so conscious. Her companion was an old gentleman, as I have said; and his appearance was not merely venerable, but likewise distinguished and aristocratic; and in his button-hole he wore the ribbon of a Tuscan military order.

The carriage stopped by a command issued from the old gentleman's lips, as the Count and myself met it; and after a brief conversation with the gentleman and the lady, the Count of Livorno introduced me to them. I then learnt that the old gentleman was the Marquis of Faleri, and that the lady was the Viscountess Cenci. They both expressed themselves much pleased at making my acquaintance—and begged that they might be permitted the honour of calling on the Countess of Eccleston. I gave a suitable response; and rode on with my friend the Count of Livorno.

"There is a tale connected with a fellow-countryman of yours and that lady," said the Count, when we were beyond earshot of the occupants of the carriage, "which I have been several times about to narrate, but which circumstances have on each occasion transpired to banish from my memory. Do you happen to know the name of Sir William Stratford?"

"To the best of my recollection," I answered, "the name has never before met my ears. Is he a Baronet or a Knight?—for as you are aware, we have in England those two grades which both alike confer the distinction of *Sir* as a prefix to the Christian name."

"I am unable to answer your question, my dear Eccleston," replied the Count of Livorno. "But let me tell you something about that gentleman and lady to whom I have just introduced you. And first of all I will make you acquainted with a fact which I do not think you could have gathered from the brief discourse which has just taken place—I mean that the Viscountess Cenci is the Marquis of Faleri's daughter."

"I surmised as much," I said, "from a certain family likeness existing between them—although I should conclude, from the different expressions of

their countenances, that their dispositions and characters are very dissimilar."

"True!" rejoined the Count: "for although the Marquis of Falieri has been a soldier and holds the rank of a General, he is one of the most amiable and kind-hearted of men. He did not marry until somewhat late in life; and this daughter was the only issue of that alliance. The Marquis lost his wife soon after the birth of that daughter; and he devoted himself to the duty of rearing his motherless child with as much tenderness as possible. He is very rich; and when his daughter grew up to the marriageable state, she had numberless suitors for her hand. Her own choice fell upon the Viscount Cenci; and this was approved of by her father—for the Viscount was in all respects a most eligible aspirant to the young lady's hand. He belonged to an excellent family—his character was good—his disposition amiable—and his fortune immense. About seven years ago—the lady being then nineteen—she was conducted by the Viscount to the altar. Three years ago he was consigned to a vault in the very church where his nuptials had been solemnized: he died after a brief illness—leaving his widow in possession of his immense fortune, and to every appearance disconsolate for his loss. Her father went to reside with her; and indeed they have lived together down to the present time."

"I presume therefore," I said, "that she is a dutiful and affectionate daughter——"

"You shall hear," interrupted the Count of Livorno. "About four or five months ago Sir William Stratford made his appearance in Florence. He is a man of about six or seven years older than yourself—and very good-looking. His manners are distinguished; he has travelled much—he speaks the Italian language fluently—and he possesses great conversational powers. Indeed, in some sense he may be termed one of those fascinating men who are best adapted to make an impression upon the female heart. How he got into the best Florentine society, I have not learnt: for I was absent with my Countess at our estate near Leghorn when Sir William Stratford first made his appearance in the Tuscan capital: but I presume that he must have brought letters of introduction to some good families."

"Or perhaps he may have been introduced," I suggested, "by the British Minister at your royal uncle's Court?"

"No," responded the Count of Livorno: "it was not so—as I shall presently have to explain to you. Certain however it is that Sir William Stratford *did* get into the very best society; and in the brilliant saloons of fashion he became introduced to the widowed Viscountess Cenci. He speedily grew assiduous in his attentions towards her; and she who had hitherto refused the offers of several distinguished personages who sought to lead her again into the matrimonial sphere, seemed to favour the suit of Sir William Stratford. From the first, however, her father never liked him: there was something about him which made the old man suspect that he was not an individual calculated to ensure his daughter's happiness. When therefore the Marquis perceived that the Viscountess appeared to listen with a willing ear to the tender language of Sir William, he spoke his mind freely to her; and then for the first time

the daughter displayed that spirit which seemed determined to assert its independence of the paternal advice or wishes. The Marquis consulted me; and I recommended him to make inquiries as to the character, the family, and the pecuniary means of Sir William Stratford. At the request of the Marquis, I spoke to the British Envoy upon the subject: but his Excellency informed me that he had no knowledge of Sir William Stratford beyond having occasionally met him at some of the aristocratic houses which he frequented. I did not like to press the point any further; and there the conversation ended. At length Sir William proposed to the Viscountess; and she accepted the offer. Her father the Marquis thereupon sought an opportunity of speaking privately to Sir William Stratford. He addressed him as one gentleman would accost another under such circumstances. He said that he had no doubt Sir William was everything he represented himself—but that being a foreigner, and a stranger as it were in Italy, he could not deem himself insulted at being asked to furnish proofs that he was an eligible suitor for the hand of the Viscountess. Sir William Stratford answered with all that affability of manner which he knows so well how to display: he declared that the Marquis was perfectly right in thus questioning him, and that he himself should have volunteered explanations even if they had not been asked. He then spoke of his family, which he represented to be an old and honourable one—of his estates in England, which he declared to be extensive—and of various other matters to prove his respectability: but beyond all these verbal assertions he proffered no evidence of the truth of his story. In a word, he brought matters to such a point that the Marquis could not press him any further without either appearing rude or else suspicious: for Sir William has a certain off-hand, half-dashing, half-wheeling way with him, which renders it impossible to keep him fixed upon any particular topic. The Marquis was dissatisfied with the result of the interview; and he stated this much to his daughter. The Viscountess was highly incensed at her father's interference: she indignantly rejected the idea that anything suspicious attached itself to Sir William Stratford: she considered that he had been insulted by the questions put to him; and she expressed her fears lest he should break off the contemplated match. In a word, my dear Eccleston, the Viscountess herself is infatuated with this man; and her father is miserable on account of the suspicions and misgivings which are haunting his mind. These may be after all utterly without foundation, and Sir William Stratford may prove to be everything which he represents himself: but on the other hand, it is quite possible that he is nothing more than an adventurer angling after the immense fortune which the Viscountess Cenci possesses. The preparations for the nuptials are now being made, and I believe that they will be solemnized about a fortnight hence, if nothing in the meanwhile shall transpire to prevent or postpone them."

"There is certainly something suspicious," I observed, "in the fact that Sir William Stratford did not, when pressed by the Marquis, refer his lordship to his solicitor or banker in London—or to any of those sources of information with which



gentlemen of property and social standing must invariably have some connexion. Nevertheless, it would be wrong for me to throw out anything which might tend unjustly to disparage the character of one with whom I am totally unacquainted. Indeed, I have known Englishmen who entertained such a high sense of honour and such a strong feeling in respect to their own consequence, that merely to hint at the necessity for a reference would give them mortal offence,—persons, in a word, who being fully conscious of their own integrity, cannot understand how others should seek to have substantial and business-like proofs of it.”

“Some such ideas as these have occasionally flitted through my own mind,” said the Count of Livorno; “and therefore I have found it difficult to advise the Marquis of Faleri how to act. He is passionately fond of his daughter; and it would break the old man’s heart if she were to throw herself away on a mere adventurer. Indeed, even supposing that Sir William Stratford is everything he represents himself, the match would prove but little satisfactory to the old nobleman; for he has conceived the positive opinion that the Englishman is not calculated to ensure his daughter’s happiness.”

“Where does this Sir William Stratford reside? and what is his style of living?” I asked.

“He has resided at one of the principal hotels in the city,” responded the Count of Livorno: “he has lived in excellent style—and so far as I could learn, has paid all his liabilities regularly and liberally. Indeed he has every appearance of a man of wealth. He is certainly gay and dissipated; and shortly after his arrival in Florence, rumours were wafted from Rome to the effect that he had played deep in that capital. It is these circumstances which have led the old Marquis to view the contemplated alliance with apprehension; and therefore his opinion is not altogether a prejudice. But then, on the other hand, there are plenty of men who are gay and extravagant during their bachelor career, but who become steady and well conducted when settling down into married life. However, I should like you, my dear Eccleston, to see this countryman of your’s, so that you might be enabled to form some opinion concerning him; and in the course of conversation you might lead him to talk of his family, his estates, and so forth—”

“What opportunity shall we have of seeing him soon?” I inquired.

“To-morrow evening the Viscountess Cenci has her usual reception: you heard what her ladyship said—that she should be happy to include you amongst the circle of her visitors; and indeed she is certain to call and pay her respects to Lady Eccleston in the course of to-day or to-morrow. You can therefore accompany me to the Cenci mansion to-morrow evening; and there you will no doubt see Sir William Stratford.”

The conversation soon turned into another channel; and after riding through some of the most beautiful parts of the vale of Arno, we re-entered Florence at about the time when the Countess of Livorno and my own wife were wont to take an airing in the carriage, or walk in the grounds of the ducal palace, to which we all had free admission. On the afternoon of the day of

which I am writing, the ladies preferred a walk; and we accordingly repaired to the grounds just alluded to. We had not been long there, when we beheld the Marquis of Faleri and the Viscountess Cenci advancing: they immediately accosted us—and the Viscountess was introduced to Annabel. The two parties joined in the ramble; and I found that the Viscountess could render her conversation exceedingly agreeable, and that its powers were of a versatile description. She could discourse on literature and the fine arts, as well as on the opera, the fashions, and other light subjects: she was evidently a woman of strong mind; and I was therefore all the more astonished that she had yielded to so complete an infatuation in respect to this Sir William Stratford of whom I had that day heard so much.

While we were walking through the beautiful gardens of the ducal palace, I perceived a gentleman and lady of distinguished appearance roaming at a little distance. At the first glimpse which I obtained of the gentleman’s countenance I thought that he was not unknown to me; and I asked the Count of Livorno if he knew who this couple were: for I should observe that it was only persons of rank and distinction who could obtain the privilege of admission to the ducal pleasure-grounds. The Count was not acquainted with that couple: but he remarked that they were evidently English, and were no doubt recent arrivals, as he did not remember to have seen them before. Presently they passed us; and now that I had a full view of their countenances the recognition was complete. They were Lord and Lady Ravenshill.

The reader will recollect that the old Lord and Lady Ravenshill had died some time back—that the present nobleman, when plain Mr. Walter, had married a Miss Jenkinson, who was an heiress—and that by means of her fortune he was enabled to resuscitate the ancient splendours of the family to which he belonged. I had never seen either him or his wife since I was a livery-page in his father’s service; and though years had elapsed since then, yet neither he nor her ladyship were so much altered as to prevent me from now recognising them. Lady Ravenshill was eminently handsome: his lordship, though having lost the slenderness of youth, was of a fine commanding figure.

Scarcely had they passed us, when the British Envoy entered the grounds; and accosting Lord and Lady Ravenshill, he conversed with them for a few minutes. His Excellency then advanced towards our party; and after an interchange of the usual compliments, he requested me to step aside with him for a moment. This I did: and his Excellency then said, “Lord and Lady Ravenshill, to whom I have just been speaking, are most anxious for the honour of being introduced to your lordship. They inquired of me who the numerous party were that they beheld walking in the grounds; and when I mentioned your lordship’s name, they evinced signs of great pleasure,—both immediately proffering that request which I have now conveyed to you.”

I at once assented to the proposition; and taking the Minister’s arm, was conducted by him towards Lord and Lady Ravenshill, who on their part advanced to receive us. The introduction was effected for form’s sake—though in reality no such introduction was needed, for full well did we know each

other. The Envoy withdrew to rejoin the party I had just left; and when he was beyond earshot, Lord Ravenshill, taking my hand, said with much emotion, "My dear Earl of Eccleston, will you honour me by reckoning me amongst the number of your friends? and will you permit her ladyship to be presented to your own amiable Countess, of whom we have heard so much?"

I answered in a suitable manner; and Lady Ravenshill said, "We have been for a long time on the Continent: but we have frequently observed to each other that immediately on our return to England, we would do ourselves the pleasure of calling at Eccleston House."

"And perhaps some day," added the nobleman, "we shall have the honour of entertaining your Lordship and your Countess at Charlton Hall in Devonshire. Nothing, I can assure you, would afford us greater delight!"

Although there was no positive allusion to the past, there was a certain significance in this speech—yet as delicate as it was well meant. It was as much as to say that where in other times I had lived in a menial capacity, I should be made welcome as an honoured guest; and it likewise distinctly reminded me that both Lord and Lady Ravenshill remembered with gratitude the little service I had rendered them at the time when the machinations of the old lord were tending to involve his son in the hated matrimonial meshes which were spread by the Boustead family to ensnare him.

"You know perhaps, my dear Earl," continued Lord Ravenshill, "that I regained possession of Charlton Hall and the Devonshire estates after my father's death. We have been living upon the Continent for some time, because we are both fond of continental life and of visiting the principal European cities. But we have recently been talking of making a speedy return to England, and devoting more of our time than we have hitherto done to the welfare of those who live on our estates. Has your lordship been lately in Devonshire?"

"Not for many years," I replied. "Ah! by the bye, you remember, perhaps, the Rev. Mr. Howard?"

"Certainly," exclaimed Lord Ravenshill,—"the Vicar of Charlton? He married an amiable lady—"

"And that lady is my own aunt," I replied,—"my deceased mother's sister."

"Yes—now that I recollect, it must be so!" said Lord Ravenshill. "And talking of the persons who were in that neighbourhood at the time of our first acquaintance, do you happen to remember a certain Sir Malcolm Wavenham who used to visit at the Hall?"

"Perfectly," I responded, with difficulty suppressing a sigh as I thought of my Annabel's long deceased sister, the beautiful but erring Violet.

"All Sir Malcolm's estates have for some years past been incorporated with my own," continued Lord Ravenshill. "I purchased them—"

"And what has become of Sir Malcolm?" I inquired.

"I know not," he responded. "Profligate and extravagant, Sir Malcolm Wavenham ran through his fortune—was plunged into difficulties—I believe that he was even for a while the inmate of a

debtor's prison—at all events his estates were brought to the hammer; and I purchased them. But what has since become of him I have not the slightest notion."

We discoursed relative to other persons who used to reside, or still resided in the neighbourhood of Charlton Hall; and then I conducted Lord and Lady Ravenshill towards my own party whom I had so recently left. Introductions were effected; and I speedily perceived that the amiable Lady Ravenshill and my own charming Annabel were destined to form a firm friendship.

After breakfast on the following morning, I was proceeding alone and on foot, through one of the principal streets of Florence towards a tradesman's shop where I had certain purchases to make, when whom should I encounter but Mr. Tennant, the London solicitor? He was not aware that I at the time was on a visit to Florence; while of all people in the world he was about the last whom I should have expected to meet at such a distance from the British metropolis—especially as he was a man well stricken in years. I should observe that he was not my own regular attorney, although I had had constant dealings with him in his capacity of solicitor to the late Sir Matthew Heseltime; and moreover when we were in London, he was a frequent and always welcome visitor at Eccleston House. I asked him what business had brought him to Florence: but before he replied, he looked somewhat significantly over his shoulder—and I then perceived that a man, unmistakably belonging to the British nation, had halted at some little distance. This individual was a stout powerfully built person; and though well dressed, was evidently not quite a member of the same sphere of society in which Mr. Tennant himself moved.

"That man," said the solicitor, taking me by the button-hole, and speaking in a tone of mysterious confidence, "is a Bow Street officer."

"A Bow Street officer?" I exclaimed in astonishment. "And what on earth are you doing with a Bow Street officer in Florence?"

"I will tell you lordship," answered Mr. Tennant. "Let us walk on slowly together."

We accordingly proceeded along the street,—the officer following at a respectful distance; and Mr. Tennant gave me the ensuing explanation:—

"You know, my dear Earl, that solicitors have clients of all sorts, though some of us endeavour to keep our connexion as respectable as possible. Amongst my clients is a money-lender; and this person has been most grossly defrauded by an Englishman of some rank and position. Mr. Ward—for that is the name of the money-lender—had for some years been accustomed to advance large sums to the culprit of whom I am speaking, and no doubt had reaped a rich harvest from his usurious dealings. Then came a period during which the borrower was nowhere to be found, although he was indebted in a considerable sum to Mr. Ward. At length—it may be about a twelve-month back—the gentleman suddenly transpires; and entering Mr. Ward's office, he tells him some tale to account for his long disappearance: but inasmuch as he concluded by stating that he had now the means of liquidating Mr. Ward's claim, the latter was quickly disarmed of his resentment. The gentleman proceeded to tell another long story,

with the details of which I need not trouble your lordship; but the gist of it was this,—that he had won a very considerable sum of a country Squire on a particular horse-race, and that he was to have the Squire's bills to the amount of five thousand pounds. He showed several letters in proof of this statement; and informed Mr. Ward how he could learn all particulars in respect to the Squire's solvency without suffering the Squire himself to know that such inquiries were being made, for the gentleman represented the affair to be of a very delicate character. You see, my lord," added Mr. Tennant, "I call the person a gentleman for the sake of distinction, because I don't want to mention names for the present."

"I admire your characteristic caution," I observed, laughing: "though I certainly cannot understand why you should have any punctiliousness in reference to an individual who, as you have already told me, had committed a gross fraud."

"I will explain to your lordship," continued Mr. Tennant. "The upshot of the matter was that Mr. Ward made the inquiries and was perfectly satisfied of the respectability and the pecuniary position of the country Squire. A few days afterwards the gentleman brought the bills, to the amount of five thousand pounds: Mr. Ward deducted his own original claim, together with all sorts of interest, commission, and discount,—giving the gentleman the difference, to the extent of a clear three thousand pounds. No suspicion was entertained as to the character of the bills until they fell due,—when they proved to be forgeries. The Squire had never betted upon any such race, and had never lost a shilling to the individual who pretended to have won of him. Mr. Ward instantaneously came to consult me; and I advised him to make as little noise as possible about the matter in the first instance; for all that he wanted was the money of which he had been swindled; and as the swindler was well connected, his relations might possibly compromise the matter on his behalf. The relatives were accordingly communicated with—some negotiations ensued—but they ended in nothing. At length, a little while back, Mr. Ward obtained information of a certain character—the result of which is my present visit to Florence, where I arrived last night."

"And this Bow Street officer who is accompanying you," I said,—“what use can you make of him in a foreign country where he has no jurisdiction?”

"The Tuscan Government will render me a certain assistance if need be," answered Mr. Tennant: "because, inasmuch as the culprit of whom I have been speaking travels with a false passport, he will be turned out of the country on this fact being made known. What, for instance, if he be shipped on board an English vessel at Leghorn?—my Bow Street officer at once takes him into custody! But this is really not my policy: all I want is to get back Mr. Ward's money. Therefore, if I call upon my gentleman, introduce the Bow Street officer, and represent what the alternative will be should he refuse to settle the business,—I think, or at least hope that such a settlement may be effected."

"Are you sure that the man is in possession of sufficient resources?" I asked.

"From the information which reached Mr. Ward a little while back, I should be inclined to

answer in the affirmative. But as yet I really know very little on the point: for as I have already informed your lordship, I only arrived in Florence last night. I am now on my way to see the individual; and if he will settle the business amicably, he will save his reputation and there will be no need to blow the whole affair to the world. Your lordship now comprehends wherefore I am delicate in mentioning his name."

"Quite right," I responded. "But permit me to observe that if you desire the succour of powerful interest in respect to the expulsion of this culprit from the country—I mean in case matters have to be pushed to an extremity—I know that you may command the assistance of the Count of Livorno, whom you have met at my house in London. I am staying with the Count; and I hope you will call upon us before you leave Florence."

Mr. Tennant thanked me; and we separated—he pursuing his way in one direction, followed by the Bow Street officer, and I proceeding in another direction.

In the evening, at about eight o'clock, Annabel and I accompanied our friends the Count and Countess of Livorno to the Cenci mansion. Lord and Lady Ravenshill had likewise received an invitation; and we encountered them there. The splendid saloons were brilliantly lighted, and were decorated with garlands and festoons of the choicest flowers. A numerous company was assembled: the principal members of the Florentine fashionable world, as well as all distinguished foreigners who were visiting the Tuscan capital at the time, were gathered there. The Viscountess Cenci was magnificently attired: her dress was a perfect blaze of diamonds—and if somewhat too gorgeous, it nevertheless seemed well suited to the grand style of her commanding beauty. She looked in every sense the queen of that fairy scene which she had conjured up: though I am proud to be enabled to state that the more modest and retiring, as well as more delicately enchanting beauty of my own Annabel evidently attracted a far greater admiration than that which was bestowed upon the Viscountess Cenci. Nor did Olivia, the Countess of Livorno, fail to produce that sensation which a loveliness such as her's was so well calculated to excite;—and the same may be said in respect to Lady Ravenshill.

On entering the brilliantly lighted saloons, we paid our respects first of all to the mistress of the mansion; and then we turned to discourse with her father, the venerable Marquis of Falieri. The old nobleman was dressed in his full uniform as a General-officer; and though he affected that air of gaiety which he believed to be consistent with the scene, it was easy to perceive that a deep sorrow lay beneath, and that affliction was gnawing at the noble veteran's heart's-core. I looked around, in the expectation that my eyes would settle upon some Englishman whom I might at once single out as Sir William Stratford: but the Count of Livorno, penetrating my thoughts, whispered in my ear, "He has not yet made his appearance. It is his habit to enter late on such occasions as these, that he may come in with all the greater *clat*."

The Viscountess moved through her spacious apartments with that mingled dignity and grace which suited her rank, her sex, and her position as the mistress of the mansion. Her manners were

most affable: she had a courteous word to say to every one whom she passed; and when the splendid band struck up to indicate that dancing was about to commence, ~~It~~ was suffered to understand that her ladyship was desirous of opening the ball with me. We accordingly danced together; and the quadrille was nearly at an end, when I suddenly became aware of a sensation at the further extremity of the room; and suspecting what it was, I glanced towards the countenance of my partner. For an instant that handsome face was lighted up with a glow of mingled pride, love, and satisfaction, as her large dark eyes were bent upon that far-off extremity of the spacious saloon, where an elegantly dressed gentleman was now slowly advancing, bestowing his courteous salutations on the guests whom he encountered there. But the next instant the Viscountess recovered her complete self-possession—calm, graceful, and dignified; and I made some observation in order to create the impression that I had taken no special notice of what had just passed. Nevertheless, that tell-tale glow upon her cheeks had made me unmistakably aware that the elegantly dressed new-comer could be none other than the object of her infatuation—Sir William Stratford.

## CHAPTER CLXII.

### SIR WILLIAM STRATFORD.

WHEN the dance was over, I conducted the Viscountess to a seat; and perceiving that Sir William Stratford was now gradually making his way towards her, I bowed and retired to a distance. I looked about for the Count of Livorno, with the idea that the suitor of the Viscountess might presently through his medium be introduced to me—under which circumstance I was determined to question him as far as with propriety I might, relative to his family and estates. But I could not immediately find the Count of Livorno: another dance was about to be commenced; and I was engaged on this occasion to Lady Ravenshill. Sir William Stratford danced with the Viscountess Cenci; and I soon obtained a near view of him. I looked—and looked again: I was almost certain that I had seen that countenance before. Again I looked at him: the conviction deepened in my mind that the handsome profile of this Englishman was not unknown to me. But where had I seen him? I could not for the life of me recollect. Lady Ravenshill evidently began to notice that I was abstracted and thoughtful; and I said to her, "That handsome distinguished-looking man, with whom the Viscountess is dancing, is the successful suitor for her hand; and in a few days they are to be married."

"The circumstance appears to interest your lordship much," said Lady Ravenshill, with a smile.

"The truth is," I responded, "it strikes me that I have met Sir William Stratford before: but I cannot remember where or how."

"And this surprises you?" exclaimed her ladyship, again laughing. "I should imagine that your lordship must frequently be bewildered to

identify the persons whom you meet—visiting large assemblies as you do."

"There are no doubt many persons whose acquaintance we slightly form, whose names we hear and recollect for the occasion, and of whom we subsequently have a very dim remembrance. But I can assure you, Lady Ravenshill," I continued, "that in the present case it is somewhat different. There are certain countenances which strike one as being associated with memories that are pleasant or memories that are unpleasant, dim and shadowy though they may be in either case; and on the present occasion the countenance of that man has inspired me with some disagreeable sensation—I know not how to explain it—I scarcely even know what it is."

Lady Ravenshill now surveyed Sir William Stratford with more attention than she had hitherto bestowed upon him; and she said, "There seems to be, after all, a certain fitness in the union of that pair. Both are handsome—both endowed with elegant manners; and perhaps the gentleman is not inferior on the score of wealth to the lady herself?"

I again looked at Sir William Stratford: I caught his profile—it seemed to grow more and more familiar to me; and yet for the life of me I could not recollect why it should thus have evidently occupied a cell in my brain to be vividly reproduced when the original itself was present. A handsome glossy moustache, and a tuft (or *imperial*) upon the chin, gave a sort of military character to that countenance; and Sir William's figure was of perfect symmetry. He danced with great elegance; and presently, as he passed close by me, I caught the sound of his voice as he made some observation to the Viscountess. That voice was full of masculine harmony; and methought it was not less familiar to me than the profile itself. The dance concluded: I promenade with Lady Ravenshill into an adjoining room, where I consigned her to the care of her husband. I was lounging back into the grand saloon in the hope of meeting the Count of Livorno, when I was suddenly struck by an observation which I heard one gentleman make to another. These were two Englishmen whom I had not seen before, and whom I therefore concluded to be fresh arrivals in Florence. One was about forty—the other a few years his junior. They were standing a little apart from the brilliant assemblage, and were evidently making their comments upon the principal characters. It was the elder who was speaking at the instant, and whose observations had so impressively struck me.

"Stratford indeed!" he contemptuously ejaculated. "I could tell a tell if I chose—But why spoil a fellow-countryman's game?"

I lingered for an instant in the neighbourhood of these two gentlemen; and I heard the younger one say something about "duty;" he also breathed the words "put them upon their guard;" but I could catch nothing more of his observations. Both the gentlemen were strangers to me; and I could not therefore introduce myself to them nor join in their discourse: but I passed onward, saying within myself, "Yes, I am now confident the misgivings of the old Marquis are correct! There's something wrong about this Stratford: and it would be shocking to allow the wealthy and bril-



liant Viscountess to throw herself away on a mere adventurer."

"My dear Eccleston I have been looking for you," said the Count of Livorno, now suddenly taking me by the arm. "I want to introduce Sir William Stratford to you."

"The very object for which I on my side have been searching for you!" I responded.

I was about to explain that the countenance of Sir William did not appear to be altogether unknown to me—when that gentleman himself drew near the spot where the Count of Livorno had thus joined me; and the Count said, "Permit me, Sir William Stratford, to introduce you to my friend the Earl of Eccleston."

"I am delighted to have the honour of forming his lordship's acquaintance," said Sir William, bowing to me alike courteously and respectfully.

The Count of Livorno remained conversing with

us on indifferent topics for a few minutes; and then he said, "You must excuse me, my dear Eccleston—but I have engaged your amiable Countess for the next dance, which is almost immediately to commence."

"You have been residing in Florence for some time?" I said to Sir William Stratford after the Count of Livorno had left us.

"Yes: it is a delightful city, with numerous attractions for every one—but with an especial enchantment for me," he added with a smile. "Altogether I like the Continent much better than England—"

"In this respect," I observed, "you resemble my friend Lord Ravenshill, who was telling me yesterday—"

"Lord Ravenshill?" ejaculated Sir William Stratford, with accents that surprised me. "Is he in Florence, my lord?"

"Yes—and within these walls," I answered. "It was Lady Ravenshill with whom you saw me dancing just now."

"Oh, indeed!" said Sir William, with his habitual suavity of manner. "I have not the honour of her ladyship's acquaintance: but Lord Ravenshill—And you say he is here to-night?"

"Yes—I saw him but a few minutes back: it was in one of the adjacent rooms——"

"Ah! these rooms are so spacious, and the assemblage is so numerous," said Sir William, "that even in the course of an entire evening one stands no chance of seeing all one's friends and acquaintances. But your lordship will excuse me for a few minutes:—and with a somewhat hasty but completely courteous bow, Sir William Stratford glided away.

After lingering on the spot in reflection for a few moments, I passed into the adjacent room, where I had just now seen Lord Ravenshill. At the very instant I thus entered it, I observed his lordship standing apart from the rest of the company—indeed almost completely in a corner—conversing with Sir William Stratford. But at the same moment the Viscountess Cenci accosted them; and I heard her say, "Really, my Lord Ravenshill—and you also, Sir William—I must chide you both for standing gossiping here while there are so many fair ones who are in want of partners for the ensuing dance."

"Permit me to offer my hand to the fairest," said Sir William, with the tender familiarity of an accepted suitor; but as he led the Viscountess away, I saw that he flung upon Lord Ravenshill a rapid glance of singular significance.

He passed into the grand saloon with the Viscountess Cenci; and Lord Ravenshill remained standing on the same spot where this little scene had taken place. I observed that he had an irresolute and bewildered air: he did not notice me—nor do I think had Sir William Stratford perceived my proximity at the time. I waited till this individual had led the Viscountess forth from the room; and then I accosted Lord Ravenshill.

"Ah, my dear Eccleston!" he said with a sort of start: "you are the very one whom I could best wish to consult under present circumstances!"

"On what subject?" I inquired, though conjecturing that it was in reference to Sir William Stratford.

"Come hither," said Ravenshill: and he drew me forth upon a balcony lighted with lamps, and decked with flowers which shed a delicious perfume.

The balcony looked upon the spacious garden attached to the Cenci mansion; and we could there discourse without restraint.

"I am somewhat perplexed how to act," said Lord Ravenshill. "An earnest appeal has been made to me: and yet on the other hand there is the sternest sense of duty——"

"Ah!" I ejaculated; for I was thus suddenly reminded of the few words I had ere now heard drop from the lips of the two English gentlemen, as I have already informed the reader.

"Do you suspect anything?—have you fathomed anything?" inquired Ravenshill. "Tell me, my dear Earl! Lady Ravenshill just now informed me that when she was dancing with you——"

"You are alluding to Sir William Stratford," I

interrupted my noble companion. "I myself have fathomed nothing—but I feel there is something wrong about that man."

"There is, Eccleston!" said Ravenshill vehemently; "and it is totally impossible that we can be a party to the deception. He just now accosted me—I recognised him in a moment, although I had not seen him for years—despite too that moustache and tuft——He was telling me some plausible tale to account for his change of name—he was beseeching me to say naught which would injure him——But you yourself know him! We spoke of him yesterday when we met——"

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated, as a light flashed in unto my mind. "It is Sir Malcolm Wavenham!"

"Yes—it is he," rejoined Ravenshill. "How is it that you did not recognise him?"

"I knew his face, and I knew his voice," I answered: "but I was a mere youth—a boy of sixteen or seventeen—when last I saw him. He too was a very young man at that time; and this moustache moreover disguises him——"

"But it is he!" ejaculated Ravenshill. "He was telling me that though he had lost the family estates, he has recently inherited other large properties——"

"Believe it not!" I vehemently interjected. "That man is a villain! I know more of him than you suspect—I could tell you a tale——" and then I sighed profoundly as I thought of the hapless and perished Violet. "But enough for the present! What are we to do in reference to this man? Shall we unmask him publicly? or shall we speak to him in private?"

"The latter is the preferable alternative," answered Lord Ravenshill: "we will not create a scene within these walls. Come, my dear Eccleston, and let us at once seize an opportunity to whisper our intentions to that villainous adventurer."

"Yes," I said: "we will avoid a scene:—and it was not only for the sake of the Viscountess Cenci that I thus spoke, but likewise for that of Annabel: for I knew full well that if the name of Sir Malcolm Wavenham were mentioned in her hearing, it would conjure up the most afflicting memories concerning her loved and lost sister.

Ravenshill and myself stepped from the balcony back into the apartment; and just at that instant a footman accosted me, saying, "I beg your lordship's pardon—but there is an English gentleman who requests a few minutes' private conversation with your lordship. This is his card."

I took the card, and found it to be Mr. Tennant's.

"Where is this gentleman?" I inquired.

"I have shown him to a private apartment," responded the footman; "and if your lordship——"

"My dear Ravenshill," I said, "there are circumstances that have come to my knowledge which inspire me with the conviction that the plot is thickening. Come with me! I am much mistaken if you may not as well hear what Mr. Tennant has to communicate to me.—Lead us forth," I added, now speaking to the domestic, "in a manner that may excite as little notice as possible."

It was not necessary to pass through the prin-



cipal saloon where the dancing was taking place; and the footman led us forth without even being perceived by Sir Malcolm Wavenham. We traversed the spacious landing—we descended the magnificent marble staircase—we reached the hall; and thence the footman showed us into a parlour where Mr. Tennant was waiting. The domestic withdrew; and when the door was closed, I said to the solicitor, "This is my friend Lord Ravenshill; and I am convinced that whatsoever you are about to communicate to me, need not be kept secret from him."

"And it is not likely, my lord," answered Mr. Tennant, "to be kept secret from any one much longer. I allude to a most unpleasant business—a disagreeable duty which I have to perform. Your lordship cannot have forgotten the partial explanations I gave you this morning? That unprincipled forger is beneath this roof!"

"Forger?" ejaculated Ravenshill. "Is it possible that you can mean Sir Malcolm Wavenham?"

"It is," answered the lawyer.

"And we ourselves have discovered," I observed, "that Sir William Stratford and Sir Malcolm Wavenham are identical!"

"Your lordship is aware," resumed Mr. Tennant, "that I only reached Florence last night, and that this morning when I met you, I was on my way to institute certain inquiries and to see Sir Malcolm Wavenham. My object was *then* to give him the chance of settling the affair amicably, because I had not the remotest idea that under his assumed name of Stratford he was plotting the deepest villany in respect to a too confiding lady. The particulars of this scheme I have however learnt during the day; and I thereupon resolved to change the whole plan of my proceedings. I have not therefore seen Sir Malcolm Wavenham at all; but I have communicated with the Chief of the Florentine police—and every arrangement is made to set in operation that law of passports which will hand the villanous forger and unprincipled adventurer into the custody of the Bow Street officer who has accompanied me from London. But inasmuch as on calling just now at the Livorno palace to see your lordship and report all these things, I learnt that you were at the Cenci mansion—where I also expected to find Sir Malcolm Wavenham—it occurred to me that I would consult your lordship as to the best means of carrying out the business in a way calculated to spare the feelings of the Viscountess Cenci, and of her venerable father, of whom I have heard so much good."

"This is very kind and considerate on your part, Mr. Tennant," I said: and then, after a few minutes' reflection, I communicated to the solicitor and Lord Ravenshill a plan which had entered my mind.

They both assented to its propriety: Ravenshill remained with Mr. Tennant; and I ascended once more to the brilliant saloons. Entering them with the air of one who had nothing very serious to preoccupy him, I glanced about me. Sir Malcolm Wavenham was engaged in discourse with some ladies at the farther extremity of the grand saloon: the Viscountess Cenci was at the instant leaving a group with whom she had evidently been conversing at the other end. I accosted her, and said, "May I request a few minutes' private interview

with your ladyship? It is relative to a matter of considerable importance."

The Viscountess naturally regarded me with an air of the profoundest astonishment: but as I could now no longer preserve the careless indifference which I had assumed, she was evidently struck by my look—and she said, "This way, my lord."

She conducted me across the landing, to a small and exquisitely furnished apartment, where we were alone together. Her ladyship looked at me as if she were anxious at a glance to penetrate my meaning; and yet she evidently struggled with herself to maintain an appearance of calm dignified composure.

"Deeply, deeply afflicted am I, lady," I began, "to be the bearer of evil intelligence: but when everything is explained, you will appreciate my motives in thus privately and deliberately breaking the tidings to you."

"My lord, tell me at once," she said, "what it is you have to impart? I am not a child—and if it be some sudden calamity, I can meet it with a becoming fortitude."

I saw full well that she was from the first smitten with misgivings in respect to the object of her love—and she suspected that the forthcoming intelligence had reference to him: but far—very far was she from anticipating the full extent of the change that was to take place in her mind with regard to that man.

"Perhaps," I continued, "it might have been more delicate on my part to have charged the Countess of Eccleston to speak to your ladyship: but methought that it would possibly mitigate the pang somewhat if all this proceeding were conducted as quietly as possible. In a word, madam, that Englishman who has had the audacity to seek your hand in marriage, is utterly unworthy of you—he is not a mere adventurer—"

"Lord Eccleston," interrupted the Viscountess Cenci, "there are persons from whose lips I should have received such intelligence with the utmost caution: but as it comes from your's—"

Her countenance had grown deadly pale as she commenced this speech: she now stopped suddenly short. I saw that she staggered—and I assisted her to a chair. Then her fortitude, her sense of dignity, her pride, all suddenly gave way; and she burst into a torrent of tears. For some minutes I suffered her to weep: it was impossible to offer a single syllable of consolation; and besides, I knew that those tears would relieve her.

"Tell me everything! tell me the worst!" she said, again breaking silence. "Sir William is not, what he seems—or what he has assumed to be? Perhaps he has no estates? perhaps he has no title? But his character may be otherwise honourable—he may have been unfortunate—"

"Methought I had already prepared your ladyship," I interrupted her, "to hear the very worst in respect to that man. Oh! it is most painful for me to break the terrible truth unto your knowledge!"

"Then it must be something dreadful!" said the Viscountess: and for a few moments an expression of ineffable anguish passed over her features. "But hesitate not to tell me, my lord!" she continued, suddenly growing calm—yet it was with a desperate unnatural species of composure. "It is

true that I have loved him—and love itself is a prejudice! Perhaps I have not listened with sufficient attention to the representations of my father and my friends. But if I have indeed loved one who is unworthy, rest assured that susceptible as my heart has been to receive the impression, with equal facility can it banish an image which it may no longer in honour cherish. I am no puling sentimental girl—my feelings are strong—and as deeply as I have loved, with an equal bitterness can I hate. Now, my lord, that I have told you all this, hesitate no longer to inform me why I must not love Sir William Stratford?"

"Madam," I answered, "circumstances have combined to save you not merely from becoming the dupe of a penniless adventurer, but likewise from wedding positive infamy!"

Again for an instant did that anguished expression flit over the features of the Viscountess; but it was less perceptible than before—and it was more evanescent.

"Infamy!" she said: and then the proud blood of her race rushed to her cheeks. "My lord," she continued, after a few moments' pause—and it was with a singular fixity of look that she spoke,—"there is no longer any love in my heart for that man! You may deem it strange that I give you this assurance: you may regard it as singular that I should be enabled all in a moment, as it were, to put forth from my soul a sentiment which was so recently an infatuation. But it is impossible for me, the daughter of an honourable man—the widow of an honourable man—to love one who bears a tainted reputation!"

There was a species of heroism in the present tone, conduct, and demeanour of the Viscountess, which could not fail to inspire admiration. I saw that if in one sense she had a woman's weakness, in every other sense she had an Amazonian strength of mind: love was the weakness—but even therewith was a pride which constituted strength; and the moment the love was felt to be an unworthy one, its weakness was absorbed in the dominating strength of that pride.

"The person who has dared to aspire to your hand in the hope of obtaining your riches," I continued, "does indeed bear the title of a British Baronet—but a title which he has disgraced. His name is not Sir William Stratford: it is Sir Malcolm Wavenham. His estates have long been disposed of: the very money with which he has been keeping up an appearance in Italy, was obtained by the foulest fraud in England—and within the hour that is passing the mechanism of justice is preparing to fold him in its grasp—unless—but of that hereafter! Madam," I added impressively, "circumstances have saved you from becoming the victim of a forger!"

"And that man is still beneath my roof?" exclaimed the Viscountess, drawing herself up with all her dignity, while the proud blood again rushed to her cheeks. "It is time that my lacqueys should drive him hence!"

She was advancing with an air of queenly indignation towards the door, when I hastened to fling myself in the way, saying, "But your ladyship will not surely give publicity to all this? My object was to spare your feelings—to warn you of the blow that was about to smite Sir Malcolm Wavenham—to ascertain whether you might choose that

the affair should be hushed up, and that he should be released from his terrible predicament on condition that at once and for ever he absented himself from the Tuscan States? If the matter be so settled, the world need not know that the man on whom the Viscountess Cenci bestowed her love, was a criminal; and some pretext may be devised for the breaking-off of the match."

"I fully appreciate your lordship's good intentions," answered the Viscountess; "and I offer my sincerest gratitude. But it is not thus that so serious an affair can be settled. Publicly have I shown favour to that man; and as publicly will I exhibit my scorn and abhorrence. I have not been ashamed to suffer the world to perceive that I loved him: I must not now hesitate to prove to this same world that I detest him. If there have been pride in love, there shall be pride in hatred also! My lord, the shame is not mine—but it shall be his own!"

I was about to offer further remonstrances—I was on the point of representing all the inconvenience that might arise from creating "a scene" in the midst of the brilliant entertainment: but the Viscountess convinced me by a look that my endeavour would be vain—for that her mind was made up.

"Have the goodness, my lord," she said, "to accompany me back to the rooms where the guests are assembled."

She did not take my arm: but she walked in front of me,—evidently fortified with all her feminine dignity—invested with the pride of the Goddess Juno herself. We entered the principal saloon: a glance showed me that Sir Malcolm Wavenham was conversing with a group of ladies and gentlemen almost in the centre of that spacious and brilliantly lighted apartment. Annabel was seated with the Count and Countess of Livorno and Lady Ravenshill at the farther extremity from that by which the Viscountess and myself now re-entered the saloon.

The Viscountess advanced straight up to the group with whom Sir Malcolm Wavenham was conversing; and I hastened onward to prepare Annabel for the explosion.

"My dearest wife," I said, seating myself by her side, and hastily whispering in her ear, "there is a subject on which you and I have not breathed a word to each other for a very long, long time—the subject of your deceased sister's career—the hapless Violet! But her wrongs will now be avenged—the villain who enticed her from the path of honour is within these walls—he is here—you behold him now—Prepare yourself, for heaven's sake prepare yourself, dearest Annabel—"

"Dare not approach me!" were now the words which, suddenly bursting upon the ears of all present, interrupted the hurried speech that I was whisperingly making to Annabel.

It was the Viscountess who had thus spoken; and her words appeared to electrify the entire assembly. There was what might be termed a hushed and subdued sensation, if the reader can understand what I mean—a sensation which was universally felt—a breathless suspense—a dead silence for a few moments.

"Friends!" continued the Viscountess, still speaking in a tone that was audible in every part of the

spacious room, "you have seen me receive this man with favour: you now behold me expel him with ignominy. Begone!—begone, vile forger! Felon that you are, the hand of justice is stretched out to grasp you!"

I must confess that all this was at the moment striking and impressive to a degree; though, when afterwards calmly looked at, it had too much the appearance of a melodramatic scene upon a stage, and in which the Viscountess enacted the part of an outraged revengeful heroine. There was something too in her attitude and look at the moment which reminded me of all I had ever read of Mrs. Siddons—so queenly was the air of the Marquis of Falieri's daughter, as with extended arm she pointed towards the door of the saloon. The sensation was now more than ever perceptible: there was a hum of indignant voices—and there were even ejaculations of applause for the lady; while others of scorn for the unmasked adventurer burst forth as the latter hurried from the apartment. I was not near enough to see how he looked: but I was subsequently informed that his appearance was so utterly crest-fallen and wretched—so thoroughly discomfited, spirit-broken, and crushed—that his must have been feelings scarcely to be envied by even a criminal on his way to execution.

"Condign punishment has at length overtaken the author of Violet's wrongs," I whispered to Annabel: "for that man is Sir Malcolm Wavenham!"

### CONCLUSION.

SIR MALCOLM WAVENHAM, on stealing down the great staircase, with the feelings of a criminal as he was, encountered two or three of the Florentine sbirri, who took him into custody: for the rumour had at once been passed down to the hall that the man was thoroughly unmasked. He was led away to the neighbouring police-office,—Mr. Tennant and the Bow Street constable following. His passport was demanded; and as it bore the name of Sir William Stratford, Mr. Tennant produced evidence to prove that his real name was Sir Malcolm Wavenham. Upon this information the Tuscan authorities at once sent the culprit, in the custody of the sbirri, to Leghorn—Mr. Tennant and the Bow Street officer accompanying them. At Leghorn Sir Malcolm was placed on board an English vessel; and on that deck—which was the same as British ground—the Bow Street officer took the criminal into custody. He was brought to England—tried for the forgery—and sentenced to transportation to the penal settlements. I have never heard of him since.

Infinite was the joy of the old Marquis de Falieri on that occasion, when, in the midst of her assembled guests, his daughter expelled the villa-

nous adventurer from her presence; and his lordship assured me, a few days afterwards, that the Viscountess, having entreated his pardon for neglecting his well-meant counsel in reference to her English suitor, had promised that never again would she prove indifferent to the paternal advice. The venerable Marquis is still alive; and his daughter is still the widowed Viscountess Cenci.

Mrs. Bentinck had not accompanied us on this visit to the Continent: she had remained behind in England, to spend the interval of our absence with Mr. and Mrs. Howard at Delmar Manor. After sojourning about eight months away from home—passing the time in visits to the Count of Livorno, to our friends in Rome, and to those in Corsica—we returned to England; for Annabel's anxiety to rejoin her mother was increasing. We have since remained altogether in our native land; and nothing has occurred to interrupt the even tenour of our happy and prosperous existence. Our own domestic hearth is a scene of perfect felicity; and all the bliss which wealth and health can afford, is ours. We have numerous friends who are interested in our welfare,—not the mere butterfly-friends who attach themselves to the blooming flowers of prosperity, but flit away from those that are withering beneath the breath of adversity,—but stanch and tried friends—friends whom, as the reader has seen, I had known in many adverse circumstances, and whose attachment towards me and mine has been cemented by all the incidents of the past.

And often are these friends gathered beneath the roof of Eccleston House, or at one of the country-seats which embellish the domains that I possess. And when they are all seated at my board, and I behold the Count and Countess of Livorno on one side, the Count and Countess of Monte d'Oro on the other—then the Count and Countess of Avellino—all smiling and happy, and all having travelled from their somewhat distant homes to pay friendship's tributary visit—when I hear the jolly laugh of Saltcoats sounding through the room—or find the worthy old Dominie wondering whether he first formed my acquaintance at Baillie Owlhead's or at the Laird of Tintosquashdale's,—when the Chief of Inch Methglin or Sir Alexander and Lady Carrondale speak of the wild scenery of their own native Caledon,—or when the good-hearted Duncansby reminds me, in a whisper and with a smile, of how we first travelled together in a hired post-chaise,—the incidents of the past are conjured up; and I behold therein so many ramifications of the web which, at one time apparently so tangled, nevertheless led on to that happy phase of my existence which I now enjoy.

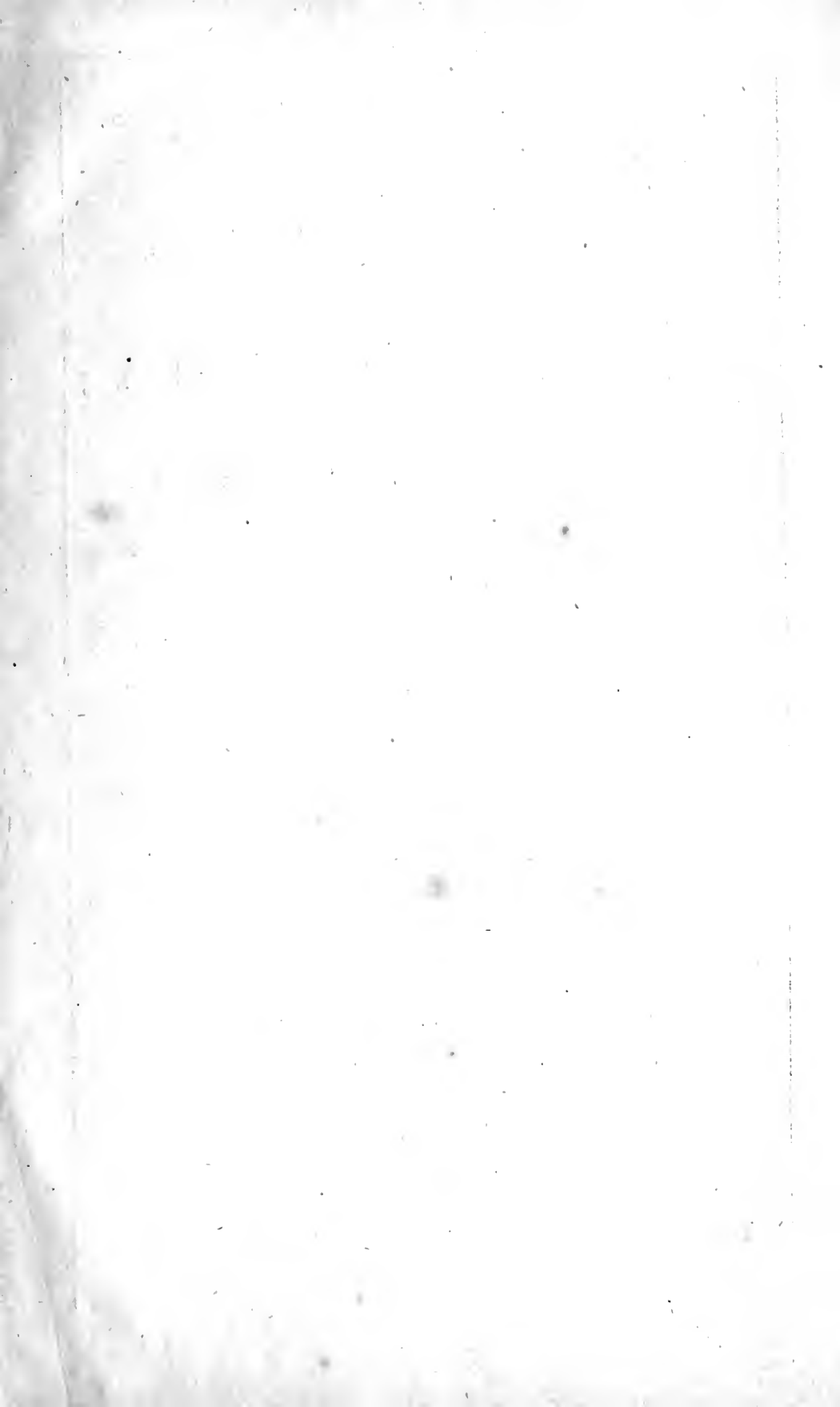
Reader, my task is done. Faithfully have I fulfilled it; and for whatsoever labour it has cost me, shall I be more than adequately rewarded if through its medium I have succeeded in pointing a moral that may be useful to those who have followed my adventurous course through the pages of this narrative.

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