

Eugene Aram, Book 5.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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EUGENE ARAM

By Edward Bulwer-Lytton

BOOK V.

Surely the man that plotteth ill against his
neighbor perpetrath ill against himself,
and the evil design is most evil to him that
deviseth it.

--Hesiod

CHAPTER I.

GRASSDALE.--THE MORNING OF THE MARRIAGE.--THE CRONES GOSSIP.--THE BRIDE
AT HER TOILET.--THE ARRIVAL.

JAM veniet virgo, jam dicetur Hymenaeus,
Hymen, O Hymenae! Hymen ades, O Hymenae!
CATULLUS: Carmen Nuptiale.

It was now the morning in which Eugene Aram was to be married to Madeline Lester. The student's house had been set in order for the arrival of the bride; and though it was yet early morn, two old women, whom his domestic (now not the only one, for a buxom lass of eighteen had been transplanted from Lester's household to meet the additional cares that the change of circumstances brought to Aram's) had invited to assist her in arranging what was already arranged, were bustling about the lower apartments and making matters, as they call it, "tidy."

"Them flowers look but poor things, after all," muttered an old crone, whom our readers will recognize as Dame Darkmans, placing a bowl of exotics on the table. "They does not look nigh so cheerful as them as grows in the open air."

"Tush! Goody Darkmans," said the second gossip. "They be much prettier and finer, to my mind; and so said Miss Nelly when she plucked them last night and sent me down with them. They says there is not a blade o' grass that the master does not know. He must be a good man to love the things of the field so."

"Ho!" said Dame Darkmans, "ho! When Joe Wrench was hanged for shooting the lord's keeper, and he mounted the scaffold wid a nosegay in his hand, he said, in a peevish voice, says he: 'Why does not they give me a tarnation? I always loved them sort o' flowers,--I wore them when I went a courting Bess Lucas,--an' I would like to die with one in my hand!' So a man may like flowers, and be but a hempen dog after all!"

"Now don't you, Goody; be still, can't you? What a tale for a marriage day!"

"Tally vally!" returned the grim hag, "many a blessing carries a curse in its arms, as the new moon carries the old. This won't be one of your

happy weddings, I tell ye."

"And why d' ye say that?"

"Did you ever see a man with a look like that make a happy husband? No, no! Can ye fancy the merry laugh o' childer in this house, or a babe on the father's knee, or the happy, still smile on the mother's winsome face, some few years hence? No, Madge! the devil has set his black claw on the man's brow."

"Hush, hush, Goody Darkmans; he may hear o' ye!" said the second gossip, who, having now done all that remained to do, had seated herself down by the window, while the more ominous crone, leaning over Aram's oak chair, uttered from thence her sibyl bodings.

"No," replied Mother Darkmans, "I seed him go out an hour ago, when the sun was just on the rise; and I said, when I seed him stroom into the wood yonder, and the ould leaves splashed in the damp under his feet, and his hat was aboon his brows, and his lips went so,—I said, says I, 't is not the man that will make a hearth bright that would walk thus on his marriage day. But I knows what I knows, and I minds what I seed last night."

"Why, what did you see last night?" asked the listener, with a trembling voice; for Plother Darkmans was a great teller of ghost and witch tales, and a certain ineffable awe of her dark gypsy features and malignant words had circulated pretty largely throughout the village.

"Why, I sat up here with the ould deaf woman, and we were a drinking the health of the man and his wife that is to be, and it was nigh twelve o' the clock ere I minded it was time to go home. Well, so I puts on my cloak, and the moon was up, an' I goes along by the wood, and up by Fairlegh Field, an' I was singing the ballad on Joe Wrench's hanging, for the spirats had made me gamesome, when I sees somemut dark creep, creep, but iver so fast, arter me over the field, and making right ahead to the village. And I stands still, an' I was not a bit afeared; but sure I thought it was no living cretur, at the first sight. And so it comes up faster and faster, and then I sees it was not one thing, but a many, many things, and they darkened the whole field afore me. And what d' ye think they was? A whole body o' gray rats, thousands and thousands on 'em; and they were making away from the outbuildings here. For sure they knew, the witch things, that an ill luck sat on the spot. And so I stood aside by the tree, an' I laughed to look on the ugsome creturs as they swept close by me, tramp, tramp! and they never heeded me a jot; but some on 'em looked aslant at me with their glittering eyes, and showed their white teeth, as if they grinned, and were saying to me, 'Ha, ha! Goody Darkmans, the house that we leave is a falling house, for the devil will have his own.'"

In some parts of the country, and especially in that where our scene is laid, no omen is more superstitiously believed evil than the departure of these loathsome animals from their accustomed habitation; the instinct which is supposed to make them desert an unsafe tenement is supposed also to make them predict, in desertion, ill fortune to the possessor. But while the ears of the listening gossip were still tingling with this narration, the dark figure of the student passed the window, and the old women, starting up, appeared in all the bustle of preparation, as Aram now entered the apartment.

"A happy day, your honor; a happy good morning," said both the crones in a breath; but the blessing of the worse-natured was vented in so harsh a croak that Aram turned round as if struck by the sound, and still more disliking the well-remembered aspect of the person from whom it came, waved his hand impatiently, and bade them begone.

"A-whish, a-whish!" muttered Dame Darkmans,--"to spake so to the poor; but the rats never lie, the bonny things!"

Aram threw himself into his chair, and remained for some moments absorbed in a revery, which did not bear the aspect of gloom. Then, walking once or twice to and fro the apartment, he stopped opposite the chimney-piece, over which were slung the firearms, which he never omitted to keep charged and primed.

"Humph!" he said, half aloud, "ye have been but idle servants; and now ye are but little likely ever to requite the care I have bestowed upon you."

With that a faint smile crossed his features; and turning away, he ascended the stairs that led to the lofty chamber in which he had been so often wont to outwatch the stars,--

"The souls of systems, and the lords of life,
Through their wide empires."

Before we follow him to his high and lonely retreat we will bring the reader to the manor-house, where all was already gladness and quiet but deep joy.

It wanted about three hours to that fixed for the marriage; and Aram was not expected at the manor-house till an hour before the celebration of the event. Nevertheless, the bells were already ringing loudly and blithely; and the near vicinity of the church to the house brought that sound, so inexpressibly buoyant and cheering, to the ears of the bride with a noisy merriment that seemed like the hearty voice of an old-fashioned friend who seeks in his greeting rather cordiality than discretion. Before her glass stood the beautiful, the virgin, the glorious form of Madeline Lester; and Ellinor, with trembling hands (and a voice between a laugh and a cry), was braiding up her sister's rich hair, and uttering her hopes, her wishes, her congratulations. The small lattice was open, and the air came rather chillingly to the bride's bosom.

"It is a gloomy morning, dearest Nell," said she, shivering; "the winter seems about to begin at last."

"Stay, I will shut the window. The sun is struggling with the clouds at present, but I am sure it will clear up by and by. You don't, you don't leave us--the word must out--till evening."

"Don't cry!" said Madeline, half weeping herself, and sitting down, she drew Ellinor to her; and the two sisters, who had never been parted since birth, exchanged tears that were natural, though scarcely the unmixed tears of grief.

"And what pleasant evenings we shall have," said Madeline, holding her sister's hands, "in the Christmas time! You will be staying with us, you know; and that pretty old room in the north of the house Eugene has already ordered to be fitted up for you. Well, and my dear father, and

dear Walter, who will be returned long ere then, will walk over to see us, and praise my housekeeping, and so forth. And then, after dinner, we will draw near the fire,--I next to Eugene, and my father, our guest, on the other side of me, with his long gray hair and his good fine face, with a tear of kind feeling in his eye,--you know that look he has whenever he is affected. And at a little distance on the other side of the hearth will be you--and Walter; I suppose we must make room for him. And Eugene, who will be then the liveliest of you all, shall read to us with his soft, clear voice, or tell us all about the birds and flowers and strange things in other countries. And then after supper we will walk half-way home across that beautiful valley--beautiful even in winter--with my father and Walter, and count the stars, and take new lessons in astronomy, and hear tales about the astrologers and the alchemists, with their fine old dreams. Ah! it will be such a happy Christmas! And then, when spring comes, some fine morning--finer than this--when the birds are about, and the leaves getting green, and the flowers springing up every day, I shall be called in to help your toilet, as you have helped mine, and to go with you to church, though not, alas! as your bridesmaid. Ah! whom shall we have for that duty?"

"Pshaw!" said Ellinor, smiling through her tears.

While the sisters were thus engaged, and Madeline was trying, with her innocent kindness of heart, to exhilarate the spirits, so naturally depressed, of her doting sister, the sound of carriage-wheels was heard in the distance,--nearer, nearer; now the sound stopped, as at the gate; now fast, faster,--fast as the postilions could ply whip and the horses tear along. While the groups in the church-yard ran forth to gaze, and the bells rang merrily all the while, two chaises whirled by Madeline's window and stopped at the porch of the house. The sisters had flown in surprise to the casement.

"It is, it is--good God! it is Walter," cried Ellinor; "but how pale he looks!"

"And who are those strange men with him?" faltered Madeline, alarmed, though she knew not why.

CHAPTER II.

THE STUDENT ALONE IN HIS CHAMBER.--THE INTERRUPTION.--FAITHFUL LOVE.

NEQUICQUAM thalamo graves
Hastas
Vitabis strepitumque et celerem sequi
Ajacem.

--HORACE: Od. xv. lib. 1.

["In vain within your nuptial chamber will you
shun the deadly spears, ... the hostile shout,
and Ajax eager in pursuit."]

Alone in his favorite chamber, the instruments of science around him, and books, some of astronomical research, some of less lofty but yet abstruser lore, scattered on the tables, Eugene Aram indulged the last meditation he believed likely to absorb his thoughts before that great

change of life which was to bless solitude with a companion.

"Yes," said he, pacing the apartment with folded arms, "yes, all is safe! He will not again return; the dead sleeps now without a witness. I may lay this working brain upon the bosom that loves me, and not start at night and think that the soft hand around my neck is the hangman's gripe. Back to thyself, henceforth and forever, my busy heart! Let not thy secret stir from its gloomy depth! The seal is on the tomb; henceforth be the spectre laid. Yes, I must smooth my brow, and teach my lip restraint, and smile and talk like other men. I have taken to my hearth a watch, tender, faithful, anxious,--but a watch. Farewell the unguarded hour! The soul's relief in speech, the dark and broken, yet how grateful, confidence with self, farewell! And come, thou veil! subtle, close, unvarying, the everlasting curse of entire hypocrisy, that under thee, as night, the vexed world within may sleep, and stir not! and all, in truth concealment, may seem repose!"

As he uttered these thoughts, the student paused and looked on the extended landscape that lay below. A heavy, chill, and comfortless mist sat saddening over the earth. Not a leaf stirred on the autumnal trees, but the moist damps fell slowly and with a mournful murmur upon the unwavering grass. The outline of the morning sun was visible, but it gave forth no lustre: a ring of watery and dark vapor girded the melancholy orb. Far at the entrance of the valley the wild fern showed red and faded, and the first march of the deadly winter was already heralded by that drear and silent desolation which cradles the winds and storms. But amidst this cheerless scene the distant note of the merry marriage-bell floated by, like the good spirit of the wilderness, and the student rather paused to hearken to the note than to survey the scene. "My marriage-bell!" said he. "Could I, two short years back, have dreamed of this? My marriage-bell! How fondly my poor mother, when first she learned pride for her young scholar, would predict this day, and blend its festivities with the honor and the wealth her son was to acquire! Alas! can we have no science to count the stars and forebode the black eclipse of the future? But peace! peace! peace! I am, I will, I shall be happy now! Memory, I defy thee!"

He uttered the last words in a deep and intense tone; and turning away as the joyful peal again broke distinctly on his ear,--

"My marriage-bell! Oh, Madeline, how wondrously beloved, how unspeakably dear thou art to me! What hast thou conquered! How many reasons for resolve, how vast an army in the Past, has thy bright and tender purity overthrown! But thou--No, never shalt thou repent!" And for several minutes the sole thought of the soliloquist was love. But scarce consciously to himself, a spirit, not, to all seeming, befitted to that bridal-day,--vague, restless, impressed with the dark and fluttering shadow of coming change,--had taken possession of his breast, and did not long yield the mastery to any brighter and more serene emotion.

"And why," he said, as this spirit regained its empire over him, and he paused before the "starred tubes" of his beloved science,--"and why this chill, this shiver, in the midst of hope? Can the mere breath of the seasons, the weight or lightness of the atmosphere, the outward gloom or smile of the brute mass called Nature, affect us thus? Out on this empty science, this vain knowledge, this little lore, if we are so fooled by the vile clay and the common air from our one great empire, self! Great God! hast thou made us in mercy, or in disdain? Placed in this narrow world, darkness and cloud around us; no fixed rule for men; creeds,

morals, changing in every clime, and growing like herbs upon the mere soil,--we struggle to dispel the shadows; we grope around; from our own heart and our sharp and hard endurance we strike our only light. For what? To show us what dupes we are,--creatures of accident, tools of circumstance, blind instruments of the scorner Fate; the very mind, the very reason, a bound slave to the desires, the weakness of the clay; affected by a cloud, dulled by the damps of the foul marsh; stricken from power to weakness, from sense to madness, to gaping idiocy, or delirious raving, by a putrid exhalation! A rheum, a chill, and Caesar trembles! The world's gods, that slay or enlighten millions, poor puppets to the same rank imp which calls up the fungus or breeds the worm,--pah! How little worth is it in this life to be wise! Strange, strange, how my heart sinks. Well, the better sign, the better sign! In danger it never sank."

Absorbed in these reflections, Aram had not for some minutes noticed the sudden ceasing of the bell; but now, as he again paused from his irregular and abrupt paces along the chamber, the silence struck him, and looking forth, and striving again to catch the note, he saw a little group of men, among whom he marked the erect and comely form of Rowland Lester, approaching towards the house.

"What!" he thought, "do they come for me? Is it so late? Have I played the laggard? Nay, it yet wants near an hour to the time they expected me. Well, some kindness, some attention from my good father-in-law; I must thank him for it. What! my hand trembles. How weak are these poor nerves; I must rest and recall my mind to itself!"

And indeed, whether or not from the novelty and importance of the event he was about to celebrate, or from some presentiment, occasioned, as he would fain believe, by the mournful and sudden change in the atmosphere, an embarrassment, a wavering, a fear, very unwonted to the calm and stately self-possession of Eugene Aram, made itself painfully felt throughout his frame. He sank down in his chair and strove to re-collect himself; it was an effort in which he had just succeeded, when a loud knocking was heard at the outer door; it swung open; several voices were heard. Aram sprang up, pale, breathless, his lips apart.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands. "'Murderer!'--was that the word I heard shouted forth? The voice, too, is Walter Lester's. Has he returned? Can he have learned--?"

To rush to the door, to throw across it a long, heavy iron bar, which would resist assaults of no common strength, was his first impulse. Thus enabled to gain time for reflection, his active and alarmed mind ran over the whole field of expedient and conjecture. Again, "Murderer!" "Stay me not," cried Walter, from below; "my hand shall seize the murderer!"

Guess was now over; danger and death were marching on him. Escape,--how? whither? The height forbade the thought of flight from the casement! The door?--he heard loud steps already hurrying up the stairs; his hands clutched convulsively at his breast, where his fire-arms were generally concealed,--they were left below. He glanced one lightning glance round the room; no weapon of any kind was at hand. His brain reeled for a moment, his breath gasped, a mortal sickness passed over his heart, and then the MIND triumphed over all. He drew up to his full height, folded his arms doggedly on his breast, and muttering, "The accuser comes,--I have it still to refute the charge!" he stood prepared to meet, nor despairing to evade, the worst.

As waters close over the object which divided them, all these thoughts, these fears, and this resolution had been but the work, the agitation, and the succeeding calm of the moment; that moment was past.

"Admit us!" cried the voice of Walter Lester, knocking fiercely at the door.

"Not so fervently, boy," said Lester, laying his hand on his nephew's shoulder; "your tale is yet to be proved,--I believe it not. Treat him as innocent, I pray,--I command,--till you have shown him guilty."

"Away, uncle!" said the fiery Walter; "he is my father's murderer. God hath given justice to my hands." These words, uttered in a lower key than before, were but indistinctly heard by Aram through the massy door.

"Open, or we force our entrance!" shouted Walter again; and Aram, speaking for the first time, replied in a clear and sonorous voice, so that an angel, had one spoken, could not have more deeply impressed the heart of Rowland Lester with a conviction of the student's innocence,

"Who knocks so rudely? What means this violence? I open my doors to my friends. Is it a friend who asks it?"

"I ask it," said Rowland Lester, in a trembling and agitated voice.

"There seems some dreadful mistake: come forth, Eugene, and rectify it by a word."

Is it you, Rowland Lester? It is enough. I was but with my books, and had secured myself from intrusion. Enter." The bar was withdrawn, the door was burst open, and even Walter Lester, even the officers of justice with him, drew back for a moment as they beheld the lofty brow, the majestic presence, the features so unutterably calm, of Eugene Aram. "What want you, sirs?" said he, unmoved and unfaltering, though in the officers of justice he recognized faces he had known before, and in that distant town in which all that he dreaded in the past lay treasured up. At the sound of his voice the spell that for an instant had arrested the step of the avenging son melted away.

"Seize him!" he cried to the officers; "you see your prisoner."

"Hold!" cried Aram, drawing back. "By what authority is this outrage, --for what am I arrested?"

"Behold," said Walter, speaking through his teeth, "behold our warrant! You are accused of murder! Know you the name of Richard Houseman,--pause, consider,--or that of Daniel Clarke?"

Slowly Aram lifted his eyes from the warrant, and it might be seen that his face was a shade more pale, though his look did not quail, or his nerves tremble. Slowly he turned his gaze upon Walter; and then, after one moment's survey, dropped it once more on the paper.

"The name of Houseman is not unfamiliar to me," said he calmly, but with effort.

"And knew you Daniel Clarke

"What mean these questions?" said Aram, losing temper, and stamping

violently on the ground. "Is it thus that a man, free and guiltless, is to be questioned at the behest, or rather outrage, of every lawless boy? Lead me to some authority meet for me to answer; for you, boy, my answer is contempt."

"Big words shall not save thee, murderer!" cried Walter, breaking from his uncle, who in vain endeavored to hold him, and laying his powerful grasp upon Aram's shoulder. Livid was the glare that shot from the student's eye upon his assailer; and so fearfully did his features work and change with the passions within him that even Walter felt a strange shudder thrill through his frame.

"Gentlemen," said Aram at last, mastering his emotions, and resuming some portion of the remarkable dignity that characterized his usual bearing, as he turned towards the officers of justice, "I call upon you to discharge your duty. If this be a rightful warrant, I am your prisoner, but I am not this man's. I command your protection from him!"

Walter had already released his gripe, and said, in a muttered voice,

"My passion misled me; violence is unworthy my solemn cause. God and Justice--not these hands--are my avengers."

"Your avengers!" said Aram. "What dark words are these? This warrant accuses me of the murder of one Daniel Clarke. What is he to thee?"

"Mark me, man!" said Walter, fixing his eyes on Aram's countenance. "The name of Daniel Clarke was a feigned name; the real name was Geoffrey Lester: that murdered Lester was my father, and the brother of him whose daughter, had I not come to-day, you would have called your wife!"

Aram felt, while these words were uttered, that the eyes of all in the room were on him; and perhaps that knowledge enabled him not to reveal by outward sign what must have passed within during the awful trial of that moment.

"It is a dreadful tale," he said, "if true,--dreadful to me, so nearly allied to that family. But as yet I grapple with shadows."

"What! does not your conscience now convict you?" cried Walter, staggered by the calmness of the prisoner. But here Lester, who could no longer contain himself, interposed; he put by his nephew, and rushing to Aram, fell, weeping, upon his neck.

"I do not accuse thee, Eugene, my son, my son! I feel, I know thou art innocent of this monstrous crime; some horrid delusion darkens that poor boy's sight. You, you, who would walk aside to save a worm!" and the poor old man, overcome with his emotions, could literally say no more.

Aram looked down on Lester with a compassionate expression; and soothing him with kind words, and promises that all would be explained, gently moved from his hold, and, anxious to terminate the scene, silently motioned the officers to proceed. Struck with the calmness and dignity of his manner, and fully impressed by it with the notion of his innocence, the officers treated him with a marked respect; they did not even walk by his side, but suffered him to follow their steps. As they descended the stairs, Aram turned round to Walter, with a bitter and reproachful countenance,

"And so, young man, your malice against me has reached even to this! Will nothing but my life content you?"

"Is the desire of execution on my father's murderer but the wish of malice?" retorted Walter; though his heart yet well-nigh misgave him as to the grounds on which his suspicion rested.

Aram smiled, as half in scorn, half through incredulity; and, shaking his head gently, moved on without further words.

The three old women, who had remained in listening astonishment at the foot of the stairs, gave way as the men descended; but the one who so long had been Aram's solitary domestic, and who, from her deafness, was still benighted and uncomprehending as to the causes of his seizure, though from that very reason her alarm was the greater and more acute, she, impatiently thrusting away the officers, and mumbling some unintelligible anathema as she did so, flung herself at the feet of a master whose quiet habits and constant kindness had endeared him to her humble and faithful heart, and exclaimed,--

"What are they doing? Have they the heart to ill-use you? O master, God bless you! God shield you! I shall never see you, who was my only friend--who was every one's friend--any more!"

Aram drew himself from her, and said, with a quivering lip to Rowland Lester,--

"If her fears are true--if--if I never more return hither, see that her old age does not starve--does not want." Lester could not speak for sobbing, but the request was remembered. And now Aram, turning aside his proud head to conceal his emotion, beheld open the door of the room so trimly prepared for Madeline's reception: the flowers smiled upon him from their stands. "Lead on, gentlemen," he said quickly. And so Eugene Aram passed his threshold!

"Ho, ho!" muttered the old hag whose predictions in the morning had been so ominous,--"ho, ho! you'll believe Goody Darkmans another time! Providence respects the sayings of the ould. 'T was not for nothing the rats grinned at me last night. But let's in and have a warm glass. He, he! there will be all the strong liquors for us now; the Lord is merciful to the poor!"

As the little group proceeded through the valley, the officers first, Aram and Lester side by side, Walter, with his hand on his pistol and his eye on the prisoner, a little behind, Lester endeavored to cheer the prisoner's spirits and his own by insisting on the madness of the charge and the certainty of instant acquittal from the magistrate to whom they were bound, and who was esteemed the one both most acute and most just in the county. Aram interrupted him somewhat abruptly,

"My friend, enough of this presently. But Madeline, what knows she as yet?"

"Nothing; of course, we kept--"

"Exactly, exactly; you have done wisely. Why need she learn anything as yet? Say an arrest for debt, a mistake, an absence but of a day or so at most,--you understand?"

"Yes. Will you not see her, Eugene, before you go, and say this yourself?"

"I!--O God!--I! to whom this day was--No, no; save me, I implore you, from the agony of such a contrast,--an interview so mournful and unavailing. No, we must not meet! But whither go we now? Not, not, surely, through all the idle gossips of the village,--the crowd already excited to gape and stare and speculate on the--"

"No," interrupted Lester; "the carriages await us at the farther end of the valley. I thought of that,--for the rash boy behind seems to have changed his nature. I loved--Heaven knows how I loved my brother! But before I would let suspicion thus blind reason, I would suffer inquiry to sleep forever on his fate."

"Your nephew," said Aram, "has ever wronged me. But waste not words on him; let us think only of Madeline. Will you go back at once to her,--tell her a tale to lull her apprehensions, and then follow us with haste? I am alone among enemies till you come."

Lester was about to answer, when, at a turn in the road which brought the carriage within view, they perceived two figures in white hastening towards them; and ere Aram was prepared for the surprise, Madeline had sunk pale, trembling, and all breathless on his breast.

"I could not keep her back," said Ellinor, apologetically, to her father.

"Back! and why? Am I not in my proper place?" cried Madeline, lifting her face from Aram's breast; and then, as her eyes circled the group, and rested on Aram's countenance, now no longer calm, but full of woe, of passion, of disappointed love, of anticipated despair, she rose, and gradually recoiling with a fear which struck dumb her voice, thrice attempted to speak, and thrice failed.

"But what--what is--what means this?" exclaimed Ellinor. "Why do you weep, father? Why does Eugene turn away his face? You answer not. Speak, for God's sake! These strangers,--what are they? And you, Walter, you,--why are you so pale? Why do you thus knit your brows and fold your arms! You, you will tell me the meaning of this dreadful silence,--this scene. Speak, cousin, dear cousin, speak!"

"Speak!" cried Madeline, finding voice at length, but in the sharp and straining tone of wild terror, in which they recognized no note of the natural music. The single word sounded rather as a shriek than an adjuration; and so piercingly it ran through the hearts of all present that the very officers, hardened as their trade had made them, felt as if they would rather have faced death than answered that command.

A dead, long, dreary pause, and Aram broke it. "Madeline Lester," said he, "prove yourself worthy of the hour of trial. Exert yourself; arouse your heart; be prepared! You are the betrothed of one whose soul never quailed before man's angry word. Remember that, and fear not!"

"I will not, I will not, Eugene! Speak, only speak!"

"You have loved me in good report; trust me now in ill. They accuse me of a crime,--a heinous crime! At first I would not have told you the real charge. Pardon me, I wronged you,--now, know all! They accuse me, I say, of crime. Of what crime? you ask. Ay, I scarce know, so vague is the

charge, so fierce the accuser; but prepare, Madeline,--it is of murder!"

Raised as her spirits had been by the haughty and earnest tone of Aram's exhortation, Madeline now, though she turned deadly pale, though the earth swam round and round, yet repressed the shriek upon her lips as those horrid words shot into her soul.

"You!--murder!--you! And who dares accuse you?"

"Behold him,--your cousin!"

Ellinor heard, turned, fixed her eyes on Walter's sullen brow and motionless attitude, and fell senseless to the earth. Not thus Madeline. As there is an exhaustion that forbids, not invites repose, so when the mind is thoroughly on the rack, the common relief to anguish is not allowed; the senses are too sharply strung, thus happily to collapse into forgetfulness; the dreadful inspiration that agony kindles, supports nature while it consumes it. Madeline passed, without a downward glance, by the lifeless body of her sister; and walking with a steady step to Walter, she laid her hand upon his arm, and fixing on his countenance that soft clear eye, which was now lit with a searching and preternatural glare, and seemed to pierce into his soul, she said,

"Walter, do I hear aright? Am I awake? Is it you who accuse Eugene Aram,--your Madeline's betrothed husband,--Madeline, whom you once loved? Of what? Of crimes which death alone can punish. Away! It is not you, --I know it is not. Say that I am mistaken,--that I am mad, if you will. Come, Walter, relieve me; let me not abhor the very air you breathe!"

"Will no one have mercy on me?" cried Walter, rent to the heart, and covering his face with his hands. In the fire and heat of vengeance he had not reeked of this. He had only thought of justice to a father, punishment to a villain, rescue for a credulous girl. The woe, the horror he was about to inflict on all he most loved: this had not struck upon him with a due force till now!

"Mercy--you talk of mercy! I knew it could not be true!" said Madeline, trying to pluck her cousin's hand from his face; "you could not have dreamed of wrong to Eugene and--and upon this day. Say we have erred, or that you have erred, and we will forgive and bless you even now!" Aram had not interfered in this scene; he kept his eyes fixed on the cousins, not uninterested to see what effect Madeline's touching words might produce on his accuser. Meanwhile she continued: "Speak to me, Walter, dear Walter, speak to me'. Are you, my cousin, my playfellow, --are you the one to blight our hopes, to dash our joys, to bring dread and terror into a home so lately all peace and sunshine, your own home, your childhood's home? What have you done? What have you dared to do? Accuse him! Of what? Murder! Speak, speak. Murder, ha! ha!--murder! nay, not so! You would not venture to come here, you would not let me take your hand, you would not look us, your uncle, your more than sisters, in the face if you could nurse in your heart this lie,--this black, horrid lie!"

Walter withdrew his hands, and as he turned his face said,--

"Let him prove his innocence. Pray God he do! I am not his accuser, Madeline. His accusers are the bones of my dead father! Save these, Heaven alone and the revealing earth are witness against him!"

"Your father!" said Madeline, staggering back,--"my lost uncle! Nay, now I know indeed what a shadow has appalled us all! Did you know my uncle, Eugene? Did you ever see Geoffrey Lester?"

"Never, as I believe, so help me God!" said Aram, laying his hand on his heart. "But this is idle now," as, recollecting himself, he felt that the case had gone forth from Walter's hands, and that appeal to him had become vain. "Leave us now, dearest Madeline, my beloved wife that shall be, that is! I go to disprove these charges. Perhaps I shall return to-night. Delay not my acquittal, even from doubt,--a boy's doubt. Come, sirs."

"O Eugene! Eugene!" cried Madeline, throwing herself on her knees before him, "do not order me to leave you now, now in the hour of dread! I will not. Nay, look not so! I swear I will not! Father, dear father, come and plead for me,--say I shall go with you. I ask nothing more. Do not fear for my nerves,--cowardice is gone. I will not shame you, I will not play the woman. I know what is due to one who loves him. Try me, only try me. You weep, father, you shake your head. But you, Eugene, --you have not the heart to deny me? Think--think if I stayed here to count the moments till you return, my very senses would leave me. What do I ask? But to go with you, to be the first to hail your triumph! Had this happened two hours hence, you could not have said me nay,--I should have claimed the right to be with you; I now but implore the blessing. You relent, you relent; I see it!"

"O Heaven!" exclaimed Aram, rising, and clasping her to his breast, and wildly kissing her face, but with cold and trembling lips, "this is indeed a bitter hour; let me not sink beneath it. Yes, Madeline, ask your father if he consents; I hail your strengthening presence as that of an angel. I will not be the one to sever you from my side."

"You are right, Eugene," said Lester, who was supporting Ellinor, not yet recovered,--"let her go with us; it is but common kindness and common mercy."

Madeline uttered a cry of joy (joy even at such a moment!), and clung fast to Eugene's arm, as if for assurance that they were not indeed to be separated.

By this time some of Lester's servants, who had from a distance followed their young mistresses, reached the spot. To their care Lester gave the still scarce reviving Ellinor; and then, turning round with a severe countenance to Walter, said, "Come, sir, your rashness has done sufficient wrong for the present; come now, and see how soon your suspicions will end in shame."

"Justice, and blood for blood!" said Walter, sternly; but his heart felt as if it were broken. His venerable uncle's tears, Madeline's look of horror as she turned from him, Ellinor all lifeless, and he not daring to approach her,--this was HIS work! He pulled his hat over his eyes, and hastened into the carriage alone. Lester, Madeline, and Aram followed in the other vehicle; and the two officers contented themselves with mounting the box, certain the prisoner would attempt no escape.

CHAPTER III.

THE JUSTICE--THE DEPARTURE--THE EQUANIMITY OF THE CORPORAL IN BEARING THE MISFORTUNES OF OTHER PEOPLE.--THE EXAMINATION; ITS RESULT.--ARAM'S CONDUCT IN PRISON.--THE ELASTICITY OF OUR HUMAN NATURE.--A VISIT FROM THE EARL.--WALTER'S DETERMINATION.--MADELINE.

Bear me to prison, where I am committed.
--Measure for Measure.

On arriving at Sir--'s, a disappointment, for which, had they previously conversed with the officers they might have been prepared, awaited them. The fact was, that the justice had only endorsed the warrant sent from Yorkshire; and after a very short colloquy, in which he expressed his regret at the circumstance, his conviction that the charge would be disproved, and a few other courteous common-places, he gave Aram to understand that the matter now did not rest with him, but that it was to Yorkshire that the officers were bound, and before Mr. Thornton, a magistrate of that country, that the examination was to take place. "All I can do," said the magistrate, "I have already done; but I wished for an opportunity of informing you of it. I have written to my brother justice at full length respecting your high character, and treating the habits and rectitude of your life alone as a sufficient refutation of so monstrous a charge."

For the first time a visible embarrassment came over the firm nerves of the prisoner: he seemed to look with great uneasiness at the prospect of this long and dreary journey, and for such an end. Perhaps, the very notion of returning as a suspected criminal to that part of the country where a portion of his youth had been passed, was sufficient to disquiet and deject him. All this while his poor Madeline seemed actuated by a spirit beyond herself; she would not be separated from his side--she held his hand in hers--she whispered comfort and courage at the very moment when her own heart most sank. The magistrate wiped his eyes when he saw a creature so young, so beautiful, in circumstances so fearful, and bearing up with an energy so little to be expected from her years and delicate appearance. Aram said but little; he covered his face with his right hand for a few moments, as if to hide a passing emotion, a sudden weakness. When he removed it, all vestige of colour had died away; his face was pale as that of one who has risen from the grave; but it was settled and composed.

"It is a hard pang, Sir," said he, with a faint smile; "so many miles--so many days--so long a deferment of knowing the best, or preparing to meet the worst. But, be it so! I thank you, Sir,--I thank you all,--Lester, Madeline, for your kindness; you two must now leave me; the brand is on my name--the suspected man is no fit object for love or friendship! Farewell!"

"We go with you!" said Madeline firmly, and in a very low voice.

Aram's eye sparkled, but he waved his hand impatiently.

"We go with you, my friend!" repeated Lester.

And so, indeed, not to dwell long on a painful scene, it was finally settled. Lester and his two daughters that evening followed Aram to the dark and fatal bourne to which he was bound.

It was in vain that Walter, seizing his uncle's hands, whispered,

"For Heaven's sake, do not be rash in your friendship! You have not yet learnt all. I tell you, that there can be no doubt of his guilt! Remember, it is a brother for whom you mourn! will you countenance his murderer?"

Lester, despite himself, was struck by the earnestness with which his nephew spoke, but the impression died away as the words ceased: so strong and deep had been the fascination which Eugene Aram had exercised over the hearts of all once drawn within the near circle of his attraction, that had the charge of murder been made against himself, Lester could not have repelled it with a more entire conviction of the innocence of the accused. Still, however, the deep sincerity of his nephew's manner in some measure served to soften his resentment towards him.

"No, no, boy!" said he, drawing away his hand, "Rowland Lester is not the one to desert a friend in the day of darkness and the hour of need. Be silent I say!--My brother, my poor brother, you tell me, has been murdered. I will see justice done to him: but, Aram! Fie! fie! it is a name that would whisper falsehood to the loudest accusation. Go, Walter! go! I do not blame you!--you may be right--a murdered father is a dread and awful memory to a son! What wonder that the thought warps your judgment? But go! Eugene was to me both a guide and a blessing; a father in wisdom, a son in love. I cannot look on his accuser's face without anguish. Go! we shall meet again.--How! Go!"

"Enough, Sir!" said Walter, partly in anger, partly in sorrow--"Time be the judge between us all!"

With those words he turned from the house, and proceeded on foot towards a cottage half way between Grassdale and the Magistrate's house, at which, previous to his return to the former place, he had prudently left the Corporal--not willing to trust to that person's discretion, as to the tales and scandal that he might propagate throughout the village on a matter so painful and so dark.

Let the world wag as it will, there are some tempers which its vicissitudes never reach. Nothing makes a picture of distress more sad than the portrait of some individual sitting indifferently looking on in the back-ground. This was a secret Hogarth knew well. Mark his deathbed scenes:--Poverty and Vice worked up into horror--and the Physicians in the corner wrangling for the fee!--or the child playing with the coffin--or the nurse filching what fortune, harsh, yet less harsh than humanity, might have left. In the melancholy depth of humour that steeps both our fancy and our heart in the immortal Romance of Cervantes (for, how profoundly melancholy is it to be compelled by one gallant folly to laugh at all that is gentle, and brave, and wise, and generous!) nothing grates on us more than when--last scene of all, the poor Knight lies dead--his exploits for ever over--for ever dumb his eloquent discourses: than when, I say, we are told that, despite of his grief, even little Sancho did not eat or drink the less:--these touches open to us the real world, it is true; but it is not the best part of it. What a pensive thing is true humour! Certain it was, that when Walter, full of contending emotions at all he had witnessed,--harassed, tortured, yet also elevated, by his feelings, stopped opposite the cottage door, and saw there the Corporal sitting comfortably in the porch,--his vile modicum Sabini before him--his pipe in his mouth, and a complacent expression of satisfaction

diffusing itself over features which shrewdness and selfishness had marked for their own;--certain it was, that, at this sight Walter experienced a more displeasing revulsion of feeling--a more entire conviction of sadness--a more consummate disgust of this weary world and the motley masquers that walk thereon, than all the tragic scenes he had just witnessed had excited within him.

"And well, Sir," said the Corporal, slowly rising, "how did it go off?--Wasn't the villain bash'd to the dust?--You've nabbed him safe, I hope?"

"Silence," said Walter, sternly, "prepare for our departure. The chaise will be here forthwith; we return to Yorkshire this day. Ask me no more now."

"A--well--baugh!" said the Corporal.

There was a long silence. Walter walked to and fro the road before the cottage. The chaise arrived; the luggage was put in. Walter's foot was on the step; but before the Corporal mounted the rumbling dickey, that invaluable domestic hemmed thrice.

"And had you time, Sir, to think of poor Jacob, and look at the cottage, and slip in a word to your uncle about the bit tato ground?"

We pass over the space of time, short in fact, long in suffering, that elapsed, till the prisoner and his companions reached Knaresbro'. Aram's conduct during this time was not only calm but cheerful. The stoical doctrines he had affected through life, he on this trying interval called into remarkable exertion. He it was who now supported the spirits of his mistress and his friend; and though he no longer pretended to be sanguine of acquittal--though again and again he urged upon them the gloomy fact--first, how improbable it was that this course had been entered into against him without strong presumption of guilt; and secondly, how little less improbable it was, that at that distance of time he should be able to procure evidence, or remember circumstances, sufficient on the instant to set aside such presumption,--he yet dwelt partly on the hope of ultimate proof of his innocence, and still more strongly on the firmness of his own mind to bear, without shrinking, even the hardest fate.

"Do not," he said to Lester, "do not look on these trials of life only with the eyes of the world. Reflect how poor and minute a segment in the vast circle of eternity existence is at the best. Its sorrow and its shame are but moments. Always in my brightest and youngest hours I have wrapt my heart in the contemplation of an august futurity.

""The soul, secure in its existence, smiles
At the drawn dagger, and defies its point."

"If I die even the death of the felon, it is beyond the power of fate to separate us for long. It is but a pang, and we are united again for ever; for ever in that far and shadowy clime, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' Were it not for Madeline's dear sake, I should long since have been over weary of the world. As it is, the sooner, even by a violent and unjust fate, we leave a path begirt with snares below and tempests above, the happier for that soul which looks to its lot in this earth as the least part of its appointed doom."

In discourses like this, which the nature of his eloquence was peculiarly calculated to render solemn and impressive, Aram strove to prepare his

friends for the worst, and perhaps to cheat, or to steel, himself. Ever as he spoke thus, Lester or Ellinor broke on him with impatient remonstrance; but Madeline, as if imbued with a deeper and more mournful penetration into the future, listened in tearless and breathless attention. She gazed upon him with a look that shared the thought he expressed, though it read not (yet she dreamed so) the heart from which it came. In the words of that beautiful poet, to whose true nature, so full of unuttered tenderness--so fraught with the rich nobility of love--we have begun slowly to awaken,

"Her lip was silent, scarcely beat her heart.
Her eye alone proclaimed 'we will not part!'
Thy 'hope' may perish, or thy friends may flee.
Farewell to life--but not adieu to thee!"
--[Lara]

They arrived at noon at the house of Mr. Thornton, and Aram underwent his examination. Though he denied most of the particulars in Houseman's evidence, and expressly the charge of murder, his commitment was made out; and that day he was removed by the officers, (Barker and Moor, who had arrested him at Grassdale,) to York Castle, to await his trial at the assizes.

The sensation which this extraordinary event created throughout the country, was wholly unequalled. Not only in Yorkshire, and the county in which he had of late resided, where his personal habits were known, but even in the Metropolis, and amongst men of all classes in England, it appears to have caused one mingled feeling of astonishment, horror, and incredulity, which in our times has had no parallel in any criminal prosecution. The peculiar turn of the prisoner--his genius--his learning--his moral life--the interest that by students had been for years attached to his name--his approaching marriage--the length of time that had elapsed since the crime had been committed--the singular and abrupt manner, the wild and legendary spot, in which the skeleton of the lost man had been discovered--the imperfect rumours--the dark and suspicious evidence--all combined to make a tale of such marvellous incident, and breeding such endless conjecture, that we cannot wonder to find it afterwards received a place, not only in the temporary chronicles, but even the most important and permanent histories of the period.

Previous to Walter's departure from Knaresbro' to Grassdale, and immediately subsequent to the discovery at St. Robert's Cave, the coroner's inquest had been held upon the bones so mysteriously and suddenly brought to light. Upon the witness of the old woman at whose house Aram had lodged, and upon that of Houseman, aided by some circumstantial and less weighty evidence, had been issued that warrant on which we have seen the prisoner apprehended.

With most men there was an intimate and indignant persuasion of Aram's innocence; and at this day, in the county where he last resided, there still lingers the same belief. Firm as his gospel faith, that conviction rested in the mind of the worthy Lester; and he sought, by every means he could devise, to soothe and cheer the confinement of his friend. In prison, however (indeed after his examination--after Aram had made himself thoroughly acquainted with all the circumstantial evidence which identified Clarke with Geoffrey Lester, a story that till then he had persuaded himself wholly to disbelieve) a change which, in the presence of Madeline or her father, he vainly attempted wholly to conceal, and to which, when alone, he surrendered himself with a gloomy abstraction--came

over his mood, and dashed him from the lofty height of Philosophy, from which he had before looked down on the peril and the ills below.

Sometimes he would gaze on Lester with a strange and glassy eye, and mutter inaudibly to himself, as if unaware of the old man's presence; at others, he would shrink from Lester's proffered hand, and start abruptly from his professions of unaltered, unalterable regard; sometimes he would sit silently, and, with a changeless and stony countenance, look upon Madeline as she now spoke in that exalted tone of consolation which had passed away from himself; and when she had done, instead of replying to her speech, he would say abruptly, "Ay, at the worst you love me, then--love me better than any one on earth--say that, Madeline, again say that!"

And Madeline's trembling lips obeyed the demand.

"Yes," he would renew, "this man, whom they accuse me of murdering, this,--your uncle,--him you never saw since you were an infant, a mere infant; him you could not love! What was he to you?--yet it is dreadful to think of--dreadful, dreadful;" and then again his voice ceased; but his lips moved convulsively, and his eyes seemed to speak meanings that defied words. These alterations in his bearing, which belied his steady and resolute character, astonished and dejected both Madeline and her father. Sometimes they thought that his situation had shaken his reason, or that the horrible suspicion of having murdered the uncle of his intended wife, made him look upon themselves with a secret shudder, and that they were mingled up in his mind by no unnatural, though unjust confusion, with the causes of his present awful and uncertain state. With the generality of the world, these two tender friends believed Houseman the sole and real murderer, and fancied his charge against Aram was but the last expedient of a villain to ward punishment from himself, by imputing crime to another. Naturally, then, they frequently sought to turn the conversation upon Houseman, and on the different circumstances that had brought him acquainted with Aram; but on this ground the prisoner seemed morbidly sensitive, and averse to detailed discussion. His narration, however, such as it was, threw much light upon certain matters on which Madeline and Lester were before anxious and inquisitive.

"Houseman is, in all ways," said he, with great and bitter vehemence, "unredeemed, and beyond the calculations of an ordinary wickedness; we knew each other from our relationship, but seldom met, and still more rarely held long intercourse together. After we separated, when I left Knaresbro', we did not meet for years. He sought me at Grassdale; he was poor, and implored assistance; I gave him all within my power; he sought me again, nay, more than once again, and finding me justly averse to yielding to his extortionate demands, he then broached the purpose he has now effected; he threatened--you hear me--you understand--he threatened me with this charge--the murder of Daniel Clarke, by that name alone I knew the deceased. The menace, and the known villainy of the man, agitated me beyond expression. What was I? a being who lived without the world--who knew not its ways--who desired only rest! The menace haunted me--almost maddened! Your nephew has told you, you say, of broken words, of escaping emotions, which he has noted, even to suspicion, in me; you now behold the cause! Was it not sufficient? My life, nay more, my fame, my marriage, Madeline's peace of mind, all depended on the uncertain fury or craft of a wretch like this! The idea was with me night and day; to avoid it, I resolved on a sacrifice; you may blame me, I was weak, yet I

thought then not unwise; to avoid it, I say I offered to bribe this man

to leave the country. I sold my pittance to oblige him to it. I bound him thereto by the strongest ties. Nay, so disinterestedly, so truly did I love Madeline, that I would not wed while I thought this danger could burst upon me. I believed that, before my marriage day, Houseman had left the country. It was not so, Fate ordered otherwise. It seems that Houseman came to Knaresbro' to see his daughter; that suspicion, by a sudden train of events, fell on him, perhaps justly; to screen himself he has sacrificed me. The tale seems plausible; perhaps the accuser may triumph. But, Madeline, you now may account for much that may have perplexed you before. Let me remember--ay--ay--I have dropped mysterious words--have I not? have I not?--owning that danger was around me--owning that a wild and terrific secret was heavy at my breast; nay, once, walking with you the evening before, before the fatal day, I said that we must prepare to seek some yet more secluded spot, some deeper retirement; for, despite my precautions, despite the supposed absence of Houseman from the country itself, a fevered and restless presentiment would at some times intrude itself on me. All this is now accounted for, is it not, Madeline? Speak, speak!"

"All, love all! Why do you look on me with that searching eye, that frowning brow?"

"Did I? no, no, I have no frown for you; but peace, I am not what I ought to be through this ordeal."

The above narration of Aram's did indeed account to Madeline for much that had till then remained unexplained; the appearance of Houseman at Grassdale,--the meeting between him and Aram on the evening she walked with the latter, and questioned him of his ill-boding visitor; the frequent abstraction and muttered hints of her lover; and as he had said, his last declaration of the possible necessity of leaving Grassdale. Nor was there any thing improbable, though it was rather in accordance with the unworldly habits, than with the haughty character of Aram, that he should seek, circumstanced as he was, to silence even the false accuser of a plausible tale, that might well strike horror and bewilderment into a man much more, to all seeming, fitted to grapple with the hard and coarse realities of life, than the moody and secluded scholar. Be that as it may, though Lester deplored, he did not blame this circumstance, which after all had not transpired, nor seemed likely to transpire; and he attributed the prisoner's aversion to enter farther on the matter, to the natural dislike of so proud a man to refer to his own weakness, and to dwell upon the manner in which, despite of that weakness, he had been duped. This story Lester retailed to Walter, and it contributed to throw a damp and uncertainty over those mixed and unquiet feelings with which the latter waited for the coming trial. There were many moments when the young man was tempted to regret that Aram had not escaped a trial which, if he were proved guilty, would for ever blast the happiness of his family; and which might, notwithstanding such a verdict, leave on Walter's own mind an impression of the prisoner's innocence; and an uneasy consciousness that he, through his investigations, had brought him to that doom.

Walter remained in Yorkshire, seeing little of his family, of none indeed but Lester; it was not to be expected that Madeline would see him, and once only he caught the tearful eyes of Ellinor as she retreated from the room he entered, and those eyes beamed kindness and pity, but something also of reproach.

Time passed slowly and witheringly on: a man of the name of Terry having

been included in the suspicion, and indeed committed, it appeared that the prosecutor could not procure witnesses by the customary time, and the trial was postponed till the next assizes. As this man was however, never brought up to trial, and appears no more, we have said nothing of him in our narrative, until he thus became the instrument of a delay in the fate of Eugene Aram. Time passed on, Winter, Spring, were gone, and the glory and gloss of Summer were now lavished over the happy earth. In some measure the usual calmness of his demeanour had returned to Aram; he had mastered those moody fits we have referred to, which had so afflicted his affectionate visitors; and he now seemed to prepare and buoy himself up against that awful ordeal of life and death, which he was about so soon to pass. Yet he,--the hermit of Nature, who--

"Each little herb
That grows on mountain bleak, or tangled forest,
Had learnt to name;"
--Remorse, by S. T. Coleridge

he could not feel, even through the bars and checks of a prison, the soft summer air, 'the witchery of the soft blue sky;' he could not see the leaves bud forth, and mellow into their darker verdure; he could not hear the songs of the many-voiced birds; or listen to the dancing rain, calling up beauty where it fell; or mark at night, through his high and narrow casement, the stars aloof, and the sweet moon pouring in her light, like God's pardon, even through the dungeon-gloom and the desolate scenes where Mortality struggles with Despair; he could not catch, obstructed as they were, these, the benigner influences of earth, and not sicken and pant for his old and full communion with their ministry and presence. Sometimes all around him was forgotten, the harsh cell, the cheerless solitude, the approaching trial, the boding fear, the darkened hope, even the spectre of a troubled and fierce remembrance,--all was forgotten, and his spirit was abroad, and his step upon the mountain-top once more.

In our estimate of the ills of life, we never sufficiently take into our consideration the wonderful elasticity of our moral frame, the unlooked for, the startling facility with which the human mind accommodates itself to all change of circumstance, making an object and even a joy from the hardest and seemingly the least redeemed conditions of fate. The man who watched the spider in his cell, may have taken, at least, as much interest in the watch, as when engaged in the most ardent and ambitious objects of his former life; and he was but a type of his brethren; all in similar circumstances would have found some similar occupation. Let any man look over his past life, let him recall not moments, not hours of agony, for to them Custom lends not her blessed magic; but let him single out some lengthened period of physical or moral endurance; in hastily reverting to it, it may seem at first, I grant, altogether wretched; a series of days marked with the black stone,--the clouds without a star;--but let him look more closely, it was not so during the time of suffering; a thousand little things, in the bustle of life dormant and unheeded, then started froth into notice, and became to him objects of interest or diversion; the dreary present, once made familiar, glided away from him, not less than if it had been all happiness; his mind dwelt not on the dull intervals, but the stepping-stone it had created and placed at each; and, by that moral dreaming which for ever goes on within man's secret heart, he lived as little in the immediate world before him, as in the most sanguine period of his youth, or the most scheming of his maturity.

So wonderful in equalizing all states and all times in the varying tide of life, are these two rulers yet levellers of mankind, Hope and Custom, that the very idea of an eternal punishment includes that of an utter alteration of the whole mechanism of the soul in its human state, and no effort of an imagination, assisted by past experience, can conceive a state of torture which custom can never blunt, and from which the chainless and immaterial spirit can never be beguiled into even a momentary escape.

Among the very few persons admitted to Aram's solitude, was Lord--That nobleman was staying, on a visit, with a relation of his in the neighbourhood, and he seized with an excited and mournful avidity, the opportunity thus afforded him of seeing, once more, a character that had so often forced itself on his speculation and surprise. He came to offer not condolence, but respect; services, at such a moment, no individual could render,--he gave however, what was within his power--advice,--and pointed out to Aram the best counsel to engage, and the best method of previous inquiry into particulars yet unexplored. He was astonished to find Aram indifferent on these points, so important. The prisoner, it would seem, had even then resolved on being his own counsel, and conducting his own cause; the event proved that he did not rely in vain on the power of his own eloquence and sagacity, though he might on their result. As to the rest, he spoke with impatience, and the petulance of a wronged man. "For the idle rumours of the world, I do not care," said he, "let them condemn or acquit me as they will;--for my life, I might be willing indeed, that it were spared,--I trust it may be, if not, I can stand face to face with Death. I have now looked on him within these walls long enough to have grown familiar with his terrors. But enough of me; tell me, my Lord, something of the world without, I have grown eager about it at last. I have been now so condemned to feed upon myself, that I have become surfeited with the diet;"--and it was with great difficulty that the Earl drew Aram back to speak of himself: he did so, even when compelled to it, with so much qualification and reserve, mixed with some evident anger at the thought of being sifted and examined--that his visitor was forced finally to drop the subject, and not liking, nor indeed able, at such a time, to converse on more indifferent themes, the last interview he ever had with Aram terminated much more abruptly than he had meant it. His opinion of the prisoner was not, however, shaken in the least. I have seen a letter of his to a celebrated personage of the day, in which, mentioning this interview, he concludes with saying,--"In short, there is so much real dignity about the man, that adverse circumstances increase it tenfold. Of his innocence I have not the remotest doubt; but if he persist in being his own counsel, I tremble for the result,--you know in such cases how much more valuable is practice than genius. But the judge you will say is, in criminal causes, the prisoner's counsel,--God grant he may here prove a successful one! I repeat, were Aram condemned by five hundred juries, I could not believe him guilty. No, the very essence of all human probabilities is against it."

The Earl afterwards saw and conversed with Walter. He was much struck with the conduct of the young Lester, and much impressed with a feeling for a situation, so harassing and unhappy.

"Whatever be the result of the trial," said Walter, "I shall leave the country the moment it is finally over. If the prisoner be condemned, there is no hearth for me in my uncle's home; if not, my suspicions may still remain, and the sight of each other be an equal bane to the accused and to myself. A voluntary exile, and a life that may lead to

forgetfulness, are all that I covet.--I now find in my own person," he added, with a faint smile, "how deeply Shakspeare had read the mysteries of men's conduct. Hamlet, we are told, was naturally full of fire and action. One dark discovery quells his spirit, unstrings his heart, and stales to him for ever the uses of the world. I now comprehend the change. It is bodied forth even in the humblest individual, who is met by a similar fate--even in myself."

"Ay," said the Earl, "I do indeed remember you a wild, impetuous, headstrong youth. I scarcely recognize your very appearance. The elastic spring has left your step--there seems a fixed furrow in your brow. These clouds of life are indeed no summer vapour, darkening one moment and gone the next. But my young friend, let us hope the best. I firmly believe in Aram's innocence--firmly!--more rootedly than I can express. The real criminal will appear on the trial. All bitterness between you and Aram must cease at his acquittal; you will be anxious to repair to him the injustice of a natural suspicion: and he seems not one who could long retain malice. All will be well, believe me."

"God send it!" said Walter, sighing deeply.

"But at the worst," continued the Earl, pressing his hand in parting, "if you should persist in your resolution to leave the country, write to me, and I can furnish you with an honourable and stirring occasion for doing so.--Farewell."

While Time was thus advancing towards the fatal day, it was graving deep ravages within the pure breast of Madeline Lester. She had borne up, as we have seen, for some time, against the sudden blow that had shivered her young hopes, and separated her by so awful a chasm from the side of Aram; but as week after week, month after month rolled on, and he still lay in prison, and the horrible suspense of ignominy and death still hung over her, then gradually her courage began to fail, and her heart to sink. Of all the conditions to which the heart is subject, suspense is the one that most gnaws, and cankers into, the frame. One little month of that suspense, when it involves death, we are told, in a very remarkable work lately published by an eye-witness. [Note: See Mr. Wakefield's work on 'The Punishment of Death.'] is sufficient to plough fixed lines and furrows in the face of a convict of five-and-twenty--sufficient to dash the brown hair with grey, and to bleach the grey to white. And this suspense--suspense of this nature, for more than eight whole months, had Madeline to endure!

About the end of the second month the effect upon her health grew visible. Her colour, naturally delicate as the hues of the pink shell or the youngest rose, faded into one marble whiteness, which again, as time proceeded, flushed into that red and preternatural hectic, which once settled, rarely yields its place but to the colours of the grave. Her flesh shrank from its rounded and noble proportions. Deep hollows traced themselves beneath eyes which yet grew even more lovely as they grew less serenely bright. The blessed Sleep sunk not upon her brain with its wonted and healing dews. Perturbed dreams, that towards dawn succeeded the long and weary vigil of the night, shook her frame even more than the anguish of the day. In these dreams one frightful vision--a crowd--a scaffold--and the pale majestic face of her lover, darkened by unutterable pangs of pride and sorrow, were for ever present before her. Till now, she and Ellinor had always shared the same bed: this Madeline would not now suffer. In vain Ellinor wept and pleaded. "No," said Madeline, with a hollow voice; "at night I see him. My soul is alone with

his; but--but,"--and she burst into an agony of tears--"the most dreadful thought is this, I cannot master my dreams. And sometimes I start and wake, and find that in sleep I have believed him guilty. Nay, O God! that his lips have proclaimed the guilt! And shall any living being--shall any but God, who reads not words but hearts, hear this hideous falsehood--this ghastly mockery of the lying sleep? No, I must be alone! The very stars should not hear what is forced from me in the madness of my dreams."

But not in vain, or not excluded from her, was that elastic and consoling spirit of which I have before spoken. As Aram recovered the tenor of his self-possession, a more quiet and peaceful calm diffused itself over the mind of Madeline. Her high and starry nature could comprehend those sublime inspirations of comfort, which lift us from the lowest abyss of this world to the contemplation of all that the yearning visions of mankind have painted in another. She would sit, rapt and absorbed for hours together, till these contemplations assumed the colour of a gentle and soft insanity. "Come, dearest Madeline," Ellinor would say,--"Come, you have thought enough; my poor father asks to see you."

"Hush!" Madeline answered. "Hush, I have been walking with Eugene in heaven; and oh! there are green woods, and lulling waters above, as there are on earth, and we see the stars quite near, and I cannot tell you how happy their smile makes those who look upon them. And Eugene never starts there, nor frowns, nor walks aside, nor looks on me with an estranged and chilling look; but his face is as calm and bright as the face of an angel;--and his voice!--it thrills amidst all the music which plays there night and day--softer than their softest note. And we are married, Ellinor, at last. We were married in heaven, and all the angels came to the marriage! I am now so happy that we were not wed before! What! are you weeping, Ellinor? Ah, we never weep in heaven! but we will all go there again--all of us, hand in hand!"

These affecting hallucinations terrified them, lest they should settle into a confirmed loss of reason; but perhaps without cause. They never lasted long, and never occurred but after moods of abstraction of unusual duration. To her they probably supplied what sleep does to others--a relaxation and refreshment--an escape from the consciousness of life. And indeed it might always be noted, that after such harmless aberrations of the mind, Madeline seemed more collected and patient in thought, and for the moment, even stronger in frame than before. Yet the body evidently pined and languished, and each week made palpable decay in her vital powers.

Every time Aram saw her, he was startled at the alteration; and kissing her cheek, her lips, her temples, in an agony of grief, wondered that to him alone it was forbidden to weep. Yet after all, when she was gone, and he again alone, he could not but think death likely to prove to her the most happy of earthly boons. He was not sanguine of acquittal, and even in acquittal, a voice at his heart suggested insuperable barriers to their union, which had not existed when it was first anticipated.

"Yes, let her die," he would say, "let her die; she at least is certain of Heaven!" But the human infirmity clung around him, and notwithstanding this seeming resolution in her absence, he did not mourn the less, he was not stung the less, when he saw her again, and beheld a new character from the hand of death graven upon her form. No; we may triumph over all weakness, but that of the affections. Perhaps in this dreary and haggard interval of time, these two persons loved each other more purely, more

strongly, more enthusiastically, than they had ever done at any former period of their eventful history. Over the hardest stone, as over the softest turf, the green moss will force its verdure and sustain its life!

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVENING BEFORE THE TRIAL.--THE COUSINS.--THE CHANGE IN MADELINE.--THE FAMILY OF GRASSDALE MEET ONCE MORE BENEATH ONE ROOF.

Each substance of a grief hath twenty shadows,
For Sorrow's eye, glazed with blinding tears,
Divides one thing entire to many objects.

.....
[Hope] is a flatterer,
A parasite, a keeper back of death;
Who gently would dissolve the bands of death
Which false Hope lingers in extremity?
--Richard II.

It was the evening before the trial. Lester and his daughters lodged at a retired and solitary house in the suburbs of the town of York; and thither, from the village some miles distant, in which he had chosen his own retreat, Walter now proceeded across fields laden with the ripening corn. The last and the richest month of summer had commenced, but the harvest was not yet begun, and deep and golden showed the vegetation of life, bedded among the dark verdure of the hedge-rows, and "the merrie woods!" The evening was serene and lulled; at a distance arose the spires and chimneys of the town, but no sound from the busy hum of men reached the ear. Nothing perhaps gives a more entire idea of stillness than the sight of those abodes where "noise dwelleth," but where you cannot now hear even its murmurs. The stillness of a city is far more impressive than that of Nature; for the mind instantly compares the present silence with the wonted uproar. The harvest-moon rose slowly from a copse of gloomy firs, and diffused its own unspeakable magic into the hush and transparency of the night. As Walter walked slowly on, the sound of voices from some rustic party going homeward, broke jocundly on the silence, and when he paused for a moment at the stile, from which he first caught a glimpse of Lester's house, he saw, winding along the green hedgerow, some village pair, the "lover and the maid," who could meet only at such hours, and to whom such hours were therefore especially dear. It was altogether a scene of pure and true pastoral character, and there was all around a semblance of tranquillity, of happiness, which suits with the poetical and the scriptural paintings of a pastoral life; and which perhaps, in a new and fertile country, may still find a realization. From this scene, from these thoughts, the young loiterer turned with a sigh towards the solitary house in which this night could awaken none but the most anxious feelings, and that moon could beam only on the most troubled hearts.

"Terra salutiferas herbas, eademque nocentes
Nutrit; et urticae proxima saepe rosa est."

He now walked more quickly on, as if stung by his reflections, and avoiding the path which led to the front of the house, gained a little garden at the rear, and opening a gate that admitted to a narrow and shaded walk, over which the linden and nut trees made a sort of

continuous and natural arbour, the moon, piercing at broken intervals through the boughs, rested on the form of Ellinor Lester.

"This is most kind, most like my own sweet cousin," said Walter approaching; "I cannot say how fearful I was, lest you should not meet me after all."

"Indeed, Walter," replied Ellinor, "I found some difficulty in concealing your note, which was given me in Madeline's presence; and still more, in stealing out unobserved by her, for she has been, as you may well conceive, unusually restless the whole of this agonizing day. Ah, Walter, would to God you had never left us!"

"Rather say," rejoined Walter--"that this unhappy man, against whom my father's ashes still seem to me to cry aloud, had never come into our peaceful and happy valley! Then you would not have reproached me, that I have sought justice on a suspected murderer; nor I have longed for death rather than, in that justice, have inflicted such distress and horror on those whom I love the best!"

"What! Walter, you yet believe--you are yet convinced that Eugene Aram is the real criminal?"

"Let to-morrow shew," answered Walter. "But poor, poor Madeline! How does she bear up against this long suspense? You know I have not seen her for months."

"Oh! Walter," said Ellinor, weeping bitterly, "you would not know her, so dreadfully is she altered. I fear--" (here sobs choked the sister's voice, so as to leave it scarcely audible)--"that she is not many weeks for this world!"

"Great God! is it so?" exclaimed Walter, so shocked, that the tree against which he leant scarcely preserved him from falling to the ground, as the thousand remembrances of his first love rushed upon his heart. "And Providence singled me out of the whole world, to strike this blow!"

Despite her own grief, Ellinor was touched and smitten by the violent emotion of her cousin; and the two young persons, lovers--though love was at this time the least perceptible feeling of their breasts--mingled their emotions, and sought, at least to console and cheer each other.

"It may yet be better than our fears," said Ellinor, soothingly. "Eugene may be found guiltless, and in that joy we may forget all the past."

Walter shook his head despondingly. "Your heart, Ellinor, was always kind to me. You now are the only one to do me justice, and to see how utterly reproachless I am for all the misery the crime of another occasions. But my uncle--him, too, I have not seen for some time: is he well?"

"Yes, Walter, yes," said Ellinor, kindly disguising the real truth, how much her father's vigorous frame had been bowed by his state of mind. "And I, you see," added she, with a faint attempt to smile,--"I am, in health at least, the same as when, this time last year, we were all happy and full of hope."

Walter looked hard upon that face, once so vivid with the rich colour and the buoyant and arch expression of liveliness and youth, now pale,

subdued, and worn by the traces of constant tears; and, pressing his hand convulsively on his heart, turned away.

"But can I not see my uncle?" said he, after a pause.

"He is not at home: he has gone to the Castle," replied Ellinor.

"I shall meet him, then, on his way home," returned Walter. "But, Ellinor, there is surely no truth in a vague rumour which I heard in the town, that Madeline intends to be present at the trial to-morrow."

"Indeed, I fear that she will. Both my father and myself have sought strongly and urgently to dissuade her; but in vain. You know, with all that gentleness, how resolute she is when her mind is once determined on any object."

"But if the verdict should be against the prisoner, in her state of health consider how terrible would be the shock!--Nay, even the joy of acquittal might be equally dangerous--for Heaven's sake! do not suffer her."

"What is to be done, Walter?" said Ellinor, wringing her hands. "We cannot help it. My father has, at last, forbid me to contradict the wish. Contradiction, the physician himself says, might be as fatal as concession can be. And my father adds, in a stern, calm voice, which it breaks my heart to hear, 'Be still, Ellinor. If the innocent is to perish, the sooner she joins him the better: I would then have all my ties on the other side the grave!'"

"How that strange man seems to have fascinated you all!" said Walter, bitterly.

Ellinor did not answer: over her the fascination had never been to an equal degree with the rest of her family.

"Ellinor!" said Walter, who had been walking for the last few moments to and fro with the rapid strides of a man debating with himself, and who now suddenly paused, and laid his hand on his cousin's arm--"Ellinor! I am resolved. I must, for the quiet of my soul, I must see Madeline this night, and win her forgiveness for all I have been made the unintentional agent of Providence to bring upon her. The peace of my future life may depend on this single interview. What if Aram be condemned--and--and--in short, it is no matter--I must see her."

"She would not hear of it, I fear," said Ellinor, in alarm. "Indeed, you cannot--you do not know her state of mind."

"Ellinor!" said Walter, doggedly, "I am resolved." And so saying, he moved towards the house.

"Well, then," said Ellinor, whose nerves had been greatly shattered by the scenes and sorrow of the last several months, "if it must be so, wait at least till I have gone in, and consulted or prepared her."

"As you will, my gentlest, kindest cousin; I know your prudence and affection. I leave you to obtain me this interview; you can, and will, I am convinced."

"Do not be sanguine, Walter. I can only promise to use my best

endeavours," answered Ellinor, blushing as he kissed her hand; and, hurrying up the walk, she disappeared within the house.

Walter walked for some moments about the alley in which Ellinor had left him, but growing impatient, he at length wound through the overhanging trees, and the house stood immediately before him,--the moonlight shining full on the window-panes, and sleeping in quiet shadow over the green turf in front. He approached yet nearer, and through one of the windows, by a single light in the room, he saw Ellinor leaning over a couch, on which a form reclined, that his heart, rather than his sight, told him was his once-adored Madeline. He stopped, and his breath heaved thick;--he thought of their common home at Grassdale--of the old Manor-house--of the little parlour with the woodbine at its casement--of the group within, once so happy and light-hearted, of which he had formerly made the one most buoyant, and not least-loved. And now this strange--this desolate house--himself estranged from all once regarding him,--(and those broken-hearted,)--this night ushering what a morrow!--he groaned almost aloud, and retreated once more into the shadow of the trees. In a few minutes the door at the right of the building opened, and Ellinor came forth with a quick step.

"Come in, dear Walter," said she; "Madeline has consented to see you--nay, when I told her you were here, and desired an interview, she paused but for one instant, and then begged me to admit you."

"God bless her!" said poor Walter, drawing his hand across his eyes, and following Ellinor to the door.

"You will find her greatly changed!" whispered Ellinor, as they gained the outer hall; "be prepared!"

Walter did not reply, save by an expressive gesture; and Ellinor led him into a room, which communicated, by one of those glass doors often to be seen in the old-fashioned houses of country towns, with the one in which he had previously seen Madeline. With a noiseless step, and almost holding his breath, he followed his fair guide through this apartment, and he now stood by the couch on which Madeline still reclined. She held out her hand to him--he pressed it to his lips, without daring to look her in the face; and after a moment's pause, she said--

"So, you wished to see me, Walter! It is an anxious night this for all of us!"

"For all!" repeated Walter, emphatically; and for me not the least!"

"We have known some sad days since we last met!" renewed Madeline; and there was another, and an embarrassed pause.

"Madeline--dearest Madeline!" said Walter, at length dropping on his knee; "you, whom while I was yet a boy, I so fondly, passionately loved;--you, who yet are--who, while I live, ever will be, so inexpressibly dear to me--say but one word to me on this uncertain and dreadful epoch of our fate--say but one word to me--say you feel you are conscious that throughout these terrible events I have not been to blame--I have not willingly brought this affliction upon our house--least of all upon that heart which my own would have forfeited its best blood to preserve from the slightest evil;--or, if you will not do me this justice, say at least that you forgive me!"

"I forgive you, Walter! I do you justice, my cousin!" replied Madeline, with energy; and raising herself on her arm. "It is long since I have felt how unreasonable it was to throw any blame upon you--the mere and passive instrument of fate. If I have forborne to see you, it was not from an angry feeling, but from a reluctant weakness. God bless and preserve you, my dear cousin! I know that your own heart has bled as profusely as ours; and it was but this day that I told my father, if we never met again, to express to you some kind message as a last memorial from me. Don't weep, Walter! It is a fearful thing to see men weep! It is only once that I have seen him weep,--that was long, long ago! He has no tears in the hour of dread and danger. But no matter, this is a bad world, Walter, and I am tired of it. Are not you? Why do you look so at me, Ellinor? I am not mad! Has she told you that I am, Walter? Don't believe her! Look at me! I am calm and collected! Yet to-morrow is--O God! O God!--if--if!--"

Madeline covered her face with her hands, and became suddenly silent, though only for a short time; when she again lifted up her eyes, they encountered those of Walter; as through those blinding and agonised tears, which are only wrung from the grief of manhood, he gazed upon that face on which nothing of herself, save the divine and unearthly expression which had always characterised her loveliness, was left.

"Yes, Walter, I am wearing fast away--fast beyond the power of chance! Thank God, who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, if the worst happen, we cannot be divided long. Ere another Sabbath has passed, I may be with him in Paradise! What cause shall we then have for regret?"

Ellinor flung herself on her sister's neck, sobbing violently.--"Yes, we shall regret you are not with us, Ellinor; but you will also soon grow tired of the world; it is a sad place--it is a wicked place--it is full of snares and pitfalls. In our walk to-day lies our destruction for to-morrow! You will find this soon, Ellinor! And you, and my father, and Walter, too, shall join us! Hark! the clock strikes! By this time to-morrow night, what triumph!--or to me at least (sinking her voice into a whisper, that thrilled through the very bones of her listeners) what peace!"

Happily for all parties, this distressing scene was here interrupted. Lester entered the room with the heavy step into which his once elastic and cheerful tread had subsided.

"Ha, Walter!" said he, irresolutely glancing over the group; but Madeline had already sprang from her seat.

"You have seen him!--you have seen him! And how does he--how does he look? But that I know; I know his brave heart does not sink. And what message does he send to me? And--and--tell me all, my father: quick, quick!"

"Dear, miserable child!--and miserable old man!" muttered Lester, folding her in his arms; "but we ought to take courage and comfort from him, Madeline. A hero, on the eve of battle, could not be more firm--even more cheerful. He smiled often--his old smile; and he only left tears and anxiety to us. But of you, Madeline, we spoke mostly: he would scarcely let me say a word on any thing else. Oh, what a kind heart!--what a noble spirit! And perhaps a chance tomorrow may quench both. But, God! be just, and let the avenging lightning fall on the real criminal, and not blast the innocent man!"

"Amen!" said Madeline deeply.

"Amen!" repeated Walter, laying his hand on his heart.

"Let us pray!" exclaimed Lester, animated by a sudden impulse, and falling on his knees. The whole group followed his example; and Lester, in a trembling and impassioned voice, poured forth an extempore prayer, that Justice might fall only where it was due. Never did that majestic and pausing Moon, which filled that lowly room as with the presence of a spirit, witness a more impressive adjuration, or an audience more absorbed and rapt. Full streamed its holy rays upon the now snowy locks and upward countenance of Lester, making his venerable person more striking from the contrast it afforded to the dark and sunburnt cheek--the energetic features, and chivalric and earnest head of the young man beside him. Just in the shadow, the raven locks of Ellinor were bowed over her clasped hands,--nothing of her face visible; the graceful neck and heaving breast alone distinguished from the shadow;--and, hushed in a death-like and solemn repose, the parted lips moving inaudibly; the eye fixed on vacancy; the wan transparent hands, crossed upon her bosom; the light shone with a more softened and tender ray upon the faded but all-angelic form and countenance of her, for whom Heaven was already preparing its eternal recompense for the ills of Earth!

CHAPTER V. THE TRIAL.

"Equal to either fortune."--Speech of Eugene Aram.

A thought comes over us, sometimes, in our career of pleasure, or the troublous exultation of our ambitious pursuits; a thought come over us, like a cloud, that around us and about us Death--Shame--Crime--Despair, are busy at their work. I have read somewhere of an enchanted land, where the inmates walked along voluptuous gardens, and built palaces, and heard music, and made merry; while around, and within, the land, were deep caverns, where the gnomes and the fiends dwelt: and ever and anon their groans and laughter, and the sounds of their unutterable toils, or ghastly revels, travelled to the upper air, mixing in an awful strangeness with the summer festivity and buoyant occupation of those above. And this is the picture of human life! These reflections of the maddening disparities of the world are dark, but salutary:--

"They wrap our thoughts at banquets in the shroud;" [Young.]

but we are seldom sadder without being also wiser men!

The third of August 1759 rose bright, calm, and clear: it was the morning of the trial; and when Ellinor stole into her sister's room, she found Madeline sitting before the glass, and braiding her rich locks with an evident attention and care.

"I wish," said she, "that you had pleased me by dressing as for a holiday. See, I am going to wear the dress I was to have been married in."

Ellinor shuddered; for what is more appalling than to find the signs of

gaiety accompanying the reality of anguish!

"Yes," continued Madeline, with a smile of inexpressible sweetness, "a little reflection will convince you that this day ought not to be one of mourning. It was the suspense that has so worn out our hearts. If he is acquitted, as we all believe and trust, think how appropriate will be the outward seeming of our joy! If not, why I shall go before him to our marriage home, and in marriage garments. Ay," she added after a moment's pause, and with a much more grave, settled, and intense expression of voice and countenance--"ay; do you remember how Eugene once told us, that if we went at noonday to the bottom of a deep pit, [Note: The remark is in Aristotle. Buffon quotes it, with his usual adroit felicity, in, I think, the first volume of his great work.] we should be able to see the stars, which on the level ground are invisible. Even so, from the depths of grief--worn, wretched, seared, and dying--the blessed apparitions and tokens of Heaven make themselves visible to our eyes. And I know--I have seen--I feel here," pressing her hand on her heart, "that my course is run; a few sands only are left in the glass. Let us waste them bravely. Stay, Ellinor! You see these poor withered rose-leaves: Eugene gave them to me the day before--before that fixed for our marriage. I shall wear them to-day, as I would have worn them on the wedding-day. When he gathered the poor flower, how fresh it was; and I kissed off the dew: now see it! But, come, come; this is trifling: we must not be late. Help me, Nell, help me: come, bustle, quick, quick! Nay, be not so slovenly; I told you I would be dressed with care to-day."

And when Madeline was dressed, though the robe sat loose and in large folds over her shrunken form, yet, as she stood erect, and looked with a smile that saddened Ellinor more than tears at her image in the glass, perhaps her beauty never seemed of a more striking and lofty character,--she looked indeed, a bride, but the bride of no earthly nuptials. Presently they heard an irresolute and trembling step at the door, and Lester knocking, asked if they were prepared.

"Come in, father," said Madeline, in a calm and even cheerful voice; and the old man entered.

He cast a silent glance over Madeline's white dress, and then at his own, which was deep mourning: the glance said volumes, and its meaning was not marred by words from any one of the three.

"Yes, father," said Madeline, breaking the pause,--"We are all ready. Is the carriage here?"

"It is at the door, my child."

"Come then, Ellinor, come!"--and leaning on her arm, Madeline walked towards the door. When she got to the threshold, she paused, and looked round the room.

"What is it you want?" asked Ellinor.

"I was but bidding all here farewell," replied Madeline, in a soft and touching voice: "And now before we leave the house, Father,--Sister, one word with you;--you have ever been very, very kind to me, and most of all in this bitter trial, when I must have taxed your patience sadly--for I know all is not right here, (touching her forehead)--I cannot go forth this day without thanking you. Ellinor, my dearest friend--my fondest sister--my playmate in gladness--my comforter in grief--my nurse in

sickness;--since we were little children, we have talked together, and laughed together, and wept together, and though we knew all the thoughts of each other, we have never known one thoughts that we would have concealed from God;--and now we are going to part?--do not stop me, it must be so, I know it. But, after a little while may you be happy again, not so buoyant as you have been, that can never be, but still happy!--You are formed for love and home, and for those ties you once thought would be mine. God grant that I may have suffered for us both, and that when we meet hereafter, you may tell me you have been happy here!"

"But you, father," added Madeline, tearing herself from the neck of her weeping sister, and sinking on her knees before Lester, who leaned against the wall convulsed with his emotions, and covering his face with his hands--"but you,--what can I say to you?--You, who have never,--no, not in my first childhood, said one harsh word to me--who have sunk all a father's authority in a father's love,--how can I say all that I feel for you?--the grateful overflowing, (paining, yet--oh, how sweet!) remembrances which crowd around and suffocate me now?--The time will come when Ellinor and Ellinor's children must be all in all to you--when of your poor Madeline nothing will be left but a memory; but they, they will watch on you and tend you, and protect your grey hairs from sorrow, as I might once have hoped I also was fated to do."

"My child! my child! you break my heart!" faltered forth at last the poor old man, who till now had in vain endeavoured to speak.

"Give me your blessing, dear father," said Madeline, herself overcome by her feelings;--"Put your hand on my head and bless me--and say, that if I have ever unconsciously given you a moment's pain--I am forgiven!"

"Forgiven!" repeated Lester, raising his daughter with weak and trembling arms as his tears fell fast upon her cheek,--"Never did I feel what an angel had sate beside my hearth till now!--But be comforted--be cheered. What, if Heaven had reserved its crowning mercy till this day, and Eugene be amongst us, free, acquitted, triumphant before the night!"

"Ha!" said Madeline, as if suddenly roused by the thought into new life:-
-"Ha! let us hasten to find your words true. Yes! yes!--if it should be so--if it should. And," added she, in a hollow voice, (the enthusiasm checked,) "if it were not for my dreams, I might believe it would be so:-
-But--come--I am ready now!"

The carriage went slowly through the crowd that the fame of the approaching trial had gathered along the streets, but the blinds were drawn down, and the father and daughter escaped that worst of tortures, the curious gaze of strangers on distress. Places had been kept for them in court, and as they left the carriage and entered the fatal spot, the venerable figure of Lester, and the trembling and veiled forms that clung to him, arrested all eyes. They at length gained their seats, and it was not long before a bustle in the court drew off attention from them. A buzz, a murmur, a movement, a dread pause! Houseman was first arraigned on his former indictment, acquitted, and admitted evidence against Aram, who was thereupon arraigned. The prisoner stood at the bar! Madeline gasped for breath, and clung, with a convulsive motion, to her sister's arm. But presently, with a long sigh she recovered her self-possession, and sat quiet and silent, fixing her eyes upon Aram's countenance; and the aspect of that countenance was well calculated to sustain her courage, and to mingle a sort of exulting pride, with all the strained and fearful acuteness of her sympathy. Something, indeed, of what he had

suffered, was visible in the prisoner's features; the lines around the mouth in which mental anxiety generally the most deeply writes its traces, were grown marked and furrowed; grey hairs were here and there scattered amongst the rich and long luxuriance of the dark brown locks, and as, before his imprisonment, he had seemed considerably younger than he was, so now time had atoned for its past delay, and he might have appeared to have told more years than had really gone over his head; but the remarkable light and beauty of his eye was undimmed as ever, and still the broad expanse of his forehead retained its unwrinkled surface and striking expression of calmness and majesty. High, self-collected, serene, and undaunted, he looked upon the crowd, the scene, the judge, before and around him; and, even among those who believed him guilty, that involuntary and irresistible respect which moral firmness always produces on the mind, forced an unwilling interest in his fate, and even a reluctant hope of his acquittal.

Houseman was called upon. No one could regard his face without a certain mistrust and inward shudder. In men prone to cruelty, it has generally been remarked, that there is an animal expression strongly prevalent in the countenance. The murderer and the lustful man are often alike in the physical structure. The bull-throat--the thick lips--the receding forehead--the fierce restless eye--which some one or other says reminds you of the buffalo in the instant before he becomes dangerous, are the outward tokens of the natural animal unsoftened--unenlightened--unredeemed--consulting only the immediate desires of his nature, whatever be the passion (lust or revenge) to which they prompt. And this animal expression, the witness of his character, was especially wrought, if we may use the word, in House-man's rugged and harsh features; rendered, if possible, still more remarkable at that time by a mixture of sullenness and timidity. The conviction that his own life was saved, could not prevent remorse at his treachery in accusing his comrade--a sort of confused principle of which villains are the most susceptible, when every other honest sentiment has deserted them.

With a low, choked, and sometimes a faltering tone, Houseman deposed, that, in the night between the 7th and 8th of January 1744-5, sometime before 11 o'clock, he went to Aram's house--that they conversed on different matters--that he stayed there about an hour--that some three hours afterwards he passed, in company with Clarke, by Aram's house, and Aram was outside the door, as if he were about to return home--that Aram invited them both to come in--that they did so--that Clarke, who intended to leave the town before day-break, in order, it was acknowledged, to make secretly away with certain property in his possession, was about to quit the house, when Aram proposed to accompany him out of the town--that he (Aram) and Houseman then went forth with Clarke--that when they came into the field where St. Robert's Cave is, Aram and Clarke went into it, over the hedge, and when they came within six or eight yards off the Cave, he saw them quarrelling--that he saw Aram strike Clarke several times, upon which Clarke fell, and he never saw him rise again--that he saw no instrument Aram had, and knew not that he had any--that upon this, without any interposition or alarm, he left them and returned home--that the next morning he went to Aram's house, and asked what business he had with Clarke last night, and what he had done with him? Aram replied not to this question; but threatened him, if he spoke of his being in Clarke's company that night; vowing revenge either by himself or some other person if he mentioned any thing relating to the affair. This was the sum of Houseman's evidence.

A Mr. Beckwith was next called, who deposed that Aram's garden had been

searched, owing to a vague suspicion that he might have been an accomplice in the frauds of Clarke--that some parts of clothing, and also some pieces of cambric which he had sold to Clarke a little while before, were found there.

The third witness was the watchman, Thomas Barnet, who deposed, that before midnight (it might be a little after eleven) he saw a person come out from Aram's house, who had a wide coat on, with the cape about his head, and seemed to shun him; whereupon he went up to him, and put by the cape of his great coat, and perceived it to be Richard Houseman. He contented himself with wishing him good night.

The officers who executed the warrant then gave their evidence as to the arrest, and dwelt on some expressions dropped by Aram before he arrived at Knaresbro', which, however, were felt to be wholly unimportant.

After this evidence there was a short pause;--and then a shiver, that recoil and tremor which men feel at any exposition of the relics of the dead, ran through the court; for the next witness was mute--it was the skull of the Deceased! On the left side there was a fracture, that from the nature of it seemed as it could only have been made by the stroke of some blunt instrument. The piece was broken, and could not be replaced but from within.

The surgeon, Mr. Locock, who produced it, gave it as his opinion that no such breach could proceed from natural decay--that it was not a recent fracture by the instrument with which it was dug up, but seemed to be of many years' standing.

This made the chief part of the evidence against Aram; the minor points we have omitted, and also such as, like that of Aram's hostess, would merely have repeated what the reader knew before.

And now closed the criminatory evidence--and now the prisoner was asked, in that peculiarly thrilling and awful question--What he had to say in his own behalf? Till now, Aram had not changed his posture or his countenance--his dark and piercing eye had for one instant fixed on each witness that appeared against him, and then dropped its gaze upon the ground. But at this moment a faint hectic flushed his cheek, and he seemed to gather and knit himself up for defence. He glanced round the court, as if to see what had been the impression created against him. His eye rested on the grey locks of Rowland Lester, who, looking down, had covered his face with his hands. But beside that venerable form was the still and marble face of Madeline; and even at that distance from him, Aram perceived how intent was the hush and suspense of her emotions. But when she caught his eye--that eye which even at such a moment beamed unutterable love, pity, regret for her--a wild, a convulsive smile of encouragement, of anticipated triumph, broke the repose of her colourless features, and suddenly dying away, left her lips apart, in that expression which the great masters of old, faithful to Nature, give alike to the struggle of hope and the pause of terror.

"My Lord," began Aram, in that remarkable defence still extant, and still considered as wholly unequalled from the lips of one defending his own, and such a cause;--"My Lord, I know not whether it is of right, or through some indulgence of your Lordship, that I am allowed the liberty at this bar, and at this time, to attempt a defence; incapable and uninstructed as I am to speak. Since, while I see so many eyes upon me, so numerous and awful a concourse, fixed with attention, and filled with

I know not what expectancy, I labour, not with guilt, my Lord, but with perplexity. For, having never seen a court but this, being wholly unacquainted with law, the customs of the bar, and all judiciary proceedings, I fear I shall be so little capable of speaking with propriety, that it might reasonably be expected to exceed my hope, should I be able to speak at all.

"I have heard, my Lord, the indictment read, wherein I find myself charged with the highest of human crimes. You will grant me then your patience, if I, single and unskilful, destitute of friends, and unassisted by counsel, attempt something perhaps like argument in my defence. What I have to say will be but short, and that brevity may be the best part of it.

"My Lord, the tenor of my life contradicts this indictment. Who can look back over what is known of my former years, and charge me with one vice--one offence? No! I concerted not schemes of fraud--projected no violence--injured no man's property or person. My days were honestly laborious--my nights intensely studious. This egotism is not presumptuous--is not unreasonable. What man, after a temperate use of life, a series of thinking and acting regularly, without one single deviation from a sober and even tenor of conduct, ever plunged into the depth of crime precipitately, and at once? Mankind are not instantaneously corrupted. Villainy is always progressive. We decline from right--not suddenly, but step after step.

"If my life in general contradicts the indictment, my health at that time in particular contradicts it yet more. A little time before, I had been confined to my bed, I had suffered under a long and severe disorder. The distemper left me but slowly, and in part. So far from being well at the time I am charged with this fact, I never, to this day, perfectly recovered. Could a person in this condition execute violence against another?--I, feeble and valetudinary, with no inducement to engage--no ability to accomplish--no weapon wherewith to perpetrate such a fact;--without interest, without power, without motives, without means!

"My Lord, Clarke disappeared: true; but is that a proof of his death? The fallibility of all conclusions of such a sort, from such a circumstance, is too obvious to require instances. One instance is before you: this very castle affords it.

"In June 1757, William Thompson, amidst all the vigilance of this place, in open daylight, and double-ironed, made his escape; notwithstanding an immediate inquiry set on foot, notwithstanding all advertisements, all search, he was never seen or heard of since. If this man escaped unseen through all these difficulties, how easy for Clarke, whom no difficulties opposed. Yet what would be thought of a prosecution commenced against any one seen last with Thompson?

"These bones are discovered! Where? Of all places in the world, can we think of any one, except indeed the church-yard, where there is so great a certainty of finding human bones, as a hermitage? In times past, the hermitage was a place, not only of religious retirement, but of burial. And it has scarce, or never been heard of, but that every cell now known, contains, or contained these relics of humanity; some mutilated--some entire! Give me leave to remind your Lordship, that here sat SOLITARY SANCTITY, and here the hermit and the anchorite hoped that repose for their bones when dead, they here enjoyed when living. I glance over a few of the many evidences that these cells were used as repositories of the

dead, and enumerate a few of the many caves similar in origin to St. Robert's, in which human bones have been found." Here the prisoner instanced, with remarkable felicity, several places, in which bones had been found, under circumstances, and in spots analogous to those in point. [Note: See his published defence.] And the reader, who will remember that it is the great principle of the law, that no man can be condemned for murder unless the body of the deceased be found, will perceive at once how important this point was to the prisoner's defence. After concluding his instances with two facts of skeletons found in fields in the vicinity of Knaresbro', he burst forth--"Is then the invention of those bones forgotten or industriously concealed, that the discovery of these in question may appear the more extraordinary? Extraordinary--yet how common an event! Every place conceals such remains. In fields--in hills--in high-way sides--on wastes--on commons, lie frequent and unsuspected bones. And mark,--no example perhaps occurs of more than one skeleton being found in one cell. Here you find but one, agreeable to the peculiarity of every known cell in Britain. Had two skeletons been discovered, then alone might the fact have seemed suspicious and uncommon. What! Have we forgotten how difficult, as in the case of Perkin Warbeck and Lambert Symnell, it has been sometimes to identify the living; and shall we now assign personality to bones--bones which may belong to either sex? How know you that this is even the skeleton of a man? But another skeleton was discovered by some labourer! Was not that skeleton averred to be Clarke's full as confidently as this?

"My Lord, my Lord--must some of the living be made answerable for all the bones that earth has concealed and chance exposed? The skull that has been produced, has been declared fractured. But who can surely tell whether it was the cause or the consequence of death. In May, 1732 the remains of William Lord Archbishop of this province were taken up by permission in their cathedral, the bones of the skull were found broken as these are. Yet he died by no violence! by no blow that could have caused that fracture. Let it be considered how easily the fracture on the skull produced is accounted for. At the dissolution of religious houses, the ravages of the times affected both the living and the dead. In search after imaginary treasures, coffins were broken, graves and vaults dug open, monuments ransacked, shrines demolished, Parliament itself was called in to restrain these violations. And now are the depredations, the iniquities of those times, to be visited on this? But here, above all, was a castle vigorously besieged; every spot around was the scene of a sally, a conflict, a flight, a pursuit. Where the slaughtered fell, there were they buried. What place is not burial earth in war? How many bones must still remain in the vicinity of that siege, for futurity to discover! Can you, then, with so many probable circumstances, choose the one least probable? Can you impute to the living what Zeal in its fury may have done; what Nature may have taken off and Piety interred, or what War alone may have destroyed, alone deposited?

"And now, glance over the circumstantial evidence, how weak, how frail! I almost scorn to allude to it. I will not condescend to dwell upon it. The witness of one man, arraigned himself! Is there no chance that to save his own life he might conspire against mine?--no chance that he might have committed this murder, if murder hath indeed been done? that conscience betrayed to his first exclamation? that craft suggested his throwing that guilt on me, to the knowledge of which he had unwittingly confessed? He declares that he saw me strike Clarke, that he saw him fall; yet he utters no cry, no reproof. He calls for no aid; he returns quietly home; he declares that he knows not what became of the body, yet he tells where the body is laid. He declares that he went straight home,

and alone; yet the woman with whom I lodged declares that Houseman and I returned to my house in company together;--what evidence is this? and from whom does it come?--ask yourselves. As for the rest of the evidence, what does it amount to? The watchman sees Houseman leave my house at night. What more probable, but what less connected with the murder, real or supposed, of Clarke? Some pieces of clothing are found buried in my garden. But how can it be shewn that they belonged to Clarke? Who can swear to, who can prove any thing so vague? And if found there, even if belonging to Clarke, what proof that they were there deposited by me? How likely that the real criminal may in the dead of night have preferred any spot, rather than that round his own home, to conceal the evidence of his crime!

"How impotent such evidence as this! and how poor, how precarious, even the strongest of mere circumstantial evidence invariably is! Let it rise to probability, to the strongest degree of probability; it is but probability still. Recollect the case of the two Harrisons, recorded by Dr. Howell; both suffered on circumstantial evidence on account of the disappearance of a man, who, like Clarke, contracted debts, borrowed money, and went off unseen. And this man returned several years after their execution. Why remind you of Jaques du Moulin, in the reign of Charles the Second?--why of the unhappy Coleman, convicted, though afterwards found innocent, and whose children perished for want, because the world believed the father guilty? Why should I mention the perjury of Smith, who, admitted king's-evidence, screened himself by accusing Fainloth and Loveday of the murder of Dunn? the first was executed, the second was about to share the same fate, when the perjury of Smith was incontrovertibly proved.

"And now, my Lord, having endeavoured to shew that the whole of this charge is altogether repugnant to every part of my life; that it is inconsistent with my condition of health about that time; that no rational inference of the death of a person can be drawn from his disappearance; that hermitages were the constant repositories of the bones of the recluse; that the proofs of these are well authenticated; that the revolutions in religion, or the fortune of war, have mangled or buried the dead; that the strongest circumstantial evidence is often lamentably fallacious, that in my case, that evidence, so far from being strong, is weak, disconnected, contradictory; what remains? A conclusion, perhaps, no less reasonably than impatiently wished for. I, at last, after nearly a year's confinement, equal to either fortune, entrust myself to the candour, the justice, the humanity of your Lordship, and to yours, my countrymen, gentlemen of the jury."

The prisoner ceased: and the painful and choking sensations of sympathy, compassion, regret, admiration, all uniting, all mellowing into one fearful hope for his acquittal, made themselves felt through the crowded court.

In two persons only, an uneasy sentiment remained--a sentiment that the prisoner had not completed that which they would have asked from him. The one was Lester;--he had expected a more warm, a more earnest, though, perhaps, a less ingenious and artful defence. He had expected Aram to dwell far more on the improbable and contradictory evidence of Houseman, and above all, to have explained away, all that was still left unaccounted for in his acquaintance with Clarke (as we will still call the deceased), and the allegation that he had gone out with him on the fatal night of the disappearance of the latter. At every word of the prisoner's defence, he had waited almost breathlessly, in the hope that

the next sentence would begin an explanation or a denial on this point: and when Aram ceased, a chill, a depression, a disappointment, remained vaguely on his mind. Yet so lightly and so haughtily had Aram approached and glanced over the immediate evidence of the witnesses against him, that his silence her might have been but the natural result of a disdain, that belonged essentially to his calm and proud character. The other person we referred to, and whom his defence had not impressed with a belief in its truth, equal to an admiration for its skill, was one far more important in deciding the prisoner's fate--it was the Judge!

But Madeline--Great God! how sanguine is a woman's heart, when the innocence, the fate of the one she loves is concerned!--a radiant flush broke over a face so colourless before; and with a joyous look, a kindled eye, a lofty brow, she turned to Ellinor, pressed her hand in silence, and once more gave up her whole soul to the dread procedure of the court.

The Judge now began.--It is greatly to be regretted, that we have no minute and detailed memorial of the trial, except only the prisoner's defence. The summing up of the Judge was considered at that time scarce less remarkable than the speech of the prisoner. He stated the evidence with peculiar care and at great length to the jury. He observed how the testimony of the other deponents confirmed that of Houseman; and then, touching on the contradictory parts of the latter, he made them understand, how natural, how inevitable was some such contradiction in a witness who had not only to give evidence against another, but to refrain from criminating himself. There could be no doubt but that Houseman was an accomplice in the crime; and all therefore that seemed improbable in his giving no alarm when the deed was done, was easily rendered natural, and reconcileable with the other parts of his evidence. Commenting then on the defence of the prisoner (who, as if disdaining to rely on aught save his own genius or his own innocence, had called no witnesses, as he had employed no counsel), and eulogizing its eloquence and art, till he destroyed their effect by guarding the jury against that impression which eloquence and art produce in defiance of simple fact, he contended that Aram had yet alleged nothing to invalidate the positive evidence against him.

I have often heard, from men accustomed to courts of law, that nothing is more marvellous, than the sudden change in a jury's mind, which the summing up of the Judge can produce; and in the present instance it was like magic. That fatal look of a common intelligence, of a common assent, was exchanged among the doomers of the prisoner's life and death as the Judge concluded.

They found the prisoner guilty.

The Judge drew on the black cap.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DEATH.--THE PRISON.--AN INTERVIEW.--ITS RESULT.

"Lay her i' the earth,
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring."

.....

"See in my heart there was a kind of fighting

That would not let me sleep."

--Hamlet.

"Bear with me a little longer," said Madeline. "I shall be well, quite well presently."

Ellinor let down the carriage window, to admit the air; and she took the occasion to tell the coachman to drive faster. There was that change in Madeline's voice which alarmed her.

"How noble was his look! you saw him smile!" continued Madeline, talking to herself: "And they will murder him after all. Let me see, this day week, ay, ere this day week we shall meet again."

"Faster; for God's sake, Ellinor, tell them to drive faster!" cried Lester, as he felt the form that leant on his bosom wax heavier and heavier. They sped on; the house was in sight; that lonely and cheerless house; not their sweet home at Grassdale, with the ivy round its porch, and the quiet church behind. The sun was setting slowly, and Ellinor drew the blind to shade the glare from her sister's eyes.

Madeline felt the kindness, and smiled. Ellinor wiped her eyes, and tried to smile again. The carriage stopped, and Madeline was lifted out; she stood, supported by her father and Ellinor, for a moment on the threshold. She looked on the golden sun, and the gentle earth, and the little motes dancing in the western ray--all was steeped in quiet, and full of the peace and tranquillity of the pastoral life! "No, no," she muttered, grasping her father's hand. "How is this? this is not his hand! Ah, no, no; I am not with him! Father," she added in a louder and deeper voice, rising from his breast, and standing alone and unaided. "Father, bury this little packet with me, they are his letters; do not break the seal, and--and tell him that I never felt how deeply I--I--loved him--till all--the world--had--deserted him!"--

She uttered a faint cry of pain, and fell at once to the ground; she lived a few hours longer, but never made speech or sign, or evinced token of life but its breath, which died at last gradually,--imperceptibly--away.

On the following evening Walter obtained entrance to Aram's cell: that morning the prisoner had seen Lester; that morning he had heard of Madeline's death. He had shed no tear; he had, in the affecting language of Scripture, "turned his face to the wall;" none had seen his emotions; yet Lester felt in that bitter interview, that his daughter was duly mourned.

He did not lift his eyes, when Walter was admitted, and the young man stood almost at his knee before he perceived him. He then looked up and they gazed on each other for a moment, but without speaking, till Walter said in a hollow voice: "Eugene Aram!"

"Ay!"

"Madeline Lester is no more."

"I have heard it! I am reconciled. Better now than later."

"Aram!" said Walter, in a tone trembling with emotion, and passionately clasping his hands, "I entreat, I implore you, at this awful time, if it be within your power, to lift from my heart a load that weighs it to the dust, that if left there, will make me through life a crushed and miserable man;--I implore you, in the name of common humanity, by your hopes of Heaven, to remove it! The time now has irrevocably passed when your denial or your confession could alter your doom; your days are numbered, there is no hope of reprieve; I implore you then, if you were led, I will not ask how or wherefore, to the execution of the crime for the charge of which you die, to say, to whisper to me but one word of confession, and I, the sole child of the murdered man, will forgive you from the bottom of my soul."

Walter paused, unable to proceed.

Aram's brow worked; he turned aside; he made no answer; his head dropped on his bosom, and his eyes were unmovedly fixed on the earth.

"Reflect," continued Walter, recovering himself, "Reflect! I have been the mute instrument in bringing you to this awful fate, in destroying the happiness of my own house--in--in--in breaking the heart of the woman whom I adored even as a boy. If you be innocent, what a dreadful memory is left to me! Be merciful, Aram! be merciful. And if this deed was done by your hand, say to me but one word to remove the terrible uncertainty that now harrows up my being. What now is earth, is man, is opinion, to you? God only now can judge you. The eye of God reads your heart while I speak, and in the awful hour when Eternity opens to you, if the guilt has been indeed committed, think, oh think, how much lighter will be your offence, if, by vanquishing the stubborn heart, you can relieve a human being from a doubt that otherwise will make the curse--the horror of an existence. Aram, Aram, if the father's death came from you, shall the life of the son be made a burthen to him, through you also?"

"What would you have of me? speak!" said Aram, but without lifting his face from his breast.

"Much of your nature belies this crime.--You are wise, calm, beneficent to the distressed. Revenge, passion,--nay, the sharp pangs of hunger, may have urged to one deed; but your soul is not wholly hardened: nay, I think I would so far trust you, that, if at this dread moment--the clay of Madeline Lester scarce yet cold, woe busy and softening at your breast, and the son of the murdered dead before you;--if at this moment you can lay your hand on your heart, and say: 'Before God, and at peril of my soul, I am innocent of this deed,' I will depart--I will believe you, and bear, as bear I may, the reflection, that, in any way I have been one of the unconscious agents of condemning to a fearful death an innocent man! If innocent in this--how good! how perfect in all else! But, if you cannot at so dark a crisis take that oath,--then! oh then! be just--be generous, even in guilt, and let me not be haunted throughout life by the spectre of a ghastly and restless doubt! Speak! oh! speak!"

Well, well may we judge how crushing must have been that doubt in the breast of one naturally bold and fiery, when it thus humbled the very son of the murdered man to forget wrath and vengeance, and descend to prayer! But Walter had heard the defence of Aram; he had marked his mien: not once in that trial had he taken his eyes from the prisoner, and he had felt, like a bolt of ice through his heart, that the sentence passed on the accused, his judgment could not have passed! How dreadful must then have been the state of his mind when, repairing to Lester's house he

found it the house of death--the pure, the beautiful spirit gone--the father mourning for his child, and not to be comforted--and Ellinor!--No! scenes like these, thoughts like these, pluck the pride from a man's heart.

"Walter Lester!" said Aram, after a pause; but raising his head with dignity, though on the features there was but one expression--woe, unutterable woe. "Walter Lester! I had thought to quit life with my tale untold: but you have not appealed to me in vain! I tear the self from my heart!--I renounce the last haughty dream, in which I wrapt myself from the ills around me. You shall learn all, and judge accordingly. But to your ear the tale can scarce be told:--the son cannot hear in silence that which, unless I too unjustly, too wholly condemn myself, I must say of the dead! But Time," continued Aram, mutteringly, and with his eyes on vacancy, "Time does not press too fast. Better let the hand speak than the tongue:--yes; the day of execution is--ay, ay--two days yet to it--to-morrow? no! Young man," he said abruptly, turning to Walter, "on the day after to-morrow, about seven in the evening, the eve before that morn fated to be my last--come to me. At that time I will place in your hands a paper containing the whole history that connects myself with your father. On the word of a man on the brink of another world, no truth that imparts your interest therein shall be omitted. But read it not till I am no more; and when read, confide the tale to none, till Lester's grey hairs have gone to the grave. This swear! 'tis an oath difficult perhaps to keep, but--" "As my Redeemer lives, I will swear to both conditions!" cried Walter, with a solemn fervour.

"But tell me now at least"--"Ask me no more!" interrupted Aram, in his turn. "The time is near, when you will know all! Tarry that time, and leave me! Yes, leave me now--at once--leave me!"

To dwell lingeringly over those passages which excite pain without satisfying curiosity, is scarcely the duty of the drama, or of that province even nobler than the drama; for it requires minuter care--indulges in more complete description--yields to more elaborate investigation of motives--commands a greater variety of chords in the human heart--to which, with poor and feeble power for so high, yet so ill-appreciated a task we now, not irreverently if rashly, aspire!

We pass at once--we glance not around us at the chamber of death--at the broken heart of Lester--at the two-fold agony of his surviving child--the agony which mourns and yet seeks to console another--the mixed emotions of Walter, in which, an unsleeping eagerness to learn the fearful all formed the main part--the solitary cell and solitary heart of the convicted--we glance not at these;--we pass at once to the evening in which Aram again saw Walter Lester, and for the last time.

"You are come, punctual to the hour," said he, in a low clear voice: "I have not forgotten my word; the fulfilment of that promise has been a victory over myself which no man can appreciate: but I owed it to you. I have discharged the debt. Enough!--I have done more than I at first purposed. I have extended my narration, but, superficially in some parts, over my life: that prolixity, perhaps I owed to myself. Remember your promise: this seal is not broken till the pulse is stilled in the hand which now gives you these papers!"

Walter renewed his oath, and Aram, pausing for a moment, continued in an altered and softening voice:

"Be kind to Lester: soothe, console him--never by a hint let him think otherwise of me than he does. For his sake more than mine I ask this. Venerable, kind old man! the warmth of human affection has rarely glowed for me. To the few who loved me, how deeply I have repaid the love! But these are not words to pass between you and me. Farewell! Yet, before we part, say this much: whatever I have revealed in this confession--whatever has been my wrong to you, or whatever (a less offence) the language I have now, justifying myself, used to--to your father--say, that you grant me that pardon which one man may grant another."

"Fully, cordially," said Walter.

"In the day that for you brings the death that to-morrow awaits me," said Aram, in a deep tone, "be that forgiveness accorded to yourself! Farewell. In that untried variety of Being which spreads beyond us, who knows, but progressing from grade to grade, and world to world, our souls, though in far distant ages, may meet again!--one dim and shadowy memory of this hour the link between us, farewell--farewell!"

For the reader's interest we think it better (and certainly it is more immediately in the due course of narrative, if not of actual events) to lay at once before him the Confession that Aram placed in Walter's hands, without waiting till that time when Walter himself broke the seal of a confession, not of deeds alone, but of thoughts how wild and entangled--of feelings how strange and dark--of a starved soul that had wandered from, how proud an orbit, to what perturbed and unholy regions of night and chaos! For me, I have not sought to derive the reader's interest from the vulgar sources, that such a tale might have afforded; I have suffered him, almost from the beginning, to pierce into Aram's secret; and I have prepared him for that guilt, with which other narrators of this story might have only sought to surprise.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONFESSION.--AND THE FATE.

"In winter's tedious nights, sit by the fire
With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales
Of woful ages long ago betid:
And ere thou bid good night, to quit their grief,
Tell them the lamentable fall of me."

--Richard II.

"I was born at Ramsgill, a little village in Netherdale. My family had originally been of some rank; they were formerly lords of the town of Aram, on the southern banks of the Tees. But time had humbled these pretensions to consideration; though they were still fondly cherished by the heritors of an ancient name, and idle but haughty recollections. My father resided on a small farm, and was especially skilful in horticulture, a taste I derived from him. When I was about thirteen, the deep and intense Passion that has made the Demon of my life, first stirred palpably within me. I had always been, from my cradle, of a solitary disposition, and inclined to reverie and musing; these traits of character heralded the love that now seized me--the love of knowledge. Opportunity or accident first directed my attention to the abstruser

sciences. I poured my soul over that noble study, which is the best foundation of all true discovery; and the success I met with soon turned my pursuits into more alluring channels. History, poetry, the mastery of the past, the spell that admits us into the visionary world, took the place which lines and numbers had done before. I became gradually more and more rapt and solitary in my habits; knowledge assumed a yet more lovely and bewitching character, and every day the passion to attain it increased upon me; I do not, I have not now the heart to do it--enlarge upon what I acquired without assistance, and with labour sweet in proportion to its intensity.

[We learn from a letter of Eugene Aram's, now extant, that his method of acquiring the learned languages, was, to linger over five lines at a time, and never to quit a passage till he thought he had comprehended its meaning.]

The world, the creation, all things that lived, moved, and were, became to me objects contributing to one passionate, and, I fancied, one exalted end. I suffered the lowlier pleasures of life, and the charms of its more common ties, to glide away from me untasted and unfelt. As you read, in the East, of men remaining motionless for days together, with their eyes fixed upon the heavens, my mind, absorbed in the contemplation of the things above its reach, had no sight of what passed around. My parents died, and I was an orphan. I had no home, and no wealth; but wherever the field contained a flower, or the heavens a star, there was matter of thought and food for delight to me. I wandered alone for months together, seldom sleeping but in the open air, and shunning the human form as that part of God's works from which I could learn the least. I came to Knaresbro': the beauty of the country, a facility in acquiring books from a neighbouring library that was open to me, made me resolve to settle there. And now, new desires opened upon me with new stores: I became seized, possessed, haunted with the ambition of enlightening my race. At first, I had loved knowledge solely for itself: I now saw afar an object grander than knowledge. To what end, said I, are these labours? Why do I feed a lamp which consumes itself in a desert place? Why do I heap up riches, without asking who shall gather them? I was restless and discontented. What could I do? I was friendless; I was strange to my kind; I was shut out from all uses by the wall of my own poverty. I saw my desires checked when their aim was at the highest: all that was proud, and aspiring, and ardent in my nature, was cramped and chilled. I exhausted the learning within my reach. Where, with my appetite excited not slaked, was I, destitute and penniless, to search for more? My abilities, by bowing them to the lowliest tasks, but kept me from famine:--was this to be my lot for ever? And all the while, I was thus grinding down my soul in order to satisfy the vile physical wants, what golden hours, what glorious advantages, what openings into new heavens of science, what chances of illumining mankind were for ever lost to me! Sometimes when the young, whom I taught some elementary, all-unheeded, initiations into knowledge, came around me; when they looked me in the face with their laughing eyes; when, for they all loved me, they told me their little pleasures and their petty sorrows, I have wished that I could have gone back again into childhood, and becoming as one of them, enter into that heaven of quiet which was denied me now. Yet more often it was with an indignant and chafed rather than a sorrowful spirit that I looked upon my lot; and if I looked beyond it, what could I see of hope? Dig I could; but was all that thirsted and swelled within to be dried up and stifled, in order that I might gain the sustenance of life? Was I to turn menial to the soil, and forget that knowledge was abroad? Was I to starve my mind, that I might keep alive my body? Beg I could not. Where

ever lived the real student, the true minister and priest of knowledge, who was not filled with the lofty sense of the dignity of his calling? Was I to shew the sores of my pride, and strip my heart from its clothing, and ask the dull fools of wealth not to let a scholar starve? Pah!--He whom the vilest poverty ever stooped to this, may be the quack, but never the true disciple, of Learning. Steal, rob--worse--ay, all those I or any of my brethren might do:--beg? never! What did I then? I devoted the lowliest part of my knowledge to the procuring the bare means of life, and the grandest,--the knowledge that pierced to the depths of earth, and numbered the stars of heaven--why, that was valueless, save to the possessor.

"In Knaresbro', at this time, I met a distant relation, Richard Houseman. Sometimes in our walks we encountered each other; for he sought me, and I could not always avoid him. He was a man like myself, born to poverty, yet he had always enjoyed what to him was wealth. This seemed a mystery to me; and when we met, we sometimes conversed upon it. 'You are poor, with all your wisdom,' said he. 'I know nothing; but I am never poor. Why is this? The world is my treasury.--I live upon my kind.--Society is my foe.--Laws order me to starve; but self-preservation is an instinct more sacred than society, and more imperious than laws.'

"The undisguised and bold manner of his discourse impressed while it revolted me. I looked upon him as a study, and I combated, in order to learn, him. He had been a soldier--he had seen the greatest part of Europe--he possessed a strong shrewd sense--he was a villain--but a villain bold--adroit--and not then thoroughly unredeemed. His conversation created dark and perturbed reflections. What was that state of society--was it not at war with its own elements--in which vice prospered more than virtue? Knowledge was my dream, that dream I might realize, not by patient suffering, but by active daring. I might wrest from society, to which I owed nothing, the means to be wise and great. Was it not better and nobler to do this, even at my life's hazard, than lie down in a ditch and die the dog's death? Was it not better than such a doom--ay better for mankind--that I should commit one bold wrong, and by that wrong purchase the power of good? I asked myself that question. It is a fearful question; it opens a labyrinth of reasonings, in which the soul may walk and lose itself for ever.

"One day Houseman met me, accompanied by a stranger who had just visited our town, for what purpose you know already. His name--supposed name--was Clarke. Man, I am about to speak plainly of that stranger--his character and his fate. And yet--yet you are his son! I would fain soften the colouring; but I speak truth of myself, and I must not, unless I would blacken my name yet deeper than it deserves, varnish truth when I speak of others. Houseman joined, and presented to me this person. From the first I felt a dislike creep through me at the stranger, which indeed it was easy to account for. He was of a careless and somewhat insolent manner. His countenance was impressed with the lines and character of a thousand vices: you read in the brow and eye the history of a sordid yet reckless life. His conversation was repellent to me beyond expression. He uttered the meanest sentiments, and he chuckled over them as the maxims of a superior sagacity; he avowed himself a knave upon system, and upon the lowest scale. To overreach, to deceive, to elude, to shuffle, to fawn, and to lie, were the arts that he confessed to with so naked and cold a grossness, that one perceived that in the long habits of debasement he was unconscious of what was not debased. Houseman seemed to draw him out: he told us anecdotes of his rascality, and the distresses to which it had brought him; and he finished by saying: 'Yet you see me

now almost rich, and wholly contented. I have always been the luckiest of human beings; no matter what ill-chances to-day, good turns up to-morrow. I confess that I bring on myself the ill, and Providence sends me the good.' We met accidentally more than once, and his conversation was always of the same strain--his luck and his rascality: he had no other theme, and no other boast. And did not this stir into gloomy speculation the depths of my mind? Was it not an ordination that called upon men to take fortune in their own hands, when Fate lavished her rewards on this low and creeping thing, that could only enter even Vice by its sewers and alleys? Was it worth while to be virtuous, and look on, while the bad seized upon the feast of life? This man was instinct with the basest passions, the pettiest desires: he gratified them, and Fate smiled upon his daring. I, who had shut out from my heart the poor temptations of sense--I, who fed only the most glorious visions, the most august desires--I, denied myself their fruition, trembling and spell-bound in the ceremonies of human laws, without hope, without reward,--losing the very powers of virtue because I would not stray into crime.

"These thoughts fell on me darkly and rapidly; but they led to no result. I saw nothing beyond them. I suffered my indignation to gnaw my heart; and preserved the same calm and serene demeanour which had grown with my growth of mind. Nay, while I upbraided Fate, I did not cease to love mankind. I envied--what? the power to serve them! I had been kind and loving to all things from a boy; there was not a dumb animal that would not single me from a crowd as its protector, [Note: All the authentic anecdotes of Aram corroborate the fact of his natural gentleness to all things. A clergyman (the Rev. Mr. Hinton) said that he used frequently to observe Aram, when walking in the garden, stoop down to remove a snail or worm from the path, to prevent its being destroyed. Mr. Hinton ingeniously conjectured that Aram wished to atone for his crime by shewing mercy to every animal and insect: but the fact is, that there are several anecdotes to shew that he was equally humane before the crime was committed. Such are the strange contradictions of the human heart!] and yet I was doomed--but I must not premeditate my tale. In returning, at

night, to my own home, from my long and solitary walks, I often passed the house in which Clarke lodged; and sometimes I met him reeling by the door, insulting all who passed; and yet their resentment was absorbed in their disgust. 'And this loathsome, and grovelling thing,' said I, inly, 'squanders on low excesses, wastes upon outrages to society, that with which I could make my soul as a burning lamp, that should shed a light over the world!'

"There was that in this man's vices which revolted me far more than the villainy of Houseman. The latter had possessed no advantages of education; he descended to no minutiae of sin, he was a plain, blunt, coarse wretch, and his sense threw something respectable around his vices. But in Clarke you saw the traces of happier opportunities of better education; it was in him not the coarseness of manner so much as the sickening, universal canker of vulgarity of mind. Had Houseman money in his purse, he would have paid a debt and relieved a friend from mere indifference; not so the other. Had he been overflowing with wealth, he would have slipped from a creditor, and duped a friend; there was a pitiful and debasing weakness in his nature, which made him regard the lowest meanness as the subtlest wit. His mind too was not only degraded, but broken by his habits of life; a strange, idiotic folly, that made him love laughing at his own littleness, ran through his character. Houseman was young; he might amend; but Clarke had grey hairs and dim eyes; was old in constitution, if not years; and every thing in him was hopeless

and confirmed; the leprosy was in the system. Time, in this, has made Houseman what Clarke was then.

"One day, in passing through the street, though it was broad noon, I encountered Clarke in a state of intoxication, and talking to a crowd he had collected around him. I sought to pass in an opposite direction; he would not suffer me; he, whom I sickened to touch, to see, threw himself in my way, and affected gibe and insult, nay even threat. But when he came near, he shrank before the mere glance of my eye, and I passed on unheeding him. The insult galled me; he had taunted my poverty, poverty was a favourite jest with him; it galled me; anger, revenge, no! those passions I had never felt for any man. I could not rouse them for the first time for such a cause; yet I was lowered in my own eyes, I was stung. Poverty! he taunt me! He dream himself, on account of a little yellow dust, my superior! I wandered from the town, and paused by the winding and shagged banks of the river. It was a gloomy winter's day, the waters rolled on black and sullen, and the dry leaves rustled desolately beneath my feet. Who shall tell us that outward nature has no effect upon our mood? All around seemed to frown upon my lot. I read in the face of heaven and earth a confirmation of the curse which man hath set upon poverty. I leant against a tree that overhung the waters, and suffered my thoughts to glide on in the bitter silence of their course. I heard my name uttered--I felt a hand on my arm, I turned, and Houseman was by my side.

"What, moralizing?" said he, with his rude smile.

"I did not answer him.

"Look," said he, pointing to the waters, 'where yonder fish lies waiting his prey, that prey his kind. Come, you have read Nature, is it not so universally?'

"I did not answer him.

"They who do not as the rest," he renewed, 'fulfil not the object of their existence; they seek to be wiser than their tribe, and are fools for their pains. Is it not so? I am a plain man, and would learn.'

"Still I did not answer.

"You are silent," said he; 'do I offend you?'

"No!"

"Now, then," he continued, 'strange as it may seem, we, so different in mind, are at this moment alike in fortunes. I have not a guinea in the wide world; you, perhaps, are equally destitute. But mark the difference, I, the ignorant man, ere three days have passed, will have filled my purse; you, the wise man, will be still as poor. Come, cast away your wisdom, and do as I do.'

"How?"

"Take from the superfluities of others what your necessities crave. My horse, my pistol, a ready hand, a stout heart, these are to me, what coffers are to others. There is the chance of detection and of death; I allow it. But is not this chance better than some certainties?"

"I turned away my face. In the silence of my chamber, and in the solitude of my heart, I had thought, as the robber spoke--there was a strife within me.

"'Will you share the danger and the booty?' renewed Houseman, in a low voice.

"I turned my eyes upon him. 'Speak out,' said I; 'explain your purpose!'

"Houseman's looks brightened.

"'Listen!' said he; 'Clarke, despite his present wealth lawfully gained, is about to purloin more; he has converted his legacy into jewels; he has borrowed other jewels on false pretences; he purposes to make these also his own, and to leave the town in the dead of night; he has confided to me his intention, and asked my aid. He and I, be it known to you, were friends of old; we have shared together other dangers, and other spoils; he has asked my assistance in his flight. Now do you learn my purpose? Let us ease him of his burthen! I offer to you the half; share the enterprise and its fruits.'

"I rose, I walked away, I pressed my hands on my heart; I wished to silence the voice that whispered me within. Houseman saw the conflict; he followed me; he named the value of the prize he proposed to gain; that which he called my share placed all my wished within my reach!--the means of gratifying the one passion of my soul, the food for knowledge, the power of a lone blessed independence upon myself,--and all were in my grasp; no repeated acts of fraud; no continuation of sin, one single act sufficed! I breathed heavily, but I threw not off the emotion that seized my soul; I shut my eyes and shuddered, but the vision still rose before me.

"'Give me your hand,' said Houseman. [Note: Though, in the above part of Aram's confession, it would seem as if Houseman did not allude to more than the robbery of Clarke; it is evident from what follows, that the more heinous crime also was then at least hinted at by Houseman.]

"'No, no,' I said, breaking away from him. 'I must pause--I must consider--I do not yet refuse, but I will not now decide.'--

"Houseman pressed, but I persevered in my determination;--he would have threatened me, but my nature was haughtier than his, and I subdued him. It was agreed that he should seek me that night and learn my choice--the next night was the one on which the deed was to be done. We parted--I returned an altered man to my home. Fate had woven her mesh around me--a new incident had occurred which strengthened the web: there was a poor girl whom I had been accustomed to see in my walks. She supported her family by her dexterity in making lace,--a quiet, patient-looking, gentle creature. Clarke had, a few days since, under pretence of purchasing lace, decoyed her to his house (when all but himself were from home), where he used the most brutal violence towards her. The extreme poverty of the parents had enabled him easily to persuade them to hush up the matter, but something of the story got abroad; the poor girl was marked out for that gossip and scandal, which among the very lowest classes are as coarse in the expression as malignant in the sentiment; and in the paroxysm of shame and despair, the unfortunate girl had that day destroyed herself. This melancholy event wrung forth from the parents the real story: the event and the story reached my ears in the very hour in which my mind was wavering to and fro. Can you wonder that they fixed it

at once, and to a dread end? What was this wretch? aged with vice--forestalling time--tottering on to a dishonoured grave--soiling all that he touched on his way--with grey hairs and filthy lewdness, the rottenness of the heart, not its passion, a nuisance and a curse to the world. What was the deed--that I should rid the earth of a thing at once base and venomous? Was it crime? Was it justice? Within myself I felt the will--the spirit that might bless mankind. I lacked the means to accomplish the will and wing the spirit. One deed supplied me with the means. Had the victim of that deed been a man moderately good--pursuing with even steps the narrow line between vice and virtue--blessing none but offending none,--it might have been yet a question whether mankind would not gain more by the deed than lose. But here was one whose steps stumbled on no good act--whose heart beat to no generous emotion;--there was a blot--a foulness on creation,--nothing but death could wash it out and leave the world fair. The soldier receives his pay, and murders, and sleeps sound, and men applaud. But you say he smites not for pay, but glory. Granted--though a sophism. But was there no glory to be gained in fields more magnificent than those of war--no glory to be gained in the knowledge which saves and not destroys? Was I not about to strike for that glory, for the means of earning it? Nay, suppose the soldier struck for patriotism, a better feeling than glory, would not my motive be yet larger than patriotism? Did it not body forth a broader circle? Could the world stop the bound of its utilities? Was there a corner of the earth--was there a period in time, which an ardent soul, freed from, not chained as now, by the cares of the body, and given wholly up to wisdom, might not pierce, vivify, illumine? Such were the questions which I asked:--time only answered them.

"Houseman came, punctual to our dark appointment. I gave him my hand in silence. We understood each other. We said no more of the deed itself, but of the manner in which it should be done. The melancholy incident I have described made Clarke yet more eager to leave the town. He had settled with Houseman that he would abscond that very night, not wait for the next, as at first he had intended. His jewels and property were put in a small compass. He had arranged that he would, towards midnight or later, quit his lodging; and about a mile from the town, Houseman had engaged to have a chaise in readiness. For this service Clarke had promised Houseman a reward, with which the latter appeared contented. It was arranged that I should meet Houseman and Clarke at a certain spot in their way from the town, and there--! Houseman appeared at first fearful, lest I should relent and waver in my purpose. It is never so with men whose thoughts are deep and strong. To resolve was the arduous step--once resolved, and I cast not a look behind. Houseman left me for the present. I could not rest in my chamber. I went forth and walked about the town; the night deepened--I saw the lights in each house withdrawn, one by one, and at length all was hushed--Silence and Sleep kept court over the abodes of men. That stillness--that quiet--that sabbath from care and toil--how deeply it sank into my heart! Nature never seemed to me to make so dread a pause. I felt as if I and my intended victim had been left alone in the world. I had wrapped myself above fear into a high and preternatural madness of mind. I looked on the deed I was about to commit as a great and solemn sacrifice to Knowledge, whose Priest I was. The very silence breathed to me of a stern and awful sanctity--the repose, not of the charnel-house, but the altar. I heard the clock strike hour after hour, but I neither faltered nor grew impatient. My mind lay hushed in its design.

"The Moon came out, but with a pale and sickly countenance. Winter was around the earth; the snow, which had been falling towards eve, lay deep

upon the ground; and the Frost seemed to lock the Universal Nature into the same calm and deadness which had taken possession of my soul.

"Houseman was to have come to me at midnight, just before Clarke left his house, but it was nearly two hours after that time ere he arrived. I was then walking to and fro before my own door; I saw that he was not alone, but with Clarke. 'Ha!' said he, 'this is fortunate, I see you are just going home. You were engaged, I recollect, at some distance from the town, and have, I suppose, just returned. Will you admit Mr. Clarke and myself for a short time--for to tell you the truth,' said he, in a lower voice--'The watchman is about, and we must not be seen by him! I have told Clarke that he may trust you, we are relatives!'

"Clarke, who seemed strangely credulous and indifferent, considering the character of his associate,--but those whom fate destroys she first blinds, made the same request in a careless tone, assigning the same cause. Unwillingly, I opened the door and admitted them. We went up to my chamber. Clarke spoke with the utmost unconcern of the fraud he purposed, and with a heartlessness that made my veins boil, of the poor victim his brutality had destroyed. All this was as iron bands round my purpose. They stayed for nearly an hour, for the watchman remained some time in that beat--and then Houseman asked me to accompany them a little way out of the town. Clarke seconded the request. We walked forth; the rest--why need I repeat? Houseman lied in the court; my hand struck--but not the death-blow: yet, from that hour, I have never given that right hand in pledge of love or friendship--the curse of memory has clung to it.

"We shared our booty; mine I buried, for the present. Houseman had dealings with a gipsy hag, and through her aid removed his share, at once, to London. And now, mark what poor strugglers we are in the eternal web of destiny! Three days after that deed, a relation who neglected me in life, died, and left me wealth!--wealth at least to me!--Wealth, greater than that for which I had . . . ! The news fell on me as a thunderbolt. Had I waited but three little days! Great God! when they told me,--I thought I heard the devils laugh out at the fool who had boasted wisdom! Tell me not now of our free will--we are but the things of a neverswerving, an everlasting Necessity!--pre-ordered to our doom--bound to a wheel that whirls us on till it touches the point at which we are crushed! Had I waited but three days, three little days!--Had but a dream been sent me, had but my heart cried within me,--'Thou hast suffered long, tarry yet!' [Note: Aram has hitherto been suffered to tell his own tale without comment or interruption. The chain of reasonings, the metaphysical labyrinth of defence and motive, which he wrought around his act, it was, in justice to him, necessary to give at length, in order to throw a clearer light on his character--and lighten, perhaps, in some measure the heinousness of his crime. No moral can be more impressive than that which teaches how man can entangle himself in his own sophisms--that moral is better, viewed aright, than volumes of homilies. But here I must pause for one moment, to bid the reader mark, that that event which confirmed Aram in the bewildering doctrines of his fatalism, ought rather to inculcate the Divine virtue--the foundation of all virtues, Heathen or Christian--that which Epictetus made clear, and Christ sacred--FORTITUDE. The reader will note, that the answer to the reasonings that probably convinced the mind of Aram, and blinded him to his crime, may be found in the change of feelings by which the crime was followed. I must apologize for this interruption--it seemed to me advisable in this place;--though, in general, the moment we begin to inculcate morality as a science, we ought to discard moralizing as a method.] No, it was for this, for the guilt and its penance, for the wasted life and the shameful

death--with all my thirst for good, my dreams of glory--that I was born, that I was marked from my first sleep in the cradle!

"The disappearance of Clarke of course created great excitement;--those whom he had over-reached had naturally an interest in discovering him. Some vague surmises that he might have been made away with, were rumoured abroad. Houseman and I, owing to some concurrence of circumstance, were examined,--not that suspicion attached to me before or after the examination. That ceremony ended in nothing. Houseman did not betray himself; and I, who from a boy had mastered my passions, could master also the nerves, which are the passions' puppets: but I read in the face of the woman with whom I lodged, that I was suspected. Houseman told me that she had openly expressed her suspicion to him; nay, he entertained some design against her life, which he naturally abandoned on quitting the town. This he did soon afterwards. I did not linger long behind him. I dug up my jewels,--I concealed them about me, and departed on foot to Scotland. There I converted my booty into money. And now I was above want--was I at rest? Not yet. I felt urged on to wander--Cain's curse descends to Cain's children. I travelled for some considerable time,--I saw men and cities, and I opened a new volume in my kind. It was strange; but before the deed, I was as a child in the ways of the world, and a child, despite my knowledge, might have duped me. The moment after it, a light broke upon me,--it seemed as if my eyes were touched with a charm, and rendered capable of piercing the hearts of men! Yes, it was a charm--a new charm--it was Suspicion! I now practised myself in the use of arms,--they made my sole companions. Peaceful, as I seemed to the world, I felt there was that eternally within me with which the world was at war.

"I do not deceive you. I did not feel what men call remorse! Having once convinced myself that I had removed from the earth a thing that injured and soiled its tribes,--that I had in crushing one worthless life, but without crushing one virtue--one feeling--one thought that could benefit others, strode to a glorious end;--having once convinced myself of this, I was not weak enough to feel a vague remorse for a deed I would not allow, in my case, to be a crime. I did not feel remorse, but I felt regret. The thought that had I waited three days I might have been saved, not from guilt, but from the chance of shame,--from the degradation of sinking to Houseman's equal--of feeling that man had the power to hurt me--that I was no longer above the reach of human malice, or human curiosity--that I was made a slave to my own secret--that I was no longer lord of my heart, to shew or to conceal it--that at any hour, in the possession of honours, by the hearth of love, I might be dragged forth and proclaimed a murderer--that I held my life, my reputation, at the breath of accident--that in the moment I least dreamed of, the earth might yield its dead, and the gibbet demand its victim;--this could I feel--all this--and not make a spectre of the past:--a spectre that walked by my side--that slept at my bed--that rose from my books--that glided between me and the stars of heaven, that stole along the flowers, and withered their sweet breath--that whispered in my ear, 'Toil, fool, and be wise; the gift of wisdom is to place us above the reach of fortune, but thou art her veriest minion!' Yes; I paused at last from my wanderings, and surrounded myself with books, and knowledge became once more to me what it had been, a thirst; but not what it had been, a reward. I occupied my thoughts--I laid up new hoards within my mind--I looked around, and I saw few whose stores were like my own,--but where, with the passion for wisdom still alive within me--where was that once more ardent desire which had cheated me across so dark a chasm between youth and manhood--between past and present life--the desire of applying

that wisdom to the service of mankind? Gone--dead--buried for ever in my bosom, with the thousand dreams that had perished before it! When the deed was done, mankind seemed suddenly to have grown my foes. I looked upon them with other eyes. I knew that I carried within, that secret which, if bared to-day, would make them loath and hate me,--yea, though I coined my future life into one series of benefits on them and their posterity! Was not this thought enough to quell my ardour--to chill activity into rest? The more I might toil, the brighter honours I might win--the greater services I might bestow on the world, the more dread and fearful might be my fall at last! I might be but piling up the scaffold from which I was to be hurled! Possessed by these thoughts, a new view of human affairs succeeded to my old aspirings;--the moment a man feels that an object has ceased to charm, he reconciles himself by reasonings to his loss. 'Why,' said I; 'why flatter myself that I can serve--that I can enlighten mankind? Are we fully sure that individual wisdom has ever, in reality, done so? Are we really better because Newton lived, and happier because Bacon thought?' This dampening and frozen line of reflection pleased the present state of my mind more than the warm and yearning enthusiasm it had formerly nourished. Mere worldly ambition from a boy I had disdained;--the true worth of sceptres and crowns--the inquietude of power--the humiliations of vanity--had never been disguised from my sight. Intellectual ambition had inspired me. I now regarded it equally as a delusion. I coveted light solely for my own soul to bathe in. I would have drawn down the Promethean fire; but I would no longer have given to man what it was in the power of circumstance alone (which I could control not) to make his enlightener or his ruin--his blessing or his curse. Yes, I loved--I love still;--could I live for ever, I should for ever love knowledge! It is a companion--a solace--a pursuit--a Lethe. But, no more!--oh! never more for me was the bright ambition that makes knowledge a means, not end. As, contrary to the vulgar notion, the bee is said to gather her honey unperceiving of the winter, labouring without a motive, save the labour, I went on, year after year, hiving all that the earth presented to my toils, and asking not to what use. I had rushed into a dread world, that I might indulge a dream. Lo! the dream was fled; but I could not retrace my steps.

"Rest now became to me the sole charm of existence. I grew enamoured of the doctrine of those old mystics, who have placed happiness only in an even and balanced quietude. And where but in utter loneliness was that quietude to be enjoyed? I no longer wondered that men in former times, when consumed by the recollection of some haunting guilt, fled to the desert and became hermits. Tranquillity and Solitude are the only soothers of a memory deeply troubled--light griefs fly to the crowd--fierce thoughts must battle themselves to rest. Many years had flown, and I had made my home in many places. All that was turbulent, if not all that was unquiet, in my recollections, had died away. Time had lulled me into a sense of security. I breathed more freely. I sometimes stole from the past. Since I had quitted Knaresbro' chance had thrown it in my power frequently to serve my brethren--not by wisdom, but by charity or courage--by individual acts that it soothed me to remember. If the grand aim of enlightening a world was gone--if to so enlarged a benevolence had succeeded apathy or despair, still the man, the human man, clung to my heart--still was I as prone to pity--as prompt to defend--as glad to cheer, whenever the vicissitudes of life afforded me the occasion; and to poverty, most of all, my hand never closed. For oh! what a terrible devil creeps into that man's soul, who sees famine at his door! One tender act and how many black designs, struggling into life within, you may crush for ever! He who deems the world his foe, convince him that he has one friend, and it is like snatching a dagger from his

hand!

"I came to a beautiful and remote part of the country. Walter Lester, I came to Grassdale!--the enchanting scenery around--the sequestered and deep retirement of the place arrested me at once. 'And among these valleys,' I said, 'will I linger out the rest of my life, and among these quiet graves shall mine be dug, and my secret shall die with me!'

"I rented the lonely house in which I dwelt when you first knew me--thither I transported my books and instruments of science. I formed new projects in the vast empire of wisdom, and a deep quiet, almost amounting to content, fell like a sweet sleep upon my soul!

"In this state of mind, the most free from memory and from the desire to pierce the future that I had known for twelve years, I first saw Madeline Lester. Even with that first time a sudden and heavenly light seemed to dawn upon me. Her face--its still--its serene--its touching beauty, shone upon me like a vision. My heart warmed as I saw it--my pulse seemed to wake from its even slowness. I was young once more. Young! the youth, the freshness, the ardour--not of the frame only, but of the soul. But I then only saw, or spoke to her--scarce knew her--not loved her--nor was it often that we met. When we did so, I felt haunted, as by a holy spirit, for the rest of the day--an unquiet yet delicious emotion agitated all within--the south wind stirred the dark waters of my mind, but it passed, and all became hushed again. It was not for two years from the time we first saw each other, that accident brought us closely together. I pass over the rest. We loved! Yet oh what struggles were mine during the progress of that love! How unnatural did it seem to me to yield to a passion that united me with my kind; and as I loved her more, how far more urgent grew my fear of the future! That which had almost slept before awoke again to terrible life. The soil that covered the past might be riven, the dead awake, and that ghastly chasm separate me for ever from HER! What a doom, too, might I bring upon that breast which had begun so confidently to love me! Often--often I resolved to fly--to forsake her--to seek some desert spot in the distant parts of the world, and never to be betrayed again into human emotions! But as the bird flutters in the net, as the hare doubles from its pursuers, I did but wrestle--I did but trifle--with an irresistible doom. Mark how strange are the coincidences of fate--fate that gives us warnings and takes away the power to obey them--the idle prophetess--the juggling fiend! On the same evening that brought me acquainted with Madeline Lester, Houseman, led by schemes of fraud and violence into that part of the country, discovered and sought me! Imagine my feelings, when in the hush of night I opened the door of my lonely home to his summons, and by the light of that moon which had witnessed so never-to-be-forgotten a companionship between us, beheld my accomplice in murder after the lapse of so many years. Time and a course of vice had changed and hardened, and lowered his nature; and in the power, at the will of that nature, I beheld myself abruptly placed. He passed that night under my roof. He was poor. I gave him what was in my hands. He promised to leave that part of England--to seek me no more.

"The next day I could not bear my own thoughts, the revulsion was too sudden, too full of turbulent, fierce, torturing emotions; I fled for a short relief to the house to which Madeline's father had invited me. But in vain I sought, by wine, by converse, by human voices, human kindness, to fly the ghost that had been raised from the grave of time. I soon returned to my own thoughts. I resolved to wrap myself once more in the solitude of my heart. But let me not repeat what I have said before,

somewhat prematurely, in my narrative. I resolved--I struggled in vain, Fate had ordained, that the sweet life of Madeline Lester should wither beneath the poison tree of mine. Houseman sought me again, and now came on the humbling part of crime, its low calculations, its poor defence, its paltry trickery, its mean hypocrisy! They made my chiefest penance! I was to evade, to beguile, to buy into silence, this rude and despised ruffian. No matter now to repeat how this task was fulfilled; I surrendered nearly my all, on the condition of his leaving England for ever: not till I thought that condition already fulfilled, till the day had passed on which he should have left England, did I consent to allow Madeline's fate to be irrevocably woven with mine. Fool that I was, as if laws could bind us closer than love had done already.

"How often, when the soul sins, are her loftiest feelings punished through her lowest! To me, lone, rapt, for ever on the wing to unearthly speculation, galling and humbling was it indeed, to be suddenly called from the eminence of thought, to barter, in pounds and pence, for life, and with one like Houseman. These are the curses that deepen the tragedy of life, by grinding down our pride. But I wander back to what I have before said. I was to marry Madeline,--I was once more poor, but want did not rise before me; I had succeeded in obtaining the promise of a competence from one whom you know. For that I had once forced from my kind, I asked now, but not with the spirit of the beggar, but of the just claimant, and in that spirit it was granted. And now I was really happy; Houseman I believed removed for ever from my path; Madeline was about to be mine: I surrendered myself to love, and blind and deluded, I wandered on, and awoke on the brink of that precipice into which I am about to plunge. You know the rest. But oh! what now was my horror! It had not been a mere worthless, isolated unit in creation that I had blotted out of the sum of life. I had shed the blood of his brother whose child was my betrothed! Mysterious avenger--weird and relentless fate! How, when I deemed myself the farthest from her, had I been sinking into her grasp! Mark, young man, there is a moral here that few preachers can teach thee! Mark. Men rarely violate the individual rule in comparison to their violation of general rules. It is in the latter that we deceive by sophisms which seem truths. In the individual instance it was easy for me to deem that I had committed no crime. I had destroyed a man, noxious to the world; with the wealth by which he afflicted society I had been the means of blessing many; in the individual consequences mankind had really gained by my deed; the general consequence I had overlooked till now, and now it flashed upon me. The scales fell from my eyes, and I knew myself for what I was! All my calculations were dashed to the ground at once, for what had been all the good I had proposed to do--the good I had done--compared to the anguish I now inflicted on your house? Was your father my only victim? Madeline, have I not murdered her also? Lester, have I not shaken the sands in his glass? You, too, have I not blasted the prime and glory of your years? How incalculable--how measureless--how viewless the consequences of one crime, even when we think we have weighed them all with scales that would have turned with a hair's weight! Yes; before I had felt no remorse. I felt it now. I had acknowledged no crime, and now crime seemed the essence itself of my soul. The Theban's fate, which had seemed to the men of old the most terrible of human destinies, was mine. The crime--the discovery--the irremediable despair--hear me, as the voice of a man who is on the brink of a world, the awful nature of which Reason cannot pierce--hear me! when your heart tempts to some wandering from the line allotted to the rest of men, and whispers 'This may be crime in others, but is not so in thee'--tremble; cling fast, fast to the path you are lured to leave. Remember me!

"But in this state of mind I was yet forced to play the hypocrite. Had I been alone in the world--had Madeline and Lester not been to me what they were, I might have avowed my deed and my motives--I might have spoken out to the hearts of men--I might have poured forth the gloomy tale of reasonings and of temptings, in which we lose sense, and become the archfiend's tools! But while their eyes were on me; while their lives and hearts were set on my acquittal, my struggle against truth was less for myself than them. For them I girded up my soul, a villain I was; and for them, a bold, a crafty, a dexterous, villain I became! My defence fulfilled its end: Madeline died without distrusting the innocence of him she loved. Lester, unless you betray me, will die in the same belief. In truth, since the arts of hypocrisy have been commenced, the pride of consistency would have made it sweet to me to leave the world in a like error, or at least in doubt. For you I conquer that desire, the proud man's last frailty. And now my tale is done. From what passes at this instant within my heart, I lift not the veil! Whether beneath, be despair, or hope, or fiery emotions, or one settled and ominous calm, matters not. My last hours shall not belie my life: on the verge of death I will not play the dastard, and tremble at the Dim Unknown. The thirst, the dream, the passion of my youth, yet lives; and burns to learn the sublime and shaded mysteries that are banned Mortality. Perhaps I am not without a hope that the Great and Unseen Spirit, whose emanation within me I have nursed and worshipped, though erringly and in vain, may see in his fallen creature one bewildered by his reason rather than yielding to his vices. The guide I received from Heaven betrayed me, and I was lost; but I have not plunged wittingly from crime to crime. Against one guilty deed, some good, and much suffering may be set: and, dim and afar off from my allotted bourne, I may behold in her glorious home the starred face of her who taught me to love, and who, even there, could scarce be blessed without shedding the light of her divine forgiveness upon me. Enough! ere you break this seal, my doom rests not with man nor earth. The burning desires I have known--the resplendent visions I have nursed--the sublime aspirings that have lifted me so often from sense and clay--these tell me, that, whether for good or ill--I am the thing of an Immortality, and the creature of a God! As men of the old wisdom drew their garments around their face, and sat down collectedly to die, I wrap myself in the settled resignation of a soul firm to the last, and taking not from man's vengeance even the method of its dismissal. The courses of my life I swayed with my own hand: from my own hand shall come the manner and moment of my death!

"Eugene Aram."

On the day after that evening in which Aram had given the above confession to Walter Lester;--on the day of execution, when they entered the condemned cell, they found the prisoner lying on the bed; and when they approached to take off the irons, they found, that he neither stirred nor answered to their call. They attempted to raise him, and he then uttered some words in a faint voice. They perceived that he was covered with blood. He had opened his veins in two places in the arm with a sharp instrument he had some time since concealed. A surgeon was instantly sent for, and by the customary applications the prisoner in some measure was brought to himself. Resolved not to defraud the law of its victim, they bore him, though he appeared unconscious of all around, to the fatal spot. But when he arrived at that dread place, his sense suddenly seemed to return. He looked hastily round the throng that swayed and murmured below, and a faint flush rose to his cheek: he cast his eyes impatiently above, and breathed hard and convulsively. The dire preparations were made, completed; but the prisoner drew back for an

instant--was it from mortal fear? He motioned to the Clergyman to approach, as if about to whisper some last request in his ear. The clergyman bowed his head,--there was a minute's awful pause--Aram seemed to struggle as for words, when, suddenly throwing himself back, a bright triumphant smile flashed over his whole face. With that smile, the haughty Spirit passed away, and the law's last indignity was wreaked upon a breathless corpse!

CHAPTER VIII.

AND LAST. THE TRAVELLER'S RETURN.--THE COUNTRY VILLAGE ONCE MORE VISITED;--ITS INHABITANTS.--THE REMEMBERED BROOK.--THE DESERTED MANOR-HOUSE.--THE CHURCHYARD.--THE TRAVELLER RESUMES HIS JOURNEY.--THE COUNTRY TOWN.--A MEETING OF TWO LOVERS AFTER LONG ABSENCE AND MUCH SORROW.--CONCLUSION.

"The lopped tree in time may grow again,
Most naked plants renew both fruit and flower;
The sorriest wight may find release from pain,
The driest soil suck in some moistening shower:
Time goes by turns, and chances change by course
From foul to fair."

--Robert Southwell, the Jesuit.

Sometimes towards the end of a gloomy day, the sun before but dimly visible, breaks suddenly out, and clothes the landscape with a smile; then beneath your eye, which during the clouds and sadness of day, had sought only the chief features of the prospect around, (some grey hill, or rising spire, or sweeping wood,) the less prominent, yet not less lovely features of the scene, mellow forth into view; over them, perhaps, the sun sets with a happier and richer glow than over the rest of Nature; and thus they leave upon your mind its last grateful impression, and console you for the gloom and sadness which the parting light they catch and reflect, dispels.

Just so in our tale; it continues not in cloud and sorrow to the last; some little ray breaks forth at the close; in that ray, characters which before received but a slight portion of the interest that prouder and darker ones engrossed, are thrown into light, and cheer from the mind of him who hath watched and tarried with us till now,--we will not say all the sadness that may perhaps linger on his memory,--and yet something of the gloom.

It was some years after the date of the last event we have recorded, and it was a fine warm noon in the happy month of May, when a horseman was slowly riding through the long--straggling--village of Grassdale. He was a man, though in the prime of youth, (for he might yet want some two years of thirty,) that bore the steady and earnest air of one who has seen not sparingly of the world; his eye keen but tranquil, his sunburnt though handsome features, which either exertion or thought, or care, had despoiled of the roundness of their early contour, leaving the cheek somewhat sunken, and the lines somewhat marked, were impressed with a grave, and at that moment with a melancholy and soft expression; and now, as his horse proceeded slowly through the green lane, which in every vista gave glimpses of rich verdant valleys, the sparkling river, or the

orchard ripe with the fragrant blossoms of spring; his gaze lost the calm expression it habitually wore, and betrayed how busily Remembrance was at work. The dress of the horseman was of foreign fashion, and at that day, when the garb still denoted the calling, sufficiently military to show the profession he had belonged to. And well did the garb become the short dark moustache, the sinewy chest and length of limb of the young horseman: recommendations, the two latter, not despised in the court of the great Frederic of Prussia, in whose service he had borne arms. He had commenced his career in that battle terminating in the signal defeat of the bold Daun, when the fortunes of that gallant general paled at last before the star of the greatest of modern kings. The peace of 1763 had left Prussia in the quiet enjoyment of the glory she had obtained, and the young Englishman took the advantage it afforded him of seeing as a traveller, not despoiler, the rest of Europe.

The adventure and the excitement of travel pleased and left him even now uncertain whether or not his present return to England would be for long. He had not been a week returned, and to this part of his native country he had hastened at once.

He checked his horse as he now past the memorable sign, that yet swung before the door of Peter Dealtry; and there, under the shade of the broad tree, now budding into all its tenderest verdure, a pedestrian wayfarer sate enjoying the rest and coolness of his shelter. Our horseman cast a look at the open door, across which, in the bustle of housewifery, female forms now and then glanced and vanished, and presently he saw Peter himself saunter forth to chat with the traveller beneath his tree. And Peter Dealtry was the same as ever, only he seemed perhaps shorter and thinner than of old, as if Time did not so much break as wear mine host's slender person gradually away.

The horseman gazed for a moment, but observing Peter return the gaze, he turned aside his head, and putting his horse into a canter, soon passed out of cognizance of the Spotted Dog.

He now came in sight of the neat white cottage of the old Corporal, and there, leaning over the pale, a crutch under one arm, and his friendly pipe in one corner of his shrewd mouth, was the Corporal himself. Perched upon the railing in a semi-dozed, the ears down, the eyes closed, sat a large brown cat: poor Jacobina, it was not thyself! death spares neither cat nor king; but thy virtues lived in thy grandchild; and thy grandchild, (as age brings dotage,) was loved even more than thee by the worthy Corporal. Long may thy race flourish, for at this day it is not extinct. Nature rarely inflicts barrenness on the feline tribe; they are essentially made for love, and love's soft cares, and a cat's lineage outlives the lineage of kaisars.

At the sound of hoofs the Corporal turned his head, and he looked long and wistfully at the horseman, as, relaxing his horse's pace into a walk, our traveller rode slowly on.

"Fore George," muttered the Corporal, "a fine man--a very fine man; 'bout my inches--augh!"

A smile, but a very faint smile, crossed the lip of the horseman, as he gazed on the figure of the stalwart Corporal.

"He eyes me hard," thought he; "yet he does not seem to remember me. I must be greatly changed. 'Tis fortunate, however, that I am not

recognised: fain, indeed, at this time, would I come and go unnoticed and alone."

The horseman fell into a reverie, which was broken by the murmur of the sunny rivulet, fretting over each little obstacle it met, the happy and spoiled child of Nature! That murmur rang on the horseman's ear like a voice from his boyhood, how familiar was it, how dear! No tone of music--no haunting air, ever recalled so rushing a host of memories and associations as that simple, restless, everlasting sound! Everlasting!--all had changed,--the trees had sprung up or decayed,--some cottages around were ruins,--some new and unfamiliar ones supplied their place, and on the stranger himself--on all those whom the sound recalled to his heart, Time had been, indeed, at work, but with the same exulting bound and happy voice that little brook leaped along its way. Ages hence, may the course be as glad, and the murmur as full of mirth! They are blessed things, those remote and unchanging streams!--they fill us with the same love as if they were living creatures!--and in a green corner of the world there is one that, for my part, I never see without forgetting myself to tears--tears that I would not lose for a king's ransom; tears that no other sight or sound could call from their source; tears of what affection, what soft regret; tears that leave me for days afterwards, a better and a kinder man!

The traveller, after a brief pause, continued his road; and now he came full upon the old Manorhouse. The weeds were grown up in the garden, the mossed paling was broken in many places, the house itself was shut up, and the sun glanced on the deep-sunk casements without finding its way into the desolate interior. High above the old hospitable gate hung a board, announcing that the house was for sale, and referring the curious, or the speculating, to the attorney of the neighbouring town. The horseman sighed heavily, and muttered to himself; then turning up the road that led to the back entrance, he came into the court-yard, and leading his horse into an empty stable, he proceeded on foot through the dismantled premises, pausing with every moment, and holding a sad and ever-changing commune with himself. An old woman, a stranger to him, was the sole inmate of the house, and imagining he came to buy, or at least, examine, she conducted him through the house, pointing out its advantages, and lamenting its dilapidated state. Our traveller scarcely heard her,--but when he came to one room which he would not enter till the last, (it was the little parlour in which the once happy family had been wont to sit,) he sank down in the chair that had been Lester's honoured seat, and covering his face with his hands, did not move or look up for several moments. The old woman gazed at him with surprise.--"Perhaps, Sir, you knew the family, they were greatly beloved."

The traveller did not answer; but when he rose, he muttered to himself,--"No, the experiment is made in vain! Never, never could I live here again--it must be so--my forefathers' house must pass into a stranger's hands." With this reflection he hurried from the house, and re-entering the garden, turned through a little gate that swung half open on its shattered hinges, and led into the green and quiet sanctuaries of the dead. The same touching character of deep and undisturbed repose that hallows the country church-yard,--and that more than most--yet brooded there as when, years ago, it woke his young mind to reflection then unmingled with regret.

He passed over the rude mounds of earth that covered the deceased poor, and paused at a tomb of higher, though but of simple pretensions; it was not yet discoloured by the dews and seasons, and the short inscription

traced upon it was strikingly legible, in comparison with those around.

Rowland Lester,
Obiit 1760, aet. 64.

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

By that tomb the traveller remained in undisturbed contemplation for some time, and when he turned, all the swarthy colour had died from his cheek, his eyes were dim, and the wonted pride of a young man's step and a soldier's bearing, was gone from his mien.

As he looked up, his eye caught afar, embedded among the soft verdure of the spring, one lone and grey house, from whose chimney there rose no smoke--sad, inhospitable, dismantled as that beside which he now stood;--as if the curse which had fallen on the inmates of either mansion, still clung to either roof. One hasty glance only, the traveller gave to the solitary and distant abode,--and then started and quickened his pace.

On re-entering the stables, the traveller found the Corporal examining his horse from head to foot with great care and scrupulosity.

"Good hoofs too, humph!" quoth the Corporal, as he released the front leg; and, turning round, saw, with some little confusion, the owner of the steed he had been honouring with so minute a survey. "Oh,--augh! looking at the beastie, Sir, lest it might have cast a shoe. Thought your honour might want some intelligent person to shew you the premises, if so be you have come to buy; nothing but an old 'oman there; dare say your honour does not like old 'omen--augh!"

"The owner is not in these parts?" said the horseman.

"No, over seas, Sir; a fine young gentleman, but hasty; and--and--but Lord bless me! sure--no, it can't be--yes, now you turn--it is--it is my young master!" So saying, the old Corporal, roused into affection, hobbled up to the wanderer, and seized and kissed his hand. "Ah, Sir, we shall be glad, indeed, to see you back after such doings. But's all forgotten now, and gone by--augh! Poor Miss Ellinor, how happy she'll be to see your honour. Ah! how she be changed, surely!"

"Changed; ay, I make no doubt! What! does she look in weak health?"

"No; as to that, your honour, she be winsome enough still," quoth the Corporal, smacking his lips; "I seed her the week afore last, when I went over to--, for I suppose you knows as she lives there, all alone like, in a small house, with a green rail afore it, and a brass knocker on the door, at top of the town, with a fine view of the--hills in front? Well, Sir, I seed her, and mighty handsome she looked, though a little thinner than she was; but, for all that, she be greatly changed."

"How! for the worse?"

"For the worse, indeed," answered the Corporal, assuming an air of melancholy and grave significance; "she be grown religious, Sir, think of that--augh--bother--whaugh!"

"Is that all?" said Walter, relieved, and with a slight smile. "And she lives alone?"

"Quite, poor young lady, as if she had made up her mind to be an old

maid; though I know as how she refused Squire Knyvett of the Grange waiting for your honour's return, mayhap!"

"Lead out the horse, Bunting; but stay, I am sorry to see you with a crutch; what's the cause? no accident, I trust?"

"Merely rheumatics--will attack the youngest of us; never been quite myself since I went a travelling with your honour--augh!--without going to Lunnor after all. But I shall be stronger next year, I dare to say--!"

"I hope you will, Bunting. And Miss Lester lives alone, you say?"

"Ay; and for all she be so religious, the poor about do bless her very footsteps. She does a power of good; she gave me half-a-guinea, your honour; an excellent young lady, so sensible like!"

"Thank you; I can tighten the girths!--so!--there, Bunting, there's something for old companion's sake."

"Thank your honour; you be too good, always was--baugh! But I hopes your honour be a coming to live here now; 'twill make things smile agin!"

"No, Bunting, I fear not," said Walter, spurring through the gates of the yard; "Good day."

"Augh, then," cried the Corporal, hobbling breathlessly after him, "if so be as I shan't see your honour agin, at which I am extramely consarned, will your honour recollect your promise, touching the 'tato ground? The steward, Master Bailey, 'od rot him, has clean forgot it--augh!"

"The same old man, Bunting, eh? Well, make your mind easy, it shall be done."

"Lord bless your honour's good heart; thankye; and--and"--laying his hand on the bridle--"your honour did say, the bit cot should be rent-free. You see, your honour," quoth the Corporal, drawing up with a grave smile, "I may marry some day or other, and have a large family; and the rent won't sit so easy then--augh!"

"Let go the rein, Bunting--and consider your house rent-free."

"And, your honour--and--"

But Walter was already in a brisk trot; and the remaining petitions of the Corporal died in empty air.

"A good day's work, too," muttered Jacob, hobbling homeward. "What a green un 'tis still! Never be a man of the world--augh!"

For two hours Walter did not relax the rapidity of his pace; and when he did so at the descent of a steep hill, a small country town lay before him, the sun glittering on its single spire, and lighting up the long, clean, centre street, with the good old-fashioned garden stretching behind each house, and detached cottages around, peeping forth here and there from the blossoms and verdure of the young may. He rode into the yard of the principal inn, and putting up his horse, inquired in a tone that he persuaded himself was the tone of indifference, for Miss Lester's house.

"John," said the landlady, (landlord there was none,) summoning a little boy of about ten years old--"run on, and shew this gentleman the good lady's house: and--stay--his honour will excuse you a moment--just take up the nosegay you cut for her this morning: she loves flowers. Ah! Sir, an excellent young lady is Miss Lester," continued the hostess, as the boy ran back for the nosegay; "so charitable, so kind, so meek to all. Adversity, they say, softens some characters; but she must always have been good. And so religious, Sir, though so young! Well, God bless her! and that every one must say. My boy John, Sir, he is not eleven yet, come next August--a 'cute boy, calls her the good lady: we now always call her so here. Come, John, that's right. You stay to dine here, Sir? Shall I put down a chicken?"

At the farther extremity of the town stood Miss Lester's dwelling. It was the house in which her father had spent his last days; and there she had continued to reside, when left by his death to a small competence, which Walter, then abroad, had persuaded her, (for her pride was of the right kind,) to suffer him, though but slightly, to increase. It was a detached and small building, standing a little from the road; and Walter paused for some moments at the garden-gate, and gazed round him before he followed his young guide, who, tripping lightly up the gravel-walk to the door, rang the bell, and inquired if Miss Lester was within?

Walter was left for some moments alone in a little parlour:--he required those moments to recover himself from the past that rushed sweepingly over him. And was it--yes, it was Ellinor that now stood before him! Changed she was, indeed; the slight girl had budded into woman; changed she was, indeed; the bound had for ever left that step, once so elastic with hope; the vivacity of the quick, dark eye was soft and quiet; the rich colour had given place to a hue fainter, though not less lovely. But to repeat in verse what is poorly bodied forth in prose--

"And years had past, and thus they met again;
The wind had swept along the flower since then,
O'er her fair cheek a paler lustre spread,
As if the white rose triumphed o'er the red.
No more she walk'd exulting on the air;
Light though her step, there was a languour there;
No more--her spirit bursting from its bound,--
She stood, like Hebe, scattering smiles around."

"Ellinor!" said Walter mournfully, "thank God! we meet at last."

"That voice--that face--my cousin--my dear, dear Walter!"

All reserve--all consciousness fled in the delight of that moment; and Ellinor leant her head upon his shoulder, and scarcely felt the kiss that he pressed upon her lips.

"And so long absent!" said Ellinor, reproachfully.

"But did you not tell me that the blow that had fallen on our house had stricken from you all thoughts of love--had divided us for ever? And what, Ellinor, was England or home with out you?"

"Ah!" said Ellinor, recovering herself, and a deep paleness succeeding to the warm and delighted flush that had been conjured to her cheek, "Do not revive the past--I have sought for years--long, solitary, desolate

years, to escape from its dark recollections!"

"You speak wisely, dearest Ellinor; let us assist each other in doing so. We are alone in the world--let us unite our lot. Never, through all I have seen and felt,--in the starry nightwatch of camps--in the blaze of courts--by the sunny groves of Italy--in the deep forests of the Hartz--never have I forgotten you, my sweet and dear cousin. Your image has linked itself indissolubly with all I conceived of home and happiness, and a tranquil and peaceful future; and now I return, and see you, and find you changed, but, oh, how lovely! Ah, let us not part again! A consoler, a guide, a soother, father, brother, husband,--all this my heart whispers I could be to you!"

Ellinor turned away her face, but her heart was very full. The solitary years that had passed over her since they last met, rose up before her. The only living image that had mingled through those years with the dreams of the departed, was his who now knelt at her feet;--her sole friend--her sole relative--her first--her last love! Of all the world, he was the only one with whom she could recur to the past; on whom she might repose her bruised, but still unconquered affections.

And Walter knew by that blush--that sigh--that tear, that he was remembered--that he was beloved--that his cousin was his own at last!

"But before you end," said my friend, to whom I shewed the above pages, originally concluding my tale with the last sentence, "you must, it is a comfortable and orthodox old fashion, tell us a little about the fate of the other persons, to whom you have introduced us;--the wretch Houseman?"--

"True; in the mysterious course of mortal affairs, the greater villain had escaped, the more generous and redeemed one fallen. But though Houseman died without violence, died in his bed, as honest men die, we can scarcely believe that his life was not punishment enough. He lived in strict seclusion--the seclusion of poverty, and maintained himself by dressing flax. His life was several times attempted by the mob, for he was an object of universal execration and horror; and even ten years afterwards, when he died, his body was buried in secret at the dead of night, for the hatred of the world survived him!"

"And the Corporal, did he marry in his old age?"

"History telleth of one Jacob Bunting, whose wife, several years younger than himself, played him certain sorry pranks with the young curate of the parish: the said Jacob, knowing nothing thereof, but furnishing great oblectation unto his neighbours, by boasting that he turned an excellent penny by selling poultry to his reverence above market prices,--'For Bessy, my girl, I'm a man of the world--augh!'"

"Contented! a suitable fate for the old dog--But Peter Dealtry?"

"Of Peter Dealtry know we nothing more, save that we have seen at Grassdale church-yard, a small tombstone inscribed to his memory, with the following sacred poesy thereto appended,--

"We flourish, saith the holy text
One hour, and are cut down the next:
I was like grass but yesterday,
But Death has mowed me into hay."

"And his namesake, Sir Peter Grindlescrew Hales?"

"Went through a long life, honoured and respected, but met with domestic misfortunes in old age. His eldest son married a maid servant, and his youngest daughter--"

"Eloped with the groom?"

"By no means,--with a young spendthrift;--the very picture of what Sir Peter was in his youth: they were both disinherited, and Sir Peter died in the arms of his eight remaining children, seven of whom never forgave his memory for not being the eighth, viz. chief heir."

"And his cotemporary, John Courtland, the non-hypochondriac?"

"Died of sudden suffocation, as he was crossing Hounslow Heath."

"But Lord--?"

"Lived to a great age; his last days, owing to growing infirmities, were spent out of the world; every one pitied him,--it was the happiest time of his life!"

"Dame Darkmans?"

"Was found dead in her bed, from over fatigue, it was supposed, in making merry at the funeral of a young girl on the previous day."

"Well!--hem,--and so Walter and his cousin were really married; and did they never return to the old Manor-house?"

"No; the memory that is allied only to melancholy, grows sweet with years, and hallows the spot which it haunts; not so the memory allied to dread, terror, and something too of shame. Walter sold the property with some pangs of natural regret; after his marriage with Ellinor he returned abroad for some time, but finally settling in England, engaged in active life, and left to his posterity a name they still honour; and to his country, the memory of some services that will not lightly pass away."

But one dread and gloomy remembrance never forsook his mind, and exercised the most powerful influence over the actions and motives of his life. In every emergency, in every temptation, there rose to his eyes the fate of him so gifted, so noble in much, so formed for greatness in all things, blasted by one crime--self-sought, but self-denied; a crime, the offspring of bewildered reasonings--all the while speculating upon virtue. And that fate revealing the darker secrets of our kind, in which the true science of morals is chiefly found, taught him the twofold lesson, caution for himself, and charity for others. He knew henceforth that even the criminal is not all evil; the angel within us is not easily expelled; it survives sin, ay, and many sins, and leaves us sometimes in amaze and marvel, at the good that lingers round the heart even of the hardest offender.

And Ellinor clung with more than revived affection to one with whose lot she was now allied. Walter was her last tie upon earth, and in him she learnt, day by day, more lavishly to treasure up her heart. Adversity and trial had ennobled the character of both; and she who had so long seen in her cousin all she could love, beheld now in her husband that greater and

more enduring spell--all that she could venerate and admire. A certain religious fervour, in which, after the calamities of her family, she had indulged, continued with her to the last; but, (softened by human ties, and the reciprocation of earthly duties and affections,) it was fortunately preserved either from the undue enthusiasm or the undue austerity into which it would otherwise, in all likelihood, have merged. What remained, however, uniting her most cheerful thoughts with something serious, and the happiest moments of the present with the dim and solemn forecast of the future, elevated her nature, not depressed, and made itself visible rather in tender than in sombre, hues. And it was sweet when the thought of Madeline and her father came across her, to recur at once for consolation to that Heaven in which she believed their tears were dried, and their past sorrows but a forgotten dream! There is, indeed, a time of life when these reflections make our chief, though a melancholy, pleasure. As we grow older, and sometimes a hope, sometimes a friend, is shivered from our path, the thought of an immortality will press itself forcibly upon us! and there, by little and little, as the ant piles grain after grain, the garnerers of a future sustenance, we learn to carry our hopes, and harvest, as it were, our wishes.

Our cousins then were happy. Happy, for they loved one another entirely; and on those who do so love, I sometimes think, that, barring physical pain and extreme poverty, the ills of life fall with but idle malice. Yes, they were happy in spite of the past, and in defiance of the future.

"I am satisfied then," said my friend,--"and your tale is fairly done!"

And now, Reader, farewell! If, sometimes as thou hast gone with me to this our parting spot, thou hast suffered thy companion to win the mastery over thine interest, to flash now on thy convictions, to touch now thy heart, to guide thy hope, to excite thy anxiety, to gain even almost to the sources of thy tears--then is there a tie between thee and me which cannot readily be broken! And when thou hearest the malice that wrongs affect the candour which should judge, thou wilt be surprised to feel how unconsciously He who has, even in a tale, once wound himself around those feelings not daily excited, can find in thy sympathies the defence, or, in thy charity the indulgence,--of a friend!

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