

Devereux, Book VI.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

THE RETREAT.

I ARRIVED at St. Petersburg, and found the Czarina, whose conjugal perfidy was more than suspected, tolerably resigned to the extinction of that dazzling life whose incalculable and god-like utility it is reserved for posterity to appreciate! I have observed, by the way, that in general men are the less mourned by their families in proportion as they are the more mourned by the community. The great are seldom amiable; and those who are the least lenient to our errors are invariably our relations!

Many circumstances at that time conspired to make my request to quit the imperial service appear natural and appropriate. The death of the Czar, joined to a growing jealousy and suspicion between the English monarch and Russia, which, though long existing, was now become more evident and notorious than heretofore, gave me full opportunity to observe that my pardon had been obtained from King George three years since, and that private as well as national ties rendered my return to England a measure not only of expediency but necessity. The imperial Catherine granted me my dismissal in the most flattering terms, and added the high distinction of the Order founded in honour of the memorable feat by which she had saved her royal consort and the Russian army to the Order of St. Andrew, which I had already received.

I transferred my wealth, now immense, to England, and, with the pomp which became the rank and reputation Fortune had bestowed upon me, I commenced the long land-journey I had chalked out to myself. Although I had alleged my wish to revisit England as the main reason of my retirement from Russia, I had also expressed an intention of visiting Italy previous to my return to England. The physicians, indeed, had recommended to me that delicious climate as an antidote to the ills my constitution had sustained in the freezing skies of the north; and in my own heart I had secretly appointed some more solitary part of the Divine Land for the scene of my purposed hermitage and seclusion. It is indeed astonishing how those who have lived much in cold climates yearn for lands of mellow light and summer luxuriance; and I felt for a southern sky the same resistless longing which sailors, in the midst of the vast ocean, have felt for the green fields and various landscape of the shore.

I traversed, then, the immense tracts of Russia, passed through Hungary, entered Turkey, which I had wished to visit, where I remained a short time; and, crossing the Adriatic, hailed, for the first time, the Ausonian shore. It was the month of May--that month, of whose lustrous beauty none in a northern clime can dream--that I entered Italy. It may serve as an instance of the power with which a thought that, however important, is generally deemed of too abstract and metaphysical a nature deeply to engross the mind, possessed me then, that I--no cold nor unenthusiastic votary of the classic Muse--made no pilgrimage to city or ruin, but, after a brief sojourn at Ravenna, where I dismissed all my

train, set out alone to find the solitary cell for which I now sickened with a hermit's love.

It was at a small village at the foot of the Apennines that I found the object of my search. Strangely enough, there blended with my philosophical ardour a deep mixture of my old romance. Nature, to whose voice the dweller in cities and struggler with mankind had been so long obtuse, now pleaded audibly at my heart, and called me to her embraces, as a mother calls unto her wearied child. My eye, as with a new vision, became open to the mute yet eloquent loveliness of this most fairy earth; and hill and valley, the mirror of silent waters, the sunny stillness of woods, and the old haunts of satyr and nymph, revived in me the fountains of past poetry, and became the receptacles of a thousand spells, mightier than the charms of any enchanter save Love, which was departed,--Youth, which was nearly gone,--and Nature, which (more vividly than ever) existed for me still.

I chose, then, my retreat. As I was fastidious in its choice, I cannot refrain from the luxury of describing it. Ah, little did I dream that I had come thither, not only to find a divine comfort but the sources of a human and most passionate woe! Mightiest of the Roman bards! in whom tenderness and reason were so entwined, and who didst sanctify even thine unholy errors with so beautiful and rare a genius! what an invariable truth one line of thine has expressed: "Even in the fairest fountain of delight there is a secret and evil spring eternally bubbling up and scattering its bitter waters over the very flowers which surround its margin!"

In the midst of a lovely and tranquil vale was a small cottage; that was my home. The good people there performed for me all the hospitable offices I required. At a neighbouring monastery I had taken the precaution to make myself known to the superior. Not all Italians--no, nor all monks--belong to either of the two great tribes into which they are generally divided,--knaves or fools. The Abbot Anselmo was a man of rather a liberal and enlarged mind; he not only kept my secret, which was necessary to my peace, but he took my part, which was perhaps necessary to my safety. A philosopher, who desires only to convince himself, and upon one subject, does not require many books. Truth lies in a small compass; and for my part, in considering any speculative subject, I would sooner have with me one book of Euclid as a model than all the library of the Vatican as authorities. But then I am not fond of drawing upon any resources but those of reason for reasonings: wiser men than I am are not so strict. The few books that I did require were, however, of a nature very illicit in Italy; the good Father passed them to me from Ravenna, under his own protection. "I was a holy man," he said, "who wished to render the Catholic Church a great service, by writing a vast book against certain atrocious opinions; and the works I read were, for the most part, works that I was about to confute." This report gained me protection and respect; and, after I had ordered my agent at Ravenna to forward to the excellent Abbot a piece of plate, and a huge cargo of a rare Hungary wine, it was not the Abbot's fault if I was not the most popular person in the neighbourhood.

But to my description: my home was a cottage; the valley in which it lay was divided by a mountain stream, which came from the forest Apennine, a sparkling and wild stranger, and softened into quiet and calm as it proceeded through its green margin in the vale. And that margin, how dazzlingly green it was! At the distance of about a mile from my hut, the stream was broken into a slight waterfall, whose sound was heard

distinct and deep in that still place; and often I paused, from my midnight thoughts, to listen to its enchanted and wild melody. The fall was unseen by the ordinary wanderer, for, there, the stream passed through a thick copse; and even when you pierced the grove, and gained the water-side, dark trees hung over the turbulent wave, and the silver spray was thrown upward through the leaves, and fell in diamonds upon the deep green sod.

This was a most favoured haunt with me: the sun glancing through the idle leaves; the music of the water; the solemn absence of all other sounds, except the songs of birds, to which the ear grew accustomed, and, at last, in the abstraction of thought, scarcely distinguished from the silence; the fragrant herbs; and the unnumbered and nameless flowers which formed my couch,--were all calculated to make me pursue uninterruptedly the thread of contemplation which I had, in the less voluptuous and harsher solitude of the closet, first woven from the web of austerest thought. I say pursue, for it was too luxurious and sensual a retirement for the conception of a rigid and severe train of reflection; at least it would have been so to me. But when the thought /is once born/, such scenes seem to me the most fit to cradle and to rear it. The torpor of the physical appears to leave to the mental frame a full scope and power; the absence of human cares, sounds, and intrusions, becomes the best nurse to contemplation; and even that delicious and vague sense of enjoyment which would seem, at first, more genial to the fancy than the mind, preserves the thought undisturbed because contented; so that all but the scheming mind becomes lapped in sleep, and the mind itself lives distinct and active as a dream,--a dream, not vague nor confused nor unsatisfying, but endowed with more than the clearness, the precision, the vigour, of waking life.

A little way from this waterfall was a fountain, a remnant of a classic and golden age. Never did Naiad gaze on a more glassy mirror, or dwell in a more divine retreat. Through a crevice in an overhanging mound of the emerald earth, the father stream of the fountain crept out, born, like Love, among flowers, and in the most sunny smiles; it then fell, broadening and glowing, into a marble basin, at whose bottom, in the shining noon, you might see a soil which mocked the very hues of gold, and the water insects, in their quaint shapes and unknown sports, grouping or gliding in the mid-most wave. A small temple of the lightest architecture stood before the fountain, and in a niche therein a mutilated statue,--possibly of the Spirit of the place. By this fountain my evening walk would linger till the short twilight melted away and the silver wave trembled in the light of the western star. Oh, then what feelings gathered over me as I turned slowly homeward! the air still, breathless, shining; the stars gleaming over the woods of the far Apennine; the hills growing huger in the shade; the small insects humming on the wing; and, ever and anon, the swift bat, wheeling round and amidst them; the music of the waterfall deepening on the ear; and the light and hour lending even a mysterious charm to the cry of the weird owl, flitting after its prey,--all this had a harmony in my thoughts and a food for the meditations in which my days and nights were consumed. The World moulders away the fabric of our early nature, and Solitude rebuilds it on a firmer base.

CHAPTER II.

THE VICTORY.

O EARTH! Reservoir of life, over whose deep bosom brood the wings of the Universal Spirit, shaking upon thee a blessing and a power,--a blessing and a power to produce and reproduce the living from the dead, so that our flesh is woven from the same atoms which were once the atoms of our sires, and the inexhaustible nutriment of Existence is Decay! O eldest and most solemn Earth, blending even thy loveliness and joy with a terror and an awe! thy sunshine is girt with clouds and circled with storm and tempest; thy day cometh from the womb of darkness, and returneth unto darkness, as man returns unto thy bosom. The green herb that laughs in the valley, the water that sings merrily along the wood; the many-winged and all-searching air, which garners life as a harvest and scatters it as a seed,--all are pregnant with corruption and carry the cradled death within them, as an oak banqueteth the destroying worm. But who that looks upon thee, and loves thee, and inhales thy blessings will ever mingle too deep a moral with his joy? Let us not ask whence come the garlands that we wreath around our altars or shower upon our feasts: will they not bloom as brightly, and breathe with as rich a fragrance, whether they be plucked from the garden or the grave? O Earth, my Mother Earth! dark Sepulchre that closes upon all which the Flesh bears, but Vestibule of the vast regions which the Soul shall pass, how leaped my heart within me when I first fathomed thy real spell!

Yes! never shall I forget the rapture with which I hailed the light that dawned upon me at last! Never shall I forget the suffocating, the full, the ecstatic joy with which I saw the mightiest of all human hopes accomplished; and felt, as if an angel spoke, that there is a life beyond the grave! Tell me not of the pride of ambition; tell me not of the triumphs of science: never had ambition so lofty an end as the search after immortality! never had science so sublime a triumph as the conviction that immortality will be gained! I had been at my task the whole night,--pale alchemist, seeking from meaner truths to extract the greatest of all! At the first hour of day, lo! the gold was there: the labour for which I would have relinquished life was accomplished; the dove descended upon the waters of my soul. I fled from the house. I was possessed as with a spirit. I ascended a hill, which looked for leagues over the sleeping valley. A gray mist hung around me like a veil; I paused, and the great sun broke slowly forth; I gazed upon its majesty, and my heart swelled. "So rises the soul," I said, "from the vapours of this dull being; but the soul waneth not, neither setteth it, nor knoweth it any night, save that from which it dawneth!" The mists rolled gradually away, the sunshine deepened, and the face of Nature lay in smiles, yet silently, before me. It lay before me, a scene that I had often witnessed and hailed and worshipped: /but it was not the same/; a glory had passed over it; it was steeped in a beauty and a holiness, in which neither youth nor poetry nor even love had ever robed it before! The change which the earth had undergone was like that of some being we have loved, when death is passed, and from a mortal it becomes an angel!

I uttered a cry of joy, and was then as silent as all around me. I felt as if henceforth there was a new compact between Nature and myself. I felt as if every tree and blade of grass were henceforth to be eloquent with a voice and instinct with a spell. I felt as if a religion had entered into the earth, and made oracles of all that the earth bears; the old fables of Dodona were to become realized, and /the very leaves/ to be hallowed by a sanctity and to murmur with a truth. I was no longer only a part of that which withers and decays; I was no longer a

machine of clay, moved by a spring, and to be trodden into the mire which I had trod; I was no longer tied to humanity by links which could never be broken, and which, if broken, would avail me not. I was become, as if by a miracle, a part of a vast though unseen spirit. It was not to the matter, but to the essences, of things that I bore kindred and alliance; the stars and the heavens resumed over me their ancient influence; and, as I looked along the far hills and the silent landscape, a voice seemed to swell from the stillness, and to say, "I am the life of these things, a spirit distinct from the things themselves. It is to me that you belong forever and forever: separate, but equally indissoluble; apart, but equally eternal!"

I spent the day upon the hills. It was evening when I returned. I lingered by the old fountain, and saw the stars rise, and tremble, one by one, upon the wave. The hour was that which Isora had loved the best, and that which the love of her had consecrated the most to me. And never, oh, never, did it sink into my heart with a deeper sweetness, or a more soothing balm. I had once more knit my soul to Isora's: I could once more look from the toiling and the dim earth, and forget that Isora had left me, in dreaming of our reunion. Blame me not, you who indulge in a religious hope more severe and more sublime; you who miss no footsteps from the earth, nor pine for a voice that your human wanderings can hear no more,—blame me not, you whose pulses beat not for the wild love of the created, but whose spirit languishes only for a nearer commune with the Creator,—blame me not too harshly for my mortal wishes, nor think that my faith was the less sincere because it was tinted in the most unchanging dyes of the human heart, and indissolubly woven with the memory of the dead! Often from our weaknesses our strongest principles of conduct are born; and from the acorn which a breeze has wafted springs the oak which defies the storm.

The first intoxication and rapture consequent upon the reward of my labour passed away; but, unlike other excitement, it was followed not by languor or a sated and torpid calm: a soothing and delicious sensation possessed me; my turbulent senses slept; and Memory, recalling the world, rejoiced at the retreat which Hope had acquired.

I now surrendered myself to a nobler philosophy than in crowds and cities I had hitherto known. I no longer satirized; I inquired: I no longer derided; I examined. I looked from the natural proofs of immortality to the written promise of our Father; I sought not to baffle men, but to worship Truth; I applied myself more to the knowledge of good and evil; I bowed my soul before the loveliness of Virtue; and though scenes of wrath and passion yet lowered in the future, and I was again speedily called forth to act, to madden, to contend, perchance to sin, the Image is still unbroken, and the Votary has still an offering for its Altar!

CHAPTER III.

THE HERMIT OF THE WELL.

THE thorough and deep investigation of those principles from which we learn the immortality of the soul, and the nature of its proper ends, leads the mind through such a course of reflection and of study; it is attended with so many exalting, purifying, and, if I may so say, etherealizing thoughts,—that I do believe no man has ever pursued it,

and not gone back to the world a better and a nobler man than he was before. Nay, so deeply must these elevating and refining studies be conned, so largely and sensibly must they enter the intellectual system, that I firmly think that even a sensualist who has only considered the subject with a view to convince himself that he is clay, and has therefore an excuse to the curious conscience for his grosser desires; nay, should he come to his wished-for yet desolate conclusion, from which the abhorrent nature shrinks and recoils, I do nevertheless firmly think, should the study have been long and deep, that he would wonder to find his desires had lost their poignancy and his objects their charm. He would descend from the Alp he had climbed to the low level on which he formerly deemed it a bliss to dwell, with the feeling of one who, having long drawn in high places an empyreal air, has become unable to inhale the smoke and the thick vapour he inhaled of yore. His soul once aroused would stir within him, though he felt it not, and though he grew not a believer, he would cease to be only the voluptuary.

I meant at one time to have here stated the arguments which had perplexed me on one side, and those which afterwards convinced me on the other. I do not do so for many reasons, one of which will suffice; namely, the evident and palpable circumstance that a dissertation of that nature would, in a biography like the present, be utterly out of place and season. Perhaps, however, at a later period of life, I may collect my own opinions on the subject into a separate work, and bequeath that work to future generations, upon the same conditions as the present memoir.

One day I was favoured by a visit from one of the monks at the neighbouring abbey. After some general conversation he asked me if I had yet encountered the Hermit of the Well?

"No," said I, and I was going to add, that I had not even heard of him, "but I now remember that the good people of the house have more than once spoken to me of him as a rigid and self-mortifying recluse."

"Yes," said the holy friar; "Heaven forbid that I should say aught against the practice of the saints and pious men to deny unto themselves the lusts of the flesh, but such penances may be carried too far. However, it is an excellent custom, and the Hermit of the Well is an excellent creature. /Santa Maria!/ what delicious stuff is that Hungary wine your scholarship was pleased to bestow upon our father Abbot. He suffered me to taste it the eve before last. I had been suffering with a pain in the reins, and the wine acted powerfully upon me as an efficacious and inestimable medicine. Do you find, my Son, that it bore the journey to your lodging here as well as to the convent cellars?"

"Why, really, my Father, I have none of it here; but the people of the house have a few flasks of a better wine than ordinary, if you will deign to taste it in lieu of the Hungary wine."

"Oh--oh!" said the monk, groaning, "my reins trouble me much: perhaps the wine may comfort me!" and the wine was brought.

"It is not of so rare a flavour as that which you sent to our reverend father," said the monk, wiping his mouth with his long sleeve. "Hungary must be a charming place; is it far from hence? It joins the heretical,--I pray your pardon, it joins the continent of England, I believe?"

"Not exactly, Father; but whatever its topography, it is a rare country--for those who like it! But tell me of this Hermit of the Well. How long has he lived here? and how came he by his appellation? Of what country is he? and of what birth?"

"You ask me too many questions at once, my Son. The country of the holy man is a mystery to us all. He speaks the Tuscan dialect well, but with a foreign accent. Nevertheless, though the wine is not of Hungary, it has a pleasant flavour. I wonder how the rogues kept it so snugly from the knowledge and comfort of their pious brethren of the monastery!"

"And how long has the Hermit lived in your vicinity?"

"Nearly eight years, my Son. It was one winter's evening that he came to our convent in the dress of a worldly traveller, to seek our hospitality, and a shelter for the night, which was inclement and stormy. He stayed with us a few days, and held some conversation with our father Abbot; and one morning, after roaming in the neighbourhood to look at the old stones and ruins, which is the custom of travellers, he returned, put into our box some alms, and two days afterwards he appeared in the place he now inhabits and in the dress he assumes."

"And of what nature, my Father, is the place, and of what fashion the dress?"

"Holy Saint Francis!" exclaimed the Father, with a surprise so great that I thought at first it related to the wine, "Holy Saint Francis! have you not seen the well yet?"

"No, Father, unless you speak of the fountain about a mile and a quarter distant."

"Tusk--tusk!" said the good man, "what ignoramuses you travellers are! You affect to know what kind of slippers Prester John wears and to have been admitted to the bed-chamber of /the Pagoda of China/; and yet, when one comes to sound you, you are as ignorant of everything a man of real learning knows as an Englishman is of his missal. Why, I thought that every fool in every country had heard of the Holy Well of St. Francis, situated exactly two miles from our famous convent, and that every fool in the neighbourhood had seen it."

"What the fools, my Father, whether in this neighbourhood or any other, may have heard or seen, I, who profess not ostensibly to belong to so goodly an order, cannot pretend to know; but be assured that the Holy Well of St. Francis is as unfamiliar to me as the Pagoda of China--Heaven bless /him/--is to you."

Upon this the learned monk, after expressing due astonishment, offered to show it to me; and as I thought I might by acquiescence get rid of him the sooner, and as, moreover, I wished to see the Abbot, to whom some books for me had been lately sent, I agreed to the offer.

The well, said the monk, lay not above a mile out of the customary way to the monastery; and after /we/ had finished the flask of wine, we sallied out on our excursion,--the monk upon a stately and strong ass, myself on foot.

The Abbot, on granting me his friendship and protection, had observed that I was not the only stranger and recluse on whom his favour was

bestowed. He had then mentioned the Hermit of the Well, as an eccentric and strange being, who lived an existence of rigid penance, harmless to others, painful only to himself. This story had been confirmed in the few conversations I had ever interchanged with my host and hostess, who seemed to take a peculiar pleasure in talking of the Solitary; and from them I had heard also many anecdotes of his charity towards the poor and his attention to the sick. All these circumstances came into my mind as the good monk indulged his loquacity upon the subject, and my curiosity became at last somewhat excited respecting my fellow recluse.

I now learned from the monk that the post of Hermit of the Well was an office of which the present anchorite was by no means the first tenant. The well was one of those springs, frequent in Catholic countries, to which a legend and a sanctity are attached; and twice a year--once in the spring, once in the autumn--the neighbouring peasants flocked together, on a stated day, to drink, and lose their diseases. As the spring most probably did possess some medicinal qualities, a few extraordinary cures had occurred, especially among those pious persons who took not biennial, but constant draughts; and to doubt its holiness was downright heresy.

Now, hard by this well was a cavern, which, whether first formed by nature or art, was now, upon the whole, constructed into a very commodious abode; and here, for years beyond the memory of man, some solitary person had fixed his abode to dispense and to bless the water, to be exceedingly well fed by the surrounding peasants, to wear a long gown of serge or sackcloth, and to be called the Hermit of the Well. So fast as each succeeding anchorite died there were enough candidates eager to supply his place; for it was no bad /metier/ to some penniless imposter to become the quack and patentee of a holy specific. The choice of these candidates always rested with the superior of the neighbouring monastery; and it is not impossible that he made an indifferently good percentage upon the annual advantages of his protection and choice.

At the time the traveller appeared, the former hermit had just departed this life, and it was, therefore, to the vacancy thus occasioned that he had procured himself to be elected. The incumbent appeared quite of a different mould from the former occupants of the hermitage. He accepted, it is true, the gifts laid at regular periods upon a huge stone between the hermitage and the well, but he distributed among the donors alms far more profitable than their gifts. He entered no village, borne upon an ass laden with twin sacks, for the purpose of sanctimoniously robbing the inhabitants; no profane songs were ever heard resounding from his dwelling by the peasant incautiously lingering at a late hour too near its vicinity; my guide, the monk, complained bitterly of his unsociability, and no scandalous legend of nymph-like comforters and damsel visitants haunting the sacred dwelling escaped from the garrulous friar's well-loaded budget.

"Does he study much?" said I, with the interest of a student.

"I fear me not," quoth the monk. "I have had occasion often to enter his abode, and I have examined all things with a close eye,--for, praised be the Lord, I have faculties more than ordinarily clear and observant,--but I have seen no books therein, excepting a missal, and a Latin or Greek Testament, I know not well which; nay, so incurious or unlearned is the holy man that he rejected even a loan of the 'Life of Saint Francis,' notwithstanding it has many and rare pictures, to say

nothing of its most interesting and amazing tales."

More might the monk have said, had we not now suddenly entered a thick and sombre wood. A path cut through it was narrow, and only capable of admitting a traveller on foot or horseback; and the boughs overhead were so darkly interlaced that the light scarcely, and only in broken and erratic glimmerings, pierced the canopy.

"It is the wood," said the monk, crossing himself, "wherein the wonderful adventure happened to Saint Francis, which I will one day narrate at length to you."

"And we are near the well, I suppose?" said I.

"It is close at hand," answered the monk.

In effect we had not proceeded above fifty yards before the path brought us into a circular space of green sod, in the midst of which was a small square stone building, of plain but not inelegant shape, and evidently of great antiquity. At one side of this building was an iron handle, for the purpose of raising water, that cast itself into a stone basin, to which was affixed by a strong chain an iron cup. An inscription in monkish Latin was engraved over the basin, requesting the traveller to pause and drink, and importing that what that water was to the body, faith was to the soul; near the cistern was a rude seat, formed by the trunk of a tree. The door of the well-house was of iron, and secured by a chain and lock; perhaps the pump was so contrived that only a certain quantum of the sanctified beverage could be drawn up at a time, without application to some mechanism within; and wayfarers were thereby prevented from helping themselves */ad libitum/*, and thus depriving the anchorite of the profit and the necessity of his office.

It was certainly a strange, lonely, and wild place; and the green sward, round as a fairy ring, in the midst of trees, which, black, close, and huge, circled it like a wall; and the solitary gray building in the centre, gaunt and cold, startled the eye with the abruptness of its appearance, and the strong contrast made by its wan hues to the dark verdure and forest gloom around it.

I took a draught of the water, which was very cold and tasteless, and reminded the monk of his disorder in the reins, to which a similar potation might possibly be efficacious. To this suggestion the monk answered that he would certainly try the water some other time; but that at present the wine he had drunk might pollute its divine properties. So saying, he turned off the conversation by inviting me to follow him to the hermitage.

In our way thither he pointed out a large fragment of stone, and observed that the water would do me evil instead of good if I forgot to remunerate its guardian. I took the hint, and laid a piece of silver on the fragment.

A short journey through the wood brought us to the foot of a hill covered with trees, and having at its base a strong stone door, the entrance to the excavated home of the anchorite. The monk gently tapped thrice at this door, but no answer came. "The holy man is from home," said he, "let us return."

We did so; and the monk, keeping behind me, managed, as he thought

unseen, to leave the stone as naked as we had found it! We now struck through another path in the wood, and were soon at the convent. I did not lose the opportunity to question the Abbot respecting his tenant: I learned from him little more than the particulars I have already narrated, save that in concluding his details, he said:--

"I can scarcely doubt but that the Hermit is, like yourself, a person of rank; his bearing and his mien appear to denote it. He has given, and gives yearly, large sums to the uses of the convent: and, though he takes the customary gifts of the pious villagers, it is only by my advice and for the purpose of avoiding suspicion. Should he be considered rich, it might attract cupidity; and there are enough bold hands and sharp knives in the country to place the wealthy and the unguarded in some peril. Whoever he may be--for he has not confided his secret to me--I do not doubt but that he is doing penance for some great crime; and, whatever be the crime, I suspect that its earthly punishment is nearly over. The Hermit is naturally of a delicate and weak frame, and year after year I have marked him sensibly wearing away; so that when I last saw him, three days since, I was shocked at the visible ravages which disease or penance had engraven upon him. If ever Death wrote legibly, its characters are in that brow and cheek."

"Poor man! Know you not even whom to apprise of his decease when he is no more?"

"I do not yet; but the last time I saw him he told me that he found himself drawing near his end, and that he should not quit life without troubling me with one request."

After this the Abbot spoke of other matters, and my visit expired.

Interested in the recluse more deeply than I acknowledged to myself, I found my steps insensibly leading me homeward by the more circuitous road which wound first by the holy well. I did not resist the impulse, but walked musingly onward by the waning twilight, for the day was now over, until I came to the well. As I emerged from the wood, I started involuntarily and drew back. A figure, robed from head to foot in a long sable robe, sat upon the rude seat beside the well; sat so still, so motionless, that coming upon it abruptly in that strange place, the heart beat irregularly at an apparition so dark in hue and so death-like in its repose. The hat, large, broad, and overhanging, which suited the costume, was lying on the ground; and the face, which inclined upward, seemed to woo the gentle air of the quiet and soft skies. I approached a few steps, and saw the profile of the countenance more distinctly than I had done before. It was of a marble whiteness; the features, though sharpened and attenuated by disease, were of surpassing beauty; the hair was exceedingly, almost effeminately, long, and hung in waves of perfect jet on either side; the mouth was closed firmly, and deep lines or rather furrows were traced from its corners to either nostril. The stranger's beard, of a hue equally black as the hair, was dishevelled and neglected, but not very long; and one hand, which lay on the sable robe, was so thin and wan you might have deemed the very starlight could have shone through it. I did not doubt that it was the recluse whom I saw; I drew near and accosted him.

"Your blessing, holy Father, and your permission to taste the healing of your well."

Sudden as was my appearance, and abrupt my voice, the Hermit evinced by

no startled gesture a token of surprise. He turned very slowly round, cast upon me an indifferent glance, and said, in a sweet and very low tone,--

"You have my blessing, Stranger: there is water in the cistern; drink, and be healed."

I dipped the bowl in the basin, and took sparingly of the water. In the accent and tone of the stranger, my ear, accustomed to the dialects of many nations, recognized something English; I resolved, therefore, to address him in my native tongue, rather than the indifferent Italian in which I had first accosted him.

"The water is fresh and cooling: would, holy Father, that it could penetrate to a deeper malady than the ills of flesh; that it could assuage the fever of the heart, or lave from the wearied mind the dust which it gathers from the mire and travail of the world."

Now the Hermit testified surprise; but it was slight and momentary. He gazed upon me more attentively than he had done before, and said, after a pause,--

"My countryman! and in this spot! It is not often that the English penetrate into places where no ostentatious celebrity dwells to sate curiosity and flatter pride. My countryman: it is well, and perhaps fortunate. Yes," he said, after a second pause, "yes; it were indeed a boon, had the earth a fountain for the wounds which fester and the disease which consumes the heart."

"The earth has oblivion, Father, if not a cure."

"It is false!" cried the Hermit, passionately, and starting wildly from his seat; "the earth has /no/ oblivion. The grave,--is /that/ forgetfulness? No, no: /there is no grave for the soul/! The deeds pass; the flesh corrupts: but the memory passes not, and withers not. From age to age, from world to world, through eternity, throughout creation, it is perpetuated; and immortality,--a curse,--/a hell/!"

Surprised by the vehemence of the Hermit, I was still more startled by the agonizing and ghastly expression of his face.

"My Father," said I, "pardon me if I have pressed upon a sore. I also have that within which, did a stranger touch it, would thrill my whole frame with torture, and I would fain ask from your holy, soothing, and pious comfort, something of alleviation or of fortitude."

The Hermit drew near to me; he laid his thin hand upon my arm, and looked long and wistfully in my face. It was then that a suspicion crept through me which after observation proved to be true, that the wanderings of those dark eyes and the meaning of that blanched brow were tintured with insanity.

"Brother and fellow man," said he, mournfully, "hast thou in truth suffered? and dost thou still smart at the remembrance? We are friends then. If thou hast suffered as much as I have, I will fall down and do homage to thee as a superior; for pain has its ranks, and I think at times that none ever climbed the height that I have done. Yet you look not like one who has had nights of delirium, and days in which the heart lay in the breast, as a corpse endowed with consciousness might lie in

the grave, feeling the worm gnaw it, and the decay corrupt, and yet incapable of resistance or of motion. Your cheek is thin, but firm; your eye is haughty and bright; you have the air of one who has lived with men, and struggled and not been vanquished in the struggle. Suffered! No, man, no,--/you/ have not suffered!"

"My Father, it is not in the countenance that Fate graves her records. I have, it is true, contended with my fellows; and if wealth and honour be the premium, not in vain: but I have not contended against Sorrow with a like success; and I stand before you, a being who, if passion be a tormentor and the death of the loved a loss, has borne that which the most wretched will not envy."

Again a fearful change came over the face of the recluse: he grasped my arm more vehemently, "You speak my own sorrows; you utter my own curse; I will see you again; you may do my last will better than yon monks. Can I trust you? If you have in truth known misfortune, I will! I will! yea, even to the outpouring--merciful, merciful God, what would I say,--what would I reveal!"

Suddenly changing his voice, he released me, and said, touching his forehead with a meaning gesture and a quiet smile, "You say you are my rival in pain. Have you ever known the rage and despair of the heart mount /here/? It is a wonderful thing to be calm as I am now, when that rising makes itself felt in fire and torture!"

"If there be aught, Father, which a man who cares not what country he visit, or what deed--so it be not of guilt or shame--he commit, can do towards the quiet of your soul, say it, and I will attempt your will."

"You are kind, my Son," said the Hermit, resuming his first melancholy and dignified composure of mien and bearing; "and there is something in your voice which seems to me like a tone that I have heard in youth. Do you live near at hand?"

"In the valley, about four miles hence; I am, like yourself, a fugitive from the world."

"Come to me then to-morrow at eve; to-morrow! No, that is a holy eve, and I must keep it with scourge and prayer. The next at sunset. I shall be collected then, and I would fain know more of you than I do. Bless you, my Son; adieu."

"Yet stay, Father, may I not conduct you home?"

"No; my limbs are weak, but I trust they can carry me to that home, till I be borne thence to my last. Farewell! the night grows, and man fills even these shades with peril. The eve after next, at sunset, we meet again."

So saying, the hermit waved his hand, and I stood apart, watching his receding figure, until the trees cloaked the last glimpse from my view. I then turned homeward, and reached my cottage in safety, despite of the hermit's caution. But I did not retire to rest: a powerful foreboding, rather than suspicion, that, in the worn and wasted form which I had beheld, there was identity with one whom I had not met for years, and whom I had believed to be no more, thrillingly possessed me.

"Can--can it be?" thought I. "Can grief have a desolation, or

remembrance an agony, sufficient to create so awful a change? And of all human beings, for that one to be singled out; that one in whom passion and sin were, if they existed, nipped in their earliest germ, and seemingly rendered barren of all fruit! If too, almost against the evidence of sight and sense, an innate feeling has marked in that most altered form the traces of a dread recognition, would not his memory have been yet more vigilant than mine? Am I so changed that he should have looked me in the face so wistfully, and found there naught save the lineaments of a stranger?" And, actuated by this thought, I placed the light by the small mirror which graced my chamber. I recalled, as I gazed, my features as they had been in earliest youth. "No," I said, with a sigh, "there is nothing here that he should recognize."

And I said aright: my features, originally small and delicate, had grown enlarged and prominent. The long locks of my youth (for only upon state occasions did my early vanity consent to the fashion of the day) were succeeded by curls, short and crisped; the hues, alternately pale and hectic, that the dreams of romance had once spread over my cheek, had settled into the unchanging bronze of manhood; the smooth lip and unshaven chin were clothed with a thick hair; the once unfurrowed brow was habitually knit in thought; and the ardent, restless expression that boyhood wore had yielded to the quiet unmoved countenance of one in whom long custom has subdued all outward sign of emotion, and many and various events left no prevalent token of the mind save that of an habitual but latent resolution. My frame, too, once scarcely less slight than a woman's, was become knit and muscular; and nothing was left by which, in the foreign air, the quiet brow, and the athletic form, my very mother could have recognized the slender figure and changeable face of the boy she had last beheld. The very sarcasm of the eye was gone; and I had learned the world's easy lesson,--the dissimulation of composure.

I have noted one thing in others, and it was particularly noticeable in me; namely, that few who mix very largely with men, and with the courtier's or the citizen's design, ever retain the key and tone of their original voice. The voice of a young man is as yet modulated by nature, and expresses the passion of the moment; that of the matured pupil of art expresses rather the customary occupation of his life. Whether he aims at persuading, convincing, or commanding others, his voice irrevocably settles into the key he ordinarily employs; and, as persuasion is the means men chiefly employ in their commerce with each other, especially in the regions of a court, so a tone of artificial blandness and subdued insinuation is chiefly that in which the accents of worldly men are clothed; the artificial intonation, long continued, grows into nature, and the very pith and basis of the original sound fritter themselves away. The change was great in me, for at that time which I brought in comparison with the present my age was one in which the voice is yet confused and undecided, struggling between the accents of youth and boyhood; so that even this most powerful and unchanging of all claims upon the memory was in a great measure absent in me; and nothing but an occasional and rare tone could have produced even that faint and unconscious recognition which the Hermit had confessed.

I must be pardoned these egotisms, which the nature of my story renders necessary.

With what eager impatience did I watch the hours to the appointed interview with the Hermit languish themselves away! However, before that time arrived and towards the evening of the next day, I was

surprised by the rare honour of a visit from Anselmo himself. He came attended by two of the mendicant friars of his order, and they carried between them a basket of tolerable size, which, as mine hostess afterwards informed me, with many a tear, went back somewhat heavier than it came, from the load of certain /receptacula/ of that rarer wine which she had had the evening before the indiscreet hospitality to produce.

The Abbot came to inform me that the Hermit had been with him that morning, making many inquiries respecting me. "I told him," said he, "that I was acquainted with your name and birth, but that I was under a solemn promise not to reveal them, without your consent; and I am now here, my Son, to learn from you whether that consent may be obtained?"

"Assuredly not, holy Father!" said I, hastily; nor was I contented until I had obtained a renewal of his promise to that effect. This seemed to give the Abbot some little chagrin: perhaps the Hermit had offered a reward for my discovery. However, I knew that Anselmo, though a griping was a trustworthy man, and I felt safe in his renewed promise. I saw him depart with great satisfaction, and gave myself once more to conjectures respecting the strange recluse.

As the next evening I prepared to depart towards the hermitage, I took peculiar pains to give my person a foreign and disguised appearance. A loose dress, of rude and simple material, and a high cap of fur, were pretty successful in accomplishing this purpose. And, as I gave the last look at the glass before I left the house, I said inly, "If there be any truth in my wild and improbable conjecture respecting the identity of the anchorite, I think time and this dress are sufficient wizards to secure me from a chance of discovery. I will keep a guard upon my words and tones, until, if my thought be verified, a moment fit for unmasking myself arrives. But would to God that the thought be groundless! In such circumstances, and after such an absence, to meet /him/! No; and yet--Well, this meeting will decide."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SOLUTION OF MANY MYSTERIES.--A DARK VIEW OF THE LIFE AND NATURE OF MAN.

POWERFUL, though not clearly developed in my own mind, was the motive which made me so strongly desire to preserve the /incognito/ during my interview with the Hermit. I have before said that I could not resist a vague but intense belief that he was a person whom I had long believed in the grave; and I had more than once struggled against a dark but passing suspicion that that person was in some measure--mediately, though not directly--connected with the mysteries of my former life. If both these conjectures were true, I thought it possible that the communication the Hermit wished to make might be made yet more willingly to me as a stranger than if he knew who was in reality his confidant. And, at all events, if I could curb the impetuous gushings of my own heart, which yearned for immediate disclosure, I might by hint and prelude ascertain the advantages and disadvantages of revealing myself.

I arrived at the well: the Hermit was already at the place of rendezvous, seated in the same posture in which I had before seen him. I made my reverence and accosted him.

"I have not failed you, Father."

"That is rarely a true boast with men," said the Hermit, smiling mournfully, but without sarcasm; "and were the promise of greater avail, it might not have been so rigidly kept."

"The promise, Father, seemed to me of greater weight than you would intimate," answered I.

"How mean you?" said the Hermit, hastily.

"Why, that we may perhaps serve each other by our meeting: you, Father, may comfort me by your counsels; I you by my readiness to obey your request."

The Hermit looked at me for some moments, and, as well as I could, I turned away my face from his gaze. I might have spared myself the effort. He seemed to recognize nothing familiar in my countenance; perhaps his mental malady assisted my own alteration.

"I have inquired respecting you," he said, after a pause, "and I hear that you are a learned and wise man, who has seen much of the world, and played the part both of soldier and of scholar in its various theatres: is my information true?"

"Not true with the respect to the learning, Father, but true with regard to the experience. I have been a pilgrim in many countries of Europe."

"Indeed!" said the Hermit, eagerly. "Come with me to my home, and tell me of the wonders you have seen."

I assisted the Hermit to rise, and he walked slowly towards the cavern, leaning upon my arm. Oh, how that light touch thrilled through my frame! How I longed to cry, "Are you not the one whom I have loved, and mourned, and believed buried in the tomb?" But I checked myself. We moved on in silence. The Hermit's hand was on the door of the cavern, when he said, in a calm tone, but with evident effort, and turning his face from me while he spoke:--

"And did your wanderings ever carry you into the farther regions of the north? Did the fame of the great Czar ever lead you to the city he has founded?"

"I am right! I am right!" thought I, as I answered, "In truth, holy Father, I spent not a long time at Petersburg; but I am not a stranger either to its wonders or its inhabitants."

"Possibly, then, you may have met with the English favourite of the Czar of whom I hear in my retreat that men have lately spoken somewhat largely?" The Hermit paused again. We were now in a long, low passage, almost in darkness. I scarcely saw him, yet I heard a convulsed movement in his throat before he uttered the remainder of the sentence. "He is called the Count Devereux."

"Father," said I, calmly, "I have both seen and known the man."

"Ha!" said the Hermit, and he leaned for a moment against the wall; "known him--and--how--how--I mean, where is he at this present time?"

"That, Father, is a difficult question respecting one who has led so active a life. He was ambassador at the court of ----- just before I left it."

We had now passed the passage and gained a room of tolerable size; an iron lamp burned within, and afforded a sufficient but somewhat dim light. The Hermit, as I concluded my reply, sank down on a long stone bench, beside a table of the same substance, and leaning his face on his hand, so that the long, large sleeve he wore perfectly concealed his features, said, "Pardon me; my breath is short, and my frame weak; I am quite exhausted, but will speak to you more anon."

I uttered a short answer, and drew a small wooden stool within a few feet of the Hermit's seat. After a brief silence he rose, placed wine, bread, and preserved fruits before me and bade me eat. I seemed to comply with his request, and the apparent diversion of my attention from himself somewhat relieved the embarrassment under which he evidently laboured.

"May I hope," he said, "that were my commission to this--to the Count Devereux--you would execute it faithfully and with speed? Yet stay: you have a high mien, as of one above fortune, but your garb is rude and poor; and if aught of gold could compensate your trouble, the Hermit has other treasures besides this cell."

"I will do your bidding, Father, without robbing the poor. You wish, then, that I should seek Morton Devereux; you wish that I should summon him hither; you wish to see and to confer with him?"

"God of mercy forbid!" cried the Hermit, and with such a vehemence that I was startled from the design of revealing myself, which I was on the point of executing. "I would rather that these walls would crush me into dust, or that this solid stone would crumble beneath my feet,--ay, even into a bottomless pit, than meet the glance of Morton Devereux!"

"Is it even so?" said I, stooping over the wine-cup; "ye have been foes then, I suspect. Well, it matters not: tell me your errand, and it shall be done."

"Done!" cried the Hermit, and a new and certainly a most natural suspicion darted within him, "done! and--fool that I am!--who or what are you that I should believe you take so keen an interest in the wishes of a man utterly unknown to you? I tell you that my wish is that you should cross seas and traverse lands until you find the man I have named to you. Will a stranger do this, and without hire? No--no--I was a fool, and will trust the monks, and give gold, and then my errand will be sped."

"Father, or rather brother," said I, with a slow and firm voice, "for you are of mine own age, and you have the passion and the infirmity which make brethren of all mankind, I am one to whom all places are alike: it matters not whether I visit a northern or a southern clime; I have wealth, which is sufficient to smooth toil; I have leisure, which makes occupation an enjoyment. More than this, I am one who in his gayest and wildest moments has ever loved mankind, and would have renounced at any time his own pleasure for the advantage of another. But at this time, above all others, I am most disposed to forget myself, and there is a passion in your words which leads me to hope that it may

be a great benefit which I can confer upon you."

"You speak well," said the Hermit, musingly, "and I may trust you; I will consider yet a little longer, and to-morrow at this hour you shall have my final answer. If you execute the charge I entrust to you, may the blessing of a dying and most wretched man cleave to you forever! But hush; the clock strikes: it is my hour of prayer."

And, pointing to a huge black clock that hung opposite the door, and indicated the hour of nine (according to our English mode of numbering the hours), the Hermit fell on his knees, and, clasping his hands tightly, bent his face over them in the attitude of humiliation and devotion. I followed his example. After a few minutes he rose: "Once in every three hours," said he, with a ghastly expression, "for the last twelve years have I bowed my soul in anguish before God, and risen to feel that it was in vain: I am cursed without and within!"

"My Father, my Father, is this your faith in the mercies of the Redeemer who died for man?"

"Talk not to me of faith!" cried the Hermit, wildly. "Ye laymen and worldlings know nothing of its mysteries and its powers. But begone! the dread hour is upon me, when my tongue is loosed and my brain darkened, and I know not my words and shudder at my own thoughts. Begone! no human being shall witness those moments: they are only for Heaven and my own soul."

So saying, this unhappy and strange being seized me by the arm and dragged me towards the passage we had entered. I was in doubt whether to yield to or contend with him; but there was a glare in his eye and a flush upon his brow, which, while it betrayed the dreadful disease of his mind, made me fear that resistance to his wishes might operate dangerously upon a frame so feeble and reduced. I therefore mechanically obeyed him. He opened again the entrance to his rugged home, and the moonlight streamed wanly over his dark robes and spectral figure.

"Go," said he, more mildly than before, "go, and forgive the vehemence of one whose mind and heart alike are broken within him. Go, but return to-morrow at sunset. Your air disposes me to trust you."

So saying, he closed the door upon me, and I stood without the cavern alone.

But did I return home? Did I hasten to press my couch in sleep and sweet forgetfulness, while he was in that gloomy sepulture of the living, a prey to anguish, and torn by the fangs of madness and a fierce disease? No: on the damp grass, beneath the silent skies, I passed a night which could scarcely have been less wretched than his own. My conjecture was now and in full confirmed. Heavens! how I loved that man! how, from my youngest years, had my soul's fondest affections interlaced themselves with him! with what anguish had I wept his imagined death! and now to know that he lay within those walls, smitten from brain to heart with so fearful and mysterious a curse,--to know, too, that he dreaded the sight of me,--of me who would have laid down my life for his! the grave, which I imagined his home, had been a mercy to a doom like this.

"He fears," I murmured, and I wept as I said it, "to look on one who

would watch over, and soothe, and bear with him, with more than a woman's love! By what awful fate has this calamity fallen on one so holy and so pure? or by what preordered destiny did I come to these solitudes, to find at the same time a new charm for the earth and a spell to change it again into a desert and a place of woe?"

All night I kept vigil by the cave, and listened if I could catch moan or sound; but everything was silent: the thick walls of the rock kept even the voice of despair from my ear. The day dawned, and I retired among the trees, lest the Hermit might come out unawares and see me. At sunrise I saw him appear for a few moments and again retire, and I then hastened home, exhausted and wearied by the internal conflicts of the night, to gather coolness and composure for the ensuing interview, which I contemplated at once with eagerness and dread.

At the appointed hour I repaired to the cavern: the door was partially closed; I opened it, hearing no answer to my knock, and walked gently along the passage; but I now heard shrieks and groans and wild laughter as I neared the rude chamber. I paused for a moment, and then in terror and dismay entered the apartment. It was empty, but I saw near the clock a small door, from within which the sounds that alarmed me proceeded. I had no scruple in opening it, and found myself in the Hermit's sleeping chamber,--a small dark room, where, upon a straw pallet, lay the wretched occupant in a state of frantic delirium. I stood mute and horror-struck, while his exclamations of frenzy burst upon my ear.

"There--there!" he cried, "I have struck thee to the heart, and now I will kneel, and kiss those white lips, and bathe my hands in that blood! Ha!--do I hate thee?--hate--ay--hate,--abhor, detest! Have you the beads there?--let me tell them. Yes, I will go to the confessional--confess?--No, no--all the priests in the world could not lift up a soul so heavy with guilt. Help--help--help! I am falling--falling--there is the pit, and the fire, and the devils! Do you hear them laugh?--I can laugh too!--ha! ha! ha! Hush, I have written it all out, in a fair hand; he shall read it; and then, O God! what curses he will heap upon my head! Blessed Saint Francis, hear me! Lazarus, Lazarus, speak for me!"

Thus did the Hermit rave, while my flesh crept to hear him. I stood by his bedside, and called on him, but he neither heard nor saw me. Upon the ground, by the bed's head, as if it had dropped from under the pillow, was a packet sealed and directed to myself. I knew the handwriting at a glance, even though the letters were blotted and irregular, and possibly traced in the first moment that his present curse fell upon the writer. I placed the packet in my bosom; the Hermit saw not the motion; he lay back on the bed, seemingly in utter exhaustion. I turned away, and hastened to the monastery for assistance. As I hurried through the passage, the Hermit's shrieks again broke upon me, with a fiercer vehemence than before. I flew from them, as if they were sounds from the abyss of Hades. I flew till, breathless, and half-senseless myself, I fell down exhausted by the gate of the monastery.

The two most skilled in physic of the brethren were immediately summoned, and they lost not a moment in accompanying me to the cavern. All that evening, until midnight, the frenzy of the maniac seemed rather to increase than abate. But at that hour, exactly indeed as the clock struck twelve, he fell all at once into a deep sleep.

Then for the first time, but not till the weary brethren had at this favourable symptom permitted themselves to return for a brief interval to the monastery, to seek refreshment for themselves and to bring down new medicines for the patient,—then, for the first time, I rose from the Hermit's couch by which I had hitherto kept watch, and repairing to the outer chamber, took forth the packet superscribed with my name.

There, alone in that gray vault, and by the sepulchral light of the single lamp, I read what follows:--

THE HERMIT'S MANUSCRIPT.

Morton Devereux, if ever this reach you, read it, shudder, and, whatever your afflictions, bless God that you are not as I am. Do you remember my prevailing characteristic as a boy? No, you do not. You will say "devotion!" It was not! "Gentleness." It was not: it was JEALOUSY! Now does the truth flash on you? Yes, that was the disease that was in my blood, and in my heart, and through whose ghastly medium every living object was beheld. Did I love you? Yes, I loved you,—ay, almost with a love equal to your own. I loved my mother; I loved Gerald; I loved Montreuil. It was a part of my nature to love, and I did not resist the impulse. You I loved better than all; but I was jealous of each. If my mother caressed you or Gerald, if you opened your heart to either, it stung me to the quick. I it was who said to my mother, "Caress him not, or I shall think you love him better than me." I it was who widened, from my veriest childhood, the breach between Gerald and yourself. I it was who gave to the childish reproach a venom, and to the childish quarrel a barb. Was this love? Yes, it was love; but I could not endure that ye should love one another as ye loved me. It delighted me when one confided to my ear a complaint against the other, and said, "Aubrey, this blow could not have come from thee!"

Montreuil early perceived my bias of temper: he might have corrected it and with ease. I was not evil in disposition; I was insensible of my own vice. Had its malignity been revealed to me, I should have recoiled in horror. Montreuil had a vast power over me; he could mould me at his will. Montreuil, I repeat, might have saved me, and thyself, and a third being, better and purer than either of us was, even in our cradles. Montreuil did not: he had an object to serve, and he sacrificed our whole house to it. He found me one day weeping over a dog that I had killed. "Why did you destroy it?" he said; and I answered, "Because it loved Morton better than me!" And the priest said, "Thou didst right, Aubrey!" Yes, from that time he took advantage of my infirmity, and could rouse or calm all my passions in proportion as he irritated or soothed it.

You know this man's object during the latter period of his residence with us: it was the restoration of the House of Stuart. He was alternately the spy and the agitator in that cause. Among more comprehensive plans for effecting this object, was that of securing the heirs to the great wealth and popular name of Sir William Devereux. This was only a minor mesh in the intricate web of his schemes; but it is the character of the man to take exactly the same pains, and pursue the same laborious intrigues, for a small object as for a great one. His first impression, on entering our house, was in favour of Gerald; and I believe he really likes him to this day better than either of us. Partly your sarcasms, partly Gerald's disputes with you, partly my

representations,--for I was jealous even of the love of Montreuil,--prepossessed him against you. He thought, too, that Gerald had more talent to serve his purposes than yourself and more facility in being moulded to them; and he believed our uncle's partiality to you far from being unalienable. I have said that, at the latter period of his residence with us, he was an agent of the exiled cause. At the time I /now/ speak of, he had not entered into the great political scheme which engrossed him afterwards. He was merely a restless and aspiring priest, whose whole hope, object, ambition, was the advancement of his order. He knew that whoever inherited, or whoever shared, my uncle's wealth, could, under legitimate regulation, promote /any/ end which the heads of that order might select; and he wished therefore to gain the mastery over us all. Intrigue was essentially woven with his genius, and by intrigue only did he ever seek to arrive at /any/ end he had in view.* He soon obtained a mysterious and pervading power over Gerald and myself. Your temper at once irritated him, and made him despair of obtaining an ascendant over one who, though he testified in childhood none of the talents for which he has since been noted, testified, nevertheless, a shrewd, penetrating, and sarcastic power of observation and detection. You, therefore, he resolved to leave to the irregularities of your own nature, confident that they would yield him the opportunity of detaching your uncle from you and ultimately securing to Gerald his estates.

* It will be observed that Aubrey frequently repeats former assertions; this is one of the most customary traits of insanity.--ED.

The trial at school first altered his intentions. He imagined that he then saw in you powers which might be rendered availing to him: he conquered his pride--a great feature in his character--and he resolved to seek your affection. Your subsequent regularity of habits and success in study confirmed him in his resolution; and when he learned from my uncle's own lips that the Devereux estates would devolve on you, he thought that it would be easier to secure your affection to him than to divert that affection which my uncle had conceived for you. At this time, I repeat, he had no particular object in view; none, at least, beyond that of obtaining for the interest of his order the direction of great wealth and some political influence. Some time after--I know not exactly when, but before we returned to take our permanent abode at Devereux Court--a share in the grand political intrigue which was then in so many branches carried on throughout England, and even Europe, was confided to Montreuil.

In this I believe he was the servant of his order, rather than immediately of the exiled House; and I have since heard that even at that day he had acquired a great reputation among the professors of the former. You, Morton, he decoyed not into this scheme before he left England: he had not acquired a sufficient influence over you to trust you with the disclosure. To Gerald and myself he was more confidential. Gerald eagerly embraced his projects through a spirit of enterprise; I through a spirit of awe and of religion. RELIGION! Yes,--then,--long after,--now,--when my heart was and is the home of all withering and evil passions, Religion reigned,--reigns, over me a despot and a tyrant. Its terrors haunt me at this hour; they people the earth and the air with shapes of ghastly menace! They--Heaven pardon me! what would my madness utter? Madness?--madness? Ay, /that/ is the real scourge, the real fire, the real torture, the real hell, of this fair earth!

Montreuil, then, by different pleas, won over Gerald and myself. He left us, but engaged us in constant correspondence. "Aubrey," he said, before he departed, and when he saw that I was wounded by his apparent cordiality towards you and Gerald--"Aubrey," he said, soothing me on this point, "think not that I trust Gerald or the arrogant Morton as I trust you. /You/ have my real heart and my real trust. It is necessary to the execution of this project, so important to the interests of religion and so agreeable to the will of Heaven, that we should secure all co-operators: but they, your brothers, Aubrey, are the tools of that mighty design; you are its friend." Thus it was that, at all times when he irritated too sorely the vice of my nature, he flattered it into seconding his views; and thus, instead of conquering my evil passions, he conquered by them. Curses--No, no, no!--I /will/ be calm.

We returned to Devereux Court, and we grew from boyhood into youth. I loved you then, Morton. Ah! what would I not give now for one pure feeling, such as I felt in your love? Do you remember the day on which you had extorted from my uncle his consent to your leaving us for the pleasures and pomps of London? Do you remember the evening of that day, when I came to seek you, and we sat down on a little mound, and talked over your projects, and you spoke then to me of my devotion and my purer and colder feelings? Morton, at that very moment my veins burned with passion!--at that very moment my heart was feeding the vulture fated to live and prey within it forever! Thrice did I resolve to confide in you, as we then sat together, and thrice did my evil genius forbid it. You seemed, even in your affection to me, so wholly engrossed with your own hopes; you seemed so little to regret leaving me; you stung, so often and so deeply, in our short conference, that feeling which made me desire to monopolize all things in those I loved, that I said inly,--"Why should I bare my heart to one who can so little understand it?" And so we turned home, and you dreamed not of that which was then within me, and which was destined to be your curse and mine.

Not many weeks previous to that night, I had seen one whom to see was to love! Love!--I tell you, Morton, that /that/ word is expressive of soft and fond emotion, and there should be another expressive of all that is fierce and dark and unrelenting in the human heart!--all that seems most like the deadliest and the blackest hate, and yet is not hate! I saw this being, and from that moment my real nature, which had slept hitherto, awoke! I remember well it was one evening in the beginning of summer that I first saw her. She sat alone in the little garden beside the cottage door, and I paused, and, unseen, looked over the slight fence that separated us, and fed my eyes with a loveliness that I thought till then only twilight or the stars could wear! From that evening I came, night after night, to watch her from the same spot; and every time I beheld her the poison entered deeper and deeper into my system. At length I had an opportunity of being known to her, of speaking to her, of hearing her speak, of touching the ground she had hallowed, of entering the home where she dwelt!

I must explain: I said that both Gerald and myself corresponded privately with Montreuil; we were both bound over to secrecy with regard to you; and this, my temper and Gerald's coolness with you rendered an easy obligation to both;--I say my temper, for I loved to think I had a secret not known to another; and I carried this reserve even to the degree of concealing from Gerald himself the greater part of the correspondence between me and the Abbe. In his correspondence with each of us, Montreuil acted with his usual skill; to Gerald, as the elder in

years, the more prone to enterprise, and the manlier in aspect and in character, was allotted whatever object was of real trust or importance. Gerald it was who, under pretence of pursuing his accustomed sports, conferred with the various agents of intrigue who from time to time visited our coast; and to me the Abbe gave words of endearment and affected the language of more entire trust. "Whatever," he would say, "in our present half mellowed projects, is exposed to danger, but does not promise reward, I entrust to Gerald; hereafter, far higher employment, under far safer and surer auspices, will be yours. We are the heads: be ours the nobler occupation to plan; and let us leave to inferior natures the vain and perilous triumph to execute what we design."

All this I readily assented to; for, despite my acquiescence in Montreuil's wishes, I loved not enterprise, or rather I hated whatever roused me from the dreamy and abstracted indolence which was most dear to my temperament. Sometimes, however, with a great show of confidence, Montreuil would request me to execute some quiet and unimportant commission; and of this nature was one I received while I was thus, unknown even to the object, steeping my soul in the first intoxication of love. The plots then carried on by certain ecclesiastics I need not say extended, in one linked chain, over the greater part of the Continent. Spain, in especial, was the theatre of these intrigues; and among the tools employed in executing them were some who, though banished from that country, still, by the rank they had held in it, carried a certain importance in their very names. Foremost of these was the father of the woman I loved; and foremost, in whatever promised occupation to a restless mind, he was always certain to be.

Montreuil now commissioned me to seek out a certain Barnard (an underling in those secret practices or services, for which he afterwards suffered, and who was then in that part of the country), and to communicate to him some messages of which he was to be the bearer to this Spaniard. A thought flashed upon me--Montreuil's letter mentioned, accidentally, that the Spaniard had never hitherto seen Barnard: could I not personate the latter, deliver the messages myself, and thus win that introduction to the daughter which I so burningly desired, and which, from the close reserve of the father's habits, I might not otherwise effect? The plan was open to two objections: one, that I was known personally in the town in the environs of which the Spaniard lived, and he might therefore very soon discover who I really was; the other that I was not in possession of all the information which Barnard might possess, and which the Spaniard might wish to learn; but these objections had not much weight with me. To the first, I said inly, "I will oppose the most constant caution; I will go always on foot and alone; I will never be seen in the town itself; and even should the Spaniard, who seems rarely to stir abroad, and who, possibly, does not speak our language,--even should he learn by accident that Barnard is only another name for Aubrey Devereux, it will not be before I have gained my object; nor, perhaps, before the time when I myself may wish to acknowledge my identity." To the second objection I saw a yet more ready answer. "I will acquaint Montreuil at once," I said, "with my intention; I will claim his connivance as a proof of his confidence, and as an essay of my own genius of intrigue." I did so; the priest, perhaps delighted to involve me so deeply, and to find me so ardent in his project, consented. Fortunately, as I before said, Barnard was an underling,--young, unknown, and obscure. My youth, therefore, was not so great a foe to my assumed disguise as it might otherwise have been. Montreuil supplied all requisite information. I tried (for the first

time, with a beating heart and a tremulous voice) the imposition! it succeeded; I continued it. Yes, Morton, yes!--pour forth upon me your bitterest execration, in me, in your brother, in the brother so dear to you,--in the brother whom you imagined so passionless, so pure; so sinless,--behold that Barnard, the lover, the idolatrous lover--the foe, the deadly foe,--of Isora d'Alvarez!

Here the manuscript was defaced for some pages by incoherent and meaningless ravings. It seemed as if one of his dark fits of frenzy had at that time come over the writer. At length, in a more firm and clear character than that immediately preceding it, the manuscript continued as follows:--

I loved her, but even then it was with a fierce and ominous love (ominous of what it became). Often in the still evenings, when we stood together watching the sun set; when my tongue trembled, but did not dare to speak; when all soft and sweet thoughts filled the heart and glistened in the eye of that most sensitive and fairy being; when my own brow perhaps seemed to reflect the same emotions,--feelings which I even shuddered to conceive raged within me. Had we stood together in those moments upon the brink of a precipice, I could have wound my arms around her and leaped with her into the abyss. Everything but one nursed my passion; nature, solitude, early dreams, all kindled and fed that fire: Religion only combated it; I knew it was a crime to love any of earth's creatures as I loved. I used the scourge and the fast;* I wept hot, burning tears; I prayed, and the intensity of my prayer appalled even myself, as it rose from my maddened heart, in the depth and stillness of the lone night: but the flame burned higher and more scorchingly from the opposition; nay, it was the very knowledge that my love was criminal that made it assume so fearful and dark a shape. "Thou art the cause of my downfall from Heaven!" I muttered, when I looked upon Isora's calm face: "thou feelest it not, and I could destroy thee and myself,--myself the criminal, thee the cause of the crime!"

* I need not point out to the novel-reader how completely the character of Aubrey has been stolen in a certain celebrated French romance. But the writer I allude to is not so unmerciful as M. de Balzac, who has pillaged scenes in "The Disowned" with a most gratifying politeness.

It must have been that my eyes betrayed my feelings that Isora loved me not, that she shrank from me even at the first: why else should I not have called forth the same sentiments which she gave to you? Was not my form cast in a mould as fair as yours? did not my voice whisper in as sweet a tone? did I not love her with as wild a love? Why should she not have loved me? I was the first whom she beheld: she would--ay, perhaps she would have loved me, if you had not come and marred all. Curse yourself, then, that you were my rival! curse yourself that you made my heart as a furnace, and smote my brain with frenzy; curse--O sweet Virgin, forgive me!--I know not,--I know not what my tongue utters or my hand traces!

You came, then, Morton, you came; you knew her; you loved her; she loved you. I learned that you had gained admittance to the cottage, and the moment I learned it, I looked on Isora, and felt my fate, as by intuition: I saw at once that she was prepared to love you; I saw the

very moment when that love kindled from conception into form; I saw--and at that moment my eyes reeled and my ears rang as with the sound of a rushing sea, and I thought I felt a cord snap within my brain, which has never been united again.

Once only, after your introduction to the cottage, did I think of confiding to you my love and rivalry; you remember one night when we met by the castle cave, and when your kindness touched and softened me despite of myself. The day after that night I sought you, with the intention of communicating to you all; and while I was yet struggling with my embarrassment and the suffocating tide of my emotions, you premeditated me by giving me /your/ confidence. Engrossed by your own feelings, you were not observant of mine; and as you dwelt and dilated upon your love for Isora, all emotions, save those of agony and of fury, vanished from my breast. I did not answer you then at any length, for I was too agitated to trust to prolix speech; but by the next day I had recovered myself, and I resolved, as far as I was able, to play the hypocrite. "he cannot love her as I do!" I said; "perhaps I may, without disclosure of my rivalry and without sin in the attempt, detach him from her by reason." Fraught with this idea, I collected myself, sought you, remonstrated with you, represented the worldly folly of your love, and uttered all that prudence preaches--in vain, when it preaches against passion!

Let me be brief. I saw that I made no impression on you; I stifled my wrath; I continued to visit and watch Isora. I timed my opportunities well: my constant knowledge of your motions allowed me to do that; besides, I represented to the Spaniard the necessity, through political motives, of concealing myself from you; hence, we never encountered each other. One evening, Alvarez had gone out to meet one of his countrymen and confederates. I found Isora alone, in the most sequestered part of the garden; her loveliness, and her exceeding gentleness of manner, melted me. For the first time audibly my heart spoke out, and I told her of my idolatry. Idolatry! ay, /that/ is the only word, since it signifies both worship and guilt! She heard me timidly, gently, coldly. She spoke; and I found confirmed from her own lips what my reason had before told me,--that there was no hope for me. The iron that entered also roused my heart. "Enough!" I cried fiercely, "you love this Morton Devereux, and for him I am scorned." Isora blushed and trembled, and all my senses fled from me. I scarcely know in what words my rage and my despair clothed themselves: but I know that I divulged myself to her; I know that I told her I was the brother, the rival, the enemy of the man she loved,--I know that I uttered the fiercest and the wildest menaces and execrations,--I know that my vehemence so overpowered and terrified her that her mind was scarcely less clouded--less lost, rather--than my own. At that moment the sound of your horse's hoofs was heard. Isora's eyes brightened and her mien grew firm. "He comes," she said, "and he will protect me!" "Hark!" I said, sinking my voice, and, as my drawn sword flashed in one hand, the other grasped her arm with a savage force,--"hark, woman!" I said,--and an oath of the blackest fury accompanied my threats,--"swear that you will never divulge to Morton Devereux who is his real rival, that you will never declare to him nor to any one else that the false Barnard and the true Aubrey Devereux are the same,--swear this, or I swear [and I repeated, with a solemn vehemence, that dread oath] that I will stay here; that I will confront my rival; that, the moment he beholds me, I will plunge this sword in his bosom; and that, before I perish myself, I will hasten to the town, and will utter there a secret which will send your father to the gallows: now, your choice?"

Morton, you have often praised, my uncle has often jested at, the womanish softness of my face. There have been moments when I have seen that face in the glass, and known it not, but started in wild affright, and fancied that I beheld a demon; perhaps in that moment this change was over it. Slowly Isora gazed upon me; slowly blanched into the hues of death grew her cheek and lip; slowly that lip uttered the oath I enjoined. I released my gripe, and she fell to the earth suddenly, and stunned as if struck by lightning. I stayed not to look on what I had done; I heard your step advance; I fled by a path that led from the garden to the beach; and I reached my home without retaining a single recollection of the space I had traversed to attain it.

Despite the night I passed--a night which I will leave you to imagine--I rose the next morning with a burning interest to learn from you what had passed after my flight, and with a power, peculiar to the stormiest passions, of an outward composure while I listened to the recital. I saw that I was safe; and I heard, with a joy so rapturous that I question whether even Isora's assent to my love would have given me an equal transport, that she had rejected you. I uttered some advice to you commonplace enough: it displeased you, and we separated.

That evening, to my surprise, I was privately visited by Montreuil. He had some designs in hand which brought him from France into the neighbourhood, but which made him desirous of concealment. He soon drew from me my secret; it is marvellous, indeed, what power he had of penetrating, ruling, moulding, my feelings and my thoughts. He wished, at that time, a communication to be made and a letter to be given to Alvarez. I could not execute this commission personally; for you had informed me of your intention of watching if you could not discover or meet with Barnard, and I knew you were absent from home on that very purpose. Nor was Montreuil himself desirous of incurring the risk of being seen by you,--you over whom, sooner or later, he then trusted to obtain a power equal to that which he held over your brothers. Gerald then was chosen to execute the commission. He did so; he met Alvarez for the first and only time on the beach, by the town of ----- . You saw him, and imagined you beheld the real Barnard.

But I anticipate; for you did not inform me of that occurrence, nor the inference you drew from it, till afterwards. You returned, however, after witnessing that meeting, and for two days your passions (passions which, intense and fierce as mine, show that, under similar circumstances, you might have been equally guilty) terminated in fever. You were confined to your bed for three or four days; meanwhile I took advantage of the event. Montreuil suggested a plan which I readily embraced. I sought the Spaniard, and told him in confidence that you were a suitor--but a suitor upon the most dishonourable terms--to his daughter. I told him, moreover, that you had detected his schemes, and, in order to deprive Isora of protection and abate any obstacles arising from her pride, meant to betray him to the Government. I told him that his best and most prudent, nay, his only chance of safety for Isora and himself was to leave his present home and take refuge in the vast mazes of the metropolis. I told him not to betray to you his knowledge of your criminal intentions, lest it might needlessly exasperate you. I furnished him wherewithal to repay you the sum which you had lent him, and by which you had commenced his acquaintance; and I dictated to him the very terms of the note in which the sum was to be inclosed. After this I felt happy. You were separated from Isora: she might forget you; you might forget her. I was possessed of the secret of her father's

present retreat: I might seek it at my pleasure, and ultimately--so hope whispered--prosper in my love.

Some time afterwards you mentioned your suspicions of Gerald; I did not corroborate, but I did not seek to destroy them. "They already hate each other," I said; "can the hate be greater? meanwhile, let it divert suspicion from me!" Gerald knew of the agency of the real Barnard, though he did not know that I had assumed the name of that person. When you taxed him with his knowledge of the man, he was naturally confused. You interpreted that confusion into the fact of being your rival, while in truth it arose from his belief that you had possessed yourself of his political schemes. Montreuil, who had lurked chiefly in the islet opposite "the Castle Cave," had returned to France on the same day that Alvarez repaired to London. Previous to this, we had held some conferences together upon my love. At first he had opposed and reasoned with it; but, startled and astonished by the intensity with which it possessed me, he gave way to my vehemence at last.

I have said that I had adopted his advice in one instance. The fact of having received his advice,--the advice of one so pious, so free from human passion, so devoted to one object, which appeared to him the cause of Religion; advice, too, in a love so fiery and overwhelming, that fact made me think myself less criminal than I had done before. He advised me yet further. "Do not seek Isora," he said, "till some time has elapsed; till her new-born love for your brother has died away; till the impression of fear you have caused in her is somewhat effaced; till time and absence, too, have done their work in the mind of Morton, and you will no longer have for your rival one who is not only a brother, but a man of a fierce, resolute, and unrelenting temper."

I yielded to this advice: partly because it promised so fair; partly because I was not systematically vicious, and I wished, if possible, to do away with our rivalry; and principally, because I knew, in the meanwhile, that if I was deprived of her presence, so also were you; and jealousy with me was a far more intolerable and engrossing passion than the very love from which it sprang. So time passed on: you affected to have conquered your attachment; you affected to take pleasure in levity and the idlest pursuits of worldly men. I saw deeper into your heart; for the moment I entertained the passion of love in my own breast, my eyes became gifted with a second vision to penetrate the most mysterious and hoarded secrets in the love of others.

Two circumstances of importance happened before you left Devereux Court for London; the one was the introduction to your service of Jean Desmarais, the second was your breach with Montreuil. I speak now of the first. A very early friend did the priest possess, born in the same village as himself and in the same rank of life; he had received a good education and possessed natural genius. At a time when, from some fraud in a situation of trust which he had held in a French nobleman's family, he was in destitute and desperate circumstances, it occurred to Montreuil to provide for him by placing him in our family. Some accidental and frivolous remark of yours which I had repeated in my correspondence with Montreuil as illustrative of your manner, and your affected pursuits at that time, presented an opportunity to a plan before conceived. Desmarais came to England in a smuggler's vessel, presented himself to you as a servant, and was accepted. In this plan Montreuil had two views: first, that of securing Desmarais a place in England, tolerably profitable to himself and convenient for any plot or scheme which Montreuil might require of him in this country; secondly,

that of setting a perpetual and most adroit spy upon all your motions.

As to the second occurrence to which I have referred; namely, your breach with Montreuil--"

Here Aubrey, with the same terrible distinctness which had characterized his previous details and which shed a double horror over the contrast of the darker and more frantic passages in the manuscript, related what the reader will remember Oswald had narrated before, respecting the letter he had brought from Madame de Balzac. It seems that Montreuil's abrupt appearance in the hall had been caused by Desmarais, who had recognized Oswald, on his dismounting at the gate, and had previously known that he was in the employment of the Jansenistical /intrigante/ Madame de Balzac.

Aubrey proceeded then to say that Montreuil, invested with far more direct authority and power than he had been hitherto in the projects of that wise order whose doctrines he had so darkly perverted, repaired to London; and that, soon after my departure for the same place, Gerald and Aubrey left Devereux Court in company with each other; but Gerald, whom very trifling things diverted from any project, however important, returned to Devereux Court to accomplish the prosecution of some rustic /amour/, without even reaching London. Aubrey, on the contrary, had proceeded to the metropolis, sought the suburb in which Alvarez lived, procured, in order to avoid any probable chance of meeting me, a lodging in the same obscure quarter, and had renewed his suit to Isora. The reader is already in possession of the ill success which attended it. Aubrey had at last confessed his real name to the father. The Spaniard was dazzled by the prospect of so honourable an alliance for his daughter. From both came Isora's persecution, but in both was it resisted. Passing over passages in the manuscript of the most stormy incoherence and the most gloomy passion, I come to what follows--

I learned then from Desmarais that you had taken away her and the dying father, that you had placed them in a safe and honourable home. That man, so implicitly the creature of Montreuil, or rather of his own interest, with which Montreuil was identified, was easily induced to betray you also to me,--me whom he imagined, moreover, utterly the tool of the priest, and of whose torturing interest in this peculiar disclosure he was not at that time aware. I visited Isora in her new abode, and again and again she trembled beneath my rage. Then, for the second time, I attempted force. Ha! ha! Morton, I think I see you now!--I think I hear your muttered curse! Curse on! When you read this I shall be beyond your vengeance, beyond human power. And yet I think if I were mere clay; if I were the mere senseless heap of ashes that the grave covers; if I were not the thing that must live forever and forever, far away in unimagined worlds, where nought that has earth's life can come,--I should tremble beneath the sod as your foot pressed and your execration rang over it. A second time I attempted force; a second time I was repulsed by the same means,--by a woman's hand and a woman's dagger. But I knew that I had one hold over Isora from which, while she loved you, I could never be driven: I knew that by threatening your /life/, I could command her will and terrify her into compliance with my own. I made her reiterate her vow of concealment; and I discovered, by some words dropping from her fear, that she believed you already suspected me, and had been withheld by her entreaties from seeking me out. I questioned her more, and soon perceived that it was

(as indeed I knew before) Gerald whom you suspected, not me; but I did not tell this to Isora. I suffered her to cherish a mistake profitable to my disguise; but I saw at once that it might betray me, if you ever met and conferred at length with Gerald upon this point, and I exacted from Isora a pledge that she would effectually and forever bind you not to breathe a single suspicion to him. When I had left the room, I returned once more to warn her against uniting herself with you. Wretch, selfish, accursed wretch that you were, why did you suffer her to transgress that warning?

I fled from the house, as a fiend flies from a being whom he has possessed. I returned at night to look up at the window, and linger by the door, and keep watch beside the home which held Isora. Such, in her former abode, had been my nightly wont. I had no evil thought nor foul intent in this customary vigil,--no, not one! Strangely enough, with the tempestuous and overwhelming emotions which constituted the greater part of my love was mingled--though subdued and latent--a stream of the softest, yea, I might add almost of the holiest tenderness. Often after one of those outpourings of rage and menace and despair, I would fly to some quiet spot and weep till all the hardness of my heart was wept away. And often in those nightly vigils I would pause by the door and murmur, "This shelter, denied not to the beggar and the beggar's child, this would you deny to me if you could dream that I was so near you. And yet, had you loved me, instead of lavishing upon me all your hatred and your contempt,--had you loved me, I would have served and worshipped you as man knows not worship or service. You shudder at my vehemence now: I could not then have breathed a whisper to wound you. You tremble now at the fierceness of my breast: you would then rather have marvelled at its softness."

I was already at my old watch when you encountered me: you addressed me; I answered not; you approached me, and I fled. Fled there--there was the shame, and the sting of my sentiments towards you. I am not naturally afraid of danger, though my nerves are sometimes weak and have sometimes shrunk from it. I have known something of peril in late years when my frame has been bowed and broken--perils by storms at sea, and the knives of robbers upon land--and I have looked upon it with a quiet eye. But you, Morton Devereux, you I always feared. I had seen from your childhood others whose nature was far stronger than mine yield and recoil at yours; I had seen the giant and bold strength of Gerald quail before your bent brow; I had seen even the hardy pride of Montreuil baffled by your curled lip and the stern sarcasm of your glance; I had seen you, too, in your wild moments of ungoverned rage, and I knew that if earth held one whose passions were fiercer than my own it was you. But your passions were sustained even in their fiercest excess; your passions were the mere weapons of your mind: my passions were the torturers and the tyrants of mine. Your passions seconded your will; mine blinded and overwhelmed it. From my infancy, even while I loved you most, you awed me; and years, in deepening the impression, had made it indelible. I could not confront the thought of your knowing all, and of meeting you after that knowledge. And this fear, while it unnerved me at some moments, at others only maddened my ferocity the more by the stings of shame and self-contempt.

I fled from you: you pursued; you gained upon me; you remember how I was preserved. I dashed through the inebriated revellers who obstructed your path, and reached my own lodging, which was close at hand; for the same day on which I learned Isora's change of residence I changed my own in order to be near it. Did I feel joy for my escape? No: I could have

gnawed the very flesh from my bones in the agony of my shame. "I could brave," I said, "I could threaten, I could offer violence to the woman who rejected me, and yet I could not face the rival for whom I am scorned!" At that moment a resolution flashed across my mind, exactly as if a train of living fire had been driven before it. Morton, I resolved to murder you, and in that very hour! A pistol lay on my table; I took it, concealed it about my person, and repaired to the shelter of a large portico, beside which I knew that you must pass to your own home in the same street. Scarcely three minutes had elapsed between the reaching my house and the leaving it on this errand. I knew, for I had heard swords clash, that you would be detained some time in the street by the rioters; I thought it probable also that you might still continue the search for me; and I knew even that, had you hastened at once to your home, you could scarcely have reached it before I reached my shelter. I hurried on; I arrived at the spot; I screened myself and awaited your coming. You came, borne in the arms of two men; others followed in the rear; I saw your face destitute of the hue and aspect of life, and your clothes streaming with blood. I was horror-stricken. I joined the crowd; I learned that you had been stabbed, and it was feared mortally.

I did not return home: no, I went into the fields, and lay out all night, and lifted up my heart to God, and wept aloud, and peace fell upon me,—at least, what was peace compared to the tempestuous darkness which had before reigned in my breast. The sight of you, bleeding and insensible,—you, against whom I had harboured a fratricide's purpose,—had stricken, as it were, the weapon from my hand and the madness from my mind. I shuddered at what I had escaped; I blessed God for my deliverance; and with the gratitude and the awe came repentance; and repentance brought a resolution to fly, since I could not wrestle with my mighty and dread temptation: the moment that resolution was formed, it was as if an incubus were taken from my breast. Even the next morning I did not return home: my anxiety for you was such that I forgot all caution; I went to your house myself; I saw one of your servants to whom I was personally unknown. I inquired respecting you, and learned that your wound had not been mortal, and that the servant had overheard one of the medical attendants say you were not even in danger.

At this news I felt the serpent stir again within me, but I resolved to crush it at the first: I would not even expose myself to the temptation of passing by Isora's house; I went straight in search of my horse; I mounted, and fled resolutely from the scene of my soul's peril. "I will go," I said, "to the home of our childhood; I will surround myself by the mute tokens of the early love which my brother bore me; I will think,—while penance and prayer cleanse my soul from its black guilt,—I will think that I am also making a sacrifice to that brother."

I returned then to Devereux Court, and I resolved to forego all hope—all persecution—of Isora! My brother—my brother, my heart yearns to you at this moment, even though years and distance, and, above all, my own crimes, place a gulf between us which I may never pass; it yearns to you when I think of those quiet shades, and the scenes where, pure and unsullied, we wandered together, when life was all verdure and freshness, and we dreamed not of what was to come! If even now my heart yearns to you, Morton, when I think of that home and those days, believe that it had some softness and some mercy for you then. Yes, I repeat, I resolved to subdue my own emotions, and interpose no longer between Isora and yourself. Full of this determination, and utterly melted towards you, I wrote you a long letter; such as we would have written to

each other in our first youth. Two days after that letter all my new purposes were swept away, and the whole soil of evil thoughts which they had covered, not destroyed, rose again as the tide flowed from it, black and rugged as before.

The very night on which I had writ that letter, came Montreuil secretly to my chamber. He had been accustomed to visit Gerald by stealth and at sudden moments; and there was something almost supernatural in the manner in which he seemed to pass from place to place, unmolested and unseen. He had now conceived a villanous project; and he had visited Devereux Court in order to ascertain the likelihood of its success; he there found that it was necessary to involve me in his scheme. My uncle's physician had said privately that Sir William could not live many months longer. Either from Gerald or my mother Montreuil learned this fact; and he was resolved, if possible, that, the family estates should not glide from all chance of his influence over them into your possession. Montreuil was literally as poor as the rigid law of his order enjoins its disciples to be; all his schemes required the disposal of large sums, and in no private source could he hope for such pecuniary power as he was likely to find in the coffers of any member of our family, yourself only excepted. It was this man's boast to want, and yet to command, all things; and he was now determined that if any craft, resolution, or guilt could occasion the transfer of my uncle's wealth from you to Gerald or to myself, it should not be wanting.

Now, then, he found the advantage of the dissensions with each other which he had either sown or mellowed in our breasts. He came to turn those wrathful thoughts which when he last saw me I had expressed towards you to the favor and success of his design. He found my mind strangely altered, but he affected to applaud the change. He questioned me respecting my uncle's health, and I told him what had really occurred; namely, that my uncle had on the preceding day read over to me some part of a will which he had just made, and in which the vast bulk of his property was bequeathed to you. At this news Montreuil must have perceived at once the necessity of winning my consent to his project; for, since I had seen the actual testament, no fraudulent transfer of the property therein bequeathed could take place without my knowledge that some fraud had been recurred to. Montreuil knew me well; he knew that avarice, that pleasure, that ambition, were powerless words with me, producing no effect and affording no temptation: but he knew that passion, jealousy, spiritual terrors, were the springs that moved every part and nerve of my moral being. The two former, then, he now put into action; the last he held back in reserve. He spoke to me no further upon the subject he had then at heart; not a word further on the disposition of the estates: he spoke to me only of Isora and of you; he aroused, by hint and insinuation, the new sleep into which all those emotions--the furies of the heart--had been for a moment lulled. He told me he had lately seen Isora; he dwelt glowingly on her beauty; he commended my heroism in resigning her to a brother whose love for her was little in comparison to mine, who had, in reality, never loved /me/,--whose jests and irony had been levelled no less at myself than at others. He painted your person and your mind, in contrast to my own, in colors so covertly depreciating as to irritate more and more that vanity with which jealousy is so woven, and from which, perhaps (a Titan son of so feeble a parent), it is born. He hung lingeringly over all the treasure that you would enjoy and that I--I, the first discoverer, had so nobly and so generously relinquished.

"Relinquished!" I cried, "no, I was driven from it; I left it not while

a hope of possessing it remained." The priest affected astonishment. "How! was I sure of that? I had, it is true, wooed Isora; but would she, even if she had felt no preference for Morton, would she have surrendered the heir to a princely wealth for the humble love of the younger son? I did not know women: with them all love was either wantonness, custom, or pride; it was the last principle that swayed Isora. Had I sought to enlist it on my side? Not at all. Again, I had only striven to detach Isora from Morton; had I ever attempted the much easier task of detaching Morton from Isora? No, never;" and Montreuil repeated his panegyric on my generous surrender of my rights. I interrupted him; I had not surrendered: I never would surrender while a hope remained. But, where was that hope, and how was it to be realized? After much artful prelude, the priest explained. He proposed to use every means to array against your union with Isora all motives of ambition, interest, and aggrandizement. "I know Morton's character," said he, "to its very depths. His chief virtue is honour; his chief principle is ambition. He will not attempt to win this girl otherwise than by marriage; for the very reasons that would induce most men to attempt it, namely, her unfriended state, her poverty, her confidence in him, and her love, or that semblance of love which he believes to be the passion itself. This virtue,--I call it so, though it is none, for there is no virtue out of religion,--this virtue, then, will place before him only two plans of conduct, either to marry her or to forsake her. Now, then, if we can bring his ambition, that great lever of his conduct, in opposition to the first alternative, only the last remains: I say that we /can/ employ that engine in your behalf; leave it to me, and I will do so. Then, Aubrey, in the moment of her pique, her resentment, her outraged vanity, at being thus left, you shall appear; not as you have hitherto done in menace and terror, but soft, subdued, with looks all love, with vows all penitence; vindicating all your past vehemence by the excess of your passion, and promising all future tenderness by the influence of the same motive, the motive which to a woman pardons every error and hallows every crime. Then will she contrast your love with your brother's: then will the scale fall from her eyes; then will she see what hitherto she has been blinded to, that your brother, to yourself, is a satyr to Hyperion; then will she blush and falter, and hide her cheek in your bosom." "Hold, hold!" I cried "do with me what you will; counsel, and I will act!"

Here again the manuscript was defaced by a sudden burst of execration upon Montreuil, followed by ravings that gradually blackened into the most gloomy and incoherent outpourings of madness; at length the history proceeded.

"You wrote to ask me to sound our uncle on the subject of your intended marriage. Montreuil drew up my answer; and I constrained myself, despite my revived hatred to you, to transcribe its expressions of affection. My uncle wrote to you also; and we strengthened his dislike to the step you had proposed, by hints from myself disrespectful to Isora, and an anonymous communication dated from London and to the same purport. All this while I knew not that Isora had been in your house; your answer to my letter seemed to imply that you would not disobey my uncle. Montreuil, who was still lurking in the neighbourhood and who at night privately met or sought me, affected exultation at the incipient success of his advice. He pretended to receive perpetual intelligence of your motions and conduct, and he informed me now that Isora had come to your house on hearing of your wound; that you had not (agreeably,

Montreuil added to his view of your character) taken advantage of her indiscretion; that immediately on receiving your uncle's and my own letters, you had separated yourself from her; and, that though you still visited her, it was apparently with a view of breaking off all connection by gradual and gentle steps; at all events, you had taken no measures towards marriage. "Now, then," said Montreuil, "for one finishing stroke, and the prize is yours. Your uncle cannot, you find, live long: could he but be persuaded to leave his property to Gerald or to you, with only a trifling legacy (comparatively speaking) to Morton, that worldly-minded and enterprising person would be utterly prevented from marrying a penniless and unknown foreigner. Nothing but his own high prospects, so utterly above the necessity of fortune in a wife, can excuse such a measure now, even to his own mind; if therefore, we can effect this transfer of property, and in the meanwhile prevent Morton from marrying, your rival is gone forever, and with his brilliant advantages of wealth will also vanish his merits in the eyes of Isora. Do not be startled at this thought: there is no crime in it; I, your confessor, your tutor, the servant of the Church, am the last person to counsel, to hint even, at what is criminal; but the end sanctifies all means. By transferring this vast property, you do not only insure your object, but you advance the great cause of Kings, the Church, and of the Religion which presides over both. Wealth, in Morton's possession, will be useless to this cause, perhaps pernicious: in your hands or in Gerald's, it will be of inestimable service. Wealth produced from the public should be applied to the uses of the public, yea, even though a petty injury to one individual be the price."

Thus, and in this manner, did Montreuil prepare my mind for the step he meditated; but I was not yet ripe for it. So inconsistent is guilt, that I could commit murder, wrong, almost all villany that passion dictated, but I was struck aghast by the thought of fraud. Montreuil perceived that I was not yet wholly his, and his next plan was to remove me from a spot where I might check his measures. He persuaded me to travel for a few weeks. "On your return," said he, "consider Isora yours; meanwhile, let change of scene beguile suspense." I was passive in his hands, and I went whither he directed.

Let me be brief here on the black fraud that ensued. Among the other arts of Jean Desmarais, was that of copying exactly any handwriting. He was then in London, in your service. Montreuil sent for him to come to the neighbourhood of Devereux Court. Meanwhile, the priest had procured from the notary who had drawn up, and who now possessed, the will of my unsuspecting uncle, that document. The notary had been long known to, and sometimes politically employed by, Montreuil, for he was half-brother to that Oswald, whom I have before mentioned as the early comrade of the priest and Desmarais. This circumstance, it is probable, first induced Montreuil to contemplate the plan of a substituted will. Before Desmarais arrived, in order to copy those parts of the will which my uncle's humour had led him to write in his own hand, you, alarmed by a letter from my uncle, came to the Court, and on the same day Sir William (taken ill the preceding evening) died. Between that day and the one on which the funeral occurred the will was copied by Desmarais; only Gerald's name was substituted for yours, and the forty thousand pounds left to him--a sum equal to that bestowed on myself--was cut down into a legacy of twenty thousand pounds to you. Less than this Montreuil dared not insert as the bequest to you: and it is possible that the same regard to probabilities prevented all mention of himself in the substituted will. This was all the alteration made. My uncle's writing was copied exactly; and, save the departure from his apparent

intentions in your favour, I believe not a particle in the effected fraud was calculated to excite suspicion. Immediately on the reading of the will, Montreuil repaired to me and confessed what had taken place.

"Aubrey," he said, "I have done this for your sake partly; but I have had a much higher end in view than even your happiness or my affectionate wishes to promote it. I live solely for one object,--the aggrandizement of that holy order to which I belong; the schemes of that order are devoted only to the interests of Heaven, and by serving them I serve Heaven itself. Aubrey, child of my adoption and of my earthly hopes, those schemes require carnal instruments, and work, even through Mammon, unto the goal of righteousness. What I have done is just before God and man. I have wrested a weapon from the hand of an enemy, and placed it in the hand of an ally. I have not touched one atom of this wealth, though, with the same ease with which I have transferred it from Morton to Gerald, I might have made my own private fortune. I have not touched one atom of it; nor for you, whom I love more than any living being, have I done what my heart dictated. I might have caused the inheritance to pass to you. I have not done so. Why? Because then I should have consulted a selfish desire at the expense of the interests of mankind. Gerald is fitter to be the tool those interests require than you are. Gerald I have made that tool. You, too, I have spared the pangs which your conscience, so peculiarly, so morbidly acute, might suffer at being selected as the instrument of a seeming wrong to Morton. All required of you is silence. If your wants ever ask more than your legacy, you have, as I have, a claim to that wealth which your pleasure allows Gerald to possess. Meanwhile, let us secure to you that treasure dearer to you than gold."

If Montreuil did not quite blind me by speeches of this nature, my engrossing, absorbing passion required little to make it cling to any hope of its fruition. I assented, therefore, though not without many previous struggles, to Montreuil's project, or rather to its concealment; nay, I wrote some time after, at his desire and his dictation, a letter to you, stating feigned reasons for my uncle's alteration of former intentions, and exonerating Gerald from all connivance in that alteration, or abetment in the fraud you professed that it was your open belief had been committed. This was due to Gerald; for at that time, and for aught I know, at the present, he was perfectly unconscious by what means he had attained his fortune: he believed that your love for Isora had given my uncle offence, and hence your disinheritance; and Montreuil took effectual care to exasperate him against you, by dwelling on the malice which your suspicions and your proceedings against him so glaringly testified. Whether Montreuil really thought you would give over all intention of marrying Isora upon your reverse of fortune, which is likely enough from his estimate of your character; or whether he only wished by any means to obtain my acquiescence in a measure important to his views, I know not, but he never left me, nor ever ceased to sustain my fevered and unhallowed hopes, from the hour in which he first communicated to me the fraudulent substitution of the will till we repaired together to London. This we did not do so long as he could detain me in the country by assurances that I should ruin all by appearing before Isora until you had entirely deserted her.

Morton, hitherto I have written as if my veins were filled with water, instead of the raging fire that flows through them until it reaches my brain, and there it stops, and eats away all things,--even memory, that once seemed eternal! Now I feel as I approach the consummation

of--ha--of what--ay, of what? Brother, did you ever, when you thought yourself quite alone, at night, not a breath stirring,--did you ever raise your eyes, and see exactly opposite to you a devil?--a dread thing, that moves not, speaks not, but glares upon you with a fixed, dead, unrelenting eye?--that thing is before me now and witnesses every word I write. But it deters me not! no, nor terrifies me. I have said that I would fulfil this task, and I have nearly done it; though at times the gray cavern yawned, and I saw its rugged walls stretch--stretch away, on either side, until they reached hell; and there I beheld--but I will not tell you till we meet there! Now I am calm again: read on.

We could not discover Isora nor her home: perhaps the priest took care that it should be so; for, at that time, what with his devilish whispers and my own heart, I often scarcely knew what I was or what I desired; and I sat for hours and gazed upon the air, and it seemed so soft and still that I longed to make an opening in my forehead that it might enter there, and so cool and quiet the dull, throbbing, scorching anguish that lay like molten lead in my brain; at length we found the house. "To-morrow," said the Abbe, and he shed tears over me,--for there were times when that hard man did feel,--"to-morrow, my child, thou shalt see her; but be soft and calm." To-morrow came; but Montreuil was pale, paler than I had ever seen him, and he gazed upon me and said, "Not to-day, Son, not to-day; she has gone out, and will not return till nightfall." My brother, the evening came, and with it came Desmarais; he came in terror and alarm. "The villain Oswald," he said, "has betrayed all; he drew me aside and told me so. 'Hark ye, Jean,' he whispered, 'hark ye: your master has my brother's written confession and the real will; but I have provided for your safety, and if he pleases it, for Montreuil's. The packet is not to be opened till the seventh day; fly before then. But I know," added Desmarais, "where the packet is placed;" and he took Montreuil aside, and for a while I heard not what they said; but I did overhear Desmarais at last, and I learned that it was your /bridal night/.

What felt I then? The same tempestuous fury,--the same whirlwind and storm of heart that I had felt before, at the mere anticipation of such an event? No; I felt a bright ray of joy flash through me. Yes, joy; but it was that joy which a conqueror feels when he knows his mortal foe is in his power and when he dooms that enemy to death. "They shall perish, and on this night," I said inly. "I have sworn it; I swore to Isora that the bridal couch should be stained with blood, and I will keep the oath!" I approached the pair; they were discussing the means for obtaining the packet. Montreuil urged Desmarais to purloin it from the place where you had deposited it, and then to abscond; but to this plan Desmarais was vehemently opposed. He insisted that there would be no possible chance of his escape from a search so scrutinizing as that which would necessarily ensue, and he evidently resolved not /alone/ to incur the danger of the theft. "The Count," said he, "saw that I was present when he put away the packet. Suspicion will fall solely on me. Whither should I fly? No: I will serve you with my talents, but not with my life." "Wretch," said Montreuil, "if that packet is opened, thy life is already gone." "Yes," said Desmarais; "but we may yet purloin the papers, and throw the guilt upon some other quarter. What if I admit you when the Count is abroad? What if you steal the packet, and carry away other articles of more seeming value? What, too, if you wound me in the arm or the breast, and I coin some terrible tale of robbers, and of my resistance, could we not manage then to throw suspicion upon common housebreakers,--nay, could we not throw it upon

Oswald himself? Let us silence that traitor by death, and who shall contradict our tale? No danger shall attend this plan. I will give you the key of the escritoire: the theft will not be the work of a moment." Montreuil at first demurred to this proposal, but Desmarais was, I repeat, resolved not to incur the danger of the theft alone; the stake was great, and it was not in Montreuil's nature to shrink from peril, when once it became necessary to confront it. "Be it so," he said, at last, "though the scheme is full of difficulty and of danger: be it so. We have not a day to lose. To-morrow the Count will place the document in some place of greater safety, and unknown to us: the deed shall be done to-night. Procure the key of the escritoire; admit me this night; I will steal disguised into the chamber; I will commit the act from which you, who alone could commit it with safety, shrink. Instruct me exactly as to the place where the articles you speak of are placed. I will abstract them also. See that if the Count wake, he has no weapon at hand. Wound yourself, as you say, in some place not dangerous to life, and to-morrow, or within an hour after my escape, tell what tale you will. I will go, meanwhile, at once to Oswald; I will either bribe his silence--ay, and his immediate absence from England--or he shall die. A death that secures our own self-preservation is excusable in the reading of all law, divine or human." I heard, but they deemed me insensible: they had already begun to grow unheeding of my presence. Montreuil saw me, and his countenance grew soft. "I know all," I said, as I caught his eye which looked on me in pity, "I know all: they are married. Enough!--with my hope ceases my love: care not for me."

Montreuil embraced and spoke to me in kindness and in praise. He assured me that you had kept your wedding so close a secret that he knew it not, nor did even Desmarais, till the evening before,--till after he had proposed that I should visit Isora that very day. I know not, I care not, whether he was sincere in this. In whatever way one line in the dread scroll of his conduct be read, the scroll was written in guile, and in blood was it sealed. I appeared not to notice Montreuil or his accomplice any more. The latter left the house first. Montreuil stole forth, as he thought, unobserved; he was masked, and in complete disguise. I, too, went forth. I hastened to a shop where such things were procured; I purchased a mask and cloak similar to the priest's. I had heard Montreuil agree with Desmarais that the door of the house should be left ajar, in order to give greater facility to the escape of the former; I repaired to the house in time to see Montreuil enter it. A strange, sharp sort of cunning, which I had never known before, ran through the dark confusion of my mind. I waited for a minute, till it was likely that Montreuil had gained your chamber; I then pushed open the door, and ascended the stairs. I met no one; the moonlight fell around me, and its rays seemed to me like ghosts, pale and shrouded, and gazing upon me with wan and lustreless eyes. I know not how I found your chamber, but it was the only one I entered. I stood in the same room with Isora and yourself: ye lay in sleep; Isora's face--O God! I know no more--no more of that night of horror--save that I fled from the house reeking with blood,--a murderer,--and the murderer of Isora!

Then came a long, long dream. I was in a sea of blood,--blood-red was the sky, and one still, solitary star that gleamed far away with a sickly and wan light was the only spot, above and around, which was not of the same intolerable dye. And I thought my eyelids were cut off, as those of the Roman consul are said to have been, and I had nothing to shield my eyes from that crimson light, and the rolling waters of that unnatural sea. And the red air burned through my eyes into my brain, and then that also, methought, became blood; and all memory,--all images

of memory,--all idea,--wore a material shape and a material colour, and were blood too. Everything was unutterably silent, except when my own shrieks rang over the shoreless ocean, as I drifted on. At last I fixed my eyes--the eyes which I might never close--upon that pale and single star; and after I had gazed a little while, the star seemed to change slowly--slowly--until it grew like the pale face of that murdered girl, and then it vanished utterly, and /all/ was blood!

This vision was sometimes broken, sometimes varied by others, but it always returned; and when at last I completely woke from it, I was in Italy, in a convent. Montreuil had lost no time in removing me from England. But once, shortly after my recovery, for I was mad for many months, he visited me, and he saw what a wreck I had become. He pitied me; and when I told him I longed above all things for liberty--for the green earth and the fresh air, and a removal from that gloomy abode--he opened the convent gates and blessed me, and bade me go forth. "All I require of you," said he, "is a promise. If it be understood that you live, you will be persecuted by inquiries and questions which will terminate in a conviction of your crime: let it therefore be reported in England that you are dead. Consent to the report, and promise never to quit Italy nor to see Morton Devereux."

I promised; and that promise I have kept: but I promised not that I would never reveal to you, in writing, the black tale which I have now recorded. May it reach you! There is one in this vicinity who has undertaken to bear it to you: he says he has known misery; and when he said so, his voice sounded in my ear like yours; and I looked upon him, and thought his features were cast somewhat in the same mould as your own; so I have trusted him. I have now told all. I have wrenched the secret from my heart in agony and with fear. I have told all: though things which I believe are fiends have started forth from the grim walls around to forbid it; though dark wings have swept by me, and talons, as of a bird, have attempted to tear away the paper on which I write; though eyes, whose light was never drunk from earth, have glared on me; and mocking voices and horrible laughter have made my flesh creep, and thrilled through the marrow of my bones,--I have told all; I have finished my last labour in this world, and I will now lie down and die.

AUBREY DEVEREUX.

The paper dropped from my hands. Whatever I had felt in reading it, I had not flinched once from the task. From the first word even to the last, I had gone through the dreadful tale, nor uttered a syllable, nor moved a limb. And now as I rose, though I had found the being who to me had withered this world into one impassable desert; though I had found the unrelenting foe and the escaped murderer of Isora, the object of the execration and vindictiveness of years,--not one single throb of wrath, not one single sentiment of vengeance, was in my breast. I passed at once to the bedside of my brother: he was awake, but still and calm,--the calm and stillness of exhausted nature. I knelt down quietly beside him. I took his hand, and I shrank not from the touch, though by that hand the only woman I ever loved had perished.

"Look up, Aubrey!" said I, struggling with tears which, despite of my most earnest effort, came over me; "look up: all is forgiven. Who on earth shall withhold pardon from a crime which on earth has been so awfully punished? Look up, Aubrey; I am your brother, and I forgive you. You are right: my childhood was harsh and fierce; and had you

feared me less you might have confided in me, and you would not have sinned and suffered as you have done now. Fear me no longer. Look up, Aubrey, it is Morton who calls you. Why do you not speak? My brother, my brother,--a word, a single word, I implore you."

For one moment did Aubrey raise his eyes, one moment did he meet mine. His lips quivered wildly: I heard the death-rattle; he sank back, and his hand dropped from my clasp. My words had snapped asunder the last chord of life. Merciful Heaven! I thank Thee that those words were the words of pardon!

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE HISTORY MAKES A GREAT STRIDE TOWARDS THE FINAL CATASTROPHE.--THE RETURN TO ENGLAND, AND THE VISIT TO A DEVOTEE.

AT night, and in the thrilling forms of the Catholic ritual, was Aubrey Devereux consigned to earth. After that ceremony I could linger no longer in the vicinity of the hermitage. I took leave of the Abbot and richly endowed his convent in return for the protection it had afforded to the anchorite, and the Masses which had been said for his soul. Before I left Anselmo, I questioned him if any friend to the Hermit had ever, during his seclusion, held any communication with the Abbot respecting him. Anselmo, after a little hesitation, confessed that a man, a Frenchman, seemingly of no high rank, had several times visited the convent, as if to scrutinize the habits and life of the anchorite; he had declared himself commissioned by the Hermit's relations to make inquiry of him from time to time; but he had given the Abbot no clew to discover himself, though Anselmo had especially hinted at the expediency of being acquainted with some quarter to which he could direct any information of change in the Hermit's habits or health. This man had been last at the convent about two months before the present date; but one of the brothers declared that he had seen him in the vicinity of the well on the very day on which the Hermit died. The description of this stranger was essentially different from that which would have been given of Montreuil, but I imagined that if not the Abbe himself, the stranger was one in his confidence or his employ.

I now repaired to Rome, where I made the most extensive though guarded inquiries after Montreuil, and at length I learned that he was lying concealed, or rather unnoticed, in England, under a disguised name; having, by friends or by money, obtained therein a tacit connivance, though not an open pardon. No sooner did I learn this intelligence, than I resolved forthwith to depart to that country. I crossed the Alps, traversed France, and took ship at Calais for Dover.

Behold me, then, upon the swift seas bent upon a double purpose,--reconciliation with a brother whom I had wronged, and vengeance,--no, not vengeance, but /justice/ against the criminal I had discovered. No! it was not revenge: it was no infuriate, no unholy desire of inflicting punishment upon a personal foe which possessed me; it was a steady, calm, unwavering resolution, to obtain justice against the profound and systematized guilt of a villain who had been the bane of all who had come within his contact, that nerved my arm and engrossed my heart. Bear witness, Heaven, I am not a vindictive man! I have, it is true, been extreme in hatred as in love; but I have ever had the power to control myself from yielding to its impulse. When the full

persuasion of Gerald's crime reigned within me, I had thrall'd my emotion; I had curbed it within the circle of my own heart, though there, thus pent and self-consuming, it was an agony and a torture; I had resisted the voice of that blood which cried from the earth against a murderer, and which had consigned the solemn charge of justice to my hands. Year after year I had nursed an unappeas'd desire; nor ever when it stung the most, suffered it to become an actual revenge. I had knelt in tears and in softness by Aubrey's bed; I had poured forth my pardon over him; I had felt, while I did so,--no, not so much sternness as would have slain a worm. By his hand had the murderous stroke been dealt; on his soul was the crimson stain of that blood which had flowed through the veins of the gentlest and the most innocent of God's creatures; and yet the blow was unavenged and the crime forgiven. For him there was a palliative, or even a gloomy but an unanswerable excuse. In the confession which had so terribly solved the mystery of my life, the seeds of that curse, which had grown at last into MADNESS, might be discovered even in the first dawn of Aubrey's existence. The latent poison might be detected in the morbid fever of his young devotion, in his jealous cravings of affection, in the first flush of his ill-omened love,--even before rivalry and wrath began. Then, too, his guilt had not been regularly organized into one cold and deliberate system: it broke forth in impetuous starts, in frantic paroxysms; it was often wrestled with, though by a feeble mind; it was often conquered by a tender though a fitful temper; it might not have rushed into the last and most awful crime, but for the damning instigation and the atrocious craft of one, who (Aubrey rightly said) could wield and mould the unhappy victim at his will. Might not, did I say? Nay, but for Montreuil's accursed influence, had I not Aubrey's own word that that crime never /would have/ been committed? He had resolved to stifle his love,--his heart had already melted to Isora and to me,--he had already tasted the sweets of a virtuous resolution, and conquered the first bitterness of opposition to his passion. Why should not the resolution thus auspiciously begun have been mellowed into effect? Why should not the grateful and awful remembrance of the crime he had escaped continue to preserve him from meditating crime anew? And (oh, thought, which, while I now write, steals over me and brings with it an unutterable horde of emotions!) but for that all-tainting, all-withering influence, Aubrey's soul might at this moment have been pure from murder and Isora--the living Isora--by my side!

What wonder, as these thoughts came over me, that sense, feeling, reason, gradually shrank and hardened into one stern resolve? I looked as from a height over the whole conduct of Montreuil. I saw him in our early infancy with no definite motive (beyond the general policy of intrigue), no fixed design, which might somewhat have lessened the callousness of the crime, not only fomenting dissensions in the hearts of brothers; not only turning the season of warm affections, and yet of unopened passion, into strife and rancour, but seizing upon the inherent and reigning vice of our bosoms, which he should have seized to crush, in order only by that master-vice to weave our characters, and sway our conduct to his will, whenever a cool-blooded and merciless policy required us to be of that will the minions and the tools. Thus had he taken hold of the diseased jealousy of Aubrey, and by that handle, joined to the latent spring of superstition, guided him on his wretched course of misery and guilt. Thus, by a moral irresolution in Gerald had he bowed him also to his purposes, and by an infantine animosity between that brother and myself, held us both in a state of mutual hatred which I shuddered to recall. Readily could I now perceive that my charges or my suspicions against Gerald, which, in ordinary circumstances, he might

have dispassionately come forward to disprove, had been represented to him by Montreuil in the light of groundless and wilful insults; and thus he had been led to scorn that full and cool explanation which, if it had not elucidated the mystery of my afflictions, would have removed the false suspicion of guilt from himself and the real guilt of wrath and animosity from me.

The crime of the forged will, and the outrage to the dead and to myself, was a link in his woven guilt which I regarded the least. I looked rather to the black and the consummate craft by which Aubrey had been implicated in that sin; and my indignation became mixed with horror when I saw Montreuil working to that end of fraud by the instigation not only of a guilty and unlawful passion, but of the yet more unnatural and terrific engine of /frenzy/,--of a maniac's despair. Over the peace, the happiness, the honour, the virtue of a whole family, through fraud and through blood, this priest had marched onward to the goal of his icy and heartless ambition, unrelenting and unrepenting; "but not," I said, as I clenched my hand till the nails met in the flesh, "not forever unchecked and unrequited!"

But in what manner was justice to be obtained? A public court of law? What! drag forward the deep dishonour of my house, the gloomy and convulsive history of my departed brother, his crime and his insanity? What! bring that history, connected as it was with the fate of Isora, before the curious and the insolent gaze of the babbling world? Bare that awful record to the jests, to the scrutiny, the marvel and the pity, of that most coarse of all tribunals,--an English court of law? and that most torturing of all exposures,--the vulgar comments of an English public? Could I do this? Yea, in the sternness of my soul, I felt that I could submit even to that humiliation, if no other way presented itself by which I could arrive at justice. /Was/ there no other way?--at that question conjecture paused: I formed no scheme, or rather, I formed a hundred and rejected them all; my mind settled, at last, into an indistinct, unquestioned, but prophetic resolution, that, whenever my path crossed Montreuil's, it should be to his destruction. I asked not how, nor when, the blow was to be dealt; I felt only a solemn and exultant certainty that, whether it borrowed the sword of the law, or the weapon of private justice, /mine/ should be the hand which brought retribution to the ashes of the dead and the agony of the survivor.

So soon as my mind had subsided into this determination, I suffered my thoughts to dwell upon subjects less sternly agitating. Fondly did I look forward to a meeting with Gerald, and a reconciliation of all our early and most frivolous disputes. As an atonement for the injustice my suspicions had done him, I resolved not to reclaim my inheritance. My fortune was already ample; and all that I cared to possess of the hereditary estates were the ruins of the old house and the cosses of the surrounding park: these Gerald would in all likelihood easily yield to me; and with the natural sanguineness of my temperament, I already planned the reconstruction of the ancient building, and the method of that solitary life in which I resolved that the remainder of my years should be spent.

Turning from this train of thought, I recurred to the mysterious and sudden disappearance of Oswald: /that/ I was now easily able to account for. There could be no doubt but that Montreuil had (immediately after the murder), as he declared he would, induced Oswald to quit England, and preserve silence, either by bribery or by threats. And when I

recalled the impression which the man had made upon me,--an impression certainly not favourable to the elevation or the rigid honesty of his mind,--I could not but imagine that one or the other of these means Montreuil found far from difficult of success. The delirious fever into which the wounds and the scene of that night had thrown me, and the long interval that consequently elapsed before inquiry was directed to Oswald, gave him every opportunity and indulgence in absenting himself from the country, and it was not improbable that he had accompanied Aubrey to Italy.

Here I paused, in deep acknowledgment of the truth of Aubrey's assertion, that "under similar circumstances I might perhaps have been equally guilty." My passions had indeed been "intense and fierce as his own;" and there was a dread coincidence in the state of mind into which each of us had been thrown by the event of that night, which made the epoch of a desolated existence to both of us; if mine had been but a passing delirium, and his a confirmed and lasting disease of the intellect, the causes of our malady had been widely different. He had been the criminal; I, only the sufferer.

Thus, as I leaned over the deck and the waves bore me homeward, after so many years and vicissitudes, did the shadows of thought and memory flit across me. How seemingly apart, yet how closely linked, had been the great events in my wandering and wild life! My early acquaintance with Bolingbroke, whom for more than nine years I had not seen, and who, at a superficial glance, would seem to have exercised influence over my public rather than my private life,--how secretly, yet how powerfully, had that circumstance led even to the very thoughts which now possessed me, and to the very object on which I was now bound. But for that circumstance I might not have learned of the retreat of Don Diego d'Alvarez in his last illness; I might never have renewed my love to Isora; and whatever had been her fate, destitution and poverty would have been a less misfortune than her union with me. But for my friendship for Bolingbroke, I might not have visited France, nor gained the favour of the Regent, nor the ill offices of Dubois, nor the protection and kindness of the Czar. I might never have been ambassador at the court of -----, nor met with Bezoni, nor sought an asylum for a spirit sated with pomp and thirsting for truth, at the foot of the Apennines, nor read that history (which, indeed, might then never have occurred) that now rankled at my heart, urging my movements and colouring my desires. Thus, by the finest but the strongest meshes had the thread of my political honours been woven with that of my private afflictions. And thus, even at the licentious festivals of the Regent of France, or the lifeless parade of the court of -----, the dark stream of events had flowed onward beneath my feet, bearing me insensibly to that very spot of time from which I now surveyed the past and looked upon the mist and shadows of the future.

Adverse winds made the little voyage across the Channel a business of four days. On the evening of the last we landed at Dover. Within thirty miles of that town was my mother's retreat; and I resolved, before I sought a reconciliation with Gerald or justice against Montreuil, to visit her seclusion. Accordingly, the next day I repaired to her abode.

What a contrast is there between the lives of human beings! Considering the beginning and the end of all mortal careers are the same, how wonderfully is the interval varied! Some, the weeds of the world, dashed from shore to shore,--all vicissitude, enterprise, strife,

disquiet; others, the world's lichen, rooted to some peaceful rock, growing, flourishing, withering on the same spot,--scarce a feeling expressed, scarce a sentiment called forth, scarce a tithe of the properties of their very nature expanded into action.

There was an air of quiet and stillness in the red quadrangular building, as my carriage stopped at its porch, which struck upon me, like a breathing reproach to those who sought the abode of peace with feelings opposed to the spirit of the place. A small projecting porch was covered with ivy, and thence issued an aged portress in answer to my summons.

"The Countess Devereux," said she, "is now the superior of this society [convent they called it not], and rarely admits any stranger."

I gave in my claim to admission, and was ushered into a small parlour: all there, too, was still,--the brown oak wainscoting, the huge chairs, the few antique portraits, the /uninhabited/ aspect of the chamber,--all were silently eloquent of quietude, but a quietude comfortless and sombre. At length my mother appeared. I sprang forward: my childhood was before me,--years, care, change were forgotten,--I was a boy again,--I sprang forward, and was in my mother's embrace! It was long before, recovering myself, I noted how lifeless and chill was that embrace, but I did so at last, and my enthusiasm withered at once.

We sat down together, and conversed long and uninterruptedly, but our conversation was like that of acquaintances, not the fondest and closest of all relations (for I need scarcely add that I told her not of my meeting with Aubrey, nor undeceived her with respect to the date of his death). Every monastic recluse that I had hitherto seen, even in the most seeming content with retirement, had loved to converse of the exterior world, and had betrayed an interest in its events: for my mother only, worldly objects and interests seemed utterly dead. She expressed little surprise to see me,--little surprise at my alteration; she only said that my mien was improved, and that I reminded her of my father: she testified no anxiety to hear of my travels or my adventures; she testified even no willingness to speak of herself; she described to me the life of one day, and then said that the history of ten years was told. A close cap confined all the locks for whose rich luxuriance and golden hue she had once been noted,--for here they were not the victim of a vow, as in a nunnery they would have been,--and her dress was plain, simple, and unadorned. Save these alterations of attire, none were visible in her exterior: the torpor of her life seemed to have paralyzed even time; the bloom yet dwelt in her unwrinkled cheek; the mouth had not fallen; the faultless features were faultless still. But there was a deeper stillness than ever breathing through this frame: it was as if the soul had been lulled to sleep; her mien was lifeless; her voice was lifeless; her gesture was lifeless; the impression she produced was like that of entering some chamber which has not been entered before for a century. She consented to my request to stay with her all the day: a bed was prepared for me; and at sunrise the next morning I was folded once more in the chilling mechanism of her embrace, and dismissed on my journey to the metropolis.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RETREAT OF A CELEBRATED MAN, AND A VISIT TO A GREAT POET.

I ARRIVED in town, and drove at once to Gerald's house. It was not difficult to find it, for in my young day it had been the residence of the Duke of -----; and wealthy as I knew was the owner of the Devereux lands, I was somewhat startled at the extent and the magnificence of his palace. To my inexpressible disappointment, I found that Gerald had left London a day or two before my arrival on a visit to a nobleman nearly connected with our family, and residing in the same county as that in which Devereux Court was situated. Since the fire, which had destroyed all of the old house but the one tower which I had considered as peculiarly my own, Gerald, I heard, had always, in visiting his estates, taken up his abode at the mansion of one or other of his neighbours; and to Lord -----'s house I now resolved to repair. My journey was delayed for a day or two, by accidentally seeing at the door of the hotel, to which I drove from Gerald's house, the favourite servant of Lord Bolingbroke.

This circumstance revived in me, at once, all my attachment to that personage, and hearing he was at his country house, within a few miles from town, I resolved the next morning to visit him. It was not only that I contemplated with an eager yet a melancholy interest an interview with one whose blazing career I had long watched, and whose letters (for during the years we had been parted he wrote to me often) seemed to testify the same satiety of the triumphs and gauds of ambition which had brought something of wisdom to myself; it was not only that I wished to commune with that Bolingbroke in retirement whom I had known the oracle of statesmen and the pride of courts; nor even that I loved the man, and was eager once more to embrace him. A fiercer and more active motive urged me to visit one whose knowledge of all men and application of their various utilities were so remarkable, and who even in his present peace and retirement would not improbably be acquainted with the abode of that unquiet and plotting ecclesiastic whom I now panted to discover, and whom Bolingbroke had of old often guided or employed.

When my carriage stopped at the statesman's door, I was informed that Lord Bolingbroke was at his farm. Farm! how oddly did that word sound in my ear, coupled as it was with the name of one so brilliant and so restless!

I asked the servant to direct me where I should find him, and, following the directions, I proceeded to the search alone. It was a day towards the close of autumn, bright, soft, clear, and calm as the decline of a vigorous and genial age. I walked slowly through a field robbed of its golden grain, and as I entered another I saw the object of my search. He had seemingly just given orders to a person in a labourer's dress, who was quitting him, and with downcast eyes he was approaching towards me. I noted how slow and even was the pace which, once stately, yet rapid and irregular, had betrayed the haughty but wild character of his mind. He paused often, as if in thought, and I observed that once he stopped longer than usual, and seemed to gaze wistfully on the ground. Afterwards (when I had joined him) we passed that spot, and I remarked, with a secret smile, that it contained one of those little mounds in which that busy and herded tribe of the insect race, which have been held out to man's social state at once as a mockery and a model, held their populous home. There seemed a latent moral in the pause and watch of the disappointed statesman by that mound, which afforded a clew to the nature of his reflections.

He did not see me till I was close before him, and had called him by his

name, nor did he at first recognize me, for my garb was foreign, and my upper lip unshaven; and, as I said before, years had strangely altered me; but when he did, he testified all the cordiality I had anticipated. I linked my arm in his, and we walked to and fro for hours, talking of all that had passed since and before our parting, and feeling our hearts warm to each other as we talked.

"The last time I saw you," said he, "how widely did our hopes and objects differ! Yours from my own: you seemingly had the vantage-ground, but it was an artificial eminence, and my level state, though it appeared less tempting, was more secure. I had just been disgraced by a misguided and ungrateful prince. I had already gone into a retirement where my only honours were proportioned to my fortitude in bearing condemnation, and my only flatterer was the hope of finding a companion and a Mentor in myself. You, my friend, parted with life before you; and you only relinquished the pursuit of Fortune at one court, to meet her advances at another. Nearly ten years have flown since that time: my situation is but little changed; I am returned, it is true, to my native soil, but not to a soil more indulgent to ambition and exertion than the scene of my exile. My sphere of action is still shut from me: /my mind is still banished/.^{*} You return young in years, but full of successes. Have they brought you happiness, Devereux? or have you yet a temper to envy my content?"

^{*} I need scarcely remind the reader that Lord Bolingbroke, though he had received a full pardon, was forbidden to resume his seat in the House of Lords.--ED.

"Alas!" said I, "who can bear too close a search beneath the mask and robe? Talk not of me now. It is ungracious for the fortunate to repine; and I reserve whatever may disquiet me within for your future consolation and advice. At present speak to me of yourself: you are happy, then?"

"I am!" said Bolingbroke, emphatically. "Life seems to me to possess two treasures: one glittering and precarious; the other of less rich a show, but of a more solid value. The one is Power, the other Virtue; and there is this main difference between the two,--Power is intrusted to us as a loan ever required again, and with a terrible arrear of interest; Virtue obtained by us as a /boon/ which we can only lose through our own folly, when once it is acquired. In my youth I was caught by the former; hence my errors and my misfortunes! In my declining years I have sought the latter; hence my palliatives and my consolation. But you have not seen my home, and /all/ its attractions," added Bolingbroke, with a smile which reminded me of his former self. "I will show them to you." And we turned our steps to the house.

As we walked thither I wondered to find how little melancholy was the change Bolingbroke had undergone. Ten years, which bring man from his prime to his decay, had indeed left their trace upon his stately form, and the still unrivalled beauty of his noble features; but the manner gained all that the form had lost. In his days of more noisy greatness, there had been something artificial and unquiet in the sparkling alternations he had loved to adopt. He had been too fond of changing wisdom by a quick turn into wit,--too fond of the affectation of bordering the serious with the gay, business with pleasure. If this had not taken from the polish of his manner, it had diminished its dignity

and given it the air of being assumed and insincere. Now all was quiet, earnest, and impressive; there was tenderness even in what was melancholy: and if there yet lingered the affectation of blending the classic character with his own, the character was more noble and the affectation more unseen. But this manner was only the faint mirror of a mind which, retaining much of its former mould, had been embellished and exalted by adversity, and which if it banished not its former faculties, had acquired a thousand new virtues to redeem them.

"You see," said my companion, pointing to the walls of the hall, which we had now entered, "the subject which at present occupies the greater part of my attention. I am meditating how to make the hall most illustrative of its owner's pursuits. You see the desire of improving, of creating, and of associating the improvement and the creation with ourselves, follows us banished men even to our seclusion. I think of having those walls painted with the implements of husbandry, and through pictures of spades and ploughshares to express my employments and testify my content in them."

"Cincinnatus is a better model than Aristippus: confess it," said I, smiling. "But if the senators come hither to summon you to power, will you resemble the Roman, not only in being found at your plough, but in your reluctance to leave it, and your eagerness to return?"

"What shall I say to you?" replied Bolingbroke. "Will you play the cynic if I answer /no/? We /should not/ boast of despising power, when of use to others, but of being contented to live without it. This is the end of my philosophy! But let me present you to one whom I value more now than I valued power at any time."

As he said this, Bolingbroke threw open the door of an apartment, and introduced me to a lady with whom he had found that domestic happiness denied him in his first marriage. The niece of Madame de Maintenon, this most charming woman possessed all her aunt's wit, and far more than all her aunt's beauty.* She was in weak health; but her vivacity was extreme, and her conversation just what should be the conversation of a woman who shines without striving for it.

* I am not ashamed to say to you that I admire her more every hour of my life.--Letter from Lord Bolingbroke to Swift.

Bolingbroke loved her to the last; and perhaps it is just to a man so celebrated for his gallantries to add that this beautiful and accomplished woman seems to have admired and esteemed as much as she loved him.--ED.

The business on which I was bound only allowed me to stay two days with Bolingbroke, and this I stated at first, lest he should have dragged me over his farm.

"Well," said my host, after vainly endeavouring to induce me to promise a longer stay, "if you can only give us two days, I must write and excuse myself to a great man with whom I was to dine to-day. Yet, if it were not so inhospitable, I should like much to carry you with me to his house; for I own that I wish you to see my companions, and to learn that if I still consult the oracles, they are less for the predictions of fortune than as the inspirations of the god."

"Ah!" said Lady Bolingbroke, who spoke in French, "I know whom you allude to. Give him my homage, and assure him, when he next visits us, we will appoint six /dames du palais/ to receive and pet him."

Upon this I insisted upon accompanying Bolingbroke to the house of so fortunate a being, and he consented to my wish with feigned reluctance, but evident pleasure.

"And who," said I to Lady Bolingbroke, "is the happy object of so much respect?"

Lady Bolingbroke answered, laughing, that nothing was so pleasant as suspense, and that it would be cruel in her to deprive me of it; and we conversed with so much zest that it was not till Bolingbroke had left the room for some moments that I observed he was not present. I took the opportunity to remark that I was rejoiced to find him so happy and with such just cause for happiness.

"He is happy, though at times he is restless. How, chained to this oar, can he be otherwise?" answered Lady Bolingbroke, with a sigh; "but his friends," she added, "who most enjoy his retirement, must yet lament it. His genius is not wasted here, it is true: where could it be wasted? But who does not feel that it is employed in too confined a sphere? And yet--" and I saw a tear start to her eye--"I, at least, ought not to repine. I should lose the best part of my happiness if there was nothing I could console him for."

"Believe me," said I, "I have known Bolingbroke in the zenith of his success; but never knew him so worthy of congratulation as now!"

"Is that flattery to him or to me?" said Lady Bolingbroke, smiling archly, for her smiles were quick successors to her tears.

"/Detur digniori!/" answered I; "but you must allow that, though it is a fine thing to have all that the world can give, it is still better to gain something that the world cannot take away?"

"Are you also a philosopher?" cried Lady Bolingbroke, gayly. "Ah, poor me! In my youth, my portion was the cloister;* in my later years I am banished to /the porch!/ You have no conception, Monsieur Devereux, what wise faces and profound maxims we have here, especially as all who come to visit my lord think it necessary to quote Tully, and talk of solitude as if it were a heaven! /Les pauvres bons gens!/ they seem a little surprised when Henry receives them smilingly, begs them to construe the Latin, gives them good wine, and sends them back to London with faces half the length they were on their arrival. /Mais voici, Monsieur, le fermier philosophe!"

* She was brought up at St. Cyr.--ED.

And Bolingbroke entering, I took my leave of this lively and interesting lady and entered his carriage.

As soon as we were seated, he pressed me for my reasons for refusing to prolong my visit. As I thought they would be more opportune after the excursion of the day was over, and as, in truth, I was not eager to

relate them, I begged to defer the narration till our return to his house at night, and then I directed the conversation into a new channel.

"My chief companion," said Bolingbroke, after describing to me his course of life, "is the man you are about to visit. He has his frailties and infirmities,--and in saying that, I only imply that he is human,--but he is wise, reflective, generous, and affectionate; add these qualities to a dazzling wit, and a genius deep, if not sublime, and what wonder that we forget something of vanity and something of fretfulness,--effects rather of the frame than of the mind. The wonder only is that, with a body the victim to every disease, crippled and imbecile from the cradle, his frailties should not be more numerous, and his care, his thoughts, and attentions not wholly limited to his own complaints. For the sickly are almost of necessity selfish; and that mind must have a vast share of benevolence which can always retain the softness of charity and love for others, when pain and disease constitute the morbid links that perpetually bind it to self. If this great character is my chief companion, my chief correspondent is not less distinguished; in a word, no longer to keep you in suspense, Pope is my companion and Swift my correspondent."

"You are fortunate, but so also are they. Your letter informed me of Swift's honourable exile in Ireland: how does he bear it?"

"Too feelingly: his disappointments turn his blood to acid. He said, characteristically enough, in one of his letters, that in fishing once when he was a little boy, he felt a great fish at the end of his line, which he drew up almost to the ground, but it dropped in, and the disappointment, he adds, vexes him to this day, and he believes it to be the type of all his future disappointments:* it is wonderful how reluctantly a very active mind sinks into rest."

* In this letter Swift adds, "I should be ashamed to say this if you [Lord Bolingbroke] had not a spirit fitter to bear your own misfortunes than I have to think of them;" and this is true. Nothing can be more striking, or more honourable to Lord Bolingbroke, than the contrast between Swift's letters and that nobleman's upon the subject of their mutual disappointments. I especially note the contrast, because it has been so grievously the cant of Lord Bolingbroke's decriers to represent his affection for retirement as hollow, and his resignation in adversity as a boast rather than a fact. Now I will challenge any one /thoroughly/ and dispassionately to examine what is left to us of the life of this great man, and after having done so, to select from all modern history an example of one who, in the prime of life and height of ambition, ever passed from a very active and exciting career into retirement and disgrace, and bore the change--long, bitter, and permanent as it was--with a greater and more thoroughly sustained magnanimity than did Lord Bolingbroke. He has been reproached for taking part in political contests in the midst of his praises and "affected enjoyment" of retirement; and this, made matter of reproach, is exactly the subject on which he seems to me the /most/ worthy of praise. For, putting aside all motives for action, on the purity of which men are generally incredulous, as a hatred to ill government (an antipathy wonderfully strong in wise men, and wonderfully weak in fools), the honest impulse of the citizen, and the better and higher sentiment, to which Bolingbroke appeared peculiarly alive, of affection to mankind,--putting these utterly aside,--it must be owned that resignation is the more noble in proportion as it is the less passive;

that retirement is only a morbid selfishness if it prohibit exertions for others; that it is only really dignified and noble when it is the shade whence issue the oracles that are to instruct mankind; and that retirement of this nature is the sole seclusion which a good and wise man will covet or commend. The very philosophy which makes such a man seek the /quiet/, makes him eschew the /inutility/ of the hermitage. Very little praiseworthy to me would have seemed Lord Bolingbroke among his haymakers and ploughmen, if among haymakers and ploughmen he had looked with an indifferent eye upon a profligate Minister and a venal parliament; very little interest in my eyes would have attached itself to his beans and vetches, had beans and vetches caused him to forget that if he was happier in a farm, he could be more useful in a senate, and made him forego, in the sphere of a bailiff, all care for re-entering that of a legislator.--ED.

"Yet why should retirement be rest? Do you recollect in the first conversation we ever had together, we talked of Cowley? Do you recollect how justly, and even sublimely, he has said, 'Cogitation is that which distinguishes the solitude of a God from that of a wild beast'?"

"It is finely said," answered Bolingbroke; "but Swift was born not for cogitation but action; for turbulent times, not for calm. He ceases to be great directly he is still; and his bitterness at every vexation is so great that I have often thought, in listening to him, of the Abbe de Cyran, who, attempting to throw nutshells out of the bars of his window, and constantly failing in the attempt, exclaimed in a paroxysm of rage, 'Thus does Providence delight in frustrating my designs!'"

"But you are fallen from a far greater height of hope than Swift could ever have attained: you bear this change well, but not /I hope/ without a struggle."

"You are right,--/not/ without a struggle; while corruption thrives, I will not be silent; while bad men govern, I will not be still."

In conversation of this sort passed the time, till we arrived at Pope's villa.

We found the poet in his study,--indued, as some of his pictures represent him, in a long gown and a velvet cap. He received Bolingbroke with great tenderness, and being, as he said, in robuster health than he had enjoyed for months, he insisted on carrying us to his grotto. I know nothing more common to poets than a pride in what belongs to their houses; and perhaps to a man not ill-natured, there are few things more pleasant than indulging the little weaknesses of those we admire. We sat down in a small temple made entirely of shells; and whether it was that the Creative Genius gave an undue charm to the place, I know not: but as the murmur of a rill, glassy as the Blandusian fountain, was caught, and re-given from side to side by a perpetual echo, and through an arcade of trees, whose leaves, ever and anon, fell startingly to the ground beneath the light touch of the autumn air; as you saw the sails on the river pass and vanish, like the cares which breathe over the smooth glass of wisdom, but may not linger to dim it, it was not difficult to invest the place, humble as it was, with a classic interest, or to recall the loved retreats of the Roman bards, without smiling too fastidiously at the contrast.

"Sweet Echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen,
Within thy airy shell,
By slow Meander's margin green,
Or by the violet embroidered vale
Where the lovelorn nightingale
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well;
Sweet Echo, dost thou shun those haunts of yore,
And in the dim caves of a northern shore
Delight to dwell!"

"Let the compliment to you, Pope," said Bolingbroke, "atone for the profanation of weaving three wretched lines of mine with those most musical notes of Milton."

"Ah!" said Pope, "would that you could give me a fitting inscription for my fount and grotto! The only one I can remember is hackneyed, and yet it has spoilt me, I fear, for all others."

"Hujus Nympha loci, sacri custodia fontis
Dormio dum blandae sentio murmur aquae;
Parce meum, quisquis tanges cava marmora, somnum
Rumpere; sive bibas, sive lavere, tace."*

* Thus very inadequately translated by Pope (see his Letter to Edward Blount, Esq., descriptive of his grotto):--

"Nymph of the grot, these sacred springs I keep,
And to the murmur of these waters sleep:
Ah, spare my slumbers; gently tread the cave,
And drink in silence, or in silence lave."

It is, however, quite impossible to convey to an unlearned reader the exquisite and spirit-like beauty of the Latin verses.--ED.

"We cannot hope to match it," said Bolingbroke, "though you know I value myself on these things. But tell me your news of Gay: is he growing wiser?"

"Not a whit; he is forever a dupe to the /spes credula/; always talking of buying an annuity, that he may be independent, and always spending as fast as he earns, that he may appear munificent."

"Poor Gay! but he is a common example of the improvidence of his tribe, while you are an exception. Yet mark, Devereux, the inconsistency of Pope's thrift and carelessness: he sends a parcel of fruit to some ladies with this note, 'Take care of the papers that wrap the apples, and return them safely; they are the only copies I have of one part of the Iliad.' Thus, you see, our economist saves his paper, and hazards his epic!"

Pope, who is always flattered by an allusion to his negligence of fame, smiled slightly and answered, "What man, alas, ever profits by the lessons of his friends? How many exact rules has our good Dean of St. Patrick laid down for both of us; how angrily still does he chide us for

our want of prudence and our love of good living! I intend, in answer to his charges on the latter score, though I vouch, as I well may, for our temperance, to give him the reply of the sage to the foolish courtier--"

"What was that?" asked Bolingbroke.

"Why, the courtier saw the sage picking out the best dishes at table. 'How,' said he with a sneer, 'are sages such epicures?'--'Do you think, Sir,' replied the wise man, reaching over the table to help himself, 'do you think, Sir, that the Creator made the good things of this world only for fools?'"

"How the Dean will pish and pull his wig when he reads your illustration," said Bolingbroke, laughing. "We shall never agree in our reasonings on that part of philosophy. Swift loves to go out of his way to find privation or distress, and has no notion of Epicurean wisdom; for my part, I think the use of knowledge is to make us happier. I would compare the mind to the beautiful statue of Love by Praxiteles. When its eyes were bandaged the countenance seemed grave and sad, but the moment you removed the bandage the most serene and enchanting smile diffused itself over the whole face."

So passed the morning till the hour of dinner, and this repast was served with an elegance and luxury which the sons of Apollo seldom command.* As the evening closed, our conversation fell upon friendship, and the increasing disposition towards it which comes with increasing years. "Whilst my mind," said Bolingbroke, "shrinks more and more from the world, and feels in its independence less yearning to external objects, the ideas of friendship return oftener,--they busy me, they warm me more. Is it that we grow more tender as the moment of our great separation approaches? or is it that they who are to live together in another state (for friendship exists not but for the good) begin to feel more strongly that divine sympathy which is to be the great bond of their future society?"**

* Pope seems to have been rather capricious in this respect; but in general he must be considered open to the sarcasm of displaying the bounteous host to those who did not want a dinner, and the niggard to those who did.--ED.

** This beautiful sentiment is to be found, with very slight alteration, in a letter from Bolingbroke to Swift.--ED.

While Bolingbroke was thus speaking, and Pope listened with all the love and reverence which he evidently bore to his friend stamped upon his worn but expressive countenance, I inly said, "Surely, the love between minds like these should live and last without the changes that ordinary affections feel! Who would not mourn for the strength of all human ties, if hereafter these are broken, and asperity succeed to friendship, or aversion to esteem? //, a wanderer, without heir to my memory and wealth, shall pass away, and my hasty and unmellowed fame will moulder with my clay; but will the names of those whom I now behold ever fall languidly on the ears of a future race, and will there not forever be some sympathy with their friendship, softer and warmer than admiration for their fame?"

We left our celebrated host about two hours before midnight, and returned to Dawley.

On our road thither I questioned Bolingbroke respecting Montreuil, and I found that, as I had surmised, he was able to give me some information of that arch-schemer. Gerald's money and hereditary influence had procured tacit connivance at the Jesuit's residence in England, and Montreuil had for some years led a quiet and unoffending life in close retirement. "Lately, however," said Bolingbroke, "I have learned that the old spirit has revived, and I accidentally heard three days ago, when conversing with one well informed on state matters, that this most pure administration has discovered some plot or plots with which Montreuil is connected; I believe he will be apprehended in a few days."

"And where lurks he?"

"He was, I heard, last seen in the neighbourhood of your brother's property at Devereux Court, and I imagine it probable that he is still in that neighbourhood."

This intelligence made me resolve to leave Dawley even earlier than I had intended, and I signified to Lord Bolingbroke my intention of quitting him by sunrise the next morning. He endeavoured in vain to combat my resolution. I was too fearful lest Montreuil, hearing of his danger from the state, might baffle my vengeance by seeking some impenetrable asylum, to wish to subject my meeting with him and with Gerald, whose co-operation I desired, to any unnecessary delay. I took leave of my host therefore that night, and ordered my carriage to be in readiness by the first dawn of morning.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLOT APPROACHES ITS DENOUEMENT.

ALTHOUGH the details of my last chapter have somewhat retarded the progress of that /denouement/ with which this volume is destined to close, yet I do not think the destined reader will regret lingering over a scene in which, after years of restless enterprise and exile, he beholds the asylum which fortune had prepared for the most extraordinary character with which I have adorned these pages.

It was before daybreak that I commenced my journey. The shutters of the house were as yet closed; the gray mists rising slowly from the earth, and the cattle couched beneath the trees, the cold but breezeless freshness of the morning, the silence of the unawakened birds, all gave an inexpressible stillness and quiet to the scene. The horses slowly ascended a little eminence, and I looked from the window of the carriage on the peaceful retreat I had left. I sighed as I did so, and a sick sensation, coupled with the thought of Isora, came chill upon my heart. No man happily placed in this social world can guess the feelings of envy with which a wanderer like me, without tie or home, and for whom the roving eagerness of youth is over, surveys those sheltered spots in which the breast garners up all domestic bonds, its household and holiest delights; the companioned hearth, the smile of infancy, and, dearer than all, the eye that glasses our purest, our tenderest, our most secret thoughts; these--oh, none who enjoy them know how they for

whom they are not have pined and mourned for them!

I had not travelled many hours, when, upon the loneliest part of the road, my carriage, which had borne me without an accident from Rome to London, broke down. The postilions said there was a small inn about a mile from the spot; thither I repaired: a blacksmith was sent for, and I found the accident to the carriage would require several hours to repair. No solitary chaise did the inn afford; but the landlord, who was a freeholder and a huntsman, boasted one valuable and swift horse, which he declared was fit for an emperor or a highwayman. I was too impatient of delay not to grasp at this intelligence. I gave mine host whatever he demanded for the loan of his steed, transferred my pistols to an immense pair of holsters, which adorned a high demi-pique saddle, wherewith he obliged me, and, within an hour from the date of the accident, recommenced my journey.

The evening closed, as I became aware of the presence of a fellow-traveller. He was, like myself, on horseback. He wore a short, dark gray cloak, a long wig of a raven hue, and a large hat, which, flapping over his face, conspired, with the increasing darkness, to allow me a very imperfect survey of his features. Twice or thrice he had passed me, and always with some salutation, indicative of a desire for further acquaintance; but my mood is not naturally too much inclined to miscellaneous society, and I was at that time peculiarly covetous of my own companionship. I had, therefore, given but a brief answer to the horseman's courtesy, and had ridden away from him with a very unceremonious abruptness. At length, when he had come up to me for the fourth time, and for the fourth time had accosted me, my ear caught something in the tones of his voice which did not seem to me wholly unfamiliar. I regarded him with more attention than I had as yet done, and replied to him more civilly and at length. Apparently encouraged by this relaxation from my reserve, the man speedily resumed.

"Your horse, Sir," said he, "is a fine animal, but he seems jaded: you have ridden far to-day, I'll venture to guess."

"I have, Sir; but the town where I shall pass the night is not above four miles distant, I believe."

"Hum--ha!--you sleep at D-----, then?" said the horseman, inquisitively.

A suspicion came across me; we were then entering a very lonely road, and one notoriously infested with highwaymen. My fellow equestrian's company might have some sinister meaning in it. I looked to my holsters, and leisurely taking out one of my pistols, saw to its priming, and returned it to its depository. The horseman noted the motion, and he moved his horse rather uneasily, and I thought timidly, to the other side of the road.

"You travel well armed, Sir," said he, after a pause.

"It is a necessary precaution, Sir," answered I, composedly, "in a road one is not familiar with, and with companions one has never had the happiness to meet before."

"Ahem!--ahem!--/Parbleu/, Monsieur le Comte, you allude to me; but I warrant this is not the first time we have met."

"Ha!" said I, riding closer to my fellow traveller, "you know me, then,

and we /have/ met before. I thought I recognized your voice, but I cannot remember when or where I last heard it."

"Oh, Count, I believe it was only by accident that we commenced acquaintanceship, and only by accident, you see, do we now resume it. But I perceive that I intrude on your solitude. Farewell, Count, and a pleasant night at your inn."

"Not so fast, Sir," said I, laying firm hand on my companion's shoulder, "I know you now, and I thank Providence that I have found you. Marie Oswald, it is not lightly that I will part with you!"

"With all my heart, Sir, with all my heart. But, /morbleu/! Monsieur le Comte, do take your hand from my shoulder: I am a nervous man, and your pistols are loaded, and perhaps you are choleric and hasty. I assure you I am far from wishing to part with you abruptly, for I have watched you for the last two days in order to enjoy the honour of this interview."

"Indeed! your wish will save both of us a world of trouble. I believe you may serve me effectually; if so, you will find me more desirous and more able than ever to show my gratitude."

"Sir, you are too good," quoth Mr. Oswald, with an air far more respectful than he had yet shown me. "Let us make to your inn, and there I shall be most happy to receive your commands." So saying, Marie pushed on his horse, and I urged my own to the same expedition.

"But tell me," said I, as we rode on, "why you have wished to meet me?--me whom you so cruelly deserted and forsook?"

"Oh, /parbleu/, spare me there! it was not I who deserted you: I was compelled to fly; death, murder, on one side; safety, money, and a snug place in Italy, as a lay-brother of the Institute on the other! What could I do?--you were ill in bed, not likely to recover, not able to protect me in my present peril, in a state that in all probability never would require my services for the future. Oh, Monsieur le Comte, it was not desertion,--that is a cruel word,--it was self-preservation and common prudence."

"Well," said I, complaisantly, "you apply words better than I applied them. And how long have you been returned to England?"

"Some few weeks, Count, not more. I was in London when you arrived; I heard of that event; I immediately repaired to your hotel; you were gone to my Lord Bolingbroke's; I followed you thither; you had left Dawley when I arrived there; I learned your route and followed you. /Parbleu/ and /morbleu/! I find you, and you take me for a highwayman!"

"Pardon my mistake: the clearest-sighted men are subject to commit such errors, and the most innocent to suffer by them. So Montreuil /persuaded/ you to leave England; did he also persuade you to return?"

"No: I was charged by the Institute with messages to him and others. But we are near the town, Count, let us defer our conversation till then."

We entered D-----, put up our horses, called for an apartment,--to which summons Oswald added another for wine,--and then the virtuous Marie

commenced his explanations. I was deeply anxious to ascertain whether Gerald had ever been made acquainted with the fraud by which he had obtained possession of the estates of Devereux; and I found that, from Desmarais, Oswald had learned all that had occurred to Gerald since Marie had left England. From Oswald's prolix communication, I ascertained that Gerald was, during the whole of the interval between my uncle's death and my departure from England, utterly unacquainted with the fraud of the will. He readily believed that my uncle had found good reason for altering his intentions with respect to me; and my law proceedings, and violent conduct towards himself, only excited his indignation, not aroused his suspicions. During this time he lived entirely in the country, indulging the rural hospitality and the rustic sports which he especially affected, and secretly but deeply involved with Montreuil in political intrigues. All this time the Abbe made no further use of him than to borrow whatever sums he required for his purposes. Isora's death, and the confused story of the document given me by Oswald, Montreuil had interpreted to Gerald according to the interpretation of the world; namely, he had thrown the suspicion upon Oswald, as a common villain, who had taken advantage of my credulity about the will, introduced himself into the house on that pretence, attempted the robbery of the most valuable articles therein,--which, indeed, he had succeeded in abstracting, and who, on my awaking and contesting with him and his accomplice, had, in self-defence, inflicted the wounds which had ended in my delirium and Isora's death. This part of my tale Montreuil never contradicted, and Gerald believed it to the present day. The affair of 1715 occurred; the government, aware of Gerald's practices, had anticipated his design of joining the rebels; he was imprisoned; no act of overt guilt on his part was proved, or at least brought forward; and the government not being willing, perhaps, to proceed to violent measures against a very young man, and the head of a very powerful house, connected with more than thirty branches of the English hereditary nobility, he received his acquittal just before Sir William Wyndham and some other suspected Tories received their own.

Prior to the breaking out of that rebellion, and on the eve of Montreuil's departure for Scotland, the priest summoned Desmarais, whom, it will be remembered, I had previously dismissed, and whom Montreuil had since employed in various errands, and informed him that he had obtained for his services the same post under Gerald which the Fatalist had filled under me. Soon after the failure of the rebellion, Devereux Court was destroyed by accidental fire; and Montreuil, who had come over in disguise, in order to renew his attacks on my brother's coffers (attacks to which Gerald yielded very sullenly, and with many assurances that he would no more incur the danger of political and seditious projects), now advised Gerald to go up to London, and, in order to avoid the suspicion of the government, to mix freely in the gayeties of the court. Gerald readily consented; for, though internally convinced that the charms of the metropolis were not equal to those of the country, yet he liked change, and Devereux Court being destroyed, he shuddered a little at the idea of rebuilding so enormous a pile. Before Gerald left the old tower (/my tower/) which was alone spared by the flames, and at which he had resided, though without his household, rather than quit a place where there was such "excellent shooting," Montreuil said to Desmarais, "This ungrateful /seigneur de village/ already shows himself the niggard; he must know what /we/ know,--that is our only sure hold of him,--but he must not know it yet;" and he proceeded to observe that it was for the hotbeds of courtly luxury to mellow and hasten an opportunity for the disclosure. He instructed Desmarais to see that Gerald (whom even a valet, at least one so artful as Desmarais, might

easily influence) partook to excess of every pleasure,--at least of every pleasure which a gentleman might without derogation to his dignity enjoy. Gerald went to town, and very soon became all that Montreuil desired.

Montreuil came again to England; his great project, Alberoni's project, had failed. Banished France and Spain, and excluded Italy, he was desirous of obtaining an asylum in England, until he could negotiate a return to Paris. For the first of these purposes (the asylum) interest was requisite; for the latter (the negotiation) money was desirable. He came to seek both these necessities in Gerald Devereux. Gerald had already arrived at that prosperous state when money is not lightly given away. A dispute arose; and Montreuil raised the veil, and showed the heir on what terms his estates were held.

Rightly Montreuil had read the human heart! So long as Gerald lived in the country, and tasted not the full enjoyments of his great wealth, it would have been highly perilous to have made this disclosure; for, though Gerald had no great love for me, and was bold enough to run any danger, yet he was neither a Desmarais nor a Montreuil. He was that most capricious thing, a man of honour; and at that day he would instantly have given up the estate to me, and Montreuil and the philosopher to the hangman. But, after two or three years of every luxury that wealth could purchase; after living in those circles, too, where wealth is the highest possible merit, and public opinion, therefore, only honours the rich, fortune became far more valuable and the conscience far less nice. Living at Devereux Court, Gerald had only £30,000 a year; living in London, he had all that £30,000 a year can purchase: a very great difference this indeed! Honour is a fine bulwark against a small force; but, unbacked by other principle, it is seldom well manned enough to resist a large one. When, therefore, Montreuil showed Gerald that he could lose his estate in an instant; that the world would never give him credit for innocence, when guilt would have conferred on him such advantages; that he would therefore part with all those /et eoetera/ which, now in the very prime of life, made his whole idea of human enjoyments; that he would no longer be the rich, the powerful, the honoured, the magnificent, the envied, the idolized lord of thousands, but would sink at once into a younger brother, dependent on the man he most hated for his very subsistence,--since his debts would greatly exceed his portion,--and an object through life of contemptuous pity or of covert suspicion; that all this change could happen at a word of Montreuil's, what wonder that he should be staggered,--should hesitate and yield? Montreuil obtained, then, whatever sums he required; and through Gerald's influence, pecuniary and political, procured from the minister a tacit permission for him to remain in England, under an assumed name and in close retirement. Since then, Montreuil (though secretly involved in treasonable practices) had appeared to busy himself solely in negotiating a pardon at Paris. Gerald had lived the life of a man who, if he has parted with peace of conscience, will make the best of the bargain by procuring every kind of pleasure in exchange; and /le petit/ Jean Desmarais, useful to both priest and spendthrift, had passed his time very agreeably,--laughing at his employers, studying philosophy, and filling his pockets; for I need scarcely add that Gerald forgave him without much difficulty for his share in the forgery. A man, as Oswald shrewdly observed, is seldom inexorable to those crimes by which he has profited. "And where lurks Montreuil now?" I asked; "in the neighbourhood of Devereux Court?"

Oswald looked at me with some surprise. "How learned you that, Sir? It

is true. He lives quietly and privately in that vicinity. The woods around the house, the caves in the beach, and the little isle opposite the castle, afford him in turn an asylum; and the convenience with which correspondence with France can be there carried on makes the scene of his retirement peculiarly adapted to his purpose."

I now began to question Oswald respecting himself; for I was not warmly inclined to place implicit trust in the services of a man who had before shown himself at once mercenary and timid. There was little cant or disguise about that gentleman; he made few pretences to virtues which he did not possess; and he seemed now, both by wine and familiarity, peculiarly disposed to be frank. It was he who in Italy (among various other and less private commissions) had been appointed by Montreuil to watch over Aubrey; on my brother's death he had hastened to England, not only to apprise Montreuil of that event, but charged with some especial orders to him from certain members of the Institute. He had found Montreuil busy, restless, intriguing, even in seclusion, and cheered by a recent promise, from Fleuri himself, that he should speedily obtain pardon and recall. It was, at this part of Oswald's story, easy to perceive the causes of his renewed confidence in me. Montreuil, engaged in new plans and schemes, at once complicated and vast, paid but a slight attention to the wrecks of his past projects. Aubrey dead, myself abroad, Gerald at his command,--he perceived, in our house, no cause for caution or alarm. This, apparently, rendered him less careful of retaining the venal services of Oswald than his knowledge of character should have made him; and when that gentleman, then in London, accidentally heard of my sudden arrival in this country, he at once perceived how much more to his interest it would be to serve me than to maintain an ill-remunerated fidelity to Montreuil. In fact, as I have since learned, the priest's discretion was less to blame than I then imagined; for Oswald was of a remarkably impudent, profligate, and spendthrift turn; and his demands for money were considerably greater than the value of his services; or perhaps, as Montreuil thought, when Aubrey no longer lived, than the consequence of his silence. When, therefore, I spoke seriously to my new ally of my desire of wreaking ultimate justice on the crimes of Montreuil, I found that his zeal was far from being chilled by my determination,--nay, the very cowardice of the man made him ferocious; and the moment he resolved to betray Montreuil, his fears for the priest's vengeance made him eager to destroy where he betrayed. I am not addicted to unnecessary procrastination. Of the unexpected evidence I had found I was most eager to avail myself. I saw at once how considerably Oswald's testimony would lessen any difficulty I might have in an explanation with Gerald, as well as in bringing Montreuil to justice: and the former measure seemed to me necessary to insure, or at least to expedite, the latter. I proposed, therefore, to Oswald, that he should immediately accompany me to the house in which Gerald was then a visitor; the honest Marie, conditioning only for another bottle, which he termed a travelling comforter, readily acceded to my wish. I immediately procured a chaise and horses; and in less than two hours from the time we entered the inn we were on the road to Gerald. What an impulse to the wheel of destiny had the event of that one day given!

At another time, I might have gleaned amusement from the shrewd roguery of my companion, but he found me then but a dull listener. I served him, in truth, as men of his stamp are ordinarily served: so soon as I had extracted from him whatever was meet for present use, I favoured him with little further attention. He had exhausted all the communications it was necessary for me to know; so, in the midst of a long story about

Italy, Jesuits, and the wisdom of Marie Oswald, I affected to fall asleep; my companion soon followed my example in earnest, and left me to meditate, undisturbed, over all that I had heard, and over the schemes now the most promising of success. I soon taught myself to look with a lenient eye on Gerald's after-connivance in Montreuil's forgery; and I felt that I owed to my surviving brother so large an arrear of affection for the long injustice I had rendered him that I was almost pleased to find something set upon the opposite score. All men, perhaps, would rather forgive than be forgiven. I resolved, therefore, to affect ignorance of Gerald's knowledge of the forgery; and, even should he confess it, to exert all my art to steal from the confession its shame. From this train of reflection my mind soon directed itself to one far fiercer and more intense; and I felt my heart pause, as if congealing into marble, when I thought of Montreuil and anticipated justice.

It was nearly noon on the following day when we arrived at Lord -----'s house. We found that Gerald had left it the day before, for the enjoyment of the field-sports at Devereux Court, and thither we instantly proceeded.

It has often seemed to me that if there be, as certain ancient philosophers fabled, one certain figure pervading all nature, human and universal, it is /the circle/. Round, in one vast monotony, one eternal gyration, roll the orbs of space. Thus moves the spirit of creative life, kindling, progressing, maturing, decaying, perishing, reviving and rolling again, and so onward forever through the same course; and thus even would seem to revolve the mysterious mechanism of human events and actions. Age, ere it returns to "the second childishness, the mere oblivion" from which it passes to the grave, returns also to the memories and the thoughts of youth: its buried loves arise; its past friendships rekindle. The wheels of the tired machine are past the meridian, and the arch through which they now decline has a correspondent likeness to the opposing segment through which they had borne upward in eagerness and triumph. Thus it is, too, that we bear within us an irresistible attraction to our earliest home. Thus it is that we say, "It matters not where our midcourse is run, but we will /die/ in the place where we were born,--in the point of space whence /began/ the circle, there also shall /it end/!" This is the grand orbit through which Mortality passes only once; but the same figure may pervade all through which it moves on its journey to the grave. Thus, one peculiar day of the round year has been to some an era, always colouring life with an event. Thus, to others, some peculiar place has been the theatre of strange action, influencing all existence, whenever, in the recurrence of destiny, that place has been revisited. Thus was it said by an arch-sorcerer of old, whose labours yet exist,--though perhaps, at the moment I write, there are not three living beings who know of their existence,--that there breathes not that man who would not find, did he minutely investigate the events of life, that, in some fixed and distinct spot or hour or person, there lived, though shrouded and obscure, the pervading demon of his fate; and whenever, in their several paths, the two circles of being touched, that moment made the unnoticed epoch of coining prosperity or evil. I remember well that this bewildering yet not unsolemn reflection, or rather fancy, was in my mind, as, after the absence of many years, I saw myself hastening to the home of my boyhood, and cherishing the fiery hope of there avenging the doom of that love which I had there conceived. Deeply, and in silence, did I brood over the dark shapes which my thoughts engendered; and I woke not from my revery, till, as the gray of the evening closed around us, we entered the domains of Devereux Court. The road was rough and

stony, and the horses moved slowly on. How familiar was everything before me! The old pollards which lay scattered in dense groups on either side, and which had lived on from heir to heir, secure in the little temptation they afforded to cupidity, seemed to greet me with a silent but intelligible welcome. Their leaves fell around us in the autumn air, and the branches as they waved towards me seemed to say, "Thou art returned, and thy change is like our own: the green leaves of /thy/ heart have fallen from thee one by one; like us thou survivest, but thou art desolate!" The hoarse cry of the rooks, gathering to their rest, came fraught with the music of young associations on my ear. Many a time in the laughing spring had I lain in these groves, watching, in the young brood of those citizens of air, a mark for my childish skill and careless disregard of life. We acquire mercy as we acquire thought: I would not /now/ have harmed one of those sable creatures for a king's ransom!

As we cleared the more wooded belt of the park, and entered the smooth space, on which the trees stood alone and at rarer intervals, while the red clouds, still tinged with the hues of the departed sun, hovered on the far and upland landscape,--like Hope flushing over Futurity,--a mellowed yet rapid murmur, distinct from the more distant dashing of the sea, broke abruptly upon my ear. It was the voice of that brook whose banks had been the dearest haunt of my childhood; and now, as it burst thus suddenly upon me, I longed to be alone, that I might have bowed down my head and wept as if it had been the welcome of a living thing! At once, and as by a word, the hardened lava, the congealed stream of the soul's Etna, was uplifted from my memory, and the bowers and palaces of old, the world of a gone day, lay before me! With how wild an enthusiasm had I apostrophized that stream on the day in which I first resolved to leave its tranquil regions and fragrant margin for the tempest and tumult of the world. On that same eve, too, had Aubrey and I taken sweet counsel together; on that same eve had we sworn to protect, to love, and to cherish one another!--AND NOW!--I saw the very mound on which we had sat,--a solitary deer made it his couch, and, as the carriage approached, the deer rose, and then I saw that he had been wounded, perhaps in some contest with his tribe, and that he could scarcely stir from the spot. I turned my face away, and the remains of my ancestral house rose gradually in view. That house was indeed changed; a wide and black heap of ruins spread around; the vast hall, with its oaken rafters and huge hearth, was no more,--I missed /that/, and I cared not for the rest. The long galleries, the superb chambers, the scenes of revelry or of pomp, were like the court companions who amuse, yet attach us not; but the hall, the old hall,--the old, hospitable hall,--had been as a friend in all seasons, and to all comers, and its mirth had been as open to all as the heart of its last owner! My eyes wandered from the place where it had been, and the tall, lone, gray tower, consecrated to my ill-fated namesake, and in which my own apartments had been situated, rose like the last of a warrior band, stern, gaunt, and solitary, over the ruins around.

The carriage now passed more rapidly over the neglected road, and wound where the ruins, cleared on either side, permitted access to the tower. In two minutes more I was in the same chamber with my only surviving brother. Oh, why--why can I not dwell upon that scene, that embrace, that reconciliation?--alas! the wound is not yet scarred over.

I found Gerald, at first, haughty and sullen; he expected my reproaches and defiance,--against them he was hardened; he was not prepared for my prayers for our future friendship, and my grief for our past enmity, and

he melted at once!

But let me hasten over this. I had well-nigh forgot that, at the close of my history, I should find one remembrance so endearing, and one pang so keen. Rapidly I sketched to Gerald the ill fate of Aubrey; but lingeringly did I dwell upon Montreuil's organized and most baneful influence over him, and over us all; and I endeavoured to arouse in Gerald some sympathy with my own deep indignation against that villain. I succeeded so far as to make him declare that he was scarcely less desirous of justice than myself; but there was an embarrassment in his tone of which I was at no loss to perceive the cause. To accuse Montreuil publicly of his forgery might ultimately bring to light Gerald's latter knowledge of the fraud. I hastened to say that there was now no necessity to submit to a court of justice a scrutiny into our private, gloomy, and eventful records. No, from Oswald's communications I had learned enough to prove that Bolingbroke had been truly informed, and that Montreuil had still, and within the few last weeks, been deeply involved in schemes of treason, full proof of which could be adduced, far more than sufficient to insure his death by the public executioner. Upon this charge I proposed at the nearest town (the memorable seaport of -----) to accuse him, and to obtain a warrant for his immediate apprehension; upon this charge I proposed alone to proceed against him, and by it alone to take justice upon his more domestic crimes.

My brother yielded at last his consent to my suggestions. "I understand," said I, "that Montreuil lurks in the neighbourhood of these ruins, or in the opposite islet. Know you if he has made his asylum in either at this present time?"

"No, my brother," answered Gerald, "but I have reason to believe that he is in our immediate vicinity, for I received a letter from him three days ago, when at Lord -----'s, urging a request that I would give him a meeting here, at my earliest leisure, previous to his leaving England."

"Has he really then obtained permission to return to France?"

"Yes," replied Gerald, "he informed me in this letter that he had just received intelligence of his pardon."

"May it fit him the better," said I, with a stern smile, "for a more lasting condemnation. But if this be true we have not a moment to lose: a man so habitually vigilant and astute will speedily learn my visit hither, and forfeit even his appointment with you, should he, which is likely enough, entertain any suspicion of our reconciliation with each other; moreover, he may hear that the government have discovered his designs, and may instantly secure the means of flight. Let me, therefore, immediately repair to -----, and obtain a warrant against him, as well as officers to assist our search. In the meanwhile you shall remain here, and detain him, should he visit you; but where is the accomplice?--let us seize /him/ instantly, for I conclude he is with you."

"What, Desmarais?" rejoined Gerald. "Yes, he is the only servant, besides the old portress, which these poor ruins will allow me to entertain in the same dwelling with myself; the rest of my suite are left behind at Lord -----'s. But Desmarais is not now within; he went out about two hours ago."

"Ha!" said I, "in all likelihood to meet the priest; shall we wait his return, and extort some information of Montreuil's lurking-hole?"

Before Gerald could answer, we heard a noise without, and presently I distinguished the bland tones of the hypocritical Fatalist, in soft expostulation with the triumphant voice of Mr. Marie Oswald. I hastened out, and discovered that the lay-brother, whom I left in the chaise, having caught a glimpse of the valet gliding among the ruins, had recognized, seized, and by the help of the postilions, dragged him to the door of the tower. The moment Desmarais saw me he ceased to struggle: he met my eye with a steady but not disrespectful firmness; he changed not even the habitual hue of his countenance,--he remained perfectly still in the hands of his arresters; and if there was any vestige of his mind discoverable in his sallow features and glittering eye, it was not the sign of fear, or confusion, or even surprise; but a ready promptness to meet danger, coupled, perhaps, with a little doubt whether to defy or to seek first to diminish it.

Long did I gaze upon him,--struggling with internal rage and loathing, the mingled contempt and desire of destruction with which we gaze upon the erect aspect of some small but venomous and courageous reptile,--long did I gaze upon him before I calmed and collected my voice to speak:

"So I have /thee/ at last! First comes the base tool, and that will I first break, before I lop off the guiding hand."

"So please Monsieur my Lord the Count," answered Desmarais, bowing to the ground, "the tool is a file, and it would be useless to bite against it."

"We will see that," said I, drawing my sword; "prepare to die!" and I pointed the blade to his throat with so sudden and menacing a gesture that his eyes closed involuntarily, and the blood left his thin cheek as white as ashes: but he shrank not.

"If Monsieur," said he, with a sort of smile, "will kill his poor, old, faithful servant, let him strike. Fate is not to be resisted; and prayers are useless!"

"Oswald," said I, "release your prisoner; wait here, and keep strict watch. Jean Desmarais, follow me!"

I ascended the stairs, and Desmarais followed. "Now," I said, when he was alone with Gerald and myself, "your days are numbered: you will fall; not by my hand, but by that of the executioner. Not only your forgery, but your robbery, your abetment of murder, are known to me; your present lord, with an indignation equal to my own, surrenders you to justice. Have you aught to urge, not in defence--for to that I will not listen--but in atonement? /Can/ you now commit any act which will cause me to forego justice on those which you /have/ committed?" Desmarais hesitated. "Speak," said I. He raised his eyes to mine with an inquisitive and wistful look.

"Monsieur," said the wretch, with his obsequious smile, "Monsieur has travelled, has shone, has succeeded; Monsieur must have made enemies: let him name them, and his poor, old, /faithful/ servant will do his best to become the humble instrument of their /fate/!"

Gerald drew himself aside, and shuddered. Perhaps till then he had not been fully aware how slyly murder, as well as fraud, can lurk beneath urbane tones and laced ruffles.

"I have no enemy," said I, "but one; and the hangman will do my office upon him; but point out to me the exact spot where at this moment he is concealed, and you shall have full leave to quit this country forever. That enemy is Julian Montreuil!"

"Ah, ah!" said Desmarais, musingly, and in a tone very different from that in which he usually spoke; "must it be so, indeed? For twenty years of youth and manhood I have clung to that man, and woven my destiny with his, because I believed him born under the star which shines on statesmen and pontiffs. Does dread Necessity now impel me to betray him?--him, the only man I ever loved. So--so--so! Count Devereux, strike me to the core: I will /not/ betray Bertrand Collinot!"

"Mysterious heart of man!" I exclaimed inly, as I gazed upon the low brow, the malignant eye, the crafty lip of this wretch, who still retained one generous and noble sentiment at the bottom of so base a breast. But if it sprang there, it only sprang to wither!

"As thou wilt," said I; "remember, death is the alternative. By thy birth-star, Jean Desmarais, I should question whether perfidy be not /better luck/ than hanging: but time speeds; farewell; I shall meet thee on thy day of trial."

I turned to the door to summon Oswald to his prisoner. Desmarais roused himself from the reverie in which he appeared to have sunk.

"Why do I doubt?" said he, slowly. "Were the alternative his, would he not hang me as he would hang his dog if it went mad and menaced danger? My very noble and merciful master," continued the Fatalist, turning to me, and relapsing into his customary manner, "it is enough! I can refuse nothing to a gentleman who has such insinuating manners. Montreuil /may be/ in your power this night; but that rests solely with me. If I speak not, a few hours will place him irrevocably beyond your reach. If I betray him to you, will Monsieur swear that I shall have my pardon for past /errors/?"

"On condition of leaving England," I answered, for slight was my comparative desire of justice against Desmarais; and since I had agreed with Gerald not to bring our domestic records to the glare of day, justice against Desmarais was not easy of attainment; while, on the other hand, so precarious seemed the chance of discovering Montreuil before he left England, without certain intelligence of his movements, that I was willing to forego any less ardent feeling, for the speedy gratification of that which made the sole surviving passion of my existence.

"Be it so," rejoined Desmarais; "there is better wine in France! And Monsieur my present master, Monsieur Gerald, will you too pardon your poor Desmarais for his proof of the great attachment he always bore to you?"

"Away, wretch!" cried Gerald, shrinking back; "your villainy taints the very air!"

Desmarais lifted his eyes to heaven, with a look of appealing innocence;

but I was wearied with this odious farce.

"The condition is made," said I: "remember, it only holds good if Montreuil's person is placed in our power. Now explain."

"This night, then," answered Desmarais, "Montreuil proposes to leave England by means of a French privateer, or pirate, if that word please you better. Exactly at the hour of twelve, he will meet some of the sailors upon the seashore, by the Castle Cave; thence they proceed in boats to the islet, off which the pirate's vessel awaits them. If you would seize Montreuil, you must provide a force adequate to conquer the companions he will meet. The rest is with you; my part is fulfilled."

"Remember! I repeat if this be one of thy inventions, thou wilt hang."

"I have said what is true," said Desmarais, bitterly; "and were not life so very pleasant to me, I would sooner have met the rack."

I made no reply; but, summoning Oswald, surrendered Desmarais to his charge. I then held a hasty consultation with Gerald, whose mind, however, obscured by feelings of gloomy humiliation, and stunned perhaps by the sudden and close following order of events, gave me but little assistance in my projects. I observed his feelings with great pain; but that was no moment for wrestling with them. I saw that I could not depend upon his vigorous co-operation; and that even if Montreuil sought him, he might want the presence of mind and the energy to detain my enemy. I changed therefore the arrangement we had first proposed.

"I will remain here," said I, "and I will instruct the old portress to admit to me any one who seeks audience with you. Meanwhile, Oswald and yourself, if you will forgive, and grant my request to that purport, will repair to -----, and informing the magistrate of our intelligence, procure such armed assistance as may give battle to the pirates, should that be necessary, and succeed in securing Montreuil; the assistance may be indispensable; at all events, it will be prudent to secure it: perhaps for Oswald alone, the magistrates would not use that zeal and expedition which a word /of yours/ can command."

"Of mine?" said Gerald, "say rather of yours; you are the lord of these broad lands!"

"Never, my dearest brother, shall they pass to me from their present owner: but let us hasten now to execute justice; we will talk afterwards of friendship."

I then sought Oswald, who, if a physical coward, was morally a ready, bustling, and prompt man; and I felt that I could rely more upon him than I could at that moment upon Gerald. I released him therefore of his charge, and made Desmarais a close prisoner in the inner apartment of the tower. I then gave Oswald the most earnest injunctions to procure the assistance we might require, and to return with it as expeditiously as possible; and cheered by the warmth and decision of his answer, I saw him depart with Gerald, and felt my heart beat high with the anticipation of midnight and retribution.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CATASTROPHE.

IT happened unfortunately that the mission to ----- was indispensable. The slender accommodation of the tower forbade Gerald the use of his customary attendants, and the neighbouring villagers were too few in number, and too ill provided with weapons, to encounter men cradled in the very lap of danger; moreover, it was requisite, above all things, that no rumour or suspicion of our intended project should obtain wind, and, by reaching Montreuil's ears, give him some safer opportunity of escape. I had no doubt of the sincerity of the Fatalist's communications, and if I had, the subsequent conversation I held with him, when Gerald and Oswald were gone, would have been sufficient to remove it. He was evidently deeply stung by the reflection of his own treachery, and, singularly enough, with Montreuil seemed to perish all his worldly hopes and aspirations. Desmarais, I found, was a man of much higher ambition than I had imagined; and he had linked himself closely to Montreuil, because, from the genius and the resolution of the priest, he had drawn the most sanguine auguries of his future power. As the night advanced, he grew visibly anxious; and, having fully satisfied myself that I might count indisputably upon his intelligence, I once more left him to his meditations, and, alone in the outer chamber, I collected myself for the coming event. I had fully hoped that Montreuil would have repaired to the tower in search of Gerald, and this was the strongest reason which had induced me to remain behind: but time waned; he came not, and at length it grew so late that I began to tremble lest the assistance from ----- should not arrive in time.

It struck the first quarter after eleven: in less than an hour my enemy would be either in my power or beyond its reach; still Gerald and our allies came not; my suspense grew intolerable, my pulse raged with fever; I could not stay for two seconds in the same spot; a hundred times had I drawn my sword, and looked eagerly along its bright blade. "Once," thought I, as I looked, "thou didst cross the blade of my mortal foe, and to my danger rather than victory; years have brought skill to the hand which then guided thee, and in the red path of battle thou hast never waved in vain. Be stained but once more with human blood, and I will prize every drop of that blood beyond all the triumphs thou hast brought me!" Yes, it had been with a fiery and intense delight that I had learned that Montreuil would have companions to his flight in lawless and hardened men, who would never yield him a prisoner without striking for his rescue; and I knew enough of the courageous and proud temper of my purposed victim to feel assured that, priest as he was, he would not hesitate to avail himself of the weapons of his confederates or to aid them with his own. Then would it be lawful to oppose violence to his resistance, and with my own hand to deal the death-blow of retribution. Still as these thoughts flashed over me my heart grew harder, and my blood rolled more burningly through my veins. "They come not; Gerald returns not," I said, as my eye dwelt on the clock, and saw the minutes creep one after the other: "it matters not; HE at least shall not escape!--were he girt by a million, I would single him from the herd; one stroke of this right hand is all that I ask of life, then let them avenge him if they will." Thus resolved, and despairing at last of the return of Gerald, I left the tower, locked the outer door, as a still further security against my prisoner's escape, and repaired with silent but swift strides to the beach by the Castle Cave. It wanted about half an hour to midnight: the night was still and breathless; a dim mist spread from sea to sky, through which the stars gleamed forth heavily, and at distant intervals. The moon was abroad, but the vapours that surrounded her gave a watery and sicklied dulness

to her light, and wherever in the niches and hollows of the cliff the shadows fell, all was utterly dark and unbroken by the smallest ray; only along the near waves of the sea and the whiter parts of the level sand were objects easily discernible. I strode to and fro for a few minutes before the Castle Cave; I saw no one, and I seated myself in stern vigilance upon a stone, in a worn recess of the rock, and close by the mouth of the Castle Cave. The spot where I sat was wrapped in total darkness, and I felt assured that I might wait my own time for disclosing myself. I had not been many minutes at my place of watch before I saw the figure of a man approach from the left; he moved with rapid steps, and once when he passed along a place where the wan light of the skies was less obscured I saw enough of his form and air to recognize Montreuil. He neared the cave; he paused; he was within a few paces of me; I was about to rise, when another figure suddenly glided from the mouth of the cave itself.

"Ha!" cried the latter, "it is Bertrand Collinot: Fate be lauded!"

Had a voice from the grave struck my ear, it would have scarcely amazed me more than that which I now heard. Could I believe my senses? the voice was that of Desmarais, whom I had left locked within the inner chamber of the tower! "Fly," he resumed, "fly instantly; you have not a moment to lose: already the stern Morton waits thee; already the hounds of justice are on thy track; tarry not for the pirates, but begone at once."

"You rave, man! What mean you? the boats will be here immediately. While you yet speak methinks I can descry them on the sea. Something of this I dreaded when, some hours ago, I caught a glimpse of Gerald on the road to ----- . I saw not the face of his companion; but I would not trust myself in the tower: yet I must await the boats; flight is indeed requisite, but /they/ make the only means by which flight is safe!"

"Pray, then, thou who believest, pray that they may come soon, or thou diest and I with thee! Morton is returned,--is reconciled to his weak brother. Gerald and Oswald are away to ----- for men to seize and drag thee to a public death. I was arrested,--threatened; but one way to avoid prison and cord was shown me. Curse me, Bertrand, for I embraced it. I told them thou wouldst fly to-night, and with whom. They locked me in the inner chamber of the tower; Morton kept guard without. At length I heard him leave the room; I heard him descend the stairs, and lock the gate of the tower. Ha! ha! little dreamed he of the wit of Jean Desmarais! /Thy/ friend must scorn bolt and bar, Bertrand Collinot. They had not searched me: I used my instruments; thou knowest that with those instruments I could glide through stone walls!--I opened the door; I was in the outer room; I lifted the trap door which old Sir William had had boarded over, and which thou hadst so artfully and imperceptibly replaced, when thou wantedst secret intercourse with thy pupils; I sped along the passage, came to the iron door, touched the spring thou hadst inserted in the plate which the old knight had placed over the key-hole, and have come to repair my coward treachery, to save and to fly with thee. But while I speak we tread on a precipice. Morton has left the house, and is even now perhaps in search of thee."

"Ha! I care not if he be," said Montreuil, in a low but haughty tone. "Priest though I am, I have not assumed the garb, without assuming also the weapon, of the layman. Even now I have my hand upon the same sword which shone under the banners of Mar; and which once, but for my foolish mercy, would have rid me forever of this private foe."

"Unsheath it now, Julian Montreuil!" said I, coming from my retreat, and confronting the pair.

Montreuil recoiled several paces. At that instant a shot boomed along the waters.

"Haste, haste!" cried Desmarais, hurrying to the waves, as a boat, now winding the cliff, became darkly visible: "haste, Bertrand, here are Bonjean and his men; but they are pursued!"

Once did Montreuil turn, as if to fly; but my sword was at his breast, and, stamping fiercely on the ground, he drew his rapier and parried and returned my assault; but he retreated rapidly towards the water while he struck; and wild and loud came the voices from the boat, which now touched the shore.

"Come--come--come--the officers are upon us; we can wait not a moment!" and Montreuil, as he heard the cries, mingled with oaths and curses, yet quickened his pace towards the quarter whence they came. His steps were tracked by his blood: twice had my sword passed through his flesh; but twice had it failed my vengeance, and avoided a mortal part. A second boat, filled also with the pirates, followed the first; but then another and a larger vessel bore black and fast over the water; the rush and cry of men were heard on land; again and nearer a shot broke over the heavy air,--another and another,--a continued fire. The strand was now crowded with the officers of justice. The vessel beyond forbade escape to the opposite islet. There was no hope for the pirates but in contest, or in dispersion among the cliffs or woods on the shore. They formed their resolution at once, and stood prepared and firm, partly on their boats, partly on the beach around them. Though the officers were far more numerous, the strife--fierce, desperate, and hand to hand seemed equally sustained. Montreuil, as he retreated before me, bore back into the general /melee/, and, as the press thickened, we were for some moments separated. It was at this time that I caught a glimpse of Gerald; /he/ seemed also then to espy me, and made eagerly towards me. Suddenly he was snatched from my view. The fray relaxed; the officers, evidently worsted, retreated towards the land, and the pirates appeared once more to entertain the hope of making their escape by water. Probably they thought that the darkness of the night might enable them to baffle the pursuit of the adverse vessel, which now lay expectant and passive on the wave. However this be, they made simultaneously to their boats, and among their numbers I descried Montreuil. I set my teeth with a calm and prophetic wrath. But three strokes did my good blade make through that throng before I was by his side; he had at that instant his hold upon the boat's edge, and he stood knee-deep in the dashing waters. I laid my grasp upon his shoulder, and my cheek touched his own as I hissed in his ear, "I am with thee yet!" He turned fiercely; he strove in vain to shake off my grasp. The boat pushed away, and his last hope of escape was over. At this moment the moon broke away from the mist, and we saw each other plainly, and face to face. There was a ghastly but set despair in Montreuil's lofty and proud countenance, which changed gradually to a fiercer aspect, as he met my gaze. Once more, foot to foot and hand to hand, we engaged; the increased light of the skies rendered the contest more that of skill than it had hitherto been, and Montreuil seemed to collect all his energies, and to fight with a steadier and a cooler determination. Nevertheless the combat was short. Once my antagonist had the imprudence to raise his arm and expose his body to my thrust: his sword

grazed my cheek,--I shall bear the scar to my grave,--mine passed twice through his breast, and he fell, bathed in his blood, at my feet.

"Lift him!" I said, to the men who now crowded round. They did so, and he unclosed his eyes, and glared upon me as the death-pang convulsed his features, and gathered in foam to his lips. But his thoughts were not upon his destroyer, nor upon the wrongs he had committed, nor upon any solitary being in the linked society which he had injured.

"Order of Jesus," he muttered, "had I but lived three months longer, I--"

So died Julian Montreuil.

CONCLUSION.

MONTREUIL was not the only victim in the brief combat of that night; several of the pirates and their pursuers perished, and among the bodies we found Gerald. He had been pierced, by a shot, through the brain, and was perfectly lifeless when his body was discovered. By a sort of retribution, it seems that my unhappy brother received his death-wound from a shot, fired (probably at random) by Desmarais; and thus the instrument of the fraud he had tacitly subscribed to became the minister of his death. Nay, the retribution seemed even to extend to the very method by which Desmarais had escaped; and, as the reader has perceived, the subterranean communication which had been secretly reopened to deceive my uncle made the path which had guided Gerald's murderer to the scene which afterwards ensued. The delay of the officers had been owing to private intelligence, previously received by the magistrate to whom Gerald had applied, of the number and force of the pirates, and his waiting in consequence for a military reinforcement to the party to be despatched against them. Those of the pirates who escaped the conflict escaped also the pursuit of the hostile vessel; they reached the islet, and gained their captain's ship. A few shots between the two vessels were idly exchanged, and the illicit adventurers reached the French shore in safety. With them escaped Desmarais, and of him, from that hour to this, I have heard nothing: so capriciously plays Time with villains!

Marie Oswald has lately taken unto himself a noted inn on the North Road, a place eminently calculated for the display of his various talents; he has also taken unto himself a WIFE, of whose tongue and temper he has been known already to complain with no Socratic meekness; and we may therefore opine that his misdeeds have not altogether escaped their fitting share of condemnation.

Succeeding at once, by the death of my poor brother, to the DEVEREUX estates, I am still employed in rebuilding, on a yet more costly scale, my ancestral mansion. So eager and impatient is my desire for the completion of my undertaking that I allow rest neither by night nor day, and half of the work will be done by torchlight. With the success of this project terminates my last scheme of Ambition.

Here, then, at the age of thirty-four, I conclude the history of my life. Whether in the star which, as I now write, shines in upon me, and which a romance, still unsubdued, has often dreamed to be the bright prophet of my fate, something of future adventure, suffering, or

excitement is yet predestined to me; or whether life will muse itself away in the solitudes which surround the home of my past childhood and the scene of my present retreat,--creates within me but slight food for anticipation or conjecture. I have exhausted the sources of those feelings which flow, whether through the channels of anxiety or of hope, towards the future; and the restlessness of my manhood, having attained its last object, has done the labour of time, and bequeathed to me the indifference of age.

If love exists for me no longer, I know well that the memory of that which has been is to me far more than a living love is to others; and perhaps there is no passion so full of tender, of soft, and of hallowing associations as the love which is stamped by death. If I have borne much, and my spirit has worked out its earthly end in travail and in tears, yet I would not forego the lessons which my life has bequeathed me, even though they be deeply blended with sadness and regret. No! were I asked what best dignifies the present and consecrates the past; what enables us alone to draw a just moral from the tale of life; what sheds the purest light upon our reason; what gives the firmest strength to our religion; and, whether our remaining years pass in seclusion or in action, is best fitted to soften the heart of man, and to elevate the soul to God,--I would answer, with Lassus, it is EXPERIENCE!"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DEVEREUX, BY LYTTON, BOOK VI. ***

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