

MAGDALEN;

OR,

THE PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

VOL. II.

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THE PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

AN HISTORICAL NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ST. MARGARET'S CAVE, OR THE NUN'S STORY,
THE PILGRIM OF THE CROSS, &c. &c.

VOL. II.

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THE
PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

CHAPTER XIV.

“I HAD not, however, time for much reflection,” continued the fair nun, “for the man recovering, as it were from a trance, sprang to the door, and in a voice that made me tremble, furiously exclaimed,—“Villains!—fools!—where are you?—come forth and behold the effects of your boasted skill and sagacity.—Here, look and anticipate your future reward—your limbs quivering on the wheel, or reeking at the stake.”

“The next moment the apartment was filled with ruffians, and he that I had before denominated their chief, exclaimed,—“What mean you?”

“That you have ruined yourselves and me.—This is not Mary de Vavasour, but, from her habit, a nun.—Speak,” addressing me, “are you professed?” “I am,” returned I.

“There!—there!” exclaimed he, in an agony, “and what have I to expect but the merciless fangs of the inquisition?” “And yet there is one way to escape,” said the chief of the ruffians, darting a fierce look at me that harrowed up my soul.—“What way?” demanded de Vavasour.—“The answer demands privacy,” returned the other.—They then sullenly quitted the apartment, leaving me in no pleasant frame of mind; nothing doubting but the way of safety hinted at was by my death, and that they were now retired to deliberate on the means, and the mode of concealment.

“About two hours more passed when I heard the door again open, and one of the men entered, who having placed a cup of wine and some viands upon the table, he, without speaking, withdrew. “By poisoned food,” said I then to myself, “I suppose they mean to end me,—but I will endure the want of nourishment as long as frail nature will permit, and then the will of God be done!”—A further time elapsed, and the same man returned to trim the lamp;—passing the table,—“You have not touched your food,” said he, in a low voice. “No,” answered I, “for I would not be an accessory in my own murder.” Without reply, the man went cautiously to the door and looked out, then hastily returning, addressing me again in a low voice, he said,—“Be under no apprehensions, I have not time for words,—but see, you may take some refreshment without dread,” at the same time eating of the food and drinking some of the wine;—“that you are not in danger I will not say,—at a proper opportunity you shall know more,—but, if possible, I will save you,—farewel.” He then closed the door and withdrew,—after which, commending myself to the protection of God, and the Holy Virgin, being faint, I took some of the food and wine, and nature being worn out and exhausted, I sunk into a sound sleep.

“How long I remained in this state I know not,” continued Magdalen, “for as no other light than what the lamp afforded entered the apartment, I could only ascertain time by guess, and knew not when it was day or night; I should, however, suppose that I slept six or eight hours, for I found myself greatly refreshed.—I then continued alone a considerable length of time, after which the same man brought me more refreshment, and said hastily,—“What is your name?”—“Magdalen,” answered I.—“Magdalen!” repeated he, with great surprise, “it is strange!—it is wonderful!”—“What is wonderful?”

interrupted I.—“I have not time for explanation,” answered the man, “my companions are dispatched to see whether they cannot retrieve their error; but if they succeed or not, I will not answer for your life after their return, for de Vavasour will never restore or let you escape, to endanger his own liberty. It is now dark, at midnight I will liberate you, or perish in the attempt; be ready, therefore, to depart at a moment’s warning, and take food, for I know not when we shall again be able to procure any.”

“So saying he left me, much comforted with the thought that I had once more a prospect of liberty. But the interval between this time and midnight was dreadful, apprehending that should they return before that period, my death was certain. My agitation also increased, when I thought that possibly Mary might by that time be also in their power. At length the expected hour arrived, and I heard, with a palpitating heart, the door of my prison softly open, and in a moment my deliverer in a low voice said,—“Speak not—give me your hand—let us away, and God speed you!”

“We now, softly and in silence, groped our way, until we came to the steps by which, I suppose, we before descended, at the top of which the man unbarred what appeared to me a small wicket, and once more I breathed the pure air. He now left me for the space of ten minutes, to see if any one was near, and on his return,—“We must lose no time,” whispered he, and taking me by the arm, we walked at a great rate until I could go no further, being much fatigued from the unusual exercise.—“We must rest then,” said he, “but this is not a proper place,—about a short mile from hence is a ruined castle, where you may remain till dawn of day, exert yourself, and we will walk slowly thither; there we can also take refreshment, for I contrived, though with much difficulty, to procure some.”

“Is that in our way to the convent?” said I.—“It is not,” replied the man.—“Then why not rest here?” I demanded.—“Because,” answered he, “here we might probably be discovered; but no one approaches the ruins, as it was formerly the hiding place of exiles and men of desperate fortunes—though none are there now. I am acquainted with every hole and corner, and while you repose, will watch, in a part that commands a view of the whole country for miles round.”

“I made no answer, but stopped, and appeared irresolute and fearful.—“Come, come,” said the man, “I guess your thoughts,—you think me a greater villain than I am.—Bad enough, indeed, I have been,—but I dare not harm you.—This is not a proper place to say more, or to explain why I now stand forth your avowed defender from injury, even at the hazard of my life.—Bear witness, great God, to the truth of my words,” said he, dropping on his knees and solemnly lifting his hands and eyes to Heaven, “so may I be blessed or cursed for ever!”

“I have no doubts remaining,” returned I, “so let us away,” at the same time taking hold of his arm, “and may God be our guide!”—“Amen!” replied he.

“I felt my spirits revive after this conversation, and we again walked forward until we reached a large desolated building, vast fragments of which frequently interrupted our walk, even at some distance before we arrived at the outer court. As we approached the gloomy walls overspread with ivy, in which time and war had made several breaches, my heart sunk within me, so that when I stepped on the fallen portcullis, and attempted to pass the arched entrance, I stopped, shuddered, and drew back.—The man, finding I did not proceed, turned round,—“What fear you,” said he, “have I not sworn to protect you?—There is nothing to dread here but mouldering walls.”

“This darkness is fearful,” returned I.—“But that I can speedily remove,” replied he, “for I am provided with the means, only let us first gain a place where you may rest in security, while I watch the return of day.” So saying, he gave me his hand, and led, and sometimes lifted me over ponderous masses of stone, until we reached an angle of the main building, at the extremity of the inner court, when he stopped, and looking wistfully for some time at a particular spot close to the wall, he exclaimed,—“All is right,—no one has discovered this entrance!”—He then put on a pair of thick gloves, and with much difficulty drew aside some long thorny shrubs, which grew near, and perfectly covered a secret entrance. When these were put aside, he lifted up an iron grating, and unfolded to my view a flight of steps that were before concealed.—“We must descend here,” said he, “but first it is necessary to procure a light,” he then unbuckled a wallet that was fastened with straps across his shoulders, and taking out the necessary implements he set light to two tapers, one of which he placed in my hand, and then assisted me to descend until we reached a large vaulted stone chamber.

“Stay here awhile,” said he, “until I make all secure by letting fall the trap.”—In a few minutes he returned,—“All is safe,” said he, “and we will now explore a more convenient resting place.”—He then led the way up a flight of narrow winding steps, that brought us to a smaller apartment than the other, and in which there remained two or three old settles, worm-eaten and nearly gone to decay. Placing his wallet on one of them, he took from it a couple of manchets, some meat, and a leathern bottle containing wine. Filling a small cup from the latter, he respectfully withdrew to the extremity of the apartment, after having courteously entreated me to take refreshment. Regaining courage and confidence from his behaviour, I did not scruple to take some food, and desired that he would do the same.—“I shall presently retire,” answered he, “to a recess upon the ruined walls, and carry some food with me, leaving you to take some repose; for there I can, myself unseen, behold every thing that approaches.”

“You appear to be well acquainted with this place,” said I.—“I am,” returned he, “I resided here near eighteen months, in which time I believe I left not a stone unexplored.”

“A silence of some minutes ensued, which he at length broke, by saying—“I see astonishment in your countenance, that any one should take up an abode in so desolate a place; but mine was an act of necessity, not of choice, being surprised and made a prisoner, in the first instance, by the banditti, who, some little time since, were masters of these ruins.”

“You say, that during the time you remained with them, you explored every part; did no opportunity then present to escape?”

“None, until by the terror of being put to death, I had been forced to become as guilty as themselves, for then they knew I could not quit them, without danger of incurring the punishment inflicted on robbers. When I say I became as guilty as themselves, I mean, as far as assisting in their plundering parties, for, thanks to Providence! I have never yet imbrued my hands in blood; nay, it is to an abhorrence of that crime, and some other concurring circumstances, that your life is preserved, and that you see me here. You appear surprised; I will explain myself, but for this purpose it may be necessary to go back to some occurrences, which lead to the present time.

“My parents were vassals to an English baron, whom my father, following to the wars, here in Guyenne, lost his life; some months after his death, my mother, being at the

time he was killed, pregnant with me, was appointed to suckle a new born female child, of which the baroness was delivered. It will be needless to dwell on the events of my youth, as they are trivial, and of no import; suffice it to say, that my mother brought me up with such a due reverence for our holy religion, that, though guilty of great enormities, I have never yet intirely lost sight of it.

“About five years since, my mother died, and I engaged myself as page to a Norman gentleman, who left England, and came hither, on account of some property that fell to him in this province.—My master having settled his affairs, was about to return to Normandy; and travelling over this barren heath, with no other servant than myself, he was attracted by the appearance of these ruins, when, both alighting from our horses, we entered the inner court, to take a nearer view. Fatal curiosity! for in an instant, and before we could remount our horses, we were surrounded by a number of well-armed ruffians, who laid my master dead by a stroke from a pole-axe, and made me an easy prey.

“For some hours I was confined in a dungeon, beneath the main building, where I had nothing to disturb my own horrid reflections, for all was darkness and solitude; at length I beheld a gleam of light appear through a fissure of the massy wall, and presently I heard the rusty bolts of my prison harshly grate, as they were drawn back; the door opened, and two armed ruffians entered, one bearing some coarse bread, and the other a pitcher of water. Having set down what they brought, one pointed to some rushes that lay in a corner of my dungeon, and then silently retired, taking care to replace the bolts on the outside.

“This scene took place, with no variation, for about a week, when one night my usual visitors appeared, and told me to follow them. I per force obeyed, and was conducted into a large hall, where about twenty horrid looking fellows sat round a large oaken table, or rather before some rough hewn planks, put awkwardly together, to answer that purpose. One, about the age of twenty-five, who appeared to be their chief, sat at the head of the table, and who was no other than the man that commanded the party which forced you from the Convent of the Benedictines; he demanded my name and country—that of my master—from whence we came—whither we were going,—and where his property lay. I answered these interrogatories as well as I could, he, at the same time, consulting some papers which lay open before him, to see if he could detect me in a falsity; for I was given to understand, after my examination, that those papers belonged to my late master.

“Well,” said he, after he had finished “I believe you have not attempted to deceive me, for if you had, we should have hanged you up immediately. It appears, that your master died rich, and we, by the law of arms, are his heirs, though possibly the chicane of other courts may endeavour to cheat us. I see here among his papers, a letter to his uncle, in Normandy, setting forth, that he was about purchasing an estate near to his present domain in Guyenne, but that he should want five hundred marks to complete the bargain.—Do you know why this letter was not sent?”

“Because,” replied I, “my master having completed his business sooner than he imagined, thought he might as well fetch the money himself.”

“Enough,” said he, “it was wisely resolved. He is at peace from all the turmoils of riches, and we will take the troublesome charge upon ourselves; thus much for business.—And now,” continued he, addressing me, “though thou art but a menial, we will permit thee to be seated in gentlemen’s company; take that empty stool, and drink

this cup of wine.—Obey!” cried he, sternly, seeing that I hesitated; upon which I immediately complied.—“It is well,” continued he, smoothing the asperity of his brows, “not any here disobey my commands, for they know that the general safety depends on a proper subordination, and none but a tyrant would exact a servile one.—Fill round—here is liberty, under proper restriction.”

“As I saw I had not the *liberty* either to refuse the wine, or wave the toast, I perforce complied.—“Gramercy,” exclaimed the chieftain, “I espy hopes in thee, notwithstanding thou appearest to be somewhat tramelled by early prejudice; but thy education shall be improved, if we find thee not stupid and incorrigible.—Meantime, he shall partake of the same viands with ourselves; and Roldan, see thou prepare him a better bed than he has reposed on for some nights past,” an order that was exactly obeyed.

CHAPTER XV.

“THIS apparent indulgence was far from giving me pleasure, for it now plainly appeared, that the motive was to induce me to turn marauder, and to keep me with them until I was cut off, either by the hand of justice, or by the desperate arm of some aggrieved traveller.

“I had now but one chance left, in order to regain my liberty, namely, a seeming compliance, on my part, until I found a proper opportunity to escape; but, alas! I was too closely watched, and while I was eagerly and impatiently waiting that event, I was often compelled to make one in their villanous depredations.

“They had hitherto acted with caution, never attacking any one save my master, near the ruins, and that they would not have done, had he not been so completely in their power.—He being dead, could tell no tales, and it was not until much consultation had been held, that they agreed to spare my life.

“Their usual robberies were committed many miles distant, concealing themselves until dusk in the forests, near some great road, where, disguising their persons, they burst forth upon the unwary like so many wild beasts; then, having effected their dire purpose, they dispersed by unfrequented paths, and regained their den.

“In this manner they went on, in their villanies, for near eighteen months after my master’s murder, during which time I had not a single opportunity to withdraw myself, or knew I where to go, for I feared an enemy in every human face.—You may remember, I told you that our chief meditated getting the five hundred marks mentioned in my master’s letter; this he had the address to affect by taking a journey to Normandy, where, presenting my master’s hand-writing, the uncle having no suspicion, paid the money.—In this excursion he was accompanied by another of the gang, remarkable for having a large scar on his right cheek; he had the imprudence to take this man to the uncle’s house. After the payment of the money, weeks, nay months elapsed, though the uncle had, it seems, written letter after letter, and made every possible inquiry, but no tidings of his nephew was received. At length, he resolved to go to Guyenne, and, in the market-place of a considerable town, about ten miles from the ruins, he recognized the man with the scarred face, leading the identical horse belonging to his late nephew.

“The man had been dispatched early that morning, in company with another of the gang, who was disguised as a countryman; this last rode a strong horse, on which panniers had been fixed, in order to carry provisions, which his companion was to purchase, and which were much wanted. The alarm being given, both attempted to escape, but to no purpose, they were instantly secured, loaded with fetters, and thrown into a dungeon.

“Being confronted with the uncle, the man who accompanied the chief of the gang into Normandy, engaged to make capital discoveries, provided his life might be spared; a compromise to this effect was entered into,—particularly as he was not the identical man that murdered the nephew.

“While this business was transacting, the party at the ruins, little suspecting the detection of their comrades, were awaiting their return, and anticipating a joyous revelry on the wine and good things they were to bring back;—their number was eighteen, exclusive of the two detained members and the captain, the latter having, fortunately for himself, taken a ride through the lone and unfrequented parts of the forest.—As for

myself, I had that day experienced a more than usual depression of spirits, revolving on my own sad fate in being thus cut off from the society of humanized beings, and forced to associate with murderers and robbers.

“In this frame of mind, about sun-set I walked forth, and seating myself upon a large fragment of the fallen wall, opposite to the only remaining tower, I there began to meditate on the means of escape;—my thoughts, however, were soon interrupted by a rustling among some dry underwood upon my left hand, lifting up my eyes, I saw a large hare come forth from beneath, cross before me, and take refuge among those brambles that cover the iron grating and steps by which we entered this place. Starting up I endeavoured to secure it, and for that purpose began to remove the brambles, which with some difficulty I effected; but instead of my prey, found only the iron trap, between the vacancies of which I had no doubt it had entered. Curiosity now took place, and every other thought was banished; I lifted up the grating and found steps beneath, leading to the tower.—“It is plain,” said I to myself, “this part of the ruin is unknown to its present inhabitants,—I will immediately return, make the discovery, get light, and explore it.” I was in the act of letting the trap fall, in order to put my resolve in execution, when a sudden and loud shout, a din of arms alternately intermingled with groans, cries of triumph, and others of discomfiture reached my ear. I started, stood aghast and appalled, instinctively raised the trap, descended a few steps, and let fall the grating.

“The noise continued for a considerable time, but at length became more indistinct and confused, and gradually ceased, when an universal silence succeeded. By this time it was totally dark, which added not a little to the horror and uncertainty of my situation.

“That our men had met with a sharp rencontre I had little doubt, and from the silence that ensued most likely were worsted, if not wholly exterminated. It was also as probable, in this latter case, that the victors would remain, at least for some time, on the spot; what then was to become of me, immured as I was, without food or sustenance,—setting aside the probability of being discovered, in which case an ignominious death would be my certain fate, and the same if even I surrendered?—Thus environed, in darkness and despair, I passed some of the most comfortless hours of my life, sometimes standing, at other times sitting on the cold steps. At length the sun’s welcome beams above the horizon, directed some faint glimmerings of light towards the trap, of which I took the advantage, by putting my hand through the spaces of the grating to draw the brambles over the surface, in order to conceal it,—in this I pretty well succeeded.—As the sun approached nearer to its meridian height, I found I could distinctly explore my place of concealment.

“The castle had originally formed one vast square, a parapet rising considerably on each front, and had been flanked at the corners by strong towers. Between the towers and the main building there had originally been strong walls, which enclosed passages of communication;—these walls no longer remained, save only a part of one adjoining this wing of the building, on the western side.—There was no apparent access, the subterranean entrance being unknown, and the aperture on the other side, which communicated with the main building, being blocked up by the falling of the front walls.

“At a considerable height from the ground, in this tower, were small openings, large enough to admit a hand, made for the purpose, I suppose of admitting air; these were now of the greatest service, as they supplied light sufficient for me to descend the

steps and examine this part of the castle. It contained only the vaulted apartment below, and this small one, from which there was an aperture communicating with the wall on the western side, large enough to admit a man;—that part of the wall was raised much above the opening, and from whence you might, unseen, by means of certain loopholes, observe what was passing beneath.

“Daylight and reflection having in some measure allayed my terror, I cautiously looked around, surveyed the lower chamber, bolted and barred, without noise, a strong door that led to the entrance; I then ascended to where we now are, and finally, finding that I could, unobserved, take a survey around, I silently crept on the wall, and plainly discovered several dead bodies, and a number of armed men in close conversation.

“Though this was nothing more than what I expected, yet it added to my misery, for if these men remained any time, there was a certainty of my being starved to death; and already did I feel the cravings of nature very powerful, having ate no supper the night before. While I was mournfully ruminating on my hard fate, I heard the noise of different birds, both within and on the outside of the tower; a sudden gleam of hope rushed on my mind, I immediately examined a number of holes and cavities, and, to my unspeakable pleasure, found not only eggs, but also young birds. A sudden emotion of thankfulness seized me,—“Praised be God,” said I, “here is a present supply at least!” I then took and devoured about a dozen eggs, which much revived me.—During the day I repeatedly and anxiously watched for the departure of the men I had seen, but to my sorrow I found they remained, some appearing to keep guard, while others, well armed, were straggling about the ruins, in separate parties.—Two of these men, about the close of day, approached the wall where I lay hid, engaged in earnest conversation,—“Yes,” I distinctly heard one say, in reply to the other, “it is a dear bought victory, for though the rogues have lost eleven of their number, and the rest will infallibly be hanged, yet we have also had seven of our party killed, exclusive of the wounded; and what is worse, we that survive were taught to expect a great booty, when after the strictest search we have not been enabled to discover enough to recompense our trouble, setting aside the blood that has been spilt.—I wonder how their captain and the other young villain escaped,—I mean he that was servant to the murdered gentleman.”

“That is impossible to tell, but that *they have escaped* is certain,” replied the other, “and as that is the case, I wonder how much longer we are to be harassed with watching,—I think we have had fatigue enough.”

“Why, I can satisfy you in that particular,” replied his comrade, “we are only to remain another night;—at break of day we depart.”

“And a pretty night we shall have of it, from the blackness of the clouds,” returned the other; “you and I doubtless will have fine drenched skins, as I understand we are of the party that is to keep guard without.”—By this time the sun had disappeared below the horizon, and a tucket sounded, to call the stragglers together, so that I heard no more.—However, what I had heard was joyful tidings to me, as it convinced me that they had no suspicion of my being so near; and likewise that their removal would give me free liberty to quit my hiding place, and gain some safe retreat.

“As the man had predicted, the rain soon descended in torrents, however this was an advantage to me, for I copiously slaked my thirst, from what was retained in the cavities of the wall; after which I regaled myself on some eggs, and having again drank some more rain water, I laid down on one of these settles and soon fell asleep.

“For some hours my rest was quiet and undisturbed, but about the dawn of day I dreamed that my mother stood before me, and said,—“Repent your sins and quit this wretched place.”—And that I replied,—“Alas! mother, whither shall I fly?”—“Travel due south for five miles,” answered she, “you will then come to an avenue of large trees, at the end of which you will meet one whom you have known, he shall tell you what to do.”

“I awoke, so impressed with this dream, that I at first looked round expecting to see my mother;—at that instant the tucket sounded, and I flew to the wall, where I beheld the whole troop, consisting of about forty men, mounting their horses and preparing to depart. In about half an hour they were completely out of sight; I, however, did not quit my station for more than three hours after, when I cautiously descended, and once more returned to our old place of rendezvous.—On my way thither I beheld shocking vestiges of the late engagement, though the bodies had been removed and buried, as I supposed, in one pit, for the ground near the scene of action appeared to have been newly opened.—Our old habitation too had suffered its share of spoilage, as well as its late inhabitants, for every thing that could not be carried off was broken and rendered useless. This was no longer a place for me, for I had now full liberty to depart.—The whole world was before me, but I had no one to assist or counsel me;—like Cain, I appeared as a fugitive and a vagabond on the face of the earth, and knew not whither to direct my steps. In this emergency I fell upon my knees, called upon God to assist me, and shed a flood of tears;—immediately my dream occurred fresh to my memory,—“Yes,” cried I, in a frenzied accent, “my mother, I will obey thy commands!”—and instantly began my walk, directing my steps by the sun, which was then at its meridian height, due south.

“Having had but little nourishment for many hours past, by the time that I supposed I had gone five miles, I became sick and faint;—I, however, still walked on about another mile, when glancing my eyes to a turn of the forest on my right hand, I beheld a long avenue of tall trees, and gave an involuntary cry of joy.—Pursuing my way beneath their spreading branches, I was at length stopped by a deep moat, over which was a small bridge, but drawn up on the further side;—the view beyond this was obstructed by a thick plantation of trees. Finding my progress stopped in that direction, my spirits sunk, and I turned in order to go back, when a voice that appeared perfectly familiar to me, called me by my name.—I looked up, but saw no one,—“Surely,” said I, “this is a deception of the senses, or the effect of witchcraft, I will begone.”—“Stop,” articulated the same voice, “I will be with you presently.”—Still I beheld no one,—but in a minute after, I saw the bridge drop across the moat, and recognized our late chief advancing towards me.

CHAPTER XVI.

“THIS dream,” said I, to myself, “must be the work of the devil, for the spirit of my mother would never urge me to seek those who would lead me to destruction.”

“Thou art a fortunate varlet,” said he, in a sullen tone of voice, as he approached near me;—“has any of our brave associates survived the surprise—and by what means didst thou escape?”

“I stated, in as concise terms as possible, that on the night of the attack, being on the outside of the building, in a part obscured from view, I had been witness of the unexpected assault;—that I had concealed myself until the assailants had retired, and then, not knowing which way to direct my steps, chance had brought me to the spot where he then beheld me.

“Know you of any one else that hath escaped?” said he.

“No,” returned I, “I do not think that a single individual, exclusive of ourselves, has been saved from death or captivity.”

“Peace be with them, dead or living!” rejoined he, “one or the other would most probably have been my fate, had I not possessed more foresight;—for finding that our comrades did not return from market about their usual time, my mind misgave me, and I mounted my horse, pursuing private ways through woods and intricate paths well known to myself. For some hours I reconnoitred the country round, from a cover where I could not be perceived; from thence I at length observed a troop of armed men, slowly advancing towards our castle.—I watched their motions, undiscovered, until I had no doubt of their intentions;—in fine, I pursued their footsteps, by hovering in their rear until I saw them, under the cover of the gloom, commence their attack.—Their numbers and equipment precluded all hope of victory on our part, so I had no other chance left but to take care of myself;—fortunately I had previously secreted my share of the spoils, being well aware of the uncertain tenure of our lives.”

“You have then, I suppose,” said I, “taken up your abode somewhere near this spot?”

“My dwelling,” replied he, with a smile, “must for the present be concealed; however, I think I have interest enough to provide for you, if you have no objection to serve.”

“I have an objection,” said I, resolutely, “to serve the devil any longer, by living by plunder.”

“Oh, if that is all your objection,” replied he, laughing,—“you may make your mind perfectly easy. In short, I know an old gentleman, a man of good estate, who wants a confidential assistant, in an expedition he is about to undertake; and you appear to be the very person.”

“I have no objection,” said I, “provided the expedition is lawful.”

“Of that there can be no doubt; for it is only, by the aid of resolute persons, to rescue family property from the gripe of injustice and hypocrisy.—But you shall know more anon, and have all your *conscientious* scruples quieted,” continued he, with a sneer; “meantime I will go and propose the business to the principal.”

“Do so,” I replied, “and if you can contrive to procure me some refreshment, I shall be glad, for I have fared but indifferently since I saw you last.”

“Poor devil!” said he; “well, repose yourself on this bank, and you shall speedily hear from me.”—“I did as I was directed, and in about a quarter of an hour, a man, with a lowering aspect, appeared, who having surveyed me intently, bade me follow him. I obeyed, and he led me over the bridge, which, having drawn up, we proceeded by a long winding path, through a plantation of trees and shrubs, so closely set as almost to exclude daylight; the walk was terminated by a small gloomy dwelling, which having entered, the man, from proper receptacles, spread all the necessaries for eating; he then withdrew, and soon after returned with wine and cold meats, which having set before me, he shut the door and retired.

“I had not long finished my meal, before I was joined by our late chief, who, seating himself, said, “I forgot to caution you, as you value your life, not to hint at our late connexion. You see me here in my proper character, that of a gentleman; at the castle I never went abroad but so well disguised, as not to be recognised.—My situation here you will also not inquire into; for depend upon it, if your curiosity should be excited, it will not be gratified, and it would only lead you into extreme peril.—Your services will be light, and probably not immediately needed; in this spot you will reside, where you will live well, but your walks must not extend, for your own safety, beyond the paling that surrounds these grounds.”

“There was a mystery in his words that I did not approve, but I had no remedy, and was obliged to submit. I had indeed no cause to complain, for I continued several days without having any thing to do, but to eat, drink, and sleep; until at length this inaction and sameness became wearisome.—One day, after sunset, the captain suddenly appeared, and, without any preamble, said,—“You are immediately to be called into action, though it is only a prelude to the main business; in a few minutes you will have proper habiliments brought you, accoutre yourself without delay, and be ready.”—So saying, he went out, and presently a man entered, bearing a bundle, which he put on the table, and departed. The package contained a complete disguise. I was soon equipped, when, being joined by my late chief, we sallied forth, crossed the bridge, and joined three others, two of whom had led horses saddled and bridled, and the third had, beside his own, a sumpter horse, bearing some packages, and which, from the darkness of the night, I could not distinguish.—Having mounted the spare horses, our chief commanded the men to go forward, and singling me out, said,—“It is now time to explain the business we are about to undertake;—know then, the lord of these domains, which are most ample and extensive, hath several children, amongst them a daughter newly come of age.—Being willing to spare no expence in her education, and in order to make her perfectly accomplished, he placed her in a neighbouring convent.—During her early years, an aunt died and left her large possessions, which the abbess hearing, hath, in order to obtain them, so estranged the weak girl from her family connexions, that, without some vigorous effort be made to withdraw her, both her person and property will speedily be for ever lost. To prevent this, there is no other means than to make an opening into the convent garden, which, when done, may be easily concealed.—Nothing afterwards remains, but to watch a fair opportunity, and to bear her off;—we are this night furnished with proper implements to begin the work, at a part of the wall, so distant from the convent, and so well concealed on the outside, by a thick coppice, as to set discovery at defiance.—It is a business that will soon be achieved, a hundred marks a man is the reward, together with safe conduct to whatever place they may choose to retire, when the business is effected.”

“For my own part, I had no great inclination to earn this money, but I had gone too far to draw back;—besides, I was too much in this man’s power, he might contrive to betray me into the hands of justice, or procure my murder, for I knew him to be artful, bold, and daring,—I, therefore, made a virtue of necessity, and accepted his proposal.—In due time we reached the convent wall, and began our operations at a place that he pointed out,—for it seems he had previously contrived to reconnoitre not only the best part to make a breach, but also the interior grounds, where the nuns and novices take their exercise.

“But this was a more difficult task than we had been taught to expect, for it was not until the third night’s hard labour that we compleated a sufficient entrance, which was perfectly concealed within by thick underwood, and by the coppice without,—and which, even in the day time secured ourselves, our horses, and instruments from view.

“For three whole weeks after we had effected the breach we had no sufficient opportunity to complete the undertaking; for though we lay hid in the garden for several days, and had Mary de Vavasour, as we thought, perfectly pointed out to us, yet something or other always impeded, till the night of the storm, when, from mistake, you were seized.”

“I do not wonder at that,” I replied, “our size and form are not unlike.”

“I need not relate,” resumed my deliverer, “what followed your seizure, until the time that de Vavasour discovered that you were not his daughter;—you doubtless remember his rage, and that after being called in, we all quitted your apartment in order to hear our chief’s expedient to insure our future safety.—It was a horrid one—your murder!”

“It was what I thought at the time,” said I.

“My blood ran cold at the proposal,” continued my deliverer, “and nothing but the faint light of a single taper could have concealed my confusion.—“No,” said I to myself, “I have already been too criminal, and will sooner lose my life than be an accomplice in such an accursed business.”—I, however, concealed my thoughts, and apparently consented. They then discussed the means, and which were, to persuade you that they meant to restore you to the convent, on your taking an oath to make no discovery; but on your road thither, to murder and conceal you in an old stone quarry. My companions were again dispatched, with orders to make every exertion to gain the right object; and even, under cover of the night, to break into the convent.”

“Pray Heaven they may not succeed!” interrupted I.

“I trust they will not,” he replied. “However,” continued he, “their absence produced one good effect, for I was deputed to wait upon you. What followed you are acquainted with, except one circumstance, and which determined me to save your life.—After the departure of my companions, having seated myself on a stool which was placed in a recess, near your prison, I became suddenly drowsy, and fell asleep;—again, to my fancy, I beheld my mother,—“Save the poor prisoner!” said she, “Save,—” and the voice appeared to falter, as if unwilling to mention the name,—at length it continued,—“Save—O! save Magdalen!—the much loved—infant—child—the beauteous—injured—persecuted,—but I must not utter more,—farewel.—Save!”—The voice and form now appeared gradually to sink and die away.—I awoke in the utmost terror, exclaiming,—“Yes, I will save her!”—I then endeavoured to arouse myself, and looked cautiously around to see if any one was near, that might have heard my involuntary exclamation, but

no one was in sight, or within hearing,—and you know what followed,” said he, addressing me, “until we reached this place.”

“I do,” I replied, “but were you never introduced to the *Sieur de Vavasour* before the night I was forced from the convent?”

“Never,” he replied, “nor did I, until then, hear the name of our employer;—with whom, however, our chief appeared to be very familiar.”

“Know you by what means they became acquainted?” interrogated I.

“I do not,” answered he, “nor did I, until that night, know that there was a mansion so near the place where I first encountered the chief, it was so surrounded and shaded by trees. Indeed, I was acquainted then with only that part where you were confined, which, I was given to understand, stood detached, and had no communication with the main building;—nor did I ever see any domestics, save those that assisted in the expedition to the convent.”

“Was there a necessity,” said I, “for us to come here, instead of proceeding in an even course to the convent?”

“There was,” said he, “for if we had gone the direct road thither, we might have encountered those that forced you from thence, and certain death would have been the consequence.—Besides, we now shall have day-light, in which *they* will not dare appear, so that we can then proceed in safety.”

“My deliverer and conductor then ceased,—and I said,—“You appeared astonished when I told you my name was *Magdalen*, and exclaimed,—“It is strange!—it is wonderful!”—I knew not then of your dreams,—they were no less wonderful—What was your mother’s name?”

“*Margaret la Fontaine*,” answered he.—I started with amazement.—“Did you then know my mother?” interrogated he.

“I—I thought I did,” answered I, recollecting myself, “was she ever in France?”

“Never,” replied he, “though my father was a native of Normandy, and taught me the French language.”

“And what is your baptismal name?” said I.

“I was called *Morgan*,” replied he.

“I concealed my emotion as well as I could, for I had no longer a doubt but that this man’s mother had been my nurse, and that this was the son who partook of the same milk which nurtured my infantile years.”

“Did you confide your thoughts on this subject to him?” eagerly inquired the abess.

“Never,” replied *Magdalen*,—“but kept to the strict letter of my oath.”

“You have done well,” said the abbot, “I pray you go on.”

“During his recital,” resumed *Magdalen*, “I became so interested that I had quite forgotten that he had taken no nourishment, though I had;—but at the close of his narration I desired him to eat, being well assured he must need refreshment.—“I will follow your advice,” said he, “and as I am equally convinced you must require rest, I will retire for a few hours;” so saying, he took some food and wine with him, and bowing respectfully, immediately withdrew.

“The perturbation of mind, added to fatigue, caused me to sleep for some hours. When I awoke, I found it was broad day; I was then in haste to depart, and called for *Morgan*, but receiving no answer, I looked through the aperture he before mentioned, and

saw him fast asleep in a recess of the wall.—Though the delay was not pleasing, I could not determine to break the rest of a man that had saved my life, I therefore waited for about three hours. He then awoke, and we were preparing to depart, when there suddenly came on a heavy rain; as, from its violence, we supposed it could not be lasting, we agreed to wait some little time before we set forward. The storm, however, continued until about five in the afternoon, and then abated, which again determined us to renew our walk.

“Fortunately, before we descended for that purpose, Morgan repaired to the wall, in order to inspect the surrounding country, for fear of a surprise. His caution was well timed, for he returned to me in great haste, and reported that he saw two horsemen, at a distance, riding at a great rate, and apparently in a direction towards the castle.—“They doubtless are only travellers,” continued he, “and will quickly pass; for none can have business at this desolate place.—I will, however, watch their motions, and the moment they are out of sight, will let you know.”—So saying, Morgan retreated through the aperture, but soon returned in great trepidation—“It is de Vavasour and the chief,” said he; “they have just alighted, and are gone into that part of the building that we used to inhabit; what their business is I cannot guess, for it is impossible they can have any knowledge of our route, and I am equally certain this retreat is unknown to the chief. I will however again to my post on the wall.”

“I am fearful of being left alone,” said I.

“You may then, if you please, accompany me, for the wall is perfectly secure; there is likewise no danger of your being discovered, from the height of the parapet, provided you keep silent.”—So saying, he crept through the opening, and I followed.—We had not remained many minutes, before we beheld de Vavasour and his companion issuing forth from a part of the main building, and bending their steps slowly towards the tower, they appeared in earnest converse.—“It was, indeed, a cursed mischance,” said the former, as he approached, “and ruin is the consequence; ere this they have reached the convent.—Had you but returned last night, before they escaped, her death would have made all sure; nothing now remains but to flee, and save our own lives, if it is not too late, by making to the first sea-port.”

“Why do we then waste the time?” hastily interrupted the chief; “let us proceed and secure my treasure, for that is the business that brought us hither—not to talk. I fancy that must be all that we shall have to depend on, exclusive of what you have hastily been able to draw together; for no doubt your estates will be confiscated, and yourself outlawed—a pretty conclusion you have brought things to by your cursed avarice.”

“Add too, your wild extravagance,—but reproach me not—for whose sake did I——” Here all further hearing was cut off, by a distance that rendered their farther discourse unintelligible to us. We, however, soon after, saw them busied at another part of the ruins, from whence they appeared to remove something weighty; after which they returned the same way, again entered the ruins, led out their horses, remounted, and galloped off.

“Though we had been detained a considerable time longer, it was yet no small satisfaction to find, by de Vavasour and his companion’s discourse, that so far from having succeeded in carrying off Mary, that they had given up the attempt, and fled to save their own lives. We were also now assured, that we might return without danger of meeting the ruffians, we therefore cheerfully quitted the ruins, carefully closing the

entrance, that it might not tempt rogues and vagabonds to take possession of a post, from whence they might annoy the unwary traveller.

“I had inquired of Morgan, soon after we left the ruins, how far distant the convent was?” He replied, “He thought about twelve miles;” “so that I was in hopes that I should have reached hither, in good time, and without much fatigue; but, owing to the brooks and rivulets being swelled by the heavy rains, which caused us to go much about, and some part of the way being deep and miry, it was past the hour of midnight, and I thought I must have sunk under the fatigue.”

CHAPTER XVII.

MAGDALEN ceased; and the abbot said,—“Daughter, I have listened attentively to your narration, and am far from thinking any blame or censure can be attached to your leaving the convent; your account also, from that period to the present time, is ingenuous, open, and candid.—Kneel, therefore, and receive our blessing; we absolve you for trespassing against the rules of this house, which, by oath, you were bound to obey, forasmuch as you broke those rules, by force, and not wilfully, the Almighty, therefore, bless, keep, and protect you.” He then raised and led her to the abbess, who said,—“Neither can I censure you, Magdalen, for you appear to have preserved a due regard to your sacred vows; and henceforth you shall partake of my favour and confidence.”

“One thing yet remains,” said the abbot; “know you ought where the man Morgan hath retreated to, Magdalen?”

“I do,” replied she, “for he throws himself at the foot of holy mother church, and entreated me to intercede for him, that he may be restored to those rites which he has forfeited.”

“His offences have been heavy,” said the abbot, “but, as he has, in some measure, made reparation, and as his vicious life was, in the first instance, constrained, we will make our report accordingly, to the archbishop of this diocese; let him, therefore, take sanctuary, for his own personal safety, he will there receive food, and be examined in regard to his repentance, which, if found sincere, he will be pardoned and absolved—for the church is a lenient as well as a severe mother.—You will acquaint the Lady Abbess with the place of his concealment, and she will dispatch a messenger to conduct him to the sanctuary, from whence no secular arm dare force him.—But our attention must first be directed against the principal offenders, whose persons must be forthwith seized, if they have not already eluded justice by flight, in which case a spiritual anathema must be denounced against them, their property registered, and put under sequestration.—Farewel, lady,” said he to the abbess; “I go to advise with the arch bishop on these events.”

“Grace and peace be with you,” returned the abbess.—“You, Magdalen,” continued she, “had better retire, and endeavour to recruit your strength and spirits, from the fatigue and perturbation you have sustained; and for this purpose we will, for a day or two, excuse you from the accustomed duties.”

“May I not, in the mean time, lady, hold communion with Mary and little Ela?”

“You may,” mildly answered the abbess, “for your conduct now appears so exemplary, that I mean not to restrict you in any rational indulgence.—You will only be careful not to walk near the wilderness, nor even to the bridge, until we have had every part of the grounds examined, and made secure.”

“I will most assuredly obey you, lady,” said Magdalen, “for I have no inclination to experience such another alarm.”—Magdalen now repaired to the refectory, where she found Mary and several of the nuns assembled. The two friends warmly embraced, and congratulated each other on their again meeting, while the others fatigued her with a thousand questions, which she answered as concisely as possible; being unwilling to hurt Mary’s feelings, by publicly announcing that she owed her late distresses to the novice’s unworthy parent.

No sooner did Magdalen and Mary disengage themselves from the curiosity of the overwhelming inquirers, by whom they were surrounded, than they repaired to the dormitory of the latter, where, being seated, Mary again embraced and congratulated her friend on her return.—“I understand, my dear Magdalen,” said she, “by what you told the nuns just now, that you were forced from hence, and have suffered much.”

“I have, indeed,” replied Magdalen, “though they mistook their object, for the outrage was designed for another.”

“For another!” repeated Mary.

“Yes,” answered Magdalen, “and happy am I at the mistake; for had it been otherwise, possibly neither the perpetrators would have been discovered, or the injured party ever more heard of.”

“You surprise me, dear Magdalen!—Do you know, then, who was their real object?”

“Yes,—Mary de Vavasour.”

“Impossible!—for who could meditate so cruel an injury?”

“Her unnatural father,—the Sieur de Vavasour.”

“Oh! my dear Magdalen!” replied Mary.—“Yet let me indulge the flattering hope that it is not so, for,—oh! my God!” continued she, “what can I have done that a parent should doom his child to destruction?”

“You have been guilty of the worst of crimes, in the eye of avarice,—rivalled your father and brother in a rich aunt’s favor.”

“How willingly, dear Magdalen, would I forego all personal advantage, to enjoy parental and fraternal affection!”

“It would be a dear bought purchase, Mary;—for, believe me, you would only possess the shadow for the substance.—But let not this distress you, my dear unfortunate girl,” observing Mary’s tears, “you have a better father,—an all good—all powerful one, that can defeat the wicked machinations of sinful man—one that will protect innocence;—and in me, Mary, behold a sister—not bound by the ties of blood, but in the closer links of true friendship and affection.”

Mary pressed Magdalen to her bosom, and said,—“Well then, we will, indeed, be sisters, and your God shall be my God!—no longer will I oppose the will of Heaven,—and what have I to regret in quitting the world?—Come then, my dear sister,” continued she, rising from her seat, “let us immediately repair to the abbess, and notify my willing resolve.”

“Stop, Mary,” replied Magdalen, “let not the enthusiasm of the moment precipitate you to a deed which cannot be revoked,—give this sudden resolution some hours thought, and—”

“It is not a sudden resolution,” interrupted Mary, “but what I had determined on during your absence, when I was fearful I had lost you for ever.—Your return has, indeed, strengthened my resolution, for you have convinced me that I ought to have no affections but to my God, and to what is contained within the narrow limits of these walls.—Oh! Magdalen, how can I repay you for what you have suffered on my account?—But may I ask, (that is, if the recital will not prove too painful,) will you oblige me with particulars?”

“It will, indeed, be painful,” said Magdalen, “because I am afraid, that notwithstanding the undeserved injuries you have sustained, you cannot hear, unmoved,

the errors and vices of one to whom you owe your being.”—Magdalen then ran over, briefly as possible, a narrative of all she had suffered;—only concealing their intent to destroy her, and softening, where she could, the blackest part of de Vavasour’s conduct.

“Wretched, mistaken parent!” exclaimed Mary, as Magdalen ceased,—“how art thou punished!—forced to flee and become a wanderer!—Alas!—Alas! that ever I was born;—and thou, accursed gold, bane of society, but for thee I might have been happy!”

“Riches, my dear Mary, are bestowed for a blessing;—it is our passions only that render them pernicious and injurious to society.”

“True, my dear Magdalen, and who knows whether those baneful passions might not have taken as firm a root in me, as they have done in my unhappy parent, had I been permitted to live in the world, to my soul’s utter perdition. Oh! my friend,—my sister,—every thing strengthens—every word that you utter convinces me that I should delay my vows no longer;—one short struggle and I have done with the world.—Could I but once more see my mother,—hear her call me by the endearing name of child,—and know that my father is in safety, cruel as he has been to me.—Perhaps a little time may see him in a strange land, friendless and in want,—he that has had every comfort, every luxury.—O! Magdalen, I cannot bear it!—I cannot consent to give up all—*all* my fortune, and not reserve a little for a distressed parent;—the abbess surely will not require it!”

“Perhaps,” said Magdalen, “he may not want it.”

Mary for a moment looked wistfully at Magdalen, then burst into a flood of tears,—“Surely, Magdalen,” said she, “you do not mean that you think he will be taken and put to death?”

“How ready, Mary, you are to torment yourself.—My meaning is, that at least for the present I should suppose he is pretty well stored.”

“I remarked,” said Mary, “that at the conclusion of your account of the outrage, you added the abbot’s opinion, that my father’s estate would be put under sequestration,—they surely will not be so unjust as to deprive my brother of it.”

“You seem to have more affection for your brother than he had for you; it did not appear that he had any scruples about your being deprived of your fortune.—Upon my word,” added Magdalen, smiling, “you will make an excellent nun, and will far exceed in practice many of the professed sisters; for, though but a novice, you have already learned to love your enemies, and to do good to those that persecute you.”

The conversation was here broken off by the boisterous intrusion of little Ela, who kept up an incessant knocking at the door of the dormitory, until she was admitted,—crying,—“I will come in and see my mamma Magdalen;—my Lady Abbess says I may, and I will too.—Open the door.”

Mary arose and admitted the little pleader, who immediately flung herself into Magdalen’s arms, saying,—“My dear mother, where have you been this long, long time?—how could you go without Ela?—They say you have been run away with,—why did they not run away with me too, and then we would not have come back again?”

“What then you would have left me,” said Mary.—“O, fie! Ela, I thought you loved me.”

“O, no,” replied Ela, “we would have come back for dear Mary;—only——”

“Only what, Ela?” said Mary, interrupting the little prattler.

“Why only, I was thinking, perhaps the Lady Abbess would not let us run away again, and then we must all have been obliged to stay in this dismal place.”

“So then,” said Mary, smiling, “I find, that rather than your mamma Magdalen, and yourself should be detained, you would however leave dear Mary.”

“Ah, but you know,” returned Ela, “that when you are married you will leave the convent, and go home and live with your husband.”

“Yes, when my soul is united with my Heavenly spouse, I trust I shall; for my body is doomed never to quit the precincts of a cloister.”

“If the reflection, my dear Mary, impresses a regret on your spirits, why resolve to take the vows?—It is not yet too late to retract; you have not publicly avowed a determination, and, believe me, nothing that has been uttered in my presence shall ever transpire.”

“I have no regrets,” answered Mary;—“it is true I had once other views, but they are for ever lost.”

The two friends were now interrupted by the ringing of the convent bell, an indication that the general mid-day meal was about to take place. Mary, Ela, and Magdalen, however, were indulged in taking their’s together, on account of the fatigue the latter had so recently sustained, and they were also further favoured by its being sent from the abbess’s own table. Not but that lady had another motive as well as the granting a particular indulgence,—she had well weighed all the recent events, and did not wish to have them publicly canvassed before the opinion and determination of the bishop of the diocese was known.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TWO days after, the arrival of the Arch-bishop of Bourdeaux was announced at the convent, he was accompanied by the Abbot of Pau. The arch-bishop was a venerable old man, his countenance and demeanor having every mark of christian piety and humility.—After his introduction to the abbess, and some little time had passed, Mary and Magdalen were summoned before him. He addressed both with mildness and kindness,—markingly surveying them with looks of sympathy and compassion. They both knelt before him, and he raised and blessed them with an emotion truly parental.—“Daughters,” said this worthy prelate, “I feel and commiserate the outrages and sufferings you have sustained, and am come hither to redress them as much as within me lies.” He then made Mary recapitulate every circumstance of her family connexions,—her introduction to the convent, and every succeeding event.

It was plain, that at the commencement of this account the Abbot of Pau and the Abbess of the Benedictines did not feel much at their ease;—however, as the narrative advanced, and they found that Mary stifled the harsh and cruel usage she had undergone in the convent, their visages brightened up,—nay, their eyes moistened into tender commiseration at the want of affection in her family to such a pious and sweet tempered child,—to whom, the abbess said, *on her part*, her duty as well as affection, would oblige her to return doubly, what she so severely missed in her parents.

“It is both pious and benevolent in you, Lady,” said the prelate, “and I will occasionally join in the pleasurable undertaking.—What say, you, Mary, shall *I* be your father?”

The grateful maid arose, and throwing herself at the arch-bishop’s feet, said,—“and shall I then have one that I may call by that tender name?—the poor forsaken desolate Mary!—Oh, my father!—then again bless—bless your happy daughter!”

The arch-bishop gently raised,—folded her in his arms,—kissed her cheek,—then raising his hands and eyes to Heaven, solemnly ejaculated,—“Father of Mercies, look down upon this child—bless,—comfort,—and give her that peace which the world cannot bestow!”

“Amen!” responded Mary, with joyful fervor, again sinking upon her knees, “and hear and record Mary’s firm and willing resolve,—she from this moment devotes her life to thee, her God!—for thou alone can give peace and comfort.”

“Is this resolve free and voluntary!” said the arch-bishop.

“It is,” replied Mary.

“You have a considerable fortune, I understand.”

“It is appropriated, holy father,” answered Mary.

“How appropriated, daughter—and who were your advisers?—for you appear much too young to have acted for yourself,” said the arch-bishop.—“Did your father constrain you?—if so, your non-age will put it aside.”

“No, holy father, it is a gift to St. Bertrand,” said Mary.

“To St. Bertrand!—Ha,” said the arch-bishop, “St. Bertrand needs it not.—To St. Bertrand!” repeated he, “and pray who are St. Bertrand’s trustees?”

During this interrogation the abbot and abbess's countenances had undergone different degrees of suffusion,—from pale to yellow,—from that to red and crimson;—they, however, chose to continue silent and await Mary's answer.

"I know not," replied Mary.—"But if you, my lord, would condescend to become his almoner, I am assured it cannot be in better hands."

"I have no objection," replied the arch-bishop, "in occasionally assisting and advising with you in the disposal of a part of your property, for pious and charitable purposes. But answer me, daughter, was the first idea your own, and perfectly voluntary?"

"Heaven and you pardon me, holy father. I at first was guilty of the sin of hypocrisy of which I sincerely repent, and crave your absolution; and as an atonement for my offence, now willingly offer up my fortune to St. Bertrand.—Yet, my lord, if I could, without sin, make one request,—"

"What is it, daughter?"

"My father's offences, which incur punishment, were levelled at myself. May the Almighty pardon him as freely as I do! His disgrace would be an everlasting bar to my future peace.—Ah, my lord, your power could sanction——"

"Amiable—exemplary child!—Well—well, for your sake, there shall no search be made;—but let him take care of himself, and keep out of our way, and your elder brother, also, for he, I understand, has been a party in this atrocious act; they must, therefore, in future, be aliens to their native country."

"One thing more, my lord;—poverty, which they have not been used to, will be hard to encounter; and I have been told it frequently leads to vice. My father's estate—"

"Must inevitably be put under sequestration; not only to prevent the commission of more crimes by him and your elder brother, but also that a provision may be made for your mother, and the other children, in which distribution yourself shall be considered."

"Heaven be praised!—I shall then have it in my power to assist the unhappy, and perhaps repentant wanderers."

"If any thing can make an impression on their hardened bosoms, it, doubtless, will be a knowledge of the amiable disposition of one they had so much injured," said the arch-bishop. Then turning to Magdalen, he said, "I will not trouble you, daughter, to recapitulate the terrors and dangers you have so lately sustained; having minutely weighed every circumstance, as related to me by the abbot, suffice it, that I have taken measures for future security in all the religious houses within my diocese.—The man you term your deliverer, I have seen; it appears, upon the whole, that he has acted from coercion, and that what share of guilt may attach to him, has been much extenuated by your deliverance.—Add to which, he appears a true penitent, and is desirous of expiating his former offences, by entering into holy orders; he is now in sanctuary, until his pardon can be made out, he then will enter upon his noviciate—for I mean to take his patronage on myself. I have also," continued the prelate, "had the curiosity to examine your late place of concealment, and have given orders for every part of the ruins to be levelled, that they may no more serve as receptacles for plunderers."

"By my conversation with Morgan, I think I have also gained some knowledge of the man, called the chief; but this even your deliverer is not aware of, and which I shall keep secret until my suspicions are well authenticated.—And now, Lady Abbess," continued the prelate, "nothing remains for me to say, in regard to your house, but that

you will give immediate orders to a skilful surveyor, to inspect both within and without your walls; the height of the latter must be raised, and the approaches to them totally cleared of the coppices, to a considerable distance. I would also advise the wilderness, within side, to be cut down and laid open, so shall you have nothing to apprehend in future.”

The Lady Abbess promised implicitly to obey his directions, and the good arch-bishop having, with the utmost kindness, taken leave of Mary, the fair nun, the abbot, and the superior, he left the convent.

After his departure, and that of the abbot, nothing could exceed the kindness and condescension of the Lady Abbess. She repeatedly embraced the two friends, called them her dear children—said that now the utmost wish of her heart was gratified, in Mary’s voluntary consent, and which she had no doubt was owing to the pious and salutary advice of Magdalen. Nor did the kindness and affability of the abbess end in words—she that day invited them to her own table, and, that their entertainment might be more grateful, she permitted little Ela to be of the party.

In the afternoon she also condescended to accompany them into the garden, and pointed out the alterations and additions she intended making; not only for the pleasure and convenience of the sisterhood, but for their personal security.—“It will be attended with great charge,” added she.—“To be sure, the revenues of the convent are ample, and fully adequate to its former disbursements.—And now, my dear daughter Mary, your pious and noble donation to St. Bertrand, will fully enable us to answer the present expence, as well as to increase our future charitable purposes.”

Mary replied, that she was happy it was in her power to contribute her part towards a religious establishment, and in aid of her fellow creatures;—that she had no desire to accumulate wealth, though she should wish to reserve a little for particular occasions, as she had expressed to the arch-bishop.

“The arch-bishop is a good man,” replied the abbess, “but he is not severe enough to hardened offenders, which makes crimes multiply in his diocese;—but every one hath their faults. He is a man of high birth, vast possessions, and has great connexions in almost every part of Europe; so that there are even but few of the crowned heads that would refuse him any thing he chose to ask.—The Pope is his near relation, and he might have been a Cardinal, and even have filled the papal chair, had he been so disposed.”

“In truth,” said Mary, “he appears worthy of that, or, indeed, of a more exalted station; for never did my inexperience view so much unaffected piety and humility, blended in one and the same person.”

“You are an excellent panegyrist,” replied the abbess, coldly, “and seem *perfectly* to understand how to return the arch-bishop’s predilection in your favor.—But you are young and inexperienced in the world, in a few more years you will learn not to give your opinion lightly.”

“Dear Lady,” said Mary, “why did not yourself say that the arch-bishop was a good man,—and is not the esteem of princes a certain proof of it?”

“And pray, what have you heard me say *against* his being a good man?—Heaven forbid that I should be a slanderer, or detract from any one’s merit!—A man’s deeds best speak for him.—Then, as for the esteem of princes, they are not infallible in regard to their discriminative powers, any more than other mortals in a less elevated sphere.—But we have got upon a subject that we have nothing to do with,” said the abbess, smiling and

suddenly recollecting herself, for she had unawares let her natural disposition shew itself, when she only meant to exhibit smiles and complacency.

She had truly said that the arch-bishop was a very powerful man, which she was not a little sorry for, because he was likewise a good man; and though he *did not* punish petty offenders to the extreme letter of the law, he would neither wink at, tolerate, or connive at injustice and oppression. He had the utmost zeal for religion, but it was of the true primitive kind, that did not seek to deck the shrines of saints with costly jewels, or to enrich convents by impoverishing a future progeny. Such a visitor was not formed to be a favorite with hypocritical monks and bloated abbesses, though they deemed it needful to dress their holy-day countenances with the semblance of joy and gladness at his appearance; in order to conceal the devil that reigned within.

“There will be a very considerable sum to receive,” continued the abbess, “now you are of age, my dear Mary;—but I think there was no occasion to trouble the arch-bishop in regard to either the receipt or its disposal.—St. Bertrand, who doubtless inspired you with the idea of appropriating it to his service, will also point out the mode and manner to his agents.”

“I trust he will, Lady,” said Mary, “for I am a perfect novice in money concerns, and shall, therefore, leave them to those that are better skilled.”

“You answer prudently, child; and now you are in a proper frame of mind, no doubt every thing will be conducted to the satisfaction of all parties.”

By this time they had arrived at the foot of the old bridge, and Magdalen could not help shuddering at the recollection of events that passed the last time she was there; which the abbess perceiving, said,—“You need not now fear, for I have had the breach in the wall properly closed, and guards posted night and day on the outside, who will remain until the walls are raised, and all the woody covert, both without and within, cleared away and laid open.—When that is done, a deep and wide moat is to be dug all round the walls, which will be always kept full by this brook;—and as to the wilderness on the other side of this bridge, it may be rendered of some use, which it never yet has been, when all those overgrown trees are cut down and grubbed up.”

“It is almost a pity, on any other account than security, to destroy these venerable inmates, that appear nearly coeval with creation,” said Magdalen.

“Oh, I shall not feel the least compunction,” replied the abbess, “for they will furnish the convent with a notable supply of fuel for some years to come. I wonder I did not think of it before,—and the ground may be turned to better account when it has been properly cultivated.”

“I think,” said Mary, “if it is found necessary to destroy these, they may be replaced to advantage by covering their scite with fruit trees; for an orchard is very much wanted to the convent.”

“A very good thought, Mary,” said the abbess, “I will adopt it;—but we must then repair, or rather make an entire new bridge.”

“And with all due reverence, Lady,” answered Mary, “I think our patron here has suffered equally from the attacks of all-destroying Time.”

“The symbolical figure of St. Bertrand hath, indeed, suffered, and it will be needful, for the credit of the house, that it should also undergo renovation, least we should draw upon us the gibes of the profane,—who would say, we were solicitous and careful of the building, while we neglected its guardian and protector.—To prevent this,

we will employ the best artist in Guyenne, who shall be instructed to form a new and accurate likeness of our patron, which, when finished, shall be placed in the interior of the convent; not only as an incitement to devotion, but also to preserve it from the weather.”

As neither the abbess nor her companions had any desire to cross the bridge and explore the devoted groves, they slowly returned towards the convent; the conversation, by the way, turning on the approaching ceremony, which was to add a new sacrifice to St. Bertrand, in the person of Mary.

The abbess wished the pomp and splendor of the house to be exhibited on the occasion;—while Mary, on the contrary, pleaded that all external shew might be banished.—“There is only one thing,” continued she, “that I would wish,—the spiritual aid and comfort of the good arch-bishop, if he would condescend to be present;—and, previous to its taking place, that I might receive a last embrace and blessing from my earthly parent—my mother.—I shall then, I trust, quit all thoughts of busy society, for which I once pined, without regret; nothing doubting, but that internal peace here, and eternal happiness hereafter, will be the consequence.”

As the abbess could not make any reasonable objection, she assented to both requests, though at the same time she wished Mary and the arch-bishop to converse as little as possible, lest any thing should by chance transpire that she did not like to be known.—Yet she was aware, that by seeming averse, explanations might occur, which would possibly bring about the very circumstances that she was anxious should not be discussed.—She had, however, two chances in her favor,—the first was, that as every thing relative to Mary had been minutely brought forward at the last meeting, a second investigation, she conjectured, would be deemed unnecessary.

But a more substantial and better reason to hope that the past would be buried in oblivion was founded in the moderation and forgiving spirit of Mary;—a disposition which it was her interest to conciliate and cherish, and which she now did, to that degree of indulgence, that it was not only noticed, but became the common topic of all the sage censorious dames of the convent,—who, though they agreed in one point, namely that of envy to the reigning favorite, yet nevertheless were divided into two factions,—the malignant and the cunning. The first met and discussed with the most vituperative fervor, their supposed grievances, in the preference and indulgence that Mary was favored with; the latter had art enough to conceal their dislike, and to make the young novice’s interest with the abbess, subservient to their own wishes.

CHAPTER XIX.

SUCH was the state of politics within the convent of the Benedictine nuns, at the second visitation of the arch-bishop, who acquainted the abbess, that since his former visit, he had convoked a provincial synod, at which de Vavasour and his adherents had been cited to appear, and answer to the crimes exhibited against them. That, in default, a spiritual anathema had been passed against their persons, and all their known property taken possession of and vested in trust for especial purposes;—a moiety of de Vavasour's estate being reserved for the maintenance of his wife and younger children,—a portion thereof being likewise set apart for Mary, to be at her own disposal; an indulgence which the arch-bishop said he thought but just, as a small remuneration for the cruel and oppressive treatment she had sustained from her family. As for her own fortune, the prelate continued, he had laid all the circumstances before the members of the synod, spiritual and temporal, and they had decreed, that the disbursements of the rents and monies should be dictated by her, to whomsoever she might choose as her agents, if she took the veil, and this to continue during her natural life. After the period of which, if she chose to bequeath it to St. Bertrand—"that is to say," added the arch-bishop, "if she continues in the mind to bestow her wealth on this house, she will be at liberty so to do; but, otherwise, it would militate against the third canon passed at a synod held at Westminster, in the year 1127, where William Curboil, Arch-bishop of Canterbury presided as the Pope's legate, and which canon expressly forbids taking money for receiving monks and nuns into religious houses."

"Pardon me, my lord arch-bishop," interrupted the abbess.—"The present case does not come within the meaning of the canon law; Mary's is a free, voluntary, and pious gift, offered at the shrine of St. Bertrand."

"I have been assured otherwise," answered the arch-bishop; "and indeed it appears to me to have been originally a stratagem of Mary's, in order to escape being forced into a conventual life.—However succeeding circumstances may have influenced her to acquiesce, we cannot therefore suffer what was begun by force, and continued in guile, should stand good in our diocese.—If Mary is now willing to take the vows freely, it will be far from me to oppose it, but then it must be agreeable to what has been determined by the synod; from whose voice, however, if any should deem themselves aggrieved, there still may be an appeal to the Pope, before whom all the proceedings of the synod must then be laid, together with the reasons that caused their determinations."

This explanation was by no means pleasing to the abbess, who had so long flattered herself with the idea of enjoying an uncontrouled disposition of Mary's fortune. To be balked on the very eve of completion, was doubly mortifying, and more particularly so, as the arch-bishop had given some hints, that clearly proved he was more acquainted with the business than she was aware of, and, if so, it was plain that she had spies on her conduct, and in that case an appeal to his holiness, so far from being conducive to her wishes, would, most probably, end in her own discomfiture; and this now appeared so palpable, that she instantly resolved to try, if, by temporizing, she could not avert, or at least meliorate, the business, by which, something might be gained, and her conduct rest secure from investigation.

This being the mode which appeared best calculated to succeed, she replied to the reverend prelate,—“It is very true, my good lord, that I have been anxious for Mary’s being a member of our community; not from a selfish motive, for I can have, in seclusion, no personal wants, abstracted from the general interest I feel, the funds of the convent should be in a flourishing state. The intention of the Sieur de Vavasour in placing Mary here, was to gratify his avarice, that being the case, and her family totally devoid of affection, I submit it to your wisdom, whether her taking the veil would not be far more eligible, than a friendless, unprotected state, or, perhaps, something worse; for, in the daring outrage on the person of Magdalen, and the subsequent conduct, the de Vavasours have fully exhibited to what lengths their villany may be carried. An increase of fortune, therefore, would only enable them to extend their crimes; while, on the contrary, if bestowed on a religious establishment, it would serve to promote and enlarge the pious and charitable purposes for which these houses were ordained.”

“In both instances I hold with you, lady abbess,” said the arch-bishop, “with the proviso that the will is free and unrestrained, both in regard to person and property; for neither can prove an acceptable offering to the Most High, where either force, deception, or subterfuge, is made subservient.—Nor will I ever, knowingly, admit either to be used in any religious house within my jurisdiction. In regard to Mary de Vavasour, she hath, already, in my presence, expressed her willingness to take upon her the vows of seclusion; if she remains steady, in the same disposition, I will willingly assist at the ceremony.”

The abbess acquainted the arch-bishop how very acceptable his condescension would prove to Mary, who, with Magdalen, were then introduced into his presence; when having received some spiritual advice, and the reverend prelate’s blessing, he took leave and departed, after having fixed Mary’s renunciation of the world to take place on that day month.

The interim between that time was taken up by Mary, in preparing for what she deemed one of the most solemn acts of life. Whole days were passed in prayer, and in a strict examination whether she could, without repining, give up the pomps and vanities of the world.—In these meditations and devotions she was occasionally assisted by a reverend priest, called Father Dominick, who had been recommended by the arch-bishop as a confessor, and who was also authorized, by that venerable prelate, to explain to her the nature and extent of her temporal concerns.

One day, previous to his entering on his sacred function, he said,—“I am desired by the arch-bishop to acquaint you that his treasurer has, by his order, been collecting certain sums due from the tenants occupying your lands, and which I have brought hither with me.—His grace also desired me to say, that large sums, and many jewels and valuables have been embezzled during the time that your father had the administration, and of which he therefore can produce no vouchers in regard to their application.—For what I now present you, the arch-bishop, who is a just steward, hath sent a regular account, and desires, in return, your acquittal.—He is also desirous that you should have it as speedily as possible, not knowing whether you might not have some worldly arrangements to make, or some little services of friendship or remembrance to fulfil.”—The priest then produced two bags, each containing five hundred marks, and which he had caused to be brought into the convent.

“What thanks can I,” said Mary, “return for such exalted goodness?”

“The arch-bishop requires none,” returned the priest, “but esteems himself sufficiently repaid by the Almighty having placed him in a situation to be serviceable to his fellow creatures.”—The holy father then changed the discourse, by asking her if there was any commission without the walls of the convent that he could fulfil?

“There is but one thing remains, and for which I have the Lady Abbess’s permission; it is to take leave of my earthly parent. Would you, holy father, signify to her my desire, and entreat her presence; I should hold myself highly favored. The arch-bishop, I trust, will have no objection.”

“None daughter,—and for myself, I undertake the office most willingly;—but only exhort you to meet and part with becoming fortitude, so that your health may not suffer by the weaknesses of human nature.”

“I trust, holy father,” said Mary, “that I have sufficiently conquered those pinings and regrets with which my younger years were so forcibly marked; and which were caused by my having conceived a strong and high wrought picture of the pleasures of unrestrained society, and of family affection. Miserably deceived in the latter, the former has fled like a shadow, and I now consider all worldly enjoyments as so many idle vanities.”

“You draw a just conclusion, daughter,” returned the priest, “by cherishing of which you will imbibe peace of mind, the first step towards true piety;—for no peace dwelleth with the wicked and worldly minded.”

After a number of admonitions and exhortations preparatory to her taking the vows, the priest retired, and Mary sent to know if she might be permitted to have a few minutes conversation with the superior, a request that was immediately complied with.

“The holy father, lady,” said Mary, “has brought me some monies collected from my estates, by order of the arch-bishop, and here are five hundred marks, which I am come to entreat you will disburse to the honor of St. Bertrand, and for the benefit of the community, in what way you shall deem most meet.”

“I accept your largess, daughter,” said the abbess, “and thank you, in the name of St. Bertrand, who, no doubt will grant his protection to so zealous a votary;—it is a gift that comes very opportune to defray the additional expences we have been obliged to incur, and which, nevertheless, are for purposes that will prove beneficial to all. Your receipts will be more considerable, I understand, than what your father reported, or was willing should be made known.”

“Such the holy father informed me,” replied Mary, “but I only rejoice thus far, that it will afford an additional aid to charitable and humane actions.”

Three days previous to the ceremony taking place, Mary de Vavasour’s mother was announced at the convent, and Magdalen, by the order of the superior, was sent to prepare Mary for the interview.—Contrary to her expectation, she received the tidings with calmness,—“This was unnecessary,” said she, with a smile, “I have, by the Divine assistance, brought my mind to a perfect composure, and trust nothing will again disturb its serenity.—Lead me to my parent, and you, the sister of my soul, be present at the interview,” so saying, with a placid countenance and firm step, she took the arm of Magdalen, and repaired to the superior’s apartment, where the abbess and Madame de Vavasour were waiting to receive her.

Madame de Vavasour, now left at her free liberty, and uncontrolled by her husband not being present, received her with outstretched arms, and in silent agony

pressed her to her bosom; from which Mary gently sunk upon her knees, and said,—“Bless, O, my mother! bless your poor child, and forgive her all the trouble she has occasioned both to her father and yourself!—Alas! could I but have foreseen the disastrous consequences of my perverse disobedience to his will, he should have possessed my fortune without a murmur!”

Such unexampled conduct, from a wronged and persecuted child, greatly distressed Madame de Vavasour, who appeared overcome by the conflicting passions of shame, remorse, and tenderness.—“Oh! my child!” at length she uttered, “ask not forgiveness of your cruel and unjust parents;—that word would better become us.—It is our knees that ought to bend before our for ever injured child.—With what face can we ever implore Divine mercy, when we cannot make any reparation for the wrongs we have inflicted?”

“You have done me no wrong, my parent,” said Mary, “but only removed the film from before my eyes, which prevented my seeing the road which leads to happiness.—Had I been permitted to live in the world, at the time my mind was misled by what I had heard of its vanities—lost in fallacious pursuits, my reason would never have had leisure to select the good, and reject the evil.—Do I not, then, owe you thanks for my salvation?—My father too, has only been an agent in the hand of Divine Providence to bring about its own wise and salutary decrees;—the means, to *human foresight*, appear not altogether justifiable, but may not their failing in success, and consequent punishment, lead to that penitence which prosperity would never have excited?—Oh, my mother!” continued she, “forgive your visionary child!—Methinks I see my father, in his last moments, imploring pardon, and blessing his poor Mary!”

Mary, from being perfectly calm, had, at the conclusion of her speech, raised herself to a pitch of enthusiasm, which appeared to communicate to all present, who beheld the young novice with a degree of admiration bordering on reverence;—even the abbess’s natural apathy was apparently subdued, and she exhibited some tokens of feeling, and what she called human frailty,—for her eyes were actually moistened, either from pity or a remorse arising from retrospection.—But Providence has wisely ordained, that high wrought affections should not long continue, lest they should overwhelm and destroy our frail organic system; the passions, therefore, of the assembly gradually subsided, refreshments were introduced, after which the abbess and Magdalen retired, leaving Mary and her mother together.

Mary carefully avoided all discourse that might lead her mother into self accusation, and indeed, she wanted not any aggravation of her feelings, for she now, too late, discovered what it was to be deprived of an affectionate child,—of one, who by her duty, attachment, and tenderness would have mitigated the pangs arising from being forsaken by her husband, and neglected by her profligate sons. Mary, in the most soothing language, attempted to mitigate her mother’s grief, nor did she wholly fail of success;—she told her, that not neglecting her duty to God, notwithstanding her seclusion, she would ever remain her devoted and affectionate child,—that her mother might have frequent opportunities of seeing her, and that from the goodness of the archbishop, she should be able to assist both her and her father.—“I have,” continued she, “my dear mother, reserved for that purpose, five hundred marks, and will, from time to time, furnish you with more. I do not ask you of my father’s place of retirement, which I would not wish to know, that it may not lead me into falsehood, or prevarication, should

enquiry be made.—I trust that he is well and in safety, and will ever pray for his eternal happiness.”

“Exemplary child!” exclaimed Madame de Vavasour.—“What have we lost by pursuing an empty shadow—that phantom, family aggrandizement? And for whom was the sacrifice made? for one who observed no law, nor performed one moral duty. Born amidst dissipation, and bred up in luxury and extravagance, your brother early became proud, cruel, vindictive, and disobedient—these faults, instead of being checked in time, were softened, and called spirit, bravery, and a love of freedom.—Late your father found his mistake, but was himself too haughty and imperious to acknowledge it, although his ample possessions were drained to support his son’s revels.—One event, indeed, for a time, appeared to make an impression on his mind, for it struck at your brother’s personal safety.—In a vindictive mood, he quarrelled with, and killed one of his intimate companions; the rank of this man made it necessary for him to fly, and seek a place of concealment.—For a time neither your father nor myself knew his place of residence;—after some months absence he suddenly, early one morning, presented himself before us, but so disguised, that at first we knew him not. From that time to your father’s retreat, he kept himself concealed in an obscure and private out-building, some distance from the mansion, until the fatal attempt was made, that reduced them to the condition of being everlasting aliens to their native country, or of expiating their offences by an ignominious death.”

“Unhappy parent! unhappy brother!” exclaimed Mary;—“but have I not two other brothers? say, my mother, they surely——”

“Alas, my daughter,” interrupted Madame de Vavasour,—“though not so much in favour with your father as your elder brother, the same erroneous system has been pursued, and nothing but the supplies of money hath been wanting to render them equally criminal.”

“Merciful Heaven!” exclaimed Mary, dropping on her knees, “praised be thy holy name, that I, by a seeming cruelty, have escaped the dire contagion. Forgive thy shortsighted creature, for so long and obstinately opposing thy will; confirm and strengthen my present sentiments—extend thy mercy and forgiveness to my father and to my brethren, and finally turn their hearts towards thee in humble and sincere repentance.”

“I trust,” said Madame de Vavasour,—“that misfortune will bring reflection, and reflection repentance.—Oh, my dear child! though I cannot charge myself with any other crime, than basely assenting to give thee up, though unwillingly—yet my heart never knew true peace; even amidst the glare of splendour, my reason would revolt, as my body wearied, and I would say, *Is this happiness?*”

“A thousand times have I resolved to break the bonds of custom, and live a rational creature; but my resolution has ever proved too weak, and the want of example in him, that should have been my guide and instructor, contributed to render every virtuous determination abortive.—Weak by nature, and more so from indolence and habit, I have often suffered myself to be laughed out of my most serious resolves.

“Thus I continued from day to day, from year to year, until the vengeance of offended Heaven, in counteracting your father’s cruel design, burst at once upon us.—Your father fled—then conscience flashed conviction on my guilty soul—a deserted hopeless innocent tortured my fancy by day, and haunted my sleepless nights.—I had none left to divide my affection, and all the mother returned.—My callous heart was

softened—I longed to fold my child in my arms, but dared not approach in my distress the object I had so vilely abandoned.

“Tortured by a thousand conflicting passions, my mind was at length relieved, as if by an angel sent from Heaven—the good priest appeared, and removed the weight which bowed me to the earth, for he brought me a gladsome message from my child, and he spake the words of peace to my soul.

“Once more, my angelic sufferer, pardon your repentant mother, that she may, at the close of her life, enjoy true comfort; and undisturbed by worldly sorrow, strive, by a sincere repentance, to deprecate the wrath of an offended Creator.”

“If my forgiveness, Oh, my mother, is essential to your happiness—freely do I bestow it. May the Almighty,” continued Mary, dropping on her knees, “look with compassion on my parents, and accord them mercy and forgiveness.—Grant them inward comfort and peace in this vale of mortality, and at his own good time receive them into the mansions of everlasting blessedness.”

“Thy prayers, my good child, must prove efficacious; already I feel a new creature, and am resolved no more to embark in a deceitful and treacherous world.

“No, my daughter, never more will I quit thee, but devote the remainder of my life to the service of my Creator; and by acts of mortification and penitence hope to atone for my past offences.—Here will I daily contemplate thy perfections, and, in imagination, anticipate the glad hour when all worldly sorrow will be done away, and the repentant mother and her forgiving daughter meet in bliss.”

“Do you, then, my mother,” said Mary, “resolve to embrace a conventual life? Have you not duties to fulfil in the world, and can you quit it wholly without regret?”

“It is not, my dear Mary, the thought of a moment,” replied Madame de Vavasour,—“I have long pondered on my own sinful state, emerged in scenes of busy dissipation, from which, while your father was present, I found it impossible to retreat.—I have now, alas! no duty to fulfil; your younger brothers are both in the army, and were taught, long since, to despise their mother, and treat her with neglect and contempt. Judge, then, my Mary, whether I can have a duty preferable to the care of my own soul, or that I can hesitate to quit the world, without regret, wherein I have not the least tender tie remaining?”

“Far be it from me, my mother, to oppose so pious a wish; and happy, doubly happy shall I be, after having regained a parent, to know that we shall part no more.—But will my father, I pray ye, approve and consent to your resolution?”

“He has ever acted more like a stern tyrant than a husband,” replied Madame de Vavasour, “or I should never have patiently acquiesced in giving up my child.—You may remember, and must have noticed, that I was obliged to repress my tenderness at our former meeting, when you sent to desire his presence, previous to your entering on your noviciate.—No, he will, I doubt not, be much pleased to be quit of one, that he has, for many years past, deemed an incumbrance, and a spy on his pleasures. Besides, labouring under his present difficulties, by having incurred the heavy censure of the church, he will not be able to return, but must for ever remain an alien to his native land.

“I therefore entreat that you will make known my desire to the superior of this house, that I may gain a speedy admission to the place where my sole affections rest.”

The conversation between Madame de Vavasour and Mary was terminated by the entrance of the abbess.

“My mother, lady,” said the young novice, “is desirous of quitting the world, and would gladly place herself under the protection of the Holy St. Bertand, and wishes, preparatory to receiving his patronage, to offer, at his shrine, the sum of five hundred marks; being well aware that, however willing the saint may be to encrease the number of his votaries, they cannot be sustained without expence.”

“We receive her, willingly, daughter, not only on her own account, but doubly so on your’s; and heartily do I congratulate her on this pious resolution.—Here she will find a calm and safe retreat from the sorrows and troubles of busy life; I wish that many would follow her example. It is true, the funds of this community will not admit of a large encrease, but pious gifts to our patron saint might sustain the charge, as it has heretofore done; and, blessed be the name of our protector! his house yields to none in fame, for piety, zeal, or ample endowment.”

This was far from a vain boast in the abbess, for it enjoyed at least a reputation for piety and zeal, that had extended not only over Guyenne and Normandy, but which also reached England; hence the superstition and bigotry of the twelfth century did not fail to bestow on it large revenues.—Added to this, the abbess was of high birth, and possessed the happy talent of ingratiating herself into the favor of powerful personages, by paying an implicit obedience to their mandates;—a proof of this fully appeared in the mysterious and secret admission of Magdalen.—Neither was she failing in increasing the funds, and keeping up a sufficient stock to support and aid the disbursements, for which purpose St. Bertrand was often brought forward, and few there were of the inmates, that were known to possess any property, who had the hardihood to deny the Saint, and his coadjutrix the abbess.

One thing, indeed, appeared rather unfavorable to the superior’s views, as has been already noticed;—the arch-bishop of the diocese was not a favorer of injustice, nor of hypocrisy, —zealous without being intolerant, he would neither relax a proper discipline, nor condemn to the flames for a difference in opinion.—In that unenlightened age the rigid bigots would have whispered that he was a favorer of heresy, had they not been awed by his exalted rank and power;—such being the case, the abbess was obliged to proceed with some degree of caution, particularly, as the prelate had lately taken upon himself to inspect the convent, which he had not before done.

In the present instance his visits were peculiarly unwelcome, for at their commencement she had nearly put the finishing hand towards engrossing the whole of Mary’s fortune; whereas, by his interference, she had been disappointed, and was obliged to change her plan, by putting off the tyrant, and endeavouring to gain by smiles and courtesy, what she meant to seize by force. The transition was not difficult, and did not, even in the first instance, fail of success.—Mary’s fortune and revenues, it was true, would be *nominally* in her own power, but having no wants, with a little artful management, St. Bertrand and herself would be the real possessors.

CHAPTER XX.

THE day at length arrived which was to add another victim to a blind and mistaken zeal,—to shut for ever from society a member ordained by Providence to be useful and ornamental. To Mary the sacrifice had long ceased to be dreadful,—her spirits, originally strong and ardent, were broken by parental unkindness,—no kindred affections existed without the walls of the convent,—and even her seclusion was now become habitual. The abbess too had ceased to treat her with severity, added to which, the pleasure of being assured that she would never be separated from Magdalen and her mother, operated to make her think the approaching ceremony truly desirable.—She, therefore, beheld, unmoved, the bustle and preparation, for the Lady Abbess was not to be persuaded to forego the exhibition of all the massy rich plate, jewels, and paraphernalia used to dignify the sacrifice, nor to omit any part of the ceremony.—Every individual of the convent was marshalled in due form, and joined in the procession.

The arch-bishop and the Abbot of Pau led the way,—next followed twelve priests,—a small space was then left for the abbess,—the nuns succeeded, walking in pairs, according to seniority, the best voices chaunting a solemn anthem selected for the occasion.—The nun elect then appeared, dressed in pure white, supported on each side by her mother and Magdalen, a favor which she particularly requested.—Six novices came next,—and the procession was finally closed by the inferior members and servants belonging to the house.

As they reached the altar, they ranged on each side, the arch-bishop taking the right hand, supported by the Abbot of Pau, the priests being placed behind them.—The abbess and nuns occupied the other side in like manner, all waiting until Mary was led up the aisle;—when near the altar, the arch-bishop and the abbess advanced, and each taking one of her hands led her to a cushion,—then all kneeling, the arch-bishop repeated an impressive prayer, after which he addressed an exhortatory discourse to the whole assembly, suitable to the occasion,—an anthem was then sung, accompanied by solemn music, the choristers joining in the responses.—A silent pause for some minutes took place, after which, the abbot slowly rising, began the ceremony, requiring her to declare whether she willingly quitted the world, and dedicated the remainder of her life to the service of God, and the exercise of true religion?

On her answering in the affirmative, the vows were administered in due form,—her hair was cut off,—her worldly robes removed, and replaced by those used by the professed.—Mary de Vavasour became for ever lost to society, and the substituted name of Bertha gave a new sister to the convent.

Mary's conduct was calm and dignified, and no regret of the sacrifice she had made, appeared either in word, or in demeanor.—Mary, indeed,—or sister Bertha, as she must now be called, had justly appreciated the change, and found it amounted only to the mere ceremony; for the same habits she had been accustomed to while a novice, would be pursued.—Nay, as the arch-bishop had secured to her the disposition of her own property, she, with much reason, reckoned on being favored with still greater indulgences. Nor was she mistaken, for setting aside the seclusion, and the accustomed formula of the house, she found herself as much at her ease as she could desire; and, to add to her satisfaction, both her mother and Magdalen were included, and treated with equal kindness. Such

influence, however, was not occasioned by any change of disposition in the Lady Abbess, but only in order to insure Bertha's ensuing rents, and to share her mother's allowance of the part allotted out of de Vavasour's estate;—for the sagacious abbess knew that they had no wants or worldly provision to make, she, therefore, always took care, in due time, that St. Bertrand should need some assistance,—that is, that the house had incurred some expence more than the revenues would discharge, an allegation known to be perfectly false,—but which none cared, nor even dared attempt to controvert, though the old nuns, in their private gossippings, did not fail to laugh at, and turn their superior's avarice into ridicule.—Even her bosom counsellors, Martha and Bridget, grown jealous of the new favorite's influence, said, one day,—“You must be careful, now, how you affront sister Bertha;—times are strangely altered since she was denounced as a dissembler, and an enemy to Holy St. Bertrand.”

“Aye,” replied Bridget, “altered indeed,—the Saint and sister Bertha are no longer enemies;—she hath, it seems, made him a noble present,—and yet, I doubt whether he will have a new doublet and hose for all that.”

“How should he,” returned Martha, “when you know the abbess says, the revenues of the convent are all swallowed up in gluttony, and that the times are so hard that she must be obliged to increase the number of meagre days, which if she does, we shall all be reduced to skeletons.”

“No, not all,” replied Bridget, “for there is nothing but junketing from morning till night with Bertha, Magdalen, Madame de Vavasour, and the Lady Abbess.—The times are hard enough, indeed, with us, and if she does increase the meagre days, she will soon have a meagre house, for we shall all die of consumptions; for my own part, I am nothing but skin and bone already.”

“Nay, don't say *I*, sister Bridget,—if *I* was as fat and sleek as you are, I should have no cause to complain;—for, notwithstanding the new favorites, you can always manage to get *your share* of the choice bits, and a cup of good wine.—It is I, God help me, that am reduced to skin and bone, I have not egress and regress to the store room.”

“I scorn your words, Martha,” replied Bridget, “I get no choice bits;—and then, for wine, it is well known that I never drink any thing but water,—“As abstemious as sister Bridget,” is a common saying throughout the house.—But your tongue is no slander, and since you force me to speak, you know very well the reason why you are shut out of the store room,—it was for your making too free with the wine;—and then, your being spare and thin is owing to your own envious fretful temper, which you should strive to correct, by praying for patience and christian charity——”

“I am glad to find you so well employed,” said the abbess, who that instant entered, and who only overheard the last words,—“patience and charity are indeed truly christian virtues, and I am heartily sorry to interrupt a discourse that must needs have been both pleasurable and edifying to each?—but you can resume it at another opportunity.—I now want you to fetch some necessaries from the storeroom, Bridget, and which I have placed apart on a table. Martha may, if she pleases, assist you.”

“Willingly, Lady,” replied Martha. The two nuns then departed to execute their commission;—and, to shew that they bore no malice, nor harboured rancour in their hearts, they each took a cheering cup of oblivion, out of one of the abbess's jars; after which they separated in as perfect amity as their dispositions would permit.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE arch-bishop strictly kept his word in regard to Morgan. A pardon had been formally passed in his favor, and at his particular request he was placed under the tuition and spiritual guidance of Father Dominic, who employed him as a lay brother; in which capacity he was frequently sent to the convent on business, to the Lady Abbess, Friar Lawrence, Magdalen, and Bertha.—In the course of his attendance, he sometimes continued at the convent three or four days, as an assistant to Friar Lawrence, who was old and infirm. At these periods, Magdalen had frequent opportunities of seeing her deliverer at the grate.—Bertha often accompanied her, and both could not help admiring the apparent good sense and ingenuousness that marked his character;—even the abbess herself appeared interested in his favor, and said, she did not doubt but that in time he might prove a pious member of the church, and expiate, by a life of penitence and mortification, all his former sins.—And, indeed, without the superior being gifted with a spirit of divination, her prediction became every day more and more verified; for Morgan pursued his studies with so much perseverance, and was so devoted to a religious life, that the arch-bishop soon admitted him into priestly orders, continuing him in the same house with Friar Dominic, whose piety and learning being superior to the ecclesiastics of that period, had much ingratiated him with the good prelate.

In the same monastery there had been placed, under the immediate care of Friar Dominic, a child, supposed of noble birth, for the utmost attention was paid to his person, morals, and education; but, excepting the arch-bishop and Friar Lawrence, none were intrusted with the secret of his origin, or what was to be his future destination.

At the period of Bertha's taking the veil, and which was about seven years from Magdalen's entrance into the convent, he was about ten years of age, tall, and of a graceful person;—knowing no parents, he was much attached to Friar Lawrence, who sometimes found it difficult enough to restrain, even at that early age, the natural impetuosity of his temper.—Morgan, speedily after his introduction, also became a great favorite with Eustace, for so was the boy called.—It was, indeed, by no means wonderful, that among so many austere and rigid monks, the mild manners of Morgan should be most pleasing to a young mind;—Eustace, therefore, would seize all opportunities of being with Morgan, and accompanying him in his walks. As the convent of the Benedictines was only at the distance of three miles, Morgan one day took him thither, with the consent of Friar Lawrence, and presented him to Magdalen and Bertha. The two nuns appeared particularly struck with the beautiful person and noble mien of the boy, and both, for some minutes, remained thoughtful and silent.

“These are the only sights that bring with them regret,” at length said Bertha.—“I might, perhaps, had I lived in the world, possessed the fraternal affections of a brother, like this child.”

“And I—oh, my God!” exclaimed Magdalen, bursting into tears,—“But let me forbear—Oh, my God! do not try thy poor creature beyond her strength.—Alas, alas! I am but mortal.”

“Are you angry with me, lady, and do I make you cry?” said Eustace.

“Oh, no,” replied Magdalen, kissing one of his hands, which he rested on the grate,—“I am not angry—I am pleased to see you.”

“Then why do you cry?—See, you have wetted my hand with your tears—you will make me cry too. If I thought I vexed you, I would not come again, and that would make me very sorry.”

“What would make you sorry, dear child?” said Magdalen.

“Not to see you,” replied Eustace.—“Friar Dominic often tells me of angels, but I never could think what they were like before.—Are you an angel?”

“No, you little flatterer.—Have you been long with Friar Dominic?” said Magdalen.

“O yes, a long time—ever since I came from—but I must not tell—for one day I hid myself in Father Dominic’s study, and there I heard the arch-bishop and the father talking in a low voice; I have a good mind to tell you what they said—and I know Morgan loves me, and will not acquaint the arch-bishop and the father.—Shall I tell, Morgan?”

“Not if it will displease those good men,” answered Morgan.

“Oh, but I will though, for it is no harm, and I shall only be whipped.—They said I came from England.”

“From England!” exclaimed Magdalen, in violent agitation—“and—and—what else did they say?—Yet, stop—Oh, God, what a situation is mine!”

“Forbear,” said Morgan; “see how ill you have made the lady,—come, let us be gone, you must not return here any more,” taking Eustace by the hand.

“Have I made you ill, lady,” said Eustace, holding the grate with the other hand.—“How can that be, when I feel that I love you too well to hurt you.”

“Stay, Morgan, one minute,” said Magdalen,—“I am sufficiently recovered, and do not mean to ask the child any improper questions.”

“Nay, I have got no more to say,—for they both spoke in so low a voice that I did not hear any more.—But I asked Father Dominic one day, if I came from England, and he made me tell him how I knew, and then he said, I should be whipped, if I ever said any thing about it; and I never have but to you, for I would tell you any thing, if they did beat me, and they may beat me every day, if they please, if they will but let me come and see you.”

The scene now became painfully interesting.—Magdalen’s feelings almost overpowered her, and she leaned her whole frame against the grating, which she sprinkled with her tears; while the boy, on the other side, kissed the cold lattice, against which her face rested, and sobbed aloud.

Morgan and Bertha were not calm spectators, though both were sufficiently collected to endeavour to put an end to these painful effusions.—Morgan, therefore, partly by force, joined to entreaty, withdrew the boy’s hand from the grate, and hastened back to the monastery.

The friar, on their return, after dismissing Eustace, did not fail to interrogate Morgan on what passed at the convent, and received a just recital.

“It is as I expected,” said the good old man.—“Oh, nature, how powerful are thy workings! Now, Morgan, mark and adore the wonderous and mysterious ways of Divine Providence! what you deemed a great misfortune hath proved the ultimate means of saving two lives, and the guilty alone have fallen. It appears by your late master’s papers, which fell into the hands of the robbers, at the time he was murdered, that he was hastening to Normandy to destroy his uncle, in order to obtain his property, although he

himself needed it not.—Your captivity succeeded his death, and two remarkable dreams, or rather visions, made you the instrument of preserving the life of Magdalen.—And now, Morgan, prepare for astonishment!—But first swear, as you shall answer it at the great day, when all crimes are punished, never to reveal what I am about to disclose, until you are permitted, or until the death of some particular persons make concealment no longer necessary.”

“I solemnly swear,”—replied Morgan.

“Magdalen, then, whose life you saved, is your foster sister,” replied the friar.

“Amazement! what, the daughter of the Baron and Baroness de——?”

“Hush!” interrupted the friar, cautiously looking round,—“Not even names must ever be articulated; there are powerful reasons which render caution necessary—the lives of some of the first people in the state would be brought into jeopardy, and even Magdalen herself sacrificed.—She is also solemnly bound to silence.”

“It is strange, but I obey,” replied Morgan.

“You will do well,” said the friar.—“The arch-bishop confides in your discretion; he is a good man, and wishes to alleviate the sorrows of human nature.—He therefore makes you the agent between the mother and her child.”

“Gracious Heaven!” exclaimed Morgan.—“Eustace the son of Magdalen?”

“Yes! but that circumstance must still remain unknown to the boy, for he is as yet too young, and too high spirited, to be entrusted; it is on those conditions that she will be permitted to see him.—You likewise are also only to recognise her as Magdalen the nun; she has not beheld him since his infantile years; and probably knew him not. Had she ought of suspicion, think you, beyond a mother’s sympathetic feeling, that it was her own child?”

“I know not,” replied Morgan. “And yet she surveyed him most intently.”

“The arch-bishop will speedily see her, and enter into proper explanations,” returned the friar,—“the good man has been long pained at the hardships of the restrictions she has for some years been shackled with, and has laboured much to soften them. He hath, at length, obtained permission that she might see this boy, he being placed at so short a distance from her, but in conformity to her oath at her entrance into the convent, she is not to make herself known to him, or to any one else.—Indeed, her strict observance of the stipulations solemnly entered into, has had all due weight in obtaining this indulgence, as well as the arch-bishop’s entreaties in her behalf.”

“Her fate is severe and trying,” said Morgan, with a sigh. “When I recal a few years that are passed, and compare her then situation with the present, I must per-force feel for her.—Oft has my mother borne the infant prattler about in her arms.—Methinks I now see the enraptured parents hanging with fond delight over their darling child.—As she grew up all eyes followed her, and wondered at so fair a creature;—even envy was dumb, and malice was softened by her smiles.—Good she was too, as well as fair, for the poor distressed traveller never departed unrelieved from her father’s gate.—What a melancholy reverse succeeded this early promise of happiness!—Forced—torn from the bosom of her family by lawless power,—sequestered and concealed for years, vindictive rage, as it now appears, discovered, and hath doomed her to everlasting solitude;—yet every one believed her dead, and that report, *more than the lapse of years*, must have prevented my recognition, though it is plain she had no doubt who I was, by the surprise she expressed during one part of my recital, particularly when I told her my name.”

“The service you rendered her,” returned Friar Dominic, “your subsequent good conduct,—your wish to dedicate yourself to the church, together with the possibility of your some time recollecting her, all conduced to determine the arch-bishop that you should be intrusted;—and you will see the propriety, in regard to her oath, that you never converse with her on the subject of her former life.”

“I shall take especial care,” replied Morgan.—“I understand,” continued he, “that Eustace has an elder brother,—are the children always to remain in obscurity?”

“Doubtless not,” replied the friar, “for there are orders, that no expence shall be spared in their education, to qualify them for the exalted stations in life which they, at some future period, may be supposed to fill.”

“Is the other boy in Guyenne?” inquired Morgan.

“He is in England,” answered the friar, “under the particular guidance of his father; in whose protection he was when Magdalen and Eustace, as they are now called, were seized and secretly conveyed hither. At that immediate period, great rewards were offered for their discovery, dead or alive, but the measures of the injured wife were so well contrived, that hitherto every effort has proved ineffectual, and now likely to continue so; for Magdalen has no wish to renew her past errors, the effect having already proved so fatal, in causing an everlasting dissention between the husband, wife, and legitimate sons, some of them young men.—These, taking part with their mother, have ever since been in open rebellion, whereby much blood hath been spilt.”

“Is it true,” said Morgan, “that the noble lady herself hath since been in a state of captivity?”

“Too true,” replied father Dominic, “for openly avowing that she had destroyed her hated rival, and for ever barred his access to the child, the revengeful imperious husband swore, in his rage, to shut her up for life, and immediately put her into confinement. In the first transports of his grief for the loss of her that is now called Magdalen, he also caused a coffin, in which she was supposed to be placed, to be taken out of the ground, and re-interred in a most sumptuous manner.”

“Is it not strange,” said Morgan, “so many having been intrusted with the execution of this mysterious business, that Magdalen’s concealment, and being still alive, should never have transpired; particularly as some of the emissaries employed on the occasion must have been of the lower order, and consequently not proof against corruption and the power of gold?”

“They were doubtless well paid;—besides, though they might have obtained a present reward for betraying their trust, yet a severe vengeance would await them, whenever the heir succeeded to power,—an event that might not possibly be far distant.—Added to which, they would have brought upon themselves the anathema of the church, as his holiness, the Pope, perfectly concurred in the proceedings, and this on political as well as on religious principles.”

“How much are the good old baron and his worthy consort to be pitied, in being deprived of Magdalen,” said Morgan, “and, to add to their affliction, they have since lost their elder daughter.”

“Was she not thought very like her sister?” inquired Father Dominic.

“So much,” replied Morgan, “that but for the difference of eight years you would scarce have known one from the other.”

“I can readily believe it,” returned the friar, “for her daughter and namesake, little Ela, at her first entrance into the convent, would not be persuaded but that Magdalen was her mother.”

“Is the child at the convent then?—the Earl of Salisbury’s daughter?” inquired Morgan.

“She is,” answered the friar, “and consequently Magdalen’s niece,—though the child knows it not; neither is the earl aware that his late wife’s sister is yet alive, and under the same roof with his daughter.”

“Death, I think, would have been preferable,” said Morgan, “to being debarred the free exercise of feelings, which alone make life desirable;—surely, if any torture more cruel than another can be devised, it must be this,—the torture of the mind.”

“Yet cruel as these restrictions may appear,” returned Friar Dominic, “they were unavoidable.—The only alternative that was allowed if she refused this necessary severity, was an immediate deprivation of life;—and the latter some certain circumstances would have rendered doubly criminal.—It is true that there are many mitigating pleas that may be urged in regard to Magdalen’s errors, such as her being forced from her father’s house, at the early age of fourteen, by one so exalted in rank as to be above any fear of the law’s controul.—But though too high for an earthly tribunal, the Almighty has punished this lofty transgressor of divine and moral justice, with a continued domestic warfare, and an alienation of affection in every branch of his family.—Even foreign powers have taken a part in the dispute, and that not only in England, but France, Normandy; nay, this province of Guyenne, doth rue the day, when the gratification of one lawless passion, entailed death and misery on thousands.”

“Poor Magdalen!” exclaimed Morgan, “I now clearly see the necessity, though a bitter one, of thy fate.—Though but a young man, I have already experienced enough to know that this is a bad world; and right glad am I to quit the vice and folly of busy life, to enjoy a calm and peaceful retirement.”

“And right glad am I, my son,” returned the good old priest, “to find you so disposed;—for though virtue and religion are not confined to any particular spot, yet amidst the cares and turmoils of the world, the temptation of pleasure and the force of bad example, the human mind is too frequently wholly absorbed, or drawn aside from the paths of rectitude, and from the contemplation of that Being whom it is our duty never to lose sight of.—But I hear the bell for vespers, let us perform our evening duty; to-morrow, I doubt not, but that the arch-bishop will see Magdalen; after which Eustace’s visits there will be frequent.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE following morning the arch-bishop was announced at the convent, and after having some previous conversation with the superior, by his desire, Magdalen was introduced into the apartment. The benevolent prelate received her with a smiling countenance, and, after the accustomed salutation and blessing had been given, he ordered her to be seated.—“Daughter Magdalen,” said he, “I trust I am the messenger of pleasing tidings;—a certain gracious lady, amidst her own enthrallments has not forgotten you.—She is much pleased with your late conduct, and wishes to temper justice with mercy.”

“Am I then so happy as to have obtained her forgiveness?” exclaimed Magdalen, suddenly rising and throwing herself on her knees.—“Oh, bless her! bless her!—This is one great weight removed from off my burthened soul.—Oh, may I know if my——”

“Your children are well—your parents also,” replied the arch-bishop.

“My parents!” exclaimed Magdalen,—“died not then, my much loved and honoured mother, my lord, of grief at my unhappy conduct, and supposed death?”

“No, daughter,” answered the prelate. “It was indeed so rumoured; but after a long and severe illness, she is now recovered.”

“Oh, my God!” exclaimed Magdalen—“how doth thy mercies multiply upon thy poor offending creature! praised be thy holy name!—To have obtained forgiveness from one, whom, next to God, I have most sinned against, and to know that I have not caused my mother’s death, transports me almost beyond my bearing.”

“Your thankfulness, daughter, for these benefits, are truly laudable,” said the arch-bishop,—“and I trust that reason and religion will teach you to bear good, as well as evil, with moderation.—Your repentance, I doubt not, has been also accepted by a higher power than her whom you have injured, for yet another blessing awaits you—receive it with fortitude. You have lately seen a young stranger—did no maternal feeling disclose that Eustace was——”

“Oh, yes, my lord, my throbbing heart confessed what my lips dared not acknowledge—I was convinced my child stood before me.—I rejoiced to behold him, longed to press him to my bosom, though shame and remorse, those bitter attendants on guilt, made me shrink back, abashed and confounded; yet, thankful that my vow of secrecy prevented his knowing that I was his parent, as dreading, at some future period, to hear his reproaches for his illegitimate birth.”

“Daughter, your feelings are too acute; and, in this instance, they bear you away from true religion, into something like pride, fearing your disgrace should be known. The human mind is prone to err, but a sincere and unaffected repentance can, most assuredly, obliterate every stain.—“Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will make your burden light”—saith the scripture.—Again, “There is more joy in heaven over one sinner, that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons, that need no repentance.”—What a comfortable assurance—That your repentance hath been truly sincere, I can have no doubt; and from the representations that have been made to this effect, you will, henceforward, be allowed to see Eustace, for at present he is to know no other name.—I need not, I suppose, add, that the same line of conduct and secrecy, by yourself, in every respect, is still to be pursued.”

Magdalen bowed obedience, and gratefully thanked the benevolent prelate; who, after having conferred some time, in private, with the abbess, on the affairs of the convent, summoned the whole of the sisterhood together in the chapel, for the purpose of spiritual exhortation; he then bestowed a general benediction and withdrew.

From this time, few days passed without Eustace appearing at the grate of the convent, to see the lovely nun, as he called Magdalen; and, if at any time he was negligent in his studies, or gave way to the natural warmth and impetuosity of his temper, it was only necessary to debar him of that indulgence, to make him more attentive and tractable to his instructors.—Indeed a word or a look from Magdalen would, at all times, have more effect than the most soothing or coercive measures of his teachers.—He had hitherto, from idleness, and an apparent volatility of disposition, made but little progress in learning; but, stimulated by the fair nun's reproaches, he perfected himself, in all his lessons, with a rapidity that astonished every one.—His sense, indeed, in many instances, was manly, and far beyond his years—his conceptions clear and just—his temper bold and enterprising—his person was uncommonly tall, considering his age, and his limbs, though they displayed strength, yet were finely formed, and exhibited grace and ease in every motion. In short, his whole air and mein betokened that he was cast in no common mould.

Little of moment passed in the next seven years, that was very interesting, either to Magdalen or Bertha, though, in the course of that period, several of the old nuns paid their debt to nature; among them was the mother, of the latter, Martha, Bridget, and Josephine, who were replaced by others.

In this space of time, Eustace had nearly completed his studies, and was grown up almost to manhood—handsome in person, and accomplished in his manners. His attachment to Magdalen, also, so far from decreasing with his boyish years, appeared daily to strengthen, so that almost every vacant hour was passed at the grate of the convent.

Ela too had grown up almost to the stature of a woman; beautiful in person, mild, pleasing, and gentle in her manners.—She had received every branch of education that the nuns could bestow, and now only waited her father's return from abroad, to quit the convent; yet, much as she wished to behold her parent, she could not reflect on the time that was to separate her from Magdalen, without the deepest sorrow and regret.—Nor could Magdalen herself, though inured to misery, and deeply practised in resignation, look forward to that event without feeling the most lively pain; and only consoled herself, that when deprived of her, she would still have Eustace left. But Providence, often for its own wise purposes, counteracts the wishes and designs of mortals, for, about this time, the Abbot of Pau, soon after he had made a hearty meal, was taken off by a fit of apoplexy. Father Dominic was also removed from this transitory world to a state for which he had been long preparing.

The good arch-bishop was now grown so old and infirm, as daily to expect his dissolution. Maturely reflecting on the situation of Eustace, when that event happened, the reverend prelate had written to those in England, who placed the boy in Guyenne, and shortly after received from them an order to return him to his father, with proper vouchers of his authenticity.

On the receipt of these papers, the good old man lost no time, but had himself conveyed in a litter to the convent, and explained to the abbess and Magdalen, the

necessity there was for taking this step, that the young man might not be left without proper guidance, nor have his future prospects clouded.—This separation was doubtless an augmentation of Magdalen's sufferings; but she was, at the same time, too much aware of the propriety and justice of the measure to oppose it.—What was still more severe, on the occasion, she was, by cruel necessity, restrained from exhibiting the feelings of a mother; while the young man, on his part, though unknowing he was her son, let his grief know no bounds, but alternately exhibited such paroxysms of sorrow and rage, that appeared little short of madness. In vain they told him that he had a noble father in England, and that wealth, rank, and honours, awaited his arrival.

He could neither love nor esteem a father, he replied, that for so many years had banished him his presence;—that wealth, rank, and honours, were, in his estimation, mere baubles, and unworthy the consideration of one that alone prized quiet and retirement—for which purpose, he continued, it had, for some time past, been his determination to devote himself to the church.

The arch-bishop, at this declaration, appeared astonished, and expressed his surprise, that so young a man should voluntarily resign what was so alluring to persons of his age.

“But your decision, in this case,” continued the prelate, “does not depend on yourself, it must rest with one, who, doubtless, will consult your true interest, but who, nevertheless, is powerful, arbitrary, and *will* be obeyed.”

“I know no power that can controul a free and independent mind,” replied Eustace.

“Fallacious argument,” said the prelate, “and void of existence; while man acknowledges himself a member of civil society, *he must* be governed, his whole happiness and safety depend on his acquiescence.”

“If I must give up every tender and endearing affection of the soul, I would rather relinquish a society that exacts so cruel a sacrifice,” answered Eustace.

“Own you no duties then,” questioned the arch-bishop, “to a parent—to a sovereign?—and say, what are the affections which you place in opposition to these duties?”

“I have, indeed, my Lord, *heard* and *read* of such duties; but never having experienced that, which I have been taught a parent *owes* his child, may it not be supposed that I am unpractised in the reciprocal duty of a child to a parent?—And, secluded from my earliest years in a monastery, can I know ought of sovereigns?—My daily and nightly allegiance there, has been offered to the King of Kings!—You also ask me, my Lord, of my worldly affections,—where could I,—where ought I,—I in my turn demand, place them? if not on those who labored for my happiness.—On yourself then, Father Dominic, Morgan, and—. But why need I hesitate—away with all base and disingenuous concealment!—who could behold the more than mortal perfections of Magdalen and not adore?—Who could listen to the divine and moral truths she uttered, without conviction?—*Why, oh, why!* my Lord, was I placed in Guyenne?—Why was I permitted to form connections which promised a long and happy continuance, and then have them at once dissolved into—”

A loud groan from Magdalen here interrupted the sentence,—“Oh! my God!” she exclaimed, “where will my miseries end?—If this, indeed, is the wages of sin, 'tis *worse*

than death.—Alas! alas! why did I wish to elude the fatal stroke, to experience such complicated torture?”

“Cruel destiny!—Dreadful concealment!” said the arch-bishop.

“Sin!” re-echoed Eustace, replying to Magdalen’s words, and not attending to the prelate’s exclamation, “I’ll not believe it, though even yourself should proclaim it.—No, your unsullied soul, long accustomed to start at visionary offences, is prone to self accusation only.”

“Eustace forbear!” said Magdalen, in a firm and determined tone of voice, “prepare to obey the arch-bishop,—your eternal happiness or misery depends on it,—fatal necessity commands that we now part.—Nay, hear me,” continued she, seeing him about to speak, “on your compliance alone rests whether we meet again.—Bear one thing also in remembrance,—that among your future connexions not a word or ought relating to Magdalen ever transpire, and this as you value her future peace—nay her life itself.—Farewel,—angels guard you.”—Magdalen’s emotion was now too strong to be concealed,—she groaned with anguish, sobbed aloud, and, accompanied by the abbess, hastily retired.

Eustace for some moments appeared motionless as if he had received the stroke of death, his eyes bent on the earth.—At length, raising them, he wildly gazed around,—“And is this a reality?” he exclaimed. “So then, I have only had a transient gleam of happiness—a momentary vision!—Happiness did I say?—O, fool!—fool!—did I not know she was a nun—professed—for ever secluded?—How could I then indulge and cherish a——”

“Eustace!” said the arch-bishop.

“Happiness!” resumed Eustace, “what has an unknown, friendless being to do with happiness?—One that never knew the fond caresses of a mother—thrown upon the world—left to the mercy and pity of strangers!—Ha! ha!” continued he, wildly laughing, “and yet, though hopeless and despairing, was it not happiness daily to behold her—to hear her speak!—even her chidings were harmonious!—Perhaps I may never again behold her!—But madness and desperation is in that thought!—Yes, yes there is *one way*, and the tortured soul rests in peace!”

“Never! rash young man!” exclaimed the good old prelate.—“The spirit of the suicide shall never know rest nor peace,—his own guilty hand bars all repentance;—he at once throws off his allegiance to the power that alone could raise him from sorrow and misery, to make an everlasting league with demons, who dwell in regions dark and gloomy as his own desponding soul.”

Eustace raised his eyes with a vacant stare, and fixed them on the arch-bishop.—Having surveyed his countenance for some time most intently, recollection appeared to re-visit him,—“I pray you, my Lord,” said he, “did not Magdalen say, that my eternal happiness or misery depended on my going to England,—and it was upon that condition we ever met again?”

“She did,” replied the arch-bishop, “and rest assured your speedy compliance alone will hasten, or, on failure, will *for ever* prevent your again beholding her.—A mystery, not to be as yet explained, binds her in impenetrable shackles;—time may develop this secret, and remove some of those evils of which you now complain.”

“Heaven grant it, and preserve Magdalen,” returned Eustace.—“Come, my Lord, if my compliance will expedite our meeting, let us depart.—Farewel, ye sacred walls,—

soon, O, soon may I again behold ye—and what my soul holds most precious!—Oh! Magdalen, rest assured your last words shall indelibly be written on my memory;—not a word, or ought relative to Magdalen, shall ever transpire,—not even a murmur of your name shall escape my lips, though my heart should burst.”

The arch-bishop now prepared to depart, accompanied by Morgan and Eustace;—the sighs of the latter, as the portal closed against him, deeply proclaiming the agitation of his mind. Every step he moved from the walls appeared to increase his distress.—The arch-bishop entered his litter, and the attendants led forth the mules belonging to Morgan and Eustace.—The heart of the latter appeared to die within his bosom as he mounted and turned from the convent. Silent and slowly he re-measured the ground which led to the monastery, turning often to catch one more, and still another glimpse of those walls from whence he had departed; at length even the highest pinnacle was lost to his view, and an unbounded prospect was before him, but, though beautiful, had no charms for Eustace.

In a few days he was to embark for England, in which interval often did he solicit for an interview with Magdalen, but in vain.—The time at length arrived which was to be the period of his sojourn in Guyenne.—The good old prelate blessed,—strained him to his arms, and took a last farewell;—for the day that Eustace gained his native shore, terminated the good man’s mission here on earth, and gave him to that master whom he had so long and faithfully served.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE tidings of Eustace's departure and the arch-bishop's death, reached Magdalen at one and the same time, which, joined to her former afflictions, on account of what passed during her last interview with Eustace and the arch-bishop, occasioned her a severe fit of sickness; under which she undoubtedly would have sunk, but for the unwearied care and attention of Bertha, joined to the consolatory aid of Morgan, who, for a considerable time past had been admitted into full orders, and now officiated as spiritual director at the convent of St. Bertrand.

Two months had elapsed from the commencement of Magdalen's illness, and nearly three from Eustace's departure from Guyenne, before the disorder gave way to the goodness of her constitution, and indicated a speedy restoration to health.—One day that she was in more than ordinary spirits, Morgan inquired if she knew whether the abbess had lately received any news from England?

"I know not," she replied, "I pray ye, good father, hear ye ought from thence?"

"I have letters," answered the priest, "Eustace and his brother are well, and in the road to greatness.—The elder has rank in the army, and their father would fain persuade Eustace to follow his example;—but he has expressed so warm and decisive a preference for the church, that it is supposed his parent will acquiesce, particularly as he is very fond of him, and enabled to bestow such high preferment, when Eustace attains a proper age, and is duly qualified."

"Comes your intelligence immediately from Eustace?" inquired Magdalen, after a little pause.

"It doth," replied the father, "for he particularly, before his departure, solicited a correspondence."

"Would my perusal of the letter from Eustace be improper?" said Magdalen.

"Highly so," returned he, "for it breathes all the ardent impetuosity of a young man, forgetful that Magdalen is professed—devoted—and unknowing that she is his mother.—Nay, in indulging the fatal delusion, he seems to have forgotten humanity itself, rejoicing that the flames of civil discord is likely to be again renewed in Guyenne, as the surest means of bringing him hither in his father's company."

"Ah me! unhappy in every point of view.—How did my heart yearn with maternal fondness, when the good arch-bishop said, I should again behold my son.—Fatal renewal of an affection that had better been lost and buried in oblivion!—Henceforward, let no one say, thus far only shall my punishment extend.—Erring mortals only view the gilded surface, nor discover, till too late, that the effects of guilt, in its complicated consequences, spares not even the children, who suffer for the crimes of their parents, unto the third and fourth generation.—But in this the great and Divine Being shews mercy unto thousands, for being thus warned by his holy word, they wisely fly from vice, and escape the wrath that is sure to follow."

"That punishment follows the commission of sin is most true," said Morgan— "but God is merciful as well as just, and, in no instance, is his mercy more shewn to the offender, who truly repents, than when he suffers in this world pain and sorrow from the effects of guilt; for, this kind of suffering, only, in most instances, brings conviction to the mind.—Were mankind to prosper in sin, their hearts would be hardened, and their

offences would multiply with their years, even unto the hour of death, and beyond the reach of forgiveness.”

“If, in that dreadful hour,” replied Magdalen, “I may obtain mercy, let my sufferings still increase, till their weight bow down my exhausted frame to the silent tomb.—And oh, my God! spare those whom my guilt, alone, hath involved in misery; nor let the blood that hath been already shed cry out against me in the day of retribution.”

“I trust it will not,” replied Morgan;—“nor doubt I, but that the ambition of turbulent faction would have formed some pretext for executing its designs, had you never existed.—Should, however, the English army and their leader again oppose the rebellious princes, and in Guyenne, it may be necessary, perhaps, for the abbess to remove you, for a short space, to a place of more security, but it will be time enough to concert measures when we hear they are on their way hither; in the mean time, take comfort, and do not let your sorrows again prey on your health.”—Magdalen promised to attend, to this advice, and the priest withdrew.

Though the abbess was, by this time, well stricken in years, yet did not the spirit of avarice appear to abate, but seemed rather to increase with her length of days.

From the time the arch-bishop had taken upon himself to inspect, minutely, into the affairs of the convent, this passion, though far from conquered, had been suffered to lay dormant. Her temper too, though not a whit amended, she had confined within due bounds; but, from the good prelate’s death, having none to controul her,—for his successor paid little attention to any thing besides the revenues of his diocese, she began again to harass Bertha, and to curtail, by little and little, many of her and Magdalen’s indulgences; and though Bertha regularly and liberally presented her with a large portion of her annual receipts, she contrived, under various pretences, to borrow a great part of the remainder.—When she found that this artifice was likely to prove no longer successful, she, at once, threw off the mask, and told her, that as the whole of her revenues was a free gift from her to St. Bertrand, she had no right to appropriate any part of it to her own use; and although the folly and sacrilegious connivance of the late arch-bishop had so long tolerated it, the injustice, if continued, would, doubtless, bring down divine vengeance upon the convent.

“Had not the late arch-bishop,” Bertha replied, “been convinced that he was acting conscientiously and uprightly, he never would, in full convocation, have sanctioned the business, nor since, on maturer consideration, have empowered Morgan to receive money in trust for my use; for my own part,” added she—“the stipend that I choose to appropriate, is not for my own immediate expenditure, but to sustain those in misfortune, whom I think it my duty to succour.”

“There again you act erroneously,” replied the abbess, “by fostering the wicked and evil doer.—They were, besides, your bitterest enemies.”

“They were so; but are we not instructed to bless them that curse us, and to help them that despitefully treat us?—If we alone render benefit for benefit, what advantage have we over the Heathen?”

“I see,” answered the abbess, “that though you have been so long professed, yet the same wicked spirit of obstinacy still guides you.”

“No, lady,” said Bertha, “my firmness, not obstinacy, is occasioned by being truly *devoted* to a religious life, and not merely from my having professed and taken upon me the habit of a nun of St. Bertrand.”

“Impertinent!” replied the abbess;—“but know there are ways to reduce your haughty spirit.—If one of my high birth, and holy station, is to be thus insulted, we must see what the Pope and assembled conclave will say to it.”

“If I do wrong, lady, I incur censure and punishment, without the trouble of having recourse to such high authorities,” answered Bertha spiritedly.—“But, on the other hand, if I am injured, I will most assuredly, through the medium of Morgan, appeal to the Sovereign himself, whom, I understand, is daily expected to arrive with his army in Guyenne.”

This unexpected reply startled the abbess, who was aware that Henry, having sustained much vexation from churchmen, was, by no means, favourable to those that presided over religious orders.—She knew, too, that this business would not bear investigation, and might also possibly lead to discoveries, dangerous in their consequences, not only to herself, but which would involve some of the first characters in the realm in ruin.—She, therefore, though ready to choak with passion, thought it best not to continue the altercation, but await a more favorable opportunity to effect her purpose; that is to say, after the king had quitted Guyenne, when she would no longer be in danger from Bertha’s threatened appeal.

The abbess, therefore, deigned not to reply, but, with a haughty look, which she meant should convey, both defiance and contempt, she quitted the apartment; leaving Bertha in no pleasant frame of mind, she being much vexed, that this unwelcome theme should again be renewed, after having been so long suffered to sleep.

It also made her again regret losing so powerful a friend as the arch-bishop, the loss of whom was no less severe on the part of Magdalen, she now having no one left to interpose in her behalf, should the abbess chuse to make her situation uncomfortable.—Morgan, it is true, was, at present, the spiritual director of the convent, but he was not pliant enough to the superior’s humours to be a favorite, and therefore liable to be removed at the abbess’s pleasure; an event which appeared to be not very distant, as she had, for some time past, expressed herself dissatisfied, on account of too much indulgence being allowed in the convent, and a relaxation of discipline in regard to rigid penances.—These complaints were now strongly enforced, she having, since her dispute with Bertha, resolved to remove Morgan previous to the king’s arrival in Guyenne, as the nun would then have no one left to stand between her and oppression.

The abbess had conducted her schemes with that cunning and address, which low minds are often capable of, though not gifted with extraordinary talents; so that before either Magdalen or Bertha had an item of Morgan’s removal from the Convent of St. Bertrand, an order reached him for that purpose, signed by the new arch-bishop, and giving him only ten days notice to prepare himself for a voyage to England.

On the receipt of this mandate, which was expressed in the most peremptory terms, Morgan, without loss of time, communicated the unwelcome contents to Magdalen and Bertha, who were almost reduced to despair by the intelligence; the latter nothing doubting but that it was occasioned by her threat of appealing, through the medium of Morgan, to the King, whom Morgan now informed them was, with his army, then on his passage to Guyenne.

Morgan had scarce concluded, when they were interrupted by the presence of the superior, who, with a malignant grin, told him that he was no longer spiritual nor corporeal director of that house.—“I, therefore,” continued she, “*most holy father,*” at the

same time making a low reverence, “wish you a good voyage to England, where I advise you to attend only to your religious mission, and not interfere in *worldly concerns*.—As for you, Magdalen and Bertha, I command you instantly to your apartments, that you may hold no further converse with—a wolf in sheep’s cloathing.”—Then seeing Morgan about to speak,—“I want no explanation,” continued she, “nor shall await any,”—so saying, almost forcing the two nuns away before her, she retired, and left Morgan alone; not a little surprised at the superior’s behaviour, and no less concerned at the unprotected state in which he should leave Magdalen and Bertha, when solely under the conduct of a woman so avaricious and tyrannical as the Lady Abbess of St. Bertrand.

The superior having thus achieved her main object, namely, removing the only earthly protector of two defenceless women, she began to exult, and retired to her apartment to ruminate on the best means of gaining possession of the papers relative to Bertha’s property. Preparatory to this purpose, she had, some time before, ordered two small apartments, adjoining the tower where Esther and Mary used to perambulate during their noviciate, to be got ready, and without any previous notice, caused Magdalen and Bertha to be removed thither soon after they quitted Morgan.

Her impatience to gain the wished for prize, would have tempted her immediately to begin the search, but prudence, or rather cunning, whispered, that it would be better to delay it until the nuns had retired to their respective dormitories; she, therefore, contented herself for the present with securing the doors of Magdalen and Bertha’s late apartments, and with ordering a huge iron door, which terminated a long stone passage that led to their new chambers, to be bolted, though it had hitherto, at least for many years, been left open. These precautions taken, nothing now remained but to seize the prey. The nuns were fast asleep, Magdalen and Bertha secured by the iron door;—the abbess, therefore, silently stole forth,—gained the unoccupied chambers,—explored every corner, and found—nothing that she wanted!—for the treasure she longed to possess had first passed into the hands of Dominic, from thence they were transferred to the good arch-bishop, and finally to Morgan.

Stung to the quick, and indignant at being thus foiled, she returned to her own chamber, resolving on the morrow to pursue such a line of severity as should force an acknowledgement of where the deeds were concealed, and make Bertha gladly compound to produce and regularly assign them over to St. Bertrand.—But Providence, that had long forborne to chastise and punish this irreligious and hardened hypocrite, was now about to stretch out its just and avenging arm, and to let it fall with dreadful weight on her guilty head.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE troubles of Magdalen and Bertha prevented their sleeping,—and the latter, deploring their present situation, and contrasting it with the calm and unruffled period they enjoyed during the life of the arch-bishop, said,—“I fear my guardian angel, that urged me in my dream, to persevere, has now forsaken me, and it only remains to quit my property.”

“Say not so, Bertha,—the hand of the Almighty that raised you up such a friend as the arch-bishop, can still protect you;—even *now* your guardian angel may be commissioned to your relief.”

“Heaven grant it, and forgive my enemies and persecutors.—Good night, dear Magdalen.”

Bertha was about to retire to the adjoining chamber, when a fearful and continued shrieking, for a minute, rendered her motionless.—Pale, and trembling they gazed wildly on each other; then suddenly rushing to an aperture, which overlooked the main building, they, with horror, beheld the abbess’s apartment enveloped with flames, by the light of which they also saw her endeavouring to force through the window bars—but in vain.—The devouring element pursued her on every side.—“Oh, Magdalen!—Mary!” she exclaimed.—“Help!—I burn!—I die!—Mercy!—mercy!—mercy!”

The two friends now speeded towards the door at the end of the passage, which being fastened with strong bolts on the contrary side, resisted all their efforts.—“Oh, my God!” exclaimed Magdalen, “Ela, my dear Ela, will perish!”

Magdalen’s senses were about failing her, when suddenly she heard the bolts hastily withdrawn, and Morgan presented himself, bearing Ela in his arms, almost unclothed.—Mean time the fire rapidly spread on every side, and threatened a speedy destruction to the whole building.—“We have not a moment to waste,” said Morgan to Magdalen, who was embracing Ela, “the flames will prevent our return by the way we came; we must, therefore, promptly resort to other means of escape.”

“There is a door at the foot of the stairs, which leads from the tower, that must, I think, communicate without,” said Bertha.

“Proceed we thither,” said Morgan.

Bertha immediately led the way, and, in a short space, reached the postern, which Morgan, with some little difficulty, forced open, and the whole party presently found themselves secure in the convent garden, amidst the assembled nuns and domestics of the house, not an individual being missed but the superior; who, it was supposed, having fastened the door of her apartment, had fallen into such a profound sleep, as not to awake before the flames had so surrounded the chamber, that to escape was impossible.

The fire continued to rage the whole of the night with the most ungovernable fury, alternately seizing different parts of the building, and causing large fragments of the massy walls to give way, with a tremendous crash, as the timbers were consumed; so that, by break of day, the Convent of St. Bertrand exhibited only one vast ruin.

This awful spectacle could not fail to attract the attention of the inhabitants for miles round, and numbers assembled, in order to check the progress of the flames, or to satisfy their curiosity; the attempts of the former were completely abortive, while the

latter were abundantly gratified in viewing, once in their lives, a scene so awful and terrific.

The distressed nuns sought for refuge among their friends, or otherwise disposed of themselves until they could be settled in another religious house; but the case was different with Magdalen—she was firmly bound by oath, and did not dare to take any decisive step in regard to her future disposal, without orders. And the abbess being dead, she knew not where to apply.

In this dilemma she had none to consult except Morgan; for Bertha, bred in a convent from her childhood, knew no more of the world than an infant.

“I know not what to advise,” said Morgan;—“but must give some hours to reflection.—For the present we cannot do better than to make some of the outbuildings, which the fire hath spared, our dwelling.—I will employ the servants to make this temporary lodging as comfortable as the present circumstances will permit; and, in the mean time, I must repair to the arch-bishop, and acquaint him with the sad tidings of the demolition of the convent, and of the death of the Lady Abbess.—Fear not, during my absence, for I shall particularly commend you to the care of the domestics.—Farewell!”

Morgan then departed to give the necessary orders; and afterwards pursued his way to the arch-bishop, who, he found, had already heard of the fatal accident.—He inquired minutely into the supposed cause of the conflagration, and whether any of the nuns had perished. Being informed of these particulars, he, at Morgan’s request, gave him a power to delay his journey to England, according to his own discretion, the latter having pleaded, that, in consequence of the fire, he should have further provision to make for his subsistence, and for that of two nuns, whose friends were not immediately on the spot.

The arch-bishop then informed him, that the king was hourly expected in Guyenne, and that Prince Richard was arming against his father, in Normandy, with a number of the queen’s adherents, and particular friends; on which account he could not then determine, whether the convent should be rebuilt, or the nuns removed, until peace was restored in the province.

During Morgan’s absence, Magdalen and Bertha became collected enough to discourse on the subject of the last eventful night.—“Good heaven!” said the latter, “how have the circumstances of my remarkable dream been verified, and at the very moment these words passed your lips—*“Even now your guardian angel may be commissioned to your relief.”*—“In that same moment too, the dreadful words of my dream were repeated by the abbess.—Almighty God!” continued Bertha, “grant her that mercy she so loudly called for. Oh, the fearful sound will for ever vibrate upon mine ear, and dwell within my soul! Willingly, most willingly, would I surrender that fatal bequest, if, by so doing, I could recal the mischiefs it has occasioned in tempting so many to sin;—and Heaven bear me witness, it should not so long have been a subject of contention, but on account of a poor unfortunate misguided parent!”

“The ways of Heaven are doubtless just, though often awful to the extreme,” said Magdalen; “in order to terrify the hardened sinner into repentance, and save his soul alive.”

The two nuns assisted in disposing and placing what little of the furniture was saved from the flames, so that before Morgan’s return, a large granary and barn, detached from the convent, were divided into temporary places of residence; and as the cellars,

common kitchen, and larder, also remained untouched, the provisions they contained, joined to the stock in the piggery and poultry yard, with the aid of the fish ponds, dove houses, &c. precluded the dread of wanting necessary food, even for a much longer time than they could possibly think of remaining within the walls of the desolated convent of St. Bertrand.

Morgan was surprised to find so much order and regularity restored in so short a space, and in buildings originally appropriated to such different uses to what necessity had now assigned them;—"In truth," said he, "I see that need is our best friend, for it makes us call forth the energies of the mind, which otherwise would lie dormant within us.—Heaven, therefore, be praised for our mental faculties! I doubt not," continued he, "you have been thankful for your late preservation; but our great perturbation of spirits having subsided, and calmness being, in some degree, restored, it more particularly behoves us to assemble together, and to prostrate ourselves before that Great Being, whose mighty arm was so mercifully stretched forth to save us from the devouring element."

The chapel being separated from the convent by a stone cloister, had escaped the conflagration; thither the two sisters Magdalen and Bertha, with the domestics, assembled, when Morgan, after a most impressive prayer of thankfulness, made a pathetic address, suitable to the occasion. He then selected the psalms of *de Profundis*, *Laudata Dominum*, &c. and concluded with a prayer for the soul of the late abbess.—This duty being performed, the little congregation retired, partook of a frugal meal, and composed themselves to rest.

Eight days had elapsed since the fire before a word had passed as to their future destination; for Morgan had been almost constantly occupied in attending the archbishop, chiefly for him to determine on what was to be done with the servants, for whom there remained now no duties to fulfil, and for whom there would soon be no provision.—The prelate, for some days, appeared irresolute and wavering, but at length told Morgan, that they must be forthwith discarded; repeating the former excuse, that, during the unsettled state of the province, he could not think of restoring the convent. This plea, however plausible, Morgan had reason to suppose was wide from the truth; and that the prelate rather wished to keep the revenues, which were most ample, in his own hands.

"And what is to become of us," said Bertha, when this was related, "for I unfortunately have but little money left; and the writings of my estate being consumed, I dread, lest any demur, in regard to the rents, should arise."

"They are not consumed, but safely deposited under the chapel," replied Morgan, "and I meant to ask, whether I should demand your rents that are in arrear."

"Doubtless," said Bertha.—"But by what fortunate circumstance were they preserved, when your dormitory was consumed?"

"I immediately removed them, on hearing that the abbess had renewed her old pretensions; as doubting their safety in my own immediate custody, and where she was absolute mistress."

"Your guardian angel has not, you see, forsaken you," said Magdalen, "and you now will have it abundantly in your power to perform your filial duty without any controul, and to choose your own convent.—For me, I know not how to act."

“Know you not where to find the tall stranger that first introduced you to the convent, on that memorable night when Esther and I concealed ourselves?” said Bertha.

“Oh, yes!” replied Magdalen, “but how far an application to him might be deemed to infringe upon my oath, I know not.”

“Yet the urgency of the occasion may well excuse it,” said Morgan; “dwells he within a reasonable distance from this place?”

“He hath large domains in this province,” replied Magdalen, “and must, I think, ere this, if living, have heard of the destruction of our convent.”

“My advice is then,” said Morgan, “that we tarry here a few days longer, to await any inquiry; in which time, I can also collect Bertha’s rents.—Should we not, by that period, gain any intelligence, by which you are to regulate your future conduct, we must, ourselves, determine on a method best adapted to the circumstances of the case.”

The third day after this conversation, a stranger was announced as having some intelligence to impart to the nun Magdalen.—On being introduced, Magdalen surveyed him intently, and was about to inquire his business, when the stranger, with a smiling and courteous demeanor, said,—“I perceive you do not recognise me;—years and some affliction hath doubtless made great alteration in Ralph de Faie, but better known as the near relative of the noble mistress of this province.”

Magdalen made a low obeisance, appeared somewhat confused, and remained silent; for she now perfectly recollected the tall stranger, under whose conduct she was brought to the convent so many years back.

“Sit you down,” said he, taking her hand and leading her to a stool. “These ladies,” turning to Bertha and Ela, “and the holy father here, I deem are your friends.”

“They are, sir,” said Magdalen, “but should you have any thing to impart, that my solemn obligations render necessary to remain secret, they will retire.”

“For a moment then,” said the stranger, bowing politely to Morgan and Bertha, as they quitted the place.—“I should have seen you ere this,” continued he, “for I have known of the fatal accident some days, and that you remained on the spot;—the prince, however, being in Normandy, I thought it fitting first to hold a conference with him on the subject.—Time and due reflection have made a material alteration in the sentiments of the aggrieved parties, and, joined with a consideration of your long suffering and sincere repentance, they are desirous of mitigating their former severity;—say, then, what are your wishes in regard to your future disposal?”

“I have no desire, my lord, but to pass the remainder of my life in calm retirement, and to endeavour, by penitence, to atone for the sins of my early life.—There is, however, one favor, could I obtain it;—the good father who left us even now, with the nun, Bertha, is about to repair to England, as spiritual director to a convent of English nuns;—if Bertha and myself might be permitted to accompany him thither, and enter the same house, I should have no further wish remaining.”

“Your desire shall be granted, and an order made out for your reception on your arrival.—A suitable provision shall also be made, in regard to expences. Have you long known the father, and the nun, Bertha?” said the stranger.

“Many years, my lord; the father was our spiritual guide, when the convent was destroyed—Bertha was there from a child, and long before my arrival. The younger lady was a boarder in the house, left by her father when he went to the wars.”

“Means she to accompany you in your voyage to England?”

“If it so please you, my lord.—The Friar Morgan will take charge of her.”

“Be it so,” replied de Faie, “when purpose you to leave this place?”

“Having seen you, my lord,” answered Magdalen, “we have but little to impede us; as I understand the business of the friar, and that of Bertha, can be settled in a few days.”

“You shall then have letters for England and supplies of money tomorrow, after which I would advise your speedy departure by the nearest port; for, in a little time these provinces will be overspread by troops whose interests are contrary, so that you might find travelling dangerous.—The King will also be in this vicinity. Fare you well, lady,—health and peace be with you.—Should you need it, Ralph de Faie will be your friend while living;—should I not exist, Prince Richard, by desire of his mother, will protect you.—He is noble and generous, and though at variance with his father, much notices your sons,—especially William, whose martial spirit more particularly accords with his own.—Once more, farewell, lady.”

“Farewel, my lord,—and if the prayers of a sinner may reach the throne of Grace, Magdalen’s shall ever be offered up in gratitude for the man who was an agent in the hands of the Almighty to bring her to repentance.”

“It was a rigid, but necessary duty,” returned he, “and I would the task had devolved on any but me;—yet, I trust, your future peace and happiness will more than compensate for the fleeting pleasures you have been deprived of.”

De Faie now left her, and presently after, Morgan, Bertha, and Ela returned.—They were much pleased at the result of this conference;—particularly as they would not now have any impediment thrown in the way of their departure.—The severity of Magdalen’s restrictions would also be done away, and at her entrance into another religious house, she would only be considered in the same point of view with the other nuns.

On the following day arrived the recommendatory and introductory letters, in which Magdalen was mentioned as a branch of a noble Norman family;—these papers were accompanied with two hundred marks for her expences.

Nothing now remained but the completion and settlement of Bertha’s affairs; and those, through the assiduity of Morgan, were speedily arranged as to future payments, and a good sum obtained from the rents then due.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE afternoon preceding the day fixed for their departure from a place where Magdalen and Bertha had experienced so much sorrow and trouble, at length arrived, and both walked forth to take a last survey of the desolated convent, accompanied by Morgan and Ela; for all the domestics had been discharged early that morning. Every part of the building that would admit, was explored, and the recollection of past scenes occasioned some tears and many bitter sighs.—With difficulty they at length reached the bare walls of the abbess's apartment,—an awful memento of her sad catastrophe.—Here, all the party kneeling on the ruins, offered up their prayers for the soul of their late persecutor; for whose remains, no other holy rites could be performed, as not a vestige of them was to be found.

Arising, sad and melancholy, from paying this last tribute, they slowly proceeded to the garden, and retraced their former walks, not forgetting to visit, for the last time, the grave of hapless Agatha.—“Here the wicked cease from troubling!” said Morgan, “peace to thy manes!—I trust that thou wast not thy own destroyer, and that thy sufferings and repentance hath procured thy soul an abode among the blessed.”

Farewel!—a long farewel, poor persecuted dust!” said Magdalen, “our spirits may one day meet in glory!—My fate has been too similar.—But I must forbear.—Oh! could the fell destroyers of innocence—the votaries of vice, in the moment of guilty pleasure, have the veil of delusion torn from before their eyes, and behold the end of all their fancied joys!—Low are now the destroyer and the destroyed,—the persecutor and the persecuted,—the tongue that flattered to betray, and the heart that believed and was deceived!—Agatha, once lovely, now crumbled to dust, farewel for ever!”

Magdalen now kneeled and kissed the sod, an example that was followed by Bertha and Ela.—The party then returned towards the ruins, at a short distance from which, by the little light they had, for the evening was far advanced, they discerned a man who appeared to be just issuing from the common portal. Near the place where they then stood, was a building from whence the convent was supplied with fuel,—it was open on each side,—thither they retired, and silently watched his motions.—His gestures appeared wild and extravagant, alternately quitting the desolated walls, then returning with an hurried step, striking his forehead, and groaning aloud.—“Ah, no!—I will not—dare not for a moment suppose it—the thought is death!”—He loudly exclaimed,—“Oh, Magdalen! Magdalen!”—He then threw himself with violence on the earth, and, for some moments remained silent.—Morgan, in this interval, slowly moved towards him,—“No, it cannot be!” the stranger resumed, raising his head, “they cannot all—all have perished!—Magdalen—Bertha—Ela—Morgan!”

“Are here,” said Morgan.

The young man, Eustace, or rather Geoffrey, for it was no other, sprang upon his feet, recoiled some steps from the place where Morgan's voice appeared to issue, and stood aghast;—nor could he, for some moments, believe, that the individuals, whose names he had rehearsed, were now before him.—He gazed with wonder and delight;—at length returning recollection broke at once upon him, and in a wild tumult of joy and rapture, he threw himself at the feet of Magdalen.

“May the sins of the parents be not visited upon the children!” said Magdalen.—“May Geoffry and his brother be virtuous—and bless them, Almighty God!”

“Geoffry is indeed blessed,” replied he, “though a short space since the most wretched of mortal beings!—Oh, never, never have I lost sight of this dear spot!—Amidst the splendor of palaces and the favor of princes, the Convent of St. Bertrand was ever present to my view;—judge then of my horror and despair when I beheld it desolate and in ruins.”

“The ardent and extravagant imagination of man,” said Morgan, “often portrays scenes of happiness which never can be realized;—when such is the case, reason should in time check the delusion, and restore the wandering senses, which otherwise might produce most fatal consequences.—In the present instance, it appears to have caused a total deprivation of memory, or Geoffry would not have forgotten that his old friends Bertha and Ela were present.”

“Pardon me, ladies,” said Geoffry; “bewildered with joy to find Magdalen—I mean, to find my friends safe, I, for a while, lost sight of courtly compliment to the whole.”

“In order to pay adoration, individually,” said Ela, smiling; “that I must confess, does not favour of the courtier,” continued she sarcastically, “unless it accords with his interest.”

“You are too severe, Ela,” said Morgan.—“Geoffry owes the nun, Magdalen, much; she hath, for years, been unto him even as a mother—her pious precepts and instructions, will, I trust, never be by him forgotten.”

The features of Geoffry now appeared grave and perplexed, and, with a faltering voice, he addressed Bertha, Ela, and Morgan, expressing how glad he was to see them in safety.—“For, my first alarm, on beholding the destroyed building, and the supposition that my friends were lost, almost transported me beyond my reason,” said he; “happily, I now feel more composed.—Will the building be restored?”

“I doubt not speedily,” said Morgan, “unless the contentions which disturb this province should be amicably adjusted, and the army withdrawn.”

“Which at present is very unlikely,” replied Geoffry, “for Prince Richard’s demands are what the king cannot comply with—both have therefore taken up arms.”

“It is a pity,” said Morgan, “that such an unnatural contest should be carried on between father and son.—The prince has many good qualities,—I hear your brother William is a great favourite with him.”

“He is, and most deservedly; for he once, in the heat of action, saved the prince’s life.—Indeed, in heroic spirit and fire, he is much like Richard, though in filial duty and affection widely different; for, on the first rumour of this quarrel, he then serving with Richard, demanded his discharge.—This the generous prince immediately complied with, and not only dismissed him with grace and favour, but gave him safe conduct to the king, with whom he is now in Guyenne.”

Morgan and Magdalen, at the conclusion of this speech, expressing some apprehension at the seat of war being in that immediate vicinity, Geoffry assured them, that they need not be alarmed, as he had sufficient interest with the king to protect them from danger.

“I trust we shall not want it,” said Morgan, “but we had better now retire out of the damp air;—besides, we must make some provision for Geoffry’s accommodation, as

it will be too late for him to return to-night.—I fear you will find your lodging here not equal to that you have recently inhabited,” continued he, addressing Geoffry.

“I shall, notwithstanding, prefer it to any other,” said he, “and can turn my horse, which I have fastened at some little distance, into one of the inclosed pastures of the convent.”

“Have you no attendant?” inquired Morgan.

“None,” answered Geoffry; “for I strictly bore in remembrance what I promised when we last parted, that not a word, or aught relative to Magdalen, should ever transpire; on this account too, I gave out that my intended excursion was only to view the scenes of my youthful days, and to greet those who had been my instructors.”

“Your caution was highly commendable, and at the same time your assertion strictly true,” said Morgan, “but here is our mansion,” continued he, lifting a latch that fastened the door.—“Enter—what think ye of our habitation, I pray?”

“It is a sorry dwelling for ladies,” replied Geoffry, with a sigh.

“To those pampered in palaces, it may appear so,” said Morgan; “but nuns and priests, long inured to their humble cells, feel not the hardship; content and humility to those who have few wants, are ample substitutes for pomp and pride.”

“Mean you to continue here any time?—The Lady abbess, I suppose, is preparing another mansion,” inquired Geoffry.

“The Lady Abbess needs no other,” replied Morgan, “she perished in the conflagration. The nuns and novices have retired elsewhere, and we purpose to commence our journey for England to-morrow, a religious house there, being appointed for *our* reception.”

“To England! and to-morrow! Surely—surely not so soon; where is the necessity? and is this then the happiness I promised myself in Guyenne, after so many tedious months absence.—If pecuniary matters occasion this speed, I have now the means.”

“Not so,” replied Morgan, “we are amply supplied, but forget ye, that Magdalen and Bertha are irrevocably devoted to a conventual life, that, though forced by dire necessity, without the grate, that should for ever have enclosed them, yet a wilful continuance in that society, which they have solemnly renounced, would be indecent, scandalous, and wicked. Besides, the world has no longer charms nor allurements for Bertha and Magdalen; grown sage by reflection, mature in years, and mortified in spirit, all passions are dead and cold.—Say, Bertha, and you in particular, Magdalen—do I speak your thoughts?”

“Most truly,” replied Magdalen. “Were even his holiness to sanction a revocation of my vows, and declare them null and void, I would not again enter a world which I now look upon with detestation, abhorrence, and horror, and in which there is no safety from daring vice and insult.”

“In humble and lonely society, the strong and powerful, too frequently, oppress and injure the weak and unprotected,” said Geoffry.—“Such violence, I shudder to think, three females may sustain in a long and tiresome journey, with only one man to defend them—one whose *profession* and habit is a bar to resistance.”

“I know no profession, however sacred,” replied Morgan, “that precludes a resistance to violators of the divine commandments, in the maintenance of which, even life itself ought to be accounted a mean and trifling sacrifice.”

“You may be somewhat ambitious to obtain the name of a martyr,” said Geoffry, apparently vexed; “but, however well the name of St. Morgan might sound in romantic legends, would not all wise men deem it rashness to madly adventure your own life, and endanger those of three females, by crossing this province, into that of Normandy, in their present disturbed state, filled as they are with a wild and ungovernable soldiery?”

“My ambition, if such you call it,” said Morgan gravely, “is not of so lofty a turn; and, as I would not wish to incur the censure of wisdom, and be accounted rash, will therefore ask, what you might deem a safer expedient.”

“To repair forthwith to the camp, where I will present you all to the king; he will prove a most powerful protector.”

“Never! horror and distraction is in the thought,” exclaimed Magdalen. “Rash and ungovernable young man! what demon could suggest such an idea?—Have you forgot your former impious declaration to—one devoted to Heaven—and whose life and eternal salvation rests on her privacy?—Henceforth, bear it in remembrance—or we must meet no more!”

“How cruel is my destiny, yet per force I must obey,” said Geoffry, with a deep sigh.

“You have only to combat a weak and ill-judged impression,” said Morgan, “which circumstances made it madness ever to indulge.—Your sufferings, if such you call them, are a deserved punishment; to Magdalen they are an increase of misery, almost beyond human nature to support,—nay, doubly so, because all explanation is impossible.”

A melancholy silence of some minutes ensued, which Morgan interrupted by asking Geoffry to accompany him, while he procured his horse some provender, and made ready a place for his repose.—“In the mean time,” said he, “you, ladies, will set out our humble repast, for we do not abound in superfluities; but peace and thankfulness has hitherto sweetened the frugal meal.”—So saying, they retired for a short time, and at their return found the board spread, and eggs, milk, bread, and some fruit placed thereon.

Morgan blessed the food, and, accompanied by Ela and Bertha, made a hearty and cheerful meal;—but Magdalen and Geoffry ate little, and in silence.—“Is it then irrevocably determined,” at length said the latter, “that you depart to-morrow, and that after being flattered so many years with your friendship and that of Morgan, the only solace of my younger days, the chill and blighting frost of cold neglect should now take place to mar my opening prospects;—for, alas! I feel it is not fortune that can render Geoffry happy.—When I listened to your instructions, you forbid me not to love, to esteem my instructress.”

“Nor do I now forbid the same affection and esteem which a son owes a parent,—this observed, Geoffry will ever have Magdalen and Morgan’s friendship.—For our departure, I see the necessity of it more than ever,—but with Morgan’s approbation, we will, on your account, delay it for another day. Your own sojourn in Guyenne will probably not be long;—remember, therefore, that on yourself alone depends the renewal of that friendship, in England, which you seem desirous of continuing.”

“It is the sole happiness of my life,” replied Geoffry, “and upon any condition would I preserve it; judge then, whether your personal safety is not dear to me, you will, therefore, permit me to procure an escort, and to accompany you part of the way.”

“We can agree to neither, for it would take away from the privacy with which we choose to travel,” said Morgan; “I am well acquainted with the roads, shall take those that are safe, and mean only to journey by daylight, to avoid danger and fatigue.”

Geoffry, completely foiled, both in his attempt to detain them longer in Guyenne, or to make himself a companion in their journey, now gave over the trial, and after some little conversation, they all retired for the night.

END OF VOL. II.

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