

MAGDALEN;

OR,

THE PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

VOL. III.

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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. III.

BRENTFORD:

PRINTED BY AND FOR P. NORBURY;
AND SOLD BY
C. CRADOCK AND W. JOY, NO. 32, PATER-NOSTER-ROW,
LONDON.

1812.

THE
PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON the morrow the travellers were busily occupied in preparing their baggage against the arrival of the muleteers, who were to convey it on the road.—About noon, the tinkling of the bells, fastened to the heads of the beasts, proclaimed their approach. The muleteers, exclusive of the beasts destined to bear the luggage, brought with them a light covered waggon, for the accommodation of the females; and two spare mules, one to carry Morgan, the other to relieve occasionally. The animals were furnished with provender, and left to rest for a few hours, that they might be more enabled to perform their journey;—the men, also, were provided with food, and dismissed, to repose on some clean straw spread for that purpose.

In the cool of the evening, the beasts destined to carry their luggage, were loaded and began their journey; as the weight they carried would require frequent stoppages, and occasion them to proceed more slowly than the travellers.

Morgan now enforced the necessity of an early separation, they being to commence their journey by sunrise the next morning; they, therefore, took leave of Geoffry early, Morgan having granted his request of corresponding with him when he reached England. Geoffry would fain have remained another night, but all remonstrated strongly against it, particularly as he had but few miles to travel, and day-light sufficient to complete his journey.

Sorrowfully mounting his horse, he scarce articulated a last adieu, while Magdalen silently implored a blessing on a son she dared not acknowledge; and restrained her tears with feigned smiles of composure, while her heart was throbbing with agony. In this distress she retired, though not to sleep,—it was the last night she was to remain in the precincts of a place where she had passed so many melancholy years; she recalled to her memory all the events that had taken place from the evening she was first brought thither.—Her tears — her sighs — her groans appeared to pass in review before her, and to outnumber even the minutes of her long—long seclusion.—“Detested walls,—receptacles of hypocrisy and persecution,” said she, mentally, “I quit you at last,—quit you for my native clime—the land where dwell my dear and honored parents!—the land where the fair morning of my youth—but what was I about to say?—Alas! it is the land where the fair morning of my youth was for ever blighted!—I must now acknowledge no parents—no children!—I have no place of rest until I sink into the silent tomb!—Oh! I may truly say, with Cain,—“My punishment is greater than I can bear!”

The day broke on Magdalen’s sad meditations without her being able to compose herself to sleep, and she arose to prepare for her journey.—The mules were already yoked,—Bertha, Ela, and Morgan also were soon ready, for every thing had been properly disposed the evening before, such as provisions, &c. for they did not purpose to seek any other accommodation than what the waggon and the open air afforded, while the weather continued fine, except at night. And that their appearance might be less

remarkable, the nun's habits were concealed and disguised by travelling dresses, that they might seem, at least, people of the world; and, by that means, prevent being gazed at, and subjected to impertinent inquiries.—As for Morgan, he still retained his priest's habit.

The time was now arrived for them to bid adieu to the Convent of St. Bertrand.—Morgan formally delivered up what remained of the stock, &c. to a person deputed by the arch-bishop for that purpose, — mounted his mule, and with the ladies, who had previously ascended their car, took a silent look at the ruins, ejaculated a prayer for the success of their journey, another for the soul of the late abbess, then turned their backs on the walls for ever.

Though the whole party felt no regret in quitting a place where they had experienced so much sorrow, yet, when memory presented to their recollection its former flourishing state, the number of inmates—part of whom lay mouldering in their silent graves, the rest dispersed in different directions, a melancholy gloom pervaded each countenance; and though the day was fine and the country beautiful, every eye, save those of Morgan, were bent to earth.—“Your regrets are useless, ladies,” said he, smiling, “they will not restore the convent, nor again realize scenes that are past.”

“Heaven forbid that they should be realized,” said Bertha, “for I was retracing some of the most distressing ones of my life.”

“My thoughts were not more pleasing,” replied Magdalen, “though at this time not strictly personal, for I was reflecting on the uncertainty of all human desires and wishes, and contrasting the Lady Abbess's haughty air and demeanor, when she announced the father Morgan's dismissal, with her last dreadful appearance at the grated window.”

“And I, for my part,” said Ela, “was thinking, what I should have done so long, if I had not been blessed with my dear mother Magdalen's company,—for I have ever considered her as a parent;—indeed, it would seem as if I had no other.—I wonder what pleasure my father can take in those odious wars, and in wandering about in strange countries?”

“Your father's life, I understand, during that of your mother's, was a continued scene of domestic felicity,” replied Morgan;—“at her death all happiness was banished, every place that reminded him of his loss became hateful,—even the sight of you, whom he doated on, would throw him into an agony approaching to madness, from the resemblance you bore to your mother. In this state his bodily health visibly declined, and a busy and active change of scene was advised, as the only means of prolonging his life. In compliance to the solicitations of his sovereign, and numerous friends, he at length consented, and having placed you with his relation, Madame de Rosmar, he joined the army in Normandy;—from thence he embarked for Spain, and fought against the Moors.—After signalizing himself in several encounters with those infidels, he joined a select body of crusaders and sailed for the Holy Land;—from whence, as you know, he is daily expected, and it is to be hoped that time has now alleviated the poignancy of his sorrow, and that he will joyfully recognise in his daughter, all the perfections of his dear and much lamented wife.”

“I have nearly lost all remembrance of my father,” returned Ela, “and think I can more clearly recal my mother's features;—but that, I suppose, must be from always considering her like Magdalen;—an idea which she has often told me was so strongly

impressed on my infant fancy, at my admission into the convent, that I could never be persuaded to the contrary.”

“And if you were like your mother,” said Bertha, “the mistake is not at all marvellous, for never was there so striking a resemblance as between your features and complexion, and those of Magdalen’s.”

“Whatever similitude there may be in our persons, righteous Heaven hear my prayers, and mercifully grant that her destiny may be the reverse of mine!” said Magdalen; “that her ears may be ever deaf to flattery, and that her beauty may never attract the eye of the cruel and invidious betrayer!”

“Trust in a gracious Providence, and banish all melancholy pictures,” said Morgan; “now you have lost sight of the desolated walls, let a cheering hope enliven your future hours. There is no gloom in true religion, it is only assumed in particular establishments, as a cover for hypocrisy, or to give an appearance of sanctity, which the heart is far from possessing. From my small share of experience, I have ever found the most pleasant countenances to be indicative of a sincere, just, and benevolent mind; such was the good arch-bishop’s—such was Dominic’s—and such, I hear, is the Lady Abbess’s to whom we are especially recommended. Be joyful, therefore, and lift up your hearts with gladness to your great Creator.—Look around, and see how all nature seems to smile at the return of day, invigorated by rest, or refreshed by the genial rays of the sun. Observe the lowing of the cattle, the bleating of the sheep, the frisking of the lambs, and the cheerful warbling of the birds; do they not all appear as so many congratulations to that Power who has so abundantly supplied their wants?—Let us not be the last to offer up our tribute of thankfulness.”—Morgan then sang an hymn, accompanied by Magdalen, Bertha, and Ela, after which he said, “I never feel myself in better spirits than when I have performed my duty to my Maker.—I fear, for some time to come, we shall not be able to attend regularly to those duties. But though necessity may compel us to forego somewhat of the solemnity, yet if the heart still remains steadfast, opportunities will, in every station of life, be found, to offer up our humble petitions, and to render thanksgivings for the mercies we have received.”

The farther they advanced on their way, the country appeared to increase in beauty; for they had passed the heath where formerly stood the castle, the ruins of which were finally destroyed by the late arch-bishop’s order.—“We are now at no great distance from Saintes,” said Morgan, “and in a small space of time shall arrive at the banks of a river, where we will alight, and take refreshment, under the wide spreading branches of some stately sycamores.”

In about an hour they reached the proposed spot, and were much pleased with Morgan’s choice of a place at once so agreeable, convenient, and secluded, it being situated on a rising ground, out of one part of which a clear spring of water issued forth, gently meandering down the slope, until it reached the neighbouring river; watering, in its course, a rich and luxurious soil, thickly bespread with a number of bushy shrubs, and wild flowers, altogether forming a scene, to the women, at once so novel and delightful, that while Morgan and the muleteers were getting ready for the repast, they agreed to walk, and further explore its charms.

Unused, for many years, to any thing but the dull uniform convent grounds, new beauties caught their attention at every step, so that two hours appeared to glide away as so many minutes, and possibly a much longer space would have elapsed, had not Morgan

gone out to seek them.—The good-natured priest readily admitted their excuses, and convinced them that he had not been idle during their absence, for every thing was set forth in a simple order for their repast; the muleteers also had unyoked their beasts, and put them to feed.

They now, with the utmost cheerfulness, and good temper, formed into two parties, each making a hearty meal, and then prepared to renew their journey.—“Our present sojourn, and method of travelling,” said Morgan, “resembles that of the patriarchs; we carry our provision with us, and, like them, encamp where we find good pasturage and water.”

“It is a delightful life,” said Ela, “and I shall regret when we are obliged to quit it, and again be confined within the dull walls of a convent.”

“There is a time when every place has its pleasures and conveniences,” said Morgan; “but I think in cold dreary stormy weather, you would be inclined to give the dull walls of a convent a decided preference.”

“Ela,” said Magdalen, “like most young people, surveys the fair sunshine, not giving a thought to distant storms.—In her experience, too, of a secluded life, she has, on the contrary, seen only the harsh side of the picture; and therefore does not think it possible that there can be happiness in a state of retirement.—She is disgusted and astonished at having beheld hypocrisy, envy, perfidy, avarice, malice, and uncharitableness, in the confined precincts of a house dedicated to religious purposes; but how much more will she be shocked to meet, at every step in her walk through busy life, those, and numberless other vices, exhibited, in some instances, with unblushing effrontery,—and in others, artfully concealed, under the semblance of moral rectitude.—If, to these depravities, which debase human nature, we join the various sufferings and casualties that, on each side, environ and torture the sympathising beholder, how much more to be envied is a state that excludes such horrid scenes, or, at the worst, portrays them in a more confined point of view.”

“May guilt, and its concomitant punishment, be a stranger to Ela,” said Morgan; “but if, in her sojourn through life, it should ever meet her eye, in the person of another, may it tend to confirm her in virtue, to strengthen her faith in divine justice, and make her have a steadfast reliance in God’s holy protection, which alone can keep us free from sin and——”

Morgan was here suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a stranger, who, rushing out from an adjacent thicket, first intently surveyed, and then abruptly accosting him, said,—“I pray you, if you are what your habit betokens—a priest—for the love of God come and receive the confession of a dying penitent.”

“Most assuredly I am what my habit betokens, and therefore it is my duty to administer to such as need spiritual assistance; but where resides the person of whom you speak, for I can perceive no dwelling.”

“Within that opening of the thicket stands my lone hut,” said the man; “for I earn my daily bread by cutting wood.—Two hours before daylight I awoke, and was preparing to arise, in order to pursue my labour, when suddenly I heard a distant sound, like some one calling.—Knowing there were no inhabitants in this part of the country, save myself and my wife, who lay sleeping by my side, I listened, and heard the calling repeated, attended with impatient cries of distress.—Having awakened my wife, I dressed myself speedily as possible, and opened the door of my hut, when I was convinced the sound

came from a large pit, about an hundred yards distant. I hastened thither, and found at the bottom of the descent two travellers, the elder of whom, unwarily, having passed too near the edge, which in places is almost covered with underwood, had fallen to the bottom, and was so severely hurt, that perhaps, by this time, he may be dead, though I got him out as soon as possible, for I—”

“No matter,” interrupted Morgan, “we will hear how you got him out another time. Lead the way to your dwelling instantly.”

“I will,” said the man, “and I then must haste and see if I can meet my wife, who was dispatched with the ass, three hours ago, to see if she could get a little wine, and find out a priest; but the poor man is so much worse since, that I was going in search of her when I met with you.”

“You had better tarry awhile,” said Morgan, speaking to the women, “you will be safe under the protection of the muleteers, and I will return speedily as possible.”—He then followed the wood-cutter to his hut, and was presently introduced into a small darkened chamber, where, stretched on a miserable bed, lay the wretched sufferer, whose piteous groans only announced that he was still living.

No sooner had the wood-cutter withdrawn, than a voice, the sound of which appeared to be known to Morgan, said,—“Excuse me kind and courteous Sir, that I do not rise to thank you for this goodness.—I am supporting the head of my unfortunate parent, which if I let fall, I fear his soul will depart before any holy rites can be administered—rites, which, alas! we have both ridiculed.—Oh say, good father, can there be any forgiveness for wretches who have spurned at every sacred and divine ordinance—whose souls are crimsoned over with sins of the deepest dye—but whose hearts have happily, for some time past, been pierced with conviction; and whose repentance has brought them thus far on their way, to implore forgiveness of the injured, and then to expiate their manifold crimes by the hand of justice.”

“If indeed ye truly repent, God hath given power and commandment to his ministers, to pronounce absolution and forgiveness; but take heed that ye lie not against the Holy Spirit, for thereby ye only increase your condemnation.—By what means was your conversion wrought?”

“Aliens from our native land, and in a foreign country, our subsistence arose from the piety of one whom we have most basely—most unnaturally injured. But Heaven would not always suffer this goodness to be misapplied—three times the remittances never reached us, when, impelled by distress, and instigated by Satan, we attempted to rob a holy priest, threatening the good man with instant death for non-compliance.—“Death!” replied he, with a benignant smile, “hath no terrors, for I trust it will introduce me to eternal bliss.—But it is ye that are in its dreary paths—for the wages of sin is death, from which, oh, my erring brethren, let me rescue you.—Go with me, and I will relieve your present necessities, and, if possible, save your souls from perdition.”—Truth and sincerity were impressed on his countenance; we entrusted him with our lives—visited him daily, confessed our enormities, and were at length rendered sensible of our wretched lost state, without a sincere repentance. Two months since, the holy man departed this life, in order to receive that reward he had so ardently sought. Knowing our intent, from which he would have dissuaded us, he bequeathed a small sum to bear our expences, and we were thus far on our way, when a retributive Providence hurled my father into the pit where we had once designed to precipitate another.”

A loud and deep groan here broke the narration, and the unfortunate sufferer, in a low and feeble tone of voice, said,—“I feel my last moments rapidly approaching.—I flattered myself to have received my injured child’s forgiveness,—a few short miles more would—but I have not strength.—Declare, my son, to this holy father, without reserve, who and what we are,—and the particular weight that bends our souls to earth.—Haste, that the few moments of my life may be employed in prayer.”

“You see before you, holy father, in that wretched man, and in his no less wretched son—the once lord—and the heir, of these ample domains,—now nothing pertains to us but the names of——”

“Philip and Pierre de Vavasour,” interrupted Morgan; “let all surprise cease at this knowledge of your persons, and endeavour to collect yourselves.—Time is precious—prepare for an immediate interview with those, for whom you are most interested. The pious, filial, Mary de Vavasour, will joyfully embrace a repentant father and brother; and the nun, Magdalen, willingly also accord her forgiveness.”

Morgan then instantly withdrew, leaving the Vavasours wrapped in confused astonishment.—At his approach Magdalen and Bertha advanced to meet him.

“In what state,” said the latter, “did you find the dying man?”

“Thoroughly penitent for his misdeeds, but anxious for the forgiveness of those he has wronged,” answered Morgan.—“Could we but find them, his mind would doubtless be at peace.”

“Where dwell they?” hastily inquired Bertha. — “If my endeavours——”

“Bertha,” interrupted Morgan, “you have, when very young, exhibited a fortitude beyond your years. I need your assistance—but first say, can your religion and piety bear you up against a sight of woe—of death!—Death has no terrors, but when accompanied with hardened impenitence.—Would you, of your choice, prefer seeing a dear friend, or near relative, in this state, though in bodily health, or behold him in the arms of death, and his peace made with heaven?”

“Can you have a doubt of my sentiments,” answered Bertha. “But why this question? surely such preparation leads to something wonderful and unexpected. Oh, say then, at once, and fear me not—what am I to expect?”

“To meet a dying parent, who purposely comes to supplicate a daughter’s forgiveness; to receive also a brother, no less guilty, but equally penitent.”

“Great Father of Mercies!” said Bertha, “enable thy servant to support this arduous trial, and let me not sink under the weight of my affliction; — thy hand alone, and not that of chance, hath directed our steps hither, that impious scoffers may be convinced, and revere thy judgments.”

Morgan led the way to the hut, while Magdalen, Bertha, and Ela, slowly followed; the latter seating themselves in the outer apartment, while Morgan went to prepare the Vavasours for an interview, which they both longed to take place, and yet dreaded.—“I will arise,” they heard the elder Vavasour say; — “oppose me not — for what purpose did I come hither? was it not to throw myself at her feet, and entreat her forgiveness.”

Bertha could bear no more—she longed to fold her repentant parent in her arms; and suddenly breaking away from Magdalen, she rushed impetuously into the inner chamber.—Startled at the noise, the old man turned his head, shrunk from her extended arms, and prostrated himself at her feet.

“Mercy! — mercy and forgiveness!” — he attempted to ejaculate, but the exertions of almost exhausted nature, rendered the sounds inarticulate;—respiration appeared to cease, and animation was, for a time, suspended.

After some time, Morgan succeeded in restoring the elder Vavasour to a knowledge of the objects by whom he was surrounded; and soon after, he raised his hands and eyes pitifully to Bertha, in a supplicatory posture.— “My God! support and bless my father,” said she.—“Oh, my father, bless your child!”

“Hear, and record, O ye blessed angels!” at length said he — “the oppressed, persecuted child, does not curse her unnatural parent! — Oh, Pierre, let us bend our stubborn knees, and bow our obdurate hearts, that she may pronounce those blessed words, pardon and forgiveness. — Oh, my child, delay not—my peace—my happiness depend;—my eyes grow dim—my senses fleet—pardon!—mercy!—forgive!”

Vavasour’s speech faltered; he motioned to his son, caught his hand with a convulsive grasp, and both sunk to the earth, before Bertha.—The nun kneeling also, supported her dying parent in her arms,—“Witness, O my God!” said she, “such pardon and forgiveness as my soul implores of thee! do I accord my father.”

“Those, indeed, are words of peace,” said he; “sounds which my soul long hath coveted.—The injured Magdalen too—she whose life was doomed to fall a sacrifice, to hide our guilt.—Oh, I shudder at the recollection.—Will you not, my child, intercede with her to forgive our foul trespass, and more foul intention of murder.”

Bertha for a moment retired, but presently returned, leading Magdalen up to her father.—“May your soul’s felicity be now your care,” said the latter.—“My forgiveness I cannot withhold to penitence, or how dare I supplicate for mercy. — Here, then, take my pardon and pity, with this kiss of peace—and rest assured you shall ever be remembered in our prayers.”

“One thing more now only remains,” said Vavasour, “and I have done with the world for ever.—My child, of whom I was unworthy, behold your guilty brother! — Shame and remorse hath riveted his eyes to earth.—I do not ask you to love him, it is impossible—purity and guilt cannot associate!—yet angels glance an eye of pity towards erring mortals, and—horrid recollection, my example and false indulgence, have, doubtless, more than contributed to his ruin.”

Bertha held forth the hand of forgiveness to her brother, which he kissed, and bathed with his tears, and sobbed aloud;—for the lion-hearted chief of the robbers—he who had dared to meet his friend, and slay him in single combat, was ashamed from conviction, and softened by penitence.

The elder Vavasour’s end rapidly approached—his tongue faltered, and his limbs grew convulsive.—“I pray ye,” said Morgan to the nuns, “retire for a short space to Ela, for I perceive we must tarry here, at least until the morrow. I will speedily, therefore settle with the muleteers about our accommodation.”—Magdalen then retired to the outward apartment, where she was soon after joined by Bertha, she having taken a melancholy, though affectionate, farewell of her father.

The dying man was now left to the spiritual consolation of Morgan, without either him or the son recognizing in the priest their former associate.—So much had the sacerdotal habit, and some years passed in piety and sober living, altered his appearance; though both the Vavasours were speedily recollected by Morgan.

The good priest, earnestly devoted to religion, administered the last sacred rites to the suffering penitent, comforting him by prayer and exhortation, as long as his mental faculties permitted; and only quitted him when—he resigned his breath.

Bertha received the melancholy tidings of his death with piety and resignation; abstracted from the world, and weaned, as it were, from all the tender ties of affection, by the unnatural conduct of her family, little, except moral and religious duty, on her part, could be expected.—She had long endeavoured to protect him from worldly want, and only felt a pang when she reflected on the state of his immortal part.—This anxiety was now happily removed, for she had no doubt of his sincere penitence; and though she was grieved, and deplored his sad end, she could not, at the same time, look upon their meeting in any other light, than brought about by the especial direction of Providence.

By this time the wood-cutter and his wife were returned, and brought with them an ass laden with necessaries, which the younger Vavasour had sent for; though the wife had not been able to find either a priest, or any one to examine the hurts of the old man, her inquiries after both, and the length of way, having so long detained her, her husband reached the village to which she had been dispatched, before her purchases were completed.—These two, with the addition of the muleteers, were now all busily employed in preparing a place for the women to rest that night, the outer chamber being put in order for the purpose. — The younger Vavasour, by choice, remained with the body of his father.—Morgan was accommodated in a kind of loft—the wood-cutter and his wife occupied a place in which they piled their faggots, and the muleteers declared that it would be no hardship for them to sleep, for one night, on some straw and rushes in the waggon.

This business being settled, they all partook of some refreshment, after which Morgan went out, and employed the men to dig a grave, where the remains of Vavasour were meant to be deposited the day following.—The spot had formerly belonged to an old chapel, long since gone to decay, and had been appropriated for the reception of the dead; but the despoliations of war having ruined an adjacent village, the inhabitants had removed to more peaceable habitations, leaving the bones of their ancestors to moulder in quiet by themselves.

Though this was the first day of their travels, it had proved an eventful one, and tended more strongly than ever to confirm both Magdalen and Bertha in their predilection of a conventual life. Harassed and fatigued, either in mind or body, all parties chose an early retirement—the laborious division to rest, and the thoughtful to meditate on the various changes, chances, and casualties, of mortal life.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE returning morning brought with it indispensable duties.—Morgan was first stirring, and summoned every individual that bore the name of Christian, to public prayer. The usual early meal then took place, after which the body of Vavasour, decently placed on a bier, being brought forth, preceded by Morgan, and accompanied by every body on the spot, was, with as much solemnity as circumstances would allow, borne to the grave.

This necessary rite performed, and a becoming admonition pronounced to those who attended, they silently returned to the hut, where Morgan had a long conference with the younger Vavasour, and, in the end, finally prevailed on him to forego his former intention of surrendering himself to the secular powers; but in lieu thereof to accompany them to England, and enter himself into some religious order, where, by a life of piety and mortification, he might make atonement for his former crimes.

Nothing remained but to offer remuneration to the wood-cutter, which was done both by Vavasour and Bertha, and the cavalcade again set forward, Vavasour being accommodated with the spare mule.—A melancholy silence, which continued for some miles, took place, each reflecting on the late events.—Fatigue too had some effect on their spirits, for, added to the little inclination they had for sleep, during the last night, their lodging was none of the best; which made Ela confess, that notwithstanding the pleasure of travelling, a comfortable convent would, sometimes, be far from disagreeable, provided the Lady Abbess was good-natured.

“In our journey through life,” said Morgan, “we must be content to take the evil with the good; but this is one of the wise dispensations of Providence, otherwise we should forget ourselves,—become thankless for the benefits we receive, and look for no other happiness than what is sensual and corporeal.—But you remind me,” continued he, “that Magdalen complained of want of rest the night before we quitted the convent, we will therefore endeavour to gain some town, as speedily as possible, and retire early to repose;” and being then near St. Jean, they agreed to conclude there the short stage of their second day’s travel, especially as the muleteers assured them, they would otherwise meet with no other tolerable accommodation for many miles.

On reaching the place where they meant to pass the night, Morgan gave immediate orders for their lodging, and to prepare their evening’s repast, for Vavasour appeared to be so much absorbed in melancholy, as to be incapable of attending to any thing—his eyes were ever bent to the earth, to avoid meeting those of Bertha and Magdalen.—The nuns saw and pitied his distress, and endeavoured to draw him into conversation.—“Let us not grieve, my brother,” said Bertha to him, “like those without hope—I trust the loss to us of our parent is his eternal gain.”

“Brother—parent,—” repeated Vavasour.—“Can a tyger—an unprincipled monster of barbarity, deserve the name of brother? parents I might have had too.—Oh recollection—villain—villain—no! there can be no pardon for such a wretch as I am—it would be injustice!”

“To have a due sense of the grievousness of our offences, is necessary to true repentance,” said Morgan,—“but let us beware of that worst of sin—despair, which often leads to a crime for which there can be no forgiveness. There is mercy for every one that

asks with a sorrowful and contrite heart; have we not an assurance of it in these words—
“Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden, and I will make your burden light.”

“You know not the extent of my offences,” said Vavasour.—“My excesses first injured my father’s large possessions, and made him unjust to my mother, and inhuman to his innocent daughter.—My enormities caused me to imbrue my hands in blood—to join with robbers—to be guilty of sacrilegious violence.—Alas, alas! how many sinful souls may I not have been the means of condemning, by the force of example, or persuasion?—One I obliged to herd with thieves and murderers, and afterwards bribed to be a party in that diabolical attempt for which we were compelled to fly our country.”

“Herein,” said Morgan, “was the interposing arm of Providence most conspicuous, as it prevented the commission of a still greater crime—nay, it exhibited vice to that very individual you allude to — in such strong—such detestable colours, that—Behold him here!—your late associate in vice—now, I trust, a sincere convert to virtue.”

“Impossible!” exclaimed Vavasour, starting up, and intently surveying him;—
“and yet I think, notwithstanding the lapse of time, and the disguise of dress, that I have some recognition of—of—scenes that I shudder to reflect on.—And can you then be truly and sincerely a minister of that holy faith which speaks peace and pardon.”

“Do you think it impossible a sinner should turn from the evil of his ways, and do that which is lawful and right?—Was not the zealous St. Paul a persecutor of the church? and with humble reverence and thankfulness, I trust, I may, without profanation, say, with the blessed apostle, that from a vile offender — “I am what I am—and hope the grace of God was not bestowed on me in vain.”

“The hand, indeed, of all ruling Providence has been in this; and I will not despair, but humbly hope you are the agent allotted to complete what the good priest began, and submit myself therefore to your guidance and direction.—Yet, wretch that I am, how can I presume to bring a dead weight—a clog—a vile incumbrance, on those I have most injured?—Do not think it is pride—say, should I be that abject thing, would you not deem me a base fawning hypocrite—distrust—loathe, and despise me?”

“The first principle of Christianity,” replied Morgan, “is charity—universal charity,—by which is not to be understood the mere bestowing an alms.—It teacheth us likewise to harbour no mean, ungenerous suspicions, and to render good for evil,—for though we are cautioned to be as wise as serpents, we are instructed to be harmless as doves—to bless those that curse us, and to do good to those that despitefully use us.—It is a divine attribute, or rather an emanation of the Deity, affixing no limit to offences.—“How often shall my brother offend against me—seven times?—Yea, verily, I say unto you, even unto seventy times seven.”

“If my brother,” said Bertha, “can think so meanly of me, as to suppose that I have only quitted the world in outward shew, and retain those warring passions which set man against man, I here inform him, that I hold a part of my late parents’ estate in trust only;—that parent no longer needing it, it is now his.—Should that be insufficient, I will willingly supply the deficiency, and think myself amply repaid, that I have gained a brother, and Heaven a proselyte.”

“How mean and ungenerous, indeed, O, my sister!” said Vavasour, “are those jarring doubts which distract a mind long accustomed only to worldly policy;—

henceforward I renounce them, and will endeavour to direct my soul in search of those divine truths, by the attainment of which all grosser ideas will be done away."

The conversation was here interrupted by the introduction of supper, and the whole party sat down to their meal with chearful thankfulness; after which, Morgan repeated the evening service and prayers, and, together with the nuns and Ela, sang some hymns, before they retired to rest.

Next morning they arose, thoroughly refreshed, and after having performed their accustomed orisons, and finished their usual repast, they again set forward, resolving to make up, if possible, for the deficiency of the former day's travel, and to reach St. Maxient;—but before they had proceeded two miles, there suddenly came on a heavy rain, which so much swelled a brook they had to cross, that it appeared even to Morgan a formidable stream.—However, as the muleteers affirmed it could be passed in safety, they entered the water at the usual fording place, when about midway, the mules, frightened at the height and splashing of the water, became unmanageable; and notwithstanding the utmost exertions of their drivers, overturned the waggon in the midst of the stream, which was then running with the utmost violence. Vavasour, with great presence of mind, leaped off his mule, caught his sister, and bore her to land;—but Magdalen and Ela, not so fortunate, floated down the rapid current, where, in all probability, their earthly pilgrimage would have terminated, but for the brave and humane exertions of two travellers; who, at a small distance below the ford, saw the accident, and plunged into the stream at the hazard of their own lives, rescuing those of Magdalen and Ela, though not before they were both rendered insensible. — "It is Magdalen!" said one of the strangers, in a tone of grief and despair,— "Oh, fool that I was to quit her for a moment!—If she is dead what have I to do with life?—William!—Inhuman!—haste, help me to restore her!"

"Restore her!" re-echoed the other stranger, with a deep sigh, "pray Heaven I may be able!—How young!—how beautiful!—But see, she recovers—assist me to bear her to the house."

"Oh, torture!" exclaimed his companion. — "Alas, she is dead! — Flower of the world! — Magdalen, look up—she hears me not!"

"Magdalen—my mother dead!" repeated Ela, starting up, and awakening to sudden recollection.—At that instant Magdalen also gave signs of returning animation, and was soon sensible enough to find she was supported in the arms of Geoffry.—By this time Morgan, Vavasour, and Bertha, came to the spot, and aided the strangers to convey Magdalen and Ela into an adjacent house, appropriated for the accommodation of travellers, who had to wait the subsiding of the stream, when it was occasionally swelled by land floods.

This accident having put a stop to their further proceeding on that day's journey, Morgan and Vavasour, after having given their assistance for the restoration of the sufferers, took care for the drying the baggage, and for repairing the mischief the waggon and its appendages had sustained.—Amidst this necessary business, suitable acknowledgments were not wanting to Geoffry and his companion; and when the nuns and Ela were sufficiently recovered, and their attire changed, their adventurous deliverers were introduced, to receive their personal gratitude.

“The brave and humane,” said Magdalen, as they entered, “covet not the meed of thanks; within their own breasts, the plaudits of an approving conscience sits enthroned—*May he who best can*, reward you!—may you ever be good, prosperous, and happy.”

“The actions of a true knight, lady,” replied the elder, “can never be more worthily displayed, than in the service of those devoted to religion, when to such, beauty is also joined,” added he, falteringly, “it would be sacrilege to withhold our aid;—and right joyful am I, that I yielded to the importunities of my brother Geoffry, in making this excursion, which, under the special guidance of Providence——”

“Is Geoffry then your brother?” hastily inquired Magdalen.

“He is,” answered Elás’s preserver, “yet I knew not you had ever met.”

“I was, as you know,” said Geoffry, “educated in this province, near unto the house in which the nun Magdalen was professed, and even in my early days I received impressions—that is to say, precepts, which, I can never forget.”

“It is not wonderful,” replied the other; “there are indeed impressions which never can.—This lovely maiden—whose amazing similitude to you, lady,” addressing himself to Magdalen, “by her habit does not appear to be professed — forgive me if I am too presumptuous.”

“She is not,” answered Magdalen, smiling.—“And now may I inquire your name?”

“William,” replied he; “my companions call me also Long Espeé—I know not why.”

“It is for his undaunted bravery,” said Geoffry, “signifying that his sword reaches to every part of the field.”

“Oh, no, there is no such meaning,” hastily exclaimed William.

“Thus it ever is,” said Geoffry, “when his own commendation is the subject—mark how he blushes.”

“I have heard of this before,” said Morgan; “with the especial addition, that he never yet had cause to blush for a base or immoral action.”

“Unhappy mother! lost to such a son,” exclaimed Magdalen, with a sigh.

“Lost, indeed, lady—fouly murdered, while I was an infant!—Perhaps you have seen her;—even now my father dwells with rapture on her name.—Full oft has he described her,—insomuch that I think I could take her portrait; and so strongly has fancy implanted each lineament in my memory, that when I first beheld this beauteous maid, I mentally exclaimed—“Such once was my angelic mother!”

“Forbear, Sir,” said Morgan,—you distress the nun Magdalen—her nature is pitiable—she cannot bear a tale of woe.”

“Forgive me, gentle lady,” said William, “I grieve to give you pain.—Geoffry tells me you are for England—may I sometimes be permitted to ask of your health, and that of this fair maid?”

“We shall ever, I trust, gratefully remember our preservers; and, as far as the rules of the house will permit, gladly receive your visits.—Our prayers shall likewise be daily put up for your safety.—Fate will not permit your mother to be restored—consider me then her substitute, while I implore that blessing, which she, under the tender name of parent, cannot give.”

There was something so awfully impressive in Magdalen’s manner, as she slowly arose, lifted her clasped hands, and raised her eyes to heaven, that all in the apartment

quitted their seats; when Morgan, taking the young men by the hand, led them towards her, each bending the knee, while she solemnly pronounced,—“Father of mercies—thou who sittest enthroned in the highest heavens!—if a sincere penitence and sorrow, for the offences of my youth, have been acceptable in thy sight,—hear—O hear my humble petition;—not for myself—not for myself, O Lord, do I now entreat.—Bless—bless and protect these thy servants; direct them in the way of truth—teach them early to seek thee, their God.—Let not the specious names of greatness, power, or fame, turn them aside from the paths of rectitude and humanity—but of thy gracious goodness, so order every action of their lives, that the spirit of divine grace, in their hearts, may be made manifest by their good works; and when this weary pilgrimage of my days shall cease, and time shall also render their souls into the hands of their Creator,—may the sons—may Magdalen—may the happy mother—all meet in bliss!”

Magdalen having concluded her prayer, returned in silence to her seat, a silence which no one seemed inclined to interrupt, so much did she attract the reverence of all present.—Geoffry appeared uncommonly agitated, and at length exclaimed — “Yes, I will henceforth endeavour to merit thy blessing—thou more than parent;—from my childish days thou hast endeavoured to train my mind to virtue—but amazed and bewildered with the beauty of the instructress, my ears only caught the sounds—my eyes gazed — my soul sickened with delight! I beheld only a paragon of mortal creation, for my clouded sight then knew not that the earthly mould inclosed the soul of an angel.—From this time I will indeed consider Magdalen as a mother, or rather think the spirit of my early lost parent, purified from mortal stain, dwells within her bosom. — Those divine truths, which she so early inculcated, shall now sink deep within my heart.—I will no longer waver in irresolution—from this hour I devote myself to the service of the church.”

“Our minds, in early life,” said Morgan, “from various causes, often receive impressions, which precipitate us into hasty resolutions, and into rash actions—of which, in an hour of calmness, we frequently repent.—I will not say that such is your present determination,—but my advice is, that you at least deliberate for a time on the subject;—weigh well your nature—commune with your own heart—examine whether no worldly disappointment influences your conduct,—for, be assured, no sacrifice can be acceptable to the Almighty, the origin of which is not pure and unspotted.”

“That I have entertained other views, and held forth visionary prospects, which calm reflection convinces me never can be realized, I confess,” said Geoffry. “The heated imagination of the brain, I trust, hath now subsided.—I have been used, from my earliest youth, to dwell in cloistered retreats—my father wishes me to make a choice; the profession of arms accords not with my liking—where then can I fix?—Where can I find examples more worthy imitation than the good Arch-bishop—Father Dominic—Morgan, and Magdalen?”

“My brother,” said William, “has indeed, when warmly pressed on the subject, ever given the study of our holy religion a most decided preference.”

“The determination being influenced by no worldly consideration,—far be it from me to hold out any opposition,” said Morgan; “for I would that all mankind were ministers of peace, and practisers of godliness—the vengeful sword might then rust in its scabbard, and innocence securely dwell in safety.”

“There would then indeed be no occasion for the soldier,” said William, smiling; “but as long as ambition, fraud, treason, and rebellion, usurp the throne of rectitude, the hand of vengeance must be reared, to punish such crimes.—Bred in the field from almost my infancy, the practice of arms hath been my delight, yet never has my sword been drawn in a base or ignoble quarrel.”

“Deem you the present contest will be speedily terminated?” inquired Morgan.

“I know not,” answered William. “The disputes between the king and prince would have been long since adjusted, but for the ambitious interference of the King of France, who seeks to aggravate the quarrel between father and son, that both parties may be weakened, and the rich provinces, by that means, fall under his domination.—He has likewise, it is supposed, a powerful enemy in this province, in the person of Ralph de Faie, the secret partisan and uncle of Queen Eleanor, whom I more than suspect of being many years since, one of the perpetrators of a foul crime, and which I would have called upon him to affirm or deny in the open field, but, on account of his extreme age and debility; notwithstanding which, should proofs of his baseness and treachery sufficiently appear, neither his rank nor age will screen him from the king’s resentment.”

Morgan was aware that this was a subject particularly ungrateful to Magdalen, and that all further discussion would only perplex and discompose her; he therefore changed the discourse, by intreating them to partake of the refreshments that had been prepared, and which were now introduced.—The conversation soon became general, Vavasour, Bertha, and Ela, joining in entertaining them, until the lateness of the hour made it necessary to think of repose; previous to which they joined in thanksgivings for their late preservation.

The whole party were early stirring, and the accustomed duties being performed, a slight repast took place.—The mules were then brought out and yoked; the brothers also, having their request granted of attending them a few miles on their way, mounted their horses, and made a part of the cavalcade.—The waters now being drained off, nothing remained but a shallow brook, scarce overtopping the fetlocks of their beasts.—This being crossed, William took the first opportunity that presented, of singling out Morgan, and of desiring a few minutes conference with him, on a subject wherein he professed himself much interested.—Morgan immediately checked his mule, and each loitering some paces behind, William addressed him as follows.

“Deem me not abrupt and rude, holy father, that I trouble you with a few questions.—You were yesterday pleased to express satisfaction on hearing me favourably reported; believe me, I possess no impertinent curiosity, nor am I a trifler, but I would fain——”

“Propound son,” said Morgan, smiling, “I am thoroughly disposed to afford you a patient hearing; though I think I can already give more than half a guess at the tendency of your questions—but proceed.”

“The fair Ela,” said William, “whose life yesterday I had the good fortune to preserve——”

“Is a maid of condition,” replied Morgan, “and richly gifted.”

“Magdalen, likewise, said she was not professed.”

“Nor intended for seclusion; she is the sole prop and stay of a noble family, whose alliance would be an honour to princes.—In virtue and endowments, herself, a gem beyond purchase.”

“Affianced, perhaps,” said William with a sigh; “if so, I feel I must be wretched.”

“Not so,” replied Morgan, “nor do I conceive she hath yet formed any attachment, save for Magdalen and Bertha, unless she yesterday caught the impression from her deliverer, for the maid has a grateful heart.—Your ardent stolen glances were not lost on any of the company, nor the modest pleasure she took in your attentions.—I will, therefore, confer with Magdalen on this business; for, believe me, the son of—that is to say, the character of William stands too high in my esteem, for me not to take an interest in his happiness.”

William expressed the most lively thanks, and the rest of the party stopping and alighting, they rode up to join them, dismounting likewise.—An unusual thoughtfulness and silence had taken possession of Ela during this little absence, which, on their approaching the car, appeared to subside; a smile of satisfaction again dimpled her artless cheek, which was only clouded when the idea of a long separation stole upon the present happiness. — “Already,” said Bertha, jestingly to William, “have you proved yourself a truant knight, in leaving the ladies, to converse with that sage counsellor,—preferring wisdom to beauty.”

“Perhaps beauty was the theme,” answered Morgan, “and wisdom was only postponed to a future day, when time shall have meliorated the gay trifler into vanity and vexation of spirit.”

“We must not permit our knights, if such you call them,” said Magdalen, “to escort us any further; already will they have several miles to traverse a country, unsafe, from civil commotion, and doubly dangerous, if night overtakes them, unsheltered by any habitation.—We are now, as I understand from Morgan, within a few miles of St. Maxient, which we shall reach ere the day closes; let us therefore prepare to take leave, trusting to a happy meeting in England. Nuns have but few remembrances to bestow, and those of no intrinsic worth.—I have, however, preserved a few precious relics, for they were the gifts of my parents—two rubies set in gold; I pray ye, wear them, they will sometimes remind you of one who will never forget you in her prayers.—Ela also begs her preserver to accept a token of gratitude, and bade me make her excuse, that she had not at present any thing better worth bestowing, but trusts that time may yet come.”

Both the young men received Magdalen’s gifts, which they respectfully raised to their lips, and afterwards deposited in safety.—Ela’s present to William was lodged in a small gold box, which, when he opened, presented a likeness of herself; it was an exact copy of one done by an artist, and sent to her father into the Holy Land, by his express desire.

“Not worth bestowing!” exclaimed he, in rapture, on viewing the picture; “nothing can exceed its value, save the fair original,—nor should this rich dukedom purchase it from me!—I have not, indeed, any thing in return, to requite such an inestimable gift,—but may I, Lady,” said he, addressing Magdalen, “be permitted to present her with a token—insignificant in value—but of my unalterable regard and high respect?”

“What say you, Lady Ela,” said Morgan, “are you disposed to accept his unalterable regard,—or would you rather decline it?”

“The Lady—Magdalen—will determine—what I ought;—yet surely there can be no impropriety,—for I must perforce regard—I mean respect, the preserver of my life,” said Ela, blushing, and with hesitation.

“Though long unused to the manners of the world,” said Magdalen, “I see no impropriety,—nor doubt I, were her father present, but that he would sanction the acceptance.”

Thus emboldened, William drew forth a valuable ring, which he placed on Ela’s finger, respectfully kissing her hand as he gently let it fall.—“Farewel, lovely maid,” said he, “angels that watch over innocence ever guard and protect you!—should you sometimes look on that ring and think on William, he will deem himself happy.—Lady,” continued he, addressing Magdalen, “you have permitted me to call you by the revered and endearing name of parent, and in that name have bestowed a benediction most valued,—may not the adopted son claim then a parting embrace and renewed blessing?”

“Most willingly,” replied Magdalen, folding him in her arms,—“Bless—bless—O, my God, bless and protect William!”

“Has then my more than parent,—the guide and instructress of my youth, but one blessing to bestow?—Bless me—even me also,” said Geoffry.

“O, yes,” answered Magdalen, “equally beloved. — Bless, O, my God, this my other—adopted child! and, if he devotes himself to thy service, inspire his heart with thy holy spirit;—unfold to his mind thy sacred truths, that he may prove a worthy member of the Divine mission, and be the messenger of salvation to thousands!”

Bertha, Vavasour, and Ela, also took an affectionate leave of the two brothers; the eyes of the latter being diffused in tears. Morgan, likewise, who had ever been warmly attached to Geoffry, and now little less so to William, was much affected; he blessed and strained both in his arms, while William, amidst his last adieus, pressed his hand and said,—“I pray you be not unmindful of my dearest interests—Remember.”

The brothers then turned their horses heads to depart, after wistfully looking back, while the nuns and their company were in view; who on their parts also strained their visual organs, to catch a last glimpse of the young men, until an envious copse of trees at length interfered and completely shrouded them from sight. An universal silence then took place, which lasted until they reached St. Maxient, at which place they purposed to take up their night’s repose; and Morgan, as was his usual custom, gave orders for their lodging and entertainment.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THERE being a religious house at St. Maxient, and the travellers arriving early enough for vespers, they attended the regular service, for the first time since the demolition of the convent of St. Bertrand. Morgan being recognized by some of the late sisters of that house, who had now taken up their residence in that of St. Maxient, the nuns and Ela had the pleasure to salute their old friends; who would fain have persuaded them to terminate their journey there, urging, among many other reasons, the length of way they had to travel—the danger they had already encountered, — and what they most probably might expect—both by sea and land — before they had finally accomplished so weary a pilgrimage.

Magdalen pleaded, in excuse, herself and Ela, being natives of England, and already engaged by their friends to a house in that country.—Bertha being also under like engagements to accompany them — they therefore took a final farewell of their former inmates, and returned to their inn; where, with the cordiality of friends that have but one interest—one great end to pursue—they sat down to supper.

“This is the fourth day of our travel,” said Morgan, “in which we have not, as yet, made any great progress in respect to distance;—but this small space of time has brought about some wonderful events, which ought to convince us, that what we often deem chance, in our own affairs, is conducted by the especial interposition of Divine Providence, which is always watchful for those that put trust in its protection.”

“The hand of Heaven may be seen throughout,” said Vavasour; “nothing did the souls of my father and myself long for more ardently than my sister’s forgiveness.— Three nights before the fatal event, which cost him his life, for I will not call it accident—he dreamed, that he fell into a deep abyss, from which she released him;—and the night before we crossed the brook, I dreamed that I stood on the margin of a deep and rapid stream, when, suddenly, I beheld my sister, and, at some little distance, Magdalen, and the lady Ela, struggling amidst the waters.—That, devoid of terror, I plunged in and safely brought Bertha to land, when, looking to see what was become of Magdalen and Ela, I beheld two figures, bearing the form of angels, bursting from the clouds, who, darting down upon the waters, bore them triumphantly to heaven; and so strongly was this vision impressed on my imagination the next day, that when the disaster happened to the waggon, and I had safely landed my sister,—viewing the rescue of Magdalen and Ela, from the waters,—for a moment, and before recollection took place,—I really expected to have seen them borne aloft in air.”

“The two young men were, no doubt, the embodied instruments appointed for their preservation,” said Morgan, “as you likewise were for your sister’s; how far the whole of your dream may be verified heaven only knoweth. Should Geoffry devote himself to the church, he may likewise be the instrument of promoting the salvation of Magdalen, and also of many others,—for that is the only way I can at present interpret part of your dream,—Magdalen being doubtless the occasion of his adopting the resolution of entering into holy orders.”

“When time shall have abated somewhat of his ardent impetuosity of temper,” said Bertha, “he may become one of the church’s brightest ornaments; at present I think

William and he should exchange dispositions—for William, though report says he is a brave soldier, — is yet mild, calm, and steady.”

“Geoffry, nevertheless, has a good heart,” said Morgan, “and we ought to make great allowance for a fervid youthful imagination; particularly when under the domination of such peculiar circumstances, that might have betrayed even more advanced age into misconception and error.”

“I pray ye,” said Ela to Morgan, “be not unmindful of William’s last injunction—he told you to remember——”

“I do remember,” said Morgan.

“And have you performed what he desired?” said Bertha.

“Curiosity ruined our first mother,” replied Morgan.

Ela, who had eagerly raised her head to hear Morgan’s answer, now fixed her eyes on the ring which William gave her, and twirled it round on her finger; Magdalen smiled, and remained silent.

“You just now asked me a question,” said Morgan, addressing Bertha; “I will now propose one to you, and desire you will ponder ere you reply.”—As this was uttered with great apparent gravity, every one present became very attentive.—“This is my interrogatory,” continued he. “What is William now doing?”

“Pooh, nonsense!” replied Bertha.

“Nonsense, indeed,” re-echoed, Morgan, “for I should suppose he is engaged in viewing a certain young lady’s picture, who is so insensible of the favour, that she is only contemplating a paltry ring.”

“I was not thinking of the ring,” said Ela.

“Nor he of the mere copy, I dare be bound,” answered Morgan; “and now having, *in part*, complied with William’s injunction, and been, I trust, innocently pleasant, we will perform our serious duties, and retire to rest.”

The next morning they arose at a very early hour, and proceeded towards Poitiers, on their road to which place they were overtaken by numerous detachments of the military, hastening towards Normandy.—From some of these they learned, that the king was bringing up the rear guard of the army, and would pass them in the course of a few hours.—This was unwelcome tidings to some of the party, and occasioned a conference between Magdalen and Morgan, the result of which was, that under a supposition of Poitiers being filled with the passing troops, Morgan should propose to vary from the direct path, and take up a lodging at some obscure village for a day or two, until the main road became clear,—a point that was acceded to by all, as soon as it was mentioned.—They therefore turned a little to the west, and took up their sojourn at a small village near Ardin, where they remained three days. On the morning of the fourth, understanding that the country was now tolerably clear, they again set forward, and striking into the direct road, in due time reached Poitiers, without experiencing any interruption.

At Poitiers the inhabitants had been terribly distressed from the number of their late visitors, so that the travellers found but poor entertainment, the provisions being mostly consumed, or carried off. They learned here, that the king’s affairs were far from being in a prosperous state;—that his spirits were much depressed, he having almost lost his wonted vigour of mind, and activity of body. In short, that age and domestic calamity,

bore heavy upon him, and aided his enemies more than all their accumulated force; and it was thought he would soon accede to the hard conditions they wished to impose.

It was not his foreign dominions alone that were in a state of insurrection, but also a majority of the most powerful of the English Barons; in which rebellion was linked his favourite and darling son John, whose name, among the list of conspirators, appeared to have struck him with such horror — that in his first paroxysm of grief and rage, he had bitterly cursed him, which malediction he never could be prevailed on to retract. Thus totally deserted by his own family, he had been alone soothed and comforted by his two natural children, William and Geoffry; who scarce ever quitted his presence, but endeavoured, by their affection, attention, and assiduity, to make up for the barbarity of his lawful progeny, who were endeavouring to wrest from the arms of a feeble old man, what a short time would give them possession of, without the crime of rebellion, and the names of parricides.

These tidings were imparted to Magdalen by Morgan.—“Alas! unhappy man,” said she, “how are the mighty fallen!—He who made kings tremble at his frown—whose will was law, and power absolute;—from the breath of whose mouth, the holy altar was stained with blood, and who feared not to violate the sacred rights of hospitality,—as a parent, thou now feellest—by the rebellion of thy sons—those pangs thou hast made others feel, to gratify thy guilty pleasures. — In thy illicit offspring, thou alone findest comfort. — Oh! may they never be visited for the sins of their parents.”

“I trust they will not,” said Morgan, “nor are we so to interpret the words of God’s holy ordinance, revealed unto Moses, for he is just, abundant in pity, and will not punish us for faults committed by others—but shew mercy unto such as love him, and keep his commandments; and I hope these young men, uncontaminated by the vices of courts, will merit divine grace, and prove rich in virtue. The king’s ill health, and unsuccessful fortune, are, at present, unpropitious to their worldly establishment; but neither are past recovery, or, if they were, a provision would be made for their support. Prince Richard has also recognized them as his natural brothers, and has a particular affection for William, of which indeed he appears every way deserving. — I know not how, but he attaches every one to him;—marked you not the sudden impression he made on the Lady Ela.—He is also equally smitten—if an alliance could, at some future day, be effected between them, it might not prove unworthy either party, but be alike an union of affection,—both propitious and advantageous.”

“I know not,” replied Magdalen, “any thing in this world, that would give me more pleasure, than the alliance you mention, particularly as report speaks so much in favour of William. — Of the goodness of Ela’s disposition I am well assured.—I would not, however, encourage a clandestine correspondence between them, that might end in disappointment, for we know not what other views the earl, her father, may have entertained.”

“We must leave all to time and Providence, hoping for the best,” said Morgan; “doubtless the king, if he was acquainted with William’s affection for the maid, would further his wishes, and would then make a suitable provision. Nor do I see how the earl could object to the alliance,—particularly when he knew who was the preserver of his daughter’s life; and it is not likely, that, in so many years passed in camps, that he should have formed any engagements in regard to her disposal.”

During this conversation, Ela, Bertha, and Vavasour, were engaged in discussing the occurrences and events that had befallen them; Ela saying, that travelling, though perilous, in some respects, still had its pleasures. From thence, adverting to their late accident, she extolled, in the highest terms, the gallant behaviour of the two brothers, in hazarding their own lives, for the preservation of her's and Magdalen's.—“I wonder whether we shall see them again, while we remain in France?” continued she, sighing, and looking at the ring.

“It will not be at all marvellous if we do,” said Bertha, “if we consider the character of the two gallant champions, who doubtless can give a pretty accurate guess at our route; but you seem to forget, in the commendation of your heroes achievements, that I am also as much indebted to my brother.”

“Ah,” replied Ela, “that was natural enough—to save a sister.”

“And unnatural indeed,” said Vavasour, “to attempt to destroy her.”

“Distress me not,” replied Bertha; “you are now, indeed, my brother, and every thing past must be no more remembered.”

Magdalen and Morgan having finished their conference, rejoined the rest of the party, and supper being introduced, the conversation became general, and related to the safest way of pursuing their route, during the troublesome warfare in which the whole country was involved; and which made the nuns regret their not taking up their abode with those of St. Maxient, till peace was again restored.

“It is an event that may not speedily take place,” said Morgan, “for the dispute appears to encrease every day between the contending parties, and to be more complicated and perplexed.—It is besides much aggravated by Philip, King of France, who, enraged that so many fine provinces of his kingdom should be in possession of the English, endeavours to foment jealousies between the king and his son, Prince Richard, whose naturally impetuous and fiery temper needs no spur to his restless ambition.”

“The example of his brother Henry's death-bed repentance,” said Vavasour, “on account of his unnatural rebellion, has had no effect upon Richard.”

“For about three years he was peaceable,” replied Morgan; “at length, being weary of a state so dissimilar to his humour, he repaired to Guyenne, and took upon himself the government, where he found himself supported by the people. From thence he went to Poitou, and from both provinces, having collected some troops, he attacked his brother Geoffrey, in Bretagne, whom he defeated.—But hearing his father was coming with a large army, he retired to Poitou, where the king sent him an absolute command, to meddle no more with the affairs of Guyenne, threatening to disinherit him for non-compliance,—a consideration, that for a time kept him quiet, particularly as the king agreed to leave him in possession of Poitou. The motives on which Prince Richard grounds his complaints, in the present war, and in which he is joined by King Philip, are twofold,—The first is, that his father detains from him the Princess Alice, to whom he was betrothed, and meant to marry her to his younger and favourite son, John.—The other was, that Henry absolutely refused to have him crowned, in his own lifetime; to this last he would by no means consent, having experienced the ill consequences before.—Indeed, whatsoever is the reason,” continued Morgan, “he seems in no haste to perform the contract in regard to Alice, or to restore her to her brother; notwithstanding which, he has made various overtures for peace, but at every attempt his adversaries advance some new and degrading article, which being rejected, Philip has lately received Richard's

homage, for all the provinces in France, belonging to England—as pretending, that Henry has incurred the guilt of rebellion, in making war against his sovereign—in consequence of which, most of his subjects in France have revolted, and joined his son.”

The provinces through which they meant to travel being in this state of danger, Morgan advised the nuns and Ela to take up their abode, for a short space of time, in a convent near Loudun, a few miles further, while himself, leaving Vavasour at Loudun, re-measured his steps back, to counsel the Arch-bishop on the propriety of the measure, and to get it approved by him.

This proposition was unanimously agreed to, and immediately pursued. Morgan then forthwith took his departure from thence, and reached the archiepiscopal palace in three days; when the prelate, on hearing the circumstances recited, that prevented their proceeding, gave his permission to delay their journey, according to the circumstances that might occur.—And indeed this indulgence appeared, soon after, highly necessary, for the king’s affairs became every day more and more in disorder, till at length he had the mortification to see himself deserted by all, except William, Geoffrey, and three or four nobles; his troops also were every where defeated, and at last so reduced, that he was no longer able to continue the war.—He had now no other alternative left, than to desire the Pope to interpose, and procure a peace. As it was not his holiness’s interest that one Christian potentate should become too powerful, at the expence of another, he complied with Henry’s request, and dispatched his legate to France; who threatened Philip with excommunication, in case he did not desist from a war, which he affirmed, prevented Henry from turning his arms against the Infidels.

Philip, however, grown haughty from success, replied, that the Pope had no business to intermeddle with the affairs of his kingdom—that he was only chastising a rebellious vassal, adding—“No doubt the King of England’s money has been largely distributed to make the legate plead in such a cause.”

This was Henry’s last resource, for finding the Pope could render him no service, he was obliged to submit to a peace, on the most degrading and humiliating terms, which, together with the ingratitude and defection of his children, nobles, and the friends of his prosperity, made this hitherto high-spirited and successful monarch, give himself up to grief and despair; so that falling into his last sickness, at Chinon, in that exigency, he was deserted by even the few who had, till then, remained, — William and Geoffrey excepted.

These tidings speedily reached Loudun, with the addition, that the unfortunate monarch had not even a spiritual assistant, in this his most fatal extremity. — Deeply impressed, and zealous in the cause of religion, Morgan immediately departed, and soon reaching Chinon, presented himself to William and Geoffrey; who were no less astonished than gratified at his appearance, particularly when they learned the praiseworthy cause of his journey thither.—The brothers confirmed the report of their father and sovereign’s deserted state, adding likewise, that the king would be much pleased to see him, as he had expressed great compunction for his past life, and deeply deplored his neglect of the duties of religion.—“But we should be wanting in love to our parent to delay your admission,” said William, “in this his last extremity; I will therefore announce your benevolent errand, and return forthwith, that our father’s last moments may be rendered comfortable.”

William presently returned, and, together with Geoffrey, introduced Morgan into the king's presence. At their entrance, Henry said—"Where is he?—let the holy man enter and stand before me, that I may see him."

"Peace be with you, my liege lord," said Morgan.

"Amen!" replied the king. Then fixing his eyes, for some moments, on Morgan, he continued, in a languid voice, and with a faint smile—"You see here but little to betoken the sovereign;—behold what a small space contains the King of England, and lord of many mighty provinces!—Here lies fallen greatness!—Where are now my numerous courtiers? that herd of lying sycophants, whose smiles were nurtured by prosperity, and chilled by adversity—all, all fled.—Misfortune and death level all distinctions!—My children too!—Children, did I say?—yes, I have children!—Draw near, William and Geoffrey, *ye are, indeed, my natural children!*—Bless ye, my sons!—for the present leave this holy man with me, I need some converse with him.—Anon ye shall again be admitted."

William and Geoffry then withdrew, while Henry, for the space of two hours, was assisted in his devotions by Morgan, who, afterwards, by the king's command, made note of several things, which he wished to be performed after his decease, particularly recommending William and Geoffry to his successor.—To these injunctions, among others, he affixed his hand and seal, and gave them into the keeping of Morgan, who constantly attended him during his illness.

At length, finding his end approaching, he caused himself to be carried into the church, and laid before the altar, where, having confessed himself, and expressed signs of repentance, he expired.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE same ingratitude attended this last sad scene, as had been before exhibited by his courtiers; for no sooner were his eyes closed in death, than his domestics forsook him, having first plundered the dead body, and left it naked in the church.

Such was the end of Henry the Second, one of the most illustrious Princes of the period in which he lived—as famous for genius as he was for the extent of his dominions; but whose vices more than preponderated, and turned the scale against his virtues.—He was courageous, generous, deeply skilled in politics, studious, and learned; but these were counterbalanced by haughtiness, ambition, and lust—for he assailed the chastity of all the women that came in his way—historians say, the princess designed for his son, not excepted.

The beginning of his reign was the happiest that the subjects of this country ever saw.—There was not a king in Europe more feared or respected, until the fatal catastrophe of Becket disturbed his felicity, and created him many troubles.—Next followed the dissensions in his own family, which ever after imbibited his peace, and most probably shortened his days.

Morgan being charged with the last commands of the deceased monarch, attended his remains to Fontevrault, accompanied by William and Geoffry; it having been his express desire, that his body, after death, should be deposited in the choir of a nunnery, which he had there founded.—Richard, like his brother Henry, a late repentant, came forth to meet, and attend the royal corpse to the silent tomb;—moved at the sight, and conscience-struck at his undutiful conduct, he burst into tears, and, with many bitter lamentations, openly accused himself of his father's death.

William and Geoffry were affectionately received by the new king, who promised implicitly to obey his father's commands in regard to their future fortunes; nor did he fail in his word, bestowing several lordships on William, and considerable church preferment on Geoffry, who, agreeable to his former declaration, had undergone priestly ordination. Neither was Morgan left unrequited for his attention to the late king, he being rewarded with a rich benefice, and promised still further elevation in the church; and, as if Richard was not only resolved to bestow favours on such as had been attached to his father, but also to punish such as had been disobedient, he shewed his displeasure, by banishing the most criminal, and treating others with marked and contemptuous neglect — and if they had the boldness to complain, forbade them ever after to appear in his presence.

Henry being laid in his grave, Richard's complaints in regard to Alice were no more remembered, nor his pretended jealousy of his brother John. As he continued in France above a month after Henry's death, his first care was to do homage to Philip for the ducal crown of Normandy; at the same time he did not neglect to send an order to England, for his mother, Queen Eleanor's release, who had been confined sixteen years.—He also sent a commission for her to take the administration of the government, during his absence; empowering her, likewise, to release what prisoners she pleased.—Taught by her own sufferings, to pity the misfortunes of others, she willingly exercised the power thus delegated to her; nor did she, during the remainder of her life, omit any opportunity of exercising her charity to such as were debarred the sweets of liberty—the value of which she had learned during her own confinement.

Amidst the hurry and bustle of a court, Morgan was not forgetful of those he had left at Loudun; nor did William's new honours and dignities make him, for a moment, banish the ardent affection he had entertained for Ela. His duty and obedience required him to attend Richard to England, but he left a charge, with Morgan, not to be unmindful of promoting his suit with the lovely maid; to whom, and to Magdalen, he sent the most warm and affectionate commendations, accompanied with some rare and costly presents, in which he was also joined by his brother Geoffry.

Soon after this memorial of love and friendship had been dispatched, the Earl of Salisbury arrived in Normandy, from the Holy Land, where he had sustained much hardship from a long captivity among the Saracens.—Having paid his duty to his new sovereign, his first care was to claim his daughter; and for that purpose he asked permission of Richard to depart, for a short space, to Guyenne, being as yet unacquainted with the fatal accident that had befallen the abbess.—The king, who had been informed by Morgan of all the subsequent events from that period, and wishing to obtain so rich an heiress for his brother, replied—“You may spare yourself the trouble of so long a journey, my good Lord of Salisbury, the Lady Ela is in safety, and much nearer; but say, what reward will you render those who have twice saved her life?—once from a dreadful conflagration, in which your aunt, the Lady Rosmar, perished — a second time from the fury of an overwhelming current.”

“Good heavens! my liege,” exclaimed the earl, “how bountiful has Divine Providence been to my child, amidst my own afflictions and distresses.”

“It hath, indeed,” replied Richard, “and I trust you will prove no niggard on the occasion.”

“My gracious sovereign,” said Salisbury, “if my fortune—nay, my life itself—can repay it.—”

“We covet not such sacrifices, my lord,” said Richard; “her life was preserved from the flames by a holy churchman, who will willingly resign his portion of the reward to her second preserver, our natural brother, William Fitz-Henry, commonly called Longsword.—He is a right valiant young man, and choicely gifted; he hath our affection, and loves the maid, who, I understand, as far as virgin modesty will admit, also regards him.—What say you, my lord, shall we have your alliance? and the gifts of fortune shall more than equal the fair one's expectations.—But you shall see, and judge yourself of the young man.”

Richard then ordered William to attend, who immediately obeyed the royal command.—He introduced him to the earl, saying — “William, love my good Lord of Salisbury; he is a valiant soldier, and a brave defender of the cross.”

William advanced, and modestly and courteously saluted the earl; who, much struck with his appearance, warmly embraced and thanked him for the service he had rendered his daughter.

“Nothing now remains,” said Richard, “but to speed the fair lady to the arms of her parent.—You, my lord, want repose—we also need your counsel. William shall, therefore, haste, and be her escort; at the same time giving in charge, in our name, to the abbess of Loudun, for some one of her ladies to accompany her hither.”

The earl acquiesced, and William joyfully accepted the commission, immediately commencing his journey, in which he was accompanied by Geoffry and Morgan; but little time served to convey them to Loudun, where they found the nuns, Ela, and

Vavasour, in good health. The presents and letters had been received, and all parties appeared much pleased at the happy prospects of the young man. Ela was delighted at the tidings of her father's return, after so long an absence; and it was plain that her pleasure was not diminished, at William being deputed to convey her to the Norman court.

Magdalen had been long unused to express any extraordinary emotions of gladness; yet, though in a manner dead to all fervour, but what arose from ardent piety, she could not help feeling satisfaction at the prosperity of her friends, particularly as one great burden had been removed from her mind, in regard to Geoffry's altered conduct, and at his subsequent entrance into holy orders.

It being the intention of the nuns to set forward on their journey to England, whenever the provinces were sufficiently quiet for them to travel in security; they therefore availed themselves of this opportunity, and departed from Loudun, with the brothers and Ela, accompanied also by Vavasour.—Never had Ela appeared to such advantage, for her spirits were raised to an uncommon degree of exhilaration, at the unexpected sight of her preserver; and much more so, when she understood he came expressly to conduct her to her father.

“What a happy girl is Ela,” said she to Magdalen; “I shall soon have all that I hold dear about me.—How pleased too my father will be to see my dear mother, and to thank her for the kindness she has shewn to his child.”

“My Ela, I trust,” said the nun, “will soon be surrounded by those who love her; but she forgets that Magdalen hath for ever abjured the world, and that she cannot, so solemn and obligatory is her vow, hold converse that might lead to a disclosure of events, that must, till her last moments approach, be buried in oblivion.”

“Have I then,” said Ela, “had only a transient view of happiness?—my mother lost in my infant days!—again as I thought restored, and for years—only to make the separation doubly painful.”

“You, my dear child, have had years to prepare for a parting, which you knew must one day arrive.—Your prospects were opening and bright—mine obscure and dreary; tending only to pain all who were unfortunately interested in my favour.—Yet, bear witness for me, O, my God, that I do not repine.—I only feel for those who love me, and whom, in return, I dearly love.”

“How prone is the human mind,” said Morgan, “to search out affliction, because it cannot enjoy the whole of its own wayward desires.—Heaven, for its own wise purposes, hath decreed to mortals different means whereby they may obtain happiness, and therefore hath deemed it right, that Magdalen should, by a life of seclusion, earn her everlasting felicity.—To you it possibly points out worldly duties to fulfil,—to soothe and comfort an aged parent,—to rear and bring up in the fear of the Lord, a future progeny,—to feed and clothe the poor,—to be a worthy pattern of imitation to your equals, and a kind and pious instructress to your inferiors and dependents;—so shall the wicked be reclaimed, and the righteous bear testimony of your good works.—Magdalen will also rejoice, as having early sown the seeds of grace, and thereby added to her own salvation.”

“Though Magdalen will be secluded,” said Bertha, “she will not be lost, you may see her as often as you have opportunity;—Ela will also be frequently the theme of converse.—You will, besides, have the satisfaction to reflect, that she will not be friendless,—for that Mary, the partner of her earlier years, with whom she used to wander

and unfold her sorrows in the gloomy shades of St. Bertrand, will, as Bertha, be still the sister of her heart; until death dissolves the mortal tie, and unites their souls in celestial affection.”

As Ela had been accustomed, from her childhood, to pay the utmost deference to the opinion and judgment of those she loved, the arguments of her friends had all due weight; and she, by degrees, became more reconciled to a separation, which she was convinced was unavoidable.

During the many years she had passed at St. Bertrand's, she had witnessed enough to know there was something peculiar in Magdalen's fate; though she was well aware there was always a secrecy observed that precluded inquiry, in respect to the connections of those that were professed. — This silence had been more rigorously enforced in respect to Magdalen, a silence which she had often seen and ruminated on, until she became weary of conjectures, to which there was no apparent clue.

As they now travelled with more dispatch, than when Morgan conducted the route, they soon reached Rouen, where Magdalen again, for the present time, took up her abode in a convent, while Bertha attended Ela to her father.—Their meeting, after so long an absence, was tender and affecting, the earl being struck at the resemblance she bore to his late countess.—To Bertha he expressed many thanks, and much obligation, for her care, and the strong interest she took in his daughter's welfare.

Having learned from Ela, the unwearied and truly maternal attention of Magdalen, and that she had accompanied them to Rouen, he declared his resolution of making his personal acknowledgments; and was much grieved when Bertha acquainted him, that, owing to some certain restrictions imposed on her friend, she would be obliged to decline that honour for the present.—“I must then perforce, though unwillingly, acquiesce,” said the earl; “but shall remain unhappy until I can see a lady to whom I am so much indebted.”

William and Geoffry were not neglected, they also receiving the earl's thanks, as did likewise Morgan; who, on account of being instrumental in Ela's preservation, stood very high in Salisbury's regard.—As for William, a little time rendered him so great a favourite, that he obtained permission to address her, Richard promising, at the earl's request, on the event of a marriage taking place with his daughter, that the earldom of Salisbury should continue to William and their heirs.

In a few days Richard sailed for England, attended by the Earl of Salisbury, William, Geoffry, and many of the nobles and dignified clergy—Magdalen, Bertha, Morgan, and Vavasour, continuing for some time in Normandy, in order to avoid the hurry and bustle that would take place in England, at the first landing of the new king. — Notwithstanding the pomp and glare that now took place with Ela, and which is so particularly attractive to young minds, she appeared almost inconsolable at parting with Magdalen; nor was the other little less affected.—William and Geoffry also took an affectionate leave, promising to see them as speedily as possible, after they had heard of the nuns' arrival in England, and being settled in their selected convent. In the mean time Ela promised to inform Magdalen, by letter, of every material circumstance that should occur until she again beheld her.

Ela was not unmindful of her word, for in about six weeks after her departure, Magdalen received a large packet, containing letters from herself, William, and Geoffry—her epistle was as follows:

“Do not be angry, my dearest mother, with your child, nor think her ungrateful, and negligent. — I have got into a new world, where there is nothing but noise and confusion.—Oh, how I sometimes wish for the peaceful sameness of the convent, with which I used to be so much tired.—From the never-to-be-forgotten day when I left my dear mother, and entered the ship, to the day we landed at Southampton, I was sick and ill; but on reaching the shore, I appeared to have new life, though every thing around was strange and wonderful.—The language—manners—people—all different.

“From Southampton we proceeded to Winchester, the king journeying thither in order to take note of his father’s treasure; which being done, we speeded to London, where I thought I should have some rest, and time to write to my dear mother, but no such thing—for orders were given for the king’s coronation, a ceremony in which my father bore a part, and for which I was obliged to assist, in preparation for the same.—By the king’s order, no women were to be present; but as I have heard the form recited, both by my father and Lord William, and, as I think it may amuse you, and dear Bertha, I will endeavour to describe it.

“First, then, the Arch-bishop of Canterbury and Rouen, who came over with the king, and the Arch-bishop of Dublin, with other bishops and abbots, in rich caps, and having the cross, holy water, and censers, carried before them, received the king at the door of his privy chamber, and conducted him, in solemn procession, to the abbey church of Westminster. In the middle of the bishops and clergy walked four barons, each carrying a golden candlestick with a taper; after which came Geoffry de Lucy, bearing the royal cap, and John the marshal next, with a massy pair of gold spurs. Then, William, Earl of Pembroke, with the royal sceptre; after him, William Fitz-Patrick, Earl of Salisbury, with a golden rod, having a dove on the top.—Three other earls followed—David, brother to the king of Scotland, as Earl of Huntingdon;—Prince John, Earl of Lancaster and Derby, and Robert, Earl of Leicester, each bearing a sword.—After them, six earls and barons, bearing a chequered table, on which were laid the royal robes.—Next followed William Mandeville, Earl of Albemarle and Essex, bearing the crown, which was richly adorned with precious stones. Richard came next, between the Bishops of Durham and Bath, over whom a canopy of state was borne by four barons.—Then followed a numerous train of earls, barons, knights, &c. &c.

“In this order they proceeded to the church, where, before the high altar, Richard, laying his hand on the Evangelists, and relics of saints, took a solemn oath, “That he would observe peace, honour, and reverence to God, his church, and her ministers, all the days of his life.—That he would exercise upright justice and equity towards the people committed to his charge.—That he would abrogate and disannul all evil laws and wrongful customs, and make, keep, and maintain those that were good and laudable.”

“Then they put off all his garments, from the middle upwards, except his shirt, which was open on the shoulders; then they next put on his shoes, which were of gold tissue. The Arch-bishop then anointed him on the head, the breast, and the arms; then covering his head with a linen cloth, he set the cap thereon which Geoffry de Lucy carried, and when he had put on his waistcoat and upper garment, the Arch-bishop delivered to him the sword of the kingdom; which done, two earls put on his spurs, and he was led, clad in a royal mantle, again to the altar, where the Arch-bishop charged him, in God’s name, not to presume to take upon him that dignity, except he resolved inviolably to keep the vows and oaths he had just then made.—To which the king

replied—“That by the grace of God he would faithfully perform them all.” The crown was then taken from beside the altar, and delivered to the Arch-bishop, who placed it upon the king’s head; after which he put the sceptre in his right hand, and the rod royal in his left.

“Thus crowned, he was conducted to his throne, with the same solemnity, as before.—Mass then began, and when they came to the offertory, the king was led by the Bishops of Durham and Bath to the altar, where he offered a mark of pure gold, according to the form used by his predecessors; after which he was brought back to his throne by the same bishops.—He was then attended by the same form of procession to an adjoining chamber, where, after a short rest, he returned in like procession to the chair, when having put off his heavy crown and robes, he went to dinner in Westminster Hall—the citizens of London acting as butlers, and those of Westminster serving up the dishes.— The Arch-bishops and bishops sat down with the king, while the earls and barons waited, according to their several places and dignities.

“Amidst all this festivity and rejoicing, I have to lament, my dear mother, a sad spectacle which occurred, from the infuriate zeal of the common people; who cruelly put to death a number of Jews, that, in honour of the day, came to offer the king presents.— Surely, my dear mother, inhumanity and persecution, on account of a different form of worship, cannot be acceptable to God.—They say, that the people were exasperated, by reason of the tidings which arrived, some time since, of the Saracens having taken Jerusalem. But what have the Jews to do with that?—I hate bloodshed and war. — Heigho! Do not be angry with me, my dear mother, and I will tell you all my thoughts—and—and—all my—what shall I say?—all my troubles.

“My dear father is but just come home, after so many years of hardship and captivity, and now all the world is going mad again about these nasty Saracens.—I do not mean to say, that my father means to engage in those wars; but then the king, and a mighty host, are preparing.—Oh, my dear mother! you will be grieved too—William, whom I love as a brother, — a brother did I say? — why should I be ashamed, my father says, I may love him.—Do not think your child bold, for was he not my preserver? and does he not love me?—and yet he is about to leave England. He says his honour will oblige him to undertake this dangerous expedition.—Alas! what is this high-sounding name, that cuts in twain every endearing — every tender tie? — Has honour no affections? doth it delight in nothing but war and bloodshed?—Say, my dear mother, will they call William coward, and a mere professor of our holy religion, should he decline going? for so he tells me—and that he would be deemed a recreant, and a dishonour to knighthood.—And are not knights Christians?—and does not Christianity forbid the shedding of blood? They call this war a holy one, and say, that every one that perishes in it will infallibly go to Heaven.—I hope they will; yet God forbid that William should be killed—the very thought of it is like the stroke of death, and I can write no more.—So God bless you, my dear mother!”

The epistles of William and Geoffry were written in a truly affectionate style; that of the former was chiefly supplicatory, entreating Magdalen would, by letter, endeavour to reconcile Ela to the expedition, in which his honour was so much engaged, and to set forth how much it would disoblige the king, should he not accompany him to the Holy Land.

Morgan being also high in Ela's estimation, was entreated to unite his interest with Magdalen, for the same purpose, a requisition that both thought it highly necessary to comply with; for though both were averse to this waste of human blood, and thought the sacred name of religion prostituted in the quarrel, yet, being aware of Richard's irascible temper, they were fearful, in case of a non-compliance, it might prove injurious to William's future fortune.—They therefore jointly endeavoured, by every consolatory argument that reason and religion could suggest, to soothe and calm her fears for his safety;—nor did their efforts, at last, prove unsuccessful, particularly when backed by an assurance from her father, that she should pass the term of his absence with Magdalen and Bertha, at Godstow; the convent at that place being the house appointed for the reception of the nuns on their arrival in England.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE dukedom now being restored to a tranquil state, there was nothing to impede the continuation of their journey; they therefore again set forward, and, in due time, arrived at Dieppe, from whence they proposed to embark for England.—For this purpose Vavasour was commissioned to repair to the harbour, in order to engage a ship for their passage. Having agreed with the captain of a vessel, that was to sail in a few days, he was about to return, when suddenly he found himself assailed by an armed man, who, plunging his sword into his body, exclaimed—“This, in revenge of my brother,” and instantly fled.

A crowd soon gathered round the unfortunate Vavasour, among whom was a person skilled in the knowledge of wounds, who, on inspection, declared the thrust of the assassin to be a deadly one; and therefore recommended the sufferer to lose no time in settling his affairs, and in endeavouring to make his peace with Heaven.

Vavasour’s own feelings convinced him the chirurgeon did not deceive him; he therefore lost no time in sending for his sister and Morgan; who, amidst their concern at the shocking tidings, did not fail to repair to him with all possible dispatch.—They found him perfectly calm, collected, and resigned, acknowledging the retributive hand of justice in the blow from the brother of him he had slain.—“It is fitting,” said he, “that blood should have blood; I have long repented of the deed that brought on this vengeance, and trust my death will prove an expiation.—The Almighty has been merciful in conducting the steps of my sister to pronounce pardon and forgiveness to my misguided father and myself.—Oh, that I could obtain forgiveness, and make restitution to those I plundered, while among the banditti—but it cannot be,—for, alas! I know not the sufferers, nor have I the means. One satisfaction, nevertheless, arises—no blood was shed while I was among them, save that of the Norman, at whose death I was not present, and which I severely censured.

“And now,” continued he,—“while I have yet strength remaining, let me make known how I became so lost and depraved, as to associate with common thieves and robbers.

“From my father’s false indulgence, I had been early initiated into scenes of extravagance and dissipation; and having always money at command, soon became a prey to the needy gamester and sharper, by some of whom I was introduced into houses frequented by the most abandoned and debauched of both sexes. In one of these receptacles of vice, I quarrelled with a man whom I had called a friend, but whom I discovered to have cheated me of various sums of money.—We fought—and he fell.—As my antagonist was nephew to the seneschal, a man who was particularly severe against duellists, I knew my life was only to be secured by flight and concealment, for which purpose I entered the walls of the old castle; when, to my infinite surprise, I found it inhabited by banditti, by whom I was seized, and made prisoner.—A short space apparently remained between me and death, for so the rogues had decreed, when just as they were about to put their sentence into execution, the arrival of their chief, from an excursion, prevented the stroke, for he proved to be an old companion, whom I had for some time missed from our vicious haunts. A mutual explanation took place, for he had also fled to elude the hand of justice—he persuaded me that I could not be more secure

than with the banditti.—But I must be brief, for my strength fails—I became a robber.—On the death of their chief I was elected to succeed him, and, from time to time, by keeping up a secret correspondence with my father, found I had nothing to hope for, in regard to a pardon. At length our wicked society was dissolved by a dreadful attack, in which many were slain, and myself reduced to seek a secret refuge upon my father's estate.—You know the rest, and will therefore spare me the pain of reciting the remainder of my abhorrent actions.”

Vavasour ceased—a cold sweat bedewed his forehead,—he snatched, with an eager grasp, the cross which hung to Morgan's girdle—conveyed it to his lips—pressed it with a convulsive motion to his breast,—raised his eyes to Heaven—and expired.

Bertha was much affected at her brother's untimely death, for she was convinced he had renounced his bad habits, and was a thorough convert to virtue.—He had also saved her life, and given many proofs of his affection — continually attending her steps, and guarding her, on every occasion, with the attention of a tender parent, more than that of a brother.

Magdalen and Morgan also were much concerned; for the gloom with which he appeared to be enveloped, at their first meeting, had long subsided, and made way for the consolations which the scriptures hold out to a repentant sinner.—To these he gave a full and perfect credence, trusting and firmly hoping for a remission of his heavy offences in faith of those promises.

The manner of his own death also appeared to be strongly impressed on his mind, in so much that he would frequently repeat the circumstances of a dream he had previous to the escape the nuns had from drowning. Not that the recollection created a melancholy dread of the vision being one day realized,—far otherwise, for he always spoke of it with calmness, as a thing requisite and to be desired;—a kind of mortal expiation for a deadly trespass against a divine commandment.

These being Vavasour's sentiments, and which he retained to his last breath, there was no search made by his friends after the assassin; for he had expressly obtained their promise to that effect, saying,—that he had for some time past ceased to draw the distinction between the crime of murder being committed by two men equally armed against each other's life, and the death blow of a common assassin — for that if any abatement of crime could be made, the latter was frequently less criminal than a premeditated duellist.

On the third day, the corpse of Vavasour was committed to its parent earth, with all the rites of the church;—and three days more Morgan and Magdalen remained at Dieppe, in order to soothe and restore the spirits of Bertha, which had been violently affected by this melancholy catastrophe.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AT length the hour so long wished for by all the party arrived—the hour that was to terminate Magdalen's banishment and long sojourn in a foreign land.—Bertha felt no pang in quitting the country which gave her birth;—Morgan was a citizen of the world, harbouring universal benevolence and good will towards all men. Prosperous winds filled their sails, and in due time wafted them over the narrow seas, towards the coast of Sussex, upon which they landed.

Magdalen greeted her native sands with a silent tear, while her heart felt a pleasing emotion, at once more treading the same ground with those that were most dear to her; though at the same time her joy was clouded by the remembrance that she was for ever precluded all personal recognition.

From Sussex the travellers proceeded by easy stages to London, when their arrival being made known to Ela, she hastened with all the speed that a true and sincere affection could urge, to embrace and welcome her dear mother,—Magdalen, for she still continued to call her by that tender name.—In this visit she was accompanied by William, to whom she had been for some time publicly betrothed, though the marriage was not to be solemnized until his return from Palestine.

William's attention to Magdalen was in no wise inferior to that of Ela;—he also embraced Bertha, and the good priest, Morgan, with the affection and regard of an old friend.—To the latter he said, — “I assure you, the King holds your services to his father in remembrance, and means to reward them with one of the vacant abbeys, before he sets forward on his expedition.—He hath already richly provided for Geoffry, by giving him the Arch-bishopric of York, together with all its lucrative temporalities,—out of which, and the lay fees of Wycumb, in England, the earldom of Earl Giffard, in Normandy, and that of Baugi, in Anjou, bestowed by his father, and now confirmed by him, Geoffry has covenanted to pay three thousand pounds towards defraying the expences of the crusade.—Indeed, the King hath this business so much at heart, that he obliges every subject to contribute, either more or less, according to their respective abilities, which, in numberless instances has caused no little murmuring, and created him some powerful enemies.”

“I am happy to understand,” said Morgan, “that the archbishop enjoys so large a portion of the royal favour and affection.”

“I scarcely know how to answer that,” replied William. “Geoffry has, for some time past, grown irascible, gloomy, peevish, discontented, and reserved, even to me;—provoking the King, immediately after his appointment, by refusing to be consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and make profession of canonical obedience.—He also strenuously insisted on displacing those whom the king had named to fill the deanery, treasureship, and other dignities in the church of York; for which contumacy the king was about to commit him, and was, with some difficulty, prevailed on to forbear, on Geoffry promising future obedience, and not to apply to the Pope for his confirmation,—a promise which I doubt he will not keep in the king's absence.—He has also consented to remain in Normandy, until the king's return, for he hath lately much associated with that restless and ambitious Prince, John, Richard's brother, whom the king thought likewise to send to Normandy; but he has recently, for his own reasons, altered that intention, which

I rejoice at, as the prince will then have no opportunity of tampering with Geoffry, in order to withdraw him from his allegiance,—a measure of which the king has entertained some suspicions. Though he is sufficiently politic to give John no cause to think his loyalty or affection are doubted, for Richard has not only confirmed to him his father's grants of land in England, to the value of four thousand pounds yearly, but he hath likewise bestowed on him the Earldoms of Cornwall, Dorset, Somerset, Nottingham, Derby, and Lancaster, with several castles, and other honours and emoluments.—By his marriage with Avisia, he also adds the Earldom of Gloucester to his other titles, together with all the late earl's ample domains.”

“These favours will surely produce a grateful return,” said Magdalen; “but may we not indulge a hope of seeing the Arch-bishop soon?”

“He embarked three days since for Normandy, and was, when we parted, in better spirits than what he has been accustomed to have; flattering himself with the expectancy of being able to see you before you sailed for England.”

“I am sorry we did not arrive in time to see him before his departure, particularly as it may be long before we again meet,” replied Magdalen.

The latter part of this observation drew a heavy sigh from Ela, which was repeated by William.—“Yes,” said he, “it may probably be two or three years before we return from Palestine. — I must per force have patience—but I much doubt that of Geoffry, notwithstanding the king has commanded him to stay in Normandy, during the whole term of his absence.”

“Is your expedition in a state of forwardness?” enquired Morgan.

“It is,” replied William, “for, added to the king's exertions, the clergy have been zealously labouring to procure soldiers; making the pulpits resound with the great merit of serving in the holy war, or furnishing money for carrying it on. By these means the army is not only very numerous, but well provided with all things; every individual that has any thing to bestow, being eager to promote a work, by which they are told their own salvation will be secured.—Added to these mighty preparations, the king has not been remiss in endeavouring to ensure the internal safety of the kingdom, during his absence, by placing the government thereof in able hands; and that there may be no danger from neighbouring powers, he hath renewed his alliances with the kings of Scotland and Wales, so that, as far as human foresight can reach, every thing has been attended to.

“Thus much for public occurrences.—In regard to my nearer and dearest interest—amidst the disquietude that I must be bound to suffer—by a long—long separation from all my soul prizes, I shall yet rejoice that my Ela will enjoy the protection of her loved and revered Magdalen; for she is yet too young to take upon her the care of her father's household.”

“Her society will afford me much pleasure,” replied Magdalen; “long used to consider her as my child, I have borne even this short absence hardly—but we are not to live for ourselves.—May the Almighty return you in safety, and if it be his good pleasure, I trust I shall surrender my charge into your hands, spotless in mind and person; nor will I then selfishly regret her loss, for, as she calls me mother, her husband of course must be my son also—and believe me, I know no one to whom I would more willingly resign her.”

“Forget you, then,” said William, “that with your blessing you gave me permission to call you by that dear and honoured name—to call you, did I say,—surely

heaven so wills it—for in your presence my heart swells, and yearns with a sincere and truly filial affection—Again then, O my mother! bless your children—bless Ela—bless William!”

There was an ardent enthusiasm in William’s manner, as he advanced towards Magdalen, that appeared to extend to Ela and the nun also.—For a moment the solemn vow was buried in forgetfulness,—Magdalen sprang forward with extended arms, and Ela and William were folded in her embrace;—while nature, more powerful than worldly caution, articulated—“This, O this, repays me for years of suffering.—Bless!—bless!—my children!”

“Forbear!” said Morgan, in a loud tone of voice.—“Magdalen’s feelings for those she loves are too acute, and will injure her weak spirits. I pray ye, desist.”

This friendly interposition awakened the nun to recollection—she gently withdrew herself from their embrace, and, with clasped hands, raised her eyes to Heaven, and said—“Why, O my God, am I withheld?” Then crossing her arms on her bosom, and bowing her head, she continued—“Yet not my will, but thine be done!”

Ela felt for her distress, and tried to alleviate it by changing the discourse.—“I have it in command, from my father, to again repeat his acknowledgments,” said she, “and to say, that he hopes to be indulged with an interview before you retire to your place of retreat; at which time he means to leave me with you, as the king is desirous that he should accompany the royal army to Sicily, to assist in their embarkation.”

Magdalen, scarcely recovered from her former perturbation, found her distress renewed, and directed a glance of agonised feeling towards Morgan, who perfectly understood its meaning, and replied for her.—“Magdalen, I know, will be happy,” said he, “to receive your father, but the earl will have the goodness to let the visit be private, and dispense with all worldly form; for now she is in England, and about to enter her cloister, she must be habited strictly as a recluse, and not appear before any man, unveiled.—These rules, it is true, have not been attended to during our journey, as travelling nuns would have been subjects of curiosity, and attracted the eyes of every idle gazer.—But when does the earl purpose to visit Magdalen? for we cannot long delay our departure to the convent.”

“Speedily,” returned William, “for the expedition being now complete, in all points, we only await the word to set forward.—Indeed, the earl and myself were fearful it would have been given ere your arrival; in which case we should have endeavoured to place Ela in secure guardianship, until she could be rendered safe into your protection, of which we have been most anxious.”

A messenger, at this moment, from the Earl of Salisbury, came to desire William’s immediate attendance, to accompany him to the king, who had sent to require their presence on business of import. Ela changed colour at this hasty summons, foreboding that it related to their speedy embarkation; nor was she mistaken, for in a few hours William returned, and confirmed her prognostic, saying, that the king had fixed their departure for the third day following, as his army had already reached the port from which they were to sail.

Melancholy now pervaded every face, save Morgan’s, who endeavoured to keep up their spirits, by an appearance of cheerfulness, and by the dint of reason and religion.—“William,” said he, “will be under the protection of the same God in Palestine as in England — a few months will soon slip away, and ye are both young enough to wait

that time, ere you enter into the cares of a wedded life.—Be cheerful, then,—Ela will want no attention, and can fill up her vacant hours, that otherwise might pass a little heavily, in her duty to God, and in studying those most befitting a good wife and mother, when Heaven shall so will it.

“As for William, amidst the ardor and enthusiasm of the Christian soldier, I trust he will not forget humanity, but remember Infidels are men,—formed by the same God that made himself. For it is a misfortune, and not a crime, that their eyes are not opened to the truth, and I fear that most desirable event will never be achieved by force of arms;—as it is now near a century since this *pious* warfare, as it is called, was first set on foot, with the amazing force of three hundred thousand men.”

“Alas, I doubt,” said Ela, “the present armament will not be powerful enough to withstand the Saracens, if such numbers have already failed; especially, as the Infidels have remained so long unsubdued.”

“In the former crusades, vast numbers have indeed been sacrificed,” replied William; “but then it should be considered, that they were in general an undisciplined rabble, badly conducted and provisioned.—The present expedition can boast of veteran troops, under experienced leaders, of which thirty-five thousand are Englishmen—those of France treble in number. To sustain which, every provision has been made, so that the most sanguine hopes are entertained of success.”

“Heaven only knoweth,” said Magdalen, “alas! how many mothers will have to lament for their sons—wives for their husbands, that never shall again return.—Why will churchmen, whose mission should be peace, stir up the minds of vindictive men to the shedding of blood?—If God so willed it, he could defend the sacred sepulchre without worldly aid.—Did not our Lord say to Peter,—“Put up thy sword, for whosoever draweth the sword shall perish by the sword.”—What a lesson is this for princes, who must one day be accountable for the life of every subject slain in an unjust quarrel!”

“I would not have you promulgate these opinions,” said Morgan, sarcastically, “in the hearing of some of my brethren, even though you produce holy writ in their favour, lest St. Peter’s successors, at Rome, should say, your humanity had got the better of your orthodoxy,—an imputation which would infallibly bring down upon you the indignation of the church; for corporeal feelings have no right to interfere with the pious mandates that dictate an extirpation of unbelievers, and give the executioners an assurance of salvation.”

“Is it with this assurance, believe you,” said Bertha, “that Richard takes the cross, at this early period of his reign, and exchanges all the pride and pomp of royalty, for the dangers of warfare and the fatigues of a camp?”

“That the King may have imbibed some of the superstitious enthusiasm of the time, I nothing doubt,” said William, “which may also be augmented by a supposition that a crusade will in some measure prove an expiation for his undutiful conduct to his father, the heinousness of which seemed particularly to strike him at the time he met the body;—nor should I wonder, at the feeling of the moment, that he then vowed to undertake the expedition, which his father had previously engaged to do, in concert with Philip.—It must, however, be confessed, that the love of fame is Richard’s ruling passion, and how far that may overbalance every other consideration himself alone can judge;—for he is close in his councils, wily, and politic,—eager to gather the opinions of others, but carefully concealing his own. It was from a knowledge of this temper in Richard, and

of the restless ambitious one of Philip, that has caused his holiness, the Pope, also to instigate both to the crusade; least two such ardent spirits should embroil the peace of Europe, and thereby injure the interests of the holy pontiff, who must, perforce, have sided with one party."

"It becometh not me, perhaps," said Morgan, "to scrutinize into the motives and designs of princes, but I must confess myself puzzled to account for the Pope's permitting those who had made a vow to engage in the crusade, afterwards to commute, on payment of a certain stipend; particularly as his holiness has, for a length of time, earnestly entreated all ranks not to neglect an opportunity that most assuredly would lead to Heaven."

"But in this business you will find, there are more paths pointed out than one," said William; "the willingness to engage, was, to be sure, a direct road, but, as the king had occasion for vast sums to meet the enormous expence,—to such as repented a hasty vow, a composition would open a snug private entrance.—But, jesting apart, whatever advantage may ultimately accrue from the expedition, much mischief appears to have arisen in the outset, from the turning every thing saleable into money,—even provinces have been bartered away to the king of Scotland,—nay, to the scandal of the church, the Earldom of Northumberland has been permitted to be purchased by the Bishop of Durham, thereby giving occasion for ridicule, it being now a common jest to say, that the king has made a young earl of an old bishop."

"The king, doubtless, is much interested in the expedition," said Morgan, "or he would not pursue such unpopular measures;—amongst those, not the least censured, is his continuation of Ralph de Glanville, as Lord Chief Justice, after having heavily fined him for former misdemeanors.—I fear the draining of so much treasure will be long felt, particularly should the administration not be ably conducted during the king's absence, or should the members thereof not act with cordiality and unanimity; events which, the turbulent and seditious are ever ready to avail themselves of, in order to cover their own ambitious designs, under an appearance of acting for the public welfare."

"If any disorder of this kind arise," said William, "which Heaven forefend, it will be my chief happiness to think my dearest friends will be safe within the peaceful walls of religious seclusion. Should Geoffry break his word, and return to England, I much fear the arts and machinations of Prince John may be exerted to shake his allegiance; but, as he doubtless will visit Godstow, and I know he holds an implicit deference to Magdalen's and Morgan's counsels, both will, I am sure, point out the danger of listening to any views that militate against his duty, and which must ultimately terminate in not only his own destruction, but likewise involve his friends in suspicion."

"I grieve to hear," said Magdalen, "that Geoffry's character should be so far changed, as to afford any just apprehensions of his entertaining dangerous views and connexions.—I ever knew him warm and impetuous, but trusted that the holy function he had embraced, would have moderated his youthful fervor; he never, while in Guyenne, appeared ambitious, nor can he ever hope for greater preferment from John, than what he may reasonably expect from King Richard."

"John is crafty, designing, and insinuating," replied William, "with these arts, he has, for some time past, practised upon Geoffry's unsuspecting credulity, in order to alienate his affections from Richard; accusing the latter of rank avarice, in taking from Geoffry three thousand pounds, for the Arch-bishoprick of York, which it cost him

nothing to bestow.—True it is, that the king, knowing our father bequeathed us considerable sums, among other means, deemed it expedient to appropriate a part towards his expences, making a remuneration in lands, and other emoluments.—I much fear that the prince endeavours to foment jealousies, in order to weaken the king's interest, and to strengthen his own party, in case any thing should befall his brother.—There is, even in that case, an obstacle against his obtaining the crown, namely, his elder brother's son, Prince Arthur, of Bretagne, whose title, no doubt, would be recognized and supported by foreign powers, and possibly by a party in England. We must, however, leave these future events to the care of an unerring Providence—for the present, I must perforce quit this much-loved and revered circle of friends, having some business of import to transact, relative to the expedition. The Lady Ela will remain with you, until the morrow, when the earl, her father, means to pay his personal regards to the Lady Magdalen, and take his farewell for a short space of time."

William then retired, and a silence of some minutes ensued, which was broken by Morgan, saying—"I trust that our weary pilgrimage is nearly completed, and that we shall soon be rested within the peaceful walls of Godstow, as we have nothing now to detain us. — But if I read the Lady Ela's looks aright, I deem she has no wish for retirement.—Neither do I censure her,—as she hath not as yet encountered any of those cares which render busy life disgusting; but, high in birth, youth, health, and great expectations, has to look forward to worldly comfort—may such be long her lot—may she be ever good, and ever happy!"

"I thank you, holy father," said Ela, "you, I trust, and my dear mother Magdalen, will forgive me, if I acknowledge a divided affection; in Guyenne, I knew not a father—William, too, was unknown—and——"

"My dear Ela needs no excuse, for parental love, and her virgin affections cannot be more worthily placed than on William, nor more to my content and satisfaction," replied Magdalen.

"Though Magdalen and myself have been secluded, from our early years," said Bertha, "we are not so unreasonable as to wish every fair damsel to pine and waste in dull obscurity. I know not Magdalen's thoughts on the subject, but, for myself, I must confess, that had such a young and gallant knight as William, presented himself before me, if I had been free to choose, I think I could not have found in my heart to refuse him, particularly if he had fished me up from the bottom of a river."

"A very ingenuous confession for a nun of some years standing," said Morgan, smiling, "what would your old co-mates, Ursula and Bridget, have said to this, had they been living, and heard you avow such impure sentiments?"

"Why, reprobated as old devotees and hypocrites, what their hearts acknowledged, when young women, and free from the shackles of a convent.—But though I own thus much,—I do not mean to say that I am discontented with my present lot, or wish to change — for time and experience work great alterations in the human frame—after a certain age."

"That last sentence was also a wonderful addition to your commentary upon nuns and hypocrites, or rather upon hypocritical nuns, for I trust that all nuns are not hypocrites."

"God forbid," replied Magdalen; "my forced seclusion, I own, for a length of time, sat most heavily upon me; but I have long ceased to regret it as a misfortune, and

now look up to it as my greatest worldly happiness,—giving me leisure and opportunities for repentance, and affording a calm and peaceful asylum, from the dangers, cares, and turmoils, with which every station of life is environed.”

“And I trust,” replied Morgan, “that you will also enjoy much comfort at Godstow, for it is unlike most religious houses, being a cheerful, but yet a pious seminary. The ground on which it stands was given by John St. John, at the latter part of the reign of Henry the First, and the nunnery erected by Editha, a pious widow, who was the first abbess.—The church was dedicated by Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, in the year 1138, King Stephen being present at the ceremony.—The present superior, the fifth in succession, is a lady of noble family, high in the estimation of Queen Eleanor, but more exalted by her goodness and amiable qualities. The nuns are select in number, of good families, and, like their superior, of mild and pleasant dispositions,—for all untoward characters are, during their novitiate, expelled, and their places filled up by those whose tempers are found, on trial, to prove more congenial with the established rules and ordinances of the house,—severe penance and mortification being not of the number, where envy, hatred, and detraction, are made crimes, and an universal love and harmony, not only inculcated, but, by practice, made a leading principle.”

“You talk of an earthly paradise, if such a place can exist,” said Magdalen, “and make me earnestly desire, indeed, to set up my earthly pilgrimage there.—But, I pray you, good Morgan, how gained you your knowledge of these particulars, being so long a sojourner in Guyenne?”

“Even from Richard himself, who gave me liberty to say, upon our arrival in England, that more good awaited you—any thing further I may not yet explain.”

“The God of mercy and forgiveness be praised!—I inquire no further.—There is, however, one fond wish, which frail nature indulgeth — one cheering hope—for surely Godstow was not selected by chance.—Oh, Morgan, if I might be permitted—once more to behold my dear and honoured parents.”

“A late event has made a material alteration.—Secresy now is no longer a policy, and indeed would not be thought obligatory, but in a moral point of view, on which matter the Pope and conclave must determine;—therefore cheerfully await the event, and hope every thing.”

“Yes, I will hope.—How pleasing to again revisit the scenes of my early days—if such scenes had not also been those of shame and disgrace.—Yet I trust, that my penitence and bitter sorrow, may atone for my offences.—Blessed, doubly blessed be the hands that snatched me from the paths of perdition, and placed me in the road to salvation;—immersed in what the world calls pleasure, and revelling in guilty splendour,—my soul would have been lulled into a fatal negligence of a future state, until, perhaps, the sudden and unexpected stroke of fate had plunged it into endless misery.”

“Forbear, sister of my soul,” exclaimed Bertha, “nor longer hold in remembrance errors, if such they were, expiated by suffering and repentance.—Even now, after the lapse of so many tedious years, doth remembrance recal the dismal night, when, shrouded by the pillars of the chapel, Esther and myself beheld you borne within the dreary walls of St. Bertrand. — Our hearts died within us, to see such youth—such resplendent beauty, the victim of lawless power; for too well did we know the fatal portal was for

ever closed, and that nought but death, or the immediate hand of Heaven, could remove the barbarous fiat pronounced for your perpetual enthrallment.”

The following morning the Earl of Salisbury was announced to Magdalen, who endeavoured to calm the perturbation of her spirits, on receiving a visit from one she had known in the days of early youth and spotless innocence. She had, it is true, but little to apprehend, in regard to her person being recognized, for she had strictly conformed to Morgan’s instructions of being habited as a nun, and her features closely shrouded by a thick veil, impenetrable to the sight. In addition to these concealments, a lapse of nearly twenty years would doubtless have done away all certainty of recollection; nevertheless, at the earl’s entrance, an universal trepidation appeared to have absorbed every faculty, so that she could scarcely reply to Salisbury’s greeting and acknowledgments.

“You will permit me, my lord,” said Morgan, “to apologise for the Lady Magdalen, who is scarcely sufficiently recovered from the sickness and fatigue of her voyage—to express how much she esteems herself honoured by this visit.—She dearly loves the Lady Ela, and participates in the pleasure of her having regained a parent after so long an absence.”

This address of Morgan’s gave Magdalen time for recollection, particularly, as the earl now said, “Forgive me, lady, for thus early breaking in upon the repose which your long travel so justly demands.—However anxious to render my grateful acknowledgments, I would, on that account, have delayed my visit; but my duty to the king calls me away, leaving no alternative than either to press rudely into your presence, or to forego, for a length of time, a declaration, how much I feel your goodness to my daughter.”

“My Lord of Salisbury,” said Magdalen, “owes me no acknowledgment.—From me rather thanks are due, — that Ela has been so long spared, for the comfort and solace of many — very many — otherwise unhappy hours;—amply repaying, by an affection truly filial, every little attention I had it in my power to bestow.”

“Such kindness as your’s, must, perforce, produce affection.—I marvel not, therefore, lady — she has ever esteemed you a parent—or indeed,—” continued the earl, sighing,—“that at an early age she conceived you *her own*, in reality, for never did I hear such a similitude of voice, with that of my lamented wife;—your forms too the same.—Pardon, lady, nor deem me rude by these comparisons.—Had you but known the matchless perfections of my Ela’s mother,—Salisbury—the wandering and forlorn Salisbury would stand excused.”

“Oh! she was, indeed, all—all that bounteous heaven could form,” exclaimed Magdalen, in an agony of grief, and wildly throwing up her veil.—“Angel in mind—in person lovely—the delight of her parents—revered—adored—say—did she not execrate the wretch that broke in upon all her worldly comfort, and consigned her a pining victim to the grave?”

“Execrate?” repeated Salisbury, starting and gazing with astonishment—“Can this be a delusion,—an error of the brain?—My disordered fancy pourtrays, I know not what—calls up living images long since departed—a resemblance of my—Ela, or one that——”

“Was her murderer,” interrupted Magdalen, in an agony of grief and distress.—“Her pure soul disdained to hold longer alliance with an adultress, and sought its kindred heaven.—Yes, I am Rosamond, the ill-fated wretch, that dishonoured the name of

Clifford,—whose sins overwhelmed her parents with grief and shame—destroyed an affectionate sister's life—involved a child in dreadful error,—and who now completes her crimes by perjury and despair.”

“Not so, poor sufferer,” articulated a mild voice.—“Thy punishment hath been long and severe.—The author of thy woes is now no more—may his soul rest in peace—thou hast my forgiveness;—the church accepts, likewise, thy long penance, and sincere penitence,—by my entreaty it grants you absolution.”

The wild emotion of Magdalen, and the surprise of Salisbury, were, by these sounds, suddenly arrested, and conveyed into different channels.—For some moments they gazed on the noble female, who stood before them in awful—doubting silence—for, conviction of her royal person at the same instant burst upon them.

“Surely, it is our gracious queen,” said Salisbury.

“Injured—injured majesty,” exclaimed Magdalen, falling on her knees, and covering her face with her hands.

“Look up, Magdalen, and fear me not,” said Eleanor;—“I wield not now the fatal dagger, but come to pour the balm of comfort on thy wounded spirit.”

“What comfort—gracious—much wronged sovereign, can await a wretch whose encrease of sin demands the penalty?—Humbly then do I submit my forfeit life.”

“What mean you, Magdalen?” said the queen.

“That, contrary to my sacred vow, I have unveiled the mystery in which I was developed—disclosed the secret that I still existed, and——”

“When—where—and to whom?” hastily interrupted the queen.

“It was involuntary,” replied the earl. — “Under the impression of powerful feelings, which, at the moment, banished recollection, I discovered one, long since consigned to oblivion — further circumstances I know not.”

“Salisbury!” said the queen, “assist me to raise and console your humbled sister, whose sufferings have far exceeded her guilt.—Alas! had I earlier known the treachery, fraud, and guile, practised on her unsuspecting youth, my jealous vindictive rage would have been disarmed; and those severe restrictions which bound her to be concealed while the king lived, had long since been effaced.”

“Pardon me, gracious sovereign,” said Morgan, “if I presume to ask whether those restrictions were not also to continue while Magdalen lived?”

“The obligation which she signed, and solemnly swore to obey, signified, that she should take the veil in any convent dictated to her for that purpose; and that an inviolable secrecy should be observed, until circumstances rendered privacy no longer necessary.—It is to be observed, that what those circumstances were, was not then specified, but annexed to the parchment afterward. — In the terror of her surprise, and dreading instant death, she was impressed with an idea, that a lasting concealment of her person was imposed; whereas she was only restricted during the king's life, provided she survived him. One copy of the deed was left with the Abbess of St. Bertrand's, and, most probably, perished with her in the conflagration. — My Lord of Salisbury, order one of my attendants, whom you will find within, to produce the original, and search whether it accords with this account.” Salisbury instantly obeyed, and presently returned, bearing the compulsive writing.

“Let Morgan inspect, and unfold its contents,” said the queen.

“It imports what my sovereign lady hath promulgated,”—replied Morgan, after a pause.

“Tear off the seals then,” said the queen—“the past we regret, and cannot alter. May Magdalen’s future days be those of peace and tranquillity;—her vows have been faithfully observed, and what more can she offer than penitence and sorrow for her offences?—Take comfort, therefore, and prepare to renew those tender ties so long withheld.—Your venerable parents are undeceived, and impatient to embrace a child, whose death they have long lamented, and whose supposed tomb has been frequently watered by their tears.—Your children, too, will now know, and be allowed to acknowledge their mother.—My good Lord Salisbury, will I know receive the much-loved sister of one he has unceasingly lamented—the parent of his future son, and foster mother to his Ela; by whose precepts she has been trained to virtue, and by whose unremitting attention she has been practised in every female accomplishment.”

The mind of Magdalen, during this conversation, appeared to undergo a variety of revolutions—by turns confused, collected, or exhilarated, her eyes being alternately raised to heaven,—her folded arms, in patient resignation, crossed on her bosom.—At the close of Eleanor’s speech, a look, which supplicated pity, pleaded so powerfully in the breast of the good earl, that the pride of family gave immediate place to sympathetic feeling.—He beheld the inward shame arising from a consciousness of error—recognized in Magdalen the features of his loved Ela,—saw her drooping—fainting,—and overwhelmed by a torrent of conflicting passions; his manly heart was softened into compassion, while his extended arms opened wide to receive her falling weight.—“Yes, lovely copy of my Ela,” said he, “I will indeed receive and cheer thy drooping spirits; for thy errors were not those of hardened guilt—a childish vanity betrayed thee to listen, and fraud and power completed thy ruin.”

“Extenuate not my offences, my good lord,” said Magdalen, “but rather turn your eyes to their dreadful effects, so shall your pity give place to your indignation;—you will then view your royal injured mistress a captive,—the hands of children raised against a parent,—a people slaughtered in the unnatural contest,—your own domestic peace destroyed, and for ever lost,—for such have been the fatal consequences of what you wish to soften.”

“Though none can foresee the fatal consequences that may follow a deviation from virtue,” said the queen, “yet many of those consequences are often produced, or much augmented, by other causes than those alleged.—Be assured this was the case in regard to the dissensions which took place between the king and his sons, in which so many lost their lives, and wherein I myself was also a sufferer. Let this assurance, and the long expiation you have made, which, no doubt, will prove acceptable, assuage your transports of grief,—for sorrow, when too much indulged, produces despair, the most baneful of all other sins.”

“Nor is her self-accusation just in regard to her sister’s death,” said Salisbury; “for though she grieved at Rosamond’s supposed sad fate, yet her illness was an affection of the lungs, proceeding from a severe cold, and which, in the end, baffled the art of those most skilled in medicine.”

“Once more then take comfort,” said the queen, to Magdalen. “Farewel, and notwithstanding we were some time past at enmity, let it be forgotten.—Should you ever need it, you shall find Eleanor one of your warmest friends;—let her be remembered in

your prayers." So saying, she held out her hand, which Magdalen, bending her knees silently, kissed, for her feelings bereaved her of speech.—The queen then retired, being led out by Salisbury, who presently again returned.

"Great God!" said Magdalen, during his absence, "how eventful has the short period of my return to my native land proved!—and shall indeed the late forlorn Magdalen, after the lapse of so many years, again embrace her loved parents?—and will they receive the poor penitent?—Alas! how shall I dare look up, and survey those features, where honour ever sat enthroned, and never were clouded but by a daughter's guilt?—My children too—O shame!—Say, Morgan, will they not reproach me with the illegitimacy of their birth?"

"The noble William," said Morgan, "will exult in realizing a parent, whom he before loved as one, and only will regret the short space which stern honour at present allows him to exhibit his duty and affection.—York is a courtier, and, besides, a dignified churchman, both of which I understand, have caused some alteration in the man.—The character, however, of one devoted to religion, will, I trust, teach him the duty he owes a parent, as well as restrain his effervescence of temper."

"Heaven grant it," said Magdalen.—"This sudden and unexpected appearance of the queen," continued she, "notwithstanding the glad tidings of my future indulgence, has confused my understanding, and bewildered my imagination;—and yet it could not surely be chance that brought her hither?"

"It was not," said Morgan, "did I not say, yesterday, that good awaited you, of more I was not then permitted to speak.—In Normandy I had several conferences with Richard, wherein you was mentioned.—Since his arrival in England, business relative to you has been frequently discussed between the king and his mother, and at length finally agreed, that as there was no longer existing cause for your restraints, that they should be entirely removed. I have still other matter for your private ear, which, at the present, we have not time for," continued Morgan, "as I momentarily expect my Lord of Salisbury's return. — Suffice it, that the queen's visit was no surprize to me, for, on that account, I prevented Ela and Bertha being present.—But no more—for here is the earl."

"I knew not," said the earl, "this morning, that, in visiting the nun Magdalen, I should find a sister—one once so dearly loved, and whose supposed tragical end caused so much grief.—Forgive me, if, in the confusion of my mind, occasioned by the discovery, and the queen's unexpected appearance, that I did not exhibit those feelings of affection, which my Ela's sister, and the aunt of my child is intitled to,—nay, I ought, indeed, to say her second mother.—How was it possible, that, aware of the proximity of blood, no unguarded moment should betray the near connexion?"

"The struggles were, in truth, arduous," replied Magdalen;—"but thanks be given to whom they are due.—My prayers for firmness and strength of mind have borne me through, even when opposed to strong maternal feeling, joined with the most trying and perplexed circumstances, until the supposition that I had caused my sister's death; in the frenzy of the moment, this morning I betrayed my long concealment,—an offence which, though involuntary, would have embittered my latest hours, but for the timely, though unlooked-for explanation, in regard to the exact tenour of my vow.—An explanation so unexpected, that I marvel how the queen was apprised of my arrival in England so speedily; and more so, at her condescension to one by whom she has been so greatly wronged, and on whose account she has suffered so much hardship."

“I wonder not that my Lord of Salisbury’s surprize,” said Morgan, “should absorb every other sensation, in again viewing one, long since consigned, by public report, to the silent tomb,—whose funeral obsequies have been openly performed, and that with no little pomp and pageantry;—nay, and for whose soul’s rest, masses are yet celebrated.—In regard to the queen’s knowledge of your arrival in England, and her unexpected appearance, it remains with me to explain.—Duke Richard, while yet in Normandy, had frequent correspondence with Ralph de Faie, in the course of which was detailed the destruction of St. Bertrand’s; and, advising with him in regard to Magdalen’s future destination, at length it was finally settled, that she should proceed for England.—Soon after this determination, the death of the late king caused me to repair to Normandy, where I often held conference with Richard; in one of these I attempted to soften the rigour of the restrictions, nor were my endeavours unsuccessful — the prince observing, that as his father was dead, he saw no reason why Magdalen’s existence should not be made known.—The final determination was, however, left to the queen, who was to be apprised of our arrival. In the interim I was enjoined, and promised secrecy.—Soon as convenient I notified Magdalen’s being in London, and then was permitted to announce, “that good awaited her,”—though I was restricted saying that the queen meant personally to convey the gladsome tidings.—The exact tenour of Magdalen’s solemn engagement to the queen, I was, until that visit, ignorant of.”

“Sincerely do I congratulate you,” said Salisbury, “on your prospect of future comfort, in being again permitted to enjoy those natural rights, so long withheld; and in the restoration of which, I am persuaded, the good Morgan has had no mean share.”

“We are, my lord, both much beholden to him.—I for no less than life—salutary counsel, and spiritual consolation;—to these I may now add, a view of earthly satisfaction.—You, my lord, are indebted to him for your daughter’s preservation from the devouring flames, for the improvement of her mind, and above all, for her soul’s health.—But I will not dwell upon this theme, for praise and commendation is not the incense that Morgan delighteth in — his good works rest upon him, and will, in time, ensure a just reward.”

“I know I owe him much,” said Salisbury, “and would fain make some return; but Morgan has a proud, or rather a princely spirit, and scorns all worldly remuneration, or William and myself would, ere this, have endeavoured to shew our gratitude with more than mere sounds expressed in words.”

“But that I know my Lord of Salisbury does not think me proud, or I should feel offended.—My spirit, indeed, is independent, and I hope pure, *if not legitimately princely*,—for it dictates that an honest man cannot accept a reward for merely performing his duty.”

“I meant not to offend,” replied Salisbury, “for therein should I act unworthily for benefits received.—Of Morgan’s integrity and disinterestedness no one can doubt—his actions evince the same.—Even his sovereign bears testimony thereof, — saying, “he was a churchman in whom there was no guile;—cherish his friendship, Salisbury,” concluded he, “and esteem him as allied to ourself.—My own opinion prompts me to follow this advice, provided Morgan disdains not my friendship.”

“If any thing can make me proud,” said Morgan, “it will be my sovereign’s partiality, and my Lord of Salisbury’s kindness.—But do we not, too long, delay the tidings of this morning.—The Lady Ela will be rejoiced to know she hath indeed a near

and dear relative in the nun Magdalen,—and Bertha's sisterly friendship entitles her to the same communication.—It appears most fitting, that this task should be given to my Lord of Salisbury, with his good liking."

Salisbury willingly accepted the commission, and retired to execute the same, and, in the mean time, Magdalen and Morgan took the opportunity to discuss their thoughts on the latent occurrences, and their probable consequences.—“With what exultation,” said Magdalen, “should I now avow—myself the mother of such a son as William;—but for the shame attendant on the acknowledgment, that no holy rite sanctioned his birth.—Softened nature, perhaps, may plead powerfully in his manly bosom, on the discovery of a parent;—but will not calm reflection teach him to contemn and despise a wanton adultress?”

“Time and reflection hath taught you to look upon your early errors with a rigid severity,” said Morgan, “a severity which, in you, was fitting, as it led to repentance.—Your children, in the rapture of finding a parent, now exemplary, will not even recognize failings;—failings not only rigidly atoned, but also productive of their own exalted situations in life.—Alas! had I now been blessed with a mother, of whom I had no greater cause to be ashamed—how joyfully would I acknowledge myself her son—nor spurn indignantly at the name of Blewit.”

“Blewit!” replied Magdalen, with visible surprise—“I have a confused remembrance of some painful incidents,—and that there was a child called Morgan connected with that name.—There was also a boy, the acknowledged son of my nurse, who was named Morgan, and whom, for some years past, I have had every reason to suppose was yourself.”

“Nor were you mistaken in either particular, bating, that both these Morgans are one and the same person, though not the actual child of your nurse, but the son of the late King Henry and Dame Blewit, and who, to answer especial purposes, was early placed with your foster-mother, she having the consent and approbation of the good baron and his lady,—by her I was nurtured, and loved with a truly maternal affection;—the baron and baroness, also, for years, behaved kindly, and permitted my instruction to be superior to my supposed birth. At length the early dawn of my happiness fled—by an event that — plunged the whole family in grief and distraction, — you, the darling of their hearts, was missing—and soon the despoiler of their happiness was revealed.—From this time a coldness, nay, a kind of loathing appeared to take place in the heretofore generous hearts of your father and mother. Unused to this unlooked for change, my spirits could not brook the alteration, and, after a while, brooding in melancholy silence over my former state, I privately quitted the once hospitable mansion, and for a time wandered distressed and forlorn; at length I entered into the service of the Norman gentleman, whose life was taken by the banditti. What followed you are not ignorant of, saving, that Henry, on his deathbed, asked me questions which led to explanations; for, among other interrogations, he demanded my name, and country,—the length of time I had been in holy orders,—the place of my religious study,—and my antecedent pursuits.—All these questions I answered most truly, and, in return, he appeared shocked and surprized, which I at first attributed to the disgust he had conceived at my sojourn with the banditti. But judge my amazement, when the sick monarch, stretching forth his hand, and pressing mine, declared, he had no doubt but that I was his own natural son by Dame Blewit, and the same whom he had, while young, prevailed on the Baron Clifford to be fostered and

brought up in his family, as the son of the nurse; this deception being adopted, to prevent my being stolen away and secreted, several attempts, for that purpose, having been made by emissaries employed by the queen.—At this part of the account the king paused—appeared confused, and powerfully affected;—my spirits also were much agitated. I knelt before him, imploring a parent’s blessing.—The scene, for a time, was tender, solemn, and impressive; at length both became more collected, and the king, after a pause, during which he appeared to be labouring under a variety of conflicting passions, at length said,—“You have doubtless heard, Morgan,—for monarch’s actions do not pass unheeded, nor uncensured,—you have doubtless heard, I say, that your erring parent was ever the slave of some ungovernable desire, that precipitated him into the commission of unwarrantable and unjust deeds—unworthy the sovereign, and degrading to the man.—Of such a nature was the base and dishonourable act that despoiled and rent in twain the peace and happiness of an ancient and noble house,—infringed the laws of hospitality—and, with specious pretence of sacred friendship, stole away and violated unsuspecting innocence.—This, O, my son! I deem one of my foulest offences—for though I now behold the adulterer in a vile point of view,—yet Blewit’s wife was not practised on by arts, nor deceived, but barely solicited, and easily yielded.—She was afterwards base enough to be the decoyer, and to betray, for lucre, the innocent, hapless, beauteous Rosamond, to the rage of an injured wife, who sacrificed her and her infant,—for she was then pregnant,—to her cruel revenge.—Those young men, by whom you were introduced, are the sons of Rosamond, and your brothers—you will find them worthy of your love. For the present spare me the pain of disclosing your relationship, and let it suffice, that I give sufficient vouchers to prove that you are also my son; these, with other documents of much import, I shall entrust you to deliver to my successor, Richard, who, I make no doubt, will pay an implicit obedience to the commands of a father, whom, while living, he much troubled.”

“Your recital,” said Magdalen, “hath greatly astonished me; — but know not the young men, your brothers, of your relationship?”

“They do not,” said Morgan; “for it was commanded by Richard, that the disclosure of their mother, and of their having another brother, should be promulgated by the queen, after our arrival in England.—I doubt not, therefore, but it will speedily take place in regard to William.—But no more of this for the present, for I hear the footsteps of my Lord of Salisbury, and the Lady Ela.”

The gentle spirits of Ela had been nearly overcome, as the earl, her father, unfolded the mystery, in which Magdalen had, for so many years, been enveloped; and though she would have flown to embrace her now avowed near relative, yet it was found necessary, for some time, to restrain her, that her extreme agitation might, in some measure, subside.—Her impatience, however, could not be checked, by either Bertha or her father’s remonstrances — “no longer prevent me,” she exclaimed, as she struggled for entrance—“for I will embrace my more than mother.—Oh, did not my heart always claim an interest here,” said she, as she strained Magdalen in her arms.—“William’s mother’s too!—doubly dear—yet cruel, for so long withholding our just rights in your affection.—What are vows—or the barbarous policy of princes,—when opposed to more powerful nature?”

Magdalen’s feelings, though she was for some time silent, were no less distressing than Ela’s; for even joy, beyond a certain medium, becomes painful.—“Dear—dear child,

of a loved sister," said she, at length, "who has often pressed me in her arms with a more than maternal love,—even as I now hold this fair copy of her perfections to my heart.—Thy musical voice even now appears to dwell upon my ear, still calling me "thy flower—thy rose."—Bitter remembrance! Forgive me, my Lord of Salisbury, for awakening such poignant feelings."

"You err, indeed, Magdalen," said Bertha; "and suffer me to add, ill repay the opening bounty of heaven, by these repinings.—Hath not a gracious and benign Providence still left you parents,—children—from the sight of whom you are no longer debarred. — Behold your Bertha, she hath no tender relatives, but she hath a God, and is thankful; for hath he not said, "I will never abandon nor forsake thee." But forgive me, my sister, I mean not reproof, but to afford comfort;—your Bertha rejoices at the events, which tend to restore your peace, and which now leave nothing for regret."

"Justly, indeed, Bertha," said Magdalen, "do I deserve your friendly reproof; my wayward spirit, though long unused to joy, was about to forget a just chastisement for past offences, amidst the exultations of present indulgences and blessings.—Henceforward I trust the Almighty will enable me not to offend by sinful regret; but to await, with patience and resignation, the appointed time, when all our sorrows shall be done away, and our virtuous friendships everlastingly renewed."

"If you thus severely condemn yourself," said Salisbury, "how much more abundant cause have I for self reproach, for having unceasingly lamented one, whose loss to me has been her eternal gain?"

"Human reason is indeed weak, erroneous—nay, selfish," said Morgan, "for it not unfrequently prompts us to lament a departed friend, removed from suffering mortality to endless felicity;—and this, because we are, for a short time, deprived of their company, or of those worldly enjoyments, which their presence inspired.—The only cause for regret, is, the death of the hardened and impenitent; but when a just and righteous spirit is called to the mansions of the blessed, the rational tribute we ought to pay to their memory is a pleasing and joyful reflection of their good deeds, and a strong and vigorous imitation of them ourselves, in order to prepare us for an eternal and heavenly friendship, in lieu of one that was fleeting and perishable."

While these explanations were taking place with Magdalen and her friends, the king failed not to apprise William, that he had still a mother living, and to unfold all the circumstances of her mysterious concealment; it having been so preconcerted, before the queen's visit to Magdalen.—When William had, in some measure, recovered from his strong emotion, Richard no longer repressed his impatience to embrace his parent; and the enraptured son, speeding to the spot, burst into the apartment which contained his mother, and, with speechless ecstasy, regardless of all present, rushed into her arms.—For some minutes all was silence, no one venturing to interrupt the maternal and filial emotions — in beholding which, they were both pained and delighted. — "This indeed is transport," at length said Magdalen, "and is the blessing real?—Is the time arrived, in which I may acknowledge my son—and such a son!—Teach me, O my God, to bear my joy with moderation!"

"O, my mother!" said William, "from the hour a gracious Providence conducted me to your presence, my heart glowed with filial love and duty;—your first blessing too, has ever been held in joyful remembrance. — My friends," continued he, "do ye not partake of my happiness? But why need I ask? your moistened eyes proclaim your

generous sympathy—your heart-felt satisfaction. — My lovely Ela has a renewed claim—a lively interest in the general joy.—Her dear father, also, gains a long-lost sister—Morgan, too, the friend whom my soul loves and esteems——”

“Add the name of brother to that of friend, my son,” said Magdalen, “for such you will find Morgan.—This has been a day of surprise and wonder; but Morgan himself can best explain.—My dear friends will, I know, excuse me for a short space, for I feel I must retire, in order to calm my perturbed spirits.” — So saying, she quitted the apartment, leaning on Bertha, and endeavoured, by prayer and thanksgiving, to moderate her transports, and still her agitated mind.

In the meantime Morgan disclosed to those that remained, the secret of his own birth, and produced the signature of the late King Henry, as a voucher of the fact.—William warmly embraced his new discovered paternal brother, who received the congratulations of all present.—“I have but little to pride myself upon,” said Morgan, “though, as the natural son of a king, I might look for worldly advancement, and have, indeed, been already named to one of the highest honours of the church, provided I would retain my mother’s name, which I can never acquiesce in, as the woman who gave me birth, hath dishonoured her own, by a number of base actions; among others, with being an accessory in the young—the innocent—the beautiful Rosamond Clifford’s dishonour, and afterwards vilely betraying her to the queen for reward.—Memory now recalls every incident of her, and my childish years, she the adored daughter of the noble house of Clifford, I a supposed dependent in the family, and the reputed son of her nurse—by whom we were both fostered and beloved.—An early friendship commenced, and long subsisted, between King Henry and the baron, for the latter had materially assisted Henry’s mother, the Empress Matilda, in her wars against Stephen.—Nor would this friendship, in all probability, have been interrupted, but for the fatal passion which Henry conceived for the young and beautiful Rosamond, who appeared, for the first time in public, to grace, my Lord of Salisbury, your nuptials with her elder sister, to honour which, Henry also was present.—For some time, as he told me in his last sickness, he endeavoured to combat his desires, opposing honour and friendship to his passion; but, alas! human frailty triumphed over every virtuous sentiment.—The obligations of his early years, were forgotten.—The more recent one; their care and attention to his spurious offspring was also no more remembered—all the arts and flatteries that human nature could devise, were put in practice to effect his purpose. When these were found ineffectual, fraud, — vile fraud and guilt—my mother—O, shame! dare I proclaim it?—yet truth and justice is my better parent.—The king, then, variable and inconstant in his passions, no longer retained any inclination for my mother, but she still remained in the royal suite, rioting in splendid vice; and having lost her former ascendancy, was at length so meanly wicked, as to become an instrument of seduction; for, understanding from the king, that though Rosamond listened with a degree of childish pleasure, to his flatteries, yet she grew indignant, and threatened to acquaint her parents, when he presumed one day to take some unbecoming liberties.—She therefore counselled him, to either bear her away forcibly from her father’s house, by emissaries employed for that purpose, or to procure some agent who might, by guile, withdraw her from his protection; in the latter case, proffering herself to act the fell deceiver, engaging for the success of the wicked enterprise.—Need I add, that the offer was accepted, and was too prosperous; for the virtues of the beautiful, artless Rosamond, in some measure contributed to her own ruin.

“The worthy baron, her father, was rich, generous, and humane; the fair maid was his almoner, and her tender heart was ever open to a tale of woe. — The poor, the sick, the oppressed, from her, were sure to procure the means to obtain relief; and, as her charitable kindness was spread abroad, her applicants were numerous. — Among other petitions for relief, she received one from an apparent modest and artless girl, in behalf of an aged mother, almost perishing from disease and poverty.—The unsuspecting Rosamond administered present succour, and promised, in the course of her evening ride, to stop at the described cottage, to inquire more particularly into the wants of the distressed woman.—Alas! she knew not, nor foreboded the many years of distress and sorrow this benevolent action would occasion, both to herself and to her family.—And here I would willingly draw a veil over transactions, that sully human nature, and that more particularly reflect such disgrace on the authors of my being; yet, though I may blush at the depravity of an earthly parent, I must deem truth a superior relative—let me, however, be brief in the painful recital.

“Blessed with youth, beauty, and health, her bosom elate with conscious innocence, Rosamond set forth, accompanied only by one attendant, and soon reached the cottage where the sick woman was said to reside, for it nearly adjoined the baron’s demesne. On entering the fatal walls, she found the counterfeit sick woman apparently at the last extremity, and alone.—Alarmed and terrified, her humanity prompted her to go in search of relief; on consulting her attendant for that purpose, she was told, that not any could be procured at a nearer distance than five miles, by the accustomed road, but that, by crossing a forest, which skirted that place, it would shorten the journey one half. Intent only on doing good, her inexperience sought not reflection, nor was aware of any impropriety; but, re-mounting her horse, desired her attendant to lead by the nearest way.—The treacherous lackey, for he had been bribed to betray, instantly struck into the most intricate part of the forest, in which they continued so long, that Rosamond thought it necessary to inquire if they were near the place of their destination; to which the false guide replied, by saying, “he was fearful he had missed the way, but that he would endeavour to repair the mistake as soon as possible.”

“Rosamond, though much chagrined, on account of the poor woman, still entertained no suspicion; but after riding a considerable time longer, with no prospect of the forest ending, she began to be alarmed, and ordered the man to return, which he, as she thought, obeyed.—By this time it was near sun-set, and a dismal gloom pervaded the forest; at length it became so dark, that it was found necessary to slacken their horses speed, and to proceed slowly and with circumspection.—Amidst the melancholy stillness of the night, and the solitariness of a place, apparently undisturbed by human footsteps, Rosamond had now ample leisure to reflect upon, and to censure her imprudence;—reflections which were, no doubt, considerably heightened by the alarm her absence would create in the bosom of her friends.—But however unpleasant her meditations and surmises, they were soon interrupted by a dreadful certainty of some evil, for on reaching an opening in the forest, that led to a wide plain, Rosamond was suddenly surrounded by a number of armed men, two of whom removed her from her own horse, and though fainting with terror, placed her before a third, when the whole of the ravishers galloped off with the utmost speed, and bore her, in a state of insensibility, to a place prepared for her reception, fitted up and adorned with the utmost state and magnificence, and where she was attended with every mark of the most profound respect.—Notwithstanding these

exterior appearances, Rosamond was too much frightened and dejected to be reconciled to her situation; and, amidst her tears, sighs, and lamentations, continually entreated to be restored to her parents.”

“Alas! how bitter the remembrance of that fatal day, on which the sister of my Ela was missing,” said the earl.—“Methinks the lamentations of her fond parents still sound in my ears;—and the more placid, yet heart-rending sorrow, of my faithful consort, doth also augment and renew the former scene of woe.—With what dread and cruel uncertainty, did we all pass the first night, surmising what we then deemed the worse that could happen—her death, by some dreadful casualty.—The fair face of day at length broke in upon our griefs, but it brought no comfort, for the villanous attendant of Rosamond appeared, some hours after, with well counterfeited sorrow, and affected pain of body.—His tale converted grief into rage and despair, for, after detailing Rosamond’s visit to the cottage, he said, that under pretence of procuring aid for a sick old woman, she directed her course through the forest, until they fell in with a troop of horsemen, who were, no doubt, waiting there by her appointment; for that she appeared much pleased at their meeting, and was warmly greeted by their leader, who presently gave orders to his followers to bind Rosamond’s attendant to a tree, that her flight might not be impeded. That he continued in this state of confinement the remainder of the night, his limbs benumbed by the cold, and the pressure of the cords,—that at the break of day, his unceasing cries for succour at length brought a wood-cutter to his assistance, who untied the cords, and restored him to liberty, when he found, presently after, the horses on which himself and Rosamond had ridden, fastened to trees near the spot;—that having, in some measure, recovered the use of his limbs, he speeded home with the sorrowful intelligence,—concluding his account with saying, that he nothing doubted but that Rosamond’s free will and consent had aided, and gone hand-in-hand with the whole of the business.

“Though the uncertainty of Rosamond’s fate had been dreadful,” continued the earl, “it was light, in comparison to what the baron and baroness felt, when they supposed their daughter dishonoured, by her own consent.—Their grief was then turned into rage—they cursed the hour of her birth, and bitterly deplored her fatal beauty.—To seek revenge was in vain, for the seduced was unknown and unsuspected;—and though the most diligent search was made, for some months, all inquiry proved fruitless, so artfully had this business been conducted. Mean while the baroness’s health became a prey to her immoderate grief, so that her dissolution was hourly expected.—My wife too, though she endeavoured to conceal her feelings, I much feared, would become a victim to a silent sorrow. In this melancholy state were two heretofore happy families, when it began to be whispered, that Rosamond was living in royal state in the manor of Woodstock; a report that was soon confirmed beyond a doubt.—All intercourse was now suspended between our families and the king, though we could not fail hearing, that in the course of time, Rosamond had borne him two sons; and that the queen and princes, greatly enraged, had made several attempts to destroy the connexion, and to get Rosamond into their power—but that Henry kept her so closely guarded, and caused her residence to be so artfully concealed, that, for a while, all attempts proved abortive, and the king became so much attached to her, that Eleanor found herself totally neglected.—Indignant at this usage, and thirsting for revenge, she at length succeeded in corrupting Dame Blewit, by whose machinations Rosamond had been first betrayed into the king’s power, and who since had

been placed at the head of the royal establishment at Woodstock.—The king's absence in Normandy affording an opportunity not to be neglected, the few guards that were on duty were surprised by a numerous party of the queen's, conducted by her uncle, Ralph de Faie, and Eleanor, in person, was led through the winding intricacies of the royal bower, by Dame Blewit, until she reached the apartment where the unsuspecting Rosamond little thought of receiving so unwelcome a visitor. What passed has as yet never transpired so as to be publicly known, it being given out, and generally believed, that Rosamond was put to death, not even myself or her parents knowing ought to the contrary; for the queen caused a coffin, supposed to contain her body, to be interred, which Henry, at his return, commanded to be again removed, and buried with great funeral pomp and solemnity. His rage also against the perpetrators knew no bounds; the queen was doomed to perpetual confinement, and every one that could be proved an accessory in the commission of the act, was pursued with such unrelenting revenge, as to be obliged to seek for safety in flight and exile. On the contrary, all that had exhibited any mark of attachment, or were particularly noticed by Rosamond, during her residence at Woodstock, were amply provided for.—Consolatory overtures also were made to the baron and myself, expressing the deepest regret—these were accompanied by several offers of aggrandizement and emoluments, which it was incompatible with the honour and dignity of either family to accept; though the loyalty and allegiance of both, during the contest between the king and his sons, remained unshaken. Nay, after the death of my loved Ela, I personally persisted in Henry's behalf, until finding a change of scene necessary to my health and repose, I placed my daughter at St. Bertrand's, and engaged in the contest then waged against the Infidels."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE earl's discourse was here interrupted by the entrance of Magdalen and Bertha. — "I pray ye, pardon me," said the former, "for quitting you so abruptly; my mind was indeed overcharged, but I have addressed myself with submission and thankfulness unto the Almighty, and trust I shall be restored to calmness—that my dear friends may not be disturbed, the short space they have to remain here, and Heaven only knows when we may again meet."

"Speedily and joyfully, I trust, my beloved and honoured parent," said William, "and I depart with the satisfaction of knowing, that I have a mother,—that her future days will be comfortable, — and that my Ela will have a fostering parent and protector."

Ela looked up affectionately to Magdalen, and warmly embraced her, then turned her eyes towards her father and William, and deeply sighed.

"We must not look for complete satisfaction in this world, my daughter," said the earl, "for we live not for ourselves; though as far as human foresight can reach, your future prospects wear not a threatening aspect,—be cheerly, therefore, and expect happy results — In the mean time William's mother will be your's also, and her venerable parents will joy in the daughter of their loved Ela, whom they have not beheld since her infant days.

"My loved Ela will also, with all duty, commend William to the notice of his grand-parents, and say that he longs to claim their love, and implore a blessing."

"Alas!" said Magdalen, "how shall their contaminated daughter—their ill-fated Rosamond, ever dare to raise her eyes from earth to meet their's, and ask a blessing?—how can I enter into explanations that my soul blushes to recollect?"

"The pleasing task be mine," said Morgan.—"I have long watched with a scrutinising eye over Magdalen's conduct, nay, endeavoured to search out some latent secret spot or stain, but found none.—"The blemish then dwells alone," said I, "in her first error—long and bitterly repented."—On this supposition I rested, and often sighed in secret, that such a goodly picture—such a glorious fabric—was not perfect;—how unjust the surmise, and what reparation can I make, for such an injurious suspicion? Henry, on his death bed, I am happy to say, acknowledged the fraud and force, that has hitherto clouded a fame; which otherwise would have been spotless;—acknowledged that, for many months after her ruin was completed, she was kept a close prisoner, daily entreating to be restored to her parents, until she was persuaded that her mother was dead from grief, and that her father, assured of her guilt, had abandoned and renounced her. In this belief, she sorrowfully at length submitted to her hard fate, became the mother of two children, and was pregnant of a third.—But say, Magdalen, nor shame to declare what is necessary, if more be wanting, it is a duty you owe to God,—to your relatives,—to the world, and to your own future fame—that the stigma of a professed wanton, may not, in ages yet unpassed, sully the noble name of Clifford.—Though painful the task, speak—I conjure you,—and declare likewise, if Henry's declaration was——"

"Most true," interrupted Magdalen, "and rightly have you judged, that recalling past occurrences to me, must be painful;—bitter are they, indeed, and dreadful, though little remains but what you have unfolded.—Suffice it, then, that on the terrible day of my surprisal by the injured queen, I was busied in finishing a piece of embroidery,

surrounded by some female attendants.—Geoffry, then an infant, was sleeping in a corner of the apartment; my mind, that morning, had been disturbed, and sore oppressed—for my once happy home, and the days of cheerful innocence, painfully obtruded on my imagination, and awoke unpleasant feelings,—pourtraying the shade of my mother, reproaching me in angry, though mournful accents, as a matricide, and the destroyer of family peace.—Labouring under this impression,—tears streaming down my face,—the doors suddenly unfolded with a fearful burst, — and dreadful — infuriated — injured majesty, stood before me!—I shrieked aloud, and should have fainted, but the upraised fatal dagger’s point, reared to my breast, recalled my almost fleeting spirits.—I sunk at her feet, and implored mercy.”

“Ha!” said the queen, “this indeed is some recompence;—the enslaver of kings,—the disturber of a nation’s peace, kneels at the neglected Eleanor’s feet—and implores her mercy!—Mercy, I know it not! Arise, wretch, and stand before me, that I may awhile peruse those fatal charms, and contemplate how I may best mangle and disfigure that beauty which dares to rival a queen!”

“Oh, not for myself,—not for myself, do I supplicate,” I hastily exclaimed; “but pity,—Oh, pity the innocent,—the unborn!”

“Think you then to move me by pleading the guilty consequence of your licentious commerce—a spurious issue, preserved, perhaps, to disturb the peace of a legitimate offspring.—No, wretch!—this instant prepare for death.—Be gone,” continued she, speaking sternly to the trembling attendants, a command which they instantly obeyed; then addressing herself to one that had accompanied her, and who appeared to ruminate on this dreadful scene in awful silence,—“Uncle,” said she, “bring in the fatal bowl; this poniard shall force her to drain it to the dregs, that we may not stain our hands, unless obliged, with her guilty blood.”

“De Faie prepared to obey the queen, when I suddenly arrested his progress by throwing myself at his feet, wildly embracing his knees, and imploring protection; vowing, that if they would spare my life, to immure myself in a convent. At this moment a cry from Geoffry, who had been awakened by the noise, engaged their notice, and they surveyed him with marked attention;—a slight conference then passed in a low voice, when, to my great surprise, both retired.

“For the space of two hours I was left in the most dreadful uncertainty of what was to be my future destiny, weeping over the infant, and deploring my sad fate, when the re-entrance of de Faie, alone, presently relieved some part of my apprehensions, at least so far as it regarded the terror of immediate death.—“The queen’s humanity is great, said he, “notwithstanding your offences; — on certain conditions she consents to spare your life, but then you must solemnly and religiously subscribe to those conditions—which also it will be put out of your power materially to infringe.”

“I need not, my good friends,” said Magdalen, “repeat to you what those conditions were, or what followed subsequently;—suffice it, that good hath arisen from evil, and what I deemed a great misfortune, will, I trust, procure me lasting happiness.”

“I nothing doubt it,” said Morgan, “and trust that your fame, even in this world, will be redeemed from unmerited obloquy; as undeniable testimony can be adduced, to clear you from all primeval intention of guilt.”

Magdalen now received the congratulations of all her friends, and happiness once more, after so many years of affliction, appeared to open upon her, and to brighten her future days.

“I should, indeed, have nothing more to desire on this side of the grave,” said she, “if a dear part of my friends were not so speedily to leave us; but I trust they will again be restored in safety, for the same God will be their protector—why then should I be so unthankful as to repine or murmur?”

The remainder of the day was passed in friendly converse, each being careful to avoid all discourse that might bring on regret, or renew unpleasant feelings.—At a late hour the earl and William departed, and the next day took a final leave of the nuns, Ela, and Morgan, being obliged to join the expedition forthwith.—Magdalen and her party also having now no business in London, commenced their journey, and, in due time, reached Godstow; where their reception exceeded their most sanguine expectations, and formed a striking contrast to what they had experienced at St. Bertrand’s.—That was a gloomy austere prison, this a delightful, peaceful retreat, where cheerfulness and religion were so equally blended, as scarcely to appear a place abstracted, and set apart for seclusion.

CONCLUSION.

THE Lady Abbess as has been before noticed, was of a noble family, and in her disposition truly amiable. The endowments of the house were most ample, for in addition to the original funds, the late king had been a liberal benefactor, on the supposition that Rosamond was buried there, and Queen Eleanor, on the nun's admission, accompanied her recommendation with presents worthy of a sovereign to bestow, at the same time explaining as much of Rosamond's story as was necessary to set her character in a fair point of view; expressing also a wish, that her situation might be rendered perfectly pleasant, as a small acknowledgment, and recompence, for her having inflicted undeserved severity.

Though the sisters of Godstow were perfectly well bred and polite, yet no small anxiety prevailed amongst them, to behold their future inmate, Magdalen;—one whose story had made so much noise, and which had been so variously related,—one whom all the world believed dead—and whose tomb and epitaph still remained with them.—Their curiosity, however, was restrained within due bounds,—and when she was presented by the Lady Abbess—though at first an almost inarticulate sound, or rather whisper, was heard among them, it was easy to discern, that it proceeded not from disrespect, but from admiration and pity.—“How very charming,” said one, “and what native goodness and innocence is imprinted on her countenance,” replied a second.—“True,” continued a third, “I will not believe guilt could ever harbour there.”

Such was the first impression that Magdalen made among the truly charitable nuns of Godstow—how unlike those of St. Bertrand! —“Ladies,” said the superior, smiling, for she easily judged the cause, “are you not somewhat tardy in bidding your new sister welcome?”—“Not from disrespect, Lady Abbess,” replied the elder; “our rudeness was occasioned by contemplating features, with which we are already much pleased.—Welcome, dear sister,—thrice welcome to our happy mansion, and peaceful society.” — This was followed by a friendly embrace,—while “Welcome, sister,” was again repeated by every member of the community.

The reception of Bertha and Ela, though not distinguished with the degree of warmth, almost bordering upon enthusiasm, which marked that of Rosamond, was highly friendly and polite. Morgan was also received as their new spiritual director, with all due respect and attention; and his piety, and the impressive manner, in which he performed all the sacred functions, speedily gained him the universal love and esteem of the whole vicinity, as well as that of the nuns of Godstow.

In a short time after Magdalen's arrival at Godstow, an interview took place with her venerable parents.—The meeting was solemn, affecting, and impressive, though both parties had been, for some time, prepared for this happy renewal of family affection — an affection, that in all human probability, would never have experienced an interruption, but from the fierce and unbridled passions of one, whose high rank, and exalted station, ought to have prompted him to deeds of virtue and honour;—passions most baneful in their effects,—productive of domestic evil,—subversive of public tranquillity,—offensive to God—and injurious to moral order.

With the death of the high offender, Magdalen's long sufferings happily ceased,—and the famed, once beauteous Rosamond, in the vale of life, at length found a

peaceful asylum;—expiating, by deeds of charity, and a sincere penitence, the errors of youthful inexperience.

But a short space, however, remained to Magdalen, in this last retreat.—In her early years she was supposed dead, and privately interred; the fictitious remains were then taken up, and sumptuously again deposited at Godstow.—At length her dissolution in reality took place, and the same holy ground was destined to receive her, her good friend Morgan performing the last pious rights.—In the grave, “the weary are said to be at rest, and the wicked cease from troubling.” — But even the grave proved no asylum to the bones of poor Magdalen, for a misguided zeal, and blind superstition, caused them to be removed into a charnel-house, lest they should pollute the consecrated earth.

After the death of Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln, who had caused this outrage to humanity, her remains were replaced by the nuns of Godstow, by whom she was much respected. The revenues of the nunnery of Godstow, at the dissolution of the religious catholic seminaries, were valued at two hundred and seventy-four pounds per annum.—It was situated two miles north of Oxford, on the river Isis; all that is now left, is a portion of the outward wall, part of a tower, and a small chapel, the walls of which are painted. A pond, said to have been formed by Rosamond—a coffin, reported to be her’s, is also shewn, and likewise a subterranean passage, which is believed to extend as far as Woodstock.—Such alone are the frail and perishable memorials of beauty, once so renowned.—The only LASTING MONUMENT IS VIRTUE!

FINIS.