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MAGDALEN;

OR,

THE PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

VOL. I.

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MAGDALEN;

OR,

THE PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

AN HISTORICAL NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY ELIZABETH HELME,

AUTHOR OF

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

VOL. I.

*BRENTFORD:*

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THE  
PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

CHAPTER I.

ON the banks of the river Garonne, near a league from the sea, in the province of Guyenne, in France, about the year 1170, there stood a Convent of the Benedictine order, dedicated to St. Bertrand.—It was founded near a century before the above-mentioned period. The establishment was ample, and its inmates select, but the rules were so rigid and severe that few chose it for an asylum; except, indeed, such as were forced thither by parental authority, or those who were disgusted with the world, and sought in affected severities, to efface the enormity of those sins, which sincere repentance and the practice of active virtue might sooner have obliterated.

The interior of the convent was spacious, and the grounds extensive, the whole forming a dreary melancholy picture, being at a considerable distance from any town or even habitation. The abbess was a woman of high rank, and descended from Gualter de Evereaux, Earl of Rosmar, a Norman, who attending William the Conqueror to England, gave first rise to the noble family of Salisbury, by grants from his royal master in the county of Wiltshire; which he bequeathed to his second son, Edward de Salisburie, leaving to his eldest son, Walter, with the title of Earl of Rosmar, his extensive possessions in Normandy.

The nuns of St. Bertrand were most of them in years, the boarders being only received in their infancy, and in general such as were expected hereafter to take the veil; which if they declined, they were never after admitted within the walls.

Vespers had just concluded in the convent chapel—the abbess had retired to enjoy the comforts of a good supper,—the novices were walking solitarily in the garden by moon-light, lamenting the past, and, with melancholy, anticipating the future;—the devotees were shut up in their cells,—and a few old nuns, whom even years had not cured of gossiping, were seated on a bench at the entrance of the chapel, descanting on the merits and narrow politics contained within the convent walls.

This party was augmented by two boarders named Esther and Mary, of the age of fifteen, and who, weary of the monotonous life of the convent, sought alternately in the different groups to vary the scene.

“Heigh-ho!” sighed sister Martha, an old nun, who was lean, yellow, withered, and dry as an Egyptian mummy,—“what a savoury smell issues from the kitchen!” at the same time distending her nostrils and snuffing the air with peculiar satisfaction.

“Yes,” replied another of the antiquated group, “the lady abbess has a duck for supper; the abbot has granted her a plenary indulgence, so *she* eats and drinks what she pleases.—There is not a nun in the whole convent looks half so hearty; why, she is as fat as a sucking pig, and her cheeks are as red and as extended as those of a trumpeter.”

“No matter for that,” rejoined another venerable vestal, “her fat, she says, arises from her sedentary life, and passing so much time upon her knees. Flatulency also

deprives her of her appetite, for though she has every delicacy in season prepared for her table, she constantly avers that she never touches any thing but dry bread and a few raisins.”

“What wonderful forbearance amidst a well furnished table,” answered sister Josephine. “But one thing I am at a loss to account for; what becomes of the food? as I can swear the dishes always come out empty, having constantly made that remark.”

“Oh,” said Martha, “what a simpleton you must be; do not you know that she has four favourite dogs and two cats—they eat up all, to be sure.”

“And drink up all, mayhap,” answered Josephine; “for I am sure the store room is frequently replenished with wine. Well, much good may it do her; but I hate hypocrisy. Do you remember the day I was so troubled with the cholic, and only sent to her for a cup of cordial, how she sighed, and turned up the whites of her eyes, and bade me remember the sin of drinking strong waters in my next confession.”

“Hist! I thought I heard steps,” said sister Anne, interrupting her in a low tone of voice. “I hope no one has been listening, and overheard our discourse.”

A pause of a few moments ensued.—“It is only fancy, I believe,” answered Josephine. “Yet, after the imperious order which was given a fortnight since, for us all to retire to our cells immediately after vespers, it is good to be cautious.”

“It is,” added Martha, “for though I believe we all think alike, yet our Lady Abbess has great power. What all the changes that have taken place bode I cannot conjecture; four nuns removed to other convents, and what is still more extraordinary, without any fault assigned, and you know our Lady Abbess is seldom at a loss in this particular of accusation and penance.—Well, I will say no more, for the least said is the soonest mended, and a still tongue betokens a wise head. I have heard the nuns are sent to England; but I would not have it reported that I said so, for I do not like defending and proving, and Martha said this, and Martha said that, when it is well known, there is not a more taciturn nun in the whole convent than I am; and if they are sent to England”——

“Let them be sent where they may,” said the youthful Esther, “they cannot be sent to a more disagreeable place than this is; for though I have been here almost as long as I can remember, so far from use making me reconciled to the spot, I hate and detest it, and consider myself as buried alive. For my part, I think convents ought only to be allowed for such as are too deformed and ugly to appear in the world.”

“That is good indeed,” answered, Martha, “and shews your ignorance, child, but even if that was the case, need you exult on a supposition of being excluded on the score of beauty; for my part, if I was his Holiness the Pope, beauties alone should become nuns, as they cause the greatest mischief in the world. Lord, I remember when I was a girl”——

“Do you, indeed,” interrupted Mary, the second boarder, “that must have been a long time ago. I wonder that your memory does not fail you; what a blessing!”

“A long time ago,” retorted the enraged Martha, with a face reddening with rage, “not so long, neither, and, as to my *memory* it is indeed a blessing; for it reminds me of the difference between young people, in this babbling impertinent age, and in those days that are past;—maids were then seldom seen, and never heard, now they are continually exposing their unveiled unblushing faces, and chattering like so many magpies, for fear their boldness should not sufficiently bring them into notice.”

“I think I can answer for Mary, that she did not wilfully mean to offend you. It must, indeed, appear to you a long time since you were a girl, as the years of your youth were passed in a convent,”—answered Esther, sighing.

This apology somewhat modified the wrath of the time-stricken Martha, whose loud vociferous tones now softened into a sanctified whine.

“Why, aye,” said she, “the time has indeed sometimes appeared long; but we are all prone to sin, and apt to repine after the pomps and vanities of this wicked world. But, thank Heaven, I have now, in a great measure, subdued all worldly desires, and am ready to acknowledge that youth and beauty are most safe in a convent.”

Esther and Mary both stifled a laugh—“I think I have heard you say, Martha,” said the former, “that you were placed in a convent merely to increase your brother’s revenues.”

“It is most true,” replied Martha, “he used to say my pretty face would be best concealed in a nunnery. I remember I was once at a masque, which followed a tournament, where a certain knight laid his sword and spear at my feet, gallantly observing, that though he could not see my face, he had no doubt it was equal to my shape.”

“And la, how could he be so rude,” interrupted Mary.—

“Rude—rude,” echoed Martha, half choaked with rage.

“Yes,” answered Mary, “for you know no one can help being ill made.”

“Ill made, indeed; and pray who told you I was ill made?” interrogated Martha.

“No one,” replied Mary. “I *sometimes* require no other evidence than—my own senses.”

“And *sometimes* you call in a little envy; do you not?”

“Never, where your beauty is concerned.”

Esther, who delighted more in peace than in raillery, and who saw a tempest was brewing in Martha’s bosom, now endeavoured to allay the storm, by saying, “Mary, this is all nonsense. Dear Martha, I want to ask you a question; pray, why did the knight lay his sword and spear at your feet? Was he going to kill you?”

“Kill me, no, silly girl; he meant to—to undermine my virtue, by fascinating my understanding. Oh, if I had leisure, I could tell you of a thousand schemes made use of by those wicked men, to delude us poor girls.—Yes, yes, *I know all their tricks*, but thanks to my own chastity, and the vigilance of the blessed saints, I sat them all at defiance.”

“I think,” replied Mary, “your parents acted very wisely, in putting a stop to your studies of the arts of those wicked men you speak of, by sending you to a convent; for, by your own account, you appear to have attained a considerable stock of knowledge for so young a maiden, as you say you was. What a mercy you escaped pure and uncontaminated!”

“You forget, Mary,” replied one of the sisterhood, “that Martha’s guardian saints were upon the alert.”

“True Bertha; their vigilance caught her up in time, and conveyed her into this convent, where, Heaven knows, there is no temptation, but plenty of mortification. I wish my guardian saints would convey me out of it;—Monks and nuns may preach till doomsday, but they never can persuade me but that human creatures, endowed with health and understanding, were meant for active agents in life.—I call Heaven to be my witness, that I had rather possess a clean cottage, and live under the protection of a good

husband, as I have read of them, than be the most renowned devotee in the whole world; nay even if I was sure they would do me the favour to canonize my old bones after my death.”

“And I am perfectly of the same mind,” replied Bertha, “a light heart and a rosy cheek for me. None of your hypocritical voluntary mortification—no sunken eyes and sallow complexion, if I can avoid them.”

Esther was too mild and timid to express a similar sentiment in any other manner, than by a heavy sigh, which was profoundly re-echoed by all the sisterhood present; though the more old and professed nuns devoutly crossed their bosoms, as it were to preserve themselves from the contagion of evil example.

“You, Mary and Bertha,” said Martha, “are enough to corrupt the whole convent, and ought to be reported to our Lady Abbess; who, by enjoining penance and abstinence, might, in time, overcome these wicked propensities of light talking, and railing against sacred institutions, and I shall take the earliest opportunity to acquaint her of it.”

“Not forgetting the duck, and the wine, and the four dogs and two cats, that kindly lent the abbess their assistance,” interrupted Mary; “for should these anecdotes escape your memory, I shall then also come forward, and, like your knight in days of yore, lay my weapons at your feet.”

An old nun, by the name of Ursula, now took up the contest by saying, “Well, well, how times are altered! formerly there used to be some subordination within these walls; the seniors were wont to be treated with respect.—Lack-a-day, lack-a-day! Ten or fifteen years ago, when you and I were girls, Martha.”—

Mary now, in spite of every effort, laughed outright, saying, “Why I thought you and Martha had been forty years at least in this convent.”

Martha, stretching out her meagre neck, with the crimson of anger overcoming the saffron of her complexion, scowling a look of stifled rage upon her, replied only by the word “Impertinent!”

The peaceful Esther endeavoured to soothe her, by observing to Mary, “That the wan complexion and spare form of Martha, only arose from ill health and austere habits, which made her appear older than she really was.”

“That is truly observed, child,” answered the old nun; “delicate and fragile forms, like mine, like the gay and sweet-scented flowers of the garden, fade the soonest.”

“Your’s then must have been delicate, indeed,” replied Mary.

Martha construed this into a compliment, for she replied, “You say truly; indeed I did not enter this convent at the very infantile age that is now required, but such has been the purity of my life, even in the world, that it may put guilt to the blush.”

“Perhaps you never met temptation,” said Mary.

“What do you mean?” returned Martha, bridling. “Are you ever upon the watch to affront me? I never met temptations! Do you take me for a stick or a stone? Pray, what young woman with a good person can be in the public haunts of men, and not be exposed to temptation? Were even you, Mary, to quit these hallowed walls, though you are not handsome, I should tremble for your danger.”

“And that is more than I should for my own,” said Mary aside to Esther; then turning to the old nun she added, “But do not you think the greater the allurements the more virtue is required to resist it; for example, in this convent we have nothing to excite temptation, and therefore we have few sins to confess, except those of envy, malice, and

uncharitableness, and Heaven knows they are heinous enough of all conscience; but amidst the dissipation of the world, my books tell me, we have to pass a kind of fiery ordeal, from which, if we escape unsullied and pure, our virtue deserves more commendation than it can possibly deserve, in the inactive and unassailed routine of monastic seclusion.”

The nuns having nothing to answer, at least to the purpose, had again recourse to their usual silent rhetoric, that of crossing themselves; only Martha, whose volubility was seldom exhausted, entered into a long dissertation of the hair-breadth escapes which *she might have encountered*, had not the saints kindly interfered and snatched her from those embryo trials that doubtless were hatching into perfection in the womb of time. Having partly exhausted the topic of what might have been, she began comparing herself to the young women of that period, losing nothing by her own praise, except the attention of her auditors, who were universally beginning to yawn, when suddenly they were aroused by a loud ringing at the convent gate. Fearful of being discovered and punished for a disobedience of orders, the nuns hastened to their cells, while Esther and Mary, more bold, or more curious, retreated behind some pillars, in a dark aisle of the chapel, where they considered themselves secure from detection, should any one pass through to the interior of the convent.

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## CHAPTER II.

A FEW minutes elapsed, when the portress hastily crossed the chapel, and speedily returned with the abbess and an old nun named Bridget, who was reputed to be admitted into her most secret councils.

“Are you sure,” interrogated the abbess, “that all are retired to their apartments?”—Being answered in the affirmative—“Then close the door that enters the convent, and let the portress unbar the outward portal, that the strangers may enter,” continued she.

A silence now ensued, which continued for the space of ten minutes, when the sound of distant footsteps were heard, which slowly and gradually seemed to approach near to the spot where Mary and Esther endeavoured to conceal themselves. Presently they observed a man of a lofty demeanor enter the chapel, followed by four others, wrapped in long cloaks, and bearing between them, what, to the inexpressible terror of Esther and Mary, they conceived to be a dead body, wrapped in a large mantle, which they deposited on the steps leading to the altar, and at no great distance from the lamp, which burnt before the image of the virgin.

Having thus far performed their part, they retreated some paces, and appeared to await, in respectful silence, the further commands of him, whose outward form denoted a personage of more than common rank.

The abbess now approached, and with her arms crossed on her bosom, stood on one side of the body, absorbed in profound contemplation.

On the other side, with folded arms, and with an aspect of severity, was placed the stranger. An awful pause ensued; a deep sigh, which seemed to issue from the apparently lifeless body, at length broke in upon the death-like solemnity of the scene, and which, in some measure, recalled the almost fleeting spirits of the appalled Mary and Esther, who, by this time, were near fainting, and mentally bewailing their ill-timed curiosity.

“A cup of wine,” said the stranger, in a deep commanding tone of voice, turning to Bridget. The old nun instantly obeyed the command; the hitherto inanimate body was then raised, when the mantle falling off, discovered a woman clothed in a white flowing dress—the stranger supported her head with his arm, and with great difficulty at length succeeded in forcing some wine within her lips. In a short space some heavy moans, and a few inarticulate words, seemed to announce returning animation.

The stranger now addressed her in a language unknown to either Mary or Esther; she, however, appeared not as yet sufficiently recovered to reply, or even to support herself. Being immediately within the beams of the lamp, her person was, in a great measure, discernible to them. Her arms hung lifeless to her sides; the pallid hue of death was spread over her countenance, which to them, nevertheless, appeared beautiful, and as youthful as their own. Her eyes were half closed, and a profusion of amber-coloured ringlets, in wild confusion, shaded her face and bosom.

“I did not expect you so soon,” said the abbess to the principal stranger, addressing him in French.—“Though I have all prepared, and you may depend on the exact performance of my duty.”

“I doubt it not,” replied he; “we have letters for you from your noble lady.”—As he spoke, he made a sign to one of his attendants, who immediately presented a large packet, which the abbess, approaching the lamp, opened and read.

Esther and Mary, at the distance where they were placed, could only discover a piece of parchment, to which a large seal appeared to be affixed. Having perused it, she said to the principal—

“Religion, as well as duty, command obedience to this mandate. The lady shall be secure from danger; and I make no doubt will, hereafter, bless the time when she was snatched from the commission of the most deadly and heinous sin, and placed in the road of repentance.”

“We hope so,” answered the stranger, in French.—“But say, holy mother, are these ancient sisters, whom you have entrusted with our secret, to be depended upon?”

“I answer for them; myself, and the Abbot of Pau, have witnessed their solemn oaths, sworn and registered at the foot of the altar.”

“It is well—it is only necessary, then, for me to inform them, that rewards attend their secrecy, and death, should they divulge the trust reposed in them; and now my task, I think, is nearly done.—Good sister,” addressing one of the nuns, “take my place in supporting this weak woman, who sinks under the fatigues of a long and perilous voyage, and sickens, even to death, to return to those sins that have proved her destruction; but hope it not,” added he, turning to her, and still speaking in French, “your scene of power and wickedness is fled, never to return.—Your whole family think you dead; and so you would have been, but for the mercy of her you have most injured. Your paramour will mourn his minion, till his fickle heart fixes upon a new one, when you will be forgotten, as though you had never been. What I would advise, is to repent, take the oaths required of you, receive the veil, and renounce not only the vanities of the world, but also endeavour to forget them; so shall you be at liberty in this convent, as the other nuns—if you refuse, you are still a prisoner, and will be confined and treated with rigour.”

Thus speaking, he left his pale and trembling victim, and drawing aside, held a long and apparently earnest discourse with the abbess; after which, bidding her farewell, he, with his companions, left the chapel, and soon after, Esther and Mary heard the heavy gates of the convent close after them.

On the return of the portress, the abbess commanded her and the old nun, sister Bridget, to raise the stranger, and bear her into the interior of her own apartments, where all was prepared for her reception. They obeyed, and, in a few minutes, Esther and Mary were left alone in the chapel.

They viewed each other with dread, fearful even of breaking silence, lest they should be overheard. At length, grasping Mary’s hand, Esther said, in a low voice,—“Are we awake? Good gracious! is it possible such atrocities can be acted, even at the altar, and in the presence of Heaven! Were this poor sufferer guilty, there would be no need of so much secrecy. Did you hear the tall stranger threaten death, in case the secret was divulged?”

“I did, with horror,” answered Mary.—“I would we had been in our apartments; for Heaven’s sake, let us steal away as softly as possible, lest we be discovered—and for your life, Esther, do not utter a word relative to any thing that has passed to night in the chapel.”

“Be you equally as careful; let us separate in the cloisters.—Good night.”

### CHAPTER III.

ON the ensuing morning, Esther and Mary were early stirring, and silently attentive to all that passed; but no circumstance transpired to announce publicly that a stranger was in the convent. Some days after, the Abbot of Pau was admitted, and remained for several hours in the apartment of the abbess; but still the subject was enveloped in secrecy and mystery. Weeks and even months elapsed, without any change taking place; and Esther and Mary, when, with dread, they conversed cautiously in the most retired parts of the garden, on the events which they had witnessed, were inclined to think that the stranger had been removed in the dead of night, or yet, more probably, had been released by death.—Time, however, could never efface from their memory the discourse which had passed, the features of the lady, nor of those of the person who brought her. The remembrance redoubled their aversion to a monastic life, and with tears they frequently deplored the cruelty of their fate, which made it impossible for them to avoid it.

Six months had thus passed, when one morning, about the hour of vespers, two visitors were announced to the abbess, and were conducted through the aisle of the chapel to her audience chamber. The one was in pontifical robes, and the other a man in mourning weeds, and in whom, to the horror of Esther and Mary, they recognized the tall stranger, who had conducted the unhappy woman, who had given them so much concern.—Vespers were no sooner concluded, than the abbess retired, while Esther and Mary, curious to see the strangers return, entered into a vague conversation with some of the nuns. They had thus been engaged about half an hour, when a loud and piercing scream reached their ears. The nuns looked at each other with amazement; and, after a short pause, some retired to enquire from whence the alarm had proceeded.—Esther and Mary, however, attributed it to a cause, secret to all but themselves, except the parties concerned; they judged the young female, whom they had seen brought into the chapel, was still alive, and concealed in the abbess's apartment, and dreaded she was enduring some fresh persecution, in consequence of the tall stranger's arrival.

They instinctively grasped each other's hands, and fearful of betraying their emotion, walked into the cloisters. A few moments after, they heard the voice of the old portress, by the command of the abbess, ordering all to retire to their cells.

Esther and Mary, however their curiosity was excited, found no means to satisfy it for near three months, when one morning the abbess, with apparent carelessness, informed some of the elder nuns, that she had, some short time before, admitted a young novice on her probation, but who, from ill health, she had been induced to keep entirely within her own chamber, that she might superintend the instructions bestowed upon her. Nuns, as well as those more actively situated in life, understood that flattery was a ready road to favour, they therefore did not fail to extol their superior's humanity and devotion, offering their assistance in the pious undertaking; she however declined their proffered aid, and the conversation ceased.

Some few days after, the portress and sister Bridget, led from the apartment of the abbess, the stranger, whom she had announced as a new comer; but in whom Esther and Mary both immediately recognized the unhappy victim, whose secret arrival they had witnessed, while concealed behind the pillars of the chapel. The nuns supported her to the

foot of the altar, where, after remaining some time, they led her into the outward cloisters for air, for she was too weak to conduct herself.

Esther and Mary both considered with pity, the change which had taken place in her person. Her face was wan, and much reduced—her eyes wild and sunken—her lips livid, and her whole form of such shadowy thinness, that had any of the inhabitants of the convent seen her unexpectedly, and unsupported, they would have deemed her to have been a wandering spirit. She was passive and silent; and, after having remained some time in the air, they reconducted her to the apartments she had left.

From this period she was seen daily, but never unattended; though, by slow degrees, her person appeared to gain strength.—She entered into no conversation, not even observing the accustomed salutations, when passing any of the inmates of the convent, being strictly enjoined silence; and the nuns and novices were forbidden, on pain of punishment, to address her. She passed much time at the altar of the Virgin, apparently in fervent prayer, and deep depression; for her tears were observed to flow abundantly, and her sighs were so heavy, that they appeared to shake her fragile form almost to dissolution.

The Abbot of Pau frequently visited her, but his counsels, if he bestowed them, appeared to afford her no comfort, for she was usually more depressed after his visits.

The comments respecting her were various, according to the different tempers and dispositions of the inmates of the convent—the younger members pitied her, and insisted that she was a paragon of beauty, and not more than sixteen, and, at the most, seventeen years old; that they had no doubt she was in love, by her melancholy, but that innocence was depicted in every feature.—Some of the elders, on the contrary, at the head of which was old Martha, insisted she was nineteen or twenty, at the least; that to be sure, she had a fair complexion, tolerable features, and good eyes, considering they were blue, but, upon the whole, her person wanted dignity, and could not, by any means, claim pretensions to beauty.—“For my part,” continued Martha, “I say nothing, for comparisons are odious; and swans have no right to set themselves in competition with geese. But this I will say,—I have known those that would have put her out of countenance.”

“Of that I make no doubt,” replied Mary; “for Heaven knows, there are *shameless women* enough in the world, who are ever on the watch to depreciate beauty, and put innocence to the blush.”

“Shameless women!” echoed Martha; “you are a pert chattering baggage, and would provoke a saint, but I am not to be moved.”

“Is that because you are only a sinner?” returned Mary.

“There, there, do you hear,” spluttered Martha, almost choaked with passion.—“She calls me sinner! the abbess shall be told that I am a sinner; and——”

“Why, did not you acknowledge just now,” answered Mary, calmly, “that you knew those that would put our young novice out of countenance? and, if you are acquainted with such miscreants, who would attempt to insult a broken spirit like her’s? You must, at least, allow that they are the worst of sinners.”

“I did not mean any such thing, I only spoke in regard to beauty; and I still maintain, that I have seen (one at least) that, according to the old saying, your beautiful novice is not worthy to be compared to.”

“And that one, I suppose,” replied Mary, “was either yourself, in days of yore, or else Queen Guineaur, wife of the renowned King Arthur.—Though, on second thoughts, I do not think you can be quite so ancient as to remember her.”

“You have nothing to do with my age; but if I am old, good manners, at least, should teach you to pay me some respect.”

“Where wisdom keeps pace with declining years, our reverence is justly excited; not so when envy, malice, and detraction, deform the hoary brow, even more than the wrinkles of a thousand ages.”

“I think Mary much to blame,” said Ursula. “Sister Martha did not give her opinion; and, for my own part, I must own, I think the young novices’ features are too regular to be striking,” continued she.—“In my mind, prominent features are necessary, for they give an expression and grandeur to the countenance.”

“A long nose and chin are the characteristics of beauty,” replied Mary, significantly, fixing her eyes on Ursula.

“I understand your impertinent insinuation, child,” answered Ursula, angrily, “but you are too insignificant to vex me; my thoughts are not placed on such transitory toys as my beauty or person.”

“I am glad to hear that,” replied Mary, “with all my heart.”

“You are glad; and why so, I pray?”

“Why, because then you will not grieve at your homeliness.”

“Notwithstanding your insolence,” resumed Ursula, “and though I have done with the vanities of the world, there are many who can remember what I was.”

“They, doubtless, must be very wise people then; for I have been told, that wisdom increaseth with years,” answered Mary.

“I cannot say any thing about wisdom,” replied Ursula, “for I was never vain of Heaven’s gifts; indeed I always thought my chin too prominent for perfect beauty, though I can remember a handsome knight once telling me, a full chin was a mark of wisdom.—However, of that I do not pretend to judge, but then my nose was of the perfect shape was allowed by painters.”

“Lord! Lord!” exclaimed Mary—“how it must have grown since that time; perhaps it has increased so for a punishment of your sins.”

Ursula’s passion to hear this favorite feature spoken thus lightly of, exceeded all bounds; she raised her hand to strike Mary, but, probably reflecting that this might bring on a disagreeable discussion, she contented herself with stamping with her foot, grinning horribly in her face, and, in a rage, hobbling away from the place of contention.

A silence for some minutes succeeded her departure, the elder sisterhood, who formed the majority, being doubtless not more pleased, at the sarcastic ebullitions of the young novice, in regard to Ursula. Not that either their respect, or affection, operated in her favour, for, as an individual, they did not care a whit what vexation she received; but it was a common cause—out of the dull routine of the conventual life, they had no other mode of filling up the intervening hours, than by recounting to each other what their persons *had* been, before the austerities of the order, and not their age, had marred their charms. These agreeable conversations, intermingled with a portion of scandal, for the moment, appeared to unknit even the gloomy rigid brow of age, and gave to the antiquated sisterhood the only degree of complacency towards each other, that their contracted minds were capable of feeling; but thus to be broken upon, by a few young

novices, in the flower of youth and beauty, was an intolerance much to be dreaded, as it left them no resource—no relaxation.

While the elders were ruminating on this new grievance, their meditations were interrupted by Esther, saying, “I considered the young stranger’s face attentively this morning, and compared it with the paintings round the chapel, but not one of them is half so beautiful—the expression of her countenance is most like that of St. Catharine, but the painting is far inferior, in point of beauty, to the reality.”

The nuns appeared shocked at Esther’s comparing the stranger to St. Catharine, and, after a general concert of sighing and groaning, they retired to their cells.

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## CHAPTER IV.

THE stranger had assumed the dress of a novice, and though youth and strength appeared to struggle against a fixed and deadly grief, she still continued silent; and, as at first, never appeared out of her chamber, unless accompanied by either the abbess, the portress, or Bridget.—Thus passed a year from her first admission, when the abbess informed the nuns that the Abbot of Pau had, for weighty and powerful, though private reasons, ordered that the young novice should enter immediately the holy pale,—that henceforward they would know her by the name of sister Magdalen,—and that the sacred ceremony of her renouncing the world would take place in a few days.

The old nuns highly applauded the goodness of the abbot who had kindly shortened the probation of the novice, while the young boarders sighed at the prospect of a sacrifice which might soon be their own lot.

At length the day arrived, but the ceremony, contrary to general custom, was private; no one being present but the inmates of the convent, the Abbot of Pau, and some monks devoted to his service.—All prepared, the victim was led forth, but had refused the ornaments usual on such occasions.—The solemn music resounded, high mass was performed, and the agitation of the pale and trembling victim made it requisite to support her till the moment approached for her to take the vows which separated her for ever from the world.

As the ceremony proceeded she seemed to gain strength, and raising her eyes to Heaven she approached the altar;—the abbot attended to administer the vows, and with indecent celerity appeared in haste to conclude the sacrifice.

No one but those immediately attending the abbess had yet heard the young stranger speak, and all felt a lively interest to hear her voice.—On the abbot asking her whether she willingly renounced the vanities of the world, she replied, in a soft but firm accent,—“Aye, the vanities I willingly relinquish, but I dare not lie at the foot of the altar and in the face of Heaven.—There are objects in the world which can never cease to be dear to me;—if the vows I take are sinful, Heaven remove the weight from my soul, fatal necessity compels, and I obey.”

The abbot affected to take her words in a sense which were evidently not their true meaning.—“Daughter,” replied he, “while we are enveloped in frail mortality, our hearts, in spite of our firmest resolutions, will partake in worldly things.—In renouncing the allurements and temptations to err, you take the first step towards repentance; and I commend the candour which prompts you boldly to confess your sins.”

“Purity alone, father, should be offered to Heaven, and the unhappy woman before you, as you well know, hath not purity to offer.”

“Alas! daughter, none are pure!—your sins are indeed great, but not, I trust, beyond the reach of mercy.”—Then, as if fearful she should reply, he turned hastily, and requested the nuns to sing *Misericordia*; which performed, he hurried through the remainder of the ceremony like a man who was in haste to conclude a business at once disagreeable and disgraceful to him, but which he was obliged to accomplish.

On her beautiful ringlets being cut off, according to the custom of assuming the veil, both Esther and Mary, in spite of their utmost endeavours, burst into tears, and were severely reprimanded by the abbess.

Their emotion was not lost upon the votary,—“Alas!” said she, “is pity then a crime within these walls dedicated to Heaven?—Humanity and mercy are the attributes of Holy Spirits,—crush not, therefore, the divine emanation in these young maids.”

The high swollen spirit of the abbess could ill bear this public reproof, but it was no time to resent it; and the ceremony being concluded, the priests returned to their monastery, and the nuns to their cells.

Though Magdalen, as she was now called, had taken the veil, and was for ever secluded from the world, yet sister Bridget, or the old portress, as usual, attended her steps for several months; when, finding that she formed no particular acquaintance, nor held much conversation with any one, their cares began to relax, and she was suffered to walk in the garden alone, from whence, however, it was next to impossible to escape.

In one of these melancholy recreations she was met by Esther and Mary, who seeing her alone, ran to her, and each taking one of her hands, with the warmth of youthful feeling, pressed it to their lips,—“Dear, dear sister,” said Mary, “we have long wished to tell you that we love you, that we commiserate your misfortunes, and, though we never before dared avow it, witnessed the cruel and unjust manner in which you were brought into the convent.”

Magdalen started, trembled, turned pale, and appeared oppressed almost to fainting,—“For Heaven’s sake, peace!” said she,—at length looking round and being convinced no one was near, she added,—“Come with me into the more retired part of the garden, where we may speak with greater freedom,—here we are in momentary danger.”

So saying, Magdalen led the way in silence to a part of the ground particularly shunned by the inhabitants of the convent. It was a deep dell, at the extremity of the enclosed land, thickly planted with trees; and which, from the underwood, and neglect, were almost in some parts impenetrable. A brook separated it from the cultivated part of the garden, to which it only was united by a rustic bridge, in so decayed and neglected a state, that a short time only appeared to be requisite to cut off all communication.

Though Esther and Mary had resided in the convent from their infancy, they never had ventured to cross this bridge, at the foot of which stood the image of St. Bertrand; being placed there as a kind of centinel, to prevent the evil spirit, which was reported to haunt the wood, from straying beyond its precincts. The story handed down by tradition, and firmly believed in the convent, was, that near a century before, one of the Dukes of Guienne, having seduced a maid of inferior degree, named Agatha, his wife, in his absence, caused her to be seized and forced into St. Bertrand’s, where she was delivered of a son, who was immediately taken from her, and placed she knew not where,—or perhaps destroyed.—The latter supposition preyed upon her spirits, until her intellects gave way, and she became raving mad.—After a time her malady settled into a desponding melancholy, notwithstanding which, she was suffered to stray by herself to any part of the extensive inclosure. The wood, though gloomy, was then cultivated, and was her almost constant retreat; in the deepest recess she constructed, with her own hands, a kind of cell, or rather hut, by first interweaving the branches of the trees, upon which she spread clay, until she rendered it proof against the weather. This employment she was suffered to enjoy, as it injured no one, and to keep her in a quiet state was far more desirable than to venture a relapse into the furious ravings that had before afflicted her. She even passed her nights in this retreat, and frequently, had not food been brought her, would have remained till too weak to come forth to seek it. After one of these



absences, two of the sisters, as was their usual custom, carrying her a basket of food, to their great terror found her dead, and lying upon the earth with a dagger in her side. This act was, by the then superior of the convent and her partizans, denominated suicide; and the effects of her crime first madness, then self-murder, which last they seemed to have no doubt would plunge her into everlasting perdition, their charity making no allowance for insanity.

Some of the inmates of the convent, however, dared to think otherwise, though they were fearful to express their thoughts;—nay, some few thought it might even be possible, that her own hands did not direct the fatal blow.

The Duke of Guienne was just returned from Constantinople, where he had been for two years, and it appeared not impossible but that the jealousy of the duchess might have impelled her to remove for ever a dreaded rival, who was already dead to the world, and to effect which was no difficult matter, as Agatha was often at such a distance from the convent, that no alarm could reach them. The walls that enclosed the grounds were indeed high, yet not to that degree, as not to be scaled on the outside by determined ruffians.

To corroborate this opinion, one of the nuns had, on the first discovery of the unfortunate Agatha, started a very formidable objection against the act of suicide, namely,—“how she could obtain a dagger?” such a weapon not being within the sacred walls.

The vindictive spirit of the superior, however, soon crushed this kind of argument, upon pain of the most rigid penance being inflicted upon those who should dare to be contumacious, where the honour and profit of her house were so intimately concerned.—She likewise recapitulated and exaggerated the errors of the simple Agatha, whose madness she affirmed was nothing more nor less than an actual possession of her sinful frame by the evil spirit, who first tempted her to sin, and then, doubtless, furnished her with the means to accomplish her dreadful purpose.

“This opinion, though as before mentioned, not implicitly believed by all, at least, came from too high an authority to be disputed. Consecrated ground was, therefore, out of the question, and a hole was dug in poor Agatha’s cell, where her body was deposited; the act, sanctified by no holy rite, nor hallowed by one friendly tear!

The murderous dagger was cast into the Garonne, and the nuns prohibited from frequenting the wood where so foul a deed had taken place, and where there was no doubt the perturbed spirit of the frail Agatha would wander and hover, in painful penance for her earthly crimes, until time should be no more.

As tales of horror seldom lose by frequent repetition, it was soon reported that Agatha, with a dagger in her hand, had been in reality seen; and caused such terror, that the superior found it necessary to place the image of St. Bertrand at the foot of the bridge, holding a crucifix, to prevent the wandering spirit passing into the garden.

It was at first in contemplation, to destroy the bridge, but as it was composed of timber, that had grown on consecrated ground, it was suffered to remain; leaving to time to interrupt the communication between the garden and the wood.

Magdalen, fearlessly, passed the bridge—Esther started and drew back—but the strong mind of Mary needed no more than example; and, taking Esther’s hand, she said, “Come on, we have never injured any one; and if the spirit does not molest Magdalen, it will surely not hurt us.”—

Esther, thus encouraged, crossed the brook, and entered the wood, where Magdalen, turning round, said,—“Fear nothing, this is my daily haunt, I have forced a rude path, with great difficulty, through the underwood, and visited poor Agatha’s grave; all there is quiet, and I trust her guilty, but persecuted spirit, rests from its labours in the bosom of peace and infinite mercy.”

Esther and Mary acquired fresh courage as they advanced; when Magdalen addressing them, with great emotion, said,—“We are now, I think, safe, tell me therefore, I conjure you, by my soul’s peace, and in the name of the Holy Virgin, tell me all you know respecting me.”

“Sweet lady,” answered Esther, “we would not injure you for worlds, for well do we know that you have been cruelly oppressed.”

“I believe you, but again conjure you to disclose all you know, and relieve my anxiety—never will I betray your confidence.”

Mary then related their concealment in the chapel,—the bringing in of what they thought, at first, a dead body—the tall stranger, speaking to Magdalen in a language unknown to them—his addressing the abbess, in French, and the same afterwards to Magdalen,—his giving the abbess a letter, with a large seal—his caution respecting secrecy—and his threats in case of the secret’s being developed.

Magdalen listened to the relation with trembling anxiety, which, when concluded, she said,—“Tell me, I pray you, for my memory retains few of the occurrences which then passed. What did the tall stranger name me? From whence did he say he brought me? And what said he were my connexions?”

“He did not name you, lady; it was evident that the abbess had, for some days, expected your arrival, by her orders for all to retire early to their cells.—Other changes had also taken place in the convent, but whether on your account, we know not.—The brutal stranger, who came with you, said to the abbess, that he brought her letters from her noble mistress, and she respectfully replied, that she would be careful to execute her commands with the greatest punctuality. He also spoke of you, lady, in a manner which I am convinced you do not deserve; for, if virtue and goodness dwell not in so sweet a form, where shall we seek them?”

“My good girls, your innocence misleads you; the fairest bodies do not always contain the purest minds—this unhappy form hath wrought my destruction. Mark me well! so shall ye save me from renewed sorrow,—those dearer to me than life, from ruin, and yourselves from bodily danger; nay, perhaps, from death.”

Esther and Martha were much affected, trembled exceedingly, and requested an explanation of her words.

“Should you ever reveal what you have witnessed, my kind girls, my death, or perpetual imprisonment, and, in all probability, yours’ would be the consequence. Not only so, but the innocent, who never injured human soul, would bleed, and for whose safety, behold me buried in this living grave.—Swear, then, my young friends, here, in the face of Heaven, unseen but by the saints, never to disclose, to any one, what you saw or heard on that eventful night; and, in return, I swear to you an inviolable love and friendship, if you will accept it from one so lost as I am.”

Shocked and alarmed, they both knelt, and called upon the Holy Virgin to witness the oath of secrecy which Magdalen required; after which, kneeling by their side, she took a hand of each, and, raising her beautiful eyes to Heaven, exclaimed with fervour,—

“Ye holy saints, who are never deaf to the supplications of the sorrowful, hear and witness the friendship I vow to these young maids.—Oh, guard them with a watchful eye, direct their youth, protect them from the beguiling snares of greatness; deliver them from this prison where chastity is the punishment, not the glory of woman—if single, make them examples of purity in a corrupt world—or, if wedded, make them virtuous wives and happy mothers.”

The young maids hung round her, and, with youthful enthusiasm said, they would share her fate.—“Heaven forbid,” replied she. “My oaths, though in some measure constrained, are sacred, and bind me ever in oblivion. For you I will not despair, but let us now separate; for should our intercourse be discovered, it would ruin all, and redouble the rigour of my situation—we can occasionally meet here, and communicate our thoughts.”

The party now separated and retired to the convent, where their trepidation insensibly subsided, and in a little time their meetings, though cautiously conducted, became frequent; as from a similarity of situation and disposition they were soon warmly attached to each other.

Mary, in the course of one of their conversations ventured to ask Magdalen the events of her life, but received an answer which precluded all further inquiry.—“Mary,” replied she, “repeat that question no more, or we must separate for ever.—A sacred and everlasting silence closes my lips; nor can even the hour of death release me from my vow of making no verbal disclosure.”

Thus passed above a year after Magdalen had taken the veil;—her health gradually returned, but the depression of her spirits remained the same.—She seldom conversed with any one except Esther and Mary, and then only in their secret meetings; for it was evident she was careful to give no rise to suspicion.

At one of those meetings, observing that Magdalen was even more heavily depressed than usual, and that her eyes were swollen with weeping, Esther and Mary pressed her to disclose the cause.

“My kind girls,” replied she, “this is my unhappy birth day,—this morn I completed my nineteenth year. Alas! what complicated miseries have darkened the morning of my days!—the retrospect is dreadful!—my heart sickens, and my head grows giddy at the remembrance!—Oh! my sainted mother, if you be permitted to witness the sorrows of your wretched daughter, supplicate that her earthly miseries may be shortened!—Ah! no,” continued she, after a pause, “rather entreat that her corporeal anguish may be prolonged, until her spirit, purified by suffering, may be more worthy to join with your’s in bliss!”

Esther and Mary wept with her.—“Alas!” said the former, “Mary and I, confined to this convent from the age of seven years, have drawn nothing but flattering presages, and formed perhaps false pictures of the world;—I much fear our imaginations have beguiled us.”

“A certain portion of suffering is attached to all human creatures,” replied Magdalen, “but virtue is a shield against which the arrows of shame, malice, slander, and disgrace strike harmless;—their barbed points fix and rankle only in the guilty breast, and leave wounds no earthly medicine can cure.”

Fearful of causing suspicion by too long an absence, they soon after crossed the bridge, and by different ways returned to the convent.

## CHAPTER V.

ESTHER was of the family of the Count de Maltravers, not particularly rich, but honorable; and who, anxious to increase the revenues of an elder son, doomed his young and unoffending daughter to perpetual celibacy in a convent. He was, however, saved from the atrocity of this act by an accident which human knowledge could not foresee, nor paternal prudence prevent.

The darling son, who was to transmit his boasted honours to posterity, and for whom Esther was to be sacrificed, was himself slain in a licentious quarrel respecting a courtesan.

Secluded from the world, this news was unknown to Esther, who seldom saw her parents above once in two years, and then only in the presence of the abbess, and at the grate of the convent. The death of the son left Esther sole heiress of their possessions, and as they had no inclination to enrich the convent, at the expence of the extinction of their boasted pedigree, they now became as anxious to see her married, as they had been before to doom her to a single life.

They therefore informed the abbess of their intention of removing her, which however she divulged to no one till the moment the count came to claim his daughter; and even then she did not suffer her to leave her presence till she quitted the convent.

Esther, at the first intelligence, appeared wild with joy; but looking round, and fixing her eyes on Mary and sister Magdalen, she burst into tears. Mary threw her arms round her for a last embrace, while Magdalen, viewing her at once with a smile of congratulation and a starting tear, hastily left the chapel where they were assembled, lest either their feelings or her own should betray them.

“Away with this folly!” said the abbess, haughtily;—“your parents wait, Esther.—I pity their delusion, which snatches you from peace and safety, to plunge you into the allurements of the world.—Look round for the last time, for no more will you be permitted to defile these walls by your presence.”

Esther made no reply, but pressing Mary once more to her bosom, followed the portress who waited to conduct her to the gates.

Mary de Vavasour was not so highly born as Esther, but her father, the Sieur de Vavasour, was immensely rich;—he had three sons and only one daughter, whose maternal aunt had left her a considerable property. To enrich his sons with this wealth, and to ennoble his family, he resolved to provide for her in a convent; and for that purpose had carefully confined her, from her early youth, in St. Bertrand’s.

An old nun, who had been a particular friend of her aunt’s, insensibly became attached to her, and Mary returning her affection, her infancy scarcely missed the attention of a parent. When she was thirteen, sister Adeline, as she was called, died, and Mary having ever decidedly shewn a dislike to a conventual life, being of a cheerful and giddy temper, sister Adeline, at once impelled by rectitude and affection, considered it a point of duty to inform her of every particular respecting herself and family; at the same time advising her to conceal what she had thus divulged, till necessity obliged her to reveal it, as it might make her situation yet more disagreeable in the convent, and, she feared, would not be able to preserve her from taking the vows, should her father persist in forcing her to make the sacrifice.—“Three or four years,” continued the old nun, “may,

my dear child, give you more serious thoughts, and a life of retirement may lose its horrors;—for, believe me, the world is full of sorrows.—Your father was in England when your aunt died, and as they had not been on terms of friendship for many years, he did not even know of our acquaintance. She died when you were only two years old, and that same year I retired to this convent, and candidly confess, that when I saw you here, and learned your family, I judged the reason was the enriching of your brother.—I, however, kept my suspicions to myself, for a disclosure would only have procured me ill-will, and you, to whom I have ever been warmly attached, would have been separated from me, for the abbess doubtless knows every circumstance; and though she would willingly have the whole of your wealth settled upon the convent, yet she had rather take a part than lose all.”

Three days after this communication the sister died, and Mary first experienced sorrow. The words of her friend she treasured in her memory, and to no one but Esther had ever mentioned the circumstance.—Days and nights did she pass, as her years increased, in devising means for her release, but all appeared vague and uncertain; she resolved, however, to make the trial before she entered upon her noviciate, and was strengthened in her resolution by the departure of Esther, since when the convent had become detestable to her, the private meetings she had with Magdalen being her only consolation.

In the mean time the abbess, vexed at losing Esther, whose seclusion would have brought money to her coffers, resolved that no delay should take place in Mary’s entering upon her noviciate, lest some unlucky chance should deprive the convent of her also. She, therefore, sent the Sieur de Vavasour word of her intentions, and in return received his entire consent and approbation.

Ordering Mary to be sent into her apartment, she informed her of her father’s resolution, and desired her to enter on her noviciate immediately. Well aware of her temper, she expected tears and resistance, but to her great surprise observed she received the information with apparent calmness, and without any marked reluctance.—“I have long expected this command, Madam,” replied she, “and rejoice at it, as it enables me to disclose a secret which has been very painful to me.—All I request is, to see my parents, and in their presence to make the necessary communication, after which I am at their command and your’s.”

The abbess would fain have persuaded her to give up this request, saying, that if she thought to persuade her parents from their determined purpose,—a plan which had been settled on the most mature deliberation, it would be vain. Mary replied, that she had no such intention, and not only requested the presence of her parents, but that also of some of the elders of the convent; as what she had to say was of the utmost moment to the whole house.

“To whom does it relate?” demanded the abbess, in a quick tone of voice,—“the affairs of this community have no right to be discussed with any one but myself.”

“It relates only to *myself*, Lady, and the enriching this establishment,” answered Mary, “which a minor, like me, has no power to do, however I may have the inclination.”

The abbess viewed her with some surprise, then replied,—“True, child, and you gain my good will by the remark.—Your parents, though not rich, will give a respectable sum on your entering our holy community, and the pious intention must be received as it merits.”

“Yet, Lady, could I make it more——”

“It would be most praise-worthy; but it is impossible, you are dependant on your parents.”

“Undoubtedly, you will therefore please to grant my request of seeing them, when I shall relieve my conscience, and all will be arranged, I hope, for the best.”

So saying, she left the abbess, who had hitherto regarded her only as a giddy girl, and now felt extreme surprise at her serious and determined conduct.—She well knew that Mary was heiress to some estates, but was not aware of their great value; and, convinced that no one in the convent knew ought on the subject, had no suspicion that she, who had been an inmate since the age of seven years, could have gained any information. She, however, resolved to write to her parents, and request their presence as a preliminary step to her entering on her noviciate. At the first moment of Mary’s demand, a suspicion of Magdalen’s being concerned pressed her thoughts; but the improbability of the surmise, and the subsequent behaviour of Mary, completely banished the idea.

On the other hand, when the abbess’s letter was received by the Vavasours, Mary’s request was far from affording them any satisfaction.—Not that they feared being moved from their determined purpose by natural affection, or by her tears and entreaties, but knowing they were acting wrong, their consciences, for the first time, presented a fear of they knew not what.—However, being unable to form any plausible excuse for their non-attendance, they appointed a day, and in the presence of the abbess, two priests, sister Bridget, the portress, and two other nuns greatly devoted to the abbess, prepared to take a final farewell of their devoted child.

Mary threw herself at the feet of her parents, but the contracted brow of her father repelled tenderness; while her mother, in spite of her efforts, burst into tears and pressed her to her bosom.—Mary’s heart beat too high to admit of words, but her eyes plainly spoke to her maternal feelings, and accused her of cruelty.—“And was it for this I was summoned here?” said the Sieur de Vavasour, sternly.—“You, holy mother,” addressing the abbess,—“I think said, Mary had something her conscience required her to disclose, previous to her taking the veil.”

The harshness of the Sieur de Vavasour, at once recalled Mary’s courage.—“It is most true, Sir,” replied she. “The business on which I requested your presence should not be a secondary consideration; for I well perceive, that sordid interests hold a primary place, and unnaturally banish that affection, which even brutes, *instinctively*, feel towards their progeny.—You have chosen St. Bertrand for my patron, and are determined to seclude me for ever from the world. I appeal to your own conscience, whether your motive is dictated by piety; for, in that case, justice must also influence your conduct. At the age of eighteen, I might naturally expect to enter the world, or, at least, to see my parents entertain some compunction at sacrificing a child to their ambition.—Say, holy mother, and you reverend fathers, had I been suffered to wed a mortal husband, would he not have been entitled to those estates, which at twenty-one I inherit in Normandy.”

The Sieur de Vavasour startled, turned pale, and endeavoured to interrupt her, as did also the abbess; but, regardless of their efforts, she continued with increased energy.—

“Peace, I pray you, this time I will speak, whatever may befall.—If I relinquish the world, and devote myself to Heaven, St. Bertrand then becomes my spouse, nor shall he

be defrauded of my patrimony. My resolution is not sudden; it is the effect of reflection, nor shall death itself force me to retract it. Three years will I remain on my noviciate, and when I attain the age of twenty-one, settle my whole wealth on the convent, and take the vows. This is my demand, and the business for which I required your presence.”

The Sieur de Vavasour was enraged beyond his patience; he almost cursed his daughter, and accused the abbess of filling her mind with vain thoughts of enriching her convent.—The abbess, in her turn, not being gifted with the most patient disposition, replied with acrimony to his unjust charge, till the spirit of discord made one party forget prudence, and the other almost the assumed appearance of sanctity.—Hypocrisy, however, was too habitual to be easily overcome; and, with a face crimsoned with rage, and eyes sparkling with malignity, the abbess replied—“Your accusation is unjust; wicked man that you are, to dare insult the peace and holiness of this retreat. I had indeed heard that Mary had some estates, but neither knew their extent, nor where they are situated; to wish to give what is justly her’s to the convent, can be no sin, but is doubtless the inspiration of the holy saint, and in which I will support her to the utmost of my power.”

Mary, charmed to find her plan succeed beyond her hopes, was sufficiently shrewd to lose no advantage.—“My aunt,” said she, “possessed a diamond cross of great value, it was attached to her neck at the hour of death; that cross, I pray you, on the first opportunity, good father, present to my guardian saint, it may incline him to be propitious to me.”

“The maid speaks nobly,” said one of the fathers, “and her piety merits praise; such a daughter is a treasure to a family, for how efficacious must be her prayers in their behalf.”

“My aunt had many jewels,” resumed Mary, “those, please to present to my mother; and the large bag of broad gold pieces, preserved in her ebony cabinet, I beg you to accept yourself. But for the estates at Rouen, and in Poictou, together with their accumulating revenues, if I espouse a holy life, they belong to my convent.”

“Impudent wench! You are well tutored,” said the Sieur de Vavasour, almost inarticulate with passion—“but you have no claim, till you attain the age of twenty-one.”

“I know it well, and therefore defer my vows till that period. Had you, Sir, possessed more nature, I might have shewn more affection; as it is, if my will is not granted, through these fathers will I appeal to the Pope, and he will do me justice.”

Awed by her courage, and the lure she held out to the convent of inheriting her wealth, the abbess and the priests both took her part, and threatened her father with the anathema of the church, should he endeavour to use force or cruelty to so exemplary a child, who was, doubtless, inspired by St. Bertrand himself; or how could she be informed of particulars totally unknown to any one else in the convent, as where her aunt’s estates were situated, the knowledge of her jewels, the diamond cross, so nobly offered to the saint, and particularly the broad pieces of gold in the cabinet.

The mention of these valuables had astonished Vavasour himself, for he thought them secure from all mortal knowledge; as indeed they were, except to sister Adeline, who, soon after her friend’s death, left that part of the country where Mary’s aunt resided, and retired to St. Bertrand’s.—In the conversation previous to her death, she had mentioned these effects to Mary, which now served to strengthen her claim.

“I will remove you from this convent,” said Vavasour, “and place you in one where you will learn your duty.”

“She shall not quit our house,” replied the abbess, “unless with her own consent; you yourself placed her under the patronage of St. Bertand, and as I have every reason to think your motives are not for the maid’s benefit, you must assign a better reason for her removal than that of her great devotion to our holy patron.”

Mary, who was now convinced she should gain nothing by a removal, but, on the contrary, expected to experience redoubled severity in another convent, or, perhaps, be at the mercy of a parent devoid of natural affection, espoused the opinion of the abbess, and insisted on staying where she was. Much time was spent in contention, neither party being inclined to give way. At length the Sieur de Vavasour, finding that he had those to contend with, who were to the full as obstinate and as interested as himself, with the addition of being more powerful, quitted the convent; muttering curses on a child whose only crime was wishing not to be sacrificed to unnatural avarice.

Though the abbess was deeply skilled in hypocrisy and art, yet, unable to account for Mary’s conduct, she suffered her own interested motives to blind her judgment; and hoping to grasp all, however unwillingly, resolved to wait the full time when Mary could, legally, endow the convent with her wealth, and, if possible, to detain her within the walls, until that event should take place.

Mary had, in some measure, attained her end. At first she had hoped to interest her parents, and to induce her father to relax his intentions; his severity undeceived her, and, emboldened by despair, she put in practice a scheme of revenge which she had frequently meditated, namely, that of making the whole of her wealth accompany the sacrifice of herself.

By this line of conduct there was also some hopes of superior advantages ultimately accruing. In the first place, she gained a respite of three years; and, secondly, a probability, at least, that in that space of time something might occur, by the means of which she might be totally freed from a thralldom so repugnant to her wishes.

On the departure of Vavasour, Mary received the congratulations of the fathers, and the abbess; the latter of whom remarked, that she had, for some time past, observed a great change in the character of Mary, which afforded her peculiar pleasure, as she judged it proceeded from pious motives, by which she had been latterly influenced, under the particular care and protection of St. Bertrand.

Mary did not attempt to undeceive her, and made no reflections on what had passed, for the cruelty of her father wrung her heart;—besides, she was conscious that the change of her temper from liveliness to gravity, arose from the deprivation of Esther’s company only, and not from any miraculous interposition of holy St. Bertrand in her favour.



## CHAPTER VI.

THE conduct and resolution of Mary, for some time afforded conversation for the whole convent;—some applauded and others condemned her spirit. The abbess's party affirmed it proceeded from inspiration, while the opposite faction, at the head of whom was Martha, heard of her boldness with dismay and wonder.—“Well, Heaven bless me,” cried the old nun, turning up the whites of her eyes, “how different are the girls of these days to what they were in mine!—all then was retiring modesty, submission, delicacy, and acquiescence!—Now they stand forth with unblushing effrontery, and plead like lawyers!—I should not wonder, if, hereafter, they were to run wild about the world, usurp the rights of men, and claim the same independence!—When I took the veil, my father's word was law,—though I had, I must confess, a *stronger* cause for reluctance than Mary can possibly have,—for there was a knight.—But such thoughts are now vanity,—yet he was as fine a man as ever wore armour; and though his modesty never suffered him to disclose his passion for me, yet his eyes have declared it a thousand times. But I was never vain, nor given to boast of my attractions.—You, sister Ursula, remember my coming into the convent;—you had taken the vows some years, and had overcome those tumultuous feelings so hard to be suppressed when young people first leave the world.”

“I thank you for that,” replied Ursula, with evident pique, “I had not professed two months when you entered the convent,—though, I thank Heaven, *I* had no vicious propensities to overcome; and for knights or 'squires, I was too young for any such filthy trash to enter my thoughts. I can just remember, for as I said before, I was very young,—you looked old enough to be my mother.—But age is no sin, however vanity may be one.”

“Old enough to be your mother,” exclaimed Martha, “that's good indeed;—why I could not be more than——”

“Thirty, at least,” interrupted Ursula, “and that is now thirty-one years ago.”

“It is a spiteful falsehood,” vociferated Martha, scarcely articulate from anger,—“I was nearer thirteen than thirty, though it is now of no consequence.—But I am sorry to see, at *your* age, Ursula, and in spite of your holy calling, that you are given to envy, and addicted to depreciate the merits of others.”

“Holy St. Bertrand be my witness, that I never *envied* you,” answered Ursula,—“nay, I believe all the good sisters can vouch for me, that I had no occasion in regard to person; and then, as to depreciating your *virtues*, I fancy you are not overstocked, any more than your neighbours.”

“Why surely you will not dare to call my virtue in question in this holy place.—To be sure, in the world I *was* surrounded with temptation that required the prudence——”

“Of thirteen years of age to protect it,” interrupted Ursula, “but you have now a trustier safeguard, Martha,—Time, from whose withered clutches no one will attempt to assail it.”

This reply increased Martha's anger,—“I defy your malice,” exclaimed she, “my virtue——”

“Is very secure,” again interrupted Ursula, “so let it rest in quiet, as doubtless it will;—for beauty being its greatest bane, that, *you* may thank Heaven, you never possessed.”

“Not beauty!” hastily replied Martha, struggling to overcome her passion.—“Age, Ursula, strangely impairs the memory.”

“So it appears,” returned Ursula, “for me, my memory is as good as ever it was in my life;—for example, I remember your person on the day you took the veil, as well as if it was but yesterday,—I perfectly recollect that your hair——”

“Ah, those raven locks, as a young knight used to call them,” interrupted Martha, with great self complacency.

“Were as grizzled as those of a badger,” exclaimed Ursula, “your skin was as yellow as a kite’s foot, and your teeth as black as ebony.—Marry, it was no great sacrifice to devote you to St. Bertrand.”

Martha stamped with passion, and for a few moments was unable to reply;—she then hastily shook sister Anne, whom even the violence of the altercation could not keep waking, and by whose auxiliary aid she hoped to combat with more success.—But here too Martha was unsuccessful, for Anne was so cross at being disturbed, that she absolutely refused even to be umpire; and Martha was therefore obliged to defer the vindication of her beauty until a more favourable opportunity presented itself.

“I surely heard the voice of discord,” said Magdalen, entering from one of the outward cloisters;—what is amiss, I pray ye, good sisters?”

Fearful of injuring their reputation for sanctity before a young sister, the old nuns immediately resumed their accustomed hypocrisy.—“Nay, nothing was amiss, kind Magdalen,” replied Ursula, “Martha and I were only discoursing on the dangers of beauty, and the difficulty of forgetting those allurements which were most dear to us in life.”

“Difficult, indeed,” replied Magdalen; “to pluck up pleasures by the root, to throw down the self-built castle of worldly happiness, and to forego those affections on which the heart was fixed, require, alas! time, reason, reflection, and prayer.”

“Aye, and mortification,” interrupted Martha, “fast, and punish your pampered body, sister.—That fair face, roseate cheek, and bright eye, are ill tokens of a contrite heart.”

“Is it by outward tokens, Martha,” replied Magdalen, “that you judge your fellow sinners?—Is there, then, no feeling that passeth shew, and that like a vulture preys upon the heart instead of the countenance.”

“None without injuring the complexion, that ever I saw or heard of,” answered Martha.—“Look at me, and behold a change which penitence hath wrought for only venial errors; for, I thank God, that I never was prone to sin.”

“Aye, aye, age and convent discipline are sad enemies to the complexion,” said Ursula.

“To judge, indeed, by your countenance,” replied Magdalen, without noticing Ursula’s remark, “your sufferings must have been severe, nay, dreadful;—and they may serve as a beacon to terrify the young and unwary from sin, if such be its direful effects in the hour of repentance.—But Heaven is gracious, good Martha, therefore, I pray you, be merciful to yourself, for you have already more the aspect of a spectre than of a human

being; and should you die from the severity of your mortification it would surely be sinful.”

“A spectre, quotha!” retorted Martha, forgetting her usual hypocrisy, and grinning horribly in her face,—“no more a spectre than yourself.—I wonder at your matchless insolence;—you have affected silence and meekness a long time, but I thought such prudent conduct could not last for ever.—No, no, I am seldom deceived, I thought the mild lamb would turn out a very tyger.—Mercy on me, I wonder the world stands, when even the retreat of holy St. Bertrand is a cloak for hypocrisy, affected meekness, boasting, and vanity.”

“I grieve to see it,” answered Magdalen, mildly, “but be patient, good sister, if my countenance offends you, could you look into my heart you would be amply revenged.”

So saying, Magdalen left them, and repaired to the garden, in hopes of meeting Mary, of whose conduct she had heard both from the abbess and Bridget, mixed with great encomiums on her devotion and love to St. Bertrand. Magdalen heard the account with surprise, well knowing her young friend’s detestation to a convent, and could attribute the change to no cause but some sinister motive which impelled her to assume an appearance of hypocrisy which was totally opposite to her real character.

Not far from the accustomed spot they encountered each other, and after, as usual, looking round to see if any one was within hearing, Magdalen asked for an explanation of what she had heard.—“I cannot injure you, even for a moment, to suppose you a hypocrite,” said she, “but surely, dear girl, it is sinful to jest on sacred subjects.”

“Then on their heads be the sin who forced me to assume a character so opposite to my natural disposition,” replied Mary. “I will acknowledge that a parent who acts from real affection, is the best judge of what is befitting a child, and in its nonage has a right to its disposal;—but neither reason nor duty can sanction an acquiescence to an act influenced by motives so cruel and unjust as those by which my father is governed.—Heaven pardon him,” continued she, after a short pause, “and inspire him with sentiments of affection and pity to a child that never offended him willingly.—Dear Magdalen, how I could love my parents would they permit me!—I want not wealth, let them dispose of that as they please, but let me not be immured for life in a gloomy sepulchre, haunted by mortal fiends.—Hypocrisy, no my dear Magdalen, I detest the very name, for within these walls we see nothing else;—my conduct is the offspring of fatal necessity, by which I have gained at least time, and if at last I am obliged to take the vows, I will endeavour to insure myself some privileges superior to those possessed by the sordid grovelling phantoms of this convent,—creatures who think snuffling through their Ave Marias an expiation for every crime—and with the sacred name of religion in their mouths, wear a diabolical mask, under the cover of which they defile the holy altars with falsehood, vanity, slander, and every degenerate passion that can disgrace the human heart.”

“For Heaven’s sake be prudent, dear Mary;—consider the consequence should your real motive be discovered.”

“I could but die, Magdalen; I have long considered this subject, and my resolution is fixed. I have a bold spirit, and am rendered desperate by tyranny.—Say, my dear Magdalen, should I find the means to accomplish my escape, would you accompany my flight?”

“Never! The most sacred vows bind me to this spot; nothing but force, or the most fatal necessity, shall ever remove me. Here must I live, and here must I die.”

“Then here, alas! must I die too, for I cannot call it living. I had thought of a scheme, a desperate one perhaps, but liberty is worth a hazard—it was to steal the keys while the portress was asleep.”

“A desperate one, indeed; I tremble at the bare idea of the danger, and am unable to counsel you. But, never, Mary, shall you repent your confidence in me.”

“I know it well, dear Magdalen; but what resource can I now have; or to what spot can I direct my steps alone? A stranger in the world, without money, unacquainted with the manners and customs of mankind—alas! alas! if you are fixed here, then so must I—doomed never to escape these detested walls—never to range at large in those delightful plains; for, even from my childhood, whensoever I could find an opportunity, I have stolen up to the turrets of the convent, and gazed with wonder and admiration at the open country, where I have seen numbers walking free and unrestrained. Oh, how delightful did the fertile fields, and the majestic trees of the forest appear? Then the great and boundless ocean! I once beheld a storm, and saw the ships, for such I judged them to be from what I had read, tossed to the clouds, and the next moment lost to my view. Tears insensibly stole from my eyes, and my heart grew sick at their danger. Yet then, even then, Magdalen, I wished I was in one of them; for I considered I should either be buried in the fathomless deep, or reach some happy land of peace and freedom.”

Magdalen endeavoured to soothe the strong emotion that accompanied her words, though, at the same time, she was grieved to see that she had imbibed so decided a hatred to a conventual life, as not a shadow of an alternative presented itself.—“My dear girl,” said she, “your ardent fancy paints the world in more fascinating colours than it merits; should you tempt its dangers, never may it beguile you.”

“Often have I wished that I had been the daughter of the meanest hind,” resumed Mary, “so that I had enjoyed the affections of my parents; I then would have laboured for them, and endeavoured to soften the infirmities of declining age, seeking no other recompense than parental love. How have I watched and envied the tender attention of the birds to their young brood! Oh would I had been formed like them, for then could I have flown away from this hateful prison, and far distant from this detested country!”

“You would encounter the same degree of intolerance in the spiritual government of all countries that are denominated Christian; and, behold the hearts of parents, and ghostly directors, equally steeled to natural affection, and as prone to self interest as in this,” answered Magdalen. “Believe me, Mary, you would often meet danger where you least expected it; and find treachery cloaked under the specious guise of probity and honour. Young, fair, and innocent as you are in the world, you would meet with many enemies.”

“Enemies, dear Magdalen, I would injure no one; but love all who would let me. Why, therefore, should they be my enemies?”

“It is under the semblance of love that maids are most beguiled, Mary. Men are arrant deceivers, and consider it no violation of their honour to falsify the oaths they make us, and plunge us into destruction.”

“Yet, Magdalen, they look noble and honest.”

“Trust not too implicitly to the countenance, Mary; you have seen few, except those in the convent, and religion has, or ought to have, tempered their passions into peace.”

“Dear Magdalen, I once saw such a gallant troop of soldiers, I have thought of them ever since; nay, I have even dreamed of them, particularly of the horseman who led them. He, I judge, was the master or captain, for the rest appeared to imitate his actions; and when he spoke, though I could not hear what he said, yet his followers rent the air with shouts of applause. He did not appear to be young, but his carriage was noble, and his features bespoke command.”

“How was it possible you could witness such a sight,” demanded Magdalen.

“I will tell you. Esther and myself, accustomed to the convent from our early childhood, had, in our playful hours, explored every corner; and, in one of our researches, had mounted the turrets, which, from that time, became our favourite retreat, though we carefully concealed it from all the inmates of the house, fearful of not only meeting reproof, but being restrained from those excursions in future. As our years increased, the view it afforded made it doubly pleasant to us; and, in one of these visits, we saw the sight I mentioned. At first, the sound of loud and strange music, such as we had never heard before, struck our ears; for unlike the soft music in the chapel, this appeared to bespeak discord, wrath, and defiance—and though we could not but admire it, we both trembled, gazing with wonder from whence it came. We saw a numberless multitude of men, whose armour glittered in the sun, and dazzled our sight; the noble horseman, whom I mentioned, unsheathed his sword, and by his action appeared to breathe defiance, his men followed his example, and at once, scared, alarmed, yet delighted. I know not when our admiration would have ceased, had not the great bell of the convent rang hastily, as a summons for every one to attend. We reluctantly obeyed the call, and found all assembled in the chapel, appearing much alarmed. The priests said mass, and the greater part of the afternoon was passed in prayer. After the service, I heard one of the fathers inform the abbess that the army of England had passed forward towards Bourdeaux.”

“When was this, dear Mary?” demanded Magdalen, hastily.

“About three months before you came to the convent,” replied Mary.

“Dreadful, never to be forgotten period!” said Magdalen, in a low voice, but with an agitation which attracted Mary’s attention.

“You are not well,—your face has the appearance of death,” cried she, supporting her.

“I am faint.—I pray you let us part, a few moments will restore me.”

“Nay, not so, be seated,—I will run and fetch you water from the fountain.”

“I pray you take no notice of this, I shall speedily recover.”

A silence of some minutes ensued, when Magdalen, shedding a flood of tears which appeared to recal her scattered senses, affectionately embraced Mary, and said,—“What you have witnessed, my young friend, is a tribute which sin demands.—Your mind is pure, long, long may it continue so; for then, neither the malice of men, nor of devils, can inflict the torments which I endure. Oh! how have my trespasses bowed my soul to the earth, and marred every happy prospect!”

Mary attempted to soothe her sorrows, but finding the effort did but increase them, ceased; and, after some short conversation, fearing their longer absence might be noticed, they returned to the house; in their way to which, Magdalen endeavoured, and in some measure regained her accustomed serenity.

## CHAPTER VII.

THAT cunning people often outwit themselves, and that avarice frequently defeats its own purpose, was most truly verified in the abbess, who, allured by grasping all Mary's wealth in three years, readily yielded to her not taking the vows till that period; and, to render all secure, resolved to call in the power of the church, should her parents attempt to remove her during that interval. In the mean time, she determined to treat her with distinguished kindness, and, as an honour rarely granted to any one, frequently invited her to her table.

Mary had too much discernment to be so easily deceived, but willing to take advantage of the present disposition in her favour, frequently lamented the loss of Esther; and one day that the superior was in a more than usual good humour, ventured to ask permission to cultivate the acquaintance of Magdalen, whom, she observed, was peculiarly reserved and melancholy,—that she had taken a particular fancy to her,—and as all the other nuns were in years, should be happy to have a companion more suited to her own age.

The abbess paused, and for some moments appeared irresolute, but aware of Mary's warm and determined temper, and fearful of exasperating or disgusting her at so critical a juncture, at length replied,—“Well may Magdalen be sorrowful,—she has many sins to answer for. However, as she appears penitent, you have my permission to converse with her; but, I charge you, let no idle vain discourse, relating to the allurements of the world, pass between you.—I shall give her the same caution, and be sure, as you value my favour, and wish to have this indulgence continued, be strictly obedient to my commands.”

Mary, on her part did not scruple to promise a due observance, and on the following day the superior was a considerable time shut up in her apartment with Magdalen, from whence, when she came forth, she introduced the young nun to Mary, who cautiously received her as a new acquaintance,—simply (and without letting her great satisfaction be too apparent) returning the abbess thanks for her compliance with her request. Magdalen, on her part, was wholly silent until the abbess had withdrawn; she then hastily demanded of Mary how it was possible she could bring her to agree to such a concession in her favour?

“By that which governs every thing in this house,” replied Mary.

“I do not understand you.”

“Why, Lord how dull you are, dear Magdalen, you must have made but little observation for the time you have been doing penance in this earthly purgatory;—do not you see that every thing is carried on here by art and hypocrisy, so in this instance I have turned my lady abbess's weapons against herself.”

“I am truly sorry that such things are practised within the precincts of a place set apart for pious meditation and holy worship.”

“And I am sorry, on my part, to use such deception;—but in this case, I trust, it is pardonable, for it has been carried on for no ill purpose.—In your bosom I can now, without fear, pour out my sorrows; and though you will not, or cannot have equal confidence in me, yet will I be your true and sincere friend.”

From this time they conversed publicly, but were careful of appearing intimate beyond the common conversation of the convent; an intercourse which in some measure soothed the melancholy of Magdalen, and rendered Mary's aversion to a life of seclusion less painful.

While Mary was arranging her plans within the walls of the convent, the Sieur de Vavasour was no less busy to defeat them from without, for which purpose he had recourse to the law, by the potent aid of which, he was for some time flattered by its professors, that he would be able to rescue his daughter's fortune from the strong gripe of St. Bertrand, who, they nothing doubted, would then willingly relinquish her person.—The latter, it is true, would not have operated violently on his parental feelings, otherwise than that he knew it was essentially necessary to place her in some other mansion of security; in default of which, the ultimate object of his wishes would be as difficult to be achieved as ever. This, however, could he but once get her out of the hands of the abbess, did not appear to him an insurmountable bar to the completion of the business; for he was sure that a sum of money would at any time influence other superiors, as well as the abbess of St. Bertrand's, and make them glad to receive a refractory daughter.

But this happened to be a more troublesome business than he was aware of; for though mandate after mandate was issued by the secular courts, which enjoined the abbess to deliver up her charge to parental authority, she was too strict a disciple of Thomas a Becket to acknowledge any other than an ecclesiastical order; the citations, therefore, of the law, which summoned her personally to answer for her disobedience, were totally disregarded. To enforce an appearance was out of the question, for no officer would be found hardy enough to encounter the dreadful anathemas of holy mother church.

To such a man as the Sieur de Vavasour, this fatal termination of his long fostered schemes appeared worse than death;—already had large sums been expended for his daughter's pension, and in law expences, the reflection of which preyed on his vitals like a vulture, and he secretly cursed both law and church.—What could be done?—To lose the estates,—to pay up their arrears,—to give up the diamond cross, was not to be borne;—the very idea drove him to madness.

In this wild perturbation of mind a sudden thought spread an instantaneous gleam of hope through all his frame.—The abbess, no doubt, was as interested as himself,—“Yes,” cried he, starting up in a transport of joy,—“I will offer her a bribe that shall do the business at once—not for St. Bertrand but for herself!”

Elate with this idea, he sent a trusty messenger to demand a private audience, which being granted, he with very little ceremony proposed to present to the abbess three thousand marks, provided she delivered up his daughter to his custody, and relinquished all claims on the part of St. Bertrand to her property.

The Sieur de Vavasour was not out in his conjecture when he supposed the superior of St. Bertrand to be as interested as himself; but his sagacity had not yet learnt, that she was far beyond him in cunning, and would therefore prefer a large fortune to a small part. She was well aware, that though St. Bertrand's name would stand forward in the title deeds, yet that in fact he would be a mere nonentity—a kind of *sleeping* partner, while she alone would be his active agent, and receive and disburse at pleasure, without any apprehension of St. Bertrand's appearing to call her to an account. This being the case, no wonder that the Sieur de Vavasour's proposal was received with every visible

mark of pious horror and astonishment;—thrice were her eyes raised upwards, as if imploring vengeance on the wicked wretch who could sacrilegiously dare to bribe her to cheat holy St. Bertrand—thrice did she reverently cross herself, by way of exorcism, while her lips moved with inarticulate and, no doubt, pious ejaculation.

“Begone,” at length vociferated the abbess, “thou unnatural father, and monster of impiety!—Begone, nor longer pollute this sacred retreat with thy unhallowed presence and demon like temptations; lest holy St. Bertrand should annihilate thy body, and plunge thy sinful soul into endless torment!”

So saying, the abbess, with more haste, and consequently less dignity than became the superior of St. Bertrand’s, quitted the grate that interposed between her and the Sieur de Vavasour; closing in her retreat the massy door of the interior with such violence, that the whole cloister shook and trembled in unison with the appalled heart of Vavasour, who now retired, in no very pleasant frame of mind,—for he would almost have compounded for the threatened annihilation of his body, so that he could have escaped his own feelings.

Mary, though the principal person in the contest, was entrusted by neither party, and therefore remained ignorant of all that passed; it being deemed politic by the abbess to keep her mind easy, and prevent her, if possible, from having any communication with her parents, till she was effectually beyond their power, and it was also impossible for her to retract.

Thus the time passed insensibly away, until Magdalen had entered the twenty-third year of her age, at which period she had been near five years in the convent. Mary was now in her twentieth year, and began to look forward with horror, when she reflected that another year would determine her fate, and forever fix her within those hated walls.—Sometimes giving way to anger, when alone with Magdalen, she would severely deprecate the avarice of her parents; at other times she would only weep and deplore their cruelty, that could banish an unoffending child from their sight, and bury her alive in a cloister.

At the period above mentioned, an infant of between four and five years old became an inmate of the convent; her name was Ela, she was daughter of William, second Earl of Salisbury, her mother was lately dead, and the earl being engaged in the wars which at that time involved both England and Normandy in the unnatural contentions raised by Queen Eleanor between King Henry and his sons, he resolved to place his infant daughter with his great aunt, Sibella de Rosmar, the Abbess of St. Bertrand’s.

The Earldom of Rosmar had been long extinct, and the Norman possessions, in consequence, devolved to the younger branch of the family resident in England, where the earldom was first bestowed upon Patrick; who, being slain by Guy de Lusignan, on his return from a pilgrimage to St. James of Compostela, in Spain, in the year 1169, left his son William to succeed him, and who was father to the infant Ela.

Though so nearly allied to the abbess, the Earl of Salisbury was not admitted further than the grate, when he came to deliver his child to her care.—“To your tenderness, holy mother,” said he, “I commit my Ela. Devoted to the service of my country, my absence from England may be long, I therefore consider my little treasure safer in your care than left behind me; for sole heiress to our family, I dread that her



wealth may tempt the avarice of those that might profit by her death, and her childhood and innocence render her an easy prey to their designs.”

The abbess promised that her young charge should want no care nor attention, but would not suffer any attendant to accompany her; at the same time she did not fail to remind the Earl of the concession she made in his favour of admitting an inmate, whose residence was only temporary.

The Earl gratefully acknowledged the sense he had of her condescension, and took an affectionate leave of little Ela, and a most respectful one of the abbess; while the former did not appear at all sensible of the obligation she had incurred, by being permitted to be a resident of St. Bertrand's,—for she continued to weep bitterly when separated from her father and her nurse, until she passed with the abbess from the grate to the chapel, where all were assembled to evening prayers. Here the little Ela's curiosity was so much attracted, that she gave over crying; and suddenly fixing her eyes on Magdalen, snatched her hand from the abbess, and running towards her, exclaimed, in her infantile accents,—“Are you an angel? if you are, I know you; you are my mother!”

Magdalen clasped the infant to her bosom, and, overpowered by stifled feelings, and bitter remembrances, sunk down senseless on the steps before the altar. Mary and some of the nuns hastened to raise her, while Ela, bursting into a flood of tears, again exclaimed,—“Oh, now I know you are my mother, and you are again going to Heaven, to leave me. Ah, dear mother, take your own Ela with you.”

Tears at length relieved the suffering nun; Ela hung round her neck and repeatedly kissed her, still calling her by the name of mother, and tenderly chiding her for remaining so long absent from her.—Magdalen returned her caresses, while Mary turned aside and wept, as she considered what satisfaction she herself should feel in being mother to such a lovely child,—a blessing that, in all human probability, she must never experience.—Tears now filled her eyes, and her overcharged heart swelled near unto bursting.

“Alas!” said she, mentally repining, “how hard is my fate; never have I experienced the transports of maternal affection! never shall I communicate them, but, like a tree blighted in the bud, wither, unnoticed and unlamented.”

The abbess viewed the scene with a frown; her bosom was unacquainted with those tender ties which mothers only can properly estimate. Some of the nuns beheld the child with grinning malignity; while the novices, like Mary, plainly shewed by their sighs, and starting tears, that their virgin hearts were formed by nature to have entered warmly into the sympathies and duties of the matron.

Ela was at length restored to silence, but still holding Magdalen's hand. The evening duty was performed, after which, when the abbess attempted to give her to the care of Bridget, the chapel resounded with her cries. Magdalen, with great gentleness, soothed her, and at length prevailed on the superior to let her have the care of her for a few days, till she was accustomed to the convent.

The liberal stipend allowed by the Earl of Salisbury, for his daughter, was a circumstance strongly in favour of the little Ela, as the abbess by no means wished to render the convent hateful to her. She flattered herself with being able to keep her some years under her care; and should the Earl at any time visit the house, and find her disgusted with the society, he might, from his extreme fondness, remove her.

Magdalen, at a proper hour, put her young charge to rest, placing her own head on her pillow till she was asleep. She would fain have taken her for her companion during

the night, but that indulgence the abbess refused, saying, that when once asleep, sister Bridget would, if she awoke, pay her all proper attention.

Magdalen, on retiring from the presence of the abbess, walked into the outward cloisters, and meeting Mary, proceeded to the garden, where they entered into a more particular conversation, than the publicity of the house would allow.

“Magdalen,” said Mary, “I never saw you appear so interesting, as while you caressed that infant to day; your arm was placed so tenderly round her, and your eyes gazed so fondly on her. Ah, how I envy children who enjoy such comforts, and how I pity those who know not the tenderness of a mother!”

“Alas, alas!” exclaimed Magdalen, in an agony of grief, wringing her hands, “My punishment is greater than I can bear.”

“Holy Virgin!” cried Mary, “how have I unintentionally distressed you.—Your parents, I now know, were cruel; but behold me, dear Magdalen, your sister in affliction, we will comfort each other.”

“Ah, Mary, there the barbed dart sticks fast in my heart. I dare not turn my eyes inward; my punishment, though severe, is just.—I was an ingrate to the best of mothers, and at my great and final account, her mild and suffering spirit will doom me to perdition.”

“Say not so, Magdalen; though you should be faulty, a good mother will plead for mercy for her child, and at the judgment seat of Heaven, the prayers of the virtuous find place.”

“Then, indeed, Mary, will her’s be heard, and once more may we meet.—Oh, in mercy, if that be granted, I am content to suffer here. But I pray you, dear Mary, let us change the subject; for, though I feel confident in my own resolutions never wilfully to falsify the vows which confine my sorrows to my own breast, yet in a moment of unguarded agonized feeling, I may utter some expressions not strictly according with their solemn purport.”

The affectionate Mary immediately began a conversation on her own affairs.—She expressed her wonder that she had received no news of her parents, and speaking of her fate as fixed, said,—that now she was grieved she had endeavoured to protract it.—That in truth her brothers, though she had never seen them, were more dear to her than St. Bertrand, and therefore she wished they had possessed her wealth;—that she pitied her parents for not knowing how sincerely she was capable of loving them,—and finally, condemned herself for her hasty resolution of revenging herself on their want of affection.

Thus conversing they returned to the convent, and in heaviness of heart retired to rest,—or rather to reflect, during the solitary hours of night, on the bitterness of their fate.

## CHAPTER VIII.

WHILE Magdalen and Mary were commiserating each other's misfortunes, the usual group of scandal retailers, with Martha at their head, had assembled in a corner of the chapel; where Ursula began by very significantly inquiring whose child it was that had been admitted into the convent that afternoon?

"The abbess," said Anne, "announced her as the only child of the Earl of Salisbury, an orphan, and committed to her care, as the earl was about being engaged in the wars."

"That is likely enough," replied Martha, "but can you tell me who is the mother?"

"That I did not hear," answered Anne.

"You did not *hear*," replied Martha,— "well but though you did *not hear*, could not you *see*—or at least understand?—But mayhap you wilfully shut the eyes and ears of your senses.—*I did not hear* neither, but though I did not hear it is as *plain*——"

"Aye, aye, Martha," interrupted Ursula, "it is as plain as the nose on your face."

"I do not know what my nose has to do in the business," replied Martha, pettishly.

"Nor I neither," said Anne, "for it appears to be a scandalous one, and therefore unbecoming an aged devotee."

"Aged!—Marry come up;—and scandal too!—and pray where can there be any scandal in truth?—I say the mystery is now solved."

"Mystery," replied Anne, "what mystery?"

"Why Magdalen's silence and sickness, and weeping and wailing.—The abbess too, I suppose, did not wish to expose the errors of her nephew, and so kept her within the purlieu of her own apartments until——well, for my part, I say it is a shame that we chaste virgins should be constrained to mix with such impure women.—Heaven preserve me from the effects of evil example, for poor human nature, without its protection, is never infallible."

"Amen!" replied Anne, "though I hope *your* danger, Martha, from the passions you allude to, is pretty well over.—But," continued she, after a pause, "Magdalen's child it cannot be, for by its age it must have been born since she was in the convent."

"Some children appear younger than they really are,—as for Magdalen, I dare say she is older than she looks;—to be sure, there are many girls that are very forward.—I must own, from her first coming into the convent I always suspected *something*, and now my suspicions are fully verified;—indeed, for that matter, no one can be mistaken, for the child is the very picture of her,—and did not you note how she ran to her and called her mother,—and how Magdalen pressed her to her bosom, and wept over her!"

"What a wise child she must be to know her mother by instinct!" replied Anne, "for we are all well assured it can be by no personal communication; as no child has passed the grate of the convent into the interior part for many years, until the day that little Ela was introduced by the abbess."

Sister Josephine, who at times took a particular pleasure in thwarting the old nun, under an appearance of being on her side of the question, now remarked, that she had likewise taken notice of the child's behaviour, and should not hesitate a moment in being of the same opinion with Martha,— "only, perhaps," continued she, "Magdalen might resemble Ela's mother, and that will account for the child's behaviour."

“Resemble a fiddlestick,” replied the disappointed nun, who at first was flattered into an assurance that she had made Josephine a proselyte to her opinion,—“I say, and will maintain it, that it was sympathy;—the power of sympathy is great, as I myself have experienced.”

“What then have *you* had a child?” demanded Josephine.

Martha apparently started with horror, and with a voice broken and almost inarticulate through rage, exclaimed,—“A child!—I a child!—I defy your malice.—Satan himself could not tempt me to—to have a child.—No, were even his Holiness the Pope to release me from my vows, no man should tempt me to sin,—even though kings and princes knelt at my feet.”

“You may as well withhold your protestations till you find them there,” replied Josephine; “though I think it would be truly laughable to see all that are left out of the grave, of the kings and princes of your youth, come hobbling on their crutches, swathed in flannels, kneeling at your feet.”

“Malignant wicked woman,” exclaimed Martha, passionately, “were it not that St. Bertrand himself has gifted me with more than common patience, you would make me guilty of the sin of anger.”

“There is no cause for anger,” said sister Anne, “I thought you were speaking of Magdalen, but you have strangely varied from the subject.”

“Josephine ever does so,” replied Martha, “her greatest delight is to affront and insult me, and cast reflections on my chastity.”

“Not I, in truth, for I am well assured your chastity is very secure. ’Tis your own vanity beguiles you.—Had you been young and beautiful, and left to the temptations of the great world, I know not what might have happened;—but as it was providentially settled otherwise, the danger has been prevented.—To be sure, I have heard poor old sister Joanna say, that when you were both girls together, *you* was dreadfully forward; and that your greatest delight was in romping with your father’s lackeys, who were in continual disgrace on your account.”

“It is false, and all a vile lie from beginning to end,” exclaimed Martha; “and as for that wicked slanderer, Joanna, who, I make no doubt, is now in purgatory for propagating such scandal, she was a woman when I was a child—a mere infant.”

“Good lack! good lack! how wonderfully you both must have changed situations,” replied Josephine, “for in the register of your births, you have somehow or other contrived to hop full three years before her.—Ah, I doubt not but sister Joanna was right, as you appear, even from your nativity, to have been a very forward chicken.”

“Your slander, Josephine,” returned Martha, assuming a look of composure, “moves no other passion than pity.—Indeed I do not wonder much—but you should endeavour to overcome that unfortunate propensity which ever betrays itself, and makes even the novices say,—‘Sister Josephine looks pure and rosy to-day, it is not for nothing that Bridget and she are so intimate.’—‘No, no,’ replies another, ‘she keeps the key of the abbess’s store room.’”

Martha had now touched a key that was not likely to produce harmony in the mind of Josephine.—Conscious of her own failing, like a galled jade, she became peculiarly sore and restive, till one vindictive word producing another their mutual rage knew no bounds; every thing that malicious spirits could invent, or narrow minds could utter, was repeated.

Sister Anne, and the other nuns, now thought it high time to interfere, and to make peace between them, or at least to endeavour to restore quiet, on their own accounts; being fearful of the disturbance reaching the abbess's ear, in which case, the least they had to expect would be a curtailment of their meetings in future, a punishment, in their sequestered state, much to be dreaded. After some little time their efforts proved successful, the angry nuns retiring to their cells vowing never more to hold intercourse or conversation with each other.

This vow they had made at least a hundred times before, and had as often broken, notwithstanding they had jointly called upon St. Bertrand to ratify the agreement; for it frequently happened, that some fresh news, or some secret scandal occurred, and as no congenial mind at the moment presented, they were per force obliged, like the great politicians of the world, to wave their rancour, and form a close alliance.

Such were the women who professed to lead a life of holiness!—who had foresworn the vanities of these earthly regions, but who impiously insulted Heaven with a specious hypocrisy, under the mask of what they termed religion.

Ela on the ensuing day ran again to Magdalen, and threw herself into her arms; from the time she awoke, she had not ceased crying until she saw her. As before, she clung about her, as if fearful of being removed;—again she called her, her dear, dear mother, nor could the anger or persuasion of the abbess cause her to desist.—“Sister Magdalen is not your mother,” said the abbess, “and I will not have you call her so.”

“She is my own dear, dear mother, and I will call her so,” replied Ela, with the petulant spirit of a spoiled child;—“though it is so long since I saw her,” continued she, her eyes filling with tears, “ah! she was then so ill, and so pale, and as she kissed me her face was so cold!—and then they forced me away, and would not let me see her again, but told me she was gone to Heaven, to be an angel.—Oh! I am glad I have found her again!—and though you call her sister Magdalen, I am sure her name is not sister Magdalen, and you shall not call her so, for I will tell my father if you do.”

“You are an obstinate perverse child,” replied the abbess; “I am your mother now.”

“You *my mother*,” repeated Ela, with a saucy toss of her head, and a smile dimpling her cheek, still wet with tears,—“*You*, no, I know better than that; you are too big, too fat, too old, and too ugly, to be my mother.”

The holy abbess of the pious sisterhood of St. Bertrand forgot herself so far, as to give the young Ela a violent shake, at the same time threatening her with being severely punished.

For a minute, Ela could not speak; but when she did, sobbing with passion, she replied,—“See, naughty woman, how you have made my dear mother cry?” then kissing Magdalen, she added,—“Do not cry, I do not mind her, my father promised to come and see me soon, and then I will tell him all, and that you are here, and that he shall see you, and take you home again; for I do not believe this is Heaven.”

The words of Ela, childish as they were, appeared to confuse the abbess; her ruby cheeks, for a moment, became pale, and she remained silent. Magdalen, in some measure, appeared to share her embarrassment, and addressing the child, said,—“Indeed I am not your mother; but if you are good, I will love you dearly.”

The entrance of the priest, who performed the morning duties, put a stop to the conversation; and prayers being concluded, the abbess, after a long and particular private

discourse with Magdalen, either from some secret cause, or that she relaxed in her first intentions respecting Ela, consented that the child should be placed under her care during the day, but that she should still sleep within her own apartment during the night.

The first part of this arrangement was highly gratifying to little Ela, and not otherwise to Magdalen, whose melancholy was frequently beguiled by her innocent conversation, and infantile caresses. Ela was equally a favourite with Mary; and between both these friends, she speedily became reconciled to the convent, night only operating as a drawback on her daily happiness, as she then was obliged to sleep in the same apartment (to use her own words) “with the old ill-natured Bridget.”

The petulant effervescence of Ela’s temper was never checked by Mary, whose active spirit and firm character appeared more formed to support her through the cares and turmoils of the world, than suited to the dull, inactive, and monotonous routine of a conventual life. Magdalen, on the contrary, never failed to reprove her young charge, when she found her giving way to the natural warmth of her temper, which had still been increased by excessive indulgence.

To these gentle lectures, which bore the marks of maternal solicitude, more than of chiding, Ela would listen with attentive silence; and when Magdalen had concluded, she would throw her arms about her neck, and promise obedience, provided her dear mother, (for so she ever called her,) would not be angry, nor look sad.

Thus passed several months, and the time fast approached that was to fix Mary’s fate for ever.

## CHAPTER IX.

WITHIN a month of Mary's completing the age of twenty-one, which was the time specified for her inheriting her estates, the abbess informed her, it was expected she should be professed as speedily as possible, after her minority had passed.

Mary replied,—“That she first required to see her mother, as she had considered on the sin of disobedience, and wished to entreat her pardon.”

The abbess appeared much provoked at this request, which she said was nothing but a subterfuge, and peremptorily gave her a denial; at the same time palliating her refusal, by saying it was impossible, after what had passed. That, in regard to herself, she had met with every indulgence the convent could afford, and it was now full time to prove her sincerity to St. Bertrand, and her devotion to Heaven; in which, if she failed, her duplicity would not be overlooked, but would draw down upon her the severest punishment in this world, as well as eternal condemnation hereafter.

The high spirit of Mary rose contemptuously at this threat.—“I have done nothing to deserve punishment,” said she; “it rather belongs to those, who, in defiance of all laws, human and divine, attempt to violate and subvert the dearest ties of nature. But if I am to suffer, I will meet it not like a criminal, but with that fortitude which my oppressors may, probably, want, when the hour of retribution comes;—kindness may influence me, restraint I will repel by firmness. But why, Madam, need there be any dispute on account of so trivial a request? I only entreat to see my mother; there surely can be no guilt in this. You will perhaps say, to what purpose can it lead? Simply, then, for no other, than *for once* to indulge the painful feelings of nature and filial love; those tender ties which, alas! I have never been allowed to experience. Perhaps, too, I might be enabled to awaken dormant affection in her heart, and make her acquainted with the child she relinquishes for ever.”

“Away with these earthly weaknesses,” interrupted the abbess, “which enervate and corrupt the mind—prepare to embrace another and a better mother, holy religion, who rejects none that truly seek her; in her fostering arms you will learn to forget your worldly parents, and those things which now bow your soul to dust.”

“Stern rugged nurse!” emphatically replied Mary. “Yet not so—surely religion doth not destroy all the social affections of the mind, for it strictly enjoins us to love, honour, and succour our parents; and never will I forget or cease to pray for mine, though, cruel reflection! they have abandoned their poor unoffending child.”

“Were you as truly devoted to a religious life, as I had flattered myself,” answered the abbess, “this request had never been made, and which now convinces me, that you have for near three years been deceiving not only me, but also the holy devotees of our house; but I warn you not to urge my kindness too far, for not even the Sieur de Vavasour himself, were he now so disposed, could remove you. His Holiness the Pope has been informed of your first resolve; and should you retract, will give me full authority to act as I think proper.”

“At your pleasure, Madam,” replied Mary. “I have already informed you, that threats will not influence me; bind my body with fetters of iron, my mind will still be free,—force cannot compel me to *assign* my property.—You will please also to

remember, that were *even* my life to be the sacrifice to a non-compliance, *my family alone* would be the gainers.”

“Deceitful, abominable hypocrite,” exclaimed the abbess, “would you be impious enough to falsify the offer you formerly made?—would you defraud holy St. Bertrand of what is now his just right?—and do you not tremble at the vengeance which he will doubtless, by the hands of his ministers, inflict, if you continue thus obstinate? But I will not longer contaminate myself by holding conversation with one so lost and depraved, lest your sinful breath should prove infectious.—I shall forthwith summon the holy fathers of this diocese, who, unless you speedily repent, will deliver you over to that awful tribunal from whose sentence there is no appeal. Once more I warn you,—repent, I say, or tremble at the fate which awaits you, if you persist, and once incur the anathema of holy mother church.”

With these words the abbess left her, and overwhelmed with melancholy at the dangers which were now drawing to a crisis, her wonted spirits almost forsook her. Willingly would she have retired from her own painful reflections to seek consolation from Magdalen, but that she feared involving that tender hearted friend in her own disgrace.—Painful retrospection was alone in her power,—bitterly did she regret the step she had taken, and sincerely did she repent her thwarting her father’s views; for the mild affections of her heart severely accused her, when she reflected, that had she acquiesced in his desires, by taking the vows, her fortune would have made her family happy, which now would only be expended in pampering the pride of the fat abbess, and assist her in extending her hypocrisy. Though, as before observed, Mary was totally unacquainted with what had passed between the *Sieur de Vavasour* and the abbess, yet the latter, in order to make every thing as secure as possible, had spared no pains to render all the endeavours of the father to remove his daughter ineffectual; and for that purpose she had sufficient interest to procure an extraordinary convocation of the priesthood of the diocese, who had recourse to their accustomed fulminating doctrine of threatening the father of Mary, if he dared to persist in her removal, to lay him under the pains and penalties of excommunication,—a threat which obliged him to desist, and left him only to deplore his own cruelty and avarice, from the fruits of which he was now so justly deprived.

Mary had not continued alone more than an hour, when she was joined by sister *Bridget* and the portress;—they brought the commands of the abbess for her to retire to a cell in the penitentiary, where, as they expressed, the abbess hoped *St. Bertrand* would inspire her with better thoughts, and expel the evil spirit which had so fatally wrought on her youth and weakness.

Mary with determined courage concealed the horror with which this command inspired her, and followed the nuns, without reply, to the place appointed. It was a cell in the outward cloisters, of about six feet square, faintly enlightened by a small grated window at a considerable height from the ground. The whole furniture of this gloomy apartment consisted of an old table, the feet of which were fixed in the ground; it stood before a recess in the wall, near six feet in length and two in breadth, in this a straw mattress had been deposited. As the wretched hole was raised a convenient height from the ground, it served a double purpose of both chair and bed.—On the table a large crucifix was erected, and underneath was placed a skull upon some crossed bones; and for fear these solemn insignias should not render the mind sufficiently gloomy, a large



book lay open at a particular passage, which set forth the heavy punishments, both in this world and that to come, attending different crimes, particularly that of offending the saints by speaking evil of them, or attempting to deceive them by protestations or false promises,—which crime, without exemplary repentance, and a life of severe mortification, was doomed to be expiated by fire in this world, and the offender's ashes scattered by the wind.

Mary glanced her eye over the dreadful page, and shuddered with wild dismay.—In a few minutes she collected her almost fleeting senses, and said mournfully,—“Am I then in truth such a sinner as is here pourtrayed?—Oh, righteous Power, if such be the punishments threatened to those who unintentionally offend the saints, what will be their lot who wilfully sin against *thee* by vile hypocrisy, and for the sake of filthy lucre. I have indeed acted deceitfully, for which may I obtain forgiveness; but my unhappy situation will, I trust, in some measure plead in my behalf. Gross as I feel my error, would it not yet be more deadly to pollute the altar with false vows?—else why should I feel a moment's repugnance in quitting a world in which I have no particular interest,—no tender parents,—no affectionate brothers or sisters,—no friends.—Gracious Heaven! to what purpose was I born, forlorn and deserted as I am?—*My very prosperity becomes my bane*, and serves but for an instrument of persecution.—I love Magdalen, and her company would soothe the horrors of this living grave;—but should she die, to be forever confined within these hated walls, without a friend, and surrounded by vile moping hypocrites—my heart revolts at the thought, and my constant murmurings and discontent would increase my first error, which repentance may obliterate, into the most deadly and fearful trespass.—How to determine I know not.—Heaven protect and direct me!—Could I but once more see my dear Magdalen, she should be the arbitress of my fate, and her voice at once direct and fix my irresolute mind.”

Mary passed several hours, after this soliloquy in sad and dreary silence, which was at length interrupted by the door of her prison being unbarred, unbolted, and unlocked, and in a few moments old Bridget entered, bearing a pitcher of water in one hand and a small loaf in the other. Having placed these sparing aliments on the table in gloomy silence, she solemnly stalked forth, and the same harsh noise of fastening the huge portal occurred as grated the ear upon its opening.

Mary surveyed what had been brought her with silent anguish, but her heart was too full to take any nourishment, except a little water; after which, having commended herself to that Being whose eye can pierce even into the deepest recess of a dungeon, she threw herself upon the humble couch, and soon sunk to rest, if perturbed and broken slumbers can be so called,—for the events of the day had made too strong an impression to be easily erased from her mind, though sleep had closed her eyelids. At one time, fancy pourtrayed the abbess, furious and swollen with rage, threatening all the pains and penalties that human art could inflict; and denouncing eternal vengeance, if she longer refused to take the vows. Mary thought she was reduced to the most hopeless despair, and was for a short space wavering and undetermined how to act, when suddenly a soft voice whispered,—“Persevere!” Her spirits now appeared raised to an uncommon degree of resolution, insomuch that she gave the abbess a firm denial.—“Die then, wicked irreligious dissembler,” pronounced the enraged phantom, suddenly darting a poniard at the breast of the trembling sleeper. Horror struck, and anticipating instantaneous death, already she conceived she felt the dagger's point, when lo, a radiant form, with a motion

quick as the lightning's flash, arrested the stroke, and the murderous weapon fell from her nerveless arm.—“Die *thou*, wicked irreligious dissembler,” pronounced the areal being, in a voice that appeared to shake the building, a bright flame of fire at the same time issuing from his mouth, expanding and spreading, until it completely encircled the now terrified superior, whose loud scream betokened horror and dismay.—“Oh! save me, Mary!” she seemed to say, “save me from the avenging flame!—I sink—I die!—Mercy!—mercy!—mercy!”

The terrific sounds struck so fearfully on the ear of Mary that they dissolved the bands of sleep and she awoke under all the influence of a disturbed imagination. Starting from her humble couch, she gazed wildly around, nor could she for a while persuade herself that it was only an illusion proceeding from perturbed spirits, and a more than usual abstinence.

After some little time she became calm enough to reflect on the particular circumstances of her dream, with which her mind was much impressed.—“The deeds of the wicked,” said she, “are a consuming fire.—Persevere.—Yes, I will persevere, for surely it was the voice of my guardian angel who pronounced that consolatory word.”—Mary's mind now felt more calm than it had been since her confinement, and she resolved to await the event with a firm and patient resignation.

## CHAPTER X.

WE shall leave Mary for a short space, and return to the superior, whose soft and luxurious couch had by no means been a place of calm ease and quiet rest, for her slumbers had also been broken and disturbed.—Numberless horrid forms appeared flitting before her disturbed imagination, some reproaching and severely censuring her hypocrisy,—others exhorting her to repentance; amongst the latter, her disordered fancy distinguished two figures in winding sheets, who, though pale and emaciated, yet bore the perfect resemblance of Magdalen and Mary.—Rising, as she thought, to correct their bold intrusion, their forms suddenly were lost in air,—loud thunder shook the walls,—vivid lightning encircled her on every side.—Her mental agitation now burst the bonds of sleep, and in an indescribable agony of terror and dismay, she shrieked so loud as to alarm old Martha, who, rushing into the apartment, demanded the cause? Bereft of her usual cunning by the fright, Martha heard the dreadful vision recounted.—Having crossed herself, in due form she then comforted and soothed the abbess, and finally, that no efforts on *her* part might be wanting, in order to strengthen the relaxed nerves of the superior, she filled up and presented her a large cup of aqua vitæ; and as tales of terror sometimes make a strong impression on sympathetic and feeling minds, Martha, to avoid all bad consequences, followed the good example.

The cordial was truly reviving to both parties, the tremulous nerves of the Lady Abbess soon regained their former tone, and Martha was emboldened, partly by the liquor, and partly by the confidence her superior had just reposed in her, to offer gratuitously, what she called a bit of advice.—“My good Lady,” said the antiquated nun, “why will you discomfort and terrify yourself about two sinful ungrateful creatures, when you have the power to make them act as you see best befitting your own will and pleasure.—If Mary’s perverseness blinds her to the interest you have, that is to say, which you take for her soul’s health, let her pampered body be daily scourged, and reduced by fasting and solitary meditation, and, my life upon it, she will soon be brought to compliance; and as for her mincing demure friend Magdalen, who, by the bye, I take to be more hypocrite than saint, it is my firm belief that she advises and upholds her in her stubbornness.—Were I in your place, I would separate them entirely, for they only corrupt each other with vain and idle discourse.”

“Good Martha,” returned the abbess, “your counsel I partly approve, and if Mary does not speedily retract her perverseness, she shall feel all the vengeance that our holy religion empowers its ministers to inflict on obstinate and incorrigible offenders;—but first of all I mean to try milder methods. After matins send Magdalen to me, I will see how she is disposed to assist in this affair, for I know that her power with the weak girl is great. She shall be commanded to visit Mary in her cell, and to advise her to a speedy compliance;—if she refuses, she shall partake of her punishment,—and that there may not be any deception, prepare yourself to hear, unseen by them, what passes.—But hark! there is the matin bell—let devotion alone now be our care.”

With demure and solemn steps, the arch hypocrites then repaired to the chapel, raising, with apparent sanctity, their hands and eyes to Heaven; while their sordid and grovelling souls were absorbed and chained to earth.

Matins being ended, these habitual devotees, who changed according to time and place, put off the outward garb of sanctity, and cloathed themselves with their usual mammon of unrighteousness.

Martha was dispatched for Magdalen; while the superior, seating herself in state, debated within herself whether she should receive her with all the awful dignity of an arbitrary cloistered tyrant, or whether she should unbend the accustomed severity of her features, and dress her face with the smiles of mildness and benevolence.

The latter was just concluded upon, and she had only time to adjust the proper muscles, as Magdalen entered and kneeled at her feet.

The requested benediction was given with much apparent sweetness and complacency. Magdalen then arose, and the Lady Abbess having made a sign to her with her hand, to take a seat, she addressed her in this manner:—"I am greatly pleased, daughter, to see, for some time past, that melancholy which formerly clouded your brow, give way to a calm serenity;—believe me, my dear child, the vain and gaudy pleasures of sinful life, are not to be regretted, and will ever, on reflection, sink as nothing, when brought in competition with holy retirement.—We here pass our days unenvying and unenvied, and peaceably await that great change which insures our eternal happiness."

"Heaven grant, holy mother, that we may be truly prepared," replied Magdalen.—"I humbly trust that I am at length weaned from all worldly allurements; and begin, indeed, to find that inward peace which none can enjoy whose minds are divided from their Creator by coveting precarious honours, fading riches, or fleeting pleasures."

"You talk this well," interrupted the abbess, dropping her assumed complacency, and reddening all over;—for the latter part of Magdalen's speech was, from innate guilt, self applied.—"But are you sure," continued she, "that—that you *truly* feel as you speak,—that you do not deceive yourself,—or what is still more heinous, by attempting to deceive me, you are false to——"

"My God!" wildly articulated Magdalen, rising and dropping on her knees.—"Oh, never,—never dare I lie against the Holy Spirit!—Should I not then be another Saphira?—and might I not expect the awful thunder of Almighty vengeance hurled at my guilty head, pronouncing—*Die, wretch!*"

"Hold!—Hold!" shrieked out the abbess, "nor longer wound my ears, I charge you, with your shocking impieties!—Begone instantly!" waving her hand towards the entrance of the portal. Magdalen obeyed the peremptory command, and the conscience stricken abbess, in the utmost perturbation of spirit, sunk upon her soft cushions gasping for breath; for Magdalen's words had awakened and renewed with redoubled horror the terrors of her dream.

Leaving the abbess to her own reflections for a small space, we will return to Magdalen, who, in her retreat, was accosted by Martha, with,—"So you have your lesson, I suppose,—but i' faith it has been but a short one.—Why what is to do now! you look as if you had seen the evil one."

"Evil enough, indeed, I fear," returned Magdalen, with a sigh.

"Oh! oh! then it seems you do not approve the part you are to take in the business;—but you had better comply, or it will be worse for you."

"What business, good Martha, and why am I thus threatened?—Surely there is some strange insanity abroad!"

“Insanity, quotha!—Come, leave this fooling, and haste to obey the abbess’s commands.”

“I have obeyed them.”

“You have obeyed them!—why this is downright madness.—Which way did you get in and out then—through the latticed bars?”

“I noticed no latticed bars; you introduced me through the portal yourself, and I returned by the same way that I entered.”

“Indeed!—Well—well, my jeering companion,—we shall soon see who is to be the laughing stock.—I go to acquaint the abbess that you *have* obeyed her commands, though, to my certain knowledge you have not been near Mary.—Never fear but she shall be told in what manner—for do not think that I will be laughed at with impunity.” So saying, with an hysteric grin, which was truly diabolical, from her countenance being distorted by passion, she hastily quitted Magdalen to put her threats in execution.

The old nun’s rage threw her off her guard, so that the usual ceremony of humbly tapping at the haughty superior’s retired apartment door was omitted; in lieu of which she forced it open with such a sudden jerk, that it rebounded with a noise that occasioned the abbess to start and stand aghast,—doubly increasing the disorder in which Magdalen had left her.

For some moments each gazed wildly on the other; at length the abbess broke silence, and with her lips quivering with passion, exclaimed,—“What want ye, old fiend?—How dare you, thus unceremoniously to break on my privacy?”

“Pardon me, good Lady, I was so provoked that I scarce knew what I did, for Magdalen——”

“Well, what of her?”

“Why she says she *has* obeyed your command.”

“True.”

“But she has not visited Mary,—so how can that be?”

“Because she knew nothing of the matter—She obeyed my command of quitting my presence.—Her impertinence—but no matter,—in short she displeased me, and—and I dismissed her somewhat hastily; but summon her again, and hold yourself in readiness to give her access to Mary, and to heed their conversation.”

Martha instantly obeyed, and in a few minutes returned with Magdalen, in which time the abbess had again brought her features to their former composure, and she received the fair nun with a gracious nod, accompanied by a smile of complacency.—“I am scrupulous, child,” said she, “perhaps I am *over* scrupulous, when sacred subjects are the theme of conversation;—but I trust you did not mean to speak irreverently, though your expressions were certainly not sufficiently guarded.—But enough of this for the present,—for I wish to hold some conversation with you of the utmost import, on which, perhaps, the salvation of an immortal soul depends;—say, if through your means a wayward spirit could be reclaimed, would it not be a glorious triumph over sin and Satan?—and would it not, think you, plead in mitigation, when your offences are brought before the great tribunal?”

“Oh, teach me, dear Lady,” interrupted Magdalen, with great energy, “teach me how I may become the humble instrument in such a cause, and you shall find my whole soul devoted to your pious wishes.”

“Why that is well,—and no doubt conduct like this, and an implicit submission to your spiritual directors, will, in time, obliterate your past misdeeds. Since I find you so disposed, I shall instruct you in the way you can promote this holy work.—The perverseness of the novice, Mary, is not unknown to you, and, mark me well, I am perfectly aware of the power you have over her;—I expect, then, that you exert this power, for her’s and your own soul’s salvation. This business completed, you may both, through life, expect from me every mark of favour and indulgence.”

The abbess paused, and Magdalen was about to reply, but the superior, possibly auguring no ready acquiescence to her will, from the nun’s countenance, immediately rose up and led her to the portal, saying,—“Retire, I want no reply,—Martha waits to conduct you.—Act in obedience to my commands, or dread the vengeance of the holy fathers.”

Confused and astonished at what had passed, Magdalen was too much agitated to form any resolution.—Indeed she had no time for deliberation, for Martha immediately accosted her with,—“Well, I suppose we are not at cross purposes this time, so if you will condescend to tread in my footsteps, I shall lead you where you are to go.”

So saying, she sullenly led the way through a chain of dark and winding passages, at the termination of which their course was interrupted by a ponderous door, secured on the outside by an iron bar, a lock, and three bolts; the sonorous noise of which, while they were separately removed, and the surrounding gloom, impressed an unusual terror on the already alarmed mind of Magdalen. A cold dew stood on her forehead, her lips opened to expostulate, but her tongue refused its office.—Immediately the harsh grating of the hinges vibrated on her ear, the portal was thrown wide, and Magdalen found herself within the space it enclosed. Before she could collect her disordered thoughts, she heard the dissonant fastenings again replaced, and the next minute she found herself in the arms of the persecuted novice. For some time their overcharged hearts would not permit any other communication than by their mingled tears, and the reiterated exclamations of—“Dear Mary!”—“Dear, dear Magdalen!”

At length, being more composed, they seated themselves on the humble couch, and Mary recounted all she had felt since her confinement,—not forgetting to relate her dream, the impression it had made on her mind, and her resolution to persist in refusing to take the veil.

“Alas! dear Mary,” said Magdalen, “if that is your determination, I dread the event;—what cannot cruel power inflict within these walls, where peace and comfort never enter? Do not think that I am permitted to visit you out of kindness,—I am sent for the express purpose of persuading you to accord with their desires; nor would I fail to do so, were this indeed a sanctuary in which the unhappy might find rest, in holy meditation and calm retirement,—for you have no tender parent,—no affectionate brother,—no sympathizing friend!—The whole world, to you, presents a blank,—one vast and dreary void!”

“Oh, my God!” exclaimed Mary, “for what purpose was I born?—was it only to be rendered miserable?—Even the offspring of wolves and tigers experience some affection from the creatures that gave them being,—is it just that Providence should be more bountiful to them than to me!”

“Forbear, my dear Mary, it is sinful to repine,—but much more so, to arraign the wisdom of that Being, who, for a time, permits injustice and oppression to flourish, in

order that his own power and might may be more clearly evinced to short sighted mortals, and that their future happiness may be more complete. Did you not tell me, that in your dream, when reduced to despair, your spirits were suddenly raised?—and again, that when a form, like the abbess, raised the fatal poniard, a celestial Being arrested the impending stroke? Believe me, my dear girl, I augur much from your dream.—Put your whole trust in the Almighty, and humble yourself in lowly reverence before him,—he alone can aid you in your distress;—for I will not impose upon your understanding to say any help can be attained from mortals.”

“To him humbly will I submit, and implore pardon for my fretful impatience,” said Mary.—“But, dear Magdalen, what account mean you to render of your mission—for I know your soul too well to think you will advance a falsehood, when the superior demands in what manner you have obeyed her?—Will it not be best to say, you did not care to urge me too much in the first visit; that you are not without *hopes* of my compliance, for that I have no hold on which I can ground an affection, without the walls of this dismal seclusion. This, alas! is a sad truth, and, to enjoy your company, my dear friend, I would willingly submit, in any other *real* religious house;—but to be continually surrounded by a parcel of wicked hypocrites, with that spiteful ugly old harridan, Martha, at their head, is too much for human patience to bear.”

“I grieve, Mary, to say, that I fear there is too much justice in your remarks of the pretended sanctity of many within these walls;—nor are you deceived in supposing, that I will not submit, whatever may be the consequence to myself, to say that I have implicitly obeyed the abbess’s arbitrary commands.—I however think it right, more on your account than on my own, to soften the report, and it may be as well to do it in the manner you have proposed; for without a miracle being wrought in your favour, I at present can see no alternative to your taking the vows, or falling a sacrifice to your non-compliance.”

“Act as you see best befitting the circumstances that may occur, my dear Magdalen,” said Mary, “and those, to my sorrow, will doubtless speedily be called into action, for that abominable hag, Martha, will soon be here, and she——”

The door was now heard to unlock, unbar, and unbolt, and with a spiteful rigidity of countenance, in stalked the much affronted old nun.—“Yes,” re-echoed Martha, “She,—the abominable old hag and harridan is here, and will most faithfully recount every syllable of your pious conversation.—Reviling your superiors,—accusing them of hypocrisy,—casting an odium on holy religion,—if this does not bring down punishment, impiety may rest secure.—But, thank Heaven, we do not live in an age of paganism, and if the holy tribunal doth not take cognizance of such misdeeds, Heaven itself would avenge them. Old hag!—we shall see what a figure beauty will cut, when smoking at a stake!”

“I know not what either have done to deserve such a fate,” replied Magdalen, “if you allude to us.”

“And, however good your will may be to bring us thither,” continued Mary, “thank Heaven that power does not rest with you.—It appears that you have been meanly endeavouring to overhear our conversation, for what purpose is obvious; in doing this, the adage has been verified,—‘Listeners never hear any good of themselves.’—Yet let me conjure you, for your soul’s sake, not to aggravate what you have heard;—if you do not choose to soften, let there be no malicious additions. I may, perhaps, be blamable for

speaking of you in not the most respectful manner;—but be assured, were it in my power, I would not do you the least prejudice.”

“Oh, ho!—oh, ho!” horribly grinned the old nun, at the same time sticking her arms a kimbo, and waddling up to Mary, “what, you want to wheedle and soften the old hag, do you;—but you may spare yourself the trouble, for——”

“Away with such mean derogatory suppositions,” interrupted Mary, “nor dare to think my soul on a level with thine!—Make concession to one like thee!—Sooner will I brave the utmost rigour my unjust enemies can inflict!—Farewel, my dear Magdalen,” throwing herself into her arms, and bursting into tears, “you shall be remembered in my prayers. Possibly this may be our last embrace,—yet we shall one day meet in happier regions.—Farewel—Oh, farewell!”

The afflicted friends now tore themselves from each other’s arms.—Mary threw herself upon her wretched couch, covering her face with her hand and sobbing aloud; while Magdalen, equally moved, slowly quitted the cell, followed by Martha, who failed not to replace the massy fastenings which secured the hapless prisoner.—“My presence, I suppose, can be dispensed with until you have made your report, I shall therefore, for the present retire,” said Magdalen; “when the abbess requires me to come forth, I shall obey her summons.”

Martha heard with sullen silence, and pursued her way to the superior’s retired apartment, while the young nun, with a heavy heart, sought her lonely cell, foreboding that much inquietude would arise from the late events.



## CHAPTER XI.

MAGDALEN was not mistaken in her conjectures, for the irritated old woman, by her relation, had incensed the superior into a perfect frenzy, under the influence of which, she ordered Mary to be severely scourged, a command that Martha, aided by Bridget, took care to see obeyed. This violence, however, had not the effect of making the injured novice more compliant; on the contrary,—though mild and susceptible by nature, even unto weakness, she was now roused into a state little short of madness, and which terminated in a fever so violent, that on the second day her life was despaired of.

The abbess, for the first time, now began to think she had gone too far. Not that she felt any compunction for her savage barbarity; but she feared to defeat her own projects by Mary's death. Her character, too, for sanctity and humanity, possibly would be called in question; for, though the agents of her cruelty might be presumed to be her creatures, yet she knew that caballing and whispering was not unfrequent, even within the walls of a convent.

As Magdalen had also incurred the Superior's displeasure, she also was thought a meet object for punishment, though the abbess did not think it prudent to carry it to the extent she had done with Mary; she therefore contented herself with only restricting her of her usual liberty, and ordered her to keep close within her cell. But this restraint was of no long continuance; for when Mary was supposed to be in danger, it occurred to the sagacious abbess, that no one would be so likely to soothe her perturbed mind as Magdalen. She was, therefore, commanded forthwith to administer to the necessities of her afflicted friend, and by every means in her power to endeavour to recal her wandering reason.

Magdalen willingly obeyed, but was greatly shocked to see the ravages that the disorder had made, in so short a period, on the person of the persecuted Mary; she therefore lost no time in doing every thing in her power, not only to restore her wandering senses, but also to repair her weakened frame, which was much shaken and impaired by the violence of the fever. To aid both purposes, she obtained of the abbess permission to exclude all those who had been Mary's persecutors, and to be herself the sole attendant; this the abbess willingly acquiesced in, not from a desire to gratify either of the friends, but it was too plain to admit of a doubt, that Mary's derangement would never subside, while Martha and Bridget were admitted, her irritation of mind constantly increasing while they were present—nor would she take any medicine or nourishment from their hands.

A very little time convinced the abbess, that this was the only method to pursue, for Mary's disorder gradually abated, insomuch, that in a few days, she recognised the person of her friend, and rejoiced at her presence. But nature had been too much exhausted to expect an entire and speedy restoration, for which reason the crafty abbess forbore to urge, for the present, the completion of her interested project; on the contrary, her art and hypocrisy led her to assume an air of kindness and affability—a behaviour too palpable to deceive either Mary or Magdalen. It however had one good effect, for it rendered their situation more comfortable, by the liberty they enjoyed of a free and uninterrupted communication, of which even little Ela was now suffered to partake.

Some months thus passed, to the mutual satisfaction of the friends, who, notwithstanding the dull monotonous routine of a conventual life, thought themselves happy that the abbess had abated her former persecution; and that she contented herself with only daily recapitulating to Mary, the mild and calm satisfaction that the professed devotee enjoyed, on these occasions, appealing to Magdalen, whether they were not superior to the turbulent and guilty pleasures of the great world.

“Since the Almighty hath so willed it,” replied Magdalen, one day, “I bow submissively; and yet there are ties which busy memory will sometimes recal to wound and lacerate poor human nature. Oh, reflection! Parents—a friend and sister—and, alas! those still dearer ties of affection——”

“Magdalen,” sternly interrupted that abbess,—“have you forgotten your solemn—the only condition which preserved your wretched——”

“Ah, no!” articulated the distressed nun, dropping on her knees, and wildly gazing around, “my terrified imagination again presents the horrid scene;—again I behold the uplifted dagger pointed at my breast by injured——”

“Forbear, frenzied woman,” exclaimed the abbess, putting her hand before her mouth, “nor tempt your certain fate, should you betray——Instantly retire, and recollect yourself.”

Magdalen obeyed, and slowly rising sought her cell, to contemplate, in painful solitude, over the misfortunes of her eventful life.

A silence of some minutes ensued, which Mary did not venture to interrupt, in which interval the abbess endeavoured, and in part succeeded, to regain her former smiling complacency; after which she bestowed the accustomed benediction, and majestically withdrew.

Magdalen’s meditations were soon interrupted by a message from the abbess, requiring her immediate presence, a command which the fair nun instantly obeyed, though with a heavy heart; foreboding not only a severe reprimand, but also some severe penance being inflicted, for having inadvertently suffered her feelings to recal past images to her heated imagination.

But severity at this time did not suit the abbess’s purpose.—Magdalen was therefore agreeably disappointed when she found that the superior received her with a serene countenance, and mildly cautioned her to be more guarded in her expressions; as it might lead to dreadful consequences, from the effects of which it would not be even in her, the superior’s power, to save her.

## CHAPTER XII.

SOME little time now passed in a state of happiness, that is when compared with the past, for the abbess ceased from her persecution;—in addition to which, the health of Mary became completely established. Little Ela was sometimes permitted to accompany them in their walks, and they again wandered together in social converse; congratulating each other on the calm of the present moment, and praying for its continuance.

When the child was with them they confined their walks to the garden; at other times, they would wander beyond the bridge, and not unfrequently the friends would drop a tear of pity on the sod which covered the remains of poor Agatha.

One evening, Mary having complained that she had a slight pain in her head, Magdalen would have declined walking, and continued with her, but the young novice knowing her friend's fondness for her accustomed exercise, insisted that it should be pursued; saying, that as the pain was but slight, she was well enough to accompany her. Magdalen, however, would not admit of this exertion,—at length it was agreed, that Magdalen should take a walk by herself as far as the bridge, and then return, as by that time it would be about the hour for vespers.—As this friendly altercation had continued some time, it was nearly dusk, the sun having sunk beneath the horizon, when the young friends separated.

The vesper bell tolled for prayer, and the nuns were assembled, but Magdalen did not appear. The abbess loudly exclaimed, and threatened a severe penance.—At that moment a vivid flash of lightning, accompanied by a tremendous burst of thunder, produced an instantaneous trepidation and silence in the whole assembly;—all fell on their knees, and endeavoured, by fervent supplication, to deprecate the wrath of Heaven.

For six hours the storm raged with the utmost fury,—the lightning exhibited whole sheets of fire, which illumined all around,—the thunder shook the building to its foundation,—the rain poured in torrents,—and such furious gusts of wind howled around, that the affrighted sisterhood, deeming all things in nature were going to wreck, had not leisure to bestow a thought on ought but themselves; alternately shrieking, and each, putting up prayers for her own individual safety. Poor Magdalen was therefore forgotten by the abbess, and indeed by all except Mary, whose anxiety getting the better of her terror, she attempted to bribe the old gardener and the portress to accompany her in search of her friend. But these personages declared, that the wealth of Christendom should not tempt them near the unhallowed purlieu of Agatha's grave,—where, doubtless, the foul fiend that guided the fatal dagger, was roaming, with more than common activity on such a ruthless night.

But a cessation of the storm, and a fine morning, brought a quietus to the perturbed minds of the alarmed fraternity;—their piety slackened as the hurricane subsided,—their vows to the saints, particularly pecuniary ones, were no more remembered,—and the extraordinary disappearance of Magdalen became the natural substitute. Some of the sisters remarked, with a calm stoical gravity, that doubtless she had perished in the storm; while others, amongst whom were Martha and Bridget, gave it as their opinion, that the evil spirit over the bridge, had not only destroyed her, but also had raised the late fearful tempest concluding their charitable surmise with saying,—“Aye, aye, hypocrisy, vanity, and pride will always meet with its deserved punishment.”

Whatever the superior's thoughts were, she however had the cunning to keep them to herself; and commanding silence, said, that some of the nuns, accompanied by the old gardener, should, at the first dawn of day, seek her. The latter did not dare disobey, and Mary directly presented herself for this purpose; others excused themselves, one having a violent cold, and could not therefore endanger her life by walking on the wet ground,—another had the tooth ache,—a third would have gone with a very good will, but then she must of course leave them at the bridge, having made a vow never to pass it. The abbess then ordered Bridget and Martha to accompany Mary and the gardener, saying,—that she would herself, though their superior, have set them an example of charity and humiliation, by heading the search, but that she had private devotions to perform, in gratitude for the preservation of the community from the effects of the late tempest.

The abbess having bestowed her benediction, majestically withdrew to her private apartment, to await the result of the search. Mary also waited, but impatiently, the return of light, which no sooner appeared than the whole posse proceeded, and without experiencing much terror from an apprehension of supernatural agency; it being a consequent conclusion, for weak understandings to associate darkness with areal forms, whether celestial or infernal.

This being the case, the gardener now declared, that being in such good company, he should not much care whether he, even for once, passed the dreaded bridge, should their search not be terminated before. The two old nuns held their peace, only now and then by significant winks, nods, and shrugs, gave each other to understand, they expected as fatal a catastrophe, in the present instance, as that which befel poor Agatha.

As for Mary, her friendly feelings for Magdalen, unsheltered, and exposed to all the fury of the tempest, absorbed every other consideration; that she had fallen a victim to its violence, she doubted not.—She would fain have consoled herself with the idea, that Magdalen's misfortunes and sufferings had now terminated; yet, when she reflected that she herself would be left without a single friend or adviser, her anguish was redoubled.—How trifling did she now think were her late troubles, and how gladly would she have compounded with acceding to the abbess's views, provided she could have regained her lost friend, and made her a partner in her seclusion.—“Ah!” said she, mentally, “I shall never again behold the hapless Magdalen, for doubtless she has perished.”

The thought was like the stroke of death,—a cold chill came over her,—she groaned aloud,—vital animation was for a time suspended,—and she fell motionless on the damp earth.

The old nuns shrieked and turned round, their pallid wrinkled countenances assuming a cadaverous hue, from fear, while the almost superannuated gardener's long neck was stretched out to develop the sudden mystery;—his eye-balls were fixed on vacancy, his short grey hairs became erect and bristling, his nostrils distended, and his whole frame agitated and tremulous, from extreme terror.

“Lord have mercy upon us!” exclaimed the nuns.

“Lord have mercy upon us!” roared out the old man.

Immediately some underwood in a thick coppice, close to the gardener, became violently agitated,—a rushing noise was heard, accompanied by a fearful scream,—the old sisters again shrieked, and measured their lengths by Mary.—Not so the gardener, for terror at different periods gives power as well as inability;—such now nerved the limbs of

the old man, who suddenly starting from the horrid spot, ran, or rather flew, till he regained the lodge of the convent, where, breathless with his extraordinary exertion, and incoherent from fright, he presented himself before the portress, who, not being able to make out the cause of alarm herself, thought it expedient to repair forthwith to the superior, and acquaint her with as much as she knew of the gardener's return.

Some little time elapsed before she could gain admittance, for the abbess being fatigued with watching during the storm, had, after recruiting her spirits with some choice viands and exhilarating cordials, quietly, now the danger was over, resigned herself to sleep, and was not in the most pleasant humour to be thus disturbed; but, on hearing that the gardener was returned alone, and much agitated, she thought it necessary to descend to the lobby, and endeavour to gain what information she could into the cause.

The old man was, by this time, sufficiently recovered to recite, minutely and circumstantially, the order of their march, until the terrific groan of Mary; her falling lifeless on the earth, in consequence, as he supposed, of her seeing some frightful apparition—the old nuns sharing the same fate—the goblin's disappearance, and loud scream, which shook the whole coppice—with divers other matters, which either fear or fancy had impressed on his disturbed imagination.

“And what is become of Mary, Bridget, and Martha?” enquired the abbess.

“Dead—stone dead,” replied the gardener.

“Dead!” re-echoed the superior. “Good Providence! And did you not see any thing of Magdalen?”

“Nothing! doubtless the evil spirit hath borne her clean away with him.”

“Heaven preserve us!” ejaculated the superior;—“but lose no time—haste to the dormitory belonging to the chapel, and summon Friar Lawrence; tell him a pressing occasion requires his immediate attendance, and do you accompany him hither.”

The old man obeyed, and speedily returned with the friar, for his order not requiring the ornament of dress, he needed but little time to array himself. The abbess, then, in few words, explained the cause for requiring his presence, and having called for two more of the older nuns, this company set forth, to renew the search for Magdalen, and to assist, if not already past assistance, the fallen members of the late cavalcade.

The abbess and holy father led the van, descanting on the disappearance of Magdalen, and the succeeding occurrence, while the two grave sisters formed a corps of reserve, and the gardener, at some little distance, and perfectly to his satisfaction, brought up the rear; resolving, on the very first alarm, to make his retreat, while the evil spirit was employed in carrying off, or otherwise annoying, his superiors. But a little time convinced him, that this precaution would be needless; for, on a nearer approach to the dreaded bridge, they all saw—not the apparition of Agatha, but the corporeal substances of Martha, Bridget, and Mary, sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, in grave and social converse.

On perceiving the abbess and her companions, the first party immediately arose, and approached to meet them; when the superior lost no time in demanding an explanation of the gardener's report. Mary described her fainting as being caused by her concern for Magdalen; and the old nuns *their's*, in consequence of the supposed death of Mary.—“But the gardener,” rejoined the superior, reports, “that after he supposed all three to be lifeless, there was another loud scream, which proceeded from the coppice, accompanied by a violent agitation of the leaves and branches.”

“I know not from whence that could be produced, or by what means,” interrupted Mary, “unless it was occasioned by a screech owl; for I remember, on my recovery, I saw a very large one enter the coppice, making at the same time a fearful noise.”

“Doubtless it was nothing but this bird that occasioned the silly old gardener’s terror,” replied the friar.

“But have you seen nothing of Magdalen?” said the abbess.

“No, good lady,” answered Bridget; “though, indeed, we have not yet crossed the brook to search the wilderness.”

“We will then, so please you, direct our steps that way,” said the friar, “and also examine the stream, least, peradventure, accident, or design, may have precipitated her therein.”

“So be it,” replied the abbess; and the whole party then moved forward, carefully exploring every brake, dell, or cover; following also the course of the stream to its outlet, under the mossy wall which surrounded the convent’s grounds, where a strong iron grating was placed, in order to prevent any thing but water from passing.

But, notwithstanding the strictest scrutiny took place, not the least vestige of Magdalen appeared, and the whole groupe slowly returned to the convent; the superior and the friar earnestly conversing, in a low voice, while the rest silently followed.

Just as they were about to re-enter the convent, they saw the Abbot of Pau, moving with hasty steps towards them, who, addressing the abbess, exclaimed, in a hurried tone of voice,—“Have you heard the rumour?”

“Of what tendency,” replied she.

“That Henry of England is incog, in this province.”

“Ha!” groaned out the abbess, turning pale.

“Good heavens!” ejaculated the abbot, “has any thing displeasing?”—

“I—I was about sending for you,” falteringly replied the superior,—“Magdalen is missing!”

“Ha!” cried the abbot, his countenance assuming as pallid a hue as that of the abbess, and the eyes of both were now fixed on each other, in all the wildness of consternation and dismay.

For a short space not a word more was uttered; at length the abbess broke the awful silence, by commanding the inmates of the convent to retire, when she and the abbot, after having continued in conversation for about half an hour, the latter retired in much seeming perturbation.

### CHAPTER XIII.

FOR three whole days the abbess was not visible, and the gates of the convent were kept closely shut and barricaded, but, as all remained quiet and unmolested, the novices began to ridicule this more than usual precaution; when, to their great terror and consternation, a little after midnight, on the fourth morning, the whole community was disturbed by a loud and repeated beating at the front portal, which not being answered, was renewed, with little intermission, at the other entrances. Though all were greatly alarmed, having speedily assembled together, yet the portress, Martha, and Bridget, appeared in perfect agony, often exclaiming, that nothing could save their lives. Mary, though young, and exceedingly terrified, asked the portress why she did not repair to the abbess, and counsel her in this emergency.

“Oh,” exclaimed the old beldame, “she is not in the convent; she has taken care of herself, and left us to the vengeance of the enraged.—Oh, Lord! there—there—they are breaking in,” screamed the terrified portress, the noise at this period being loudly repeated, at the same time throwing down the keys, and quitting the assembled nuns, with as much speed as her limbs would permit; in which act she was accompanied by Martha and Bridget.—In the mean time the noise ceased not, and Mary, though every limb quaked through fear, became collected enough to propose going up to a tower over the front portal, and from a lattice, demand the meaning of this violence, provided any of the sisters would accompany her. After some little hesitation, they agreed to move together in as close and compact a body as the premises, through which they were to pass, and the old winding staircase would permit. To increase their courage, they carried with them a number of lighted tapers, for darkness is no mean auxiliary to terror. In this manner they began the procession, with Mary at their head; as they advanced, and the light from the tapers glared through the iron-grated apertures of the tower, the knocking ceased. Mary soon reached a small turret over the portal, and demanded if any one was at the gate?—“It is I,” answered a feeble voice, “for God’s sake admit me as speedily as possible.”

“Sure it is not Magdalen!” exclaimed Mary, with joyful surprise, joined with a doubt of uncertainty.

“Magdalen indeed, and I believe I speak to Mary.—But haste, for I am faint and exhausted.”

Mary needed no more.—“It is Magdalen!—It is Magdalen returned!” said she, endeavouring to get before the rest of the cavalcade; but this was impossible, for the pass was narrow, and those that were behind in the ascent, now, in their turn became leaders.—Besides, fear had given way to curiosity;—the exit of Magdalen had been wonderful,—her sudden return was no less strange, in their speed for information it is therefore, not amazing, that they made a small mistake,—namely, in repairing to the portal without the keys. This mistake was, however, soon rectified, for they recollected the portress throwing them down, in the refectory, when she made her exit. With some difficulty they unclosed all the doors between the main entrance, and at length reached the wicket of the grand portal, through which they admitted the trembling and almost exhausted Magdalen; who had no sooner gained the threshold, and found herself in safety, than sinking into the arms of Mary she fainted away.

This was a mortifying drawback to most of the members present, who had already vociferated in a breath,—“Where have you been?”—“How came you here?”—“By what means did you quit the convent?” &c. &c.—Mary, with much difficulty, at length prevailed on them to restrain their inquiries until Magdalen was in a better state to answer them, and to content themselves in the present instance with endeavouring to restore and comfort her.

This requisition, after some little demur, they thought proper to comply with, and for a two-fold reason,—in the first place, these ladies had been carefully instructed to preserve an appearance of humanity; added to which, they sagaciously concluded, that until Magdalen was recovered, their curiosity must remain unsatisfied. They, therefore, by different applications, and by administering cordials, at length restored and bore her into the interior of the convent;—she was, however, as yet too weak and faint to indulge them with the much desired recital, which being the case, some of the elder sisters thought it advisable to search for Martha and Bridget, as representatives of the abbess, in order to acquaint them with Magdalen’s reappearance.

This, for a time, was a task of some difficulty,—for whatever was the particular reason that impressed *them* with a greater apprehension of danger than the rest of the community, yet remained unknown; certain it was, they were more anxious to withdraw themselves from it, had what they feared, namely, a forcible entry into the convent, taken place.—However, some little time after sunrise, the noise and confusion having completely subsided, these sage damsels came forth from their hiding places, and received an explanation of the cause of alarm, and of Magdalen’s return.—The latter report appeared to give them much satisfaction, though to the great surprise of the rest, they did not seem at all anxious for the fair nun’s recital,—saying, that they must insist that Magdalen should not be disturbed by any one, until the abbess arose.

“Arose!” replied one of the younger nuns, “why did not the portress say that she was not in the convent, and that——”

“I said no such thing,” gravely interrupted the old beldame,—“did I, Martha and Bridget?”

“No, to be sure you did not,” replied the latter, “and whoever raises such false reports may rest assured they will not fail to be severely punished.”—So saying, the grave triumvirate stalked out of the assembly, leaving them not a little surprised at this declaration.

A silence of some moments ensued, which was at length interrupted by Josephine,—“Well, for my part,” exclaimed she, “I think the wickedness and effrontery of some people—mind, I mention no names—is beyond every thing;—what do you say, Ursula?”

“Say,” re-echoed Ursula, “why I say nothing, for the least said is the soonest mended,—but this I will say,—that in future I shall be careful how I trust to my own hearing, or give way to the evidence of any of my senses. To be sure I thought the old cross grained portress said, when she threw down the keys, that——But I will not repeat her words, for they say that walls have ears, and there is so much mystery now-a-days in every thing;—indeed, there has been nothing but mystery and confusion since this Magdalen came among us.—I am afraid she is no great things for all her outward demureness.”



“I think,” interrupted Mary, “that you give your tongue great latitude, notwithstanding your apparent caution.—Suspend your judgment, however, if you possess any, for a little time, and, my life on it, the character of Magdalen will appear as unsullied as that of any one within the walls of this domain.”

“It ill becomes such a chit as you,” returned Josephine, “and one who is only a novice, to address the language of reproof to a professed sister; but impertinence and folly are as natural to youth——”

“As scandal and malevolence to some of riper age,” replied Mary, “when that age has been attained without acquiring wisdom, or possessing humanity and good nature.”

“I am sure you want to be taught wisdom and good manners to boot,” replied Josephine.

“And I would gladly learn,” retorted Mary, “did I know where to apply for an instructor.”

“You may depend upon it that the abbess shall hear this,” said Josephine.

“And then, you may depend upon it that the abbess shall also hear what gave rise to it; and other matters which, no doubt, she will be equally pleased with,” answered Mary.

“Come, Josephine,” said Ursula, “let us leave this weak girl to herself,—the matin bell will soon ring, when we will pray for her amendment.”

“Do,” replied Mary, “not forgetting your own at the same time.”—Mary possibly might have added something equally as flippant, but the piqued ladies gravely stalked away; contenting themselves with bestowing only a spiteful glance at the young novice as they passed by her.

In the mean time, Martha, Bridget, and the portress had held a consultation together, the result of which was, that Friar Lawrence was dispatched on an especial embassy; these grave sisters then attended matins.—Some hours after which, about midday, the Abbot of Pau was announced, and ushered into the abbess’s private apartment, where he remained some time. The abbess then made a public appearance, declaring, that for the last three days she had been greatly indisposed and obliged to keep her apartment; she then retired, accompanied by the abbot, having first dispatched Bridget to Magdalen with an order for her forthwith to attend her.

The fair nun, though still very weak, was yet sufficiently recovered to obey this summons, and was received by the abbot and abbess with an appearance of much severe gravity; but seeing her weak and trembling state, they pointed to a stool, and commanded her to sit. A silence of some minutes then ensued, after which, the abbot addressing her, said,—“Magdalen, you have, contrary to your solemn oath, and against the rules of this house, clandestinely withdrawn yourself, and been absent for some days;—you are now to declare, without any prevarication or concealment, in what manner you contrived to surmount the high walls of the convent—who were your advisers and assistants—where you have been concealed during your absence,—and with whom you have had any communication?—It is expected, in your answer, that you will be very explicit and open, not only in regard to persons, but also in describing places, and the conversations that passed in your presence, from the minute of your departure to that of your return;—by so doing, we shall be the better able to decide, how far it may plead in mitigation of the dreadful punishment attached to a breach of your solemn oaths.”

A pause of some moments now ensued, after which Magdalen, with great modesty, but equal firmness, replied,—“If it be deemed necessary, most holy Father, that I should be punished for what I could not help nor prevent, God’s will be done, and I will endeavour humbly and submissively to bow with resignation beneath the unjust sentence.”

“How, daughter!” interrupted the abbot, “for such I will still call you,—did I hear aright?—was there then force used to oblige you to leave these holy walls?—But sure it could not be!—who dare be guilty of so much impiety? and what means could they contrive to penetrate into a place where no expence has been spared to render it secure?”

“Does not this circumstance, holy father, plead in my behalf?” returned Magdalen; “could a poor weak woman, unfriended and unaided, penetrate through, or ascend such enclosures?—Means of communication also I have none, nor doth a human being know that I exist, except those that are hostile to my re-appearance in the world.—I have no wish, no desire to leave this place, else why did I return, the minute that I was at liberty so to do? Yet I must confess, there are some ties—some dear pledges, of whom, nevertheless, could I but sometimes be assured, they were well and happy, I need no more.—Here would I live—here die.”

“Dear daughter,” replied the abbot, in a softened tone,—“your words have the appearance of artlessness, and I find myself inclined to give them credence, their tenor still tends to confirm their first import; proceed then minutely, and without interruption, with a narrative of all that happened after you entered the garden on that eventful day, in which you was missing.”

“An eventful day, indeed, holy father,” replied Magdalen,—“and never to be forgotten by me. You may remember, lady,” said she, addressing the abbess, “that Mary and I had been accustomed to walk together in the convent garden; on that fearful evening, I went forth by myself, for some faint flashes of lightning having appeared, and of which Mary had great dread, having also a trifling indisposition, she declined accompanying me, and would fain have dissuaded me from walking, and fortunate would it have been had I taken her counsel. I, however, only meant to proceed to the bridge, and from thence return to vespers. I had gained the proposed termination of my walk, and for a few minutes leaned on the old fence, seriously intent in viewing the reflection of the lightning playing on the water, when suddenly I was aroused by a dreadful flash, succeeded by a crash that nearly stunned me.—In the terror of the moment, instead of hastening to the convent, I pursued a contrary direction, and unknowing what I did, rushed over the bridge, and sought for refuge in a thicket; meantime the rain descended in torrents, and returning recollection prompted me to seek the convent, though certain of being drenched to the skin.—On raising my eyes for this purpose, what was my increase of terror, to behold the figures of two men, who barred my passage back to the bridge. I gave a loud scream, and immediately two more rushed from the thicket where I stood, who seized, and threw a large cloak over me—From this time I fainted, and became senseless.

“How long I remained in this state I cannot judge, I only know, that when I recovered, the storm had much abated, and I found myself seated on a bench, in a kind of mud hovel, supported by two of these men.—In a little time they were joined by a third; then all uniting, they bore me in their arms to some little distance, where, under the spreading branches of an immense large tree, there stood some horses, on one of these a

man was mounted, before whom I was placed; two other horsemen kept close on each side, while one went on at a little distance before, and another rode close behind. In this manner we travelled, I should suppose, for some hours, though our track never appeared in a direct line, for sometimes, I have since reflected, that it seemed as if we were approaching the same spot we had lately quitted, which possibly was done to avoid habitations, and direct roads; this also appears the more likely, as we frequently passed amongst clusters of trees, and between such thick underwood, that the horses with difficulty maintained their footing.

“Journeying for some miles in this manner, sometimes slowly, and sometimes at a brisk pace, the leader at length suddenly turned round, and, in the French language, commanded them to halt; then approaching me, he said, in the same language,

“You must submit to have your eyes covered for a short space; but rest assured, no other violence will be offered, unless you endeavour to resist this necessary measure, or that you make any outcry.”

“Fearing for my life, if I refused, for they were all armed with daggers, I tremblingly acquiesced, and the man who appeared their chief, affixed a bandage over my eyes, and that so effectually, as to exclude all vision.—After this, we continued to move forward for about another hour, in extreme silence, and at a very slow rate; then we suddenly stopped for the space of about ten minutes. I now found myself lifted from the horse, and led forward by two persons, each holding an arm; soon after we descended a number of steps, and, by the sound of our feet, appeared to traverse a long stone paved passage. Here our journey terminated, for in a few minutes my bandage was removed, and I found myself in a small vaulted apartment, without any casement, or other aperture, the only furniture of which consisted of a lamp suspended from the roof, and an old couch and table. Here the two ruffians, who introduced me into this dismal place, left me to my torturing reflections; under which I should doubtless have speedily sunk, had I not buoyed up my spirits with a suspicion, that is, I mean with a hope, that——”—Magdalen here faltered and paused.

“What *was* your suspicion and your hope?” hastily interrupted the abbess, her colour changing to a deep red;—“I trust that you had no criminal hope that the——”

“Oh, no,” interrupted Magdalen, in her turn—“my hope was—forgive me, lady—that you yourself had, conceiving some danger, and fearing that my residence in the convent was discovered, been the means of conveying me to a place of more security.”

“Well,” rejoined the abbess, “and during the time that you were absent from hence, did you meet with *any thing to confirm* your surmise?”

“Nothing, lady.”

“Well, go on,” impatiently replied the abbess.

“I remained some hours in all the cruel uncertainty of what was to be my future destination; at length I heard the door unbarred, and drawing my veil close around me, I, tremblingly, and in silence, endeavoured to resign myself to the will of Heaven, addressing my prayers to that power alone that could afford me succour.”

“It was well done; but proceed,” said the abbot.

“The door opened, and a tall man of a noble port, but with much harshness and severity depicted in his countenance, entered, and stood before me. For some moments he surveyed me with folded arms, where I was seated, for I had not power to rise; at length he broke the awful silence by saying—“Obstinate and perverse girl, at last you are in my

power; how long is the peace and prosperity of a noble family to be thwarted by your non-compliance with our views?—Here, instantly, sign this deed, or tremble at the certain vengeance of an incensed father?”

“The honoured name of father aroused me from an almost state of torpor. I started from my seat, threw back my veil, and endeavoured, with frantic ardour, to recal to my memory the revered features of my much-loved parent, but without effect—not the least similitude appeared.—But if my surprise was great, that of the man was tenfold; he started back—gasped for breath—uttered a fearful oath—gnashed his teeth, and exclaimed—“Undone! undone! This is not Mary de Vavasour!”—A sudden light from those words now broke forth, for I was well assured that this man could be no other than the unnatural parent of my dear Mary; and at the instant I did not fail to rejoice that the mistake of his ruffians had, in all probability, prevented her becoming a victim to his rapacious avarice.”

END OF VOL. I.

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MAGDALEN;

OR,

THE PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

VOL. II.

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MAGDALEN;

OR,

THE PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

AN HISTORICAL NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY ELIZABETH HELME,

AUTHOR OF

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

VOL. II.

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THE  
PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

CHAPTER XIV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## CHAPTER XV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER XVI.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I was called Morgan,” replied he.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## CHAPTER XVII.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“For another!” repeated Mary.

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

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

“Yes,—Mary de Vavasour.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“It is,” replied Mary.

“You have a considerable fortune, I understand.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What is it, daughter?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER XIX.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER XX.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER XXI.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I solemnly swear,”—replied Morgan.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER XXII.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Eustace!” said the arch-bishop.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER XXIV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Proceed we thither,” said Morgan.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## CHAPTER XXV.

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

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

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

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

“Are here,” said Morgan.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Have you no attendant?” inquired Morgan.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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MAGDALEN;

OR,

THE PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

VOL. III.

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MAGDALEN;

OR,

THE PENITENT OF GODSTOW.

AN HISTORICAL NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY ELIZABETH HELME,

AUTHOR OF

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

VOL. III.

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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 feelest—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.

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## 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 surgeon 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 pours, 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 adulteress, 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 condemn 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 beauteous Rosamond Clifford’s dishonour, and afterwards vilely betraying her to the queen for reward.—Memory now recals 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 beauteous 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 beauteous, 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.

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## 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.