CHAPTER XI

What transport to retrace our early plays,
Our easy bliss, when each thing joy supplied
The woods, the mountains and the warbling maze
Of the wild brooks!

THOMSON

Blanche's slumbers continued, till long after the hour, which she had so impatiently anticipated, for her woman, fatigued with travelling, did not call her, till breakfast was nearly ready. Her disappointment, however, was instantly forgotten, when, on opening the casement, she saw, on one hand, the wide sea sparkling in the morning rays, with its stealing sails and glancing oars; and, on the other, the fresh woods, the plains far stretching and the blue mountains, all glowing with the splendour of day.

As she inspired the pure breeze, health spread a deeper blush upon her countenance, and pleasure danced in her eyes.

"Who could first invent convents!" said she "and who could first persuade people to go into them? and to make religion a pretence, too, where all that should inspire it, is so carefully shut out! God is best pleased with the homage of a grateful heart, and, when we view his glories, we feel most grateful. I never felt so much devotion, during the many dull years I was in the convent, as I have done in the few hours, that I have been here, where I need only look on all around me — to adore God in my inmost heart!"

Saying this, she left the window, bounded along the gallery, and, in the next moment, was in the breakfast room, where the Count was already seated. The cheerfulness of a bright sunshine had dispersed the melancholy glooms of his reflections, a pleasant smile was on his countenance, and he spoke in an enlivening voice to Blanche, whose heart echoed back the tones. Henri and, soon after, the Countess with Mademoiselle Bearn appeared, and the whole party seemed to acknowledge the influence of the scene; even the Countess was so much reanimated as to receive the civilities of her husband with complacency, and but once forgot her good humour, which was when she asked whether they had any neighbours, who were likely to make *this barbarous spot* more tolerable, and whether the Count believed it possible for her to exist here, without some amusement?

Soon after breakfast the party dispersed; the Count, ordering his steward to attend him in the library, went to survey the condition of his premises, and to visit some of his tenants; Henri hastened with alacrity to the shore to examine a boat, that was to bear them on a little voyage in the evening and to superintend the adjustment of a silk awning; while the Countess, attended by Mademoiselle Bearn, retired to an apartment on the modern side of the château, which was fitted up with airy elegance; and, as the windows opened upon balconies, that fronted the sea, she was there saved from a view of the *horrid*

Pyrenees. Here, while she reclined on a sofa, and, casting her languid eyes over the ocean, which appeared beyond the wood-tops, indulged in the luxuries of *ennui*, her companion read aloud a sentimental novel, on some fashionable system of philosophy, for the Countess was herself somewhat of a *philosopher*, especially as to *infidelity*, and among a certain circle her opinions were waited for with impatience, and received as doctrines.

The Lady Blanche, meanwhile, hastened to indulge, amidst the wild wood walks around the château, her new enthusiasm, where, as she wandered under the shades, her gay spirits gradually yielded to pensive complacency. Now, she moved with solemn steps, beneath the gloom of thickly interwoven branches, where the fresh dew still hung upon every flower, that peeped from among the grass; and now tripped sportively along the path, on which the sunbeams darted and the checquered foliage trembled — where the tender greens of the beech, the acacia and the mountain-ash, mingling with the solemn tints of the cedar, the pine and cypress, exhibited as fine a contrast of colouring, as the majestic oak and oriental plane did of form, to the feathery lightness of the cork tree and the waving grace of the poplar.

Having reached a rustic seat, within a deep recess of the woods, she rested awhile, and, as her eyes caught, through a distant opening, a glimpse of the blue waters of the Mediterranean, with the white sail, gliding on its bosom, or of the broad mountain, glowing beneath the midday sun, her mind experienced somewhat of that exquisite delight, which awakens the fancy, and leads to poetry. The hum of bees alone broke the stillness around her, as, with other insects of various hues, they sported gaily in the shade, or sipped sweets from the fresh flowers: and, while Blanche watched a butterfly, flitting from bud to bud, she indulged herself in imagining the pleasures of its short day, till she had composed the following stanzas.

THE BUTTER-FLY TO HIS LOVE

What bowery dell, with fragrant breath,
Courts thee to stay thy airy flight;
Nor seek again the purple heath,
So oft the scene of gay delight?

Long I’ve watch’d i’ the lily’s bell,
Whose whiteness stole the morning’s beam;
No fluttering sounds thy coming tell,
No waving wings, at distance, gleam.

But fountain fresh, nor breathing grove,
Nor sunny mead, nor blossom’d tree,
So sweet as lily’s cell shall prove, —
The bower of constant love and me.

When April buds begin to blow,
The prim-rose, and the hare-bell blue,

That on the verdant moss bank grow,
With violet cups, that weep in dew;

When wanton gales breathe through the shade,
And shake the blooms, and steal their sweets,
And swell the song of ev'ry glade,
I range the forest's green retreats:

There, through the tangled wood-walks play,
Where no rude urchin paces near,
Where sparely peeps the sultry day,
And light dews freshen all the air.

High on a sunbeam oft I sport
O'er bower and fountain, vale and hill;
Oft ev'ry blushing flow'ret court,
That hangs its head o'er winding rill.

But these I'll leave to be thy guide,
And show thee, where the jasmine spreads
Her snowy leaf, where may-flow'rs hide,
And rose-buds rear their peeping heads.

With me the mountain's summit scale,
And taste the wild-thyme's honied bloom,
Whose fragrance, floating on the gale,
Oft leads me to the cedar's gloom.

Yet, yet, no sound comes in the breeze!
What shade thus dares to tempt thy stay?
Once, me alone thou wish'd to please,
And with me only thou wouldst stray.

But, while thy long delay I mourn,
And chide the sweet shades for their guile,
Thou may'st be true, and they forlorn,
And fairy favours court thy smile.

The tiny queen of fairy-land,
Who knows thy speed, hath sent thee far,
To bring, or ere the night-watch stand,
Rich essence for her shadowy car:

Perchance her acorn-cups to fill
With nectar from the Indian rose,
Or gather, near some haunted rill,
May-dews, that lull to sleep Love's woes:

Or, o'er the mountains, bade thee fly,

To tell her fairy love to speed,
When ev'ning steals upon the sky,
To dance along the twilight mead.

But now I see thee sailing low,
Gay as the brightest flow'rs of spring,
Thy coat of blue and jet I know,
And well thy gold and purple wing.

Borne on the gale, thou com'st to me;
O! welcome, welcome to my home!
In lily's cell we'll live in glee,
Together o'er the mountains roam!

When Lady Blanche returned to the château, instead of going to the apartment of the Countess, she amused herself with wandering over that part of the edifice, which she had not yet examined, of which the most ancient first attracted her curiosity; for, though what she had seen of the modern was gay and elegant, there was something in the former more interesting to her imagination. Having passed up the great staircase, and through the oak gallery, she entered upon a long suite of chambers, whose walls were either hung with tapestry, or wainscoted with cedar, the furniture of which looked almost as ancient as the rooms themselves; the spacious fireplaces, where no mark of social cheer remained, presented an image of cold desolation; and the whole suite had so much the air of neglect and desertion, that it seemed, as if the venerable persons, whose portraits hung upon the walls, had been the last to inhabit them.

On leaving these rooms, she found herself in another gallery, one end of which was terminated by a back staircase, and the other by a door, that seemed to communicate with the north-side of the château, but which being fastened, she descended the staircase, and, opening a door in the wall, a few steps down, found herself in a small square room, that formed part of the west turret of the castle. Three windows presented each a separate and beautiful prospect; that to the north, overlooking Languedoc; another to the west, the hills ascending towards the Pyrenees, whose awful summits crowned the landscape; and a third, fronting the south, gave the Mediterranean, and a part of the wild shores of Rousillon, to the eye.

Having left the turret, and descended the narrow staircase, she found herself in a dusky passage, where she wandered, unable to find her way, till impatience yielded to apprehension, and she called for assistance. Presently steps approached, and light glimmered through a door at the other extremity of the passage, which was opened with caution by some person, who did not venture beyond it, and whom Blanche observed in silence, till the door was closing, when she called aloud, and, hastening towards it, perceived the old housekeeper. "Dear ma'amselle! Is it you?" said Dorothée "How could you find your way hither?" Had Blanche been less occupied by her own fears, she would probably have observed the strong expressions of terror and surprise on

Dorothée's countenance, who now led her through a long succession of passages and rooms, that looked as if they had been uninhabited for a century, till they reached that appropriated to the housekeeper, where Dorothée entreated she would sit down and take refreshment. Blanche accepted the sweetmeats, offered to her, mentioned her discovery of the pleasant turret, and her wish to appropriate it to her own use. Whether Dorothée's taste was not so sensible to the beauties of landscape as her young lady's, or that the constant view of lovely scenery had deadened it, she forbore to praise the subject of Blanche's enthusiasm, which, however, her silence did not repress. To Lady Blanche's enquiry of whither the door she had found fastened at the end of the gallery led, she replied, that it opened to a suite of rooms, which had not been entered during many years, "For," added she "my late lady died in one of them, and I could never find in my heart to go into them since."

Blanche, though she wished to see these chambers, forbore, on observing that Dorothée's eyes were filled with tears, to ask her to unlock them, and, soon after, went to dress for dinner, at which the whole party met in good spirits and good humour, except the Countess, whose vacant mind, overcome by the languor of idleness, would neither suffer her to be happy herself, nor to contribute to the happiness of others. Mademoiselle Bearn, attempting to be witty, directed her badinage against Henri, who answered, because he could not well avoid it, rather than from any inclination to notice her, whose liveliness sometimes amused, but whose conceit and insensibility often disgusted him.

The cheerfulness, with which Blanche rejoined the party, vanished, on her reaching the margin of the sea; she gazed with apprehension upon the immense expanse of waters, which, at a distance, she had beheld only with delight and astonishment, and it was by a strong effort, that she so far overcame her fears as to follow her father into the boat.

As she silently surveyed the vast horizon, bending round the distant verge of the ocean, an emotion of sublimest rapture struggled to overcome a sense of personal danger. A light breeze played on the water, and on the silk awning of the boat, and waved the foliage of the receding woods, that crowned the cliffs, for many miles, and which the Count surveyed with the pride of conscious property, as well as with the eye of taste.

At some distance, among these woods, stood a pavilion, which had once been the scene of social gaiety, and which its situation still made one of romantic beauty. Thither, the Count had ordered coffee and other refreshment to be carried, and thither the sailors now steered their course, following the windings of the shore round many a woody promontory and circling bay; while the pensive tones of horns and other wind instruments, played by the attendants in a distant boat, echoed among the rocks, and died along the waves. Blanche had now subdued her fears; a delightful tranquillity stole over her mind, and held her in silence; and she was too happy even to remember the convent, or her former sorrows, as subjects of comparison with her present felicity.

The Countess felt less unhappy than she had done, since the moment of her leaving Paris; for her mind was now under some degree of restraint; she feared to indulge its wayward humours, and even wished to recover the Count's good opinion. On his family, and on the surrounding scene, he looked with tempered pleasure and benevolent satisfaction, while his son exhibited the gay spirits of youth, anticipating new delights, and regretless of those, that were passed.

After near an hour's rowing, the party landed, and ascended a little path, overgrown with vegetation. At a little distance from the point of the eminence, within the shadowy recess of the woods, appeared the pavilion, which Blanche perceived, as she caught a glimpse of its portico between the trees, to be built of variegated marble. As she followed the Countess, she often turned her eyes with rapture towards the ocean, seen beneath the dark foliage, far below, and from thence upon the deep woods, whose silence and impenetrable gloom awakened emotions more solemn, but scarcely less delightful.

The pavilion had been prepared, as far as was possible, on a very short notice, for the reception of its visitors; but the faded colours of its painted walls and ceiling, and the decayed drapery of its once magnificent furniture, declared how long it had been neglected, and abandoned to the empire of the changing seasons. While the party partook of a collation of fruit and coffee, the horns, placed in a distant part of the woods, where an echo sweetened and prolonged their melancholy tones, broke softly on the stillness of the scene. This spot seemed to attract even the admiration of the Countess, or, perhaps, it was merely the pleasure of planning furniture and decorations, that made her dwell so long on the necessity of repairing and adorning it; while the Count, never happier than when he saw her mind engaged by natural and simple objects, acquiesced in all her designs, concerning the pavilion. The paintings on the walls and coved ceiling were to be renewed, the canopies and sofas were to be of light green damask; marble statues of wood nymphs, bearing on their heads baskets of living flowers, were to adorn the recesses between the windows, which, descending to the ground, were to admit to every part of the room, and it was of octagonal form, the various landscape. One window opened upon a romantic glade, where the eye roved among the woody recesses, and the scene was bounded only by a lengthened pomp of groves; from another, the woods receding disclosed the distant summits of the Pyrenees; a third fronted an avenue, beyond which the grey towers of Château-le-Blanc, and a picturesque part of its ruin were seen partially among the foliage; while a fourth gave, between the trees, a glimpse of the green pastures and villages, that diversify the banks of the Aude. The Mediterranean, with the bold cliffs, that overlooked its shores, were the grand objects of a fifth window, and the others gave, in different points of view, the wild scenery of the woods.

After wandering, for some time, in these, the party returned to the shore and embarked; and, the beauty of the evening tempting them to extend their excursion, they proceeded further up the bay. A dead calm had succeeded the light breeze, that wafted them hither, and the men took to their oars. Around, the waters were spread into one vast expanse of polished mirror, reflecting the grey cliffs and feathery woods, that overhung its surface, the glow of the western

horizon and the dark clouds, that came slowly from the east. Blanche loved to see the dipping oars imprint the water, and to watch the spreading circles they left, which gave a tremulous motion to the reflected landscape, without destroying the harmony of its features.

Above the darkness of the woods, her eye now caught a cluster of high towers, touched with the splendour of the setting rays; and, soon after, the horns being then silent, she heard the faint swell of choral voices from a distance.

"What voices are those, upon the air?" said the Count, looking round, and listening; but the strain had ceased.

"It seemed to be a vesper hymn, which I have often heard in my convent," said Blanche.

"We are near the monastery, then" observed the Count; and, the boat soon after doubling a lofty headland, the monastery of St. Claire appeared, seated near the margin of the sea, where the cliffs, suddenly sinking, formed a low shore within a small bay, almost encircled with woods, among which partial features of the edifice were seen; — the great gate and gothic window of the hall, the cloisters and the side of a chapel more remote; while a venerable arch, which had once led to a part of the fabric, now demolished, stood a majestic ruin detached from the main building, beyond which appeared a grand perspective of the woods. On the grey walls, the moss had fastened, and, round the pointed windows of the chapel, the ivy and the briony hung in many a fantastic wreath.

All without was silent and forsaken; but, while Blanche gazed with admiration on this venerable pile, whose effect was heightened by the strong lights and shadows thrown athwart it by a cloudy sunset, a sound of many voices, slowly chanting, arose from within. The Count bade his men rest on their oars. The monks were singing the hymn of vespers, and some female voices mingled with the strain, which rose by soft degrees, till the high organ and the choral sounds swelled into full and solemn harmony. The strain, soon after, dropped into sudden silence, and was renewed in a low and still more solemn key, till, at length, the holy chorus died away, and was heard no more. — Blanche sighed, tears trembled in her eyes, and her thoughts seemed wafted with the sounds to heaven. While a rapt stillness prevailed in the boat, a train of friars, and then of nuns, veiled in white, issued from the cloisters, and passed, under the shade of the woods, to the main body of the edifice.

The Countess was the first of her party to awaken from this pause of silence.

"These dismal hymns and friars make one quite melancholy" said she; "twilight is coming on; pray let us return, or it will be dark before we get home."

The count, looking up, now perceived, that the twilight of evening was anticipated by an approaching storm. In the east a tempest was collecting; a heavy gloom came on, opposing and contrasting the glowing splendour of the setting sun. The clamorous seafowl skimmed in fleet circles upon the surface

of the sea, dipping their light pinions in the wave, as they fled away in search of shelter. The boatmen pulled hard at their oars; but the thunder, that now muttered at a distance, and the heavy drops, that began to dimple the water, made the Count determine to put back to the monastery for shelter, and the course of the boat was immediately changed. As the clouds approached the west, their lurid darkness changed to a deep ruddy glow, which, by reflection, seemed to fire the tops of the woods and the shattered towers of the monastery.

The appearance of the heavens alarmed the Countess and Mademoiselle Bearn, whose expressions of apprehension distressed the Count, and perplexed his men; while Blanche continued silent, now agitated with fear, and now with admiration, as she viewed the grandeur of the clouds, and their effect on the scenery, and listened to the long, long peals of thunder, that rolled through the air.

The boat having reached the lawn before the monastery, the Count sent a servant to announce his arrival, and to entreat shelter of the Superior, who, soon after, appeared at the great gate, attended by several monks, while the servant returned with a message, expressive at once of hospitality and pride, but of pride disguised in submission. The party immediately disembarked, and, having hastily crossed the lawn — for the shower was now heavy — were received at the gate by the Superior, who, as they entered, stretched forth his hands and gave his blessing; and they passed into the great hall, where the lady abbess waited, attended by several nuns, clothed, like herself, in black, and veiled in white. The veil of the abbess was, however, thrown half back, and discovered a countenance, whose chaste dignity was sweetened by the smile of welcome, with which she addressed the Countess, whom she led, with Blanche and Mademoiselle Bearn, into the convent parlour, while the Count and Henri were conducted by the Superior to the refectory.

The Countess, fatigued and discontented, received the politeness of the abbess with careless haughtiness, and had followed her, with indolent steps, to the parlour, over which the painted casements and wainscot of larch wood threw, at all times, a melancholy shade, and where the gloom of evening now loured almost to darkness.

While the lady abbess ordered refreshment, and conversed with the Countess, Blanche withdrew to a window, the lower panes of which, being without painting, allowed her to observe the progress of the storm over the Mediterranean, whose dark waves, that had so lately slept, now came boldly swelling, in long succession, to the shore, where they burst in white foam, and threw up a high spray over the rocks. A red sulphurous tint overspread the long line of clouds, that hung above the western horizon, beneath whose dark skirts the sun looking out, illumined the distant shores of Languedoc, as well as the tufted summits of the nearer woods, and shed a partial gleam on the western waves. The rest of the scene was in deep gloom, except where a sunbeam, darting between the clouds, glanced on the white wings of the seafowl, that circled high among them, or touched the swelling sail of a vessel, which was seen labouring in the storm. Blanche, for some time, anxiously watched the

progress of the bark, as it threw the waves in foam around it, and, as the lightnings flashed, looked to the opening heavens, with many a sigh for the fate of the poor mariners.

The sun, at length, set, and the heavy clouds, which had long impended, dropped over the splendour of his course; the vessel, however, was yet dimly seen, and Blanche continued to observe it, till the quick succession of flashes, lighting up the gloom of the whole horizon, warned her to retire from the window, and she joined the Abbess, who, having exhausted all her topics of conversation with the Countess, had now leisure to notice her.

But their discourse was interrupted by tremendous peals of thunder; and the bell of the monastery soon after ringing out, summoned the inhabitants to prayer. As Blanche passed the window, she gave another look to the ocean, where, by the momentary flash, that illumined the vast body of the waters, she distinguished the vessel she had observed before, amidst a sea of foam, breaking the billows, the mast now bowing to the waves, and then rising high in air.

She sighed fervently as she gazed, and then followed the Lady Abbess and the Countess to the chapel. Meanwhile, some of the Count's servants, having gone by land to the château for carriages, returned soon after vespers had concluded, when, the storm being somewhat abated, the Count and his family returned home. Blanche was surprised to discover how much the windings of the shore had deceived her, concerning the distance of the château from the monastery, whose vesper bell she had heard, on the preceding evening, from the windows of the west saloon, and whose towers she would also have seen from thence, had not twilight veiled them.

On their arrival at the château, the Countess, affecting more fatigue, than she really felt, withdrew to her apartment, and the Count, with his daughter and Henri, went to the supper-room, where they had not been long, when they heard, in a pause of the gust, a firing of guns, which the Count understanding to be signals of distress from some vessel in the storm, went to a window, that opened towards the Mediterranean, to observe further; but the sea was now involved in utter darkness, and the loud howlings of the tempest had again overcome every other sound. Blanche, remembering the bark, which she had before seen, now joined her father, with trembling anxiety. In a few moments, the report of guns was again borne along the wind, and as suddenly wafted away; a tremendous burst of thunder followed, and, in the flash, that had preceded it, and which seemed to quiver over the whole surface of the waters, a vessel was discovered, tossing amidst the white foam of the waves at some distance from the shore. Impenetrable darkness again involved the scene, but soon a second flash showed the bark, with one sail unfurled, driving towards the coast. Blanche hung upon her father's arm, with looks full of the agony of united terror and pity, which were unnecessary to awaken the heart of the Count, who gazed upon the sea with a piteous expression, and, perceiving, that no boat could live in the storm, forbore to send one; but he gave orders to his people to carry torches out upon the cliffs, hoping they might prove a kind of

beacon to the vessel, or, at least, warn the crew of the rocks they were approaching. While Henri went out to direct on what part of the cliffs the lights should appear, Blanche remained with her father, at the window, catching, every now and then, as the lightnings flashed, a glimpse of the vessel; and she soon saw, with reviving hope, the torches flaming on the blackness of night, and, as they waved over the cliffs, casting a red gleam on the gasping billows. When the firing of guns was repeated, the torches were tossed high in the air, as if answering the signal, and the firing was then redoubled; but, though the wind bore the sound away, she fancied, as the lightnings glanced, that the vessel was much nearer the shore.

The Count's servants were now seen, running to and fro, on the rocks; some venturing almost to the point of the crags, and bending over, held out their torches fastened to long poles; while others, whose steps could be traced only by the course of the lights, descended the steep and dangerous path, that wound to the margin of the sea, and, with loud halloos, hailed the mariners, whose shrill whistle, and then feeble voices, were heard, at intervals, mingling with the storm. Sudden shouts from the people on the rocks increased the anxiety of Blanche to an almost intolerable degree: but her suspense, concerning the fate of the mariners, was soon over, when Henri, running breathless into the room, told that the vessel was anchored in the bay below, but in so shattered a condition, that it was feared she would part before the crew could disembark. The Count immediately gave orders for his own boats to assist in bringing them to shore, and that such of these unfortunate strangers as could not be accommodated in the adjacent hamlet should be entertained at the château. Among the latter, were Emily St. Aubert, Monsieur Du Pont, Ludovico and Annette, who, having embarked at Livorno and reached Marseilles, were from thence crossing the Gulf of Lyons, when this storm overtook them. They were received by the Count with his usual benignity, who, though Emily wished to have proceeded immediately to the monastery of St. Claire, would not allow her to leave the château, that night; and, indeed, the terror and fatigue she had suffered would scarcely have permitted her to go farther.

In Monsieur Du Pont the Count discovered an old acquaintance, and much joy and congratulation passed between them, after which Emily was introduced by name to the Count's family, whose hospitable benevolence dissipated the little embarrassment, which her situation had occasioned her, and the party were soon seated at the supper table. The unaffected kindness of Blanche and the lively joy she expressed on the escape of the strangers, for whom her pity had been so much interested, gradually revived Emily's languid spirits; and Du Pont, relieved from his terrors for her and for himself, felt the full contrast, between his late situation on a dark and tremendous ocean, and his present one, in a cheerful mansion, where he was surrounded with plenty, elegance and smiles of welcome.

Annette, meanwhile, in the servants' hall, was telling of all the dangers she had encountered, and congratulating herself so heartily upon her own and Ludovico's escape, and on her present comforts, that she often made all that

part of the château ring with merriment and laughter. Ludovico's spirits were as gay as her own, but he had discretion enough to restrain them, and tried to check hers, though in vain, till her laughter, at length, ascended to *my Lady's* chamber, who sent to enquire what occasioned so much uproar in the château, and to command silence.

Emily withdrew early to seek the repose she so much required, but her pillow was long a sleepless one. On this her return to her native country, many interesting remembrances were awakened; all the events and sufferings she had experienced, since she quitted it, came in long succession to her fancy, and were chased only by the image of Valancourt, with whom to believe herself once more in the same land, after they had been so long, and so distantly separated, gave her emotions of indescribable joy, but which afterwards yielded to anxiety and apprehension, when she considered the long period, that had elapsed, since any letter had passed between them, and how much might have happened in this interval to affect her future peace. But the thought that Valancourt might be now no more, or, if living, might have forgotten her, was so very terrible to her heart, that she would scarcely suffer herself to pause upon the possibility. She determined to inform him, on the following day, of her arrival in France, which it was scarcely possible he could know but by a letter from herself, and, after soothing her spirits with the hope of soon hearing, that he was well, and unchanged in his affections, she, at length, sunk to repose.

CHAPTER XII

Oft woo'd the gleam of Cynthia, silver-bright,
In cloisters dim, far from the haunts of Folly,
With Freedom by my side, and soft-ey'd Melancholy.
GRAY

The Lady Blanche was so much interested for Emily, that, upon hearing she was going to reside in the neighbouring convent, she requested the Count would invite her to lengthen her stay at the château. "And you know, my dear sir" added Blanche "how delighted I shall be with such a companion; for, at present, I have no friend to walk, or to read with, since Mademoiselle Bearn is my mamma's friend only."

The Count smiled at the youthful simplicity, with which his daughter yielded to first impressions; and, though he chose to warn her of their danger, he silently applauded the benevolence, that could thus readily expand in confidence to a stranger. He had observed Emily, with attention, on the preceding evening, and was as much pleased with her, as it was possible he could be with any person, on so short an acquaintance. The mention, made of her by Mons. Du Pont, had also given him a favourable impression of Emily; but, extremely cautious as to those, whom he introduced to the intimacy of his daughter, he determined, on hearing that the former was no stranger at the convent of St. Claire, to visit the abbess, and, if her account corresponded with his wish, to invite Emily to pass some time at the château. On this subject, he was influenced by a consideration of the Lady Blanche's welfare, still more than by either a wish to oblige her, or to befriend the orphan Emily, for whom, however, he felt considerably interested.

On the following morning, Emily was too much fatigued to appear; but Mons. Du Pont was at the breakfast table, when the Count entered the room, who pressed him, as his former acquaintance, and the son of a very old friend, to prolong his stay at the château; an invitation, which Du Pont willingly accepted, since it would allow him to be near Emily; and, though he was not conscious of encouraging a hope, that she would ever return his affection, he had not fortitude enough to attempt, at present, to overcome it.

Emily, when she was somewhat recovered, wandered with her new friend over the grounds belonging to the château, as much delighted with the surrounding views, as Blanche, in the benevolence of her heart, had wished; from thence she perceived, beyond the woods, the towers of the monastery, and remarked, that it was to this convent she designed to go.

"Ah!" said Blanche with surprise "I am but just released from a convent, and would you go into one? If you could know what pleasure I feel in wandering here, at liberty — and in seeing the sky and the fields, and the woods all round me, I think you would not." Emily, smiling at the warmth, with which the Lady

Blanche spoke, observed, that she did not mean to confine herself to a convent for life.

"No, you may not intend it now" said Blanche; "but you do not know to what the nuns may persuade you to consent: I know how kind they will appear, and how happy, for I have seen too much of their art."

When they returned to the château, Lady Blanche conducted Emily to her favourite turret, and from thence they rambled through the ancient chambers, which Blanche had visited before. Emily was amused by observing the structure of these apartments, and the fashion of their old but still magnificent furniture, and by comparing them with those of the castle of Udolpho, which were yet more antique and grotesque. She was also interested by Dorothée the housekeeper, who attended them, whose appearance was almost as antique as the objects around her, and who seemed no less interested by Emily, on whom she frequently gazed with so much deep attention, as scarcely to hear what was said to her.

While Emily looked from one of the casements, she perceived, with surprise, some objects, that were familiar to her memory; — the fields and woods, with the gleaming brook, which she had passed with La Voisin, one evening, soon after the death of Monsieur St. Aubert, in her way from the monastery to her cottage; and she now knew this to be the château, which he had then avoided, and concerning which he had dropped some remarkable hints.

Shocked by this discovery, yet scarcely knowing why, she mused for some time in silence, and remembered the emotion, which her father had betrayed on finding himself so near this mansion, and some other circumstances of his conduct, that now greatly interested her. The music, too, which she had formerly heard, and, respecting which La Voisin had given such an odd account, occurred to her, and, desirous of knowing more concerning it, she asked Dorothée whether it returned at midnight, as usual, and whether the musician had yet been discovered.

"Yes, ma'amselle" replied Dorothée "that music is still heard, but the musician has never been found out, nor ever will, I believe; though there are some people, who can guess."

"Indeed!" said Emily, "then why do they not pursue the enquiry?"

"Ah, young lady! Enquiry enough has been made — but who can pursue a spirit?"

Emily smiled, and, remembering how lately she had suffered herself to be led away by superstition, determined now to resist its contagion; yet, in spite of her efforts, she felt awe mingle with her curiosity, on this subject; and Blanche, who had hitherto listened in silence, now enquired what this music was, and how long it had been heard.

“Ever since the death of my lady, madam,” replied Dorothée.

“Why, the place is not haunted, surely?” said Blanche, between jesting and seriousness.

“I have heard that music almost ever since my dear lady died” continued Dorothée, “and never before then. But that is nothing to some things I could tell of.”

“Do, pray, tell them, then” said Lady Blanche, now more in earnest than in jest. “I am much interested, for I have heard sister Henriette, and sister Sophie, in the convent, tell of such strange appearances, which they themselves had witnessed!”

“You never heard, my lady, I suppose, what made us leave the château, and go and live in a cottage” said Dorothée.

“Never!” replied Blanche with impatience.

“Nor the reason, that my lord, the Marquis” — Dorothée checked herself, hesitated, and then endeavoured to change the topic; but the curiosity of Blanche was too much awakened to suffer the subject thus easily to escape her, and she pressed the old housekeeper to proceed with her account, upon whom, however, no entreaties could prevail; and it was evident, that she was alarmed for the imprudence, into which she had already betrayed herself.

“I perceive” said Emily, smiling “that all old mansions are haunted; I am lately come from a place of wonders; but unluckily, since I left it, I have heard almost all of them explained.”

Blanche was silent; Dorothée looked grave, and sighed; and Emily felt herself still inclined to believe more of the wonderful, than she chose to acknowledge. Just then, she remembered the spectacle she had witnessed in a chamber of Udolpho, and, by an odd kind of coincidence, the alarming words, that had accidentally met her eye in the MS. papers, which she had destroyed, in obedience to the command of her father; and she shuddered at the meaning they seemed to impart, almost as much as at the horrible appearance, disclosed by the black veil.

The Lady Blanche, meanwhile, unable to prevail with Dorothée to explain the subject of her late hints, had desired, on reaching the door, that terminated the gallery, and which she found fastened on the preceding day, to see the suite of rooms beyond. “Dear young lady” said the housekeeper “I have told you my reason for not opening them; I have never seen them, since my dear lady died; and it would go hard with me to see them now. Pray, madam, do not ask me again.”

“Certainly I will not” replied Blanche, “if that is really your objection.”

"Alas! It is" said the old woman: "we all loved her well, and I shall always grieve for her. Time runs round! It is now many years, since she died; but I remember everything, that happened then, as if it was but yesterday. Many things, that have passed of late years, are gone quite from my memory, while those so long ago, I can see as if in a glass." She paused, but afterwards, as they walked up the gallery, added to Emily "this young lady sometimes brings the late Marchioness to my mind; I can remember, when she looked just as blooming, and very like her, when she smiles. Poor lady! how gay she was, when she first came to the château!"

"And was she not gay, afterwards?" said Blanche.

Dorothée shook her head; and Emily observed her, with eyes strongly expressive of the interest she now felt. "Let us sit down in this window" said the Lady Blanche, on reaching the opposite end of the gallery: "and pray, Dorothée, if it is not painful to you, tell us something more about the Marchioness. I should like to look into the glass you spoke of just now, and see a few of the circumstances, which you say often pass over it."

"No, my lady" replied Dorothée; "if you knew as much as I do, you would not, for you would find there a dismal train of them; I often wish I could shut them out, but they will rise to my mind. I see my dear lady on her death bed — her very look — and remember all she said — it was a terrible scene!"

"Why was it so terrible?" said Emily with emotion.

"Ah, dear young lady! Is not death always terrible?" replied Dorothée.

To some further enquiries of Blanche Dorothée was silent; and Emily, observing the tears in her eyes, forbore to urge the subject, and endeavoured to withdraw the attention of her young friend to some object in the gardens, where the Count, with the Countess and Monsieur Du Pont, appearing, they went down to join them.

When he perceived Emily, he advanced to meet her, and presented her to the Countess, in a manner so benign, that it recalled most powerfully to her mind the idea of her late father, and she felt more gratitude to him, than embarrassment towards the Countess, who, however, received her with one of those fascinating smiles, which her caprice sometimes allowed her to assume, and which was now the result of a conversation the Count had held with her, concerning Emily. Whatever this might be, or whatever had passed in his conversation with the lady abbess, whom he had just visited, esteem and kindness were strongly apparent in his manner, when he addressed Emily, who experienced that sweet emotion, which arises from the consciousness of possessing the approbation of the good; for to the Count's worth she had been inclined to yield her confidence almost from the first moment, in which she had seen him.

Before she could finish her acknowledgments for the hospitality she had received, and mention of her design of going immediately to the convent, she was interrupted by an invitation to lengthen her stay at the château, which was pressed by the Count and the Countess, with an appearance of such friendly sincerity, that, though she much wished to see her old friends at the monastery, and to sigh, once more, over her father's grave, she consented to remain a few days at the château.

To the abbess, however, she immediately wrote, mentioning her arrival in Languedoc and her wish to be received into the convent, as a boarder; she also sent letters to Monsieur Quesnel and to Valancourt, whom she merely informed of her arrival in France; and, as she knew not where the latter might be stationed, she directed her letter to his brother's seat in Gascony.

In the evening, Lady Blanche and Mons. Du Pont walked with Emily to the cottage of La Voisin, which she had now a melancholy pleasure inapproaching, for time had softened her grief for the loss of St. Aubert, though it could not annihilate it, and she felt a soothing sadness in indulging the recollections, which this scene recalled. La Voisin was still living, and seemed to enjoy, as much as formerly, the tranquil evening of a blameless life. He was sitting at the door of his cottage, watching some of his grandchildren, playing on the grass before him, and, now and then, with a laugh, or a commendation, encouraging their sports. He immediately recollected Emily, whom he was much pleased to see, and she was as rejoiced to hear, that he had not lost one of his family, since her departure.

"Yes, ma'amselle" said the old man "we all live merrily together still, thank God! and I believe there is not a happier family to be found in Languedoc, than ours."

Emily did not trust herself in the chamber, where St. Aubert died; and, after half an hour's conversation with La Voisin and his family, she left the cottage.

During these the first days of her stay at Château-le-Blanc, she was often affected, by observing the deep, but silent melancholy, which, at times, stole over Du Pont; and Emily, pitying the self-delusion, which disarmed him of the will to depart, determined to withdraw herself as soon as the respect she owed the Count and Countess De Villefort would permit. The dejection of his friend soon alarmed the anxiety of the Count, to whom Du Pont, at length, confided the secret of his hopeless affection, which, however, the former could only commiserate, though he secretly determined to befriend his suit, if an opportunity of doing so should ever occur. Considering the dangerous situation of Du Pont, he but feebly opposed his intention of leaving Château-le-Blanc, on the following day, but drew from him a promise of a longer visit, when he could return with safety to his peace. Emily herself, though she could not encourage his affection, esteemed him both for the many virtues he possessed, and for the services she had received from him; and it was not without tender emotions of gratitude and pity, that she now saw him depart for his family seat in Gascony;

while he took leave of her with a countenance so expressive of love and grief, as to interest the Count more warmly in his cause than before.

In a few days, Emily also left the château, but not before the Count and Countess had received her promise to repeat her visit very soon; and she was welcomed by the abbess, with the same maternal kindness she had formerly experienced, and by the nuns, with much expression of regard. The well known scenes of the convent occasioned her many melancholy recollections, but with these were mingled others, that inspired gratitude for having escaped the various dangers, that had pursued her, since she quitted it, and for the good, which she yet possessed; and, though she once more wept over her father's grave, with tears of tender affection, her grief was softened from its former acuteness.

Some time after her return to the monastery, she received a letter from her uncle, Mons. Quesnel, in answer to information that she had arrived in France, and to her enquiries, concerning such of her affairs as he had undertaken to conduct during her absence, especially as to the period for which La Vallée had been let, whither it was her wish to return, if it should appear, that her income would permit her to do so. The reply of Mons. Quesnel was cold and formal, as she expected, expressing neither concern for the evils she suffered, nor pleasure, that she was now removed from them; nor did he allow the opportunity to pass, of reproving her for her rejection of Count Morano, whom he affected still to believe a man of honour and fortune; nor of vehemently declaiming against Montoni, to whom he had always, till now, felt himself to be inferior. On Emily's pecuniary concerns, he was not very explicit; he informed her, however, that the term, for which La Vallée had been engaged, was nearly expired; but, without inviting her to his own house, added, that her circumstances would by no means allow her to reside there, and earnestly advised her to remain, for the present, in the convent of St. Claire.

To her enquiries respecting poor old Theresa, her late father's servant, he gave no answer. In the postscript to his letter, Monsieur Quesnel mentioned M. Motteville, in whose hands the late St. Aubert had placed the chief of his personal property, as being likely to arrange his affairs nearly to the satisfaction of his creditors, and that Emily would recover much more of her fortune, than she had formerly reason to expect. The letter also enclosed to Emily an order upon a merchant at Narbonne, for a small sum of money.

The tranquillity of the monastery, and the liberty she was suffered to enjoy, in wandering among the woods and shores of this delightful province, gradually restored her spirits to their natural tone, except that anxiety would sometimes intrude, concerning Valancourt, as the time approached, when it was possible that she might receive an answer to her letter.