

CHAPTER XII

Light thickens, and the crow
 Makes wing to the rooky wood:
 Good things of day begin to droop, and drowse;
 While night's black agents to their preys do rouse.

MACBETH

Meanwhile Count De Villefort and Lady Blanche had passed a pleasant fortnight at the château de St. Foix, with the Baron and Baroness, during which they made frequent excursions among the mountains, and were delighted with the romantic wildness of Pyrenean scenery. It was with regret, that the Count bade adieu to his old friends, although with the hope of being soon united with them in one family; for it was settled that M. St. Foix, who now attended them into Gascony, should receive the hand of the Lady Blanche, upon their arrival at Château-le-Blanc. As the road, from the Baron's residence to La Vallée, was over some of the wildest tract of the Pyrenees, and where a carriage wheel had never passed, the Count hired mules for himself and his family, as well as a couple of stout guides, who were well armed, informed of all the passes of the mountains, and who boasted, too, that they were acquainted with every brake and dingle in the way, could tell the names of all the highest points of this chain of Alps, knew every forest, that spread along their narrow valleys, the shallowest part of every torrent they must cross, and the exact distance of every goatherd's and hunter's cabin they should have occasion to pass — which last article of learning required no very capacious memory, for even such simple inhabitants were but thinly scattered over these wilds.

The Count left the château de St. Foix, early in the morning, with an intention of passing the night at a little inn upon the mountains, about half way to La Vallée, of which his guides had informed him; and, though this was frequented chiefly by Spanish muleteers, on their route into France, and, of course, would afford only sorry accommodation, the Count had no alternative, for it was the only place like an inn, on the road.

After a day of admiration and fatigue, the travellers found themselves, about sunset, in a woody valley, overlooked, on every side, by abrupt heights. They had proceeded for many leagues, without seeing a human habitation, and had only heard, now and then, at a distance, the melancholy tinkling of a sheepbell; but now they caught the notes of merry music, and presently saw, within a little green recess among the rocks, a group of mountaineers, tripping through a dance. The Count, who could not look upon the happiness, any more than on the misery of others, with indifference, halted to enjoy this scene of simple pleasure. The group before him consisted of French and Spanish peasants, the inhabitants of a neighbouring hamlet, some of whom were performing a sprightly dance, the women with castanets in their hands, to the sounds of a lute and a tamborine, till, from the brisk melody of France, the music softened into a slow movement, to which two female peasants danced a Spanish Pavan.

The Count, comparing this with the scenes of such gaiety as he had witnessed at Paris, where false taste painted the features, and, while it vainly tried to supply the glow of nature, concealed the charms of animation — where affectation so often distorted the air, and vice perverted the manners — sighed to think, that natural graces and innocent pleasures flourished in the wilds of solitude, while they drooped amidst the concourse of polished society. But the lengthening shadows reminded the travellers, that they had no time to lose; and, leaving this joyous group, they pursued their way towards the little inn, which was to shelter them from the night.

The rays of the setting sun now threw a yellow gleam upon the forests of pine and chesnut, that swept down the lower region of the mountains, and gave resplendent tints to the snowy points above. But soon, even this light faded fast, and the scenery assumed a more tremendous appearance, invested with the obscurity of twilight. Where the torrent had been seen, it was now only heard; where the wild cliffs had displayed every variety of form and attitude, a dark mass of mountains now alone appeared; and the vale, which far, far below had opened its dreadful chasm, the eye could no longer fathom. A melancholy gleam still lingered on the summits of the highest Alps, overlooking the deep repose of evening, and seeming to make the stillness of the hour more awful.

Blanche viewed the scene in silence, and listened with enthusiasm to the murmur of the pines, that extended in dark lines along the mountains, and to the faint voice of the izard, among the rocks, that came at intervals on the air. But her enthusiasm sunk into apprehension, when, as the shadows deepened, she looked upon the doubtful precipice, that bordered the road, as well as on the various fantastic forms of danger, that glimmered through the obscurity beyond it; and she asked her father, how far they were from the inn, and whether he did not consider the road to be dangerous at this late hour. The Count repeated the first question to the guides, who returned a doubtful answer, adding, that, when it was darker, it would be safest to rest, till the moon rose. “It is scarcely safe to proceed now” said the Count; but the guides, assuring him that there was no danger, went on. Blanche, revived by this assurance, again indulged a pensive pleasure, as she watched the progress of twilight gradually spreading its tints over the woods and mountains, and stealing from the eye every minuter feature of the scene, till the grand outlines of nature alone remained. Then fell the silent dews, and every wild flower, and aromatic plant, that bloomed among the cliffs, breathed forth its sweetness; then, too, when the mountain bee had crept into its blossomed bed, and the hum of every little insect, that had floated gaily in the sunbeam, was hushed, the sound of many streams, not heard till now, murmured at a distance. — The bats alone, of all the animals inhabiting this region, seemed awake; and, while they flitted across the silent path, which Blanche was pursuing, she remembered the following lines, which Emily had given her:

TO THE BAT

From haunt of man, from day’s obtrusive glare,
Thou shroud’st thee in the ruin’s ivy’d tow’r.

Or in some shadowy glen's romantic bow'r,
 Where wizard forms their mystic charms prepare,
 Where Horror lurks, and ever-boding Care!
 But, at the sweet and silent ev'ning hour,
 When clos'd in sleep is ev'ry languid flow'r,
 Thou lov'st to sport upon the twilight air,
 Mocking the eye, that would thy course pursue,
 In many a wanton-round, elastic, gay,
 Thou flit'st athwart the pensive wand'rer's way,
 As his lone footsteps print the mountain-dew.
 From Indian isles thou com'st, with Summer's car,
 Twilight thy love—thy guide her beaming star!

To a warm imagination, the dubious forms, that float, half veiled in darkness, afford a higher delight, than the most distinct scenery, that the sun can show. While the fancy thus wanders over landscapes partly of its own creation, a sweet complacency steals upon the mind, and

Refines it all to subtlest feeling,
 Bids the tear of rapture roll.

The distant note of a torrent, the weak trembling of the breeze among the woods, or the far off sound of a human voice, now lost and heard again, are circumstances, which wonderfully heighten the enthusiastic tone of the mind. The young St. Foix, who saw the presentations of a fervid fancy, and felt whatever enthusiasm could suggest, sometimes interrupted the silence, which the rest of the party seemed by mutual consent to preserve, remarking and pointing out to Blanche the most striking effect of the hour upon the scenery; while Blanche, whose apprehensions were beguiled by the conversation of her lover, yielded to the taste so congenial to his, and they conversed in a low restrained voice, the effect of the pensive tranquillity, which twilight and the scene inspired, rather than of any fear, that they should be heard. But, while the heart was thus soothed to tenderness, St. Foix gradually mingled, with his admiration of the country, a mention of his affection; and he continued to speak, and Blanche to listen, till the mountains, the woods, and the magical illusions of twilight, were remembered no more.

The shadows of evening soon shifted to the gloom of night, which was somewhat anticipated by the vapours, that, gathering fast round the mountains, rolled in dark wreaths along their sides; and the guides proposed to rest, till the moon should rise, adding, that they thought a storm was coming on. As they looked round for a spot, that might afford some kind of shelter, an object was perceived obscurely through the dusk, on a point of rock, a little way down the mountain, which they imagined to be a hunter's or a shepherd's cabin, and the party, with cautious steps, proceeded towards it. Their labour, however, was not rewarded, or their apprehensions soothed; for, on reaching the object of their search, they discovered a monumental cross, which marked the spot to have been polluted by murder.

The darkness would not permit them to read the inscription; but the guides knew this to be a cross, raised to the memory of a Count de Beliard, who had been murdered here by a horde of banditti, that had infested this part of the Pyrenees, a few years before; and the uncommon size of the monument seemed to justify the supposition, that it was erected for a person of some distinction. Blanche shuddered, as she listened to some horrid particulars of the Count's fate, which one of the guides related in a low, restrained tone, as if the sound of his own voice frightened him; but, while they lingered at the cross, attending to his narrative, a flash of lightning glanced upon the rocks, thunder muttered at a distance, and the travellers, now alarmed, quitted this scene of solitary horror, in search of shelter.

Having regained their former track, the guides, as they passed on, endeavoured to interest the Count by various stories of robbery, and even of murder, which had been perpetrated in the very places they must unavoidably pass, with accounts of their own dauntless courage and wonderful escapes. The chief guide, or rather he, who was the most completely armed, drawing forth one of the four pistols, that were tucked into his belt, swore, that it had shot three robbers within the year. He then brandished a clasp knife of enormous length, and was going to recount the wonderful execution it had done, when St. Foix, perceiving, that Blanche was terrified, interrupted him. The Count, meanwhile, secretly laughing at the terrible histories and extravagant boastings of the man, resolved to humour him, and, telling Blanche in a whisper, his design, began to recount some exploits of his own, which infinitely exceeded any related by the guide.

To these surprising circumstances he so artfully gave the colouring of truth, that the courage of the guides was visibly affected by them, who continued silent, long after the Count had ceased to speak. The loquacity of the chief hero thus laid asleep, the vigilance of his eyes and ears seemed more thoroughly awakened, for he listened, with much appearance of anxiety, to the deep thunder, which murmured at intervals, and often paused, as the breeze, that was now rising, rushed among the pines. But, when he made a sudden halt before a tuft of cork trees, that projected over the road, and drew forth a pistol, before he would venture to brave the banditti which might lurk behind it, the Count could no longer refrain from laughter.

Having now, however, arrived at a level spot, somewhat sheltered from the air, by overhanging cliffs and by a wood of larch, that rose over the precipice on the left, and the guides being yet ignorant how far they were from the inn, the travellers determined to rest, till the moon should rise, or the storm disperse. Blanche, recalled to a sense of the present moment, looked on the surrounding gloom, with terror; but giving her hand to St. Foix, she alighted, and the whole party entered a kind of cave, if such it could be called, which was only a shallow cavity, formed by the curve of impending rocks. A light being struck, a fire was kindled, whose blaze afforded some degree of cheerfulness, and no small comfort, for, though the day had been hot, the night air of this mountainous region was chilling; a fire was partly necessary also to keep off the wolves, with which those wilds were infested.

Provisions being spread upon a projection of the rock, the Count and his family partook of a supper, which, in a scene less rude, would certainly have been thought less excellent. When the repast was finished, St. Foix, impatient for the moon, sauntered along the precipice, to a point, that fronted the east; but all was yet wrapt in gloom, and the silence of night was broken only by the murmuring of woods, that waved far below, or by distant thunder, and, now and then, by the faint voices of the party he had quitted. He viewed, with emotions of awful sublimity, the long volumes of sulphureous clouds, that floated along the upper and middle regions of the air, and the lightnings that flashed from them, sometimes silently, and, at others, followed by sullen peals of thunder, which the mountains feebly prolonged, while the whole horizon, and the abyss, on which he stood, were discovered in the momentary light. Upon the succeeding darkness, the fire, which had been kindled in the cave, threw a partial gleam, illumining some points of the opposite rocks, and the summits of pine woods, that hung beetling on the cliffs below, while their recesses seemed to frown in deeper shade.

St. Foix stopped to observe the picture, which the party in the cave presented, where the elegant form of Blanche was finely contrasted by the majestic figure of the Count, who was seated by her on a rude stone, and each was rendered more impressive by the grotesque habits and strong features of the guides and other attendants, who were in the back ground of the piece. The effect of the light, too, was interesting; on the surrounding figures it threw a strong, though pale gleam, and glittered on their bright arms; while upon the foliage of a gigantic larch, that impended its shade over the cliff above, appeared a red, dusky tint, deepening almost imperceptibly into the blackness of night.

While St. Foix contemplated the scene, the moon, broad and yellow, rose over the eastern summits, from among embattled clouds, and showed dimly the grandeur of the heavens, the mass of vapours, that rolled half way down the precipice beneath, and the doubtful mountains.

What dreadful pleasure! there to stand sublime,
 Like shipwreck'd mariner on desert coast,
 And view th'enormous waste of vapour, tost
 In billows length'ning to th'horizon round!

THE MINSTREL

From this romantic reverie he was awakened by the voices of the guides, repeating his name, which was reverbed from cliff to cliff, till a hundred tongues seemed to call him; when he soon quieted the fears of the Count and the Lady Blanche, by returning to the cave. As the storm, however, seemed approaching, they did not quit their place of shelter; and the Count, seated between his daughter and St. Foix, endeavoured to divert the fears of the former, and conversed on subjects, relating to the natural history of the scene, among which they wandered. He spoke of the mineral and fossile substances, found in the depths of these mountains — the veins of marble and granite, with which they abounded, the strata of shells, discovered near their summits, many thousand

fathom above the level of the sea, and at a vast distance from its present shore; — of the tremendous chasms and caverns of the rocks, the grotesque form of the mountains, and the various phenomena, that seem to stamp upon the world the history of the deluge. From the natural history he descended to the mention of events and circumstances, connected with the civil story of the Pyrenees; named some of the most remarkable fortresses, which France and Spain had erected in the passes of these mountains; and gave a brief account of some celebrated sieges and encounters in early times, when Ambition first frightened Solitude from these her deep recesses, made her mountains, which before had echoed only to the torrent's roar, tremble with the clang of arms, and, when man's first footsteps in her sacred haunts had left the print of blood!

As Blanche sat, attentive to the narrative, that rendered the scenes doubly interesting, and resigned to solemn emotion, while she considered, that she was on the very ground, once polluted by these events, her reverie was suddenly interrupted by a sound, that came in the wind. — It was the distant bark of a watchdog. The travellers listened with eager hope, and, as the wind blew stronger, fancied, that the sound came from no great distance; and, the guides having little doubt, that it proceeded from the inn they were in search of, the Count determined to pursue his way. The moon now afforded a stronger, though still an uncertain light, as she moved among broken clouds; and the travellers, led by the sound, recommenced their journey along the brow of the precipice, preceded by a single torch, that now contended with the moonlight; for the guides, believing they should reach the inn soon after sunset, had neglected to provide more. In silent caution they followed the sound, which was heard but at intervals, and which, after some time entirely ceased. The guides endeavoured, however, to point their course to the quarter, whence it had issued, but the deep roaring of a torrent soon seized their attention, and presently they came to a tremendous chasm of the mountain, which seemed to forbid all further progress. Blanche alighted from her mule, as did the Count and St. Foix, while the guides traversed the edge in search of a bridge, which, however rude, might convey them to the opposite side, and they, at length, confessed, what the Count had begun to suspect, that they had been, for some time, doubtful of their way, and were now certain only, that they had lost it.

At a little distance, was discovered a rude and dangerous passage, formed by an enormous pine, which, thrown across the chasm, united the opposite precipices, and which had been felled probably by the hunter, to facilitate his chase of the izard, or the wolf. The whole party, the guides excepted, shuddered at the prospect of crossing this alpine bridge, whose sides afforded no kind of defence, and from which to fall was to die. The guides, however, prepared to lead over the mules, while Blanche stood trembling on the brink, and listening to the roar of the waters, which were seen descending from rocks above, overhung with lofty pines, and thence precipitating themselves into the deep abyss, where their white surges gleamed faintly in the moonlight. The poor animals proceeded over this perilous bridge with instinctive caution, neither frightened by the noise of the cataract, nor deceived by the gloom, which the impending foliage threw athwart their way. It was now, that the solitary torch, which had been hitherto of little service, was found to be an inestimable

treasure; and Blanche, terrified, shrinking, but endeavouring to recollect all her firmness and presence of mind, preceded by her lover and supported by her father, followed the red gleam of the torch, in safety, to the opposite cliff.

As they went on, the heights contracted, and formed a narrow pass, at the bottom of which, the torrent they had just crossed, was heard to thunder. But they were again cheered by the bark of a dog, keeping watch, perhaps, over the flocks of the mountains, to protect them from the nightly descent of the wolves. The sound was much nearer than before, and, while they rejoiced in the hope of soon reaching a place of repose, a light was seen to glimmer at a distance. It appeared at a height considerably above the level of their path, and was lost and seen again, as if the waving branches of trees sometimes excluded and then admitted its rays. The guides hallooed with all their strength, but the sound of no human voice was heard in return, and, at length, as a more effectual means of making themselves known, they fired a pistol. But, while they listened in anxious expectation, the noise of the explosion was alone heard, echoing among the rocks, and it gradually sunk into silence, which no friendly hint of man disturbed. The light, however, that had been seen before, now became plainer, and, soon after, voices were heard indistinctly on the wind; but, upon the guides repeating the call, the voices suddenly ceased, and the light disappeared.

The Lady Blanche was now almost sinking beneath the pressure of anxiety, fatigue and apprehension, and the united efforts of the Count and St. Foix could scarcely support her spirits. As they continued to advance, an object was perceived on a point of rock above, which, the strong rays of the moon then falling on it, appeared to be a watchtower. The Count, from its situation and some other circumstances, had little doubt, that it was such, and believing, that the light had proceeded from thence, he endeavoured to reanimate his daughter's spirits by the near prospect of shelter and repose, which, however rude the accommodation, a ruined watchtower might afford.

"Numerous watchtowers have been erected among the Pyrenees" said the Count, anxious only to call Blanche's attention from the subject of her fears; "and the method, by which they give intelligence of the approach of the enemy, is, you know, by fires, kindled on the summits of these edifices. Signals have thus, sometimes, been communicated from post to post, along a frontier line of several hundred miles in length. Then, as occasion may require, the lurking armies emerge from their fortresses and the forests, and march forth, to defend, perhaps, the entrance of some grand pass, where, planting themselves on the heights, they assail their astonished enemies, who wind along the glen below, with fragments of the shattered cliff, and pour death and defeat upon them. The ancient forts, and watch-towers, overlooking the grand passes of the Pyrenees, are carefully preserved; but some of those in inferior stations have been suffered to fall into decay, and are now frequently converted into the more peaceful habitation of the hunter, or the shepherd, who, after a day of toil, retires hither, and, with his faithful dogs, forgets, near a cheerful blaze, the labour of the chase, or the anxiety of collecting his wandering flocks, while he is sheltered from the nightly storm."

“But are they always thus peacefully inhabited?” said the Lady Blanche.

“No” replied the Count “they are sometimes the asylum of French and Spanish smugglers, who cross the mountains with contraband goods from their respective countries, and the latter are particularly numerous, against whom strong parties of the king’s troops are sometimes sent. But the desperate resolution of these adventurers, who, knowing, that, if they are taken, they must expiate the breach of the law by the most cruel death, travel in large parties, well armed, often daunts the courage of the soldiers. The smugglers, who seek only safety, never engage, when they can possibly avoid it; the military, also, who know, that in these encounters, danger is certain, and glory almost unattainable, are equally reluctant to fight; an engagement, therefore, very seldom happens, but, when it does, it never concludes till after the most desperate and bloody conflict. You are inattentive, Blanche” added the Count: “I have wearied you with a dull subject; but see, yonder, in the moonlight, is the edifice we have been in search of, and we are fortunate to be so near it, before the storm bursts.”

Blanche, looking up, perceived, that they were at the foot of the cliff, on whose summit the building stood, but no light now issued from it; the barking of the dog too had, for some time, ceased, and the guides began to doubt, whether this was really the object of their search. From the distance, at which they surveyed it, shown imperfectly by a cloudy moon, it appeared to be of more extent than a single watchtower; but the difficulty was how to ascend the height, whose abrupt declivities seemed to afford no kind of pathway.

While the guides carried forward the torch to examine the cliff, the Count, remaining with Blanche and St. Foix at its foot, under the shadow of the woods, endeavoured again to beguile the time by conversation, but again anxiety abstracted the mind of Blanche; and he then consulted, apart with St. Foix, whether it would be advisable, should a path be found, to venture to an edifice, which might possibly harbour banditti. They considered, that their own party was not small, and that several of them were well armed; and, after enumerating the dangers, to be incurred by passing the night in the open wild, exposed, perhaps, to the effects of a thunderstorm, there remained not a doubt, that they ought to endeavour to obtain admittance to the edifice above, at any hazard respecting the inhabitants it might harbour; but the darkness, and the dead silence, that surrounded it, appeared to contradict the probability of its being inhabited at all.

A shout from the guides aroused their attention, after which, in a few minutes, one of the Count’s servants returned with intelligence, that a path was found, and they immediately hastened to join the guides, when they all ascended a little winding way cut in the rock among thickets of dwarf wood, and, after much toil and some danger, reached the summit, where several ruined towers, surrounded by a massy wall, rose to their view, partially illumined by the moonlight. The space around the building was silent, and apparently forsaken, but the Count was cautious; “Step softly” said he, in a low voice “while we reconnoitre the edifice.”

Having proceeded silently along for some paces, they stopped at a gate, whose portals were terrible even in ruins, and, after a moment's hesitation, passed on to the court of entrance, but paused again at the head of a terrace, which, branching from it, ran along the brow of a precipice. Over this, rose the main body of the edifice, which was now seen to be, not a watchtower, but one of those ancient fortresses, that, from age and neglect, had fallen to decay. Many parts of it, however, appeared to be still entire; it was built of grey stone, in the heavy Saxon-gothic style, with enormous round towers, buttresses of proportionable strength, and the arch of the large gate, which seemed to open into the hall of the fabric, was round, as was that of a window above. The air of solemnity, which must so strongly have characterised the pile even in the days of its early strength, was now considerably heightened by its shattered battlements and half demolished walls, and by the huge masses of ruin, scattered in its wide area, now silent and grass grown. In this court of entrance stood the gigantic remains of an oak, that seemed to have flourished and decayed with the building, which it still appeared frowningly to protect by the few remaining branches, leafless and moss-grown, that crowned its trunk, and whose wide extent told how enormous the tree had been in a former age. This fortress was evidently once of great strength, and, from its situation on a point of rock, impending over a deep glen, had been of great power to annoy, as well as to resist; the Count, therefore, as he stood surveying it, was somewhat surprised, that it had been suffered, ancient as it was, to sink into ruins, and its present lonely and deserted air excited in his breast emotions of melancholy awe. While he indulged, for a moment, these emotions, he thought he heard a sound of remote voices steal upon the stillness, from within the building, the front of which he again surveyed with scrutinizing eyes, but yet no light was visible. He now determined to walk round the fort, to that remote part of it, whence he thought the voices had arisen, that he might examine whether any light could be discerned there, before he ventured to knock at the gate; for this purpose, he entered upon the terrace, where the remains of cannon were yet apparent in the thick walls, but he had not proceeded many paces, when his steps were suddenly arrested by the loud barking of a dog within, and which he fancied to be the same, whose voice had been the means of bringing the travellers thither. It now appeared certain, that the place was inhabited, and the Count returned to consult again with St. Foix, whether he should try to obtain admittance, for its wild aspect had somewhat shaken his former resolution; but, after a second consultation, he submitted to the considerations, which before determined him, and which were strengthened by the discovery of the dog, that guarded the fort, as well as by the stillness that pervaded it. He, therefore, ordered one of his servants to knock at the gate, who was advancing to obey him, when a light appeared through the loophole of one of the towers, and the Count called loudly, but, receiving no answer, he went up to the gate himself, and struck upon it with an iron pointed pole, which had assisted him to climb the steep. When the echoes had ceased, that this blow had awakened, the renewed barking — and there were now more than one dog — was the only sound, that was heard. The Count stepped back, a few paces, to observe whether the light was in the tower, and, perceiving, that it was gone, he returned to the portal, and had lifted the pole to strike again, when again he

fancied he heard the murmur of voices within, and paused to listen. He was confirmed in the supposition, but they were too remote, to be heard otherwise than in a murmur, and the Count now let the pole fall heavily upon the gate; when almost immediately a profound silence followed. It was apparent, that the people within had heard the sound, and their caution in admitting strangers gave him a favourable opinion of them. "They are either hunters or shepherds" said he "who, like ourselves, have probably sought shelter from the night within these walls, and are fearful of admitting strangers, lest they should prove robbers. I will endeavour to remove their fears." So saying, he called aloud, "We are friends, who ask shelter from the night."

In a few moments, steps were heard within, which approached, and a voice then enquired — "Who calls?"

"Friends," repeated the Count; "open the gates, and you shall know more."—

Strong bolts were now heard to be undrawn, and a man, armed with a hunting spear, appeared. "What is it you want at this hour?" said he. The Count beckoned his attendants, and then answered, that he wished to enquire the way to the nearest cabin. "Are you so little acquainted with these mountains," said the man, "as not to know, that there is none, within several leagues? I cannot show you the way; you must seek it — there's a moon." Saying this, he was closing the gate, and the Count was turning away, half disappointed and half afraid, when another voice was heard from above, and, on looking up, he saw a light, and a man's face, at the grate of the portal.

"Stay, friend, you have lost your way?" said the voice. "You are hunters, I suppose, like ourselves: I will be with you presently." The voice ceased, and the light disappeared. Blanche had been alarmed by the appearance of the man, who had opened the gate, and she now entreated her father to quit the place; but the Count had observed the hunter's spear, which he carried; and the words from the tower encouraged him to await the event. The gate was soon opened, and several men in hunters' habits, who had heard above what had passed below, appeared, and, having listened some time to the Count, told him he was welcome to rest there for the night. They then pressed him, with much courtesy, to enter, and to partake of such fare as they were about to sit down to. The Count, who had observed them attentively while they spoke, was cautious, and somewhat suspicious; but he was also weary, fearful of the approaching storm, and of encountering alpine heights in the obscurity of night; being likewise somewhat confident in the strength and number of his attendants, he, after some further consideration, determined to accept the invitation. With this resolution he called his servants, who, advancing round the tower, behind which some of them had silently listened to this conference, followed their Lord, the Lady Blanche, and St. Foix into the fortress. The strangers led them on to a large and rude hall, partially seen by a fire that blazed at its extremity, round which four men, in the hunter's dress, were seated, and on the hearth were several dogs stretched in sleep. In the middle of the hall stood a large table, and over the fire some part of an animal was boiling. As the Count approached, the men arose, and the dogs, half raising themselves, looked fiercely at the

strangers, but, on hearing their masters' voices, kept their postures on the hearth.

Blanche looked round this gloomy and spacious hall; then at the men, and to her father, who, smiling cheerfully at her, addressed himself to the hunters. "This is a hospitable hearth," said he, "the blaze of a fire is reviving after having wandered so long in these dreary wilds. Your dogs are tired; what success have you had?"

"Such as we usually have," replied one of the men, who had been seated in the hall, "we kill our game with tolerable certainty."

"These are fellow hunters," said one of the men who had brought the Count hither, "that have lost their way, and I have told them there is room enough in the fort for us all." "Very true, very true," replied his companion, "What luck have you had in the chase, brothers? We have killed two izards, and that, you will say, is pretty well."

"You mistake, friend," said the Count, "we are not hunters, but travellers; but, if you will admit us to hunters' fare, we shall be well contented, and will repay your kindness."

"Sit down then, brother," said one of the men: "Jacques, lay more fuel on the fire, the kid will soon be ready; bring a seat for the lady too. Ma'amselle, will you taste our brandy? it is true Barcelona, and as bright as ever flowed from a keg." Blanche timidly smiled, and was going to refuse, when her father prevented her, by taking, with a good humoured air, the glass offered to his daughter; and Mons. St. Foix, who was seated next her, pressed her hand, and gave her an encouraging look, but her attention was engaged by a man, who sat silently by the fire, observing St. Foix, with a steady and earnest eye.

"You lead a jolly life here," said the Count. "The life of a hunter is a pleasant and a healthy one; and the repose is sweet, which succeeds to your labour."

"Yes" replied one of his hosts "our life is pleasant enough. We live here only during the summer, and autumnal months; in winter, the place is dreary, and the swoln torrents, that descend from the heights, put a stop to the chase."

"'Tis a life of liberty and enjoyment," said the Count: "I should like to pass a month in your way very well."

"We find employment for our guns too," said a man who stood behind the Count: "here are plenty of birds, of delicious flavour, that feed upon the wild thyme and herbs, that grow in the valleys. Now I think of it, there is a brace of birds hung up in the stone gallery; go fetch them, Jacques, we will have them dressed."

The Count now made enquiry, concerning the method of pursuing the chase among the rocks and precipices of these romantic regions, and was listening to

a curious detail, when a horn was sounded at the gate. Blanche looked timidly at her father, who continued to converse on the subject of the chase, but whose countenance was somewhat expressive of anxiety, and who often turned his eyes towards that part of the hall nearest the gate. The horn sounded again, and a loud halloo succeeded. "These are some of our companions, returned from their day's labour," said a man, going lazily from his seat towards the gate; and in a few minutes, two men appeared, each with a gun over his shoulder, and pistols in his belt. "What cheer, my lads? what cheer?" said they, as they approached.

"What luck?" returned their companions: "have you brought home your supper? You shall have none else."

"Hah! who the devil have you brought home?" said they in bad Spanish, on perceiving the Count's party, "are they from France, or Spain? — where did you meet with them?"

"They met with us, and a merry meeting too" replied his companion aloud in good French. "This chevalier, and his party, had lost their way, and asked a night's lodging in the fort." The others made no reply, but threw down a kind of knapsack, and drew forth several brace of birds. The bag sounded heavily as it fell to the ground, and the glitter of some bright metal within glanced on the eye of the Count, who now surveyed, with a more enquiring look, the man, that held the knapsack. He was a tall robust figure, of a hard countenance, and had short black hair, curling in his neck. Instead of the hunter's dress, he wore a faded military uniform; sandals were laced on his broad legs, and a kind of short trowsers hung from his waist. On his head he wore a leathern cap, somewhat resembling in shape an ancient Roman helmet; but the brows that scowled beneath it, would have characterised those of the barbarians, who conquered Rome, rather than those of a Roman soldier. The Count, at length, turned away his eyes, and remained silent and thoughtful, till, again raising them, he perceived a figure standing in an obscure part of the hall, fixed in attentive gaze on St. Foix, who was conversing with Blanche, and did not observe this; but the Count, soon after, saw the same man looking over the shoulder of the soldier as attentively at himself. He withdrew his eye, when that of the Count met it, who felt mistrust gathering fast upon his mind, but feared to betray it in his countenance, and, forcing his features to assume a smile, addressed Blanche on some indifferent subject. When he again looked round, he perceived, that the soldier and his companion were gone.

The man, who was called Jacques, now returned from the stone gallery. "A fire is lighted there" said he "and the birds are dressing; the table too is spread there, for that place is warmer than this."

His companions approved of the removal, and invited their guests to follow to the gallery, of whom Blanche appeared distressed, and remained seated, and St. Foix looked at the Count, who said, he preferred the comfortable blaze of the fire he was then near. The hunters, however, commended the warmth of the other apartment, and pressed his removal with such seeming courtesy, that the

Count, half doubting, and half fearful of betraying his doubts, consented to go. The long and ruinous passages, through which they went, somewhat daunted him, but the thunder, which now burst in loud peals above, made it dangerous to quit this place of shelter, and he forbore to provoke his conductors by showing that he distrusted them. The hunters led the way, with a lamp; the Count and St. Foix, who wished to please their hosts by some instances of familiarity, carried each a seat, and Blanche followed, with faltering steps. As she passed on, part of her dress caught on a nail in the wall, and, while she stopped, somewhat too scrupulously, to disengage it, the Count, who was talking to St. Foix, and neither of whom observed the circumstance, followed their conductor round an abrupt angle of the passage, and Blanche was left behind in darkness. The thunder prevented them from hearing her call but, having disengaged her dress, she quickly followed, as she thought, the way they had taken. A light, that glimmered at a distance, confirmed this belief, and she proceeded towards an open door, whence it issued, conjecturing the room beyond to be the stone gallery the men had spoken of. Hearing voices as she advanced, she paused within a few paces of the chamber, that she might be certain whether she was right, and from thence, by the light of a lamp, that hung from the ceiling, observed four men, seated round a table, over which they leaned in apparent consultation. In one of them she distinguished the features of him, whom she had observed, gazing at St. Foix, with such deep attention; and who was now speaking in an earnest, though restrained voice, till, one of his companions seeming to oppose him, they spoke together in a loud and harsher tone. Blanche, alarmed by perceiving that neither her father, nor St. Foix were there, and terrified at the fierce countenances and manners of these men, was turning hastily from the chamber, to pursue her search of the gallery, when she heard one of the men say:

“Let all dispute end here. Who talks of danger? Follow my advice, and there will be none — secure *them*, and the rest are an easy prey.” Blanche, struck with these words, paused a moment, to hear more. “There is nothing to be got by the rest,” said one of his companions, “I am never for blood when I can help it — dispatch the two others, and our business is done; the rest may go.”

“May they so?” exclaimed the first ruffian, with a tremendous oath — “What! to tell how we have disposed of their masters, and to send the king’s troops to drag us to the wheel! You were always a choice adviser — I warrant we have not yet forgot St. Thomas’s eve last year.”

Blanche’s heart now sunk with horror. Her first impulse was to retreat from the door, but, when she would have gone, her trembling frame refused to support her, and, having tottered a few paces, to a more obscure part of the passage, she was compelled to listen to the dreadful councils of those, who, she was no longer suffered to doubt, were banditti. In the next moment, she heard the following words, “Why you would not murder the whole *gang*?”

“I warrant our lives are as good as theirs” replied his comrade. “If we don’t kill them, they will hang us: better they should die than we be hanged.”

“Better, better” cried his comrades.

“To commit murder, is a hopeful way of escaping the gallows!” said the first ruffian — “many an honest fellow has run his head into the noose that way, though.” There was a pause of some moments, during which they appeared to be considering.

“Confound those fellows” exclaimed one of the robbers impatiently, “they ought to have been here by this time; they will come back presently with the old story, and no booty: if they were here, our business would be plain and easy. I see we shall not be able to do the business tonight, for our numbers are not equal to the enemy, and in the morning they will be for marching off, and how can we detain them without force?”

“I have been thinking of a scheme, that will do,” said one of his comrades: “if we can dispatch the two chevaliers silently, it will be easy to master the rest.”

“That’s a plausible scheme, in good faith,” said another with a smile of scorn—“If I can eat my way through the prison wall, I shall be at liberty! — How can we dispatch them *silently*?”

“By poison” replied his companions.

“Well said! That will do” said the second ruffian “that will give a lingering death too, and satisfy my revenge. These barons shall take care how they again tempt our vengeance.”

“I knew the son, the moment I saw him,” said the man, whom Blanche had observed gazing on St. Foix, “though he does not know me; the father I had almost forgotten.”

“Well, you may say what you will” said the third ruffian “but I don’t believe he is the Baron, and I am as likely to know as any of you, for I was one of them, that attacked him, with our brave lads, that suffered.”

“And was not I another?” said the first ruffian “I tell you he is the Baron; but what does it signify whether he is or not? — shall we let all this booty go out of our hands? It is not often we have such luck at this. While we run the chance of the wheel for smuggling a few pounds of tobacco, to cheat the king’s manufactory, and of breaking our necks down the precipices in the chace of our food; and, now and then, rob a brother smuggler, or a stragglng pilgrim, of what scarcely repays us the powder we fire at them, shall we let such a prize as this go? Why they have enough about them to keep us for —”

“I am not for that, I am not for that” replied the third robber “let us make the most of them: only, if this is the Baron, I should like to have a flash the more at him, for the sake of our brave comrades, that he brought to the gallows.”

“Aye, aye, flash as much as you will” rejoined the first man “but I tell you the Baron is a taller man.”

“Confound your quibbling” said the second ruffian “shall we let them go or not? If we stay here much longer, they will take the hint, and march off without our leave. Let them be who they will, they are rich, or why all those servants? Did you see the ring, he, you call the Baron, had on his finger? — It was a diamond; but he has not got it on now: he saw me looking at it, I warrant, and took it off.”

“Aye, and then there is the picture; did you see that? She has not taken that off” observed the first ruffian “it hangs at her neck; if it had not sparkled so, I should not have found it out, for it was almost hid by her dress; those are diamonds too, and a rare many of them there must be, to go round such a large picture.”

“But how are we to manage this business?” said the second ruffian: “let us talk of that, there is no fear of there being booty enough, but how are we to secure it?”

“Aye, aye,” said his comrades, “let us talk of that, and remember no time is to be lost.”

“I am still for poison” observed the third “but consider their number; why there are nine or ten of them, and armed too; when I saw so many at the gate, I was not for letting them in, you know, nor you either.”

“I thought they might be some of our enemies” replied the second “I did not so much mind numbers.”

“But you must mind them now” rejoined his comrade “or it will be worse for you. We are not more than six, and how can we master ten by open force? I tell you we must give some of them a dose, and the rest may then be managed.”

“I’ll tell you a better way” rejoined the other impatiently “draw closer.”

Blanche, who had listened to this conversation, in an agony, which it would be impossible to describe, could no longer distinguish what was said, for the ruffians now spoke in lowered voices; but the hope, that she might save her friends from the plot, if she could find her way quickly to them, suddenly reanimated her spirits, and lent her strength enough to turn her steps in search of the gallery. Terror, however, and darkness conspired against her, and, having moved a few yards, the feeble light, that issued from the chamber, no longer even contended with the gloom, and, her foot stumbling over a step that crossed the passage, she fell to the ground.

The noise startled the banditti, who became suddenly silent, and then all rushed to the passage, to examine whether any person was there, who might have overheard their councils. Blanche saw them approaching, and perceived

their fierce and eager looks: but, before she could raise herself, they discovered and seized her, and, as they dragged her towards the chamber they had quitted, her screams drew from them horrible threatenings.

Having reached the room, they began to consult what they should do with her. "Let us first know what she had heard" said the chief robber. "How long have you been in the passage, lady, and what brought you there?"

"Let us first secure that picture" said one of his comrades, approaching the trembling Blanche. "Fair lady, by your leave that picture is mine; come, surrender it, or I shall seize it."

Blanche, entreating their mercy, immediately gave up the miniature, while another of the ruffians fiercely interrogated her, concerning what she had overheard of their conversation, when, her confusion and terror too plainly telling what her tongue feared to confess, the ruffians looked expressively upon one another, and two of them withdrew to a remote part of the room, as if to consult further.

"These are diamonds, by St. Peter!" exclaimed the fellow, who had been examining the miniature "and here is a very pretty picture too, "faith; as handsome a young chevalier, as you would wish to see by a summer's sun. Lady, this is your spouse, I warrant, for it is the spark, that was in your company just now."

Blanche, sinking with terror, conjured him to have pity on her, and, delivering him her purse, promised to say nothing of what had passed, if he would suffer her to return to her friends.

He smiled ironically, and was going to reply, when his attention was called off by a distant noise; and, while he listened, he grasped the arm of Blanche more firmly, as if he feared she would escape from him, and she again shrieked for help.

The approaching sounds called the ruffians from the other part of the chamber. "We are betrayed" said they; "but let us listen a moment, perhaps it is only our comrades come in from the mountains, and if so, our work is sure; listen!"

A distant discharge of shot confirmed this supposition for a moment, but, in the next, the former sounds drawing nearer, the clashing of swords, mingled with the voices of loud contention and with heavy groans, were distinguished in the avenue leading to the chamber. While the ruffians prepared their arms, they heard themselves called by some of their comrades afar off, and then a shrill horn was sounded without the fortress, a signal, it appeared, they too well understood; for three of them, leaving the Lady Blanche to the care of the fourth, instantly rushed from the chamber.

While Blanche, trembling, and nearly fainting, was supplicating for release, she heard amid the tumult, that approached, the voice of St. Foix, and she had scarcely renewed her shriek, when the door of the room was thrown open, and he appeared, much disfigured with blood, and pursued by several ruffians. Blanche neither saw, nor heard any more; her head swam, her sight failed, and she became senseless in the arms of the robber, who had detained her.

When she recovered, she perceived, by the gloomy light that trembled round her, that she was in the same chamber, but neither the Count, St. Foix, nor any other person appeared, and she continued, for some time, entirely still, and nearly in a state of stupefaction. But, the dreadful images of the past returning, she endeavoured to raise herself, that she might seek her friends, when a sullen groan, at a little distance, reminded her of St. Foix, and of the condition, in which she had seen him enter this room; then, starting from the floor, by a sudden effort of horror, she advanced to the place whence the sound had proceeded, where a body was lying stretched upon the pavement, and where, by the glimmering light of a lamp, she discovered the pale and disfigured countenance of St. Foix. Her horrors, at that moment, may be easily imagined. He was speechless; his eyes were half closed, and, on the hand, which she grasped in the agony of despair, cold damps had settled. While she vainly repeated his name, and called for assistance, steps approached, and a person entered the chamber, who, she soon perceived, was not the Count, her father; but, what was her astonishment, when, supplicating him to give his assistance to St. Foix, she discovered Ludovico! He scarcely paused to recognise her, but immediately bound up the wounds of the Chevalier, and, perceiving, that he had fainted probably from loss of blood, ran for water; but he had been absent only a few moments, when Blanche heard other steps approaching, and, while she was almost frantic with apprehension of the ruffians, the light of a torch flashed upon the walls, and then Count De Villefort appeared, with an affrighted countenance, and breathless with impatience, calling upon his daughter. At the sound of his voice, she rose, and ran to his arms, while he, letting fall the bloody sword he held, pressed her to his bosom in a transport of gratitude and joy, and then hastily enquired for St. Foix, who now gave some signs of life. Ludovico soon after returning with water and brandy, the former was applied to his lips, and the latter to his temples and hands, and Blanche, at length, saw him uncloset his eyes, and then heard him enquire for her; but the joy she felt, on this occasion, was interrupted by new alarms, when Ludovico said it would be necessary to remove Mons. St. Foix immediately, and added "The banditti, that are out, my Lord, were expected home, an hour ago, and they will certainly find us, if we delay. That shrill horn, they know, is never sounded by their comrades but on most desperate occasions, and it echoes among the mountains for many leagues round. I have known them brought home by its sound even from the Pied de Melicant. Is anybody standing watch at the great gate, my Lord?"

"Nobody" replied the Count; "the rest of my people are now scattered about, I scarcely know where. Go, Ludovico, collect them together, and look out yourself, and listen if you hear the feet of mules."

Ludovico then hurried away, and the Count consulted as to the means of removing St. Foix, who could not have borne the motion of a mule, even if his strength would have supported him in the saddle.

While the Count was telling, that the banditti, whom they had found in the fort, were secured in the dungeon, Blanche observed that he was himself wounded, and that his left arm was entirely useless; but he smiled at her anxiety, assuring her the wound was trifling.

The Count's servants, except two who kept watch at the gate, now appeared, and, soon after, Ludovico. "I think I hear mules coming along the glen, my Lord" said he "but the roaring of the torrent below will not let me be certain; however, I have brought what will serve the Chevalier" he added, showing a bear's skin, fastened to a couple of long poles, which had been adapted for the purpose of bringing home such of the banditti as happened to be wounded in their encounters. Ludovico spread it on the ground, and, placing the skins of several goats upon it, made a kind of bed, into which the Chevalier, who was however now much revived, was gently lifted; and, the poles being raised upon the shoulders of the guides, whose footing among these steepes could best be depended upon, he was borne along with an easy motion. Some of the Count's servants were also wounded — but not materially, and, their wounds being bound up, they now followed to the great gate. As they passed along the hall, a loud tumult was heard at some distance, and Blanche was terrified. "It is only those villains in the dungeon, my Lady" said Ludovico.

"They seem to be bursting it open," said the Count.

"No, my Lord" replied Ludovico "it has an iron door; we have nothing to fear from them; but let me go first, and look out from the rampart."

They quickly followed him, and found their mules browsing before the gates, where the party listened anxiously, but heard no sound, except that of the torrent below and of the early breeze, sighing among the branches of the old oak, that grew in the court; and they were now glad to perceive the first tints of dawn over the mountain tops. When they had mounted their mules, Ludovico, undertaking to be their guide, led them by an easier path, than that by which they had formerly ascended, into the glen. "We must avoid that valley to the east, my Lord" said he, "or we may meet the banditti; they went out that way in the morning."

The travellers, soon after, quitted this glen, and found themselves in a narrow valley that stretched towards the north-west. The morning light upon the mountains now strengthened fast, and gradually discovered the green hillocks, that skirted the winding feet of the cliffs, tufted with cork tree, and evergreen oak. The thunder clouds being dispersed, had left the sky perfectly serene, and Blanche was revived by the fresh breeze, and by the view of verdure, which the late rain had brightened. Soon after, the sun arose, when the dripping rocks, with the shrubs that fringed their summits, and many a turfy slope below, sparkled in his rays. A wreath of mist was seen, floating along the extremity of

the valley, but the gale bore it before the travellers, and the sunbeams gradually drew it up towards the summit of the mountains. They had proceeded about a league, when, St. Foix having complained of extreme faintness, they stopped to give him refreshment, and, that the men, who bore him, might rest. Ludovico had brought from the fort some flasks of rich Spanish wine, which now proved a reviving cordial not only to St. Foix but to the whole party, though to him it gave only temporary relief, for it fed the fever, that burned in his veins, and he could neither disguise in his countenance the anguish he suffered, nor suppress the wish, that he was arrived at the inn, where they had designed to pass the preceding night.

While they thus reposed themselves under the shade of the dark green pines, the Count desired Ludovico to explain shortly, by what means he had disappeared from the north apartment, how he came into the hands of the banditti, and how he had contributed so essentially to serve him and his family, for to him he justly attributed their present deliverance. Ludovico was going to obey him, when suddenly they heard the echo of a pistol shot, from the way they had passed, and they rose in alarm, hastily to pursue their route.

CHAPTER XIII

Ah why did Fate his steps decoy
In stormy paths to roam,
Remote from all congenial joy!

BEATTIE

Emily, meanwhile, was still suffering anxiety as to the fate of Valancourt; but Theresa, having, at length, found a person, whom she could entrust on her errand to the steward, informed her, that the messenger would return on the following day; and Emily promised to be at the cottage, Theresa being too lame to attend her.

In the evening, therefore, Emily set out alone for the cottage, with a melancholy foreboding, concerning Valancourt, while, perhaps, the gloom of the hour might contribute to depress her spirits. It was a grey autumnal evening towards the close of the season; heavy mists partially obscured the mountains, and a chilling breeze, that sighed among the beech woods, strewed her path with some of their last yellow leaves. These, circling in the blast and foretelling the death of the year, gave an image of desolation to her mind, and, in her fancy, seemed to announce the death of Valancourt. Of this she had, indeed, more than once so strong a presentiment, that she was on the point of returning home, feeling herself unequal to an encounter with the certainty she anticipated, but, contending with her emotions, she so far commanded them, as to be able to proceed.

While she walked mournfully on, gazing on the long volumes of vapour, that poured upon the sky, and watching the swallows, tossed along the wind, now disappearing among tempestuous clouds, and then emerging, for a moment, in circles upon the calmer air, the afflictions and vicissitudes of her late life seemed portrayed in these fleeting images; — thus had she been tossed upon the stormy sea of misfortune for the last year, with but short intervals of peace, if peace that could be called, which was only the delay of evils. And now, when she had escaped from so many dangers, was become independent of the will of those, who had oppressed her, and found herself mistress of a large fortune, now, when she might reasonably have expected happiness, she perceived that she was as distant from it as ever. She would have accused herself of weakness and ingratitude in thus suffering a sense of the various blessings she possessed to be overcome by that of a single misfortune, had this misfortune affected herself alone; but, when she had wept for Valancourt even as living, tears of compassion had mingled with those of regret, and while she lamented a human being degraded to vice, and consequently to misery, reason and humanity claimed these tears, and fortitude had not yet taught her to separate them from those of love; in the present moments, however, it was not the certainty of his guilt, but the apprehension of his death (of a death also, to which she herself, however innocently, appeared to have been in some degree instrumental) that oppressed her. This fear increased, as the means of certainty concerning it approached; and, when she came within view of Theresa's cottage, she was so

much disordered, and her resolution failed her so entirely, that, unable to proceed, she rested on a bank, beside her path; where, as she sat, the wind that groaned sullenly among the lofty branches above, seemed to her melancholy imagination to bear the sounds of distant lamentation, and, in the pauses of the gust, she still fancied she heard the feeble and far off notes of distress. Attention convinced her, that this was no more than fancy; but the increasing gloom, which seemed the sudden close of day, soon warned her to depart, and, with faltering steps, she again moved toward the cottage. Through the casement appeared the cheerful blaze of a wood fire, and Theresa, who had observed Emily approaching, was already at the door to receive her.

“It is a cold evening, madam” said she “storms are coming on, and I thought you would like a fire. Do take this chair by the hearth.”

Emily, thanking her for this consideration, sat down, and then, looking in her face, on which the wood fire threw a gleam, she was struck with its expression, and, unable to speak, sunk back in her chair with a countenance so full of woe, that Theresa instantly comprehended the occasion of it, but she remained silent. “Ah!” said Emily, at length “it is unnecessary for me to ask the result of your enquiry, your silence, and that look, sufficiently explain it; — he is dead!”

“Alas! my dear young lady” replied Theresa, while tears filled her eyes, “this world is made up of trouble! The rich have their share as well as the poor! But we must all endeavour to bear what Heaven pleases.”

“He is dead, then!” — interrupted Emily — “Valancourt is dead!”

“A-well-a-day! I fear he is” replied Theresa.

“You fear!” said Emily “do you only fear?”

“Alas! yes, madam, I fear he is! neither the steward, nor any of the Epourville family, have heard of him since he left Languedoc, and the Count is in great affliction about him, for he says he was always punctual in writing, but that now he has not received a line from him, since he left Languedoc; he appointed to be at home, three weeks ago, but he has neither come, nor written, and they fear some accident has befallen him. Alas! that ever I should live to cry for his death! I am old, and might have died without being missed, but he” — Emily was faint, and asked for some water, and Theresa, alarmed by the voice, in which she spoke, hastened to her assistance, and, while she held the water to Emily’s lips, continued, “My dear young mistress, do not take it so to heart; the Chevalier may be alive and well, for all this; let us hope the best!”

“O no! I cannot hope” said Emily “I am acquainted with circumstances, that will not suffer me to hope. I am somewhat better now, and can hear what you have to say. Tell me, I entreat, the particulars of what you know.”

“Stay, till you are a little better, mademoiselle, you look sadly!”

“O no, Theresa, tell me all, while I have the power to hear it” said Emily “tell me all, I conjure you!”

“Well, madam, I will then; but the steward did not say much, for Richard says he seemed shy of talking about Mons. Valancourt, and what he gathered was from Gabriel, one of the servants, who said he had heard it from my lord’s gentleman.”

“What did he hear?” said Emily.

“Why, madam, Richard has but a bad memory, and could not remember half of it, and, if I had not asked him a great many questions, I should have heard little indeed. But he says that Gabriel said, that he and all the other servants were in great trouble about M. Valancourt, for that he was such a kind young gentleman, they all loved him, as well as if he had been their own brother — and now, to think what was become of him! For he used to be so courteous to them all, and, if any of them had been in fault, M. Valancourt was the first to persuade my lord to forgive them. And then, if any poor family was in distress, M. Valancourt was the first, too, to relieve them, though some folks, not a great way off, could have afforded that much better than he. And then, said Gabriel, he was so gentle to everybody, and, for all he had such a noble look with him, he never would command, and call about him, as some of your quality people do, and we never minded him the less for that. Nay, says Gabriel, for that matter, we minded him the more, and would all have run to obey him at a word, sooner than if some folks had told us what to do at full length; aye, and were more afraid of displeasing him, too, than of them, that used rough words to us.”

Emily, who no longer considered it to be dangerous to listen to praise, bestowed on Valancourt, did not attempt to interrupt Theresa, but sat, attentive to her words, though almost overwhelmed with grief. “My Lord” continued Theresa “frets about M. Valancourt sadly, and the more, because, they say, he had been rather harsh against him lately. Gabriel says he had it from my Lord’s valet, that M. Valancourt had *comported* himself wildly at Paris, and had spent a great deal of money, more a great deal than my Lord liked, for he loves money better than M. Valancourt, who had been led astray sadly. Nay, for that matter, M. Valancourt had been put into prison at Paris, and my Lord, says Gabriel, refused to take him out, and said he deserved to suffer; and, when old Gregoire, the butler, heard of this, he actually bought a walking stick to take with him to Paris, to visit his young master; but the next thing we hear is, that M. Valancourt is coming home. O, it was a joyful day when he came; but he was sadly altered, and my Lord looked very cool upon him, and he was very sad, indeed. And, soon after, he went away again into Languedoc, and, since that time, we have never seen him.”

Theresa paused, and Emily, sighing deeply, remained with her eyes fixed upon the floor, without speaking. After a long pause, she enquired what further Theresa had heard. “Yet why should I ask?” she added; “what you have already

told is too much. O Valancourt! thou art gone — for ever gone! and I — I have murdered thee!”

These words, and the countenance of despair which accompanied them, alarmed Theresa, who began to fear, that the shock of the intelligence Emily had just received, had affected her senses. “My dear young lady, be composed” said she “and do not say such frightful words. You murder M. Valancourt — dear heart!” Emily replied only by a heavy sigh.

“Dear lady, it breaks my heart to see you look so” said Theresa “do not sit with your eyes upon the ground, and all so pale and melancholy; it frightens me to see you.” Emily was still silent, and did not appear to hear anything that was said to her. “Besides, mademoiselle” continued Theresa, “M. Valancourt may be alive and merry yet, for what we know.”

At the mention of his name, Emily raised her eyes, and fixed them, in a wild gaze, upon Theresa, as if she was endeavouring to understand what had been said. “Aye, my dear lady” said Theresa, mistaking the meaning of this considerate air, “M. Valancourt may be alive and merry yet.”

On the repetition of these words, Emily comprehended their import, but, instead of producing the effect intended, they seemed only to heighten her distress. She rose hastily from her chair, paced the little room, with quick steps, and, often sighing deeply, clasped her hands, and shuddered.

Meanwhile, Theresa, with simple, but honest affection, endeavoured to comfort her; put more wood on the fire, stirred it up into a brighter blaze, swept the hearth, set the chair, which Emily had left, in a warmer situation, and then drew forth from a cupboard a flask of wine. “It is a stormy night, madam,” said she, “and blows cold — do come nearer the fire, and take a glass of this wine; it will comfort you, as it has done me, often and often, for it is not such wine as one gets every day; it is rich Languedoc, and the last of six flasks that M. Valancourt sent me, the night before he left Gascony for Paris. They have served me, ever since, as cordials, and I never drink it, but I think of him, and what kind words he said to me when he gave them. ‘Theresa’ says he ‘you are not young now, and should have a glass of good wine, now and then. I will send you a few flasks, and, when you taste them, you will sometimes remember me your friend.’ Yes — those were his very words — me your friend!” Emily still paced the room, without seeming to hear what Theresa said, who continued speaking. “And I have remembered him, often enough, poor young gentleman! — for he gave me this roof for a shelter, and that, which has supported me. Ah! He is in heaven, with my blessed master, if ever saint was!”

Theresa’s voice faltered; she wept, and set down the flask, unable to pour out the wine. Her grief seemed to recall Emily from her own, who went towards her, but then stopped, and, having gazed on her, for a moment, turned suddenly away, as if overwhelmed by the reflection, that it was Valancourt, whom Theresa lamented.

While she yet paced the room, the still, soft note of an oboe, or flute, was heard mingling with the blast, the sweetness of which affected Emily's spirits; she paused a moment in attention; the tender tones, as they swelled along the wind, till they were lost again in the ruder gust, came with a plaintiveness, that touched her heart, and she melted into tears.

"Aye" said Theresa, drying her eyes, "there is Richard, our neighbour's son, playing on the oboe; it is sad enough, to hear such sweet music now." Emily continued to weep, without replying. "He often plays of an evening," added Theresa, "and, sometimes, the young folks dance to the sound of his oboe. But, dear young lady! do not cry so; and pray take a glass of this wine," continued she, pouring some into a glass, and handing it to Emily, who reluctantly took it.

"Taste it for M. Valancourt's sake" said Theresa, as Emily lifted the glass to her lips, "for he gave it me, you know, madam." Emily's hand trembled, and she spilt the wine as she withdrew it from her lips. "For whose sake! — Who gave the wine?" said she in a faltering voice. "M. Valancourt, dear lady. I knew you would be pleased with it. It is the last flask I have left."

Emily set the wine upon the table, and burst into tears, while Theresa, disappointed and alarmed, tried to comfort her; but she only waved her hand, entreated she might be left alone, and wept the more.

A knock at the cottage door prevented Theresa from immediately obeying her mistress, and she was going to open it, when Emily, checking her, requested she would not admit any person; but, afterwards, recollecting, that she had ordered her servant to attend her home, she said it was only Philippe, and endeavoured to restrain her tears, while Theresa opened the door.

A voice, that spoke without, drew Emily's attention. She listened, turned her eyes to the door, when a person now appeared, and immediately a bright gleam, that flashed from the fire, discovered—Valancourt!

Emily, on perceiving him, started from her chair, trembled, and, sinking into it again, became insensible to all around her.

A scream from Theresa now told, that she knew Valancourt, whom her imperfect sight, and the duskiness of the place had prevented her from immediately recollecting; but his attention was immediately called from her to the person, whom he saw, falling from a chair near the fire; and, hastening to her assistance — he perceived, that he was supporting Emily! The various emotions, that seized him upon thus unexpectedly meeting with her, from whom he had believed he had parted for ever, and on beholding her pale and lifeless in his arms — may, perhaps, be imagined, though they could neither be then expressed, nor now described, any more than Emily's sensations, when, at length, she unclosed her eyes, and, looking up, again saw Valancourt. The intense anxiety, with which he regarded her, was instantly changed to an expression of mingled joy and tenderness, as his eye met hers, and he perceived,

that she was reviving. But he could only exclaim “Emily!” as he silently watched her recovery, while she averted her eye, and feebly attempted to withdraw her hand; but, in these the first moments, which succeeded to the pangs his supposed death had occasioned her, she forgot every fault, which had formerly claimed indignation, and beholding Valancourt such as he had appeared, when he won her early affection, she experienced emotions of only tenderness and joy. This, alas, was but the sunshine of a few short moments; recollections rose, like clouds, upon her mind, and, darkening the illusive image, that possessed it, she again beheld Valancourt, degraded — Valancourt unworthy of the esteem and tenderness she had once bestowed upon him; her spirits faltered, and, withdrawing her hand, she turned from him to conceal her grief, while he, yet more embarrassed and agitated, remained silent.

A sense of what she owed to herself restrained her tears, and taught her soon to overcome, in some degree, the emotions of mingled joy and sorrow, that contended at her heart, as she rose, and, having thanked him for the assistance he had given her, bade Theresa good evening. As she was leaving the cottage, Valancourt, who seemed suddenly awakened as from a dream, entreated, in a voice, that pleaded powerfully for compassion, a few moments attention. Emily’s heart, perhaps, pleaded as powerfully, but she had resolution enough to resist both, together with the clamorous entreaties of Theresa, that she would not venture home alone in the dark, and had already opened the cottage door, when the pelting storm compelled her to obey their requests.

Silent and embarrassed, she returned to the fire, while Valancourt, with increasing agitation, paced the room, as if he wished, yet feared, to speak, and Theresa expressed without restraint her joy and wonder upon seeing him.

“Dear heart! sir” said she, “I never was so surprised and overjoyed in my life. We were in great tribulation before you came, for we thought you were dead, and were talking, and lamenting about you, just when you knocked at the door. My young mistress there was crying, fit to break her heart —”

Emily looked with much displeasure at Theresa, but, before she could speak, Valancourt, unable to repress the emotion, which Theresa’s imprudent discovery occasioned, exclaimed “O my Emily! am I then still dear to you! Did you, indeed, honour me with a thought — a tear? O heavens! you weep — you weep now!”

“Theresa, sir” said Emily, with a reserved air, and trying to conquer her tears, “has reason to remember you with gratitude, and she was concerned, because she had not lately heard of you. Allow me to thank you for the kindness you have shown her, and to say, that, since I am now upon the spot, she must not be further indebted to you.”

“Emily” said Valancourt, no longer master of his emotions “is it thus you meet him, whom once you meant to honour with your hand — thus you meet him, who has loved you — suffered for you? — Yet what do I say? Pardon me, pardon me, mademoiselle St. Aubert, I know not what I utter. I have no longer any claim

upon your remembrance — I have forfeited every pretension to your esteem, your love. Yes! Let me not forget, that I once possessed your affections, though to know that I have lost them, is my severest affliction. Affliction — do I call it! — That is a term of mildness.”

“Dear heart!” said Theresa, preventing Emily from replying “talk of once having her affections! Why, my dear young lady loves you now, better than she does anybody in the whole world, though she pretends to deny it.”

“This is insupportable!” said Emily; “Theresa, you know not what you say. Sir, if you respect my tranquillity, you will spare me from the continuance of this distress.”

“I do respect your tranquillity too much, voluntarily to interrupt it” replied Valancourt, in whose bosom pride now contended with tenderness; “and will not be a voluntary intruder. I would have entreated a few moments attention — yet I know not for what purpose. You have ceased to esteem me, and to recount to you my sufferings will degrade me more, without exciting even your pity. Yet I have been, O Emily! I am indeed very wretched!” added Valancourt, in a voice, that softened from solemnity into grief.

“What! Is my dear young master going out in all this rain!” said Theresa. “No, he shall not stir a step. Dear! Dear! To see how gentlefolks can afford to throw away their happiness! Now, if you were poor people, there would be none of this. To talk of unworthiness, and not caring about one another, when I know there are not such a kindhearted lady and gentleman in the whole province, nor any that love one another half so well, if the truth was spoken!”

Emily, in extreme vexation, now rose from her chair, “I must be gone” said she “the storm is over.”

“Stay, Emily, stay, mademoiselle St. Aubert!” said Valancourt, summoning all his resolution “I will no longer distress you by my presence. Forgive me, that I did not sooner obey you, and, if you can, sometimes, pity one, who, in losing you — has lost all hope of peace! May you be happy, Emily, however wretched I remain, happy as my fondest wish would have you!”

His voice faltered with the last words, and his countenance changed, while, with a look of ineffable tenderness and grief, he gazed upon her for an instant, and then quitted the cottage.

“Dear heart! Dear heart!” cried Theresa, following him to the door, “why, Monsieur Valancourt! How it rains! What a night is this to turn him out in! Why it will give him his death; and it was but now you were crying, mademoiselle, because he was dead. Well! young ladies do change their mind in a minute, as one may say!”

Emily made no reply, for she heard not what was said, while, lost in sorrow and thought, she remained in her chair by the fire, with her eyes fixed, and the image of Valancourt still before them.

“M. Valancourt is sadly altered! madam” said Theresa; “he looks so thin to what he used to do, and so melancholy, and then he wears his arm in a sling.”

Emily raised her eyes at these words, for she had not observed this last circumstance, and she now did not doubt, that Valancourt had received the shot of her gardener at Toulouse; with this conviction her pity for him returning, she blamed herself for having occasioned him to leave the cottage, during the storm.

Soon after her servants arrived with the carriage, and Emily, having censured Theresa for her thoughtless conversation to Valancourt, and strictly charging her never to repeat any hints of the same kind to him, withdrew to her home, thoughtful and disconsolate.

Meanwhile, Valancourt had returned to a little inn of the village, whither he had arrived only a few moments before his visit to Theresa’s cottage, on the way from Toulouse to the château of the Count de Duvarney, where he had not been since he bade adieu to Emily at Château-le-Blanc, in the neighbourhood of which he had lingered for a considerable time, unable to summon resolution enough to quit a place, that contained the object most dear to his heart. There were times, indeed, when grief and despair urged him to appear again before Emily, and, regardless of his ruined circumstances, to renew his suit. Pride, however, and the tenderness of his affection, which could not long endure the thought of involving her in his misfortunes, at length, so far triumphed over passion, that he relinquished this desperate design, and quitted Château-le-Blanc. But still his fancy wandered among the scenes, which had witnessed his early love, and, on his way to Gascony, he stopped at Toulouse, where he remained when Emily arrived, concealing, yet indulging his melancholy in the gardens, where he had formerly passed with her so many happy hours; often recurring, with vain regret, to the evening before her departure for Italy, when she had so unexpectedly met him on the terrace, and endeavouring to recall to his memory every word and look, which had then charmed him, the arguments he had employed to dissuade her from the journey, and the tenderness of their last farewell. In such melancholy recollections he had been indulging, when Emily unexpectedly arrived to him on this very terrace, the evening after her arrival at Toulouse. His emotions, on thus seeing her, can scarcely be imagined; but he so far overcame the first promptings of love, that he forbore to discover himself, and abruptly quitted the gardens. Still, however, the vision he had seen haunted his mind; he became more wretched than before, and the only solace of his sorrow was to return in the silence of the night; to follow the paths which he believed her steps had pressed, during the day; and, to watch round the habitation where she reposed. It was in one of these mournful wanderings, that he had received by the fire of the gardener, who mistook him for a robber, a wound in his arm, which had detained him at Toulouse till very lately, under the hands of a surgeon. There, regardless of himself and careless of his friends,

whose late unkindness had urged him to believe, that they were indifferent as to his fate, he remained, without informing them of his situation; and now, being sufficiently recovered to bear travelling, he had taken La Vallée in his way to Estuvière, the Count's residence, partly for the purpose of hearing of Emily, and of being again near her, and partly for that of enquiring into the situation of poor old Theresa, who, he had reason to suppose, had been deprived of her stipend, small as it was, and which enquiry had brought him to her cottage, when Emily happened to be there.

This unexpected interview, which had at once shown him the tenderness of her love and the strength of her resolution, renewed all the acuteness of the despair, that had attended their former separation, and which no effort of reason could teach him, in these moments, to subdue. Her image, her look, the tones of her voice, all dwelt on his fancy, as powerfully as they had late appeared to his senses, and banished from his heart every emotion, except those of love and despair.

Before the evening concluded, he returned to Theresa's cottage, that he might hear her talk of Emily, and be in the place, where she had so lately been. The joy, felt and expressed by that faithful servant, was quickly changed to sorrow, when she observed, at one moment, his wild and frenzied look, and, at another, the dark melancholy, that overhung him.

After he had listened, and for a considerable time, to all she had to relate, concerning Emily, he gave Theresa nearly all the money he had about him, though she repeatedly refused it, declaring, that her mistress had amply supplied her wants; and then, drawing a ring of value from his finger, he delivered it her with a solemn charge to present it to Emily, of whom he entreated, as a last favour, that she would preserve it for his sake, and sometimes, when she looked upon it, remember the unhappy giver.

Theresa wept, as she received the ring, but it was more from sympathy, than from any presentiment of evil; and before she could reply, Valancourt abruptly left the cottage. She followed him to the door, calling upon his name and entreating him to return; but she received no answer, and saw him no more.