

REGINALD.

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A ROMANCE.

LANE, MINERVA-PRESS, LEADENHALL-STREET.

REGINALD,

*the* *House of Mirandola* 1287

HOUSE OF MIRANDOLA.

A Romance.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF MELBOURNE, &c.

"All foreign things  
Should answer solemn accidents!—The matter?  
Triumphs for nothing, and laments for toys,  
Is jollity for apes, and grief for boys!"

CYMBELINE.

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## P R E F A C E.

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IT is an arduous undertaking to wield the pen of Romance after the “mighty Magician of Udolpho,” as she is justly termed by the author of the Pursuits of Literature ; yet the attempt is fascinating : and the kind indulgence with which the Public has viewed my former endeavours, induces me to hope this may be received with equal condescension. It is not my wish to emulate

Mrs. Radcliffe's successful flights into the regions of horror; but if I wholly fail, I shall but add another leaf to her immortal wroath, by shewing the difficulty of the attempt to follow her. The subject of supernatural impressions has of late been so fully discussed, that I need say nothing here. That the species of horror they inspire, is congenial with human nature, is sufficiently proved by the avidity with which they are pursued; and any vehicle by which moral precepts may be conveyed and enforced, is not to be despised in the realms of literature.

Fortitude is, perhaps, one of the most useful virtues we can practise:—to inculcate this is one great design of the following pages, which I send forth to the world with mingled confidence and apprehension.

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# REGINALD.

## CHAP. I.

“ But why should foresight thy fond heart alarm ?

“ Perish the lore that deadens young desire.

“ Pursue, poor imp, th’ imaginary charm ;

“ Indulge gay hope and fancy’s pleasing fire.”

BEATTIE.

IN one of those fertile vallies of Savoy, where Nature seems to delight in displaying a lovely contrast to the grand horrors of the Alps, stood the little village of Colano, adorned with all that a luxuriant country, cultivated by indefatigable industry, could produce. This village far surpassed the

neighbouring hamlets in civilization, plenty, and all the arts and habits that embellish life; her peasants were not only more expert, but they were also gayer even than the generality of the gay Savoyards; the young girls were prettier, and adorned themselves with more taste, and the old men were wiser than any of their countrymen. Quarrels and jealousies were unknown in the village of Colano, and for all this peculiar happiness its inhabitants were indebted to the good father Buonafede, who had long been its pastor, under the direction of a community of Dominican Friars, who resided in a monastery built among the tremendous precipices of the Alps. Father Buonafede loved his parishoners as if they had been his own children, and no offers of aggrandizement in his Convent could tempt him to relinquish the sweet pleasure of living with and for these simple rustics, who more than counterbalanced, by the sincerity and warmth of their attachment to him, their want of refinement and elegance.

There

There were, indeed, a few chateaus in the neighbourhood, where Father Buonafede was always a welcome guest; and not unfrequently he visited his former companions in the monastery, among whom were many worthy and learned Monks, with whom he enjoyed the solace of friendly communication, and indeed his presence never failed to create a sort of holiday among the younger boarders and lay-brothers of the Convent. Among the foremost of the boarders who flew to congratulate his arrival, a youth of the name of Sigismond was usually the most distinguished. Sigismond had been admitted among these associates by the interest of Father Buonafede, who thenceforward considered him as more particularly his own *protigée*, and was always regarded by the lad with peculiar affection and gratitude. One day, however, on visiting the Convent, Sigismond failed to meet the Father with his usual alacrity, and the omission excited the alarms of the venerable man. Finding the usual time of his visit



elapse without the youth's appearing, he sought him in his cell, where he sat overwhelmed with sorrow; a faint smile passed across his pallid countenance as he beheld the good Father, who tenderly enquired the reason of his evident grief.

"Alas! my father," said the youthful mourner, "you see me the most miserable of mortals; I am doomed to irreparable wretchedness."

"And what irremediable sorrow can have overwhelmed you at your age?" enquired the Father; "you surely apprehend too much."

"No, Father," replied the youth, "judge if I enlarge upon my cause of grief.—Tomorrow I am to enter my noviciate, and, in consequence of my having passed my life within these walls, it is to be shortened half the usual time, and in six months I am to be admitted a member of the community."

"And is this so terrible a lot, my dear Sigismond?" asked the Father; "it is what you must always have expected."

"Alas!

“ Alas ! alas ! my Father,” replied Sigismond, “ I have never thought about my future destination ; but every observation I have been capable of making, serves only to convince me that the monastic life is a most miserable one, and that my disposition is wholly repugnant to it.”

“ And by what means are you enabled, my son,” said the Friar, “ to compare the evils of the monastic life with those to be encountered in the world ?”

“ Oh !” answered the youth, “ there is not one exception to the misery of the Monks ; in the world there is at least a diversity of fates, a chance of chequering evil with good. It is not so here ; there is not one shade of white thrown across the gloomy horrors of religious seclusion.”

“ Alas ! my son,” replied the Father, “ how many of those who have experienced the various miseries of the world, sigh for the security and peace of a cloister !”

“ Surely,” exclaimed Sigismond, “ it is because they have never tried that boasted



security; had they—— but too surely it is the irrevocability of the fate that constitutes great part of its peculiar wretchedness.”

“ And does not your own reason, Sigismund,” said the Father, “ convince you that a state in itself good, is not altered by being irrevocable ;—that, on the contrary, the certainty of its continuance is a strong argument in its favour, and that religious communities are in their principle good.”

“ Pardon me, my Father,” replied Sigismund ; “ but you, who have known the world out of a cloister as well as in it, must be even more convinced than I am, how often systems, beautiful in theory, fail when reduced to practice ;—nay, you yourself, my benefactor, have first taught me to languish for a scene of more active virtue than a cloister—you, who are perpetually employed in doing good—you, whose countenance is always serene—you, who would not quit your little village for the highest honours our cloister can bestow—who would

not be our Superior; though, if you had, your poor Sigismond would never have wished to leave this dreadful prison."

Here the tears of the young reasoner flowed afresh, and Father Buonafede, after tenderly embracing him, recommended it to him to reconcile himself to his fate, and uttered much good counsel, which had but little effect on the poor youth, who with horror contemplated the ceremonies appointed for the ensuing day.

Father Buonafede felt in reality more sympathy and compassion for Sigismond than he dared to express, and on leaving him, went directly to the Superior, with whom he had a long conversation; and though at first he entertained but little hopes of succeeding, yet he so forcibly urged the repugnance and aversion of the poor youth to his destiny, and the absolute necessity there was that a sacrifice should be voluntary to render it acceptable to the Supreme Being, that he obtained a mitigation of the sentence; for the Superior would not wholly relinquish his  
claims

claims upon Sigismond, but insisted that if in a given period no circumstance occurred which should place the youth to advantage in the world, he should return to the monastery, and take the irrevocable vow which was for ever to seclude him from society. For a long time the Superior insisted that this period should be fixed to the day when Sigismond should attain the age of eighteen; and it was with infinite difficulty that Father Buonafede obtained an extension of it two years longer. More easily he gained permission to take Sigismond with him to his humble abode; since no means of providing for him could occur if he were to remain shut up within the walls of the Convent.

Fraught with these welcome tidings, Father Buonafede returned to the cell of Sigismond, who, bathed in tears, hid his face, and exclaimed—"Never, never let me see you again, my dear benefactor! it is not by seeing you I am to be reconciled to my lot."

"I am

“ I am sorry for that,” replied the Father, “ since I have obtained a short reprieve for you, on condition that I take you home with me, and endeavour to bring you to a proper frame of mind to receive the vows.”

“ Al! Father,” exclaimed Sigismond, smiling through his tears, “ did I hear you aright? But a short reprieve, you say!— Well, I will not complain, nor ungratefully spurn at the blessings that are offered to me, because they are not all my sanguine fancy could wish for.”

“ That is turning philosophy to some account,” replied Father Buonafede; “ but come, are you ready? Colano is at some distance, and I am not a rapid traveller.”

“ Ready, Oh Father——” and the grateful youth threw himself at the feet of his venerable friend, and embraced his knees with an enthusiasm the Friar strove in vain to repress. At length, however, he made him sensible of the necessity of moderation, and hastily making up a small packet of linen, Sigismond bade a short farewell to his companions,

nions, paid a formal compliment to the Superior, who would have given him a long harangue on what he expected from his docility in future, but that he trusted the task to Father Bucafede ; and placing himself at the elbow of the benevolent Friar, was in a few minutes on the outside of those walls which so lately he had imagined enclosed him for life. Tears of gratitude and joy burst from his eyes as he heard the portal closed behind him, and he pressed the hand of his good friend with an energy far more eloquent than language. His heart was too full to allow him to utter a syllable, and they walked for some time in silence through the deep woods which Sigismund had so often viewed from the high narrow windows of the monastery—woods which excluded all view of that world beyond, to which its inmates often sent forth an ardent wish. They proceeded along the sides of precipices which overhung chasms of tremendous depth, while rocks of equal height rose beside them, fringed at the top with pines of

of grotesque forms, whose roots, bare to the blast, seemed scarcely to cling to the soil from whence they derived their nourishment. Sigismond, though so wholly unused to the view of nature, was too busily engaged within to attend even to the striking objects that momentarily presented themselves without; till at length, suddenly emerging from the woods, the travellers found themselves on a green knoll which commanded a most extensive view among the romantic and tremendous mountains, and afforded them a full and inviting prospect of the fertile valley and happy village of Colano, while, through a mountain vista of immense extent, the eye discerned a distant landscape, brilliant with sunshine, and gay with towns and villas. A sudden exclamation burst from Sigismond, and pressing the hand of the good Father to his heart, he said in a low and suppressed voice—"Never, never did I so fully feel the value of liberty as at this moment! Oh my Father! can it be an acceptable sacrifice that men should shut



“ themselves out from the enjoyment of such delight ?”

“ Sigismond,” said the venerable Friar, “ survey this wide extended view, fix your sight also on the little humble habitation beneath your feet,—then observe these tremendous gigantic children of nature among which we are wandering !”

“ I do, my Father,” interrupted Sigismond ; “ I observe, I admire all these various objects, and I feel that to you I am indebted for beholding them ;—but, Oh my Father ! I feel also that they will render me more than ever averse to returning to the Convent.—A short reprieve you said, my Father ?”

“ It will seem a short one to you, my son,” replied the venerable Father, “ even if you enjoy the whole period allowed to you. The Superior insists that, unless circumstances should occur to render it impossible, you shall return to the Convent, and receive the vows when you reach the age of twenty.”

“ Oh

“ Oh my Father !” exclaimed Sigismond, “ at what a moment have you explained to me the fulness of my happiness ! Four years of liberty !—liberty which on the summits of these mountains appears such an extended, such an invaluable gift ! And what is this wide world which I see before me ? Was it not given to man for his inheritance ? not to shut himself up between gloomy walls, and to hide from his own knowledge these magnificent objects which lift his soul to his Creator. Why, my Father, tell me,” continued Sigismond, “ why are we formed to feel such boundless delight at the thought of an unreserved intercourse with our fellow-creatures, if it be acceptable to the great Creator that we should fly from such intercourse, and debar ourselves from that delight ?”

“ My young friend,” replied Buonafede, “ I am not at all surprised at the warmth with which you reason ; your sentiments are natural at your age ; hereafter, perhaps, you will be better able to comprehend the feelings



feelings which have induced men to seclude themselves from the temptations and miseries of the world, and to respect the high enthusiasm of devotion which has led them to forsake the pleasures of society."

"Pardon me, my Father," answered the youth, "if to my inexperienced conceptions it appears that the first are founded in cowardice, and the second in mistake. If there are temptations in the world, they are surely permitted by God to add a new lustre to that virtue which triumphs over them.—If there are miseries—alas! though there are greater miseries in a Convent—yet it is cowardly to seek a mean and selfish security from those sorrows to which others are left exposed; we ought all to help to bear each other's burthens, and in so doing, fortify the endurance of each other; and surely the enthusiasm of devotion can never be so highly excited at a cloister as at such a moment as this, when, in the midst of his stupendous works, the mind sees and feels somewhat of the immensity and grandeur of the Almighty!"

"We

“ We must continue our argument as we proceed on our journey,” said Buonafede ; “ we have yet far to go, and the sun is hastening to the west ;—see how he already tinges the light clouds with crimson.”

“ Ah ! my Father, support yourself on my arm,” said Sigismond, “ it will save you from some fatigue. There was but one window to which I had access in the monastery, from whence I could behold the sublime sight of the setting sun, and that was so high, that it was with some difficulty I could gratify my eyes with it. Yet how often have I lingered after the vesper bell has rung, to gaze on the floating vapours, tinted with purple, and fringed with gold, —to mark the small brilliant clouds, glowing with almost insufferable brightness, which surround that glorious luminary when he is about to hide himself from our eyes, —to watch the gradual change of the serene blue to a luminous vermilion, then, in the upper regions of the air, to a rich purple, while in the horizon still remained a line of  
radiant

radiant crimson, which continued to glow, though graduating towards a saffron hue, long after the upper air had assumed the dusky grey of evening."

"You have been an ardent admirer of this glorious sight, my son," answered Buonafede, "and now then take a last look, for this evening, of the west that so fascinates your young imagination; for we are going again to plunge amid woods which will obstruct our view of the horizon."

Sigismond gazed eagerly at the west, and then turning towards his kind protector, pursued his way with alacrity through the woods, where the faint glimmering of the twilight scarcely permitted them to discern the path. At length, however, they finally quitted the bosom of the forest, and entered the village of Colano, which appeared to the youthful Sigismond a perfect paradise. He gazed around him with delight,—now lamented that the failing light would not permit him to satisfy his eager curiosity, and now remembered with transport that the  
morrow,

morrow, and many successive morrows would enable him to view at his leisure the scene that so enchanted him. He pressed the hand of his venerable conductor, and exclaimed—"And in all these cottages, my Father, reside human beings, who reciprocally give and receive happiness. Ah! even now I see through that window an interesting young woman giving their wholesome supper to a number of children! How happy the little creatures look with their plentiful portion of bread and fruit, and with what kindness the good woman looks at them!—She is undoubtedly their mother."

"She is," replied the good Father; "but, my son, in time you shall know all these human beings who so strongly interest you; let us now move homewards; the evening is chilly."

Sigismond tore himself away from a sight that gave so new a pleasure to his young and benevolent heart, and accompanied the Priest to a humble white habitation, scarcely distinguished from the other cottages of the

the hamlet, where a good old woman received her master with joy, and his young companion with surprise.

“ Here, Urfula,” said Father Buonafede, “ I have brought you a young man to enliven the house ; you must make up a bed for him.”

“ A bed !” exclaimed Urfula, “ yes, sure !—But who is the gentleman ? Sure I remember his face ?”

“ And yet,” replied the Father, “ it is many, very many years since you saw it,—he was not five years old when you knew him.”

“ What then,” cried Urfula, “ this is the very Sigismond that I have danced so often in my arms ?”

“ The very same, indeed,” replied the Father ; “ but come, Urfula, we are hungry, and shall soon be sleepy also.”

A simple repast was immediately spread before this new Mentor and Telemachus, who both did honour to their frugal fare ; and when Sigismond retired to his bed, for a time

a time extreme happiness kept him waking, till at length he fell into a sleep as profound and as tranquil, as ever blessed the couch of infant innocence.

He arose in the morning, gay as the lark that carolled over his head, and gazed with inexpressible transport on the vestiges of inhabitation which every where met his eyes. The process of cultivation, which caught his attention from many a neighbouring field, interested him extremely; for in the magnificent solitude to which he had hitherto been confined, no traces of society were to be seen. The wants of the community were supplied as it were by magic, for no symptoms of labour were any where to be discerned, nor any thing to be descried, which reminded the beholder of that world inhabited by his fellow-men, or of the dependance, which no human being can shake off, on the community of which he is a member.

Sigismund, though he had reflected a good deal for his age, had not in the Convent considered the means by which himself and the



the brethren were furnished with the necessities of life ; and now that he saw the inhabitants of the village at that labour, so indispensable to the support of thousands, he more than ever found reason to object to the luxurious indolence which detained so many in the idle severities of a Monkish life, who had no pretext from their birth or their fortune to escape the general lot of the laborious poor.

Father Buonafede was sorry to see his objections to monastic seclusion so firmly rooted, as he feared necessity would make it his ultimate resource ; for he knew of no friend that Sigismond possessed in the wide universe that so delighted him with prospects of society, save himself, and he was powerless to provide for him otherwise than in the Convent. But the youth so warmly declared he would far prefer the most laborious life to that he had witnessed so many years, and from which there was no return, that the good Father trembled lest the Superior should at the appointed time insist

insist on his re-entering the monastery. Sigismond, however, suffered no fears of so distant a period to interrupt the happiness of the present hour. Four years appeared to him like a whole life, and to have suffered even an inevitable evil, which was not to take place till four years were elapsed, to embitter his hopes, would have appeared to his ardent imagination highly absurd, and to his youthful reason unphilosophical:—how much more so then, when a thousand events already presented themselves to his lively fancy which would entirely derange the plans of the Superior. He would go into some army, and signalize himself in war; he would marry some young peasant girl, and, surrounded by a family of smiling children, realize in his own house the picture which had so forcibly struck him the preceding evening:—in short, he would certainly defeat, the views of the Father Abbot, and since a futurity so smiling was before him, he would give the present wholly to the direction of Father Buonafede.

Father



Father Buonafede took him to the various cottages, made him acquainted with the inhabitants of Colano, whom many of them remembered when Sigismond first appeared in the village an infant. Every where he found good humour and gaiety, and in the evening Sigismond joined with the young peasants in the dance on the green, and thought all the fictions of the poets realized, and the golden age really existing on earth. A few days passed in amusements, and the first enjoyment of a delight so exquisite as the consciousness of liberty; and Father Buonafede then laid down a plan of study which should enlarge the views, and direct the judgment of Sigismond; and by making him acquainted with human nature in general, and with his own heart in particular, enable him to decide justly and properly concerning his own future plans of life. Sigismond added great docility to excellent talents, and Father Buonafede, who in his early youth had been a proficient in all the elegant literature of the age,

I  
delighted

delighted to recal ideas which had long lain dormant, and to see the young imagination of Sigismond take fire and expand as he caught the sublime visions of the poets, or the lofty truths of philosophy.

Father Buonafede continued his occasional visits to the monastery; and the only moments in which gloom ever overspread the face of the youth, were when it was deemed necessary for him also to visit the Convent. The constant check the Superior still pretended to hold over his future life, tersified and dejected him; and he eagerly tried to escape from so discouraging a prospect to more consolatory views of things. When he did not accompany the Father on these painful occasions, he employed the intervals of his absence in wandering through the delightful pastoral environs of the village, or among the grand and sublime scenes which the neighbouring mountains afforded him. —He was an enthusiastic lover of the noble and awful views he found in the bosom of the Alps;—he gazed with wonder and admiration

admiration on those enormous efforts of creation, and when he saw them retiring in endless perspective behind each other, some frowning in rude and naked majesty, some clothed with ancient and venerable forests, and some adorned with spots of cultivation which his fancy resembled to Colano, he felt ennobled by considering himself as of more real importance than these tremendous objects—himself—man—the being to whom the earth, thus beautifully and sublimely adorned, was given! He would return after these excursions to the good Father's lowly habitation, and the expressions of his gratitude and delight often called tears into the Father's eyes.

Nor was Sigismond wholly lost in this enthusiasm;—he loved and cultivated the softer arts of life; the scenes he admired, his ready pencil could transfer to paper with a spirit and fidelity which would serve in future times to embellish distant scenes with a thousand dear remembrances.—“Multiply these pictures, my son,” the good Father would

would say to him ; “ should your lot throw you into the more troublesome and thorny scenes of life, you will return, by means of these views, to the calm village of Colano and the animating grandeur of the Alps ; and even should your future destiny be happy, nothing will ever be more sweet to you than the remembrance of the days of your youth.”

In a fine evening, too, Sigismond would wake the breathing flute with inimitable tenderness and grace, and whether he played the lively airs so congenial to the gaiety of the peasants, or the touching melodies which spoke the soft sensibility of his own heart, no one gave such sweetness to its tones or such force to its expression. There was one peculiar recess in the bosom of the mountains to which he often persuaded the Father to retire with him, where the hills formed a number of natural echoes, and where the melting sounds reverberated many times more and more faintly, till at last they

seemed like the song of spirits, borne at intervals upon the gale.

Father Buonafede would often gaze upon the youth, formed as he seemed to enjoy happiness, and to adorn society, and endeavour to discern what would be his future fate, till irrepressible anxiety clouded his countenance, and tears started from his eyes. Sigismond, though he perceived the uneasiness of his benefactor, penetrated not its cause, and respected too much the invariable silence he preserved to enquire into it; but he exerted all his powers of soothing to alluage the sorrow which lacerated his own bosom, nor could the Father be insensible to the gentle efforts of so affectionate a being. Sigismond himself would sometimes venture to enquire who were his parents, and what circumstances had thrown him so wholly on the care of the Father? But these enquiries were always answered in a manner that for a considerable time prevented their renewal, and Sigismond, who, in the manner in which he lived, knew not  
all

all the worth the world attaches to rank and birth, soon forgot the solicitude casual circumstances had excited, and happy in the present, suffered neither the past nor the future to create uneasiness, or overcloud the sunshine he enjoyed. There was nothing in the situation of those whom he saw daily to renew his curiosity—they were Claude, Julian, Francesco,—he was Sigismond;—this caused no speculation; he danced occasionally with Marina, with Laurula, with Flora, and they distinguished him not from the other youths that shared in their pastimes. Ursula alone sometimes approached him with a respect which at times created a wonder in his bosom; but this subsided when he considered that she accustomed herself to this manner, as he was the friend and companion of her master.

The cultivation which Father Buonafede bestowed upon his talents excited the most lasting suspicions; he knew that the peasants were not taught to philosophize and reason, that they were insensible to the charms



charms of poesy, or to the delicacies of music; but the manner of the Father served ultimately to repress his enquiries, and he remained contented in his ignorance. "And indeed," said he to himself, when he had in vain bewildered himself in conjectures,—  
"and, indeed, of what consequence is it? If in these various talents, which the goodness of Father Buonafede suffers me to cultivate, he is only giving me new and various means of happiness, are birth and rank necessary to their enjoyment?—and am I not equally delighted with the sublime scenes of Nature, or the enchanting melodies of music, as if I knew to whom I was indebted for my birth?—My powers of enjoyment, I know full well I owe to Father Buonafede, and no child can love a parent better than I love him—nor can a parent feel more affection for his offspring than he does for me;—yet there is something inexpressibly sweet in the bond between parents and children! Dorina gazes on the young people

people with such tenderness as they encircle her of an evening, and when I take her daughter Flora for my partner, she watches her with so much solicitude:—well, and do I feel any want of this exquisite tenderness in my connexion with Father Buonafede?—Oh no! it were ungrateful to wish to penetrate a mystery which perhaps he himself is unable to unravel.



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## CHAP. II.

"Yon pending column, mossy-grown and rude,  
"Now torn by Time, and faithless to its trust,  
"Once mark'd the proud spot where a temple stood,  
"And mystic rites made consecrate its dust."

LOVELL.

IN the meanwhile weeks insensibly grew into months, and months into years, while Sigismond was pursuing a course of life so beneficial and so agreeable, without reflecting on what was to be his permanent destination in future. The Prior of the Convent, however, forgot him not, and reminded Father Buonafede, who had for some time forborne to

to

to take him at all on those unpleasant visits, that Sigismond must be advancing rapidly to the appointed period, and he had not yet heard that any mode of providing for him had offered more eligible than the establishment originally destined for him in the Convent ;—and the good Father returned this evening with renewed pensiveness to his pupil, who had advanced some way up the romantic path, in order to meet his benefactor. It was yet early in the day, and the beauty of the season tempted them to repose awhile in the cave of Echo, a name which the fanciful Sigismond had given to the spot where that fabled nymph amused herself with such singular sportiveness ; and as Sigismond was never without his flute, he rejoiced in the proposal. The cave was at some distance from the path they were pursuing, and they had to cross some very rugged ground in order to arrive at it.

The youth supported the venerable Father over some tottering crags, and they proceeded in silence, not even uttering one

remark on the wild and fantastic forms which in this cross-path the mountains assumed.

The Monk was fatigued by the time he reached the cave, and seated himself on a rude bench which Sigismond had constructed, and placed in the most favourable part to hear the effect of the echoes, while he advanced to a remote corner, from whence the sounds floated more distinctly through the numerous passages, and occasioned such harmonious reverberations. He took out his flute, and played two or three simple airs, gay and lively, and then insensibly deviated into some wild and irregular symphonies, stopping every now and then, abruptly, to hear the dying falls among the receding mountains, and beginning again in strains plaintive and unpremeditated as those of the *Æolian* harp. At length he touched a few notes of a pathetic air, which he but rarely indulged himself in in the hearing of Father Buonafede. The Father, indeed, in a moment of luxurious melancholy had taught him this air, which was, in a peculiar manner, connected

connected with the remembrance of a mournful event, that had driven him from the world into the sheltering bosom of religion; and he could rarely hear those tremulous notes without shedding new tears to the memory of the Lady Olivia, who died suddenly of a most malignant fever, a few days before that appointed for his nuptials with her.

This circumstance, so deeply impressed, and so fondly remembered, softened the good Father's heart to all the sweet humanities of life; he had known the luxury of those soft affections which are wholly refused to the votaries of religious seclusion; his own were indeed buried in the grave of his Olivia, but they taught him to feel for others, while the greater part of the brotherhood, united in the community from natural austerity of temper, or placed there in early youth by the authority of parents or guardians, had never known, and had no sympathy for the most delicious propensities of nature. The placid serenity of the hea-

vens, the chequered sun-beams that fell softened on the grass through the waving foliage of a large poplar, the soft whispers of the breeze which played among its trembling leaves, and the profound stillness with which the Father sat and listened to the music, all conspired to induce Sigismond to venture on the first notes of this exquisitely plaintive melody. Its first notes were peculiar, and when he had sounded them, he stopped abruptly, as if to listen for the echoes : but in reality to observe their immediate effect on the Father, who made him a sign to continue the air. Sigismond obeyed. Never had he played with such touching expression ; never had the song sounded so beautiful or so affecting ; and when he had finished, he waited a moment in silence to hear the last faint notes as they rebounded along the hills, and swelled upon the gale ; and when the most distant echo ceased to repeat the sacred tones, he put his flute into his pocket, and with light and noiseless foot approached the Father, and throwing himself

self on the ground at his feet, grasped his hand, and bathed it with delicious tears of exquisite sensibility;—those of Buonafede were silently stealing down his venerable cheek, and bending over the form of Sigismond, they mingled together expressions so congenial of such kindred minds. After some moments, the Father roused himself from this indulgence, and suddenly recalling the remembrance of the Father Abbot's conversation with him, enquired of Sigismond how old he was. Sigismond started from the ground, and reflecting a moment, could give no answer; but went and leaned against the opposite rock, and tears, far different from those tender ones just excited by the music—tears of bitter regret, stole down his face, and he remained musing in silence. At length he recalled his fortitude, and returning to the Father, he said,—“Almost three years are elapsed of that period I once thought would last for ever! I had ceased to reflect that the Superior would reclaim me as his property; and now, that



so unpleasant a remembrance has occurred, I must venture to enquire by what authority he claims me at all. I was made a member of his community by no parent; there is no reason why I should fetter myself with vows to which my whole soul is adverse; and when he calls upon me to re-enter the Convent, I will refuse to obey. I know of no duty that binds me to be the slave of the Father Abbot."

"My son," replied Father Buonafede, "do you think I, who am subjected to the authority of the Father Abbot by vows which I neither can, nor wish to annul—do you think that I can uphold you in contumacy? Or do you wish to make me regret the time I have bestowed on the cultivation of your mind?"

"My Father," answered Sigismond, "though you have been, as you say, long subjected to the rules of the Convent by inviolable vows, and though I have no doubt but you perceive and feel the propriety of adhering to engagements voluntarily made,

made, yet I know your mind is too liberal to insist upon the necessity of any one, already free, making a sacrifice to which his whole soul is utterly repugnant! In all the sentiments I have heard you express, in all the opinions you have inculcated in our various conversations, you have displayed a generosity of soul far, very far superior to the abject meannefs of submitting implicitly to an usurped authority."

"And what authority, Sigismond, will you acknowledge?" asked the Father.

"From your earliest infancy I have educated you; I placed you in the Convent, and knowing I could make no better provision for you, consented to your becoming a lay-brother.—Do you wish to make me recede from engagements thus tacitly formed? or do you wish me to violate the word given three years ago, when I took you again out of the Convent, that at the age of twenty I would again resign you to it, if no events had occurred in the interval to render it impracticable?"

"Not

“Not for the world, my Father,” replied Sigismond, “would I wish you, in the smallest degree, to violate on my account any engagement either openly or tacitly acknowledged; nor will I, by any contumacy, subject you to regret. But my resolution is taken:—I will not either devote myself a victim to everlasting repentance—I will at the appointed time re-enter the Convent; but when there, I will assert my own freedom, and refuse to embrace its obligations.”

“The time is not yet arrived, my son,” answered Buonafede; “before it does come, I must convince you how unavailing would be any resistance you might make when once you were again within those walls.—Oh my son, my son!—you, though so long an inmate of the Convent, yet know not the extent of its power—the dreadful punishments it can inflict!”

“No matter, my Father; at least I will not wilfully doom myself to endless regret; but, as you say, the time is not yet arrived—

a year

a year may be pregnant with many and strange events. Something within seems to persuade me I was not born to be immured in a cloister; and we will, at least, not begin yet to make ourselves miserable about a circumstance, which things, yet hidden in the bosom of futurity, may render wholly inconsequential."

Sigismond affected a serenity he did not feel; for, in fact, the words of Buonafede had deeply impressed him. He felt that the good Father was indeed involved in his future obedience, and he knew that the obligation of long habits had rendered implicit submission to the orders of the Convent a first principle in the mind of Buonafede. Liberal in himself, he would never have established a community which constituted the abrogation of every social feeling, a chief virtue in its code; but, become a member of such a community, to which, from the habits of early education, he had ever borne a profound respect, he held inviolable submission to its ordinances rather

rather an act of necessity than of volition. Sigismond felt that to the Father he himself owed every thing—even the implicit obedience of a child to a parent; he felt that were his conduct to involve his benefactor in regret, or in what he would esteem disgrace, he never could forgive himself; and to save Buonafede from any such feeling, he could at that moment have devoted himself to the horrors of a monastic life. Nor was he wholly ignorant of the dreadful punishments to which the Father alluded. He remembered that a member of the community had incurred the displeasure of the Superior, and had been threatened with confinement; that the person had been carried into that confinement, whence he had never returned, and it was even rumoured that he had died there.

These reflections passed across his mind as they moved silently homeward; and reading a strong expression of disquiet on the countenance of the Father, Sigismond expressed his determination to abide by his will

will at the appointed time, if no event should occur to fix his destiny in any other way before that period.

Other reflections had passed in the bosom of Buonafede during the same interval. He, however, expressed his approbation of, and even gratitude for, the docility of his pupil ; though, at the same time, he secretly hoped that an event, of which he sometimes saw a possibility he dared not hint to the sanguine mind of Sigismond, might take place, to save him from a lot so ardently, and perhaps so justly, deorecated. They reached the village just as the departing sun had tinged the horizon with a saffron glow, while the moon, rising modestly in the east, threw her silver radiance over the serene and beautiful scene. The lads and lasses of the village were assembled for their evening dance, and Marina, who was disengaged, seeing Sigismond, ran sportively to him, and invited him to join the party ; but Sigismond was not disposed for the gay dissipation of the dance,—severer thoughts were passing



in his mind; and the melody of the tabor and pipe, which had so often set his spirits and his limbs at once in motion, now sounded discord in his ears. He refused Marina, and she was retreating with a look of piqued disappointment, when suddenly reflecting that a habit of conquering merely selfish feelings was a great step towards real virtue, he followed her with a look of humility and good humour, and joined the merry group. The sight of their festivity was however insufficient to raise his spirits; but the approbation of Buonafede, who had seen and understood the struggle and the triumph, at least procured him, on his return to the cottage, a sound and peaceful slumber, undisturbed by any visions of monastic reflections or monastic severities.

The following evening, just as the venerable Father and his docile pupil were going to set out for their evening walk, a messenger arrived from the Villa Salviati, requesting that the Friar would visit there the Lady St. Clair, who was in a very indifferent state of health,  
and

and who had often, at various times, entreated the attendance of Buonafede. He immediately prepared to obey the summons, and Sigismond proposed to accompany him as far as the gate that opened into the demesne particularly belonging to the villa. The road they had to pass was beautiful, and united all the peculiar features of the adjacent country:—part of it lay through venerable woods, from which, emerging on a sudden, it commanded at various openings diversified and enchanting views over very distant tracts of land, while the Doria spread its winding waters among scenes of varied beauty, cultivation, and mildness. As they wound up the sides of the hill, while the charms of the way beguiled the toilsome ascent, Sigismond asked some questions relative to the Lady St. Clair, who, oftener than any of the inhabitants of the neighbouring villas, sent to request the presence of the Priest. Buonafede told his pupil that she was the widow of a French Officer of distinction;

distinctions; that her history was mournful, having lost her husband within a twelve-month after their union, and that this loss was also attended with some distressing circumstances, which had so much affected her spirits, that she had immediately quitted the scene of her former happiness, and had ever since resided in the Villa Salviati, with which she had been accommodated by a friend who knew all the particulars of her situation.—“ Her life,” added Buonafede, “ is the most exemplary imaginable; her charities are almost unbounded—at least they know no limits but her ability, and she often taxes her own very moderate indulgences to enable her to enlarge her donations; her piety is sincere and fervent, and never did I know a human being so saint-like as Madame St. Clair. She has passed the last seventeen years (the term of her abode here) in a constant preparation for that world to which I have long thought her hastening. Religion is her only consolation; yet so great have been her misfortunes, that

that there are moments when even religion is insufficient to preserve her tranquillity. She reproaches herself with these moments as with crimes, so truly delicate is her conscience."

"Ah my Father!" exclaimed Sigismond, "how much your account of this amiable mourner interests me!—how much I should wish to hear all the particulars of a history so afflicting."

"I, myself, am not fully acquainted with it," replied Buonafede, "but even the circumstances I do know, further than I have already related to you, I am bound to conceal. Madame St. Clair wishes not to become an object of pity to any one."

"As you have described her, my Father," answered Sigismond, "she must be an object of reverence to all who know how to esteem virtue! Oh that I had but a chance of ever being introduced to her!"

"That, I fear," replied the Father, "you have not. She avoids the sight of strangers, and I know her disposition too exactly to

with

wish to make such a proposal;—but we have reached the gate, and now, Sigismond, we must part.”

Sigismond opened the gate for Buonafede to pass through, and struck into a path on the right hand, which seemed to lead into the deepest recesses of the woods. He wandered for a considerable time without either knowing or reflecting whither he was going, when suddenly the appearance of some ruined building at a distance caught his attention, and he went up to it. The ruins appeared to have belonged to some very noble mansion, as the columns were of immense diameter, and some of them, which still remained standing, seemed to have supported a roof of amazing height, and most beautifully ornamented with the fanciful fretwork of Gothic architecture. He wandered along a noble corridor which terminated in a chapel less ruinous indeed than the colonade, but still unfit for use; its appearance bespoke the grandeur of the family to which it had once belonged; its walls

walls were covered with escutcheons which, though faded and torn, yet spoke loudly of the former fame of their owners; the broken windows yet displayed some fragments of painted glass, in the centre of which, in every window that remained undemolished, were blazoned the arms of the same family to whom the escutcheons also belonged; where the glass was wholly gone, its place was supplied by huge masses of ivy and various other creepers, which prevented the glare of day from ever disturbing the "dim religious light" of this venerable structure. Sigismond endeavoured to read the inscriptions which covered the walls, but most of them were so much decayed by time and damp as to be illegible; but one monument appeared to have fallen a victim to neglect, rather than to time,—it was a magnificent structure, and on its top reposed a martial figure, whose countenance, uncommonly well executed by a most skilful statuary, had something in it that engaged the attention of Sigismond in a very high degree.



degree. He stood contemplating it for a considerable time, and read all that was yet left of an inscription that appeared to have been industriously defaced; the name and quality of the person were not to be discovered, but enough yet remained to inform the observer that he had been murdered by banditti in the flower of his age. At the bottom of the inscription was the same coat of arms he had remarked in every window and upon every escutcheon—it was a dog reposing at the foot of a pyramid built on a rock. Sigismond wandered from this monument to others scattered about the chapel; but none interested him like this, and observing the failing light, he quitted the ruins, and endeavoured to trace back his way to the village; but he had rambled beyond the usual extent of his walks, or rather in a different direction, and he found himself bewildered in the mazes of the wood. Finding that he only involved himself in greater perplexity, he resolved to regain the chapel, preferring to pass the  
night

night under its shelter, than amidst the trees of the forest.

For a time, however, the increasing darkness rendered this apparently impossible, and he began to resign himself to the idea of spending the long hours till morning beneath the shade of the trees.

A thousand ideas rushed upon his mind respecting the premature death of the person, as he had understood from the inscription that he had been murdered at no great distance from the chapel, or at least from the castle to which the chapel had belonged. The uneasiness of Buonafede also added to his perturbation, and he continued to wander, though hopeless of discovering either the ruins or the road to Colano. Very rarely did the intermingling branches of the venerable trees permit him to obtain a glimpse of the firmament which, when he could view it, he found obscured by heavy clouds. The apprehension of a storm, added to his reluctance to pass the night without shelter; but he quite despaired of regaining

regaining the chapel, when suddenly he thought he perceived an angle of the building. His pace was now quickened by hope, and it was not long ere he perceived the end of the long corridor that led to the chapel;—he entered it with alacrity, and turned to view the threatening atmosphere, which already shot forth soft prelusive lightning, while the gathering clouds prognosticated a tremendous storm.

As he moved slowly along the colonade, he rejoiced that he was no longer exposed to the apprehension of banditti; then again reflecting that he was poor, and could afford no temptation to those plunderers, he checked himself for permitting groundless fears to take possession of his mind, and wished it were in his power to apprise the reverend Father of the shelter he had obtained against the inclemency of the night. The number of hours that had elapsed since they had parted at the little wicket that led into the grounds belonging to the Villa Salviati, precluded all doubt of Buonafede being exposed to the war of elements that seemed approaching.

He

He walked forward, listening to the echo of his own steps, when suddenly a violent flash of lightning illuminating the whole corridor, he thought he perceived a human figure at the further end of it stealing also into the chapel.

The idea that this might be Buonafede instantly occurred to him, and he quickened his pace, and shouted aloud. The sound of his voice was lost in a tremendous clap of thunder, which shook the ruins to their foundation; and a new terror seized the heart of Sigismond, lest the shelter he had chosen as so secure, should prove his grave. Still, however, he moved onwards, reflecting on the certain danger of seeking shelter from trees during a storm, and gazed earnestly forward through the corridor to see again the same figure. During the interval of the flashes the darkness was too great to permit him to distinguish any object whatever, and when the next flung a momentary splendour over the colonade, no creature was visible. He then concluded this person

had gained the chapel; and though he trusted it was not his venerable friend, yet he rejoiced in the idea of having a companion during so dreadful a night as this threatened to be. He was now at the door of the chapel, and turning round to look down the long arcades he had passed, he thought he perceived at the other end a figure, strongly resembling that he had before observed at the very place where he himself now stood. He thought he must be deceived by the partial and momentary light of the flashes; for it was only during their continuance that he could discern any object at all, and concluded he had mistaken the shadow of a broken pillar for a human figure; for he thought it unlikely that so many travellers should seek a shelter under these ruins, unless indeed, and he shuddered as the thought glanced across his mind, they were a gang of banditti, who lurked securely in the midst of these ruins, and had fixed here their permanent habitation. Not a little dismayed by this idea, he

he remained fixed to the spot where he stood, while the thunder rolled awfully over his head, and in repeated reverberations founded among the distant mountains. Before this tremendous peal was well finished, another gleam of lightning disclosed again to his view the same figure, which appeared stationary; he was now certain he was not deceived;—it could not be a pillar he saw, for their shadows fell in a different direction. He determined to wait, steadily gazing on the spot, till the next concussion should be over, and then to shout aloud.—He did so, and while his voice yet founded along the corridor, a new flash enabled him to observe the figure suddenly move from the spot, and glide hastily away;—it appeared to Sigismund that it went into the forest, yet this seemed so improbable, that he expected by the next illumination, to see it almost beside him. When the repercussion of the thunder ceased, however, he listened intently to hear the sound of footsteps along the colonade; but all was still as death; no



found met his ear, save the wind that gently agitated the leaves at intervals during the pauses of the storm, nor did the quickly succeeding flash discover to him any person along the cloisters.

He now recollected the first figure he had observed in the spot where he now stood, and, seized with an indescribable awe, he trembled to enter the chapel; yet reflecting that many hours must yet elapse before the morning light would enable him to regain the road to Colano, and recollecting that there were some benches yet covered with tattered remains of velvet, which would afford him some repose, he strove to shake off the superstitious terror that was creeping on his mind, and entered the chapel. The sound of his footsteps echoed dismally along the vaulted roof, and whenever the gleams of the lightning cast a partial light over the building, he eagerly tried to discover whether there was any one in it besides himself. Sometimes he fancied he distinguished other footsteps than his own; yet when he stood still, he was convinced by the perfect silence  
that

that he had been deceived,—nor could he, as he gazed down the long aisles, discern any object to justify the fears he felt. Yet he well knew that any person might be perfectly concealed behind any of the monuments, and might wholly elude his observation; then again he reflected, with what view should any one do this?—Even supposing the chapel to be the resort of banditti, it was not likely that any person of sufficient wealth, to excite them to murder and depredation, should be wandering in the forest, unattended, at that hour of the night; it was far more likely that it should be some humble inhabitant of the village, as in fact he was, bewildered in the mazes of the wood, and seeking a shelter from the inclemency of the night among these ruined buildings; and indeed, if there were any other human being within the building but himself, it was more likely that he also should have sought shelter there from similar motives. Endeavouring to quiet himself by these reflections, he tried to find the benches he had observed in the evening,

and at length succeeding by the assistance of the lightning, he seated himself, and strove to compose his mind.

After some time the storm abated, and the moon even began at intervals to throw her steady light across the chapel. Sigismond felt thankful for the cessation of the tempest, and after a while, observing that the moon fully illuminated the whole building, he raised himself on the bench, and endeavoured to discover whether any other being was within the ruinous walls. As he gazed intently in every direction, something on the left hand like a human eye attracted his attention, and turning suddenly round, he thought he perceived a figure glide behind the monument of the distinguished person who had so strongly interested him. Convinced that no one could act thus but from the worst of motives, his heart sunk within him;—yet reflecting that by the caution the villain preserved he was probably alone, and meant to have waited till sleep should have sealed the eyes of his victim, the

the courage of Sigismond roused within him, and feeling himself equal to a contest with any single being, he boldly descended from the bench where he stood, and followed to the very spot where he thought he had seen the person conceal himself; but no trace of any human being appeared, nor along the aisle, which, as he now stood, was perfectly enlightened by the moon, did any symptom discover that any one was in the chapel save himself.—Not the lightest echo of a footstep whispered along the vaulted arches, not the softest breathing stole upon his ear, and a terror less conquerable, because less determinate than the former, took possession of his senses. He felt ashamed of his fears, and regaining the bench, resumed his station, and tried to examine whether the moon beams, falling on any prominence in the pillars, had occasioned the gleam he had mistaken for a human eye; but nothing appeared either to renew or to explain his fears, and after continuing watching a long time, without any

new circumstance arising to confirm his terrors, reason and reflection assisted to disperse them ; and fatigued both in mind and body, he stretched himself on the bench, and sought in sleep a renovation of his powers.

Sigismond slept peacefully and well, until the bright beams of the morning sun, darting on his face, awoke him. Freed from all his terrors, he gazed around him on the chapel, of which he could now observe all the beauty, and wondered at the alarms that had, a few hours before, so overpowered his philosophy. All was tranquil, and no trace was to be found of the being that had caused him so much speculation. He blushed for the weak terrors that had so overawed him, and leaving the chapel, endeavoured to regain the lost road to Colano. The morning, brilliant and calm, was uncommonly delightful after the tremendous war of elements that had agitated the night ; dew-drops glittered like diamonds on every blade of grass, and on every leaf that trembled

bled in the gale: the birds poured forth their carols with peculiar animation, and Sigismond, as he felt the pure breath of Heaven salute his cheek, and beheld the rays of the sun gloriously illuminating all nature, forgot the terrors of the night, or only remembered them to laugh at or blush for them. He wandered for some time without being able to find the road, till at length perceiving an aged peasant, he called to him, and requested a direction to Colano.

“It is very early in the day, young Signor,” said the peasant, “for you to have lost your way.”

“True, my friend,” replied Sigismond. “and, in fact, I have been bewildered in the forest ever since yester-evening.”

“And have you then passed the night in the forest?” enquired the old man: “it was a fearful night!”

“No,” answered Sigismond, “I found a fortunate shelter from the storm in yonder ruined building.”



“What, in that chapel, Signor?” demanded the peasant with evident astonishment.

“Yes,” replied Sigismond.

“And you thought yourself fortunate,” remarked the peasant, “in finding such shelter! By the Mass, if you passed a quiet night there, you were indeed fortunate. But you say you are going to Colano;—I am going there myself, and as the way is rather intricate, if you please I will be your guide.”

Sigismond thankfully accepted this offer, and the old man and he set forward together.

“What did you mean by your allusion to the chapel, friend?” said Sigismond.

“Nay, Signor,” replied the peasant, “I only said you were fortunate if you passed a quiet night there. Were you disturbed, Signor?”

“The night was a very unquiet one,” answered the youth; “I never remember a more tremendous storm; it was not likely I should sleep undisturbed through such a tempest,

tempest, but after that I reposed tranquilly enough."

"Indeed!" said the old man; "yet there are strange things said; but you must know best—you slept well you say?"

"Quite well," replied Sigismond.

"Then there is no more to be said," observed the old man; "but by the holy Mass, numbers will be glad to hear you had a good night's rest there, though I doubt they won't believe me."

"What is your meaning, friend?" asked Sigismond.

"Nay, Signor," replied the peasant, "I have always said they were only tales to be laughed at, and Father Pugnani has always discouraged all repetition of such nonsense; and so, if you please, we will say no more about it."

"As you please," said Sigismond, who perceived that the more interest he betrayed, the more the old man resolved to be silent.

"As you please," said he; "but do you know whether there was formerly a large  
castle

castle on that situation ? The chapel and the corridor appear to have belonged to a very noble edifice."

" Why you must be quite a stranger in these parts," replied the peasant, " if you don't know that there was a very magnificent castle there, which was pulled down, all but that chapel and the corridor ; and the Villa Salviati built with the materials."

" Then the Villa Salviati is not very far distant from the chapel ?" said Sigismond.

" Distant, Signor ! no, not above a quarter of a mile ; it would have been placed further off, but that it would have been so expensive to remove the materials ; for my Lord did not much like to have it built so near."

" Why so ?" asked Sigismond ; " as far as I could judge, the corridor seemed to command a very fine view, and the castle must there have enjoyed every advantage of situation."

" Oh yes, Signor ! the situation was good enough for that matter, and better, indeed,

as a situation, then where the Villa Salviati stands ; but my Lord did not mind so much about the beauty of it, as to have it further from the old place.”

“ And for what reason ?” asked Sigismond.

“ Nay, as for that matter, I suppose because my Lord chose it ; if he had liked the old place, you know, he would not have pulled down the old castle, for that was a much finer building than the Villa ; and as he don’t live in the Villa himself, it would have been no more expence to have let the castle stand, nay not so much as to have built up the Villa.”

“ And who is this Lord ?” enquired Sigismond.

“ Lord, Signor, don’t you know ? Why what business can you have to ask so many questions about all these things, if you know nothing of my Lord ?—Not that I know his name now myself, but at the time this happened he was called —— he was called —— deuce take it, I cannot remember either name  
just

just now ;—However, I suppose, Signor, it does not much signify.”

“ Not at all,” replied Sigismond, who began to think that the old peasant had some motive for concealing what he did know ; and therefore affecting to have no further curiosity on the subject, he began talking of other things.

The old man, who longed to open his heart fully on the subject of the Castle, brought back the conversation to it, by asking Sigismond if he had remarked the monument in the South aisle.

Sigismond coolly replied that he had.

“ What a sad tale doth that record !” observed the old man.

“ A very sad one,” answered Sigismond.

“ Mayhap you don’t know the name of that gentleman neither ?” asked the peasant.

“ I cannot know it,” replied Sigismond, “ for it is effaced from the monument.”

“ Aye, Signor, I know it is,” said the old man, “ and some people pretend to give a guess why ; but for my part, I guess nothing about

about it ; but it is a pity it is not restored ; such a fine monument to be without a name, when the gentleman it belongs to bore so good a one too !”

“ And what was his name, then ?” said Sigismond.

“ Oh ! I do not mean just what he was called,” replied the old man, “ but he bore such an excellent character, and that you know, Signor, is a man’s good name.”

“ True,” answered Sigismond, who began to wish he could get rid of his loquacious companion, whose artful evasions and mysterious manner served more to prejudice Sigismond against himself, than to excite any curiosity concerning the story he seemed so well acquainted with. But although he now knew perfectly well the way to Colano, as they had for some time been in the road he was accustomed to, he felt a degree of delicacy which prevented him from bidding adieu to the old man, and taking advantage of his knowledge and agility to get to the village in much less time than suited the  
years



years and infirmities of his guide. They continued, therefore, talking sometimes about the castle, and sometimes on other topics, without Sigismond's advancing at all nearer to any comprehension of the mysteries the peasant seemed to insinuate existed, respecting the castle and the chapel; till, after a walk which Sigismond thought at least double its usual length, they reached the village of Colano, and the old shepherd took leave of his young companion, and turned into one of the houses. Sigismond now hastened to the venerable Father's habitation, and just upon the threshold he found that good man preparing to sally forth on a search for the lost sheep thus happily restored to him.

Buonafede welcomed his pupil home with an earnestness of delight which brought tears into Sigismond's eyes; and leading him back into the house, enquired with much interest into the causes of his unexpected absence.

Sigismond related all the events of the night with great accuracy, and dwelt with  
much

much energy on the beauty of the monument. He mentioned, but without much interest, the mysterious figure which had so much agitated him, and also mentioned the vague hints of his new acquaintance.

Father Buonafede treated the old man's hints as vulgar tales, that gained credit only with the idle and illiterate; and warned Sigismond not to suffer the terrors of superstition to lay hold of his heart, leading him to believe that the figure he had seen was the creation of his own disturbed imagination, heated as it was by the agitation naturally occasioned by the scene and the situation. He proposed examining the chapel the next evening before his visit to the Lady St. Clair, who was so much indisposed as to request his daily attendance; and advised Sigismond now to take some repose, as he must want it after so disturbed a night:—but Sigismond disclaimed any unusual fatigue, and the day passed as usual. In the evening, as they walked towards the chapel, Buonafede confirmed part of the old

old man's tale, by saying that there had been indeed a most noble edifice on that situation, of which the chapel and the corridor were the only remains; but that in the civil commotions which had at that period desolated Italy, when so many individuals assumed to themselves the right of avenging their own injuries by attacking their enemies even in their castles; the Castle Pontalti had been so much dilapidated during a siege, that it was judged more advisable to pull it down entirely, and that the remaining materials had sufficed to erect the Villa Salviati.

When they reached the corridor, Sigismond could not help reflecting with some emotion on the figure he had seen there the preceding evening, and expected every moment to see it gliding away in distance among the long arcades; but he gazed in vain—no object appeared in any way to lessen the loneliness of the place, or to add new terrors to the solitude. As they walked along, they could not but observe among  
the

the ruins many deep excavations which almost appeared as if they might lead to some subterranean passages and chambers; and Sigismond remarked that if that were the case, these places might very probably be the haunt of banditti, and then the figure he had seen might be one of the gang who, alarmed by his shouting, had suddenly retreated to one of those secure hiding-places. Father Buonafede allowed this to be a probable solution of the mystery, and they entered the chapel.

“The beauty of this building,” said the Father, “and its having been consecrated to religious uses, occasioned its being saved from the general destruction of Pontalti; and indeed it is, I think, one of the most perfect specimens of Gothic architecture I remember ever to have seen.”

“It has suffered greatly,” observed Sigismond, “from the weather, if indeed that can have occasioned such considerable injury. I should rather be tempted to suppose it had been maliciously defaced.”

“It

“It is now near nineteen years,” replied Buonafede, “since it has been entirely deserted; for several years after the demolition of Pontalti no one inhabited the demesne at all, and since the Lady St. Clair has resided in the Villa, she has only made use of the private oratory that is consecrated within its walls; and when a building stands exposed to the injuries of the weather, and to the depredations of wantonness for nineteen years, we should rather wonder that so much remains, than that so much is defaced.”

“How happened it,” enquired Sigismond, “that the Lord of this domain has so entirely deserted it?”

“The Marquis Mirandola,” replied Buonafede, “lost his life very prematurely, and the property passed into other hands. His present possessor probably has no peculiar attachment to this place; besides that, he possesses another splendid castle in the Apennines.”

“I cannot

“ I cannot but regret,” said Sigismond, “ that such noble monuments of former greatness should ever be destroyed. The Marquis Mirandola was a good man as well as a great man—was he not ?”

“ He was indeed,” replied Buonafede; “ this whole neighbourhood had reason to lament his loss.”

“ And who,” enquired Sigismond, “ is the present possessor of this demesne ?”

“ Prince Rezzonico,” answered Father Buonafede. “ But I think it is time for me to visit the Lady St. Clair; you will not again be ambitious of passing the night among these ruins, my son ?”

Sigismond replied that he should not; and quitting the chapel with Buonafede, he attended him to the little gate, and amused himself with wandering in the neighbourhood until the Father, having finished his evening's attendance on the Lady St. Clair, joined him again at the entrance, and they returned to the village together. As they descended the winding path, they met the old



old shepherd, who, recognizing Sigismond, wished him good evening, enquiring whether he had again been to the ruins, and whether they were most agreeable by day or night?

Sigismond replying that they were always beautiful, the old man shook his head, saying archly,—“ You won’t confess, Signor, you won’t confess!”—and again wishing them good night, he went on his way, and our travellers reached the village without further accident.

“ Was Prince Rezzonico then,” asked Sigismond, as they entered the village, “ the friend who accommodated the Lady St. Clair with the Villa Salviati?”

“ I think not,” replied Buonafede; “ she mentioned a French nobleman as the person who had done her that service; probably he was a friend of Prince Rezzonico, though the Lady St. Clair did not name her real host. But your curiosity seems much excited, my son, respecting this castle and its possessor.”

“ I own

“ I own it, my Father,” answered Sigismond; “ yet I can have no reason for indulging so much curiosity.”

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### CHAP. III.

“ When the soul,  
 “ Snatch'd by the power of music from the cell  
 “ Of fleshly thralldom, feels herself upborne  
 “ On plumes of ecstacy, and boldly springs,  
 “ Mid swelling harmonies and pealing hymns,  
 “ Up to the gate of Heaven.”

MASON.

FATHER Buonafede had continued his daily visits to the Lady St. Clair, and Sigismond his rambles, though he had not constantly visited the chapel;—to say the truth, his

apprehensions of banditti had been strongly excited, and had overpowered the enthusiasm created by the grandeur and beauty of the building. One evening, however, having suffered his imagination to dwell on the melancholy circumstance of the Marquis's death, murdered so near his own home, and in the flower of his age, he determined to return to the chapel, and indulge himself again in gazing on a countenance which had strongly impressed his affections. When the good Father, therefore, passed through the little gate to go to the Villa Salviati, Sigismond turned into the right hand path, which quickly conducted him to the chapel;—it was yet early in the evening, and the ruddy glow of the west, as it shone through the large window, rendered the scene more than commonly beautiful. Sigismond, lost in high enthusiasm, moved with slow and solemn step along the solitary aisles, and now endeavoured to decipher some of the inscriptions from scripture on the walls, and now raised his mind towards  
the

the Being to whom this once magnificent building was dedicated. His thoughts then darted into futurity, and he ruminated on his own destiny. It was not religion from which he shrunk appalled,—it was from monkish rules and earthborn severity! Yet he saw no means of escaping from his fate, and he contemplated it perhaps with more reluctance, from considering it to be inevitable. At length going up to the monument of Mirandola, he gazed on that countenance so noble, so animated, and shed some most delicious tears to the memory of so unfortunate a being; the mutilated inscription declared him to have been brave, generous, and happy. His countenance strongly corroborated the character given of him; and, overcome by a variety of emotions, Sigismond knelt at the foot of the monument, and wept in silence. While he continued in this attitude, lost in a reverie of varied and desultory thoughts, a strain of music stole upon the silence of the scene, so entrancing, so soothing, that in a moment

so enthusiastic, Sigismond thought it the music of an aerial spirit. He dared not move, lest the action should destroy the illusion, and the sounds seemed to approach nearer;—now long and melodious notes swelled on the gale with a force and clearness that vibrated through his soul; now soft and delicate divisions sunk to a lightness of tone that seemed scarcely the echo of a distant sound. He could distinguish no words; but it was no instrument that poured forth such enchanting harmony—they were clearly the tones of a most melodious voice—of the voice of an angel the young enthusiast imagined, and every moment expected to see the chapel illuminated with a celestial light. At length the voice seemed undoubtedly to enter the chapel; but Sigismond was so placed that he could not discern whether any being entered, or not—nor did he venture to change his position, but gave up his whole soul to the entrancing power of melody. He now distinguished a vesper hymn to the Virgin, which he had heard in the  
Convent,

Convent; and when that ceased, he heard the following words:—

Oh! genial breath of balmy Spring,  
To thee I raise the votive strain;  
Thy gentle influence hither bring,  
Oh haste and bless these groves again.

Here shed thy glad-reviving charm;  
Bid health once more illumine that eye,  
Once more inspire that drooping form,  
That now excites my secret sigh!

Soft power, while sleeping Nature hears,  
And starts at thy benignant voice,  
Oh! deign to sooth my anxious fears,  
Oh! bid my trembling heart rejoice!

These words, sung in a most simple and affecting style, served, however, to convince him that it was a mortal who sung; and he should have judged, from their tenor, the daughter of the Lady St. Clair, but that he had never heard she had a daughter. In the silence which followed the cessation of the music, he plainly distinguished footsteps, and thought they approached that part of the chapel where he lay concealed. He trem-



bled lest the sudden discovery of him in that situation should alarm the musician; and yet he knew not by what means to prevent a discovery, which, as far as related to himself only, he ardently wished to take place; and while he was yet ruminating how to manage it in the least terrifying manner, the footsteps approached much nearer, and with a faint scream some person fell to the floor.

Sigismond rose in a moment, seized the form that had fallen, and bore to the open air a female of most delicate frame, who appeared wholly insensible. Alarmed and impatient, he knew not how to recal the life which appeared to have fled its delicate tenement; when the fresh breeze of the evening blowing on her face, she opened her eyes, but perceiving Sigismond, seemed desirous to close them again.

“Pardon me,” cried the youth in the softest accents, “pardon me for an involuntary fault; recover from your alarm, loveliest

leveliest lady, and be assured there is nothing to fear."

"Oh my mother!" murmured the fair creature, "I have disobeyed your injunction, and I have suffered severely for it."

"Your spirits have indeed suffered," replied Sigismond; "but let me hope the injury is not material.—Tell me that you are recovering from your terror!"

"Alas! who are you?" cried the young creature, gazing earnestly on Sigismond. "you do not look ungentle."

"I would not hurt you for the world," exclaimed Sigismond,—“believe me, I would not.”

"I do believe you would not," replied she; "but how came you in the chapel—and who are you?"

"I was waiting in the chapel for Father Buonafede," returned he, "and my name is Sigismond."

"Your condescension," said the fair girl, "makes me blush for my impertinent enquiries; but I believe my terror has

berest me of my senses. I have sometimes before visited the chapel, but never met with a human being till this evening.—You know Father Buonafede then?”

“ I live with him.”

Surprise now was evident on the countenance of the young female, whom Sigismond regarded with at least equal astonishment. She appeared scarcely seventeen, so fair, so fragile, so delicate, she resembled a young lily bending with every gale. Her light auburn tresses fell in profusion over the most beautifully turned shoulders imaginable; nothing could equal the transparent whiteness of her skin, and if every feature were not perfectly beautiful, at least Sigismond was incapable of discovering any defect. She was, at the same time, examining Sigismond with some attention, and he presented to her view a figure worthy of her notice, tall, well-formed, and manly; his open expressive countenance was shaded by dark curling hair; his strongly marked eyebrows bespoke thought and fortitude, while

while his intelligent eyes declared the secret movements of his ardent soul, whose animation mounted in a ruddy glow to his cheek, and played upon his lips in a smile of tenderness and delight.

Suddenly recollecting herself, the young maiden exclaimed, "I must go home, lest still further I incur the blame of my mother. I thank you, Sir, for your attention, but I must leave you."

Till this moment, Sigismond had been assisting her to support herself against a broken fragment of a column, but now, disengaging herself from him, she attempted to move forwards; but he saw her weakness, and extending his arms, saved her from again falling.

"You must not go yet," said he; "you are, indeed, incapable of the exertion."

"Alas!" exclaimed she, "I am very foolish; but indeed I must not, will not stay here."

"Suffer me then to assist you," cried Sigismond; "lean upon me; you owe your

weakness to me, and I have a right to offer you some support."

The fair girl again leaned against the pillar, and burst into tears. Sigismond was in an agony; he knew not how to offer consolation—he knew not what to do, and he did what was wisest,—he suffered those salutary tears to flow, and his lovely companion declared herself better, and able to undertake the walk.

"Have you far to go?" enquired Sigismond.

"Only to the Villa Salviati," she replied.

"Ah!" exclaimed he, "are you then, as I have already dared to imagine, the daughter of Madame St. Clair?"

"I am, indeed," replied she.

"But you will not forbid my seeing you safe home?" said he; "you really must not go alone."

"There is no occasion, indeed," said Mademoiselle St. Clair; "I am quite strong now."

"Strong!"

“ Strong!” exclaimed Sigismond, “ with that trembling frame, and that varying colour!—Ah! what is weakness if this be strength?”

And with these words he drew her arm within his, and gently obliging her to lean upon him, led the way to the Villa Salviati. As they walked slowly along, Sigismond felt that it would be almost impossible to part from his fair companion without some hope of seeing her again, and in a subdued tone of voice he said,—“ Shall I never again be thus fortunate? Shall I never more behold Mademoiselle St. Clair?”

“ Probably not,” replied she; “ I seldom quit the Villa, and my mother fees no strangers.”

“ Oh!” exclaimed Sigismond, “ I cannot, indeed I cannot relinquish the hope of seeing you again;—yet wherefore, since I have already seen you too much?”

These last words, uttered in the lowest whisper, though they did not wholly escape Mademoiselle St. Clair, were yet not fully



heard by her ; and she replied,—“ I acknowledge that were it probable, I should with pleasure see you again ; but do not expect it.”

Animated by the smile which adorned her lovely mouth as she uttered these words, Sigismond said with energy—“ Oh ! intercede with Madame St. Clair to admit me ; I will entreat Father Buonafede to plead for me.”

Mademoiselle St. Clair smiled at his impetuosity ; and Sigismond understood the smile, and understood too, at once, all the feelings that had prompted that impetuosity. They had now reached the wicket, and bowing on the hand he was forced to relinquish, he ventured to impress on it a gentle kiss, and said—“ May I, at least, hope Mademoiselle St. Clair will remember, without anger, a man whose acquaintance with her began so inauspiciously ; and that if ever I am again so fortunate as to be in her presence, she will not look upon me wholly as a stranger ?”

Mademoiselle St. Clair withdrew her hand; a faint blush passed across her cheek, and vanishing, left it unusually pallid; but she replied not a word to the humble request of Sigismond, and opening the wicket, slowly crossed the little lawn, and turning round an angle of the building, was immediately out of his sight.

Sigismond remained standing at the little gate looking after her, and recalling to his mind all her looks and words, and every peculiar circumstance of her manner—recalling also the sweetness of that strain which had first announced her arrival; and remembering that he had no hope of seeing her again, he sunk into visions of gloomy despair, whose black and horrible impression was still visible upon his countenance when the good Father, issuing from the Villa, was surprised to find him waiting at the wicket. He opened it in silence, and without speaking, followed Buonafede along the winding descent that led to the village. The Father, surprised at a silence so different from his pupil's

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pupil's usual manner, turned to look at him; and perceiving the blackness of his countenance, enquired what had happened, and what was the subject of those ruminations that so evidently disturbed his mind. On being thus questioned by the Father in a tone of the gentlest compassion, the heart of Sigismond was softened, and tears started from his eyes; he was, however, unable to speak, till the priest repeated his enquiries with still more interest, and then he exclaimed—"Oh my Father, I have seen her!"

This vague exclamation recalling to Buonafede's mind his account of the mysterious figure he had seen in the corridor, he asked with quickness whom he had seen; a thousand reports rushing instantly into his mind respecting the ruins, and almost expecting to receive a confirmation of them, from the strange solemnity of Sigismond's manner.—"Whom have you seen?" repeated the Father.

The youth, in a scarcely audible voice, replied—"Mademoiselle St. Clair!"

The

The astonished priest repeated his words with every symptom of surprise and regret; and Sigismond, grasping his hand, said, in a voice broken by sobs—"She came like an angel of light, surrounded with music from Heaven!—Oh my Father! I supported her in my arms; but she is gone, and I shall see her no more!"

This strange, incoherent tale still confirmed the good Father's first idea, that he had seen some visionary being in the chapel; and it was some time ere he could obtain from the youth any thing like a clear account of the event that had so much discomposed him. When, however, Buonafede understood that it was really the daughter of his penitent that his pupil had thus unexpectedly met, his regret increased, as he found the very deep impression this casual interview had made on his heart, and as he very well knew the small probability there was of their ever seeing each other again. He dwelt on this circumstance to Sigismond, judging it better to crush this beginning passion in its first bud,

by

by overwhelming it with well-founded despair, than to suffer it to strengthen itself by false hopes, and feed it with expectations that never would be realized. "Besides, my son," said the Father, "what could you expect, even were you to pursue this inauspicious acquaintance? What would you propose to yourself even from the most successful love?—Certainly not happiness. The more you inspired Agnes St. Clair with a mutual passion, the more miserable you must be, since you must be convinced that you could not ask her to share the fortunes of a man who hath not where to lay his head; nor would Madame St. Clair ever consent to such an attachment, nor would the virtuous Agnes ever engage in it without her mother's sanction."

"And does then happiness necessarily depend upon riches?" asked Sigilmond; "if it does, why are the peasants of Colano so happy, who earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow? I am young and strong, why

why should not I work? and to w  
Agnes, would sweeten every toil!"

"You are speaking now, my son," replied Buonafede, "with all the vehemence and inconsideration of a beginning passion; your feelings, and not your reason, are arguing with me;—when you shall have considered this affair coolly, you will see it in the same light that I do, and will own that it would be impossible to ask Agnes St. Clair, the child of luxury and indulgence, brought up with the softest tenderness, and unaccustomed to any hardship, to share with you a life of which you would soon find the inconveniences, though now your heated fancy represents it to you as abounding only with innocent delights:"

Sigismond, never of a disposition to argue pertinaciously, felt and confessed the truth of Buonafede's words, and made a sort of promise to endeavour, at least, to conquer a passion, which being so newly born, could not, probably, have taken very deep root in his bosom; but Buonafede perceived with  
sorrow



## REGINALD.

that from this time the mind of his  
had lost much of its energy. The  
same pursuits no longer engaged him with  
so much ardour; languor and dejection fre-  
quently overspread that countenance hitherto  
the seat of animation and hope; and that  
mind, whose fortitude not even the terror of  
monastic seclusion could overcome, was  
weakened to an extreme by a suddenly  
conceived attachment. Yet he strenuously  
refused himself any indulgence to a passion  
he was convinced it would be right to con-  
quer; he no longer accompanied the Friar  
to the gate of the Villa; he no longer visited  
the chapel, nor lingered round the spot where  
the form of Agnes, bright as a celestial  
being to his imagination, had dazzled his  
senses. The Father noticed and commended  
his forbearance, and hoped in time he would  
recover a blow so suddenly, though so deeply  
struck.

Several weeks had elapsed since Sigis-  
mond's first meeting with Agnes St. Clair,  
and he had never revisited the chapel, nor  
accompanied

accompanied the Friar further than half way towards the Villa Salviati; his daily visits had indeed been discontinued, but he still occasionally waited on the Lady St. Clair. Sigismond generally denied himself even the trifling pleasure of enquiring for her, not daring to pronounce a name which agitated his frame. The Friar, partly deceived by his assumed composure, and partly trusting to his evident exertions, began to hope that this fatal interview would not so lastingly affect the peace of his pupil as he had feared. He was now advancing in the last year of his liberty, and to return to the Convent with a heart devoted to an earthly object, the Father knew would render his religious vows a blasphemy; he hoped therefore, and prayed sincerely, that Sigismond might be enabled to overcome an attachment that so cruelly militated against his happiness; and he began to flatter himself that the conquest was in a degree taking place, when one evening, as they were wandering in the mazes of the wood, not  
— meaning

meaning to approach Salviati, they were met by a peasant, evidently in extreme distress, requesting their assistance to convey his wife to some place of shelter; that she had fallen suddenly ill near the chapel, but that the idea of passing the night there most horribly increased her illness, already sufficiently alarming.

The peasant did not belong to Colano, but to a village much more distant; and it immediately occurred to Buonafede that it would be better to convey the woman to Colano, where she might meet with that assistance so necessary; he therefore hastened, accompanied by Sigismond, to the chapel where the poor woman lay, suffering the accumulated evils of pain and superstitious horror, loudly exclaiming on her husband for leaving her to die in a place so well known to be the resort of evil spirits; and when she had fatigued herself with these exclamations, she suddenly fainted wholly away. The good Friar, as best known at the Villa Salviati, hastened immediately thither to solicit some cordial

cordial, that might enable them to remove the poor sufferer, and Sigismond assisted the peasant to bring her to the air, his mind dwelling on his former similar employment in the same place; when, on a sudden, the well-known tones of that melodious voice came to his ear, swelling on the gale, while horror stiffened the peasant's brow, who instantly concluded it was the music of those unquiet spirits with which the legends of superstition had peopled the chapel of Pontalti. Lost in an ecstasy he trembled to indulge, Sigismond's first emotion was to fly from the Syren so dangerous to his peace; but the increasing horror of the peasant, who in a moment perceived his intention, and whose fears thus received the sanction of what he imagined Sigismond felt, shewed him the impropriety of flight; and to lessen the man's terrors, he exclaimed as unconcernedly as he could—"Tis Mademoiselle St. Clair."

It was the first time the name had passed his lips since the evening he had met her,  
and

and his frame shook with convulsive agitation. The peasant, quickened by terror, perceived the changing colour and tremulous perturbation of Sigismond, and exclaimed—“ Oh, holy St. Francis, preserve us !”

“ Fear nothing,” continued Sigismond ; “ ’tis the young lady who lives in the Villa Salviati !”

“ No—no, she lives no where but in these cloisters,” cried the peasant in an agony irrepressible.

At that moment, however, the living Agnes approached, and hearing voices in the corridor, ceased her song, and hesitated whether to advance ; but the hurried voice of the peasant, who now exclaimed in a tone of horror—“ Oh my poor wife, will you die in this horrid place !” brought her instantly forward.

The sight of Sigismond called a thousand **varying** colours into her cheek ; yet, though scarcely able to support herself, she advanced to the fainting woman, and applying a bottle of salts to her nose, the poor wretch began  
to

to recover, and Agnes seeing the Father also, coming from the Villa with some of the servants, and every prospect of assistance, was about to depart without having uttered a single word, when Sigismond, hurried on by the feelings of the moment, caught her hand, and said—"Not a word? Cruel Mademoiselle St. Clair!"

Agnes looked surprised at a vehemence their short acquaintance could so little justify. She withdrew her hand, and repeating the word "cruel," was again moving away, when the wretched Sigismond, regardless of the peasant or his wife, who were indeed too much engaged to notice him, again stopped her, saying in a more subdued tone—"Forgive me, Mademoiselle St. Clair; you know not what I have suffered since I saw you!"

"I cannot, however, permit this conduct, Sir," said Agnes; "I must return to the Villa; it is your fate to make me always repent when I quit it."

Agnes uttered these words with a degree of severity, which awed Sigismond from making



making any further attempt to detain her; and she moved from the colonade in a different direction from that in which the Friar was approaching it. Sigismond saw her depart with an agony indescribable; her sudden appearance, the entrancing sound of her voice, her active and ready benevolence to the poor woman, and the changing colours in her cheeks, which he had too accurately noticed, all contributed to renew with greater fervour than ever the first so deep impression, and he was almost tempted to pursue her, and to acknowledge all the force of a passion he felt hopeless of ever subduing. His better genius, however, now reached the colonade in the form of Buonafede, who had from a distance witnessed the interview, and noticed the passionate gestures of Sigismond. He too well comprehended all that passed in the mind of that unhappy youth; yet dissembling the pity he really felt, he said—"I have brought directions from Madame St. Clair to have this poor woman removed to the Villa, where I have no doubt she

she will be perfectly recovered by to-morrow, and able to pursue her journey; and as Madame St. Clair has sent such ample assistance, our longer stay is unnecessary, and would only be distressing."

He then took the arm of Sigismond, and moved to leave the colonade, whispering to the poor youth, whose countenance expressed the most agonizing despair—"Recover yourself, my son; let not this casual interview overthrow all the equanimity you had with so arduous a struggle regained."

"I had regained nothing," replied Sigismond, "but the power of concealing my feelings, and that I have now lost for ever!"

"Not so, my son," answered Buonafede; "the motives which before roused you to exertion, will not have lost their influence; you will again recal the energy of your spirit, and I shall have lost my Sigismond only for an interval."

Sigismond was affected; but he replied only by a warm pressure of the Father's

hand; and they pursued their way in silence. But the power of exertion was now over; Sigismond no longer refused himself the dangerous indulgence of lingering near the Villa, of loitering in the long arcades of the cloisters, of wandering in every direction through the wood immediately surrounding Salviati, and endeavouring to trace the print of the light foot of Agnes among the tender herbs. He would often steal from the cottage late in the evening, and, sauntering dejectedly along the beautiful environs, would find himself, unintentionally perhaps, leaning on the gate which commanded a view of the Villa, listening with eager attention to catch the lightest, the most distant sound of that harmonious voice, or watching to perceive the faintest shadow of that sylph-like figure;—but he watched and listened in vain. He frequently, indeed, observed lights and people passing and repassing; but the windows which fronted the gate, seemed to belong to apartments inhabited only by servants, and he formed a project to discover  
some

some other view of the mansion, from whence he might, perhaps, sometimes have a chance of perceiving Agnes. One evening, then, when he had stolen away from the cottage, and reached the environs of Salviati, instead of lingering as usual near the white gate, or loitering in the colonade, or in the chapel, he went along by the side of the fence which seemed to surround the private garden belonging to the Villa, which, however, appeared to extend very wide, and to lead him far away from any view of the building. Still, notwithstanding, he proceeded; and after wandering for some time, at length perceived a part of the fence, which seemed low and easily scaleable. Impelled by a blind and headlong passion, he leaped over, and found himself within the precincts of the habitation of Agnes. But he saw no light nor any thing to guide him towards the house, and he continued searching his way through a delightful wilderness of odoriferous shrubs, in which he perceived a bower of lattice work, with a seat and a

rustic table, on which he saw a book, which had, in all probability, been left there by Agnes. Going in to examine it, he perceived also on the ground a piece of written paper, which he took up; and recollecting the words it contained to be those of the air he had heard her sing in the chapel, he carefully put it in his bosom, and resolved to preserve it as a relic. Diverted by this treasure from any further examination of the bower, he proceeded to seek for the house itself, and after wandering some time longer the path he was in suddenly terminated in a vista which led immediately to the Villa; the walk was broad, and at this moment fully illuminated by a bright moon,—nor dared he venture to approach the building in so bold a manner. He feared to be seen by Agnes, and to incur her displeasure; and wholly forgot the evident risk he ran of being supposed a robber by the servants, and treated accordingly. The idea of Agnes alone filled his imagination; and turning into a small serpentine path, that seemed also to lead to the house,

house, he followed its meander, and presently discovered lights in the Villa.

He now moved cautiously forward, and through the trees at length perceived a parlour, whose lattices were thrown open to admit the refreshing breeze of evening; it was illuminated so as that he could distinguish every object within it, and on a sofa, drawn near to the open window, reposed a lady whom he concluded to be the Lady St. Clair, while by her side sat Agnes with her lute in her hand, on which she seemed preparing to play, while she was yet listening to the words of her mother. Sigismond watched for the answer of Agnes with an impatience which would scarcely suffer him to breathe; it consisted merely of a gentle affirmative to the question Madame St. Clair had asked, but Sigismond felt enraptured at the tone of her voice. She now struck a few notes on the lute, seemingly without art or design, and at length played the very air of which he had just obtained the words;—she joined too her exquisite, her touching

voice



voice to the instrument, and Sigismond felt in Heaven !”

“ You had not your lute then ?” said Madame St. Clair.

Agnes replied that she had not.

He felt it possible that this remark might allude to the first evening he had seen her, and listened still more attentively ; but the next words seemed to point at some other circumstance, and Agnes moving to lay aside her lute, he lost the words of her answer. He observed, however, that she looked far paler and thinner than when he had seen her ; and while he contemplated this change with grief and apprehension, Madame St. Clair rising, said—“ We will walk again, Agnes ; the evening is lovely, and the air will refresh me.”

Agnes immediately threw a veil over her mother, and taking her arm, they entered the garden together. As they first turned, Sigismond thought they were coming even into the very walk where he was ; but was relieved

relieved by Madame St. Clair saying,—  
“ No, the broad walk will be the dryest.”

They had not advanced many steps, when she desired Agnes to step back for the lute, as she would rest herself in the bower.

Agnes obeyed; and Madame St. Clair leaned against a tree while she was gone; for she seemed unable to support herself. When her daughter again joined her—“ Hush !” said Madame St. Clair, “ listen !”

“ I hear nothing,” said Agnes, after a pause.

“ Nor I now,” replied Madame St. Clair; “ but while you were gone, I thought I heard some person rustling in the trees behind me;—but I might be deceived.”

“ It might be the wind,” said Agnes.

“ There is no wind,” answered Madame St. Clair.

“ True,” replied Agnes; “ yet sometimes of an evening a low murmuring breeze will agitate the leaves, while yet there appears to be no wind; I have often sat still, and listened to it, and imagined it must

be some partial gulf escaping as it were from among the mountains, and just in its last faint breathings, waving the upper branches of the trees."

"You imagine wind, then, to be of the nature of sound," said Madame St. Clair: "well, it may be so;—but let us walk—it is cool standing."

They proceeded, and Sigismond, conscious that Madame St. Clair had heard him amongst the trees, followed them very cautiously, and at a distance—so cautiously, indeed, that he heard the soft notes of the lute carelessly struck by the light hand of Agnes before he had half reached the bower. She began to sing another air, which sounded even more entrancing to him than the former; but by the time he had gained the wilderness, she had ceased singing, and was again speaking.

"I am certain," said she, "it was here this morning."

"You

“ You must be mistaken,” replied Madame St. Clair, “ no one would have stolen a song ;—to whom could it be of value ?”

By the faint light of the moon Sigismond fancied he saw a light blush pass across the pale cheek of Agnes at these words ; but she was moving, and he could not continue to observe her. She began to speak of the chapel, and expressed a wish to see it again.

Madame St. Clair said it was too far for her, and she did not like her venturing out alone ;—“ there might be banditti ; the ruins of Pontalti would afford them very safe and undisturbed retreats.”

“ I think,” said Agnes, “ the fears of the lower class of people would prevent even banditti from abiding in Pontalti.”

“ Do you imagine,” said Madame St. Clair, “ that those men would be deterred from inhabiting a commodious retreat by such idle terrors ? Those very superstitions would prove their security, by preventing the too close inspection of the idle or the curious.—You were there once, you say,

before the day you met there the poor sick woman?"

"I was," replied Agnes.

"And you thought it a fine building?"

"A most beautiful one," she answered; "and the monument of the Marquis Mirandola was exquisite!"

Sigismond, who attentively caught every accent of her voice, fancied that at these words it became rather tremulous. She took up her lute, and played the vesper hymn in a low tone, singing in an under voice; and when she had finished, Madame St. Clair proposed returning to the house.

Sigismond dared follow them no farther; but finding again the way by which he had entered, retraced his former footsteps, and regained the village.

Father Buonafede tenderly chid him for indulging his melancholy humour in these solitary rambles, and blamed him for affording such food to a passion he was sensible it was his duty to conquer.

Sigismond, who felt somewhat of an indescribable hope springing up in his heart,—a hope, however, that he dared not avow, answered but slightly to these remonstrances of the Father, and diverted the conversation to other topics. The following evening he forbore to visit the Villa; but he could no longer than till the succeeding one refrain taking advantage of his new discovery. He went with rapid foot to the well-known spot, where he gained entrance into the garden, and was advancing hastily to enter the bower, when the white garments of a female caught his eye. He watched cautiously at a distance, and perceived that it was Agnes alone; burning to speak to her, yet fearful of alarming her, he continued to observe her actions, and saw her standing at the entrance of the bower—her eyes fixed on the moon, and her arms crossed on her bosom;—her attitude was graceful, and her figure elegant; but while he gazed with admiration, his heart sunk within him to observe the alarming fragility of her form—



the exquisite delicacy of her complexion ; she seemed more aerial than earthly, and while her fine eyes were fixed on the moon, she seemed almost preparing for a flight into purer and more ethereal regions. She sighed heavily ; her lips moved, but even the attentive ear of Sigismond caught no accents ;—at length she covered her eyes with her hand, exclaiming in a tremulous voice—“ I blush for my own folly !”

“ Ah !” thought Sigismond, “ is it possible ?—But away, presumptuous hopes—hark !—she speaks again !”

“ So soon, so suddenly,” said she ; “ Oh Agnes, Agnes ! do not flatter yourself that you are remembered !”

The agitation of Sigismond became almost intolerable.—She continued in a lower voice—“ Yet my apparent severity !—Oh ! had he known what it cost me, he would have despised the weak, the wretched Agnes !”  
—She wept.

Scarcely could Sigismond refrain from flying to kiss away those precious tears ; he could

could not doubt that it was to himself she alluded. Merciful Heaven! could he avoid assuring her, at least, that it was impossible he could despise her? But he overcame his emotions, conscious that the sight of him at such a moment would be too much for her debilitated frame.—She spoke again.—“ Ah, my mother!” said she, “ often have you wished your poor Agnes consigned.— Oh heavens!” said she, shuddering as she spoke, “ whither, whither does my folly lead me?”—She hastily left the grotto, and advancing with a rapid footstep towards the house, entered it, and Sigismond saw her no more.

No lattices were open, no lights appeared; he heard no exquisite music borne on the bosom of the night; but without staying to regain his usual entrance, ventured slowly round the Villa, and leaping over the little wicket, which was secured for the night, pursued the usual path to Colano.

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## CHAP. IV.

" Fall'n pile! I ask not what has been thy fate!  
" But when the weak winds, wafted from the main  
" Through each lone arch, like spirits that complain,  
" Come hollow to my ear, I meditate  
" On this world's passing pageant."

BOWLES.

SEVERAL days elapsed without Sigismond's again obtaining a sight of Agnes, inasmuch that he almost began to despair, and for some evenings desisted from his customary walk. The perturbation of his mind began to affect his health and appearance, and Buonafede saw with regret his strength and spirits falling a prey to a sudden  
and

and vehement attachment;—sometime, indeed, the dear hope that he was not indifferent to Agnes, illumined his countenance with a transient sunshine; but the reflection that even her partiality could scarcely avail him any thing if he were thus excluded from her society, and the utter improbability that Madame St. Clair would ever consent to their union, even if he were admitted to her acquaintance, instantly clouded over the deceitful gleam, and plunged him in double night. Restless and uneasy, he could not sleep, and often deserted his bed before the sun illumined the eastern hemisphere; sometimes he wandered through the gardens of Salviati—sometimes he industriously avoided them, and blamed himself for his reprehensible want of energy and exertion. One morning he had been rambling through the forest in a very different direction from the Villa, and strongly placing before his judgment the undoubted reasons he had for endeavouring to detach himself from the too lovely Mademoiselle St. Clair, reflecting how

how little he knew of her, and how little reason he had to suppose her impressed in his favour, and also severely remembering the absolute poverty he only could invite her to share, he formed a resolution steadily to endeavour to forget the delirium which had held him so long in thrall, and to resume the usual energy of his character; but, with the fondness and inconsistency of a lover, he determined once more to visit the gardens of the Villa, to take a last farewell of the bower, and to repeat his resolution in the spot consecrated by the idea of Agnes. He sanctified the resolution he had formed, by persuading himself it was out of regard for her that he determined to renounce her.—“ I shall imagine,” said he to himself, “ in a more lively manner, under those shades than I can do here, the fair and delicate figure of my beloved; I shall ask myself, with a poignancy I cannot here attain to, whether I would condemn her elegant form and fragile frame to all the hardships of poverty, and all the fatigues of labour?—  
whether

whether I would be base enough to tear her from the lap of indulgence, in which she has hitherto been nursed, to expose her to all the inclemencies of a frowning and variable world?—Could I be this savage?—Could I reduce her to such a situation, and read in her uncomplaining patience the struggles of her heart, and not abhor myself?—Let me hasten once more then to the scene of her present comforts—let me view once more the elegances and indulgences to which she is accustomed—let me recal her lovely figure embellishing those beautiful shades,—and let me for ever abjure the selfishness which could, for a moment, entertain the idea of injuring such sweetness!”

With this steadfast determination Sigismond rapidly crossed the intricate paths of the forest, reached the well-known boundary, hastened to the bower, and beheld Agnes herself, her head resting on her hand, a handkerchief concealing her lovely face, but evidently weeping in great agitation.



His hasty footsteps had alarmed her, and she looked up: a sudden blush shot across her cheek as she perceived Sigismond, but she instantly rose to depart.

Sigismond, wholly forgetting not only his late determination, but the singularity of his being within the precincts of the Villa, suddenly threw himself in her way, and exclaimed—"You weep, loveliest of women; ah! what sorrow can reach you?"

Agnes, impressed at once with fear and surprise, made another effort to go; but he seized her hand, regardless of all appearances, and bowing low upon it, said—"Oh that I were worthy to share, to sooth those griefs!"

"Sir," said Agnes, commanding some composure, "this intrusion from a stranger——"

"Oh mad that I am!" cried Sigismond. "Yes, Madam, I am indeed to blame; but I, to whom you are no stranger, forget that you knew not the unfortunate Sigismond."

“I remember to have seen you, Sir,” replied Agnes, “and remember too that each time we have met, you have occasioned me to regret it; leave me now that——”

“No, rather,” exclaimed Sigismund, “let me not leave you till I have obtained your pardon both for this and my former offences—ah! forgive the man who will offend no more! I come now, believe me I did, to take an everlasting farewell of your adored idea—to view, for the last time, scenes consecrated by your presence, and to renew, in these groves, the resolution I had formed.”

“All this, Sir,” interrupted Agnes, “is wholly unintelligible to me, and I must entreat to be released.”

“Can I quit you,” said he, “while I see that I have incurred your anger? Oh sweetest lady! pardon, I beseech you, the faults occasioned by an uncontrollable love!—yes, I have dared to adore you, all lovely as you are—the unknown, the obscure Sigismund has dared to raise his thoughts to the enchanting Agnes St Clair; but at her feet  
he

he promises to restrain henceforward all expression of a passion so offensive—to deny himself even the poor indulgence of treading the paths consecrated by her footsteps;—may he not hope then for her pardon for the past?”

Had Sigismond been expert at reading the female heart in the countenance, that extreme paleness which chased away the roses from the cheek of Agnes would not so cruelly have alarmed him as to induce him suddenly to relinquish the hand he had been grasping, and to exclaim—“I am only adding to offences already inexpiable!—I tear myself from your sight, Mademoiselle St. Clair, and in some future period, perhaps, you may remember with more pity than indignation, the miserable Sigismond.”

He bowed respectfully, and speedily retracing his way, repassed the fatal boundary, and tried to applaud the steadfastness of the resolution with which he had bidden adieu to Agnes.—“At least,” thought he, “if my unhappy passion offends her, she cannot refuse her

her esteem to the firmness with which I endeavour to controul it."

With the fortitude inspired by despair, he flew to the cottage, and related to Father Buonafede all that had passed, who, though he saw something to blame, and more to lament, in the impetuosity of Sigismond's conduct, and in the consequences of it, yet, in pity to his apparent misery, forbore to express all he thought, and only wished this meeting and explanation with Agnes had not taken place; but Sigismond, though he had solemnly renounced her, and passed his word to Agnes herself to refuse every trifling indulgence to a passion which must offend her, yet felt relieved that he had confessed that passion to its object; and far from regretting the vehemence and inconsiderateness which had thus made Agnes a party in his own fatal secret, rejoiced that she knew how fervently and how delicately he adored her, though he knew not what advantage he could possibly reap from her being in possession of that knowledge.

Buonafede,

Bionafede, perhaps, saw a little more deeply into the probable consequences of this confession than Sigismond himself did, and thought it not impossible that the warm expressions and impressive sincerity of the youth might really create an interest for him in the gentle and sensible heart of Agnes, and thus that the misery this love had brought on him, might also extend to her, for he saw not the least probability of a happy issue to their attachment ; he forbore, however, to hint at the possible participation of Agnes in the passion of Sigismond, for he knew that the heart of a young lover would overlook every obstacle if he could but suppose his love returned, and that the delirious happiness of such an idea would only make him a greater sufferer on any reverse of fortune.

Sigismond seemed, indeed, nerved by the promise he had made to Agnes, to conquer his passion, and to refuse himself all those little indulgences so dear to true love, but which only serve to fan the fire. He sedulously

lously applied to his studies, formerly so delightful, and even sometimes commanded something like attention; he stedfastly avoided all those walks where he had so often lingered to muse on the idea of Agnes; and Father Buonafede rejoiced to see him roused to so much exertion, though he lamented to observe the effect it had on him. He still, indeed, preserved an appearance of gaiety and spirits; but his cheeks grew pale, and his frame languid, and the resolution of his mind threatened to overpower the strength of his body.

While Sigismond was continuing these laudable exertions, the Father was one morning summoned to the Lady St. Clair. This, as it recalled all the remembrances he was endeavouring to obliterate, was a severe blow to the youth; but he determined to employ the interval of Buonafede's absence in some vigorous occupation, which should prevent his mind from dwelling on a circumstance so likely to affect him. The Father left him deeply engaged in study, and hastened to the



the Villa. When he entered, he found Madame St. Clair alone; and motioning to him to be seated—"I have requested your company, my good friend," said she to him, "not for my own sake, but for my daughter's: I see with grief that Agnes is pining under some sorrow which she will not explain to me, and I should feel myself eternally your debtor, could you induce her to reveal it: you know how much of my comfort rests on her, nor can there be a reasonable wish in which I would not indulge her. I should suspect her of having formed some clandestine attachment, but that in this seclusion I know not that she has seen any one who could endanger her peace; and if she had, the peculiar circumstances I feel myself in, make me earnestly long to see my child in the arms of a worthy and respectable protector."

As he listened, Father Buonafede felt convinced that Agnes was sinking under the same cause that had undermined the peace of Sigismund, though, from the youth's  
account

account of the circumstance, he had depended on the indifference of Mademoiselle St. Clair ;—in as few words as possible, however, he now related the whole affair to Madame St. Clair, who saw it in the same light as he did, yet felt the timidity and doubt of her daughter a sufficient excuse for her silence. Much inclined to repose confidence in a youth educated by Buonafede, and far less solicitous to secure wealth and grandeur than peace and happiness for her Agnes, Madame St. Clair earnestly enquired of Buonafede concerning the heart and mind of his pupil, and expressed the most ready indulgence to the wishes of her child.—“ If,” said she, “ your Sigismond be in character worthy of my Agnes, which, as your *élève*, I cannot doubt, bring him to me, and let us share the exquisite delight of permitting and viewing the happiness of two young and sensible hearts glowing with a first and virtuous passion.”

Father Buonafede replied to Madame St. Clair by a modest yet warm eulogium on

Sigismond, adding, that he believed him to be well born, though he was yet ignorant of the family to which he belonged.

Tears rolled rapidly down the face of Madame St. Clair as she answered —“ Alas! my good Father, my Agnes has no right to claim high birth or family; the virtues of her own heart entitle her to an honest and affectionate husband, but the privileges of her birth are small indeed;—even you, my good Father, know not yet the history of your penitent; but you shall know it, and you shall then judge whether Agnes St. Clair be worthy of your pupil. You imagine me the widow of an Officer—alas! to all my other sins is added that of having deceived you—I am no widow! I was born of a noble Italian family, and being one of many children, my father found it difficult to provide for all, and I was destined to a Convent. Never was a more reluctant victim doomed to a religious life; but my reluctance signified nothing, for my father was severe, and my mother was powerless; but, alas! young

as I was, I knew that the world contained a being with whom I could gladly have braved the horrors of poverty. During the *fêtes* given on occasion of the splendid nuptials of one of my sisters, I first beheld the being who turned my reluctance to the Convent into abhorrence; the object of my tenderness had lived in the world, and the gentleness of his attentions, to which I had been very little accustomed, won my heart perhaps without any design on his side. The manly beauty of his person, his manners noble and commanding, obtained at once my love and my reverence, and my infatuated fancy bestowed on him the attributes of a superior being;—I imagined that all possible felicity was comprised in the single circumstance of an union with the man I loved, and the insuperable barrier raised to it in my religious destination, served only to increase a passion already too ardent for my peace. He was a friend of my brother's, and came to my father's castle on a visit to him, but a few days previous to that on which I was to enter the

Convent. The dejection of my countenance was but too visible ; and finding me one day alone, and in tears, he exerted his utmost powers to sooth me ; and whether a young woman in affliction is always an interesting object to a young man, or whether in the simplicity of my heart any symptoms of the truth escaped me, and inspired him with a design which was but too successful, I cannot now decide : but certain it is, that before we separated, he had professed the most ardent passion for me, and I had confessed no inadequate return.—Was I then unhappy ? —No ! the thought that I was beloved by him banished every sorrow, and I forgot the hateful destiny that awaited me. In our next meeting, however, the remembrance pressed upon me, and I besought my lover to snatch me from it by demanding me of my father, since such an establishment would have satisfied all his ambition, and honourably rescued me from the fate I dreaded. The sudden change of his countenance alarmed me.—‘ My beloved Agnes,’ said he, throwing his

his arms round me, and shedding tears upon my bosom, ‘do you think I could have needed your remonstrance to remind me of so necessary a duty; I have spoken to your father, and——’

‘What,’ interrupted I, ‘am I then the object of his hatred?—Does he refuse?’

‘He does,’ replied my ardent lover, whose caresses I was incapable of resisting; ‘he refuses on the plea of my being born in France, and I know not what old ——’

‘I know too well!’ exclaimed I; ‘we must then part.’

‘And can my Agnes so tamely resign me?’ interrupted he: ‘Alas! she knows not what it is to love!’

“But not to dwell on moments still too present to my memory, let me tell you briefly, that we laid a plan too fatally successful; in consequence of which I entered the Convent at the appointed time, and by a contrivance, which I need not now explain, was in a fortnight restored to love and liberty. The vehemence of my lover



terrified me, though I did not doubt his honour; and I eagerly besought him to marry me. He told me, with sufficient plausibility, that it would be impossible to get the ceremony performed in Italy; the circumstance of his having stolen a Novice from her Convent would become too rapidly public, and that we must defer our nuptials until we were securely in Switzerland, towards which country we were travelling with as much expedition as my strength would bear. But, alas! my Father, let no woman depend on her own fortitude in such a situation as mine! Imprudently had I put myself completely in the power of a man whom I scarcely knew, but whom I loved to distraction; and, through every night, offended by his vehement sollicitations, I determined to leave the man who could lose his respect for the woman he was bound to protect: yet the morning constantly brought with it renewed repentance on his part, and increased tenderness on mine, so that I deferred the only proper step I could have taken, too long.

long. I might by a timely flight have preserved any innocence, though my reputation was irrecoverably gone; but I was willing to pardon the vehemence of love, and at length fell a sacrifice to mingled fraud, tenderness, and violence. I will not pretend to describe the agony I felt, though I was afterwards deluded with a pretended marriage, of which, however, I was not long suffered to enjoy the idea: I was, in a moment of rage, told the truth with every humiliating circumstance; I saw, too late, the true character of the man I had believed above humanity—I saw him treacherous, deceitful, inexorable, deformed with every vice that can debase a mortal.—Dreadful was the period during which I remained subjected to his will. Pardon me if I hasten over it.—Alas! my father, I fear my crimes helped to shorten thy days, for soon did my brother become the head of our family!—this my ungenerous tyrant told me, with every aggravation that could lacerate my bosom, and boasted of his own security.

“ Alas ! ere long I lost also this brother, and concluded that my ignoble captivity would last my life ; but I was at length discovered by one benevolent and worthy being, who rescued me and my unborn Agnes from the tyranny of my jailer. When he saw me in safety from his pursuit, he gave to me a sum of money which my brother had left for me, and procured for me the use of the Villa Salviati, which was endeared to me by many circumstances needless now to relate. We concerted together the story by which you have been deceived, and his interest procured me a full pardon from the church, and permission to ~~some~~ appearances by changing my name, and concealing my story. Agnes, dear affectionate girl, often weeps the fate of her supposed parent ;—that her real father still lives, and may one day claim his unfortunate offspring, makes me so earnestly wish to see her established in marriage with some worthy man ;—but, perhaps, now you have heard my  
tale,

tale, you will no longer permit her union with your, perhaps, high-born pupil.”—

Lost in tears and sorrow, Madame St. Clair remained some time overwhelmed with the violence of her own feelings. The Father spoke comfort to her heart, and assured her of his equal esteem and reverence for the virtues of her present life, and acknowledged that he believed the happiness of both the young people, and perhaps their preservation, depended on their union. The conversation lasted some time longer, and was at length determined that Sigisf should be immediately introduced to Madame St. Clair, and even that their union should be very speedily completed. Francis with tidings so joyful, Father Buona hastened to his cottage, and found Sigisf endeavouring to merit all the happiness store for him, by his resolute perseverance in the employment he had undertaken.

Buonafede embraced him.—“ My father said he, “young as you are, you have tried by adversity, and have shewn, a

your disposition to support it with fortitude ; —can you with equal patience bear felicity ?”

“ Felicity, my Father !” exclaimed Sigismond ; “ Oh what felicity ? Is it from the Villa Salviati you offer me felicity ?”

The good Father smiled, and Sigismond instantly proved that he knew the full value of such felicity ; for he burst into tears, and throwing himself on the ground, embraced his father’s knees with every demonstration of gratitude.

Be not so impetuous, my son,” said Masfede ; “ your happiness is not certain ; no one knows not of it ; and though Madame Clair permits me to introduce you at the villa, Agnes may forbid these hopes.”

A sudden fear dashed the joy of Sigismond ; yet Hope grew mightier, and he refused admittance to any idea that could tend to lessen the delight he now experienced.

The visit was to take place that evening ; and never did any hours appear so precious as those which intervened before they met.

set out for this delightful visit : yet, as they approached the Villa, a thousand terragitated the bosom of the youth, and when they reached the wicket, that had so long seemed to shut him from all his hopes, had scarcely strength to open, or courage to pass through it.

When Father Buonafede conducted Sigismond into the saloon, they found that Madame St. Clair alone. She received the youth with a graceful sweetness which lighted him, and took so much pains to draw him forth, that Sigismond by degrees forgot his embarrassments, and at length conversed with Madame St. Clair as with a personal friend ; and she saw in him so much to approve, that she neither doubted nor regretted that Agnes had given him her heart.

An hour or more had elapsed, and Agnes yet appeared not. Father Buonafede began to imagine that Madame St. Clair had contrived this interview, that she might draw off his pupil without encouraging any attachment in her daughter, which a further know-



of the youth might forbid her to realize ;  
and was about to take leave, when they saw  
ones approaching. The extreme perturbation  
which Sigismond instantly displayed,  
convinced the careful mother she had nothing  
far from his indifference ; and the moment  
her daughter's entrance (who was wholly  
surprized of the strangers she was to meet)  
did entirely confirm or destroy her con-  
victions with respect to the cause of her  
present ill health.

ones now entered, through an open  
end of the saloon, with a basket of fresh  
flowers in her hand, which she was preparing  
to put in a vase near the place where Sigis-  
mond had sat, hitherto unobserved by her.  
She perceived him: her attentive  
eye saw in the instantaneous change of her  
complexion, the indecision of her air, and  
the steadiness of her step, a full confirma-  
tion of all her suspicions ; and hastening to  
him, at least, from the surprise she  
felt, she announced the pupil of Father  
Buonafede

Buonafede as a youth whom Agnes was henceforward to consider as a friend.

Sigismond now advanced, and timidly requested to relieve Agnes from her frag burthen. She relinquished the basket, seated herself beside her mother in evi agitation. A very few minutes only elapsed to allow some very significant glances to pass between Madame St. Clair and F Buonafede, ere the latter rose to depart. Sigismond most reluctantly obeyed the mons. Madame St. Clair, however, made no effort to stop them, and they took leave of their fair hostesses, and regained the path that led to the cottage.

“And thus ends,” said Sigismond, in a tone of discontent, “thus ends an interview from which I had promised myself so much, and which has paid me so little, what has served only to shew me more fully the propriety of my attachment, and the impossibility of my success.”

“Am I to imagine, my son,” said Buonafede, “that this new passion has

changed your character, or only that it has developed traits in it which were before unknown to me?—Why are you thus impatient and unreasonable? Would you have Madame St. Clair shew you more marked marks of favour? or would you had Agnes, to whom your visit was by a surprise, lay aside the modesty of sex and of her character, and——”

“Say no more, my Father,” interrupted Reginald; “I see, I feel my error, and will with patience the unfolding of this”

very short time decided it;—Sigismond perceived as the avowed lover of Agnes, hesitated not to confess that this arrangement was infinitely pleasing to her; and Madame St. Clair took so strong an affection for her adopted son, that she became almost as patient as himself for the ceremony was to give him really a claim to that appellation. Yet so watchful was this parent over the future happiness of her son, that she fixed the end of his probation

probation at a distant period, willing to try whether ease and security might not be the ardour of that love which had flourished in despair; and willing also to examine accurately every tract in the heart and disposition of the man to whom she was going to commit the fate of Agnes.

The heart and mind of Sigismond, however, could only rise in estimation as they were more intimately known; and they passed on in the enjoyment of more and more exquisite happiness than is often the lot of the sojourners upon earth. Their tastes and pursuits of this little party so completely accorded, that the same amusement which interested the one, was precisely the same which pleased the other. The hours were sometimes given to poetry, to literature, to drawing, and not unfrequently to long and delicious rambles through the romantic scenery with which the country abounded, where, with interwoven arms, Sigismond and Agnes would share the sublime enthusiasm to which the magnificent and varied objects awakened

for

sometimes wandering through delightful  
valleys, sometimes climbing awful mountains,  
sheltered beneath the spreading branches of  
the tree, overlooking immense tracts of  
landscape—here, savage with wild and over-  
hanging rocks—there, brilliant with towns  
and buildings, and rich with cultivation. In  
scenery like these, Sigismund would some-  
times accompany the melodious voice of  
Agnes with the soft breathings of the flute;  
he never had his soul felt so inspired with  
sublime emotions that spring from har-  
mony, as at these times. Agnes sung with  
wonderful pathos the affecting little air so  
dearly dear to Father Buonafede, and  
which occasionally venture to awaken in his  
soul all those thrilling remembrances recal-  
led by every well-known note, and in the  
solitude of Echo delighted to hear it rever-  
berated among a thousand hills, its last faint  
notes trembling and dying on the breeze.  
Did they shun the ruined aisles of the  
cathedral, or the long arcades of the cloisters,  
they were drawn to both their hearts by a thousand  
tender

tender recollections. Agnes shuddered as Sigismond related, beneath those sculptured arches, the ideal horrors he had one night experienced, and could scarcely persuade herself they were indeed only ideal. She made him repeat anew every circumstance that had occurred, and scarcely dared to throw her eyes across the gloom that was now rapidly deepening around.

“But do you believe, Sigismond, that the spirits of the dead are permitted sometimes to revisit this earth?” said Agnes.

“Dearest Agnes,” replied Sigismond, “does not every reason contradict such a belief?”

“Reason may,” answered Agnes; “but feeling in every age, in every country, and perhaps experience, have rendered the belief universal. This Marquis, for instance, so suddenly, so barbarously murdered, is fully believed by all the neighbourhood not unfrequently to hover round the spot where his mortal remains are laid.”



“ Had I then,” said Sigismond, “ confessed to the peasant the fancies that possessed me, he would have been convinced that I had seen the Marquis.”

“ Undoubtedly he would ; and would it be impossible to make you think so ? ”

“ It would,” replied he ; “ because I can see no reason that the Marquis’s appearing to me could have answered : his corpse is buried with all due funereal honours, and I am no way related to his family. If ever spirits are permitted to appear, dearest Agnes, it cannot be on light or trivial errands—to terrify the weak, or to amaze the stranger ; if justice is to be done, if the guilty are to be punished, the innocent avenged, or the hardened conscience awakened to a sense of its wickedness, it might be a business of sufficient import to disturb the dead ; but to me, an accidental wanderer near his tomb, sincerely lamenting, though no ways interested in his unfortunate and premature end, what purpose could it answer that the Marquis should shew himself to me ? besides,  
if

if there were any reason, unknown, which might occasion his appearing to me, he would certainly have come in an unquestionable form—not an obscure figure gliding along the shadowy corridor, or a single eye glaring from behind a pillar; had he been permitted to appear to me, it would doubtless have been for some wise purpose, and his appearance would have been calculated fully to remove all doubts, and to explain the reason of so great an inversion of the usual order of Nature.”

“ Well, dear Sigismund,” replied Agnes, “ at least, let us now bend our steps homeward, for I own myself affected with something like a superstitious awe while I remain among these ruins, discussing the probability or improbability of the tale so currently reported, and so universally believed.”

“ They returned to the Villa, but the subject of their conversation still continued the same. They found Madame St. Clair and Father Buonafede in the garden, enjoying the bright moonlight, and serene beauty  
of

of the night, in an harbour of the most lovely and fragrant shrubs; and they were too warmly interested in the topic they had been discussing, to change it immediately to another. Agnes trusted she should at least find her mother of her opinion, with respect to the truth of appearances from the other world, and was surprised and disappointed to find she concurred wholly with Father Buonafede, who said—

“ It appears almost impossible to disbelieve the concurrent testimonies and opinions of all nations, and of all ages; yet when we consider that these opinions have been chiefly prevalent among the uninstructed, the vulgar, or the enthusiastic, that they have lost ground in proportion as the age became enlightened, and that they accord with the propensities of the human mind to attach itself to the marvellous, we ought not perhaps to wonder at the universality of the delusion; for that it is a delusion I have no doubt.”

“ A delusion, Father!” said Agnes, “ how produced, or how carried on? In the

the infancy of society who should invent or execute such a delusion, or how could the ideas of all nations so wonderfully accord?"

"Your question is ingenious, my daughter," replied Buonafede, "supposing by delusion I meant an artifice; but this was not my meaning; by delusion, I understand the play of the imagination itself, which, feeling the difference between soul and body, and yet conscious of their close connexion and mutual interest during their union, cannot imagine a total cessation of this interest after their separation by the stroke of death. There is something solemn in the idea of this separation, something solemn also in the re-appearance of the spirit. To an uninstructed—nay, perhaps to the most cultivated mind, there is something wonderful in the event that separates the corporeal from the spiritual essence of man; there is also something answerably wonderful in the visible return of that spiritual essence: and these corresponding feelings are fully sufficient to induce the belief."

"All

“All this reasoning is very just, my Father,” said Agnes; “yet whence arises the peculiar and unconquerable awe we all experience on entering the receptacles of the dead?”

“Believe me, my daughter, this awe arises wholly from our not accustoming ourselves, as we ought to do, to reflect on this necessary end of our being, and of the total change it will make in all our ideas and pursuits. We all of us believe, in a degree, that the pursuits and attachments of the soul after death will continue of the same nature as those that interested it while united with the body; but, surely, if we thought reasonably about it, we should be convinced that from the moment of its quitting this earthly tenement, its sole occupation will be that which ought now most to awaken its energy—its future and eternal situation.”

These words led to ideas too awful for the subject to be pursued any longer; and Buonafede and his pupil retired to the village for the night.

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CHAP. V.

“Thou unseen Power, when dark despair surrounds us,  
“When the black night of woe o’ershades the soul,  
“Sudden thou shinest amid surrounding horrors;  
“The darkness fades, and welcome joy breaks in  
“Upon the grief-worn mind.”

SAYER.

THIS happy intercourse continued for several weeks, during which Madame St. Clair was secretly preparing for nuptials which were to secure to Agnes a protector from the undue authority of a father, whom she had no reason to respect, and to whose existence she was as a stranger,—and not only a protector, but a friend the most unchangeable, a companion the most dear! That tender



tender parent saw with inexpressible delight that she could not have made a choice more likely to ensure happiness to her daughter, and she became anxious to conclude a marriage which promised so much felicity; and one evening, while they were all sitting together in the bower, enjoying the luxury of conversation, where kindred minds mingle together, and each responsive heart vibrates to the sentiments of the beloved objects around, Madame St. Clair, in a pause of their voices, said—"My children, I am anxious to confirm your mutual felicity; I feel my own infirmities too much to suffer me to hope long to continue the guardian of my Agnes, and I wish to leave her in the protection of one who will secure her feebleness from sorrow and danger;—are you willing, Sigismond, speedily to accept so important a charge?"

"My dearest Madam," exclaimed the grateful youth, "ever unworthy of your goodness, I know not how to express my emotions:—will my Agnes——"

"You

"You are not now to learn, dearest Sigismond," said the blushing Agnes in a half-whisper, "that you are dear, and that my mother's wishes are sacred to me."

Sigismond threw his arms around the fair object of his tenderness, and sealed their contract by a kiss, sanctified by the presence of their guardian friends. A day not very distant was appointed for their union; and Sigismond eagerly wished the time annihilated, that he might call the now blooming Agnes irrevocably his own! It was with the utmost reluctance he quitted her that night, and the following morning saw him early at the Villa; Madame St. Clair called him to her, and told him, it was perhaps necessary to apprise him that Agnes was not nobly born, as she understood he was so;—the particulars of his history, she said, Father Buonafede had related to her in a summary way, but she found he believed him to belong to a noble family.

Of this, Sigismond replied, he himself was wholly ignorant; but no considerations of

birth could detach him from Agnes. They must be very trifling compared to the tenderness he felt for her; nor could he in his present situation attach the least consequence at all to birth, rank, or riches. He was most earnest then, he said, to conclude the marriage while he yet remained in that obscurity Madame St. Clair had had the goodness to overlook; lest if he were really nobly allied, his relations should come and tear him from all he held truly valuable upon earth.

Madame St. Clair, embracing and blessing him, bade him now return to Buonafede without seeing Agnes, and learn from him the particulars both of his own birth and that of Agnes.—“I do not believe,” added she, “that either now or ever you would wish to retract a single particle of what you have now uttered; but I cannot answer it to my own heart to suffer you to wed my daughter while ignorant of those circumstances I am not equal myself to relate: you ought also to be acquainted with all  
that

that is known of your own origin; and then return to me, my son, equally beloved with my own Agnes!"

Sigismond bowed gratefully, and departed. He obtained from Father Buonafede the recital of Madame St. Clair's sufferings, and shed many genuine tears at a tale of so much woe, protesting that he saw no stigma the history he had learnt could cast on Agnes, and professing his impatience greater than ever to conclude the marriage. He then requested the good Father to impart to him what he knew of his own origin, expressing some wonder that he had never before been sufficiently inquisitive on a subject apparently so interesting, as to obtain the now desired information.

"I have always repressed enquiries, my dear Sigismond," said the Father, "which you have frequently in former days been inclined to make; it would have answered no purpose, but to fill your head with idle conjectures, which probably never will be realized, and to disgust you with that life to  
H 2 which

which you are apparently destined—a quiet and obscure one. There is a great deal in your habit and disposition that will lead you to scenes of activity and energy, though now repressed by this passion. This passion, however, will not always govern you so implicitly as it does now; and perhaps at some future period, the tale I am now going to tell, will detach you from your quiet home, and lead you to search after adventures, and the disclosure of a mystery which, I allow, cannot but interest you.”

This exordium was not calculated to damp the curiosity Sigismond felt; and he expressed his earnest desire to hear the particulars, assuring the Father, however, that nothing in the world could ever detach him from that home which would be embellished by Agnes, and endeared by love.

“It is now nearly nineteen years and a half ago,” said Buonafede, “that one evening, on my return from a visit to the Convent, I found in my cottage a young man who was unknown to me, and a young woman whose  
face

face I recollected, though I could not recall her name. I enquired their business, and asked where and how I had formerly known the girl.

‘ Ah Father Buonafede !’ said she, ‘ have you then forgotten Nerina, who left Colano only two years ago with the Signora Fregoso ?’

“ These words recalled to my mind one of my parishioners who had entered the service of a Neapolitan Lady, who was travelling into France. I acknowledged my former acquaintance, and she continued :—

‘ It is above a year and a half since I quitted the service of the Signora Fregoso, and attached myself to another mistress, to serve whom I am now a suppliant to you.’

‘ And how,’ said I, ‘ can I serve you ? and who is your present mistress ?’

‘ Excuse me, Father,’ replied Nerina, ‘ if I conceal the name of my mistress, and the family with whom I have lived ; only suffer me to assure you that it is in the cause of injured virtue I seek to interest you !’



My beloved mistress, by an unhappy chain of circumstances, is in the deepest and most undeserved misery; she knows not of my journey. Alas! could I inform her of it, what peace would it not give to her agonized heart!

Nerina wept.

‘ Explain yourself further,’ said I; ‘ how can I serve this unhappy lady?’

‘ Alas, Father!’ replied she, ‘ you know not how good and amiable she is! I have been unable to save her; but with the assistance of my good Jeronymo here, I have preserved her infant from a dreadful fate. Oh my mistress! would I could also have saved you!’

‘ Alas!’ said I, ‘ is she then dead?’

‘ I know not,’ replied Nerina, ‘ nor shall I ever probably have any means of knowing; that she will die, and that speedily, is certain;—if her own sorrows do not inevitably destroy her, there is one that will, and that would have destroyed my precious charge, had we not fortunately saved him.’

‘ And

‘ And the infant, Nerina ?’

‘ Is in your chamber, Father, asleep, and unconscious of his misery. Will you, O Father Buonafede ! will you cherish this hapless babe ? He may some day be called upon to fill his high station in life ; though who shall assert the rights of the orphan ? Father, he is the only rightful heir to a noble family ; but further I dare not explain myself. Ask me no questions, for I must not answer them ; I have learnt of my beloved mistress to be faithful and firm.’—

“ I respected her declaration,” continued Father Buonafede, “ too much to seek any further explanation, and instantly desired her to take me to the babe. She led me to my own hard couch, where, smiling in innocence, lay a lovely infant of nearly six months old. The dear babe opened its eyes, and, still smiling, grasped one of my fingers, which I put into its hand. The soft pressure bound me to it for ever, and I swore never to desert it. Nerina thanked me with as much enthusiasm as if the babe had been her own.

I told her I must, at least, call the child by some name. She considered a moment, and then said—‘ He has received several baptismal names ; by that of Sigismond I think he might be unsuspectedly distinguished.’— You cannot have doubted, my son, that you were the infant thus strongly recommended to my protection ; and to shorten the tale, she left you with me, satisfied to have procured for you a safe asylum, and a faithful, though not a powerful friend.”

Sigismond expressed his gratitude to the Father for his kind and paternal care of him, and declared himself not in the least sanguine in his expectations, from Nerina’s avowal that he was the right heir to a noble family. Had he even known to what family he was supposed to belong, it would have been more easy to endeavour to trace out the long line of ancestry, unfriended, unsupported as he was ; but wholly ignorant of his name, of his connexions, with no powerful friends to press his cause, he doubted not but his claim, if he really possessed any,  
would

would sink away in oblivion, and he should continue to live in the same obscurity as he had hitherto done ; that, with respect to his attachment to Agnes, his possible expectations could have no weight with him at all : she was of a character to adorn any station, even supposing he should ever have it in his power to raise her to a more elevated one ; and he should abhor himself, if the mere accidents of birth could have power for a moment to make him think less of the merit of one who possessed every virtue, every accomplishment, every grace.

Father Buonafede expressed himself fully satisfied with this avowal of his pupil's sentiments ; and with a heart beating high with love and hope, Sigismond returned to the Villa. Madame St. Clair once more received him alone, and Sigismond felt embarrassed how to declare the absolute unimportance he attached to the difference of birth between Agnes and himself. He threw himself, however, at the feet of Madame St. Clair, and kissing her hand,

exclaimed—"Bless me once more, my respected, my beloved mother! and let me from this hour consider my gentle Agnes as my own!"

Madame St. Clair felt the delicacy of his manner, which so gracefully assured her she had lost none of his respect by the history she had desired him to learn from Buonafede; and raising him, and tenderly embracing him, she expressed a deep sense of her happiness in having selected such a friend and protector for her beloved daughter. She wept in the fulness of her heart; and when she had a little regained her composure, she said to Sigismond—"I feel impatient, my son, to commit my daughter wholly to your care; for I am many times warned by symptoms I can neither disbelieve nor disregard, that I shall not be much longer permitted to behold your mutual happiness.—Alas! I have long prayed to be allowed to see my Agnes in the arms of a worthy and amiable man—to see her secured from sharing the misery of her mother; and if I may but live  
to

to join your hands, I shall feel all the evils of my life more than counter-balanced !”

“ Long, very long, my dearest Madam,” replied Sigismond, “ may you witness the happiness you so generously bestow ! Long may you see my earnest endeavours to do justice to your excellent Agnes ; and by what you see, may you feel convinced that never, during the remainder of my life, shall I cease to adore her gentle perfections !”

“ Your wishes, my dear son,” said Madame St. Clair, “ are in vain ; it is impossible I should long continue to witness your mutual felicity, nor shall I need it to convince me of your worth and faithfulness ; but I feel that within, my Sigismond, which will make me grateful if I am permitted to assist at the ceremony which is so soon to unite you for ever.”

“ And why, my mother,” cried Sigismond, “ should that ceremony be at all delayed ? Why, if you have these melancholy presages, should I not even now



call my revered Father Buonafede hither, and beseech his immediate blessing on our union?"

Agnes, who just then entered, caught the last words; and seeing her mother's tears, earnestly asked their meaning.

"My beloved," said Sigismond, "this is a moment to conquer all your scruples, and call upon you to join my prayers to your dear mother to permit our instant nuptials! Could my Agnes, without reluctance, add her petitions to mine, that the appointed interval might be wholly waved, and this very hour unite us inseparably!"

He fixed his eyes on her melting ones, and then, grasping her hand, led her to Madame St. Clair, saying—"This benignant angel refuses not to join with me in entreating that you would no longer delay to seal that happiness you are anxious to witness complete! Dearest Madam, your presages once refuted, these black ideas will no longer overwhelm your mind."

"Ha!"

“Ha!” cried Agnes, “what presages, what black ideas do you mean?”

“Nothing material, my child,” replied Madame St. Clair, whose mind had now acquired more firmness; “only I have been weak enough to imagine that my eyes would not be permitted to behold your union: but I own the idea was childish, and deserved to be combated with less indulgence than your dear Sigismond has shewn. No, my children, unconnected as I seem in this wide universe, there yet survives one being to whom it is fit I should confide my intentions of marrying my daughter. The day I have already fixed for your union will bring back the messenger I have sent.”

“Alas!” interrupted Sigismond, “and does then our happiness still depend on the concurrence of a distant being?”

“Think me not so ungenerous, my son,” interposed Madame St. Clair, “as to raise your hopes to such a pitch, while there yet remained a possibility of their being defeated. No, you have nothing to fear from this  
distant

distant friend ; but I wish to fulfil my duty, and I will endeavour, during the short interval that remains, to conquer the foolish presages with which my heart has so long been cruelly oppressed."

"And what are these presages," cried the alarmed Agnes, "and how have they arisen? Are you less well than you have been? Oh my mother! if this be indeed the case, how can your Agnes think of any thing but you? How can her own happiness occupy her mind for a moment?"

"My dearest child," said Madame St. Clair, "you can no way so much contribute to restore peace to my heart, as by suffering me to behold you the wife of our beloved Sigismond. Alas, my daughter! if I have forborne my complaints, that I might not break down your early happiness by the weight of my sorrows, it is not the less true that I have long felt myself gradually, but irresistibly verging towards the end of all my cares. Mine has been a case in which complaints were useless, because relief was impossible ;

impossible ; my disorder has been the slow but inevitable effects of incurable grief, and it has been for your sake, my Agnes, that I have so long struggled with feelings which, had I not most strenuously opposed, would long ago have conducted me to the grave. It is impossible to struggle longer ; and the rapid increase of symptoms, not to be mistaken, convinces me I have not many days to live. Weep not thus bitterly, my Agnes, but reflect what a consolation it is to me in death to see you thus properly protected—to see your happiness thus secured ! Believe me, my child, if I behold you really the wife of Sigismond, I shall die happy !”

“ My mother, my adored mother,” said Agnes, with a forced calmness, “ let to-morrow then make me the wife of Sigismond ; let us not leave any thing to a future contingency that can conduce to your ease. Oh Sigismond ! these will be indeed mournful nuptials !”

Sigismond received the pale and trembling Agnes in his arms, and encouraging the tears that would no longer be repressed, vowed aloud, as he clasped her to his bosom, that no chance, no contingency should prevent their union. —“ I consider this dear angel,” he cried, “ as a charge consigned to me from Heaven, and no earthly power shall force me to relinquish it ! Be comforted, my mother : Agnes is indeed mine !”

Madame St. Clair uttered a fervent blessing upon them as they knelt before her ; but the convulsive sobs of Agnes alarmed Sigismond, and he led her hastily to the garden ; where suffering her tears to flow freely, and feeling the pure breath of Heaven blowing freshly around her, she recovered to greater composure, and Sigismond besought her to be comforted. “ Your dearest mother, my beloved,” said he, “ has suffered her mind just now to be overcome by the weakness of ill health. She is not more ill than usual, and long, I trust, will she witness the felicity she so earnestly wishes confirmed to

to us. Rejoice then again, my Agnes, in the prospect of our union! Look up, my love, and bless me with your smiles!”

“Alas! dearest friend of my heart,” replied the weeping Agnes, “blame me not, nor impute it to want of love, if at such a moment my bosom refuses to exult even in our mutual tenderness; yet believe me, my Sigismond, it is all of comfort I can know.”

Leaning on the arm of Sigismond, Agnes wandered awhile in the wilderness, and felt revived by his endearments and encouraging hopes; and after a short absence they returned to the Villa, determined again to entreat Madame St. Clair that they might be indissolubly united on the ensuing morning, that she might be sure to witness these so much desired nuptials. They found with her Father Buonafede, who joined in their petition, and at length persuaded the reluctant Madame St. Clair to wait no longer for the return of her messenger, but to join their hands on the morrow. Sigismond, who fancied the mind of that excellent lady  
weakened



weakened by long indisposition, and trusted that she would soon recover her usual state of health and cheerfulness, felt an uncontrollable joy take possession of his bosom as he reflected how few hours were now to intervene ere he would be secure in the possession of the beloved of his heart; while poor Agnes, deeply impressed by the mournful presages her mother had expressed—presages so uncommon with her, and so alarming, could only answer the cheering smiles of Sigismund with tears, and felt her heart sink within her as she contemplated the approaching festival; a festival which, a few hours before she had anticipated with the most enlivening hopes, now seemed surrounded only by gloomy apprehensions and images of sorrow. She tried, however, to restrain the grief she could not wholly subdue, and to meet the tender delight of Sigismund with equal sensibility, if not with equal gaiety; and when they parted for the evening, she endeavoured still more earnestly to repress her feelings,

feelings, that she might not contribute to lower the spirits of her mother.

The morning rose at length in all its beauty ; and scarcely had the sun appeared above the horizon, ere Sigismond was already on his way to the Villa. Fearful, however, of disturbing its inhabitants, he lingered in those beautiful scenes, the winding path every instant varied before him, and sometimes stepped aside to view from some craggy point the vast extent of landscape which spread far away beyond the mountain vista that retired to permit its sight ; and while his benevolent heart drew a thousand animated pictures of society in all the numerous habitations he could descry, no less that his lively fancy could suggest, seemed so full of delight as that which awaited him with his beloved Agnes. Living in an elegant solitude, undisturbed by the vices, the passions, or the follies of the world, beyond the reach of its allurements, unseduced by example, happy in the society of such friends as Madame St. Clair and Father Buonafede,

Buonafede, and daily exercising the most refined and faithful affection towards each other—imagination could add no more, nor would he suffer reflection to take away any thing from the picture. Scarcely could he persuade himself that all these blessings were about to become his own,—that the same being, who was once destined to spend his miserable days in a monastery, was now to be the happy husband of the lovely Agnes! and he hastened to receive from her the full confirmation of his felicity.

The countenance of Agnes, still mournful, cast a slight shade over the dazzling sunshine of his joy; yet she pressed his hand with such true affection, returned his ardent kiss with such timid tenderness, and expressed such chastened happiness in the pensive smile with which she surveyed him, that he cast all melancholy once again far from him, and hailed, with unalloyed delight, the brilliant morning that rose to light him to his love.

Madame

Madame St. Clair was not yet visible. The hour at which she had requested the venerable Buonafede to bless the union of Sigismond and Agnes, was not yet arrived; and they wandered together in the wilderness, or reposed in the bower during the interval—an interval filled up with most sweet discourse—so sweet, that even Agnes ceased to grieve, and felt for the moment a suspension of all consciousness, save that of love and happiness. At length they returned to the Villa; they went to the apartment of Madame St. Clair; they found there Father Buonafede, and they prepared to retire to the oratory, when Madame St. Clair, rising from her seat, suddenly staggered, and fell in the arms of Sigismond, who started forward to support her. A piercing shriek escaped from Agnes. She flew towards her mother, she knelt before her, she embraced her knees, she called on her in the thrilling accents of despair! Madame St. Clair opened her eyes, fixed them with a most benevolent smile on her children, made a  
vain

vain attempt to speak, and again her eyes closed to open no more!

Father Buonafide alone preserved any presence of mind. He exerted himself to save the fainting Agnes from the terrible effects of this sudden blow; he bore her from the melancholy scene, and leaving Sigismond and some female attendants with her, proceeded to do the last kind offices to his deceased friend. The suddenness of her death, the sad accomplishment of her predictions, and the blow thus unexpectedly struck at the happiness of his pupil, all impressed the mind of the good Father with more than common force. Terrible as is always the sight of death, the peculiar circumstances with which this was attended, rendered it more than usually distressing; and it was with difficulty even the venerable Father could command sufficient serenity to give what directions were necessary, so much did he lament the fatal change occasioned in the occupations of the day, and, but that he was firmly persuaded that every thing happens

happens for the best, he would have lamented still more that the nuptials the departed saint had so earnestly wished to witness, had not taken place previous to this terrible event. This must necessarily delay them some time; how well soever Agnes might be inclined to make her mother's evident will her law, and bestow herself on Sigismond as soon as she could sufficiently collect her spirits, yet at present she certainly could only weep and lament the sudden stroke that had deprived her of a parent so justly dear.

When all that was necessary was accomplished, Father Buonafede went to seek the wretched lovers. Incapable of giving or receiving comfort, each was weeping bitterly; and the Father rejoiced to see those salutary tears flow from the eyes of Agnes. They were insufficient, however, to preserve her from the baneful effects of grief; for even before the corse of Madame St. Clair was committed to its parent earth, Agnes was laid in the bed of sickness, scorched by a raging fever, and alike insensible to the pressure



pressure of grief, or to the tenderness of Sigismond. Long time she hovered between life and death, and Sigismond hourly expected to see his promised bride snatched from him by the invincible arm of Fate. He was utterly inconsolable, could scarcely be induced on any account to leave the bedside where Agnes lay suffering, and became so pale and haggard, that the Father trembled almost as much for him as for her. At length their united cares restored Agnes to a sense of her loss; and bitterly as she lamented it, something like the glow of returning health began again to mantle over her cheek.—“She will live, my son,” said Buonafede, “she will live to bless you still! Rouse then yourself from this unmanly weakness, and be not surpassed in fortitude by a female.”

As Agnes, however, recovered from her illness, she shewed a fixed determination to retire for a while from the sight of Sigismond, and to pass in a cloister the period that she devoted to mourning for the memory of her mother;

mother: nor could all the pleadings of Sigismond, nor all the reasonings of the Father alter her resolution.

“ I would have yielded,” said she mournfully, “ to the wishes of that dear saint whom I have lost, could she have witnessed a ceremony she so much desired to see; I would have given my hand to Sigismond, oppressed as was my heart by a thousand fears for her; I should not have given him indeed a cheerful, happy bride, but I should not have been dissatisfied with my conduct, since I should have conformed to the will of my parent;—but now, since she is denied the consolation of seeing that union she approved, my Sigismond cannot blame me if I refuse to be his while my heart would reproach me for such a step. How would the memory of my lost mother rise up before me, and prevent my returning the love I so truly feel? How could I fulfil two such discordant duties? and why should I undertake it? The time will come, wretched as I now feel, when the memory of my departed parent will no longer

longer raise this tempest of grief within me; when a penlive and placid remembrance shall allow me to cherish other feelings, and when the first hours of our union shall not be disturbed by tears so bitter, and affliction so poignant. Rest satisfied, my Sigismond—I will be your's; but it shall be when I can be your's without reluctance, when the idea of joy shall no longer be painful to my soul; yet believe that the thoughts of your affection will, in her severe affliction, be the sole comfort of your wretched Agnes."

Sigismond replied to the pleadings of Agnes with a look of sorrow, but with expressions of profound submission. He only pleaded to be permitted to visit her at the Convent; an indulgence she readily granted, and her admission was speedily settled. Grieved as he was to find his marriage thus delayed, Sigismond could not but respect the reasons, and love the feelings that prompted the conduct of Agnes; he too wished that the first hours of their union should be marked with joy, that they should ever after remem-  
ber

ber them with pleasure; and he felt, that deeply as he regretted Madame St. Clair, Agnes must mourn her loss far more acutely. He resigned himself, therefore, to this interruption with much fortitude, and strengthened his endurance by frequent visits to the Convent. The mild melancholy and undisguised tenderness of Agnes attached him to her, if possible, more fondly than ever. Though she limited the length of his stay with her, he loved to linger around the walls that enclosed her—to watch the window of her apartment, that he might, perhaps, be blessed with a transient sight of her—then to wander in the deep recesses of the woods and mountains, and muse on the felicity that was yet in store for him. With an indefinable delight he saw the acuteness of her sorrow subsiding into a calm and gentle melancholy. She loved to talk of her mother, though her anguish was great at the recollection.—“ Yet, dearest Sigismund,” said she, “ what a blessing it is to me that no self-reproach embitters my reflections on the

irreparable loss I have sustained ! I trust I have never given my mother serious cause of complaint against me ; and the memory of departed friends is dear to the soul when no conscious accusation mingles with our tears. My mother, even now, from her abode of happiness, looks down with pleasure on the grief of her child, and even from thence will witness, with joy, the future tranquillity we shall enjoy together ! Yes, Sigismond, Heaven is my witness, no idea of delight ever obtrudes itself on my mind unaccompanied by your participation, and my mother's approval !”

“ Dearest of human beings !” said Sigismond, “ who from you could withhold the most perfect approbation ? And Oh ! how blessed above all men am I, who am permitted even now to call you, to consider you my own—my own Agnes !”

Agnes replied to this only with a look of unutterable tenderness ; and when Sigismond entreated her to shorten the period she had assigned for her mourning, she still continued  
silent ;

silent ; but fixing her eyes upon him, tears stole down her cheeks.

“ I will await your will in patience, my beloved,” said Sigismond. “ I fear not from you that coldness or caprice should retard my happiness.”

“ Alas ! my Sigismond,” said Agnes at length, “ it is for the sake of your happiness that I yet delay our union ; not that I shall ever love you more, but that I may mourn my mother less !”

Sigismond kissed the hand he held, and with many tender adieus tore himself from her. Two months had elapsed since the death of Madame St. Clair, and never till now had he seen her so composed. At the end of another month she had consented to be his, and had avowedly shortened the period she should have allotted for her mourning, because it had been so earnestly the wish of her mother that their union should be speedily completed. That the messenger who had been dispatched never returned, disquieted not Sigismond nor



Agnes, since they knew not to whom he had been sent, nor could Father Buonafede do more than conjecture. He concluded that he had been sent to that friend whose kindness had supported Madame St. Clair, and secured a provision for her daughter; and Sigismond, whose thoughts now dwelt wholly on the felicity that seemed once more almost within his grasp, wandered through the mountain paths with a carelessness of time that carried him to a considerable distance from the village of Colano. His mind, however, was happily occupied, and it was not till the western sun reminded him of the approach of night, that he reflected how far he had rambled; but now with hasty steps seeking the well-known descent, he soon found himself in the road to the village.

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## CHAP. VI.

“ 'Tis only when with inbred horror smote  
“ At some base act, or done, or to be done,  
“ That the recoiling soul, with conscious dread,  
“ Shrinks back into itself.”

MASON.

FATHER Buonafede, to whom the limited duration of Sigismond's visits at the Convent were well known, was already beginning to expect his return, when a stranger with a small retinue entered the village. This was so great a phenomenon at Colano, that it drew all the inhabitants from their houses to gaze on the Signor, who demanded of one

of the villagers which was the habitation of Father Buonafede, and was speedily conducted to it. The stranger, who was a man of noble port and lofty demeanour, ordered his attendants to wait at some distance, but not to go far off, as he should probably depart soon and suddenly; then entering the Father's humble abode, abruptly demanded Sigismond.

Father Buonafede's countenance expressed his surprise, which was too great to allow him to speak, and the stranger hastily exclaimed—"You know the youth. I can admit of no evasions; he has always been under your care, and I now demand him."

"By what authority," asked Buonafede, roused at a demeanour so ungracious, "by what authority do you ask these questions, and demand the youth?"

"By an authority," resumed the imperious stranger, "it would ill become you to oppose."

"Yet to such vague speeches," said the Friar, "I shall not deign to reply."

"My

“ My questions,” said the naughty unknown, “ are surely clear and decisive enough.”

“ The mode of asking them, at least,” said the Monk, “ is sufficiently decisive.”

“ Tell me then,” said the stranger, “ do you not know Sigismond? But why do I waste my time in asking questions, when I know from the lips of Nerina that she herself, accompanied by Jeronymo, brought him to you, and that you promised never to desert him. Tell me then, does the youth still live?”

Father Buonafede, extremely startled at this sudden event, which seemed pregnant with a thousand sorrows for his pupil, tried yet further to evade the question.—“ Of what consequence,” said Buonafede, “ can be to you the fate of this youth?”

“ Lives he, or not?” repeated the stranger, whose countenance assumed a most terrific expression.

“ He lives,” replied the Priest.

“ 'Tis well,” said the unknown ; “ then give him to me ; I demand him—I claim him !”

His voice faltered remarkably as he uttered these words ; and Buonafede, earnestly gazing at him, saw the colour desert his cheek, and a meaning he could not define, rise suddenly to his eyes.—“ Once more I ask,” said the Friar, “ by what authority ?”

“ I have already answered you,” said the stranger, “ that I claim him by an authority it would be madness in you to dispute !”

“ I will, however,” said Buonafede, “ resign him to no doubtful authority. Tell me to whom I speak, and why you claim Sigismond.”

“ These are impertinent questions,” said the unknown ; “ yet in consideration of your age and profession, I will deign to answer them ; you see before you Prince Rezzonico, and I claim Sigismond in the quality of his father.”

A thousand distressing recollections crowded into the mind of Father Buonafede at this

this concise explanation, and he felt perhaps more than ever unwilling to relinquish Sigismond.

The Prince beheld the gloom that obscured his countenance, and said with an air of severity—"You are either inclined not to believe me, old man, or, believing me, you are unwilling to obey me."

"And in either case, Signor," replied Buonafede, "I am surely to be pardoned; if I distrust the tale of a total stranger, backed by no proof, corroborated by no circumstance, it is not to be wondered at: though I have lived many years out of the world, I lived long enough in it to know that fraud and treachery are sometimes practised by its sons; and if I do believe you, it is still less wonderful if I grieve to part with the only tie that attaches me to earth, with the sweetest and most amiable companion man ever possessed! Deign, Signor, I beseech you, to explain to an incredulous old man how you are the father of my Sigismond."



“ You cannot deny,” answered the Prince, “ the circumstance of Sigismond’s being brought to you still an infant, by a female servant named Nerina !”

“ I will not deny this,” said the Father, “ for this is true !”

“ And is not this strong presumptive evidence in my favour ?” asked Rezzonico.

“ It is,” replied Buonafede ; “ but presumption is not proof.”

“ Nerina was then, and has ever since remained in my service,” said the Prince ; “ she is now indeed on the bed of death, and confessed to me, in those moments when only truth can be uttered, where she had deposited my son.”

“ Forgive me, Prince,” said Buonafede ; “ but for what reason could Nerina ever secrete a son from a parent, or, having been justified in such conduct, with what view does that parent redemand his child ?”

“ It is strange,” observed the Prince, “ that you can dare to question me thus ; and perhaps still more strange that I condescend

descend to answer you ; however, to explain this circumstance, I must confide to you part of my history. You perhaps remember the tragical end of the Marquis Mirandola ?”

“ Full well,” replied Buonafede.

“ I was his relation,” continued Rezzonico, “ and as he was childless, his next heir. His possessions all devolved to me, but none appeared to me so desirable as the hand and heart of his widow. I wooed, and as I thought, won them both. A very short time elapsed between his death and our espousals, and Sigismond is my son by that woman, the most lovely, and the most infamous that ever disgraced humanity !”

“ Pardon me, Prince, for interrupting you,” said Buonafede, “ but here is some mistake ; my Sigismond is most certainly not *your* son by the Marchioness Mirandola, since Sigismond was brought to me within three months after the Marquis’s death, and was then six months old !”

“ You

"You are an accurate calculator, my friend," observed Rezzonico, with a snile that made the Father shudder; "your remark, however, is true, yet it does not invalidate my story."

"How can that possibly be?" said the Friar.

"Alas! good old man," replied the Prince with an air of humility, "you say you once knew the world; have you then forgotten the crimes that infest it? I own myself guilty, and I blush to proclaim it; yet with still more reluctance do I acknowledge the guilt of her whom still I love, the beautiful, the enchanting, the infamous Hypolita. Yes, my friend, Sigismond is the son of that fair creature and of me, though born, as you very justly observe, three months prior to the death of the Marquis. This circumstance may perhaps account for Hypolita's ready violation of decorum in forming a second nuptial so speedily; but what, what shall account for her versatility, her wickedness in forsaking, in  
basely

basely injuring the second partner of her bed? What shall excuse her infidelity to me, who, pardoning the fault she had committed, and which I believed had been occasioned by her love for me, had immediately raised her to the honourable station of my wife, and had determined to overlook the birth of Sigismond, and instantly acknowledge him my son, and heir of all my possessions? Alas! Father, her fault had not been the effect of a passion for me, but of an insatiable passion for variety! Why else, just Heaven! why else did she so soon dishonour herself and me with a base menial? Why force me to doubt that Sigismond was not my son? and depriving me of all hopes for the future, rob me also of the consolation of the past?"

"And why, my Prince," asked Buonafede, "am I to believe, in contradiction to the fair character the Marchioness Mirandola ever bore, that Sigismond is rather the dishonourable fruit of your amour with her, than the lawful son of that husband she seemed to adore?"

“ Ah ! good Father,” said Rezzonico, “ how little you know the world ! How few confessions have met your unpractised ears, of the duplicity, the wickedness, the licentiousness of that sex, given us for our felicity, or for our ruin ! Alas ! how few women really in singleness of heart adore the husband of their bosoms ; how few preserve for him alone those treasures Nature has entrusted to their care ; how many children usurp names, titles, and possessions they have no right by birth to inherit ! Oh my good Father ! had I time or spirits, I would relate to thee the various minute artifices by which Hypolita contrived to deceive the ill-fated Marquis into a belief of her perfect adoration and unblemished purity—the stratagems by which we met ! Even at this distance of time those stolen interviews rise to my mind in most seducing colours. Alas ! I then thought Hypolita lived only for me ! With what timid tenderness did she embrace me ! With what bewitching sweetness permit and return those caresses that made me the happiest

happiest of men! Yet, even in the moments of my most perfect bliss, even when I called her wholly mine, the recollection of her misconduct taught some sentiments of disrespect to mingle with my tenderess; but when her husband unexpectedly died, and I saw the helpless creature bereft of his support, I determined to forget an error which had me for its object, and instantly requested and obtained her hand. Oh Father! can your tranquil bosom conceive the emotions that agitated mine, when a faithful friend first announced to me the infidelity of Hypolita? For a long time I refused to believe it; till at length proofs so indisputable were produced, I could no longer shut my eyes to conviction. Then, indeed, my rage knew no bounds, and perhaps it was not then imprudent in Nerina to withdraw Sigismond from my sight. The dying Hypolita, however, so solemnly declared Sigismond to be really my son, and shewed so much penitence in her last hours——”

“What,



“What, is the Marchioness dead?” interrupted Buonafede.

“Alas! she is indeed,” replied Rezzonico, “and, as I was saying, she shewed so much real penitence, and so earnestly averred Sigismond to be indeed my child, that pity for her, and an unextinguished love for the youth, determined me, if ever I could find him, to recal him to the station I had originally destined him to fill.”

“And you will find him, my Prince,” interposed Buonafede, “most worthy of that station; a more excellent, a more amiable, a more accomplished youth exists not. Yes, my Prince, Sigismond is worthy of his rank in life, exalted as it is.”

“But allow for the weakness of a father,” said the Prince. “and suffer me in my turn to be the questioner. Does Sigismond suspect any circumstance respecting his birth?”

“He knows, my Lord,” replied Buonafede, “that he belongs to a noble house; but to what house we had no means of conjecturing.”

“That

“That is well,” said the Prince; “his education then has been liberal, his mind is well formed?”

“I think,” said the Father with an honest pride, “I think he would do honour to any station.”

“I doubt it not,” said the Prince; “a noble mind displays itself in despite of all inferior obstacles! But, Father, in this instance, I beseech you, oblige me!—discover not to Sigismond that I am his father; let me manage this discovery as I wish; tell him only that I am willing to assist him in reclaiming his birthright, and that I think I have a clue by which he will be enabled to trace his real parents.”

“There is no need of this duplicity,” replied Buonafede; “and probably there will be a necessity for the truth, or he may not willingly quit me.”

“What, then, is his mind so servile, that the just claims of a laudable ambition will have no hold upon him?” exclaimed the Prince.

“ On the contrary, my Prince,” replied Buonafede ; “ but——”

“ I hope,” interrupted Rezzonico, “ he has formed no attachment to any plebeian, low-born Villager ?”

Buonafede, embarrassed at this question, was relieved from the necessity of an immediate answer by the sudden entrance of Sigismond, who started at the sight of a stranger, but instantly recovering, paid his compliments with an air of easy gracefulness.—Not so, the Prince. The sight of the youth seemed to strike him with astonishment ; and an expression that seemed composed of hatred and terror, displayed itself on his brow ; his check became pale, and his eyes fixed. He could not speak for some moments, till at length he articulated—“ This is indeed Sigismond !”

“ Alas !” thought Father Buonafede, and he sighed as the reflection crossed his mind, “ the errors of the Marchioness press hard on the heart of her husband ; and Sigismond’s resemblance to his unhappy mother

mother calls up a thousand cutting recollections in his father's bosom."

The silence of Buonafede, the singular countenance of the Prince, to say nothing of the strangeness of finding a winter in the cottage, all embarrassed Sigismond, who longed to speak of Agnes—to impart to the Father his observations on her returning tranquillity, and the pleasing prospects that again dawned upon him. He longed for the departure of the stranger, who continued to gaze upon him with an intrepidity which did not help to relieve Sigismond from his embarrassment; and the Prince, after a few moments, repeating—"Yes, it is Sigismond, I cannot doubt it!" Sigismond gazed with a countenance of enquiry, and said in a hesitating voice—"I am Sigismond, Signor, but why should you doubt it?"

"Oh that voice!" exclaimed the Prince. "Come hither, Sigismond; what other name do you bear?"

"None,"

“None,” replied Sigismond.

“And are you not anxious to find your other name? Are you not anxious to discover your now unknown parentage?”

Sigismond started.

“The discovery of a virtuous and affectionate family,” said he, “might possibly add to my happiness, Signor; but my present is too delightful for me, lightly to wish to change it.”

“You owe then a great deal to this venerable man?”

“A great deal,” exclaimed Sigismond—  
“every thing! What parent can ever have so great a claim upon me as this more than father?”

“A parent, who could voluntarily have deserted you, young man,” replied the Prince, “could certainly not have so strong a claim on your affections; but one, from whom you had been unjustly detained—one, who had been seeking you with ardent hopes—one, who languished night and day  
to

to discover you, what would such a parent deserve from you?"

"And have I such a parent?" exclaimed Sigismond.

"You have," replied Rezzonico.

"Father Buonafede," cried Sigismond, throwing himself into the arms of the Father, "is this true? Have I indeed an affectionate parent who will not tear me from all that is dear to me?—Where is he?"

"This gentleman, my son," replied Buonafede, "Prince Rezzonico, will conduct you to him."

"Where then may I join Prince Rezzonico for that purpose," said Sigismond, "in a few days, when I shall be ready to quit for a while the abode of my youth?"

"We must depart immediately," replied the Prince.

"That is impossible," answered Sigismond; "the claims and duties of a whole life are not to be broken through so instantaneously; in a week I will join your Highness



ness at any place you may appoint, but sooner——”

“Immediately, or never!” said Rezzonico, in a tone that astonished Sigismond; his surprise painted itself most legibly on his countenance, and the Prince assuming an air of sorrow, said—“We have no time to lose—perhaps, even now, we may not find your father alive.”

“Alas!” exclaimed Sigismond, “and do I then learn that I have a parent, only to witness his loss? I will then instantly accompany you, Prince; and to you, my Father, I leave the charge of explaining every thing to my Agnes.”

“Agnes!” repeated Rezzonico in a voice of thunder. “Have you then dared to love?”

“And by what authority, Prince, do you ask that question?” replied the dauntless Sigismond. “Yes, I do love, I glory in my love, nor shall all the parents in the world ever force me to abandon her!”

“We

"We shall see," said Rezzonico.

"No father so newly found," answered Sigismond, "can supersede the claims and attachments of the time that is past; in all reasonable points I will obey my father, but if he commands me to forsake my Agnes, I will relinquish the honours of my birth, and return to that obscurity she was willing to overlook!"

"This is a wild and impracticable resolution," said Prince Rezzonico, "and could only be formed by a youth like yourself, unacquainted with the laws of society. You will soon learn how impossible it would be for a man born to a high station, to hereditary honours, to maintain the hopes of a noble family,—you will soon learn how utterly impossible it would be for such a man to persevere in such a resolution as you have avowed.—Pray, who is this Agnes?"

"We will settle this affair finally with my father," replied Sigismond; "he only can have a right to question me thus closely, and I may yet hope to find him more

indulgent to a well-placed love: I am impatient to repair to that parent you tell me I may not even now find alive."

"You have brought up this youth," said Rezzonico, turning to Buonafede, "without any idea of proper subordination; but, however, he shall accompany me—perhaps he will be dazzled by the sight of splendour to which he must be wholly unaccustomed."

"I hope not," exclaimed Sigismond; "but pray, Monsignor, let us depart;—have we far to go?"

"We have a journey of three days," replied Rezzonico, "and unless we set out immediately, we shall not traverse the woods before nightfall."

"That will now be impossible," said Sigismond, "for even now the evening is closing."

"No matter; we have no time to lose, and my guide knows the way," replied the Prince.

"Go then, my son," said Father Buonafede, "go, and preserve in all situations  
the

the principles of virtue it has been my care to instil into your heart, retain that filial piety and submission I have ever recommended to you, and forget not the first duties of a man. Be ever sincere in the cause of virtue, and ever, my Sigismond, be faithful and firm !”

As the Father uttered these words, Prince Rezzonico darted on him a look of inexpressible rage—he strove, however, to check it; but Buonafede had observed the wildness of his countenance, and trembled to commit Sigismond to a man subject to such violent paroxysms of passion.

“ Why those strange cautions ?” said Rezzonico, attempting to assume an air of calmness. “ What need of firmness will that youth have, who is immediately going to be placed under the authority of a father ?”

“ To that authority,” replied Buonafede, “ in all things just and honourable Sigismond will, I am sure, implicitly submit ;—but I said not ill, my Prince. Fidelity and firmness are qualities ever to be cherished by

a man of honour! and do you, my Sigismond, carefully treasure my parting words—be faithful and firm!”

“Again that odious expression!” exclaimed Rezzonico.

Sigismond gazed astonished at the Prince, and throwing himself into the arms of Buonafede, vowed never to forget his words, and again recommended Agnes to his care. The Prince eagerly shortened these adieus, and Sigismond at length departed from the home where he had experienced all he had known of happiness.

Sigismond was mounted upon a horse which one of the attendants of the Prince had led; and, lost in a thousand various reveries, he accompanied his conductor in silence. He observed, however, that they took not the road towards the Villa Salviati, but entered the woods on the opposite side of Colano. They were travelling to the southward, and Sigismond soon entered upon a tract of country he had never before explored; but his mind was not now sufficiently at ease

to

to be amused with the novelty or beauty of the scene. The thoughts of Agnes, left thus abruptly, without a possible guess at the period of their separation, the idea of a dying father, of an entire change in his situation, and something indefinable, and almost amounting to horror of his companion—all these thoughts united gave full employment to his mind, and he continued ruminating in silence. At length all his attention was aroused by the Prince exclaiming in a voice of thunder—"We are wrong: we did not pass this place in our way!"

"No, my Lord," said the guide; "but the road leads to the same point."

"I do not think it," said the Prince; "it points quite in a different direction; we are going westward, and Aruno is rather to the south-east of Colano."

"True, my Lord," replied their conductor; "but this road leads to a good passage over the river Doria, from whence we shall easily regain the road we came before."



“ Why did you deviate from it ?” again exclaimed the Prince furiously.

“ I knew the difference was immaterial, my Lord,” answered the guide ; but Sigismond remarked to Rezzonico that the voice of the guide faltered as he spoke these words, and reminded him that many parts of these woods were the haunt of banditti.

The idea of treachery on the part of the guide instantly occurred to the Prince, and he ordered the man to go foremost, directing his own men to charge their pieces and on the least appearance of danger, to make him their first victim.

It was now nearly dark, and they seemed still in the very thickest part of the woods ; the road grew more and more intricate, and every heart was oppressed with the idea of wandering all night amidst those gloomy and tremendous forests, which fancy represented as peopled with wild beasts, and still worse, by savage hordes of men, who prey upon the fortunes and lives of passengers.

No

No one spoke; till at length Sigismond proposed retracing their steps, and returning to Colano.

“This must not be,” said Rezzonico, “we have no time to lose. Seek a road to the south-east.”

The guide rode forward to examine a spot where the road seemed to part in various directions, and they soon lost sight of him in the obscurity of the night. The departing steps of his horse struck fainter and fainter on their ears, and at length it was evident that he was gone to return no more. The idea of treachery instantly recurred to the Prince with new force, and he affirmed that the guide was connected with the horde of banditti that infested these forests, and that he was now gone to direct his friends where to find their prey. This notion was instantly adopted by all the attendants. Sigismond only ventured to hint that the guide might really be gone forward, in innocence, to search for the right way, or perhaps to request assistance from some cottage or hamlet he

recollected in this part of the forest: but Rezzonico deided this idea as absurd, and while they were deciding on the now unequivocal guilt of the guide, the sound of a bell was borne on the gale. Sigismond averred that it was the bell of a Convent, of which there were several in these deep woods, and now insisted that the guide had gone thither in search of assistance. That it was a Convent bell many of the attendants agreed; but Prince Rezzonico seemed convulsed with horror as its solemn tones struck on his ear. At length it ceased, and after a pause of some moments, Sigismond observed that the sound had come from the left, and that in all probability if they followed the road in that direction, they should soon reach some abode of man. Several of the attendants concurred in this idea, and besought the Prince to seek shelter there for the night, or at least to request assistance; but Rezzonico in a hollow voice asserted that it was no Convent bell, and commanded silence.

No one now spoke, till at length the trampling of horses was heard.

"Here come the villains!" said the Prince; "prepare to fire the moment you can distinguish them."

"Perhaps," said Sigismond, "it is our guide returning."

"I do not doubt it," said Rezzonico; "he is returning in company with the banditti to murder and plunder us; but we will sell our lives dearly!"

They now again listened, and distinctly heard voices and the tread of more horses than one.

"Hark!" said Sigismond, "it is the voice of our guide; he is hallooing to us—shall we not answer?"

"Fool!" said Rezzonico, "and so betray to him the exact spot where we are! He halloos to know whether we still remain where he left us, and you would kindly give him the information he desires."

Sigismond was silent, and they now obeyed the orders of the Prince, and concealed

themselves as well as they could behind some trees, to await the arrival of the robbers, who now gained upon them; and they distinctly heard an unknown voice say—  
“There is no one to be seen or heard; where can they be, Sagri?”

To which the well-known voice of Sagri, their guide, instantly replied—“They cannot be far from hence.”

“Villain!” exclaimed Rezzonico, firing as he spoke, “receive the reward of thy treachery!”

“Oh holy Father!” exclaimed the first speaker, “you have killed your faithful servant!”

A deep groan from Sagri seemed to confirm these fears; and even the Prince stood in silent consternation while the stranger pursued—“This unfortunate man came to our monastery to solicit assistance for a party of travellers whom he had unhappily led astray. I returned hither with him to offer you all a shelter for the night beneath our holy walls, whither

whither you must now affix to convey this wounded man."

The attendants took up the senseless Sagri, and the whole party followed, with silent and heavy steps, to the monastery.

They were received with civility by several Monks, who, however, looked very serious at the account of the misfortune that had occurred; and Sigismond accompanied those who went to examine into the wounds the unhappy Sagri had received. While he was absent, the Prince recounted the circumstances which had occasioned his alarm, and forbore to mention the hints the youth had given of the possibility of a mistake. Some of the good Fathers were charitably inclined to think the occasion justified the rash action; and when Sigismond returned with the intelligence that, although the man had fainted from terror and loss of blood, his wounds were not likely to prove of any consequence, every one seemed to dismiss the remembrance of the vehemence that had nearly ended so fatally.



The Prince and Sigismond were now invited to a collation in the apartment of the Prior of the monastery, while the attendants were left to the care of the inferior brothers of the Convent. The collation was delicious, and the wines excellent. The Superior was a worthy, sensible man, and several of the Monks possessed highly cultivated minds and great urbanity of manners. Sigismond found himself delighted and instructed by their society, and reflected on the strong contrast these men formed to all the inmates of the community to which he had formerly been destined to belong, while he wished that Father Buonafede could see and know these amiable religious. Yet again he thought it possible that these agreeable manners might be merely assumed in the company of strangers, remembering that he had occasionally witnessed such hypocrisy when he sojourned in the Convent near Colano.

While these ideas passed in the mind of Sigismond, all the charms of conversation,  
and

and all the endeavours of Hospitality were insufficient to enliven Rezonico. He was placed immediately opposite to Sigismond, and he contemplated his features with a varied expression, to which no language could do adequate justice. The Monks, who observed the continued seriousness of their guest, and who found that conversation had no power to banish it, concluded that the circumstance that had so recently occurred, weighed heavy on his conscience, and exerted many good-natured endeavours to re-assure a mind wounded by the consciousness of guilt, however unintentional.

“It is to be sure,” said Father Saldoni, “a terrible thing to have murdered a man; but in self-defence every body would stand excused. You, Signor, had surely sufficient plea to justify what you did; but, thank Heaven, the man is likely to recover, so that you will not have the guilt of blood upon your mind.”

“Indeed,” said Father Nocetti, “the Signor had quite enough to justify his promptness

promptness to fire; had he known as much of these woods as we do, he would have ordered his whole party to fire at the same instant."

"Truly," replied Saldoni, "these forests are infested by a savage race of banditti, who, not contented with robbing, frequently murder the unhappy wretches who fall in their way. How long is it since the murder of the Marquis Mirandola? though, to be sure, that happened on the other side of Colano."

"Oh!" answered Nocetti, "that is near twenty years ago."

"Surely not so much!" replied Saldoni; "it scarcely seems half the number."

"It is, however," interposed the Superior, "as long ago as that; for it took place before my election to the Priory of this Convent."

"True, Father," answered Saldoni; "I could not have thought it so much; how time flies when properly occupied!"

"But

“ But the murder of Miranda,” said Rezzonico ; “ was that attended with any peculiar circumstances ? ”

“ It was, Signor,” said a Monk, who had not before spoken.

“ And what were they, holy Father ? ” said the Prince, turning to Saldoni ; for the peculiar countenance of the Monk who spoke, had oppressed him, and forced him to turn aside from his steady and unvarying gaze.

“ I know not so accurately as Father Zadeski,” replied Saldoni ; “ if he will, he can inform you of many particulars.”

“ But I will not,” said Zadeski, fixing his eyes on the Prince with a steadiness that abashed him.

Sigismund, who felt particularly interested in all that concerned the Marquis Miranda, with whose fate were connected so many tender remembrances, had failed, in his eagerness to attend to what was passing, to remark the countenance of Rezzonico ; and now turning to Nocetti, near whom he sat,

said—"Did the Marquis leave any family, Father?"

"There have been many reports about that," said Nocetti; "a wife he certainly left, and some say a daughter; but their fate no one knows."

It immediately occurred to Sigismond that in Madame St. Clair and Agnes he had discovered that wife and daughter. The history he had heard of Madame St. Clair had always appeared to him improbable, and he could imagine many reasons why she should wish to conceal her name and quality since the murder of her husband:—her profound melancholy, the agitation he thought he had observed in her on the mention of the Marquis, the vicinity of her abode to the spot—in short, a number of concurring circumstances led him to believe her the widow of the Marquis. With a view, if possible, to discover more, he turned again to Nocetti.—"Was the Marchioness a French woman, good Father?" said he.

"That,"

"That," replied Nocetti, "I know not exactly; but she had certainly French connexions."

"And could no one trace her destiny?" said Sigismond.

"If they could, young Signor," replied the Father, "it was not in this Convent that it could be traced."

"And what were the reports that you mentioned concerning her?" asked Sigismond.

"He has already told you," said Zadeski, "that some people said she survived her husband, and that it was believed by some that she had a daughter."

"Was she with the Marquis at the moment of his murder?" again asked Sigismond.

"No," said Zadeski.

Sigismond was beginning to request some further information, when, suddenly, Prince Rezzonico fell back in his chair in a fit. This put the whole company in commotion; he was immediately conveyed to bed, and all medical applications used to recover him.

In



In a short time he opened his eyes, his respiration returned, and he desired to be left alone with Sigismond.

“ You must not converse, Signor,” said Zadeski, “ and I myself must pass the night near you ; I cannot delegate the charge to this youth.”

“ It is of most material consequence that I speak to him alone,” replied the Prince ; “ I will not converse long.”

“ In a few minutes I shall return,” said Zadeski, “ therefore waste no time.”—And with these words he left the room.

“ Tell me, Sigismond,” said the Prince, as soon as they were alone together, “ tell me, are my name and quality known here ?”

“ No, my Prince,” said Sigismond ; “ for the Monks were enquiring amongst each other, and as they did not ask me, I was silent.”

“ I must not be known,” said Rezzonico ; “ if they ask you, remember I am Signor Pigliani, a Milanese, and caution my attendants ;

attendants ; the consequence will be fatal if I am recognized here."

" I will obey you," said Sigismond, " as far as keeping silence ; but why should I utter a lie ?"

" Keep silence then," said Rezzonico, " and order my attendants to do so too. I had before given them sufficient directions, but do you refresh their memories."

Sigismond bowed.

" I know not, I cannot foresee," continued the Prince, " to what extremities I may be reduced if I am known. Be careful !"

" Monsignor," replied Sigismond, " in a cause of consequence I know how to be faithful and firm !"

To this the Prince answered not ; and Zadeski soon after entering, Sigismond retired.

He immediately found that the attendants had been faithful to their master's orders, for Father Nocetti spoke of the stranger by the name of Pigliani ; and after  
some

some desultory conversation, Sigismond was shewn to the bed allotted for him. Here the various reflections that crossed his mind, kept him waking. He felt his abhorrence to his new protector increase with every look he recalled to his mind, with every sentence he remembered to have heard him utter. He shuddered at the idea of finding his unknown father dead, and being left in the power of such a man as Rezzonico; and then returning in mental tenderness to Salviati and Agnes, he deplored a separation to which he foresaw no immediate end. He dreaded the possibility of being torn for ever from her, and was framing a thousand plans for his future conduct, when a slight noise in his room alarmed him. He heard a voice whisper—"Art thou awake, young stranger? Fear not—I am thy friend!"

He recognized instantly the voice of Zadeski, and answered—"I am awake: do I not hear Father Zadeski?"

"The

"The same," replied the Monk, now discovering his features to Sigismond by the light of a dark lanthorn he carried.

Sigismond would have arisen, but Zadeski desired him to continue quiet; and seating himself on the bed, addressed him in accents of kindness.—"My son," said he, "your appearance has pleased me, and I feel myself truly interested about you. Will you allow me to ask, and will you answer candidly, a few questions really important to your future happiness?"

"As far as respects myself, Father," replied Sigismond, "I have no wish to be silent, and feel grateful for your kind curiosity."

"Tell me then, my son," said Zadeski, "by what ties are you connected with this Signor Pigliani, as they call him?"

"I hope by none at all," replied Sigismond; "for till this afternoon I never saw him."

"And how came you then to be travelling with him?"

"He

“ He came, Father,” said Sigismond, “ to the peaceful abode of my youth, and has drawn me thence by a promise to carry me to my father, whom I have never seen, and of whose name and quality I am ignorant.”

“ Nor will you ever see him !” answered Zadeski ; “ your father, I am convinced, is in Heaven !”

Sigismond replied not ; he remembered that the Prince had told him his father was ill, and that with all their haste they might not yet see him alive. But how this circumstance could already be known to Zadeski, puzzled him.

Zadeski, however, allowed him not much time for reflection, for he directly said—  
“ And where has been the abode of your youth ?”

“ At Colano, with Father Buonafede,” answered Sigismond.

“ And your name ?” asked Zadeski.

“ Is Sigismond ; what else I know not.”

“ Father

“ Father Buonafede is an excellent man,” observed Zadeski ; “ I know him well.”

“ Then you must love him,” answered Sigismond, “ for he is indeed most excellent.”

Tears started from his eyes at the mention of his benefactor, and taking Zadeski's hand, —“ He has been to me,” continued Sigismond, “ father, guardian, and friend united. He cherished my helpless infancy, he formed my ductile soul, he conducted my ardent youth, and but for this sudden interference, would have crowned me with happiness.”

“ You have then left at Colano some one as dear to you as——”

“ As the life-blood that warms my heart !” added the youth.

“ Poor youth !” said Zadeski ; “ I pity thee from my soul ;—this Pigliani is but a sad substitute for the benevolent Buonafede.”

“ Happily, however, I am not subjected to him,” replied Sigismond ; “ and I trust I shall find my father a different being.”

“ Alas,



“ Alas, young man! you forget,” said Zadeski, “ that I have already told you you will not find your father.”

“ True,” said the youth; “ but how do you know this?”

“ No matter for that,” answered the Monk, “ suffice it that it is true.”

“ Well,” said Sigismond, “ at least this — this Pigliani can have no right to controul me, and I trust I know how to be faithful and firm.”

“ Ha!” said Zadeski.

“ Am I not right,” asked the youth, “ in determining to be so?”

“ Most surely,” replied the Monk; “ it was the combination of words that struck me.”

“ It seemed also to strike my fellow-traveller,” observed Sigismond, “ and perhaps that remark has led me to use them together. Father Buonafede, in his last charges to me, recommended me to make them the rule of my conduct.”

“ And

“ And thou wilt have reason enough to remember the caution,” said Zadeski. “ And now, my young friend, attend to what I am going to say.—When you reach the end of this journey, you will most probably find yourself destined to remain for a while, at least, in the habitation of your present conductor. I know him! but when there, seek the friendship of Bertoldo, repeat to him as much as you can remember of this conversation, and in all difficulties consult him.”

“ You seem,” said Sigismond, “ to know a great deal of my destiny.”

“ I suspect much, my son,” said Zadeski; “ but it would be unkind to you to communicate to you all I think—it would unsettle your young mind. Bertoldo knows as much, and will probably think as I do; and now I must leave you, nor will I ever forget to recommend you to Heaven in my prayers. Farewel, my son !”

Sigismond uttered a reluctant farewel, and the Monk departed, leaving him less inclined

to sleep than before. But not long did he remain in peace, for he heard the voice of Rezzonico loudly calling him.—“ I will be gone instantly,” cried that impetuous man; “ not another hour will I abide under this accursed roof !”

Sigismond rose quickly, and was ready to attend the Prince, nor was it yet two o'clock when they quitted the Convent.

The Prince seemed much discomposed, nor did any of his attendants venture to enquire the cause of this sudden departure. They had a guide sent with them from among the lay-brethren of the Convent, and they travelled on in profound silence. At length the morning began to dawn, and by its increasing light, Sigismond remarked the perturbed and gloomy countenance of Rezzonico, and felt dismayed as he observed it. Yet the Prince was certainly handsome; his figure was majestic, and his aspect commanding; his eye beamed authority, and his voice enforced obedience; every feature was regular and well-formed, yet a more repulsive countenance

countenance Sigismond thought he had never seen. At length, from the brow of a hill, the guide pointed out to them the road they were to follow to the passage over the river Doria.

The way was plain, not to be mistaken; and the Prince, turning to the guide, said coldly—"It is enough," and desiring one of his attendants to give him the recompence agreed on, the brother turned back, and the travellers pursued their way.

The attendants kept at a respectful distance, and Sigismond was not encouraged to speak by the observations he had made on his companion; he therefore absorbed himself in his own thoughts, which had now sufficient employment, and no one spoke.

At length the Prince muttered in an under voice—"Accursed Convent! rather would I have met the swords of banditti, than have entered thy detested walls!"

"Yet the Monks were hospitable," said Sigismond.

"Hospitable!" repeated the Prince; "and can hospitality atone for enmity, for

calumny? But let us forget it, and, Sigismond, as you value my favour, never name in my hearing that abhorred Zadeski."

Sigismond gazed.

The features of Rezzonico were convulsed with passion; and Sigismond, who would have imagined this the consequence of deranged intellects, was enabled to judge, by Zadeski's conversation with himself, of the cause of this extreme emotion; yet the whole conversation had been so mysterious, that he had no clue to guide him, nor could he by any means imagine what Zadeski could have said to the Prince to occasion this fury and abhorrence: yet he was convinced that it arose from some suspicion the Monk had expressed, or some knowledge he had betrayed; and, but that the stern countenance of Rezzonico forbade all approaches to confidence, he would have confided to him the conversation he had had with the Monk, and besought him to explain it. The open habits of confidence in which Sigismond had hitherto lived with Buonafede, made

made his present reserve wretched to him ; but he felt a distrust of the Prince which was strengthened by the cautions of Zadeski, and not lessened by the desire of Rezzonico himself to remain unknown. Thus silent and distrustful, they reached the hamlet, where, after some slight refreshment, they crossed the river Doria, which seemed to the heart of Sigismund like an eternal barrier between him and the objects of his best affections.



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## CHAP. VII.

“ This place doth this night wear  
“ More than its wonted gloom ;—these shrubby groves  
“ Have caught the dismal colouring of my soul.”

MASON.

THE road now wound over some bleak and barren hills, but thinly scattered with sheep, and scarcely a vestige of human habitation was to be discovered. The eye was fatigued with wandering over an unadorned extent of country, and as the heat increased, the rays of the sun fell with intolerable power on the heads of the travellers. In vain they gazed around for the friendly shelter of a tree ; not one was to be discerned,

cerned, and the distant stream of the Doria, from which every moment removed them further, served only to tantalize their imaginations with the knowledge that they were leaving behind them scenes of refreshing coolness, which for some time they must not now expect to meet with again.

Sigismond felt the change still more forcibly. He regretted not merely the quitting the green woods and sheltering hills he had left—he severely lamented the separation from all he held dear; and as he looked into the bosom of futurity, to endeavour to find some period on which to rest his hopes, the reign of uncertainty appeared as boundless as the downs over which they were passing, and the moment of his re-union with Agnes was as indistinctly seen as was now the village of Colano, the humble boundary of his ambition and his wishes. Still another circumstance added to the poignancy of his feelings. He had ever been accustomed to confide to Buonafede every thought, every emotion of his heart; and the perturbation

and regret that now oppressed him, were doubly heavy from having no one to share them with him. He now and then stole an earnest glance at the Prince, endeavouring, but how vainly, to discover in his varying countenance the real character and emotions of his soul.—Ah hapless youth! that countenance, accustomed to hypocrisy by a long commerce with the world, displayed not, like thy innocent physiognomy, the pure and artless workings of Nature: it spoke a language intelligible only to those who are “hacknied in the ways of men,” and who, unfortunately for themselves, can comprehend the deep and subtle plans of artifice, and all its train of horrid concomitants.

Sigismond then studied in vain, and only discovered that it was a countenance he never could love, and which would always awaken in his soul a degree of involuntary fear.

With these feelings of uneasiness and alarm, Sigismond naturally continued silent; while Prince Rezzonico, disgusted with a survey

survey which seemed to produce no favourable impression on the mind of his young companion, began at length to talk industriously to one of his servants, who appeared superior to the others, and whom he called Spigno. To this man Sigismond had hitherto attended but little; but now thus called forward, he gave him also a look of scrutiny, and thought he saw before him the dauntless agent of any kind of villany. Looking on Rezzonico as capable of plotting, he considered Spigno as able to execute whatever was diabolical;—a face ferocious, remorseless, unfeeling, adorned with features as ugly as ever distinguished a human being; a figure, though distorted, not inactive; hair of a dirty carrotty red, hanging in greasy streaks over his broad unequal shoulders; an eye, small, red, in perpetual motion, and overhung with immense shaggy eyebrows, were the chief traits in the appearance of Spigno. They rode apart together, and conversed earnestly in a low voice. Sigismond went on alone, and the attendants that

remained behind, conversed together also. Of their conversation Sigismond could not help hearing occasionally detached sentences, though he listened not, till at length his attention was caught by the following words —“ I wonder not that the Prince is so much struck with him—the likeness is surprising !”

“ It is indeed,” returned another voice.

“ Why, do you remember well enough to judge ?” resumed the first speaker ; “ surely, Francisco, you are too young.”

“ I can only judge,” returned Francisco, “ by the picture that hangs in the vaulted room at the end of the east gallery.”

“ Or rather,” interposed the first speaker, “ that did hang there.”

“ Why, where is it now, Ghiberti ?” asked Francisco.

“ It is in the dark apartment beyond that vaulted chamber,” replied Ghiberti.

“ I shall not go there to look for it,” answered Francisco.

“ What,” said Ghiberti, laughing, “ you are alarmed by Pietro’s stories ?”

“ Not

“Not more alarmed than another,” said Francisco; “but what need of going into a dark room to look at a picture?”

“True,” said Ghiberti; “but the likeness—it strikes you then?”

“Amazingly,” answered the other, “the same complexion, hair, figure, and even attitudes.”

“I see it just as strongly,” observed Ghiberti.

“Ah Ghiberti!” said Francisco, “you could tell me many a history if you would; you have lived so long in that castle.”

“I am no retailer of ghost stories,” replied Ghiberti.

“No, ’tis true stories I want; for instance now, what became of Jeronymo?”

At this name Sigismond redoubled his attention, but was mortified when Ghiberti answered—“Why, after he left my Lord’s service, I have not kept up any correspondence with him.”

“Ah Ghiberti!” resumed Francisco, “but how came he to leave my Lord’s service?”



“ Upon some discontent or other, I suppose,” said Ghiberti.

“ You know better ! *I* know better than that,” said Francisco.

“ Then why ask ?” said Ghiberti.

“ Because you have been so long with my Lord, that I dare say you know all about it.”

“ All about what ?” said Ghiberti.

“ All about Jeronymo's sudden departure,” replied Francisco.

“ There was nothing wonderful in it,” said Ghiberti.

“ How can you say so, Ghiberti !” exclaimed Francisco ; “ I dare say Jeronymo knew too much.”

“ If knowledge is so dangerous,” said Ghiberti, “ why do you seek it ?”

The approach of the Prince and Spigno here put an end to this conversation, and Sigismond took an opportunity of surveying the speakers. The one was a youth, apparently younger than himself, seeming alert, good-humoured, and thoughtless. The countenance of Ghiberti was more strongly

marked with character—it was placid, benevolent, thoughtful, and discreet. He felt a wish to gain the affections of Ghiberti; for he was convinced that if the prophecy of Zadeski were true, he should stand in need of a friend: and Ghiberti, by an air of civility and complacence towards Sigismond, shewed himself disposed to become so.

The heat of the day was now entirely over; the sun was even verging on the west which had assumed that glow so beautiful and picturesque. The travellers were still on the open downs, though they now beheld distinctly villages and woods to which they were advancing. The downs were here and there adorned with trees, and sometimes a solitary shepherd reposing in a hollow, or standing on a knoll, his garments waving in the southern breeze, and his dark figure contrasting the vivid glow of the west, added beauty and effect to the picture.

The Prince seemed now disposed to converse with Sigismond, who ventured to ask him

him whither they were travelling, and where he was to hope to meet his father.

“We are going,” said the Prince, “to the Castle Voltorno in the Apennines, where your father resides; but it remains with you, Sigismond, to make the meeting a joyful one. I know your father jealous of power and authority; he will not suffer any rebellion to his will, and unless you can go resolved in every respect to obey him, you will not have reason to bless the hour that presents you to his sight.”

“In all reasonable points,” said the youth, “I am disposed and determined to obey him; but there are circumstances which would justify firmness and fidelity.”

The Prince started.

“What circumstances?” demanded he sternly.

“I know to what you allude, my Prince,” replied Sigismond, “when you so strenuously recommend implicit obedience; I cannot be ignorant that your words point at my attachment to Agnes.”

“Well,

“ Well, Sir,” said the Prince.

“ I cannot, will not give her up,” answered Sigismond; “an attachment entered into before I knew I had a father——”

“ Cannot be binding when you find you have one,” interrupted Rezzonico. “From that moment you must be implicitly subjected to his will.”

“ Perhaps, Monsignor,” said Sigismond calmly, “my father may not be so averse to this attachment as you apprehend.”

“ ~~He~~ I shall see,” replied the Prince; “but who is this Agnes?”

“ A lovely and amiable being,” answered Sigismond, “that would do honour to any station!”

“ Has she no other name?” said Rezzonico. “And where does she reside?”

“ Her name is St. Clair,” answered Sigismond, “and she lives at the Villa Salviati.”

“ St. Clair! Villa Salviati!” repeated the Prince with a look of malignant joy. “What a mystery unravelled!—Spigno!”

Spigno

Spigno approached.

“The Villa Salviati is inhabited,” said the Prince, “by the St. Clairs!”

“I thought,” replied Sigismond, “that the Villa was your property, my Prince?”

“It is so,” said the Prince.

“How then could you be ignorant of its inhabitants?” asked Sigismond.

“That is a natural question,” said Rezonico. “I had been misled; but how came you to know the Villa Salviati? Is it so near Colano?”

“Within a short mile,” replied Sigismond.

“Indeed!” said the Prince; “I have scarcely ever visited that property since it came into my possession by the sudden death of the Marquis Mirandola, and was not aware it was so near Colano; and are there not also some fine ruins near the spot?”

“There are a chapel and a corridor standing,” said Sigismond, “which once, I am told, belonged to the Castle Pontalti.”

“Have

“ Have you examined those ruins ? ” asked Rezzonico.

“ Frequently,” replied the youth ; “ in the chapel is a fine tomb containing the bones of the Marquis Mirandola, adorned with his statue ; and an inscription, of which the first part, describing his name and title, seems to have been industriously defaced.”

“ In a ruin,” observed the Prince, “ and exposed to weather and casual depredators, its being defaced need not be ascribed to design.

“ They say the Marquis was murdered near that spot,” said Sigismond.

“ And I dare say,” remarked the Prince, “ that the whole country abounds with idle tales of ghosts and apparitions near those ruins. Have you ever seen any of them yourself ? ”

The recollection of the gliding figure and the mysterious eye here rushed upon the mind of Sigismond, and he hesitated to reply.

“ Oh ! you have then,” suddenly resumed the Prince with a sneer of contempt ; “ I thought



thought you just a fit subject for visions and illuminations ; but I desire I may have no imaginations of that sort—no flights into the world of spirits ; I cannot—your father will not suffer any such enthusiasm.”

A flush of indignation passed over Sigismond's cheek at these words ; yet as he considered their tenor, they seemed to strike him at once with conviction that his father was no more, and that Rezzonico, knowing this circumstance, had inveigled him from Buonafede's abode with some sinister purpose. Once impressed with this idea, he became more than ever suspicious of Rezzonico ; and feeling no desire to renew the subject of Agnes with a man so repulsive to his nature, though he seemed to have some mysterious knowledge of Agnes and her mother, he cautiously said—“ If you have any reason, my Prince, to believe that my father exists no longer, suffer me to return to Father Buonafede.”

“ You talk wildly,” interrupted the Prince ; “ do you think I have taken this  
long

long journey to no purpose?—No, young man; if your father be no more, he will at least have left directions concerning you, as he knew of your existence, and by his will I will take care that you shall abide.”

Sigismond replied not; these words, which implied such absolute power on the part of the Prince, and so very close a connection with this unknown father, filled his heart with more horror and repugnance than desire to see his parent, whom he imagined, as a friend of Rezzonico, must in some degree resemble him. Ah, unhappy Sigismond! what will be thy emotions when thou learnest that thou art the son of Rezzonico!

They continued journeying on some time in silence, during which period Sigismond was contriving the plan of an escape from the power and controul of Rezzonico; he trusted that he should regain Colano, and that the tale he had to tell would induce Agnes instantly to grant him her hand, after which he should defy the malice and power of the Prince. He foresaw not all the difficulties  
he

he should have to encounter, nor the absolute certainty there was of his pursuers tracing him over the open downs they had that day passed. Liberty and Agnes were the prizes of his attempt, and every difficulty vanished from his view. He determined when they should repose for the night, while Rezzonico and his attendants should be buried in sleep, to escape from them, and, concealing himself in the neighbouring hamlets for some days, return to Colano after they should have abandoned the search for him. Absorbed in this wild and impracticable scheme, Sigismond started as from a dream on hearing the voice of Rezzonico.—“ You were lost in thought,” observed the Prince; “ were you thinking of Agnes?”

“ I was,” answered Sigismond.

“ Dismiss for ever all thoughts of her,” replied the Prince; “ I know enough of her to be sure that you will never marry her—your father will never permit it.”

“ There

“ There is, however, a period,” said Sigismond indignantly, “ when the power of a parent ceases.”

“ Already so eager to escape from an unknown parent !” said the Prince ; “ is this your filial duty ?”

“ I am desirous of observing it,” said Sigismond, “ but——”

“ You will only observe it,” interrupted Rezzonico, “ when it exactly accords with your own wishes. You have been ill taught the duties of life, young man. The merit of a son consists in his obedience in difficult points, in circumstances that clash with his inclinations ; and it is the duty of a father to exert the authority delegated to him by Heaven and Nature, to prevent the giddy steps of his offspring from hastening down precipices unobserved by their ardent perceptions :—that your father will fulfil his duty I doubt not ; prepare therefore to do your’s, even where it may check a favourite propensity.”

“ I must

“ I must first be convinced that it is my duty,” said Sigismond ; “ I must first be made to feel that there is an authority which has power to annul all previous engagements—that versatility is a virtue when commanded by a parent—that it is right to desert the cause of the orphan when ambition or avarice dictate it—that, in short, a son is born a slave, and this slavery is his portion by the will of Heaven—I must be convinced of all this, and that it is my father’s opinion, as well as your’s, Prince Rezzonico, before I can dispose my heart to yield such implicit submission as you require.”

Rezzonico replied not, and they proceeded in silence. The Prince often surveyed him with looks that made him tremble, and again calling Spigno, conversed with him in a low voice. The names of St. Clair and Salviati, however, often struck his ear, and he apprehended some desperate plan against his Agnes. A thousand times he blamed himself for having betrayed her name and abode ; for rather would he now that she should

should have been thought some humble villager, than that a being so ruthless as Rezzonico should be enabled to get her into his power;—at length, however, he consoled himself with the reflection that the Prince knew not of her removal to the Convent, and that even if he did, that was a sanctuary he would be unable to violate, and again concerting the means of his projected escape, lost himself in reverie. That escape appeared now more necessary than ever, since Agnes also seemed to be an object of the Prince's malice. Sigismond now desired nothing so much as to withdraw her from the Convent, make her his own, and seek some humble abode in the bosom of the Alps, surrounded by forests, and concealed by the humility of their lives, where they might dwell in peace and security from the machinations of the Prince, and one whom his blood curdled to think of as associated in the Prince's views; yet every thing seemed to point to his father as the principal, and Rezzonico only an obedient agent to his will.—Who then



then was this father? By what magnificent titles is the hitherto obscure Sigismond to be distinguished? Hateful elevation! abhorred magnificence! since it tears him from all he loves!

The sun was now wholly sunk, and night advanced apace; one star after another twinkled in the cloudless firmament, and Rezzonico, again addressing Spigno, proposed refreshing their horses and themselves, and proceeding forward during the night. This plan was agreed to, and Sigismond saw with regret his intended escape frustrated. He remembered, however, that while Rezzonico and Spigno were still in his view, Agnes was unmolested; and reflected too, that if he made no opposition to their plans, he should be allowed more liberty on his arrival at the Castle of his father. Eager also to learn from Bertoldo the suspicions of Zadeski, and to explore something of the mystery of his own birth and connexions, he quietly assented to the plan proposed, and trusted the peace  
of

of his Agnes to her own purity and the friendship of Buonafede.

They reached a hamlet, with whose very indifferent accommodation they were obliged to be satisfied, as their over-wearied horses refused to proceed. Just, however, as they had satisfied their own hunger, the landlord of the little inn proposed to furnish them with fresh horses, and that either one of his people should lead them in the morning to any place appointed, and bring back his own, or that Monsignor might leave one of his attendants with them, who could follow at his leisure. This plan seemed to strike Rezzonico with a prospect of some indefinable advantage; triumph sparkled in his eyes, and he called aside his privy counsellor, Spigno.

Sigismond, meanwhile left with Ghiberti and Francisco, remained slowly pacing up and down the small room they were in, which was only divided from the apartment where the Prince was by a very thin partition. He very plainly heard their voices, and once

or twice thought he distinguished the name of Agnes. A dreadful surmise now crossed his mind ; Spigno was to be left behind, to return to Colano, to force Agnes from her present retreat, and convey her for ever beyond his reach. Agonized by this idea, which struck him with the force of instantaneous conviction, and restrained by the presence of Ghiberti and Francisco from listening to the conversation that filled him with horror, he suffered an internal misery that changed his whole countenance.

“ You are ill, young Signor,” said Ghiberti, approaching him with an air of benevolence.

“ No,” said Sigismond, “ not ill, I thank you, Ghiberti.”

“ Ah Signor !” said Ghiberti, drawing him to the window, “ then you are not happy ; fear not me, Signor ; though in the service of Prince Rezzonico, I am strongly interested for you ; there is something in your face that demands the heart of old Ghiberti.”

This

This speech was singular, and it struck Sigismond in that light. While he was considering the meaning of the clause—"though in the service of the Prince"—with much attention, Ghiberti was attentively gazing on his face, while tears started into his own eyes.—"Young Signor," said he at length in a low voice, "you do not comprehend me; when I have leisure, I will explain myself more fully; at present I have only to request your pardon for my presumption in imagining that my friendship could possibly be of use to you."

"I thank you," said Sigismond, "for your kind intentions, and accept your offered friendship."

"Ah Signor!" said Ghiberti, squeezing his hand, "Ah Signor, you overwhelm me with your goodness!"—but then hearing the footsteps of the Prince, he suddenly loosed his grasp, and retired to a distance from Sigismond.

The youth, eager to have his terrors confirmed or relieved, watched with painful

attention for the decision he expected ; but whatever Rezzonico had determined, had been settled in the other room, and he continued conversing on general subjects. At length the landlord's horses appeared, and Sigismond saw with a delight he knew not how to repress, that there was a horse saddled for each of them. He heard orders given to the landlord to send their own horses forward to the passage over the Po, from which place his messenger should carry back the borrowed ones. This arrangement, which seemed wholly to set aside his fears, he learned with as much joy as if it had promised him some unexpected blessing ; and felt so easy to be relieved from the indefinable terror that had oppressed him, that he gave way to more vivacity than he had yet felt since he quitted Colano. Agnes was safe at least for a time ; and he determined soon to find a messenger who might convey to Buonafede the alarms he himself entertained. They travelled on during a cloudless night without meeting with any interruption ; and  
towards

towards morning they beheld from the summit of one of the last of this branch of the Alps, the silver waters of the Po wandering through the plains of Montferrat. At a town on its borders they purposed resting for some hours in the middle of the day, to avoid the extreme heat; and when the sun was declining, they meant to renew their journey on their own horses, which they expected would be arrived by that time.

When they reached the town, Prince Rezonico lay down to enjoy a few hours' repose; and Sigismond, eager to warn Father Buonafede of the dangers that he feared surrounded Agnes, sought an opportunity of speaking privately to old Ghiberti, nor sought he long in vain.—The man was also on the watch, and obeyed the slightest signal. When they had removed into a retired place, Ghiberti would have begun by expressing his own thoughts and apprehensions; but Sigismond, with the rash impetuosity of youth, instantly confided to him the cause of his seeking him, and conjured him to find



a trusty messenger who would carry a letter to Colano. Ghiberti readily undertook the commission, and retiring to seek some one who would accept the charge, left Sigismond at leisure to write the letter. It was short, but forcible, beseeching the Father to apprize Agnes of all that had happened, fully expressing his dislike and distrust of Prince Rezonico, and enlarging on the suspicions he could not help entertaining, that black designs were formed against the unoffending Agnes. Scarcely had he finished it, laconic as it was, ere Ghiberti returned, introducing a countryman who professed himself acquainted with Colano, and willing for a trifling reward to convey the letter thither: this reward Sigismond was unable to bestow, but assured the clown of an ample recompence when he had delivered his charge. This, however, did not satisfy him, and he was fullenly quitting the room, when Ghiberti humbly, but earnestly, besought Sigismond to allow him to obviate this difficulty. Sigismond gratefully

gratefully accepted this offer, and Ghiberti satisfied the man's expectations.

Sigismond had the pleasure to see him depart, and really follow the road to Colano, while Prince Rezzonico was still reposing. He then expressed his thanks to Ghiberti; and, entreating him also to seek some repose, laid himself down to endeavour to sleep; but no sooner was he alone, than his imprudent rashness rose in strong colours to his view, and he blamed the readiness with which he had listened to Ghiberti's promises of friendship. If he were betrayed (and how probable it was that the man would betray him!) he must for ever curse the openness and unguardedness of his disposition, so easily wrought upon.—“Alas!” said he to himself, “Agnes was safe before in the respectable protection of her Convent; I have involved her in a thousand dangers—I have betrayed her sanctuary, and taught the vultures where to find her. Wretch that I am! foolishly to trust the first professions of attachment—weakly to put my whole hap-

piness in the care of Ghiberti! All that could have happened to myself was trifling compared to the misery to which I have betrayed Agnes."

He dwelt so long on these gloomy ideas, that the destruction of Agnes seemed certain to ensue from his hastiness; and, unable to charm away reflection by sleep, he arose from his couch, and walking to the window, gazed over the country, through which he could trace the road they had come to some distance, and actually thought he could see the man still pressing forward towards Colano. As he gazed, the remembrance of his intended escape recurred to him. It was now the heat of noon; Prince Rezzonico did not purpose proceeding till the sun should have past his meridian by many hours, and Sigismond thought it possible to elude the sleeping servants, and, supporting the intense heat of the weather, gain so many hours upon them, that, even when he was missed, it would be impossible for them to overtake him. The more he dwelt on this project, the

the more feasible it appeared, and he gently opened the door of the apartment in which he had been left alone to sleep; the next, through which he was obliged to pass, was vacant, but at the outer door, peeping through a crevice before he opened it, he thought he discerned Spigno keeping guard. He returned to his own room filled with new alarms and new distrust of Ghiberti. If Spigno were really placed there to watch him, it was utterly impossible that Ghiberti could have introduced the peasant to him without exciting the fellow's suspicions. Was then Ghiberti, whose countenance bore such ample testimony to the goodness of his heart, was Ghiberti in league with Spigno, the detestable agent of the Prince? More than ever alarmed for Agnes, whose ruin he now thought certain, he examined the windows of his chamber: those to the country were high and small; there were others not high from the ground, but that opened into an inner court, surrounded by other houses, and the circumstance of his leaping from them

would perhaps excite curiosity and suspicion in any observers. Extremely dismayed, Sigismond returned to the anti-room, and no longer distinguishing Spigno, ventured to open the door.—The place was clear; he shut it gently again, and hurried down stairs. Unacquainted with the place, and not daring to speak to any one, he followed a passage which seemed to conduct him to the entrance, and presently he saw the open country through a door that stood ajar. To it he hastened, and was going to fall forth, when the sound of voices arrested him.—One of the speakers he knew distinctly to be Ghiberti, and fancied that the other was Spigno. Shuddering, he attempted to hear what was passing; and it was with no small emotion he distinguished these words in the voice of Ghiberti—“Are you sure he will not take advantage of your absence to escape?”

“No,” replied the other, “I have reason to believe him asleep; and if he were not, his escape would be impossible.”

“ Well,” said Ghiberti, “ the charge is your’s, and so will be the responsibility.”

“ But why,” said Spigno, (as Sigismond was now convinced the second speaker was), “ why should he seek to escape?—Are you in his confidence?—Does he suspect any evil?—Yet why should he?—Is he not amused by a prospect of seeing his father?—Why then should you suspect him of wishing to escape?—Have you any reason?”

“ None in the world,” replied Ghiberti in a tone that re-affured Sigismond, who had waited for his answer with inexpressible impatience.

“ However,” said Spigno, “ I will return to my post, lest the Prince should come out of his room.”

Sigismond now instantly conceived the project of letting Spigno pass him, by retreating into an obscure room he had observed; and when the agent of villany had regained his post, to persuade Ghiberti, of whose fidelity he now felt assured, to favour his escape.



Part of this plan he executed successfully : Spigno passed him without discovering him, and Sigismond, as soon as he could safely venture from his place of concealment, besought Ghiberti to suffer him to escape.—“ I have heard too much,” said Sigismond, “ to allow me to remain here : now, Ghiberti, prove the friendship you professed, and assist me in quitting this house.”

Ghiberti at these words turned as pale as death ; but endeavouring to rally and conquer his alarm, said —“ And what have you heard, Signor, to justify this proceeding ?”

“ Oh good Ghiberti !” said Sigismond, “ a moment is precious—your conference with Spigno—a thousand circumstances !”

He was interrupted by Ghiberti falling senseless in his arms. Terrified and perplexed, unable to leave him to perish for want of assistance, yet dreading to be found in that situation by the Prince or Spigno, he gently reposed him on the ground, and issuing forth at the door, besought some boys to call assistance to that poor man, and hurrying hastily

hastily forward, tried to congratulate himself upon his escape. Scarcely had he proceeded an hundred yards, however, from the house, ere he found his arm rudely caught, and turning round, perceived Spigno. Determined not to yield tamely to this infamous being, Sigismond drew his poniard, and bade him defend himself; but Spigno was prepared for this attack, and throwing a strong rope over his shoulders, manacled both his arms, and rendered all his courage of no effect. Indignant and ashamed, Sigismond suffered himself to be reconducted to the apartment he had just quitted. He uttered not a word, for he dared not ask after Ghiberti, lest he should involve him in a suspicion that might be fatal to him: and he scorned to speak to the being that had thus obtained a power over him. When they reached the apartment, Spigno, after disarming the youth, unbound his arms, and said with a malicious grin—"he hoped he would excuse his remaining in the same room, as a  
second

second endeavour to escape would certainly be attended with fatal consequences."

Sigismond submitted in gloomy silence, and Spigno continued to offer, what he thought a great mark of favour, to conceal from Prince Rezzonico the attempt the youth had made to escape; but Sigismond already foresaw more of misery in making himself a dependant on the caprice of such a being as Spigno, than in braving the worst that could befall him. He therefore made no reply to this kind offer of protection and countenance; but Spigno remarked his looks of disdain, and worried him with a thousand teasing remarks on the irritability and impatience of his disposition, recommending it to him to submit quietly to the will of Prince Rezzonico, adding—"I myself at one time thought it hard that he should assume such absolute authority; but I soon found that he had means of compelling that assent I was unwilling to give—and, indeed, I have long found my inclination and my duty go hand in hand: so be comforted, young Signor; habit

habit makes all things easy, and you will soon learn to submit with a good grace to the will of the Prince, and not be romantically seeking to make your escape."

"If I did not disdain subterfuge," said Sigismond, "I would ask you what proof you could bring to shew that I meant to escape?—or by what right I am controuled in walking when and where I please?"

"Ah Signor!" said Spigno with a ghastly grin, "had you not been trying to elude my vigilance, you would not have drawn your sword, and bid me defend myself."

"True," said the youth; "I did mean to have left the Prince; I avow my design, for I know not by what right he controuls my actions."

"He don't chuse to be questioned about his right or his authority," answered Spigno; "'tis enough that it is his will."

Sigismond now spoke no more, and Spigno soon sunk also into a sullen silence.

A thousand torturing reflections embittered the silent meditations of Sigismond,  
among

among which, regret for his unsuccessful attempt to escape was not the least, since it would undoubtedly cause him to be much more narrowly watched in future, and he feared he could never practise dissimulation either long or well enough to lull asleep the suspicions this circumstance would have excited. He looked forward without hope; the words of Spigno to Ghiberti perpetually sounded in his ears—“Is he not amused by a prospect of seeing his father?”—What then, was that father certainly dead? and if so, to what purpose was he decoyed into their toils?—Living in peaceful obscurity, ignorant of his real birth, and unseduced by that ambition which might have prompted him to unravel the mystery that shrouded it, he considered himself as no formidable opponent had they suffered him to remain at Colano. He would have married Agnes, and, contented with a peaceful retirement, would neither have had the power nor the wish to develope the truth of his ancestry; now, the many suspicious circumstances that pressed

pressed on his attention, the strange conduct of Prince Rezzonico, the alarm he betrayed at Father Buonafede's casual recommendation of "firmness and fidelity," the singular hints and behaviour of the Monk Zadeski, the secret conferences the Prince held with Spigno, the very suspicious friendship of Ghiberti, and the discovery that he was treated as a prisoner, all united together, afforded proof even amounting to conviction, that Rezzonico apprehended some danger from him, and he even began to imagine that time would unfold some circumstances in which he was implicated, and might probably bring to light some hidden villany of the Prince—while he himself was more in the way to assist the discovery if any such should be made. Again he revolved the idea which had struck him in the Convent during the conversation of Zadeski,—that Madame St. Clair and Agnes were the widow and daughter of the murdered Mirandola. The sudden surprise the Prince had betrayed on hearing that they resided at the Villa Salviati, the



the knowledge which he appeared to have of them, his own relationship to the Marquis, and many little indescribable circumstances which now recurred to his memory, all concurred to persuade him of it, though he was convinced that Agnes knew it not; and he determined to omit no opportunity that might offer of elucidating this mystery also: for notwithstanding Madame St. Clair had given so full a relation to Father Buonafede, which at her request he had accurately repeated to Sigismond, yet could not the youth persuade himself but that the names of St. Clair, and many, if not most of the circumstances were fictitious.

At length the hour of departure arrived, and Sigismond found with surprise that he was ~~suffered~~ to join the Prince as usual, and that no notice was taken of his abortive attempt. Whether then he was only detained by the self-born authority of Spigno, or whether this tale was reserved for some future occasion, to do him more ample mischief than it would have done at present, he could not

not exactly decide, but was determined to discover, even at the risk of incurring the displeasure of Rezzonico; for to be in the power of such a man as Spigno, either to be confined at his pleasure, or to give him such a controul over him as he would imagine he possessed if he did him the favour to keep this secret, the haughty soul of Sigismond could by no means bear. When they were therefore again in route, after having crossed the Po, the youth enquired whether it was at the orders of the Prince that he was detained a prisoner.

The Prince, surveying him with a look that made Sigismond recoil, said—"It certainly was by my command; and you would have shewn more prudence had you forbore to start the subject, since I had intended to have been silent about your meditated flight; but since you have dared to allude to your being confined, I will enquire from what motive you sought to fly?"

"And I," said Sigismond, "must also be allowed to enquire by what authority I  
am

am detained, and what right even you, Prince, have to controul my actions?"

"Be satisfied, young man!" said the Prince sternly; "I have a right—a right that even your pride will not dare to disavow!"

"Scarcely, Signor," replied Sigismond, "to a parent so lately known could I be induced to submit so implicitly. Coercion is the very mode to make my spirit rebel; and if you wish my compliance, believe me, gentleness is the only means of ensuring it."

"Be silent," said the Prince in a voice of thunder, "nor dare to provoke the anger I am willing to stifle!—You pretend to dictate to my conduct! Not another word, or you may chance, when it is too late, to repent your rashness!"

Sigismond, though highly indignant, forbore to reply, and they rode on in sullen silence. They proceeded with as much speed as possible along the country of Montferrat, eager to gain the place of their destination

destination with only one more rest; nor could Sigismond pay much attention to the beautiful and varied landscapes that every where presented themselves to his view. At length the shades of evening began to gather round; but the Prince intended to proceed as before, during the night, and repose for a while in the heat of the following day, meaning to reach the Castle of Voltorno before the ensuing night. There was no moon; but the clearness of an Italian sky aided their progress, and though they lost the advantage of viewing the country through which they travelled, to the Prince it was too well known, and by Sigismond too much disregarded to render that of consequence. They stopped, as the day before, when the heat of the following day grew unpleasant, and no circumstance marked the period of their repose. Again they set forward, and hastened as much as they could; for Rezzonico began to fear they should be benighted among the woods that skirted the feet of the Apennines,

Apennines, towards which they were travelling.

Sigismund, who had hitherto passed his life in the midst of the Alps, had thought, when he thought of it at all, the scenery of the country through which he had been travelling very tame, compared with that to which he had been accustomed, and had observed with some degree of interest the towering summits of the Apennines, as they had for some time skirted the horizon; the enthusiastic love of the grand and sublime features of Nature, which he had felt from his infancy, and which had been cherished by the noble and tremendous scenery the Alps and their forests afforded, revived as he gazed upon the varied and elegant forms of the Apennines, and learned that he was going to a castle amongst them. Unable to hold communion with Rezzonico or Spigno, and fearful of conversing with Ghiberti, had he wished it, Sigismund strove to detach his mind, if possible, from that chain of alarming events which, though they distressed him, he could

could not controul, and to fix his attention wholly on the objects before him. He gazed on the stupendous mountains to which he was approaching, and though the Alps had presented to his view more sublimity, more gigantic forms, and more stupendous combinations; there was still enough of grandeur to satisfy his mind, and it was so beautifully contrasted with spots of cultivation and antique forests, that as far as external objects could steal the mind from the meditation of its own internal feelings, his was occupied and amused by those he was contemplating.

The travellers now began to enter some of the woods that straggled over the plains, and wound up the mountains; and Sigismund, as he rode under the shade of enormous chestnuts, poplars, and the weeping birch, could not forbear dwelling on the many delicious hours he had passed with Agnes in the midst of similar scenes in the neighbourhood of Colano. His mind was softened by a thousand tender recollections; and when the sun threw a crimson gleam between the booms of the  
the



the venerable trees which shadowed the plain, he remembered the enthusiastic delight with which he had often with Agnes watched its setting beams as they sunk behind the rugged knolls of the mountains, or when from an eminence he had observed it gilding the horizon with a thousand gay and glorious colours. The fervour of his soul sought in vain some kindred bosom to impart its emotions to. He looked round for a moment at his companions, and the soft animation he felt was instantly extinguished. All the uneasiness his agitated spirits had conjured up as so likely to invade his peace, again pressed on his memory ; he imagined Agnes torn from her retreat, and carried where he should never see her more ;—he imagined her, Oh horror ! destined for, nay given to some other, and her life and his own rendered irrevocably wretched. A thousand times he wished, that since Nerina had preserved her important secret so long, she had carried it with her to the grave ; for though he had been told but very few particulars, he had

had learned that her death-bed confession had been the means of finding him. While he was thus ruminating, a messenger rode up to the Prince, and taking him apart, communed with him in secret, and to their conference Spigno was presently admitted. When Spigno and the newly-arrived man fell back, however, to join Ghiberti and Francisco, the Prince called Sigismond to him, and told him that the intelligence the messenger had brought, related to him; that he would have wished to soften it to him as much as he could, but that his conduct had scarcely claimed so much consideration; yet, as it must eventually be known, it was as well to explain it now;—and that the fact was, his father, to whom he expected so soon to be presented, had died the day after the Prince had commenced his journey, and had been interred immediately.

Sigismond remained a moment silent, and then said—“ Since then, Signor, I shall neither see my father himself, nor his honoured remains, there is no further occasion for my

proceeding: suffer me to return to Colano, from whence I was so abruptly torn, and in a short time I will come back again hither to identify my birth, if any means of so doing shall still remain. I will bring with me Father Buonafede, who will be able to recount more accurately than I can do, the circumstances of my first introduction to him."

"You will proceed now?" said Rezzonico, in one of those haughty tones so extremely repulsive to the heart of Sigismond.

"And wherefore, Prince?" asked the youth.

"Because it is my will!" replied Rezzonico. "Do you think I should have brought you hither, had I not had sufficient documents of your birth? and having brought you, shall I weakly suffer you to return? I was aware from the first of the possibility of this event—I even thought it almost certain; yet did I hesitate to take you from your retreat? and wherefore should I allow you to retrace your steps? Besides, your presence

presence is more immediately necessary now than ever. We must obey the will of your deceased father; I am informed that he has left me your guardian, and while my power exists, I shall chuse you to obey it."

Sigismond turned aside to conceal his indignation. This was not the moment when fortitude or firmness could be effectually exerted, and he forbore to reply, though he determined to keep his favourite maxim ever in view, and to make it the rule of his conduct; he already foresaw that he should have continual occasion for it.

The Prince soon after, softening his manner, again addressed Sigismond.—“ You seem,” said he, “ to look upon me without confidence; fear nothing, Sigismond, I will be a father to you.”

Sigismond bowed: but the countenance that met his view, accorded but little with the words he had heard—“ A father!” His very soul shuddered at the idea of such a father as Rezzonico. He now looked forward with increased despondency; the

little gleam that occasionally fell on his prospects was wholly darkened; for though he had not dared to hope that he should find in the bosom friend of Rezzonico a father who would have soothed him with the tenderness and affection of Buonafede, yet still he had trusted to find more of softness, more of congeniality than in Rezzonico; but now, that Rezzonico himself was to supply the place of that parent he often wished for, he felt that he had nothing to hope—endurance alone was what he must try to attain; and if he could endure without yielding for the period of the Prince's authority, he trusted that after that he might again be happy. The total uncertainty he should be in respecting Agnes, concerned in making him wretched;—he feared he should be unable to extend to her the firmness it would be necessary to preserve; and though he felt himself able to meet any misfortunes that should attack only himself, when he thought of her in suffering and in anguish, his heart sunk within

within him, and his fortitude seemed wholly to desert him. Oppressed by reflections such as these, he no longer heeded the road they were going ; but when, at length, the evening gloom deepened around them, the possibility of escaping in the forests, among which they were plunged, during the darkness of the night, struck him as feasible and desirable ;—he even projected to leave his horse, which would naturally follow its companions, and to escape on foot. As he revolved this project, it every moment appeared more easy of execution, when suddenly the steepness and ruggedness of the ascent called his attention to the road, which was strewn with fragments of rock, intermingled with what seemed to be ruins. Sigismond looked up to the top of the hill they were ascending, and beheld, immediately on the brow of the precipice, a Gothic castle of immense extent, surrounded by walls of insurmountable height, and impenetrable thickness.



As Sigismond surveyed its frowning horrors, he felt his hopes for ever annihilated, for he could not doubt that he beheld Voltorno. Had his mind been at ease, he would have contemplated with sublime emotions its bastions, on which the rude hand of Time had made scarcely any visible impression, though the extreme antiquity of the building was sufficiently apparent; its battlements adorned with huge masses of ivy, its long narrow loop-holes, and its dim windows of painted glass, its turrets light and airy, commanding an immense extent of country, and supported by all the fantastic fretwork of Gothic taste. But on these circumstances his sick fancy refused to dwell; he only saw with horror the dreadful height and thickness of the walls, the strong and well-guarded gates, the gloomy grandeur, and impregnable strength of the edifice, and the breadth of the fosse that surrounded it on three sides.—“From hence,” said he to himself, “to escape will be impossible; and what will avail the cessation of Rezzenico’s  
lawful

lawful power, or the certainty of my identity, when I am shut up in this castle, so wholly devoted to him, and so completely unknown to my only friend?"

While these mournful thoughts occurred to him, they were already at the gates, and Francisco advancing, blew on a large bugle a blast so loud, so sonorous, that the surrounding mountains re-echoed the sound, and ere it died away in fainter murmurs, the noise of chains rattling on the drawbridge appalled the very heart of Sigismond. The keys now sounded in the locks of the massy gates, and, at length, when one bolt after another had been withdrawn, they slowly opened on their grating hinges, and Rezzonico, followed by the whole party, silently passed the drawbridge, and through other gates into the first court of the castle.—Here the Prince turned to Sigismond, and with a look of malicious pleasure, that petrified the youth, bade him welcome to Voltorno.

Sigismond looked up, and beheld over the door of the hall which faced him, the well-

known emblem that had struck him in the chapel of Pontalti—the dog reposing at the foot of a rock. The motto too was well known to him; “Faithful and Firm,” was legible on a label beneath the device. The combination struck on his soul—Mirandola, the tomb, the mysterious figure, all glided before his fancy, and he looked away from the door which had conjured up so many images. In vain he turned. In the carve work of every window, the same device, the same motto appeared, and Sigismond could not doubt but that Pontalti and Voltorno had originally belonged to the same family; but the Prince allowed him no time for reflection. They crossed the hall, and entering a long and gloomy corridor, at length found at the end of it a large apartment wainscoted with oak, and heavily, though magnificently furnished: here the Prince called for refreshments, and invited Sigismond to be seated. An old man appeared with fruits and ices.

“Are

“Are the gentlemen in the way?” said the Prince.

The old man replied that they were.

“Announce my arrival to them then, Benedetto,” said Rezzonico.

Sigismond, at the desire of the Prince, partook of the refreshments, but was too much oppressed to speak, nor did his companion seem to wish it. Lost in a gloomy reverie, he seemed unwillingly to awake from it, when the door was again opened by Benedetto, and three or four cavaliers entered, to whom Sigismond was presented as the youth whom Rezzonico had been to seek. The Signors were not announced to him; but as he was not called on to bear much part in the conversation, he had leisure to examine the strangers.—The Count Ubaldo was a man far advanced in life, of an aspect that was any thing but noble; yet he was tall, and had a haughty and imposing manner; but his eyes expressed a low and malicious cunning, and the whole cast of his countenance bespoke a mean and servile disposition:

disposition: imperious to those beneath him, cringing to those whom he considered as his superiors, he behaved to Rezzonico with the most fawning adulation, yet seemed rather less to acknowledge the grandeur of his mind, than to bow to the nobility of his rank.—The young Chevalier Valenti, his son, with a countenance of more fire and animation, was not at all more prepossessing than the Count. He seemed about the age of Sigismond, and appeared inclined to attach himself to him; but Sigismond, open and gay with congenial minds, shrunk from an intimacy with Valenti, who seemed to unite the incautious rashness of youth with the suspicious art and despicable craftiness of old age.—Signor Vitalba, a man of about forty years of age, had an impenetrable countenance; cold and cautious, his manners were placid, and his conversation sensible. Inferior to all in rank, he preserved an equality in his conduct even with Prince Rezzonico, who, though he treated him with unflinching respect, yet seemed far from cordial

with him. Notwithstanding this, there was nothing in the smile, nothing in the voice of Vitalba that invited Sigismond to repose that confidence in him which the apparent shiness of the Prince would otherwise have induced him to.—But there yet remained the Signor Pigliani, whose name the Prince had assumed at the Convent. This man, of about thirty years of age, united to a figure of the finest proportions, a face of manly beauty; younger considerably than Rezzonico, he seemed upon terms of the most cordial familiarity with him. Of an ardent and impetuous temper, great talents served at once to guide and to direct his warmth. Instantly comprehending whatever subject was started, his presence of mind, his cool, yet determined courage shrunk from no obstacles, and every trait, both of his face and character, announced a man of no common mind. He was the only one of the party with whom Rezzonico lived on terms of real friendship, if the league of those, who are little restrained by principle, deserves that



name. He was an object of envy to the other Signors, but more particularly to Valenti, whose views, frequently the same, were perpetually confounded by the superior address of Pigliani. He treated Sigismond with an air of openness and friendliness that would have charmed his ingenuous heart, had he not felt it impossible to rely on any friend of Rezzonico. The youth therefore modestly retreated from his advances, and his backwardness was kindly by Pigliani imputed to timidity ; but he felt abashed by the unceasing gaze of Signor Vitalba, who frequently, while his eyes were fixed full on the face of Sigismond, whispered to the Count Ubaldo, who also joined in the steadfast survey. They seemed conferring together, and the youth was evidently the subject of their conversation ; nor was it long ere the Prince, drawing them towards one of the windows, joined in the low whispers. The lights but partially illuminated the apartment ; and Sigismond, affecting not to suppose himself the object of their attention, withdrew

withdrew to another window, which, deeply sunk in the enormous walls, completely hid him from their observation. The window at which he had placed himself, looked immediately down the precipice; and though it was far too dark to distinguish the surrounding scenery, yet the white foam of a torrent that washed the base of the rock on which Voltorno stood, made itself visible even through the gloom, and threw up its white spray to an amazing height. Unable to collect his thoughts, Sigismond gazed, in a sort of vague reverie, at the foaming waters, the pines which waved to the left hand, and the retiring mountains scarcely seen to the right. He contemplated, as far as the darkness of night would permit, the situation of the edifice, and felt himself completely a prisoner. The ideas of Buonatede and Agnes, lost to him as he believed for ever, arose to his mind like the remembrance of friends separated by death, and he felt wholly alone in the world: with all the beings around him his heart refused to hold commerce, and he  
could

could not shut his eyes to the utter improbability of his escaping from that castle while Rezzonico thought fit to confine him in it. While these reflections floated indeterminedly in his mind, the Chevalier Valenti approached the window where he stood, and asked him, with a sarcastic smile, how he liked his new residence.

Sigismond replied, it was yet impossible for him to judge of it.

“ Oh ! I assure you,” replied the Chevalier, “ this old castle is one of those things that do not at all improve upon acquaintance. I think the time I have spent here longer than all the rest of my life ; however, I hope it will be better now you are come ;—the old Signors are all so grave ; a young man like me can find no amusement in their company ; together, perhaps, we may contrive to kill time a little better.”

“ I am afraid, Signor,” replied Sigismond, “ I shall be but a bad associate ; I am not naturally cheerful, and just now I have no particular reason to be so.”

“ Oh !”

“ Oh !” replied the Chevalier, “ but you are young.”

“ So is Signor Pigliani,” answered Sigismond.

“ He is younger than the others, to be sure,” said Valenti, “ but he is always of their parties ; there’s no getting him to join in any amusing projects.”

“ And what amusing projects could you devise here ?” enquired Sigismond.

“ Why that’s the very thing I want your assistance for,” said Valenti ; “ however, our stay here cannot last for ever, and I’ll repay myself for this confinement when we get to Venice ;—shall you go to Venice ?”

“ I really cannot tell,” said Sigismond.

“ But tell me,” said Valenti, “ did you ever see so horrid a place as this ? And there’s a number of rooms that are never opened at all, as I am told.”

“ Probably from the antiquity of the castle,” observed Sigismond, “ those rooms may be in ruins.”

“ Perhaps

“ Perhaps so,” answered Valenti; “ for in truth it is antique enough !”

The Count Ubaldo here called away his son, and the party dispersed to their several apartments.

Benedetto was ordered to conduct Sigismond to that appointed for him ; and taking a lamp, he led the way through a number of low and intricate passages until they came to a narrow staircase, which led into a long gallery. Along one side of this gallery was a number of doors ; and when Sigismond demanded of his conductor to what apartments those doors belonged, he answered, that they were rooms not often used. Sigismond surveyed the opposite side of the gallery : it was pierced with many long and narrow windows, placed very high, and almost entirely without glass, and the wall itself bore very evident marks of decay.—“ What is this gallery called ?” said Sigismond to his conductor.

“ It is called the east gallery,” replied Benedetto : “ but there, Signor,” continued  
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the man, throwing open a low door, "there is your apartment, and here is a lamp."

Sigismond received the lamp, and entered the apartment ;—he heard the steps of Benedetto run hastily along the gallery, till at length, when he was wholly gone, his heart sunk within him at the uncommon loneliness of the place. He surveyed his own room, or rather dungeon ; it was large and lofty ; its damp stone walls were in many parts covered with green moss, and various other vegetable productions of moisture. There seemed some windows in equally good repair with those he had noticed in the gallery, but so high, that they were far beyond his reach ; the floor was of stone, and the ceiling was vaulted ; in one corner of the room stood the remains of what had been once a bed, but which was almost destroyed by damp and vermin. To sleep was at once dangerous and impossible ; and convinced as he was that his room was very far distant from the apartments of the other Signors, he determined to examine as much as he could the  
part



part of the castle he was in, thinking it not impossible but that from its ruinous state, he might be enabled to effect his escape from it. As he surveyed the mouldering walls, he remarked a hook which had once probably supported a picture; and he remembered the conversation Ghiberti and Francisco had held respecting his resemblance to a picture that once hung in what he now suspected to be that very chamber—the vaulted room at the end of the east gallery.

Impressed with this idea, he determined to search for the dark apartment beyond the vaulted chamber while he yet possessed the advantage of a light; and searching around his own room for a door, he at length discovered one, of which he with some difficulty undrew the rusty bolts; it opened into a kind of low cell, which apparently had been long shut up, and which seemed to contain nothing but a heap of rubbish in one corner, among which it seemed scarcely probable that a picture should be deposited. Sigismond, nevertheless, went forward to examine  
of

of what it was composed; and on gazing on it, perceived nothing but a parcel of rusty armour. He was retreating disappointed, when suddenly the light gleaming on part of a shield, he thought he discovered the well-known words in the motto—"Faithful and Firm." Roused by this circumstance, he drew forth the shield, and amidst the rust and dirt with which long neglect had encrusted it, he discerned the device which had so often met his eye. "Some ancestor of the Marquis Mirandola, probably," said he to himself, "for I believe this castle, with other property, descended from that family to Rezzonico—some ancestor of that illustrious House once bore this shield in battle; many blows has its battered front repelled, and many a dreadful shock has this bruised helmet also encountered."

While he thus meditated, he removed the uppermost pieces of armour, and, at length, at the bottom of all he thought he saw a picture. Eagerly he now cleared away all that yet covered it, and at length drew it forth

forth from its abode. He carefully brushed the dust from it, and found that it was damaged in many places; in some even perforated by the sharp points of the armour. Still, however, he could see that it represented a warlike figure, and, as he at length contrived to throw the light properly upon it, he fancied that it represented the very person whose effigies he had seen in the chapel of Pontalti. The longer he gazed, the more he was convinced of this; he saw the same benevolent smile, the same intelligent countenance, the same expressive eye that had so charmed him in the sculptured figure; he felt his heart beat with indescribable emotion as he viewed it; and long would he have continued to gaze upon it, had not a distant sound in the gallery alarmed him.

Sigismond listened for a moment, unable to distinguish what the noise might mean, until at length convinced that it was approaching his room, he imagined it might be Benedetto returning to him; he therefore hastily re-entered his apartment, and closing  
the

the door of the cell, waited the arrival of the person, whose footsteps he heard. After some moments of tormenting suspense, he distinguished his own name pronounced in a sort of half whisper.

Feeling that he had nothing to fear, he went to the door that opened on the corridor, and enquired who called him.

“ Ah Signor,” repeated the same voice, “ you are then awake ; pray admit me—I am Ghiberti.”

Dismissing all ungenerous suspicions of the old man, Sigismond unclosed his door, and saw him loaded with raggots.

“ Here, Signor,” said he, “ I have brought you some wood ; this room has not been inhabited these eighteen or nineteen years, so I thought you must want a fire.—God bless me, and there’s no bed fit for you ! Well, stay, Signor, I’ll just kindle you a fire, and then I’ll fetch you a good bed at least to lie on ; the Prince ought to be ashamed to put you into such a hole as this !”

Sigismond

Sigismond gratefully accepted the comforts the old man's care had provided, and indeed felt the necessity of a fire very strongly, for in his situation it was more than a luxury—it was a real necessary of life; the humid walls struck such a cold chill through his whole frame, and the whole place had so much the air of a charnel-house, that it was not merely unpleasant—it was absolutely unwholesome. While the fire was illuminating every part of the room with its cheerful blaze, Ghiberti again went to fetch some better bedding; and when he returned, and had made up some, at least, dry accommodation for Sigismond, he seemed as if he had something he wished to say; and Sigismond inviting him to rest himself awhile, Ghiberti sat down, and after a pause of a few minutes, said—“This apartment is very lonely, Signor.”

“It seems to have been a long time uninhabited,” replied Sigismond.

“It has never been used since the death of the late Lord,” answered Ghiberti,  
“except

“except to be stripped of all its beautiful furniture, and all its ornaments; it was quite another thing then, for it belonged to his Lordship.”

“Has he been dead long?” asked Sigismond.

“About nineteen years, or rather more,” answered Ghiberti.

“And how did he die?” enquired the youth with increased curiosity.

“Oh Signor! do you not know,” replied Ghiberti, “that he was murdered by banditti close to Pontalti?”

“What, the Marquis Mirandola?” said Sigismond; “’tis then as I thought!”

“Yes, Signor,” said Ghiberti, “it was indeed the Marquis Mirandola; but do not let us talk of him at this time of night in these apartments.”

“Why, Ghiberti?”

“Oh Signor!” said the old man, “they say strange things have been seen and heard by those who dare disturb the dead.”

“Perhaps



“ Perhaps so,” observed Sigismond; “ but we shall not disturb the Marquis by speaking of him.”

“ Nay, Signor,” continued Ghiberti, “ histories have been told of these very apartments, by those who have occasionally visited them, that would have prevented my coming near them, had it not been to serve you.”

“ I thank you, Ghiberti,” replied Sigismond, “ and will not then detain you; the histories that are related do not alarm me; but ere you leave me, I will request you to-morrow to find some means of presenting me to Father Bertoldo.”

“ Alas, Signor!” said Ghiberti, “ the good Father died during our absence.”

“ Ha!” exclaimed Sigismond, “ during our absence, said you?—Could he, then, be the parent Prince Rezzonico was bringing me to?”

“ He!—No, Signor, no.”

“ And what, Ghiberti, was that picture which you and Francisco thought I so much resembled?”

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“ We will think of that some other time, Signor.”

“ Well, Ghiberti, I will detain you then no longer—some other time; but poor Bertoldo, I fear I have at least lost in him a friend, if not a father!”

“ A friend you doubtless have lost, Signor,” said Ghiberti; “ he lived here during the Marquis’s life, and was extremely attached to all the family of Mirandola; he would doubtless have been your friend, and many a strange tale could he have unfolded: but, Signor, while I live, I never will desert you, if you will accept of what services are in my power; and some other time I too could relate, for I have lived here many years——”

“ With the late Marquis?” enquired Sigismond.

“ Oh yes, Signor!—But hark! was not there a noise?”

They both listened.

“ It was only the wind sighing dismally through the broken windows of the corridor,”

said Sigismond; "but, Ghiberti, it grows late; you have had a great deal of fatigue lately; you had better retire."

Ghiberti, who was growing gradually paler, till he was nearly as bloodless as the ghosts he feared, presently accepted the offer of Sigismond to dismiss him, and once more replenishing the fire, he promised to place still better accommodations for him there before the next night, and wishing him sound and undisturbed repose, he left him.

Too much occupied in his mind to sleep, Sigismond remained sitting before the fire in an easy chair, whose tattered remnants yet told its former magnificence.—"In this very apartment, then," said he, "once slept the unfortunate Marquis; nor can I doubt but that picture is his resemblance. How strangely his successor seems to have been bent upon destroying all vestiges of him! Pontalti razed to the ground, and these apartments stripped of their furniture, and left to ruin and destruction!

But not long did the fate of the Marquis continue to engross his thoughts, amply as it supplied them with conjectures; his own uncertain fortunes pressed hard upon him, and the strange mode in which Prince Rezzonico treated him. A sad foreboding seized him that these apartments were destined to be his prison, and perhaps his grave; for he distrusted the guardianship of which Rezzonico spoke, and felt impressed with the idea that he was decoyed hither for some malignant purpose, though what cause could have excited anyone's malignity, he was unable to imagine. Why was he driven from the chambers usually inhabited, to a remote, a ruined part of the castle, but the better to enable the Prince to detain him, perhaps to murder him unobserved? That the other Signors had seen him, excited in him no hope of relief; there was not one, except Vitalba, who did not seem devoted to Rezzonico, and Vitalba he feared equally with the Prince. The death of Bertoldo was a severe blow to him; he had hoped from

from him to obtain a full explanation of the strange hints of Zadeski, and to find in him a friend to whom he could apply, without fear, on every emergency.—If indeed in him he had not found a father, the strange coincidence of his death with that of the parent he was brought hither to see, and of whom not a word had been mentioned, seemed to speak conviction to his mind. He had felt too little hope from his promised father to make him very anxious for any explanation; he dreaded to ask the Prince any questions, lest he should hear his absolute dependance on his will confirmed; and he shuddered to enquire of Ghiberti, lest he should learn a tale that might fill him with abhorrence either for this deceased parent, or for Rezzonico. Sometimes he imagined that Rezzonico was, perhaps, but for him, heir to the honours and possessions of that parent; and he was brought hither to be silently dispatched, that the Prince might obtain, uncontested, all that ought to have been his property.—“Alas!” thought he, “if he knew how  
very

very much I should prefer quiet and happiness with Agnes, in the humble vale of Colano, to these immense domains, which impose duties more extensive than the advantages they bestow, he would have left me in the obscurity with which I was contented, nor have taught me that there was any thing withheld from me by the injustice of man."

At the name of Agnes his mind became softened; tears stole from his eyes, and he sunk into a quiet, though vague reverie. At length he threw himself on the bed, which the care of Ghiberti had supplied him with, and towards morning fell into a peaceful and undisturbed slumber.

END OF VOL. I.





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