

CHAPTER III

Oh! could I worship aught beneath the skies
That earth hath seen or fancy could devise,
Thine altar, sacred Liberty, should stand,
Built by no mercenary vulgar hand,
With fragrant turf, and flowers as wild and fair,
As ever dressed a bank, or scented summer air.

Cowper.

His whole attention bent upon bringing to justice the Assassins of his Sister, Lorenzo little thought how severely his interest was suffering in another quarter. As was before mentioned, He returned not to Madrid till the evening of that day on which Antonia was buried. Signifying to the Grand Inquisitor the order of the Cardinal-Duke (a ceremony not to be neglected, when a Member of the Church was to be arrested publicly) communicating his design to his Uncle and Don Ramirez, and assembling a troop of Attendants sufficiently to prevent opposition, furnished him with full occupation during the few hours preceding midnight. Consequently, He had no opportunity to enquire about his Mistress, and was perfectly ignorant both of her death and her Mother's.

The Marquis was by no means out of danger: His delirium was gone, but had left him so much exhausted that the Physicians declined pronouncing upon the consequences likely to ensue. As for Raymond himself, He wished for nothing more earnestly than to join Agnes in the grave. Existence was hateful to him: He saw nothing in the world deserving his attention; and He hoped to hear that Agnes was revenged, and himself given over in the same moment.

Followed by Raymond's ardent prayers for success, Lorenzo was at the Gates of St. Clare a full hour before the time appointed by the Mother St. Ursula. He was accompanied by his Uncle, by Don Ramirez de Mello, and a party of chosen Archers. Though in considerable numbers their appearance created no surprize: A great Crowd was already assembled before the Convent doors, in order to witness the Procession. It was naturally supposed that Lorenzo and his Attendants were conducted thither by the same design. The Duke of Medina being recognised, the People drew back, and made way for his party to advance. Lorenzo placed himself opposite to the great Gate, through which the Pilgrims were to pass. Convinced that the Prioress could not escape him, He waited patiently for her appearance, which She was expected to

make exactly at Midnight.

The Nuns were employed in religious duties established in honour of St. Clare, and to which no Prophane was ever admitted. The Chapel windows were illuminated. As they stood on the outside, the Auditors heard the full swell of the organ, accompanied by a chorus of female voices, rise upon the stillness of the night.

This died away, and was succeeded by a single strain of harmony:

It was the voice of her who was destined to sustain in the procession the character of St. Clare. For this office the most beautiful Virgin of Madrid was always selected, and She upon whom the choice fell esteemed it as the highest of honours. While listening to the Music, whose melody distance only seemed to render sweeter, the Audience was wrapped up in profound attention. Universal silence prevailed through the Crowd, and every heart was filled with reverence for religion. Every heart but Lorenzo's. Conscious that among those who chaunted the praises of their God so sweetly, there were some who cloaked with devotion the foulest sins, their hymns inspired him with detestation at their Hypocrisy. He had long observed with disapprobation and contempt the superstition which governed Madrid's Inhabitants. His good sense had pointed out to him the artifices of the Monks, and the gross absurdity of their

miracles, wonders, and supposititious reliques. He blushed to see his Countrymen the Dupes of deceptions so ridiculous, and only wished for an opportunity to free them from their monkish fetters. That opportunity, so long desired in vain, was at length presented to him. He resolved not to let it slip, but to set before the People in glaring colours how enormous were the abuses but too frequently practised in Monasteries, and how unjustly public esteem was bestowed indiscriminately upon all who wore a religious habit. He longed for the moment destined to unmask the Hypocrites, and convince his Countrymen that a sanctified exterior does not always hide a virtuous heart.

The service lasted, till Midnight was announced by the Convent Bell. That sound being heard, the Music ceased: The voices died away softly, and soon after the lights disappeared from the Chapel windows. Lorenzo's heart beat high, when He found the execution of his plan to be at hand. From the natural superstition of the People He had prepared himself for some resistance. But He trusted that the Mother St. Ursula would bring good reasons to justify his proceeding. He had force with him to repel the first impulse of the Populace, till his arguments should be heard: His only fear was lest the Domina, suspecting his design, should have spirited away the Nun on

whose deposition every thing depended. Unless the Mother St. Ursula should be present, He could only accuse the Prioress upon suspicion; and this reflection gave him some little apprehension for the success of his enterprize. The tranquillity which seemed to reign through the Convent in some degree re-assured him: Still He expected the moment eagerly, when the presence of his Ally should deprive him of the power of doubting.

The Abbey of Capuchins was only separated from the Convent by the Garden and Cemetery. The Monks had been invited to assist at the Pilgrimage. They now arrived, marching two by two with lighted Torches in their hands, and chaunting Hymns in honour of St. Clare. Father Pablos was at their head, the Abbot having excused himself from attending. The people made way for the holy Train, and the Friars placed themselves in ranks on either side of the great Gates. A few minutes sufficed to arrange the order of the Procession. This being settled, the Convent doors were thrown open, and again the female Chorus sounded in full melody. First appeared a Band of Choristers: As soon as they had passed, the Monks fell in two by two, and followed with steps slow and measured. Next came the Novices; They bore no Tapers, as did the Professed, but moved on with eyes bent downwards, and seemed to be occupied by telling their Beads. To them succeeded a young

and lovely Girl, who represented St. Lucia: She held a golden bason in which were two eyes: Her own were covered by a velvet bandage, and She was conducted by another Nun habited as an Angel. She was followed by St. Catherine, a palm-branch in one hand, a flaming Sword in the other: She was robed in white, and her brow was ornamented with a sparkling Diadem. After her appeared St. Genevieve, surrounded by a number of Imps, who putting themselves into grotesque attitudes, drawing her by the robe, and sporting round her with antic gestures, endeavoured to distract her attention from the Book, on which her eyes were constantly fixed. These merry Devils greatly entertained the Spectators, who testified their pleasure by repeated bursts of Laughter. The Prioress had been careful to select a Nun whose disposition was naturally solemn and saturnine. She had every reason to be satisfied with her choice: The drolleries of the Imps were entirely thrown away, and St. Genevieve moved on without discomposing a muscle.

Each of these Saints was separated from the Other by a band of Choristers, exalting her praise in their Hymns, but declaring her to be very much inferior to St. Clare, the Convent's avowed Patroness. These having passed, a long train of Nuns appeared, bearing like the Choristers each a burning Taper. Next came the

reliques of St. Clare, inclosed in vases equally precious for their materials and workmanship: But they attracted not Lorenzo's attention. The Nun who bore the heart occupied him entirely. According to Theodore's description, He doubted not her being the Mother St. Ursula. She seemed to look round with anxiety. As He stood foremost in the rank by which the procession past, her eye caught Lorenzo's. A flush of joy overspread her till then pallid cheek. She turned to her Companion eagerly.

'We are safe!' He heard her whisper; ' 'tis her Brother!'

His heart being now at ease, Lorenzo gazed with tranquillity upon the remainder of the show. Now appeared its most brilliant ornament. It was a Machine fashioned like a throne, rich with jewels and dazzling with light. It rolled onwards upon concealed wheels, and was guided by several lovely Children, dressed as Seraphs. The summit was covered with silver clouds, upon which reclined the most beautiful form that eyes ever witnessed. It was a Damsel representing St. Clare: Her dress was of inestimable price, and round her head a wreath of Diamonds formed an artificial glory: But all these ornaments yielded to the lustre of her charms. As She advanced, a murmur of delight

ran through the Crowd. Even Lorenzo confessed secretly, that He never beheld more perfect beauty, and had not his heart been Antonia's, it must have fallen a sacrifice to this enchanting Girl. As it was, He considered her only as a fine Statue: She obtained from him no tribute save cold admiration, and when She had passed him, He thought of her no more.

'Who is She?' asked a By-stander in Lorenzo's hearing.

'One whose beauty you must often have heard celebrated. Her name is Virginia de Villa-Franca: She is a Pensioner of St. Clare's Convent, a Relation of the Prioress, and has been selected with justice as the ornament of the Procession.'

The Throne moved onwards. It was followed by the Prioress herself: She marched at the head of the remaining Nuns with a devout and sanctified air, and closed the procession. She moved on slowly: Her eyes were raised to heaven: Her countenance calm and tranquil seemed abstracted from all sublunary things, and no feature betrayed her secret pride at displaying the pomp and opulence of her Convent. She passed along, accompanied by the prayers and benedictions of the Populace: But how great was the general confusion and surprize, when Don Ramirez starting

forward, challenged her as his Prisoner.

For a moment amazement held the Domina silent and immovable:
But no sooner did She recover herself, than She exclaimed against
sacrilege and impiety, and called the People to rescue a Daughter
of the Church. They were eagerly preparing to obey her; when Don
Ramirez, protected by the Archers from their rage, commanded them
to forbear, and threatened them with the severest vengeance of
the Inquisition. At that dreaded word every arm fell, every
sword shrunk back into its scabbard. The Prioress herself turned
pale, and trembled. The general silence convinced her that She
had nothing to hope but from innocence, and She besought Don
Ramirez in a faltering voice, to inform her of what crime She
was accused.

'That you shall know in time,' replied He; 'But first I must
secure the Mother St. Ursula.'

'The Mother St. Ursula?' repeated the Domina faintly.

At this moment casting her eyes round, She saw near her Lorenzo
and the Duke, who had followed Don Ramirez.

'Ah! great God!' She cried, clasping her hands together with a frantic air; 'I am betrayed!'

'Betrayed?' replied St. Ursula, who now arrived conducted by some of the Archers, and followed by the Nun her Companion in the procession: 'Not betrayed, but discovered. In me recognise your Accuser: You know not how well I am instructed in your guilt!--Segnor!' She continued, turning to Don Ramirez; 'I commit myself to your custody. I charge the Prioress of St. Clare with murder, and stake my life for the justice of my accusation.'

A general cry of surprize was uttered by the whole Audience, and an explanation was demanded loudly. The trembling Nuns, terrified at the noise and universal confusion, had dispersed, and fled different ways. Some regained the Convent; Others sought refuge in the dwellings of their Relations; and Many, only sensible of their present danger, and anxious to escape from the tumult, ran through the Streets, and wandered, they knew not whither. The lovely Virginia was one of the first to fly: And in order that She might be better seen and heard, the People desired that St. Ursula should harangue them from the vacant Throne. The Nun complied; She ascended the glittering Machine, and then addressed the surrounding multitude as follows.

'However strange and unseemly may appear my conduct, when considered to be adopted by a Female and a Nun, necessity will justify it most fully. A secret, an horrible secret weighs heavy upon my soul: No rest can be mine till I have revealed it to the world, and satisfied that innocent blood which calls from the Grave for vengeance. Much have I dared to gain this opportunity of lightening my conscience. Had I failed in my attempt to reveal the crime, had the Domina but suspected that the mystery was none to me, my ruin was inevitable. Angels who watch unceasingly over those who deserve their favour, have enabled me to escape detection: I am now at liberty to relate a Tale, whose circumstances will freeze every honest soul with horror. Mine is the task to rend the veil from Hypocrisy, and show misguided Parents to what dangers the Woman is exposed, who falls under the sway of a monastic Tyrant.

'Among the Votaries of St. Clare, none was more lovely, none more gentle, than Agnes de Medina. I knew her well; She entrusted to me every secret of her heart; I was her Friend and Confident, and I loved her with sincere affection. Nor was I singular in my attachment. Her piety unfeigned, her willingness to oblige, and her angelic disposition, rendered her the Darling of all that was

estimable in the Convent. The Prioress herself, proud, scrupulous and forbidding, could not refuse Agnes that tribute of approbation which She bestowed upon no one else. Every one has some fault: Alas! Agnes had her weakness! She violated the laws of our order, and incurred the inveterate hate of the unforgiving Domina. St. Clare's rules are severe: But grown antiquated and neglected, many of late years have either been forgotten, or changed by universal consent into milder punishments. The penance, adjudged to the crime of Agnes, was most cruel, most inhuman! The law had been long exploded: Alas! It still existed, and the revengeful Prioress now determined to revive it.

This law decreed that the Offender should be plunged into a private dungeon, expressly constituted to hide from the world for ever the Victim of Cruelty and tyrannic superstition. In this dreadful abode She was to lead a perpetual solitude, deprived of all society, and believed to be dead by those whom affection might have prompted to attempt her rescue. Thus was She to languish out the remainder of her days, with no other food than bread and water, and no other comfort than the free indulgence of her tears.'

The indignation created by this account was so violent, as for

some moments to interrupt St. Ursula's narrative. When the disturbance ceased, and silence again prevailed through the Assembly, She continued her discourse, while at every word the Domina's countenance betrayed her increasing terrors.

'A Council of the twelve elder Nuns was called: I was of the number. The Prioress in exaggerated colours described the offence of Agnes, and scrupled not to propose the revival of this almost forgotten law. To the shame of our sex be it spoken, that either so absolute was the Domina's will in the Convent, or so much had disappointment, solitude, and self-denial hardened their hearts and sowered their tempers that this barbarous proposal was assented to by nine voices out of the twelve. I was not one of the nine. Frequent opportunities had convinced me of the virtues of Agnes, and I loved and pitied her most sincerely. The Mothers Bertha and Cornelia joined my party: We made the strongest opposition possible, and the Superior found herself compelled to change her intention. In spite of the majority in her favour, She feared to break with us openly. She knew that supported by the Medina family, our forces would be too strong for her to cope with: And She also knew that after being once imprisoned and supposed dead, should Agnes be discovered, her ruin would be inevitable. She therefore gave up her design,

though which much reluctance. She demanded some days to reflect upon a mode of punishment which might be agreeable to the whole Community; and She promised, that as soon as her resolution was fixed, the same Council should be again summoned. Two days passed away: On the Evening of the Third it was announced that on the next day Agnes should be examined; and that according to her behaviour on that occasion, her punishment should be either strengthened or mitigated.

'On the night preceding this examination, I stole to the Cell of Agnes at an hour when I supposed the other Nuns to be buried in sleep. I comforted her to the best of my power: I bad her take courage, told her to rely upon the support of her friends, and taught her certain signs, by which I might instruct her to answer the Domina's questions by an assent or negative. Conscious that her Enemy would strive to confuse, embarrass, and daunt her, I feared her being ensnared into some confession prejudicial to her interests. Being anxious to keep my visit secret, I stayed with Agnes but a short time. I bad her not let her spirits be cast down; I mingled my tears with those which streamed down her cheek, embraced her fondly, and was on the point of retiring, when I heard the sound of steps approaching the Cell. I started back. A Curtain which veiled a large Crucifix offered me a

retreat, and I hastened to place myself behind it. The door opened. The Prioress entered, followed by four other Nuns. They advanced towards the bed of Agnes. The Superior reproached her with her errors in the bitterest terms: She told her that She was a disgrace to the Convent, that She was resolved to deliver the world and herself from such a Monster, and commanded her to drink the contents of a Goblet now presented to her by one of the Nuns. Aware of the fatal properties of the liquor, and trembling to find herself upon the brink of Eternity, the unhappy Girl strove to excite the Domina's pity by the most affecting prayers.

She sued for life in terms which might have melted the heart of a Fiend: She promised to submit patiently to any punishment, to shame, imprisonment, and torture, might She but be permitted to live! Oh! might She but live another month, or week, or day! Her merciless Enemy listened to her complaints unmoved: She told her that at first She meant to have spared her life, and that if She had altered her intention, She had to thank the opposition of her Friends. She continued to insist upon her swallowing the poison: She bad her recommend herself to the Almighty's mercy, not to hers, and assured her that in an hour She would be numbered with the Dead. Perceiving that it was vain to implore this unfeeling Woman, She attempted to spring from her bed, and

call for assistance: She hoped, if She could not escape the fate announced to her, at least to have witnesses of the violence committed. The Prioress guessed her design. She seized her forcibly by the arm, and pushed her back upon her pillow. At the same time drawing a dagger, and placing it at the breast of the unfortunate Agnes, She protested that if She uttered a single cry, or hesitated a single moment to drink the poison, She would pierce her heart that instant. Already half-dead with fear, She could make no further resistance. The Nun approached with the fatal Goblet. The Domina obliged her to take it, and swallow the contents. She drank, and the horrid deed was accomplished. The Nuns then seated themselves round the Bed. They answered her groans with reproaches; They interrupted with sarcasms the prayers in which She recommended her parting soul to mercy: They threatened her with heaven's vengeance and eternal perdition: They bad her despair of pardon, and strowed with yet sharper thorns Death's painful pillow. Such were the sufferings of this young Unfortunate, till released by fate from the malice of her Tormentors. She expired in horror of the past, in fears for the future; and her agonies were such as must have amply gratified the hate and vengeance of her Enemies. As soon as her Victim ceased to breathe, the Domina retired, and was followed by her Accomplices.

'It was now that I ventured from my concealment. I dared not to assist my unhappy Friend, aware that without preserving her, I should only have brought on myself the same destruction. Shocked and terrified beyond expression at this horrid scene, scarcely had I sufficient strength to regain my Cell. As I reached the door of that of Agnes, I ventured to look towards the bed, on which lay her lifeless body, once so lovely and so sweet! I breathed a prayer for her departed Spirit, and vowed to revenge her death by the shame and punishment of her Assassins. With danger and difficulty have I kept my oath. I unwarily dropped some words at the funeral of Agnes, while thrown off my guard by excessive grief, which alarmed the guilty conscience of the Prioress. My every action was observed; My every step was traced. I was constantly surrounded by the Superior's spies. It was long before I could find the means of conveying to the unhappy Girl's Relations an intimation of my secret. It was given out that Agnes had expired suddenly: This account was credited not only by her Friends in Madrid, but even by those within the Convent. The poison had left no marks upon her body: No one suspected the true cause of her death, and it remained unknown to all, save the Assassins and Myself.

'I have no more to say: For what I have already said, I will answer with my life. I repeat that the Prioress is a Murderess; That She has driven from the world, perhaps from heaven, an Unfortunate whose offence was light and venial; that She has abused the power intrusted to her hands, and has been a Tyrant, a Barbarian, and an Hypocrite. I also accuse the four Nuns, Violante, Camilla, Alix, and Mariana, as being her Accomplices, and equally criminal.'

Here St. Ursula ended her narrative. It created horror and surprize throughout: But when She related the inhuman murder of Agnes, the indignation of the Mob was so audibly testified, that it was scarcely possible to hear the conclusion. This confusion increased with every moment: At length a multitude of voices exclaimed that the Prioress should be given up to their fury. To this Don Ramirez refused to consent positively. Even Lorenzo bad the People remember that She had undergone no trial, and advised them to leave her punishment to the Inquisition. All representations were fruitless: The disturbance grew still more violent, and the Populace more exasperated. In vain did Ramirez attempt to convey his Prisoner out of the Throng. Wherever He turned, a band of Rioters barred his passage, and demanded her being delivered over to them more loudly than before. Ramirez

ordered his Attendants to cut their way through the multitude: Oppressed by numbers, it was impossible for them to draw their swords. He threatened the Mob with the vengeance of the Inquisition: But in this moment of popular phrenzy even this dreadful name had lost its effect. Though regret for his Sister made him look upon the Prioress with abhorrence, Lorenzo could not help pitying a Woman in a situation so terrible: But in spite of all his exertions, and those of the Duke, of Don Ramirez, and the Archers, the People continued to press onwards. They forced a passage through the Guards who protected their destined Victim, dragged her from her shelter, and proceeded to take upon her a most summary and cruel vengeance. Wild with terror, and scarcely knowing what She said, the wretched Woman shrieked for a moment's mercy: She protested that She was innocent of the death of Agnes, and could clear herself from the suspicion beyond the power of doubt. The Rioters heeded nothing but the gratification of their barbarous vengeance. They refused to listen to her: They showed her every sort of insult, loaded her with mud and filth, and called her by the most opprobrious appellations. They tore her one from another, and each new Tormentor was more savage than the former. They stifled with howls and execrations her shrill cries for mercy; and dragged her through the Streets, spurning her, trampling her, and treating

her with every species of cruelty which hate or vindictive fury could invent. At length a Flint, aimed by some well-directing hand, struck her full upon the temple. She sank upon the ground bathed in blood, and in a few minutes terminated her miserable existence. Yet though She no longer felt their insults, the Rioters still exercised their impotent rage upon her lifeless body. They beat it, trod upon it, and ill-used it, till it became no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting.

Unable to prevent this shocking event, Lorenzo and his Friends had beheld it with the utmost horror: But they were roused from their compelled inactivity, on hearing that the Mob was attacking the Convent of St. Clare. The incensed Populace, confounding the innocent with the guilty, had resolved to sacrifice all the Nuns of that order to their rage, and not to leave one stone of the building upon another. Alarmed at this intelligence, they hastened to the Convent, resolved to defend it if possible, or at least to rescue the Inhabitants from the fury of the Rioters. Most of the Nuns had fled, but a few still remained in their habitation. Their situation was truly dangerous. However, as they had taken the precaution of fastening the inner Gates, with this assistance Lorenzo hoped to repel the Mob, till Don Ramirez

should return to him with a more sufficient force.

Having been conducted by the former disturbance to the distance of some Streets from the Convent, He did not immediately reach it: When He arrived, the throng surrounding it was so excessive as to prevent his approaching the Gates. In the interim, the Populace besieged the Building with persevering rage: They battered the walls, threw lighted torches in at the windows, and swore that by break of day not a Nun of St. Clare's order should be left alive. Lorenzo had just succeeded in piercing his way through the Crowd, when one of the Gates was forced open. The Rioters poured into the interior part of the Building, where they exercised their vengeance upon every thing which found itself in their passage. They broke the furniture into pieces, tore down the pictures, destroyed the reliques, and in their hatred of her Servant forgot all respect to the Saint. Some employed themselves in searching out the Nuns, Others in pulling down parts of the Convent, and Others again in setting fire to the pictures and valuable furniture which it contained. These Latter produced the most decisive desolation: Indeed the consequences of their action were more sudden than themselves had expected or wished. The Flames rising from the burning piles caught part of the Building, which being old and dry, the

conflagration spread with rapidity from room to room. The Walls were soon shaken by the devouring element: The Columns gave way: The Roofs came tumbling down upon the Rioters, and crushed many of them beneath their weight. Nothing was to be heard but shrieks and groans; The Convent was wrapped in flames, and the whole presented a scene of devastation and horror.

Lorenzo was shocked at having been the cause, however innocent, of this frightful disturbance: He endeavoured to repair his fault by protecting the helpless Inhabitants of the Convent. He entered it with the Mob, and exerted himself to repress the prevailing Fury, till the sudden and alarming progress of the flames compelled him to provide for his own safety. The People now hurried out, as eagerly as they had before thronged in; But their numbers clogging up the doorway, and the fire gaining upon them rapidly, many of them perished ere they had time to effect their escape. Lorenzo's good fortune directed him to a small door in a farther Aisle of the Chapel. The bolt was already undrawn: He opened the door, and found himself at the foot of St. Clare's Sepulchre.

Here He stopped to breathe. The Duke and some of his Attendants had followed him, and thus were in security for the present.

They now consulted, what steps they should take to escape from this scene of disturbance: But their deliberations were considerably interrupted by the sight of volumes of fire rising from amidst the Convent's massy walls, by the noise of some heavy Arch tumbling down in ruins, or by the mingled shrieks of the Nuns and Rioters, either suffocating in the press, perishing in the flames, or crushed beneath the weight of the falling Mansion.

Lorenzo enquired, whither the Wicket led? He was answered, to the Garden of the Capuchins, and it was resolved to explore an outlet upon that side. Accordingly the Duke raised the Latch, and passed into the adjoining Cemetery. The Attendants followed without ceremony. Lorenzo, being the last, was also on the point of quitting the Colonnade, when He saw the door of the Sepulchre opened softly. Someone looked out, but on perceiving Strangers uttered a loud shriek, started back again, and flew down the marble Stairs.

'What can this mean?' cried Lorenzo; 'Here is some mystery concealed. Follow me without delay!'

Thus saying, He hastened into the Sepulchre, and pursued the person who continued to fly before him. The Duke knew not the

cause of his exclamation, but supposing that He had good reasons for it, he followed him without hesitation. The Others did the same, and the whole Party soon arrived at the foot of the Stairs.

The upper door having been left open, the neighbouring flames darted from above a sufficient light to enable Lorenzo's catching a glance of the Fugitive running through the long passages and distant Vaults: But when a sudden turn deprived him of this assistance, total darkness succeeded, and He could only trace the object of his enquiry by the faint echo of retiring feet. The Pursuers were now compelled to proceed with caution: As well as they could judge, the Fugitive also seemed to slacken pace, for they heard the steps follow each other at longer intervals. They at length were bewildered by the Labyrinth of passages, and dispersed in various directions. Carried away by his eagerness to clear up this mystery, and to penetrate into which He was impelled by a movement secret and unaccountable, Lorenzo heeded not this circumstance till He found himself in total solitude. The noise of footsteps had ceased. All was silent around, and no clue offered itself to guide him to the flying Person. He stopped to reflect on the means most likely to aid his pursuit. He was persuaded that no common cause would have induced the Fugitive to seek that dreary place at an hour so unusual: The

cry which He had heard, seemed uttered in a voice of terror, and He was convinced that some mystery was attached to this event. After some minutes past in hesitation He continued to proceed, feeling his way along the walls of the passage. He had already past some time in this slow progress, when He descried a spark of light glimmering at a distance. Guided by this observation, and having drawn his sword, He bent his steps towards the place, whence the beam seemed to be emitted.

It proceeded from the Lamp which flamed before St. Clare's Statue. Before it stood several Females, their white Garments streaming in the blast, as it howled along the vaulted dungeons. Curious to know what had brought them together in this melancholy spot, Lorenzo drew near with precaution. The Strangers seemed earnestly engaged in conversation. They heard not Lorenzo's steps, and He approached unobserved, till He could hear their voices distinctly.

'I protest,' continued She who was speaking when He arrived, and to whom the rest were listening with great attention; 'I protest, that I saw them with my own eyes. I flew down the steps; They pursued me, and I escaped falling into their hands with difficulty. Had it not been for the Lamp, I should never have

found you.'

'And what could bring them hither?' said another in a trembling voice; 'Do you think that they were looking for us?'

'God grant that my fears may be false,' rejoined the First; 'But I doubt they are Murderers! If they discover us, we are lost! As for me, my fate is certain: My affinity to the Prioress will be a sufficient crime to condemn me; and though till now these Vaults have afforded me a retreat.'

Here looking up, her eye fell upon Lorenzo, who had continued to approach softly.

'The Murderers!' She cried--

She started away from the Statue's Pedestal on which She had been seated, and attempted to escape by flight. Her Companions at the same moment uttered a terrified scream, while Lorenzo arrested the Fugitive by the arm. Frightened and desperate She sank upon her knees before him.

'Spare me!' She exclaimed; 'For Christ's sake, spare me! I am

innocent, indeed, I am!

While She spoke, her voice was almost choaked with fear. The beams of the Lamp darting full upon her face which was unveiled, Lorenzo recognized the beautiful Virginia de Villa-Franca. He hastened to raise her from the ground, and besought her to take courage. He promised to protect her from the Rioters, assured her that her retreat was still a secret, and that She might depend upon his readiness to defend her to the last drop of his blood. During this conversation, the Nuns had thrown themselves into various attitudes: One knelt, and addressed herself to heaven; Another hid her face in the lap of her Neighbour; Some listened motionless with fear to the discourse of the supposed Assassin; while Others embraced the Statue of St. Clare, and implored her protection with frantic cries. On perceiving their mistake, they crowded round Lorenzo and heaped benedictions on him by dozens. He found that, on hearing the threats of the Mob, and terrified by the cruelties which from the Convent Towers they had seen inflicted on the Superior, many of the Pensioners and Nuns had taken refuge in the Sepulchre. Among the former was to be reckoned the lovely Virginia. Nearly related to the Prioress, She had more reason than the rest to dread the Rioters, and now besought Lorenzo earnestly not to abandon her to their

rage. Her Companions, most of whom were Women of noble family, made the same request, which He readily granted. He promised not to quit them, till He had seen each of them safe in the arms of her Relations: But He advised their deferring to quit the Sepulchre for some time longer, when the popular fury should be somewhat calmed, and the arrival of military force have dispersed the multitude.

'Would to God!' cried Virginia, 'That I were already safe in my Mother's embraces! How say you, Segnor; Will it be long, ere we may leave this place? Every moment that I pass here, I pass in torture!'

'I hope, not long,' said He; 'But till you can proceed with security, this Sepulchre will prove an impenetrable asylum. Here you run no risque of a discovery, and I would advise your remaining quiet for the next two or three hours.'

'Two or three hours?' exclaimed Sister Helena; 'If I stay another hour in these vaults, I shall expire with fear! Not the wealth of worlds should bribe me to undergo again what I have suffered since my coming hither. Blessed Virgin! To be in this melancholy place in the middle of night, surrounded by the mouldering bodies

of my deceased Companions, and expecting every moment to be torn in pieces by their Ghosts who wander about me, and complain, and groan, and wail in accents that make my blood run cold,

. Christ Jesus! It is enough to drive me to madness!

'Excuse me,' replied Lorenzo, 'if I am surprized that while menaced by real woes you are capable of yielding to imaginary dangers. These terrors are puerile and groundless: Combat them, holy Sister; I have promised to guard you from the Rioters, but against the attacks of superstition you must depend for protection upon yourself. The idea of Ghosts is ridiculous in the extreme; And if you continue to be swayed by ideal terrors
...'

'Ideal?' exclaimed the Nuns with one voice; 'Why we heard it ourselves, Segnor! Every one of us heard it! It was frequently repeated, and it sounded every time more melancholy and deep. You will never persuade me that we could all have been deceived. Not we, indeed; No, no; Had the noise been merely created by fancy'

'Hark! Hark!' interrupted Virginia in a voice of terror; 'God preserve us! There it is again!'

The Nuns clasped their hands together, and sank upon their knees.

Lorenzo looked round him eagerly, and was on the point of yielding to the fears which already had possessed the Women.

Universal silence prevailed. He examined the Vault, but nothing was to be seen. He now prepared to address the Nuns, and ridicule their childish apprehensions, when his attention was arrested by a deep and long-drawn groan.

'What was that?' He cried, and started.

'There, Segnor!' said Helena; 'Now you must be convinced! You have heard the noise yourself! Now judge, whether our terrors are imaginary. Since we have been here, that groaning has been repeated almost every five minutes. Doubtless, it proceeds from some Soul in pain, who wishes to be prayed out of purgatory: But none of us here dares ask it the question. As for me, were I to see an Apparition, the fright, I am very certain, would kill me out of hand.'

As She said this, a second groan was heard yet more distinctly.

The Nuns crossed themselves, and hastened to repeat their prayers

against evil Spirits. Lorenzo listened attentively. He even thought that He could distinguish sounds, as of one speaking in complaint; But distance rendered them inarticulate. The noise seemed to come from the midst of the small Vault in which He and the Nuns then were, and which a multitude of passages branching out in various directions, formed into a sort of Star. Lorenzo's curiosity which was ever awake, made him anxious to solve this mystery. He desired that silence might be kept. The Nuns obeyed him. All was hushed, till the general stillness was again disturbed by the groaning, which was repeated several times successively. He perceived it to be most audible, when upon following the sound He was conducted close to the shrine of St. Clare;

'The noise comes from hence,' said He; 'Whose is this Statue?'

Helena, to whom He addressed the question, paused for a moment.

Suddenly She clapped her hands together.

'Aye!' cried She, 'it must be so. I have discovered the meaning of these groans.'

The Nuns crowded round her, and besought her eagerly to explain

herself. She gravely replied that for time immemorial the Statue had been famous for performing miracles: From this She inferred that the Saint was concerned at the conflagration of a Convent which She protected, and expressed her grief by audible lamentations. Not having equal faith in the miraculous Saint, Lorenzo did not think this solution of the mystery quite so satisfactory, as the Nuns, who subscribed to it without hesitation. In one point, 'tis true, that He agreed with Helena.

He suspected that the groans proceeded from the Statue: The more He listened, the more was He confirmed in this idea. He drew nearer to the Image, designing to inspect it more closely: But perceiving his intention, the Nuns besought him for God's sake to desist, since if He touched the Statue, his death was inevitable.

'And in what consists the danger?' said He.

'Mother of God! In what?' replied Helena, ever eager to relate a miraculous adventure; 'If you had only heard the hundredth part of those marvellous Stories about this Statue which the Domina used to recount! She assured us often and often, that if we only dared to lay a finger upon it, we might expect the most fatal consequences. Among other things She told us that a Robber

having entered these Vaults by night, He observed yonder Ruby, whose value is inestimable. Do you see it, Segnor? It sparkles upon the third finger of the hand, in which She holds a crown of Thorns. This Jewel naturally excited the Villain's cupidity. He resolved to make himself Master of it. For this purpose He ascended the Pedestal: He supported himself by grasping the Saint's right arm, and extended his own towards the Ring. What was his surprize, when He saw the Statue's hand raised in a posture of menace, and heard her lips pronounce his eternal perdition! Penetrated with awe and consternation, He desisted from his attempt, and prepared to quit the Sepulchre. In this He also failed. Flight was denied him. He found it impossible to disengage the hand, which rested upon the right arm of the Statue. In vain did He struggle: He remained fixed to the Image, till the insupportable and fiery anguish which darted itself through his veins, compelled his shrieking for assistance.

The Sepulchre was now filled with Spectators. The Villain confessed his sacrilege, and was only released by the separation of his hand from his body. It has remained ever since fastened to the Image. The Robber turned Hermit, and led ever after an exemplary life: But yet the Saint's decree was performed, and Tradition says that He continues to haunt this Sepulchre, and

implore St. Clare's pardon with groans and lamentations. Now I think of it, those which we have just heard, may very possibly have been uttered by the Ghost of this Sinner: But of this I will not be positive. All that I can say is, that since that time no one has ever dared to touch the Statue: Then do not be foolhardy, good Segnor! For the love of heaven, give up your design, nor expose yourself unnecessarily to certain destruction.'

Not being convinced that his destruction would be so certain as Helena seemed to think it, Lorenzo persisted in his resolution. The Nuns besought him to desist in piteous terms, and even pointed out the Robber's hand, which in effect was still visible upon the arm of the Statue. This proof, as they imagined, must convince him. It was very far from doing so; and they were greatly scandalized when he declared his suspicion that the dried and shrivelled fingers had been placed there by order of the Prioress. In spite of their prayers and threats He approached the Statue. He sprang over the iron Rails which defended it, and the Saint underwent a thorough examination. The Image at first appeared to be of Stone, but proved on further inspection to be formed of no more solid materials than coloured Wood. He shook it, and attempted to move it; But it appeared to

be of a piece with the Base which it stood upon. He examined it over and over: Still no clue guided him to the solution of this mystery, for which the Nuns were become equally solicitous, when they saw that He touched the Statue with impunity. He paused, and listened: The groans were repeated at intervals, and He was convinced of being in the spot nearest to them. He mused upon this singular event, and ran over the Statue with enquiring eyes. Suddenly they rested upon the shrivelled hand. It struck him, that so particular an injunction was not given without cause, not to touch the arm of the Image. He again ascended the Pedestal; He examined the object of his attention, and discovered a small knob of iron concealed between the Saint's shoulder and what was supposed to have been the hand of the Robber. This observation delighted him. He applied his fingers to the knob, and pressed it down forcibly. Immediately a rumbling noise was heard within the Statue, as if a chain tightly stretched was flying back. Startled at the sound the timid Nuns started away, prepared to hasten from the Vault at the first appearance of danger. All remaining quiet and still, they again gathered round Lorenzo, and beheld his proceedings with anxious curiosity.

Finding that nothing followed this discovery, He descended. As He took his hand from the Saint, She trembled beneath his touch.

This created new terrors in the Spectators, who believed the Statue to be animated. Lorenzo's ideas upon the subject were widely different. He easily comprehended that the noise which He had heard, was occasioned by his having loosened a chain which attached the Image to its Pedestal. He once more attempted to move it, and succeeded without much exertion. He placed it upon the ground, and then perceived the Pedestal to be hollow, and covered at the opening with an heavy iron grate.

This excited such general curiosity that the Sisters forgot both their real and imaginary dangers. Lorenzo proceeded to raise the Grate, in which the Nuns assisted him to the utmost of their strength. The attempt was accomplished with little difficulty. A deep abyss now presented itself before them, whose thick obscurity the eye strove in vain to pierce. The rays of the Lamp were too feeble to be of much assistance. Nothing was discernible, save a flight of rough unshapen steps which sank into the yawning Gulph and were soon lost in darkness. The groans were heard no more; But All believed them to have ascended from this Cavern. As He bent over it, Lorenzo fancied that He distinguished something bright twinkling through the gloom. He gazed attentively upon the spot where it showed itself, and was convinced that He saw a small spark of light, now visible, now

disappearing. He communicated this circumstance to the Nuns:

They also perceived the spark; But when He declared his intention to descend into the Cave, they united to oppose his resolution.

All their remonstrances could not prevail on him to alter it.

None of them had courage enough to accompany him; neither could

He think of depriving them of the Lamp. Alone therefore, and in darkness, He prepared to pursue his design, while the Nuns were contented to offer up prayers for his success and safety.

The steps were so narrow and uneven, that to descend them was like walking down the side of a precipice. The obscurity by which He was surrounded rendered his footing insecure. He was obliged to proceed with great caution, lest He should miss the steps and fall into the Gulph below him. This He was several times on the point of doing. However, He arrived sooner upon solid ground than He had expected: He now found that the thick darkness and impenetrable mists which reigned through the Cavern had deceived him into the belief of its being much more profound than it proved upon inspection. He reached the foot of the Stairs unhurt: He now stopped, and looked round for the spark which had before caught his attention. He sought it in vain: All was dark and gloomy. He listened for the groans; But his ear caught no sound, except the distant murmur of the Nuns above, as

in low voices they repeated their Ave-Marias. He stood irresolute to which side He should address his steps. At all events He determined to proceed: He did so, but slowly, fearing lest instead of approaching, He should be retiring from the object of his search. The groans seemed to announce one in pain, or at least in sorrow, and He hoped to have the power of relieving the Mourner's calamities. A plaintive tone, sounding at no great distance, at length reached his hearing; He bent his course joyfully towards it. It became more audible as He advanced; and He soon beheld again the spark of light, which a low projecting Wall had hitherto concealed from him.

It proceeded from a small Lamp which was placed upon an heap of stones, and whose faint and melancholy rays served rather to point out, than dispell the horrors of a narrow gloomy dungeon formed in one side of the Cavern; It also showed several other recesses of similar construction, but whose depth was buried in obscurity. Coldly played the light upon the damp walls, whose dew-stained surface gave back a feeble reflection. A thick and pestilential fog clouded the height of the vaulted dungeon. As Lorenzo advanced, He felt a piercing chillness spread itself through his veins. The frequent groans still engaged him to move forwards. He turned towards them, and by the Lamp's glimmering

beams beheld in a corner of this loathsome abode, a Creature stretched upon a bed of straw, so wretched, so emaciated, so pale, that He doubted to think her Woman. She was half-naked: Her long dishevelled hair fell in disorder over her face, and almost entirely concealed it. One wasted Arm hung listlessly upon a tattered rug which covered her convulsed and shivering limbs: The Other was wrapped round a small bundle, and held it closely to her bosom. A large Rosary lay near her: Opposite to her was a Crucifix, on which She bent her sunk eyes fixedly, and by her side stood a Basket and a small Earthen Pitcher.

Lorenzo stopped: He was petrified with horror. He gazed upon the miserable Object with disgust and pity. He trembled at the spectacle; He grew sick at heart: His strength failed him, and his limbs were unable to support his weight. He was obliged to lean against the low Wall which was near him, unable to go forward, or to address the Sufferer. She cast her eyes towards the Staircase: The Wall concealed Lorenzo, and She observed him not.

'No one comes!' She at length murmured.

As She spoke, her voice was hollow, and rattled in her throat:

She sighed bitterly.

'No one comes!' She repeated; 'No! They have forgotten me! They will come no more!'

She paused for a moment: Then continued mournfully.

'Two days! Two long, long days, and yet no food! And yet no hope, no comfort! Foolish Woman! How can I wish to lengthen a life so wretched! Yet such a death! O! God! To perish by such a death! To linger out such ages in torture! Till now, I knew not what it was to hunger! Hark! No. No one comes! They will come no more!'

She was silent. She shivered, and drew the rug over her naked shoulders.

'I am very cold! I am still unused to the damps of this dungeon!

'Tis strange: But no matter. Colder shall I soon be, and yet not feel it--I shall be cold, cold as Thou art!'

She looked at the bundle which lay upon her breast. She bent

over it, and kissed it: Then drew back hastily, and shuddered with disgust.

'It was once so sweet! It would have been so lovely, so like him! I have lost it for ever! How a few days have changed it! I should not know it again myself! Yet it is dear to me! God! how dear! I will forget what it is: I will only remember what it was, and love it as well, as when it was so sweet! so lovely! so like him! I thought that I had wept away all my tears, but here is one still lingering.'

She wiped her eyes with a tress of her hair. She put out her hand for the Pitcher, and reached it with difficulty. She cast into it a look of hopeless enquiry. She sighed, and replaced it upon the ground.

'Quite a void! Not a drop! Not one drop left to cool my scorched-up burning palate! Now would I give treasures for a draught of water! And they are God's Servants, who make me suffer thus! They think themselves holy, while they torture me like Fiends! They are cruel and unfeeling; And 'tis they who bid me repent; And 'tis they, who threaten me with eternal perdition! Saviour, Saviour! You think not so!'

She again fixed her eyes upon the Crucifix, took her Rosary, and while She told her beads, the quick motion of her lips declared her to be praying with fervency.

While He listened to her melancholy accents, Lorenzo's sensibility became yet more violently affected. The first sight of such misery had given a sensible shock to his feelings: But that being past, He now advanced towards the Captive. She heard his steps, and uttering a cry of joy, dropped the Rosary.

'Hark! Hark! Hark!' She cried: 'Some one comes!'

She strove to raise herself, but her strength was unequal to the attempt: She fell back, and as She sank again upon the bed of straw, Lorenzo heard the rattling of heavy chains. He still approached, while the Prisoner thus continued.

'Is it you, Camilla? You are come then at last? Oh! it was time! I thought that you had forsaken me; that I was doomed to perish of hunger. Give me to drink, Camilla, for pity's sake! I am faint with long fasting, and grown so weak that I cannot raise myself from the ground. Good Camilla, give me to drink, lest I

expire before you!

Fearing that surprize in her enfeebled state might be fatal,
Lorenzo was at a loss how to address her.

'It is not Camilla,' said He at length, speaking in a slow and
gentle voice.

'Who is it then?' replied the Sufferer: 'Alix, perhaps, or
Violante. My eyes are grown so dim and feeble that I cannot
distinguish your features. But whichever it is, if your breast
is sensible of the least compassion, if you are not more cruel
than Wolves and Tigers, take pity on my sufferings. You know
that I am dying for want of sustenance. This is the third day,
since these lips have received nourishment. Do you bring me
food? Or come you only to announce my death, and learn how long
I have yet to exist in agony?'

'You mistake my business,' replied Lorenzo; 'I am no Emissary of
the cruel Prioress. I pity your sorrows, and come hither to
relieve them.'

'To relieve them?' repeated the Captive; 'Said you, to relieve

them?'

At the same time starting from the ground, and supporting herself upon her hands, She gazed upon the Stranger earnestly.

'Great God! It is no illusion! A Man! Speak! Who are you?

What brings you hither? Come you to save me, to restore me to liberty, to life and light? Oh! speak, speak quickly, lest I encourage an hope whose disappointment will destroy me.'

'Be calm!' replied Lorenzo in a voice soothing and compassionate;

'The Domina of whose cruelty you complain, has already paid the forfeit of her offences: You have nothing more to fear from her.

A few minutes will restore you to liberty, and the embraces of your Friends from whom you have been secluded. You may rely upon my protection. Give me your hand, and be not fearful. Let me conduct you where you may receive those attentions which your feeble state requires.'

'Oh! Yes! Yes! Yes!' cried the Prisoner with an exulting shriek; 'There is a God then, and a just one! Joy! Joy! I shall once more breath the fresh air, and view the light of the

glorious sunbeams! I will go with you! Stranger, I will go with you! Oh! Heaven will bless you for pitying an Unfortunate! But this too must go with me,' She added pointing to the small bundle which She still clasped to her bosom; 'I cannot part with this. I will bear it away: It shall convince the world how dreadful are the abodes so falsely termed religious. Good Stranger, lend me your hand to rise: I am faint with want, and sorrow, and sickness, and my forces have quite forsaken me! So, that is well!'

As Lorenzo stooped to raise her, the beams of the Lamp struck full upon his face.

'Almighty God!' She exclaimed; 'Is it possible! That look! Those features! Oh! Yes, it is, it is!'

She extended her arms to throw them round him; But her enfeebled frame was unable to sustain the emotions which agitated her bosom. She fainted, and again sank upon the bed of straw.

Lorenzo was surprized at her last exclamation. He thought that He had before heard such accents as her hollow voice had just formed, but where He could not remember. He saw that in her

dangerous situation immediate physical aid was absolutely necessary, and He hastened to convey her from the dungeon. He was at first prevented from doing so by a strong chain fastened round the prisoner's body, and fixing her to the neighbouring Wall. However, his natural strength being aided by anxiety to relieve the Unfortunate, He soon forced out the Staple to which one end of the Chain was attached. Then taking the Captive in his arms, He bent his course towards the Staircase. The rays of the Lamp above, as well as the murmur of female voices, guided his steps. He gained the Stairs, and in a few minutes after arrived at the iron-grate.

The Nuns during his absence had been terribly tormented by curiosity and apprehension: They were equally surprized and delighted on seeing him suddenly emerge from the Cave. Every heart was filled with compassion for the miserable Creature whom He bore in his arms. While the Nuns, and Virginia in particular, employed themselves in striving to recall her to her senses, Lorenzo related in few words the manner of his finding her. He then observed to them that by this time the tumult must have been quelled, and that He could now conduct them to their Friends without danger. All were eager to quit the Sepulchre: Still to prevent all possibility of ill-usage, they besought Lorenzo to

venture out first alone, and examine whether the Coast was clear. With this request He complied. Helena offered to conduct him to the Staircase, and they were on the point of departing, when a strong light flashed from several passages upon the adjacent walls. At the same time Steps were heard of people approaching hastily, and whose number seemed to be considerable. The Nuns were greatly alarmed at this circumstance: They supposed their retreat to be discovered, and the Rioters to be advancing in pursuit of them. Hastily quitting the Prisoner who remained insensible, they crowded round Lorenzo, and claimed his promise to protect them. Virginia alone forgot her own danger by striving to relieve the sorrows of Another. She supported the Sufferer's head upon her knees, bathing her temples with rose-water, chafing her cold hands, and sprinkling her face with tears which were drawn from her by compassion. The Strangers approaching nearer, Lorenzo was enabled to dispel the fears of the Suppliants. His name, pronounced by a number of voices among which He distinguished the Duke's, pealed along the Vaults, and convinced him that He was the object of their search. He communicated this intelligence to the Nuns, who received it with rapture. A few moments after confirmed his idea. Don Ramirez, as well as the Duke, appeared, followed by Attendants with Torches. They had been seeking him through the Vaults, in order

to let him know that the Mob was dispersed, and the riot entirely over. Lorenzo recounted briefly his adventure in the Cavern, and explained how much the Unknown was in want of medical assistance. He besought the Duke to take charge of her, as well as of the Nuns and Pensioners.

'As for me,' said He, 'Other cares demand my attention. While you with one half of the Archers convey these Ladies to their respective homes, I wish the other half to be left with me. I will examine the Cavern below, and pervade the most secret recesses of the Sepulchre. I cannot rest till convinced that yonder wretched Victim was the only one confined by Superstition in these vaults.'

The Duke applauded his intention. Don Ramirez offered to assist him in his enquiry, and his proposal was accepted with gratitude.

The Nuns having made their acknowledgments to Lorenzo, committed themselves to the care of his Uncle, and were conducted from the Sepulchre. Virginia requested that the Unknown might be given to her in charge, and promised to let Lorenzo know whenever She was sufficiently recovered to accept his visits. In truth, She made this promise more from consideration for herself than for either

Lorenzo or the Captive. She had witnessed his politeness, gentleness, and intrepidity with sensible emotion. She wished earnestly to preserve his acquaintance; and in addition to the sentiments of pity which the Prisoner excited, She hoped that her attention to this Unfortunate would raise her a degree in the esteem of Lorenzo. She had no occasion to trouble herself upon this head. The kindness already displayed by her and the tender concern which She had shown for the Sufferer had gained her an exalted place in his good graces. While occupied in alleviating the Captive's sorrows, the nature of her employment adorned her with new charms, and rendered her beauty a thousand times more interesting. Lorenzo viewed her with admiration and delight: He considered her as a ministering Angel descended to the aid of afflicted innocence; nor could his heart have resisted her attractions, had it not been steeled by the remembrance of Antonia.

The Duke now conveyed the Nuns in safety to the Dwellings of their respective Friends. The rescued Prisoner was still insensible and gave no signs of life, except by occasional groans. She was borne upon a sort of litter; Virginia, who was constantly by the side of it, was apprehensive that exhausted by long abstinence, and shaken by the sudden change from bonds and

darkness to liberty and light, her frame would never get the better of the shock. Lorenzo and Don Ramirez still remained in the Sepulchre. After deliberating upon their proceedings, it was resolved that to prevent losing time, the Archers should be divided into two Bodies: That with one Don Ramirez should examine the cavern, while Lorenzo with the other might penetrate into the further Vaults. This being arranged, and his Followers being provided with Torches, Don Ramirez advanced to the Cavern. He had already descended some steps when He heard People approaching hastily from the interior part of the Sepulchre. This surprized him, and He quitted the Cave precipitately.

'Do you hear footsteps?' said Lorenzo; 'Let us bend our course towards them. 'Tis from this side that they seem to proceed.'

At that moment a loud and piercing shriek induced him to quicken his steps.

'Help! Help, for God's sake!' cried a voice, whose melodious tone penetrated Lorenzo's heart with terror.

He flew towards the cry with the rapidity of lightning, and was followed by Don Ramirez with equal swiftness.

