

BOOK VI.

SUPERSTITION DESERTING FAITH.

Why do I yield to that suggestion, Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair.--Shakespeare

CHAPTER 6.I.

Therefore the Genii were painted with a platter full of garlands and flowers in one hand, and a whip in the other.—Alexander Ross, “Mystag. Poet.”

According to the order of the events related in this narrative, the departure of Zanoni and Viola from the Greek isle, in which two happy years appear to have been passed, must have been somewhat later in date than the arrival of Glyndon at Marseilles. It must have been in the course of the year 1791 when Viola fled from Naples with her mysterious lover, and when Glyndon sought Mejnour in the fatal castle. It is now towards the close of 1793, when our story again returns to Zanoni. The stars of winter shone down on the lagunes of Venice. The hum of the Rialto was hushed,—the last loiterers had deserted the Place of St. Mark’s, and only at distant intervals might be heard the oars of the rapid gondolas, bearing reveller or lover to his home. But lights still flitted to and fro across the windows of one of the Palladian palaces, whose shadow slept in the great canal; and within the palace watched the twin Eumenides that never sleep for Man,—Fear and Pain.

“I will make thee the richest man in all Venice, if thou savest her.”

“Signor,” said the leech; “your gold cannot control death, and the will of Heaven, signor, unless within the next hour there is some blessed change, prepare your courage.”

Ho--ho, Zanoni! man of mystery and might, who hast walked amidst the passions of the world, with no changes on thy brow, art thou tossed at last upon the billows of tempestuous fear? Does thy spirit reel to and fro?--knowest thou at last the strength and the majesty of Death?

He fled, trembling, from the pale-faced man of art,—fled through stately hall and long-drawn corridor, and gained a remote chamber in the palace, which other step than his was not permitted to profane. Out with thy herbs and vessels. Break from the enchanted elements, O silvery-azure flame! Why comes he not,— the Son of the Starbeam! Why is Adon-Ai deaf to thy solemn call? It comes not,—the luminous and delightsome Presence! Cabalist! are thy charms in vain? Has thy throne vanished from the realms of space? Thou standest pale and trembling. Pale trembler! not thus didst thou look when the things of glory gathered at thy spell. Never to the pale trembler bow the things of glory: the soul, and not the herbs, nor the silvery-azure flame, nor the spells of the Cabala, commands the children of the air; and THY soul, by Love and Death, is made sceptreless and dethroned!

At length the flame quivers,—the air grows cold as the wind in charnels. A thing not of earth is present,—a mistlike, formless thing. It cowers in the distance,—a silent Horror! it rises; it creeps;

it nears thee--dark in its mantle of dusky haze; and under its veil it looks on thee with its livid, malignant eyes,-- the thing of malignant eyes!

“Ha, young Chaldean! young in thy countless ages,--young as when, cold to pleasure and to beauty, thou stoodest on the old Fire- tower, and heardest the starry silence whisper to thee the last mystery that baffles Death,--fearest thou Death at length? Is thy knowledge but a circle that brings thee back whence thy wanderings began! Generations on generations have withered since we two met! Lo! thou beholdest me now!”

“But I behold thee without fear! Though beneath thine eyes thousands have perished; though, where they burn, spring up the foul poisons of the human heart, and to those whom thou canst subject to thy will, thy presence glares in the dreams of the raving maniac, or blackens the dungeon of despairing crime, thou art not my vanquisher, but my slave!”

“And as a slave will I serve thee! Command thy slave, O beautiful Chaldean! Hark, the wail of women!--hark, the sharp shriek of thy beloved one! Death is in thy palace! Adon-Ai comes not to thy call. Only where no cloud of the passion and the flesh veils the eye of the Serene Intelligence can the Sons of the Starbeam glide to man. But I can aid thee!--hark!” And Zanoni heard distinctly in his heart, even at that distance from the chamber, the voice of Viola calling in delirium on her beloved one.

“Oh, Viola, I can save thee not!” exclaimed the seer, passionately; “my love for thee has made me powerless!”

“Not powerless; I can gift thee with the art to save her,--I can place healing in thy hand!”

“For both?--child and mother,--for both?”

“Both!”

A convulsion shook the limbs of the seer,--a mighty struggle shook him as a child: the Humanity and the Hour conquered the repugnant spirit.

“I yield! Mother and child--save both!”

...

In the dark chamber lay Viola, in the sharpest agonies of travail; life seemed rending itself away in the groans and cries that spoke of pain in the midst of frenzy; and still, in groan and cry, she called on Zanoni, her beloved. The physician looked to the clock; on it beat: the Heart of Time,--regularly and slowly,--Heart that never sympathised with Life, and never flagged for Death! “The cries are fainter,” said the leech; “in ten minutes more all will be past.”

Fool! the minutes laugh at thee; Nature, even now, like a blue sky through a shattered temple, is smiling through the tortured frame. The breathing grows more calm and hushed; the voice of delirium is dumb,--a sweet dream has come to Viola. Is it a dream, or is it the soul that sees? She thinks suddenly that she is with Zanoni, that her burning head is pillowed on his bosom; she thinks, as he gazes on her, that his eyes dispel the tortures that prey upon her,--the touch of his hand cools the fever on her brow; she hears his voice in murmurs,--it is a music from which the fiends fly. Where is the mountain that seemed to press upon her temples? Like a vapour, it rolls away. In the frosts of the winter night, she sees the sun laughing in luxurious heaven,--she hears the whisper of green leaves; the beautiful world, valley and stream and woodland, lie before, and with a common voice speak to her, “We are not yet past for thee!” Fool of drugs and formula, look to thy dial-plate!--the hand has moved on; the minutes are with Eternity; the soul thy sentence would have dismissed, still dwells on the shores of Time. She sleeps: the fever abates; the convulsions are gone; the living rose blooms upon her cheek; the crisis is past! Husband, thy wife lives; lover, thy universe is no solitude! Heart of Time, beat on! A while, a little while,--joy! joy! joy!--father, embrace thy child!

CHAPTER 6.II.

Tristis Erinnys Praetulit infaustas sanguinolenta faces. Ovid.
(Erinnys, doleful and bloody, extends the unblessed torches.)

And they placed the child in the father's arms! As silently he bent over it, tears--tears, how human!--fell from his eyes like rain! And the little one smiled through the tears that bathed its cheeks! Ah, with what happy tears we welcome the stranger into our sorrowing world! With what agonising tears we dismiss the stranger back to the angels! Unselfish joy; but how selfish is the sorrow!

And now through the silent chamber a faint sweet voice is heard, --the young mother's voice.

"I am here: I am by thy side!" murmured Zanoni.

The mother smiled, and clasped his hand, and asked no more; she was contented.

...

Viola recovered with a rapidity that startled the physician; and the young stranger thrived as if it already loved the world to which it had descended. From that hour Zanoni seemed to live in the infant's life, and in that life the souls of mother and father met as in a new bond. Nothing more beautiful than this infant had eye ever dwelt upon. It was strange to the nurses that it came not wailing to the light, but smiled to the light as a thing familiar to it before. It never uttered one cry of childish pain. In its very repose it seemed to be listening to some happy voice within its heart: it seemed itself so happy. In its eyes you would have thought intellect already kindled, though it had not yet found a language. Already it seemed to recognise its parents; already it stretched forth its arms when Zanoni bent over the bed, in which it breathed and bloomed,--the budding flower! And from that bed he was rarely absent: gazing upon it with his serene, delighted eyes, his soul seemed to feed its own. At night and in utter darkness he was still there; and Viola often heard him murmuring over it as she lay in a half-sleep. But the murmur was in a language strange to her; and sometimes when she heard she feared, and vague, undefined superstitions came back to her,--the superstitions of earlier youth. A mother fears everything, even the gods, for her new-born. The mortals shrieked aloud when of old they saw the great Demeter seeking to make their child immortal.

But Zanoni, wrapped in the sublime designs that animated the human love to which he was now awakened, forgot all, even all he had forfeited or incurred, in the love that blinded him.

But the dark, formless thing, though he nor invoked nor saw it, crept, often, round and round him, and often sat by the infant's couch, with its hateful eyes.

CHAPTER 6.III.

Fuscis tellurem amplectitur alis.--Virgil.
(Embraces the Earth with gloomy wings.)

Letter from Zanoni to Mejnour.

Mejnour, Humanity, with all its sorrows and its joys, is mine once more. Day by day, I am forging my own fetters. I live in other lives than my own, and in them I have lost more than half my empire. Not lifting them aloft, they drag me by the strong bands of the affections to their own earth. Exiled from the beings only visible to the most abstract sense, the grim Enemy that guards the Threshold has entangled me in its web. Canst thou credit me, when I tell thee that I have accepted its gifts, and endure the forfeit? Ages must pass ere the brighter beings can again obey the spirit that has bowed to the ghastly one! And--

...

In this hope, then, Mejnour, I triumph still; I yet have supreme power over this young life. Insensibly and inaudibly my soul speaks to its own, and prepares it even now. Thou knowest that for the pure and unsullied infant spirit, the ordeal has no terror and no peril. Thus unceasingly I nourish it with no unholy light; and ere it yet be conscious of the gift, it will gain the privileges it has been mine to attain: the child, by slow and scarce-seen degrees, will communicate its own attributes to the mother; and content to see Youth forever radiant on the brows of the two that now suffice to fill up my whole infinity of thought, shall I regret the airier kingdom that vanishes hourly from my grasp? But thou, whose vision is still clear and serene, look into the far deeps shut from my gaze, and counsel me, or forewarn! I know that the gifts of the Being whose race is so hostile to our own are, to the common seeker, fatal and perfidious as itself. And hence, when, at the outskirts of knowledge, which in earlier ages men called Magic, they encountered the things of the hostile tribes, they believed the apparitions to be fiends, and, by fancied compacts, imagined they had signed away their souls; as if man could give for an eternity that over which he has control but while he lives! Dark, and shrouded forever from human sight, dwell the demon rebels, in their impenetrable realm; in them is no breath of the Divine One. In every human creature the Divine One breathes; and He alone can judge His own hereafter, and allot its new career and home. Could man sell himself to the fiend, man could prejudice himself, and arrogate the disposal of eternity! But these creatures, modifications as they are of matter, and some with more than the malignancy of man, may well seem, to fear and unreasoning superstition, the representatives of fiends. And from the darkest and mightiest of them I have accepted a boon,--the secret that startled Death from those so dear to me. Can I not trust that enough of power yet remains to me to baffle or to daunt the Phantom, if it seek to pervert the gift? Answer me, Mejnour, for in the darkness that veils me, I see only the pure eyes of the new-born; I hear only the low beating of my heart. Answer me, thou whose wisdom is without love!

Mejnour to Zanoni.

Rome.

Fallen One!--I see before thee Evil and Death and Woe! Thou to have relinquished Adon-Ai for the nameless Terror,--the heavenly stars for those fearful eyes! Thou, at the last to be the victim of the Larva of the dreary Threshold, that, in thy first novitiate, fled, withered and shrivelled, from thy kingly brow! When, at the primary grades of initiation, the pupil I took from thee on the shores of the changed Parthenope, fell senseless and cowering before that Phantom-Darkness, I knew that his spirit was not formed to front the worlds beyond; for FEAR is the attraction of man to earthiest earth, and while he fears, he cannot soar. But THOU, seest thou not that to love is but to fear; seest thou not that the power of which thou boastest over the malignant one is already gone? It awes, it masters thee; it will mock thee and betray. Lose not a moment; come to me. If there can yet be sufficient sympathy between us, through MY eyes shalt thou see, and perhaps guard against the perils that, shapeless yet, and looming through the shadow,

marshal themselves around thee and those whom thy very love has doomed. Come from all the ties of thy fond humanity; they will but obscure thy vision! Come forth from thy fears and hopes, thy desires and passions. Come, as alone Mind can be the monarch and the seer, shining through the home it tenants,--a pure, impressionless, sublime intelligence!

Chapter 6.IV.

Plus que vous ne pensez ce moment est terrible.--La Harpe, "Le Comte de Warwick," Act 3, sc. 5.

(The moment is more terrible than you think.)

For the first time since their union, Zanoni and Viola were separated,--Zanoni went to Rome on important business. "It was," he said, "but for a few days;" and he went so suddenly that there was little time either for surprise or sorrow. But first parting is always more melancholy than it need be: it seems an interruption to the existence which Love shares with Love; it makes the heart feel what a void life will be when the last parting shall succeed, as succeed it must, the first. But Viola had a new companion; she was enjoying that most delicious novelty which ever renews the youth and dazzles the eyes of woman. As the mistress--the wife--she leans on another; from another are reflected her happiness, her being,--as an orb that takes light from its sun. But now, in turn, as the mother, she is raised from dependence into power; it is another that leans on her,--a star has sprung into space, to which she herself has become the sun!

A few days,--but they will be sweet through the sorrow! A few days,--every hour of which seems an era to the infant, over whom bend watchful the eyes and the heart. From its waking to its sleep, from its sleep to its waking, is a revolution in Time. Every gesture to be noted,--every smile to seem a new progress into the world it has come to bless! Zanoni has gone,--the last dash of the oar is lost, the last speck of the gondola has vanished from the ocean-streets of Venice! Her infant is sleeping in the cradle at the mother's feet; and she thinks through her tears what tales of the fairy-land, that spreads far and wide, with a thousand wonders, in that narrow bed, she shall have to tell the father! Smile on, weep on, young mother! Already the fairest leaf in the wild volume is closed for thee, and the invisible finger turns the page!

...

By the bridge of the Rialto stood two Venetians--ardent Republicans and Democrats--looking to the Revolution of France as the earthquake which must shatter their own expiring and vicious constitution, and give equality of ranks and rights to Venice.

"Yes, Cottalto," said one; "my correspondent of Paris has promised to elude all obstacles, and baffle all danger. He will arrange with us the hour of revolt, when the legions of France shall be within hearing of our guns. One day in this week, at this hour, he is to meet me here. This is but the fourth day."

He had scarce said these words before a man, wrapped in his roquelaire, emerging from one of the narrow streets to the left, halted opposite the pair, and eying them for a few moments with an earnest scrutiny, whispered, "Salut!"

"Et fraternite," answered the speaker.

"You, then, are the brave Dandolo with whom the Comite deputed me to correspond? And this citizen--"

“Is Cottalto, whom my letters have so often mentioned.” (I know not if the author of the original MSS. designs, under these names, to introduce the real Cottalto and the true Dandolo, who, in 1797, distinguished themselves by their sympathy with the French, and their democratic ardor.--Ed.)

“Health and brotherhood to him! I have much to impart to you both. I will meet you at night, Dandolo. But in the streets we may be observed.”

“And I dare not appoint my own house; tyranny makes spies of our very walls. But the place herein designated is secure;” and he slipped an address into the hand of his correspondent.

“To-night, then, at nine! Meanwhile I have other business.” The man paused, his colour changed, and it was with an eager and passionate voice that he resumed,--

“Your last letter mentioned this wealthy and mysterious visitor, --this Zanoni. He is still at Venice?”

“I heard that he had left this morning; but his wife is still here.”

“His wife!--that is well!”

“What know you of him? Think you that he would join us? His wealth would be--”

“His house, his address,--quick!” interrupted the man.

“The Palazzo di --, on the Grand Canal.”

“I thank you,--at nine we meet.”

The man hurried on through the street from which he had emerged; and, passing by the house in which he had taken up his lodging (he had arrived at Venice the night before), a woman who stood by the door caught his arm.

“Monsieur,” she said in French, “I have been watching for your return. Do you understand me? I will brave all, risk all, to go back with you to France,--to stand, through life or in death, by my husband’s side!”

“Citoyenne, I promised your husband that, if such your choice, I would hazard my own safety to aid it. But think again! Your husband is one of the faction which Robespierre’s eyes have already marked; he cannot fly. All France is become a prison to the ‘suspect.’ You do not endanger yourself by return. Frankly, citoyenne, the fate you would share may be the guillotine. I speak (as you know by his letter) as your husband bade me.”

“Monsieur, I will return with you,” said the woman, with a smile upon her pale face.

“And yet you deserted your husband in the fair sunshine of the Revolution, to return to him amidst its storms and thunder,” said the man, in a tone half of wonder, half rebuke.

“Because my father’s days were doomed; because he had no safety but in flight to a foreign land; because he was old and penniless, and had none but me to work for him; because my husband was not then in danger, and my father was! HE is dead-- dead! My husband is in danger now. The daughter’s duties are no more,--the wife’s return!”

“Be it so, citoyenne; on the third night I depart. Before then you may retract your choice.”

“Never!”

A dark smile passed over the man’s face.

“O guillotine!” he said, “how many virtues hast thou brought to light! Well may they call thee ‘A Holy Mother!’ O gory guillotine!”

He passed on muttering to himself, hailed a gondola, and was soon amidst the crowded waters of the Grand Canal.

CHAPTER 6.V.

Ce que j'ignore

Est plus triste peut-etre et plus affreux encore.--La Harpe, "Le Comte de Warwick," Act 5, sc. 1.
(That which I know not is, perhaps, more sad and fearful still.)

The casement stood open, and Viola was seated by it. Beneath sparkled the broad waters in the cold but cloudless sunlight; and to that fair form, that half-averted face, turned the eyes of many a gallant cavalier, as their gondolas glided by.

But at last, in the centre of the canal, one of these dark vessels halted motionless, as a man fixed his gaze from its lattice upon that stately palace. He gave the word to the rowers,--the vessel approached the marge. The stranger quitted the gondola; he passed up the broad stairs; he entered the palace. Weep on, smile no more, young mother!--the last page is turned!

An attendant entered the room, and gave to Viola a card, with these words in English, "Viola, I must see you! Clarence Glyndon."

Oh, yes, how gladly Viola would see him; how gladly speak to him of her happiness, of Zanoni!--how gladly show to him her child! Poor Clarence! she had forgotten him till now, as she had all the fever of her earlier life,--its dreams, its vanities, its poor excitement, the lamps of the gaudy theatre, the applause of the noisy crowd.

He entered. She started to behold him, so changed were his gloomy brow, his resolute, careworn features, from the graceful form and careless countenance of the artist-lover. His dress, though not mean, was rude, neglected, and disordered. A wild, desperate, half-savage air had supplanted that ingenuous mien, diffident in its grace, earnest in its diffidence, which had once characterised the young worshipper of Art, the dreaming aspirant after some starrier lore.

"Is it you?" she said at last. "Poor Clarence, how changed!"

"Changed!" he said abruptly, as he placed himself by her side. "And whom am I to thank, but the fiends--the sorcerers--who have seized upon thy existence, as upon mine? Viola, hear me. A few weeks since the news reached me that you were in Venice. Under other pretences, and through innumerable dangers, I have come hither, risking liberty, perhaps life, if my name and career are known in Venice, to warn and save you. Changed, you call me!-- changed without; but what is that to the ravages within? Be warned, be warned in time!"

The voice of Glyndon, sounding hollow and sepulchral, alarmed Viola even more than his words. Pale, haggard, emaciated, he seemed almost as one risen from the dead, to appall and awe her. "What," she said, at last, in a faltering voice,--"what wild words do you utter! Can you--"

"Listen!" interrupted Glyndon, laying his hand upon her arm, and its touch was as cold as death,--"listen! You have heard of the old stories of men who have leagued themselves with devils for the attainment of preternatural powers. Those stories are not fables. Such men live. Their delight is to increase the unhallowed circle of wretches like themselves. If their proselytes fail in the ordeal, the demon seizes them, even in this life, as it hath seized me!--if they succeed, woe, yea, a more lasting woe! There is another life, where no spells can charm the evil one, or allay the torture. I have come from a scene where blood flows in rivers,--where Death stands by the side of the bravest and the highest, and the one monarch is the Guillotine; but all the mortal perils with which men can be beset, are nothing to the dreariness of the chamber where the Horror that passes death moves and stirs!"

It was then that Glyndon, with a cold and distinct precision, detailed, as he had done to Adela, the initiation through which he had gone. He described, in words that froze the blood of his listener, the appearance of that formless phantom, with the eyes that seared the brain and congealed the marrow of those who beheld. Once seen, it never was to be exorcised. It came at its own will, prompting black thoughts,--whispering strange temptations. Only in scenes of turbulent excitement was it absent! Solitude, serenity, the struggling desires after peace and virtue,--THESE were the elements it loved to haunt! Bewildered, terror-stricken, the wild account confirmed by the dim impressions that never, in the depth and confidence of affection, had been closely examined, but rather banished as soon as felt,--that the life and attributes of Zanoni were not like those of mortals,--impressions which her own love had made her hitherto censure as suspicions that wronged, and which, thus mitigated, had perhaps only served to rivet the fascinated chains in which he bound her heart and senses, but which now, as Glyndon's awful narrative filled her with contagious dread, half unbound the very spells they had woven before,--Viola started up in fear, not for HERSELF, and clasped her child in her arms!

"Unhappiest one!" cried Glyndon, shuddering, "hast thou indeed given birth to a victim thou canst not save? Refuse it sustenance,--let it look to thee in vain for food! In the grave, at least, there are repose and peace!"

Then there came back to Viola's mind the remembrance of Zanoni's night-long watches by that cradle, and the fear which even then had crept over her as she heard his murmured half-chanted words. And as the child looked at her with its clear, steadfast eye, in the strange intelligence of that look there was something that only confirmed her awe. So there both Mother and Forewarner stood in silence,--the sun smiling upon them through the casement, and dark by the cradle, though they saw it not, sat the motionless, veiled Thing!

But by degrees better and juster and more grateful memories of the past returned to the young mother. The features of the infant, as she gazed, took the aspect of the absent father. A voice seemed to break from those rosy lips, and say, mournfully, "I speak to thee in thy child. In return for all my love for thee and thine, dost thou distrust me, at the first sentence of a maniac who accuses?"

Her breast heaved, her stature rose, her eyes shone with a serene and holy light.

"Go, poor victim of thine own delusions," she said to Glyndon; "I would not believe mine own senses, if they accused ITS father! And what knowest thou of Zanoni? What relation have Mejnour and the grisly spectres he invoked, with the radiant image with which thou wouldst connect them?"

"Thou wilt learn too soon," replied Glyndon, gloomily. "And the very phantom that haunts me, whispers, with its bloodless lips, that its horrors await both thine and thee! I take not thy decision yet; before I leave Venice we shall meet again."

He said, and departed.

CHAPTER 6.VI.

Quel est l'égarement ou ton ame se livre?

La Harpe,--"Le Comte de Warwick," Act 4, sc. 4.

(To what delusion does thy soul abandon itself?)

Alas, Zanoni! the aspirer, the dark, bright one!--didst thou think that the bond between the survivor of ages and the daughter of a day could endure? Didst thou not foresee that, until the ordeal was past, there could be no equality between thy wisdom and her love? Art thou absent now seeking amidst thy solemn secrets the solemn safeguards for child and mother, and forgettest thou that the phantom that served thee hath power over its own gifts,--over the lives it taught thee to rescue from the grave? Dost thou not know that Fear and Distrust, once sown in the heart of Love, spring up from the seed into a forest that excludes the stars? Dark, bright one! the hateful eyes glare beside the mother and the child!

All that day Viola was distracted by a thousand thoughts and terrors, which fled as she examined them to settle back the darklier. She remembered that, as she had once said to Glyndon, her very childhood had been haunted with strange forebodings, that she was ordained for some preternatural doom. She remembered that, as she had told him this, sitting by the seas that slumbered in the arms of the Bay of Naples, he, too, had acknowledged the same forebodings, and a mysterious sympathy had appeared to unite their fates. She remembered, above all, that, comparing their entangled thoughts, both had then said, that with the first sight of Zanoni the foreboding, the instinct, had spoken to their hearts more audibly than before, whispering that "with HIM was connected the secret of the un conjectured life."

And now, when Glyndon and Viola met again, the haunting fears of childhood, thus referred to, woke from their enchanted sleep. With Glyndon's terror she felt a sympathy, against which her reason and her love struggled in vain. And still, when she turned her looks upon her child, it watched her with that steady, earnest eye, and its lips moved as if it sought to speak to her, --but no sound came. The infant refused to sleep. Whenever she gazed upon its face, still those wakeful, watchful eyes!--and in their earnestness, there spoke something of pain, of upbraiding, of accusation. They chilled her as she looked. Unable to endure, of herself, this sudden and complete revulsion of all the feelings which had hitherto made up her life, she formed the resolution natural to her land and creed; she sent for the priest who had habitually attended her at Venice, and to him she confessed, with passionate sobs and intense terror, the doubts that had broken upon her. The good father, a worthy and pious man, but with little education and less sense, one who held (as many of the lower Italians do to this day) even a poet to be a sort of sorcerer, seemed to shut the gates of hope upon her heart. His remonstrances were urgent, for his horror was unfeigned. He joined with Glyndon in imploring her to fly, if she felt the smallest doubt that her husband's pursuits were of the nature which the Roman Church had benevolently burned so many scholars for adopting. And even the little that Viola could communicate seemed, to the ignorant ascetic, irrefragable proof of sorcery and witchcraft; he had, indeed, previously heard some of the strange rumours which followed the path of Zanoni, and was therefore prepared to believe the worst; the worthy Bartolomeo would have made no bones of sending Watt to the stake, had he heard him speak of the steam-engine. But Viola, as untutored as himself, was terrified by his rough and vehement eloquence,-- terrified, for by that penetration which Catholic priests, however dull, generally acquire, in their vast experience of the human heart hourly exposed to their probe, Bartolomeo spoke less of danger to herself than to her child. "Sorcerers," said he, "have ever sought the most to decoy and seduce the souls of the young,-- nay, the infant;" and therewith he entered into a long catalogue of legendary fables, which he quoted as historical facts. All at which an English woman would have smiled, appalled the tender but superstitious Neapolitan; and when the priest left her, with solemn rebukes and grave accusations of a dereliction of her duties to her child, if she hesitated to fly with it from an abode

polluted by the darker powers and unhallowed arts, Viola, still clinging to the image of Zanoni, sank into a passive lethargy which held her very reason in suspense.

The hours passed: night came on; the house was hushed; and Viola, slowly awakened from the numbness and torpor which had usurped her faculties, tossed to and fro on her couch, restless and perturbed. The stillness became intolerable; yet more intolerable the sound that alone broke it, the voice of the clock, knelling moment after moment to its grave. The moments, at last, seemed themselves to find voice,--to gain shape. She thought she beheld them springing, wan and fairy-like, from the womb of darkness; and ere they fell again, extinguished, into that womb, their grave, their low small voices murmured, "Woman, we report to eternity all that is done in time! What shall we report of thee, O guardian of a new-born soul?" She became sensible that her fancies had brought a sort of partial delirium, that she was in a state between sleep and waking, when suddenly one thought became more predominant than the rest. The chamber which, in that and every house they had inhabited, even that in the Greek isles, Zanoni had set apart to a solitude on which none might intrude, the threshold of which even Viola's step was forbid to cross, and never, hitherto, in that sweet repose of confidence which belongs to contented love, had she even felt the curious desire to disobey,--now, that chamber drew her towards it. Perhaps THERE might be found a somewhat to solve the riddle, to dispel or confirm the doubt: that thought grew and deepened in its intenseness; it fastened on her as with a palpable and irresistible grasp; it seemed to raise her limbs without her will.

And now, through the chamber, along the galleries thou glidest, O lovely shape! sleep-walking, yet awake. The moon shines on thee as thou glidest by, casement after casement, white-robed and wandering spirit!--thine arms crossed upon thy bosom, thine eyes fixed and open, with a calm unfeared awe. Mother, it is thy child that leads thee on! The fairy moments go before thee; thou hearest still the clock-knell tolling them to their graves behind. On, gliding on, thou hast gained the door; no lock bars thee, no magic spell drives thee back. Daughter of the dust, thou standest alone with night in the chamber where, pale and numberless, the hosts of space have gathered round the seer!

CHAPTER 6.VII.

Des Erdenlebens

Schweres Traumbild sinkt, und sinkt, und sinkt.--"Das Ideal und das Lebens."

(The Dream Shape of the heavy earthly life sinks, and sinks, and sinks.)

She stood within the chamber, and gazed around her; no signs by which an inquisitor of old could have detected the scholar of the Black Art were visible. No crucibles and caldrons, no brass-bound volumes and ciphered girdles, no skulls and cross-bones. Quietly streamed the broad moonlight through the desolate chamber with its bare, white walls. A few bunches of withered herbs, a few antique vessels of bronze, placed carelessly on a wooden form, were all which that curious gaze could identify with the pursuits of the absent owner. The magic, if it existed, dwelt in the artificer, and the materials, to other hands, were but herbs and bronze. So is it ever with thy works and wonders, O Genius, --Seeker of the Stars! Words themselves are the common property of all men; yet, from words themselves, Thou Architect of Immortalities, pilest

up temples that shall outlive the Pyramids, and the very leaf of the Papyrus becomes a Shinar, stately with towers, round which the Deluge of Ages, shall roar in vain!

But in that solitude has the Presence that there had invoked its wonders left no enchantment of its own? It seemed so; for as Viola stood in the chamber, she became sensible that some mysterious change was at work within herself. Her blood coursed rapidly, and with a sensation of delight, through her veins,--she felt as if chains were falling from her limbs, as if cloud after cloud was rolling from her gaze. All the confused thoughts which had moved through her trance settled and centred themselves in one intense desire to see the Absent One,--to be with him. The monads that make up space and air seemed charged with a spiritual attraction,--to become a medium through which her spirit could pass from its clay, and confer with the spirit to which the unutterable desire compelled it. A faintness seized her; she tottered to the seat on which the vessels and herbs were placed, and, as she bent down, she saw in one of the vessels a small vase of crystal. By a mechanical and involuntary impulse, her hand seized the vase; she opened it, and the volatile essence it contained sparkled up, and spread through the room a powerful and delicious fragrance. She inhaled the odour, she laved her temples with the liquid, and suddenly her life seemed to spring up from the previous faintness,--to spring, to soar, to float, to dilate upon the wings of a bird. The room vanished from her eyes. Away, away, over lands and seas and space on the rushing desire flies the disprisoned mind!

Upon a stratum, not of this world, stood the world-born shapes of the sons of Science, upon an embryo world, upon a crude, wan, attenuated mass of matter, one of the Nebulae, which the suns of the myriad systems throw off as they roll round the Creator's throne¹, to become themselves new worlds of symmetry and glory,-- planets and suns that forever and forever shall in their turn multiply their shining race, and be the fathers of suns and planets yet to come.

There, in that enormous solitude of an infant world, which thousands and thousands of years can alone ripen into form, the spirit of Viola beheld the shape of Zanoni, or rather the likeness, the simulacrum, the LEMUR of his shape, not its human and corporeal substance,--as if, like hers, the Intelligence was parted from the Clay,--and as the sun, while it revolves and glows, had cast off into remotest space that nebular image of itself, so the thing of earth, in the action of its more luminous and enduring being, had thrown its likeness into that new-born stranger of the heavens. There stood the phantom,--a phantom Mejnour, by its side. In the gigantic chaos around raved and struggled the kindling elements; water and fire, darkness and light, at war,--vapour and cloud hardening into mountains, and the Breath of Life moving like a steadfast splendour over all.

¹ "Astronomy instructs us that, in the original condition of the solar system, the sun was the nucleus of a nebulosity or luminous mass which revolved on its axis, and extended far beyond the orbits of all the planets,--the planets as yet having no existence. Its temperature gradually diminished, and, becoming contracted by cooling, the rotation increased in rapidity, and zones of nebulosity were successively thrown off, in consequence of the centrifugal force overpowering the central attraction. The condensation of these separate masses constituted the planets and satellites. But this view of the conversion of gaseous matter into planetary bodies is not limited to our own system; it extends to the formation of the innumerable suns and worlds which are distributed throughout the universe. The sublime discoveries of modern astronomers have shown that every part of the realms of space abounds in large expansions of attenuated matter termed nebulae, which are irregularly reflective of light, of various figures, and in different states of condensation, from that of a diffused, luminous mass to suns and planets like our own."--From Mantell's eloquent and delightful work, entitled "The Wonders of Geology," volume i. page 22.)

As the dreamer looked, and shivered, she beheld that even there the two phantoms of humanity were not alone. Dim monster-forms that that disordered chaos alone could engender, the first reptile Colossal race that wreathed and crawl through the earliest stratum of a world labouring into life, coiled in the oozing matter or hovered through the meteorous vapours. But these the two seekers seemed not to heed; their gaze was fixed intent upon an object in the farthest space. With the eyes of the spirit, Viola followed theirs; with a terror far greater than the chaos and its hideous inhabitants produced, she beheld a shadowy likeness of the very room in which her form yet dwelt, its white walls, the moonshine sleeping on its floor, its open casement, with the quiet roofs and domes of Venice looming over the sea that sighed below,--and in that room the ghost-like image of herself! This double phantom--here herself a phantom, gazing there upon a phantom-self--had in it a horror which no words can tell, no length of life forego.

But presently she saw this image of herself rise slowly, leave the room with its noiseless feet: it passes the corridor, it kneels by a cradle! Heaven of Heaven! She beholds her child!-- still with its wondrous, child-like beauty and its silent, wakeful eyes. But beside that cradle there sits cowering a mantled, shadowy form,--the more fearful and ghastly from its indistinct and unsubstantial gloom. The walls of that chamber seem to open as the scene of a theatre. A grim dungeon; streets through which pour shadowy crowds; wrath and hatred, and the aspect of demons in their ghastly visages; a place of death; a murderous instrument; a shamle-house of human flesh; herself; her child;--all, all, rapid phantasmagoria, chased each other. Suddenly the phantom-Zanoni turned, it seemed to perceive herself,--her second self. It sprang towards her; her spirit could bear no more. She shrieked, she woke. She found that in truth she had left that dismal chamber; the cradle was before her, the child! all--all as that trance had seen it; and, vanishing into air, even that dark, formless Thing!

“My child! my child! thy mother shall save thee yet!”

CHAPTER 6.VIII.

Qui? Toi m'abandonner! Ou vas-tu? Non! demeure,
Demeure!--La Harpe, “Le Comte de Warwick,” Act 3, sc. 5.
(Who? THOU abandon me!--where goest thou? No! stay, stay!)

Letter from Viola to Zanoni.

“It has come to this!--I am the first to part! I, the unfaithful one, bid thee farewell forever. When thine eyes fall upon this writing thou wilt know me as one of the dead. For thou that wert, and still art my life,--I am lost to thee! O lover! O husband! O still worshipped and adored! if thou hast ever loved me, if thou canst still pity, seek not to discover the steps that fly thee. If thy charms can detect and tract me, spare me, spare our child! Zanoni, I will rear it to love thee, to call thee father! Zanoni, its young lips shall pray for thee! Ah, spare thy child, for infants are the saints of earth, and their mediation may be heard on high! Shall I tell thee why I part? No; thou, the wisely-terrible, canst divine what the hand trembles to record; and while I shudder at thy power,--while it is thy power I fly (our child upon my bosom),--it comforts me still to think that thy power can read the heart! Thou knowest that it is the faithful mother that writes to thee, it is not the faithless wife! Is there sin in thy knowledge, Zanoni? Sin must have sorrow: and it were sweet--oh, how sweet--to be thy comforter. But the child, the infant, the soul that looks to

mine for its shield!--magician, I wrest from thee that soul! Pardon, pardon, if my words wrong thee. See, I fall on my knees to write the rest!

“Why did I never recoil before from thy mysterious lore; why did the very strangeness of thine unearthly life only fascinate me with a delightful fear? Because, if thou wert sorcerer or angel-demon, there was no peril to other but myself: and none to me, for my love was my heavenliest part; and my ignorance in all things, except the art to love thee, repelled every thought that was not bright and glorious as thine image to my eyes. But NOW there is another! Look! why does it watch me thus,--why that never-sleeping, earnest, rebuking gaze? Have thy spells encompassed it already? Hast thou marked it, cruel one, for the terrors of thy unutterable art? Do not madden me,--do not madden me!--unbind the spell!

“Hark! the oars without! They come,--they come, to bear me from thee! I look round, and methinks that I see thee everywhere. Thou speakest to me from every shadow, from every star. There, by the casement, thy lips last pressed mine; there, there by that threshold didst thou turn again, and thy smile seemed so trustingly to confide in me! Zanoni--husband!--I will stay! I cannot part from thee! No, no! I will go to the room where thy dear voice, with its gentle music, assuaged the pangs of travail!--where, heard through the thrilling darkness, it first whispered to my ear, ‘Viola, thou art a mother!’ A mother!--yes, I rise from my knees,--I AM a mother! They come! I am firm; farewell!”

Yes; thus suddenly, thus cruelly, whether in the delirium of blind and unreasoning superstition, or in the resolve of that conviction which springs from duty, the being for whom he had resigned so much of empire and of glory forsook Zanoni. This desertion, never foreseen, never anticipated, was yet but the constant fate that attends those who would place Mind BEYOND the earth, and yet treasure the Heart WITHIN it. Ignorance everlastingly shall recoil from knowledge. But never yet, from nobler and purer motives of self-sacrifice, did human love link itself to another, than did the forsaking wife now abandon the absent. For rightly had she said that it was not the faithless wife, it WAS the faithful mother that fled from all in which her earthly happiness was centred.

As long as the passion and fervour that impelled the act animated her with false fever, she clasped her infant to her breast, and was consoled,--resigned. But what bitter doubt of her own conduct, what icy pang of remorse shot through her heart, when, as they rested for a few hours on the road to Leghorn, she heard the woman who accompanied herself and Glyndon pray for safety to reach her husband’s side, and strength to share the perils that would meet her there! Terrible contrast to her own desertion! She shrunk into the darkness of her own heart,--and then no voice from within consoled her.

CHAPTER 6.IX.

Zukunft hast du mir gegeben,
Doch du nimmst den Augenblick.--“Kassandra.”
(Futurity hast thou given to me,--yet takest from me the Moment.)

“Mejnour, behold thy work! Out, out upon our little vanities of wisdom!--out upon our ages of lore and life! To save her from Peril I left her presence, and the Peril has seized her in its grasp!”

“Chide not thy wisdom but thy passions! Abandon thine idle hope of the love of woman. See, for those who would unite the lofty with the lowly, the inevitable curse; thy very nature uncomprehended,--thy sacrifices unguessed. The lowly one views but in the lofty a necromancer or a fiend. Titan, canst thou weep?”

“I know it now, I see it all! It WAS her spirit that stood beside our own, and escaped my airy clasp! O strong desire of motherhood and nature! unveiling all our secrets, piercing space and traversing worlds!--Mejnour, what awful learning lies hid in the ignorance of the heart that loves!”

“The heart,” answered the mystic, coldly; “ay, for five thousand years I have ransacked the mysteries of creation, but I have not yet discovered all the wonders in the heart of the simplest boor!”

“Yet our solemn rites deceived us not; the prophet-shadows, dark with terror and red with blood, still foretold that, even in the dungeon, and before the deathman, I,--I had the power to save them both!”

“But at some un conjectured and most fatal sacrifice to thyself.”

“To myself! Icy sage, there is no self in love! I go. Nay, alone: I want thee not. I want now no other guide but the human instincts of affection. No cave so dark, no solitude so vast, as to conceal her. Though mine art fail me; though the stars heed me not; though space, with its shining myriads, is again to me but the azure void,--I return but to love and youth and hope! When have they ever failed to triumph and to save!”