

CHAPTER XI

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

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

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

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

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

Soon after breakfast the party dispersed; the Count, ordering his steward to attend him in the library, went to survey the condition of his premises, and to visit some of his tenants; Henri hastened with alacrity to the shore to examine a boat, that was to bear them on a little voyage in the evening and to superintend the adjustment of a silk awning; while the Countess, attended by Mademoiselle Bearn, retired to an apartment on the modern side of the chateau, which was fitted up with airy elegance; and, as the windows opened upon balconies, that fronted the sea, she was there saved from a view of the HORRID Pyrenees. Here, while she reclined on a sofa, and, casting her languid eyes over the ocean, which appeared beyond the wood-tops, indulged in the luxuries of ENNUI, her companion read aloud a sentimental novel, on some fashionable system of philosophy, for the Countess was herself somewhat of a PHILOSOPHER, especially as to INFIDELITY, and among a certain circle her opinions were waited for with impatience, and received as doctrines.

The Lady Blanche, meanwhile, hastened to indulge, amidst the wild wood-walks around the chateau, her new enthusiasm, where, as she wandered under the shades, her gay spirits gradually yielded to pensive complacency. Now, she moved with solemn steps, beneath the gloom of thickly interwoven branches, where the fresh dew still hung upon every flower, that peeped from

among the grass; and now tripped sportively along the path, on which the sunbeams darted and the chequered foliage trembled—where the tender greens of the beech, the acacia and the mountain-ash, mingling with the solemn tints of the cedar, the pine and cypress, exhibited as fine a contrast of colouring, as the majestic oak and oriental plane did of form, to the feathery lightness of the cork tree and the waving grace of the poplar.

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

THE BUTTER-FLY TO HIS LOVE

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

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

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

When April buds begin to blow,
The prim-rose, and the hare-bell blue,
That on the verdant moss bank grow,
With violet cups, that weep in dew;

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

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

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

But these I'll leave to be thy guide,
And shew thee, where the jasmine spreads

Her snowy leaf, where may-flow'rs hide,
And rose-buds rear their peeping heads.

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

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

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

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

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

Or, o'er the mountains, bade thee fly,
To tell her fairy love to speed,
When ev'ning steals upon the sky,
To dance along the twilight mead.

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

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

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

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

Having left the turret, and descended the narrow stair-case, she found herself in a dusky passage, where she wandered, unable to find her way, till impatience yielded to apprehension, and she called for assistance. Presently steps approached, and light glimmered through a door at the other extremity of the passage, which was opened with caution by some person, who did not venture beyond it, and whom Blanche observed in silence, till the door was closing, when she called aloud, and, hastening towards it, perceived the old housekeeper. 'Dear ma'amselle! is it you?' said Dorothée, 'How could you find your way hither?' Had Blanche been less occupied by her own fears, she would probably have observed the strong expressions of terror and surprise on Dorothée's countenance, who now led her through a long succession of passages and rooms, that looked as if they had been uninhabited for a century, till they reached that appropriated to the housekeeper, where Dorothée entreated she would sit down and take refreshment. Blanche accepted the sweet meats, offered to her, mentioned her discovery of the pleasant turret, and her wish to appropriate it to her own use. Whether Dorothée's taste was not so sensible to the beauties of landscape as her young lady's, or that the constant view of lovely scenery had deadened it, she forbore to praise the subject of Blanche's enthusiasm, which, however, her silence did not repress. To Lady Blanche's enquiry of whither the door she had found fastened at the end of the gallery led, she replied, that it opened to a suite of rooms, which had not been entered, during many years, 'For,' added she, 'my late lady died in one of them, and I could never find in my heart to go into them since.'

Blanche, though she wished to see these chambers, forbore, on observing that Dorothée's eyes were filled with tears, to ask her to unlock them, and, soon after, went to dress for dinner, at which the whole party met in good spirits and good humour, except the Countess, whose vacant mind, overcome by the languor of idleness, would neither suffer her to be happy herself, or to contribute to the happiness of others. Mademoiselle Bearn, attempting to be witty, directed her badinage against Henri, who answered, because he could not well avoid it, rather than from any inclination to notice her, whose liveliness sometimes amused, but whose conceit and insensibility often disgusted him.

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

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

At some distance, among these woods, stood a pavilion, which had once been the scene of social gaiety, and which its situation still made one of romantic beauty. Thither, the Count had

ordered coffee and other refreshment to be carried, and thither the sailors now steered their course, following the windings of the shore round many a woody promontory and circling bay; while the pensive tones of horns and other wind instruments, played by the attendants in a distant boat, echoed among the rocks, and died along the waves. Blanche had now subdued her fears; a delightful tranquillity stole over her mind, and held her in silence; and she was too happy even to remember the convent, or her former sorrows, as subjects of comparison with her present felicity.

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

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

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

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

imprint the water, and to watch the spreading circles they left, which gave a tremulous motion to the reflected landscape, without destroying the harmony of its features.

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

‘What voices are those, upon the air?’ said the Count, looking round, and listening; but the strain had ceased. ‘It seemed to be a vesper-hymn, which I have often heard in my convent,’ said Blanche.

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

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

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

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

The count, looking up, now perceived, that the twilight of evening was anticipated by an approaching storm. In the east a tempest was collecting; a heavy gloom came on, opposing and contrasting the glowing splendour of the setting sun. The clamorous sea-fowl skimmed in fleet circles upon the surface of the sea, dipping their light pinions in the wave, as they fled away in search of shelter. The boatmen pulled hard at their oars; but the thunder, that now muttered at a distance, and the heavy drops, that began to dimple the water, made the Count determine to put back to the monastery for shelter, and the course of the boat was immediately changed. As the clouds approached the west, their lurid darkness changed to a deep ruddy glow, which, by reflection, seemed to fire the tops of the woods and the shattered towers of the monastery.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On their arrival at the chateau, the Countess, affecting more fatigue, than she really felt, withdrew to her apartment, and the Count, with his daughter and Henri, went to the supper-room, where they had not been long, when they heard, in a pause of the gust, a firing of guns, which the Count understanding to be signals of distress from some vessel in the storm, went to a window, that opened towards the Mediterranean, to observe further; but the sea was now involved in utter darkness, and the loud howlings of the tempest had again overcome every other sound. Blanche, remembering the bark, which she had before seen, now joined her father, with trembling anxiety. In a few moments, the report of guns was again borne along the wind, and as suddenly wafted away; a tremendous burst of thunder followed, and, in the flash, that had preceded it, and which seemed to quiver over the whole surface of the waters, a vessel was discovered, tossing amidst the white foam of the waves at some distance from the shore. Impenetrable darkness again involved the scene, but soon a second flash shewed the bark, with one sail unfurled, driving towards the coast. Blanche hung upon her father's arm, with looks full of the agony of united terror and pity, which were unnecessary to awaken the heart of the Count, who gazed upon the sea with a piteous expression, and, perceiving, that no boat could live in the storm, forbore to send one; but he gave orders to his people to carry torches out upon the cliffs, hoping they might prove a kind of beacon to the vessel, or, at least, warn the crew of the rocks they were approaching. While Henri went out to direct on what part of the cliffs the lights should appear, Blanche remained with her father, at the window, catching, every now and then, as the lightnings flashed, a glimpse of the vessel; and she soon saw, with reviving hope, the torches flaming on the blackness of night, and, as they waved over the cliffs, casting a red gleam on the gasping billows. When the firing of guns was repeated, the torches were tossed high in the air, as if answering the signal, and the firing was then redoubled; but, though the wind bore the sound away, she fancied, as the lightnings glanced, that the vessel was much nearer the shore.

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

In Monsieur Du Pont the Count discovered an old acquaintance, and much joy and congratulation passed between them, after which Emily was introduced by name to the Count's family, whose hospitable benevolence dissipated the little embarrassment, which her situation had occasioned her, and the party were soon seated at the supper-table. The unaffected kindness of Blanche and the lively joy she expressed on the escape of the strangers, for whom her pity had

been so much interested, gradually revived Emily's languid spirits; and Du Pont, relieved from his terrors for her and for himself, felt the full contrast, between his late situation on a dark and tremendous ocean, and his present one, in a cheerful mansion, where he was surrounded with plenty, elegance and smiles of welcome.

Annette, meanwhile, in the servants' hall, was telling of all the dangers she had encountered, and congratulating herself so heartily upon her own and Ludovico's escape, and on her present comforts, that she often made all that part of the chateau ring with merriment and laughter. Ludovico's spirits were as gay as her own, but he had discretion enough to restrain them, and tried to check hers, though in vain, till her laughter, at length, ascended to MY LADY'S chamber, who sent to enquire what occasioned so much uproar in the chateau, and to command silence.

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

CHAPTER XII

Oft woo'd the gleam of Cynthia, silver-bright,
In cloisters dim, far from the haunts of folly,
With freedom by my side, and soft-ey'd melancholy.—GRAY

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

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

influenced by a consideration of the Lady Blanche's welfare, still more than by either a wish to oblige her, or to befriend the orphan Emily, for whom, however, he felt considerably interested.

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

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

'Ah!' said Blanche with surprise, 'I am but just released from a convent, and would you go into one? If you could know what pleasure I feel in wandering here, at liberty,—and in seeing the sky and the fields, and the woods all round me, I think you would not.' Emily, smiling at the warmth, with which the Lady Blanche spoke, observed, that she did not mean to confine herself to a convent for life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Emily smiled, and, remembering how lately she had suffered herself to be led away by superstition, determined now to resist its contagion; yet, in spite of her efforts, she felt awe

mingle with her curiosity, on this subject; and Blanche, who had hitherto listened in silence, now enquired what this music was, and how long it had been heard.

‘Ever since the death of my lady, madam,’ replied Dorothée.

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

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

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

‘You never heard, my lady, I suppose, what made us leave the chateau, and go and live in a cottage,’ said Dorothée. ‘Never!’ replied Blanche with impatience.

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

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

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

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

‘Certainly I will not,’ replied Blanche, ‘if that is really your objection.’

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

‘And was she not gay, afterwards?’ said Blanche.

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

‘No, my lady,’ replied Dorothée; ‘if you knew as much as I do, you would not, for you would find there a dismal train of them; I often wish I could shut them out, but they will rise to my

mind. I see my dear lady on her death-bed,—her very look,—and remember all she said—it was a terrible scene!’ ‘Why was it so terrible?’ said Emily with emotion.

‘Ah, dear young lady! is not death always terrible?’ replied Dorothée.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

During these the first days of her stay at Chateau-le-Blanc, she was often affected, by observing the deep, but silent melancholy, which, at times, stole over Du Pont; and Emily, pitying the self-delusion, which disarmed him of the will to depart, determined to withdraw herself as soon as the respect she owed the Count and Countess De Villefort would permit. The dejection of his friend soon alarmed the anxiety of the Count, to whom Du Pont, at length, confided the secret of his hopeless affection, which, however, the former could only

commiserate, though he secretly determined to befriend his suit, if an opportunity of doing so should ever occur. Considering the dangerous situation of Du Pont, he but feebly opposed his intention of leaving Chateau-le-Blanc, on the following day, but drew from him a promise of a longer visit, when he could return with safety to his peace. Emily herself, though she could not encourage his affection, esteemed him both for the many virtues he possessed, and for the services she had received from him; and it was not without tender emotions of gratitude and pity, that she now saw him depart for his family seat in Gascony; while he took leave of her with a countenance so expressive of love and grief, as to interest the Count more warmly in his cause than before.

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XIII

As when a wave, that from a cloud impends,
And, swell'd with tempests, on the ship descends,

White are the decks with foam; the winds aloud,
Howl o'er the masts, and sing through ev'ry shroud:
Pale, trembling, tir'd, the sailors freeze with fears,
And instant death on ev'ry wave appears.—POPE'S HOMER

The Lady Blanche, meanwhile, who was left much alone, became impatient for the company of her new friend, whom she wished to observe sharing in the delight she received from the beautiful scenery around. She had now no person, to whom she could express her admiration and communicate her pleasures, no eye, that sparkled to her smile, or countenance, that reflected her happiness; and she became spiritless and pensive. The Count, observing her dissatisfaction, readily yielded to her entreaties, and reminded Emily of her promised visit; but the silence of Valancourt, which was now prolonged far beyond the period, when a letter might have arrived from Estuviere, oppressed Emily with severe anxiety, and, rendering her averse to society, she would willingly have deferred her acceptance of this invitation, till her spirits should be relieved. The Count and his family, however, pressed to see her; and, as the circumstances, that prompted her wish for solitude, could not be explained, there was an appearance of caprice in her refusal, which she could not persevere in, without offending the friends, whose esteem she valued. At length, therefore, she returned upon a second visit to Chateau-le-Blanc. Here the friendly manner of Count De Villefort encouraged Emily to mention to him her situation, respecting the estates of her late aunt, and to consult him on the means of recovering them. He had little doubt, that the law would decide in her favour, and, advising her to apply to it, offered first to write to an advocate at Avignon, on whose opinion he thought he could rely. His kindness was gratefully accepted by Emily, who, soothed by the courtesy she daily experienced, would have been once more happy, could she have been assured of Valancourt's welfare and unaltered affection. She had now been above a week at the chateau, without receiving intelligence of him, and, though she knew, that, if he was absent from his brother's residence, it was scarcely probable her letter had yet reached him, she could not forbear to admit doubts and fears, that destroyed her peace. Again she would consider of all, that might have happened in the long period, since her first seclusion at Udolpho, and her mind was sometimes so overwhelmed with an apprehension, that Valancourt was no more, or that he lived no longer for her, that the company even of Blanche became intolerably oppressive, and she would sit alone in her apartment for hours together, when the engagements of the family allowed her to do so, without incivility.

In one of these solitary hours, she unlocked a little box, which contained some letters of Valancourt, with some drawings she had sketched, during her stay in Tuscany, the latter of which were no longer interesting to her; but, in the letters, she now, with melancholy indulgence, meant to retrace the tenderness, that had so often soothed her, and rendered her, for a moment, insensible of the distance, which separated her from the writer. But their effect was now changed; the affection they expressed appealed so forcibly to her heart, when she considered that it had, perhaps, yielded to the powers of time and absence, and even the view of the hand-writing recalled so many painful recollections, that she found herself unable to go through the first she had opened, and sat musing, with her cheek resting on her arm, and tears stealing from her eyes, when old Dorothee entered the room to inform her, that dinner would be ready, an hour before the usual time. Emily started on perceiving her, and hastily put up the papers, but not before Dorothee had observed both her agitation and her tears.

'Ah, ma'amselle!' said she, 'you, who are so young,—have you reason for sorrow?'

Emily tried to smile, but was unable to speak.

‘Alas! dear young lady, when you come to my age, you will not weep at trifles; and surely you have nothing serious, to grieve you.’

‘No, Dorothée, nothing of any consequence,’ replied Emily. Dorothée, now stooping to pick up something, that had dropped from among the papers, suddenly exclaimed, ‘Holy Mary! what is it I see?’ and then, trembling, sat down in a chair, that stood by the table.

‘What is it you do see?’ said Emily, alarmed by her manner, and looking round the room.

‘It is herself,’ said Dorothée, ‘her very self! just as she looked a little before she died!’

Emily, still more alarmed, began now to fear, that Dorothée was seized with sudden phrensy, but entreated her to explain herself.

‘That picture!’ said she, ‘where did you find it, lady? it is my blessed mistress herself!’

She laid on the table the miniature, which Emily had long ago found among the papers her father had enjoined her to destroy, and over which she had once seen him shed such tender and affecting tears; and, recollecting all the various circumstances of his conduct, that had long perplexed her, her emotions increased to an excess, which deprived her of all power to ask the questions she trembled to have answered, and she could only enquire, whether Dorothée was certain the picture resembled the late marchioness.

‘O, ma’amselle!’ said she, ‘how came it to strike me so, the instant I saw it, if it was not my lady’s likeness? Ah!’ added she, taking up the miniature, ‘these are her own blue eyes—looking so sweet and so mild; and there is her very look, such as I have often seen it, when she had sat thinking for a long while, and then, the tears would often steal down her cheeks—but she never would complain! It was that look so meek, as it were, and resigned, that used to break my heart and make me love her so!’

‘Dorothée!’ said Emily solemnly, ‘I am interested in the cause of that grief, more so, perhaps, than you may imagine; and I entreat, that you will no longer refuse to indulge my curiosity;—it is not a common one.’

As Emily said this, she remembered the papers, with which the picture had been found, and had scarcely a doubt, that they had concerned the Marchioness de Villeroi; but with this supposition came a scruple, whether she ought to enquire further on a subject, which might prove to be the same, that her father had so carefully endeavoured to conceal. Her curiosity, concerning the Marchioness, powerful as it was, it is probable she would now have resisted, as she had formerly done, on unwarily observing the few terrible words in the papers, which had never since been erased from her memory, had she been certain that the history of that lady was the subject of those papers, or, that such simple particulars only as it was probable Dorothée could relate were included in her father’s command. What was known to her could be no secret to many other persons; and, since it appeared very unlikely, that St. Aubert should attempt to conceal what Emily might learn by ordinary means, she at length concluded, that, if the papers had related to the story of the Marchioness, it was not those circumstances of it, which Dorothée could disclose, that he had thought sufficiently important to wish to have concealed. She, therefore, no longer hesitated to make the enquiries, that might lead to the gratification of her curiosity.

‘Ah, ma’amselle!’ said Dorothée, ‘it is a sad story, and cannot be told now: but what am I saying? I never will tell it. Many years have passed, since it happened; and I never loved to talk of the Marchioness to any body, but my husband. He lived in the family, at that time, as well as myself, and he knew many particulars from me, which nobody else did; for I was about the person of my lady in her last illness, and saw and heard as much, or more than my lord himself. Sweet saint! how patient she was! When she died, I thought I could have died with her!’

‘Dorothee,’ said Emily, interrupting her, ‘what you shall tell, you may depend upon it, shall never be disclosed by me. I have, I repeat it, particular reasons for wishing to be informed on this subject, and am willing to bind myself, in the most solemn manner, never to mention what you shall wish me to conceal.’

Dorothee seemed surprised at the earnestness of Emily’s manner, and, after regarding her for some moments, in silence, said, ‘Young lady! that look of yours pleads for you—it is so like my dear mistress’s, that I can almost fancy I see her before me; if you were her daughter, you could not remind me of her more. But dinner will be ready—had you not better go down?’

‘You will first promise to grant my request,’ said Emily.

‘And ought not you first to tell me, ma’amselle, how this picture fell into your hands, and the reasons you say you have for curiosity about my lady?’

‘Why, no, Dorothee,’ replied Emily, recollecting herself, ‘I have also particular reasons for observing silence, on these subjects, at least, till I know further; and, remember, I do not promise ever to speak upon them; therefore, do not let me induce you to satisfy my curiosity, from an expectation, that I shall gratify yours. What I may judge proper to conceal, does not concern myself alone, or I should have less scruple in revealing it: let a confidence in my honour alone persuade you to disclose what I request.’

‘Well, lady!’ replied Dorothee, after a long pause, during which her eyes were fixed upon Emily, ‘you seem so much interested,—and this picture and that face of yours make me think you have some reason to be so,—that I will trust you—and tell some things, that I never told before to any body, but my husband, though there are people, who have suspected as much. I will tell you the particulars of my lady’s death, too, and some of my own suspicions; but you must first promise me by all the saints’—

Emily, interrupting her, solemnly promised never to reveal what should be confided to her, without Dorothee’s consent.

‘But there is the horn, ma’amselle, sounding for dinner,’ said Dorothee; ‘I must be gone.’

‘When shall I see you again?’ enquired Emily.

Dorothee mused, and then replied, ‘Why, madam, it may make people curious, if it is known I am so much in your apartment, and that I should be sorry for; so I will come when I am least likely to be observed. I have little leisure in the day, and I shall have a good deal to say; so, if you please, ma’am, I will come, when the family are all in bed.’

‘That will suit me very well,’ replied Emily: ‘Remember, then, to-night’—

‘Aye, that is well remembered,’ said Dorothee, ‘I fear I cannot come to-night, madam, for there will be the dance of the vintage, and it will be late, before the servants go to rest; for, when they once set in to dance, they will keep it up, in the cool of the air, till morning; at least, it used to be so in my time.’

‘Ah! is it the dance of the vintage?’ said Emily, with a deep sigh, remembering, that it was on the evening of this festival, in the preceding year, that St. Aubert and herself had arrived in the neighbourhood of Chateau-le-Blanc. She paused a moment, overcome by the sudden recollection, and then, recovering herself, added—‘But this dance is in the open woods; you, therefore, will not be wanted, and can easily come to me.’

Dorothee replied, that she had been accustomed to be present at the dance of the vintage, and she did not wish to be absent now; ‘but if I can get away, madam, I will,’ said she.

Emily then hastened to the dining-room, where the Count conducted himself with the courtesy, which is inseparable from true dignity, and of which the Countess frequently practised little, though her manner to Emily was an exception to her usual habit. But, if she retained few of the

ornamental virtues, she cherished other qualities, which she seemed to consider invaluable. She had dismissed the grace of modesty, but then she knew perfectly well how to manage the stare of assurance; her manners had little of the tempered sweetness, which is necessary to render the female character interesting, but she could occasionally throw into them an affectation of spirits, which seemed to triumph over every person, who approached her. In the country, however, she generally affected an elegant languor, that persuaded her almost to faint, when her favourite read to her a story of fictitious sorrow; but her countenance suffered no change, when living objects of distress solicited her charity, and her heart beat with no transport to the thought of giving them instant relief;—she was a stranger to the highest luxury, of which, perhaps, the human mind can be sensible, for her benevolence had never yet called smiles upon the face of misery.

In the evening, the Count, with all his family, except the Countess and Mademoiselle Bearn, went to the woods to witness the festivity of the peasants. The scene was in a glade, where the trees, opening, formed a circle round the turf they highly overshadowed; between their branches, vines, loaded with ripe clusters, were hung in gay festoons; and, beneath, were tables, with fruit, wine, cheese and other rural fare,—and seats for the Count and his family. At a little distance, were benches for the elder peasants, few of whom, however, could forbear to join the jocund dance, which began soon after sun-set, when several of sixty tripped it with almost as much glee and airy lightness, as those of sixteen.

The musicians, who sat carelessly on the grass, at the foot of a tree, seemed inspired by the sound of their own instruments, which were chiefly flutes and a kind of long guitar. Behind, stood a boy, flourishing a tamborine, and dancing a solo, except that, as he sometimes gaily tossed the instrument, he tripped among the other dancers, when his antic gestures called forth a broader laugh, and heightened the rustic spirit of the scene.

The Count was highly delighted with the happiness he witnessed, to which his bounty had largely contributed, and the Lady Blanche joined the dance with a young gentleman of her father's party. Du Pont requested Emily's hand, but her spirits were too much depressed, to permit her to engage in the present festivity, which called to her remembrance that of the preceding year, when St. Aubert was living, and of the melancholy scenes, which had immediately followed it.

Overcome by these recollections, she, at length, left the spot, and walked slowly into the woods, where the softened music, floating at a distance, soothed her melancholy mind. The moon threw a mellow light among the foliage; the air was balmy and cool, and Emily, lost in thought, strolled on, without observing whither, till she perceived the sounds sinking afar off, and an awful stillness round her, except that, sometimes, the nightingale beguiled the silence with

Liquid notes, that close the eye of day.

At length, she found herself near the avenue, which, on the night of her father's arrival, Michael had attempted to pass in search of a house, which was still nearly as wild and desolate as it had then appeared; for the Count had been so much engaged in directing other improvements, that he had neglected to give orders, concerning this extensive approach, and the road was yet broken, and the trees overloaded with their own luxuriance.

As she stood surveying it, and remembering the emotions, which she had formerly suffered there, she suddenly recollected the figure, that had been seen stealing among the trees, and which had returned no answer to Michael's repeated calls; and she experienced somewhat of the fear,

that had then assailed her, for it did not appear improbable, that these deep woods were occasionally the haunt of banditti. She, therefore, turned back, and was hastily pursuing her way to the dancers, when she heard steps approaching from the avenue; and, being still beyond the call of the peasants on the green, for she could neither hear their voices, or their music, she quickened her pace; but the persons following gained fast upon her, and, at length, distinguishing the voice of Henri, she walked leisurely, till he came up. He expressed some surprise at meeting her so far from the company; and, on her saying, that the pleasant moon-light had beguiled her to walk farther than she intended, an exclamation burst from the lips of his companion, and she thought she heard Valancourt speak! It was, indeed, he! and the meeting was such as may be imagined, between persons so affectionate, and so long separated as they had been.

In the joy of these moments, Emily forgot all her past sufferings, and Valancourt seemed to have forgotten, that any person but Emily existed; while Henri was a silent and astonished spectator of the scene.

Valancourt asked a thousand questions, concerning herself and Montoni, which there was now no time to answer; but she learned, that her letter had been forwarded to him, at Paris, which he had previously quitted, and was returning to Gascony, whither the letter also returned, which, at length, informed him of Emily's arrival, and on the receipt of which he had immediately set out for Languedoc. On reaching the monastery, whence she had dated her letter, he found, to his extreme disappointment, that the gates were already closed for the night; and believing, that he should not see Emily, till the morrow, he was returning to his little inn, with the intention of writing to her, when he was overtaken by Henri, with whom he had been intimate at Paris, and was led to her, whom he was secretly lamenting that he should not see, till the following day.

Emily, with Valancourt and Henri, now returned to the green, where the latter presented Valancourt to the Count, who, she fancied, received him with less than his usual benignity, though it appeared, that they were not strangers to each other. He was invited, however, to partake of the diversions of the evening; and, when he had paid his respects to the Count, and while the dancers continued their festivity, he seated himself by Emily, and conversed, without restraint. The lights, which were hung among the trees, under which they sat, allowed her a more perfect view of the countenance she had so frequently in absence endeavoured to recollect, and she perceived, with some regret, that it was not the same as when last she saw it. There was all its wonted intelligence and fire; but it had lost much of the simplicity, and somewhat of the open benevolence, that used to characterise it. Still, however, it was an interesting countenance; but Emily thought she perceived, at intervals, anxiety contract, and melancholy fix the features of Valancourt; sometimes, too, he fell into a momentary musing, and then appeared anxious to dissipate thought; while, at others, as he fixed his eyes on Emily, a kind of sudden distraction seemed to cross his mind. In her he perceived the same goodness and beautiful simplicity, that had charmed him, on their first acquaintance. The bloom of her countenance was somewhat faded, but all its sweetness remained, and it was rendered more interesting, than ever, by the faint expression of melancholy, that sometimes mingled with her smile.

At his request, she related the most important circumstances, that had occurred to her, since she left France, and emotions of pity and indignation alternately prevailed in his mind, when he heard how much she had suffered from the villany of Montoni. More than once, when she was speaking of his conduct, of which the guilt was rather softened, than exaggerated, by her representation, he started from his seat, and walked away, apparently overcome as much by self accusation as by resentment. Her sufferings alone were mentioned in the few words, which he could address to her, and he listened not to the account, which she was careful to give as

distinctly as possible, of the present loss of Madame Montoni's estates, and of the little reason there was to expect their restoration. At length, Valancourt remained lost in thought, and then some secret cause seemed to overcome him with anguish. Again he abruptly left her. When he returned, she perceived, that he had been weeping, and tenderly begged, that he would compose himself. 'My sufferings are all passed now,' said she, 'for I have escaped from the tyranny of Montoni, and I see you well—let me also see you happy.'

Valancourt was more agitated, than before. 'I am unworthy of you, Emily,' said he, 'I am unworthy of you;'—words, by his manner of uttering which Emily was then more shocked than by their import. She fixed on him a mournful and enquiring eye. 'Do not look thus on me,' said he, turning away and pressing her hand; 'I cannot bear those looks.'

'I would ask,' said Emily, in a gentle, but agitated voice, 'the meaning of your words; but I perceive, that the question would distress you now. Let us talk on other subjects. To-morrow, perhaps, you may be more composed. Observe those moon light woods, and the towers, which appear obscurely in the perspective. You used to be a great admirer of landscape, and I have heard you say, that the faculty of deriving consolation, under misfortune, from the sublime prospects, which neither oppression, or poverty withhold from us, was the peculiar blessing of the innocent.' Valancourt was deeply affected. 'Yes,' replied he, 'I had once a taste for innocent and elegant delights—I had once an uncorrupted heart.' Then, checking himself, he added, 'Do you remember our journey together in the Pyrenees?'

'Can I forget it?' said Emily.—'Would that I could!' he replied;— 'that was the happiest period of my life. I then loved, with enthusiasm, whatever was truly great, or good.' It was some time before Emily could repress her tears, and try to command her emotions. 'If you wish to forget that journey,' said she, 'it must certainly be my wish to forget it also.' She paused, and then added, 'You make me very uneasy; but this is not the time for further enquiry;—yet, how can I bear to believe, even for a moment, that you are less worthy of my esteem than formerly? I have still sufficient confidence in your candour, to believe, that, when I shall ask for an explanation, you will give it me.'—'Yes,' said Valancourt, 'yes, Emily: I have not yet lost my candour: if I had, I could better have disguised my emotions, on learning what were your sufferings— your virtues, while I—I—but I will say no more. I did not mean to have said even so much—I have been surprised into the self-accusation. Tell me, Emily, that you will not forget that journey— will not wish to forget it, and I will be calm. I would not lose the remembrance of it for the whole earth.'

'How contradictory is this!' said Emily;—'but we may be overheard. My recollection of it shall depend upon yours; I will endeavour to forget, or to recollect it, as you may do. Let us join the Count.'— 'Tell me first,' said Valancourt, 'that you forgive the uneasiness I have occasioned you, this evening, and that you will still love me.'—'I sincerely forgive you,' replied Emily. 'You best know whether I shall continue to love you, for you know whether you deserve my esteem. At present, I will believe that you do. It is unnecessary to say,' added she, observing his dejection, 'how much pain it would give me to believe otherwise.—The young lady, who approaches, is the Count's daughter.'

Valancourt and Emily now joined the Lady Blanche; and the party, soon after, sat down with the Count, his son, and the Chevalier Du Pont, at a banquet, spread under a gay awning, beneath the trees. At the table also were seated several of the most venerable of the Count's tenants, and it was a festive repast to all but Valancourt and Emily. When the Count retired to the chateau, he did not invite Valancourt to accompany him, who, therefore, took leave of Emily, and retired to his solitary inn for the night: meanwhile, she soon withdrew to her own apartment, where she

mused, with deep anxiety and concern, on his behaviour, and on the Count's reception of him. Her attention was thus so wholly engaged, that she forgot Dorothée and her appointment, till morning was far advanced, when, knowing that the good old woman would not come, she retired, for a few hours, to repose.

On the following day, when the Count had accidentally joined Emily in one of the walks, they talked of the festival of the preceding evening, and this led him to a mention of Valancourt. 'That is a young man of talents,' said he; 'you were formerly acquainted with him, I perceive.' Emily said, that she was. 'He was introduced to me, at Paris,' said the Count, 'and I was much pleased with him, on our first acquaintance.' He paused, and Emily trembled, between the desire of hearing more and the fear of shewing the Count, that she felt an interest on the subject. 'May I ask,' said he, at length, 'how long you have known Monsieur Valancourt?'—'Will you allow me to ask your reason for the question, sir?' said she; 'and I will answer it immediately.'—'Certainly,' said the Count, 'that is but just. I will tell you my reason. I cannot but perceive, that Monsieur Valancourt admires you; in that, however, there is nothing extraordinary; every person, who sees you, must do the same. I am above using common-place compliments; I speak with sincerity. What I fear, is, that he is a favoured admirer.'—'Why do you fear it, sir?' said Emily, endeavouring to conceal her emotion.—'Because,' replied the Count, 'I think him not worthy of your favour.' Emily, greatly agitated, entreated further explanation. 'I will give it,' said he, 'if you will believe, that nothing but a strong interest in your welfare could induce me to hazard that assertion.'—'I must believe so, sir,' replied Emily.

'But let us rest under these trees,' said the Count, observing the paleness of her countenance; 'here is a seat—you are fatigued.' They sat down, and the Count proceeded. 'Many young ladies, circumstanced as you are, would think my conduct, on this occasion, and on so short an acquaintance, impertinent, instead of friendly; from what I have observed of your temper and understanding, I do not fear such a return from you. Our acquaintance has been short, but long enough to make me esteem you, and feel a lively interest in your happiness. You deserve to be very happy, and I trust that you will be so.' Emily sighed softly, and bowed her thanks. The Count paused again. 'I am unpleasantly circumstanced,' said he; 'but an opportunity of rendering you important service shall overcome inferior considerations. Will you inform me of the manner of your first acquaintance with the Chevalier Valancourt, if the subject is not too painful?'

Emily briefly related the accident of their meeting in the presence of her father, and then so earnestly entreated the Count not to hesitate in declaring what he knew, that he perceived the violent emotion, against which she was contending, and, regarding her with a look of tender compassion, considered how he might communicate his information with least pain to his anxious auditor.

'The Chevalier and my son,' said he, 'were introduced to each other, at the table of a brother officer, at whose house I also met him, and invited him to my own, whenever he should be disengaged. I did not then know, that he had formed an acquaintance with a set of men, a disgrace to their species, who live by plunder and pass their lives in continual debauchery. I knew several of the Chevalier's family, resident at Paris, and considered them as sufficient pledges for his introduction to my own. But you are ill; I will leave the subject.'—'No, sir,' said Emily, 'I beg you will proceed: I am only distressed.'—'ONLY!' said the Count, with emphasis; 'however, I will proceed. I soon learned, that these, his associates, had drawn him into a course of dissipation, from which he appeared to have neither the power, nor the inclination, to extricate himself. He lost large sums at the gaming-table; he became infatuated with play; and was ruined. I spoke tenderly of this to his friends, who assured me, that they had remonstrated with him, till

they were weary. I afterwards learned, that, in consideration of his talents for play, which were generally successful, when unopposed by the tricks of villany,—that in consideration of these, the party had initiated him into the secrets of their trade, and allotted him a share of their profits.’ ‘Impossible!’ said Emily suddenly; ‘but—pardon me, sir, I scarcely know what I say; allow for the distress of my mind. I must, indeed, I must believe, that you have not been truly informed. The Chevalier had, doubtless, enemies, who misrepresented him.’—‘I should be most happy to believe so,’ replied the Count, ‘but I cannot. Nothing short of conviction, and a regard for your happiness, could have urged me to repeat these unpleasant reports.’

Emily was silent. She recollected Valancourt’s sayings, on the preceding evening, which discovered the pangs of self-reproach, and seemed to confirm all that the Count had related. Yet she had not fortitude enough to dare conviction. Her heart was overwhelmed with anguish at the mere suspicion of his guilt, and she could not endure a belief of it. After a silence, the Count said, ‘I perceive, and can allow for, your want of conviction. It is necessary I should give some proof of what I have asserted; but this I cannot do, without subjecting one, who is very dear to me, to danger.’—‘What is the danger you apprehend, sir?’ said Emily; ‘if I can prevent it, you may safely confide in my honour.’—‘On your honour I am certain I can rely,’ said the Count; ‘but can I trust your fortitude? Do you think you can resist the solicitation of a favoured admirer, when he pleads, in affliction, for the name of one, who has robbed him of a blessing?’—‘I shall not be exposed to such a temptation, sir,’ said Emily, with modest pride, ‘for I cannot favour one, whom I must no longer esteem. I, however, readily give my word.’ Tears, in the mean time, contradicted her first assertion; and she felt, that time and effort only could eradicate an affection, which had been formed on virtuous esteem, and cherished by habit and difficulty.

‘I will trust you then,’ said the Count, ‘for conviction is necessary to your peace, and cannot, I perceive, be obtained, without this confidence. My son has too often been an eye-witness of the Chevalier’s ill conduct; he was very near being drawn in by it; he was, indeed, drawn in to the commission of many follies, but I rescued him from guilt and destruction. Judge then, Mademoiselle St. Aubert, whether a father, who had nearly lost his only son by the example of the Chevalier, has not, from conviction, reason to warn those, whom he esteems, against trusting their happiness in such hands. I have myself seen the Chevalier engaged in deep play with men, whom I almost shuddered to look upon. If you still doubt, I will refer you to my son.’

‘I must not doubt what you have yourself witnessed,’ replied Emily, sinking with grief, ‘or what you assert. But the Chevalier has, perhaps, been drawn only into a transient folly, which he may never repeat. If you had known the justness of his former principles, you would allow for my present incredulity.’

‘Alas!’ observed the Count, ‘it is difficult to believe that, which will make us wretched. But I will not sooth you by flattering and false hopes. We all know how fascinating the vice of gaming is, and how difficult it is, also, to conquer habits; the Chevalier might, perhaps, reform for a while, but he would soon relapse into dissipation—for I fear, not only the bonds of habit would be powerful, but that his morals are corrupted. And—why should I conceal from you, that play is not his only vice? he appears to have a taste for every vicious pleasure.’

The Count hesitated and paused; while Emily endeavoured to support herself, as, with increasing perturbation, she expected what he might further say. A long pause of silence ensued, during which he was visibly agitated; at length, he said, ‘It would be a cruel delicacy, that could prevail with me to be silent—and I will inform you, that the Chevalier’s extravagance has brought him twice into the prisons of Paris, from whence he was last extricated, as I was told

upon authority, which I cannot doubt, by a well-known Parisian Countess, with whom he continued to reside, when I left Paris.'

He paused again; and, looking at Emily, perceived her countenance change, and that she was falling from the seat; he caught her, but she had fainted, and he called loudly for assistance. They were, however, beyond the hearing of his servants at the chateau, and he feared to leave her while he went thither for assistance, yet knew not how otherwise to obtain it; till a fountain at no great distance caught his eye, and he endeavoured to support Emily against the tree, under which she had been sitting, while he went thither for water. But again he was perplexed, for he had nothing near him, in which water could be brought; but while, with increased anxiety, he watched her, he thought he perceived in her countenance symptoms of returning life.

It was long, however, before she revived, and then she found herself supported—not by the Count, but by Valancourt, who was observing her with looks of earnest apprehension, and who now spoke to her in a tone, tremulous with his anxiety. At the sound of his well-known voice, she raised her eyes, but presently closed them, and a faintness again came over her.

The Count, with a look somewhat stern, waved him to withdraw; but he only sighed heavily, and called on the name of Emily, as he again held the water, that had been brought, to her lips. On the Count's repeating his action, and accompanying it with words, Valancourt answered him with a look of deep resentment, and refused to leave the place, till she should revive, or to resign her for a moment to the care of any person. In the next instant, his conscience seemed to inform him of what had been the subject of the Count's conversation with Emily, and indignation flashed in his eyes; but it was quickly repressed, and succeeded by an expression of serious anguish, that induced the Count to regard him with more pity than resentment, and the view of which so much affected Emily, when she again revived, that she yielded to the weakness of tears. But she soon restrained them, and, exerting her resolution to appear recovered, she rose, thanked the Count and Henri, with whom Valancourt had entered the garden, for their care, and moved towards the chateau, without noticing Valancourt, who, heart-struck by her manner, exclaimed in a low voice—'Good God! how have I deserved this?—what has been said, to occasion this change?'

Emily, without replying, but with increased emotion, quickened her steps. 'What has thus disordered you, Emily?' said he, as he still walked by her side: 'give me a few moments' conversation, I entreat you;—I am very miserable!'

Though this was spoken in a low voice, it was overheard by the Count, who immediately replied, that Mademoiselle St. Aubert was then too much indisposed, to attend to any conversation, but that he would venture to promise she would see Monsieur Valancourt on the morrow, if she was better.

Valancourt's cheek was crimsoned: he looked haughtily at the Count, and then at Emily, with successive expressions of surprise, grief and supplication, which she could neither misunderstand, or resist, and she said languidly—'I shall be better tomorrow, and if you wish to accept the Count's permission, I will see you then.'

'See me!' exclaimed Valancourt, as he threw a glance of mingled pride and resentment upon the Count; and then, seeming to recollect himself, he added—'But I will come, madam; I will accept the Count's PERMISSION.'

When they reached the door of the chateau, he lingered a moment, for his resentment was now fled; and then, with a look so expressive of tenderness and grief, that Emily's heart was not proof against it, he bade her good morning, and, bowing slightly to the Count, disappeared.

Emily withdrew to her own apartment, under such oppression of heart as she had seldom known, when she endeavoured to recollect all that the Count had told, to examine the probability of the circumstances he himself believed, and to consider of her future conduct towards Valancourt. But, when she attempted to think, her mind refused controul, and she could only feel that she was miserable. One moment, she sunk under the conviction, that Valancourt was no longer the same, whom she had so tenderly loved, the idea of whom had hitherto supported her under affliction, and cheered her with the hope of happier days,—but a fallen, a worthless character, whom she must teach herself to despise—if she could not forget. Then, unable to endure this terrible supposition, she rejected it, and disdained to believe him capable of conduct, such as the Count had described, to whom she believed he had been misrepresented by some artful enemy; and there were moments, when she even ventured to doubt the integrity of the Count himself, and to suspect, that he was influenced by some selfish motive, to break her connection with Valancourt. But this was the error of an instant, only; the Count's character, which she had heard spoken of by Du Pont and many other persons, and had herself observed, enabled her to judge, and forbade the supposition; had her confidence, indeed, been less, there appeared to be no temptation to betray him into conduct so treacherous, and so cruel. Nor did reflection suffer her to preserve the hope, that Valancourt had been mis-represented to the Count, who had said, that he spoke chiefly from his own observation, and from his son's experience. She must part from Valancourt, therefore, for ever—for what of either happiness or tranquillity could she expect with a man, whose tastes were degenerated into low inclinations, and to whom vice was become habitual? whom she must no longer esteem, though the remembrance of what he once was, and the long habit of loving him, would render it very difficult for her to despise him. 'O Valancourt!' she would exclaim, 'having been separated so long—do we meet, only to be miserable—only to part for ever?'

Amidst all the tumult of her mind, she remembered pertinaciously the seeming candour and simplicity of his conduct, on the preceding night; and, had she dared to trust her own heart, it would have led her to hope much from this. Still she could not resolve to dismiss him for ever, without obtaining further proof of his ill conduct; yet she saw no probability of procuring it, if, indeed, proof more positive was possible. Something, however, it was necessary to decide upon, and she almost determined to be guided in her opinion solely by the manner, with which Valancourt should receive her hints concerning his late conduct.

Thus passed the hours till dinner-time, when Emily, struggling against the pressure of her grief, dried her tears, and joined the family at table, where the Count preserved towards her the most delicate attention; but the Countess and Mademoiselle Bearn, having looked, for a moment, with surprise, on her dejected countenance, began, as usual, to talk of trifles, while the eyes of Lady Blanche asked much of her friend, who could only reply by a mournful smile.

Emily withdrew as soon after dinner as possible, and was followed by the Lady Blanche, whose anxious enquiries, however, she found herself quite unequal to answer, and whom she entreated to spare her on the subject of her distress. To converse on any topic, was now, indeed, so extremely painful to her, that she soon gave up the attempt, and Blanche left her, with pity of the sorrow, which she perceived she had no power to assuage.

Emily secretly determined to go to her convent in a day or two; for company, especially that of the Countess and Mademoiselle Bearn, was intolerable to her, in the present state of her spirits; and, in the retirement of the convent, as well as the kindness of the abbess, she hoped to recover the command of her mind, and to teach it resignation to the event, which, she too plainly perceived, was approaching.

To have lost Valancourt by death, or to have seen him married to a rival, would, she thought, have given her less anguish, than a conviction of his unworthiness, which must terminate in misery to himself, and which robbed her even of the solitary image her heart so long had cherished. These painful reflections were interrupted, for a moment, by a note from Valancourt, written in evident distraction of mind, entreating, that she would permit him to see her on the approaching evening, instead of the following morning; a request, which occasioned her so much agitation, that she was unable to answer it. She wished to see him, and to terminate her present state of suspense, yet shrunk from the interview, and, incapable of deciding for herself, she, at length, sent to beg a few moments' conversation with the Count in his library, where she delivered to him the note, and requested his advice. After reading it, he said, that, if she believed herself well enough to support the interview, his opinion was, that, for the relief of both parties, it ought to take place, that evening.

'His affection for you is, undoubtedly, a very sincere one,' added the Count; 'and he appears so much distressed, and you, my amiable friend, are so ill at ease—that the sooner the affair is decided, the better.'

Emily replied, therefore, to Valancourt, that she would see him, and then exerted herself in endeavours to attain fortitude and composure, to bear her through the approaching scene—a scene so afflictingly the reverse of any, to which she had looked forward!