

The Mysterious Novice

Or, Convent of the Grey Penitents

By Sarah Wilkinson

The deep tolling of the convent bell announced the decease of the Madre Vitoria Ursula, an abbess of the rigid order of Grey Penitents. This event, though long expected, was a source of unfeigned sorrow and regret to the sisterhood. Though vested by the rules of the foundation with an almost despotic sway, she had tempered her authority with tenderness and benevolence. Her deportment, though mild and affable, had a dignity of expression, that prevented undue familiarity from those committed to her charge, and procured respect.

This amiable woman had just attained her forty-second year, when her eyelids were closed by death. To her it had no terror: she trusted in the mercy of that Being, with whom she hoped her peace was made. Her errors had long been renounced and repented of. One person alone she had in her younger days seriously injured; to her she had made every reparation that lay within her power, but her fault was never forgiven. Every year, instead of weakening the rancour of her enemy, appears to have added strength to the most deadly hate, that ever lodged within a female breast.

Among the novices belonging to the convent, was an interesting young woman, named Constance; she had been a peculiar favourite of the late abbess, and now mourned her loss in a manner that showed the sincerity of her anguish. The affection and solicitude the abbess displayed in every thing relative to Constance, was the only instance of preference or partiality that had occurred during her superintendence of the convent; to the others, she was ever uniformly kind and just. For several days previous to the death of the Madre, Constance had been almost her only companion and attendant, she sat up with her every night; but during those lonely hours the presence of one or other of the lay sisters was always requested. When the last hour of the abbess' life arrived, she received the sacred rites of the church from the hands of the holy Father Francis, who gave her a solemn benediction and retired; according to their rules, the whole of the sisterhood were assembled around the bed to witness the awful scene; with one hand the dying sufferer grasped a small silver crucifix, the other was held by the weeping Constance, till the moment that her excellent friend ceased to breathe. Her last gaze was fixed on the lovely novice; and, as she expired, she uttered the word 'Remember'. Constance was going to reply, but perceiving that the abbess had quitted this earthly state, she fainted in the arms of Agnes, a lay sister, who stood next her, and was borne insensible to her cell.

The new abbess did not arrive at the convent till a fortnight subsequent to the interment of her predecessor had passed. She came from a Neapolitan convent; it being the rules of the Grey Penitents not to choose an abbess from among their own sisterhood, but to have one nominated by the presiding bishop. The present superior numbered a few years more than the late abbess had done, yet she appeared healthy, robust, and much elevated with her new dignity. She belonged to the same convent as her predecessor, and it appeared that great interest had been made by her friends to get her the succession. When Constance was informed that the Duke di Beroces' daughter, the Lady Josephina, was the new abbess, she gave a convulsive start and had nearly fainted; three of the nuns were present, among whom was sister Clara, a woman of repulsive manners, artful, penetrating, and apt to put malicious constructions on the most innocent events. For this well-known disposition, she had rendered herself an object of dislike to

the late superior; who treated her with civility, but never admitted her to the least share in her confidential concerns. Clara perceived the emotions of Constance with surprise, and eagerly enquired why the mention of the new abbess caused such agitation? The novice replied, that the thoughts of her late friend forcibly recurred to her mind, and she felt it would give her pain to congratulate her successor, however amiable she might be. The other sisters appeared satisfied with this explanation, and praised her sensibility; but Clara retired with a look expressive of incredulity.

The chapel, for the space of a month, was hung with black, in respect to the memory of the abbess. That time expired, the sables were taken down, and preparations made for the inauguration of the new abbess; she approached the altar supported by the elder nuns, followed by the rest of the sisters in procession, who paired off and ranged themselves along the middle aisle. The bishop having read to her the various articles she was bound to observe, explained her duty and administered the oaths usual on the occasion. She was led from the altar to an elevated seat, and the nuns repaired to a gallery appropriated to their use, and a solemn anthem was sung. The ceremony concluded by a hymn, sung by four novices, at that time belonging to the convent.

Constance shone conspicuous among the rest of her competitors for beauty and elegance of person, which even the plainness of her garb did not diminish. Her voice was seraphic, and the skill and judgement with which she executed her part, increased the admiration her appearance raised among the spectators. On these occasions, the doors were open to the public, who eagerly seized the opportunity offered. Among the noble persons whom this spectacle had drawn together, was Adolphus, the Count d'Erfeldt. The interesting appearance of Constance riveted his eyes on her, and she was the magnet of attraction, that occupied his thoughts during the solemnity. The day was nearly closed before the ceremony ended. When the abbess and her nuns returned to the interior of the convent, Constance walked with the rest of the novices after the six elder sisters, to whose care they were committed; a murmur of commiseration ran through the spectators at the sight of Constance, who was soon to be lost to a world she seemed born to ornament. It was observed, that she heaved a deep sigh as she entered the gate of the gloomy edifice; various were the conjectures from what source this mark of sorrow sprung, and none was more affected by it than d'Erfeldt. He condescended to make enquiries among the servants, who were employed about the chapel, to what family this lady belonged; some of them either could not or would not give the desired explanation, till meeting with a lay sister more loquacious than the rest, she informed him that Constance was involved in mystery; she had been in the convent but three years, and had at that time entered it late at night, accompanied by the confessor of the convent, Father Francis. She appeared in a forlorn condition, her garments were drenched with rain, her tresses hung loosely on her shoulders, nor had she either cloak or bonnet to shield her from the inclemency of the weather. She seemed nearly insensible to the objects around her, when she was led by Father Francis to the abbess's parlour. Some of the nuns, who were sitting with the abbess, were ordered to withdraw, and the conversation that passed between her, Father Francis, and Constance, did not transpire.

The conference lasted nearly an hour, when the monk retired, and the abbess ordered a chamber to be prepared for the young stranger, who having caught a severe cold attended with a degree of fever, that threatened danger, was confined during several weeks, the abbess attending her with fond solicitude; and from the period of Constance's recovery, she was to her as an indulgent mother. This account induced d'Erfeldt from its singularity to ask further questions, but the answers he received were not of a nature to satisfy the curiosity raised in his breast; the history of Constance, previous to her entering the convent, had doubtless been known to the late

abbess; but it had never transpired among the sisterhood. The lay sister spoke highly of Constance; she believed from the tenor of her conduct since she had the pleasure of knowing her, that from whatever source her distress and poverty arose, it was wholly free from guilt, and could only have been from some sudden event, as afflicting as it was unfortunate; for the accomplishments she possessed testified, that her education had been attended to with great care and expense. In general her behaviour evinced frankness of disposition; but she had never been heard to mention her parents, or give the least hint relative to her family, and if any of her companions introduced a conversation that led to such a subject she retired, or if that was not possible, started another theme.

D'Erfeldt retired with a determination of banishing the lovely Constance from his thoughts, but it was not possible, her image was rooted there, and he felt the most ardent desire to be made acquainted with the circumstances that had thus consigned to a convent's gloom the most perfect of her sex. Her expressive countenance was tempered with an innocent sweetness, that led him to coincide in opinion with the good-natured lay sister, that guilt had never been an inmate of her bosom. The situation in which Constance was placed, almost precluded the possibility of seeing her again. He felt interested in her fate, and anxious to know if it was in the power of any earthly being, by pecuniary aid, to ameliorate her woes, and prevail on her to leave the convent; where he supposed (from her countenance, which displayed resignation mixed with melancholy) she had continued more from adverse circumstances, than from inclination. It was an affair in which delicacy forbade his personal interference, nor was it probable that the abbess would condescend, or even deem it prudent to answer the interrogation of a young nobleman with respect to Constance: he made several attempts to get a letter conveyed to the novice, by means of the portress or the gardener, but he was at length obliged to desist, and found they were not to be corrupted from their duty and fidelity. In short he was baffled in every attempt he made to introduce himself to the notice of Constance.

While affairs were in this state, he was suddenly called by an express to attend the Marquis Sperreth, the father of his amiable mother (who had died in consequence of a fright from fire, in one of her accouchements), who was now supposed by his physicians to be at the point of death. The distance was only thirty miles, and the young count, impelled by duty, hastened to the castle of Sperreth with reluctance; at any other time his inclination would have kept pace with the filial respect that he really felt for his relation, from whom, in spite of a ruggedness of disposition he had from his youth, which distinguished him and made him the terror of all who had given him intentional or indeed unintentional offence, he had ever received kindness and liberality.

Though he had not been so fortunate as to gain an interview with Constance, or even to obtain the means of conveying a letter to her hands, yet it was an addition to his misery to be distant from the place that immured her from his sight. On his arrival at the castle, he found that during the preceding night, his grandfather had unexpectedly sunk into a natural sleep, from which the most salutary effects were expected. D'Erfeldt heard this account with pleasure, and he fervently hoped that the returning convalescence of the Marquis would afford him a speedy opportunity of returning to Trent, about two miles from which, situated among the stupendous mountains and terrific rocks, stood the convent of the Grey Penitents. The edifice was only accessible by a craggy path, whose frightful inequalities struck dismay into the breast of a stranger, as it suggested an idea of being at some sudden winding precipitated into a yawning gulph. The Marquis Sperreth continued in a most uncertain state, on one day he appeared to be recovering, and the next he suffered a relapse that threatened almost instantaneous dissolution. Thus did the time pass alternately for several weeks, and Adolphus was in such constant attendance on his

grandfather, that he found it impossible, without incurring his displeasure, to make even a temporary visit to Trent. Such was the affection of the marquis for his grandson, that he could scarcely endure a momentary absence, yet in the midst of this endearing cordiality, Adolphus observed something mysterious in the behaviour of his noble relation. At those periods when the excess of his pains made him entertain a belief that his last moments were approaching, he seemed on the point of unburthening his mind of some weighty oppression to Adolphus, and the attendants on his sick chamber had often been dismissed from his presence for that purpose. He would then exhort his grandson to an observance of the injunctions he was about to give him, and not to betray a trust that would devolve to him, when he who was now speaking should be no more. He would in the midst of this address start, and bid Adolphus be careful there were no listeners, and then return to hear the painful truths he had to disclose: then a cessation from pain would alter his resolves and procrastinate the confession to make, which must be humiliating to a man who was in fact proverbial for his pride. He would on these occasions exclaim, "Nothing is impossible while existence is left, and I may yet recover to do justice to those I have injured, and not expose my guilt unnecessarily even to thee! I once thought (continued he), there could be no harm in persecuting the enemies of our faith. I was taught so from my youth, and even that to bring ruin and misery on a heretic was praiseworthy. In the solitude of my chamber I have suffered deeply for this error: conscience has been an avenging judge and an awful monitor. It has taught me that one human being has no right to persecute another for difference of opinions, especially when we both adore one God and Redeemer, and only vary in less essential points."

Such scenes as these frequently occurred, and it was natural for the young count to feel his curiosity excited: that his grandfather had been guilty of some heinous act of injustice, was clearly placed beyond doubt by his self-accusation; this he regarded with surprise. He thought his grandfather possessed of the strictest honour, though neither charitable nor merciful, and quick to punish any act of injustice offered to himself or vassals. He seemed to be indefatigable in discharging obligations contracted by himself to others. Three months had elapsed when the marquis by degrees recovered so far as to be able to sit up for a few hours each evening, while Adolphus strove to amuse him by reading to or conversing with him. One evening his grandfather being in a more cheerful and complacent mood than usual, abruptly put the question to the youth, if he had yet seen the woman whom he supposed capable of forming his happiness in the connubial state. A scarlet suffusion glowed on d'Erfeldt's cheeks, as the image of Constance recurred to his mind. This emotion did not pass unnoticed by the marquis, who observed that he had ever been an advocate for early marriages, from a conviction that they secure persons of both sexes from a variety of excesses and temptations to which human nature is liable, from giving in general a sedateness to the character, which is strengthened by the new and endearing ties that spring up and estrange the mind from frivolous pursuits and degrading connexions. "It is scarcely possible, my dear son (continued the marquis), that I should live to see you in the state I have been extolling; but it would give me pleasure to know that your affections were engaged to an object worthy of an alliance with the noble race of the d'Erfeldts, now represented by you. What says my Adolphus? I know he is candid and sincere." Adolphus was indeed a stranger to every species of dissimulation: he replied, that he had never as yet addressed any lady on serious terms, nor had he till lately seen the woman who could make more than a transient impression on his heart. The conclusion of this sentence led to further explanation, and d'Erfeldt related the adventure he had met with at the convent, and the interest the novice had made on his mind. The marquis at first displayed evident marks of disapprobation, muttering that a novice of such an order could never be a fit bride for his

grandson. Adolphus proceeded in repeating what he had been informed of by the lay sister, respecting the fair Constance, and soon perceived the faculties of the marquis to be absorbed in amazement. Three times he made him repeat the account, urging him to be minute in every particular, and on each repetition he burst forth into expressions of surprise. Particularly in questioning him on the length of time that Constance had been said to reside in the convent. He expressed concern and even melted into tears, when Adolphus related the decease of the late Abbess Vitoria Ursula, from a tedious decline. He remarked, it was strange that she had not ordered at least a posthumous letter to be sent him, to announce this awful event.

This remark confirmed Adolphus that his grandfather was no stranger either to the late abbess, or the lovely girl whom she had valued. The astonished youth cast himself on his knees. "Tell me, my lord," said he in supplicating accents, "what is the family and who are the parents of Constance, perhaps you can ease my almost bursting heart, by explaining how she came in her present situation, and what means I can pursue to extricate her from—." Adolphus was at this moment interrupted by a deep groan, and the marquis, overpowered by their late conversation, and the reflections it had given, rose to sink senseless into the arms of his grandson, who conveyed him with difficulty to an adjacent couch, and then alarmed his attendants, who were in an opposite chamber with a physician, who had been retained for some time past in the castle. He was placed in bed and means used to restore him. The emotions that Adolphus had unintentionally given rise to in the breast of the marquis, had been of great disservice to him. He remained dreadfully convulsed during the whole of the night, and such was his situation at the morning's dawn, that the physician declared that it was next to an impossibility for him to survive throughout the whole of the ensuing day. This account was an unwelcome one to Adolphus: he should by this event not only lose a beloved relation, but with him the wished-for intelligence respecting Constance. The physician was indeed right, the marquis expired between the hours of three and four the next afternoon, in the arms of his beloved Adolphus. About two hours previous to this event, he had been able to converse for a short time with the youth; he drew from his bosom a small key, which had hung there suspended by a chain of exquisite workmanship, and presenting it to Adolphus, told him that it belonged to an iron chest, which he had secreted under the altar belonging to the oratory, at the end of the upper gallery, which had been the scene of his morning devotions. "Remember, most dear and duteous boy," said the marquis, "to fulfil the injunctions I am about to give you, as you value my blessings, and wish to prosper. Would to Heaven I had sooner heard what you related last night. I have not time left now to be explicit, the papers you will find in that chest will give you the history of the novice; for the Constance you mention, and the Constance whose loss I mourn, are I am assured the same person; snatch her if possible from a convent's gloom. In that case portion her worthy of my noble house, of which she is a member. My will has been made three years since, with the exception of a few memorials to my friends, and legacies to servants, you are my sole heir, and you are a deserving one. But justice must be rendered Constance, my mind has been poisoned against her by a villain: so long since I have found him, but the discovery was made too late for my peace. From what you relate I am sure Constance was innocent, for she took refuge in the arms of a mother, yes, Adolphus, Ursula was her mother, when I was led to believe her a votary of vice. One-third of my personal wealth I wish to be hers, and such an annuity out of the Vienna estate as you shall think fit, so to your honour and protection I bequeath her. If subsequent events allow of your espousing Constance, remember you have my sanction and fervent blessing, it is an event in which if my spirit could be conscious, it would rejoice. As soon as my remains are deposited in the tomb, examine the contents of the iron chest, and as you deal justly or unjustly

by Constance, my blessing or my curse be on you.” Adolphus said everything that duty or reason dictated to confirm the marquis in the opinion he had formed of his integrity.

The agonies of death precluded further conversation, except a few short sentences which the marquis uttered at intervals. Above an hour before he breathed his last, his senses forsook him, and he raved about racks, prisons, and convents, in a manner that impressed his hearers with horror. He expired with a groan deep and awful, and Adolphus left the chamber, that he might indulge free from observation the grief he could not suppress. According to the commands of the deceased, his remains lay in state a fort-night, his body being embalmed and screwed down in lead, the room was hung with black velvet, on which was displayed the armour, colours, etc. of the family. The subsequent day to the funeral, Adolphus prepared to follow the commands of the late marquis, with regard to the iron chest. He repaired to the oratory, attended by Gervaise a young man who stood high in his esteem: every vein throbbed with expectation, Adolphus trusting that he should then be acquainted with the mystery that enveloped his fair novice, and instructed in the means to restore her to the world. Bitter was the disappointment that ensued, when on searching the oratory no iron chest was to be found; in vain every part of the castle was strictly investigated, it was still missing. Adolphus was plunged into deep affliction by this unexpected affair: the marquis had been in possession of two other houses, but as he had visited neither of them for ten years past, it was not likely for it to be there. His will, and several papers of consequence were found in safe depositories, but nothing that in the least related to Constance. Adolphus was fearful that her noviciate would be expired previous to his return to Trent, and there was nothing he dreaded so much as being shocked with the intelligence that she was become a professed nun, when the difficulty of obtaining her freedom would be greatly enhanced. He set out to Trent, attended by Gervaise, and they arrived there at a late hour of the evening. He found that his servants, in honour of his arrival and acquisition of fortune, had prepared at their own expense a rural route: tents were placed on the spacious lawn, the groves were hung with coloured lamps, and the festive dance went on among the domestics and tenantry, to the cheering music which was placed at convenient distances among the trees. At any other time Adolphus would have joined with condescension in their festivity; but his spirits were at this time too much harassed to admit of mirth, and he retired to a suite of rooms prepared for his reception.

He felt the utmost gratitude for their intentions, and properly appreciated this mark of their respect; he gave orders for the party to be liberally supplied with every necessary refreshment; a sandwich and some wine was his own supper: he heard the mirth of his dependants with a melancholy pleasure, and sighed to himself, “Ah! how happy should I be, had I Constance for my bride; with what gentle condescension would she treat my humble friends, and share in a certain degree in their respectful mirth.” He retired to bed, but his slumbers were disturbed by terrific dreams, the loss of the iron chest was so mysterious and vexatious. Rodolpho and Bernard, the principal attendants on the late marquis, solemnly affirmed that it was in the oratory just before the fatal illness that had caused his dissolution; from the first attack of it, he had never visited the place where it was. They had not the least knowledge of its being removed, nor did they have reason to suppose that anyone, besides themselves and its illustrious owner, knew the place where it was deposited. The next morning, attended by Gervaise, he set out for the convent of Grey Penitents, and delivering in his card to the portress, he soon gained admittance to the grated parlour, where the abbess gave him audience. Her first appearance impressed him with unfavourable ideas: he could not avoid thinking how unfit she seemed to superintend the important trust delivered to her charge; no pious resignation sat upon her brow—no maternal

aspect that called forth love and confidence from the nuns was visible—her scowling eyes proclaimed the ambition that filled her soul, and her countenance was not devoid of the traits that mark to a skilful observer the passions of envy and revenge. With a feigned complacence she addressed Adolphus, who was awed by her manner, and at a loss how to commence the business that had brought him to the convent, when he had lost the necessary explanations that the deceased marquis had led him to expect. He stammered out something respecting the commands of the late marquis, with respect to the convent, on the abbess of which he had now the honour to wait. “My revered grandfather,” continued he, “had a weight that lay heavy on his mind, alas! he expired without its being removed according to his liberal views, any further than the assurances I gave him of fulfilling his injunctions in that respect: such was his confidence in my honour, he did not admit a doubt of my veracity, and died in a perfect security of his desires being accomplished.” Here Adolphus paused—scarcely knowing how to mention Constance, whether by an authoritative demand, or an appeal to the feelings of the abbess: in the latter case he had little hope. The abbess mistaking the cause of his silence, interrupted him with, “Most noble youth, your modest temerity is praiseworthy: allow me, according to my judgement, to relate what I suppose to be the reason of the visit with which I am favoured. The late marquis was, I have every reason to believe, a member that had a laudable zeal for the Church. One of his family, whom he abandoned to her fate for marrying a Protestant officer, at length took shelter within these walls: the marquis, though certainly apprised of the death of his Ursula, means to bestow a handsome gift on our foundation—am I not right, my lord?”

Adolphus beheld the avarice of her principles with disgust: he replied, “A handsome dower shall not be wanting, if I succeed in my purpose. But deceive not yourself, my good lady, no stipulated sum has been left by the marquis; my power in that respect is discretionary, and will be regulated according to the services I shall find the lady Constance to have received from your community, more than in respect to the memory of her mother, whose exemplary conduct, in the station to which the archbishop of B— elevated her, was an honour to your convent.”

“There are doubtless, those,” said the Madre, with a countenance inflamed by passion; “as worthy of the trust, as the late Ursula.” “It was not my intention to infer aught to the contrary,” replied the count; “nor did I suspect, that in praising the virtues of your predecessor I could give you the least offence.” The abbess regarding him with a supercilious smile, bade him proceed immediately to the subject that had occasioned his visit, as her time was too precious to be wasted in trifling.

“Briefly, thus,” said d’Erfeldt; “you have under your care a novice, named Constance.” “Hold, my lord,” interrupted the abbess, “nor shock my years by your discourse; Constance is destined to the veil. This is not the first time you have dared to interest persons, whose religious habit ought to have made them sacred from such folly, in behalf of your affection to that artful girl. But to address yourself to me, the superior of the convent, is the height of insolence. Remember, I am not Vitoria Ursula, nor obliged to continue the weak indulgence she showed her favourite.”

“Material affection is an excellence in the female character, that I did not expect to hear condemned by one of that sex; and *one* who, by favour of our church, is adopted mother to the number of females committed to her care.” “My lord,” exclaimed the abbess, “your warmth transports you beyond the bounds of respect due to my character and situation.” D’Erfeldt apologised, and the abbess proceeded. “What proof have you to give me, that Constance is the offspring of my predecessor, an assertion I must own I am not inclined to credit? Let your character for veracity rank ever so high, I am more apt to think, that the violence of your ill-placed passion, has suggested this scheme, from which, however, you are not likely to derive the

least benefit. Once more I repeat, what are your proofs?" "There, most holy mother, rests my misfortune: some secret villainy has deprived me of the (to me) invaluable papers, bequeathed me by my grandfather. I have, however, his solemn assurance, that Constance was the daughter of the late abbess; that she had been unjustly persecuted. That it was his pleasure she should be restored to the world, with a fortune worthy of her relations. It is now my present design to demand an interview with that young lady; let it be in your presence. Her account will, no doubt, elucidate those passages that the loss of my grandfather's papers has placed in doubt." The abbess turned from him with disdain, and in a most ironic strain wished him good-morning; and ringing the bell, a lay sister appeared, whom she ordered to conduct the count from the parlour, and see him out of the convent.

When the count returned to the villa at Trent, he gave way to a despair, ill-suited to his youth; the passion he had conceived for the lovely Constance had been heightened by his conversation respecting her with the late marquis; and had affection been entirely out of the question, he would have considered it as an act of justice, to reinstate the fair one in that, to which her affinity to his grandfather entitled her. His painful reflections were interrupted by the unannounced entrance of his friend Baron Steinfort, who had been his chief companion from their infant years.

Perceiving Adolphus reclined on a sofa in a melancholy posture, his dress neglected, and his hair in disorder, he started back, exclaiming, "Gracious heaven! my dear friend, what has happened? I must own I did not expect to find you in full possession of your native vivacity; the death of your grandfather called for a decent expression of grief; but as his decease was neither sudden, nor premature in respect of age, and places you in possession of a noble addition to your paternal inheritance, I cannot perceive the reason of this gust of sorrow." "Frederick," said Adolphus, rising and taking the baron's hand; "I rejoice in your presence, 'tis what I was earnestly wishing for. I should have sent over to the castle, but was informed by Leopold, my steward, that you were at Vienna." The baron explained to him, that he had returned to his castle that morning, wholly unexpected by his domestics, who had not looked for him for some weeks; an affair of consequence having hastened his departure from Vienna. "I heard," continued he, "of your arrival, and having taken a few hours' rest, hastened hither to renew the friendship this long absence has interrupted." Adolphus embraced the baron, telling him, he never, at any moment of his life, had more occasion for a confidential friend, in whose bosom he could pour the sorrows of his heart. The baron made a suitable reply, and Adolphus having given orders to be denied to any company that might call to pay their respects on his return to Trent, sat down to communicate to his friend the vexations he had laboured under with regard to Constance.

The baron listened with attention to the narrative. When Adolphus concluded by asking his advice, he said: "Indeed, d'Erfeldt, from this first step of yours in regard to the wished-for liberation of Constance; I think you have acted decidedly wrong; why make an application to the abbess in this respect? It is not likely she should bear goodwill towards this amiable object; from the very circumstance of her being so high in favour with her predecessor, whose virtues you find she cannot bear to hear repeated. Why not apply to the prince, Bishop of B—, who is now at his palace, not five miles distant from here?" Adolphus observed, that as Constance had not yet taken the veil, he did not think it requisite to apply to such high authority, merely to free her from the temporary vows appertaining to the period of her noviciate. If indeed such an interference was necessary, he had hoped that the abbess would prove his friend, and join in his request; in that hope he was disappointed, and his fears for the happiness of Constance, placed under the power of such a woman, were a heavy addition to the weight of his woes and regret.

“Was I,” continued the count, “in possession of the particulars of my fair relation, I should know better how to proceed; but I have not the least clue by which to unravel this mystery.”

“Forgive me,” replied the baron; “in this instance you have been strangely remiss. I wonder that you, who are the lover, should not hit on a point at which to commence your operations; when it instantly struck me on a hearing of your story.” “Dearest Frederick, I am all impatience. How fortunate this interview with such a friend.” “Father Francis, the monk who introduced your Constance to the late abbess at the convent, could certainly give you information on a subject, which, from subsequent events, has been rendered so interesting to you. Whether Constance was known to him before that period, or introduced by accident, will then be known, and his mediation in this affair may prove of the utmost service.”

“How very dull of apprehension must I have been,” said the count, “not to call to mind what you propose. It now strikes me in so obvious a manner, that I wonder how I could overlook it. Father Francis is, if I mistake not, a member of the monastery of St Austin’s.” “He is so, Adolphus, and I have heard him represented in a most amiable light; mild and intelligent, a *bon* Catholic, but no bigot.”

“Just what I would wish to find him,” said Adolphus; “we want such a character, to enable us to counteract the malignity of the abbess.—Will you accompany me, Frederick, to St Austin’s?” “In this or any other respect you may command me,” replied the baron, “and believe me, though I have not the same inducement as yourself to unravel this business, I feel all the eagerness, that friendship for yourself, and pity for an innocent, and I fear injured female, can incite—*se allons mon amie*.” The count, with his friend, were chagrined on their arrival at St Austin’s, to find that Father Francis was absent on a mission, that would at least detain him for a week; and in the meantime, Eugene, a monk, who had not long received the cowl, officiated at the convent of the Grey Penitents till his return. Mortified at this delay, the count was quitting the portal in silence, but the baron detained him to join in a gift to the porter for his civility; and leaving their cards, desired the reverend man to acquaint Father Francis the moment of his arrival, that they had been there with the wish to consult him on urgent business. The porter having returned them fervent thanks for their liberal donation, assured them he would pay attention to their commands; and the gentlemen returned to the Count d’Erfeldt’s residence.

To a youth of d’Erfeldt’s temper, this delay was excruciating; all ardour in every affair he engaged with, he could ill brook disappointment: happily for himself and society his propensities were virtuous—guile and seduction he abhorred; had it been otherwise, the talents and accomplishments he possessed might have proved dangerous. A few days after their visit to the monastery of St Austin’s, the veiling of a nun, who was to become one of the Penitents, made a public day at the convent. The count and Stein-fort were among the first that availed themselves of this opportunity to visit the chapel. During the ceremony the eyes of Adolphus eagerly sought for Constance; there were three novices attending the abbess, but not the one he sought. A chill ran through his veins, he feared that Constance had taken the veil; perhaps, prematurely forced to that step; for he could not conjecture, by what he had heard from the lay sister, that her noviciate was near the expiration.

He communicated his thoughts to the baron, and they agreed to place themselves by the door that led to the interior of the convent; and Adolphus was to observe the nuns as they passed, with a scrutinising glance, to discover if Constance was of that number. The abbess led the way on their return from the chapel. The nuns and novices passed on in regular order, but there was not among them a form that could have been mistaken, even for a moment, for the lovely Constance. The lay sisters closed the procession. Mary, the humane being from whom Adolphus received his

former account of the novice, seemed purposely to linger to the last. She regarded the count with an expression of melancholy. She took a small folded paper from her bosom and slid it into his hand; she then hastened in and closed the door. The count's eagerness to peruse the paper he had received, would not allow him to return to Trent, without making himself master of the contents. He therefore withdrew, accompanied by the baron, to a spot free from observation.

The contents were:

My lord count, in the earnest hopes that I shall have an opportunity of conveying this to your hands, I have ventured to pen these few lines. Constance is yet within our walls; believe not any assertion the abbess may make to the contrary, on your next application for an interview with the amiable girl, which it is reasonable to suppose will not be long delayed. Our Madre is her powerful enemy, from the circumstance of her being the daughter of the late lady Vitoria Ursula, with whom it seems she was formerly acquainted, and who offended, if not injured her. Heaven knows the truth of this assertion: if so, why should the innocent suffer? Be firm in the cause of Constance. Should anything of consequence transpire, I will endeavour to transmit an account to you. Tomorrow, we admit visitors to the chapel; I hope to see you there, when I trust an opportunity will occur to deliver this to you.

Mary

This note was dated on the preceding day, and the visit they had paid to the chapel to witness the ceremony of veiling of the nun (at least, that was the purpose declared, though the real one was the hope to see Constance) had answered to the wishes of their humble friend, the benevolent Mary, who was worthy of a better fate than the veil, to which poverty and early credulity had destined her. The contents of this note heightened their impatience for the return of Father Francis, as they had every reason to dread the power of the abbess. Much relieved were they when early one morning a short while later, as soon as d'Erfeldt had risen, Father Francis was announced, and invited to breakfast; Adolphus sent for the baron to be present at the interview, introducing him to the monk as his dearest friend and confidant. The first ceremonials passed, the monk entreated to know what particular affair had caused him to be honoured with their commands. Adolphus, in a concise manner, related every circumstance respecting Constance, his deceased grandfather, and the abbess, without betraying the name of the lay sister, from whom he had derived the principal source of his information. He then politely requested Father Francis to relate what he knew respecting the novice. "Most willingly, my lord," said the good monk, "nor have I any impediment to restrain me from a compliance with your request. I had been called out at a late hour one night to attend a dying lady, whose confessor I had long been chosen; as I returned towards St Austin's, I passed the door of a large house near the extremity of the town, it was suddenly opened, and a young female clad in a mourning dress was thrust into the street; she seemed nearly fainting, and would have fallen to the ground, had not I stretched forth my arms to save her. The door instantly closed, and I could hear the bolts drawn across. I was hastening to knock and demand the cause of this cruel proceeding, in exposing a helpless female to the rigours of such an inclement night, and at an hour so improper, but my purpose was stayed by the entreaties of the young lady, who conjured me, if I possessed humanity, to lead her far from that vile abode, to some shelter however humble, that might save her from the insults and dangers she was liable to meet with in the streets.

"I paused (continued the good monk), and recollecting the virtues of the Madre Vitoria, the abbess of the next convent, I resolved to take my fair protégée and endeavour to gain her protection within those walls, as it was impossible to give her a shelter in my own monastery, without risking an unjust scandal; nor would she be half so comfortable as with those of her own sex. The abbess was not retired for the night; I sent in a note which I had scrawled with a pencil,

by the light of a lamp, and was soon ordered into her presence with my charge, at the first sight of whom the Madre betrayed the strongest emotions. She ordered the attendant nuns away, and eagerly demanded of the young stranger her name. 'Constance, daughter of the deceased Count Kempenfeldt,' was the reply, 'And granddaughter to the Marquis Sperreth,' rejoined the abbess. 'I am so,' answered the young lady, with a look that testified surprise at the observation made by the Ma dre, who rising from her seat, and approaching her, added to her astonishment, by opening the collar of her robe, and displaying a deep stained mark of a mulberry just above her left shoulder, to Which the abbess glued her lips for a few moments, and then raising her head affectionately, embraced the weeping Constance, exclaiming, 'You perceive, my sweet girl, you are not unknown to me: I have often folded you in these arms; no wonder you do not recognise my features, they are altered by sickness and sorrow, nor did you ever behold me in this garb; you are much grown, but your likeness to your excellent father struck me forcibly the moment of your entrance. Answer me one question, on which my peace in a great measure depends; as you hope for heaven's mercy, swerve not from the truth—I left you under the protection of your grandfather, you are now a miserable girl imploring shelter—Has this change been caused by guilt, or misfortune?'

" 'I affirm,' replied Constance, with dignity, 'but that Heaven, to which I appeal—that I am innocent and virtuous.' 'Then welcome, thrice welcome, to the arms that now enfold you—the arms, my Constance, of an affectionate mother.' The daughter repeated the words, 'my mother!' and fainted.

"I feared that my presence was a restraint, and begged leave to retire; the abbess extended her hand, 'Heaven, my good father, will reward you for this deed. Tomorrow we shall be more composed, and you shall hear the story of my Constance; mine you already know; yet it will be necessary to repeat it to my child, and I solicit your presence after vespers.' I was true to the Madre's appointment," continued the monk, "and the abbess and her daughter recounted the events of their life. I will, for the sake of trespassing as little as possible on your time and patience, connect them together. The Marquis of Sperreth was a zealous bigot to the Catholic religion, and detested the members of the reformed doctrine, which was making such rapid strides throughout Germany. Not the books written by, or the discourse he held with enlightened men, who propagated the Protestant faith, could lessen his prejudices against those whom he termed heretics, nor teach him, that charity of opinion was necessary to hold persons of different faith in amicable bonds. He married for his first wife the daughter of a private gentleman, who expired soon after the birth of a female child, who in course of time was married to the Count d'Erfeldt; she bore him several children, but only one survived his infancy; he lost both his parents before he attained his ninth year, and was left to he guardianship of the marquis, who boarded him at the house of an abbé, till he came of age to take possession of his own estate.

"His second wife was the daughter of Baron Holmsbeach, as great a bigot as himself, nor did the fair lady much dissent in principle; yet her manners were mild, and she had no wish to control the opinion of others: not so her wedded lord, for so rigid was his method to force those within his power to an observance of the rites of the Roman Church, that he was apt to inspire terror and disgust instead of admiration. His wife brought him wealth and connection that gave him pleasure; yet she possessed few personal attractions or accomplishments; one daughter was also the only fruit of this union. The mother did not survive her daughter's fifth year, and the marquis was again a widower (in which state he chose to remain), and the lovely Vitoria was left to the sole care of an austere father. She had attained her sixteenth year, when the numerous connections in which the marquis was engaged, through his zeal for defending the ancient

religion from more innovations, made his house so much a resort for persons of his own sex, that he did not think it prudent for so young a lady to continue there, as she had no mother to guide her, and her sister being married. He then resided at Vienna, and thought proper to remove her to a chateau near Tyrol. Her solitude was cheered by the arrival of Josephine, a young lady some years older than herself: she possessed a large fortune, subject to no other control than that, by the will of her father she was obliged to reside under the care of the marquis till her nuptial day; religion had but a slight sway over her mind, and she had long, unknown to Sperreth, encouraged the pretensions of Count Kempenfeldt, a Protestant of engaging manners. Unawed by the presence of the marquis he became a frequent visitor to the ladies, too often so for the peace of Vitoria, who became enamoured with the lover of her friend; she exerted herself to engage his attentions, and at length so far succeeded in her unjust schemes, to flatter herself that, if Josephine was removed, and the count led to believe her faithless, she could attach him to herself. Her plan was arranged, and she lost no time in trying its effects. She wrote to her father a most urgent letter, requesting an interview, desiring at the same time that his visit might appear to Josephine as the effect of chance, and not in consequence of any invitation.

“This letter from Vitoria, and in particular the requests which terminated her epistle, excited his curiosity, and he hastened to the chateau with the utmost expedition, that he might procure an explanation, which Vitoria was as ready to give as the marquis to receive. She accused Josephine of encouraging the addresses of an heretic, and she stated her suppositions, that if means were not taken to prevent it, a speedy union would take place. The marquis resolved to spare himself that mortification; he asked Josephine to take a morning ride with him, and ere she was the least apprised of his intention, she found herself a prisoner in a convent of the Ursulines, and treated with rigour; to procure her liberty she was obliged to yield her hand to Baron Kanlintz, a husband selected by the marquis, a man old enough to be her father. He was wealthy and the owner of several dwellings; but from some disgust he had taken to the world, he lived in what might be denominated a stately gloom, which was little altered by his marriage. His doors were only opened to a select few, though he retained the same number of domestics as his ancestors had done, when festive mirth and hospitality was the order of the day. But now they were indeed more for show than use. His temper was jealous, and apt to look on the dark side of every object that admitted of a doubt. With such a being it was not likely that Josephine could enjoy happiness. Several hours of each day he was shut up in his study, while the baroness wandered about the fabric like a ghost, or contemplated the stiff portraits of the former inhabitants of the castle. The duty she owed her husband could not always hold its sway over her thoughts, they would revert to Count Kempenfeldt with tears and sighs of regret, as she pictured to herself how much happier the connubial state would have passed with him. She felt an earnest wish to ascertain how he endured their unexpected separation, and whether he had preserved that fidelity fate had not allowed her to maintain.

“She had been married to the baron two months, when her suspense was ended. But the certainty was more excruciating. He was married to the artful Vitoria, a few days preceding the period of this intelligence; it was communicated by the marquis, who in frantic rage deprecated the conduct of his daughter, and renounced her. Absorbed in religious and political controversies, and engaged in his views concerning his ward and her marriage with his friend the baron, he had little time to bestow on his daughter. He indeed wrote to her to know, if he should seek out for some young lady in reduced circumstances, whose accomplishments might render her a desirable companion. Vitoria replied, that solitude was agreeable, that her time was agreeably diversified by her morning walks, and administering to the comfort of the poor peasantry which surrounded

her dwelling; reading, working, drawing, and music, had each a share in her occupations, and the young woman who attended on her, being far superior to the usual domestics of that description, she had not one wish ungratified but the desire of seeing her father oftener. This letter gave much satisfaction to the marquis, who delighted to find his child in this frame of mind, and resting secure in the stability of her principles, left her to pursue her favourite avocations. Having removed Josephine, and lulled her father into fancied security, she began her attacks on the count; she made him believe that Josephine's absence was voluntary, and in fact by her own request.

“Disgusted by her supposed perfidy, and the insinuating manners of Vitoria, he soon transferred his affection to the latter, and their courtship was terminated by an elopement, to the chagrin and surprise of the marquis, to whom they transmitted an account of their union with solicitations of pardon, which was refused; a sum of money settled on the daughter by her deceased mother was given to her, with an assurance that was all of her once supposed large fortune she would ever receive, and at the same time intimated, that any future application she might make would not be attended to. The baroness was seized with an indisposition, the consequence of grief, that threatened to terminate her existence, and she continued for months in a pitiable state: the Countess Kempenfeldt heard of her situation, and experienced bitter pangs of remorse, and she was unhappy, though blest with the society of a husband she adored, and for whose sake she had violated the laws of duty and friendship; she wrote to the baroness intreating her pardon and avowing her own repentance, alleging her design to clear Josephine in the opinion of Kempenfeldt, whatever would be the result of such a humiliating confession to herself.

“Whatever consolation the baroness derived from this latter intimation, she would not pronounce the pardon so earnestly solicited, but replied, that her hatred and revenge should always pursue her, and if possible her offspring. Her letter flung the countess into a dangerous state: terror, repentance, and love, were at once too much for her frame. The count was assiduous in his attentions, and earnestly pressed to know the cause of her uneasiness, which she at length unfolded, beseeching Kempenfeldt not to hate her: he listened in silent wonder, and when the countess had concluded, left the room. The manner in which he had lost Josephine affected him; but recollecting that love for himself had caused Vitoria's crime, and the affectionate tenor of her conduct, he resolved on a reconciliation, and to make himself happy with the woman whom fate had ordained his wife, the birth of a daughter added another link to the chain which bound him to Vitoria, and Constance was most fondly beloved by her father. In the fifth year of their marriage the Count and Countess Kempenfeldt were shocked by hearing that the Baroness Kanlintz had eloped from her husband with a young officer to whom he was guardian, and the next intelligence was that the baron, overcome by jealousy, and a high sense of the dishonour his lady had brought upon him, had terminated his existence by poison. They caused strict enquiries to be made after the hapless Josephine, and after some lapse of time they were informed, that stung with remorse for the untimely end to which she had brought the baron, and forsaken by her lover, she had taken refuge in a convent not many leagues from Tyrol.

“The regiment of which Count Kempenfeldt was colonel being ordered on foreign service, his lady attempted to soften the heart of her father, so far that he might receive her and her child under his roof, during the absence of her husband. Vitoria had but faint hopes of succeeding, from the prohibitions formerly received, but it was the will of her lord she should make the attempt, he being loth to leave her exposed to the evils that too often assail a defenceless woman. The marquis consented for her and Constance to become inmates of his dwelling, though he

observed that without an express order for that purpose, they were not to intrude themselves into his presence. The count having seen his wife and daughter safe under the roof of the marquis, took a melancholy leave, and joined his regiment. The countess had her own attendants, and an extensive range of apartments appropriated to her use; her commands were obeyed, but she was not admitted to any society with her father, and was even ordered to be careful to avoid meeting him in her walks. She used to behold him from the casements of her apartments, with many a heartfelt sigh. Accident introduced the playful Constance to his notice: the innocence of her aspect, and the replies she made to his questions, took a strong hold on the marquis; and in a few days he felt that existence without her endearing society would be a blank. He hired masters, and spared no pains to render her accomplished. He was a fond parent to Constance; but no entreaties could procure an extension of his kindness to her mother. Count Kempenfeldt died in battle, and his estates being entailed on male heirs, he had little to bequeath his widow Vitoria; in him she lost the only being save her child that could render life desirable. In the midst of this distress she received a letter that added poignantly to her anguish. It came from Josephine, felicitating herself in her rival's misfortunes, which she attributed as a judgement on her falsehood and the miseries she had made her suffer: laying her own crimes and the baron's death to Vitoria's account, as they would never, she said, have happened but for her base dissimulation to the marquis and Kempenfeldt.

“From the marquis she had no consolation, who in fact rejoiced that the count's death had freed his daughter from a heretic. He proposed to the widowed countess to retire into a convent, and by prayer and seclusion expiate the errors of her youth: on this condition he promised to make Constance an heiress to the principal part of his wealth, the other being destined for the young Count d'Erfeldt, the child of a daughter he had by his first marriage. To this Vitoria consented, though the conditions proposed were hard; she was to give up her daughter for ever, never to see or hear from her, and the child was to be taught that her mother was dead. She had no sooner retired to the convent, than she regretted the sacrifice she had made in giving her only child to the implacability of her father; but her promise was past, and it was too late to recant.

“The marquis having thus disposed of the mother, hired a preceptress for the daughter, and a small house was taken for them in a retired situation. He having changed his first design of keeping Constance with him, caprice seemed at this time to have had a powerful effect on his actions; he gave out to the world that his daughter was dead; a mock funeral took place, and a monument was erected to her memory. He seldom saw his grandson, though he loaded him with presents. Adolphus had never heard of the existence of such a being as a granddaughter of the marquis's, as the latter was fearful of their imbibing a passion for each other, that would interfere in his present designs.

“The principal care of Constance devolved on a monk, high in favour with the marquis, though he was wholly unworthy of such a distinction, his life having been marked with enormous crimes. A dissipated nobleman had beheld Constance without knowing to whom she was related: he in vain tried to gain admittance to her residence, for her governess was a woman of honour. The character of the monk was not unknown to him: he applied to him, and met with success. Father Leopold, for a stipulated sum, agreed to place Constance in his power: he did so, and then made out an artful tale to the marquis, describing the girl's absence as voluntary, and that she was the kept mistress of an heretical count. The marquis altered a will he had made in her favour, and forbade her name to be mentioned any more in his presence: telling the monk that the greatest favour he could do him would be to force her into a convent, that she might not add to her disgrace by fresh crimes. Such was the firmness of Constance, that the count found his

rhetoric in vain, she answered all his arguments with others that convinced him she would never be a voluntary victim of guilt: while he was meditating the most diabolical schemes, she escaped from his grasp. In vain as the granddaughter of the marquis she entreated shelter; no one gave credit to her story, some treated her as an impostor, and others said, if she was related to that nobleman, he had no doubt renounced her as unworthy of his care; at length she retired to a mean lodging, from whence she made several attempts to clear herself in the opinion of the marquis, by a statement of what had happened. But her letters returned unopened, accompanied by a command from the monk, as he said by the desire of the marquis, that he might be troubled with no more applications. The monk, fearful that he should be discovered in his scheme respecting Constance, and thus lose the favour and rich presents of the marquis, determined to place the fair one in such a situation that would render it impossible for her to seek an interview with the marquis; at the time that Vitoria's death was reported Josephine knew of the deception, and being informed by the monk in what convent the countess had taken shelter, she procured a removal to the same, that she might gratify her revenge and ill-nature, by doing every ill office in her power to the ill-fated Vitoria, who in vain sought a reconciliation. On the decease of the abbess of the Grey Penitents, Vitoria's piety gained her the appointment to that office, to the mortification of her enemy.

“To place Constance under the eye of Josephine was the intention of the monk; he set out to the place where the hapless fair one had taken temporary shelter. He removed her in the dead of the night to the house, at the door of which Father Francis met with her. It seemed inhabited by the vilest of ruffians, and Constance expected assassination; she lay senseless on a miserable mattress, and the monk supposing her to be asleep, talked freely to one of his confidants. The poor girl heard with surprise that Father Leopold was the author of her misfortunes, and also that she was to be removed the next night to a convent, there to be kept in strict confinement, and not allowed to mingle with or be seen by the rest of the inhabitants of the walls. Constance heard this with horror: the monk and his associates withdrew; she was fatigued, but apprehensions kept her awake till the morning's dawn, when she fell, in spite of her efforts to keep awake, into a deep sleep, from which she did not awake till past the meridian of the day. The monk was not there: she found herself under the charge of an old woman and two men of miserable appearance, and found by their discourse that they were subordinate to a set of plunderers. Constance had some jewels on, and her robe was trimmed with rich lace; these wretches agreed to strip her and decamp with the property, as well as some valuable articles that had been left there by the monk and his associates, whose return was not expected till after midnight. The weak resistance of Constance was not of much avail; they forced her to change her dress and its appendages for a miserable black robe, and having completed this scheme, they thrust the poor girl into the street, closely barricading the door, intending to make their own retreat through another outlet. Their villainy, however, proved serviceable to Constance, as she was through this event restored to the arms of a fond mother.

“The monk, on his return to the house, found it abandoned; he was indefatigable in his search after Constance, and by some chance he heard where she was sheltered; as he found that no application was made to the marquis, he suffered Constance to remain in a retreat from whence he thought it was dangerous to attempt to remove her. Since then I have heard that the monk Leopold has been dismissed in disgrace by the marquis, and several of his enormities being discovered, he had fled from the empire with much more wealth than belonged to him. Josephine had interest to procure the succession to the office of abbess, and she was doubtless prompted to this by her knowledge of Constance residing there, that she might pursue the vengeance she had

sworn, though she feigned ignorance of such a relationship subsisting. Constance entered on her noviciate at the desire of her mother, as the late abbess would not suffer any application to be made to the marquis, lest her child should be taken from her.”

Father Francis concluded this account by advising an application to the Prince Bishop of B—, for an order to liberate Constance, in compliance with the desire of her grandfather. At this period they were interrupted by one of the servants, who informed the count, that there was an aged woman in the hall, who had a letter for his lordship, which she refused to deliver into any other hands, and would take no denial, though repeatedly informed that the count was particularly engaged. The count smiled, and ordered her to be shown into the next apartment, and he would wait on her; she no sooner beheld the count, than falling on her knees she besought him to read her letter, and pardon her penitent son. The count glancing over the contents, saw that they were important; he rang for an attendant, to whom he gave orders for the woman to be supplied with necessary refreshment, and he would see her again. Adolphus read the contents of the letter to the baron and Father Francis. It was from Bernard, one of the attendants of the late marquis. He had, when the iron chest was missing, denied all knowledge of it; a few days back he had been flung from his horse, and now lay at the point of death. He was just able to pen a letter to the count confessing his crime, for which he said his hurt was but a just punishment, for taking a bribe from the lady Josephine to secrete the iron chest the moment his lord should expire, in such a manner that it would be impossible for his heir to discover it; she said it was the intention of Father Leopold to have acted thus, but as he was absent she should trust to Bernard; she added, that it was zeal for the Church that prompted her and not gain, as she could not bear the children of heretics to inherit so much wealth; this last argument ended the scruples of Bernard, and he was true to his promise. His repentance was so sincere, that he entreated his mother to be the bearer of his letter that no mistake might arise, and to implore for him the count’s pardon. He described the exact spot where the chest was buried in a vault of the castle. As the distance was but thirty miles, the two noblemen and the monk set out immediately. Bernard died soon after receiving the forgiveness of the count.

The papers contained in the iron chest revealed an awful crime. Count Kempenfeldt did not fall in battle as reported, but was waylaid by bravoës, hired by the marquis to convey him to a place prepared for his confinement; and resisting their attack, was inhumanly murdered. This event embittered the days of the marquis; he could not endure to see his daughter, whom he regarded as the cause of his guilt; he also wished for d’Erfeldt to marry a lady of noble family; he had other views for Constance, and therefore took care to prevent their meeting, fearful of an attachment between them: every domestic was strictly forbade to mention the name of the lady Constance in the presence of Adolphus, who did not know he had such a relation. The young lady to whom he wished to unite his grandson soon after died. Constance had by this time so much engaged his affections, that he resolved to introduce her to Adolphus; when the villainous monk represented her as a disgrace to his name; and he changed his intention, resolving that the knowledge of her being his granddaughter should be carefully concealed from his grandson. The certificates of the marriage of the countess, and the baptism of her daughter, accompanied this explanation.

On their return to Trent, the monk waited on the Prince Bishop of B—, with an account of the transaction, praying that the lady Constance might be liberated from her noviciate; such was the interest this account excited in the breast of the bishop, that the next day he accompanied the Count d’Erfeldt, Baron Steinfort, and Father Francis, to the convent, to demand Constance. The rage of the abbess was easily perceived; she said that the novice, in spite of her vigilance, had

escaped from the convent with a young officer. Clara supported this assertion, when sister Mary rushed in, and accused the abbess of secreting Constance in a vault under the castle, where she was perishing with hunger and cold: she also said that sister Clara had the key of this vault. At this discovery the abbess fainted. Having procured the key, they proceeded to the dungeon, where they found the wretched Constance lying on a miserable mattress, praying for death to relieve her sufferings. Adolphus supported her to the parlour. The state of her garments testified the cruelty of the abbess, who, with the vile sister Clara, was degraded to the station of a lay sister, by the bishop: he appointed sister Mary to the dignity of abbess of another society, the rules of the order of Grey Penitents not admitting her to become their superior. Mary chanced to overhear a conversation between the abbess and Clara, which enabled her to save the amiable Constance, who had observed d'Erfeldt in the chapel with favourable sentiments, which had been much enhanced by her conversation with sister Mary, concerning him.—Constance was placed under the protection of the dowager baroness Steinfort, till her marriage with Adolphus took place.