

companion, her guide, and preceptor. It was a happiness too exquisite, too far beyond my deserts. In watching the developments of her intellect, in dwelling upon her increasing beauty, human pride obtained the mastery over my heart; I forgot, in the indulgence of paternal love, the duty to my fellow beings I had voluntarily assumed to perform.

“Again the chastening hand of mercy was pressed upon me. She, the idol of my vain imagination, fled from our protection, to enter on a path of life fraught with danger. Secret thoughts of worldly grandeur connected with her, had stolen on my mind; my ambitious hopes were now destroyed, and conscience told me I had provoked the punishment. I prayed that vengeance might not descend on her young head, and humbled in spirit, I sought to avert the evils of my secret sin, by endeavouring to strengthen her in those principles of religion and morality she first imbibed from her benefactress.

“As the sun diffuses light, and the clouds rain, as well upon the waste and rugged scenes of nature, as upon the fertile valley and pleasant glade, so doth the divine grace diffuse itself in our hearts without respect to the occupations we pursue; and I humbly trust, that if her youthful fancy has been dazzled by the allurements of fame, her heart may continue uncorrupted by the hollow pleasures that surround her. To you, my kind and generous friend, I have no words with which to shape my thanks for the maternal care you have bestowed upon her childhood, and the zeal with which you have aided my efforts to rescue her from the effects of her own folly. To you, dear lady, remains the exalted merit of a pure and disinterested benevolence; whilst I, poor sinful being, have acted from that selfish love we inherit as a portion of our fallen nature.” He paused awhile, and resuming, said: “The opera singer will visit you tomorrow—trust to her fidelity. In your present difficulties, I rely much upon her agency—be of good cheer—pray and be comforted.” He arose—gave his benediction, and retired by the entrance in the Ilex walk.

CHAPTER IX.

THE day following the successive interviews recounted in the preceding chapters, strange scenes were being enacted at the Palazzo. In fulfilment of the double engagement made with the assassin and his intended victim, Zillah passed the day there. It was at the noon-tide repast, that, anticipating with child-like vivacity, the office of the domestic, she served wine to the Countess and her niece. In smiling acknowledgment to the courtesy, each one took the draught. The Count, whose keen look rested on his wife whilst she drank, cast a glance of malicious exultation upon Zillah, as she laid the empty goblet down; but no answering look of intelligence met his eye. Her countenance wore a

expression, almost foreign to its usual quick and restless character. It might be the result of conscious rectitude, or of consummate hypocrisy: the Count judged it the latter, and thought her a promising disciple of his own school. As the day wore on, he became restless and impatient,—he was absent for some time, and returned at the approach of night, but no change was visible in the sad and worn face of the Countess. Her eyes, though sunken, were the same as in the morning; her cheek, lifeless enough in its colour, yet betrayed no nearer approach to mortality than on the preceding day; her step was quite as assured as he had seen it for years. He glanced around him moodily—Zillah and the Countess were the only persons present. At this moment a confused noise and cries of terror reached them; the sounds were in the direction of the sleeping apartments. Presently, Miss Herbert's waiting woman entered, the picture of terror and dismay, exclaiming that the Signora Isabella was dead. The Countess hurried forward, whilst the Count, grasping Zillah rudely by the arm, shook her violently, as he said:

“You shall dearly pay for this treachery, minion! I know it is your work. Keep guard upon this murderer,” he continued, addressing a servant, “till my return,” and relinquishing his cruel hold, he followed the Countess to Miss Herbert's chamber. There, on a couch, and in an easy position, her head resting on her arm, lay the insensible form of the beautiful girl. Apparently she had passed quietly from sleep into death; there was no distortion of the countenance, indicating agony or pain; the features retained their perfect loveliness,—but death it must be, for the heart was pulseless; respiration had ceased, and the eyes, when some one present raised the lids, were found fixed and sightless. The Count knew too well the deadly nature of the drug he had entrusted to Zillah, to take any interest in the vain efforts to resuscitate the lifeless form. Infuriated to find himself foiled in the hour he had made certain of success, grinding his teeth with rage and baffled hatred, and thirsting for revenge, he re-entered the apartment where Zillah was a prisoner.

“Traitor!” he exclaimed, as he approached her, “prepare for tortures such as woman never yet experienced—I swear you shall be torn limb from limb—your diminutive body crushed—trampled upon, ground to powder—aye, cower!—shrink from me! but think not you will elude my vengeance!” and again he laid hold on her roughly, as she attempted to leave the apartment; then knocking violently at a door that opened on the terrace, the summons was answered by a tall figure closely muffled and masked. “Take this wretch, Gaetano,” he said to the person that appeared, “drag her hence! shew her no mercy—none!”

She had clung in the despair of the moment to