

## THE VENGEANCE OF THE SKULL. 341

He found himself again in that quiet twilight chamber at Quilaix ; again he saw the sad eyes, the pale face of the woman from whom he had taken the ring : again her solemn utterance sounded in his ears :—" If it should bring upon you the curse which it has brought upon me and mine, you will live to rue this day."

The voice of Lorelie speaking again, roused him from his reverie.

" By this hoarded treasure, gained at the price of blood, I adjure you, speak ! Whose skull is this ? "

Mechanically his eyes wandered over the festal-board with its array of plate and jewels. The splendid parade of wealth made his present position only the more ghastly. Like a spectre from the tomb Nemesis arose to mock him amid the very riches which his guilt had purchased.

A silence had fallen both upon actors and audience. They had begun to catch a glimpse of the true meaning of this strange tableau. As motionless as statues they sat : they scarcely breathed : it would have required an earthquake or the conflagration of the hall itself to have moved them.

In silent despair the earl looked around upon the array of still faces set with earnest attention upon him, and then he turned again to the skull. All lifeless as it was, it was victor over him to-day. It seemed to be grinning at him in conscious mockery. Powerless itself to speak it had found a mouthpiece, an avenger, in the person of Lorelie.

Why had he allowed this woman to leave the secret vault, where her life had been in his hands ? He might have known that she would never rest till she had avenged herself upon him.

He looked into the depth of her dark blue eyes—eyes that were steeled to pity. " Like for like," they seemed to say : she would show him the same