

of the King of kings seemed gorgeously arrayed to hear the song of the joyful heart, and to dispense the treasures of redundant blessings. And each and every one of those peasants, kneeling in scattered groups in fervent worship, scarcely able to bear the dazzling sparks of light which the sun-beams struck from the silver tabernacle, was in that moment ennobled and graced beyond the richest and proudest of earth's lords, their rustic costume was embroidered by the golden pencil of Heaven, their honest heads was surrounded, and, in a manner, crowned by a flood of glory, and their countenances upturned with glowing features and moistened eyes towards that Presence, before which all earthly royalty is base. And now the organ pealed forth its powerful notes, and all united in a simple, but overpowering strain of evening thanksgiving.

It was at this moment that Pierrot and his wife reached the threshold of the door; and both unobtrusively paused as if unable to enter in. That sparkling light, that golden atmosphere, those joyful looks, those swelling notes, accorded not with their errand, sympathised not with their hearts, jarred, broken, fretted as they were. They were not coming to urge high and peculiar claims, but to seek pity, mercy, and peace. In a moment, however, they both felt confused at their apparent want of confidence; and, assuming boldly the privilege ever granted by Catholic feeling to the distressed, advanced to the steps leading to the Sanctuary. On these the mother laid her helpless burthen, and both kneeling down, covered their streaming eyes from the overpowering splendour that oppressed them. Long, deep, and breathless, was their prayer. During it the music had ceased, the peasants had one by one glided out, and the hermit having closed the door, and with it shut out the last dying reflection of the western sky, whispered to the afflicted father as he retired, 'I have left the door unlocked, stay as long as you please. Have courage, and may God comfort you; and, through the intercession of His blessed Mother, hear your prayers.' He was not like Heli that good hermit, who chid Anna in the temple because of her troubled supplication.

At these words both uncovered their faces and raised their eyes. They were alone with their child; a perfect silence reigned around them. There was no light but what was shed by the lamp of the Sanctuary, between them and the altar. Hanging in mid-air, this seemed as a silver fountain of mildest radiance, not shot forth in rays, not scattered abroad in fiery sparks, not playing wantonly in unsteady flame, but softly and equably diffused from its source on every side, filling the centre of the holy place with a halo of serene purest light, and thence overflowing in a more subdued and blander stream into the remoter parts and angles of the roof and walls. It was a light that appeared to exert a stilling hushing power on nature; one could not conceive noise or disturbance going on under it; a laugh, a harsh word, an angry murmur, would have

sounded sacrilegious, if they could have been possibly attempted. It created an atmosphere of its own; as though that soft tempered light diffused a corresponding warmth through the air, which the frost without could not chill; for no one could feel cold beneath its genial glow. It gave a softness and beauty to the commonest objects; the rude memorials of benefits received that hung around, and the poor paintings which adorned the upper parts of the walls, had their imperfect details concealed, and their more prominent features brought out in a subdued tone that made them look like masterpieces of art; and countenances which by day looked stern, by this mild light, were gentle and engaging. But it was on the inward feelings that its kindest influence was shed. It seemed to kindle in the breast a holy light like unto itself, beaming, serene and soothing over its disturbed affections, subduing pride and loftiness of spirit, calming anger, engentling austerity, and smoothening the folds of the crafty thought. It unruffled, it mildened, it melted the soul, and fitted it for tender and gentle emotions.

And when, thus feeling all without them in perfect harmony with their own thoughts, the unhappy parents raised their eyes towards the image of their Redeemer and His Mother, the full radiance of that lamp upon it revealed features so full of love and compassion, that never did this representation of them appear so lovely, or so truly a portrait of what in their hearts they now wished to find them both. For they felt that this was the hour for appeals for mercy and pity on distress; here was the inner audience-chamber, where the petition of the poor would be kindly received face to face, whispered into the ear.

Long and fervently did the parents pray over their child under the solemn inspiration of the place and hour. There was more of depth in the father's fervour, more of tenderness in the mother's; but both made together a joint petition, they offered up a common vow. If the child recovered, she was for the next seven years to be clothed in white, as an emblem of dedication to the purest of Maids, brought up ever in piety and devotion; and her parents would fast once a week during the same period.

"Yes," exclaimed Pierrot, in the simple poetry of Nature, "she shall be white and pure as the lily, whose root has been fed by the mountain snow; she shall be as a flower before the altar of God. She shall shine in His sanctuary as the lamp that now hangs over her; her virtues shall shed a mild lustre through the holy place, as she kneels in conscious gratitude, where now she lies. Extinguish not the light of our eyes; and let not death presume to touch her now consecrated to Thee, any more than a sacrilegious hand will ever dare to quench this holy flame that burns before Thine altar."