

It was now past ten o'clock; and it became my solemn duty to take heed, that the last few hours of the dying sinner passed not without such comfort to his struggling soul as human help might hold out. After reading to him some passages of the gospel, the most apposite to his trying state, and some desultory and unconnected conversation—for the poor creature at times seemed to be unable, under his load of horror to keep his ideas connected further than as they dwelt upon his own nearing and unavoidable execution—I prevailed upon him to join in prayer. He at this time appeared to be either so much exhausted, or labouring under so much lassitude from fear and want of rest, that I found it necessary to take his arm and turn him upon his knees by the pallet side. The hour was an awful one. No sound was heard save an occasional ejaculation between a sigh and a smothered groan from the wretched felon. The candle burned dimly; and as I turned I saw, though I scarcely noticed it at the moment, a dim insect of the moth species, fluttering hurriedly round it, the sound of whose wings mournfully filled up the pauses of myself and my companion. When the nerves are strained to their uttermost, by such trifling circumstances as we affected. *Here* (thought I) there has been no light, at such an hour, for many years; and yet here is one whose office it seems to be to watch it! My spirit felt the necessity of some exertion; and with an energy, for which a few minutes before I had hardly dared to hope, I poured out my soul in prayer. I besought mercy upon the blood-stained creature who was groveling beside me—I asked that repentance and peace might be vouchsafed to him—and that the leave-taking of body and soul might be in quietness and peace. But he shook and shivered, and nature clung to the miserable straw of existence which yet floated upon the wide and dismal current of oblivion, and he groaned heavily, and muttered, "No, no! no!" as if the very idea of death was unbearable, even for a moment; and "to die," even to him that must, were a thing impossible, and not to be thought of or named. And as I wrestled with the adversary that had dominion over him, he buried his shrunk and convulsed features in the coverings of his miserable pallet; while his fingers twisted and writhed about, like so many scotched snakes, and his low, sick moans, made the very dungeon darker.

When I lifted him from his kneeling position, he obeyed my movement like a tired child, and again sat on the low pallet, in a state of motionless and unresisting torpor. The damp sweat stood on my own forehead, though not so cold as on his; and I poured myself out a small portion of wine, to ward off the exhaustion which I began to feel unusually strong upon me. I prevailed upon the poor wretch to swallow a little with me; and, as I broke a bit of bread, I thought, and spoke to him, of that last repast of Him who came to call sinners to repentance; and methought his eye grew lighter than it was. The sinking frame, exhausted and worn down by anxiety, confinement, and the poor allowance of a felon's gaol, drew a short respite from the cordial; and he listened to my words with something of self-collected-

ness—albeit slight tremblings might still be seen to run along his nerves at intervals; and his features collapsed, ever and anon, into that momentary vacuity of wildness which the touch of despair never fails to give. I endeavoured to improve the occasion. I exhorted him, for his soul's sake, and the relief of that which needed it too much, to make a full and unreserved confession, not only to God, who needed it not, but to man, who did. I besought him, for the good of all, and as he valued his soul's health, to detail the particulars of his crime, but *his eye fell*. The dark enemy, who takes care to leave in the heart just hope enough to keep despair alive, tongue-tied him; and he would not—even now—at the eleventh hour—give up the vain imagination, that the case of his companion might yet be confounded with his, to the escape of both—and vain it was. It had not been felt advisable, so far to make him acquainted with the truth, that this had already been sifted and decided; and I judged this to be the time. Again and again I urged confession upon him. I put it to him that this act of justice might now be done for its own sake, and for that of the cleansing from spot of his stained spirit. I told him, finally, that it could no longer prejudice him in this world, where his fate was written and sealed, for that his companion *was reprieved*. I knew not what I did. Whether the tone of my voice, untutored in such business, had raised a momentary hope, I know not—but the revulsion was dreadful. He stared with a vacant look of sudden horror—a look which those who never saw cannot conceive, and which—(the remembrance is enough)—I hope never to see again—and twisting round, rolled upon his pallet with a stifled moan, that seemed tearing him in pieces.—As he lay, moaning and writhing backwards and forwards, the convulsions of his legs, the twisting of his fingers, and the shiverings that ran through his frame were terrible.

To attempt to rouse him seemed only to increase their violence—as if the very sound of the human voice was, under his dreadful circumstances, intolerable, as renewing the sense of reality to a reason already clouding, and upon the verge of temporary delirium. He was the picture of despair. As he turned his face to one side, I saw that a few, but very few hot tears had been forced from his glassy and blood-shot eyes; and in his writhings he had scratched one cheek against his iron bedstead, the red discoloration of which contrasted sadly with the deadly pallidness of hue which his visage now showed; during his struggles, one shoe had come off, and lay unheeded on the damp stone-floor. The demon was triumphant within him; and when he groaned, the sound seemed scarcely that of a human being, so much had horror changed it. I kneeled over him—but in vain. He heard nothing—he felt nothing—he knew nothing, but that extremity of prostration, to which a moment's respite would be Dives' drop of water—and yet in such circumstances, anything but a mercy. He could not bear, for a moment, to think upon his own death—a moment's respite would only have added new strength to the agony—he might be dead; but could not—"die;"

and in the storm of my agitation and pity, I prayed to the Almighty to relieve him at once from sufferings which seemed too horrible even to be contemplated.

How long this tempest of despair continued, I do not know. All that I can recal is, that after almost losing my own recollection under the agitation of the scene, I suddenly perceived that his moans were less loud and continuous, and that I ventured to look at him, which I had not done for some space. Nature had become exhausted, and he was sinking gradually into a stupor, which seemed something between sleep and fainting.—This relief did not continue long—and as soon as I saw him begin to revive again to a sense of his situation, I made a strong effort, and, lifting him up, seated him again on the pallet, and pouring out a small quantity of wine, gave it him to drink, not without a forlorn hope that even wine might be permitted to afford him some little strength to bear what remained of his misery, and collect his ideas for his last hour. After a long pause of returning recollection, the poor creature got down a little of the cordial, and as I sat by him and supported him, I began to hope that his spirits calmed. He held the glass and sipped occasionally, and appeared in some sort to listen, and to answer to the words of consolation I felt collected enough to offer. At this moment the low and distinct sound of a clock was heard, distinctly striking one. The ear of despair is quick;—and as he heard it, he shuddered, and in spite of a strong effort to suppress his emotion, the glass had nearly fallen from his hand. A severe nervous restlessness now rapidly grew upon him, and he eagerly drank up one or two small portions of wine, with which I supplied him. His fate was now evidently brought one degree nearer to him. He kept his gaze intently and unceasingly turned to the window of the dungeon. His muttered replies were incoherent or unintelligible, and his sunken and weakened eye strained painfully on the grated window, as if he momentarily expected to see the first streak of the dawn of that morning, which to him was to be night. His nervous agitation gradually became horrible, and his motions stronger.—He seemed not to have resolution enough to rise from his seat and go to the window, and yet to have an overpowering wish or impulse to do so. The lowest sound startled him—but with this terrible irritation, his muscular power, before debilitated, seemed to revive, and his action, which was drooping and languid, became quick and angular.—I began to be seized with an undefined sense of fear and alarm. In vain I combated it; it grew upon me; and I had almost risen from my seat to try and make myself heard and obtain, if possible, assistance. The loneliness of the goal, however rendered this, even if attempted, almost desperate—the sense of duty, the dread of ridicule, came across me, and chained me to my seat by the miserable criminal, whose state was becoming every minute more dreadful and extraordinary.

Exhausted by the wearing excitement and anxiety of my situation, I had for a moment sunk into that confused absence of mind