

In those moments her mother ventured not to address her, but would gaze on her in admiration and awe, believing her to be in close communion with better spirits.

At length, one day she asked her what now so much occupied her thoughts. 'I will conceal nothing from you, my dearest mother,' replied the child: 'the truth is, I can hardly bear to think, that in a few days my term of consecration, under your vow, will expire, and that I must put off my white garment, and resume that of the world.'

'And yet, my child,' her mother answered, 'it is better for us all that it should be so. You are now getting strong enough to go to work in the fields, and this is impossible in your present attire. Nor can I go, and leave you alone at home. It is necessary that we should exert ourselves more and more; for' — She paused, for what she was going to say would have been a reproach to her husband, and that she would not utter. But her tears expressed her meaning. Her daughter replied:

'It is not that I grudge toil, or shrink from being like what I in truth am, a poor peasant girl; but I feel as though, on putting off this religious attire, I shall be exposing myself more completely to the dangers and temptations of the world; and, perhaps, losing some claim to that protection of the Queen of Heaven, as whose child I have been till now brought up.'

'But it is time, my dear mother, that I should tell you of an offering which I made on that night when, for the first time, he absented himself from home, and have often since repeated before the altar. There I have again and again prayed that I may never be allowed to put off my white garments, but may be allowed to bear them down into my grave unstained; and farther' — she hesitated a moment, she added, 'I have begged of God to take my life in exchange for my dear father's conversion and return to virtue. I cannot help hoping that my prayer and offering have been accepted.'

Her mother was greatly troubled on hearing this, and hastily answered: 'Beware my child, lest you tempt Heaven. May God hear your prayer on behalf of your poor father, but not on that condition. Indeed,' she added, after a moment's reflection, 'I do not see what reason there is to fear it; for never, in spite of our sufferings, did you seem to me stronger or in better health.'

It was now, notwithstanding, finally arranged between mother and daughter, that on the morning of the anniversary of the vow, they should proceed very early to the church, so to enjoy a few hours' silent prayer, by the light of the sacred lamp, which the child loved so much, before receiving communion in thanksgiving; after which, she would change her white dress for the ordinary peasant's cloak, and so return home. And these preliminaries

both forebore to reveal again to the subject. Only Marie seemed ever intent on it, in her thoughts, now occupied in preparing the dress in which she should make her last appearance, as one consecrated to God, that its whiteness and purity should be perfect; and in weaving a garden of choicest flowers, as her last offering, to crown the image of her Lady and Patroness.

But once again we must withdraw our reader's attention from the contemplation of the virtues of mother and daughter, to trace the ruinous course of the unfortunate Pierrot, and see him plunged, at last, into the lowest abyss of guilt and degradation. The month was expired, which had been agreed on for the commission of the crime, promised to be his last. The day in fact was come, on the night of which it had to be perpetrated, and still an impenetrable secret was preserved by all around him, as to what it was to be. By this time, every thing worth moving in the houses of his two accomplices, was packed up, ready for flight, and mules were in readiness to carry their baggage and families over the frontiers. As to himself, he had not taken any measures, either to fly or to secure himself against the pursuit of justice; not merely because he was in such ignorance about the crime, that he knew not how he could best shape his course, especially with his family on his hands; but also, because he was almost reckless as to consequences, and hardly cared what the result might be. A prey to remorse, to shame, and to bitter grief, he would have preferred a prison, the gallows, or the scaffold, to his present state; and forgot all consequences and all risks in the assurance that, after this one crime, he should be freed from his present thralldom. During that last day of their partnership in guilt, his companions strove to occupy his thoughts, and divert him from unpleasant anticipations, by their wild discourse; and after their meal, they plied him with strong drink, which, if it did not actually intoxicate him, dulled his faculties, and heated his blood. He was ready for any thing, and he seemed to have made up his mind for any crime, in a desperate mood of excitement, almost amounting to phrenzy. And still he shuddered within himself, at thinking, that possibly murder might be demanded from him: no other wicked deed now seemed to him terrible or impossible. And yet, when the proposed crime was unveiled to him, it was one as much beyond his thoughts as this, and appeared to him no less frightful; and he shrank from it with a trembling horror that staggered his very companions.

It was not till late at night, when on the point of starting from the house, that the object of their expedition was revealed to Pierrot. It was no less than to plunder the church of Mont-Marie, to strip it of its silver donatives, its rich altar plate, the ornaments of its image and its tabernacle, and carry the whole of the frontiers into Spain. They had made all necessary arrangements for concealing or