

"Is it possible," returned Blanche, much shocked; "and has she still the charge of him?"

"Oh no, I dismissed her at once; I could not bear her in my sight—she very gladly accepted the promise of an allowance in lieu of her charge until the trial comes on, when her evidence will be required."

"Jacinta won't come again, will she?" asked the dwarf, looking up anxiously.

"She shall not harm you if she does," said Lord De Melfort.

"Thank you, thank you, that's a good brother."

The attention of the creature was now drawn towards Blanche—he looked at her for several minutes, and then burst into one of those idiotic laughs which is so painful a mockery of mirth.

"Is this your wife, brother?" he enquired, pointing at her; "what is that sparkling on her breast, may I touch it?" alluding to a rich gold cross suspended by a string of pearls on her neck.

Lord De Melfort held up his finger, accompanied by a frown of displeasure, while Blanche turned away her blushing face.

"You are not accustomed to these objects, as I have been," he then said to her, "while travelling through Switzerland, I encountered many, and far more formidable in appearance than this unfortunate, particularly in the valley of the Rhone, where cretinism, with the addition of the disgusting goitre, abounds; the cause by some has been attributed to the climate and the impurity of the waters, but it is difficult to say whether this is actually the case—certain it is that in the valley where mountains rise on every side, preventing the free circulation of air, while the hollow itself rich and cultivated in some parts, but in others presenting only swamps and meadows and wild pine forests, appears the chosen abode for the disease, which ceases as you gain the higher ranges. Blanche, you must visit Switzerland with me one of these days, it is a country which would delight your romantic and enthusiastic mind."

"Nay, my father wishes to steady these qualities, while you would encourage them," replied the happy Blanche, smiling.

"In you they are so blended with sense and judgment, that I cannot wish you without them—when thus accompanied, they seem to gild every thing in life with a peculiar fascination; it is only in the hands of the weak and the vain, that they prove dangerous, and degenerate into folly. I feel uneasy sometimes on account of your pretty cousin, Rosetta. I trust she is not seriously attached to Captain Forster, whose private character is not, I fear, of the highest stamp. I met him last evening at Lady Owen's, when I admired him less even than I did before. I happened to overhear a few of his sentiments, which scarcely redounded to his credit."

"Whatever may have been dear Rosetta's feelings towards him," replied Blanche, "she now sees her error, and will, I am convinced, be guided by

those who are anxiously watching over her. She is indeed too good, too sweet a creature, to be sacrificed to one incapable of appreciating her."

The hunchback still continued to cast furtive glances on Blanche, muttering to himself, and at length venturing to take one of her hands, which he pressed on his forehead. There was a gentleness in his touch, and an expression of suffering in his strange countenance, which struck her with pity.

"This creature never could have required harsh treatment," she said, gazing on him kindly.

"He is subject to violent paroxysms of rage, I am told," replied Lord De Melfort; "but of late, increasing weakness has subdued him. Hugh, you are in pain, you had better go to bed," and he rose to ring the bell as he spoke.

"I like to stay here—you must not send me away," said the wayward idiot; "see, I will sit quite still, and lay my head here," and he would have rested it on the knee of Blanche.

"Nay, this is too much," said Lord De Melfort, half angrily, and slightly pushing him away.

The countenance of the dwarf instantly assumed a ferocious expression, as he glared upon him; but on meeting the fixed determined gaze of the Earl, again the idiot laugh burst forth, while he muttered:

"Why I meant no harm, don't be angry brother; shake hands, good fellow, and be friends."

"Anger were indeed wasted on one like you," replied Lord De Melfort; "now go away, there is Maurice come for you. Blanche, dearest, shall we join your father on the lawn—this elf has made you pale?"

As he led her from the room, the voice of the dwarf still ringing harshly in their ears, Lord De Melfort pressed his hand on his eyes, while for an instant a look of agony crossed his face. Blanche felt deeply for him—the presence of this creature was indeed a humiliating trial—he seemed like the eclipse to cast a gloomy darkness on all around, and to stand between his noble brother and all that was bright and beautiful.

"The chastening is grievous," said Blanche, mentally, as she stole a timid glance upon him; "but it is needful, else it would not have been sent; if the power is granted me to alleviate it even in a small degree, shall I not have cause for deep and fervent gratitude?"

Mr. Neville perceived at once, on the approach of Lord De Melfort and his daughter, the mutual confidence which had taken place between them, and he inwardly rejoiced at the prospect of happiness which had opened on the path of his deserving child, while he prayed that no earthly prosperity might lessen that consistent piety which had hitherto marked her course, or draw her aside from the thoughts of that immortal crown which her Saviour had purchased for her by his sufferings and death.

After a delightful walk in the romantic and shaded