

Blanche affectionately pressed the arm which supported her, while for an instant her mind dwelt on the real meaning of her father's words—she then replied, smiling :

“ But the common has its beauties too, dear papa—its bright yellow furze-blossoms—the harebells and the wild heath, all are to me lovely ; and then the deep glen where the gipsies are encamped—how truly picturesque it is.”

“ You say truly, my child,” returned Mr. Neville, “ all the works of God are beautiful, from the mighty ocean—the grand cataract—even to the minutest flower which grows beneath our feet—and if this world ruined and marred as it is by the entrance of sin, is still so lovely, what will be the perfection of the one to come, so glowingly described by the Prophet Isaiah—and again in Revelation, where we are told that neither sun nor moon will be required, but where the glory of God and of the Lamb will be its light—what a prospect is this to cheer the way-worn traveller, who, after all the trials and sorrows he is doomed to experience in this lower valley, looks with an eye of faith through the glass darkly, and beholds the joys which await him in the presence of his Creator, and of all those whom he has lost and loved on earth—yes, ‘ thrice blessed are they whose strength is in thee, O Lord—in whose hearts are thy ways, who going through this vale of misery can use it for a well, and the pools are filled with water—they will go from strength to strength and unto thee appeareth every one of them in Sion.’ ”

“ But I am forgetting where we are,” continued the good minister, checking himself, “ and am actually preaching a sermon like any itinerant on the open heath ; yet when the heart overflows with gratitude it must find some channel to discharge its abundance.”

“ And how gladly do I receive its outpourings, my dearest father,” replied Blanche ; “ the altar of praise you raise up by the way side is to me always delightful, and gives me many a subject for useful meditation when I am alone.”

At this moment two horsemen appeared in view—and as they drew nearer, in the one, Blanche discovered Lord De Melfort ; her cheek instantly became crimsoned, and her manner confused as he advanced towards her and her father, at the same time, dismounting and introducing his friend Colonel Lennox ; “ Are you going far ? ” was his enquiry.

“ Only to the Priory,” replied Mr. Neville ; “ we have not seen my sister for several days, and to us that is an unusual circumstance.”

“ I have also been a stranger there of late,” said Lord De Melfort ; “ I know not how it is, my days have seemed to fly since I came to Woodland. I never can perform half that I have planned for myself in the morning.”

“ And yet I hear of much being done to which your name is attached, my lord,” returned Mr.

Neville, gazing benignantly on the fine animated countenance of the noble young man—“ I see the smoke wreathing from many a cottage—and I hear the sound of many happy voices, where all was cheerless and desolate before the return of Lord De Melfort, who does indeed seem fully to comprehend the meaning of that text which has so often been misconstrued and misunderstood ; ‘ make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,’ for you employ your riches (so often a snare) in your Divine Masters service—instead of converting them into your bitterest foes by wasting them in sinful indulgences.”

“ The absentee has a double duty to perform,” replied Lord De Melfort, carelessly, and with a flushed countenance—“ when the power is given to confer good—and it is left undone—a fearful account will be required ; but I thought your nearest road lay through the wood—you have wandered from the right path, have you not.”

“ My daughter beguiled me,” replied Mr. Neville, smiling ; “ I came this way to please her—but as it has procured us the gratification of meeting you I cannot regret it.”

Lord De Melfort had turned his horse's head and continued walking by the side of Mr. Neville, while speaking, accompanied by Colonel Lennox, whose countenance expressed interest in all that had passed, though he spoke not. Without being handsome, the appearance of the stranger possessed that high military bearing, that gentlemanlike deportment, which must ever command attention ; to these were combined the qualities of the refined intellectual man—the gallant soldier—above all, the good Christian. He had been the companion of Lord De Melfort's travels, to whom he was warmly attached, and by whom his friendship was duly appreciated ; in years he was six his senior. The little party had now reached the glen, when they were immediately assailed by several ragged gipsy children, whose sparkling black eyes and merry faces told how lightly poverty weighed upon their young hearts. They eagerly stretched forth their hands for the usual offering.

“ Why you young rascals, what would you do with money ? ” enquired Colonel Lennox, goodnaturedly opening his purse and giving a trifle, an example which was quickly followed by his companion.

“ Buy food for mammy, now daddy is gone away,” replied the grinning urchins, running down the side of the glen tumbling over each other, and hallooing in the exuberance of their joy. In the same instant a wild figure started up from below, her long white elf looks streaming in the wind, her bronzed and withered face deeply lined with the marks of age, while her piercing black eyes were turned alternately on each—Lord De Melfort's horse seemed startled at her sudden appearance, and endeavoured to break away from his hold, rearing