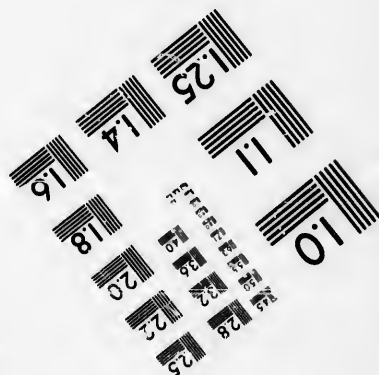
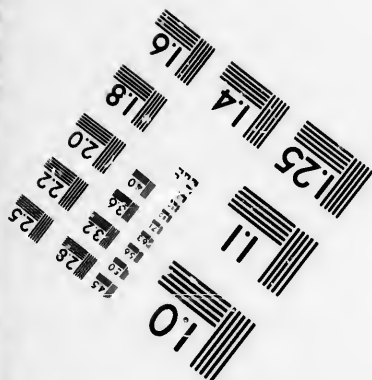
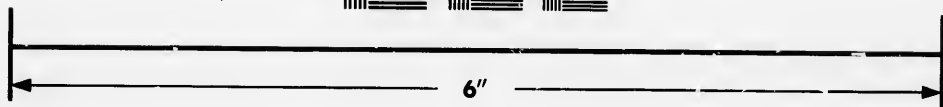
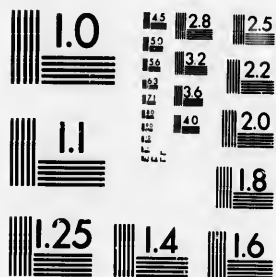


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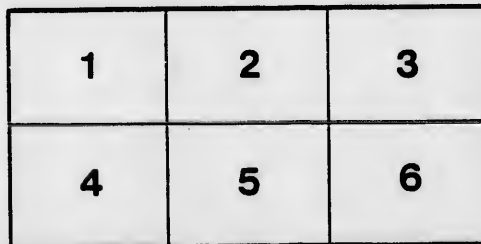
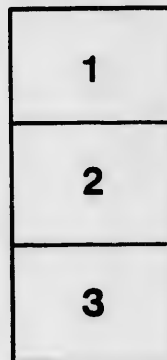
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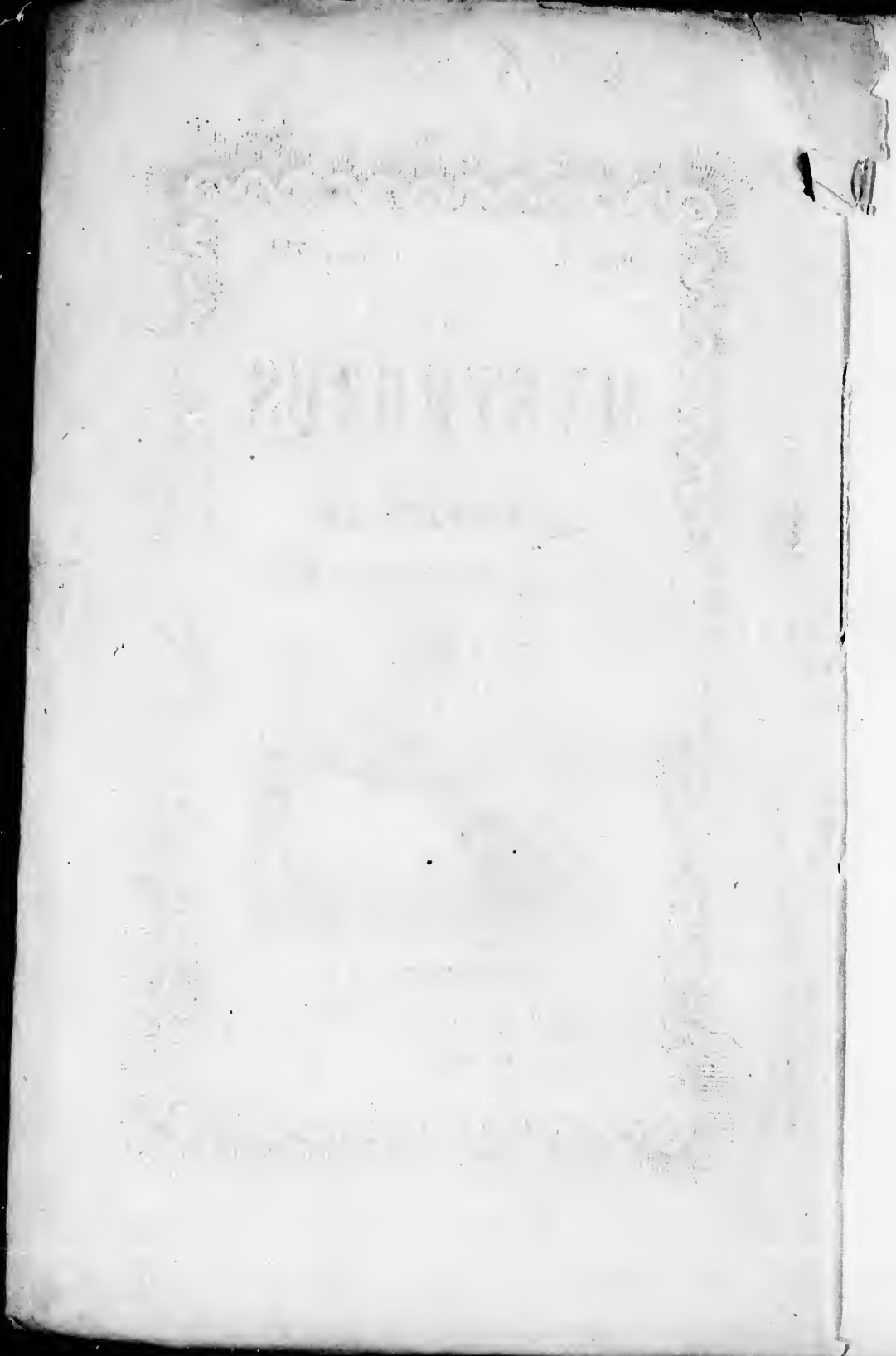
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PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

BRIGHT literature is looked upon as being the mirror of Society's excellence and turpitude—as such, its moral is certainly good; because it exposes to the universal gaze the heart of man in all its organization, dwelling much on the virtues of the indigent, and contrasting them strongly with the vices of the wealthy. But, the means which the novelist has, within a few years past, employed,—to say the least of them,—can only be “justified by the end.” For he has seized upon such extraordinary characters to illustrate the lights and shadows of our nature, that it is impossible to discover in them any thing mundane—they are either pure as angels, or corrupt as demons; and their exploits recall to mind the achievements of the heathen deities. Then, these strange beings are unceremoniously ushered into this world of matter, and pressed into the rehearsal of parts in scenes enacted on boards familiar to us all: thus do we see a rival of Mars dealing in Her Majesty's English, accoutred *à la D'Orsay*, and fighting duels at twelve paces: or, the personification of the goddess of Cythera, partial to *rouge*, reading *La Belle Assemblée*, and dashing at routs, in church, and public streets, and ultimately capturing the heart of some juvenile Sub, who dreams not he has bargained for a cargo of whale-bone, cotton-wool, and horse-hair; and all in this, the nineteenth century of the Christian era!

There is, however, one slightly redeeming feature in this unnatural enlistment of super-human agents: they are made to act in circles with which we are acquainted. Yet this is but poor amends for the egregious error committed by securing the services of heroes who have never met with parallels in the ordinary walks of life, nor will ever find followers. For, of what avail is it to set those characters as examples to the reader? Surely, it cannot be to inspire him with horror at the commission of deeds unknown to the criminal calendar of the world—on the contrary, it can only tend to lessen in his eyes, the vices which reign in society, and consequently encourage their pernicious growth. Although rather objectionable, it is quite another thing when heavenly beings are held up as worthy of imitation; because, perceiving the insignificance of his worth, when compared to such perfection, he is naturally led to exert himself to follow in the same steps, and insensibly refines his nature in the attempt to reach a similar state of goodness, although it be impossible to reach the goal.

Then, do we maintain that, to fill mankind with a loathing for wickedness, the wicked man's heart alone should be dissected and laid open, that all may

see they can plunge in the same excesses ; and that, on the other hand, to excite within every bosom a love of virtue, it is only required to picture the good man as he really is, without drawing upon the super-natural ; for, the certainty of being endowed with power, sufficient to acquire and share the moral blessings a fellow-creature has been enabled to call down upon his head, will urge us on to that "land of promise."

If light literature has degenerated in the above respect, it has, as we have already stated, vastly gained in another. Formerly, it claimed the society in general, as its province ; its moral appertained of a character so diffuse that it often proved fruitless, for it soon became threadbare, and required the ability so well displayed by the few old English novelists, to render it palatable. Now, it has assumed a far superior tone by confining itself to localities, or individual classes of people. Curiosity and vanity will lead man to enquire into everything relating to him, ever so indirectly, or to spots he has visited, or transactions in which he has taken part. Hence, the astonishing success of such publications as have, of late years, deluged the literary world.

It is after having maturely reflected on the above points, that this, a purely local tale, has been written,—one that will present society as it exists in the Canadian metropolis, as well as in the whole United Province, because inhabitants, from its various parts, will be brought in to add interest to the work.

The principal events, forming the basis of this novel, are *facts* ; but the actors are not those who, from time to time, have appeared before the public. What a number of individuals have really accomplished, and that, at periods distant one from the other, will be assigned to a narrow circle of purely fictitious characters. It will therefore baffle the ingenuity of the curious who may attempt to fasten on particular members of society, any act forming a link in the chain of this tale.

As the author of this work has had in view more than the satisfaction of uniting together, during leisure hours, a string of circumstances, to many of which he is personally cognizant, he trusts credit will be given him for aiming at some beneficial result, however much he may fall short of his destination. The field upon which he ventures affords rare opportunities of attacking a host of defects in the various branches of our social system, which have hitherto defied the stern critic's denunciation, and mocked the mild remonstrance of the moralist. He will, therefore, make a judicious use of these advantages, clothing the incidents he will narrate, with just sufficient fiction to screen the real parties, that no one may suffer from their publication.

MONTREAL, August, 1846.

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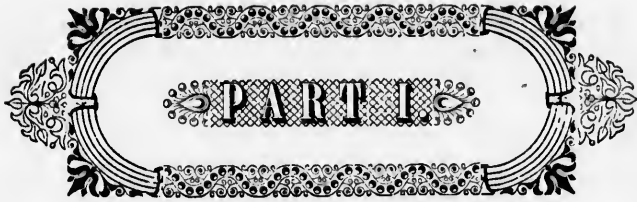
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The Mysteries of Montreal.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THE MIDNIGHT RENDEZ-VOUS.

BLAST this wind and rain ! A body can be surprised and despatched in this delightful spot, without being aware of his murderer's approach."

Such was the impatient exclamation of a tall and stout man, as he tightly drew a large, loose cloak around his person, and stood staring, in the dark, foolishly attempting to discover some lurking assassin.

And well might this mysterious individual,—whom we shall call Donald McDonald,—utter, with feigned assurance, words which told how much he experienced those fears that flash only across a guilty conscience,—rousing the worst passions which prey upon the human heart, and eradicating, from within it, every vestige of moral superiority over the brute, as they either drive their victim to desperation, or reduce him to the degraded condition of the wretch, who trembles before the monstrous creations of his diseased fancy.

For it was in one of the long and stormy nights of a Canadian fall he had sought the home of the wealthy dead—that retired spot, at the foot of the Montreal Mountain, known as the McTavish Monument ; and in the neighborhood of the mansion bearing the name of the same individual, and which the spirits of the evil kingdom are said, by credulous people, to have claimed as their haunts, long before the completion of its magnificence. Then, a furious wind swept in fearful gusts across the country, wildly revelling amidst the forests, and stripping them of their fast fading

garment; at times, it loudly hissed around the limbs it had left to nakedness, and howled hoarsely among the rocks like a maddened wild beast; whilst at others, it moaned round the vault, and seemed to claim admittance, by its shrill whistling, through the holes in the rust-eaten iron door, which then almost threatened to burst open. The trees swung their branches, like giants that give way to grief, and wring their hands and beat their breasts in great agony; whilst the mocking winds derided their sorrows, and flung around them the ruins of their by-gone splendor; and, with all this, the rain fell heavily, dropping like shot on the leaves that strewed the ground, and mournfully beating against the door of the tomb.

The darkness was awful,—had a single star twinkled amidst the leaden clouds, it would have cheered the heart of him who had ventured to that dreary spot. But nothing relieved his straining eye, save the flash of lightning as it rent the shroud that over-hung the earth, and ushered dreadful detonations of thunder, whose terrible bursts found too faithful an echo among the surrounding rocks. Every dart of the electric fluid struck terror to Donald's bosom; it lighted up the scene around, clothing the rocks and decayed remnants of trees with mantles of fire; and it seemed that some mighty magician's wand enlivened nature, and metamorphosed it into a world of unearthly beings.

The lone spectator of these horrors mentally suffered most excruciating torments. For, after the lightning had swept by, the spots which just now were peopled with monstrous formations clad in flames, seemed plunged in deeper gloom; and creatures, blacker than night, followed on the scene, and paralysed the vacant stare of the bewildered Donald.

A man, at peace with his Maker,—he, who rapturously dwells on nature writhing in the grasp of the storms, and who sees, in those terrible convulsions of matter, but other and more striking evidence of the might of his God, would have felt the Poet's indescribable leaping at the heart, on witnessing so magnificent a spectacle. But to the evil-minded and the remorse-stricken, these were terrors that are unequalled in this world. For Donald thought he listened to the winds moaning his *requiem*, whilst the

thunders broke upon his ear as a damning sentence, which the lightning threatened to inflict upon his head. The earth itself, he fancied, labored under his feet ; and he shook like an aspen-leaf, and would have wished for wings to rise above it, lest it should yawn and form some great chasm to bury him alive. In the gloom, myriads of monsters obtruded their hideous forms on his deluded vision ; and, as the darkness was momentarily dispelled, crowds of burning demons surrounded him in all the attitudes of anger and defiance. Then, if a poor affrighted bird, driven from its shelter by the pitiless storm, flew past above him, instead of welcoming it as a companion in solitude, the miserable Donald heard its flutter with dread, as though it were that of some evil spirit hastening to guide him to regions of eternal woe and misery. The cold clammy sweat which deluged his trembling limbs, personified, to his alarmed senses, the icy claspings to death's bosom ; and if the wind heaved some hot and fetid gust from the city, he felt it on his lips as the embrace of the "Grim Tyrant" himself.

Overpowered by the frightful workings of his fancy, Donald had staggered against the iron paling, which surrounds the base of the large grey column, that rears itself above the sepulchre. He sought to banish the idle fears which beset him on every side, by turning his gaze upon the city, but the lamp-lights which, on a calm night, illumine the heavens, and give to Montreal, when viewed from a distance at that hour, the appearance of a fairy town, could not triumphantly struggle with the darkness which then reigned over the whole country ; but only shed a dim glare that casts in the gloom overhead, the mistiness that is seen hovering above the smouldering of a great nocturnal conflagration.

As Donald's eye lay fastened on this distressing picture, like all wicked and pusillanimous men, he believed himself the only miserable and vicious being on earth, and envied the rest which courts so very few pillows, and those dreams, heavenly strangers, that make us forget we are of a corrupt world.

Whilst thus musing, the storm abated, and he was awakened from his reverie by the town clock, as it slowly pealed forth, from the spire of Christ church, the hour of midnight. Had the

watchman's rattle likewise reached his ear, he would have remembered that all do not taste the slumbers, for which he was thirsting but a moment before, and that he was not the only wicked man in the world.

"This is the appointed time!—will *she* come?" he exclaimed half aloud, startled at the sound of his own voice.

Passing his hand over his eyes to impart them a keener sense of perception, he almost strained them out of their sockets, in striving to pierce the night, and discover the party he had come to meet. Again phantoms assailed him; the air seemed filled with strange things that danced about in most disgusting and horrible postures; and winged serpents and flying imps swooped over his head, and appeared to absorb one another, without decreasing their numbers. He was convulsively closing his eyes, to shut out the horrid sight, when footsteps were heard hastily ascending the slope below him. They sounded too heavily for those of the person he expected,—at least he thought so; and under that impression, he surrendered to the mastery of his racked fancy, which warned him of an approaching demon come to snatch him away. Then sprung in Donald's bosom the suggestion of self-preservation. He grasped a pistol, concealed in the folds of his cloak, and slowly produced it, as he steadied himself upon his failing limbs by seizing the iron bars against which he had been reclining.

Nearer came the sounds, and when they were heard upon the stone steps which lead to the sepulchre, the affrighted wretch, leaning forward with distended neck, hoarsely groaned, his voice struggling in his choking throat:

"Who comes?—Who comes?"

"Hush, sir! do you not know me?" answered a feeble and trembling voice.

"Who're you? Speak, or your life——."

And before the miserable man could conclude to hiss the sentence, he lost all control over his convulsed grasp, and the pistol detonated with an awful explosion, which awakened the echoes of the mountain, and was reverberated from rock to rock, as if the shot had startled all nature from her slumbers.

Shrill female shrieks pierced the air, the fall of heavy bodies was heard, and all again sunk in profound calm and silence.

Donald stood petrified; the pistol dropped at his feet, and he almost felt that the warm blood of some fellow-creature scalded his hand. His arm was still extended, his eye fixed, his teeth chattering together; and as his hold of the bars gradually loosened, he slowly reached the ground on one knee, and thus stood, the image of despair, awaiting the vengeance of heaven and a merited doom.

He might have expired, and been found as frozen in that attitude, had not a certain supernatural agency roused him from his lethargy, as it irresistably attracted him to the spot whence the cries had proceeded. As he groped down the craggy declivity against which the tomb is abutting, he tore his hands on the sharp stones and thorny bushes; and, dreading to meet with some goary corpse, averted his eyes, and shuddered whenever he touched the cold, wet trunk of some prostrate tree.

On reaching the level below, he perceived a faint light which at first threw him into fresh terror; for his confused faculties endowed with more than earthly attributes, the pale flickering of a dark lantern which had opened of itself, on being allowed to fall to the ground by one of the persons who had shrieked.

A moment's pause permitted him to collect his scattered senses, and examine things around him. Before him lay the apparently lifeless forms of two females: the one nearest to him had reached the summer of womanhood, as was revealed by a stream of light which shone full on her pale features; her companion's delicate and small stature pronounced her to be of very tender years, but her face was concealed in the mantle she wore. On recognising the former, Donald groaned heavily, his bosom was on the eve of bursting, his heart plunged so madly within. At last, a gush of burning tears came to his rescue, and relieved him from the greater weight of his torment; and wringing his hands, he cried in despair:—

“My God! it is her and her child!—Am I become so wicked a wretch as to have murdered them?”

Dreading their spirits might have departed, he stooped to feel

if their hearts still beat, but as he reached his hand in front of the lantern, he saw it was red with blood, and forgetting he had injured it in his descent, he thought it bore the marks of his crime,—his sight became confused, the light burnt more dimly to his fainting eye, the darkness itself assumed a yellowish tinge around him—he staggered, and swooned away.

This senseless group, which lay like clay on the very threshold of death, offered a most dismal picture, whose shades were strangely lighted up by the lurid glare emitted from the lantern. The time at which this sad drama was enacted, the spot where it took place, lent it an effect as solemn as it was gloomy; and it were unpardonable in us to allow the occasion to escape, of dwelling for a moment on the actors.

The countenance of the elder of the female bore, deeply imprinted on its blanched *ensemble*, the rough stamp left by mental misery, and the dissipation of fashionable life. Her age was, at least, thirty; and, notwithstanding the inroads of care, and the deleterious intrusion of conventional usages, her charms were still in that remarkable state of preservation, which places the women of England, in point of personal attractions, far beyond the sex of other countries. Yet, her's was of that style of beauty which inspires us with a feeling of respect if not awe, without awakening any of those tender emotions of the heart, which induce man to protect her whose charms reflect the image of a sweetly tranquil and angel-like soul. Her beauty was of secondary advent—Were it not harsh, and, perhaps, far-fetched, we might venture to compare it to the face of a once luxuriant country, teaming with all the treasures of scenery, but convulsed by a sudden volcanic eruption, whose furious outpourings destroyed all that was calm, and threw its stronger and harsher features in prominent *relief*, without, however, diminishing its beauty. Or, taking another step in this bold comparison, we might assimilate her youthful perfection to the earth, the Eden of old, which, in its primitive state, was all a garden: although it possessed, within its bosom, the agents that human frailty has since, in an evil hour, brought into fearful action, and which have changed the entire appearance of the globe,—besprinkling it, in their chaotic freaks, with wilds, deserts, and

oasis, and altering its tamer, and sweeter nature into savage grandeur and awful magnificence. Such were the ideas which a glance at Clara Sterling's proud countenance called up in one's mind.

At fifteen she must have been a *Houri*, possessed with all the attributes of maidenly loveliness, but unconsciously harboring within her young, careless, and innocent heart, a dormant mine of stormy passions, which, upon being unfortunately brought into play by a succession of heart-rending catastrophes, preyed fearfully, both on her mind and body.

Of the little girl who accompanied Clara, we chose to say nothing at present: it were uncalled for to unfold the cloak under which she lay concealed.

Donald McDonald, in fainting, had sunk against the door of the sepulchre. His hat had fallen, and left a profusion of thick, curly red hair, to be seen. Heavy whiskers, of corresponding color, encircled a bloated and usually burning face, whose features told more of the recklessly wicked man, than of the cool, calculating, and hypocritical villain, and betrayed a moral organization of the most despicable character. His person was bulky; and, altogether, his appearance bespoke the libertine of mature years, addicted to the use of intoxicating draughts, and given to excessive debauchery of every description.

Then, do we find blended, in this extraordinary *tableau*, the haughtiness of a beautiful and fallen woman, the repulsive viciousness of a degraded man,—and the sweet innocence of a virgin, contrasting strangely with the tarnished nature of the older individuals, and picturing the purity of the lily of the valley, growing beside plants of rude and blighting character.



CHAPTER II.

THE GIRL AND THE PARCHMENTS.

GLARA was the first to give signs of returning consciousness. She seemed to have awakened from a long oppressive sleep; everything around her appeared strange, unaccountable; and forgetful of the circumstances related in the foregoing pages, she still fancied herself laboring under the effects of some horrible dream. As she slowly rose to her feet, her mantle and veil fell to the ground; the rich tresses of her raven hair loosened, and floated wantonly in the night breeze that whistled with delight through their luxuriant meshes; the disorder in which her dress had been thrown in her fall, allowed her snowy bosom to be seen, notwithstanding the prevailing darkness; and as her eyes stared wildly around, she presented the image of some stately elf, standing in her favorite haunts, the home of the dead, with her victims extended motionless before her. But when the light of the lantern attracted her gaze, she pressed her temples with her ivory hands, as if trying to retain a remnant of ideas; then slowly drawing and holding her hair back, so that it flowed in glossy undulations on her alabaster shoulders, she soliloquised thus, in that maniac attitude:—

“It is but a wicked dream! Have I not wandered in my sleep? Surely it cannot be—I have not left my home, abandoned my husband, and fled from my children!”

This partial attempt at reasoning, soon re-called her fully to the nature of her situation; she recollected the purpose of her midnight errand, her escape from her residence, and the pistol-shot; but all was a blank to her after that circumstance. Still, she easily recognised Donald, as he lay senseless by the door of the sepulchre, and after a moment's observation, exclaimed:—

“He, too, seems to be visited with the sleep that pressed me down: thanks to kind Providence it is so—I may, then, recover those documents without leaving the poor child in his power—I will abstract them.”

And she advanced towards him, having summoned up all her resolution to effect her purpose. But on bending to search his person, she perceived the blood on his hands and garments, and starting back she cried, horror-stricken :—

“ My God ! he is dead !—And how prepared to meet his Creator ! Such is the end of wickedness ! Yet, I take heaven to witness, I never wished that evil should befall him, however much he has injured me. I am degraded, still I can forgive my enemy. Rest in peace then, Donald ; and may thy example deter all men from following in the paths which have led thee hither, and make me weep my fault the more. I forgive thee—may all thou hast injured forgive thee likewise, and God be merciful to thee !”

And she fell on her knees beside him, and wept, and prayed that He, too, would forgive her foe. For such is woman, the creature of impulse : she would expose her life for the man she would stab with her own hand !

Her short oration concluded, she sought for the mysterious papers. On partly removing Donald's coat, she perceived them protruding from his bosom, and would have screamed with joy, and changed her tears, so mournful a minute ago, to those of joy, but her delight knew no motion, no accent wherewith to be expressed. Hastening to the lantern-light, she examined the seals the parcel bore, and compared the impression of one of them with the inscription on the stone of a large ring she wore—nothing had been disturbed, and all was in the same order as when the documents were enclosed. She clasped them to her heart, and kissed them, and rendered thanks to heaven. She was mad with joy !

“ I am saved !” she at last cried ; “ and so is this innocent girl ; and thou, Donald McDonald——”

But she was arrested by Donald's hard breathing, as he was on the point of recovering his consciousness.

“ He still lives, the wretch !” exclaimed Clara, anxiously listening, and trusting her ears deceived her, and that it was but the wind ; for she forgot she had beseeched heaven on his behalf a moment before. But *then* she thought him dead : her resentment

was satisfied at his supposed sudden and tragic demise,—he could harm her no more ; she therefore could well forgive him, and pray for the rest of his soul—*now*, he was breathing, that identical Donald McDonald, who could, by a word, dash her hopes to ruin and reduce her to degradation. Her pity changed into deeper hatred than she had previously entertained towards him ; her passion raged fiercer in her burning bosom, and she almost raved, and reproached herself for having been compassionate towards her enemy.

“ Let him live, then !” she continued ; “ I have the papers, and his assertions would not be credited without them. Yes, Donald, thou art thwarted in thy every design of infamy ! My curses light on thy guilty head, and follow thee to the grave, and through all eternity !”

She began these words in a whisper, but, as she proceeded, her voice grew louder and louder, and when it had reached the anathema, it sounded inhumanly—it was the accent of deadly hatred combined with fiendish exultation. Clara was no more a woman, but a fury—her glance flashed like that of a tigress—her noble form was erect as the forest sapling—and her white hand, raised in the air, seemed to call down the curses of the Almighty to unite with her own, in coalition against the object of her enmity.

“ But I must leave before he wakes,” she resumed, on becoming more calm ; “ else the villain can force the papers back from me ; and, in the depth of his anger, spurn the idea of accepting of the child, and publish my secret to the world. Come, my little girl, rise and let us depart,” she added, turning towards her youthful companion.

But the child moved not ; her tender frame had undergone too many shocks within the last hour, to be thus easily roused from her state of insensibility. Clara bent down to revive her by exposing her face to the damp air, and bathing it with rain-water she found in the crevices of the steps ; she called her by name, and forced her eyelids apart, and poured the full glare of the lantern-light in her glassy eyes ; but her efforts proved unavailing.

“ She cannot be dead !” ejaculated the horrified woman, on perceiving no signs of life in the child. “ Surely,” she continued,

clasping her hands, and interrogating the heavens by her uplifted eyes ; " that man, that wicked man, cannot have escaped death, and this sweet creature gone in his stead ? Yet, far better for you," she added, looking pitifully on the child ; " to be a corpse, before you have seared your lips on the lid of life's bitter cup. O," she continued, hiding her face in her hands and shedding scalding tears ; " that I had never reached beyond childhood's happy era ! That my soul had shrunk from the earth, when its purity rivalled that of angels !—But," she said, brushing away the large tears ; " this is no time to grieve over my sad destiny—I must away, or that man will again step between happiness and me. But this tender being, shall I abandon her to him—for she may not have expired ? No, thank God, I feel her little heart is beating. He shall not have her !"

Clara attempted to take the girl in her arms, but her strength was unequalled for the task. As she abandoned the idea of saving her attendant by that means, a terrible thought crossed her brain, and she said, with a tone of stern resolution :—

" I must not fly, and leave this child a victim to purchase a silence I can now myself impose, and which shall be forever unbroken. Were my secret divulged, I should destroy myself, and Donald is alone possessed of it—hence I must, and will, in self-preservation, and for the sake of this poor girl, reduce him to an eternal silence !"

As she spoke these words, Clara felt as if they were scalding drops of lead oozing from her lips ; her eyes rolled as if cased within burning sockets ; the air was hot and close in her nostrils ; the marrow boiled within her bones ; and her very skin experienced a shrinking up on her limbs ; whilst a cold sweat, struggling through every pore, clung to her body like slime.

No wonder she was thus tormented, for she not only meditated murder, but was reasoning herself into the commission of the dreadful deed ; and when she had thus hastily convinced herself of the necessity of accomplishing the crime, a feeling of the most fiendish description flew through her whole system, and animated her with a thirst for human blood. She clenched her hand as though it held a dagger, and knelt beside the prostrate Donald.

With her eyes riveted on his face, as though she would magnetize him into a deeper sleep, that he might not awake in this world, she groped for his bosom; and, in the intensity of her passion, believed herself armed with some fatal instrument, and attempted to bury her nails in his flesh.

The cool air, as it reached his breast, and the pain, revived Donald. As he sprung to his feet, he, unawares, threw Clara to the ground, but she rose to a kneeling posture, and with clasped hands, cried amidst her sobs:—

“Kill me, Donald, kill me! Fool, wicked fool that I am, I thought I could stab you! I confess my crime! Have pity on me, Donald! Strike, and relieve me from my accursed fate!”

“And you would have murdered me!” exclaimed Donald, with stupid air, for he had not understood her well; but as he gradually perceived things in a clearer light, he ground his teeth with rage, and his fingers closed involuntarily, and their nails almost pierced the skin of the palm of his hand.

“Truly art thou a fiend when thou becomest corrupt, O woman! But,” he vociferated, on discovering they were gone, “the papers are missing, you have stolen them,—where are they?—Speak, or, by heavens —”

He closed his rough grasp on Clara’s swan-like throat; and as the breath of life slowly escaped her, she thanked him, and would have called him *deliverer*, had she been able to articulate the word.

The idea of a happy expedient suddenly lighted up his infuriated countenance.

“Give me back those papers,” he added, with astonishing indifference, relaxing his hold, “or I shall leave you a corpse, with some communication that will apprise those who will find it, that you have destroyed yourself to escape detection and shame.”

This threat struck terror in Clara’s heart; she dreaded dying unprepared, a moment after an attempt to assassinate a fellow-creature, and in the act of sacrificing an innocent being to the cruelty of a wretch and her own pride.

“I have those papers, sir,” she replied with alarm; “I was to receive them in the state in which they were entrusted to you,

when I should deliver my child in your power, and there lies that child," pointing to the little girl who was still insensible.

"Is it so, Clara?" ejaculated Donald, with brutal joy, and rushing to seize the girl.

"Is it so?" slowly repeated the woman, in an indignant tone, and placing herself between him and his intended victim. "Sir, the manner in which you have pronounced those words, tell me too plainly what will be your conduct towards my daughter. It portends her fall, shame, and desertion. But beware, wicked man, beware! It is not enough to have assisted in the mother's ruin, but you must effect that of her offspring! You would heap on her the misery which has borne me down for years, and which shall cling to me until death!"

"Look at me!" she resumed, after a moment's pause, as if emerging from the bitterest reflections, and raising the light near her face—"Look well, and say has not wretchedness been my lot, ever since I knew you and yours? Before that day, on which the star of my happiness forever set, I was beautiful, they tell me; I then tasted the bliss of innocence; I knew the love of friends; and my hopes were bright as the living sun. Now, what am I? My charms—a curse on them! they have gone; my virtue is lost—the friends I have, are mine as long as I can deceive them, and my prospects are blacker than this night, and forever blasted. Oh! that the earth would open and swallow me, to screen me from the world's gaze, and put an end to my task of imposture! I dread every eye, lest my secret be read on my brow; I shudder when I meet innocence and virtue, because I feel it is profanity for the bad to mingle with the good! Yet, without you, I might have tasted a little happiness, here below; for I trusted in all-merciful God, and wept my sin, and hoped for pardon: indeed I thought the stain was effaced, when Providence had wedded me to a kind husband, and blessed me with little angels. But who intervened between heavenly grace and me, and cast me back in the hell I was escaping, but my unfeeling persecutor, who exacts the fulfilment of a promise extorted from me when stretched on a bed of suffering, shame and sorrow,—and thou art that persecutor!"

Donald was thunder-struck as he listened to her upbraids,

and scarcely dared to look on the fearful workings of her features, by the light of the lantern. For her eyes gleamed with rage, her teeth glistened, and her thinned lips appeared black, as they became blue with passion.

He thought himself in the presence of a fury, as she neared him at every word she uttered; and when she spoke the last in his face, he sprung back, and searched in vain for his pistol; for, goaded to madness by her attempt to murder him, the abstraction of the documents, and her reproaches, he would have despatched her on the spot.

Clara, thinking he wished to escape, grasped him by the arm, and continued with increased earnestness:—

“Yes, Donald, you have caused this renewal of my misery. Were you possessed of but common feeling, had debauchery never brutalized you, I should not be here to-night, but would slumber in peace in that security which one finds in the word of a man of honor. But you never were honorable, and it is your despicable character which has compelled me to meet you at this hour. Still, under other circumstances, I should not have complied with the conditions of the agreement; but I have now the honor of children to guard, and that of my husband, whose peace of mind I should die rather than see it troubled by even a suspicion of my fault. No, Donald, I should not be here to-night, but far away with my daughter, immured in some sanctifying solitude, to weep my sin, and teach my child to love God alone, and spurn and despise man!”

The vehemence with which Clara had uttered these bitter sentences, nearly overcame her. Donald, perceiving she was weak and in need of support, offered her his arm, but she disdainfully refused it, and leant against the tomb, dashing away the large drops of sweat that trembled on her marble brow.

“I have come then,” she resumed, after a momentary rest, “and there lies the victim. Take her, she is yours, but yours in trust. Should you attempt to sully her honor, may the kiss you rob from her lips poison you to the heart’s core. If now the least thought of injuring her, lurks in your rotten mind, may Providence send her a guardian who will soon rescue her from your grasp, and

avenge the insult you would offer her virtue. Take her and away."

"But, madam, stay," said Donald, in a jesting tone, as Clara was making a motion to depart; "you, that deceive so well a too-confiding husband," he continued, "may venture to practice your deception on me. That cloak may contain anything but the child. Wait then until I see that I am not duped."

And he knelt by the child, and removed the mantle. On perceiving her, he snatched the lantern from Clara's hand, and examined her angel-like face. His eyes gleamed with a shameful lustre; with covetous intensity they gloated on her tender beauty, and he bent to kiss her, but was arrested in the act by Clara's hand.

"Hold, villain!" she cried; "would you already pollute her lips with your unhallowed embrace! May the bitterest curses of a mother fall on you if you harm her child, and death stiffen you on attempting to carry out your infamous design."

Donald rose, for he dreaded the curse would meet with its effect.

"Take her, then, and we part for ever," said Clara, turning to descend the stone-steps.

"A moment more, madam, and then we do part forever," exclaimed Donald, retaining her by her cloak. "This may be, it is the last time we meet; and it is the only opportunity left me to give explanations to which you never would listen. Clara," — and his tone softened as he continued, — "I loved you much and long before your betrayer knew you. I had sought your alliance; but you spurned my suit, and I submitted to see him, my brother, — though such, may he be cursed! — to see him the accepted lover. I followed you to the brink of the precipice into which he hurled you; and for having thus given proof of my devotion, you accuse me of being a party to your ruin! And when the heartless man had abandoned you to a dismal fate — when you had insulted a true heart's love, and chosen that of a deceiver, — when shame was your lot, and no man would call you wife, I sought you still. I again offered you my hand, foolish man that I was; and you

spurned it again,—that hand which until then, had never known the stain of a dishonest act, was rejected by a woman bereft of her honor! I could brook no further insult; vengeance burned, where love had reigned a moment before. It was then I brought you in my power, and made you swear to surrender me the fruit of your unfortunate love, at its age of twelve years. Thus did you purchase my silence, when a word could have torn you from a comfortable home. I repeat it, you had laughed my affections to scorn; you were without mercy, and I became the wretch I now am. The day which sealed your fate, determined my destiny;—the same cloud which shut the sun of happiness from your eyes, hung over my head,—hence, my thirst for revenge, sweet revenge! And how could I satisfy it, but by tearing the child from the mother's bosom, and rending asunder the scars which began to form over your wounds! And she is mine, your daughter! Still," he added, with affected kindness of tone, after a moment's pause; "you can take her back, for I must not be so cruel; let me teach you that however much I have fallen, I can still be generous. Take her, take her."

"Impossible, Donald," interrupted Clara with joy, "Then you shall never torment me again! Donald, forgive me."

"Yes take her," rejoined Donald, with demoniac voice, as he feasted on the hopes he was encouraging, but to have the fiendish delight of crushing them; "but, madam, I take back those papers."

"Donald," cried Clara abruptly rising, for she had knelt to him in the fulness of her heart's gratitude. "Wretch! is it thus you play with an unfortunate woman? Heap injury and insult upon her;—tell her you will blast her brightest prospects, and accomplish the threat; but never say you will cease persecuting her, when you are but adding sarcasm to her wrongs. Still, I am to blame for having too readily believed you were capable of a generous act. I should have reflected that the creature who would be heartless enough to summon a feeble woman at this hour and in this place, could not have exacted so much only to have the satisfaction of releasing her from all her engagements."

"If I fixed upon this spot for our meeting," interrupted Donald,

with increased bitterness of tone; "it was merely to avoid a surprise, for were we discovered in this interview, your fair name might suffer."

And he laid a cruelly sarcastic stress on these words, to strike Clara as with a venomous dagger.

"Or," he resumed with affected *non-chalance*; "I might not have met my "feeble victim" alone had this *rendez-vous* taken place elsewhere: some bravo might have been at her command to accomplish the crime, madam, which you, but a moment ago, attempted to perpetrate at my expense, and when I was entirely in your power."

An unnatural smile wrinkled around his livid lips, as he uttered these bitter taunts. Yet, his shafts fell harmless at the proud woman's feet; she could not but despise the man who delighted in insulting an unprotected female.

"Sir," replied she, as a scornful curl of the lip conveyed more than she could express; "I admire your prudence, and yet notwithstanding this precaution to obviate the intrusion of an offensive witness to the accomplishment of our mutual engagement, it seems you were provided with arms to meet me! However, what else could be expected from the noble-minded, courageous Donald McDonald? Adieu! brave knight, I must leave you."

She was turning to retire, when her relentless persecutor again recalled her:—

"Why not kiss your child, madam?" he jeeringly enquired. "Surely a mother cannot part so coldly from her offspring; and a mother, too, of such delicacy of feeling as Clara Sterling, who sacrifices one child for the happiness of the balance of her family."

"Monster," returned the indignant woman; "how could I be so hypocritical as to pretend affection for her? I do, indeed, sacrifice her to secure the welfare of others! It is but another of your taunts, and, mark my words, you shall soon repent these cowardly insults to my feelings. Meanwhile, I again charge you to the peril of your body and soul, never to breathe a wicked word to that innocent being's heart. Once more, farewell, and remember my curse!"

Donald,

Clara withdrew with haughty step, and as she slowly disappeared she seemed like a Queen of Elfs marching through her dominions.

When Donald had lost sight of the lurid glare of the dark-lantern, he recovered from the effect of Clara's threats, and bent to take the little girl in his arms, to bear her away; and casting his eyes around him, as the ruffian is wont to do when about to commit some crime, he crouched over the senseless child like a tiger over his fallen prey. As he raised her to his bosom, he felt her sweet breath on his cheek, and it struck remorse to his bosom; for its purity instantly revealed to him all the degradation of his heart, and made him regret the days when he was as innocent as his tender victim. But these noble sentiments, which shone like pearls in the mire, soon yielded before the onslaught of his passions. That breath, which was insensibly working a salutary moral reform within him, fanned his cheek too mildly: it awakened his worse inclinations, and he was already feasting, in imagination, over the charms of his innocent burthen.

Animated by his shameful propensities, he hastened from the sepulchre, the sooner to accomplish the sacrifice of the poor thing. The obstacles he met in the dark, called many an imprecation from his burning lips; and he cursed his want of speed, for he would have wished to fly, like the vulture that soars away with its prey.

In his impatience, he lost all recollection of the path which should have led him to the Old Race Ground, on the eastern side of the Mountain; and found himself much beyond his destination in the vicinity of a farm house, beyond the Mile-End, without, however, knowing he was in that locality.

We shall now leave Donald in his predicament, to follow Clara to her home.

It was not without a pang that she abandoned the child to her pitiless enemy; yet, so completely rejoiced was she upon recovering the documents from Donald's keeping, and her feelings were so confused by the various incidents of the meeting, that she scarcely knew what to say, and how to act.

Strange, indeed, was it in her, to lead the little one to almost certain ruin; but when, as she represented to the cruel man she wished to silence, it is considered that the honor, peace of mind

and domestic happiness of a whole family circle depended on the issue, Clara's step may be viewed with some leniency ; and so she thought herself ; and when she had reached her bed-chamber, that reflection seemed to pour balm on the dreadful wound the separation had inflicted on her breaking heart ; she almost felt proud at having had courage enough to hush some of the fiercest sentiments and sympathies of the human heart, to ensure the welfare of unsuspecting friends. Without being desirous of pleading her case, and seeking her acquittal on the strength of an extenuating circumstance, we cannot help observing that, no alternative was left her—of two evils she choose the least, as the cant phrase goes ; and consequently, sacrificed one being for the sake of many.

For the remainder of that night she was sleepless ; nor can it be told on what her mind was intent, for her brain reeled continually ; and as every incident of the midnight rendez-vous pictured itself back to her imagination, she hoped it would prove some horrid dream, and dreaded the approach of day, as its light would dash her idle illusions to the ground. Amidst these scenes, which flitted across her mind in rapid and confused succession, acquiring some worse feature at every turn, she would pause, and closing her eyes, as if to shut out the tantalizing spectacle, listen to a voice like that from the tomb, as it solemnly spoke to her soul these awful words :—

“Woman, hadst thou not committed *one first* fault, thou shouldst not now be guilty of deception towards thy husband and friends ; and thou shouldst not have sacrificed an innocent fellow-creature to render thy deception the more effective !”

And these were the accents of a remorse-stricken conscience, which broke, in upbraiding terms, upon her heart, as she loved to excuse her fault, and attempted to excite a feeling of pride within her bosom, at having accomplished so trying an act.

Whenever that voice made itself heard, a cold sweat spread over her fevered limbs ; she would have torn her hair and groaned, but her every organ was paralyzed, as the little girl she had abandoned appeared to her as a phantom, and cursed her, for having cast her away.

These shocks could not be endured long ;—delirium seized upon the unfortunate Clara, and threw a gloom among the inmates of Blue-Bell Cottage as they rose, on that fated morning, to find her the wreck of what she had been on the yesterday.



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CHAPTER III.

THE BAD MAN AND HIS VICTIM.

RONALD'S wanderings would have led him to a greater distance, had not the grey dawn of morning allowed him to perceive he had strayed far from his intended course.

In the dim twilight, he could snatch the faint outlines of a farmhouse and its appurtenances, as they gradually emerged, in all their dazzling whiteness, from the receding gloom, like some fairy habitations rising by magic from the morning mistiness. The trees and shrubbery seemed hung with drapery, as a slight fog gently closed around them, and concealed the rude work of the autumn winds; hillocks rolled up, one after the other, in the distance, as the light grew stronger; and where, but a moment before, all appeared a sea teeming with hazy clouds, there sprung beautiful cottages, undulating valleys, old darkened rocks, and picturesque groves, with sufficient shade above them to deceive the eye, and wake any thoughts but those of the "sear and yellow leaf." The rain which had fallen in the course of the night, had formed like dew-drops that strewed the sickly grass with pearls innumerable, and mournfully trickled down the limbs of the trees like large tears, as they met not with the soft bosom of the verdant leaf, on which they loved to glitter in milder months. After the night-storm, the sun was soon bursting in the East, retaining still a remnant of the glow it was wont to shed in the Indian Summer, then just elapsed. A few birds, which the blasts of the Fall had not yet driven to more genial climates, lingered above the rustic buildings, to wake the inmates of the dwelling with their little songs; whilst that conceited king of the barn-yard, consigned to immortal fame by the fabulist, Chanticlear bid welcome to returning day, and exulted over the departure of night.

Over this scene dwelt that most solemn calm, which, if it could

speak, would enjoin man not to dare trouble it, and proclaim that the home-stead which it surrounds is a sanctuary, which it would be sacrilegious to defile, by entering it unlawfully, during those hours the Creator has set apart for the rest of the toil-ridden. In a word, it is that calm, which, if a burglar had a spark of feeling left in his heart, would deter him from committing his midnight depredations.

Notwithstanding the confused state of his ideas, the many apprehensions which beset him, and his natural anxiety to extricate himself from his dilemma, Donald could not help being struck with the peacefulness of everything about the farm-house. He laid down the little girl, and sitting beside her, took off his hat to wipe away the perspiration which inundated his forehead; for although his garments were still wet from their exposure to the storm of the night, and although the morning was damp and chilly, an unnatural sweat poured over him, and debilitated him to such an extent that he almost dreaded being compelled to relinquish his charge.

His thoughts at first ran on the inmates of the neighboring cot. There slumbered in peace, some hardy yet happy peasant's family, whose rest had begun with the setting of the evening shades, and would break soon, for the sun was gradually ascending the horizon. They slept well and soundly, for their riches were around them; the bread they consumed was honestly earned by the labour of their hands; their fortunes hung not on the whim of the ocean wave and wind, nor on the fluctuations in the commercial world—they depended on their own exertions, and the earth they tilled, and which yielded plentifully in return for their work. Contented, and which yielded plentifully in return for their work. Contented, domestic strife, that follows in the wake of disappointed hopes, must never have entered that humble dwelling; nor the luring temptations of pride and ambition, which banish sleep from visionary men's eyes; nor the follies of fashion, which rob the fruits of industry to satisfy vitiated appetites, and ruinous extravagance,—and quiet consciences, generous hearts, smiling faces, and sincere and true love, brought up, in Donald's mind, the van of this host of domestic felicities, which it were heavenly bliss for us, poor unfortunate cits, to taste but for an hour.

"Where shall I go?" exclaimed Donald on rising abruptly, like a man who has lost his way, as he suddenly reflected on his condition.

"If these people discover me with this child," he continued, "they will naturally suspect foul play; and I have little time left to devise some means of escaping detection, for they will soon be out, and then who knows what may happen me for my night's work!"

And he mused awhile, his arms crossed over his chest, and his gaze inclined towards the ground, attempting to fix upon some plan to prevent being interfered with.

But he was not long allowed to reflect on the course he should adopt; for the mastiff of the place, on returning from his rounds in the barn-yard, perceived a stranger's presence, and gave the alarm with a loud and generous bark, that sounded to Donald's ears, as if it issued from a score of canine throats.

Fearing the people would awake, Donald seized the little girl in his arms, and hurrying over a slight hill, soon disappeared in the woods, which cover the gradual slope formed by the Mountain, at its western extremity.

"This is a quandary!" he exclaimed, on reaching a retired spot. "It is impossible for me to lead this baggage where I intend placing her. The country people will soon be in the fields; the highway will be frequented, and to see me issuing from this place, at this hour, will cause some one to interfere,—I shall be arrested, and what will come next, but an inquiry, a conviction, and then a punishment!"

The expression of passive despair gradually over-cast his countenance, and he buried his face in his hands, wishing, but for a moment, that death would relieve him from his predicament. For such it is with weak and wicked men: the instant they are perplexed and thwarted in the execution of their shameful plans, to die seems a boon to them; but were the remedy applied, and their wishes fulfilled, how different their disposition, and how prominently, and in what disgusting shape, their more ignoble nature, and cowardly character, would picture themselves!

A sigh from the sleeping child roused Donald from the stupor,

into which the exaggerated sense of his misery had plunged him, and once more his evil passions found their sway.

"She will awake soon, and how am I to protect myself from her cries?" he said, dreading that the voice of innocence might call for retribution on his guilty head. "Shall I abandon her?" he ejaculated, after a moment's pause; "Shall I place my hand on her mouth? But this would be murder! And why should I destroy this poor thing? She has never harmed me; besides, is she not my kin, the daughter of my brother Roderick? Nature's voice forbids me committing the crime. Yet she may doom me to degrading punishment—and I should deserve it, for why wreak my vengeance on the offspring, when it was the mother who injured me! No, I have held Clara to the conditions of our agreement, that she might experience the misery I would never heap upon her little girl. Then, rest in peace, poor child, I shall not raise a murderer's hand on you.—Shall I leave her? God forbid! Donald's wrongs are not to be so tamely satisfied! A fine result of my night's labor;—nay, of twelve year's incessant watching and wretchedness! I shall not trust so valuable a treasure to the man who would find her alive in this place; nor confide her to the mournful mercies of some compassionate Robin, should she expire in these woods."

"Then, she is so sweet—she will grow to be such a fine woman!" he continued, removing the cloak, and gazing rapturously on her delicate features, as he softly kissed her over the eyes; for there was something angel-like as they lay closed, and cast their long silky lash around them. His mind seemed to acquire momentary quiet, from the holy influence the youthful creature's repose exercised on his rude heart; and his conversion would have dated from that minute, so sanctifying is the contact of female purity, had not the thirst for vengeance and retaliation been so strong in his bosom.

"And is it possible," he exclaimed afresh, his eye reddening with passion, and his heart brimful with jealousy; "that so beautiful a child should belong to another than I? I, who cherished the cruel woman so madly! A curse on my destiny! Yet, by that beauty I may see myself avenged, and this is another reason

why I should retain possession of her. Relinquish her when safe in my grasp—when Clara has the proofs of her shame, and I am without proofs to substantiate it—No, no, I part not with her so ; besides, how ridiculous should I appear in that woman's eyes, upon allowing so favorable an opportunity to escape me, of inflicting a deep wound in her heart ! Clara Stirling, know that my rage is not so impotent ; it is not a child's whim ; and may you live to see the fruits of your love felled to the ground by adversity's blast ! Yes, may you never die till you have known that Donald can hate as much as he loved !”

Thus, step by step, did McDonald work his passionate temper into a fearful state of excitement. The fear of losing his prey and an opportunity of avenging himself, at first enraged him ; then, the many dangers, to his personal safety, attendant upon a discovery of his villainous acts and purposes, inspired him with still greater passion. He, therefore, felt that a two-fold object was to be achieved, by securing against an exposure that threatened to mar his plot ; and what tantalized him most, was the feeling that his mental energies could not devise a means of preventing detection, however much he taxed their ingenuity. He felt within his soul, that Providence opposed him ; and, with too much pusillanimity, in his corrupt heart, to dare rebel against a power he feared, as much as he hated it, he repressed those sacrilegious and horrid imprecations, to which a bolder man would have given vent, in his idle fury.

Moreover, he trembled at the thought of appearing ridiculous in Clara's eyes. That mistaken notion of self regard, therefore, prevailed upon him to turn a deaf ear to all noble suggestions ; and it is not surprising, for one would rather suffer death than appear ridiculous before the woman he has loved ; because, in exciting her derision, it is arming her with a galling plea, she may urge for not returning our passion ; it lowers us in our own estimation ; and who knows but this feeling is the cause of many a suicide, when the party experiencing it has no confidence in himself !

The vehemence of his incoherent soliloquy, made Donald heedless of the risk he ran by tarrying longer in that place ; and it

was not for some minutes after, he attained sufficient self-command to perceive his dangerous situation.

He would have sought for another retreat, but the little girl seemed to sleep less soundly. Her breathing became short, hurried, and hard; some painful dream must have seized upon her, for she groaned, stifled sobs issued from her convulsed bosom, and her little hands were up-raised as if to repel an assailant—at last, she could find voice, and a sharp, shrill shriek thrilled Donald's whole frame with horror.

Before he could start to his feet, the child had sprung away, and was speeding through the forest like a deer. Her cloak had dropped; her hair waved in the wind as she ran; and, thus flying over rock and fallen tree, she personified some fair wood-nymph, disturbed in her recess, and seeking to hide herself from a stranger's intrusive glance, in the deeper solitudes of the forest.

On recovering from the extreme astonishment, into which the young fugitive's sudden motion had thrown him, Donald rose to pursue her; but she had disappeared in the dense brush-wood abounding in that vicinity. He gnashed his teeth with rage, for he dreaded she might reach some habitation before he could overtake her. His fury imparted speed to his pace; and, bounding like a wild beast after its prey, he dashed through the thicket, guided by the noise the child made in breaking down the dried branches as she ran.

After a few minute's chase, he shouted with joy, like the huntsman that sees the object of his sport, as he perceived her emerging from the wood into a cleared spot; and he chuckled with delight at the expectation of soon regaining possession of the little girl. But his fiendish exultation was of short duration, for she darted down a hill, and turned towards a small hut that lay below, —taking that direction more through the influence of Providence, than with the intention of finding a refuge at the cot's humble door, her senses were so confused!

There yet remained a short distance between her and liberation from her pursuer—a few yards more, and the villain would be compelled to abandon the chase, lest the inmates of the hovel might apprehend him. He, therefore, saw the necessity of a desperate

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☞ PART II, will be issued on the first of October, and the succeeding Parts on the First and Fifteenth of each month.

Montreal, September, 1846.

