

CHAPTER IX.

I will clear their senses dark
 What may suffice, and soften stony hearts
 To pray, repent, —————.

MILTON.

Shall I again, a renovated soul,
 Into the blessed family of the good
 Admittance have ? Think'st thou that this may be ?
 Speak if thou canst : O speak me comfort here !
 For dreadul fancies, like an armed host,
 Have pushed me to despair. It is most horrible—
 O speak of hope ! if any hope there be.

MISS BAILLIE'S *De Montfort*.

It was heavenly charity that led Miss Malcolm to the prison, and she nobly fulfilled its dictates. As the Mayor attended her home, she besought him to do every thing for the prisoner that circumstances would allow, and she put into his hands a sum of money to be employed for that purpose. She left it with him to select one of the ablest members of the church, to visit Brandywyn,

and the good Mayor readily promised to see all her orders attended to. After making these arrangements, the young lady left York to proceed southwards.

Miss Malcolm could not have entrusted the care of such matters in more humane hands, than in those of the excellent Mayor ; and it so happened that he had a son-in-law, Rector of one of the parishes of York, whose benevolent heart, zeal for his sacred profession, and exemplary piety, made him always ready to fly to the consolation of the meanest wretch in affliction ; and the large sums he bestowed in assisting their temporal wants, shewed his sincerity in the ministration of those of a spiritual nature, and tended to render his exhortations the more effectual. This good man was not slow in obeying the call of duty upon the present occasion.

On entering the cell where Brandywyn was confined, he found the unfortunate man asleep, having been overpowered and exhausted by the violent agitation he had undergone, in his interview with her who had been introduced into the prison by Miss Malcolm's means. The poor girl sat on the side of his miserable pallet, where she

seemed to be watching his countenance with extreme solicitude, yet with an anxiety no longer attended with any appearance of irrationality. Her countenance was now like the face of some beautiful garden, lately swept over by a violent tempest, where, though many leaves, and flowers, and tender stems, lie torn and broken, all is again repose.

“Hush,” said she in an underbreath, whilst, at the same time, she motioned to the clergyman to step softly; “whist, dinna wauken him! its just but ye noo that his een ha’e steekit—for mercy’s sake saftly, Sir, an dinna disturb him! a wee bit sleep may gi’e ease baith to his wounded body and soul, and Heaven kens hoo muckle they baith want it, or what they may yet ha’e to gang through.”

As she said this, she allowed the rug to fall down over him, and moved gently from the bedside, motioning to the clergyman to seat himself on the stone bench, and taking her place at a little distance from him.

“Is this unfortunate man your brother?” said the clergyman to her in a mild tone.

“Eh, na, Sir, he’s nae brither o’ mine.”

“ A more distant relation, then ? ”

“ Na, na, Sir, he’s nae kin to me.”

“ Your husband then, young woman ? ” inquired he again.

The poor girl threw her eyes to the ground, blushed deeply, and replied in a hesitating manner.—“ Aye—ou aye, Sir, or maybe, I should rather say he has promised to marry me.

“ You are his betrothed bride then ?—Poor girl ! your situation is a cruel one—cruel indeed ! But this world is a theatre of trial, and if we are patient and virtuous here, though we may suffer for a time, we are sure to receive comfort one day from the same wise hand that afflicts us. Nay, were your brightest hopes blasted for ever in this world, remember that there are hopes still brighter, dawning beyond the grave, for those who have led, as I trust you have done, a life of purity and innocence ——”

He paused to await her reply. But she answered not ; and hiding her face on her knees, her voice was only audible in an unremitting convulsion of sobbing.

“ What is it that so deeply affects you ? Do not hesitate to unbosom yourself to me. Your pre-

sent affliction seems to arise from something more painful than mere temporal misfortune. If your mind is diseased, I come as your physician—lay open its inward malady then, and I will endeavour to minister to its cure. These groans are the most powerful language in which contrition can speak; and where repentance is deep and sincere, mercy, and pardon, and peace, are not far distant.”

He waited to watch the effect of his words, and he was glad to see that they were not thrown away. After an interval of some minutes she raised her head, and a flood of tears gave relief to the bitter pangs of her bosom.

“ I can speak noo !” said she, after a deep sigh, “ I think I can speak noo,—though my heart was ower grit at first. But, though my tale is nae lang, I think unco shame to tell it. Twa or three days syne, my best hope was, that I might ha’e died in some lone place, whare neither it nor me were kenned, and been buried at the back o’ some auld country kirk-yard, whare no even the sun himsel’ wad ha’e comed to look upon the rank sod that covered me. But your kind words ha’e brought back some o’ the fresh days o’ lang syne,

when I was a blithe lassie, doing my poor minnie's bidding,—and when our good minister used to clap me on the head after I had said a' my questions till him, and ca' me the best, as well as the bonniest, lamb o' his flock. Then I could ha'e read my Bible; and aften wad I ha'e sat on some bit daisied spot on some sandy know, wi' the broom bloomin' sweetly, and the whins castin' their pleasant scent about me, greetin o'er the story o' Joseph and his Brethren, or the Prodigal Son. And then, too, I could ha'e prayed.—But I darenay pray noo!" and again she burst into a flood of tears.

“Compose yourself, my poor girl,” said the compassionate clergyman, wiping the tears from his eyes—“compose yourself, I beseech you. Be assured I feel deeply for you, and that the interest you have awakened in me is of no idle sort. Compose yourself then, and endeavour to unfold at least so much of your history, as may enable me to afford you all the temporal, as well as all the spiritual assistance in my power. Fear not that there is mercy in store for you! Remember for what purpose our Saviour delivered that beautiful parable of the Prodigal to his disciples!—do not

forget how much joy prevails in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth,—and reflect, that the poor publican himself, who could only dare to whisper Lord! Lord! was not left unjustified, though he had no other sacrifice to offer but the sincerity of his heartfelt repentance. Nor is there less hope for you. To the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the Universe, then, let your contrite prayers be addressed, and be it mine to temper your thoughts and direct your supplications.”

“ And do you think I might daur to pray, Sir ?” demanded she eagerly.

“ Prayer is at all times our duty as well as our noblest and most inestimable privilege,” answered the good clergyman ; “ but, to render its influence effectual, it must be preceded by repentance. But what are those sins which thus seem to oppress your soul ?”

“ I will tell ye, Sir,” replied she—“ I will tell you a’ as weel as my puir heart will let me. But, oh ! dinna blame him. I canna bear to hear him blamed ; for I am sure he still lo’es me weel—and I ken he will right my wrang after a’ that is, unless his life be ta’en frae him.” The idea that now crossed her, again renewed her tears.

“ My duty teaches me to comfort, not to blame,” said the clergyman ; “ and I am here for the purpose of fulfilling that duty.”

“ Then, Sir, I’ll tell ye a’,” said she, with a profound sigh, and wiping the tears from her eyes, she proceeded,—

“ I was born in the north o’ Scotland. My father was the skipper o’ a bit tradin’ brig ; and at his death he left my mother a gay piece o’ money, the produce o’ his honest industry, as I ha’e aften heard hersell say, and as she was aye a thrifty wife, I’m thinkin’ that she was no that ill to live in the warld. She kept a bit public house, and mony was the braw gentlemen o’ the kintra-side that came to birl his penny siller on the tap o’ her claret hogshead ; forbye a pour o’ sailor fouk, and sic like, that gied her house gude custom. I was her only bairn, and muckle she made o’ me, —mair maybe than she should hae dune, and far mair than I ha’e deserved ; for maybe, an she had been harder on me, and keepit me sairer at wark, or sent me to service, I might ha’e been an honest lassie in her house at this precious moment. But though I aften helped her wi’ my ain good will, she had sae muckle pride in me, that she keepit

me gentle, and had aye a woman to help her. But for twa or three years or sae, after I became a 'grown' lassie, I eased her hand a good deal, and did weel eneugh. . . .

“ But at last the men fouk that cam about the house began to ca' me bonny, and mony was the lad that wad be courtin' at me, and some o' them had siller eneugh too. My mother wad ha'e fain had me marry a dominie body that gade till the Wast Indies, and cam back wi' a hantle o' siller. But nane o' a' them that cam about me did I care for, and as for Dominie Macflae, I likit him waur nor any o' the lave. But at last the Captain came. He used aye to be kind to me as a bairn, and mony a cake o' gingebread, and mony a rusk biscuit had he gi'en me. I had been awa' frae hame at an auld auntie's o' mine, in the burrous town, for the twa or three times that his ship had been last on the coast, so he had seen me a bairn, and he fand me a woman or ever he kent. When he came to the house, a' body ran to serve him. He brought a suit o' ribbons for this ane, and shawls for the ither, coral necklaces for anither, and sae sae; but when he saw me, he gi'ed me a bonny gowd watch, and a gowden chain, and here I ha'e it

still in my breast. I mind yet the very jumpin' o' my heart when he put it round my neck ; but the thoughts, and the sight o't hae gi'en me mony an aking heart since.

“ But I'm growin' langsome.—I listened to a' his brave stories about bonny foreign towns, and distant lands, and storms and tempests, till I had amaist glowered my een out wi' looking at him ; but, maist o' a', I listened to the tales o' love he telled me. He wanted to marry me ; but my mother wad na hear o' sic a thing ; and aye after that, whenever she saw me near him, she drave me awa' frae him. Then it was I first begud to ha'e meetings wi' him unkenned to her, and——But what need I say mair ? I left my puir mother, and gaed aff to the sea wi' him, and I never ha'e seen her face sin syne. On the wide waves I buir my bonny bairn, whase birth nae priest blessed, as nane had blessed its mother's waddin'. But, oh ! my heart was like to break whan it dwined awa', and died in my arms—my bonny bit lamb !—it smiled on me but twa or three minutes or it died, as if to forgi'e me for having brought it in shame into the world. I was sae frantic that I wadna believe that it was dead, and I held it to my breast lang lang after

it was gane, and when the sailors took it frae me, and rowed it in a sack, and drapt it in the sullen ocean,—when I heard the plash—and saw the white waves curlin’ over my baby’s fathomless grave, it was a’ the men cud do to keep me frae followin’. Three years did I sail upon the seas wi’ him. But Heaven let me ha’e nae mair bairns.

“ Aweel, after mony a hard day, and mony a danger, his bark was on the coast near my mither’s house, and himself ashore on some business o’ his ain, when she was attacked by a king’s ship, and the men that was left in her ware obliged to leave her for fear o’ bein’ ta’en. I got ashore too, I canna very weel tell hoo! I daur-dna gang to my mother’s. But I kent o’ a concealment o’ his in the ruins o’ an auld castle, so till it I gaed straight. Some o’ his men telled me that he had been there a whilie afore wi’ a bonny leddy. I thought my heart wad ha’e burstit at the news. But I had na’ muckle time for thought, for the place was assaulted wi’ men and guns, and there was sic a firin’ and a burnin’, and at last I slipit out frae amang them after the castle was ta’en, and got awa.’

“ But what was I to do wi’ mysell? I couldna

face my puir mother, and the very thought o' a' the scornfu' things the neebours might say o' me, was mair than I could bear, so I wandered awa' south, and to keep up an honest face, I bought a bit basket o' bonny dies and orra things, to sell to the women fook. Weel, I wandered into England, stoppin' here and there by the road whiles, and aften I thought I was na' just mysell, and aince or twice it happened, that I forgot for a day or twa what had become o' me, but mony was the kind house, and the kind heart I met wi', and muckle was the care ta'en o' me in my wanderins.

“ At last I came till this town yestreen, and I chanced to see him as they took him in, and never left the bit till that good angel o' a Lady garred the sour men let me in till him. And noo he's eased my heart about the Leddy that was wi' him in Scotland, for he says that it was anither's business he was on that night, and that the Leddy was to ha'e gaen passenger wi' him till England, had his vessel no been ta'en. But, oh Sir, d'ye think that he'll get weel through wi' this? and dinna ye think they'll let him out o' this place? Sure, sure, he can ha'e done naething to deserve this?”

“ I have not yet had leisure to inquire into his case,” said the clergyman, who had more than once applied his handkerchief to his eyes during her simple narrative. But how did he receive you when you again met after so long a separation?—”

“ Mair kindly than ever he did in his kindest days,” replied the girl. “ And noo he wants to marry me, for fear he should die o’ this, which God in his mercy forbid !”

“ Are you sure that he sincerely wishes to make you this reparation for the wrong he has done you ?” said the clergyman.

“ More than I ever wished for safe haven, amidst the storms of a wintry sea !” exclaimed the wounded man, who had listened to the greater part of their conversation, unwilling, until now, to interrupt it, and as he said so, he pushed the rug aside with uncommon energy. “ Even this small work of atonement would be as the pouring of a cooling stream upon my burning soul. If you have charity, Reverend Sir, extend your mercy towards me, and let me instantly repair as far as I now can, the injury I have done to that poor wench. I know not how soon it may be beyond my power to do even this little. If it be

possible, pronounce a blessing on us both.—At least,” added he, after a pause, followed by a deep groan, “at least it will rest on her, though it should recoil from me.—”

“And why should it not rest on you also?” said the clergyman. “This anxiety to do even so small a portion of good betrays a lurking virtue, which may have once governed you with all its plenitude of strength, and which, though long subdued by evil habits, and years of intercourse with wicked companions, may again resume its power.”

The prisoner fell back into his straw, and groaned deeply; whilst the clergyman approached the pallet, and sat down on the side of it. He took the feverish hand of the sufferer. His eye was sunk, and his look haggard, and his whole countenance strongly manifested the torture he felt.

“My friend,” said the good man, in a tone which of itself might have spoken peace—“tell me your story? I trust I have done much to compose the mind of your guilty, but contrite companion. Fear not, but I shall be able to make the living waters of comfort reach your

heart also. I am persuaded, that the roots of early sown virtue yet remain there, and that the plant only wants culture to be restored to its former state of active vegetation."

The prisoner again groaned deeply, and wept bitterly, until, at length, becoming more composed, he sat up among the straw, and resting his back against the wall, and leaning on one arm, he began, as it seemed, to recall events long since gone by.

"Indeed, it was not always thus with me," said he; "I am not now the man I was in my youth; even the name of Brandywyn I now bear, is not my own; 'tis but a *nom de guerre* assumed, to shield off the disgrace my conduct might have brought on a better. I was the son of a farmer in the north of England, a well-educated man of considerable wealth, and even possessing some influence in the district he lived in, acquired by his sound sense and sterling honesty. When I was about ten or twelve years old I had the misfortune to lose my mother, who was the daughter of a clergyman. But I remember her well even now, and I remember also the unwearied attention she bestowed on my early religious instruc-

tion, and, if I could have profited by her lessons, they adhere to me even yet. I think even now I see her venerated form hanging over me as I knelt to say my evening prayer ; and I shall never forget the day when the hearse bore her away, and I saw the grave close over her coffin for ever. She left only one other child, my brother Henry, then an infant. My father's affliction was so severe as to render him utterly unfit, for a time, to think of any thing but the bereavement he had suffered. When he began to feel himself able for exertion, he turned his whole attention to the education of me, his eldest boy ; and, resolving to spare no expence that his means could afford, he re-let the farm he then possessed, and removed into the city of Durham, that he might the more certainly secure proper teachers for me. There he placed me at a day-school where I had every advantage, and he moreover took care that I should partake largely of his own private instructions and admonitions during those hours I spent under the paternal roof. Under so wise a system of education, it might have been expected that I should have turned out a reward to him. But, alas ! it was far otherwise.

“ Having accidentally taken up with a number of idle and wicked boys, with some of whom, a good deal older than myself, I naturally thought it manly to associate, and whose wicked tricks I soon thought it a noble thing to imitate, I was led into two or three excesses not very creditable to me, but hardly worth mentioning now, and these, coupled with my total want of application to any honourable pursuit, gave my poor father the most cutting vexation. In vain he tried to make any lasting impression upon my thoughtless heart. There were times, indeed, when his admonitions, together with the heart-rending agony I saw he suffered, melted me even to tears, and produced protestations he vainly hoped were the forerunners of serious amendment. But I was no sooner met by those wicked associates, whose tool I had in a great measure become, than what they called the prosing of my over scrupulous parent, was laughed to scorn, and every trace of virtue produced by his lessons, was speedily effaced by the ridicule they threw on them.

“ After four or five years spent in this way, during which I continued to make considerable progress in wickedness, a plan was formed for robbing

the fish-pond of one of the dignitaries of the church, and I joined in it with some relish, from the malicious thought, that our plunder was to deprive the overgrown Dean of the carp on which he was said to feast. But what I entered into very much as a frolic, produced consequences serious enough in themselves.

“ Having proceeded to the spot with my comrades, on a moonlight night, with a drag-net sufficiently large to enclose a considerable sweep of the fish-pond, we commenced our operations. As the pond was very deep in the middle, I and three other lads were employed in wading in, two of us on each side, through the shallower part of the water, those who were innermost being furnished with long poles to keep down the ground-line, whilst two other lads on the shore, assisted in hauling the drag-lines to pull the net round towards the bank at one end. The eldest boy of all, the son of a butcher, who had planned the expedition, and whose father was probably to have benefited most largely by the spoil, walked backwards and forwards on a little hillock near the pond, as a centinel.

“ Whilst things were in this posture, and we,

in the water, were all busily engaged with the net, two game-keepers, who happened that night to be looking out for poachers, who had some nights before made depredations on the pheasant preserve, happened to descry us at work from a wooded eminence in the park, the moonlight on the water rendering our figures very conspicuous at a distance. Availing themselves of the concealment of a grove, stretching down from the hill to within forty or fifty yards of the knoll where our sentry stood, they got near to him without being perceived. Armed with bludgeons, they rushed forward with the intention of knocking him down, thinking, that if they could succeed in doing so, they would easily make sure of the rest of our party.

“ We, who were in the water, and engaged in dragging the net, were too much occupied to observe the approach of the men. But not so the butcher’s son. He drew from his breast a pistol he had armed himself with, unknown to any of us, and fired it at the foremost keeper. All our eyes were instantly turned towards the spot in the most desperate alarm. ‘ The villain has murdered me,’ exclaimed the wounded man, and

we saw him stagger backwards, and fall groaning into the arms of his comrade who was coming up behind him, whilst the lad who fired the fatal shot was making off.

“All was confusion and dismay in the water. I and two others having abandoned the net, with some difficulty reached the bank, and immediately fled after the three lads, who were already in full retreat, the keeper being too much engaged with his wounded companion to think of following us. But the fourth boy who had been in the pond with us, having, in his sudden and desperate alarm, taken by mistake into the deeper water, somehow got his feet entangled among the meshes of the half floating net, and being thrown forward, was now under water, and now above, in such a situation as to leave no doubt that he must perish. His drowning and half-suffocated screams came horribly upon our ears as we fled. A twinge of self-reproach came across me that I had not staid to save him. I halted for a moment, and even went back several steps through the thicket by which I was escaping. But there came one yelling shriek of despair, followed by a splashing, and a sound of choking,—and then a

death-like silence,—and then,—I knew all was over, and I fled without knowing very well whither I was going.

“After running for some time, I perceived that I had gained the great high road, and finding it necessary to pause for a few minutes to take breath, I turned aside into a meadow, and stretched myself down among some furze bushes, within eight or ten yards of a grassy path leading through it.

“As I lay trembling in my concealment, the thoughts passed rapidly through my mind, and a thousand horrible ideas crowded along with them. The murder so recently committed, in which I had been led to be in a certain degree a participator—and then the soul-harrowing yells of my drowned companion came so strong into my imagination, that I almost heard them again. The boy, who was considerably younger than me, was the only son of a lady, the widow of an officer, who had been left with this youth in very poor circumstances. I felt conscious that it was I who had seduced a naturally virtuous boy into a participation in my wicked pranks, and, above all, that my most earnest entreaty had been necessary

to induce him to join that evening's party. I thought of his poor mother, and the execrations which, in the anguish of her soul, she would probably pour out upon him who had misled and deprived her of the only stay Heaven had left her.

“ The moon was still high, and as I lay with my ear to the ground, I heard a slow and gentle brushing of the short grass, at if some light foot were advancing. I looked up, and how was my blood frozen in my veins, when I beheld the figure of the drowned boy pass slowly along the path. His head was bare, and his long locks, as well as his garments, were dripping wet, and his eyes seemed fixed, and his face had the blueness of death upon it ! I could not doubt that it was the ghost of him whose life had just been sacrificed by my folly and wickedness ; and though I have often since tried to reason myself out of this idea, all my attempts have been in vain, so strong was the impression made on my mind by the ghastly figure, and I have since often fancied I saw him in a thousand forms. Appalled by the sight, I followed the apparition with my eyes, as it moved on without sound, until it was no longer visible, and then starting from my hiding place, I regain-

ed the road, and fled with fresh wings of terror. In the transient catches of reflection that came upon me as I ran, I resolved never more to visit my father's roof. Indeed, the crime of murder, to which I was certainly an accessory, made it too dangerous for me to do so, and I urged my flight almost unceasingly, until I reached the nearest sea-port, where I immediately hired myself as a cabin-boy in a coasting vessel bound for London. I had no sooner arrived there than I fell in with a number of dissolute characters, with whom, during the time our ship was discharging her cargo, I frequented the gin shops and low tap-houses about Wapping: and there my education, you may easily believe, was but little improved. To support my expences I took the bounty, and entered as a man-of-war's-man on board a ship fitting out for a foreign station. Whilst loitering about, I happened one day to take up a newspaper in one of my places of resort, and my eyes being accidentally attracted by a paragraph headed Durham, I read as follows:—

“ ‘ The gamekeeper who was so desperately wounded in the nocturnal affray with the poachers of this neighbourhood, still lingers in such a state

as to leave no hopes of his recovery. As connected with this unhappy affair, we are sorry to be obliged to notify the death of Mr Harrison, long the wealthy and highly respectable farmer of Wickersmere in this county. This truly worthy old gentleman, whose loss to the circle he moved in is irreparable, is supposed to have died broken-hearted, owing to some existing suspicions implicating his son George in the above murder. The young man, who is said to have been very wild, disappeared immediately after the commission of the crime, and has not since been heard of.

“Conceive what were my feelings, Sir, on reading this paragraph, knowing myself, as I did, to be that very George Harrison alluded to.—But—Good Heavens, Sir!—what?—what is the matter?—are you unwell?—Eppy! call for help, I—I beseech you!—he is going to faint!”

“No, no!” said the good clergyman, recovering himself, and speaking with great agitation—“do not call for help!—do not summon indifferent persons to witness my heart-rending emotions!—I—I am your younger brother Henry!!!”

He threw himself upon the miserable man, and embracing him, they mutually lost all power of

language for some minutes, until relieved by giving full way to their feelings.

The best medical advice was now procured, and the wounds of the unfortunate prisoner were ably dressed. For some days he gave the most flattering hopes of a speedy recovery; his pious and affectionate brother was unwearied in his attention to him; and his spiritual amendment advanced even more rapidly than that of his body. The performance of the marriage ceremony, that made Eppy his wife, gave him additional ease. All was going well. But an unexpected relapse took place,—and he died suddenly in the arms of his wife and brother.

To paint Eppy's grief would be a vain attempt. But the excellence of Henry Harrison's heart was never more tenderly displayed, than in the well-judged care and kindness he bestowed on his newly acquired sister.