

CHAPTER XV.

All pleasure springing from a gratified passion, as most of the pleasure of sin does, must needs determine with that passion.

SOUTH.

AFTER the confusion occasioned by the sudden illness of the fictitious Miss Delassaux, Lord Eaglesholme and Amherst returned to the drawing-room, where they found Cleaver just arrived.

A long and most interesting conversation ensued, during which Amherst gathered, by fragments, the circumstances we are now to give the reader in more concise and connected narrative.

Lord Eaglesholme was not always the melancholy and abstracted being we have known him. His noble features were lighted up in youth, by the unvarying sunshine of unalloyed happiness,

to which the possession of health, a handsome person, high birth, ample estates, full freedom of will, and above all, an unrepublishing conscience, largely contributed. With buoyant spirits, he travelled over Europe, loitering wherever any prospect of instruction tempted him to remain,—drinking freely, but purely and virtuously, from the fountains of delight, springing up everywhere in his path,—and plucking the roses, without twining one thorny care into his wreath.

Of all the countries he visited, he found Italy the most interesting ; and above all in that country, Naples had peculiar charms for him.

Soon after his arrival in that city, he was present at a magnificent masked ball, given by the king. The gardens were illuminated by millions of lights ; and the bosom of the sea gave back so much radiance, that even the partial and fitful explosions of Vesuvius were lost in the blaze. As he wandered about, in full enjoyment of the brilliant scene around him, his attention was arrested by the appearance of a tall, and very elegant female figure, whose lofty air and mien marked her of high, if not of royal rank. He stepped aside from the centre of the walk along which she

was advancing, to permit her, and the companion on whom she leaned, to pass with greater freedom.

The Lady acknowledged his politeness by a graceful inclination, and moved on, leaving him transfixed to the spot, and following her elegant form with his eyes. The mask, who was habited like Minerva, did not allow her's to remain idle; he perceived, from the frequent looks she threw back towards him, that she had remarked him also with some degree of interest. But she was soon lost amid the gay stream of human beings, and he saw her no more that night, though he eagerly sought for her all over the gardens.

His curiosity was highly excited, to know who the goddess was who had made so powerful an impression upon him, even while her face was concealed under a mask; but all his attempts to find a clue to her name and condition were vain.

A week had hardly passed away, when the occurrence of another similar entertainment, gave him fresh hopes of seeing her. He felt that he should be able instinctively to identify her under any disguise. Having reached the gardens, among the very earliest of the revellers, he never

ceased to move about from one entrance to another, narrowly scanning each new mask, until the crowds came pouring in so fast, as to render hopeless all chance of his detecting her in that way. In despair, he now began to make the tour of the walks, staring silently at every woman whose superior height came near that of the lady he sought, his hopes being a thousand times alternately excited and destroyed, and his strange behaviour eliciting many a cutting jest at his expence.

As he was about to retire in chagrin, he was suddenly gladdened by the appearance of her he so anxiously sought, at the very moment when he least expected it. He could have no doubt of her being the same person, for, in addition to her fine form and majestic port, being, as he was now convinced, perfectly without a rival in the gardens, she was dressed in the very same character she had worn before, and accompanied by the same female mask.

The lady passed on apparently without observing him, towards a seat within a few paces of the spot where he stood.

“*Signora,*” said she, in Italian, and in a faint

voice, yet loud enough for Lord Eaglesholme's ear, "I am unfit for this crowd to-night. A sudden giddiness has come upon me. Would that I could procure a glass of iced water."

Lord Eaglesholme felt this opportunity of introducing himself too precious to be lost. He sprang off to one of the bowers where refreshments were provided, and, when he returned, he found the lady alone. She received the proffered beverage with a courtesy that showed his attention was not displeasing to her. She then, to his great surprise, expressed her gratitude very eloquently in English; and making room for him beside her, she begged him to afford her the benefit of his protection, until the return of her friend. The lady instantly recovering from her indisposition, a conversation of a very animated description followed; and they forgot the lapse of time, till the thinning of the crowds in the gardens, and the gradual decay of the lights, warned them of the late hour.

It was then that the lady for the first time expressed some vague apprehensions about her friend. Lord Eaglesholme would have flown in search of her, but to leave the stranger alone, at such an hour, was impossible. They therefore

set out on a tour of the gardens together, to look for her. But she was no where to be found ; and the lady satisfied herself with the idea, that Signora Bellocchi, having mistaken the part of the gardens she had left her in, had missed her way back, and concluding that she had retired, had driven home to her own palazzo.

Lord Eaglesholme was too much enchanted with the new acquaintance he had formed, narrowly to scrutinize the probability of the story. He handed the lady to her equipage ; and as the flambeaux were held up to show her the step, she turned gracefully round, and taking off her mask, whilst the blaze of light fell full upon her face, she again thanked him for his polite attention to her ; then, telling him the place of her residence, she begged him to call on her next day, to afford the Marchioness de Villecour (for so she called herself,) an opportunity of repeating more fully her expressions of gratitude.

The grand and highly expressive features she thus for a moment disclosed, which might have been those of the very goddess she personated, completed the conquest her noble air, and her brilliant conversation, had begun ; and he was so

wrapt up in admiration, that, after her carriage had driven off, he stood gazing after the lights that whirled along with it, unconscious of every thing around him, until the officious inquiries of his servants recalled him to himself.

Burning with a passion, which he now, for the first time, experienced, Lord Eaglesholme hastened next day to the villa, in the lovely environs of the city, which the lady had indicated to him. He was received in a manner that enraptured him. The lady soon contrived shortly to tell him her history, describing herself as an Englishwoman of family, who, having been married to a young Frenchman of high rank, had been left a widow about a year before.

Dazzled by her beauty, her conversation, her exquisite taste, and her accomplishments, soon bewildered his understanding, and from that moment all his hours were spent with the charming Marquise. In the delirium of his love, he very soon made proposals of immediate marriage to her. These, however, she laughed gaily off, telling him, that, having once known the weight of Hymen's chains, she was resolved never to bear the irksome load again; but soon afterwards,

she artfully contrived to lead Lord Eaglesholme to forget what was due to virtue, and a connection of a looser kind began between them.

Awakening in some degree from the first fever of his intoxication, he anxiously proposed to make her reparation for the injury he accused himself of having done her. But so completely had his reason been swept away by the strong tide of his passion, that he was neither shocked nor surprized by the levity with which these honourable offers were treated, until after several months, the effects of their intercourse began to appear in a manner too unequivocal. Then it was that reflection arose, and reason began to resume her seat in the mind of Lord Eaglesholme; then it was that remorse began to operate on his mind. He again offered her,—repeatedly offered her marriage, and then it was that he began to think it inexplicable, that, with reasons so urgent, she should still continue to reject it.

But time ran on, and the wretched fruit of her infamy was brought into the world; and then it was that Lord Eaglesholme discovered the fatal truth.

The enchantress, who had so long held him

within the magic circle of her fascination was,—Lady Deborah Delassaux—the wife of his earliest and dearest friend!

Horror seized upon the virtuous mind of Lord Eaglesholme. But how was that horror increased by the manner of the discovery! It came from Lady Deborah herself.

Her husband, Sir Godmansbury Delassaux, when returning from his Grecian tour, died by the hand of assassins on the road between Torre del Greco and Portici. No sooner was Lady Deborah mistress of this intelligence, than her former train of deceit, and even common feeling itself was forgotten, in the relief she experienced at thus finding all obstacles to her marriage with Lord Eaglesholme removed. She rushed into his presence, and altogether unmindful of the character of the man, rudely snatched from his eyes the veil she had thrown over them, and with unrestrained, but ill-timed expressions of joy, declared her readiness to consent to an immediate marriage; nay, urged him to it, in her turn, with all her eloquence.

The stupor Lord Eaglesholme was thrown into by her unblushing infamy, prevented his inter-

rupting her, and she was permitted to go on to the end with her disgusting appeal. Stung to madness by the sudden discovery of the depth of that abyss he had been plunged into, he loathed the very sight of her who had betrayed him. With the fury of a maniac he rushed from the house, and, in the delirium that ensued, fled from the city and the kingdom that contained her. Posting with the impetuosity of one who hopes to forget his misfortune in the speed with which he travels, he flew over the continent of Europe, and, at length, found himself, he knew not very well how, at Eaglesholme.

But we have not yet told the full extent of his misery. Some dreadful reports reached him, representing Lady Deborah as guilty of crimes, of which, though he had no share in them, he was innocently the cause. So agonizing was the torture, endured by the sensitive mind of Lord Eaglesholme, from this reflection, that his brain became partially unsettled, and produced those paroxysms, bordering upon insanity, of which he was afterwards at times the slave.

CHAPTER XVI.

Prima da un suo fedel Clorinda ascolta
 Del suo natal l'istoria — — —

— — — — —
 Io piangendo ti presi, e in breve cesta
 Fuor ti portai tra fiori e frondi ascosa ;
 Con arte sì gentil, che nè di questa
 Diedi sospetto altrui, nè d'altra cosa.

— — — — —
 Ed io giu scendo, e ti ricolgo, e torno
 Là 've prima fur volti i passi miei ;
 E preso un picciol borgo alfin soggiorno,
 Celatamente ivi nutrir ti fei.

— — — — —
 Mi gitto a nuoto, ed una man ne viene
 Rompendo l'acqua, e te l'altra sostiene.

TASSO.

WHILST Amherst was listening to the particulars of Lord Eaglesholme's story, Eliza had walked out. More impatient than ever to learn her early history from herself, he now hastened to follow her along one of those delicious shrubbery

walks, where he had often rambled with another companion.

He found her seated in that very temple of Venus, where he had once so nearly sacrificed himself to the artificial Olivia. A thousand recollections crowded on his mind. He shuddered at the narrow escape he had then made. Even his disagreeable dream at Eaglesholme shot across his memory. But these remembrances only made his present happiness the sweeter.

The free converse the lovers now enjoyed was exquisitely delicious, from the long train of misery they had both endured since they last parted in Scotland. They ran over all their distresses, and, after these, dwelt with delight on their first interview, and on those days of happiness, during which their infant love grew so rapidly to its full strength. They talked of the chapel scene—of the certain death from which she had been snatched by the exertions of Amherst;—and this led them to think of the wonderful being who had so providentially interposed upon that occasion, as well as afterwards, in enabling Amherst to effect the escape of Eliza from Loch-an-Eilan.

They were expressing their mutual curiosity to

have the mystery that hung over that extraordinary creature cleared away, when in an instant she stood before them.

Both started with surprise. Her countenance now bore a very different expression, from that which had so lately bowed down the proud heart of the Lady Deborah. There was a softness,—an affection,—a mingled sorrow in her face, never seen there, except when she addressed Eliza.

“ Offspring of her who is now a saint in Heaven!” said she, in a mild and tender accent—
“ daughter of my beloved mistress! the time is now at hand, when, having finished my task, I may creep into some hole to die, like the wasted and winter-stricken ewe, that bears the insolent buttings of the flock, till death relieves her from her misery. When justice shall have been done thee, my sweet dove, I may bid the scornful world adieu for ever.

“ It matters not where this hideous morsel of mortality my spirit has worn so long, shall moulder into dust, so that the night-fox, or the hill-raven, have it not for food. But yet, uncouth and fearful as my form appears, it does contain as much humanity as larger and more perfect bodies hold.

“ You talked of me as I stole on you, and I wondered much to hear kindly feelings, and grateful wishes uttered in the same breath that mentioned me, so long have I been used to hear the taunts and insults of those whom it has pleased their Creator and mine to mould more happily.

“ As you spoke, you reminded me of your mother, and of her I cannot think without these tear-drops.—But now I am composed. ’Tis fitting that you know from me what ties once held me to that saint, whilst yet on earth, and from whence sprung the care with which I have never ceased to watch your fortunes. I will sit me down on this green sod, and tell you all ; all, at least, that you ought to know ; and for once I will indulge in human feelings—for once I will revel in the consciousness of having done good, so gratifying to human nature.—Listen then :—

“ I was born amid the wild mountains of Wales. My father was a shepherd on the estate of the Earl of Llanstephan, the father of Lady Deborah Delassaux. The miseries I suffered from my wretched figure began almost from my cradle. I went to school, but I was soon driven from it by the hootings and insults of the rude

children. I began to assist my father in his charge ; but even this solitary occupation was no security from their wickedness, for, when a holiday came, they formed parties cruelly to hunt me on the hills.

“ Nature had given me unusual strength and powers of action, and fear and distress of mind so compelled me to exert these powers, that they became almost miraculous. I fled from the accursed troop with the swiftness of the roe-deer ; I leaped across yawning chasms, where the thunder of the torrent, far below, came upwards in a confused and softened murmur ; I climbed up cliffs into nooks, where the wild-cat could hardly find footing, and I crept into winding holes in the rocks, where the hill-fox could alone have forced a passage, and where mine was often disputed by his angry snarl.

“ It happened that Lady Deborah, and her husband, were one day riding on the mountains. Mr Delassaux’s object was the sport of shooting, and the Lady, always bold and masculine, came with him to witness and enjoy his slaughter. Fatigued and hungry, they came together to my father’s door, to procure some refreshment, and cu-

riosity led me to look upon them from an inner apartment. The Lady accidentally observed my hideous face, and, at her command, I was very unwillingly ordered by my father to come forward. She affected kindness for me—heard my history—gave me some little present—and, learning that my mother had died in giving birth to me, begged me of my father, making, at the same time, a thousand flattering promises.

“ My father, a stern unfeeling man, was glad to rid himself of an unfortunate being, who brought, as he thought, a disgrace upon him ; and I, who, for the first time in my life, then felt the sunshine of kindness, was so warmed by its deceitful rays, that my heart burned towards my benefactress. I clung to her with eagerness, and followed her home with joy.

“ I accompanied Mr Delassaux and Lady Deborah to Naples. For some time, my life, compared with what it had been, was easy. But I soon began to be used as a toy, for the sport of the lady and her companions, and even her servants. The tortures I suffered drove my fiery temper almost to madness, and often did I resolve to escape from my persecutor.

“ Your angelic mother, who then came to Naples, showed me so much pity and kindness, that when she and Sir Marmaduke were on the eve of returning to Rome, I threw myself on the ground before her, and, clasping her knees, I entreated her to take me with her. My appeal was forcible, and her excellent heart knew not how to withstand it.

“ I bade adieu to my tyrant, exchanging what might have been called infernal torments, for what was to me an elysium upon earth. To her benevolence I owe the light of education. I loved, nay, I adored her. I could never look upon her lovely countenance, where the kind and warm affections of her pure unspotted soul gleamed in perpetual sunshine, without believing that she was my good angel, sent to redeem me from the fangs of her who had so long acted the part of a demon towards me.—But this is a theme on which I could dwell for ever. Time wears, and I must hasten to conclude my tale.

“ My Lady becoming pregnant, returned to Rome, where Sir Marmaduke died of a malaria fever. Her affliction was more dreadful than human frame could stand. Violent and some-

what premature labour was the consequence; you were born; and the angel spirit of your mother winged its flight to Heaven. Before she became insensible, she entreated me to see her orphan child, friendless in a foreign country, conveyed to Naples, to be placed under the charge of her sister-in-law, Lady Deborah. I dared not disobey her, and I had no sooner executed my trust, than I was told to be gone. Anxious for the safety of the child, I condescended to plead humbly for an asylum in Lady Deborah's house; but it was peremptorily refused, and I was not permitted to see my former mistress.

“ I then heard strange rumours of her and Lord Eaglesholme, and of a child having been born. Some horrible suspicions flashed across my mind; suspicions which must not now be whispered, since we are taught to exercise mercy, and to forgive.

“ Finding myself excluded from the house of Lady Deborah, my attachment to the child of my beloved mistress led me to conceal myself in a small hovel, near her villa, and I watched it day and night.

“ One evening, just before sunset, I saw an English sailor loitering about among some orange trees, near the house. I crept slowly into a concealment, whence I could observe him more closely. As the twilight approached, he was joined by Antonio, a ruffian whom I knew to be much in the confidence of Lady Deborah. He carried something over his shoulder in a large silk bag, and I saw it move as he went. They walked off together in silence, and I followed them into a thicker part of the grove, where they seated themselves upon a bank.

“ ‘ Harrison !’ said Antonio, in a mixture of Italian and English, and placing the bag upon his knee, ‘ I thought she would be satisfied with exposing the child, but nothing will please her but your tossing it into the bay. So, come ! here it is, make up your mind to it. I hope you are tough enough not to mind a trifle of this kind ?’

“ Harrison was silent for a moment, and then, without giving a direct reply, he said—

“ ‘ Let us look at the child before we part.’ Antonio then took the infant from the bag. I looked keenly, and as my fears foretold, I saw it

was thee, my babe, the child of my beloved mistress.

“ ‘ *Cospetto di Baccho!*’ exclaimed he, ‘ the bantling is dressed, and, as I live, in her haste, she has forgotten to take off the gold necklace and locket which the little witch of Endor brought with the child from Rome ——’

“ ‘ ’Tis a pretty bauble, let me examine it more narrowly,’ said Harrison. ‘ There seem to be cyphers in diamonds and hair there’——

“ ‘ Aye, aye!’ quoth Antonio, laying it on the bank, to that side of him farthest from his companion, and utterly beyond his reach; ‘ ’tis a pretty bauble, but, look here!’ said he, holding up the babe, ‘ look at this young imp, how she smiles!’

“ ‘ She does so, by Heaven!’ exclaimed Harrison; ‘ and could you have the heart to ask me to murder so sweet an innocent?’

“ ‘ Heart!’ exclaimed Antonio, ‘ I don’t know what you mean by heart; but I know I have honour enough never to deceive my employer, and as we are to be paid here for making sure work on’t, by committing it to the deep, I cannot permit my conscience to let you off for less,

though I will not refuse you the gratification of putting it to any easier death you can devise. What think you, ha ! ha ! ha !' exclaimed he, with a fiend like laugh—' what think you of drawing a string tight round its neck first, and then lowering it gently down as a bait for the dog-fish ?'

" ' No, Antonio,' said Harrison, shuddering at the wretch's atrocity, ' I have robbed, and I have —— 'pshaw ! I need not say what I have done, but this I solemnly swear I will not do. I will undertake to see the child so disposed of, as will secure all that her death could effect, but for murdering that innocent, with that smile of Heaven upon her face !—no ! no ! no !—I could not bring myself to do it.'

" At this moment I crept breathless behind a tree, and resolving to attempt something for the rescue of my mistress's orphan, I glided forward unperceived, and with a long hooked stick, I twitched away the gold chain that lay beside Antonio, and, at the same time, I gave him a smart blow on the elbow, quickly concealing myself again. The villain started round, and missing the prize he had so artfully set apart for

himself, suddenly exclaimed, ‘Robbers!’ and, laying down the child on the bank, drew his sword, and rushed into the thicket, calling on Harrison to pursue the thieves. I slid round the bole of the tree as they passed me,—snatched up the precious babe,—and, putting her into the bag,—darted away with her.

“Lady Delassaux had providentially heaped money upon me at different times, which now contributed to the safety of her orphan. I hired a felucca, and sailed for Sicily that very night. I need not mention the various difficulties I encountered during my wanderings, but hasten to tell you that I at last arrived at Rotterdam, where I embarked for England, without knowing very well what plan I should afterwards follow.

“During the voyage, a storm arose that drove us to the north of Scotland. Our vessel struck, and went to pieces. I grasped my babe, and was fortunate enough to cling to a portion of the wreck, and, piloted by the hand of Providence, we alone, of all the souls on board, were safely wafted through the raging billows to the shore. We landed near the mouth of the Cave of Eaglesholme. There I sought a temporary shelter,

picking up some of the ship's provisions, and other necessaries, washed ashore by the storm.

“ Whilst engaged in looking for these, I was seen accidentally by some of the inhabitants of the neighbouring fishing hamlet, with my hair hanging down. Their superstitious fears led them to fly in the utmost alarm. My figure was thus associated, in their minds, with the storm and wreck. I resolved to avail myself of these circumstances, to make myself the terror, instead of the sport of the vulgar. The discoveries I made in the cavern enabled me to carry my plan into the most perfect execution. I found out a narrow hole immediately over the fallen fragments, heaped up at the further end of the larger outer cave, which, opening at a considerable height, and just over a projecting ledge, so as to be quite unseen from below, led through a series of magnificent natural apartments, and came out through an almost invisible crevice near the sainted well.

“ The belief in my being something supernatural became so fixed among the ignorant natives, that, to propitiate my supposed malevolence, they put down fish, and food of all kinds, and coins, and various other articles, by the side of

the well I was supposed to delight in. But something more was necessary for you than mere food; and I began to be unhappy that I had secured no asylum for you, where you might receive education fitted to your birth. Had I then known that your mother was the last remaining child of Lord Eaglesholme's only uncle, I should have thought that the hand of an all-seeing God had led me to him; but I was ignorant of this circumstance, and then looked upon him in no other light, than as a nobleman of whose history I knew something, and whose wretched and recluse sort of life, bespoke at least a sincere repentance for the errors he had been led into.

“ In the course of a few weeks residence in the cavern, I had various opportunities of gathering more about Lord Eaglesholme, and I finally made up my mind to convert him, by stratagem, into the guardian of my infant treasure. How to effect this, required some previous consideration. To accost him, and to tell him at once who you were, would have been to subject myself to the suspicions of imposture; and ignorant as I was of his connection with your mother, I only anticipated indifference on his part, to the pretensions

of one of whom he knew nothing. At last I resolved to awaken his remorse, and to move his tenderness for you, by giving you to him as his own child.

“ I soon found out, that he was in the frequent habit of rambling alone upon the cliffs after dark, and I resolved to avail myself of the rumours, spread over the whole district, of my strange appearance, and supernatural powers, to meet and address him, in a manner that should at least command his attention, if not inspire him with some portion of the general belief regarding me. I carried my scheme into practice with all the effect I was capable of. I started upon him near the sainted well, in so inexplicable a manner, that I saw plainly he hardly knew whether to believe me mortal or no ; but when I told him the history of his past life, he shuddered with horror, and was lost in astonishment. I then told him that the only punishment Heaven had assigned to him, was the care of his adulterous child ; and taking you from under a cloak in which I had laid you to sleep, I gave you into his arms, and disappeared before he had time to recover from his surprise, or to know whither I had

gone. He believed my tale; and, to hide the infamy of your birth, he gave you out to be the daughter of his widowed sister, who had died abroad.

“ Finding my place of concealment convenient for my purposes, I resolved to remain there to watch over your fate. I showed myself frequently to Lord Eaglesholme during his walks on the cliffs; and, keeping up the mystery in which I had first enveloped myself, I continued to have considerable control over a mind, remorse had rendered, in some degree, unsound.

“ It was not until after your being carried off, and when I was fully satisfied of the strength of his affection towards you, by his distraction at your loss, that, on his coming to seek me near the well, I at last disclosed to him the secret of your birth, and learned with surprise, for the first time, that it had pleased Heaven to direct me for protection to the very threshold where you had the best right to look for it. And now young lady, said she, in a melancholy accent, it only remains for me to give thee a wretch’s blessing, and bid thee farewell for ever—never again shall this disgusting form distress thee!”—

Amherst and his bride replied to her at once—
“No!” said they warmly, “no! we cannot let you leave us. Our lives shall be devoted to make yours comfortable.”

The poor creature gazed upon them both for a moment, and, seating herself again on the grass, from which she had risen, she burst into a flood of tears, and was for some time convulsed by the intensity of her feelings.

“This kindness,” said she, “is more than I can well bear.—But it will not do.—I cannot be a burden to you.—I cannot be a burden to myself.—I cannot again subject myself to the persecutions of my own species. I have been too long accustomed now to live in solitude, and to be free.—Yet, to leave you!” continued she, looking towards Miss Delassaux with inexpressible feeling, “to leave you who are the only living thing which chained me to the earth, is to break my last tie with it, and to pine in living death!”

“Why should you leave me then?” said Miss Delassaux, seizing her long and bony hand; through which she felt the warm pulses of a strong affection beating; “why should you leave me? A small cottage shall be fitted up in

the most retired part of the grounds. Walls and hedges shall enclose a space large enough, to keep away even the air contaminated by human beings. You shall possess the master-key of all around; and I shall be the only mortal who shall have power to visit you. Remember! old age must come on. You saved my young life, and it is my duty—my privilege—my pleasure—my right! —to watch over and protect you in your declining years!”

The Dwarfie was overcome by the warmth of Miss Delassaux's words and manner, through which her heart so eloquently spoke out. She leaned her head upon the hand and the lap of the only being who had really sympathised with her since the death of her angelic mistress. She wept copiously; her humanity returned full upon her, and, giving way to it at once, she yielded to Eliza's wish.