

CHAPTER VI.

Ease to the body some, none to the mind
From restless thoughts, that like a deadly swarm
Of hornets arm'd, no sooner found alone,
But rush upon me thronging, and present
Times past, what once I was, and what I'm now.

MILTON.

A rogue upon the highway may have as strong an arm, and take off a man's head as cleverly as the executioner; but then there is a vast disparity, when one action is murder, and the other justice.

SOUTH.

THE day succeeding the ball being necessarily employed as a substitute for night, by those who had, on that occasion, turned the night into day, found the mansion of Brokenhurst Hall, which had so lately shone with dazzling splendour, and rung with the merry sounds of mirth and revelry, sunk in darkness and silence. The doors and windows were locked and barred, the chimneys

were smokeless, and the wrecks of the entertainment lay scattered about; and the suffocating stench of spilt oil, and half exhausted lamps, and candles,—the atmosphere of dust, which had hardly yet settled down on the floor,—the confusion of the furniture,—the shreds of artificial flowers and feathers,—and the fragments of torn drapery, which littered the apartments within,—and the traces of the numerous wheel ruts deeply marked in the gravel in front of the house, and the impression of many a hoof from the impatient stamp of the horses, wearied out with the long tarrying of their masters, were the only indications of the bustle that had so recently animated the premises.

Yet rest or repose was by no means general within its walls. The worn-out menials, indeed, who had no cares of their own, were drowned deep in those sweet and refreshing slumbers, sometimes the only solace of the plebeian, and for which the head that wears a crown is often said to sigh in vain. But the gay, and, as they would have conceived, the happy Lady of the mansion, though sufficiently jaded both in mind and body, had carried with her to bed such

thoughts as precluded the possibility of slumber. The words of the stranger, who had so unaccountably secreted himself, in a place where every precaution had been taken to exclude every one but herself and her present favourite, still haunted her mind, and originated a train of thought, she found it impossible to get rid of.

There was something much too marked, and much too serious, in the manner, as well as in the matter of the stranger's warning, to be the mere result of any of those exhibitions of assumed character, permitted by masquerade,. She applied the stranger's words to the state of her finances, and her fears on this subject reached farther than they had ever done before. Fancy wants but a few materials to begin her fairy web, and having got these, she weaves it to an extent that will embrace an ideal world within its folds. No sooner was her mind fairly set a-working on this touching theme of the possibility of her own future distress, than all her selfish feelings were roused, and bitter self-reproaches, for the folly of her past life, and the ill success of all her plans, rose one upon the other, as billow rises over billow.

What was to be done? Even supposing the words of the Necromancer to have proceeded from mere wanton malice, as she was sometimes disposed to think they did, it was evident that the failure of her fortune was already no secret; and should the tongue of scandal spread the tale widely, it would put an end to all hopes of redeeming her fortune by marriage, and sheltering herself in the arms of a wealthy husband from the difficulties she had so much cause to dread.

Aware of the motives that guided herself, she was too well acquainted with the nature of fashionable love to believe it could long endure where interest did not in some measure go hand in hand with it. She had been in the habit of considering the Count rather as a *dernier resort* than any thing else, but she now almost began to suspect that the time for seizing that *dernier resort* was arrived. The necessity of the case, and the hope of finding an asylum abroad in those splendid possessions of which he talked so much, contributed to bring her to the resolution of speedily yielding to his incessant importunities. Such were the reflections that kept Miss Delas-saux awake.

But Lady Deborah's mind was harassed by a series of recollections of the darkest description, giving birth to a train of the most agonizing thoughts, which harrowed up her very soul. In vain she tried to stretch her limbs on the soft down. It was to her like the red-hot iron bed of martyrdom. The very absence of light, occasioned by the officious zeal of her female attendant, who, careful to ensure the repose of her mistress, had curtained and barricaded every aperture against the intrusive rays of morning, till she had succeeded in producing an artificial night in the apartment, was in itself too much for her. A thousand terrific phantoms filled her disordered brain, swam before her eyes, and muttered dire forebodings in her ears. She could bear her tortures no longer; springing in a phrenzy from her bed, she rushed to a window, and, in her eagerness to undo those barriers which kept out the blessed light of day, she tore down a part of the drapery.

The glorious sun was beaming in all his splendour; she looked forth upon the smiling landscape, where woods, and shrubberies, and resplendent sheets of water, and lawns, and more distant

fields, richly cultivated by the hand of man, and smoking cottages, and towers, and glittering spires, were beautifully thrown together. It was a scene that might have gladdened the coldest heart. But it gave no joy to that of Lady Deborah. Her's sickened at the spectacle, and she was preparing to retreat from the window, when an object caught her eyes, and at once anxiously fixed them.

A man came galloping from a great distance up the approach leading to the house. As he drew nearer, she observed that his horse looked as if it was jaded and quite blown by the unnatural speed to which it had been pushed. He was yet a quarter of a mile nearly from the mansion, when the animal seemed to flag in his pace. The horseman lashed and spurred him without mercy, but the poor creature, as if suddenly failing, staggered to one side, and rolled himself and rider upon the grass. The man quickly extricating himself from the saddle, started upon his legs, and gave the animal a violent kick in the belly. But the poor horse felt it not; his heart was broken, and he was already dead. The man eyed the inanimate carcase for a moment, then, casting a

long look backwards, he, with great exertion, dragged it, saddle and all, into a thicket a few paces distant from the road, and, hiding it behind the bushes, he ran at full speed across the lawn towards the back entry to the house.

Lady Deborah paced her room backwards and forwards for some minutes in great agitation. She stopped to listen. A footstep came stealing along the passage towards her door. It opened, and Antonio, pale, haggard, worn out by fatigue, his face disfigured by a dreadful gash, his arm bound up with a handkerchief, his clothes bloody in some places, and torn in others, and his whole person begrimed with dust and dirt, threw himself, almost fainting with hunger and thirst, into the sofa before her.

With a trembling hand she shut and bolted the door of the apartment. .

“ A cup of water, for Mercy’s sake !” exclaimed the wretch, in a voice hardly intelligible. “ *Ho il fuoco d’inferno nelle mie viscere!*—Hell!—hell is here!—ugh!”

“ Where !” exclaimed the terrified lady, looking wildly around her.

“ *Sangue del Diavolo!*—here !” exclaimed

he, again striking his breast, with the violence that always characterized him.

Lady Deborah sprang towards her toilet, and pouring some cordial into a large cup, she filled it up with water, and he drained the draught to the bottom.

“Compose yourself, my good Antonio,” said the lady to him, as he was drinking it, whilst, at the same time, she seated herself on the edge of the couch he occupied, and assumed an air of calmness she was far from feeling; “compose yourself, and let me know your history since the time you parted hence; but first, to satisfy my impatience, is the girl in my power?—How has your errand sped?”

“Sped!” cried he, looking in her face with the horrible expression of a disappointed demon, “why, like the errands of those the devil deserts after they have become irrevocably his own.”

“Have you failed to secure her then?” inquired the Lady, shuddering at his speech, but at the same time with a look of intense anxiety. “Did your informant deceive you? or was the fool mistaken after all?”

“Marry, we failed not to secure her; and, an

it had not been for those damned scruples which have haunted you of late, as if the blood-red deeds of your youth could be whitened by a little lily-livered mercy now, she had been sound asleep in a sack at this moment, forty fathoms down in the black abyss of a Highland loch. But to have the quarry snatched from one's very beak by having one's talons muffled by a woman's weakness, and then to be leagued with a chicken-hearted *poltrone* to boot!—*Furie d'inferno!* I have been well served, truly!

“Then the Captain has not turned out the trusty person we had reason to suppose him?—But be calm, Antonio, I beseech you, and recapitulate as briefly as may be the circumstances of your journey to Scotland.”

“Trusty!” exclaimed Antonio, in reply to her question; “trusty!—no, hell-hound that he is!—aye, hell-hound that he is, I tell ye, for to hell I have certainly sent him—ha! ha! ha!—He is beyond the reach of telling tales—at least I have revenged myself on him—at least I have that satisfaction.” And as he said so, his expanded lips, and grinding teeth manifested the fiendish delight he received from the thought.

“ Is he dead, say you ? ” demanded the Lady with great earnestness.

“ Aye, ” replied Antonio, “ dead enough, I warrant you ; and well for you that he is so, for his carcass is in the gripe of the kites of the law by this time, and, *cospetto !* it were hard to say what stories he might have told had not his tongue been silenced.”

“ ’Tis indeed well ! ” said the Lady, shuddering, “ ’twas indeed most fortunate.”

“ Soh ! ” replied Antonio with a malignant glance, half raising himself from the reclining posture to regard her. “ So, after all, you can bear to hear of a bit of bloodshed, when it rids you of one who knows too many of your secrets ?— Eh !—*Cospetto del Diavolo !* I doubt not but you would grin with joy were some others of your sharper tools to be sacrificed,—hah ? ”

“ I do not grin with joy, Antonio, ” replied Lady Deborah, with assumed calmness, “ I do not grin with joy, Antonio ; but I confess it is some relief to me, to find that you are freed from any apprehension regarding the tales he might have told. I am anxiously alive for your safety, as much, indeed, as for the pre-

ervation of my own character. I am too sensible of your services, as well as of your fidelity, not to feel grateful and secure. But hasten to relieve my mind, I pray you, by telling me your whole adventures."

"They are soon told," said Antonio gruffly; and he shortly recapitulated the circumstances of his adventures in Scotland, the capture and escape of Miss Malcolm, and his accidental discovery and seizure of her at York. He then gave all the particulars of the scene in the wood, and the murder of Brandywyn,—the sudden appearance of the officers, and his escape. He described the perils he ran of being captured in the thickets, and he told her, that just as he was about to break from the covert, a horseman came galloping round the skirt of it. He had no other alternative but to throw himself flat on the ground, and trust to the darkness which then prevailed. He lay in the very path of the horse, but in his haste the creature sprang over him, and left him unhurt.

The horseman had no sooner swept by, than he jumped to his legs, and rushed forward over fields and hedges, until just before day-break he

came to a small paddock, near a cottage, by the side of a great road, where a tolerable nag was feeding, and what was somewhat surprising, he had most invitingly a saddle and bridle on. Such a mode of escape was too valuable to be neglected. With some difficulty he caught the animal, and was in the act of mounting him near the gate of the enclosure, which stood opportunely open, when up started a herculean farmer-looking man, who had been asleep under the hedge, and rubbing his eyes.

“ Foy ! foy ! deary me ! ” said he to Antonio. “ Sure an I hanna been sleepin’ a’ noight under the blessed skoie ! This cums o’ Farmer Barnes’s home-brewed—Was never the loikes seen !——Thank ye, sur, for cotching moy harse. I be mainly obligated to ye ! ”

“ Brother ! ” said Antonio sternly, “ I must borrow your horse for a mile or two. ”

“ Barrow moy harse, neebur—noah—yere joakin, sure ? I canna spare moy harse not by no manner o’ means. ”

But Antonio, without minding his reply, sprang into the saddle.

“ Hoity toity, neebour ! are ye a gawin to rab

me o' moy harse?—Then mun I try a tussle wi' ye—gi'e me moy harse—cum doun I tell thee, else I'll bring thee!" quoth the farmer, laying the grasp of fate upon the bridle with one hand, and on the rider with the other.

Antonio had one loaded pistol in his breast,—he drew it,—the flash of death ensued,—and the powerful countryman, having received the fatal ball in his heart, sprang into the air from the convulsive energy of the death pang, and falling upon the grass without a groan, his huge form lay inanimate across the gateway.

Antonio stopped not to remove the body. The inhabitants of a neighbouring farm-house might be alarmed with the shot, therefore it was no time to tarry. Digging his unfeeling spur into the sides of the horse, he made him spurn his late master with his heel, and gallop off at the top of his speed; and by following the least frequented paths, and avoiding all towns as much as possible, and by riding night and day, as unceasingly as he could force the creature to go, hardly tasting food himself, or allowing the wretched animal to pasture, he arrived at Brokenhurst in

the manner we have described, in an incredibly short space of time.

“ My good Antonio,” said Lady Deborah, vexed and disappointed, and much alarmed for the probable issue of his rashness; “ my excellent friend, you have permitted your hasty temper to get too much mastery in this business; I tremble for the consequences.—What if you are traced?—Merciful powers! had you not better fly immediately to the coast and embark for France.”

“ *Fico!*” said Antonio, “ I defy the devil to track me. Besides I am not just in a humour to commence a new *viaggio di piacere*.—*Anima mia!* do you take me for a wizzard to be able to ride from one end of the world to the other without breathing?”

“ Unfortunate,—most unfortunate!” exclaimed the Lady, for a moment forgetting, in the panic she had been so suddenly thrown into by Antonio’s communication, how much she was in his power. “ Had you been contented with executing my orders,—nay, had you even followed the prudent and proper counsels of your companion, all the wanton atrocities of which you now

speaking might have been saved; their direful effects yet to come might have been averted, and she, whom fortune threw so happily into your hands, might have been now safe in mine."

Antonio looked at her for some time in silence, his dark eyes flashing fire,—those of Lady Deborah sank before them.

"What!" said he, at length, in a furious tone, "am I to be upbraided then after all?—*Per Dio sono ben pagato!—Corpo del Diavolo!*—'tis the reward I might have looked for."

"Do not be angry, Antonio," said Lady Deborah, in great alarm, and in a soothing voice; "do not, I beseech you, fly off in this manner.—I mean not to upbraid you.—No!—On the contrary, I am fully aware of the zeal you have always displayed in my affairs, and am perfectly disposed fully to appreciate it, though, upon this occasion, it may, perhaps, have carried you a little farther than prudence might have required. The services you have rendered me shall never be forgotten. They shall, moreover, be splendidly rewarded. Fear not, my worthy friend, that you will find me ungrateful!"

"*Per Dio!*" said Antonio, "I will be trifled

with no longer. Empty words shall not satisfy me. I'll have deeds. I heard that Lorenzo had made good his footing here. Is it true?"

"The Count is here," said Lady Deborah, with great placidity of manner; "he has been here for some weeks. But surely your good sense will induce you to be contented with some recompence,—some arrangement of a different description from that which, pardon me, you must allow me to call a somewhat wild scheme.

"Talk not to me of wild schemes," cried Antonio, in a tone and manner sufficiently evincing the extent of his determination; "*fuoco d'inferno!* I will have your promise—I will, by all the powers of hell, or"—and, as he paused for a moment, he turned his head towards her, and thrusting it emphatically forward, he glared with his eyes full into her face, and grinding his teeth together, as his features blackened by the accumulated venom of his passion, he added, in a deeper tone,—“or,—you know what is Neapolitan revenge!! Life to me is nothing in comparison with the gratification of revenge;—and, if I shall find that you have deceived me, the struggles of death will be

to me the thrillings of extacy, should I only be able to fix my half-strangled gaze upon the last agonies of her, who, condemned to the same ignominious end, shall dangle from the same tree with me. Oh it were a dance of exquisite joy !!!” And throwing himself back in the couch, he ended his sentence with a demoniacal laugh, that ran cold through every fibre of Lady Deborah’s frame. She trembled, grew pale and faint, and tottered to a chair.

“Antonio,” said she, in a tone that spoke all the horrors of the apprehension with which his expressions had filled her,—“for mercy’s sake do not talk so! Let not such dreadful thoughts haunt your mind. I did but try to reason with you. But you are certainly the best judge of your own wishes. Be assured, I shall no longer seek to impede a marriage you are so resolved on. She is herself, too, already won. The house and gardens blazed last night with the splendour of a magnificent fête she gave in honour of the Count, and she and all in the house are still buried in sleep, after the fatigues it occasioned. I only, from my extreme anxiety for your safety, which has robbed me of repose for many a night past,

was occupied in——But, hark! some one comes this way along the gallery—quick!—to your concealment!” And Antonio, hastily starting from the couch, had just time to hide himself in a closet within the apartment, when the voice of Miss Delassaux, demanding entrance at the chamber door, compelled Lady Deborah to hasten to open it.

Miss Delassaux entered with her usual haughty air, and with the blush of pride upon her cheek.

“ I come, Madam,” said she, as she seated herself upon the couch so lately occupied by Antonio, and which was placed with its back towards the door of the closet he had retreated into, “ I come to inform you that it is my intention to change my condition. I have now resolved to yield myself to the eloquent pleading of the Count Alonzo di Montemarone, and to shorten that time of probation to which custom usually subjects lovers. In fine, Madam, we have just had an interview, and the result is, that we are to be married in the evening of the day after to-morrow.”

Lady Deborah seemed to be struck with con-

fusion at this so sudden determination, for which she had been by no means prepared.

“Olivia!” said she, “is not this rather a hasty resolution? Will it not be considered rather strange that”——

Here she paused abruptly, for the closet door slowly opened, and the ruffian head of Antonio was thrust forward into the room, his features charged with a fury of expression not to be mistaken.

“But, to be sure,” continued Lady Deborah, after some hesitation, “I need not advise; your own prudence is sufficient to direct you to what is right; and where the merits of the person on whom you have permitted your affections to rest, are in themselves so conspicuous, perhaps the sooner your happiness is secured the better.”

Miss Delassaux, who had entered the room fully prepared to expect as determined an opposition to her plans from her aunt, as the subjection to which she had now, in a great degree, reduced Lady Deborah, might have warranted her looking for, was perfectly astonished to find her so passive. Her feelings were absolutely those of disappointment. They might have been compared to those of a person, who, de-

scending a stair in the dark, has his feet suddenly met by the ground at the bottom, whilst he believes he has two or three steps more to descend. A certain degree of confusion came over her, and she stammered out something, rather incoherent, about her proposed plans. The marriage was to be quite private, she said. A servant had been already dispatched for a licence. The clergyman also had received notice. Nobody was to witness the ceremony, but Lady Deborah and the servants. It was then their intention to set off for London, where they meant to spend the honey-moon.

Here the head of Antonio again appeared for an instant, with the face relaxed into a horrible smile of triumph and exultation.

“ But what is the matter with you, aunt ? ” exclaimed Miss Delassaux ; “ you look very ill.”

“ I am, indeed, not well, Olivia,” replied her Ladyship, faintly ; “ I am, indeed, by no means well. My health has been declining for some time ; but the prospect of seeing so speedy a termination put to the parental care I have so long had of you, were of itself a sufficient explanation of these emotions. Then I slept ill—ve-

ry ill, last night, and the effects of the fatigue I underwent still remain."

"I believe I had better leave you, then, to enjoy a little rest. But say, can I do any thing for you?" said Miss Delassaux, in a much kinder tone than any she had addressed Lady Deborah in for many a long day; "you had better ring for your chocolate, and then go to bed to endeavour to procure a little sleep. I shall give orders to have the house kept quiet. You must really take more care of yourself." So saying, she left the apartment.

The sound of her feet had hardly died away in the gallery, when Antonio came forth from his concealment. Lady Deborah had sunk into the depth of an arm-chair, where she sat in mute mortification, with her eyes fixed upon the ground.—The Italian looked at her for some moments without speaking.

"*Cospetto del Diavolo!*" said he at length, with a malicious grin, "you seemed to waver, methought?—But now things are in the right train, and I may soon hope to call you my connection—ha! ha! ha!—But I'll to the larder,—*per Dio sono affamato!*"—

The haughty but humbled Lady Deborah, was stung to death by the impudent and insulting tone of triumph assumed by the villain in whose power she felt herself. Even his absence was in some degree a relief to her, though it only gave her leisure for greater self-torment. Her thoughts, by a very natural chain of association, reverted to those circumstances which had thus placed her life, and her fame, at his mercy; and conscience again began its work of torture. Rest was now for ever divorced from her pillow. Nay, she even dreaded to go to bed, where she knew that a repetition of the torments she had lately so often endured, most certainly awaited her.

“Yes,” said she to herself after a long pause, as she started up and began to pace the room, “I must rid myself of him.—One crime more!—nay—not a crime—’tis but becoming the willing instrument of Heaven’s vengeance against him,—against one whose life must soon be forfeited, if he should be detected in these his recent crimes. Yet for whom has he sinned?”—She shuddered at the thought. “But no matter—to this I must wind up my resolution. The secrets he

holds are too important,—and were he to become the prey of the law, his poisonous breath would blast my reputation for ever. He must not be allowed to fall into the hands of justice; my safety, and what is to me more than all, the safety of my high name demands that he shall be removed from its grasp. By what a labyrinth am I surrounded? and how ill have I been requited by her for whom I have thus plunged into the abyss?—Yet,” continued she after a pause, during which better feelings seemed to have arisen,—“yet she was kind but just now,—and how lovely she looks when she is kind! Her kindness comes, indeed, but seldom; but when it does come, it rekindles all my foolish fondness. Were conscience silent, I might have been contented and happy with her kindness alone, could I have had it. But to be trampled upon by her for whom I have sacrificed myself!—Oh my proud heart cannot stand it!——”