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ALICIA DE LACY ;

AN

HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

VOL. IV.

Strahan and Preston,
Printers-Street, London.

ALICIA DE LACY;

AN

HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE LOYALISTS," &c.

Wisdom in sable garb array'd,
Immers'd in rapturous thought profound,
And Melancholy, silent maid,
With leaden eye that loves the ground,
Still on thy solemn steps attend:
Warm Charity, the general friend,
With Justice, to herself severe,
And Pity, dropping soft the sadly-pleasing tear.

Gray's Ode to Adversity.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND BROWN,
PATERNOSTER-BOW.

1814.

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ALICIA DE LACY.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Up vanity!

Down royal state! all you sage counsellors hence;

And to the English court assemble now,

From every region, apes of idleness:

Now, neighbour confines, purge you of your scum.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE Earl of Lancaster was left hastening to his army, to quell the mutiny which the false pretences of Pendergrass's wizard accomplice had excited. The situation in which he had left his wife, gave such wings to his speed that Leicester who followed to entreat his immediate return could not overtake him. He arrived at Axminster, and his timely presence prevented the

lease of the pretended Edward, whom he sent off under a strong escort to Winchester, as the place of greatest security in the neighbourhood, till he could be removed to London to answer for his offences. He then shewed himself to his soldiers, and was haranguing them on the subject of their weak apprehensions, when his brother rushed into his arms. "All, I trust, is well," said Lancaster, alarmed at his unexpected appearance, "All will be well," replied Leicester, "if you can return in time to save the life of a woman who is worth an empire." He briefly stated the particulars of her confession, her inviolable attachment, and the effect which the potion had visibly taken, but which Leicester attributed to the influence of an active imagination on a slight frame and exquisitely susceptible temper. "If she is in such a state," said Lancaster, "why did you keep my contrivance

undiscovered?" "Because," replied the other, "so completely is she persuaded, that she has drunk a mortal draught, that only yourself can effectually undeceive her, and I trusted that I should overtake you before you had crossed the Tarrant." For once the fraternal affection of Lancaster yielded to irritability, and as he gave his truncheon into Leicester's hands, he reproved him for quitting the post he had assigned him at such an important crisis, instead of directing him what course to pursue against the Somersetshire insurgents.

Though nearly exhausted by fatigue and anxiety fresh horses were procured, and the Earl had mounted again to retrace the twice beaten road between Canford and Axminster, but the arrival of another messenger fatally interrupted his design; this was the almoner, who hastened to say that he had witnessed the last sigh of the Countess. The situation of

her imaginary murderer baffles description. The native impetuosity of his temper, and strong, deep feelings, subdued, but not eradicated, by his devotional habits, burst out on this trying occasion with a vehemence that threatened destruction to himself and all around him. The tempest subsided into an oblivious gloom. This was a case in which the consolations that are suggested to inspire fortitude or quicken resignation could have no effect; nothing could be hoped for but from time, and even from that only a state of acquiescence bordering upon despair.

Post after post came hurrying from Canford, but beside the task which thus devolved upon him, of preserving the peace of the western provinces, Leicester could not quit his afflicted brother. Holland next arrived to communicate the urgent reasons which induced him to consent to a premature interment. In the overwhelming certainty of Alicia's

fate all minor considerations were absorbed. At last tidings came that the young Sir Edmund had never been seen since the day of his mother's death, and that Beatrice, being desired by the seneschal to produce the child who she pretended was sick of grief in her apartment, had also disappeared. Such an extraordinary concurrence of events could not be referred to a chain of unpropitious accidents; and Leicester determined that they must proceed from some dark and as yet undiscovered treason, which it would require energy and wisdom to unravel. Leaving Holland in the command of the Lancastrian vassals, with orders to march them wherever the spirit of insurrection again burst forth, he removed the exhausted Lancaster to Kenilworth, and went himself to Canford, where his first business was to visit the minster alone, and explore the secrets of the cemetery. Thoroughly

convinced that his brother was innocent of any design to compass the lady's death, he wished to solve the enigma from which of these two causes it proceeded: was poison infused by some unknown hand interested in the annihilation of the De Lacy family; or was it terror working on a frame so delicate? To ascertain the real fact, he sought the vault, pretending an insatiable desire once more to behold a woman whom he loved with affectionate fondness. The safety of his brother required every precaution; but though his motives for thus invading the privacies of dishonoured mortality, gave him determined perseverance, his knees smote together as he removed the sear-cloth, expecting to behold the countenance which often, while it lighted up an universal glow of festal joy, had made her true friends tremble and censure amid their smiles. It must now either be faded by the common process of decay,

or, as Holland stated, exhibit the prognostics of a violent death. Instead of either of these awful spectacles, he beheld a waxen image reposing beneath the velvet pall, and occupying in mockery of their lovely heiress a niche in the sepulchral vault of the Earls of Salisbury.

But where was that beautiful and accomplished woman? What he had himself seen of her sufferings, corroborated by the account of the almoner and the chamberlain, left no doubt that she was innocent of the plot which had removed her from her husband's protection. If alive, she must be in the power of some enemy. Of Surrey he had no suspicion; the speciousness of his manner had imposed on Leicester's inexperienced youth and frank character; and he even viewed him as an honourable gentleman who had rendered his sister-in-law eminent services at the time of her escape from

Newcastle. His doubts were directed to a natural brother of Alicia's. The ignorance and turbulence of these unhappy times gave encouragement to fraud by frequently rendering it successful ; and this man, not content with a castle and demesne which the Earl of Lincoln had given him in Cambridgeshire, had lately set up a claim to be acknowledged as the lawful heir of the Earls of Lincoln, and as the issue of a precontract which invalidated the title of Lady Margaret's daughter. The contrivance of Beatrice to expedite the funeral, and her carrying off the child, pointed her out to the Earl of Leicester as the chief instrument in this villany ; and he only wanted to trace her connection with this Sir Henry, who had just assumed the name and arms of his father, in order to fix on him as the main spring and author of these machinations. Something might be discovered by putting all the domestics to the

question; but would any discoveries which they could make lead to the restoration of the mother and the child, or even allay his brother's grief? Was it not apparent that if this base-born Lacy had used such means to get his competitors in his own power, it would only be with a determination to put them to death, after having extorted such discoveries and concessions as might serve his purpose; and would the grief of Lancaster be relieved by knowing that, instead of reposing with her progenitors at Wimborn Minster, his wife was probably in the grasp of a mortal enemy? Better let the present impression that she was gone for ever continue, than agitate with the most cruel suspense a mind which, he heard from the almoner, began to shew signs of resettling into that torpid calm which succeeds the violent ebullition of passion, and is the first step to resignation. Uncertain how to act, Leicester once determined to raise

an armed band and surprize the castle which Henry de Lacy possessed on the Granta. Reconsideration suggested that, beside the odious responsibility of renewing that barbarous system of private war, which the barons had agreed to renounce, and submit the injuries they suffered from each other to the decision of justice, this step was not likely to procure the liberation of those who, if Henry's designs were murder, had ere this doubtless been sacrificed. Thus perplexed and debating how to act, the young Earl only remained fixed in one point, which was to continue faithful to his brother's fortune, and to minister to his sorrows, which now seemed capable of receiving alleviation from friendship. His deep remorse for having left the helpless lady in the power of traitors, confirmed his resolution of never again relinquishing a positive for a contingent duty.

The daily reviving energies of Lancaster's mind were a proof and a reward of Leicester's pious services. The suddenness of the lady's death was generally attributed to the pestilence; the alleged disappearance of the child died away like other extraordinary and unaccountable reports; and the deep affliction of the widowed husband refuted the rumours which were propagated by the idle and censorious respecting their conjugal infelicity. As soon as it was known that he was in a state to admit visitants, friendship was not remiss in its offices, and the first and most distinguished of his consolers was the stern but true-hearted Earl of Hereford. He had ever seen Alicia's faults magnified through the medium of opposite manners, and wondered much that Lancaster should so deeply regret the loss of a vain trifler. Yet, though thus disposed rigidly to scrutinize the propriety of a

husband's sorrows, he permitted to himself the highest ebullition of wrath, or, as he termed it, of patriotic indignation against the King, on account of his being withheld from taking possession of a desirable estate by the influence of the younger Spencer, on whom the King had bestowed it, together with the title of Earl of Gloucester, lately borne by the lamented Gilbert de Clare, to whose sister, the Lady Eleanor, this new idol was espoused. The influence of Spencer over the monarch was as unbounded as Gaveston's had formerly been, and having an abler head to direct the suggestions of avarice and ambition, he by this influence threatened to produce, with less public irritation, worse consequences to the power of the barons and the liberties of England. "The Gascon," said Hereford to Lancaster, "insulted our persons, and squandered our property; but the present minion

tramples on our rights, and seizes our lands. What consolation is it to know that he is the son of an English baron, venerable for his years and virtues, the esteemed friend of my royal father-in-law, and dear to the nation, till in the feebleness of age he fosters his son's aspiring hopes, and soothes by flattery our dreaming King? Because the yoke of the Spencers is fashioned in England it may be better shaped to our necks; but is it therefore less ignominious to be governed by a deserter of the common cause, than by an alien? Shall we hope that the usurpation will be conducted with moderation, which commenced in perjury, in falsifying every promise they gave us, and in converting royal favour into a sharp goad, to pierce those by whom it was intrusted to their hands as a consecrated weapon, to be used for general good? See already the fruits of their maladministration. In the late reign,

England treated with her enemies, holding in one hand the palm of victory, and in the other an unsheathed sword. Mighty princes sought the arbitration of our sovereign, and confided their dissensions to his justice; and his victorious troops marched, unquestioned by the flying enemy, through the wilds of Lothian till they saw the northern ocean lash the gloomy coast of Caithness. Now foiled in every attempt to restrain the Scots within their own barren region, instead of revenging the brave knights who fell at Bannockburn, or aiding the efforts of the northern priests to preserve their lands from spoliation, our new governors, out of tenderness I suspect to their brother plunderers, have exchanged the faint resistance of Gaveston to determined subjection; a two years' truce has been purchased from Scotland, of which the legate is the mediator and guarantee."

Lancaster, who had listened so far in

dejected apathy, started at the word purchased. “ Yes,” continued Hereford, “ this truce, this breathing interval to give rapacity leisure to ripen its system of home-ravage, has been purchased by concession, by abject entreaty, by an acknowledgement of Bruce’s title to the crown in prejudice of the Baliol’s, whose better right England once supported. Nay more, an acknowledgment of the independence of what court-phraseology now smoothly styles a sister kingdom, by a surrender of all claim to the town and castle of Berwick, by compromising the honour of the nation. — By all these means our north country boors have procured the signal privilege of being allowed to plough their fields and rebuild their cottages, with an assurance that for two years the King of Scotland will not interrupt them, nor licence the marauders, who, without his commission, may still perhaps take a

fancy to their fat beeves and household garniture. I tell thee, Lord Lancaster, Bruce is as brave a Knight as ever belted sword; and were he not the enemy of England I would be proud to serve him with my life;—but never should he have had such terms from me. No, rather, like one of our true bred mastiffs, would I have hung on his haunches till he severed my head from my body, than have dropt my hold for a mouldy scrap, tossed from St. Peter's alms-house."

Lancaster sighed deeply, drew his sword out of its scabbard and felt its temper, while Hereford proceeded. "Meanwhile the King, fatigued at having done so much for the good of his subjects and the glory of his kingdom, keeps his court in a style that is intended to reflect shame on the simple grandeur of his father's. We have jewels and velvet, embroidery and cloth of gold; but we have neither wisdom nor authority,

justice nor independence. I saw, on my return from captivity, helmets loaded with plumes, but they shaded the features of parasites ; surcoats charged with honourable devices, but usurers wore them ; the insignia of office in the hands of a debauchee or a gamester : such is the King's court. The Queen has her's, where Mortimer occupies the anomalous post of favourite to the Queen. They say it comprizes duties which it were treason to divulge ; but before the public, its office is to whisper in her ears, and report her gracious sayings, to lead her to and from the banquet, to dance with her on holiday revels, caress her dog, and carry her goss-hawk. 'Tis said too he has some tender prattle for the young heir of England, such as, ' Gem and paragon of all princes that ever were or shall be born to bless and astonish the world, love your beautiful and most

virtuous mother, but hate your father, for he is naught. Love such pleasant men as the gentle Mortimer, who caress and humour you, but be sure when you are King punish such grey-beards as Hereford, and such mopes as Lancaster, who would persuade you that crowns and sceptres are not given to monarchs for play-things; and that the oath of their anointing has more meaning than the litany of a worn-out saint, whose day has been blotted from the calendar by a new canonization.' "

Lancaster sternly smiled. "The royal boy," said he, "must be taught a more orthodox catechism; whether his parents are permitted to dream out their days, or are awakened from their sensual trance by the clangour of rebellion."

"Who will be his teacher?" returned Hereford, grasping Lancaster's hand. "Who is there worthy to adopt this more than orphan representative of our

Saxon and Norman Kings, this last anchor of our shipwrecked greatness; who is there to impress on his unfolding intellects, that likeness of his royal progenitors of whom his father preserves no semblance?"

Lancaster replied, that his uncle, the young Earl of Kent was virtuous and amiable.

"True" resumed Hereford, "but in admitting his youth, you acknowledge his unfitness for such an office. Born near the close of his father's life, this offspring of a French princess never saw his country's glory as it shone in the days of Edward and Eleanora. His chief merit consists in his affection for his brother, and his honourable integrity in refusing to profit by that public favour, which points at him to the prejudice of an unpopular sovereign. But he knows nothing of the track of government, having only seen heartless counsels, proud boastings, and

submissions extorted by force, cancelled by perfidy. He might instruct his young nephew how to deserve esteem and enjoy peace, not how to conquer glory. Some other guardian must be sought. Look not on me; I am an old crab-tree, crooked and austere; inflexible, I grant, but withal rugged; more capable of faithfully serving a great prince, than of training him till he might become one. You are silent. Hear, hear me, then, describe the requisites that should meet in him who is fit to nurture the ruler of England. It is one for whom pleasure has no temptations, and ambition no lures; one pointed out for this high office by the extinction of those ties of private affection that might have distracted his cares, and bound his talents to meaner uses. You must comprehend me. You, Lancaster, who are so eminently endowed with talents and virtues, so royally descended, so imbued with learning, and schooled by experience; what hinders you from

stepping forward and devoting your life to the glorious task of teaching our third Edward, so to revive the national honour that his old barons need not blush at being called his subjects, nor send a longing eye north of the Tweed in search of a King worthy to reign over a brave people? I repeat it, Heaven seems to have made you a childless widower for this purpose."

Lancaster turned his eyes on Bohun, and, in a faltering tone, said it was not Heaven that made him childless and a widower.

"Forbear," said Leicester, drawing Hereford aside, "this theme must be avoided, or tears will again burst forth along the deep-worn channels that grief has formed."

"He is brave as well as tender-hearted," said Hereford, "and therefore I spare him; but I must tell thee, Harry Plantagenet, how he schooled me

when I lost my royal lady. I was then his pupil, and I could repeat his sayings, probably unaptly, for I am more of a soldier than a schoolman. But I well know he then referred every event to Providence, and gave the will of Heaven as a reason why I should be content to part with what I held most precious: but thus it ever happens; your wisest reasoners on resignation find practice the most difficult part of their doctrine. I will one day make him admit that the same power permitted his afflictions, though his wife died of a fever brought on by dancing, and the women by over care killed her son."

Satisfied that Lancaster had not heard this light epitome of his afflictions, the Earl of Leicester led Bohun back to his brother, secretly rejoicing at the readiness with which invention enables report to sound its narratives. A sense of the decorum, which is due to the presence of a

stranger, induced Lancaster to conceal his compunction, and struggle with his grief. Fresh themes were started; but the angry Hereford, while he severely condemned the dejection of his friend, continually recurred to the subject which occupied his mind. Thus, the praises of Gilbert de Clare, the brave victim of Scottish discipline and English precipitation at Bannockbourn, led to resentful sarcasms at the rapacious minister, who now bore his title. At last, the Earl of Warwick was mentioned; and the gallant Leicester, with truly honourable feeling, bore witness to the fair fame of the rival of his love, and listened with deep interest to the description of Matilda's behaviour, whose first sorrows Hereford had witnessed. Continuing his blunt remarks, and protesting that no woman, except his consort Elizabeth of England, had ever so powerfully awakened his sympathy, Bohun asked how long she

survived her lord ; and if she were buried in the same grave with her faithful Guy of Warwick, the second of that name who had become celebrated for his love, his bravery, and his misfortunes. That she was alive seemed to him wonderful ; that Leicester should be allowed to converse with her at the grate of Amesbury was suspicious ; but that he faltered and blushed, while he described her as reconciled to the world, was explanatory ; and with the frankness of an unreserved, impetuous character, Hereford gilded his stern features with a smile, and, grasping the young Plantagenet's hand, rejoiced at his success, and protested England did not contain a knight more worthy to dry the tears of the widowed beauty.

The heart of Lancaster, which had been first revived from the benumbing grasp of despair by the glow of patriotism which Hereford's conversation infused, now became further susceptible of social

feelings excited by his brother's happy prospects. Urged to a full discovery by perceiving that the generous Lancaster, though himself cold as a marble statue to the charms of beauty, could yet derive a sympathetic pleasure from another's happiness, Leicester acknowledged that he had at last successfully pleaded his mother's wishes, and his own persevering and disinterested love; a love which had undergone the truest test of sincerity and purity, since he had preferred yielding to the wishes of the beloved object, though they thwarted the consummation of his own; and Lancaster was roused to the recollection, that there was one undischarged duty which he was still called to fulfil, that of placing his adopted sister in the safe protection of a worthy and powerful husband.

“Speed the auspicious nuptials, Henry,” said he; “and with the gift of Matilda's hand receive from me the confirmed re-

version of those temporal goods, which, by making me a mark of envy, and the object of unusual temptations, have corroded my peace and obstructed my utility. Henceforth I will be wholly the servant of my country; my duties to her will terminate only with my life." Then, turning to Hereford, he avowed his firm purpose never more to unfurl the standard of insurrection, and reproved him for supposing that a keen sense of private injury qualified a baron to step forward as the professed vindicator of public wrongs. Should the wisdom of the council, or the voice of parliament, call upon him to undertake the tuition of the infant Prince, his conscience would bind him to the service, in which he would embark with the zeal of a man, who, having nothing to ask from his cotemporaries, looked only at posterity. But this trust must be offered, not sought. He was now the only nobleman to whom

the act of amnesty, consequent to the death of Gaveston, had not been formally extended. To full forgiveness, nay, even to cordial reconciliation, he thought his recent services fully entitled him; and the first effort his restored health would permit him to make should be to obtain an interview with the King.

The suspicions to which the circumstances of Warwick's death exposed the monarch, were too vague and too little supported by testimony to be brought in the shape of a charge against him and his advisers; but they had sunk deep into the minds of Lancaster's party. The Earl himself was conscious of being equally involved with Warwick in the rash act, which was known to have excited unextinguishable enmity; and this consciousness made him (though he had not been informed by what means his friend was prematurely cut off) unwilling to put himself into the power of the King

without some previous stipulations for his own security, especially as he found his late services had been coldly received. The interview between the King and his most powerful subject and near kinsman, was preceded by forms, and guarded by circumstances similar to those adopted between hostile potentates desirous of terminating the miseries of war, yet cherishing incurable suspicions of each other—the fruit of long continued enmity. The Earl of Kent guaranteed Lancaster's safety; and the Bishop of Exeter stood pledged for the sincerity of the Earl's submission.

The interview took place at Leicester, after the King's return from the inefficient parade of opposing the Scots and besieging Berwick, which ended in the ignominious truce above related. Both parties were struck at the alteration time had made in each other's persons and affections, since the royal child and the princely stripling, engaging in the same

honourable pursuits, loved and conversed as friends. Intemperance and indolence had swoln the figure and flushed the countenance of Edward ; care, grief, and contrition had worn the form, and made pale the features of Lancaster, whose appearance, corresponding with his habit, testified the severest sorrow. Brief, solemn, and significant, was the conversation. The Earl bent his knee to receive the pardon which the King coldly bestowed, and expressed surprize at his consort's death. Lancaster was silent ; his anguish was too big for utterance ; but in the King's heart affection had yielded to resentment. He gave a sigh to the memory of Gaveston, and added, " We have also known the pain of losing what we loved." " The feelings of nature," said the Bishop of Exeter, " must be permitted." " Her feelings," replied the King, looking sternly

at Lancaster, “are most vehement when her work has been anticipated.”

“My liege,” said Lancaster, “Your Grace has granted me an oblivion of past events; but I further crave leave to devote my future days to your service, and that of my country. May the interests of both ever be the same! My situation vouches for my integrity. An insulated man cut off from those ties which, while they stimulate enterprize at times pervert principle, resembles a son of our holy mother the Church, in the purity and singleness of his aims. If I can promote the real welfare of Your Highness and your royal issue, command my exertions till those much-desired days arrive, when neither you nor England will be in need of the labours of a sincere servant. I will then occupy a cell among the canons of Kenilworth, and surrender my lands and castles to my brother Leicester, to whose

marriage with the heiress of Earl Maurice I crave your sanction."

"We are disposed," replied the King, "to look with an eye of favour on our cousin Henry; and when you, Sir, are weary of the world, we shall hope to be remembered in your prayers."

"My prayers," said Lancaster, "are now like my sword active in the cause of Your Highness. But as I have received a summons to attend your parliament, I must discharge my duty before I retire to my beads. When we meet at Westminster, I trust I shall so approve myself a true patriot and faithful subject, as not to shame the grace which I have this day received."

The King was aware that a plan was agitated among the discontented lords to remove the Prince from his parents, and place him under a governor to be chosen by themselves; and while his fears pointed at Lancaster as the person, his hopes sug-

gested that the deep despair in which he was said to be absorbed, had rendered him unfit for the office. He now discovered with regret, that, emerging from this temporary suspension, his intellects were unclouded, his courage unbroken, and his principles unchanged, while the disseverment of all domestic ties seemed to give greater pertinacity to his character. The court anticipated in the meeting of the national council a turbulent and formidable opposition, at the head of which, birth and fortune, added to public favour, would now place a man, who, even in the act of receiving pardon, boasted the purity of his intentions, and spoke with indifference of his future fortunes. Often had the King wished that, during his pilgrimage, the scymitar of the Moors, or the waves of the ocean, would rid him of his powerful kinsman; and, however formidable the insurrection in the western counties appeared, the defeat of

Pendergrass by his means was unwelcome. Edward's advisers took care to fan the flame: for whatever the Earl might be to the sovereign, they knew he was the determined opposer of that system of domestic oppression and foreign subserviency that illegal stretch of the prerogative and infringement of the chartered rights of the barons, which, in this reign of favouritism, formed the arcana of government. Relieved from the heavy pressure of the Scottish wars by the late truce, the barons had now only one object to pursue, namely, to terminate and punish the mal-administration of those who had neither fortunate occurrences, glorious successes, nor wise regulations, to oppose to the tide of obloquy, with which they were overwhelmed. The only hope of the cabal, who at this time governed England, depended on their being able to intimidate, divide, or disgrace their adver-

saries, of whom Lancaster again appeared the most formidable.

The services of this brave Earl in the affair of Pendergrass, and on which he so firmly depended for a cordial reconciliation to the King, had received such a colouring from his enemies, as to make the extraordinary exertions of a faithful subject appear like the dubious ostentation of an ambitious conspirator, playing off a minor traitor to sound public feeling, and give additional popularity to himself. That Lancaster had spared this man at the gallows, gave rise to contrary conjectures ; and an action which really sprung from a lively sense of his former extra-judicial vehemence, was interpreted to proceed from the compunctions of conscience, which at the crisis would not allow him to complete his treasons, by sacrificing the subaltern actor. The hope of life and pardon, easily induced Pendergrass to accuse Lancaster as his employer ;

but though this was enough to persuade the facile King, already predisposed to believe his kinsman guilty, it was considered that the testimony of an infamous and detected imposter, lying under a well-authenticated charge of treason, could not be received against a peer of the blood royal, by whom his seditious attempts had been frustrated, and with whom no previous connection could be traced. The King, indeed, would be as ready to inflict punishment, as he had been to believe scandal; but Lancaster must be tried by his peers, and his character would come from the assay the brighter, by being cleared of the odium with which it was incrustated. Something had been whispered respecting the suddenness of Lady Alicia's death, and the haste and secrecy of her funeral: but Surrey, who was now closely leagued with the court, requested that no investigation might take place on that head. Henry de Lacy

put in a claim for the earldom of Lincoln, but his legitimacy rested on no other evidence than his own assertions. The conspirators (for by no other name could they be called,) suggested a variety of plans, and sifted every action of Lancaster, but without discovering any grounds to found a criminal charge, save that for which the King's pardon, had been formally granted. This could not prevent him from appearing in his place in parliament, to arraign their proceedings, with all that energy and eloquence which his own qualities and the confidence of the nation put into his hands.

CHAP. XXXII.

Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough
To mask thy monstrous visage? Seek none, conspiracy;
Hide it in smiles and affability:
For if thou put thy native semblance on,
Not Erebus itself were dim enough
To hide thee from prevention.

SHAKESPEARE.

WHILE Lancaster, retired in his castle of Kenilworth, was expediting his brother's nuptials, which were at once to secure Matilda's safety and confirm the title of the house of Lancaster to the inheritance of the earls of Lincoln and Salisbury, a man of brutal manners and ferocious aspect, calling himself Sir Richard Saint Martin, presented a petition to the judges as they sat on the bench, claiming the estate which was about to be settled on the issue of the intended

bridegroom, as his own right. On being questioned as to the ground of his pretensions, he replied, that he was the husband of Alicia de Lacy, united to her by a pre-contract previous to her marriage with the Earl of Lancaster, though subsequent to her affiance to Surrey. He boasted that he could produce proofs of their intimacy, damning to the lady's fame, and as an irrefragable evidence, would bring her into court to confirm all his assertions. Consternation seized every hearer, except the presiding judges, whom history, without giving their names, stigmatizes as venal and secret abettors of the claim, on which they were called to decide. Martin was asked, if he could raise the dead : he dropped his lip in contempt, and turning an exulting leer on the incredulous questioner, led a woman into court, who, in stature, feature, and voice was recognized as the Countess of Lancaster ; the jewels, which were

known to be heir-looms of the family, decorated her person, and she wore the magnificent dress in which Alicia appeared at court, when first a bride.

The judges started from their seats, the spectators rubbed their eyes; some protested that a potent necromancer had succeeded in animating a dead body; others asked on what testimony the death of the Countess rested. Agatha affected to be equally overwhelmed with shame and sorrow; her early education in Lady Margaret's family, had given her a manner which, however vitiated by her subsequent courses, she could at will assume. Laying aside the mysterious cant of the weird sybil, and the bold profligacy of the freebooter's associate, she addressed the court with grace and modesty, bespeaking their pity for her extreme distress, and their candid interpretation of a confession thus painfully extorted,

She went into the history of the De Lacy family, described their characters, and detailed many well-known anecdotes with precision. She acknowledged, that her father's indulgence and her mother's neglect had corrupted her mind, and that in early youth she had granted favours, and signed a contract with Richard Saint Martin, a servant of her father's, which made her look on her espoused Lord Surrey with abhorrence. That her shame having come to the ears of her parents, they, to conceal it, had sacrificed the unfortunate Agatha, who, resembling her in person, had been made to bear the disgrace, and to undergo the punishment of those clandestine meetings with Martin, which had been witnessed by the domestics. Agatha, therefore, was immured in the cemetery at Wimborn, and herself, surreptitiously restored to undeserved reputation, was afterwards espoused to the Earl of Lan-

caster. Such, however, was the harshness with which he treated her, that she had since even wished to exchange situations with the miserable girl, who died broken hearted in a short space after she was liberated from her confinement. The remainder of her tale must be told by another, and the coadjutor she called upon, was Beatrice Valency, who advancing, led into court the youthful heir of the Earl of Lancaster.

After a brief detail of the sufferings which she said her lady had endured from her tyrannical spouse, she proceeded to state, that having discovered his intention of destroying her by poison, she had adroitly exchanged it for a potion which would only suspend sense. She stated some particulars of the conversation which really passed between the Earl and Alicia, and described the method she had taken to convey away the latter, and her device of a waxen image and

mock interment. She remained at Canford only to rescue the child from his cruel father, and then posted to the retirement where she had placed her lady, of whom she never after lost sight.

“My sufferings and my shames,” resumed Agatha, “had so broken my spirits, that, careless about my inheritance, I had determined on a monastic life; but, hearing that the Earl of Lancaster purposed to endow the posterity of his brother with my lands, I determined to step forward, as it were from the grave, and disprove his title, to what, indeed, never were legally his, and what he has also forfeited by the crime of complotting my death. I therefore claim to be delivered to my first, and only true husband,—and I produce this—my son by the Earl of Lancaster, to whom, with the full consent of my generous spouse, I mean to give the property of my mother, the Countess of Salisbury; hoping, that the

King, of his grace and favour, when he has duly weighed all the circumstances of my story, will allow the title of Earl of Lincoln, which, by birth-right is mine, in courtesy to one, whom, I doubt not, he will find more worthy to sit in his council, and serve in his wars, than the man who was a rebel to him, and a tyrant to me:"

A murmur of displeasure arose in Westminster-hall, as Martin, with a stalk of vulgar consequence, took the hand of the pretended Countess, and swearing she judged him rightly, narrated some acts of border puissance, which, save that the unsettled state of the kingdom, gave impunity to depredators, would have entitled him to a gibbet, rather than a peerage. But as Agatha did not pretend, that her paramour was honourable, or even of gentle blood, her story was not disproved, by Martin's discovering himself to be a captain of a band of

plunderers, though the indignant auditory execrated a woman of high birth and princely connexion, who thus published and multiplied her shames, by the dishonour attached to the quality of her paramour, as well as to the crime itself.

Though no doubt was entertained of the identity of the claimant, every one hoped that she would be driven from the court with opprobrium, and made to forfeit that inheritance by her infamy, to which she was entitled by her birth. Not so the event. The judge treated her with lenity, made some slight objections to her testimony, of a nature which could be readily obviated; and then declaring, that a cause of such importance must be laid before the King, adjourned the proceedings.

Pretending fears for her safety, and disclaiming every wish to be in future considered as Lancaster's wife, Agatha refused to be lodged in the Savoy palace,

and entreated a guard for her security. She was visited by numbers, either from curiosity, or from love or hatred to Lancaster. The penetrating she dismissed without an audience, pleading shame or indisposition ; the simple and undiscerning she conversed with and cajoled. The levity and indiscretion of the true Countess had prejudiced many who revered the Earl ; and, though no suspicion of criminality had been thrown upon her conduct, the censorious were disposed to believe that a woman of light manners might be criminal ; others waited to see how Lancaster would act. The story of the poisoned cup and mock funeral, corresponded with the suddenness of Alicia's death, and the haste of her interment. Would he produce the body of the Countess, or had he other means of ascertaining the reality of her demise ; his enemies were loud in censuring the unmasked hypocrite. Surrey made his first

visit to Agatha with marked publicity, was most minute in his enquiries, appeared suspicious and incredulous, and then seemed overwhelmed with astonishment at her relating many circumstances connected with their former intercourse ; while, with an affectation of regret, he acknowledged, that she must be the lady to whom he had been contracted, but whom, with mingled contempt and generosity, he now yielded to the claims of Sir Richard Saint Martin.

Queen Isabella would not admit so degraded a woman to her presence, but some ladies of her court, who, as rival beauties, hated and envied the Countess of Lancaster, visited Agatha from curiosity ; and as she was constantly assisted by her able and assiduous prompter, Beatrice, they saw in her the same volatile assuming creature, and convinced their royal mistress of their superior penetration, by reminding her, that they

had predicted her deviation from every rule of decorum. Nor was the attestation of Sir Hilary wanting. The sleek abbot travelled in pomp from his preferment, to identify the penitent he had so often shrived, and added his testimony, as to its being the same person, though he confessed he was totally mistaken in her character; and did he now sustain the office of her confessor, he would not only revoke his former absolutions, and enjoin a severe and solemn penance for her sins, but would also require her to found a chantry, to pray for the soul of Agatha, of whose death she was in fact the cause, and whose remains, he advised, should be removed from the obscure spot where he had heard of their being deposited, and honourably interred.

Thus so deeply was the plot laid, and thus were the conspirators drawn up in battalia, when the Earl of Lancaster

received a citation to appear before the judges, and answer the allegations of his Countess. With this was sent an intimidating message from the woman who assumed that name, threatening to charge him, criminally, with conspiring her death, unless he consented to their immediate divorce, and relinquished all claim to her inheritance. In an age that teemed with bold impostors, and subtle machinations, Lancaster's first inference was, that a female Pendergrass was playing upon his feelings and his fears; and spurning the citation with his foot, he exclaimed, "Would to heaven my Alicia could burst from her sepulture, and summon me to atone for my offences against her!"

Under these impressions, the nuptials of Henry and Matilda were solemnized. Every hour brought some vagrant news-monger to Kenilworth, charged with fresh tidings respecting the claims of the

pseudo Countess. Provoked by the false and idle tales of mendicant eaves-droppers, the Earl's retinue had orders to drive them from the demesne, and it was during this state of irritation, that father Nicholas received the inhospitable treatment, which caused the divided pair many an aggravated pang.

If the heart of Lancaster could have regained its peace, it would have been by beholding the felicity of his brother and of Matilda. In the silent contemplation of their love and harmony, he sometimes forgot his own anguish; but when they attempted to console him, his stormy grief resumed its violence, like a torrent which from opposition becomes more furious. Matilda then touching her lute, had often the art to melt desperation into sorrow. "Repeat that strain" he would say; "it soothes my melancholy, and comprizes a description of all my wishes." Matilda complied with a modu-

lation of voice and manner, adapted alike to the lament and the auditor.

Hast thou no room in thy grave, love ;
No space in thy winding sheet ?
From the world I have nothing to crave, love ;
I have found out the world's deceit.

Its pleasures with thee are sleeping,
Like my grief, its cares are awake ;
My life is no longer worth keeping ;
O let me thy grave partake !

I will lie on the cold grey stone,
Which covers my faded rose,
And number my beads alone,
And pray for her soul's repose.

Not the trumpet's martial swell,
Nor the lute, to love so dear ;
But the toll of the passing bell,
Is the music I wish to hear.

“ Henry,” said the afflicted husband,
one day, grasping his brother's hand,

“ wherever I fall, remove my corpse to Wimborn, and bury it with my consort. The church authorizes us to believe, that our disembodied spirits are permitted to penetrate the enigmas of time. If the purposes of my heart have been disclosed to my Alicia, there is no cause why I should be excluded from her grave.”

Leicester answered, “ Your calamities seem to you intolerable ; had heaven permitted you to have been the arbiter of your own fortunes, is there any other corrective that you would have thought less bitter.”

“ I could have borne all but this load of self-reproach,” said the Earl, smiting his bosom vehemently.

“ Let us,” resumed his brother, “ suppose that your wife was at this instant alive, and proving by her behaviour, that you judged her errors with too much lenity ; that she now scandalized you by public effrontery ; that what you

thought levity, was lewdness; that her carelessness, was hardness of heart; her neglect of your desires, was abhorrence of your person, since ripening into the most malignant revenge; would you not rather have her now lying insensible among the bones of her ancestors, than be indeed the worthless woman of whom so many improbable tales are related?"

"If she were alive," answered Lancaster, "she might repent her own faults, and pardon mine."

Leicester gazed attentively on his brother for some minutes, and then solemnly proceeded: "The choice you have made, commands me to disclose a secret I have painfully kept. No human remains occupy that grave at Wimborn, in which your wife was said to be deposited; I have myself investigated its secrets, and found nothing but a waxen image, fantastically habited, reposing in mockery among the Earls of Salisbury.

More I dare not say, yet dread to think. Can the detested being, who is now the subject of at once wonder and execration, be the seemingly meek saint whom I saw expiring ; or can your attractive, sportive wife, whose worst actions claimed a blended tribute of warm affection and gentle censure, and who in her vainest follies and greatest terrors ever called down blessings on your head, throw off her shroud to act the part of a demon of wantonness and malice ?”

Matilda, to whose faithful bosom Leicester had intrusted his cares, as well as his love, generously forgetting the waywardness and neglect she had experienced from a gay and thoughtless woman, in the zenith of her prosperity, endeavoured to relieve the stupor of consternation which seized Lancaster, on this intelligence, by pressing his cold hand to her lips, and exclaiming, “ Impossible, my

life to a beggar's fee, this vile woman is not, cannot, be your own lovely Alicia !”

The perturbed Earl found, like many others who are pressed down by the correcting hand of heaven, that the new anxiety which he welcomed in exchange for the old sorrow, proves the more insupportable burden. Every past conviction of his consort's tenderness, ingenuousness, and placability disproved her identity with his persecutor. But Alicia's body had not been laid in the family mausoleum. What then, was it so extraordinary a deed, for those who conspiring the death of the unhappy lady, had drugged with poison the cup which he unwarily administered, — was it so extraordinary, that they should consign her remains to some unconsecrated and unknown grave; could he doubt their being capable either of forming or executing such a design? Was there any

comparison, as to the enormity of the act of murdering an amiable woman, and denying her christian burial, especially since by appealing to this mock deposit, they could at will produce a confirmation of their bold pretensions? The hope, or shall we say, the fear, that Alicia was alive, and had undergone this horrid transformation, was obliterated; and Lancaster only felt that increasing grief, which arises when the voice of nature cries out from the ashes of those we love, and invites us when the toils of life are over, to partake their repose.

But though he judged his consort irrevocably lost, this high-minded prince and peer disdained to appear in a court of justice, to maintain his character, and defend his fortunes from the claims of a base impostor. The assurance that it really was his child whom this woman produced in court, roused the feelings of the indignant father to rescue him from a

gang of depredators, and to defend his birthright. Faithful Mabel, unknown to any one, and at the hazard of her own life, got sight of the boy, and ascertained that it was the true Sir Edmund. She posted to Kenilworth with this intelligence, which restored to her declining age, the elastic vigour and enterprize of youth. She had gained access, disguised as a travelling pedlar, and offered him some choice toys, but durst not speak to him, lest Beatrice, who never suffered him out of her sight, should know her voice. "The wretch," said Mabel, "would not allow him to come near me; and said his noble mother would not permit him to be familiar with trampers; but never shall I forget the look he gave her, when she ordered the yeoman to drive me out of the court, as much as to say, 'Scurvy jade, you are not half so good as that old woman;' and then he stretched out his arm to me, as if he

wished he was big and strong to defend me. But I saw enough ; for I saw the same spotted mole, which I pointed out to his dear lady mother, when he was but two days old, and bid her notice it, for by that she might know her child from among ten thousand. And all the while I was in the court, the noble babe stood so stern, and looked so sullen, as much as to say, ‘ You may tear me limb from limb, ere I will do any thing such base beings bid me.’

Lancaster now speeded to London, resolved to confront the enemies whom he had intended to despise ; and if no other way remained, to make a full disclosure to the world of what he once wished to conceal, and recover his child at the price of submitting his conduct to the award of the laws and the mercy of posterity. But ere he had travelled far, a courier met him on the road, with intelligence that the cause had been decided

without waiting for his appearance. Influenced by that hatred which was confirmed by Gaveston's execution, and goaded by the fears of the evil counsellors, to whom the name of Lancaster sounded like the knell of death, Edward yielded to the suggestions of those who patronized the claims of Agatha, and permitted the venal judges to decide, on what they called the irrefragable testimony of credible witnesses : the Earl's refusal to make any replication to the charge, must, they said, either proceed from guilt or contumacy, and probably indicated a determination to appeal to his favourite weapon the sword ; no time should therefore be lost in putting the lady in possession of the contested lands, since by that means his power of resistance to the laws would be diminished, and the hands of government strengthened. The contamination of moral character did not invalidate natural rights. As the paramour of a freebooter, she must be judged by another

tribunal; as the daughter of Henry de Lacy, she had a right to his lands and titles; and as a precontract abrogated her marriage with Lancaster, the settlement then made was of necessity void; she was therefore released from that engagement, and must be supported in her demand of full liberty, as to her person and fortune. Such were the reasons urged by the judges, and publicly pleaded by the king, who delayed not an instant to confirm their sentence and to issue his commands, that the Earl of Lancaster should surrender the livery of his matrimonial earldoms; thus gratifying his revenge, in punishing a fault which he had ostensibly forgiven, and at the same time allaying his fears by circumscribing the power of his most formidable subject.

Elated by success, the vile counterfeit of a faithful wife, hastened from a scene where her duplicity ran the greatest hazard of detection, to establish herself on

some portion of the property which she had surreptitiously obtained, before the injured Earl had time to prevent her. Pontefract Castle seemed the most eligible spot for her to digest her plans, and concentrate her strength, not only by reason of its distance from London, but of its vicinity to Surrey, her secret adviser, and now the ostensible protector of the daughter of his late esteemed friend. Another circumstance too was favourable; its recent pillage by the Scots had dispersed the old establishment, and would therefore allow her to be surrounded by suitable instruments. The wilds and moors of Yorkshire had indeed been the scene of her depredations, when in the character of a fortune-teller, she gained access to the houses, and preyed on the purses of the simple natives by day, and in the night conducted the banditti with whom she was connected, to carry on a more extensive and daring

system of plunder : but besides that she would now mix with a very different order of society from that among which she was led by her former habits ; who, in the fair, painted, essenced lady, richly drest, nobly attended, and affecting a fastidious delicacy in imitation of the character she claimed, could trace the form and features of the lean, olive-coloured witch, vigorous from necessity, and wild from artifice, blasphemous, and inveigling, courted by the credulous for her supposed necromantic skill, and shunned by the timid as a walking pestilence ? Her fantastic mantle, patched with more than rainbow tintured shreds, and her steeple crowned hat, figured with hieroglyphics, which claimed talismanic potency, as much resembled the graceful undulations of her velvet kirtle, and scented locks studded with gems, as did her voice when it muttered incantations or thundered curses, corres-

pond with the soft tones and plaintive whispers, with which she now welcomed the few strangers whom she admitted to her presence : ever affecting to be overwhelmed by her misfortunes, contrite for her offences, or apprehensive of being attacked by the Earl of Lancaster.

Hitherto all seemed to favour Agatha's usurpation ; but we shall form an erroneous notion of the Divine government, if we suppose, that even the prosperity of the wicked is truly enviable. Not to mention the never-dying worm which preys upon their peace, their apprehensions of a change of fortune, and their undescrivable horror of that common fate of mortality, from which neither bribes nor subterfuges will enable them to escape, inexpressible misery arises from their connection with those who carry on their criminal designs. Much of the anguish of those dolourous regions, to which impenitent guilt will be finally condemned,

will, we may believe, ensue from the uncontrolled fury of those diabolical passions which the miserable inmates never attempted to subdue on earth; these will then act, and re-act on criminals and their fellows, without any allay of good. Of this moral hell, those whose misfortunes have led them to witness the terrors of tyrants, or the malevolence of associated villains, may form some faint conception. Envy, hatred, distrust, perfidy, ingratitude, contumely, — every base propensity which can torture the human heart, or afflict our fellow creatures, there reign and riot with unchastised violence. The lot of atrocious offenders is pitiable, were it but for the society to which they have condemned themselves.

Surrey, even while yielding to his deeply cherished hatred of Lancaster, while stooping the pride of his feudal dignity to form a league with the miscreant who plundered his castle, felt his

soul recoil from the contagious alliance ; and though he styled himself the disinterested supporter of the woman whom he had ceased to love, he viewed the impostor he countenanced with undisguised aversion. It was expedient that he should entertain her in Sandal Castle, till Pontefract could be refurnished ; but silent and sullen he sat at his own banquet, his eyes fixed on the decorated banner of his ancestors which waved over his head, or on Lancaster's lovely child, without deigning to glance at her, who glittered by his side. At these moments, what were his reflections ? Did not his early crimes recur to his recollection, and the image of the distracted Emma Audley's drowned sons rise in judgment ? But for that damned deed, might he not have been father of a son, as engaging as this young Plantagenet, whose birth would have secured the possession of all De Lacy's lands ; while the companion of his

feasts would have been, not an infamous reprobate, but the lovely and admired woman, of whose death he believed himself to have been the cause? for, convinced that she had perished in the Calder while attempting her escape, he added that to the number of the crimes for which he felt remorse, but not contrition. But though he had only himself to blame for the abrogation of that contract, which would have made him an enviable husband, and though his very soul was harrowed by the retrospect of his sinful life, he still went on adding to his enormities with the continued determination, that the offence he was then committing should be his last. That one passion gratified, be it ambition, avarice, lust, or revenge — this foe subdued by his power, or that possession secured by his craft, all the rest of his days should be devoted to making his peace with heaven.

Agatha had too much penetration not

to perceive that, though Surrey had consented to use her likeness to Alicia as a means of wreaking his revenge on Lancaster, nothing but self-preservation would prevent him from ultimately casting her off to the punishment she deserved. Her dear and honoured protector therefore, (as she ostentatiously styled him,) was in reality what a jailor is to a condemned criminal, when furnished with a discretionary warrant for execution, which he suspends to reap the benefit of his labours. For Martin, her generous and most faithful love and contracted spouse, her first wish was, that he might bring himself to the gallows; for though she had sent him away with the largest sum she could possibly raise, his rapacity and prodigality were insatiable, and her finances were unequal to further demands. Surrey had been as liberal as an embarrassed man could be, who knew that the success of his project depended upon not

starving the means; but there were many witnesses to fee, much pomp to be supported, and the kingdom being in a state of the deepest poverty and distress, rents in kind could not be regularly collected, and benevolences were impossible. Never was Agatha more wretched than at the time when those querulous impugners of Providence, who look only at the surface, would have supposed her an instance of that ill-bestowed prosperity which, in their opinion, exposes the wisdom and goodness of the Deity to a suspicion that chance directs the tide of human affairs. Formerly, while immured in the mausoleum, this woman was sure her lot could not be worse; next, while as a sorceress and plunderer, she wandered from place to place, she knew that her depredations would supply her wants, and, though the day passed in apparent wretchedness, night brought sensual revels and indulgence; but now, without enjoying the

present, she dreaded a change. The grandeur and luxury for which she had long panted were impalatable, because insecure: her revenge on Lady Margaret's family was incomplete, because, as a hostage for her own life, she was compelled to cherish the Countess's grandson. The arrival of every stranger reminded her of a spy; every sudden sound she supposed announced the officers of justice, or the troopers of Lancaster; and even the delay of Beatrice's return, whom she had sent with a part of Martin's gang to secure the deeds and valuables which had been left at Canford-castle, filled her with horrible suspicions; though this woman was the chief instrument in the imposture, and indeed the original suggester of Agatha's metamorphoses, when she supposed that Alicia was removed by death from Surrey's power.

But the bringers of ill tidings, whenever they arrive, are unwelcome guests;

and Beatrice returned too soon, when flying rapidly from Kirklee, she filled the confederates with consternation by assuring them, that she had seen the Countess of Lancaster alive, wearing the habit of a novice, under the protection of a royal abbess, and apprized of their proceedings. Detection was now unavoidable. But one course of conduct remained to those whom guilt had rendered desperate ; it led indeed to another crime ; but Agatha had forgot the meaning of that word, and Surrey again resolved that this should be his last. This was to pursue the plan which the quick invention of Beatrice had adopted on the spur of the moment ; to seize Alicia as the real Agatha, and to procure a woman who should claim her as a daughter, and confess herself to be the author of the imposition that had been practised upon Lady Margaret, when this mischief-working child was first introduced into De Lacy's family.

If, in these well-informed and regular times, the great and powerful seldom want agents to execute their foul designs, in those days, a mighty baron, who could raise a county at his summons, never lingered on the threshold of iniquity waiting for a pioneer to force open the portal. A woman was soon found prepared to recognize Alicia for her daughter, and perfectly able to repeat, after Beatrice had told her, the legend of William Longspee and the fair saracen, by which she was to acknowledge she had imposed on Lady Margaret's credulity. A troop of horse were selected and armed to serve as an escort to the subaltern impostor, who, under her own name of Dame Mowbray, set off to violate the sanctuary which shielded Alicia's sorrows, and to drag her from its shelter, under the pretence that she was her daughter, and the liege-born vassal of the Earl of Surrey.

All was dispatched with the utmost promptitude ; but the contrivance of the plan and its execution necessarily involved such a portion of time as removed the intended victim to a great distance from her pursuers. Profiting by the premonitory cautions of the abbess, Alicia had entered the confines of Nottinghamshire before a thundering peal at the gate of the monastery, convinced Lady Emmeline that the evil she had anticipated was at hand. Age had rendered her prudent, but not timid ; and she was prepared to submit to the rude intrusion of violence, rather than risk the safety of the fugitive, by discovering her flight before the last moment of possible concealment had expired. She at first protested, that no person answering the description of Agatha Mowbray's person was within the walls ; and, in reply to a required permission to search, she commanded that the gates should be barri-

cadoed. Those feeble outworks, which served less to defend the sanctity which all respected, than to mark the boundary beyond which strangers and laymen must not intrude, were quickly forced, the grate demolished, and the armed cuirassiers of Surrey, rushing through the chapel, pursued the shrieking nuns along the cloisters, and, with a brutality which spoke them worthy servants of their employer, tore off their veils to discover the features they were sent to recognize. The gardens, the refectory, every separate cell underwent a search; but all in vain. At last the boldest burst into the abbess's oratory, where Lady Emmeline, prostrate before the holy rood, held up her hands in deprecatory and intercessory prayer.

“ She is here,” said the man who acted as captain. “ Advance, Dame Mowbray, and claim your run-away.” The abbess turned her venerable face, and rising with

collected majesty, awed by her dignity the ruffian who attempted to seize her. “The prey you seek,” said she, calmly, “has escaped, and you have only burdened your consciences with the weight of an unprofitable sacrilege. Go back to your employer, and say, I know the motives which have stimulated him to this deed.”

The lying instrument of Surrey’s machinations now began a tale respecting her daughter’s depravity and loss; but it was with that feebleness of diction and hesitation of speech which attends falsehood when aware that it gains no credit. “Spare the narrative,” said the abbess; “it is not designed to impose on your companions, and it cannot upon me. Your associates will bear you witness, that you have endeavoured to be punctual in your falsehood, and you may testify for them, that no compunctious fear of divine vengeance has checked their bru-

tality. Tell your Lord that the Countess of Lancaster will soon appear at the side of her Lord, an irrefragable evidence to do justice to his character, and assert her own rights. And if the narrative you began to tell me is not one inwoven tissue of basest fabrications, you will also recognize your lost daughter, and Lord Surrey his vassal, in the situation which is best suited to her character."

The 'audacious intruders retreated, overawed, and consulted what course they should pursue. Every recess in the convent had been explored, and even by seizing the person of the abbess there was no hope of inducing her by intimidation to point out where the fugitive might be found or overtaken. They returned therefore to their crest-fallen master, and while Sandal Castle was a scene of discord and dismay, teeming with dangerous expedients and contentious reproaches, the Lady Emmeline as-

sembled her dispersed sisterhood, and by exhortation and prayer recomposed their perturbed spirits. A solemn mass was performed for the safety of the pilgrim novice, of whose absence they had not been informed, lest, in the hurry of alarm, they should endanger her safety ; the vesper hymn was warbled with a devotion more intense from a grateful sense of having escaped from their recent dangers, and ere night had told her second watch, all at Kirklee. was pious thankfulness, or tranquil repose.

CHAP. XXXIII.

'Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours,
 And ask them what report they bore to heaven,
 And how they might have borne more welcome news.

YOUNG.

WE left the Countess of Lancaster, with her aged escort, flying from her enemies, and seeking the protection of her husband. Her mode of conveyance was inconvenient, the way long and solitary, and the accommodations it presented coarse and scanty; yet she was patient and persevering. In the hours of inconsiderate affluence, Alicia had often, while restless without cause, and peevish at trivial inconveniences, drawn back the silken curtains of the litter, where she languidly reclined, and looking at the rustic market girl, who cheerfully trotted

after her on her sorry jade in rain or cold, perversely envied her independent method of travelling. Her mind was now not sufficiently free to permit her body to be delicate, and she recollected past superfluous indulgences, rather as a cause of humiliation, than as a source of regret, leading to the undervaluation of present mercies.

After a safe, though fatiguing journey, she presented herself as a travelling pilgrim before the gates of Kenilworth. The different circumstances in which she used to arrive at that stately pile, were lost in the all-absorbing apprehension of what reception she should meet from its master: now anticipating the rapture with which she and her Lancaster should exchange forgiveness; now shrinking with terror, lest the sufferings and disgrace he had endured should have alienated his heart from the undesigning cause of his mortifications, or involved his mind in

the gloom of misanthropic melancholy. With a self-abasing consciousness, in which the extenuations of faithful love had as much share as the humility of true religion, she cast her eyes over its stately towers, and considered that she had made its lord acquainted with shame and sorrow. Often did she hesitate before she permitted Father Nicholas to strike upon the bell which announced the approach of an humble suitor. Lady Matilda's almoner instantly appeared; he was a stranger to her person, but his words and aspect were courteous. Alicia had enjoined her companion to gain intelligence before he solicited admission, and the tidings were of a dispiriting cast. Lancaster was not at Kenilworth, he had departed for London a few days before, in great distress, accompanied by his brother Leicester.

Alicia was unprepared for this disappointment; and as she yielded to the

sudden emotions of anguish, she gained the attention and the pity of the almoner. “ Whatever sorrow, fair pilgrim,” said he, “ has drawn you from the convent in which your habit tells me you are now a candidate for heavenly espousals, to seek the protection of the most noble and pious Lancaster, learn resignation and fortitude from his example, who, while he stretches out his hand to aid others, is himself the victim of the most undeserved persecution and extraordinary calamities ; and is now compelled to appear before a public tribunal, as the defender of a character, which all who knew him believe should have passed unquestioned in the most corrupt age. Yet, though he is absent, the Lady Matilda, that dear child and pupil of our late venerable mistress, now our guardian angel, the Queen of Navarre, preserves the hospitality of this residence ; and if your woes admit of con-

solution, inform me which way they can be allayed."

Prompted by one of those sudden impulses, under which people of keen feeling often act, and afterwards regret, Alicia suddenly turned from the gate, and exclaiming, "I cannot be a suitor to Matilda," rode from the towers which she had sought as her imagined haven of rest, as swiftly as her wasted strength and the speed of her aged companion would allow. Father Nicholas blamed this waywardness; but Alicia's distress made him lenient in his censures. Her thoughts were occupied in repeating the definition of humility which she had learned of the abbess; but among all the trials to which it supposed lowliness might be exposed, the painful necessity of intreating succour from one to whom she was conscious of having been unjust, was not enumerated. The praises which Leicester's amiable bride had deservedly obtained, not only from the

world, but, what was to her far more valuable, from the Earl of Lancaster, had; instead of stimulating (as he hoped) generous emulation and friendly competition, excited jealousy and dislike. Doubtless the mild, unassuming cast of Matilda's virtues would have changed irritability into affection, if Alicia would have allowed herself to have become thoroughly acquainted with her character; but the fuller indulgence afforded by that society in which her youth had been permitted to waste the valuable period of improvement, made her indolence recoil from a companion whose merits required exertion, and whose discernment imposed self-control. It was easier to be inaugurated into the throne of perfection by Beatrice and Dorcas, than to contend with Matilda for that superiority which discipline often acquires for those to whom nature has been less bountiful. These times were past,—Alicia had since

been long a pupil in a better school, — that of affliction: but the knowledge which it gave her of herself was so discouraging, that she did not dare to solicit a friendship for which she could produce no credentials. “ I must,” thus she reasoned within herself, “ perform something to convince Matilda that I am no longer the vain, helpless, selfish being who at once envied and despised her; I must do this, before I can ask her to give me a place in her heart; and the gates of Kirklee must be closed against me, and I must forfeit the cordial, the ennobling affection of Lady Emmeline and her gentle sisters, before I can prostrate myself even to the child and pupil of Queen Blanche, and avow myself a being alike destitute of resources, and forgetful of my own unworthiness.”

“ Where now,” said Father Nicholas, approaching her mule, while, wrapped in this painful reverie, Alicia travelled on

she knew not whither, “ where now shall I attend the Countess of Lancaster, seeing she resolves to fly from the castle of her husband ?”

“ Bear with me,” returned Alicia, “ a little longer. This journey is not undertaken to reinstate me in my former affluence, nor yet to give rest to my worn frame. It is the birthright of my child which I mean to defend ; my aim is to restore the honour and the peace of my husband, and the consummation of these wishes is the reward I seek. He is gone to London to justify himself in a cause, which my evidence must decide in his favour. It matters not whether I travel after him as a wayfaring pilgrim, or as the wife of a potent baron. The moment I appear the conspiracy is dissolved, and every delay is in me a crime.”

“ Lady,” returned the monk, “ he has left Kenilworth some days ; and doubtless his adversaries have not allowed

of any delay in a case where promptitude was indispensable. The cause must have been, ere now, decided; it may be in the Earl's favour; and surely then you had better have remained here, ready to welcome his return."

"And how could I have done so," replied Alicia, "without having been instrumental to his deliverance from his enemies? Can I relinquish the sustaining hope which now assuages my griefs, and arms me for my perils, of pleading to my Lancaster some little counterpoise of assistance to balance the load of trouble I have laid upon him; of saying to him, when grown grey in mutual affection, we look back on our early sorrows, 'In that particular I acted as your wife. Here I was not a bane and an impediment, but a helpmate and a friend. My aid was little, but it proved my sincerity.' O Lancaster! I must meet you with some protection from my self-reproaching thoughts, or I never can,

as you predicted, meet you in happiness. The kiss of reconciliation with which you will condescendingly print my cheek, will raise the blush of shame, instead of the glow of love."

"But," said the father, "though in your escape from Kirklee, you have owed your safety to outstripping your enemies, the speed you can continue to use will no longer preserve you. They will leave no means untried to compass the destruction of one, whose life is the death of their hopes. It will be suspected that your aim must be to reach London: our habit will point us out. I am ready to die with you, Lady; but I cannot defend you either from those who would willingly turn assassins for your destruction, or against the freebooters who infest the forests through which we must pass."

This too certain suggestion respecting the deadly hate and keen pursuit of Surrey and Agatha, added to the im-

probability of her arriving in London time enough to anticipate the decision of the judges, induced Alicia to return to her original plan of applying to her mother to certify her identity and maintain her right. Here again she was haunted by the bitter recollections of unperformed duties. Often in her journies from Kenilworth to Canford, she had passed at a small distance from Amesbury, without bending the knee of filial duty to the aged votaress. She who had been thus neglected by one who, in regal pomp, travelled from one scene of luxurious indulgence to another, with a numerous suite and every appendage of grandeur, was now sought by the same but now humbled child, in the garb of a novice, with no attendant but an aged monk, and no guide but necessity, which pointed out, as a place of refuge, those walls she had shunned and loathed as the dwelling of melancholy.

After three more days of painful travel, Alicia appeared before Queen Elfrida's monastic towers, in her customary character of a suppliant. On requesting permission to address the abbess, she was told that for a few hours the holy mother would be occupied ; but as it was now night-fall, she and her guide were offered the rites of hospitality. All was hurried preparation in the convent, and the strangers were asked if they would assist in the chapel service, and join in praise that the soul of a pious sister had been removed to a better world. The pomp of the funeral announced that the deceased was distinguished by worldly greatness ; but the nuns with whom Alicia conversed, only spoke of her piety. Incessant in prayer, unrivalled in mortification, entire and perfect in her renunciation of this life, she had obtained singular privileges from heaven, not only in the grant of consolatory visions and

spiritual illuminations, but in the visible prognostic of a crown of white-thorn miraculously left on her pillow on the eve of Saint Agnes ; at once significant of her speedy death and immediate beatification. The nuns were all elated with the hope, that from the canonization of so holy a creature, their house should boast of a saint as well as its sister convents. Alicia's long residence in Kirklee had shaken her faith in miracles, and occupied by her anxiety to be introduced to the abbess, and obtain an interview with her mother, she grew impatient that the celebration of these pompous obsequies should be over.

Unlike that of the community at Kirklee, which boasted no inticements to devotion but simplicity and solemnity, the chapel at Amesbury blazed with all the accumulation of pomp which the Romish church permits, and the liberality of her wealthy members bestows, either as penal.

expiations of guilt, voluntary offerings of gratitude, or the stipendiary price of stipulated benefits. — Contrasted with the gaudy display of pictures, and images in the aisles, was the solemn grandeur of the choir, which, with the pulpit and high altar, was hung with black, and only rendered visible by seven lamps, while the shrines in the nave and wings blazed alike with light and splendour. As Alicia gazed, more moved to wonder than devotion or sorrow by this magnificence, the organ commenced its solemn symphonies, and was soon accompanied by the distant voices of the choral nuns, slowly advancing before the corpse that now claimed the last rites of mortality; and chanting the following dirge:

Soul of a sister-saint, who, timely wise,
 Through Canaan trav'ling sky-ward turn'd thine
 eyes;
 If while on earth thou didst delight to dwell,
 Greeted by unseen harps in thy lone cell;

Would not our dirges seem but blasphemies,
 Did they disturb the full-toned melodies
 Which hail thy entrance to the heavenly choirs,
 Sav'd from the searchings of the penal fires ?

A friar ascended the pulpit, and pointing to the banner and coronet borne before the body, called on his auditory to reflect on the evanescent nature of human greatness, and the unperishing and ever-increasing superiority of that which is divine. " He who formed us from nothing," said he ; " he who collects the atoms of our frame after they have been scattered by every wind of heaven, and will re-edify the human form in a state of glory, beauty, and durability which is now unknown, is alone great. The pious sister, to whose faded form we are about to give the charity of concealment, once stood on the proud eminence of human greatness ; her voice was fate to thousands ; she was the mark of envy,

the prize for which adulation contended. But with a merciful severity, Providence shewed her the canker which consumes the germ of sublunary good. That canker, my daughters, is death, whose ravages we are permitted to witness before we are seized as its victims. Our departed sister saw by one irremediable blow, her dearest hopes levelled with the dust; and to that dust, with pious resignation, her spirit instantly descended; anticipating, with longing hope, the hour when the mourner should be laid by him she mourned. The symbols of ancient nobility, and the panoply of earthly pomp, we exhibit before her bier, are trophies of a christian's triumph over those delusions by which Satan captivates his vassals: these we shall suspend over her tomb, not to designate the rank of her, who, for the pre-eminent title of saint, sacrificed every other distinction, but to excite the praiseworthy emulation

of following her steps. Ye, whom affection, gratitude, admiration, or any other less commendable motive has led to witness these orgies, henceforth only remember this noble lady as one, who to obtain an heavenly spouse, renounced her earthly alliance with a mighty earl, and laid her paternal coronet at the foot of the cross."

The ceremony of interment was delayed while another orator ascended the pulpit, to mix the praises of the deceased with admonitions to the living: his look testified that he had completely subdued all the kindly affections of the human heart, for it was that iron austerity which some mistook for piety, and others rightly considered characteristic of the malignity of spiritual pride, and the cravings of insatiable avarice and ambition, which marked the devotees of a peculiar order.

"Our holy sister," said he, "whose obsequies we celebrate, was indeed a true

daughter of the church ; to its advancement, and to the furtherance of piety, she devoted a life full of good works, and affectionate regard for the saints who are upon the earth. Rightly and truly did she apply the unrighteous mammon to the purchase of immortal treasures, by consecrating her fortune to the foundation of establishments for the purposes of religion : yet, even in her soul, grace had not wholly triumphed ; some remanent affections of unsubdued nature carnalized her heart ; and though to this society she appeared faultless, I received her confession, and gave her absolution for a grievous fault, namely, grief and affection for a reprobate, who, engrossed by the vain allurements of sense, renounced all care of her eternal concerns, and being gone to perdition, should become to the faithful, as if she had never existed.”

During this harangue, many of the

sisterhood had their attention withdrawn from the friar's rhetoric, by the audible sobs of the pilgrim, who had just sought the shelter of their convent. "Doubtless," whispered one, "this is some heavy offender, who is startled with an apprehension of unpardonable guilt, from the severity with which Father Ambrose speaks of our holy sister Margaret." This idea circulated till it reached one whose gentle piety ever spoke in the tenderest offices of humanity and compassion. This graceful and amiable votress was once known and admired at the court of England, as the daughter of their mighty monarch; though the community of Amesbury recognized her by no other name than that of sister Maria; and her cell boasted no distinction save an inwrought monument of her ingenuity and humility, namely, an heraldic emblazonry of the arms of England and Castile, impaled with the emblems of mortality, and

surmounted by the victorious banner of the cross. To this cell, which might be termed pity's own mansion, the disconsolate Alicia was removed, and was joined by the royal nun, as soon as the cold remains of the Countess of Salisbury and Lincoln were deposited in that harbour of rest to which she had long looked; the grave of the drowned boy she so deeply deplored.

Presuming that the upbraidings of a too severely alarmed conscience were the cause of Alicia's anguish, the princess proposed that she should submit the state of her soul to a ghostly comforter, more enlightened and less inclined to confound with anathematising intolerance, human feelings and human frailties, with habitual guilt. But the exclamations of the sufferer soon evinced the relationship in which she stood to the deceased; and won by the sweet accents of compassion, Alicia confided to the generous

princess her eventful history and present distress. From the information of this lady she ascertained the motive which led Father Ambrose so freely to pronounce her reprobation. On the ground that she was dead, that her child was lost, and that the excommunication of Lancaster had not been fully rescinded by the legate, he had obtained from the Lady Margaret a deed of gift, conveying to him several valuable estates for the purpose of that religious foundation he had so long meditated. It was vain, therefore, for the Countess of Lancaster to expect that her identity would be acknowledged by a man who was the devoted son of an aspiring hierarchy, was an adept in the practice of pious frauds and evasions, sanctified by the object for which they were used. The peace and tranquillity which sister Maria experienced in a religious life, would have induced her to recommend it to the forlorn mourner, but the

account which she gave of Lancaster's present situation, steeled Alicia's soul against every invitation of sheltering her own person from the storms of life, while he was tossing on its troubled ocean. Him she must rescue from his enemies, his tarnished fame she must vindicate; her child's birth-right must be restored, a foul conspiracy must be detected, its authors punished, and the house of Lancaster placed in its pristine state of purity and fame; when all this was done, she would then consider whether she ought to offer the remainder of her days a sacrifice of gratitude to heaven.

The princess Mary, though elevated above all selfish regrets and desires, had long felt the shames of a sister, and the woes of a patriot penetrate the deep recesses of her sacred abode. Probably the monotonous routine of a monastic life, by deepening her early recollection of the world which she had renounced,

endeared the persons of those from whom she was separated by an impassable barrier. Often did she muse on her great father, on the glory of his reign, the majesty of his person, his conjugal and paternal tenderness, the grandeur of his court, consisting less in external pomp and splendour than in the embodied prototypes of wisdom, courage, and justice. Two of these resplendent jewels of her father's crown had been impawn'd to Scotland, and the other tarnished by the treatment which the Earl of Lancaster had lately received, and which must now be particularized.

Early dislike, first excited by envy at superior qualities, and now inflamed by provocations, and cherished by evil counsellors, had grown into such implacable revenge, that the King determined to sacrifice his kinsman, even if the act cost him his crown. Though unacquainted with the plan of imposture, which had

been daringly contrived, he wilfully violated the claims of justice, by decreeing, that the Earl of Lancaster's marriage should be dissolved, and his matrimonial estates forfeited. This was decreed with a quickness, which made it easy to discover, that the judges were guided before hand, and the King himself a promoter of the process. Against this sentence, the Earl remonstrated warmly, and firmly demanded to be heard before his peers, pleading the sacred, unalienable right of a father to his child, and repelling the plea of contumacy, by urging his conviction, that the judges never would have paid any attention to the claims of a woman, who must either be a base impostor, or a shameless hypocrite. With such a being, he deemed it a disgrace to be confronted. He declared his disbelief of her being his wife, of whose demise he had many witnesses, though he admitted the fact of her dis-interment,

which he considered as a connecting part of the same tissue of calumny and fraud. Finding this protest treated with neglect, Lancaster announced his resolution of bringing his wrongs before the great council of the nation, then on the eve of assembling, and the lords of his party again assumed those distinguishing insignia of white scarves, by which they had formerly intimidated the King to compliance. "An injury of this nature, done to a prince of the royal blood, exceedingly beloved by the people, raised an extreme indignation against the King. Nothing was every where heard, but murmurings against his government, and it was publicly said, never was the throne of England filled by a prince so unworthy to rule a free nation."*

The King and his advisers, had advanced too far to retreat, and the judges

* The words of Rapin.

consented to continue to act the part of registers of his arbitrary mandates. The demand of Lancaster to sit in parliament, as representative of five earldoms, was rejected, and to frustrate the designs of his friends, the meeting was prorogued during the royal pleasure. Officers from the civil courts were sent down, to give Agatha possession of the lands and castles; and as these were resisted by the vassals, who remained faithful to their lord, the latter was adjudged to be guilty of contumacy, and sentenced to banishment, leaving it to the King's grace, to render the period of his exile commensurate to that of his stubbornness. A threat of severer treatment was held out, to discourage further resistance, and this could only be interpreted, to mean a criminal process, for endeavouring to compass the death of his wife. As this latter allegation rested on circumstances, of which Lancaster supposed there was no living

evidence, he was inclined to brave the utmost malice of his enemies, but every argument, which he had used to dissuade the Earl of Hereford from taking any steps that might lead to civil discord, applied, still more forcibly in the present instance, as he was more universally beloved, and the injuries which he had sustained, were more deep and flagrant. Placed between the dreadful alternatives of passive submission of spoil and disgrace, or of insurrection; he preferred enduring the two former evils, to tearing open, in his own cause, the still unhealed wounds of England; and he earnestly conjured his brother Leicester, and the lords who regarded him as their political leader, to keep their loyalty untainted, and leave him to his fate. Leicester, with ill concealed astonishment, at what seemed to him like the imbecility of a mighty mind broken by affliction and self-reproach, asked him, who, in a land

of strangers, would minister to his sorrows, or redress his wrongs; and was, in return, asked, if this nation needed the scourge of civil war, added to its other intolerable inflictions; or, if he should add another stigma to his own character, by confirming the charge, that he was an abettor of Pendergrass, who yielded him a cheap victory to strengthen his hands for the work of rebellion. "Let wretched England," said he, "afford sustenance to our armies, before we call them into the field. A famished wretch, expiring for hunger, cares little about his rights as a freeman. Some breathing time must be allowed, during which, the arm of the peasant, labouring at the plough, will do more to renovate the nation, than the sword of the warrior, or the wisdom of the statesman. I trace the hand of Heaven in the misfortunes which have fallen upon me. The King is the instru-

ment of Providence, punishing my offences against others, instead of rewarding the services done to himself. So far I will bear ; beyond this bound, perhaps, he will not urge my sufferance. I infringed the forms of law, while I fulfilled its spirit ; but in my own case, the forms have been preserved, and the spirit violated. Yet, whatever befalls me, do not, Leicester, even for the sake of that fraternal love you bear me, embark the rich freight of your hopes in the vessel which carries my proscribed fortunes. The lofty spirit of our mother ever pointed to the sons of her house, as pillars hewn from the same adamantine quarry with the monarchy of England, of which they would be, for many ages, at once the ornament and support. If disjointed Lancaster has fallen a ruin, the foundations of Leicester should remain unshaken ; while built on a firmer basis, another Lancaster rises by his side,

to preserve the symmetry of the edifice, and confirm its durability. To thee, dearest brother, will I disclose a truth I long since discovered: nature never fitted me for public life. The advice of one I revered, and a passion I was invited to indulge, fixed me in a scene of action, for which I was indisposed by that vivid sensibility which enters on the stage a busy actor, instead of a cautious observer. It is not the acute sensation of moral evil, the nice discrimination, which, zealous for theoretic good, slights what is possible for what is unattainable; it is not the more interesting qualities which endear us to our friends, that fit us for situations of high responsibility, or make us happy in them. These require a fortitude often amounting to insensibility, and an activity sometimes resembling rashness, mixed with such a portion of self-esteem, as, come what will, can retire into its bosom fortress, deaf to popular

clamour, satisfied with past exertions, and in the cloudiest seasons, anticipating a future sunshine. Far other thoughts will be the attendant handmaids of my banishment ; nor can I answer, that this will not lacerate my soul, till goaded by the stimulus of that secret fire which burns most fiercely because it burns unseen, my passions may again burst forth, urging me to some act of desperation, which will render the powerful protection and unblemished loyalty of an uncle, necessary to the orphan whom I may commit to his charge."

"That precious child," said Leicester, "is now in the hand of your enemies." Lancaster waved the subject, with a remark, that the thought was more than he could endure ; and Henry now proceeded to point out the court of Scotland, as a place where he might reside with honour, till parliament moved the King to his recall, which would unquestionably

be one of its first measures. " If," continued he, " a painful consciousness of infirmity, a depressing burden laid on your soul by memory, against which it is in vain to remonstrate, palsies your arm, and enervates your mind ; or if the specimen which you saw of the destructive waste and blind fury of popular insurrection, has determined you to submit to see the laws wrested by the King, rather than trodden under foot by the people ; — if all, or any of these motives, deter you from redressing your wrongs, by an appeal to a nation which reveres you as its truest friend ; seek from the generous Bruce that protection, which a brave enemy is ever ready to afford to the valour it reveres. You have not partaken of the shames of England. In the eyes of Bruce, you are still an unconquered captain, the nephew of the mighty Edward, faithful to every engagement you made with him, and the suggester

of a system of defence, which checked the career of his conquests. From Scotland you may be easily recalled, and even your exile may be rendered beneficial to England, by repressing that spirit of hostility between the rival nations, which (now the hope of subjugation is abandoned,) can only tend to manure the border countries with the best and bravest blood of both kingdoms. In the mean time, it may be that some meaner hands may rub off the foul canker which corrodes our crown, and then, with one voice, shall we call upon the man, who sacrificed his own interests to his country's peace, to guard and preserve the burnished diadem, till our young Edward's brows are fitted for its glorious circure."

Lancaster gravely smiled at these predictions, revolving in his mind an enterprize, in the consequences of which he determined his brother should

not be involved. Feigning a resignation which he did not feel, he dismissed Leicester to Kenilworth, and set out on his journey toward the north, with the avowed design of seeking the protection of the King of Scotland, of whom he had no personal knowledge, but confiding in an apothegm sacred among the sons of chivalry, that a brave enemy will make a generous friend.

CHAP. XXXIV.

She hath offer'd to the doom,
 Which unrevers'd stands in effectual force,
 A sea of melting pearl, which some call tears;
 With them, upon her knees her humble self,
 Wringing her hands, whose whiteness so became them
 As if, but now, they waxed pale with woe.

SHAKESPEARE.

EXULTING in the idea of Lancaster's removal, the King was persuaded to keep his court at Westminster, in a style of pomp which eclipsed all his former prodigality. Isabella, agreeing only in her adherence to the same system of idle waste, differed in the mode of extravagance; she exhibited in her rival court the contrast of elegant profusion, opposed to thoughtless expence. She had obtained popularity among the better informed by cherishing those faint corus-

cations of taste and science which announced to our northern region, that the sun of literature had risen on Italy. The King would not be out-done by his consort, and beside his usual retinue of jugglers, buffoons, and mummers, he invited to his court all the minstrels and troubadours in England, proposing a valuable prize to him among them, who should best record the glories of his reign, and the majesty of his personal character.

It was the misfortune of this prince to seek reputation and security by petty contrivances and base evasions of duty. Always tormented by that mean rivalry which agitates little minds, ever mistaking the tinsel garb for the reality of majesty, he spent his time in imitating unworthy models, and even fancied himself great from adopting the infirmities and errors which, in an illustrious character, may be overlooked or pardoned.

The actions, by which he fancied he had made his reputation equal to a Cœur de Lion, a Fitz-Empress, or a Beauclerc, have not descended to posterity; and probably were of that jejune description to which even the minstrel's skill could not give sufficient importance to enable an eulogist of celebrity to come forward with propriety, and claim reward for making that great which was itself ridiculous. Some strolling musicians indeed were found, whose avarice and folly prompted them to tune their venal harps; but the flattery was gross, and conveyed in language as mean as their theme. The Queen and Mortimer exchanged significant glances of contempt, while the King's true friends, alike loyal and discriminating, turned their abashed eyes from a sovereign who was weak enough to engage in a competition of adulation, and to be mortified at his own failure. **The rough, brave barons who sat at the**

royal banquet, weary of feigning attention, yawning from fatigue, or frowning with disgust, began clamorously to call for those old promoters of festival hilarity, Maid Marian, Termagaunt and Beelzebub to drive away these tiresome parasites.

At this instant, a glee maiden rode into the hall, and craved permission to exhibit her skill to entertain the august assembly. Neither her attire nor her equipage announced the meretricious character of her profession, for the former was deep mourning, and the latter an aged monk who bore her lute. Her face was covered with a thick veil, and a rosary hung at her girdle. Some of the nobles, suspecting that these paraphernalia were a prelude to a solemn ditty, objected to the feast being entirely spoiled, first by dulness, and then by melancholy: others hoped the masquerade would be thrown aside, and some-

thing eminently ludicrous, perhaps a satire on the clergy, would be enacted by these strangely combined characters. Surrey, who after his late attempt to get Alicia into his power, had posted to London to prejudice the King against her applications, indulged this hope, combined with an apprehension which rivetted his attention on the performers.

The voices in favour of the proposed exhibition of the glee maiden's talents preponderated, and a space was cleared to allow her to approach the throne. The monk acted as prologue, and stated that the legend she was going to recite recorded a singular instance of divine vengeance on the pride and inhumanity of the Empress Matilda to her kinsman King Stephen, instructive to all who, standing high in rank and power, did not remember that they were merely instruments in the hand of Heaven.

The fair minstrel stretched out her arm

for her lute, and its whiteness and symmetry struck the beholders, as much as did the grace of her position, and the transcendent skill with which her fingers swept the chords, and drew out "tones yet unheard, with touch divine." This they said could be no itinerant hireling. The monk's proem and the lady's figure fixed every eye in anxious expectation; the goblets were stationary on the board, the jest was suspended, and the barons rested on their listless arms, while a voice, sweet as the imagined harmony of angel choirs, chaunted the following ballad :

Plac'd high beneath a purple pall,
 Blest with ambition's full desires,
 Matilda revell'd in this hall
 Beneath the banners of her sires.

“ Wake, merry minstrels, wake the string,
 And bid the shout of triumph rise ;
 My mortal foe, th' usurping King,
 In chains a hopeless pris'ner lies.

“ Ye peers of England speed my cause,
And crown the daughter of Beauclerc ;
Nor speak to her of Alfred’s laws,
Who rules by right as Alfred’s heir.”

Proudly she spoke and laugh’d aloud,
And push’d the golden chalice round ;
When lo ! a suitor from the crowd
Advanc’d, with sad and wailing sound.

Before th’ Imperial Queen she fell,
And drew aside her sable veil,
And shew’d a face which told too well
Its anguish in its features pale.

And when those features pale were shown,
Ne’er was a sight more piteous seen ;
For, kneeling at a rival’s throne,
Appear’d a sister and a Queen.

“ Hear me,” she said, and caught her vest
As the proud Empress turn’d aside,
“ Where now thou sitt’st in glory drest,
Oft have I sat by Stephen’s side.

“ Nor mused I at that golden time
Of changing friends, or trust betray’d ;
Nor how the prospects of my prime
Would darken in the ev’ning shade:

“ Thou stand’st aloft on fortune’s wheel,
I know the giddy height too well ;
I felt the false foundation reel,
And prostrate in the dust I fell.

“ Hopeless I fell, for Stephen’s doom,
Whate’er that doom, I will abide,
Partake with him the dungeon’s gloom,
Or climb the scaffold at his side.

“ O Queen, O Empress, see me bend ;
From death, from chains thy kinsman save ;
Sickness and grief thy fears will end,
And send him to a peaceful grave.

“ O think when Adela’s brave son,
Of thy young charms a champion meet,
The guerdon in the tourney won,
And laid the trophy at thy feet :

“ Impèrial Henry at thy side
Sat frowning, while thy throbbing breast
When round thy knight the scarf was tied,
The anguish of thy lot confest.

“ Past are those days, he asks to live
In holy cell or hermit cave,
His faded form to Heav’n he’ll give,
And be thy beadsman to his grave,

“ By England’s crown, which bound his brow,
Now on thy happier head devolv’d ;
By every fond or legal vow,
Ambition’s magic spell dissolv’d ;

“ Regard my state with pitying eye,
Vain fortune’s change thou too mayst prove ;
Then lay the sword of vengeance by,
And stretch thy iv’ry wand and dove.”

She ceas’d, and ancient legends read,
That every baron turn’d aside,
To bid the suppliant Queen God-speed
And dry the tear he could not hide.

Not so the Empress, cold, austere,
Can woman act so harsh a part ?
She only seem’d the tale to hear,
Because it riv’d the teller’s heart.

Nor bow’d she once with aspect meek,
As on the earth her rival lay,
To print with courteous kiss her cheek,
Or wipe the anguish’d dews away.

“ With holy men, on holy ground
A perjur’d wretch must not remain ;
A traitor with a heart unsound,
Would but the hermit’s cell profane.

“ No, he must die, or say we spare,
His doom must be the donjon cage,
With no associate but despair
To imp the shafts of lingering age.”

No more within this royal hall
Did proud Matilda revel high ;
Nor e'er did England's crown and pall
Invest her with their majesty.

Ere, with brief course, th' eventful year
Had clos'd upon her rival's woes,
Matilda fled with shame and fear ;
To power and freedom Stephen rose.

Seest thou a bier and waving plumes ?
Some war-worn chieftain rests beneath —
Soft ! 'tis the Empress, she assumes
The garb to shun the grasp of death.

How wild the wintry tempests beat,
Keen is the night, and dark the sky ;
Behold, amid the arrowy sleet,
Again for life the Empress fly.

Flies she alone ? Will none attend
The wanderer in her hour of need ?
Will no kind knight, no faithful friend,
The outcast to his castle lead ?

She has no friend ! Insulting, here
The suit of sorrow she disdain'd ;
Drank with delight a rival's tear,
And justice by revenge prophan'd.

Here, in an injur'd husband's cause,
Like Stephen's faithful Queen I kneel ;
Mercy she ask'd, but to the laws
And thee, their guardian, I appeal.

Regard my suit, for o'er thy brow
Matilda's ruin may impend ;
And hurl'd like her from empire, thou
Mayst find thy day in darkness end.

When summer friends, a feeble race,
From thy lone fortunes basely start ;
This righteous deed, this act of grace,
How will it balm thy aching heart.

The strains died away as the voice that uttered them, faltering from sensibility, gradually weakened, till in the last stanza it ceased in convulsive sobs ; while dropping her veil and her lute, the minstrel sunk upon her kness before the throne, and grasping the royal mantle

exclaimed, "Justice! my Lord the King, justice! justice! justice!"

"Who calls for justice?" exclaimed the monarch, alarmed and affected by this appeal.

"The true, faithful wife of the Earl of Lancaster," answered she, in a voice that pierced every ear. "Justice! justice!" she continued, "ere my injuries call down vengeance from heaven to crush you and your race."

"Have not I done you ample justice?" said the King, "disannulled your marriage, and reinstated you in the possession of your lands.

"My husband and I are one," returned she; "our interests, persons, hearts are united; our reputation is the same, and the same shall be our fortunes. Know me, King Edward, from a base impostor, from a venal wanton, suborned to traduce my character and disinherit my child. Confront

me with this phantom resemblance, and the delusion will vanish. The false Pendergrass could as well stand by your side, and be hailed as the son of Edward the great, as this woman to whom you have awarded my earldoms could appear in my presence, and defend the cheat of her being De Lacy's daughter. I call upon you, King and Barons of England, to recognize the voice, the person, and the features of her whom you have often seen, as the acknowledged wife of the Earl of Lancaster, that honourable, brave, and pious man; him whose name will be honoured by posterity, when those of his traducers have utterly perished. Join with me, noble representatives of those antient worthies whose energies procured and confirmed the charter of your freedom. Defend your own rights in demanding a repeal of every unjust sentence which has been passed against the Earl of Lancaster."

The barons crowded round the vehe-

ment speaker. In any other circumstances alarmed modesty would have shrunk from their scrutinizing glances ; but Alicia invited the closest observation, threw back her sunny hair, submitted every feature to remark, addressed each bold gazer by name, and repeated anecdotes which marked identity, till her eyes met those of Surrey, who with the self-command of recollected effrontery and practised guilt, advanced with the rest, seeming to seek information and suspend conviction. The keen sensibility of Alicia was not proof to this insult : an involuntary shudder thrilled her frame ; and wrapping her mantle over her face, she again clung to the King's knees, saying, " Save me ! save me ! from that bold, bad man."

Surrey could pervert language with as much adroitness as the sophists of modern times. By dint of long habit he could settle his features into suavity and composure, while the most violent tumult

raged in his bosom. “ ’Tis wonderful,”
 whispered he, in a calm tone of voice,
 “ how slight circumstances enable us to
 distinguish between truth and falsehood.
 This woman almost imposed upon me ;
 the distant likeness is so strong that
 though I parted from the Countess of
 Lancaster this morning at her own resi-
 dence, I had determined that it was she
 disguised, to surprize me and divert the
 King with a merry gambol. But you
 perceive she recoils at my approach, and
 hides her face lest I should scrutinize her
 features ; and by this I have discovered
 her to be the very creature who has
 given me measureless trouble ; a cheat,
 instructed and countenanced by the
 heretical Abbess of Kirklee, and sent
 about the country with this superannuated
 monk, to tell those absurd tales of per-
 secution and imprisonment, which gain
 credit with the vulgar, always prone to
 scandalize their betters, and to believe in
 horrors and miracles.”

Thus Surrey, specious and collected, insinuated his own story into the minds of the astonished barons, consisting chiefly of the partizans of the Spencers, his own allies, or the adherents of Mortimer ; while the shrieking Alicia, fearing neither dungeons nor death so much as the aspect of the man who had caused all her anguish, incoherently told a disordered tale of her imprisonment and escape, as her disjointed thoughts, unprepared for finding her persecutor in the royal presence, recollected every extraordinary occurrence, till faint and exhausted she sunk upon the earth, still feebly articulating the word justice. Father Nicholas knelt beside her, often holding his crucifix to her lips, and calling upon her to preserve that holy confidence which her soul truly felt, though her body sunk in the struggle.

The fainting lady was removed, the banquet thus rudely interrupted, was

speedily terminated, and the King called his council to assist him with their advice on this strange emergency. Among his advisers, beside the Earl of Surrey, who denying that he had any interest in the cause of the daughter of De Lacy, claimed a right to join in their deliberations, and the Earl of Arundel his presumptive heir, there were present the Earl of Pembroke, who with that tenacity of recollection which marks a vindictive age, boasted that he had not yet forgot the insult which he received from the Earl of Lancaster in the execution of Gaveston; and the two Spencers, now Earls of Gloucester and Winchester, who saw in the head of the second branch of the Plantagenets, a man by blood and principle inimical to the system of favouritism and private aggrandisement. Joined to these, was the Bishop of Lichfield, a prelate equally obnoxious to the nation in his private character, and

as the instrument by which the papal see played off the royal puppet, who by his own folly and necessity, had given the Pope an imperious control over his actions. It cannot be deemed wonderful that advisers thus prejudiced, accorded with the opinion of their revengeful and terrified sovereign; and saw nothing but chicane and pretence in the faded woe-worn pleader, who claimed to be the once gay and beautiful Alicia de Lacy, asserting the virtues and proclaiming the wrongs of the sworn enemy of regal misrule and papal usurpation.

None of the friends of Lancaster would deign to honour the royal banquet with their presence, while their leader's flagrant injuries were unredressed. When at the earnest adjuration of his self-denying brother, the amiable Leicester wrung his hands in anguish, and returned to Kenilworth, to secure by his allegiance the fortunes of their house, the Earl of

Hereford, fearless of consequences, still rode by the side of his proscribed friend, deferring the moment of parting by his long, lingering adieus. " You will offend the King by shewing this countenance to a banished man," said the noble Plantagenet. " I care not for Kings ; but my friend is invaluable," answered the faithful Bohun. Alicia had heard this anecdote in her perigrinations, and with clasped hands implored the favour of Heaven on the head of intrepid Hereford.

It was easy for prejudiced or implicated counsellors, to determine that a true claimant was an impostor, and deserving of punishment ; but Alicia's appeal to justice was public, and the impression she had made could not be erased without the form of a trial. The populace were unalterably attached to the Earl of Lancaster, though they entertained no high respect for the memory of his Countess. Beauty, elegance, and sensibility may act as endearing adjuncts to courtesy and

beneficence ; but of themselves they will not attract the affections of those whom pride offends, and whom necessity makes mercenary. Either from caprice or carelessness, Alicia had been inattentive to her inferiors ; yet those affectionate and proper feelings which operate with most force on the unvitiated children of nature, led every honest pair in England, when the story of the two Countesses furnished matter for their domestic conversation, to determine that she was the true wife who defended her husband's character. Popular opinion must not be entirely despised, and an apparent deference must be shewn to those powerful lords who avowed themselves to be the Earl's friends ; it was therefore necessary that these contending claimants should be confronted ; and Surrey found in Agatha so dauntless and adroit a coadjutor, that, depending on the absence of his rival, on his own wealth, and on the base devotion of his

numerous accomplices, he affected an eagerness for such a scrutiny as would unravel the mystery and establish truth on a permanent basis.

The first determination of the council was, that the old system of trial should be revived, and the competitors compelled to certify their identity either by the ordeal process, or by a juridical combat between their respective champions. On an intimation of this kind being given to Agatha, she eagerly closed with the proposal, her knight, or (as she chose to call him) her husband, Sir Richard Saint Martin was at hand, whose gaunt figure and ferocious aspect promised to intimidate meaner opponents ; for it was presumed that none of noble birth would condescend to break a spear with one of base origin and dishonest life. But Alicia was not left destitute at her extremest need ; for no sooner was it rumoured that the cause would be deter-

mined according to the old Gothic method in perplexed cases, than a combatant entered the lists as her champion, careless of the derogation of his own dignity, or of the strength and dexterity of the opposite champion.

The solemn injunctions of his brother, and regard to the stability of his family, had reluctantly withheld the Earl of Leicester from taking such steps as their enemies might misconstrue to be rebellion or treason: but he felt Lancaster's wrongs too keenly to pay any personal mark of respect to an unjust and ungrateful sovereign, at whose festivities the spirit of Guy de Beauchamp might as well be expected to sit a smiling guest, as the indignant though quiescent Henry Plantagenet. But before the extraordinary appeal of a glee maiden to the King could be known at Kenilworth, careless of exposing his person among the enemies of his house, the Earl had

posted to London, demanding to see the woman who claimed to be his brother's wife, and further, if he found her pretensions just, that she should be immediately delivered to his care. When he heard that she had been committed to custody, and all access denied, under the pretence that justice required she should be kept from any prompters till her claims could be clearly adjudged, the indignant feelings of wounded generosity gave that licence to his tongue on which the calculating spirit of artifice could easily forge many a specious charge, and cheat feeble-minded people, who believe that on every occasion the first virtue is equanimity. The partizans of Surrey suggested that Leicester's behaviour corroborated the fact of the glee maiden's being a hired impostor. He had declined the King's hospitality that the fraud might be matured in his absence; but before he could hear of his minion being

seized, he hastens to court, and carries on the farce by asking to see the puppet whom, conjointly with the Abbess of Kirklee, he had trained and put in motion. The recognition of the Earl of Leicester could be no confirmation of this woman's veracity, for it must be remembered that he was the champion of his brother's claims, and interested in the preservation of those earldoms to his house, which were to revert to his own issue by Matilda. The ministers of the crown gave a softer turn to their refusal of Leicester's demands. "If," said they, "this imprisoned minstrel is the veritable Lady Alicia de Lacy, she need not grieve at this short suspension of her liberty, nor at the weariness of a decision which will in future leave her rights indisputably established. But, on the other hand, if, as the severe investigation which the lady who now possesses the title of Countess of Lincoln has undergone,

seems to prove, this is an impostor, the honour of Lord Leicester would be implicated if he held any secret correspondence with a low conspirator."

Leicester, angrily, flung down his gauntlet, menacing all who should dare to call the wife of his injured brother a conspirator or counterfeit. He was now asked how he came to be so certain that this was his brother's wife. Was it the action of a princely lady to seek the King's presence in an unseemly disguise, to disturb a joyous festival by her cries, and outrage probability by her incoherent tales? "Let me speak to the King" said Leicester, "and I will inform him from what source I drew my information." Edward repeated the question. "Your Grace," resumed the Earl, "must recognize a pledge, which has often passed between yourself and a saintly votaress, who never interferes with the concerns of this world but to per-

form actions of kindness and equity. By this ring, the Princess Mary solicits permission to quit her cell in Amesbury, and bear testimony to the identity of the Countess of Lancaster ; she having persuaded her to adopt a disguise, which gave her the only chance of introducing her wrongs to your notice.”

As the astonished King gazed on the well remembered token, by which his secluded sister had often signified to him her benevolent desires, even his perturbed intellects began to suspect that his own thirst for revenge, and the knavery of others, had duped him into a perversion of justice. But he was soon surrounded by those whose interest it was to divert his scruples, either by starting difficulties, or by denying facts. The legate said that his authority must be interposed, to forbid the appearance of a nun in a court of justice. The anomaly of allowing those who have renounced the world to give

testimony in its concerns was so great, that it could never be admitted, except when the interests of holy church required support; in which case she was by inference supposed to exercise her miraculous gifts, and to raise one legally dead to bear evidence to the truth. In all other suits it was esteemed sacrilege, without an express indulgence from the holy see; which in this instance he could not solicit, without subjecting the fame of the princess to the suspicion of too close a connection with the Lady Emmeline, of whom charity enjoined him to be silent.

Leicester was now asked what previous acquaintance had subsisted between Alicia and the Princess Mary; and when he acknowledged that they had never met before the flight of the former from Kirklee, a pitying smile circulated round the council board, no less at the credulity of the royal nun, than at the folly of the Earl in supposing her testimony could

have any weight : and the Earl of Arundel, with a courtly bow to the sovereign, interfered with much seeming candour, deprecating any censure being thrown on a pious, benevolent lady, whose long seclusion from the world made her unacquainted with the commonest snares of hypocrisy and falsehood ; and certainly there did appear an unusual share of craft and insinuation in this woman, who at first, it was evident, wrought on the King's feelings, and might have misled his justice, did not his consummate wisdom form a happy equipoise to the yielding commiseration of his nature.

The angry Earl retired, reiterating his demand to be the champion of this much aspersed woman, whose claim to justice he determined to defend. But the King's advisers now foresaw that, whatever chance attended the combat, a cause supported by a captain of freebooters, of servile birth and base manners, must be un-

popular, particularly if he were opposed to a youthful knight of royal blood, who left the long-worshipped object of his earliest affections in the newness of their espousals, to defend the cause of an interesting unfriended female, and, if every better feeling of the heart could be trusted, an injured lady, whose claim for justice had been answered by imprisonment. While they thus hesitated on the expediency of the proposed combat, the bishops argued against its legality, founding their objections on its being a presumptuous, irreverent appeal to Providence, an opposition of physical strength and manual skill in martial exercise, to the moral qualities of truth and justice. On consulting the judges, they admitted that it was a mode of decision irreconcilable to the laws of England, and which had been laid aside for nearly a century. The friends of Alicia were desirous that a more certain criterion of her veracity

should be prescribed than the sword of her champion, and Leicester readily withdrew his gage. But against one of the decisions of the council given in the shape of advice to the King, loud and unsuccessful were the remonstrances of the faithful brother. This was, that to put a stop to these fraudulent assumptions of character, with an intent to injure or defame others, which at this time seemed matured into a system of peculation, after the identity of these claimants had been clearly ascertained, the fictitious Countess of Lancaster should be put to death, and an obsolete statute was produced, by the revival of which such severe treatment of cheats and counterfeits might be legally defended. When justice is partially administered, a law of this kind is written in the blood of innocence.

This determination of the King was communicated to Alicia, with the solemnity of a death-warrant, and though with

an affectation of kindness, it was added that if innocent she had nothing to fear, the treatment she had already experienced convinced her that her cause was prejudged. The bench of justice would be occupied by those who had confirmed Agatha's claims and banished Lancaster, and the same unwise and virulent prince would confirm their sentence. Though to preserve an air of impartiality, Agatha was also laid under a personal restraint, she was allowed full liberty of profiting by the counsels of her friends, and collecting testimony to support her claims. An eminent advocate was secured to plead her cause, and enable her to take every advantage of legal ambiguities. Thus her spirits were supported, and her success insured ; while Alicia, with no other companion than her fellow prisoner, Father Nicholas, was left in ignorance of what would have been the most cordial balm to her wounded mind, the zealous

interference of the Earl of Leicester, and the generous attentions of the lady Matilda, who, undismayed by reiterated denials, daily presented herself at the grate of the prison, desiring admission. All that Matilda could hear was that the prisoner was alive, and her only reward was the ever grateful sensation of invoking the beatified spirit of her royal guardian, saying, "Thus, most honoured Blanche, do I fulfil thy precepts, and shew my gratitude to thy memory."

This severe treatment of Alicia had still a further aim. It was hoped that the extreme danger of her situation, added to the depressing influence of solitude and confinement, might induce so timid and flexible a woman joyfully to accede to a proposal which should hold out the promise of life, and even a comfortable asylum, on condition of her withdrawing her claims. But there are cases in which the feeble can be firm, and the fearful

magnanimous. To every hint of this kind, her answer was uniform: living or dying, she would be the wife of the Earl of Lancaster. While she pondered on every ominous circumstance which led to the inference of a speedy and disgraceful termination of her life, these reflections were eminently consolatory. She had given publicity to her story; and even if her enemies turned assassins, and caused her to be privily cut off in prison, the appeal which she had made to the King before the barons, must be known to her husband. The sentiments of affectionate duty, which she then uttered, would convince him that it was not the wife of his bosom who had slandered, disgraced, and plundered him; he would know too, that his own Alicia had survived the test to which he had subjected her, and depending firmly on his promise that they should again meet in happiness, had persevered in her pious resolutions, and

might claim to be acknowledged as his true and faithful wife in a better world.

Besides this sovereign cordial, Alicia also recollected that the English were a generous nation, prone to defend innocence and resist oppression. Notwithstanding her present peril, she blessed the wise counsels of the Princess Mary, who advised that method of making her story known, and to brave the dangers consequent on such a discovery, rather than drag out a long life in safe obscurity, leaving her reputation an enigma to the present age, and a scandal to posterity. It might even happen, that personal safety would ensue from the course which she had adopted. Her faithful Lancaster at the head of the multitude that his name would spontaneously assemble, might burst her prison doors, and restore her to the threefold blessings of liberty, fame, and love. The gloom of her apartment, and its massive fastenings, hastily diverted

her thoughts from this intoxicating hope, with the consciousness of one who was too intimately acquainted with the frowns of fortune, to credit the possibility that they would give place to smiles. Her fellow-prisoner, good old Nicholas, seemed wholly occupied in the preparation for death, and called on her to imitate his wise example.

The aspect of the king of terrors was now very different from that which he wore when, with the querulous fastidiousness of prosperity, some slight opposition to her desires, some local impediment, some provoking interruption, the impertinence of a rival, the neglect of an acquaintance, or the success of an adversary, had made her desirous of escaping from a troublesome world, full of cares and disappointments. In proportion as sorrow and danger really accumulated around her, she felt (as is too generally the case) the value of life increase with her sense of

its woes and its insecurity. To preserve and hallow it to the best purposes was now her anxious care, and thus to render the apparently short portion of her days conducive to the welfare of her dearest ties, and to the securing unto herself the bright rewards of immortality. On the nature of those rewards, she frequently conversed with the good monk; and the mode of instruction chiefly consisting in the repetition of legends, she asked his opinion of an adventure recorded by the Bishop of Chartres, as having happened at a time when the devotion and zeal of St. Louis of France had raised the piety of that nation to an extraordinary pitch. He stated, that travelling along the road, he met a woman, whether an heavenly vision, or a prophetess labouring under some supernatural call to become a visible sign to the church, he knew not; but she moved swiftly along, bearing in one hand a lighted torch, and in the other an ewer

of water. The significance of her look made him ask her the meaning of those symbols; when she answered, that she was commissioned to burn paradise, and quench hell, that men might love virtue and piety for their own sake, independent of the fear of punishment, or the hope of reward.

Alicia shrunk with apprehension at the comparison of her own spiritual state, with that abstracted perfectness to which the reveries of this enthusiast indicated she ought to aspire; but the ideas of her confessor were rational and consolatory. The motive, he said, to action, must be the desire of happiness. A great proportion of our errors arose from our not distinguishing between what was imaginary and transitory good, and what was real and permanent. Of the former he would not now speak; it's bitter fruit disappointment discovered it's nature; but those desires which accompany the soul to the brink

of the grave, and equally testify their capacity of attending it to the region it is about to explore, must be aspirations after that perfection which the Creator originally communicated to man, and are at times felt by all who struggle vigorously against the corruptions and blandishments of sense. As often as our hearts, rising above the pleasures and disenthralled from the cares of this world, have glowed with disinterested transport at the happiness of those we love, or thrilled with generous sympathy at the pains or perils of virtue,—each delight which we have felt at seeing God glorified, or man benefited,—every such feeling must in it's nature partake of the joys of heaven. For in the fullest communion of love, confidence, and pious joy, in the most cordial acknowledgment of the attainments of kindred saints, and liberal sympathy of ecstasy and glory, enlightened christians are led to anticipate much of the blessedness of the heavenly

state. In vain would they listen to celestial harpings, or eat the fruit of the tree of life; neither immunity from external ills, nor even the flood of splendour poured on them from uncreated light, could bestow full beatitude, were not their hearts in unison with the transporting scene. Even that most exalted privilege of seeing God as he is, would communicate knowledge and delight only to hearts predisposed to admire the wisdom, and adore the goodness exemplified in all the boundless mysteries of nature, providence, and grace. Let the material Heaven therefore be removed, the moral Heaven must still remain, and to this the soul must here below aspire as its original destination, and long for as its chief source of delight, until benevolent and pious affections cease to be sources of pleasure, or the contemplation of an eternity spent in such exercises an object of hope. The

practice of our duty can never be wholly separated from this true and exalted idea of our own interest. Let us not be wise above what is written, nor attempt at an abstracted holiness inconsistent with our moral constitution. The Creator of the human soul knew its propensities, when he promulgated the terrors of hell to recal the sinner from the downward path of perdition, and added the hope of heaven to encourage the penitent to persevere in his arduous course, by the expectation that he shall reap the fruits of his labours.

“ Away then,” continued the good father, “ with the scrupulous refinements which are calculated to harden obduracy, and discourage piety ; nor doubt the fitness of thy preparation, if even in the present advanced state of thy spiritual pilgrimage, thou lookest on hell with grateful joy at having escaped its dolours, and on heaven with hope of enjoying its beatitudes. But let not material crowns

and sensible flames be the chief objects of thy aspirations or thy fears. In the society of consummate wickedness and utter despair, there must be supreme anguish ; in the communion of unsinning obedience and unclouded love, there must be unutterable joy. To love virtue distinct from all views of temporal advantage, is to love it for itself. To love it primarily as concentrated in the Supreme Being, and subordinately as reflected in his creatures, comprises the enjoined duties of piety and benevolence, and the highest delights of which our nature is capable. Ask thyself, therefore, as disrobing thy soul of its earthly attire, thou triest its fitness for its passage over the gulph which separates time from eternity, if thou submittest to the chastisements of heaven, even when most grievous, from a conviction that they are awakening or purifying trials ; if thou canst rejoice in the good of others, even though it seems

to have resulted from thine own calamities; if thou dost wish for the reformation of the vicious, as the only means of their becoming ultimately happy; and if thou canst candidly allow the good qualities of thine enemies, because thou art unwilling to believe that the divine ray reflected from their Creator is ever wholly extinguished? Search thy inmost soul, my daughter, and enforce these questions individually; suffer them to bear upon every distinct passion, and apply to every person; and if thou canst ingenuously answer, ‘ I do thus submit, rejoice, desire, and excuse,’ no longer tremble at the frown of man, for his utmost malice can only prematurely send thee to a world of which thou art already a meet inhabitant.”

CHAP. XXXV.

So shall you hear

Of cruel, bloody, and unnatural acts;

Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters;

Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd causes;

And, in the upshot, purposes mistook

Fall'n on th' inventors heads.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE most sedulous efforts of the Earl of Leicester could procure no further favour than that the claims of the two Countesses should be speedily investigated, and that the verification of their persons should take place in the great hall at Kenilworth. In that castle the wife of Lancaster had often resided, and it was presumed that the counterfeit, whether trained by the Abbess of Kirklee, or the Earl of Surrey, would be equally

a stranger to its interior arrangements. The honour of Leicester was pledged to give no interruption to judicial proceedings; and the judges themselves, as well as the peers who were to assist their decisions, went down attended by a sufficient force, to give efficiency to their sentence.

The Earl had once determined to inform his brother of this second claimant, who had by her demeanor exhibited juster pretensions to be considered as his resuscitated wife. But beside that such a communication would infallibly induce him to condemn the sentence of his own banishment, and be present at the investigation (the determined contumacy of which conduct would indispose the judges for an impartial investigation), Leicester considered how unequal the wounded mind of Lancaster must be to the laceration of suspense, public shame, hope, fear, and perhaps the despair con-

sequent on an unjust sentence. Through fraternal tenderness, he resolved to spare the Earl the agonizing trial ; and indulging the hope that he was now at the court of Bruce, soothed by the respect of an honourable enemy, Henry now determined that as the investigation would be speedy, he would refrain from all communications till he could send the final result ; which, if there were any truth or justice in England, would at least clear the name of Lancaster from an alliance with a base adulteress, even if it did not reunite it to a faithful wife, as well as a lovely, intelligent child.

If the inexperienced reader, unacquainted with the evanescent nature of convenient and juvenile friendship, should inquire what part the Queen took in a question so interesting as the life and reputation of her dearest Alicia, both depending upon the question of the identity of two persons assuming that name, it

must be answered that Her Majesty, if not magnanimously impartial, preserved the equanimity of indifference. The intimacy of association, the liking of reciprocal humours, had yielded to a stronger passion ; and love for the gentle Mortimer (as she emphatically called him) now engrossed the wife, the mother, and the queen. It is not unusual for women to obtain an influence over weak men in proportion to their worthlessness ; and in the latter part of the unfortunate Edward's life, it seems as if Isabella might (had she been so disposed) have given a salutary impulse to his public conduct. But abandoned to the indulgence of a criminal attachment, she spurned the generosity of cancelling early provocations by lending the aid of her superior abilities to make her husband respectable, and at the same time building up a glorious throne for her son. Nothing but the King's ruin could satiate her vengeance ; and she, who in

her years of innocence, often mediated between Edward and his barons, is afterwards only recorded as a fomenter of discord, continually embroiling the state, with a view to the deposition of her husband, and the elevation of the Prince to the throne; during whose minority she hoped with her minion “to revel on the couch of state,” and virtually “to crown at once the lover and the love.”

An insult which this vindictive princess had at that time received from one of the discontented barons, who refused to admit her and her suite into his castle when she went in pilgrimage to Canterbury, employed all her attention; and busy as she was in stirring up the King to revenge this indignity by force of arms, she had no leisure to consider the wrongs and sorrows of the Earl of Lancaster, a man who, if he had not slighted her love, had rejected her offered friendship; and as to his wife, she had heard of her death with

as much pity as a rival beauty could possibly afford. She also listened to the tale of her re-appearance and self-degradation with virtuous horror, now shocked that she had admitted such a creature to her intimacy, now declaring that she had often suspected something wrong in that giddy woman; and afterwards, if while she adjusted her robes, or borrowed a slight assistance from art to colour a cheek which through dissipation had begun to fade, she bestowed a little temporary attention on the imprisoned minstrel, who, having sung a tiresome ditty to the King, fell into fits, and then claimed to be the real Alicia de Lacy,—she expressed a wish that they would let the poor, vain woman, who she dared to say was dead, rest in her grave, and hang both the counterfeits. Then requesting that she might not be perplexed with enigmas which no human being could unravel, she called on her ladies to amuse her by playing a mall, or

else sat down to chess with the gentle Mortimer.

It seemed the general wish to hurry on the trial; and when the day arrived, the hall at Kenilworth was crowded by a vast assemblage of spectators, beside the numerous witnesses who had been collected, and the peers and judges who sat under a special commission. After the advocates had eloquently harangued and loaded with opprobrium the audacious attempt of an impostor to rob a noble lady of her inheritance, the competitors were successively introduced blindfold, Alicia in her novice's dress, Agatha splendidly appareled in the robes of a countess. They were separately desired to describe the architecture and furniture of the place in which they now stood. It was an act of memory, and Alicia's account was calm and unembarrassed. The minute exactness of her description alarmed her persecutors; but when Agatha was called

upon, she was equally perspicuous and faithful in her account; for during the period of her itineracy she had often raised contributions among the domestics of Kenilworth, and had explored every apartment in the castle. They spoke, removed from each other's hearing; the bandages were taken off, and they were then successively called upon to recognize the persons present. Powerful sensibility, ingenuous shame, and wounded dignity, had now the effect of guilt; for after Agatha had with much self-composure called on the Earl of Leicester as her brother-in-law, her successive confessors Ambrose and Hilary, her attendants Beatrice, Dorcas, Sybil, and Mabel, as well as her once contracted lord the Earl of Surrey, and many other peers, Alicia, who now after an absence of more than a year first beheld them, stood with dejected look and averted eyes, depressed by sad misgivings, recollecting all her provocations to those on whose testimony

her life and fame depended, and fearing lest a sense of resentment should preponderate against the justice of her claims and stifle the voice of truth; while each angry witness felt that the woman who was reduced to this necessity, was unworthy of the name she demanded.

But while superficial observers saw in her tremulous dejection the terror of guilt, the better informed beheld the susceptibility of a gentle spirit, whose habits rendered publicity and investigation as cruel a torture as the rack is to vulgar audacity. What in that instant passed in Alicia's bosom may be conceived when it is remembered, that among the pangs of self-condemnation which she had long endured, those arising from her neglect and injustice to the virtues of Matilda were the severest, next to her connubial reproaches. Yet in her present extremest need, female delicacy made her, when she first dared to call upon an evidence

to attest her truth, fix her eyes on the long envied theme of Lancaster's commendations; and encouraged by the burst of tears which spoke affectionate recognition, she exclaimed in tender ecstasy, "The lady Matilda knows me."

An injunction had been issued, forbidding any of the witnesses to speak till the court took off the interdiction, on pain not only of having their testimony set aside, but also of being treated as accomplices if the fraud appeared on that side to which they leaned; Matilda therefore continued silent, while her countenance conveyed ineffable consolation to the forlorn Alicia. But neither threats nor even the fear of injuring her lady could restrain the anguished feelings of Mabel. The infirmities of age had dimmed her sight; and considering her as firmly attached to the house of Lancaster, she was placed where she had not a perfect view of the claimants. But the remembered accents of Alicia no sooner reached

her ear, than she exclaimed, " My lady, my good lady Margaret's own daughter ! The sweet voice of the darling of my heart ! Tear me piecemeal," said she to the officers who drew her out of court, " there is a tune in that sound which, mimick it how you will, no living creature but the true lady can come up to, and I will die saying so." The eyes of Alicia followed Mabel out of court, while her melting heart reproved her with ruining all whom she loved.

The indiscretion of the nurse who attended her from her cradle, thus depriving Alicia of so material an evidence, pointed out to her friends the necessity of using greater caution, and inspirited the adverse party. It was now proposed by Agatha's advocate, that the witnesses having had ample time to recognize the claimants at the bar, they should be required to state their opinions ; but that the rights of justice might be fully secured, the rule of precedence must be

inverted, and the depositions of the meaner evidences first taken, lest their testimony should be influenced by fear or favour of the noble personages implicated in this cause.

The servitors were therefore first examined. Sumptuous attire, the smile, the state, and the freshness of prosperity, not only form the constituents of beauty with common observers, but are allowed even by refined judges greatly to increase natural loveliness. The Countess of Lancaster always appeared at Kenilworth habited in the splendid apparel Agatha now wore. The brief period of Alicia's reign succeeded that of a mistress who was universally adored. Compared with Queen Blanche, the gay beauty was unpopular ; her negligent, airy manner, her unfortunate predilection for her own attendants, her inattention to the wants and wishes of others, and her rage for amusement, had in their minds connected her person with the ideas of pride and levity.

The fierce and meretricious smile of Agatha announced those qualities in their fell extreme. They whose hours are devoted to labour instead of reflection, are not nice physiognomists. The pale, dejected, novice could not remind them of a great or a gay lady. One after another, the menials of Kenilworth acknowledged the gorgeously appareled Agatha as the wife of the Earl of Lancaster, while the self-reproach which this decision renewed, sealed the lips of Alicia in contrite silence.

Sybil and Dorcas were next summoned. They had seen their lady stretched out a corpse at Canford-castle, and had attended her funeral. They gave their testimony with trepidation, labouring under the common superstition that a sorcerer had reanimated a dead body, and endued it with a power of speaking and moving like a living, sentient creature, till some powerful exorcist dissolved the

spell. This effect they momentarily expected from such holy men as Father Ambrose and Sir Hilary ; and, with shuddering dread, averting their eyes from the mournful figure which, if the novice's dress were exchanged for grave-cloaths, would exactly remind them of the death-scene at Canford, they seemed to ask relief from their terrors by the adjuration of the priests. Finding them passive, they looked at their old companion Agatha, whom Lady Margaret's preference had made an object of envy and hatred ; and, with faltering simplicity, declared they knew not what *that* was, but they were sure the lady was not the daughter of the Earl of Lincoln. The practised courtesan smiled at this disclosure. The restrictions imposed by the court forbade her addressing the witnesses till all had given in their testimony ; she could therefore only condescendingly wave her head with an air indicative of gracious forgiveness

to her renegade attendants. Alicia's affectionate heart spoke a different language. She divined the cause of the terrified glances which her damsels threw upon her, and too well recollected what had so deeply impressed their minds. Exquisitely painful was that remembrance which, combined with approbation of their fidelity, renewed the emotion that so strongly agitated her on first perceiving herself exposed to the rude licence of a gazing multitude, and subjected to the most disgraceful inquisition. "See," said the hirelings of Agatha, who were dispersed among the spectators to inflame the multitude in her favour, "how the true countess speaks in that gracious, forgiving lady, and how the base impostor trembles with rage. Had she the power, she would bind those poor girls on the rack, for stopping half way in the falsehood which she had trained them to utter."

Beatrice was next called upon, but she requested to be considered rather in the light of a party than a witness. She had never lost sight of her dear and true lady, with whom she would stand or fall. In a future stage of the trial, she would, if urged, discover what would set the matter finally at rest.

There was a competition in rank between the two friars, who had successively acted as confessors to De Lacy's daughter: the age and reputed sanctity of Ambrose weighed against the rich benefice of Sir Hilary; and with a tenacity of distinction, not uncommon to those who profess a total dereliction of the world, the friar seemed inclined to defend his precedence. The court determined, that in worldly affairs temporal wealth must take place of spiritual attainments, and the austere anchorite was therefore first called upon. The saints of older times confirmed their claims to holiness by ad-

hering to maxims which might be termed the fundamental rules of papal government; holding, that the end sanctified the means; and that the interests of the church were paramount to every moral or social duty: the establishment of the Countess of Lincoln's deed of gift was the first object with Ambrose, and this was incompatible with the existence of her daughter. Rolling his dark, sullen eyes on the competitors, with the confirmed tone of a determined sceptic, he anathematized them both as counterfeits.

The richly attired Abbot was as ill selected to do credit to the ministers of religion, by paying a simple homage to truth, as the friar in his hair-shirt and coarse woollen cassock. When called to determine, he spoke of the tenderness of his conscience, and the immutable claims of justice and verity, requesting that he might be allowed to address the claimants before he gave his opinion. In walking

to the bar he displayed his gold-fringed scarf, embroidered cope, and the jewelled mitre, which was fixed on his neat tonsure with becoming majesty, while his train-bearer scientifically adjusted the sweeping folds of richest silk, that pointed out the wealthy ecclesiastic to the envy of the mendicant friar. He addressed the competitors with pious courtesy, declaimed on the guilt of fraud, and offered absolution, if the impostor would, by a timely confession, mitigate her guilt. This, he said, he did to try, by the effect of his rhetoric on the countenance, which was the penitent whom he had so often confessed. He then addressed the court, lamenting the fallacy of human judgment, wishing that all causes of this intricate nature could be reserved to the great assize, and that the debated inheritance might be divided between the claimants; but since the rights of the public required on one side justice, and

on the other the punishment of delinquency, to deter the cupidity of artifice, he must, as far as his poor abilities could decide, observe, that the pale trembling novice seemed to be a person bred in seclusion from the world, till forced into notice by a contrivance she wanted dexterity to complete; while, on the other hand, the lady who defended her birth-right from a cruel, injurious husband, evinced the spirit which became the descendant of noble and royal ancestry.

The Earl of Surrey's fiat was anticipated, but he prefaced it with many remarks. It would, he said, indeed be strange if he could not identify the woman to whom he had been contracted, had publicly wooed, and to whom, even during the possession of another, he had been faithfully though chastely attached. Let them be required to repeat several conversations, known only to himself, and he would leave the most prejudiced partizan

of the house of Lancaster to determine which was the beauty who had ornamented Queen Isabella's court, and which the trained instrument of the Abbess of Kirklee; a woman suspicious to the church for her heretical descent and lax discipline, and odious to her lay neighbours for invading their rights. In this he had himself suffered; for he was persuaded that the present nefarious attempt owed its existence to her revenge for his endeavouring to recover the daughter of one of his serfs, whom she had seduced into her monastery, and thus deprived him of the services of a vassal who had broken fealty to her liege lord. The injury which this vindictive woman had in return projected, was of a nature which would most deeply wound a man jealous of the fame of stainless knighthood; for, by implication, he was accused of countenancing a vile fraud. He would say no more; every honourable man present

would feel his situation ; and having thus spoken, with a look indicative of a lively sense of indignity, he again took his seat among the judges.

The Earl of Leicester, who, as a peer of the realm, had hitherto sat on the same bench with Surrey, now quitted it, and placed himself near Alicia. “ When a man,” said he to the court, “ claims a right to act in the irreconcilable characters of judge and culprit, evidence and condemner, the privileges of a prince and peer of England become disreputable. I quit the bench, from which the Lord Surrey has just proclaimed himself a party in the cause ; on which, as juror, he will hereafter give sentence ; and, by my resignation of my right of judging, I claim to act as the champion of unfriended innocence, overwhelmed by a powerful conspiracy. Sister by alliance, and, for thy meek endurance and patient magnanimity, sister also of my soul, behold the

brother of thy husband, and, in his absence, the sworn protector of thy life, and assertor of thy claim !”

This action of her lord was a signal to determine the conduct of Matilda. She sprang forwards to the bar where Alicia stood, who, denied, deserted, and vilified, but a moment before saw, in all the gazing crowd, which wounded her delicacy and alarmed her fears, no friend but the aged monk who shared her perils and her prison. She now beheld herself recognized and supported by the noblest persons in the assembly ; and what to her was far more welcome, by the representatives of her Lancaster. With transport inconceivable, she grasped the extended hands of Leicester and Matilda ; the strict inclosure in which she was placed prevented the interchange of embraces, but the intercourse of eyes could not be interdicted ; and Alicia’s spoke unutter-

able joy, though her lips only articulated, " I can now die content."

It was presumed by Surrey that the Earl of Leicester would, for his brother's sake, avoid going into a detail of those particulars which had put Alicia into his power ; but when the life and fame of an innocent woman were impleaded, even the character of one " dear as the vital blood which warmed his heart," could not, in the honourable mind of Henry Plantagenet, admit any competition. He encouraged, he adjured Alicia, for her own sake, and for the sake of her child's birth-right, to detail the particulars of what passed between her and Lancaster, and the manner of her being removed from Canford-castle. Restored to self-possession by the encouraging presence of Leicester, she began the painful story with modest dignity, but was immediately interrupted by Agatha's advocates, who insisted that their client's cause must not be

prejudged, which would be the case if the novice were suffered to go on uninterrupted in a well devised tale, calculated to work on the feelings of the auditors. They were willing to wave their right of cross-examination, on condition that, after one of them had proceeded a little way, the other should be allowed to take up the narrative; which, if she did without hesitation, and continued it without being charged by her opponent with any deviation from truth, nothing decisive could be inferred from the novice's readiness first to begin the story. It was also, they said, requisite that the screen which concealed the claimants from the sight of each other should be removed, and the effect of their mutual recognition seen by the court. These requests were granted; and while Alicia stood the living personification of horror, Agatha, with sovereign effrontery, proceeded to describe the events of that fearful night; com-

mencing the account with the dress of the Earl of Lancaster, and the posture in which he sat when the Countess entered in her gala attire.

The circumstance of Beatrice's having overheard all that passed between her lord and lady at that awful interview, which terminated the happiness of both, was unknown to all but herself. Ignorant of the existence of any mortal prompter, the Earl of Leicester and Alicia mutually considered this bold defiance as a proof of communication with some infernal spirit: such agency was then universally credited, and such subtlety, it was also firmly believed, no human sapience could elude. The faithful wife ever revolted from fixing an indelible stain on her husband, by confirming, with her own mouth, that he had been guilty of an act which, though she, from her soul, ascribed to an affectionate desire for her renovation, might by the

misjudging multitude be called intentional murder and determined cruelty. The disclosure would now be as useless to her child as it was injurious to his father; and satisfied that she had been recognized by those who would inform her lord that the stern medicine he administered had indeed proved the death of her follies, but instead of consigning her to the grave, had raised her to newness of life, she resigned herself to that fate which she now more than ever believed to be inevitable. It was not only the lascivious, disappointed Surrey, who was vehemently bent on her destruction; he had, by some diabolical process, conjured to his aid the imprecating wanton, the terrific reprobate, the necromantic depredator, whose dreadful curse still hung over her, and who had twice brought her to the gates of death. The sound of Agatha's voice, and the extension of her arm, as she spoke, reminded

her of the strenuous grasp which had plunged her into the Calder, and the satanic look, and screaming eagerness with which she had imprecated on her head all the pangs a wife or a mother could endure; and hiding her face from this soul-appalling object, she exclaimed, loud enough for Leicester to hear, "This is Agatha!"

From this high-wrought state of terror, which paralyzed every effort that wisdom could make for her deliverance, Alicia was quickly recalled by two recollections, which, in all her trials, had been the confirmations of her virtuous fortitude, and the directors of her conduct. If the curse of Agatha were graven on her soul, so also were the parting words of Lancaster; and though the terrible Surrey and that vile sorceress had united with the powers of hell to crush her, and defame her lord, there was a world of happiness where they should still meet.

She turned from the dreadful woman, by whom she was confronted, and beheld Leicester still stretching out his arm toward her, with a look of unsubdued hope, and increased affection. It was certain, therefore, that her name would not be left a sport to base malice, and misjudging folly. The ring too, which she first received from Lancaster, had been the constant companion of her prison hours; she had studied it in her cell at Kirklee; in solitude, in destitution, it had been her instructor; taught by this talismanic monitor, she had subdued her desires; she would now also subdue her fears.

The Earl of Leicester was acquainted with part of Agatha's history, especially with the circumstance of his brother having liberated her from the cemetery at Wimborn, and he no sooner heard Alicia pronounce her name, than defying the supernatural guards by whom she was supposed to be surrounded, he boldly

accused her of being a criminal, doubly deserving death for theft and sorcery, instead of the daughter of De Lacy; and he required that her naked shoulders should be examined, which would discover whether they bore the marks of the lacerations inflicted by the scourge of penance during her confinement. The indecorum of such a test was admitted by all, and the partiality of limiting it to one claimant loudly asserted by the advocates, who insisted, that if it were taken for granted one of these women was Alicia De Lacy, and the other that abandoned girl who so much resembled her, the personal scrutiny should extend to both. Alicia's delicacy, as was expected, recoiled from the exposure; and the judges now inquired of the peers if they were satisfied, giving it as their opinion that the preponderating weight of evidence on one side must overbalance the recognition of the Earl

and Countess of Leicester, whose interest in the issue of the cause abated the value of their testimony.

Most of the peers present were ready to decide as the judges wished; a few hesitated, and unanimity was necessary. One evidence yet remained, the young son of the Earl of Lancaster. It was proposed by the advocates, that he should be brought into the hall, and invited to point out his mother. The length of time which had elapsed since he had been separated from his true parent, made Agatha's party anticipate a sure triumph, when the court required that this experiment should be final.

The claimants were now removed to a conspicuous elevation, and a space left vacant before them, that the child's actions should not be impeded. At his entrance, a death-like silence prevailed; curiosity and suspense seemed to be wound up to agony; while every eye at-

ternately turned on him and, on the women, to watch this appeal to nature, and to hear in what language her sovereign decree would be promulgated. The noble boy advanced with a firm step, and conscious that he was in the hall of his forefathers, cast an indignant glance on those whom he deemed impertinent intruders. Agatha, with fond blandishments, invited him to her embraces, and held up the splendid cross which she wore at her girdle to hasten his obedience. He advanced a few steps towards her, then paused, attracted by another object, and rivetted to the earth by another sound. How did the breast of every parent that day assembled in the hall of Kenilworth, then vibrate! but how infinitely more tremulous were the throbs of her bosom, who for more than one long year had sickened with desire to see the beloved of her heart, and now beheld him, improved in every beauty, the in-

fant arbiter of her life and fame ! Every various feeling of maternal sensibility followed in rapid succession. It seemed at first as if her soul had flown to meet her darling ; while the same thrilling transport which expanded her intellects, chained her limbs to the earth ; her eyes devoured each fair accession to his early loveliness, with riotous accession of joy ; then gracefully checked by pious gratitude, she raised the swollen orbs to Heaven, and inarticulate praise spoke in copious tears. Again her hasty looks sought her child. He was now moving toward Agatha. This was too much for sufferance. Shall a deceiver be eloquent, and a mother mute ? She sunk upon her knees, and stretching out her arms toward the beautiful Edmund, chaunted a few lines of the tender plaint she sung to him at Canford : —

Look at me still, my lovely child,
Trace every feature, worn and wild,
It is thy mother, she who smiled
On thy soft bloom !

She could proceed no further ; for her own Edmund gave the wished response, and rushing, with an arrow's swiftness, into her arms, exclaimed,

Dearest mother, well-a-day !

A long, loud, universal shout shook the towers of royal Kenilworth ; it was reiterated, and the voices of the partial men, who misrepresented the character of British justice, now calling out silence, were unheard. Again and again were the acclamations repeated, while the child and the mother seemed in the transporting ecstasy of their strict embrace, to lose the recollection of all former woes.

The tumult died away in fainter sounds, and the presiding judge severely censuring the indecorum of thus interrupting judicial proceedings, and anticipating the decision, asked the peers if they would consent to hear one more witness, who had just announced that he

had some information to communicate, most essential to the clear decision of the cause. All eyes were turned to the bar, at which an interesting and extraordinary groupe now solicited attention; consisting of a youth, leading a blind old harper, and an aged woman, whose aspect and gesture denoted anguish and distraction. The minstrel attempted to speak; but hardly had he uttered the words "Lady Emma Audley," when the court was again interrupted by loud and tremendous cries. It was soon known that Lord Surrey was seized with those extraordinary convulsions, which were universally believed to be the effect of demoniacal possession. The appearance of the wretched man, as he was borne through the crowd, confirmed the presumption that he was labouring under the severest paroxysms of supernatural visitations; and it was soon known that the harper was come to accuse him of

being accessory to a murder, committed in his early youth on the sons of that unhappy lady, who also were his play-mates and friends. No one wondered that Satan should seize such a monster in his iron grasp; and though the improved state of science now forbids us to appeal to demoniacal agency for what may be explained by physical causes, infidelity has no cause to suppose that the arguments in favour of the moral government of Providence are weakened by these discoveries. Whether the Almighty acts by the effect of terror on the nervous system, or by the instrumentality of those evil ones, who, while they labour to impede his purposes, actually minister to his will, matter is still subjected to the influence of mind, and the dominion of conscience in this life proves the responsibility of the human soul in the next.

The execrations of the spectators, on this discovery of Surrey's early perfidy

and treachery, were as loud and universal as their scarcely subsided acclamations. It could not be said that the identity of Alicia was confirmed by this foul stain on the escutcheon of Surrey ; but the inference was undeniable, that the man, who in his boyhood consented to an assassination, would not, in his mature age, shrink from a conspiracy which, through the disgrace and death of a lady who rejected his vows, aimed at the destruction of a rival ; and the infuriated Agatha, anticipating the sentence, shewed by her countenance that the disgrace of her champion had deprived her of every hope.

The judge who presided perceived the weight of facts was too strong for him to attempt any longer to restrain the torrent of opinion. He admitted the case was now clear, and left the peers to their uninfluenced decision. All his attachment to the court could not, he knew,

procure a determination against the house of Lancaster ; he could only silence the testimony attempted to be produced against Lord Surrey, by observing, that the evidence of a strolling harper, and a woman evidently distracted, respecting a crime committed twenty years before, could not be recorded against a nobleman of the first rank. The appearance of old Lloyd in a court of justice was solely attributable to his anxiety to save Alicia. He well knew that the relic of Madoc's royal house was safer as a mountain hunter among his native tribes than under the protection of an English king ; and he placed implicit faith on the local prophecies, which asserted that Glendore, or his descendants, should one day make the race of Edward tremble. It was only to assist in saving another innocent victim from Surrey's murderous grasp, that he drew the Lady Emma Audley

from that retirement which best suited her irremediable woes.

With the cowardice common to a character in which venality is combined with intrigue, and avarice is prompted by luxurious habits, Beatrice now shuddered at the responsibility which she had undertaken, by combining her fate with Agatha's; and falling on her knees, offered to make a full confession. Willing to acquire some popularity, and knowing that the sacrifice of so mean an instrument would give those whom he was so desirous to conciliate no concern, the judge refused to hear any discovery which so base a creature could make. The cause, he said, was sufficiently clear; and bowing to the peers, he proposed that the verdict should be given by acclamation. He then left his seat, to be the first who congratulated the Countess of Lancaster on a decision which restored

her to the possession of fame and fortune.

Aware that every attention was due to the conciliatory advances of one whose judicial importance and weight with the King might accelerate the efforts he would instantly make to rescind the unjust sentence passed against Lancaster, the Earl of Leicester conducted Alicia to receive the compliment, and she relinquished the hand of her son, to take that of the chief-justice. She relinquished it but for a moment, but in that moment the child was seized, seized by the diabolical Agatha, with a yell of exultation, that had nothing human in its sound; and with a rapid agility, in which the habits of her predatory life left her without an equal, she flew across the hall, with Edmund in her arms; and while the astounded spectators wondered if it were a mortal or an infernal imp that whizzed by them with a velocity which defied pursuit, sud-

uddenly the desperate wretch appeared on one of the projecting pinnacles of the castle, menacing destruction to herself and the young heir whom she held above the battlements.

It was not only the breast of the gasping mother that panted with deadly throes at this sight, the sympathy of every beholder was too vehement for utterance or motion; it appeared as if the wand of an enchanter had suddenly petrified the assembly, and rooted them in the attitude of dismay. A voice at last uttered, "She is dead!" "Dashed in pieces, in the court!" was the exclamation of a second. Then followed an universal cry of "Where is the child?" "We cannot see him," was repeated in tones of mingled consolation and fear. Multitudes then vociferated, "He is safe! he is safe! his uncle is bringing him in his arms. He lives, he smiles, he runs, he kisses his senseless mother. Live, live,

O, injured lady, thy trials are all past.
Hark ! 'tis thine own lovely child, who
again chaunts that reviving strain. Let
all listen to the sweet babe, for he sings
in the lady's cold dull ear,

“ Dearest mother, well-a-day ! ”

Alicia slowly revived. She heard not
the sentence which restored her to life
and fame ; she was even insensible to the
joy of being saluted as the true, faithful
wife of the Earl of Lancaster. She only
saw her rescued child, whom, with a
phrenzy of joy that amounted to agony,
she held to her heart, and looked wildly
on all around her, even on the weeping
Matilda and the faithful Leicester, as if
they were going to tear him from her.
It was a long time ere she could listen to
a description of his rescue, or believe that
Leicester, unappalled by her curses and
invocations of infernal coadjutors to
seize and torture him, pursued the ma-

lignant Agatha with the same measured speed along the stair-cases and corridors, unable to overtake, but so near that his extended hand seemed within a span of the stretched-out arms of the beseeching child. The door which opened on the turret, to which Agatha directed her flight, closed with a spring, and the instant that it admitted her, it shut out Leicester, and with him, apparently, every hope of young Edmund's preservation. Here, menacing self-destruction, and glorying at having secured the means of vengeance, she shewed the heir of so many hopes to the multitude he was born to lead and protect; pointed at the abyss down which she could precipitate him; and persuaded that any terms would be offered for his preservation, alternately shouted with triumph, and laughed with blaspheming impiety. But there was another way of gaining this pinnacle, unknown to Agatha, which Leicester in-

stantly explored, while her attention was fixed on the crowd in the court. Henry felt his hand grasp young Edmund's; he could not clearly state the rest, for he knew not whether he pushed Agatha over the battlements, or if the deed were her own. But the darling child vaulted to his bosom, and clung to his neck with the grasp of vital necessity, while he saw the wretched being, human only in her form, descend in rapid whirls to the flinty pavement, where her guilty life awfully terminated.

CHAP. XXXVI.

He is a man, setting his fault aside,
 Of virtuous honour, which buys out his fault ;
 Nor did he soil the fact with cowardice,
 But with a noble fury, and fair spirit,
 Seeing his reputation touch'd to death,
 He did oppose his foe.

SHAKESPEARE.

IGNORANT of the events lately related, Lancaster, and his faithful companion Humphrey de Bohun, proceeded toward the north. As the former had seemed to assent to the proposal of seeking a refuge in the court of Scotland, no intreaties could prevail on the brave Hereford to leave him. His personal acquaintance with Bruce, while he was a prisoner at his court, might, he thought, be serviceable, in bespeaking an honourable reception for the princely exile, on the score of that

generous prédilection which brave men feel for each other, and this, his own experience of the noble nature of the liberator of Scotland assured him would not now be withheld.

The Earls conversed as they rode along ; but Lancaster felt his domestic woes too deeply to enter upon that theme. From the maladministration of Edward, and the miserable condition of England, they wandered to the virtues of Robert Bruce and the state of Scotland, free and flourishing under his able government : from hence the transition to the fatal conflict at Bannock was rapid. Hereford enumerated the deeds and the fall of each English captain of renown ; and his eyes again paid their oft-repeated tribute to the loyalty and princely virtues of the Earl of Gloucester.

“ But,” said Lancaster interrupting, with somewhat of the jealousy of partial friendship, this eulogium on the grand-

son of Edward the Great, “ why is my friend silent to the claims of another hero, whom the endeared intimacies of peculiar affection, as well as ardent attachment to the cause to which we are pledged, bound to both our hearts : our compatriot Guy de Beauchamp, on whom my sword bestowed knighthood, my companion in that disastrous campaign when, after the defection of the other barons, Bruce drove me into the border fortresses ? The strange vicissitudes of my own fortunes have so engrossed my thoughts, that I am still ignorant of the manner of his death, though his mournful spirit visited me on the heights of Montserrat, and pointed where the vanquished host of England, in fading flashes, rapidly descended down the northern sky, while Scotland’s symbol expanded as lord of the ascendant. Tell me, Hereford, how did Warwick fall, and name the Highland lairds and Lowland captains

whom he first sacrificed to Matilda's beauty and England's glory !”

“ Are you then,” said Hereford, “ the only man in England who still remains ignorant that the death of Warwick, while it bathed every honest face with tears, stained the escutcheon of our king with the foulest suspicion ?” He proceeded to narrate the circumstances. Men who writhe under the pressure of recent injury are rarely candid. Lancaster's eyes flashed vindictive fire, while he doubted if the man on whom even slander was able to fix the imputation of poisoning the brave peer he had just ostensibly pardoned, could be the genuine son of a magnanimous monarch. Much unroyal baseness, much revengeful meanness, something alike cowardly, cruel, and perfidious, must have been discernible in his conduct, before even an idiot could have been made to believe a King of England would drug the bowl of hospitality for

the noble guest who sat unsuspecting at his banquet.

Wrapped in indignant musings Lancaster rode on, till from an eminence he discerned the situations of the rival castles of Pontefract and Sandal, when he again conjured Hereford to leave him. His manner was that of a man bent on some desperate enterprize, and De Bohun thus understood it. With affectionate sternness, he exclaimed, "I can die, Lancaster, and thou canst do no more! My fortunes are thy fortunes; thy king shall be my king; and now tell me what dost thou need,—my word, my purse, or my sword?"

Lancaster answered, that his thriftless poverty would no longer attempt to throw away the treasure he so much needed. His bugle sounded, and a host of cuirassiers instantly issued from the neighbouring wood, formed, and unfurled the red rose standard. Hereford understanding

that as a token of Lancaster's determination to appeal to arms, drew his sword, and asked his friend which way they should shape their course.

Lancaster pointed to Pontefract. "I have already told thee," said he, "that Heaven has not made me childless, but hell has interrupted my widowed sorrows, by conjuring up a fiend to be my torment. The King has awarded my son to a base impostor, who claims to be his mother; but my sword may maintain my paternal right, and enable me to rescue my child from that castle, and to take him with me to Scotland."

"When the fountain of justice is dry," answered De Bohun, "deeds are a better way of petitioning the throne than words. A nobleman may enter his own castle, and a father claim possession of his child, without unfurling the banner of rebellion."

The Earl of Lancaster spurred on his

horse, and had now advanced to the river. On the opposite bank stood his horsemen, in complete array. He paused ere he passed the stream. The affections of the father and the patriot struggled for mastery: the one recalling the accusations of Pendergrass, and his own solemn determination never to justify popular insurrection, by taking arms against his prince in revenge of his private wrongs; the other presenting the insupportable idea of his own child trained to abhor and abjure him, led about like a beggar's changeling, the puppet of a cheat, and Surrey's slave. It was once the first wish of his heart to be known to posterity as the faithful friend of the King and realm of England. He had truly spoken when he told his mother that the domestic relations could not make him a more ardent lover of his country; and the fears which suggested the possibility that those ties would counteract his sense

of public duty, were prophetic. Had he never been a husband or a father, he would not now have been a banished man, seeking protection from the enemy of England, or meditating an invasion of the public peace. He could have endured the consciousness of his own slandered fame, his dignity insulted, and his rights invaded, from the hope that the vicegerence of truth and retribution would return; but there were provocations beyond the reach of patience, namely, the incurable contamination of his son's principles, by the influence of the base society to which he was familiarized. Many brave avengers of his wrongs would in time arise, who, as Leicester predicted, would cleanse the tarnished diadem of England; but ere justice could be awakened from her trance, and the voice of truth pierce the deaf ear of power, Edmund Plantagenet would be stamped with the indelible marks of a terrified

driveller, or a slothful voluptuary, even if the continuance of his life were still deemed necessary to further the machinations of his father's foes. That reflection determined him; but the front of his offending should be no more than the recovery of his child. When loyalty squares with the first laws of our being, it is better to be a resentful subject than an unnatural father. "My young eaglet must not be stung to death by adders," said he, as dashing through the ford he presented himself to the armed array whom he had previously appointed to assemble in privacy near Pontefract.

He was received in silence, according to the prescribed injunctions. The countenance of every horseman seemed to partake of the solemnity of his leader; all touched their bonnets, in token of acquiescence, while he pointed to the turrets of the castle to which he had been.

informed Agatha retired when the estates of De Lacy were awarded to her ; for his knowledge extended no further. The Earls entered the gates, meeting neither with resistance nor information ; the temporary retinue which Agatha had collected were either dismissed to their usual occupations, or had formed her travelling suite ; and Lancaster stood with Hereford in the deserted hall ; the former blending the half frantic rage of disappointment with recollections no less painful, for here he first met his lost Alicia, whose visionary resemblance seemed to flit before him, and stimulate his resolution to recover her child ; the latter leaning on the sword he wished to have stained with the blood of the usurpers of De Lacy's honours, and the polluters of that residence where he had so often enjoyed the cheerful rites of hospitality. All was now bare, tenantless, and silent.

Meanwhile the horsemen, searching the environs, discovered the porter, who at the approach of a force which he had no means to resist, had set open the gates, and endeavoured to conceal himself. This man was dragged before the Earl, and commanded that if he would preserve his life, he should discover whither the Countess had fled. The man protested that he was ignorant of his lady's proceedings, and could only say that the valuable furniture had been removed to Sandal-castle, which place she frequently visited. The fury of Lancaster needed no other incentive to fan it into an inextinguishable blaze: the demon who corroded his peace, and cankered his fame, was in the castle of his enemy. His son was also there, for the porter said his lady never suffered the young Sir Edmund to be out of her sight. One blow might crush the twin serpents, and liberate the child. He forgot, in those strong paroxysms of

fury which the chilling associations connected with Pontefract had conjured up, his first design, of limiting his resistance to the laws to the simple act of taking his son with him to Scotland. Turning to his horsemen, he asked who durst follow him to Sandal-castle. The answer was unanimous, " All ;" and the Earl of Hereford demanded that he might shew the way.

The intermediate space was quickly passed ; but the assailants found the gates of Sandal secured, the drawbridge drawn up, and lights in every apartment. " We shall surprize these revellers," said Lancaster ; while Hereford advised, that the greater part of their troop should conceal themselves behind the shade of a projecting tower, while himself and a few attendants asked admission as benighted travellers. In return to their summons, the warder answered that the Earl of Surrey was not in the castle, and during his

absence no guests were admitted. Hereford continued in parley, announcing his name, and pleading his necessity, to give time to one of his esquires to swim across the moat, who, creeping close under the walls, sprung from behind the buttress which supported the arched porch, and seized the unconscious warder, who had scarce time to spring the alarm before he fell lifeless at the foot of his opponent. The drawbridge was lowered, and the Earls with their troopers were within the court, before the vassals of Surrey could close the inner gates, or concert any plan of defence.

It was some time before the loud and reiterated supplications for quarter roused the clemency of Lancaster, to stop the work of destruction which his followers instantly commenced on the retainers of Surrey, so deeply was his attention fixed on the band of revellers whom he had surprized. But in the dissolute and now terrified

rout, he did not trace the features of any woman who could pass for his lost Alicia, nor could he find his child. Every hand and eye implored life, and every tongue seemed ready to confess all they knew of their lord's machinations. The Earl of Surrey was gone to London, with the Countess of Lancaster and the young Sir Edmund, to answer the allegations of the Abbess of Kirklee, of whose audacity in detaining a vassal of their lord's, and his subsequent violation of her convent, they told an incoherent tale, from which Lancaster could only gather that to brutality Surrey did not hesitate to add sacrilege.

Casting a stern glance on the countenances of these women, whose manners announced them to be wantons, and shuddering while they spoke of a woman bearing the name of his wife as their companion, and his son as their playmate, he was almost tempted to efface the

stain with their blood. The momentary impulse was quickly counteracted by that generous disdain which scorns to sacrifice those who cannot resist, and that decorous guardianship of the weaker sex which makes man deem the form of woman sacred, even when her polluted mind exhibits the fiend rather than the angel. He turned from these degraded beings, to muse on the cruel disappointment of his hopes, and the misery of having committed an unwarrantable aggression, without fixing on his enemy such a share of turpitude as would exonerate him from the reproach of having broken the public peace, when Maud de Nersford, the favourite courtesan of Surrey, either wrought upon by fear, stimulated by jealousy of her paramour's infidelity, or weary of a life equally miserable and guilty, gave a sign to the Earl of Lancaster that she wished to speak to him

apart. Fortified against the snares of meretricious beauty, by the purity of his morals and the sincerity of his grief, and requiring no other protection from treachery than his native courage and skill in arms, he firmly grasped his sword and ran after her, as, holding up a lamp, and beckoning him to follow, she mounted the staircase that led to the apartments which his consort once inhabited. There, drawing aside a crimson canopy suspended over the chair of state, she held up the lamp, and shewed him inscribed on the wall, in the well known characters of his lamented Alicia, the following solemn testimony of her wrongs and her fidelity.

Dumb stones that many a tedious night
 Have seen me watch the wasting light,
 To every dreadful fear a prey,
 Yet loathing the return of day,
 Which shewed unchang'd my doom,

Retain the impress of my woes,
And to my Lancaster disclose,
That not in Wimborn's holy cell,
But here, where fiends incarnate dwell,
I found a living tomb:

A cold, faint stupor, resembling the immediate prognostic of death, withered the strength of Lancaster: he reeled, and sunk senseless on the earth; but revived in the arms of Hereford, who, more chary of his safety than himself, observing a woman beckon him away, and suspicious of some snare, followed him to this remote turret. At the same moment the chiefs exchanged inquiries; Hereford eagerly asking where he was wounded, and Lancaster asking what was become of his conductor.

“ She has escaped,” said Bohun, who seeing the Earl fall at the moment he entered the chamber, concluded that Maud had stabbed him, and hurled his javelin with misdirected fury to punish the crime.

Lancaster bitterly reprobated the deed ; for though the lance of Hereford, guiltless of blood, trembled in the wall, his rashness had sealed the lips of one who, he was well assured, could have given him full intelligence of his consort's fate. He was now certain that she had been surreptitiously conveyed from Canford, and in this castle, nay in this very room, had endured the extremities of grief and misery. Perhaps these walls still inclosed her, and his now silenced informant alone knew the dungeon where she languished. Intolerable suggestion, as neither of the Earls could recognize the features of the woman, who, half veiled and wrapped in her mantle, gave him a signal to follow her.

After a minute but unavailing examination of the apartment, which afforded no further discoveries, Lancaster returned to the hall, where Surrey's whole household were now assembled. These

They were separately interrogated as to their knowledge of a lady whom their master had kept a prisoner, and whose liberation should procure their freedom, and preserve the castle. A persuasion that she was irrecoverably lost, made them wary and equivocal in their replies. They owned a lady had been brought to Sandal-castle; some said in a state of distraction, others, that she appeared dying. "She was detained many months, and treated with great respect and kindness," said some; others unwarily acknowledged that their lord slew one of his pages who attempted to facilitate her escape. At last it was allowed that she seemed very wretched; no one remembered seeing her smile; all had beheld her in tears! "Was it known that this was the Countess of Lancaster?" A general look of astonishment answered that question. The Countess of Lancaster was a gay, happy lady, who

feasted, drank, hunted, and laughed with their lord. There was, indeed, a resemblance in their persons, a striking similitude in their voices. Lancaster trembled, while Hereford observed that if manners only stamped the difference, prosperous and adverse fortune changed the character. An incautious girl answered, " they could not be the same; for some months before the Countess of Lancaster and her child first visited Sandal-castle, the melancholy lady trying to escape, was drowned in the moat. Her veil and mantle were brought to Lord Surrey, who was instantly seized with one of those dire visitations to which he was subject."

Lancaster raised his bonnet from his head, in an act of adoration. The expression of his countenance was inexpressible grief, blended with devout submission, and even a grateful feeling, that his Alicia had been preserved from disho-

nour, that her fidelity had been unimpugned, and that she was thus mournfully distinguished from the wretch who dishonoured her name; when Hereford's inquiries being answered by an assurance that, after the most minute search, the body had never been found, revived a faint possibility of her preservation. The impetuous Hereford proposed setting fire to this den of murder, and choaking, with its ruins, the water that had been Alicia's grave, when a horseman sounded at the gate. Lancaster's men had gained possession of the countersign, and questioned the stranger, who readily answered that he was a knight, charged by the King and council of England with important dispatches to Robert Bruce; and having also a message from the Lord Surrey to his seneschal, he came to lodge that night in Sandal-castle. He was instantly admitted, but remained ignorant of the

castle's having been seized by the Lancastrians, till he was conducted to the great hall, where Hereford sat in the baron's chair of justice, and Lancaster reclined over it with a countenance personifying the form of inexorable vengeance roused by unpardonable provocations. To these stern inquisitors, the emissary was now led: he advanced with a courageous mien, but as he passed the hearth affected to stumble, and drawing a letter from his bosom, threw it into the flames, from which, unknown to him, it was snatched and conveyed to the Earl of Hereford, to whom he was required to deliver his dispatches.

The knight attempted to grasp his sword, but his arms were instantly restrained, and resistance was impossible. A packet, marked with the royal signet, was taken from him, and the only inquiry he was called to answer was, did he receive his commission from the

King or from his council? The messenger was prompt and bold in his answers, saying he was a banneret in Earl Surrey's suite, employed on public business, and charged with royal credentials. He further added, that the masters whom he served were mighty, and would revenge any wrong that was offered to their servants or their possessions.

“Of that we shall hereafter stand question,” said the Earl of Hereford. “This document is directed to the King of Scotland, and the impress testifies that the council of the King of England recognize Robert Bruce by that title. By virtue of our birth, as well as special commission, the Earl of Lancaster and myself are privileged to sit at that board and give our voice in its deliberations, consequently our repute is committed by its decisions. We will therefore publickly examine on what important subject, touching the weal of

Christendom, the loyal and sage advisers with whom officially we act in concert, have counselled King Edward to commune with one whom he thus acknowledges his equal in rank, and to whom the world has long ascribed a rare portion of kingly virtues."

The envoy protested against this violation of the sanctity of his deputation, and threatened to bear testimony against them as traitors. Unmindful of his vapourings, the Earls perused the dispatches: the cheek of Hereford reddened with rage and shame, as, with an indignant smile, he asked his compatriot if he were now determined. Lancaster gave a resolute affirmative, and looked at their prisoner, who continued firm, calling all to witness that he had been faithful to his employers. Hereford determined him to be an audacious knave; but Lancaster, even while labouring under the liveliest sense of unpardonable

injuries, exercised his wonted magnanimity, and answered his colleague, "He bears himself nobly; let us beware of shedding innocent blood." Addressing the envoy, Lancaster proceeded, "I will not, Sir Knight, offend a brave man by urging the power I have over his life as a motive to induce him to do what his conscience reprobates, but I would ask you, on your oath as a knight, and on your salvation as a christian, know you the purport of the errand on which you are employed?"

The knight answered that his demeanour proved he considered it to be nothing misbecoming an honourable man. He was a noble born gentleman, educated in Lord Surrey's service, from whom he received his spurs; but he was not in the King's secrets, nor wished to be in those of his patron.

"It is fitting then," replied the Earl of Hereford, "you should know to

what actions royalty invites its brother sovereign." He proceeded to read the letter addressed to the King of Scotland: it was sealed with the King's signet, to which was superadded a blank charter authenticated by the great seal of England. The letter invited Robert Bruce to claim whatever conditions of peace he judged his kingdom's weal required, provided he would speedily compass the death of a man laden with the guilt of murder, sedition, and treason. It then named, as the proscribed person, the Earl of Lancaster, who was about to seek an asylum in his court.

The knight disdainfully disclaimed all knowledge of such treachery; but Hereford proceeded, "The hunted lion must learn a lesson from the fox, and the Lord Surrey's is among the signatures of those who, having persuaded the King that a treaty written in the blood of the Plantagenets will be most binding,

are not ashamed of shewing to the nation that owes its independence to their baseness, how well an assassin's hand will unite to a fool's head and a coward's heart. It may be that this honourable counsellor may dilate to his household governor upon his brave endeavours to render the throne of his prince permanent; and doubtless, Sir Knight, the purity of your lord's intentions have given to this parchment an indestructible temperament, for the flames have only melted the seal, which permits us to see if the Lord Surrey is one entire, consistent piece of Nature's handy-work in his private morals as well as in his public policy."

The prisoner's cheek now blushed with horror, as he anticipated a doom which he knew Surrey's private communications to his seneschal would justify; for they not only unravelled the mystery of Agatha's imposture, but afforded

what transported the Earl of Lancaster from the indecision of despair to vindictive energy, — the intelligence that his beloved Alicia was alive, that she had appealed to the King, and had been thrown into prison as a cheat and a slanderer. As, however, there was a probability that her claims could not be silenced, the seneschal was commanded to collect all the documents in his power that might corroborate the assertion, that the wandering sorceress was Countess of Lancaster. It also warranted him to put full confidence in the bearer, who, beside being announced as one worthy to be intrusted with the death-warrant of Lancaster, was acknowledged to be the master of the vessel which conveyed Alicia de Lacy from Canford-castle.

Mercy to such a confirmed and specious villain would have been injustice to society. “ We sit in Surrey’s seat of judicature,” said the Earl of Hereford,

“ and will save him the charge of feeding one miscreant. Erect the gallows opposite the gate at which, like a trustworthy knave, expert and remorseless, apt at falsity, and deaf to the pleadings of virtuous beauty, he delivered to his lecherous lord the wife of this princely Earl. And, base ravisher! though there was then no sword to rescue the distraught lady, call to mind, as the hangman performs his office, her unpitied despair.”

“ Down, down, accursed towers, which echoed with her cries!” said the Earl of Lancaster. “ Foul den of lust, intemperance, and violence; never more shall these walls resound with the voice of frantic revel, nor send forth the oppressor and his myrmidons to contaminate innocence and outrage honour.” He snatched a brand from the hearth as he spoke, and applied it to the carved tracery. His action was imitated by his

indignant followers. The castle, fired in an hundred places, quickly presented an universal blaze; while the abandoned inhabitants, barely escaping with their lives, wrung their hands in silence as they witnessed the awful conflagration of the scene of their criminality and their enjoyment. Its flames lighted the execution of that instrument of Surrey's crimes who had so boldly glossed over his infamy with the mantle of courageous knighthood. By a singular coincidence, the gallows was erected close to the yew that had been rendered so memorable by the fate of Eubulo, and his execrated remains were flung on the stony tumulus which marked the unburied relics of the late repentant youth. The fury of the Earl of Lancaster being in some degree assuaged by this act of justice, his subsiding thoughts had time to determine on the measures instantly to be pursued. The blazing towers of Sandal served

as a beacon to summon the neighbouring peasantry, whom the tyranny of Surrey led to view the destruction of his castle as an assurance of their emancipation from his yoke. These, with shouts, hailed the good Earl of Lancaster, and offered to enrol under his standard. Hereford remarked this prompt offer of service as an encouraging omen, and pointing to the conflagration, asked if that was to be their torch to light them to sepulchres in Scotland. "Rather to direct me to burst the prison which contains my wife," answered Lancaster. "I must proclaim my wrongs in the presence of our King and kinsman. The fame of these summary acts of vindictive justice will doubtless speed before me, and the palace gates will be barred against my entrance. But the throne of England shall tremble under Edward, if I am unredressed."

"Ever brave and wise are your deci-

sions," answered Bohun. " I have many a stout heart in my earldom who would like to visit London in your suite, and to help you ring a peal in the ears of their sleeping sovereign. I crave your pardon, Lancaster; for to my conception, Edward has forfeited that title and our allegiance."

Lancaster sternly answered that the oath which bestowed power on the King, was meant to secure the life and property of the subject. The wise distinctions which have, since that age, been established, rendering the person of the prince sacred, and his ministers amenable for a misuse of his authority, were not understood; and the facile instruments of despotism went on unchecked by the dread of impending responsibility, till discontent ripened into a hurricane which shook the foundations of the monarchy, and overturned its head. Lancaster kissed the hilt of his sword, and kneel-

ing, swore by the bloody trophies it had often gained him, that he would never more obey a foul conspirator, nor confide his life to the specious clemency of a treacherous pardon. Violent measures being thus agreed upon, the noblemen parted to collect their respective friends, appointing Burton-upon-Trent as their place of rendezvous, where they determined to proclaim the King incapable of government, and themselves guardians of the succession of his son, and, as soon as they were in sufficient force, proceed to London.

CHAP. XXXVII.

Mine honesty and I begin to square ;
 Tho' loyalty, well held, to fools does make
 Our faith mere folly : yet he, that can endure
 To follow with allegiance a fall'n Lord,
 Does conquer him that did his master conquer,
 And earns a place i'th' story.

SHAKESPEARE.

DISCONTENTED ambition had already added domestic war to the overflowing cup of England's bitterness. The factions of Mortimer and Spenser opposing each other, appealed to the sword ; and the former, affecting to join the patriotic lords, laid waste the lands and burnt the castles of the King's favourites. For this offence the chiefs of that name had been seized and committed to the tower, where sentence of death was passed upon them. The aged assassin of

Emma Audley's sons died in that gloomy residence; but powerful influence suspended the sentence of the gentle Mortimer, who, secure of an intercessor; even while in prison was bold enough to attempt to make himself master of the fortress where he lay, and his plot being discovered, he was a second time doomed to a public execution: but escaping every danger, and cunningly liberated from thralldom, he took refuge in France, from whence he returned to fill up the measure of his own iniquities as the punisher of an unjust prince. This task he executed with implacable severity, as is generally the case when the Almighty delegates the rod of his vengeance to those who, hardened by habits of vice, are disposed to mark what is done amiss, rather than to temper judgement with mercy. After the barbarous assassination of one who was less criminal than himself, Roger Mortimer

terminated his career by suffering the deserved death of a rebel and regicide.

The Earl of Lancaster's friends were not idle. Assembled in parliament, they voted the banishment of the Spencers; but the cabal who now governed England were of a different order of men from the weak, voluptuous foreigner, whom they succeeded in the invidious distinctions of the King's love and the people's enmity. Comprehending many a powerful baron, energetic and arbitrary as well as aspiring, they had not left themselves without resources; and instead of submitting to the sentence of exile, they collected a powerful force, which, with the King at their head, bade defiance to opposition. The Queen was first gratified by the ruin of the nobleman from whom she had received a private insult; the castle which refused her the rights of hospitality was burned, and its owner hanged. The people who

had been kept neutral by a proclamation, signifying that the King only took arms to avenge this indignity to his consort, were alarmed at seeing the royal army augmented instead of dispersed, and marching northward with the avowed intent of dismantling Warwick-castle, in consequence of the new Earl's having given indications of a disposition to inquire into the cause of his predecessor's death.

The proceedings of the Earls of Hereford and Lancaster were instantly known at court. England, though the "seat of men of mighty minds," has ever also "contained a nest of hollow bosoms;" and the falling fortunes of a master, however kind and worthy, look tremendous in the eyes of cowardice, and suggest to treachery a hope, that by a timely removal of one of its supports, the ruin thus accelerated may furnish materials for a decent edifice, in which the

traitor may sit secure, shadowed by the vine of plenty.

The most trusted knight in the suite of the Earl of Lancaster, gained over by the court, acted as a spy upon his lord's actions. Sir Robert Holland, discovering that the King's enmity to his master was fomented by advisers who would not stop at half measures, but would use any means to compass the ruin on which they were determined, meditated on the expediency of securing himself. Not only was Lancaster's desire of securing an asylum with Robert Bruce disclosed to King Edward, as soon as it was entertained, as also the Earl of Hereford's determined adherence to the fortunes of his friend; but a warning was given that some sudden explosion might be expected, from the gloomy reserve and sullen anger of his general deportment; and when the storm burst on Sandal-castle, a trusty esquire was hastened to inform

the King that the die was cast, the two Earls in open rebellion, and himself dispatched to the north, to raise the vassals of the counties palatine, while Lancaster collected the retainers of De Lacy in the neighbourhood of Pontefract. The messenger returned with equal speed to advise Holland, that the royal army, elated by their easy conquest of Lord Baddesmere, had already proceeded northwards, and would soon be heard of at Warwick. His own instructions were that while he ostensibly executed his commission, he should confer privily with Sir Andrew Harclay, the governor of Carlisle, whom he would thus make acquainted with such knights and gentlemen in Cheshire and Lancashire, who preferred their feudal lord to their sovereign; and when all was ripe, Harclay could easily collect the border garrisons, and defeat a new-raised levy betrayed by their leader. Then proceeding onwards,

they were to cut off the retreat of the Earls into the north, while the royal army, advancing from Warwick, would prevent their design of pressing toward London.

The disturbed state of the kingdom interrupting the regular communications, it was in the power of Holland to conceal from the Earl of Lancaster all knowledge of the King's state of preparation, or the intelligence that Alicia's cause would be tried at Kenilworth, till the agonized husband had braced on that mail which afterwards it was more dangerous to lay aside than to retain. The post which the Earl of Leicester dispatched to communicate the happy tidings that his wife and son were safe in the protection of his friends, and the base conspiracy dissolved, sought him at the court of Scotland. Ignorant on his part of his brother's intention to rescue his child from his enemies by force, Leicester himself fol-

lowed his messenger to the banks of the Forth, to invite the man of many woes to meet on the borders of England the faithful consort, who was journeying to join him as rapidly as her frame, exhausted by a succession of miseries, would permit.

Even on the first day of her deliverance, while the arm of her rosy boy circled her neck, impressed by his ardent kisses part of his own bloom on her faded cheek, and with honied accents told her how tenderly he loved his own dear, true mother, Alicia felt but partially blest: her lord did not share her felicity; he was in exile, afflicted, desolate. No assurance that he was well, no dependance on the care and consolations of faithful Hereford, who now seemed in her eyes more than human, could allay her longings to heal the anguish and partake the lot of him she best loved. “ Dear and generous Leicester,

most kind Matilda," said she, "speak not of my fatigues and sufferings; the reconciling interview will obliterate all. Where now rests that head, under which my levities have planted a thorny pillow? Have I not proscribed the princely wanderer from the soil which only his virtues could ameliorate? The indigent ask their benefactor; the ingenious, their patron; England, her patriot. If I cannot give them back what I have driven from them, at least let me fly to restore Lancaster to himself, and make an eternal concord between him and his conscience, by shewing him his faithful wife at his feet, blessing him for the trial he imposed on her fidelity, and boasting that she is not only worthy of his forgiveness, but even of his confidence and love. Choose the fleetest steeds, Leicester; I will travel with you; for my spirit has long enured me to bodily endurance. Matilda shall follow more leisurely with

my child, whom I will only deprive of his father's first embrace, and then commend to his arms as a present solace and future support."

The strength of the Countess of Lancaster was not equal to her zeal. A severe indisposition retarded her departure from Kenilworth; and when she was able to travel, she was obliged to submit to the slow conveyance of a litter, and to proceed by short stages. The society of her beloved child, and her friend Matilda, would have made the most tedious travel delightful, had not the long-delayed hope of meeting her husband magnified the usual difficulties of a journey performed in a state of indisposition at a severe season. Leicester, as has been already observed, had speeded before to Edinburgh, to consult with his brother on what measures could be taken to expedite his reconciliation to King Edward; and he left the charge of conducting the ladies

to Sir Thomas Withers, a gallant knight, and faithfully attached to the house of Lancaster. The escort consisted of fifty chosen lancers, a number sufficient to overawe banditti, but too few to excite jealousy in the countries through which they passed. They carried with them tents and other necessaries for their journey, and were enjoined to avoid any intercourse with the inhabitants; it being Leicester's especial wish that, at this time, the court should have no ground for charging him with exciting popular discontent.

When the travellers arrived in the neighbourhood which had been the scene of Alicia's severest trials, she could not resist the strong desire she felt to repose once more in Kirklee's happy walls, to relate to the dear and venerable consoler of her griefs, the triumph which she had gained over her enemies, and to describe her restored prospects of connubial hap-

piness. Long and strict was the embrace in which Lady Emmeline held her beloved penitent, while in weeping silence she listened to her anticipations of golden days with her honoured and beloved Lancaster, restored to his country and to the King's confidence, by a full discovery of the guilty projects of his enemies. "You look incredulous, my honoured mother," said Alicia; "trust for once my happy divinations. I have that at my heart, which tells me all will finally be well."

"Doubtless, dearest daughter, it will," answered Lady Emmeline; "for the designs of Providence are not limited to the bounds of time. There is a world where the path of the upright is not crossed by human passions, nor rendered dangerous by the erratic course of those ministers of divine vengeance who are necessary in this state of moral discipline. In that world, motives are judged; but this only

takes cognizance of actions. There, I doubt not, thyself and thy noble husband will, like twin stars, shine serenely and gloriously. But prepare thy mind still to submit to privations and sorrows, till thou art liberated from this lower sphere, over which yon planet sheds a warning light. Her full-orbed splendour is but the harbinger of her wane, while her extinguished light announces her returning increase; thus she diffuses to us a mutability similar to her own. Pray for a peaceful transmission to a region which is above her influence."

The abbess blest Alicia and her child; and left them to repose, while she was closeted with Lady Matilda, to whom she communicated the heart-rending intelligence, that the Earl of Lancaster had taken arms to rescue his wife from prison, and, after having burnt Sandal-castle, was marching for London; but that, betrayed by his confidential knight, and cut

off from his resources, the King, with a powerful army, hemmed him in on the south, while the governor of Carlisle had advanced, and prevented the possibility of his retreat to Scotland. Few troops were with him; the activity of the King hindered the Earl of Hereford from bringing up his Welsh levies: he had, however, been personally joined by many a bold baron and gallant knight, whose love for him would not permit them to remain at home while his standard was flying in the field, though they saw it was surmounted by the sable plumes of death.

Ere the abbess had finished her painful intelligence, a horseman sounded at the gate, and rushing into the cloisters, demanded to speak with the Countess of Leicester. It was Sir Thomas Withers: his countenance was like that of a man who has just met an unearthly messenger, and heard him announce that he would be instantly assassinated. Too much engrossed

by the fearful tidings of which he was the bearer, to consider the indecorum of violating the sanctuary of vestal piety, he grasped the Lady Matilda's robe, and piteously exclaimed, that he had seen the Earl of Lancaster, seen him a prisoner, — the worthiest peer in christendom degraded and insulted by a brutal soldiery, — bound on his favourite charger, his hair shorn, his head crowned with ivy, his features covered with mire. “In this manner,” continued Withers, smiting his breast, “are they leading him to his own castle of Pontefract. More I know not, — more I never wish to know. Would to heaven I had died fighting by his banner! Blessed are they who have spilt their heart's blood in his service, ere they knew the issue of this last desperate contest!”

Withers now proceeded to state, that finding all the passes to the south secured, the Earls pressed northward; but at-

tempting to cross the river Eure, at Borough-bridge, were opposed by Sir Andrew Harclay and his northern forces. The numbers were unequal, but the contest was terrible, till the brave and faithful Bohun, after having cleared the bridge by a vigorous charge, was slain by a cowardly assassin in Harclay's bands, who, going under it, pierced him with a spear, through the chinks of the boards, of which wound he instantly died. The soldiers of Lancaster, disheartened at this disaster, fled, but their leaders remained. These formed a faithful band around the Earl, and in vain attempted to rally the deserters. They next made an effort to gain the fastnesses in Richmondshire, and from thence retreat by the eastern road to Scotland, but being closely pressed, only a few of the fugitives escaped; the Earl was taken prisoner, with fourscore and fifteen knights, who, true to the last, resolved

to die with him that had long been the polar star which led them to honour in the senate and glory in the field.

Withers now requested Lady Matilda's instructions. Though his band consisted of tried veterans, they were too few to attempt a rescue; and he was not only charged with the precious safety of the Countess of Lancaster and her son, but was also the conservator of Leicester's allegiance, whom it would be madness to commit, in a hopeless cause, by an act of unjustifiable rashness. It could not be denied that the Earl was taken prisoner in open rebellion. In strictness, his life and estates were forfeited; and though they who held in their hands the bloody scourge of the law would not stay its inflictions to inquire what were the cruel provocations which stimulated the aggressor to resistance, it was still hoped that the King would hesitate to imbrue his hands in his kinsman's blood. Cle-

mercy was once the best feature in Edward's character: his mercy must be humbly supplicated. Perhaps satiate with the humiliation and wretchedness of the causers of Gaveston's death, he might consent to recollect the friend and companion he had once loved, and the subject from whom he had received essential services. At least, from respect to his own race, he might allow Lancaster to enjoy the comforts of his domestic relations in exile, even if he would not permit the injurious treatment which the Earl had received from the conspirators against his peace and honour totally to extenuate the crime of rebellion.

But who should be the pleader? Who should attempt to make royal apathy recognize the force of those impetuous feelings, which stimulate the husband and the father to enterprizes, not only perilous, but also such as conscience in cooler moments recoils from? Who

should dare to reiterate in an ear only attuned to flattery, the hated name of a man, who, when standing high in unblemished rectitude, dared to reprove his backsliding prince, and to thwart those measures which aimed at domestic despotism, and ensured foreign degradation? Who would presume to ask mercy for that stern judge and executioner, who shewed none to the worthless favourite, whose unappeased blood, in Edward's opinion, still drew down measureless calamities on England? A faithful heroic wife, ready to die with him she loved, but unable to live if one effort to preserve his life remained untried, must be prepared to undertake this office. Alicia had one more pang to endure ere the curse of Agatha was fully verified. She had with meekness and contrition repeatedly acknowledged her own faults, yet still felt proud of her husband's unquestioned excellence; but she must

now also confess, that he had been precipitate and disloyal ; that in spite of repeated abjurations, he had drawn the sword of civil contest in a private quarrel against his sovereign, and instead of her former cry of justice for the noble Lancaster, she must now sue for mercy.

Lady Emmeline was requested to prepare Alicia for this undertaking. The venerable abbess paused over her pillow ere she discharged her task, while many a tear testified her lively participations of the keen sympathies of social life. The mother and boy, clasped in each other's arms, lay locked in happy slumbers. The repose of the child was profound and unconscious ; it was that oblivion of thought which best repairs the waste of nature, and gives elasticity to the weary faculties ; but Alicia's brow bore the impression of thought, though her smiling countenance evinced that her night visions were soothing to her soul. She

supposed herself still journeying to meet her lord ; and already saw the waters of Tweed stretch like a silver chain to part the contending kingdoms, that so often spurned their gentle barrier. She beheld the blue mountains of Cheviot peering over each other's heads, and skirting the horizon ; while on the fore-ground her fancy created a troop of horsemen, marshalled under the Red Rose banner, and her own Lancaster galloping at their head. She heard him say, " We meet in happiness ! " and she sprung forward to throw herself at his feet, but awoke in the arms of Lady Emmeline ; awoke to a severer misery than she had yet ever known.

The faithful friends by whom Alicia was surrounded, anxious to guard the precious scion of a noble house, would not listen to her proposal of setting out immediately with her child for Pontefract. This might be only adding the destruc-

tion of the son to the death of the father. The King was known to be at York; nothing decisive could be done without his sanction; thither then it was proposed that the Countess should hasten, as soon as Withers returned from Pontefract, whither he had been dispatched to know in what manner they proceeded against their noble prisoner; to whom he was charged to communicate how near at hand was his faithful wife, who lived but to love his person, and obey his will.

Ere evening Withers returned: A supernatural share of fortitude appeared communicated to this long-suffering lady, enabling her nobly to sustain her final struggle. But thus does Divine assistance often interpose in aid of native weakness; and read a humiliating lesson to the boastful pride of self-dependent heroism. Not with selfish apathy, intent only on its own preservation; not with that petrifying horror which, by benumb-

ing every faculty, renders them all incapable of useful exertion ; but with collected attention, and determined duty, did Alicia listen to a tale which might have broken the stoutest heart ; for Withers stated, that with hundreds of weeping witnesses, he saw the Earl of Lancaster tried in his own hall at Pontefract, for treason and rebellion, and doomed to undergo the full severities of the law. The equity of this sentence will be properly estimated by posterity, when they reflect that his personal enemies sat as his judges. Among these were the two Spencers, now Earls of Winchester and Gloucester, who well knew, that not only the success of their ambitious schemes, but their personal safety, depended on his death ; Pembroke, who never forgave his execution of Gaveston ; Surrey, the brutal ravisher of his wife ; and Arundel, the brother-in-law and creature of the latter. Withers blushed indignantly on adding the name of the

King's brother, the Earl of Kent, unmindful how soon a young affectionate heart is misled to become an unresisting agent in the hands of those it loves.

The friends of Alicia crowded round her, but she waved her hand, signifying that consolation was alike inefficacious and superfluous. "A little longer, hold but a little longer my throbbing heart!" said she, pressing her bosom; "turn round the wheel of life till every duty is discharged, and then cease from thy labours! Say, Withers, was my Lancaster's agony long, or was his trial as brief as the judges were partial? Saw you the sufferer afterwards? Knows he that I live his faithful wife, and that his child is rescued?"

"All, dearest lady, he knows all! A few minutes decided his fate! Many witnesses attested that he had borne arms; and little more time was required than sufficed for each proud juror to add a

gibe to the pre-determined condemnation. As Lord Leicester's servant I gained permission to speak to him, when he was led back to his prison. He reveres, he loves your virtues. He bids me tell you that he shall meet you in happiness. He sends his blessing to his son ; but there is an office, lady, which he requires you to undertake, if you have courage to discharge it."

" If I have a soul capable of that world of happiness, where neither tyrants nor traitors can divide faithful lovers, but where I never shall meet the beloved who invites me to it, if my courage palters with my duty — Give, give !" continued she, eagerly snatching a crystal urn which Withers drew from his cloak ; " I know its contents ; 'tis to the King, an imperative appeal from the sepulchre of his father."

" Thy husband, lady," resumed Withers, mournfully, " before I dragged his soaring spirit down again to the earth,

was all plumed and prepared for paradise. As he fled from battle, in a hermitage on the Swale, he met Father Nicholas, who offered him the protection of his habit and cell ; but he had wedded himself to the fortunes of those gallant captains who were faithful to him unto death. He designed with these to cross the river, and gain Scotland by the eastern passes ; but the holy man convinced him of his offences in appealing to arms, when he stated, that after an arduous conflict justice had asserted her rights, and one audacious criminal by her self-inflicted punishment evinced the interposition of heaven. More passed which he did not disclose, save that he was ready to pay the penalty he had incurred. But when I told him thou wast at Kirklee, ready to put his son into his arms, his stout-heart melted ; and after many a struggle he yielded to sue for royal grace. Thou must be the pleader, lady, and deliver to the King this sacred deposit, preserved

by thy noble husband in all his perils, and meant to be the partner of his grave.”

Before the succeeding noon the palace at York was besieged by the tears and supplications of numerous pleaders, sworn never to rise from the earth till grace was obtained. To add solemnity to Alicia's intercession, the nuns of Kirklee quitted their hallowed inclosure, and, headed by their abbess, prostrated themselves in a long line before the King, holding up to him those pure hands which they were only accustomed to elevate in devotion. The lovely Matilda knelt by Alicia's side; and the young heir of Lancaster, though uncomplying and royal in his nature, was taught to bend, and prefer the prayer of innocence for a father's life. Still the King appeared inexorable. With all the narrowness of revenge acting on a mean mind, he exulted in the reflection that it was Gaveston's murderer who needed his pardon; that it

was Lincoln's daughter who sued for clemency. More proud of his conquest over his best and bravest subject, than he would have been if the Scottish thistle and the French lily had been exterminated, and the English rose had spread from Guienne to Lochaber, he looked, spoke, and thought like one who touched the summit of human greatness. What had he now to fear? In the south, the centre, and the north of his kingdom, his arms had triumphed over menacing disloyalty, and open insurrection. The castles of Leeds, Warwick, and Pontefract had opened their gates; and he had thrown down the standard of defiance in every county where it had been unfurled.

With cruel contempt Edward affected to misunderstand the object for which Alicia interceded. He told her that he had already considered what was due to his own blood, and repealed the ignominious

part of the sentence : “ We will be as lenient to our recreant cousin,” said the King, “ as he was to our faithful friend, the Earl of Cornwall. Instead of a traitor’s full doom, the decencies of the axe and scaffold have been prepared, and the execution is tempered with the mercy of spiritual assistance.”

“ Have been prepared !—Is tempered !—What, is the warrant already issued ; are the relentings of mercy cut off, before this sight could open its sluices ?”

Alicia lifted the veil from the vase as she spoke, and taking off the cover, disclosed to the King the embalmed heart of his father. “ Speak,” proceeded she, “ sacred relic of him who was indeed right royal. Hast thou not been kept from thy long desired holy sojourn, to waken in thy son the most divine attribute of princes ? O heart, less worthily imbued with these odorous spices than by the courage of a Christian knight,

and the fervour of domestic affections of which thou wast the seat, plead to him, to whom, with a great and glorious crown, thou didst also leave the assurance of thy esteem and confidence in one, who has worn thee as knights wear the insignia of an imperial order; call my Lancaster thy chosen friend, and trusted captain; say that the man to whom the heart of a dead king was so precious, could not be disloyal to a living sovereign. Urge the merits of a life of obedience against the rashness of a moment. Royal heart, thou too wast impetuous, but it was the impetuosity of true greatness. What were thy throes of tenderness, when thine Eleanora, at the hazard of her life, drew the poisonous ichor from thy livid wounds? And surely, had thy faithful partner been torn from thee by iniquitous conspirators; hadst thou seen her assailed by an accumulation of horrors, wronged in her

birth-right, injured in her fame, imprisoned, nay, menaced with death ; would even the altar of the God thou didst so truly worship have secured the villain-ravisher from thy sword ? No, Edward would have saved his consort, though in so doing he had overwhelmed a main pillar of that proud fabric, which it was the study of his life to erect and beautify."

For a while the King was silent, unwilling to spare his enemy, yet unable to subdue the lively pleadings of compunction, now rendered more poignant by the renewed sense of those neglects to which this unsepulchred relic of his illustrious father bore a shameful testimony. Bursting from Alicia's grasp, he retired to his closet, followed by the general cry of "Mercy, gracious prince, mercy on the Earl of Lancaster !"

"He is gone to deliberate, under the most happy auspices," said Lady Matilda

to Alicia ; “ his eyes are filled with tears, and he is followed by the good Bishop Stapleton. Our supplications will pierce his retirement. Be comforted, dearest sister, all will yet be well. Joy ! joy ! a train approach the palace ; my Leicester comes, I know his pennon. He enters now, conversing with thy lord’s confessor, who seems to have ridden rapidly from Pontefract. They will join their resistless rhetoric to the simple eloquence of our untutored griefs. We shall, I trust, hear that thy lord is well, fighting manfully against this last effort of his enemies.”

At the same moment, from opposite entrances, the Bishop of Exeter and the confessor entered the chamber of audience. The former announced that the King spared his kinsman’s life ; the latter only said that the Earl behaved in his last struggle with a magnanimity worthy his character. Mercy had been

slow and deliberate; but revenge was prompt and active. They who had persuaded the King to sign the death-warrant of Lancaster, well knew that it was not an instrument which should rest in inactivity. Delay might frustrate their malice; through fear, or from clemency, Edward might countermand his permission; to make all sure, their bloody sentence was executed as soon as it was ratified by the royal signature, upon a hill near Pontefract, amidst a vast assemblage, whom despair and astonishment deprived of all power of concerting means to rescue their darling chieftain. Yet, notwithstanding the opposition of the King's troops, drawn up in arms to guard the execution, the weeping multitude crowded round the body,

And dipp'd their napkins in his sacred blood;
 Yea, begg'd a hair of him for memory;
 And dying, mention'd it within their wills,
 Bequeathing it as a rich legacy
 Unto their issue.

The Earl of Leicester returned too late to save his brother. Burning with unextinguishable rage and grief, his first care was to remove Alicia and her son to the strong fortress of Kenilworth, where, while that ruthless proscription raged, which drenched the scaffolds with a deluge of blood, unknown since the times of the Norman conquest, the most steady protection preserved her from danger, and the kindest solicitude soothed her anguish. When horror subsided into grief, it was the dearest occupation of the noble Lancaster's surviving friends, to listen while the confessor described the death-scene, and delineated the character of his lamented penitent.

“ Among the rare qualities of his nature,” said the discerning priest, “ that great man possessed such tenderness of conscience, and proneness to self-condemnation, as the pride of baser spirits falsely considers to be ignoble. So lofty

were his conceptions of the virtues which his religious obligations prescribed, that as his most faithful endeavours ever fell short of the model before him, so his susceptibility made him feel the frailties of humanity as indelible stains; and the mistakes and lapses which he confessed and deplored to God he never would justify to man. If he looked with severity on the faults of others, that severity was mercy compared to what he exercised on himself. No sooner had the intelligence which he gained from Father Nicholas assured him that the deliverance he attempted by violence had been peaceably effected, than the sin of rebellion rose full in his view, and resigning himself to a fate which he felt he deserved, his only care was to preserve the remnant of those who had for him forfeited their lives and fortunes. These he guided to a ford over the river, but it was already seized; a desperate conflict ensued, some

cut their way through, many fell, more were taken prisoners. The Earl seemed more than human in strength and valour ; yet it was evident that he did not fight with hope of life or liberty, but from the desire of extricating all he could save. That done, he flung away his sword, saying, he submitted to the law, and to the King.

“ During his journey, (while he was slowly led in ignominious triumph by an enemy, alike cruel and depraved, to suffer a malefactor’s death, after the mockery of a trial, in his own castle,) the untented wounds of his conscience gave him those inward pangs which made him insensible to outward insult. He regarded not the ivy crown of brutal mockery ; he observed not the gibing homage paid him by Harclay’s soldiers, who, misled by a report that he affected royalty, saluted him with the appellation of King Arthur, the long-expected British hero.

He saw not the distant crowd, collected by the tidings that the good Earl of Lancaster was taken prisoner, who, raising their hands, preferred their unuttered prayers to Heaven, for him who had been their best earthly friend, invoking blessings on the head from which malice had shorn every seemly dignity. He looked not on his persecutors, as one who knew he merited not from man the ignominy he so largely endured. Of man he thought not, nor of sublunary punishments or shames. All his communion was with Heaven, whose forgiveness he supplicated in humble tones, often smiting his breast, and saying, "Sinful Lancaster."

"At the time of his brief trial the same was his deportment. He abstained from the privilege of challenging his judges as his enemies; but he warned them, on account of the malice which he knew they cherished, for their souls'

sake to avoid dipping their hands in his blood. After his condemnation, I was allowed to shrive him for the block, and found him prompt as a bridegroom on the morning of his espousals; for he trusted that his sins had received complete remission. A persuasion had been long engraven deeply on his soul, that his death would be beneficial to England, and cause the King, who never esteemed his living services, to feel and regret his loss, from which change of temper happy results might ensue. This he admitted; he had unjustifiably shed man's blood, and to man his blood was forfeited. He repeated to me the dying prediction of his mother, and told me he had heard the knell of Gaveston calling him to share his grave.

“ Borne down by the strong tide of affection, which testified that this world still contained what stamped a value on life, he yielded to ask for mercy, but he

yielded without hope of success. At dawn of this fatal day, he was roused from a tranquil sleep to mount the scaffold. Without either presumptuous exultation, or desponding terror, he arrayed himself to obey the summons. He walked majestically slow, as he was wont when he led his household to the sacred temple, and blessed the multitude as he went along. He neither justified his own conduct, nor arraigned the judges by whom he was condemned. He prayed for the weal of England, and said little of the King, but that little implied Christian forgiveness. His cheek was unblenched with fear; the more striking, therefore, was the change when the executioner held up the severed head to the weeping multitude. One only desire was unfulfilled; he would fain have seen his beloved consort, but even this desire became a source of consolation. 'At our last interview,' said he, 'I told her if

she was faithful, we should meet in love and happiness. Those words were not lightly spoken, for I can now name the place of our re-union.' He waved his hand, describing the arch of the cerulean firmament, and added, 'The region of uninterrupted happiness is above us, and around us. It is unseen, because we look through a dense and turbid medium ; but it is real, it is eternal. I shall soon be in that world ; invite and instruct my Alicia to follow me.' "

CHAP. XXXIX.

Woe to the hand that shed this costly blood !
 Over thy wounds, now do I prophesy,
 A curse shall light upon the limbs of men ;
 Domestic fury, and fierce civil strife.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE exertions by which great men are made conspicuous, have a natural tendency to shorten their course. England has often mourned the premature eclipse of those luminaries whose brightness, as they climbed to their zenith, promised a long race of glory ; but rarely has the fate of any of her lost worthies excited so deep, so universal a sensation as the execution of the Earl of Lancaster. The nobles, roused to extreme indignation, by the sacrifice of their illustrious leader, cherished a deep, implacable revenge, which burst out in the

ruin of those who were the authors of this catastrophe. The populace who were at once attached by his munificence, and awed by his piety, influenced by the prevailing notions of the age, transformed their love of the patriotic nobleman into veneration for the saint. The church of the priory at Pontefract, where his body was interred, was crowded with devotees, who, persuaded that his ashes possessed miraculous powers, boasted that he who on earth ministered to all their wants, was now privileged by Heaven to exercise supernaturally those offices of mercy by which his life was distinguished. With that refinement of superstition, which extended its idolatry from the bones and relics to the effigies and pictures of saints and martyrs, the resemblance of the good Earl of Lancaster became an object of worship, in the cathedral of London. An injunction of Edward the Second to the Bishop is still extant, for-

bidding prayers being offered to his cousin's portrait. The Prior of Pontefract was also commanded to discourage pilgrims from visiting his tomb. Admiration and affection spoke in what was then the common way of denoting extraordinary esteem: to us, it justly appears not only absurd but culpable. Yet the feeling of attachment was genuine and ardent, nor was it evanescent. Long after Lancaster's death, the son of the King by whose command he had suffered cancelled his condemnation, and erected a chapel on the spot which was consecrated by his blood; and in the reign of Richard the Second, the canonization of Saint Thomas Plantagenet was formally completed by a papal decree, which largely stated his real virtues and imaginary miracles.

Among his more enlightened countrymen, the Earl of Lancaster was most truly lamented as a martyr to the weal

of England, and what greatly tended to confirm the reverence in which he was held, was the miserable end of those who sought his ruin. When the death of a malefactor, or murder from the secret hand of assassination, becomes the general fate of those who take a leading part in the deeply embroiled scene of public affairs, we must be cautious how we attempt to trace the hand of Divine vengeance further than by observing, that as one deed of violence begets another, the evil passions of men are thus rightly made to execute the wrath of God; and from the punishments which these deeds inflict by their counteraction, they remind us how essential it is to eradicate that malevolence which, when the tide of events turns against us, will prove at once the instrument and the justification of our own destruction.

The first person who felt the fatal consequence of serving a corrupt court, by

procuring the ruin of a powerful subject, and of those unhappy gentlemen who were allowed to be seduced in order that they might be destroyed, was Sir Andrew Harclay. For this service he was made Earl of Carlisle, but within the year, forfeiting the favour of his employers, he suffered the same punishment as the Earl of Lancaster; and he stands upon record as the first criminal who endured the ignominy of being degraded from his knighthood, before he laid his head upon the block.

The elder Spenser, created Earl of Winchester in the last stage of venerable age, beloved for his many virtues, and (till he encouraged his son's ambitious projects) esteemed for his wisdom, was seized by the party of Mortimer and hung up in his armour, without the formality of trial, in the city of Bristol, which he attempted to defend for his sovereign. A similar fate speedily over-

took his less pitied son, on whom the distinction of a gallows, fifty feet high, was bestowed, to make him a more conspicuous object to an enraged people, who considered him as the chief instigator of Lancaster's death.

The Earl of Arundel also perished by the hand of Mortimer. The death of the Earl of Kent was reserved to disgrace the nominal administration of his wise and heroic nephew, Edward the Third; but he too was sacrificed to the guilty fears of Isabella and her paramour, before the royal spirit of the young King burst the ignominious bondage in which he was held. Soon after this amiable victim had suffered on a scaffold, for endeavouring to vindicate the wrongs of his dethroned brother, the blood-stained adulterer was also called to a tremendous account; Isabella saw her minion suffer the death of a traitor, in all its unmitigated horrors, and sur-

vived him twenty-eight years, in penitentiary confinement (let us hope), bewailing her own crimes as well as Mortimer's fate.

Sir Robert Holland, who not only ungratefully deserted but betrayed his falling master, became by that offence the peculiar object of the Earl of Leicester's inexorable enmity. He did not long live to disgrace the coronet, which was the reward of his perfidy. Early in the reign of Edward the Third, he was assassinated by Sir Thomas Withers, who, after proclaiming that he slew him for his treachery to the Earl of Lancaster, was protected from the punishment due to that act of summary vengeance, by the favour of the people and the power of his master.

But among this long catalogue of those to "whose lips even-handed justice returned the poisoned chalice," the unhappy King was pre-eminent in misery.

By the execution of fifteen mighty barons, and a long catalogue of knights and gentlemen, he presumed on having secured domestic subjection; and by procuring the thunders of the Vatican to be pointed at the King and realm of Scotland, he made quail the courage of the heroic prince, whom his military arrays rather irritated than restrained. A long truce with England was the price which the Pope required for restoring Bruce and his subjects to the peace of absolution and church-communion. Edward now deemed himself secure in his estate, and sufficiently rich in glory to devote his future life to ease and pleasure. But having leisure for reflection, Lancaster's hasty execution stung him with bitter remorse, and he is recorded to have exclaimed in an agony, when some of his courtiers importuned him to pardon a condemned criminal, "Is it possible that such a wretch as this should

find so many to intercede for him, when none of you would speak in behalf of my cousin of Lancaster, who, if he had lived, might have been useful both to me and the whole kingdom?"

If, during the short sunshine of his gloomy reign, this ill-fated King thus discovered and lamented the difference between a brave, honest subject, whom he had irritated and destroyed, and those obsequious flatterers who, destitute of principles and resources, bent to his will, and reflected the changes of his countenance; what were his sentiments when, four years after his kinsman's death, the secret machinations of his Queen and her paramour, ripened into treason, insurrection, and murder, procured his own deposition, captivity, and death? If, when in the folly of revenge, he sacrificed a popular and mighty baron to the manes of a detested minion, he exultingly boasted that the hill of Ponte-

fract had its bloody trophy, as well as that of Blacklow, while, from Kenilworth, the melancholy passing-bell echoed to testify the danger of braving a king's wrath — his own imprisonment in that same Kenilworth, and the shrieks which rung through Berkeley-castle, as loudly proclaimed the criminality of voluptuous sloth in a monarch, on whose unwearied discharge of public duties, the weal of so many thousands depended. As loudly did they proclaim the danger of disregarding those brave and powerful subjects that had the courage to speak truth, and the means of maintaining it, while he dared trust to parasites for security, and to debauchees for counsel. The degrading propensities of Edward were overawed by the grave virtues of Lancaster; and the despotism of the royal favourites was restrained by the independent spirit and steady patriotism of a baron, who could neither be bribed

nor intimidated ; but had he lived, England would not have blushed at the misrule of the adulterous Mortimer, who gained her confidence under the specious pretext of avenging the death of her favourite champion.

The King did not annex forfeiture and attainder to Lancaster's punishment ; and history records the Earl of Leicester as finally inheriting all his brother's estates and titles, which, descending from him to his granddaughter, were by her conveyed in marriage to John of Gaunt, and in the person of her son, Henry the Fourth, were re-united to the crown of England. Earl Henry was distinguished as a most attached brother, and as a faithful friend to the liberties of his country. In the former capacity he joined the Queen's party, and powerfully contributed to the deposition of an unjust sovereign, and to the placing of young Edward on his father's throne.

But his vindictive intentions were thus appeased. Appointed to the guardianship of the King's person, his heart softened at his deep distress ; and he treated his prisoner with a consideration which induced the remorseless Isabella to seek a fitter instrument for her designs. Of the barbarous murder which followed, the happy husband of the amiable Matilda, was not only innocent, but we also find him included among the number of indignant barons who combined to stimulate the young King, (with the filial piety of a Hamlet,) so to pursue the " act of avenging a father's death as not to taint his mind, nor let his soul contrive against his mother aught." The part which Leicester took in the punishment of Lord Holland has been already recorded : it may also be proper to mention that his only son, the Earl of Derby, was one of the most celebrated of Edward the Third's captains, in his long

arduous contest with the house of Valois, for the crown of France.

Thus far the most authentic history guides our researches. It remains to describe the contrasted fortunes of those who were principal actors in the preceding pages.

The reader's imagination will attend the faithful widow through the various stages of agony, horror, despair, grief, and patience, till she reached that devout resignation to the will of Providence, in which the soundest divines place the perfection of the militant Christian, — a dereliction of desires, but not of duties, a renunciation of selfish inclinations, not a forgetfulness of human affections. Light as a feather in the cap of vanity appeared to her every scheme of sublunary pleasure, or ambition mounting the ascending scale, when weighed against the awful contingents of that world to which man passes through the

dark avenue of what is called life. Affliction had done its perfect work, and established consideration, charity, and piety as the habitual residents of the soul which it had sanctified. Every tie to this world being dissolved by the death of her son, the once vain, frivolous, selfish daughter of De Lacy, became the devout, benevolent Abbess of Kirklee, treading in the steps of her revered predecessor, like her, a blessing to the neighbourhood, and an example to the community whom she had ruled with gentle sway.

In her declining years she was gratified by the attentions of royal visitants, and was at once consoled and rewarded, by seeing the sceptre of England wielded by a prince who knew how to revive its former brilliancy. He who confined Scotland within its ancient limits, reclaimed the wrested provinces from France which were his patrimonial inheritance, visited on that nation the

miseries it had fostered for England by furthering the schemes of his abandoned mother, and soothed the widow of Lancaster by offering his oblations at the tomb of her injured lord. His chaste and amiable consort Phillippa of Hainault, standing like Mercy by the side of Valour, presented a numerous and comely train of royal youths and virgins to receive the blessings and instructions of one who, after having been the richest heiress in England, and wife to its mightiest baron, discovered the true uses of life, and found that contentment which nursed prosperity could not afford, in the school of affliction.

No public act of Surrey's is recorded after the shameful fact of his signing the death-warrant of the man whom he had so vilely injured. He lived to suffer the long protracted death of a miserable old age, hated and abjured by society, and cursed by the illegitimate issue whom

his licentiousness deprived of an honourable provision. With him ended the titled honours of the house of Warren, a consideration peculiarly galling to one who felt such peculiar pride in boasting that he sprung from the line of ancient kings. The fate of Lancaster's other enemies may appear more singularly marked by the interposition of Providence, but since, in turbulent times, one death often overtakes the hero and the villain, the patriot and the traitor, who alike fall in the field or on the scaffold; we shall be more discrete in searching for the visible marks of Divine superintendence, if we fully appreciate the miseries which evil inclinations bring upon those who indulge their unrestrained excess, during a period of what the world calls prosperous fortune. From these harrowers of the soul and slow consumers of the body, nor guards nor bolts can preserve their victim. Gold can pur-

chase no opiate to lull the pangs of terrified remorse, nor can the ermined pall of state warm the torpid heart of despair. Compared to the death-bed anguish of him who has sinned till grace is denied, what are all the tortures which the refinements of diabolical cruelty can invent? These must bear the marks of imperfection which distinguish all the acts of created beings, and be finite in their nature and brief in their duration; but conscience is the agent of Omnipotence, and the precursor of eternity.

HISTORICAL NOTICES.

ALICIA, or Alice de Lacy, was the only surviving child of Henry Earl of Lincoln, by Margaret, heiress of the Longspees, Earls of Salisbury, who sprung from the son of Henry II.; by Rosamond Clifford. This Earl of Lincoln is recorded as one of Edward the First's great captains; and beside many other gifts he received from his sovereign the town of Denbigh, on account of his services in Wales. It is further stated, that he took part with the Barons in their contests with Edward II.; and laid those injunctions on his son-in-law the Earl of Lancaster, which are recited in the tenth chapter. He died just before the

insurrection that ended in the death of Gaveston, and was buried in St. Paul's cathedral. His six sons by Lady Margaret died in their childhood: one of them met his death by accidentally falling into a well at Denbigh, where his father was building a castle, which, on account of this circumstance, he never finished. He built many strong castles and monasteries: those of Pontefract among the number. He had a natural son also, named Henry, to whom he left his lands and castle, near Cambridge. On the marriage of his daughter to the Earl of Lancaster, he endowed him with the fee-simple of his lands, which were to go to the future Earls of Lancaster, even if Alice had no children.

History supplies no particulars about Lady Margaret. When this work was nearly finished, the author discovered, that after her decease, the Earl of Lincoln married a second wife. With the

heroine's character great liberties have been taken, for her deportment was such as made her real adventures unfit even for a fabulist, who studiously avoids combining an air of heroical perfection with the manners of a comparatively barbarous period. There is an unusual degree of perplexing mystery in her history. Being the richest heiress of her time, the disposing of her in marriage seems to have been a business of great difficulty: the editor of the Warren Pedigree relates, that she was early betrothed to John Warren, eighth and last Earl of Warren and Surrey; other historians record, that at nine years of age she was contracted to the Earl of Lancaster, grandson to King Henry III. She certainly became the wife of the latter; and Camden relates, that she was "forcibly taken from her maternal castle, at Canford in Dorsetshire, in 1317, by John Earl of Warren and Surrey, to

the no small damage of his reputation and injury to England." The Warren Pedigree, before alluded to, states, that as Surrey's people were carrying her off, they saw, from the top of a hill, a number of men advancing with banners, on which, supposing them to be the Earl of Lancaster's soldiers, they fled, leaving the lady; but discovering them to be only priests going in procession, they returned, and found with her an ill-favoured knight named Richard St. Martin. Alice was some time detained at Sandal-castle in Yorkshire, the seat of the Warrens, which, in revenge for this insult, the Earl of Lancaster burnt.

After the death of Gaveston, Alice was made an instrument of King Edward's irreconcilable enmity to her husband. This St. Martin, whom Walsingham describes as a man of mean look and dwarfish stature, claimed her of the judges as his wife, on the ground of a

pre-contract and criminal intercourse, which, to her eternal shame, she confessed, and was adjudged with all her estates and titles to this claimant. The sentence is severely condemned as unjust, precipitate, and originating from the King's hatred to his cousin, and desire of limiting his power. It is further said that it filled England with indignation and tumult, provoking Lancaster again to take up arms; and that on the King's keeping his feast the following Whitsuntide at Westminster, a woman in a mask rode into the hall and delivered him a letter, which he imagining to be something diverting, commanded to be read aloud, but was much incensed to find it only contained outrageous reproaches against his tyranny, cowardice, and all the grievances of his reign.

Alice de Lacy having totally lost her reputation by her light behaviour, is said to have successively bestowed the title

of Earl of Lincoln on two paramours or husbands, Eubulo le Strange and Hugh Frere, between whom and Henry Plantagenet, brother and heir of her husband, there was a contest for her lands. She had no issue, and died despised in extreme old age.

The Earl of Lancaster's descent is correctly described. The tomb of his father's first wife Avis, heiress to the Earl of Gloucester, has been lately discovered in Westminster Abbey, with her beautiful effigies still perfect. She died very young: Thomas and Henry were the issue of Earl Edmund's second marriage with Blanche of Navarre, of whom no more is known than that in the days of Edward I, she, with the reigning Queen of France and the Queen Dowager, succeeded in mediating a peace between the two kingdoms, which Philip the Fair afterwards violated. Earl Edmund gave the red rose as his device.

The character of Earl Thomas is contradictorily drawn, just as historians, who viewed his opposition to the King through different mediums, have coloured it with their own sentiments. Holingshed is most severe; but he lived many ages afterwards, and wrote at a time when the diminution of baronial privileges allowed kings such a share of arbitrary power, as made it not only dangerous but irreligious to resist an authority founded upon divine right. Of Lancaster's motives we cannot judge: it is certain his provocations were extreme; for the King not only sanctioned the shameful claims of his adulterous wife, but laid a snare for his life. The traits of his character, which are thoroughly ascertained, are here preserved; namely, his great popularity, hospitality, munificence, almsdeeds, honour for religious persons, and occasional violence and impetuosity. From the commencement of Edward II.'s reign,

till the time of his execution, he appears as the stern resister of that monarch's weak and arbitrary measures ; but in this romance he is introduced on various occasions, for which there is no historical authority. Among this number is his commanding the forces on the borders of Scotland ; his offering to carry his uncle's heart to Palestine ; his opposing Gaveston at the Wallingford-tournament ; his mediation between the King and Queen ; his excommunication ; his penance in Spain ; his conquest of Pendergrass, and all the domestic history of himself and his consort. Those particulars which are historical are his being appointed an ordainer ; his behaviour in that insurrection which ended in Gaveston's execution, and the unjust, ignominious circumstances of his own death ; we may add, the King's too late regret for his death, and the superstitious reverence paid to his memory.

Henry Earl of Leicester, and afterwards of Lancaster, married Maud, heiress to Maurice, a Welsh chieftain. He was called Wryneck, from some defect in his figure. His only son, Henry Earl of Derby, was a most eminent captain in the wars of Edward III. The behaviour of Henry Earl of Lancaster after his brother's death is historically stated in the last chapter.

The anecdotes of Edward I. and his Queen Eleanor of Castile, related in these volumes, are all authentic, except the protection they are supposed to afford to the imaginary Lady Emmeline, and the wish ascribed to the King on his death-bed, that his son should consider Lancaster as his especial friend.

Eleanor of Provence, widow of Henry III., was a very affectionate wife, and took the veil at Amesbury, as is described; as did afterwards her granddaughter, the Princess Mary, with thirteen

other noble young ladies at the same time in that celebrated convent.

It is designed that the King and Queen of this romance should be correct likenesses of Edward and Isabella, though the drapery is fanciful; of course conversations and incidental circumstances are fictitious, and a liberty is taken in supposing that the Queen desired to coquet with Lancaster. Her design to carry the young prince to France, and her amour with Mortimer, are certainly anticipated, but her depravity cannot be called exaggerated by being earlier developed. Not one weakness or crime is charged on the King which history has left doubtful.

The eighth Earl of Warren and Surrey is said by Camden to have been "a man whose mind was never free from the dominion of boundless lust." He succeeded his grandfather at the age of eighteen, was knighted with the Prince of Wales

and the Earl of Lancaster, at the festival Edward I. celebrated previous to his Scottish enterprizes, lived to be very old, and died without legitimate issue. He was succeeded in his estates by the son of his sister, who was married to the Earl of Arundel, but the title became extinct. He built or re-edified Sandal-castle, and married the daughter of the Earl of Bar, but soon divorced her, and lived in adultery. He had several children by Maud of Nersford, a knight's daughter, one of his mistresses. The two Spensers, his brother-in-law Arundel, and the Earl of Pembroke, all personal enemies to Lancaster, sat as judges on that nobleman, in the hall of his own castle at Pontefract.

The grandfather of this earl was, with the elder Mortimer, appointed by Edward I. to be guardians to three boys, sons of a Welsh prince, by Lady Emma Audley. The circumstance of drowning

two of them in the Dee, under Holt-bridge, by these cruel earls, for the sake of their inheritance, and the escape of the third, as detailed by the harper, are taken from Pennant's Tour. The child who was preserved was ancestor of the famous Owen Glendower. There is no ground for implicating the eighth Earl Warren in the murder committed by the seventh; and the reader must consider this as an adventitious exaggeration of an odious character which the author found convenient.

Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester, grandson of Edward I., by his daughter Joan of Arc, was a most promising young prince, who died at the battle of Bannockburn, as described. He is often spoken of as mediating between the King and his barons, though affectionately attached to his uncle. The part assigned him in the supposed mutiny after the death of Warwick is ficti-

tious: His sisters, Margaret and Eleanor, respectively married the King's successive favourites, Gaveston and Spenser.

Humphrey Earl of Hereford married a sister of Edward II. He was constantly of the party of Lancaster, and was concerned with him in the hasty execution of Gaveston. He joined Lancaster in the last insurrection, and died in the manner described.

Aylmer de Valance, Earl of Pembroke, was also royally allied, being descended from Isabella of Angouleme, wife of King John, by her third marriage. His conduct is correctly stated as to his taking arms against Gaveston; so is his enmity to Lancaster for executing his prisoner.

All that relates to Gaveston is historical, except his gallantry to the heroine. He was made Earl of Cornwall immediately on the death of the youngest son of the King of the Romans.

Guy de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick,

was especially recommended by Lincoln to Lancaster as a true and steady patriot. He was one of the Ordainers. His death was attributed to poison: it happened just after the King had granted him a pardon for being the prime instrument of Gaveston's death, and a few months before the battle of Bannockburn. There seems no just cause for accusing the King with the premature fate of this nobleman. He died unmarried, at least without issue. His successor (who seems to have been his brother) refused to join the King in his Scottish expeditions, on account of the suspicions attached to his death. His love-adventures are fictitious.

Walter de Stapleton, Bishop of Exeter, is recorded as an exemplary, munificent prelate, who often interposed his peaceful offices between the King and his peers, and finally lost his life in a popular insurrection, while endeavouring to keep London for the King against the party of

the Queen and Mortimer. He was a great benefactor to Oxford, for he founded Exeter College and Hart Hall. The dreadful severity of the three years' famine, in the time of Edward II., is detailed by cotemporary writers with facts almost incredible. It is not known how far the Bishop of Exeter interposed to soften this calamity ; but the most active interference, and also his supposed services to the Earl of Lancaster, accord with his benevolent intercessive disposition.

The character of the King of Scotland is a close copy of history. The description of the battle of Bannockburn is taken from a Scotch author, fond of preserving the legends of the old chronicles. The extraordinary visions which are supposed to have hurried Lancaster back to England, were by our forefathers believed to have been vouchsafed in the church of St. Magnus, in the Orkneys,

at Aberdeen, and also in the abbey of Glastonbury. Walsingham says, that the Earl of Lancaster, just before his last insurrection, seized a knight who was sent by King Edward to Robert Bruce, offering him what terms of peace he pleased, provided he would cut off Lancaster, who at that time meditated the project of seeking his court for protection. The Earl hung the bearer of these dispatches.

The actions of Simon de Montford, general against the Albigenses, and his son the Earl of Leicester, who married a sister of our King Henry III., and commanded the barons leagued against him, are faithfully described. Henry Plantagenet, eldest son of the King of the Romans (Henry III.'s brother), was sent by his cousin, then Prince Edward, to Bourdeaux, to protect the French provinces subject to the crown of England from the apprehended invasion of Philip the Hardy, who had deserted the crusade.

after the death of his father St. Louis, and hurried back to his own kingdom. Henry Plantagenet was murdered before the high altar in the church at Viterbo, while paying his devotions, by Guido de Montford, son of the Earl of Leicester, in pretended revenge for the death of his father and brother, slain at the battle of Evesham, though neither Henry nor his father were in that engagement. He was unusually lamented. His heart was interred in a golden cup, near King Edward the Confessor's shrine at Westminster. The King of the Romans died soon after, broken-hearted for his loss.

William Longspee, Earl of Salisbury, grandfather of the Margaret who conveyed that inheritance by marriage to the Earl of Lincoln, lost his life in the manner described. It would be an insult to any but very juvenile readers, to say that his amour is a fiction. Charles of Anjou, King of Sicily, was the character repre-

sented in this work. His murder of Conradine, his cruel ambition, and superstitious belief that his own interested projects were a species of consecrated warfare, are historical statements.

The Archbishop of York's patriotic efforts to preserve the northern provinces from ravage, after he had been deserted by the nobles, and the event of the battle of the White Bands, are correctly stated. Not being able to discover who was the Legate during this reign, the author feigns that office to be exercised by the Bishop of Lichfield, simply because he was (next to Gaveston) peculiarly obnoxious to the nation, and because the author did not wish to increase her list of odious characters. Notwithstanding the Earl of Lancaster's great reputation for piety, he was during the reign of his uncle and cousin a steady assertor of the independence of the national church.

Sir Robert Holland is recorded as the

secretary and confidential knight of the Earl of Lancaster. The circumstances of his betraying his master, and being afterwards assassinated by Withers, are historical ; also the part ascribed to Harclay, and his short-lived elevation, loss of favour, degradation, and death.

An interview took place between the Queen of Stephen and the Empress Matilda, daughter of Henry the First, in which the former supplicated pardon for her husband, and the latter was at once inexorable and insulting. All the circumstances described in the ballad supposed to be recited by Alicia are real. In the rapid change of fortune which befel the Empress, she once escaped from Stephen's army by means of a mock funeral, and another time, dressed in white, during a violent snow-storm.

John Pendergrass (called by Rapin Deydrass), a tanner's son of Exeter, attempted to obtain the crown from Ed-

ward II., by pretending that he was the true Edward of Caernarvon, and had been exchanged by the nurse. This man mounted a gallows instead of a throne. His bold deceit is introduced to give an air of probability to the author's fiction respecting a pseudo Countess of Lancaster, to whom the shameless behaviour, which could not be reconciled to a weak but well-intentioned affectionate woman, are ascribed. The perturbed era of the Plantagenets abounds in impostures as well as in atrocious and violent deeds. A most singular fraud was played off by Isabella and Mortimer on the Earl of Kent, son of Edward the First by his second Queen. Though this prince had attended the obsequies of his murdered brother, he was persuaded by the Queen's emissaries, who wished to draw him into rebellion, that that brother was still alive. One of the grounds of this opinion was the testimony of a friar, who had con-

jured up a spirit that told him there had been a mock interment, and that the King was preserved in honourable though close confinement. To corroborate this statement, another plot was more deeply laid; for a report was spread in the neighbourhood of Berkeley, that the royal prisoner had been removed elsewhere; and so many circumstantial particulars were stated, that a confidential priest was sent by the Earl of Kent to ascertain the fact. This man was even admitted to the governor of Corfe Castle (the scene of this mummery), who affected surprise, but acknowledged the report was true, and allowed the priest a distant view of one of his prisoners, who was served with the respect due to royalty. The Earl of Kent fell into the snare, and hasted to demand an interview with his brother. This the governor refused, but consented to be the bearer of a letter, in which Kent pledged his services to reinstate him on his throne.

On these grounds Kent was tried, condemned, and executed. The events of those turbulent times (like our own) may, from their singularity and atrocity, challenge fiction to devise any thing more incredible and melancholy than the strange, sad realities which were seen or suffered.

The account of the stupendous remains of the abbey of Bangor on the Dee is taken from Camden, and is probably much corrupted by fable; not only respecting the miraculous quality of the river, but as to the immense size and prodigious population of the monastery.

Wimborn-Minster stands near the scite of Canford-castle, in Dorsetshire, on the river Stour: King Ethelred, brother to Alfred, who fell in battle with the Danes, is buried here. At this place also was a nunnery, founded by St. Cuthberg, sister to King Ina. Lychet-beacon, to mark out the rocks of Purbeck, lies to the north.

Castle Dinas Bran, the antient residence of those Welsh princes from whom sprang the husband of Lady Emma Audley, was the birth-place of the celebrated beauty Myfanwy Vechan, immortalized by the strains of her lover Hoel.

Kenilworth-castle, built by Simon de Montford, Earl of Leicester, was given by Henry III. to his son Edmund after the battle of Evesham. Here Edward II. was confined after he was compelled to abdicate the throne; but his princely keeper, relenting at his distress, the King was removed to Berkeley-castle to complete his bloody tragedy. The Savoy was the town-residence of the Lancastrian Plantagenets.

Amesbury was a magnificent nunnery, founded by Queen Elfrida, to atone for her guilt in murdering her son-in-law King Edward, erroneously called the

Martyr. It seems to have been the favourite retreat of royal and noble ladies when weary of the world. It is near Stonehenge, on the banks of the Avon, where Ambrosius founded a monastery of three hundred monks, to pray for the soul of Vortigern and his Britons slain by Hengist.

The cross of St. Paulinus, in memory of his converting the Northern Saxons, stood in the neighbourhood of the small nunnery of Kirklee. This latter was within a few miles of Sandal-castle, which commanded the town of Wakefield, on the banks of the Calder.

The ceremony used at creating three hundred knights, chosen by Edward I. from among his first nobility, and bound by their oaths to prosecute his designs on Scotland, is copied from Camden.

The bearn or boy-bishop was a mock

prelate, pontifically attired, and carried about the country during the Christmas-holidays, with much ludicrous ceremony. He did not seem to be limited to the titles of the existing dioceses ; as in the Earl of Northumberland's household-book mention is made of largess being given to the boy-bishop of Beverley. From the above-named authentic record of domestic economy, many hints respecting manners have been adopted.

An abbot of misrule was an occasional master of revels, appointed by our joyous ancestors to preside at times of peculiar festivity.

To prevent any possibility of misleading those who travel to the end of this maze of history and fiction, they are requested to remember that of the following characters, the names only are supplied by authentic records, Queen

Blanche, the Princess Mary, Lady Matilda, the Bishop of Lichfield, Maud de Nersford, and Eubulo Le Strange. Father Ambrose, Sir Hilary, Father Nicholas, Mabel, Beatrice, Dorcas, Sybil, Lady Emmeline, Agatha, Dame Mowbray, Humphrey, the son of Alicia, Gondibert Fitz-allan, and the Sieur Manfred, are creatures of the author's brain, for whose shape and colouring she is responsible.

In this attempt to convey a general idea of the leading characters, the principal events, and the prevailing tone of manners of the reign of Edward II., chronological exactness could not be preserved without sacrificing the fiction which was designed to give interest to the whole; but the following dates may somewhat assist the reader.

Edward II. ascended the throne June 7th, 1307, was deposed in January 1327,

and murdered, September 22d, in the same year.

The King adjudged the Earl of Lancaster's wife to Sir Richard Saint Martin, in June 1317. The Earl of Lancaster was tried and sentenced in his own hall at Pontefract, March 25th, 1322; and was executed on a hill near it a day or two after.

Gaveston was beheaded on Blacklow-hill, near Warwick, June 19th, 1312. The battle of Bannockburn was fought June 24th, 1314; that of the White Bands, September 20th, 1319.

Should the style of manners in this work appear too coarse and barbarous, the reader is requested to call to mind the ballad of Edom of Gordon, preserved in Bishop Percy's valuable Collection of Antient Poems*, and to remember that the event which that ballad records, is

* Vol. I. p. 118. fourth edition.

there stated to be but too faithful a specimen of the violences practised in the feudal times in every part of this island, and, indeed, throughout Europe.

THE END.





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