THE SKELETON'S CAVE.

By William Cullen Bryant

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CHAPTER I.

Qual e quella ruina che, nel fianco
Di qua da Trento, l'Adige percosse.
O per tremuoto, o per sostegno manco,
Che, da cima del monte onde si mosse,
Al piano i: si la rocca discoseesa,
Ch' alcuna via darebbe a chi su fosse—
Cotal di quel burrato era la scesa.
Dante, *Inferno*.

We hold our existence at the mercy of the elements; the life of man is a state of continual vigilance against their warfare. The heats of noon would wither him like the severed herb; the chills and dews of night would fill his bones with pain; the winter frost would extinguish life in an hour; the hail would smite him to death, did he not seek shelter and protection against them. His clothing is the perpetual armour he wears for his defence, and his dwelling the fortress to which he retreats for safety. Yet, even there the elements attack him; the winds overthrow his habitation; the waters sweep it away. The fire, that warmed and brightened it within, seizes upon its walls and consumes it, with his wretched family. The earth, where she seems to spread a paradise for his abode, sends up death in exhalations from her bosom; and the heavens dart down lightnings to destroy him. The drought consumes the harvests on which he relied for sustenance; or the rains cause the green corn to "rot ere its youth attains a beard." A. sudden blast engulfs him in the waters of the lake or bay from which he seeks his food; a false step, or a broken twig, precipitates him from the tree which he had climbed fof its fruit; oaks falling in the storm, rocks toppling down from the precipices are so many dangers which beset his life. Even his erect attitude is a continual affront to the great law of gravitation, which is sometimes fatally avenged when he loses the balance preserved by constant care, and falls on a hard surface. The very arts on which he relies for protection from the unkindness of the elements betray him to the fate he would avoid, in some moment of negligence, or by some misdirection of skill, and he perishes miserably by his own inventions. Amid these various causes of accidental death, which thus surround us at every moment, it is only wonderful that their proper effect is not oftener produced—so admirably has the Framer of the universe adapted the faculties by which man provides for his safety, to the perils of the condition in which he is placed. Yet there are situations in which all his skill and strength are vain to protect him from a violent death, by some unexpected chance which executes upon him a sentence as severe and inflexible as the most pitiless tyranny of
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human despotism. But I began with the intention of relating a story, and I will not by my reflections anticipate the catastrophe of my narrative.

One pleasant summer morning a party of three persons set out from a French settlement in the western region of the United States, to visit a remarkable cavern in its vicinity. They had already proceeded for the distance of about three miles, through the tall original forest, along a path so rarely trodden that it required all their attention to keep its track. They now perceived through the trees the sunshine at a distance, and as they drew nearer they saw that it came down into a kind of natural opening, at the foot of a steep precipice. At every step the vast wall seemed to rise higher and higher; its seams and fissures, and inequalities became more and more distinct; and far up, nearly midway from the bottom, appeared a dark opening, under an impending crag. The precipice seemed between two and three hundred feet in height, and quite perpendicular. At its base, the earth for several rods around was heaped with loose fragments of rock, which had evidently been detached from the principal mass, and shivered to pieces in the fall. A few trees, among which were the black walnut and the slippery elm, and here and there an oak, grew scattered among the rocks, and attested by their dwarfish stature the ungrateful soil in which they had taken root. But the wild grape vines which trailed along the ground, and sent out their branches to overrun the trees around them, showed by their immense size how much they delighted in the warmth of the rocks and the sunshine. The celastrus also here and there had wound its strong rings round and round the trunks and the boughs, till they died in its embrace, and then clothed the leafless branches in a thick drapery of its own foliage. Into this open space the party at length emerged from the forest, and for a moment stopped.

"Yonder is the Skeleton's Cave," said one of them, who stood a little in front of the rest. As he spoke he raised his arm, and pointed to the dark opening in the precipice already mentioned.

The speaker was an aged man, of spare figure, and a mild, subdued expression of countenance. Whoever looked at his thin gray hairs, his stooping form, and the emaciated hand which he extended; might have taken him for one who had passed the Scripture limit of threescore years and ten; but a glance at his clear and bright hazel eye would have induced the observer to set him down at some five years younger. A broad-brimmed palmetto hat shaded his venerable features from the sun, and his black gown and rosary denoted him to be an ecclesiastic of the Romish faith.

The two persons whom he addressed were much younger. One of them was in the prime of manhood and personal strength, rather tall, and of a vigorous make. He wore a hunting-cap, from the lower edge of which curled a profusion of strong dark hair, rather too long for the usual mode in the Atlantic States, shading a fresh-coloured countenance, lighted by a pair of full black eyes, the expression of which was compounded of boldness and good-humour. His dress was a blue frock-coat trimmed with yellow fringe, and bound by a sash at the waist, deer-skin pantaloons, and deer-skin mocasins. He carried a short rifle on his left shoulder; and wore on his left side a leathern bag of rather ample dimensions, and on his right a powder flask. It was evident that he was either a hunter by

occupation, or at least one who made hunting his principal amusement; and there was something in his air and the neatness of his garb and equipments that bespoke the latter.

On the arm of this person leaned the third individual of the party, a young woman apparently about nineteen or twenty years of age, slender and graceful as a youthful student of the classic poets might imagine a wood-nymph. She was plainly attired in a straw hat and a dress of russet-colour, fitted for a ramble through that wild forest. The faces of her two companions were decidedly French in their physiognomy; hers was as decidedly Anglo-American. Her brown hair was parted away from a forehead of exceeding fairness, more compressed on the sides than is usual with the natives of England; and showing in the profile that approach to the Grecian outline which is remarked among their descendants in America. To complete the picture, imagine a quiet blue eye, features delicately moulded, and just colour enough on her cheek to make it interesting to watch its changes, as it deepened or grew paler with the varying and flitting emotions which slight cause will call up in a youthful maiden's bosom.

Notwithstanding this difference of national physiognomy, there was nothing peculiar in her accent, as she answered the old man who had just spoken.

"I see the mouth of the cave, but how are we to reach it, Father Ambrose 1 I perceive no way of getting to it without wings, either from the bottom or the top of the precipice."

"Look a few rods to the right, Emily. Do you see that pile of broken rocks reaching up to the middle of the precipice, looking as if a huge column of that mighty wall had been shivered into a pyramid of fragments? Our path lies that way."

"I see it, father," returned the fair questioner; "but when we arrive at the top, it appears to me we shall be no nearer the cave than we now are."

"From the top of that pile you may perceive a horizontal seam in the precipice extending to the mouth of the cave. Along that line, though you cannot discern it from the place where we stand, is a safe and broad footing, leading to our place of destination. Do you see, Le Maire," continued Father Ambrose, addressing himself to his other companion, "do you see that eagle sitting so composedly on a bough of that leafless tree, which seems a mere shrub on the brow of the precipice directly over the cavern? Nay, never lift your rifle, my good friend; the bird is beyond your reach, and you will only waste your powder. The superfluous rains which fall on the highlands beyond are collected in the hollow over which hangs the tree I showed you, and pour down the face of the rock directly over the entrance of the cave. Generally, you will see the bed of that hollow perfectly dry, as it is at present, but during a violent shower, or after several days' rain, there descends from that spot a sheet of water, white as snow, deafening with its noise the quiet solitudes around us, and rivalling in beauty some of the cascades that tumble from the cliffs of the Alps. But let us proceed."

The old man led the party to the pile of rocks which he had pointed out to their notice, and began to ascend from one huge block to another with an agility scarcely impaired by age. They could now perceive that human steps had trodden that rough path before them; in some places the ancient moss was effaced from the stones, and in others their surfaces had been worn smooth. Emily was about to follow her venerable conductor, when Le Maire offered to assist her.

"Nay, uncle," said she, "I know you are the politest of men, but I think your rifle will give you trouble enough. I have often heard you call it your wife; so I beg you will wait on Madame Le Maire, and leave me to make the best of my way by myself. I am not now to take my first lesson in climbing rocks, as you well know."

"Well, if this rifle be my spouse," rejoined the hunter, "I will say that it is not every wife who has so devoted a husband, nor every husband who is fortunate enough to possess so true a wife. She has another good quality—she never speaks but when she is bid, and then always to the point. I only wish for your sake, since I am not permitted to assist you, that Henry Danville were here. I think we should see the wildness of the paces that carry you so lightly over these rocks, a little chastised, while the young gentleman tenderly and respectfully handed you up this rude staircase, too rude for such delicate feet. Ah, I beg pardon, I forgot that you had quarrelled. Well, it is only a lover's quarrel, and the reconciliation will be the happier for being delayed so long. Henry is a worthy lad and an excellent marksman."

A heroine in a modern novel would have turned back this raillery with a smart or proud reply, but Emily was of too sincere and ingenuous a nature to answer a jest on a subject in which her heart was so deeply interested. Her cheek burned with a blush of the deepest crimson, as she turned away without speaking, and fled up the rocks. But though she spoke not, a tumult of images and feelings passed rapidly through her mind. One vivid picture of the past after another came before her recollection, and one well-known form and face were present in them all. She saw Henry Danville as when she first beheld, and was struck with his frank, intelligent aspect and graceful manners,—respectful, attentive, eager to attract her notice, and fearing to displease,—then again as the accepted and delighted lover,—and finally, as he was now, offended, cold, and estranged. A rustic ball rose before her imagination—a young stranger from the Atlantic States appears among the revellers—the phrases of the gay and animated conversation she held with him again vibrate on her ear—and again she sees Henry standing aloof, and looking gloomy and unhappy. She remembered how she had undertaken to discipline him for this unreasonable jealousy, by appearing charmed with her new acquaintance, and accepting his civilities with affected pleasure; how he had taken fire at this—had withdrawn himself from her society, and transferred his attentions to others. It was but the simple history of what is common enough among youthful lovers; but it was not of the less moment to her whose heart now throbbed with mingled pride and anguish, as these incidents came thronging back upon her memory. She regretted her own folly, but her thoughts severely blamed Henry for making so trifling a matter a ground of serious offence, and she sought consolation in reflecting how unhappy she must have been had she been united for life to one of so jealous a temper. "I am confident," said she to

herself, "that his present indifference is all a pretence; he will soon sue for a reconciliation, and I shall then show him that I can be as indifferent as himself."

Occupied with these reflections, Emily, before she was aware, found herself at the summit of that pile of broken rocks, and midway up the precipice.

CHAPTER II.

-----I'll look no more,
Lest my brain turn.—*King Lear*.

The ecclesiastic was the first of the party who arrived at the summit. He had seated himself on one of the blocks of stone which composed the pile, with his back against the wall of the precipice, and had taken the hat from his brow that he might enjoy the breeze which played lightly about the cliffs; and the coolness of which was doubly grateful after the toil of the ascent. In doing this he uncovered a high and ample forehead, such as artists love to couple with the features of old age, when they would represent a countenance at once noble and venerable. This is the only feature of the human face which Time spares: he dims the lustre of the eye; he shrivels the cheek; he destroys the firm or sweet expression of the mouth; he thins and whitens the hairs; but the forehead, that temple of thought, is beyond his reach, or rather, it shows more grand and lofty for the ravages which surround it.

The spot on which they now stood commanded a view of a wide extent of uncultivated and uninhabited country. An eminence interposed to hide from sight the village they had left; and on every side were the summits of the boundless forest, here and there diversified with a hollow of softer and richer verdure, where the hurricane, a short time before, had descended to lay prostrate the gigantic trees, and a young growth had shot up in their stead. Solitary savannas opened in the depth of the woods, and far off a lonely stream was flowing away in silence, sometimes among venerable trees, and sometimes through natural meadows, crimson with blossoms. All around them was the might, the majesty of vegetable life, untamed by the hand of man, and pampered by the genial elements into boundless luxuriance. The ecclesiastic pointed out to his companions the peculiarities of the scenery; he expatiated on the flowery beauty of those unshorn lawns; and on the lofty growth, and the magnificence and variety of foliage which distinguish the American forests, so much the admiration of those who have seen only the groves of Europe.

The conversation was interrupted by a harsh stridulous cry, and looking up, the party beheld the eagle who had left his perch on the top of the precipice, and having passed over their heads, was winging his way towards the stream in the distance.

"Ah," exclaimed Le Maire, "that is a hungry note, and the bird is a shrewd one, for he is steering to a place where there is plenty of game to my certain knowledge. It is the golden eagle; the war eagle, as the Indians call him, and no chicken either, as you

may understand from the dark colour of his plumage. I warrant he has gorged many a rabbit and prairie hen on these old cliff's. At all events, he has made me think of my dinner: unless we make haste, good Father Am. brose, I am positive that we shall be late to our venison and claret."

"We must endeavour to prevent so great a misfortune," said Father Ambrose, rising from the rock where he sat, and proceeding on the path towards the cavern. It was a kind of narrow terrace, varying in width from four to ten feet, running westwardly along the face of the steep solid rock, and apparently formed by the breaking away of the upper part of one of the perpendicular strata of which the precipice was composed. That event must have happened at a very remote period, for in some places the earth had accumulated on the path to a considerable depth, and here and there grew a hardy and dwarfish shrub, or a tuft of wildflowers hanging over the edge. As they proceeded, the great height at which they stood, and the steepness of the rocky wall above and below them, made Emily often tremble and grow pale as she looked down. A few rods brought the party to a turn in the rock, where the path was narrower than elsewhere, and precisely in the angle a portion of the terrace on which they walked had fallen, leaving a chasm of about two feet in width, through which their distance from the base was fearfully apparent. Le Maire had already passed it, but Emily, when she arrived at the spot, shrunk back and leaned against the rock.

"I fear I shall not be able to cross the chasm," said she, in a tone of alarm. "My poor head grows giddy from a single look at it."

"Le Maire will assist you, my child," said the old man, who walked behind her.

"With the greatest pleasure in life," answered Le Maire; "though I confess I little expected that the daughter of a clear-headed Yankee would complain of being giddy in any situation. But this comes of having a French mother I suppose. Let me provide a convenient station for Madame le Maire, as you call her, and I will help you over." He then placed his rifle against the rock, where the path immediately beyond him grew wider, and advancing to the edge of the chasm, held forth both hands to Emily, taking hold of her arms near the elbow. In doing this he perceived that she trembled.

"You are as safe here as when you were in the woods below," said Le Maire, "if you would but think so. Step forward now, firmly, and look neither to the right nor left."

She took the step, but at that moment the strange inclination which we sometimes feel when standing on a dizzy height, to cast ourselves to the ground, came powerfully over her, and she leaned involuntarily and heavily towards the verge of the precipice. Le Maire was instantly aware of the movement, and bracing himself firmly, strove with all his might to counteract it. Had his grasp been less steady, or his self-possession less perfect, they would both inevitably have been precipitated from where they stood; but Le Maire was familiar with all the perilous situations of the wilderness, and the presence of mind he had learned in such a school did not now desert him. His countenance bore witness to the intense exertion he was making; it was flushed, and its muscles were

working powerfully; his lips were closely compressed; the veins on his brow swelled, and his arms quivered with the strong tension given to their sinews. For an instant the fate of the two seemed in suspense, but the strength of the hunter prevailed, and he placed the damsel beside him on the rock, fainting and pallid as a corpse.

"God be praised," said the priest, drawing heavily the breath which he had involuntarily held during that fearful moment, while he had watched the scene, unable to render the least assistance.

CHAPTER III

--- A hollow cave
Far underneath a craggy cliff ypight,
Dark, doleful, dreary, like a greedy grave.
Spenser.

-----Beneath whose sable roof,
----ghostly shapes
Might meet at noontide,
—Fear and trembling Hope—
Silence and Foresight,—Death the Skeleton, .
And Time the Shadow.—
Wordsworth.

Some moments of repose were necessary before Emily was sufficiently recovered from her agitation to be able to proceed. The tears filled her eyes as she briefly but warmly thanked Le Maire for his generous exertions to save her, and begged his pardon for the foolish and awkward timidity, as she termed it, which had put his life as well as her own in such extreme peril.

"I confess," answered he, good-naturedly, "that had you been of as solid a composition as some ladies with whom I have the honour of an acquaintance, Madame Le Maire here would most certainly have been a widow. I understood my own strength, however," added he, for on this point he was 'somewhat vain, "and if I had not, I should still have been willing to risk something rather than to lose you. But I will take care, Emily, that you do not lead me into another scrape of the kind. When we return I shall, by your leave, take you in my arms and carry you over the chasm, and you may shut your eyes while I do it, if you please."

They now again set out, and in a few moments arrived at the mouth of the cavern they had come to visit. A projecting mass of rock impended over it, so low as not to allow in front an entrance to a person standing upright, but on each side it receded upwards in such a manner as to leave two high narrow openings, giving it the appearance of being suspended from the cavern roof. Beneath it the floor, which was a continuation of the terrace leading to the spot, was covered, in places, to a considerable depth, with soil

formed by the disintegration of the neighbouring rocks, and traversed by several fissures nearly filled with earth. As they entered by one of the narrow side openings, Emily looked up to the crag with a slight shudder. "If it should fall!" thought she to herself; but a feeling of shame at the idle fear she had lately manifested restrained her from giving utterance to the thought. The good ecclesiastic perceived what was passing in her mind, and said, with a smile—.

"There is no danger, my child; that rock has been suspended over the entrance for centuries, for thousands of years perhaps, and is not likely to fall today. Ages must have elapsed before the crags could have crumbled to form the soil now under our feet. It is true that there is no place sacred from the intrusion of accident; everywhere may unforeseen events surprise and crush us, as the foot of man surprises and crushes the insect in his path; but to suppose peculiar danger in a place which has known no change for hundreds of years is to distrust Providence. Come, Le Maire," said Father Ambrose, "will you oblige us by striking a light 1 Our eyes have been too much in the sunshine to distinguish objects in this dark place."

Le Maire produced from his hunting bag a roll of tinder, and lighting it with a spark from his rifle, kindled in a few moments a large pitch-pine torch. The circumstance which first struck the attention of the party was the profound and solemn stillness of the place. The most quiet day has under the open sky its multitude of sounds—the lapse of waters, the subtle motions of the apparently slumbering air among forests, grasses, and rocks, the flight and note of insects, the voices of animals, the rising of exhalations, the mighty process of change, of perpetual growth and decay, going on all over the earth, produce a chorus of noises which the hearing cannot analyze—which, though it may seem to you silence, is not so; and when from such a scene you pass directly into one of the rocky chambers of the earth, you perceive your error by the contrast. As the three went forward they passed through a heap of dry leaves lightly piled, which the winds of the last autumn had blown into the cave from the summit of the surrounding forest, and the rustling made by their steps sounded strangely loud amid that death-like silence. A spacious cavern presented itself to their sight, the roof of which near the entrance was low, but several paces beyond it rose to a great height, where the smoke of the torch ascending, mingled with the darkness, but the flame did not reveal the face of the vault.

They soon came to where, as Father Ambrose informed them, the cave divided into two branches. "That on the left," said he, "soon becomes a low and narrow passage among the rocks; this on the right leads to a large chamber, in which lie the bones from which the cavern takes its name."

He now took the torch from the hand of Le Maire, and turning to the right guided his companions to a lofty and wide apartment of the cave, in one corner of which he showed them a human skeleton lying extended on the rocky floor. Some decayed fragments, apparently of the skins of animals, lay under it in places, and one small remnant passed over the thighs, but the bones, though they had acquired from the atmosphere of the cave a greenish yellow hue, were seemingly unmouldered. They still retained their original relative position, and appeared as never disturbed since the sleep of

death came over the frame to which they once belonged. Emily gazed on the spectacle with that natural horror which the remains of the dead inspire. Even Le Maire, with all his vivacity and garrulity, was silent for a moment.

"Is any thing known of the manner in which this poor wretch came to his end?" he at length inquired.

"Nothing. The name of Skeleton's Cave was given to this place by the aborigines; but I believe they have no tradition concerning these remains. If you look at the right leg you will perceive that the bone is fractured: it is most likely the man was wounded on these very cliffs either by accident or by some enemy, and that he crawled to this retreat, where he perished from want of attendance and from famine."

"What a death!" murmured Emily.

The ecclesiastic then directed their attention to another part of the same chamber, where he said it was formerly not uncommon for persons benighted in these parts, particularly hunters, to pass the night. "You perceive," added he, "that this spot is higher than the rest of the cavern, and drier also; indeed no part of the cavern is much subject to moisture. A bed of leaves on this rock with a good blanket, is no bad accommodation for a night's rest, as I can assure you, having once made the experiment myself many years since, when I came hither from Europe. Ah, what have we here 1 coals, brands, splinters of pitch-pine! The cave must have been occupied very lately for the purpose I mentioned, and by people too who, I dare say, from the preparations they seem to have made, passed the night very comfortably."

"I dare say they did so, though they had an ugly bedfellow yonder," answered Le Maire; "but I hope you do not think of following their example. As you have shown us, I presume, the principal curiosities of the cave, I take the liberty of suggesting the propriety of getting as fast as we can out of this melancholy place, which has already put me out of spirits. That poor wretch who died of famine!—I shall never get him out of my head till I am fairly set down to dinner. Not that I care more for my dinner than any other man when there is any thing of importance in the way, as, for example, a buffalo, or a fat buek, or a bear to be killed; but you will allow, Father Ambrose, that a saddle of venison, or a hump of buffalo and a sober bottle of claret are a prettier spectacle, particularly at this time of day, than that mouldy skeleton yonder. I had intended to shoot something in my way back just to keep my hand and eye in practice, but it is quite too late to think of that. Besides, here is Emily, poor thing, whom we have contrived to get up to this place, and whom we must manage to get down again as well as we can."

The good priest, though by no means participating in Le Maire's haste to be gone, mildly yielded to his instances, particularly as they were seconded by Emily, and they accordingly prepared to return. On reaching the mouth of the cave, they were struck with the change in the aspect of the heavens. Dark heavy clouds, the round summits of which were seen one beyond the other, were rapidly rising in the west; and through the grayish blue haze which suffused the sky before them, the sun appeared already shorn of his

beams. A sound was heard afar of mighty winds contending with the forest, and the thunder rolled at a distance.

"We must stay at least until the storm is over," said Father Ambrose; "it would be upon us before we could descend these cliffs. Let us watch it from where we stand above the tops of these old woods: I can promise you it will be a magnificent spectacle."

Emily, though she would gladly have left the cave, could say nothing against the propriety of this advice; and even Le Maire, notwithstanding that he declared he had rather see a well-loaded table at that moment than all the storms that ever blew, preferred remaining to the manifest inconvenience of attempting a descent. In a few moments the dark array of clouds swept over the face of the sun, and a tumult in the woods announced the coming of the blast. The summits of the forest waved and stooped before it, like a field of young flax in the summer breeze,—another and fiercer gust descended,—another and stronger convulsion of the forest ensued. The trees rocked backward and forward, leaned and rose, and tossed and swung their branches in every direction, and the whirling air above them was filled with their leafy spoils. The roar was tremendous,—the noise of the ocean in a tempest is not louder,—it seemed as if that innumerable multitude of giants of the wood, raised a universal voice of wailing under the fury that smote and tormented them. At length the rain began to fall, first in large and rare drops, and then the thunder burst over head, and the waters of the firmament poured down in torrents, and the blast that howled in the woods fled before them as if from an element that it feared. The trees again stood erect, and nothing was heard but the rain beating heavily on the immense canopy of leaves around, and the occasional crashings of the thunder, accompanied by flashes of lightning, that threw a vivid light upon the walls of the cavern. The priest and his companions stood contemplating this scene in silence, when a rushing of water close at hand was heard. Father Ambrose showed the others where a stream, formed from the rains collected on the highlands above, descended on the crag that overhung the mouth of the cavern, and shooting clear of the rocks on which they stood, fell in spray to the broken fragments at the base of the precipice.

A gust of wind drove the rain into the opening where they stood, and obliged them to retire farther within. The priest suggested that they should take this opportunity to examine that part of the cave which in going to the skeleton's chamber they had passed on their left, observing, however, that he believed it was no otherwise remarkable than for its narrowness and its length. Le Maire and Emily assented, and the former taking up the torch which he had stuck in the ground, they went back into the interior. They had just reached the spot where the two passages diverged from each other, when a hideous and intense glare of light filled the cavern, showing for an instant the walls, the roof, the floor, and every crag and recess, with the distinctness of the broadest sunshine. A frightful crash accompanied it, consisting of several sharp and deafening explosions, as if the very heart of the mountain was rent asunder by the lightning, and immediately after a body of immense weight seemed to fall at their very feet with a heavy sound, and a shock that caused the place where they stood to tremble as if shaken by an earthquake. A strong blast of air rushed by them, and a suffocating odour filled the cavern.

Father Ambrose had fallen upon his knees in mental prayer, at the explosion; but the blast from the mouth of the cavern threw him to the earth, t He raised himself, however, immediately, and found himself in utter silence and darkness, save that a livid image of that insufferable glare floated yet before his eyeballs. He called first upon Emily, who did not answer, then upon Le Maire, who replied from the ground a few paces nearer the entrance of the cave. He also had been thrown prostrate, and the torch he carried was extinguished. It was but the work of an instant to kindle it again, and they then discovered Emily extended near them in a swoon.

"Let us bear her to the mouth of the cavern," said Le Maire; "the fresh air from without will revive her." He took her in his arms, but on arriving at the spot he placed her suddenly on the ground, and raising both hands, exclaimed, with an accent of despair, " The rock is fallen!—the entrance is closed!"

It was but too evident,—Father Ambrose needed but a single look to convince him of its truth,—the huge rock which impended over the entrance had been loosened by the thunderbolt, and had fallen upon the floor of the cave, closing all return to the outer world.

CHAPTER IV.

Had one been there, with spirit strong and high,
Who could observe as he prepared to die;
He might have seen of hearts the varying kind,
And traced the movements of each different mind;
He might have seen that not the gentle maid
Was more than stern and haughty man afraid.

Crabbe.

Before inquiring further into the extent of the disaster, an office of humanity was to be performed. Emily was yet lying on the floor of the cave in a swoon, and the old man, stooping down and placing her head in his lap, began to use the ordinary means of recovery, and called on Le Maire to assist him. The hunter, after being spoken to several times, started from his gloomy revery, and kneeling down by the side of the priest, aided him in chafing her temples and hands, and fanned her cheek with his cap until consciousness was restored, when the priest communicated the terrible intelligence of what had happened.

Presence of mind and fortitude do not always dwell together. Those who are most easily overcome by the appearance of danger often support the calamity after it has fallen with the most composure. Le Maire had presence of mind, but he had not learned to submit with patience to irremediable misfortune; Emily could not command her nerves in sudden peril, but she could suffer with a firmness which left her mind at liberty to employ its resources. The very disaster which had happened seemed to inspire both her mind and her frame with new strength. The vague apprehensions which had haunted her were now

reduced to certainty; she saw the extent of the calamity, and felt the duties it imposed. She rose from the ground without aid and with a composed countenance, and began to confer with Father Ambrose on the probabilities and means of escape from their present situation.

In the mean time, Le Maire, who had left them as soon as Emily came to herself, was eagerly employed in examining the entrance where the rock had fallen. On one side it lay close against the wall of the cavern; on the other was an opening of about a hand's breadth, which appeared, so far as he could distinguish, to communicate with the outer atmosphere. He looked above, but there the low roof, which met the wavering flame of his torch, showed a collection of large blocks firmly wedged together; he cast his eyes downwards, but there the lower edge of the vast mass which had fallen lay imbedded in the soil; he placed his shoulder against it and exerted his utmost strength to discover if it were moveable, but it yielded no more than the rock on which it rested.

"It is all over with us," said he, at length, dashing to the ground the torch, which the priest, approaching, prudently took up before it was extinguished; "it is all over with us; and we must perish in this horrid place like wild beasts in a trap. There is no opening, no possible way for escape, and not a soul on the wide earth knows where we are, or what is our situation." Then turning fiercely to the priest, and losing his habitual respect for his person and office in the bitterness of his despair, he said, " This is all your doing,— it was you who decoyed us hither to lay our bones beside those of that savage yonder"

"My son—" said the old man.

"Call me not son,—this is no time for cant. You take my life, and when I reproach you, you give me fine words. You call yourself a man of God,—can you pray us out of this horrible dungeon into which you have enticed us to bury us alive?”

"Say not that I take your life," said Father Ambrose mildly, without otherwise noticing his reproaches; "there is no reason as yet to suppose our case hopeless. Though we informed no person of the place to which we were going, it does not follow that we shall not be missed, or that no inquiry will be made for us. With to-morrow morning the whole settlement will doubtless be out to search for us, and as it is probable that some of them will pass this way, we may make ourselves heard by them from the mouth of the cavern. Besides, as Emily has just suggested, it is not impossible that the cave may have some other outlet, and that the part we were about to examine may afford a passage to the daylight."

Le Maire caught eagerly at the hope thus presented. "I beg your pardon, father," said he, "I was hasty— I was furious—but it is terrible, you will allow, to be shut up in this sepulchre, with the stone rolled to its mouth, and left to die. It is no light trial of patience merely to pass the night here, particularly," said he, with a smile, "when you know that dinner is waiting for you at home. Well, if the cave is to be explored, let us set about it immediately; if there is any way of getting out, let us discover it as soon as possible."

They again went to the passage which diverged from the path leading to the skeleton's chamber. It was a low, irregular passage, sometimes so narrow that they were obliged to walk one behind the other, and sometimes wide enough to permit them to walk abreast.

After proceeding a few rods it became so low that they were obliged to stoop.

"Remain here," said Le Maire, "and give me the torch. If there be any way of reaching daylight by this part of the cavern, I will give an account of it in due time."

Father Ambrose and Emily then seated themselves on a low bench of stone in the side of the cavern, while he went forward. The gleam of his torch appearing and disappearing showed the windings of the passage he was treading, and sometimes the sound of measured steps on the rock announced that he was walking upright, and sometimes a confused and struggling noise denoted that he was making his way on his elbows and knees. At length the sound was heard no longer, and the gleam of the torch ceased altogether to be descried in the passage.

"Father Ambrose!" said Emily, after a long interval. These words, though in the lowest key of her voice, were uttered in such a tone of awe, and sounded, moreover, with such an unnatural distinctness in the midst of that perfect stillness, that the good father started.

"What would you, my daughter?"

"This darkness and this silence are frightful, and I spoke that you might reassure me by the sound of your voice. My uncle is long in returning."

"The passage is a long and intricate one."

"But is there no danger? I have heard of death-damps in pits and deep caverns, by the mere breathing of which a man dies silently and without a struggle. If my poor uncle should never return!"

"Let us not afflict ourselves with supposable evils, while a real calamity is impending over us. The cavern has been explored to a considerable distance without any such consequence as you mention to those who undertook it."

"God grant that he may discover a passage out of the cave! But I am afraid of the effect of a disappointment, he is so impatient—so impetuous."

"God grant us all grace to submit to his good pleasure," rejoined the priest; "but I think I hear him on the return. Listen, my child, you can distinguish sounds inaudible to my dull ears.'"

Emily listened, but in vain. At length, after another long interval, a sound of steps was heard, seemingly at a vast distance. In a little while a faint light showed itself in the passage, and after some minutes Le Maire appeared, panting with exertion, his face covered with perspiration, and his clothes soiled with the dust and slime of the rocks. He was about to throw himself on the rocky seat beside them without speaking.

"I fear your search has been unsuccessful," said Father Ambrose.

"There is no outlet in that quarter," rejoined Le Maire sullenly. "I have explored every winding and every cranny of the passage, and have been brought up at last, in every instance, against the solid rock."

"There is no alternative, then," said the ecclesiastic, "but to make ourselves as tranquil and comfortable as we can for the night. I shall have the honour of installing you in my old bed-chamber, where, if you sleep as soundly as I did once, you will acknowledge to-morrow morning that you might have passed a worse night. It is true, Emily, that one corner of it is occupied by an ill-looking inmate, but I can promise you from my own experience that he will do you no harm. So let us adjourn to the skeleton's chamber, and leave to Providence the events of the morrow."

To the skeleton's chamber they went accordingly, taking the precaution to remove thither a quantity of the dry leaves which lay heaped not far from the mouth of the cave, to form couches for their night's repose. A log of wood of considerable size was found in this part of the cavern, apparently left there by those who had lately occupied it for the night; and on collecting the brands and bits of wood which lay scattered about they found themselves in possession of a respectable stock of fuel. A fire was kindled, and the warmth, the light, the crackling brands, and the ever-moving flames, with the dancing shadows they threw on the walls, and the waving trains of smoke that mounted like winged serpents to the roof and glided away to the larger and loftier apartment of the cave, gave to that recess lately so still, dark, and damp, a kind of wild cheerfulness and animation, which, under other circumstances, could not have failed to raise the spirits of the party. They placed themselves around that rude hearth, Emily taking care to turn her back to the corner where lay the skeleton. Father Ambrose had been educated in Europe; he had seen much of men and manners, and he now exerted himself to entertain his companions by the narrative of what had fallen under his observation in that ancient abode of civilized man. He was successful, and the little circle forgot for a while in the charm of his conversation their misfortune and their danger. Even Le Maire was enticed into relating one or two of his hunting exploits, and Emily suffered a few of the arch sallies that distinguished her in more cheerful moments to escape her. At length Le Maire's hunting watch pointed to the hour of ten, and the good priest counselled them to seek repose. He gave them his blessing, recommending them to the great Preserver of men, and then laying themselves down on their beds of leaves around the fire, they endeavoured to compose themselves to rest.

But now that each was left to the companionship of his own thoughts, the idea of their situation intruded upon their minds with a sense of pain and anxiety which repulsed

the blessing of sleep. The reflections of each on the events of the day and the prospects of the morrow were different; those of Emily were the most cheerful, as her hopes of deliverance were the most sanguine. Her imagination had formed a picture of the incidents of her rescue from the fate that threatened her, a little romance in anticipation, which she would not for the world have revealed to living ear, but which she dwelt upon fondly and perpetually in the secrecy of her own meditations. She thought what must be the effect of her mysterious absence from the village upon Henry Danville, whose very jealousy, causeless as it was, demonstrated the sincerity and depth of his affection. She represented him to herself as the leader in the search that would be set on foot for the lost ones, as the most adventurous of the band, the most persevering, the most inventive, and the most successful.

"He will pass by this precipice to-morrow," thought she; "like others, he has heard of this cave; he will see that the fall of the rock has closed the entrance, his quick apprehension will divine the place of our imprisonment, he will call upon those who are engaged in the search, he will climb the precipice, he will deliver us, and I shall forgive him. But should it be my fate to perish: should none ever know the manner and place of my death; there will be one at least who will remember and regret me. He will bitterly repent the wrong he has done me, and the tears will start into his eyes at the mention of my name." A tear gushed out from between the closed lids of the fair girl as this thought passed through her mind, but it was such a tear as maidens love to shed, and it did not delay the slumber that already began to steal over her.

Sleep was later in visiting the eyes of Le Maire. The impatience which a bold and adventurous man, accustomed to rely on his own activity and address for escape in perilous emergencies, feels under the pressure of a calamity which no exertion of his own can remedy, had chafed and almost maddened his spirit. His heart sank within him at the thought of the lingering death he must die if not liberated from his living tomb. Long and uneasily he tossed on his bed of leaves, but he too had his hopes of deliverance by the people of the village, who would unquestionably assemble in the morning to search for their lost neighbours, and who might discover their situation. These thoughts at length prevailed over those of a gloomier kind; and the fatigues of the day overcoming his eyes with drowsiness, he fell into a slumber, profound, as it seemed from his hard drawn breath, but uneasy and filled with unpleasant dreams, as was evident from frequent starts and muttered exclamations.' When it was certain that both were asleep, Father Ambrose raised himself from his place and regarded them sorrowfully and attentively. He had not slept, though from his motionless posture and closed eyes, an observer might have thought him buried in a deep slumber. His own apprehensions, notwithstanding that he had endeavoured to prevent his companions from yielding themselves up to despair, were more painful than he had permitted himself to utter. That there was a possibility of their deliverance was true, but it was hardly to be expected that those who sought for them would think of looking for them in the cavern, nor was it likely that any cry they could utter would be heard below. The old man's thoughts gradually formed themselves into a kind of soliloquy, uttered, as is often the case with men much given to solitary meditation and prayer, in a low but articulate voice. "For myself," said he, "my life is near its close, and the day of decrepitude may be even yet nearer than the day of death. I repine not, if it

be the will of God that my existence on earth, already mercifully protracted to the ordinary limits of usefulness, should end here. But my heart bleeds to think that this maiden, in the blossom of her beauty and in the spring-time of her hopes, and that he who slumbers near me, in the pride and strength of manhood, should be thus violently divorced from a life which nature perhaps intended for as long a date as mine. I little thought, when the mother of that fair young creature in dying committed her to my charge, that I should be her guide to a place where she should meet with a frightful and unnatural death. Accustomed as I am to protracted fastings, it is not impossible that I may outlive them both, and after having closed their eyes, who should have closed mine, I may be delivered and go forth in my uselessness from the sepulchre of those who should have been the delight and support of their friends. Let it not displease thee, O, my Maker! if, like the patriarch of old, I venture to expostulate with thee." And the old man placed himself in an attitude of supplication, clasping his hands and raising them towards heaven. Long did he remain in that posture motionless, and at length lowering his hands, he cast a look upon the sleepers near him, and laying himself down upon his bed of leaves, was soon asleep also.

CHAPTER V.

A dull imprisoned ray,
A sunbeam that hath lost its way,
And through the crevice and the cleft
Of the thick wall is fallen and left.

Prisoners of Chillon.

Of course the slumbers of none of the party were long protracted. They were early dispersed by the idea of their imprisonment in that mountain dungeon, which now and then showed itself painfully in the imagery of their dreams. When Emily awoke she found herself alone in the skeleton's chamber. Her eyes, accustomed to the darkness, could now distinguish most of the objects around her by the help of a gleam of light, which appeared to come in from the larger apartment. The fire, kindled the night previous, was now a mass of ashes and blackened brands; and the couches of her two companions yet showed the pressure of their forms. She rose, and not without casting a look at the grim inmate of the place, whose discoloured bones were just distinguishable in that dim twilight, passed into the outer chamber. Here she found the priest and Le Maire standing near the mouth of the cavern, where a strong light, at least so it seemed to her eyes, streamed in through the opening between the well and the fallen rock, showing that the short night of summer was already past.

"We are watching the increasing light of the morning," said the priest.

"And waiting for the friends whom it will bring to deliver us," added Le Maire*

"You will admit me to share in the occupation, I hope," answered Emily. "I am fit for nothing else, as you know, but to watch and wait, and I will endeavour to do that patiently."

It was not long before a brighter and a steady light, through the aperture, informed the prisoners that the sun had risen over the forest tops; and that the perfect day now shone upon the earth. To those, who could look upon the woods and savannas, the hills and the waters around, that morning was one of the most beautiful of the beautiful season to which it belonged. The aspect of nature, like one of those human countenances we sometimes meet with, so radiant with cheerfulness that it seems as if they had never known the expression of sorrow, showed, in the gladness it now put on, no traces of the tempest of the preceding day. The intensity of the sun's light was tempered by the white clouds that now and then floated over it, trailing through a soft blue sky; and the light and fresh breezes seemed to hover in the air, to rise and descend, with a motion like the irregular and capricious course of the butterfly; now stooping to wrinkle the surface of the stream, now rising to murmur in the leaves of the forest, and again descending to shake the dew from the cups of the opening flowers in the natural meadows. The replenished brooks had a livelier warble, and the notes of innumerable birds rang more cheerfully through the clear atmosphere. The prisoners of the cavern, however, could only distinguish the beauty of the morning by slight tokens,—now and then a sweep of the winds over the forest tops—sometimes the note of the woodthrush, or of the cardinal bird as he flew by the face of the rocks; and occasionally a breath of the perfumed atmosphere flowing through the aperture. These intimations of liberty and enjoyment from the world without only heightened their impatience at the imprisonment to which they were doomed.

"Listen !" said Emily; "I think I hear a human voice."

"There is certainly a distant call in the woods," said Le Maire, after a moment's silence. "Let us all shout together for assistance."

They shouted accordingly, Le Maire exerting his clear and powerful voice to the utmost, and the others aiding him as well as they were able, with their feebler and less practised organs. A shrill discordant cry replied, apparently from the cliffs close to the cave.

"A parrokeet," exclaimed Le Maire. "The noisy pest! I wish the painted rascal were within reach of my rifle. You see, Father Ambrose, we are forgotten by mankind; and the very birds of the wilderness mock our cries for assistance."

"You have a quick fancy, my son," answered the priest; "but it is yet quite too soon to give over. It is now the very hour when we may expect our neighbours to be looking for us in these parts."

They continued therefore to remain by the opening; and from time to time to raise that shout for assistance. Hour after hour passed, and no answer was returned to their

cries, which indeed could have been but feebly heard, if heard at all, at the foot of tho precipice; hour after hour passed, and no foot climbed the rocky stair that led to their prison. The pangs of hunger in the mean time began to assail them, and, more intolerable than these, a feverish and tormenting thirst.

"You have practised fasting," said Le Maire to Father Ambrose; "and so have I when I could get nothing to eat. In my hunting excursions I have sometimes gone without tasting food from morning till the night of the next day. I found relief from an expedient which I learned of the old hunters, but which I presume you churchmen are not acquainted with. Here it is."

Saying this, he passed the sash he wore once more round his body, drawing it tightly, and securing it by a firm knot. Father Ambrose declined adopting, for the present, a similar expedient, alleging that as yet he had suffered little inconvenience from want of food, except a considerable degree of thirst; but Emily, already weak from fasting, allowed her slender waist to be wrapped tightly in the folds of a silk shawl which she had brought with her. The importunities of hunger were thus rendered less painful, and a new tension was given to the enervated frame; but the burning thirst was not at all allayed. The cave was then explored for water; every corner was examined, and holes were dug in the soil which in some places covered the rocky floor, but in vain. Le Maire again ventured into the long narrow passage which he had followed to its termination the day previous, in the hope of now discovering some concealed spring, or some place where the much desired element fell in drops from the roof, but he returned fatigued and unsuccessful. As he came forth into the larger apartment a light fluttering sound, as of the waving of a thin garment, attracted the attention of the party. On listening attentively it appeared to be within the cavern; but what most excited their surprise was, that it passed suddenly and mysteriously from place to place, while the agent continued invisible, in spite of all their endeavours to discover it. Sometimes it was heard on the one side, sometimes on the other, now from the roof, and now from the floor, near, and at a distance. At length it passed directly over their heads.

"It is precisely the sound of a light robe agitated by the wind, or by a swift motion of the person wearing it," said Emily.

"It is no sound of this earth, I will depose in a court of justice," said Le Maire, who was naturally of a superstitious turn; "or we should see the thing that makes it."

"All we can say at present," answered the priest, "is, that we cannot discover the cause; but it does not therefore follow that it is any thing supernatural. What is perceived by one of our senses only does not necessarily belong to the other world. I have no doubt however, that we shall discover the cause before we leave the cavern."

"Nor I cither," rejoined Le Maire, with a look and tone which showed the awe that had mastered him; "I am satisfied of the cause already. It is a warning of approaching death. We must perish in this cavern."

Emily, much as she was accustomed to rely on the opinions of the priest, felt in spite of herself the infection of that feeling of superstitious terror which had seized upon her uncle, and her heart had begun to beat thick, when a weak chirp was heard.

"The mystery is resolved," exclaimed Father Ambrose, "and your ghost, my good friend, is only a harmless fellow-prisoner, a poor bird, which the storm doubtless drove into the cave, and which has been confined here ever since." As he spoke, Emily, who had looked to the quarter whence the sound proceeded, pointed out the bird sitting on a projection of rock at no great distance.

"A godsend!" cried Le Maire; "the bird is ours, though his little carcass will hardly furnish a mouthful for each of us." Saying this, he took up his rifle, which stood leaning against the wall of the cavern, and raised the piece to his eye. Another instant and the bird would have fallen, but Emily laid her hand on his arm.

"Cannot we take him alive," asked she; "and make him the agent of our deliverance?"

"How will you do that?" said Le Maire, without lowering his rifle.

"Send him out at the opening yonder with a letter tied to his wing to inform our friends of our situation. It will at least increase the chances of our escape."

"It is well thought of," answered Le Maire; "and now, Emily, you shall see how an experienced hunter takes a bird without harming a single feather of his wings."

Saying this, he went to the mouth of the cave, and began to turn up, with a splinter of wood, the fresh earth. After considerable examination he drew forth a beetle, and producing from his hunting-bag a quantity of packthread, he tied the insect to one end of it, and having placed it on the point of a crag, retired to a little distance with the other end of the packthread in his hand. By frequently changing his place, he caused the bird to approach the spot where he had laid the insect. It was a tedious process; but when at length the bird perceived his prey, he flew to it and snapped it up in an instant, with the eagerness of famine. By a similar piece of management he contrived to get the thread wound several times about one of the legs of the little creature; and when this was effected, he suddenly drew it in, bringing him fluttering and struggling to his hand. It proved to be of the species commonly called the cedar bird.

"Ah, Father Ambrose," cried Le Maire, whose vivacity returned with whatever revived his hopes, " we have caught you a brother ecclesiastic, a recollet, as we call him from the gray hood he wears. No wonder we did not see him before, for his plumage is exactly of the colour of the rocks. But he is the very bird for a letter; look at the sealing-wax he carries on his wings." As he spoke he displayed the glossy brown pinions, the larger feathers of which were ornamented at their tops with little appendages of a vermilion colour, like drops of delicate red sealing-wax.

"And now let us think," continued he, "of writing the letter which this dapper little monk is to carry for us." A piece of charcoal was brought from the skeleton's chamber, and Le Maire having produced some paper from his hunting-bag, the priest wrote upon it a few lines, giving a brief account of their situation. The letter, being folded, and properly addressed, was next perforated with holes, through which a string was inserted, and tied under the wing of the bird. Emily then carried him to the opening, through which he darted forth in apparent joy at regaining his liberty. "Would that we could pass out," said she, with a sigh, "as easily as the little creature which we have just set free. But the *recollet* is a lover of gardens, and he will soon be found seeking his food in those of the village."

The hopes to which this little expedient gave birth in the bosoms of all contributed somewhat to cheer the gloom of their confinement. But night came at length, to close that long and weary day; a night still more long and weary. The light which came in at the aperture began to wane, and Emily watched it as it faded, with a sickness of the heart which grew almost to agony, when finally it ceased to shine altogether. She had continued during the day to cherish the dream of deliverance by the sagacity and exertions of her lover; and had scarcely allowed herself to contemplate the possibility of remaining in the cavern another night. It was therefore in unspeakable bitterness of spirit that she accompanied the priest and Le Maire to the skeleton's chamber, where they collected the brands which remained of the fire of the preceding flight, and kindled them into a dull and meager flame. That evening was a silent one—the day had been passed in various speculations on the probability of their release, in searching the cave for water, and in shouting at the entrance for assistance. But the hour of darkness,— the hour which carried their neighbours of the village to their quiet and easy beds, in their homes, overflowing with abundance, filled with the sweet air of heaven, and watched by its kindly constellations—that hour brought to the unhappy prisoners of the rock a peculiar sense of desolation and fear, for it was a token that they were, for the time at least, forgotten; that those whom they knew and loved slumbered, and thought not of them. They laid themselves down upon their beds of leaves, but the horrible thirst, which consumed them like an inward fire, grew fiercer with the endeavour to court repose; and the blood that crept slowly through their veins seemed to have become a current of liquid flame. Sleep came not to their eyes, or came attended with dreams of running waters, which they were not permitted to taste; of tempests and earthquakes, and breathless confinement among the clods of earth and various shapes of strange peril, while their friends seemed to stand aloof, and to look coldly and unconcernedly on, without showmg even a desire to render them assistance.

CHAPTER VI.

My brother's soul was of the mould
Which in a palace had grown cold,
Had his free breathing been denied
The range of the steep mountain side.
Prisoners of Chillon.

Shall Nature, swerving from her earliest dictate,
Self-preservation, fall by her own act?
Forbid it Heaven! let not, upon disgust,
The shameless hand be foully crimsoned o'er,
With blood of its own lord.
Blair's Grave

On the third day the cavern presented a more gloomy spectacle than it had done at any time since the fall of the rock took place. It was now about eleven o'clock in the morning, and the shrill singing of the wind about the cliffs, and through the crevice, which now admitted a dimmer light than on the day previous, announced the approach of a storm from the south. The hope of relief from without was growing fainter and fainter as the time passed on; and the sufferings of the prisoners became more poignant. The approach of the storm, too, could only be regarded as an additional misfortune, since it would probably prevent or obstruct for that day the search which was making for them. They were all three in the outer and larger apartment of the cave. Emily was at a considerable distance from the entrance reclining on a kind of seat formed of large loose stones, and overspread with a covering of withered leaves. There was enough of light to show that she was exceedingly pale; that her eyes were closed, and that the breath came thick and pantingly through her parted lips, which alone of all her features retained the colour of life. Faint with watching, with want of sustenance, and with anxiety, she had lain herself down on this rude couch, which the care of her companions had provided for her, and had sunk into a temporary slumber. The priest stood close to the mouth of the cave leaning against the wall, with his arms folded, himself scarcely changed in appearance, except that his cheek seemed somewhat more emaciated, and his eyes were lighted up with a kind of solemn and preternatural brightness. Le Maire, with a spot of fiery red on each cheek,— his hair staring wildly in every direction, and his eyes bloodshot, was pacing the cavern floor to and fro, carrying his rifle, occasionally stopping to examine the priming, or to peck the flint; and sometimes standing still for a moment, as if lost in thought. At length he approached the priest, and said to him, in a hollow voice,

"Have you never heard of seamen on a wreck, destitute of provisions, casting lots to see which of their number should die, that the rest might live?"

"I have so."

"Were they right in so doing?"

"I cannot say that they were not. It is a horrid alternative in which they were placed. It might be lawful—it might be expedient, that one should perish for the salvation of the rest."

"Have you never seen an insect or an animal writhing with torture, and have you not shortened its sufferings by putting an end to its life?"

"I have—but what mean these questions?"

"I will tell you. Here is my rifle." As he spoke, Le Maire placed the piece in the hands of Father Ambrose, who took it mechanically. "I ask you to do for me what you would do for the meanest worm. You understand me?"

"Are you mad?" demanded the priest, regarding him with a look in which the expression of unaffected astonishment was mingled with that of solemn reproof.

"Mad! indeed I am mad, if you will have it so— you will feel less scruple at putting an end to the existence of a madman. I cannot linger in this horrid place, neglected and forgotten by those who should have come to deliver me, suffering the slow approaches of death—the pain—the fire in the veins—and, worst of all, this fire in the brain," said Le Maire, striking his forehead. "They think,—if they think of me at all,—that I am dying by slow tortures; I will disappoint them. Listen, father," continued he; "would it not be better for you and Emily that I were dead ?—is there no way 1—look at my veins, they are full yet, and the muscles have not shrunk away from my limbs; would you not both live the longer, if 1 were to die?"

The priest recoiled at the horrid idea presented to his mind. "We are not cannibals," said he, "thanks be to Divine Providence." An instant's reflection, however, convinced Father Ambrose that the style of rebuke which he had adopted was not proper for the occasion. The unwonted fierceness and wildness of Le Maire's manner, and the strange proposal he had made, denoted that alienation of mind which is no uncommon effect of long abstinence from food. He thought it better, therefore, to attempt by mild and soothing language to divert him from his horrid design.

"My good friend," said he, "you forget what grounds of hope yet remain to us; indeed, the probability of our escape is scarcely less to-day than it was yesterday. The letter sent out of the cave may be found, and if so, it will most certainly effect our deliverance; or the fall of the rock may be discovered by some one passing this way, and he may understand that it is possible we are confined here. While our existence is prolonged there is no occasion for despair. You should endeavour, my son, to compose yourself, and to rely on the goodness of that Power who has never forsaken you."

"Compose myself!" answered Le Maire, who had listened impatiently to this exhortation; "compose myself! Do you not know that there are those here who will not suffer me to be tranquil for a moment? Last night I was twice awakened, just as I had

fallen asleep, by a voice pronouncing my name, as audibly as I heard your own just now; and the second time, I looked to where the skeleton lies, and the foul thing had half-raised itself from the rock, and was beckoning me to come and place myself by its side. Can you wonder if I slept no more after that?”

"My son, these are but the dreams of a fever." "And then, whenever I go by myself, I hear low voices and titterings of laughter from the recesses of the rocks. They mock me, that I, a free hunter, a denizen of the woods and prairies, a man whose liberty was never restrained for a moment, should be entrapped in this manner, and made to die like a buffalo in a pit, or like a criminal in the dungeons of the old world,—that I should consume with thirst in a land bright with innumerable rivers and springs,—that I should wither away with famine, while the woods are full of game and the prairies covered with buffaloes. I could face famine if I had my liberty. I could meet death without shrinking in the sight of the sun and the earth, and in the fresh open air. I should strive to reach some habitation of my fellow-creatures; I should be sustained by hope; I should travel on till I sank down with weakness and fatigue, and died on the spot. But famine made more frightful by imprisonment and inactivity, and these dreams, as you call them, that dog me asleep and awake, they are more than I can bear.— Hark!" he exclaimed, after a short pause, and throwing quick and wild glances around him; "do you hear them yonder—do you hear how they mock me!—you will not, then, do what I ask ?—give me the rifle."

"No," said the priest, who instantly comprehended his purpose: "I must keep the piece till you are more composed.'"

Le Maire seemed not to hear the answer, but laying his grasp on the rifle, was about to pluck it from the old man's hands. Father Ambrose saw that the attempt to retain possession of it against his superior strength, would be vain; he therefore slipped down his right hand to the lock, and cocking it, touched the trigger, and discharged it in an instant. The report awoke Emily, who came trembling and breathless to the spot.

"What is the matter?” she asked.

"There is no harm done, my child," answered the priest, assuming an aspect of the most perfect composure. "I discharged the rifle, but it was not aimed at any thing, and I beg pardon for interrupting your repose at a time when you so much need it. Suffer me to conduct you back to the place you have left. Le Maire, will you assist!"

Supported by Le Maire on one side, and by the priest on the other, Emily, scarcely able to walk from weakness, was led back to her place of repose. Returning with Le Maire, Father Ambrose entreated him to consider how much his niece stood in need of his assistance and protection. He bade him recollect that his mad haste to quit the world before called by his Maker would leave her, should she ever be released from the cavern, alone and defenceless, or at least with only an old man for her friend, who was himself hourly expecting the summons of death. He exhorted him to reflect how much, even now, in her present condition of weakness and peril, she stood in need of his aid, and conjured

him not to be guilty of a pusillanimous and cowardly desertion of one so lovely, so innocent, and so dependent upon him.

Le Maire felt the force of this appeal. A look of human pity passed across the wild expression of his countenance. He put the rifle into the hands of Father Ambrose. "You are right," said he; "I am a fool, and I have been, I suspect, very near becoming a madman. You will keep this until you are entirely willing to trust me with it. I will endeavour to combat these fancies a little longer."

CHAPTER VII.

A burst of rain
Swept from the black horizon, broad descends
In one continuous flood. Still overhead
The mingling tempest weaves its gloom, and still
The deluge deepens.—*Thomson*.

In the mean time the light from the aperture grew dimmer and dimmer, and the eyes of the prisoners, though accustomed to the twilight of the cavern, became at length unable to distinguish objects at a few paces from the entrance. The priest and Le Maire had placed themselves by the couch of Emily, but rather, as it seemed, from that instinct of our race which leads us to seek each other's presence, than for any purpose of conversation, for each of the party preserved a gloomy silence. The topics of speculation on their condition had been discussed to weariness, and no others had now any interest for their minds. It was no unwelcome interruption to that melancholy silence, when they heard the sound of a mighty rain pouring down upon the leafy summits of the woods, and beating against the naked walls and shelves of the precipice. The roar grew more and more distinct, and at length it seemed that they could distinguish a sort of shuddering of the earth above them, as if a mighty host was marching heavily over it. The sense of suffering was for a moment suspended in a feeling of awe and curiosity. I

"That, likewise, is the rain," said Father Ambrose, after listening for a moment. "The clouds must pour down a perfect cataract, when the weight of its fall is thus felt in the heart of the rock."

"Do you hear that noise of running water?" asked Emily, whose quick ear had distinguished the rush of the stream formed by the collected rains over the rocks without at the mouth of the cave.

"Would that its channel were through this cavern," exclaimed Le Maire, starting up. "Ah! here we have it—we have it !—listen to the dropping of water from the roof near the entrance. And here at the aperture!" He sprang thither in an instant. A little stream detached from the main current, which descended over rocks that closed the mouth of the cave, fell in a thread of silver amid the faint light that streamed through the opening; he knelt for a moment, received it between his burning lips, and then hastily

returning, bore Emily to the spot. She held out her hollowed palm, white, thin, and semi-transparent, like a pearly shell, used for dipping up the waters from one of those sweet fountains that rise by the very edge of the sea— and as fast as it filled with the cool, bright element, imbibed it with an eagerness and delight inexpressible. The priest followed her example; Le Maire also drank from the little stream as it fell, bathed in it his feverish brow, and suffered it to fall upon his sinewy neck.

"It has given me a new hold on life," said Le Maire, his chest distending with several full and long breathings. "It has not only quenched that hellish thirst, but it has made my head less light, and my heart lighter. I will never speak ill of this element again—the choicest grapes of France never distilled any thing so delicious, so grateful, so life-giving. Take notice, Father Ambrose, I retract all I have ever said against water and water-drinkers. I am a sincere penitent, and shall demand absolution."

Father Ambrose had begun gently to reprove Le Maire for his unseasonable levity, when Emily cried out—"The rock moves !—the rock moves! Come back—come further into the cavern!" Looking up to the vast mass that closed the entrance, he saw plainly that it was in motion, and he had just time to draw Le Maire from the spot where he had stooped down to take another draught of the stream, when a large block, which had been wedged in overhead, gave way, and fell in the very place where he left the prints of his feet. Had he remained there another instant, it must have crushed him to atoms. The prisoners, retreating within the cavern far enough to avoid the danger, but not too far for observation, stood watching the event with mingled apprehension and hope. The floor of the cave just at the edge, on which rested the fallen rock, yawned at the fissures, where the earth with which they were filled had become saturated and swelled with water, and unable any longer to support the immense weight, settled away, at first slowly, under it, and finally, along with its incumbent load, fell suddenly and with a tremendous crash, to the base of the precipice, letting the light of day and the air of heaven into the cavern. The thunder of that disruption was succeeded by the fall of a few large fragments of rock on the right and left, after which the priest and his companions heard only the fall of the rain and the heavy sighing of the wind in the forest.

Father Ambrose and Emily knelt involuntarily in thanksgiving at their unexpected deliverance. Le Maire, although unused to the devotional mood, observing their attitude, had bent his knee to imitate it, when a glance at the outer world now laid open to his sight, made him start again to his feet with an exclamation of delight. The other two arose, also, and turned to the broad opening which now looked out from the cave over the forest. On one side of this opening rushed the torrent whose friendly waters had undermined the rock at the entrance, and now dashed themselves against its shivered fragments below. It is not for me to attempt to describe how beautiful appeared to their eyes that world which they feared never again to see, or how grateful to their senses was that fresh and fragrant air of the forests which they thought never to breathe again. The light, although the sky was thick with clouds and rain, was almost too intense for their vision, and they shaded their brows with their hands as they looked forth upon that scene of woods and meadows and waters, fairer to their view than it had ever appeared in the most glorious sunshine.

"That world is ours again," said Le Maire, with a tone of exultation. "We are released at last, and now . let us see in what manner we can descend."

As he spoke, he approached the verge of the rock from which the severed mass had lately fallen, and saw to his dismay that the terrace which had served as a path to the cavern, was carried away for a considerable distance to the right and left of where they stood, leaving the face of the precipice smooth and sheer from top to bottom. No footing appeared, no projection by which the boldest and the most agile could scale or descend it. Le Maire threw himself sullenly on the ground.

"We must pass another night in this dungeon,1' said he, " and perhaps starve to death after all. It is clear enough that we shall have to remain here until somebody comes to take us down, and the devil himself would not be caught abroad in the woods in the midst of such a storm as this."

The priest and Emily came up at this moment:—

"This is a sad disappointment," said the former, "but we have this advantage, that we can now make ourselves both seen and heard. Let us try the effect of our voices. It is not impossible that there may be some person within hearing."

Accordingly they shouted together, and though nothing answered but the echo of the forest, yet there was even in that reply of the inanimate creation something cheering and hope-inspiring, to those who for nearly three days had perceived that all their cries for succour were smothered in the depths of the earth. Again they raised their voices, and listened for an answering shout,—a third time, and they were answered. The halloo of a full-toned, manly voice arose from the woods below.

"Thank heaven, we are heard at last," said Emily.

"Let us see if the cry was in answer to ours," said the priest, and again they called, and again a shout was returned from the woods. "We are heard—that is certain," continued he," and the voice is nearer than at first,—we shall be released."

At length the sound of quick footsteps on the crackling boughs was heard in the forest, and a young man of graceful proportions, dressed, like Le Maire, in a hunting-cap and frock, emerged into the open space at the foot of the precipice. As he saw the party standing in the cavity of the rock, he clapped his hands with an exclamation of surprise and delight. "Thank heaven, they are discovered at last! Are you all safe—all well?"

"All safe," answered Le Maire, "but hungry as wolves, and in a confounded hurry to get out of this horrid den."

The young man regarded the precipice attentively for a moment, and then called out, "Have patience a moment, and I will bring you the means of deliverance." He then disappeared in the forest.

Emily's waking dream was, in fact, not wholly unfulfilled. That young man was Henry Danville; she knew him by his air and figure as soon as he emerged from the forest, and before she heard his voice. He had been engaged, with many others belonging to the settlement, in the pursuit of their lost curate and his companions, from the morning after their absence, and fortunately happened to be at no great distance when the disruption of the rock took place. Struck with astonishment at the tremendous concussion, he was hastening to discover the cause, when he heard the shout to which he answered.

It was not long before voices and steps were again heard in the wood, and a crowd of the good villagers soon appeared advancing through the trees, one bearing a basket of provisions, some dragging ladders, some carrying ropes and other appliances for getting down their friends from their perilous elevation. Several of the ladders being spliced together, and secured by strong cords, were made to reach from the broken rocks below to the mouth of the cavern, and Henry ascended.

My readers will have no difficulty in imagining the conclusion. The emotions of the lovers at meeting under such circumstances are of course not to be described, and the dialogue that took place on that occasion would not, I fear, bear to be repeated. The joy expressed by the villagers at recovering their worthy pastor brought tears into the good man's eyes; and words are inadequate to do justice to the delight of Le Maire at seeing his old companions and their basket of provisions. My readers may also, if they please, imagine another little incident, without which some of them might think the narrative imperfect, namely, a certain marriage ceremony, which actually took place before the next Christmas, and at which the venerable Father Ambrose officiated. Le Maire, when I last saw him, was living with one of Emily's children, a hale old man of eighty, with a few gray hairs scattered among his raven locks, full of stories of his youthful adventures, among which he reckoned that of his imprisonment in the cave a decidedly the best. He had, however, no disposition to become the hero of another tale of the kind, since he never ventured into another cave, or under another rock, as long as he lived; and was wont to accompany his narrative with a friendly admonition to his youthful and inexperienced hearers, against thoughtlessly indulging in so dangerous a practice.