

e Mysterious Spaniard; Or, The Ruins of St. Luke's Abbey. A Rom

Author Unknown

The Mysterious Spaniard; Or, The Ruins of St. Luke's Abbey. A Romance.

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THE Chevalier Franval, and his sister Amarylla, were the only children of a French General of great reputation, who died at the beginning of the last century, at an elegant villa to which he had retired in the evening of his days, at the distance of a few leagues from the city of Paris.

At the time of her father's death, Amarylla was receiving her education in the convent of St. Ann at Aurillac. The Chevalier watched the death-bed of his parent with the most anxious and tender affection; and the most solemn injunction which that parent bestowed on him, was, to supply his place, by every care and attention in his power, to his orphan sister; a command so congenial to the feelings of the Chevalier, that it was a satisfaction to himself to pronounce a vow to this effect on the ear of his expiring father.

Six months after the death of the General, was the time appointed for Amarylla to quit her convent; and the period being arrived, her brother set out for Aurillac, resolved himself to be her protector on her journey home. He travelled leisurely, and stopping one evening in a small town, where he was informed that the church was a handsome structure, he strolled towards it, intending to amuse an hour by viewing it. On his return to his inn, he perceived loitering before it, a gentleman whom he had seen examining the beauties of the church at the same time that he had been engaged in observing them himself; and concluding that he was a stranger in the place, and his fellow lodger at the inn, addressed himself to him. The young man (for he did not appear above twenty years of age) met Franval's advances towards an acquaintance with evident pleasure, and entered into conversation with him in a manner which displayed him to have added a liberal education to a good natural understanding. He proved (as Franval had supposed) to be a lodger at the same inn, and they agreed to sup together. The stranger informed Franval, that he was a Spaniard by birth; his name Don Manuel di Vadilla; and that he was travelling, attended by only one servant, solely for his amusement and improvement. After an evening pleasantly spent by both parties, they separated for the night; and on the following morning, took a friendly leave of each other previously to pursuing their respective journies.

The conciliating manners of Don Manuel had made a very favorable impression in his behalf on the mind of the Chevalier; and often, as he rode along, did he reflect on the agreeable hours which he had passed in the society of the young Spaniard. At length he reached the convent of Saint Ann, where a meeting of the most joyful and affectionate nature took place between him and his sister.

Amarylla had always been handsome whilst a girl; but during the four years that her brother had been separated from her, he beheld a great augmentation of her charms to have taken place. She was become tall and graceful; her eyes were of a sparkling blue, and expressive of the sweetness of her disposition; her cheeks, twin roses; her lips a bed of coral, within which reposed a double row of pearls.

After remaining three days at Aurillac, the Chevalier and his sister commenced their journey towards home. As they travelled, he remarked, that Amarylla, notwithstanding the sweetness of her temper, which was never for a moment interrupted, appeared to have some object, either of regret or melancholy, for her private thoughts. She would frequently fall into short fits of absence, and heave sighs, which appeared to be accompanied with some tender emotion. The Chevalier entreated her, by the love which he bore her, as the only remnant of his revered parents, to confide to him the secrets of her heart. For some time Amarylla, with blushes, evaded a direct reply: at length she confessed that a young man, of whom she had a few weeks before caught an accidental view from the seat appointed in the chapel of her convent for the boarders, had made an impression on her heart, which she could not obliterate from it.

Her brother smiled at the warmth of the innocent Amarylla's first sensation of the imperious passion of love, and told her, that as her acquaintance with society increased, which it would do as soon as she was introduced, on her return home, to the world, she would herself laugh at the serious manner in which she now treated a recollection of this nature.

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In apologizing for her confession, Amarylla urged, that the youth had beheld her, notwithstanding her retired situation; and that his eyes had beamed with an expression which had eloquently declared his wish of approaching her; and that he had left the church with a last gaze, which she had understood as entreating her to remember him. Still the Chevalier continued to smile, and Amarylla to sigh.

A journey free from all disasters brought them to the Chevalier's villa: it was the family mansion, a house of considerable elegance, and furnished in a style of magnificence which rivalled those of most of the nobles: in particular, one of its saloons, and a breakfast apartment on the second story, which were ornamented with paintings of so great value and excellence as frequently to attract strangers to inspect them; an indulgence which was always readily granted to persons of a respectable rank.

On entering the house, the Chevalier was met by his housekeeper, who informed him, that he had a gentleman, a stranger, lodging in one of the chambers. Franval requested an explanation of her words. She answered, that the gentleman of whom she spoke, had come to the villa about a week before, to view the pictures; that his foot having slipped as he was descending the stairs, he had had the misfortune of breaking one of his legs, and that she had been compelled by humanity, to offer him a bed in the house. The Chevalier, with the natural generosity and feeling of his heart, commended the conduct she had pursued; and, after a short time, went to visit the stranger, and make him personal offers of his services, when, to his great surprise, he beheld in the invalid, Don Manuel di Vadilla.

The nature of their remarks on this extraordinary meeting may be easily imagined: nor can it be doubted, that the Chevalier caused every attention to be paid to the recovery of a young man, his first acquaintance with whom had created for him a favorable prejudice in his heart.

Franval passed many hours in each day by the bedside of his guest; and as their acquaintance increased, he learnt from him the following particulars of his history: that he was an orphan; that the few relatives whom he possessed, were all distant ones; that Spain was a country of which the manners and the inhabitants were not congenial to his feelings, and that he had therefore quitted it, and resolved to settle in France; but he had not yet fixed on any spot as a residence: that his fortune, which was ample, he had placed in the hands of a banker in Paris; and had a servant, who was his only attendant, a man apparently about forty–five years of age, named Rodalvo, to whom he expressed himself particularly attached, as he had been in his service from the hour of his birth.

In their conversation, one day, it chanced that Franval mentioned to Don Manuel, his having brought home his sister from the convent of Saint Ann at Aurillac. At the name of the convent the Spaniard smiled; and when Franval enquired the cause of his doing so, he confessed to him, that, having one evening attended vespers in the Chapel of that convent, he had been particularly struck by the beauty of one of the boarders; that, at the time, he had not believed the impression made by her charms on his heart to have been so deep as he had since found it; but that with each succeeding day, he now desired more earnestly to see her again.

The Chevalier recollected the confession which his sister had made to him, of her having beheld with the eye of partiality, a stranger in the church of Saint Ann, who she believed had viewed her with the same emotions as she had seen him; and from the similarity of her account to that of the young Spaniard, he doubted not that they were reciprocally the hero and heroine of each others adventures. He buried his suspicions in his breast but the progress of time proved them to have been correct.

When Don Manuel was sufficiently recovered from his hurt to quit his chamber, and descend into the apartments in the daily use of the family, the first moment of his encountering Amarylla, was attended with an emotion of joy and surprise on the part of each, which clearly explained to Franval the justice of his conjectures. The enamoured pair were in raptures at this unexpected introduction to each other; and when the perfect use of Don Manuel's limbs was again restored to him, he still lingered at the villa of the Chevalier Franval, unable to quit the adorable object who possessed his heart.

Thus passed on six months, at the expiration of which, Amarylla requested her brother's permission to bestow her hand, on Don Manuel. The Chevalier saw that her affections were placed on him, and that he appeared devoted to her. He had now gained, he believed, a thorough knowledge of Don Manuel's heart and principles; he regarded them calculated to ensure happiness to his beloved sister; and their union was accordingly sanctioned by his approbation.

Never were two amiable hearts more happy than were those of Don Manuel and his Amarylla in the

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possession of each other; and the Chevalier Franval, unwilling to lose the pleasure of their society, invited them to make his villa their abode. Two years rolled on in happiness uninterrupted, during the course of which two lovely infants strengthened the bond of affection between their parents. Shortly after the birth of their second child, Don Manuel, one morning at breakfast, expressed an intention of riding that day to Paris, and returning again in the evening: this was by no means an unusual thing either with him or his brother-in-law Franval; and when the coffee was removed, he set out for the metropolis, attended by his servant Rodalvo.

The evening closed without the return of Don Manuel; the night advanced, and still he did not arrive. His wife consoled herself with the idea that some engagement, which he had been unable to decline, might have detained him to sleep at Paris, and that the morning would bring him home; but alas! her hope was fallacious; the morning came unaccompanied by Don Manuel; and once more the veil of night descended to the earth, without witnessing his return to his disconsolate Amarylla.

The Chevalier Franval was not less anxious for the fate of his brother-in-law, than distressed at beholding the misery which Don Manuel's mysterious absence caused his sister; and immediately repaired to Paris, to make enquiries concerning him. But in vain were all his attempts at discovering the truth; not a breath of intelligence could be obtained by him, either of Don Manuel, or his servant Rodalvo. The endeavors of the Chevalier to gain some light upon this dark occurrence, were unabating, and utterly unsuccessful. The days crept on; these grew into weeks, and still the adored husband of Amarylla did not return; and her grief and despondency were almost raised to madness.

At length a vague account reached the Chevalier and his sister, that her lost husband had been seen travelling in a carriage, which was moving at an extremely swift pace, upon one of the high roads at the southern extremity of the kingdom which led across the Pyrenees into Spain. From the first moment of his disappearance, Amarylla had constantly repeated her conviction, that not infidelity to her, but some misfortune, which he had not been able to counteract, had torn him from her; and she now declared her intention of endeavoring to trace his steps. With much entreaty and persuasion, her brother over-ruled her purpose, and prevailed upon her to remain the guardian of her children, whilst he undertook the office of following the track that had been described to them as the one pursued by Don Manuel.

Instant preparation was accordingly made for the Chevalier's journey, and, after a most melancholy scene of separation from his sister, he set out, accompanied by a friend named Montreville, whom he had requested to become the partner of his undertaking; and attended his Henri, a confidential servant of his own.

Their journey was pursued with the greatest alacrity till they reached the southern extremity of the kingdom: here they proceeded more slowly, being frequently delayed by their uncertainty of what road to take, and by the inquiries which they made after the object of their search. Not a gleam of success smiled on them, but still they pursued their way with unabating energy. About noon of a gloomy and uncomfortable day, they reached the foot of the rugged Pyrenees. Franval had already determined to proceed into Spain, and accordingly having refreshed themselves at an inn upon the borders of the kingdom they were about to quit, they began to ascend the rough path which led across the mountains.

They rode on till the shades of evening, which were beginning to fall on the earth, warned them to seek shelter for the night. The gloom of an overclouded sky, rendered the coming darkness more rapid than usual in its approach; and the light of day was almost entirely expelled from the Heavens, when the Chevalier Franval was so fortunate as to descry a light in a distant habitation.

"See there," he cried, on observing it, "a light at length appears! Thank Heaven, we shall now get housed for the night; for it is doubtless a post-house from whence it shines."

The light appeared in view till they were arrived within a short distance of the house, and it then vanished in a sudden manner, as if it had been blown out.

They rode up to the door: Henri applied the butt-end of his whip to it in lieu of a knocker; at the same time remarking, "That if the inhabitants were in bed, every one could scarcely be asleep, except the lamp they had seen had gone out of itself."

For a time they were led to conjecture that this had been the case, for no reply was returned to their repeated knockings: but at length, after another salute on the part of Henri with his leaden-headed whip upon the hollow door, which was loud enough to have raised the dead, if they were ever to be raised by mortal means, a window in the upper part of the house was opened, and a head thrust out. "What is it you want?" asked the voice of a female.

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"Meat, drink, and repose," replied Montreville; "have you them to sell?"

"I am no conjurer, to sell sleep," replied the woman, in a tone between pleasantry and sulkiness. "If you mean that you want to lodge here, I have not a pallet in my house that is unoccupied;" and with these uncourteous words she drew in her head again, and shut the window.

"I wish we had not travelled so late," said Franval.

"Phoo, nonsense," cried Montreville, who was a young man, and whose good spirits, and gaiety of heart, never forsook him, "they must at all events allow us to sit up in the house, if they can't put us to bed in it. I'll be satisfied with a chair—to repose in, if they will but open the larder to me."

"And the cellar, Monsieur," said Henri.

"And the cellar, as you say," replied Montreville. "So, at them again, Henri; beat another rattatoo upon the door, and let us learn if we can't come to terms, now we agree to put beds out of the question."

Henri had again recourse to his leaden-headed whip and in about ten minutes the same casement was again opened, and the rough voice of a man called out, "Whoever ye are, if ye do not go quietly about your business, and cease to disturb the peace of my house, I'll find means to make you answer for your behaviour."

"Our business, friend, is here," replied Montreville. "We are three half-starved travellers, who request to be allowed to shelter ourselves in your house during the night."

"Half-starved travellers, indeed," grumbled out the host: "it is worth while raising a man out of his sleep, to attend to half-starved travellers, truly."

"But my friend only means," said Franval, "that we are very hungry travellers, not very poor ones; and I add in his name, and my own, that we will reward you very liberally for any accommodation you may grant us."

"Upon the word of a Christian," said Henri, "there is gold in the saddle bags of both these gentlemen."

"All the better for them," returned the host, "but as I am no robber, nor can admit them into my house, none of it is likely to fall to my share."

"Why can you not admit us?" enquired Franval. "We are not robbers any more than yourself."

"It cannot be," returned the host.

"So you have told us before," replied the Chevalier; "and still do not inform us by what motive you are actuated, in refusing us shelter beneath your roof."

The host was silent.

"Yours is a post-house, is it not?" continued Franval.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Then let me tell you, friend," rejoined Montreville, "that as you live by keeping open house, the travellers upon whom you shut your door, have a just right to receive a very good reason, for your conduct, or to open the door for themselves."

"Are ye Catholics, gentlemen?" demanded the landlord.

"Yes, we are," both answered.

"Do you respect an oath as sacred?" enquired the host.

"Yes, yes; we do, we do," replied all three; imagining that some terms for their entrance into the house were about to be proposed to them.

"Then know," replied the host, "that I have already once to-night sworn by Saint Francis not to open my door; and I now swear by him a second time, to keep my first oath sacred."

Montreville was beginning to fly into a passion. The host stopped him, by raising his voice and continuing to speak; "But if I can render you any other service; if a flask of wine, a loaf of bread, or a lanthorn to light you on your way, are of any use to you, you shall have them."

"Let us taste the wine," said Montreville, whilst Franval sat meditating on the strangeness of the host's conduct.

A flask of good wine for the production of a post-house was handed out to them, and with it some cakes of newly-baked bread. Hunger is a keen sensation, that requires much less parade in its gratification than custom usually assigns to it; and, seated upon their saddles, they found the bread and wine very refreshing and comfortable.

"You have dealt so far honorably by us," said Franval, "and shall experience the same honor from us. Here," added he, throwing a demi-louis d'or at the window as he spoke, "this for your bread and wine, and twenty more

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shall follow it, if you will let us in."

"It is a good price, Messieurs; but I am better paid to keep you out," said the host.

"Us!" cried Montreville, "to keep us out?"

"Not you in particular," returned the man; "for I know you not; every one, I mean."

A woman now advanced to the window with a lanthorn, which had a lamp burning in it; the man received it at her hands, and lowering it out of the casement, asked if they chose to have it?

Henri received it; and the host then drew in his head, and was upon the point of shutting the casement.

"Stay, hear us an instant, I beg," said Franval. "Cannot you direct us to any cottage, any dwellings, where we might pass the night?"

There are stray cottages scattered about," answered the host; "but you would find it impossible to gain admittance into any one of them: their inhabitants would take you for robbers, and nothing you could say would convince them to the contrary, at this time of the night: they live in so great fear of banditti, that they might even, perhaps, fire upon you without enquiring your business."

"To cut the matter short at once," exclaimed, Montreville, "tell us how much you have received to keep out visitors, and if our purse is rich enough, we will outbid your guests."

"Gentlemen," said, the host, gravely, "you said you were Catholics, and respected an oath. Remember mine—You shall not come in."

"But if the inhabitants of cottages are afraid of three men, probably those of castles will not have the same apprehensions, as they are provided both with numbers and arms; so cannot you direct us to one of them?" enquired Franval.

"Why this is a part of the country where there are but few buildings of that description," answered the host; "there is but one within ten leagues of us, and that is at the distance of nearly four from this spot; and were you near it, I would not by any means advise you to attempt to enter it."

"Why so? who inhabits it?" asked Montreville.

"He is known by the name of Don Bazilio," replied the host, "and is by some reputed to be a nobleman of great wealth; others believe him to be Belzebub himself."

Montreville laughed at the manner of the host's expressing himself; and Franval's eye was at that moment attracted by a faint light which proceeded from an upper casement of the house, at which he perceived standing, a tall, lank form, of a swarthy and terrific countenance, which almost corresponded with his idea of the being which the host had just named, and caused him an undescribable sensation for the moment he beheld it; and it was but a moment that his eye had fixed on it, ere the shutter was pulled up, and closed it from his sight.

Franval made no observation on what he had seen to his companions; and Henri, addressing the host, said, "I suppose you mean to let us understand that it is haunted."

"Dreadfully, dreadfully haunted, is the Castle of Virandola," replied the landlord; "at least so it is reported. I never went to see, nor ever intend it."

What shall we do in this cursed dilemma?" exclaimed Montreville.

I have done all it is in my power to do for you," said the host; "and so I wish you safe travelling; and a good night, Messieurs;" and with these words he shut the casement.

Montreville was again on the point of calling him back, when Franval stopped him, by saying, "Come, let us ride on."

Ride on! but whither?" cried Montreville.

"We can have no choice; the road lies before us," replied Franval; then, in an under tone, he added, "I'll explain myself to you presently;" and as he spoke, he clapped spurs to his horse, and set forward; and his companions followed his example.

"Why did you so suddenly leave the house which you were a quarter of an hour ago as eager as myself to enter?" enquired Montreville of his friend, before they had ridden an hundred yards away from the post-house.

Franval did not slacken his horse's pace till Montreville a second time urged his enquiry; and Franval then replied, "I have no doubt but that the reason of our being refused admittance into that house, is, that a gang of banditti, or at least some members of a lawless community of that nature, are concealed within it; perhaps in the very act of flying from justice;" and he then described the terrific visage which he had seen peeping through the window, and which, he said, if it had been a human countenance, he could only suppose to be that of a savage and

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bloodthirsty plunderer.

"Thank Heaven, I did not see him," cried Henri.

"We all owe our thanks to Heaven, that we were not admitted into the house, if such are its guests, as I conjecture them to be," said Franval.

"But in my opinion," returned Montreville, "we are far from safe now: don't it appear likely to you, that we were turned from the house, in order that these fellows, of whom you saw one, might pursue and plunder, perhaps murder, us? The rascal of a host would not lose the credit of his house, by suffering us to be assailed in it, lest any of us should have the good fortune to escape from their clutches, and relate the story; so he artfully takes a deeper share in the plot, by sending us forward."

"I have no fears of that kind," rejoined Franval; "our horses are fleet-footed, and will outstrip many animals."

"Of what use is their fleetness in this gloom?" said Montreville: "don't you perceive that the night is become so dark, that when we are half a dozen paces before or behind Henri and his lanthorn, we cannot discover the road? Thus, in such an emergency, the fleetness of their feet would, in all probability, only serve to carry us headlong down a precipice. The farther we get away from the post-house, however, the better, I think; so let us lose no time in debating."

This was agreed to by Franval; and they again spurred their horses into a trot, which they continued for about half a league, when a rocky break in the ground obliged them to move with caution, and at foot's pace. Whilst they were crossing this uneven track of ground, "Hark! Messieurs, hark!" cried Henri.

"What! what do you hear?" asked Montreville impatiently.

"The trampling of horses, Messieurs: don't you?" was the reply.

"I do, I do," cried Montreville: "they are coming upon us! Franval, don't you hear them?"

A pause of silence ensued: Franval broke it: "I did hear them," he said, but they are no longer audible."

"They have stopped," said Montreville, "perhaps till some more of their comrades have joined them."

"Or, perhaps," said Henri, "they have turned out of the road upon the grass, that we may not hear their approach: they must judge that their horses hoofs cannot escape our hearing on the beaten pathway, as our lanthorn informs them exactly at what distance we are from them."

"Oh, curse the lanthorn; blow it out," cried Montreville.

"No, no," interrupted Franval: "in the course of our necessities this night, its light may prove as beneficial to us, as we now consider it injurious to our safety; therefore give it to me, Henri, and I'll hide it under my cloak."

"The sounds do not return," said Henri.

"It is as dark as pitch," cried Montreville.

"I can distinguish a knot of trees to our right," said Franval: "my plan is, that we ride in amongst them, and keep ourselves concealed there for a short time, during which period it is not improbable that they may pass us, supposing us to be gone on. —What think you of my scheme?"

"I do not disapprove it," said Montreville; "but we will load our pistols."

"Undoubtedly," replied Franval; "but the expedient I have proposed may save us from the necessity of spilling human blood, or suffering our own to be spilt."

They rode swiftly up to the trees, which were not above two score in number, planted in a shallow declivity at the mouth of the valley. Partial clumps of underwood formed a tolerable screen between them and the road they had just quitted, and they sat scarcely allowing themselves to respire, lest the suspiration of their breath should prevent their hearing any other sound which it might be important to them not to lose.

Nearly a quarter of an hour was thus spent, without the least noise of any kind meeting their ears, when they heard a sound resembling the leaves of a bush, when pressed upon by a person who is endeavoring to force himself a passage through them.

"There, there!" whispered Montreville.

Franval cocked his pistol, but did not speak.

Several minutes again passed away in silence. "It was only the wind," again whispered Montreville; but scarcely had he spoken, ere the noise was repeated; and in the following instant a voice exclaimed, "Proceed to the Castle of Virandola."

Montreville immediately discharged his pistol towards the spot from whence the voice had proceeded, and Henri fired off his in the same direction.

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When the report of the pistols had died away, universal silence again prevailed; no groan announced the bullets to have inflicted a wound: no flying step discovered the discharge of their tubes to have inspired any object with fear. "What can this mean?" exclaimed Franval.

"It is, doubtless, a lure to draw us into the power of some enemy. Ten to one but the Castle of Virandola is the residence of a banditti, who hope by this stratagem to inveigle us into their power," replied Montreville. "A likely story, indeed, that we should proceed to a place we have the account of, which the landlord gave us of this castle, upon such an obscure invitation. You would not certainly be so rash as to think of it?"

"The voice appeared more than human," said Franval.

"Nonsense," exclaimed Montreville; "I say it is some trick; and whatever your opinion may be, I swear that if I go to the castle"—

"Swear not, but go," interrupted the voice which had before been heard; and it now spoke from the opposite direction to that whence it had before proceeded.

"There again," cried Franval.

"'Tis solemn, I confess," said Montreville; "but still, I think it is mortal."

"Let us search whether we can discover some one hidden amongst the bushes," rejoined Franval, drawing the lanthorn from under his cloak; and as he spoke, he vaulted from his horse. Montreville followed his example; and Henri taking the bridles of their horses, they proceeded towards the spot where the speaker had appeared to be concealed the second time they had been addressed by him.

Nothing was to be seen; nothing was to be heard. They moved on towards the place from whence the voice had proceeded the first time of their hearing it. Equally unsuccessful was their pursuit.

After a considerable time thus spent in fruitless re searches after the mysterious speaker by whom they had been addressed, they returned to their horses. "Nobody is to be found," said Montreville, addressing Henri.

"I feared as much, Monsieur," returned the valet.

"Feared!" echoed Montreville.

"Yes, Monsieur: I cannot help thinking that the voice resembled one that was heard the night before an old lady I once lived with in Alsace died," was the reply.

Franval had already said that the voice had appeared to him to be more than human. Henri's opinion strengthened his; and the light of the lanthorn was just sufficient to shew each that his companions minds were occupied with unpleasant and undefined sensations.

The temper of Franval was steady, firm, and cool; and although transactions of an unexplained nature had lately occurred in his family, such as might also prepare him for a voice of warning or instruction, he did not choose to let it appear to his friend and servant, that he was moved by the occurrence just past; and therefore, with as much composure as he was able to command, he mounted his saddle, and said "As we appear to have no immediate cause to apprehend the approach of banditti, let us ride on; let us return to the road, and pursue our way."

Montreville was a young man not deficient in courage, but his disposition was tinged with a dislike to forming acquaintance with any of the members of the world of spirits. Henri resembled him in this particular; and therefore they joyfully followed Franval's proposition of quitting the spot, where they firmly believed one of the members of the aerial community to have been flitting around them.

They continued to ride on for a considerable time without interruption; their conversation consisting merely of occasional remarks on the extraordinary adventure which they had encountered that night. When they had proceeded about a league and a half, Montreville said, "My horse knocks up; he can't go much farther without rest, I am certain; indeed, I expect that our beasts and ourselves will all be material sufferers by our want of repose, and shelter from the night air. If we could discover any habitations I should be tempted to knock at the door, in spite of what the master of the post-house said."

This observation had not been long made on the part of Montreville, ere a vivid flash of lightning passed before their eyes.

"I have foreseen a tempest some time," said Henri, "and a heavy one I think it will be; only look at the awful blackness of the clouds over our heads, Messieurs."

Franval and his friend raised their faces to the sky and felt upon them a few partial drops of rain, which announced a shower at hand. Again the lightning flashed its resplendent brilliancy upon the earth, and the thunder

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rolled in solemn grandeur through the sky; with each flash the tempest appeared to gather strength; with each succeeding moment the rain fell in greater quantities: and the situation of our travellers became of the most pitiable kind.

"Can we espy no cavity in the earth, no rocky dell, no place of any kind which may afford us a temporary shelter?" said Montreville; "not only the cloaths we have on, but those in our saddle-bags likewise must be drenched with this heavy rain."

The mingled hail and rain, driven along by the current of a powerful north-east wind, met them full in the face; and the horses of our travellers kept continually turning to the right and to the left, in order to avoid it. At the moment Franval's horse was making a movement of this nature, a sudden flash of lightning enabled his master to descry what he could merely distinguish to be part of a wall. He communicated the observation he had made to his friend, and they immediately turned their horses towards it, in the hope of its forming part of a building which might afford them the enviable blessing of shelter from the inclemency of the weather.

As they moved on, they observed many fragments of stone scatted upon the ground, which appeared to be the ruins of a building that had either fallen into natural decay, or been crumbled by the hand of violence; and when they gained the wall which had been descried by Franval, their conjectures were confirmed, for they found that it formed a part of the ruin of an ancient monastic building.

A considerable part of the front of the edifice was still standing; but, on looking through the archway in which the gate of the entrance had once been swung, the observations which they were enable to make by the momentary illumination of the passing lightning presented them only with a long perspective of gloomy ruins.

It appeared, however, probable that these ruins might afford some nook to protect them from the weather; and in this hope they dismounted; and leading their horses through the gateway, they tied them by their bridles to the remains of a massive pillar, by the side of which the wall was sufficiently high to protect them, in some measure, from the driving blast; and by the help of the lanthorn, they then proceeded to seek out for some spot which was supplied with a covering for their own heads.

A high and narrow door-way attracted them towards it: they passed through it, and found themselves within a passage partially sheltered by a roof. On one side appeared three steps of a dark marble; these they ascended, and entered an apartment which had in all probability, been the chamber of the superior at the time that the mansion had been in a state of habitation; its walls were now bare; the floor of a black oak, and in many parts broken through; and the hearth filled with fragments of stone, which had fallen upon it from the chimney.

From this apartment a single step led into a small closet, formed in the shape of an alcove, of which the floor corresponded with the former; but the walls were intersected by niches and slender pillars of stone, surmounted with compartments in fret-work, which now exhibited a striking picture of former elegance sinking under the ravaging hand of decay.

The thunder still rolled in hoarse and awful peals; and the refulgence of the forked lightning blazed at intervals through a narrow arch in the wall, which had once been the frame of a gothic and spiral window, and of which no remnants, but the iron bars, which had intersected the glass, were now remaining.

At length, after full an hour had passed in tedious expectation, the lightning became scarcely visible, and the thunder receded in gentle murmurs to the distant mountains. "Shall we return to our horses, and proceed?" said Franval.

"It still rains violently," replied Montreville; "and the darkness appears almost impenetrable."

"It is quite so, Monsieurs," said Henri. "If I might take the liberty of advising, I think it would be infinitely better, now we have a roof over our heads, to keep under it till day begins to dawn."

"But this is a sad, uncomfortable place," resumed Franval; "and if we could reconcile ourselves to enduring it in preference to being exposed to the pelting of the merciless elements, our horses must remain suffering in the wet and cold."

"They will not be the worse for that, Monsieur," returned Henri; "they are used to all weathers when they are out at pasture; and I left them bridle-room enough to enable them to pick up the grass as they stand."

"Upon my life," cried Montreville, "I am very much of Henri's opinion about remaining here till dawn of day. We are now become tolerably dry again; and should we issue out from this retreat, we shall be certain of getting wet through once more; and perhaps, after all, may not be lucky enough to find a house to refresh ourselves at. I think it would be very possible to get a comfortable nap here, wrapped up in our cloaks."

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After a good deal of debate upon the subject, it was agreed that any shelter was preferable to encountering the heavy rain which continued to fall; and Montreville having wound his horseman's cloak tightly around him, lay down in one corner of the apartment with the intention beguiling an hour or two in sleep, and advised his companions to do the same.

"Had you not better, Monsieur, endeavor to compose yourself to sleep?" said Henri to his master; "this place seems to be perfectly quiet, and free from danger; and a little repose will render you the better able to bear the fatigue of travelling tomorrow."

"No," replied Franval; "I don't feel inclined to sleep; but lie you down, and take a nap, if you please." Henri availed himself of his master's permission, and stretched himself out by the side of Montreville, placing the lanthorn at his head.

Franval continued for some time to wander about the apartment where his friend and servant lay locked in the arms of sleep, till the wind, beginning to blow from another quarter to what it had before done, pierced through the stone arch of the window with chilly gusts, that induced him to seek a more sheltered situation in the adjoining closet.

In spite of those anxieties of mind which rendered him less impressive to the attacks of sleep than his companions, Franval began to feel rather weary; and seating himself upon the floor, he rested his head in niche between two of the pillars of the stone-work.

The minute he desisted from bodily exercise, the influence of sleep began to steal over his senses, and ideas to fade away under its advances. Suddenly a momentary crash made him start, and this was followed by a rumbling noise, which he had no hesitation in supposing to be caused by some mouldering fragments of the building, which had been precipitated upon the ruins below by the violence of the wind; and he again leant back his head, and closed his eyes.

Again his thoughts were wandering from the world into that confusion of ideas which accompanied the approach of sleep to a mind ill at ease within itself, when he was startled by the sound of a lengthened sigh. He sprang upon his feet; but instantly recollecting how near to him were Montreville, and his servant, he made no doubt that the sound he had heard, had been an exclamation uttered by one of them in his sleep.

He approached the door of the room where they lay, and, by the light of the lanthorn, he perceived them both still extended on the floor; and as he stood observing them, he heard Henri exclaim, "Oh, Marie! Marie!" which he knew to be the name of a little peasant girl in Brittany, who had won his heart and not doubting that the sigh he had heard, had been one which Henri had addressed to her image, which had appeared to him in his dreams, he returned to his resting place, and a third time composed himself to sleep.

He sunk to repose; but how long he had slept he was uncertain, when he was awakened by a noise resembling a gust of wind rushing through a narrow aperture; he hastily opened his eyes, and beheld object, at the sight of which the blood ran cold and trembling through his veins—He beheld the very countenance of savage expression, which he had seen through the window of the post-house; its eyes were fixed upon him, and assisted in their observation by a lighted firebrand, which the terrific form held in one of its hands. The figure of the unknown was tall and lank: the long black cloak in which it was enveloped was insufficient to hide the sharp angles of its bony stature; a hat of dark brown fur pulled down below its ears, gave a very finish of horror to its savage aspect; thus the horrible being appeared, bending forward as it stood, to gain a better view of Franval's person.

Franval started, but had not power to rise, or to speak. Instantly upon this motion on his part, with one rapid stride, the figure vanished from his sight. Its disappearance was followed by a loud clap, resembling the echo which runs through a hollow passage, after a door at its extremity has been hastily closed.

Franval attempted to call to his friend and Henri, but his tongue clove to his mouth, and refused its office. He staggered to the door of the apartment where he had left them asleep; the light which had been burning by their side, was now extinguished, or the lanthorn gone. A few minutes recovered to him the power of speech, and he called upon them both by name. Henri immediately replied to his call; and very soon after, Montreville enquired "what was the matter?"

Through an arched window, Franval had a view of the Heavens; and he perceived that the light of day was already beginning to streak the sky. "Be not alarmed," he replied, in answer to their enquiries; "follow me into the air; I stand in need of its refreshment; and I will then explain to you what agitates me."

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He darted out of the apartments and they followed him as quickly as the darkness of the place would permit; for their lamp had died in the socket, and the light of day was still so feeble, as to render objects scarcely discernible.

They found him leaning against a broken pillar, which stood in an open space apart from the mass of ruins. They approached him, renewed their enquiries; and he satisfied them with an account of what he had witnessed.

Montreville heard him with patience, but persisted in endeavoring to persuade him that the whole had been a dream, caused by the impression which had been made on his mind by the strangeness of the voice that had addressed them when amongst the trees, and the ghastly countenance which he had seen peeping through a window of the post-house. But Franval replied, "that he was certain that the figure which he had seen standing over him with a firebrand in its hand, and which he knew to be the same that he had beheld with a sensation approaching to horror when looking through the window of the post-house, had been a reality.

"Well," returned Montreville, "it is possible that this ruin may be the haunt of a banditti, of which he is one."

"I do not believe him to be a robber," replied Franval.

"Why not? What has changed your opinion of him?" asked his friend.

"I cannot say why," answered Franval; "and yet I feel my sentiments utterly changed with regard to him"

"Your ideas are bewildered by the events of the night," said Montreville.

"And then that strange voice commanding us to go to the Castle of Virandola," said Henri; "it rings in my ears yet."

"Strange indeed!" breathed forth Franval in solemn accents; and he added, "Can it be connected with him whom we seek?"

"Whithersoever we go," rejoined Montreville, "I think we had better be jogging from hence; this is not a place favorable to the combating of gloomy reflections, whether they proceed from imagination, or fact."

"No," resumed Franval; "I can't, I will not quit this spot, till I have made some investigation of the closet where I slept: I must examine whether there is a door in that particular part of the wall, at which the strange figure, whose countenance rests so forcibly on my memory, could have departed from the place: if I find any outlet, my ideas of its mortality will be confirmed."

"And if you do not?" said Montreville

"I shall still be very much tempted to believe that there is some mode of egress from the place which is not discernible to me, though known to that person, whoever he may be," answered the Chevalier.

Franval could not be argued out of his resolution of examining the closet in which he had passed the night, as soon as the light of the day should be sufficiently powerful to assist him in his investigation. Indeed, Montreville had promised to accompany Franval on his present journey from motives of pure friendship, and therefore was easily won to desist from any opposition to such plans as his friend conceived to be for his happiness.

A drizzling rain was still falling to the earth; and although the wind had much abated in strength, it still blew cold and cheerless through the long avenues of ruins; and as Franval was unwilling to return to the shelter of the apartment they had just quitted, they wandered about in order to preserve themselves from the ill effects of the cold.

After some time, Henri was, in the course of their movements, separated from his master and Montreville; and scarcely had they noticed his absence, ere they heard a pistol fired at a short distance from them. Supposing Henri to be attacked, they flew to the spot where they had parted from him, and observed him standing with his arm extended into the air, and his pistol still in it.

"Was it you who fired?" asked Franval.

"Yes," replied Henri; "and I have either brought him down, or he is run away."

"Who? who?" Impatiently demanded Franval and his friend.

"A tall fellow, wrapped in a black cloak," answered Henri, "exactly corresponding with the description my master gives of the rascal who stood gazing upon him with the firebrand in his hand. The moment that you had turned the angle of the range of pillars behind us, I observed him mounted upon the high wall; and the instant I observed him, I saw him stretch his arm towards me, and was ignorant to what end, till I saw some sparks, which convinced me that he had directed at me a pistol that had missed fire. I immediately drew mine from my girdle, and fired it at him in my own defence; and he directly disappeared; but I cannot tell whether he fell by my bullet or fled from a repetition of my fire."

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"We will go to the spot, and ascertain," said Franval boldly; and immediately began to climb a pile of the ruins which led to the wall whereon Henri had seen the form. Nothing that had motion, was visible to any one of the party, when they had reached the height, which had once been a terrace projecting from the second range of windows on the side of the monastery. Many delusive shapes were to be seen, which, on close investigation, proved to be only broken arches, and decapitated pillars, which, beheld at a short distance in the twilight of the morning, appeared in certain directions to assume the form of men.

They did not relax in their search, because many disappointments attended it; but it proved wholly unsuccessful; no human being was to be discerned in any part of the ruins; nor did it appear probable that Henri's pistol had wounded the one he had beheld; for as the light of day rose, they found that no spots of blood stained any part of the stone-work upon which he had appeared.

They again descended to the lower range of dilapidated grandeur, which presented itself in the romantic fragments of the mouldering abbey; and judging it now to be sufficiently light for the examination of the closet upon which Franval had resolved, they returned to that part of the building where they had passed the hours of sleep.

Montreville was the first who entered the chamber leading to the closet, and directly on stepping into it, he exclaimed, "Why, what have we here?—See—behold—characters traced upon the floor!"

Franval darted hastily forward, and beheld upon the black oak floor, these words, "Quit this place." Wrapt in astonishment and thought, he stood with his eyes fixed on the letters.

"Surely, Monsieur," cried Henri, half trembling, "it can only be a devil who plays these pranks with us."

"It is a friendly devil, however," returned Montreville, "for he warns us to get our of the way of danger; if there is any in staying here."

"I will not quit this place," cried Franval sternly, after a pause of reflective silence. "This command is to my senses, a sufficient conviction that there is some mystery to be developed by staying; and I feel impelled by a stronger sentiment than curiosity, to exert myself in order to make that discovery."

Franval rubbed one of the letters on the floor with his finger, and found that they were only written in chalk, and could easily be effaced.

"Come, pray, let us depart," said Montreville, after another pause.

"Not, at all events, till I have examined the walls of the closet," said Franval, and moved forward to the investigation. His companions followed him, and assisted in the scrutiny; but it produced only disappointment; there were an infinite number of cracks in the stone-work of the walls, but none of sufficient regularity, or length, to flatter them with the idea that it could form any part of a door, or an opening of any kind.

"I would wager my life," said Franval, "that these words were written by that horrible figure which I twice beheld in the course of last night. Surely this ruin cannot be the Castle of Virandola, of which the host spoke."

"I should imagine not," replied Montreville: "this place does not bear the appearance of ever having been a castle; every thing about it denotes it to have been a religious building."

A silence ensued; Montreville broke it: "Franval," he said, "I am certain you cannot doubt my friendship; prove to me that you have not lost that respect for the admonitions of your friend, with which you have so frequently received them at my lips: let us for the present quit this abode of mystery; let us seek some house where our bodily necessities may be attended to; and let us also employ some time in making enquiry into the report which this ruinous fabric bears in the world; and should you then still have any cause, or merely feel any wish, to make a future investigation of its secrets, I pledge my honour, that I will return with you to it, and even risk my life in assisting you through your adventure."

For a considerable time the entreaties of Montreville, seconded by those of Henri, produced no effect upon the mind of Franval: at length, after he had received a renewal of his friend's promise to return with him at some future period, if it should be his desire to make a second visit to the place they were now in, he agreed to accompany them in quest of refreshment; and information, if any were to be gained, which could assist in throwing light upon the strange adventures which had marked the last twelve hours.

Having mounted their horses, they turned into the road, and pursued the path along which they had on the former evening been journeying: at the distance of rather more than half a league from the ruin, they descried a cottage apart from the high road, and immediately rode up to it.

Before they reached the humble dwelling, the door was opened by a peasant girl of about twelve years old,

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who, it appeared, had seen them through a window, and been attracted by curiosity to behold travellers of so different an order of beings to those amongst whom she was accustomed to live.

Montreville called to her, and enquired whether there was any body in the cottage besides herself, and whether they would sell them any milk and bread.

The girl replied that her mother and grandmother were both within; and directly called the former, who quickly made her appearance. Having heard our travellers wants, she readily agreed to supply them in the best manner she was able; and invited them to alight, and walk in: this Montreville and Franval did: and Henri, conducted by the girl, led the horses to a stable behind the cottage, where he found a welcome of sweet, although coarse provender, for his beasts.

Franval and his friend took seats. The woman, with the garrulity natural to her sex, and her rank in life, began to inform them of her own family affairs: her husband and her sons, she said, were gone to labour on a distant part of the mountains, and she was anticipating their return with much pleasure, because they had promised to beg some grapes of the master of the vineyard for her mother, who was particularly fond of them, and who being now far advanced in years, and totally blind, had no enjoyment left her but that of the palate, which she had the least opportunity of gratifying.

This decrepid old female sat in one corner of the cottage, with her feet rested on a large stone, in order to shorten the distance at which they would else have hung from the ground, and with her chin nearly bent upon her knees.

The peasant's wife having finished the little history of her family, began to speak of the tempestuous night which was just past; and to enquire whether our travellers had rested in any part to which the tempest had extended?

"We had, indeed, a most uncomfortable lodging," replied Montreville, and informed the good woman where they had passed the night.

"It must have been uncomfortable lodging in the ruins of Saint Luke's Abbey," said the woman.

"Extremely so, I assure you," returned Montreville; "but on what account do you particularly mean?"

"The want of accommodation for sleep," she answered; "I should imagine there is scarcely a nook about it furnished with a roof."

"Yes, there is," replied Montreville, and gave a short account of the apartment they had found, with this necessary appendage for comfort against the peltings of a storm.

"But is there no other account on which you consider that it might be an unpleasant resting place?" enquired Franval.

"I dare say it is full of night birds, that shriek and scream, and make it dismal enough," replied the woman.

"Is it never disturbed with those spirits which, like the birds you speak of, do not leave their retirement, except in the shades of night?"

"What haunted, do you mean, Messieurs?" cried the woman. "O no, blessed be the Virgin, I never heard that of the Abbey of Saint Luke. I am sure, I hardly durst live here, if such were the case;" and she crossed herself as she spoke. "No, no; one house possessed by the Devil is enough for any district."

"And have you a house of that description in your district?" asked Franval.

"You must be a stranger in these parts to ask that question, I am certain," she returned. "The Castle of Virandola, about half a league from this house, is, as I may say, a very receptacle for Satan's legions."

Franval drew his chair nearer to the woman's, and enquired of her who was its possessor.

She replied, that his name was Don Bazilio; that he and his castle were the terror of the neighbourhood; that not an individual durst approach within a considerable distance of it after dark; and that Don Bazilio was by some supposed to be a Frenchman, by some a Spaniard, and by others a Moor. Farther information on the subject she was unable to give him.

A comfortable meal was now set before them. Franval scarcely tasted it; and the perturbation of his mind appeared to increase with every minute; at length, drawing aside his friend Montreville, he told him, that he could not divest himself of the idea of the voice which had warned them to proceed to the castle of Virandola, having some connexion with the fate of Don Manuel; and that he could not satisfy himself without approaching the edifice, over which hung the impenetrable veil of mystery with which they had on the preceding evening become acquainted.

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Montreville had promised to second every endeavor of his friend towards the development of Don Manuel's fate, and accordingly agreed to accompany him. As the castle was but a short distance from the cottage, they resolved to walk towards it. Franval had not yet determined to ask admittance; his present design was confined to inspecting the outside of the building, and proving whether he should receive any intimation of his being expected at it by the person whose voice had admonished him to approach it. The friends informed Henri of their design, and bade him prepare to accompany them; and Franval pretending to the cottagers, that curiosity impelled him and his companions to take a view of the outside of the castle of the mysterious Don Bazilio, they asked Ricardo's grand-daughter to conduct them into the road to it. She readily complied with their request; and as they proceeded, they learnt from her replies to the questions which they had advanced to her, that there was no idea existing of Don Bazilio being himself a robber, or his castle the haunt of banditti; but that he had the repute for dealing in the black art, and that midnight was the preferred hour of his orgies, at which period strange lights had been seen flitting about the castle, and dreadful noises heard within it, by those few who at that solemn hour had ventured to approach it; but that no one, of whom she had heard, had ever attempted to gain admittance.

When the towers of the castle, rising above a rocky eminence of the rugged mountains, rendered a guide no longer necessary to the travellers, the girl ran back to her cottage; and Franval and his companions pursued their way. As they advanced towards the castle, they perceived that it had once been strongly fortified, but that its bulwarks were now fallen to decay: it presented to their view a huge pile of ancient stonework, black with age, and partially mouldering under the destructive hand of Time: gloom and awfulness were its characteristic features, and not any sign of its containing inhabitants was to be discovered about it: the drawbridge appeared no longer capable of being raised; and the moat was nearly choked up.

Our friends walked several times round its gloomy walls, and were on the point of quitting the spot, when a key, thrown from some considerable eminence, fell at the feet of the Chevalier Franval. He picked it hastily up, for he perceived that there was fastened to it a paper, on which he could distinguish the marks of hand-writing: with the most tremulous agitation he read the following words; "This key opens the door in the western turret; enter it at the return of night." If these words excited the astonishment of the Chevalier Franval, what was the emotion with which he beheld the paper signed by the name of Rodalvo, the faithful and respected servant of Don Manuel!

The paper fastened to the key, by directing them to return at night, appeared to warn them to retire for the present from the site of the castle, which they accordingly did.

The emotion of Franval's soul was so great at the belief that he had discovered the retreat of his beloved sister's husband, that he was incapable of expressing his feelings. Equally tongue-tied by astonishment were his friend Montreville, and his servant Henri. They returned to the cottage, and seated themselves on a bench by the door, where some degree of composure gradually returning to their minds, they at length began to give expression to their ideas: but to form conjectures was all they were still able to do; it was impossible for them to decide by what power Don Manuel was detained an inmate of the Mysterious Castle of Virandola, as his servant's being an inhabitant of it seemed to bespeak that he was; or to ascertain what connexion there could be between him and the universally dreaded Don Bazilio.

They now doubted not that the voice which had on the preceding evening admonished them to proceed to the Castle of Virandola, had been that of Rodalvo; but they were at a loss whether or not to suppose that the terrific being who had twice been seen by Franval, and once by his servant Henri, was the owner of the castle.

The agitation of mind in which the day was passed by them all, especially by the Chevalier Franval, may be easily conjectured. They were entertained with hospitality and kindness at the cottage, but the attentions of their hostess and her family were often unheeded by them; and the natural impatience of their minds, rendered the day, in appearance, the longest they had ever known.

When the shades of night had fallen to the earth, Franval and his companions set out on their mysterious expedition. The night was cloudy, scarcely a star gemmed the face of Heave; the crescent of an infant moon rising above the distant mountains, threw a faint and silvery light upon partial spots of the landscape. Having reached the castle, they sought out the western turret, of which the situation could not be mistaken; and Franval applied the key to the lock: with little difficulty the door was opened by him, and they all three entered. Total darkness prevailed within, and they stood debating, how to proceed. Suddenly a distant light gleamed upon the scene, and they perceived that it was reflected through a spiral window of stained glass, at the extremity of a spacious hall in

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which they were standing. The light was no sooner beheld, than it again vanished: it had, however, been sufficient to shew our adventurers that they might proceed for a considerable space without the danger of falling, as the momentary illumination had been sufficient for them to perceive that there were no intervening steps between the door which they had entered and the opposite wall. Franval drew his sword; and extending before him the arm which bore it, as a protection to his person, he moved cautiously on. He continued his progress for some time, till a flaming firebrand, carried in the hand of some being whose pace was so swift as not to give him time to behold its person, darted across his path; and he observed, by the temporary influence of the light, that he had wandered into a lofty and narrow passage.

He stopped a moment, and listened; no sound met his ear; and he concluded, from the silence, that he had strayed from his companions. He, however, resolved not to suffer his courage to forsake him, or to relax in his attempt at developing the mystery of the place, to which act he had been summoned by one connected with a man whom he did not esteem less on his own account, than as the nearest relative of his beloved sister: using, therefore, every precaution which his perilous situation permitted him to do for guarding against accident, he still proceeded.

Suddenly a deep groan struck his ear; it was followed by a stifled shriek; and these sounds were succeeded by several voices, uttering such tones as might have been expected from demons uttering expressions of delight. Again all was still; and the next moment the Chevalier, moving a step or two from the spot where he had been standing, found himself upon so rapid a declivity, as obliged him to move on, whether it met his inclination or not.

This declivity continued, as nearly as Franval could conjecture, for at least the space of an hundred feet; and whilst descending it, he heard a repetition of the dreadful sounds to which he had before listened.

At length he felt himself again upon even ground; there was now no longer any pavement under his feet, but a loose and crumbling earth. Here he paused an instant: he wished for the society of his friend and Henri, but the wish was in vain: it was now evident that the darkness of the place had separated them from each other. An infinite satisfaction would it have been to his feelings, had Rodalvo now appeared to him, and either directed his progress, or given him some explanation of the existing mystery. Whilst he stood debating thus with his own mind, he heard the voice of some one either in solemn prayer, or reading emphatically aloud; which of the two he could not distinguish; and turning his eyes around on every side, a faint light, playing on a distant wall, met his sight; he moved toward it, and pursuing the direction in which it shone, ascended a few steps, cut, as it seemed, out of the rugged earth, which led him to an eminence, from whence he looked down upon a scene which almost froze his blood in its current to his heart.

Some few feet below the surface of the spot on which he stood, was what appeared to him a spacious cavern; it was illuminated by several firebrands, which were stuck into the earth at certain distances from each other, and of which the pitchy tops sent forth darting flames, which clomb like fiery serpents towards the dusky roof. At the extremity of the place, in letters which appeared the colour of transparent blood, was decyphered the word "VENGEANCE;" and immediately under this inscription, in a chair, on the back of which were fixed three human skulls, and on either side of which stood a ghastly skeleton, sat the very being whom Franval had on the preceding evening beheld, first through the window of the post-house, and next bending over him with a lighted firebrand in his hand, amidst the ruins of Saint Luke's Abbey; the being whom, from the account which he had heard of the possessor of the castle, he could not doubt to be Dan Bazilio himself nor were his suspicions incorrect.

On either side of him, seated around a table of a semi-circular form, were several other persons, habited like himself, in loose garments, with hats of dark fur, of which the brims were drawn down around their faces, and added to the terrific appearance of their countenances, already sufficiently dreadful to the view.

Before the table, and immediately opposite to Don Bazilio, knelt a human figure, nearly naked, and whose limbs were shaking with a violent trembling, produced either by cold or apprehension; and judging, from his own feelings, at the scene before him, Franval could not doubt it to be the latter. Around him were placed six familiars, in the habits of demons, each directing at him an instrument of death, which they were prepared to thrust to his heart, if a signal were given them to that effect.

A few moments observation clearly proved to Franval, that the kneeling man was a recipient, about to be admitted a member of some secret community, the lawless transactions of which he was to be terrified from divulging. The solemn voice which he had heard on his approach to the spot of terror which he was now

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contemplating, he found to have been that of Don Bazilio, who was still reading from a volume, extended before him on the table, the obligations to which the novice, at that moment initiating into the mysteries of the community, was called upon to swear observance.

The first of these obligations to which Franval heard Don Bazilio call upon the recipient to subscribe, contained these words: "Swear to divulge no secret with which you are made acquainted by the community, to any being unconnected with it; and to report every one with which you may be entrusted by other persons to it."

"I swear, replied the recipient: and the expression of satisfaction with which the assembly received his acquiescence, explained to Franval what had been the shouts of joy that had before heard when at a distance from the cavern.

Again Don Bazilio read; "If thou refuse to comply with any command issued to thee by the authority before whom thou kneelest, recollect that the sword of their revenge will fall on thee quicker than the lightning; remember this; and swear that, in assisting the vengeance they are leagued to perpetrate, neither the life of thy father, mother, wife, nor child, of thy dearest friend, or nearest connection, shall be regarded by thee."

The recipient did not immediately reply. "Swear instantly," cried Don Bazilio, or I pronounce the signal that shall seal thy death." He raised himself upon his seat as he spoke. Franval believed the last moment of the kneeling man to be at hand, and the exclamation of "Oh, merciful God!" burst from his lips.

His voice was heard by the members of the assembly; and turning their eyes to the spot from whence it had proceeded, they no sooner beheld him, than several of them sprang from their seats, and flying up to an ascent which led to the eminence where Franval stood, they seized his person, and dragged him down into the centre of the cavern.

"Who art thou?" exclaimed Don Bazilio, "who hast dared intrude upon our privacy? and by what means hast thou gained access to this spot?" Whilst speaking, he advanced towards Franval; and when he had approached sufficiently near to him to distinguish his features, he added, "Ha! I have beheld thee before in a situation to which I cannot doubt thou camest as a spy upon my actions. The ruined Abbey of St. Luke is the spot to which I refer. Under the impression which thy conduct has raised in my mind, thou can'st not live." Then turning to the familiars around him, he cried, "Bring the cord, and do your duty."

No sooner had Don Bazilio issued this command, than the recipient, moving forward, threw himself on his knees before him, and, in a voice of the humblest supplication, he exclaimed, "Oh spare him! I entreat, I implore you, for my sake spare him; he is the brother of my beloved wife!"

The tones in which the kneeling man spoke, were familiar to the ear of Franval; he turned his eyes upon him, and, to his utter astonishment, beheld in him Don Manuel di Vadilla!

After a few instants of private conversation with another member of the occult community, Don Bazilio commanded Franval to be led to the grated cell. The familiars immediately seized his arms, and, preceded by one of their fellows, who lighted them with a torch which had torn up from its station in the floor of the cavern, they forced him along several winding passages, which ultimately brought them to the grated dungeon, into which they thrust him, and then departed, taking away with them the light.

The torturing and perplexing sensations which at this period filled the breast of the Chevalier Franval, may be easily imagined. What could he suppose would be the event of his present situation? what could be the mystery which bound together the community before whose authority he had beheld the unfortunate Don Manuel, kneeling an apparent victim? Where now, he wondered, were his friends Montreville and Henri: had they, like himself, fallen into the power of the mystic band by whom the castle was habited, had they escaped their toils?

About the midnight hour, through the grating of his prison, he beheld a light approaching: in a few minutes it drew sufficiently near to him for him to distinguish that it was borne in the hand of Don Bazilio; he placed himself opposite to the grated window of Franval's cell, and thus addressed him: "Stranger, having beheld as much as you have done of the mysteries of this place, there is but one point left for you to decide upon; you must either forfeit your life to our safety, or bind yourself by the vows which connect our community."

"Your terms" replied Franval, "appear as extraordinary as your mysteries; you must inform me what the latter are, and to what purpose they are maintained, ere I can consent, or refuse, to subscribe to them."

"I intend to do so," returned Don Bazilio. "I fear not to entrust to you the secret, because within the next twenty hours, you must, as I have already declared to you, become one of us, or cease to exist. Had it not been for the intercession of the young man who is known to you by the name of Don Manuel, you had not at this moment

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been alive to receive my offer. Now then attend: I am not a Spaniard, as my name implies me to be; I am by birth a Frenchman. My elder brother was the Marquis de la Croix; myself the Chevalier of the same name. It is now about eighteen years since by brother, and another gentleman, were alike suppliants to the crown for the permission of acceding to a Duchy which at that moment lay dormant; and, in the line of succession to which, they both stood with apparently equal rights; it rested consequently on the breast of the monarch on whom the honor should be conferred; and, after having deceived my brother with false hopes, the King bestowed the contested title on his competitor. Was not this a disappointment sufficiently strong to drive almost to madness a man of proud spirit? for such was my brother; and whose pride was supported by a consciousness of having devoted not only his active services, but his purse, to his King and his country. He immediately quitted the course, vowing never to return to it again.

"My brother was, at the period of which I am speaking, a widower; from his wife, who had been a Spanish lady of considerable distinction, he had inherited this castle of Virandola; and hither he retired, accompanied by myself, and three other friends, peculiarly attached to his interests.

"We had not been here many days ere he thus addressed us. 'My friends, I am sufficiently well acquainted with your attachment to me, to be conscious that I may disclose to you the inmost sentiments of my heart in full assurance of your secrecy. Listen, then to my words: as we have not in our power any present means of revenging the failure of my just and high-raised expectation, let us have the glory of founding a sect, which shall grow by our rearing, privately and unsuspectedly, from the small number here collected, into a magnitude which shall eventually crush the exercise of such unlimited power as I have been a sufferer from.'

"We applauded his idea, and entered with fervor into his plan: we immediately bound ourselves by the most solemn oath which could pass the lips of man, to act by every exertion of our ability towards the subversion of every earthly power, by the possession of which one man is raised to a superiority over his fellows: we swore that not even the peace or safety of our dearest connections should obstruct us in the progress of our design; and moreover, that we would use every means of adding members to our secret community."

"From that instant we became a sect of Illuminati; we frequented lodges of masonry, and all public societies; we probed the hearts of their members, and when we found individuals suited to our purpose, we conducted them hither; and in the cavern which you have this night beheld, we initiated them into our mysteries.

"At the expiration of twelve years, my brother died; he fell the victim of a disorder which was slow in its progress; and as he was conscious of the approach of death, he appointed me the guardian of his only child, who was a son named Lewis, at that time in his fifteenth year; and concerning the future conduct of whose life he gave me the most particular and impressive directions.

"For many reasons, my brother and myself had for some time assumed the name of Vadilla, and professed ourselves to be Spaniards; and that of Lewis had, for the sake of accordance with our own, been changed to Manuel. Thus you perceive that the husband of your sister is my nephew."

Franval did not reply, and Don Bazilio continued thus:

"My deceased brother had enjoined me to initiate his son into the mysteries of our society when he had attained the age of twenty-one years, and to inform him that it had been the dying request of his father, that he would never form any connections in life, above all, that of marriage; but devote himself entirely to the forwarding of those views which had been planned by his parent; and which that parent conceived he might be less strenuous in pursuing, if he were bound by any other ties, which might claim at least an equal share of his feelings.

At the age of eighteen, I informed him of his father's wish that he should lead a life of celibacy; and informed him that, at the age of twenty-one, a secret of the utmost importance would be entrusted to him, and business of the most interesting and peculiar nature placed in his hands; for devoting himself entirely to the services of which, I wished him, in the intermediate time, to prepare his mind, as it had been the dying request of his father that he should do so. He was become accustomed, by habit, to behold an air of mystery pervading the countenances of such inhabitants of the castle as were in my confidence, and had been in that of his deceased father; and my words did not appear so much to surprise him, as I had expected they would. He had hitherto not been the distance of more than four or five leagues from the Castle of Virandola, and he petitioned me to suffer him to travel for two or three years: to this request I consented, on condition of his promising to return to me against the period of his completing his twenty-first year, and of his forming no connection, or engagement, in the world, upon which he

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was about to enter. He gave me his promise to this effect. I furnished him with a most liberal supply of money, which I was with the greatest ease enabled to do, from the wealth of my deceased brother; and placing him under the care of a man named Rodalvo, the only domestic in my brother's service who had been admitted into our secret community, I permitted him to depart.

"By mutual agreement, I was not to receive any letter from my nephew during his absence. At length arrived his twenty-first birth-day, and he was not returned. Several months passed on, and still he came not. I felt dissatisfied at the apparently ungrateful use which he had made of my indulgence; and I employed spies to discover for me where he loitered. Judge my disappointment and anger, when I learnt, in the course of time, from these persons, that he had broken through every injunction which I had given him, and was become a husband and a father. Against Rodalvo, also, was my rage excited, for not having withheld him from forming ties so opposite to the will of his late father.

"Having gained the knowledge of his retreat, I commissioned some of the inferior members of our occult society to lie in ambush for him and Rodalvo, to seize their persons, and to re-conduct them to this castle. On their way to your villa, my emissaries were so fortunate as to meet them in Paris; where, having hurried them into a close carriage, they set off with them, without delay, for the frontiers of the kingdom.

"Several accidents, which they met with on the road, so materially delayed their progress, that they did not till the afternoon of yesterday, reach the post-house before which you and your companions stopped last night.

"Impatience to behold my nephew, and reason with him on his disobedience to my injunctions, had brought me to the post-house to meet him; and as I found that he could not be prevailed upon, although in my power, by gentle means, to proceed to the Castle of Virandola, I resolved not to conduct him to it till the dead hour of midnight, when we should not be liable to encounter any observers of his conduct; and having resolved to remain till that hour at the post-house, I bound the host by a handsome bribe, and an oath, not to admit any one into it whilst we continued his inmates: how faithfully he performed his trust, you are already acquainted.

"Whilst we remained in the post-house, I questioned my nephew on the reason which had induced him to act in opposition to the conduct I had marked out for him to follow; and he confessed to me, that he had, by his supplications and entreaties, won Rodalvo into confessing to him, the cause for which he had been so earnestly enjoined to return, at the age of twenty-one, to the Castle of Virandola; and that abhorring, as he expressed himself, the nature and object of our community, immediately on having gained this knowledge, he determined never to accede to the plan which had been proposed for his future life, but to strike out one which he himself deemed more capable of producing his happiness. Having done this, he procured Rodalvo's promise never to quit his service; and in the course of time, he became the husband of your sister. Sufficient honor, however, was still left to him to resolve never to betray the secret of our community, out of respect to the safety of me, his uncle.

"In the Ruins of Saint Luke's Abbey, where you last night found shelter from the storm, is the entrance to a subterranean passage which leads into vaults beneath the Castle of Virandola; and this passage is in constant use by the members of our secret community, in order to protect them from being seen, and recognised, in entering or quitting the castle, as might chance to occur were they always to pass through its gates. By this passage I had last night resolved to reconduct my nephew; and having seen him safely guarded through it's entrance, I was about to follow him, when, hearing the sound of a voice amidst the ruins, I judged it not impossible that it might proceed from some brother of our society, who might have lost his way in the darkness amongst them. Lighted by the firebrand which I carried in my hand, I proceeded towards the spot from whence the sound had proceeded, and discovered you and your companions stretched on the ground asleep. The moment I beheld you, I believed you to be one of the travellers whom I had before seen refused admittance into the post-house: and as I bent over you, to ascertain if my conjecture were just, you awoke, and turned upon me your eyes. To avoid, as much as possible, your observation, I darted precipitately through a concealed door in the wall, which led to a branch in the subterranean passage of which I have already spoken to you.

"When I had quitted your sight, I began to doubt whether you and your companions were really weary travellers, or spies upon me, or the place ye were in, and counterfeiting sleep, the better to cover your purpose: I accordingly determined to watch your actions. From the spot of my concealment, I heard your footsteps quitting the dilapidated chamber, and I followed you amidst the ruin. Your servant beheld me turn an angle of the walls: I levelled my pistol at him, and it missed fire: my aim had not been to wound him, but to alarm you all, and send you away from the spot. I was foiled in this attempt: but still I pursued your steps unseen by you, and hearing you

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express a desire of returning to the apartment where you had slept, I resolved to repair thither before you and to mark the floor with the words of warning which you found upon it. "Quite this place," was the sentence I wrote; and seeing you shortly after mount your horses and depart, I congratulated myself on having procured the end I desired, by means which, probably, appeared to you of the greatest mystery; and having done so, I immediately proceeded to the castle.

"I thought of you no more throughout the day: it was passed by me in preparations for the admission of Don Manuel into our secret community; to be present at which ceremony, I had invited all the principal members of our society. The initiation was proceeding successfully, though I confess with evident reluctance on the part of the recipient, when the exclamation you uttered assailed our ears. I instantly recognised your person; and another minute would have sealed your fate in death, had not Don Manuel, to my utter astonishment, pleaded for mercy to be shewn to you, as the brother of his wife.

"A request made to the community by one of its members, is never refused to him without due deliberation being first given to it; and as we deemed Don Manuel to have proceeded so far in his initiation, as to be entitled to rank as one of us, his petition was heard, and you conveyed to prison.

"My immediate concern was then to examine by what means you had gained admittance into this castle; and to cause a diligent search to be made for your companions, whom I supposed might also have entered it: they could not be discovered; but a paper, tied to a key found in the door of the western turret, directing you to return at night, and signed Rodalvo, explained at once how you had gained entrance, and who was the traitor that merited the vengeance of the community.

"I caused him instantly to be dragged by my familiars to my feet: the fact of his own handwriting he could not deny; his every nerve appeared to be unstrung with terror; and instead of attempting to exculpate himself, he increased my knowledge of his guilt, by confessing, that, having recognized your voice last night on the outside of the post-house, his desire of informing you where to find Don Manuel, of whom he could not doubt that you were in search, led him to steal out of the post-house, and to pursue you on a mule, which he took from one of the stables; and that, having overtaken you, he enjoined you to proceed to the Castle of Virandola; but durst not stay to converse with you, lest his absence from the post-house should have been discovered by me, and punished with death."

"Whatever my fate may be," exclaimed Franval, "let me entreat your mercy to that kind old man."

"It is too late," returned Don Bazilio; "he had twice been faithless to his trust: my poniard has drunk his blood."

"Unhappy man!" replied the Chevalier: "he will be rewarded in Heaven; for his errors were on the side of Virtue."

Don Bazilio uttered an exclamation of contempt, and, after a momentary pause, spoke thus:

"Now, to my most important business with you, Chevalier: by the interference of my nephew, your life has hitherto been miraculously preserved to you; it now rests entirely with yourself, how long you wish to retain that blessing of yours. To-morrow night you must either become a member of this community, or share the fate of Rodalvo: the intervening twenty-four hours will be give you for forming your determination."

"I require not an instant," returned Franval: "the vows which bind your infamous society can never pass my lips: truth and loyalty to my sovereign, and his adherents, glow with true fervor in my breast. Beneath the authority which sways this land, my father prospered; he conducted the battles which upheld it: and his son will sooner expire on the rack, than nourish a thought toward its destruction."

"The hour of proof will come," replied Don Bazilio. "To-morrow night at twelve—Remember!" and he departed.

No one again appeared to disturb the silence of Franval's prison throughout the night; and the rugged earth, barely covered with a lock of straw, was his resting-place. In the morning Don Bazilio again appeared; he was followed by an attendant, who, through the gratings of Franval's prison, placed upon a shelf immediately below the opening a small loaf of coarse bread, and a cup of muddy water.

"Under the resolution by which I left you swayed last night," said Don Bazilio, "this wretched fare must be yours; if you are become a proselyte to my opinion, you may command whatever your please."

"I am not become so, nor shall I ever," returned Franval.

"Remember what is to be the issue of the approaching night," said Don Bazilio emphatically, and again

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retired.

In the utmost wretchedness passed the hours of the Chevalier Franval: he had no other fate to expect from the merciless beings into whose hands he had fallen, than a death of savage torture; and no consolation under his affliction, except that which he derived from the conviction that it was better to die, than to lay a load of guilt upon his conscience.

At last arrived the hour of Franval's trial; it was announced to him by the beams of torches playing on the walls of his prison, and numerous footsteps approaching towards it. Several men, dressed in similar habits to those whom he had beheld on the preceding night, led him forth, and conducted him into the cavern of horrors, where he found the blood-thirsty community over whom Don Bazilio presided, assembled: He looked anxiously around, in the hope of espying amongst the number Don Manuel, but he saw him not.

Savageness, horror, and malignancy, were pourtrayed on every countenance; and each appeared to grin with exultation, and a mixture of contempt, on Franval. The place was lighted by firebrands, as on the preceding night, and every regulation appeared the same. After a short pause, Don Bazilio spoke; he repeated to Franval, that his life could only be preserved to him by his accepting the vows of the society; and concluded by informing him, that three questions were about to be proposed to him, and that if his replies to them all were unsatisfactory to the community, his death would immediately ensue.

Franval still answered with the same firmness and resolution which his conscience had before dictated to him.

Warning him once more to consider well his intention ere he drew upon himself the sword of vengeance, Don Bazilio proposed to him the first question; pointing, as he spoke, to the inscription above the chair upon which he sat.

"Wilt thou," said he, bend thy body in obedience to the attribute of our society, Vengeance?"

"I will not," Franval replied.

"Wilt thou kneel, and pray for the approach of that day which shall give equality to men? was the second question.

"I will not," again replied Franval.

"Hadst thou rather submit to death thyself, than cause the death of one placed in a situation of power over thee?" was the substance of the third question.

"I had," replied Franval firmly.

"Take then the reward of thy stubbornness," cried Don Bazilio. "Familiars, do your duty."

Instantly Franval felt himself seized by many hands: a cloth was thrown over his head; and he expected immediately to feel the steel piercing his heart; when, at the very instant, a crash like thunder rent the castle: it was repeated a second, a third, and a fourth time, with increased violence.

"We are betrayed!" cried Don Bazilio. "Comrades, defend yourselves."

"The hands which held Franval, were now withdrawn; and, snatching the cloth from his head, he beheld the cavern entered by a band of soldiery, who, rushing upon the Illuminati, made them in a few minutes their prisoners; and the next instant Montreville and Henri were by the side of Franval.

"The tide of joy which rushed into the heart of the Chevalier Franval, every breast of feeling must be capable of estimating; but it is necessary that we should give a detail of the happy cause which led to this unexpected event.

When Montreville and Henri had, on the preceding night, been separated by the darkness in the castle hall from Franval, they wandered about for a considerable time, without being able to make any progress into the building. Franval did not return to them. Strange noises met their ears: their sight was started by one of the familiars of the secret community in his demon's dress, passing before them with a lighted firebrand in his hand; and their apprehensions being raised, not only for their companion, but for themselves, they resolved to seek, assistance for enquiring into the fate of him from whom they had been separated.

Thus determined, they precipitately quitted the castle, and returning to the cottage where they had been entertained throughout the day, they took their horses from the stable, and having mounted them, rode with all speed towards the nearest garrison town on the frontiers of France: they reached it early in the morning, and having laid an account of their adventure before the police in terms which excited them to an immediate investigation of the truth, they selected fifty of the soldiery, under the command of a trusty officer, to accompany Montreville without delay to the Castle of Virandola. They marched with as much expedition as a body of men

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bearing arms were able to do, and reached the castle about the hour of midnight: they immediately forced themselves an entrance into the building; and dispersing different ways, a considerable number of them met in the cavern of horrors, as has already been related, at the critical moment of Franval's fate.

As soon as the members of the infamous community of vengeance were secured, and Franval convinced of his safety from the mouths of his friend and servant, a search was made in the castle, in order to ascertain whether it contained any unhappy beings suffering beneath the inhumanity of the terrific horde by which it had been infested: the first object of horror which was discovered by the scrutineers, was the body of the unfortunate Rodalvo, who had fallen the victim of his affection for his master: the next was Don Manuel himself, who was chained to the walls of a flinty dungeon, where he had been fated by his relentless uncle to remain till the Chevalier Franval had either pronounced the vows which were to constitute him a member of the society, or paid the forfeit of his refusal in death.

The grief which Don Manuel had experienced at being torn from the arms of his beloved wife, and dragged to the execution of a purpose at which his soul revolted, could only be equalled by the extacy with which he beheld himself and Franval again at liberty, and dwelt on his return to his adored Amarylla, and his infant children.

The rage of Don Bazilio's disappointed soul expressed itself solely in sullen silence. By the command of the police in the town from whence Montreville had procured military assistance, the band of Illuminati were conveyed in chains to Paris, to take their public trial; and on their arrival there, the Chevalier Franval, Montreville, and Don Manuel, whom we must now know by his real name of the Marquis de la Croix, were detained to give evidence against them.

Before the day of trial arrived, Don Bazilio gave a most unquestionable proof of his consciousness of his past guilt, and of the present wretched state of his mind, by putting an end to his own existence in prison. By the voice of the law, his associates in iniquity were adjudged to die beneath the hand of the executioner; which sentence was put into effect on the third day after their condemnation.

On the Chevalier Franval, and the Marquis de la Croix, the King, in addition to other high marks of his favor, bestowed an immense pecuniary reward from the coffers of the state. And the united voice of a rejoicing people bestowed on them the tribute of public applause, for having been the instruments through which retribution and punishment had been inflicted on a set of beings, sufficiently depraved and worthless, to have been brooding the subversion of a prosperous state, and the fall of a virtuous monarch.

Happy in the consciousness of having acted as it became virtuous and loyal subjects to have done, and grateful to Providence for its invisible interposition in the fate of the excellent young Marquis, they returned to the Chevalier's villa crowned with triumph and delight, where the caresses they received from an affectionate sister, and adored wife, rendered them the most enviable men whom the kingdom of France could boast. The society of vengeance being scattered to the winds, the Chevalier and his brother instituted a community of Benevolence to celebrate its destruction. Great was the honor of being admitted a member, and unsullied the virtuous principles of those who became so.

The children of de la Croix, as they grew to manhood, considered it their glory to be descended from those who had sown the seeds of so praiseworthy a society; and their lovely mother, stretching over them in affection and joy, appeared the earthly representative of that goddess of Benevolence, to whom a temple was raised in all their hearts.