# The Ruins of the Abbey of Fitz−Martin

Anonymous

# Table of Contents

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The Abbey of Fitz−Martin had been once famous for its riches and grandeur, and, as a monastery, was dedicated to St Catherine; but the subsequent irregularity of its order, together with the despotic tyranny of one of its ancient lords, had stripped it by slow but sure degrees of all its former wealth and consequence; insomuch, that the haughty Baron had, under unjust pretences, demanded heavy contributions, to assist in carrying on the war between the first Edward and the nearly subdued Scots. His only excuse for such an open violation of ecclesiastic rights, was grounded on a discovery he pretended he had made, of one of the nuns having broken the sacred rules of her profession, by a disregard to her vows of vestal celibacy. The haughty Baron seized greedily this circumstance, as the means of succeeding in his ambitious designs, and determined to humble the pride and insolence of the superiors, since the land belonged originally to his ancestors, and was transmitted to himself with powers to exact homage and fee from the heads of the monastery for this only part of their dependance on laical jurisdiction. For this latter purpose, the Baron, as Lord Patron of the holy community, entered the abbey, and demanded from the superiors not only a large subsidy of money, but an acknowledgement of their obedience; and, to cover his injustice, pretended it was designed for the further prosecution of the Holy Wars.

The superiors proudly refused compliance, and, in angry tones, threatened an appeal to Rome, with a dreadful anathema on the head of the daring violator, if he persisted in his presumptions.

But the Baron knew the surety of his proceedings, and, with a smile of malicious triumph, exposed his knowledge of the crimes of Sister St Anna, even relating at full his acquaintance with the proof of her lapse from that sacred vow, which for ever enjoined the community of a monastery to celibacy. The fathers of the order, when summoned to the council, heard the account with confusion and dismay, and entreated time to search into the truth of the Baron's assertions. The crafty Baron knew the advantage he had over them; and, to increase their fears of the dreaded exposure, quitted the abbey, in haughty and forbidding silence, without deigning to answer their petitions.

The unhappy community of the once proud monastery of St Catherine, at length, harassed by their dread of an exposure, and the total loss of all their wealth, by multiplied and never ceasing demands, became dependant on its tyrannic Baron, who kept the monks in such entire and arbitrary subjection, that in the course of a very few years, the abbey became nearly quite forsaken by its once imperious masters; when, at length, the Baron having disclosed to the King the dissolute manners of the order, and supplying Edward also with a large sum of money, that Monarch unknowingly rewarded his treachery with the hereditary possession of the abbey, and all its tenures, revenues and riches.

The Baron, therefore, took undisputed possession of his new acquisition, which he soon transformed into a princely habitation. But tradition says, that its imperious master did not, though surrounded by the possession of a mine of wealth, enjoy that expected case, and inward happiness, which the gratification of his lawless wishes led him to hope for. For he is reported ever after to have been subject to gloomy passions, and melancholy abstractions of mind, which often ended in vehement paroxisms of madness. An imperfectly handed tradition still existed, which related, that the spectre of St Anna, the unhappy instrument of his destruction to the monastery, had repeatedly appeared to the Baron, to warn him of his heinous offences, and even accuse him as the cause of.her ruin, and subsequent punishment by death. Certain it is, that various reports and conjectures had arisen in the minds of the ignorant; some tending to involve the Baron in the guilt of being the unknown seducer of Anna, for the purpose of completing his avaricious designs. But the real truth of her destiny was totally involved in silence; as, soon after the Baron had exposed to the superiors his knowledge of her dereliction, she had suddenly disappeared from the community, nor was ever heard of after. Whatever was in reality her dreadful end is still

unknown. But the Baron lived not long to enjoy the splendor of his ill−gained riches. He was heard to confess, that peace of mind was for ever banished from his heart; and, though lying on the downy couches of luxury, yet did he never after enjoy a calm undisturbed conscience. His death was the departure of guilty horror, and alarm for the future; and he quitted the world with curses and execrations on himself, leaving no child to inherit the abbey, which descended to his next heir; who, being every way unlike his uncle, refused to reside in a place that had been obtained by fraud and injustice. From this period the abbey, for near a century and a half, had acknowledged several lords, but was seldom honored, for any length of time, by the presence of its possessors, who were in general eager to shun a place, whose traditional history teemed with dark and mysterious records. The owners of the abbey were too superiorly gifted with Fortune's treasures, and the spectred traditions of St Anna kept them from ever approaching its decayed towers. Its lands, therefore, remaining untilled, soon added increase to the surrounding forests, and were suffered to become useless, and over−run with the luxuriance of uncultivated nature.

The last owner deceased, was a distant relation of the present inheritor, Sir Thomas Fitz−Martin, who was driven by severe misfortune, and the loss of a most amiable wife, to seek its long−deserted ruins, to hide himself and family from the dreadful consequences of an over−ruling fate which no human wisdom could avert, but in the hoped−for security of this long−forgotten retreat.

Yet the suddenness of his journey, its long and fatiguing continuance, together with the gloomy, remote, and even terrific habitation he was speedily approaching, began to raise fears and doubts in the minds of the domestics, who shrunk back, declaring it impossible to venture into so terrific and ruinous a place. Sir Thomas had never but once seen it, and that many years since, and even shuddered as he again reviewed its dreary and frowning exterior, and half wished that his haste had not led him to chuse so desolate a place for his future abode. At that moment the carriage suddenly stopping, at some little distance from an open avenue that led immediately to the abbey, Owen demanded if he was to proceed further, or if his Honor had not better turn into another path, and seek the nearest way out of the dismal forest; 'for surely, my Lord will never think of entering yon frightful old ruin, which, I dare say, will fall, and crush us alive beneath its humble battlements: or perhaps we shall have to encounter a battle with an army of ghosts and hobgoblins, who will dispute our right of admission within their tottering territories.'

'Peace, I command you,' exclaimed Sir Thomas. 'I thought you, at least, possessed more courage, than to admit the impression of such idle fears as even your female companions would blush to express. The seat of my ancestors, though long deserted and now perhaps destitute of every comfort, has, I will vouch for it, nothing that can justly alarm or excite cowardice in the minds of my servants. If, however, yourself, or any of your companions, fear to enter with your lord the building he has chosen for his future abode, they have free permission to remain with the carriage till day−light, whilst I and my daughter will alone seek our admission within a mansion that hereafter shall become our chief residence.'

Sir Thomas, at length descending from the vehicle, walked, with cautious inspection, a considerable way beneath the walls, before he arrived at the heavy gates of entrance. They were, however, securely closed, and resisted his attempts to force them, with an obstinacy that surprised.him. Calling loudly to his terror−stricken people, he commanded them, on their approach, to join their efforts with his; but the gates proved the strength of their interior holds, and none of the fastenings yielded to their attacks. Tired with this fruitless labour, yet wondering at the security with which they were barricaded, Sir Thomas paused once more, and in that interval the idea flashed on his mind, that the abbey might possibly be inhabited; though well he knew he had given no one permission to enter its precincts; and the traditional terrors of the place he thought were a sufficient guard against all unknown intruders. Yet it was not unlikely, that if it were indeed inhabited, it was become the dreadful haunt of banditti, to whom the lonely situation of the forest rendered it a very favorable concealment for the practice of their daring profession. For a moment this fearful supposition rendered Sir Thomas undecided, and he remained irresolute how to proceed, from the dread of exposing his family to more real dangers than the imaginary ones of Owen, till a violent flash of lightning ended his doubts; as it glanced in an instant on the walls of the abbey, and displayed its tottering turrets and broken casements. It shewed also, at no great distance, a small postern, whose weak state seemed to promise greater success; and they determined to try it if they could not here find a more willing admission. The postern was extremely old, and seemed only held by the bolt of the lock, which soon gave way to the attack of the travellers; and crossing beneath a heavy Gothic arch, they found themselves within the

area of the first court. Sir Thomas, followed by his trembling attendants, was hastening forward, till recollecting the females in the carriage were left unguarded, he ordered one of the men to return instantly, and await with them the event of their lord's bold adventure to gain shelter within the ruin. Owen summoned up a sort of desperate courage, and declared his intention of attending his master: and lighting a torch, he followed his calm and undaunted conductor, who now advanced with caution through the wide area of a second court, which, being covered with crumbling fragments of the ruins, rendered his advances difficult, and even dangerous. At length he reached a flight of steps, that seemed to lead to the grand portal of entrance. Sir Thomas, however, determined to ascend; and Owen, though tottering beneath his own weight with terrors, dared not interpose his resistance: his trembling hand held the light to the great folding doors, and Sir Thomas, after some efforts, burst them open, and entered what appeared an immense hall, terminating in vistas of huge pillars, whose lofty heads, like the roof they supported, were impervious to the faint rays of the torch, and enveloped in an awful and misty gloom, beyond expression impressive and solemn, and creating astonishing sensations in the startled beholder.

At length Sir Thomas's progress was stopped by some steps, that led up to a Gothic door, which, with no little difficulty, he forced back, and entering its dark precincts, found himself within a large antique room, with the forms of several crumbling pieces of furniture, which, from the number of its raised couches, now covered with blackness, seemed evidently the remnants of a chamber that had once been stately and magnificent. Sir Thomas examined it well. The walls, though dripping with damp, seemed tolerably entire, and to promise security from the dangers of the night; and as he had as yet seen nothing to excite alarm or dread, he hastened to the carriage, and declared to its inmates his resolution. The females knowing that, as they had proceeded thus far, to retract from their fearful enterprise was now become impracticable, obeyed with trembling and reluctant steps, and, supported by their male companions, slowly advanced; whilst Sir Thomas, taking Rosaline in his arms, conveyed her to the abbey.

Owen and Rowland, who had, by' the command of their master, cut down several branches from the forest, now set them alight within the wide spreading hearth, whose brisk and crackling blaze soon dispelled the damp and glooms of a dreary chamber, and at length compelled even the long−stretched countenances of the females to relax into something like a smile; and the.remembered fatigue and danger of their perilous journey through the forest, when compared with their present shelter, and the comforts of a welcome and plentiful meal, succeeded at last in making a very visible alteration. The repast being ended, Sir Thomas commanded Owen to place before the fire some of the strongest couches he could find, and cover them with packages, and compose themselves to rest. The servants, who had dreaded the thoughts of being obliged to pass the night in the chamber, were grateful for this considerate permission; and reclining themselves on the couches, they soon forgot the terrors and dangers they had felt, and became alike insensible to their forlorn situation, and to the storm which howled without, and now shook the trembling fabric, with each fresh gust of wind that assailed its ruined towers.

Sir Thomas was the first of the slumbering travellers that awoke. Convinced that it was day, from a ray of light that shone through a broken window shutter, he hastened to arise; for, since he was assured he should sleep no more, he resolved not to disturb his wearied domestics, but use the present interval to search the abbey. He proceeded to a large folding door on the west side, which he concluded must have been the grand entrance; but he declined, for the present, any further examination of the outside of the building; and turning to the left, advanced to a folding door, deeply fixed within a Gothic portal, which opening harshly to his efforts, let him, with astonishment, into a long suit of rooms, which, notwithstanding their silent, deserted, ruinous state, he was rejoiced to find might again be rendered habitable, and in a little time even convenient and comfortable.

They were eight in number, and still retained many remnants of furniture, which, though covered with mildew and dust, and crumbling to tatters, evidently witnessed the splendor of its former owner. He was satisfied that these chambers would amply answer his present wants, and rejoiced to find them in such a state as to make their repair not only possible but easy.

Proceeding forward through this vast extent of chambers, Sir Thomas felt that every former surmise of robbers was at an end, as he had as yet met with not a single circumstance that could in any degree confirm it. He was now hastening back to his family, who, should they have awoke, might experience no inconsiderable alarm.

Having descended for this purpose, he found himself, as he turned on the left, in a long but narrow gallery or passage; passing forward, he opened with much labor several old doors, in hopes they would bring him into a passage leading into the great hall or church; but they only presented a number of weak and dangerous recesses,

perhaps formerly cells of the monastery, whose flooring was so much decayed, and in some places fallen in, as to render further progress impossible. Quitting the fruitless search, he proceeded to the extreme end, where he met with a stronger door, which occasioned him no small manual exercise to unclose, when, to his surprise, a violent scream rung upon his ears; and, as he threw open the arched door, he beheld his terrified party, who, awaked by the noise of his forcing of the portal, had rushed into the arms of the men, to whom they clung, shrieking for protection against nothing less than a legion of armed spectres, whom their affrighted fancies had in an instant conjured from their graves.

'I have,' said Sir Thomas, 'explored the chief apartments of the abbey, and rejoice to find them every way beyond my expectations. Workmen, and other necessary persons shall be instantly engaged for the repair of this ancient and long−neglected mansion, which, as I mean to make it perfectly habitable, I have now only to assure all present, that the seat of my family has nothing to excite just terror, or encourage misconceptions relating to beings that never had existence.'

As soon as their small repast was ended, Sir Thomas desired Owen to take one of the horses, and find the nearest way to the next town; for a supply of food was become necessary. Sir Thomas.went, followed by Owen, round the southern angle of the abbey, where they had a full view of a portal more ruinous than the one they had quitted, and which presented a long and dreary continuation of those parts of the building once dedicated to conventual occupation, and were now crumbling into dust. 'Now,' said Sir Thomas, 'mount your horse, and proceed down yonder avenue, which will conduct you to the next town; and likewise inquire for one Norman Clare, who was steward to these estates; explain to him my present situation, and that I require his attendance; and give him full commission to engage such workmen as shall be needful for the full repair.'

Owen immediately obeyed; and lashing his steed into a fast trot, soon arrived within sight of a poor but neat−looking cottage, with a venerable looking old man sitting beneath a spreading oak, who had seen the intruder as he gallopped out of the forest, with surprise strongly marked in his face. 'Pray,' said Owen, as he rode up to the cottage, 'can you inform me if there be one Norman Clare living in this neighbourhood?'

The old man started back with increased surprise, exclaiming, 'And pray what is thy business with Norman Clare?' 'The simple−hearted Owen entered into a full detail of his mission, adding, 'if such a person as Norman was alive, his master, Sir Thomas, Lord of Fitz−Martin's abbey and lands, demanded his assistance at the above named mansion.'

'If thou requirest to be acquainted with him, thou shalt not further waste thy labor; for truly I am Norman Clare; and since I find thou art real flesh and blood, thou shalt enter with me my lonely dwelling, and welcome shalt thou be to share its homely fare.' Owen alighted joyfully from his panting steed, and entered with his host the well−arranged cottage. 'Here, good dame!' exclaimed Norman to his aged partner, '1 have brought you a stranger, who, coming from the old abbey yonder, must needs lack something to cheer his spirits.'

Owen then entered at large upon the whole of his late journey, and its termination at the abbey.

'What!' cried Blanche, 'lie in such a place as the haunted abbey! Mercy on us! friend, does your master know that it has not been inhabited for more than an hundred years; and does he not know, that it is all over so full of goblins and spectres, that nobody will ever set a foot near it? And, moreover, the ghost of Anna is seen every night, walking down the great long aisles of the church up to the altar, where it kneels till the clock strikes twelve, when it goes out of the great doors, which fly open at its approach, and walks to the great south tower, where it utters three loud shrieks; when the old wicked Baron's ghost is forced to come, as soon as these are heard; and Anna drives him with a fire−brand in one hand, and a dead child in the other, all over the ruins, till they come to the chamber where the Baron used to sleep after he treacherously got possession of the abbey. Dismal yells, and dying groans, are then heard to echo through all the apartments, and blazing lights thrown about the great north bed−chamber, till the great turret clock, that has never for many a weary long year been touched by mortal hands, tolls heavily two, and sometimes three strokes upon the bell.'

'Nonsense, nonsense,' interrupted Norman, with a wink, meant to silence the loquacity of Blanche, 'you see all these idle terrors are done away. Did not Sir Thomas and his family sleep there last night, and is not Mr Owen here alive to tell us so?' Poor Owen, a coward at heart, sat trembling every joint as he listened to the extravagances of Blanche, and gave implicit belief to all the wild incoherences she tittered. At length, Owen, aided by a flaggon of ale, which inspired him with something like resolution, once more braved the terrific dangers of the abbey, and mounting his horse, (well stored with many comforts provided by Norman,) he

gallopped down the avenue leading towards the abbey.

The next day, Norman, followed by a parcel of workmen, brought with him all his paper accounts, and monies, the produce of the rents, which he had faithfully hoarded up for the lord of.the demesne whenever he thought proper to claim it.

One half of the range of the west front in a month's time was rendered perfectly safe; and having undergone a complete repair, the apartments soon began to lose much of their desolate and forlorn appearance. Three chambers were fitted up for the future residence of the steward; but it was a work of long entreaty before Sir Thomas could prevail on the venerable old Norman to take possession of them.

The lovely Rosaline (the Baron's only daughter) had at this period arrived at the age of sixteen, and having no society, but the inmates of the abbey, nor accustomed to any other, would dispense with the forms of rank, and, seating herself by the brisk wood fire that blazed on the hearth, listen attentively to the talkative Blanche's terrible narratives of spectres and supernatural appearances.

Rosaline would, at times, anxiously attend to these dreadful stories; as the tales of Blanche were generally terrific in the extreme, and always finished with the history of the Baron and the nun; who, she affirmed, still haunted the ruins of the abbey. The story of Sister Anna had made a deep impression on her memory; and having often wished for a clear and true account of what was the end of the unfortunate nun, had determined to search among the ruins, in hopes that some discoveries might be made, that would lead to a development of her death. But as this enterprise could not so well be performed alone, she made Jannette her confidant, who readily promised obedience.

As they proceeded from the abbey, Rosaline failed not to examine every nook and corner that crossed her way. Sometimes she ventured up the broken steps of a broken tower, whose lofty battlements no longer reared their proud heads, that lay extended in the area. She ascended the first story, and through the heavy arch had a full view of the south tower. Rosaline bade Jannette observe it, and asked if she had courage to enter it.—'Indeed, my lady,' she replied, 'I never behold that tower, but it makes me tremble. It was there, they say, that poor Anna was confined; and I dare hardly look at it. Besides, my lady, you see it is more ruinous than this; nor is it safe to be approached. Surely, Madam, you do not mean to make the trial?'

'If, as you say, that was the prison of poor Anna, it is there only I may' hope to find some documents relative to her fate. I am, therefore, resolved to proceed. But for you, Jannette, stay where you are: I shall not require a further attendance than your remaining within hearing.'

Rosaline descended the broken steps, and proceeded towards the tower, whilst Jannette, not daring to advance, stood trembling, entreating her young lady to forego her dangerous enterprise:

but Rosaline having as yet found nothing to gratify her search, resolved not to yield to the light fears of Jannette: she therefore proceeded, and arrived at the full sight of the south tower: its black and frowning aspect, together with its weak, tottering situation, at first aroused a momentary feeling of terror; but youthful hope encouraged her to venture, and she approached the old Gothic door, which gave her a sight of an iron grating that was fixed in the wall.

To the left she beheld a flight of stairs that led to the upper stories; but these were too weak to admit her ascent in safety to the top; she therefore gave over the design, and turned again to the iron grating. As she caught the first view of the alarming objects within, her mind, unprepared for the sudden shock, endured a momentary suspension, and she fell, nearly fainting, against the wall.

The power of calling for aid was gone, and, for a few seconds, she was unable to support herself.

The terrific spectacle that had so powerfully affected Rosaline, as she caught a view of the interior of this forlorn ruin, was a deep narrow cell, whose walls were hung with mouldering trappings of black. The only light that was admitted within, proceeded from an iron grate fixed in the amazing thickness of the wall. Around this gloomy place were fixed, in all directions, the horrific emblems of death; and which ever way the desolate inhabitant of this dreary cell turned,.images of horror, shocking to nature, met the tortured view, in the terrific state and eyeless sockets of the ghastly skull bones that hung in grim appalling array. In the middle of the cell, upon a raised pedestal, stood the mouldering relics of a coffin, which had been once covered with a velvet pall, but which now hung in tatters down its sides. At one corner was a small hillock, that appeared the sad resting place of the distracted penitent; for that this was the severe prison of penance and contrition, every superstitious emblem of monkish torture that surrounded the walls plainly bore testimony of. A crucifix, and broken

hour−glass, still remained, covered with dust, upon a small altar, beneath an arched recess; whilst the floor was strewed with skulls and human bones.

After the first momentary shock had subsided, Rosaline arose, and stood irresolute to proceed in researches. Her alarms were strong, but her curiosity was, if possible, stronger. She felt she should never be able voluntarily again to enter this tremendous place; and she debated whether her courage would support her, should she pursue further the daring adventure. 'Perhaps,' said she, 'this was, indeed, the final end of the unhappy sister. Alas! poor unfortunate, this too, surely was alike your prison, and the cause of your lingering death. Yet wherefore am I thus anxious to solve the mystery of her death? Dare I lift the pall from that horrific spectacle? What if my spirits fail me, and I sink, overcome with dread, in this charnel house of death. May not my senses forsake me in the trial? or is it not very likely that terror may bereave me of my reason?—Shall I enter?'

Either her senses were indeed confused, or perhaps her mind, wrought to a certain pitch, led her to fancy more than reality; for, as the last word dropped from her lips, she started, and thought she heard it feebly repeated by an unknown voice, which slowly pronounced, 'Enter!'

Rosaline trembled, and not exactly aware of her intentions, unfastened the grate, and threw back the rattling chains that were hooked on the staples without the cell. The grate opened with ease, and swung on its hinges with little or no resistance; and Rosaline, with an imagination distempered, and misled by the hopes of discovering something she came in search of, that would repay her fears, descended the indented declivity, and with trembling steps staggered two or three paces from the grating; but again became irresolute, and terrified from her purpose, she stopped.

'Dare I,' she faintly ejaculated, 'dare I raise the mysterious lid of that horrific coffin?'

'Dare to do so!' replied a voice, that sounded hollow along the dreaded vault; and Rosaline, whose terror now had suspended the faculty of feeling, though not of life, actually moved towards the coffin, as if performing some dreadful rite, that she found she had not a power to resist.

Impelled with a notion of that superior agency which she dared not disobey, and not exactly sensible of what she did, she fearfully cast aside the lid, which, as she touched, fell crumbling to the ground; and turning aside her head, her hand tell within the coffin; and in her fright she grasped something moist and clammy, which she brought away. Shrieking wildly, she rushed from the scene of terror, and precipitating herself through the tower−gate, fell fainting into the arms of Jannette; who, pale and terrified, called aloud for help, as she supported her insensible lady.

Norman, who had long been impatient at the stay of his mistress, and alarmed for her safety, was hastening down the ruins, when the cries of Jannette assailed his ears, and had arrived at the scene of terror as Rosaline began to open her eyes.

'Holy Virgin protect the lady,' he exclaimed. 'Hast thou seen any thing? or do these pale looks proceed from some fall which may have bruised thy tender form among the ruins?'

'Oh no, good Norman, not so,' feebly and wildly ejaculated Rosaline. 'The tower! the dreadful tower!' 'The tower! sayst thou, my' lady? Mercy on me! Have you been so hardy as to venture into that dismal place!'

Rosaline, as she gradually recovered, felt a perfect recollection of the late horrid scene, and recalling the awful voice she had heard, which she doubted not proceeded from some supernatural.agency, she no sooner beheld Norman, than she darted towards her chamber, regardless of the terrors of the old steward or Jannette.

As soon as she entered her room, she drew from the folds of her robe the relics she had unknowingly grasped from the coffin. On examination, it seemed to be some folded papers; but in so decayed a condition, that they threatened to drop in pieces with the touch.

She carefully unfolded the parcel, and found it to contain the story of the unfortunate Anna; but many of the lines were totally extinct, and only here and there a few that could be distinguished.

At length, in another packet she discovered a more perfect copy of the preceding ones, which, from the style of its writing, evidently proved them to be the labor of some of the monks, who had, from the papers discovered in the cell of her confinement, been enabled to trace the truth of her melancholy story and sufferings, in which the Baron was but too principally concerned.

Rosaline, retrimming her lamp, and seating herself nearer the table, took up the monk's copy, and began, not without difficulty, to read the melancholy story of The Bleeding Nun of St Catherine's It was in the reign of Edward the First, that, in an old dilapidated mansion, lived the poor but proud Sir Emanfred, descended of an

illustrious house, whose noble progenitors had with the Conqueror settled in England, upon the establishment of their royal master.

In the two succeeding centuries, however, great changes had taken place, and many events had reduced the once powerful and splendid ancestors of Sir Emanfred to little more than a military dependance. The proud nature of the Knight shrunk from the consequences of the total ruin of his house; and, indignant at the disgraceful and humiliating change of his circumstances, he hastily quitted the gay triumphs of the British court, because his fallen fortunes and wasted patrimony no longer enabled him to vie, in the splendor of his appearance and expenditure, with the rest of the nobles of the kingdom. In the gloomy shades of his forsaken mansion, he buried himself from all the joys of social intercourse: nor was his melancholy habitation ever after disturbed by the sounds of festive cheerfulness, or the smile of contentment. Morose in temper from his disappointments of fortune, and too proud to stoop to such honorable recourses, as might have in time procured for him the re−establishment of his decayed house, he disdained all pecuniary acquirements, and deter−mined to build his hope of future greatness on an alliance of his only child with the splendid and noble lord of Osmand. But the lovely Anna, brought up in total seclusion, and unacquainted with the manners of the world, happily free from the ambitious and haughty passions of her stem sire, had unconsciously rendered obedience to his commands impossible, and shrunk in horror from the dreaded proposal of an union with Lord Osmand; for, alas! she had not a heart to bestow, nor a hand to give away'. Anna, the beautiful and enchanting Anna, whose years scarce numbered seventeen, had known the exquisite pain and pleasures of a secret love; and, in the simple innocence of an unsuspecting mind, had given her heart, her soul, her all to a—Stranger.

Anna had never known a mother's tenderness, nor experienced a father's sheltering protection; the artless dictates of her too susceptible heart were her only guides and monitors; and, during the long absence of her sire, her soul first felt the pleasing emotions of love for an unknown but graceful Stranger, whom she had first beheld in the shades of a melancholy but romantic wood, that adjoined equally her father's domain, and the vast forest of St Catherine's monastery, where she had often been accustomed to roam, and where she had first met the fascinating Vortimer, who but too soon betrayed the unconscious maid into a confession that his fervent love was not.displeasing, and that to him, and him only, she had resigned her heart, beyond even a wish for its recall. The mind of Anna was incapable of restraining the soft, thrilling ecstasies of a first infant passion. The Stranger urged his suit with all the melting, all the prevailing, eloquence of an enraptured lover, and all the outward blandishments of feeling and sincerity. Unacquainted with the world's deceits, poor Anna listened to his fervent vows with downcast, blushing timidity, and pleased acceptance. Each secret meeting more firmly linked her chains: her very soul was devoted to the Stranger, whom, as yet, she knew not by any other title than the simple name of Vortimer.

In a moment fatally destructive to her repose, when love had blinded reason, and the artless character of Anna but too successfully aided the purposes of the Stranger, he obtained not only complete possession of her affections, but of her person also.

At midnight, in the ruined chapel of Sir Emanfred's gloomy edifice, the Stranger had prevailed on the innocent Anna to meet him, and ratify his wishes. A monk of a distant convent waited in the chapel; and the inauspicious nuptials were performed; and Anna became a bride, without knowing by what title she must in future call herself.

Scarcely had three months of happiness and love passed over her head, when a storm, dreadful and unexpected, threatened for ever to annihilate the bright prospect of felicity.

The sudden arrival of a hasty messenger from the Knight alarmed the trembling Anna; and scarce had she perused the purport of his arrival, than with a faint shriek, and a stifled cry of agony, she fell to the ground, as she feebly exclaimed, 'Lost, undone, and wretched Anna!

destruction and death await thee!'

The Stranger read the fatal paper that contained the harsh mandate of his Anna's father: his brow became contracted, and his countenance overcast with apparent gloom and sorrow, as he perused the unwelcome information of the Knight's arrival, on the morrow, at his castle, to celebrate the nuptials of his daughter with the lord of Osmand, who accompanied him. For a time a gloomy silence pervaded his lips; and Anna vainly cast her tearful, imploring eyes to him for succour and protection. At length, starting from a deep reverie, he caught her in his arms, as she was sinking to the ground, and kissing her cold and quivering lips, bade her take comfort, and abide with patience the arrival of her sire; adding, that in three weeks he would return, and openly claim her as his

wife; when the mystery that had so long enveloped his name and tide in secrecy should be unravelled, and his adored Anna be restored to affluence and splendor. Again embracing her, he hurried precipitately from the place; and Anna— the ruined hapless Anna—never saw him more—**** Here many lines became defaced, as the ink had rotted through the vellum, and all traces of writing were totally lost in mildew and obscurity. At length she was able to continue as follows:

Ferocious rage filled the soul of the Knight, and darkened his features, as prostrate at his feet lay, overwhelmed in grief and tears, the imploring Anna. 'Spare me!' she cried, 'Oh, sire! spare your wretched child—she cannot marry the lord of Osmand!'

Fury flashed in the eyes of the stem Sir Emanfred, on hearing these words of his daughter. At length the burst of rage found vent, he seized the arm of the trembling Anna, and placing her hand forcibly in that of Sir Osmand's, commanded her to prepare herself, in three days, to become his bride, or meet the curses of an angry father, and be driven from his sight for ever.

Driven to despair, and now vainly calling on the mysterious Stranger to shield her from the direful fate that awaited her, or the still more dreadful vengeance of her unrelenting father, the hapless Anna wildly flew to the gloomy wood, in the forlorn hope that there, once more, she might behold the lord of all her love and fondest wishes. In three weeks he had promised to reclaim her; but, alas! they had already expired, and no Stranger had appeared. The fourth week of his absence.came: it passed away, but he came not; and now but three days remained between her and her hateful nuptials. Wildly she wandered through the gloomy wood, and vainly cast her eyes in hopeless anguish on all around her: no Stranger met her sight: he came not to rescue his forlorn bride from the rude grasp of impending misery arid destruction. Night came on; the hours passed away unheeded, yet still she quitted not the solemn shades of the dreary grove. The bell of midnight sounded; she started at the melancholy toll, and fear and awe possessed her sickening fancy. She hurried through the wood, and reached in silence her chamber; but sleep visited not the wretched Anna.

Again, as the hour of suffering drew still nigher, she threw herself in supplication before the gloomy Knight, and besought him to spare her but one week longer, ere he linked her to misery and woe; hoping by this delay to procure time for the Stranger, and give him yet another chance, ere it was too late, to save her, and claim his affianced bride. But, inexorably bent on the union of his child with Lord Osmand, the Knight, in anger, cast her from his knees, and threatened to overwhelm her with his most tremendous curses, if she did not meet Lord Osmand at the altar before the sixth hour of the early morrow had chimed upon the bell.

Poor Anna shrunk from the angry glances of the enraged Knight; despair and anguish seized her soul. The Stranger never came; he had forgotten his solemn vows, neglected his promise, and abandoned her to her fate. Whither could she fly? How was she to avoid the choice of miseries that equally pursued her? Either she must perjure her soul to false oaths, or meet the dreadful alternative of a parent's dire malediction.—Oh! whither, lost and wretched Anna! canst thou fly!

Upon the pillow of her tear−bedewed couch she vainly laid her head, to seek a momentary oblivion of her sorrow in repose. Something lay upon her pillow—It was a paper curiously folded.— With fearful, trembling expectation she hastily opened the envelope, and read, 'The Stranger guards his love; and though unseen, and yet forbidden, to reclaim his lovely bride, now watches over her safety, and awaits the precious moment when he shall hasten on the wings of love to restore his Anna to happiness and liberty. If then she would preserve herself for her unknown friend, let her instantly fly to the monastery of St Catherine's, where she may remain in security till demanded by her adoring VORTIMER.'

The unhappy maid perused the fatal lines with unsuspecting belief and joyful ecstasy; and, in compliance with the Stranger's mysterious warning, escaped at midnight from her father's mansion; and took refuge in the cloisters of St Catherine.

The haughty lady abbess received the forlorn wanderer with cold civility and suspicious scrutiny. The unfortunate Anna had, in the simple innocence of her heart, confided to the superior her mournful tale, nor left one circumstance untold that could excite her pity, save her marriage with the Stranger, for whom she now began to feel unusual fears, and dreadful forebodings of evil to herself; for a month had glided away at the abbey, and yet he came not.

The Knight, with dreadful rage, discovered his daughter's flight; but vainly sought again to restore her to his power. He never saw her more; nor knew the sad conclusion of the unhappy Anna's destiny; who, deceived and

terrified by the threats, expostulations, and commands, of the lady abbess, and the father confessors of the monastery, was at length betrayed into her own destruction; for the merciless abbess threatened to return her to her lord, and to her father, if she longer refused to take the vow of monastic life.

Despair and horror now seized the suffering victim of bigotry and paternal tyranny. Another and another month elapsed, and hope no longer could support her—the cruel stranger never came. At.the gates of her prison, she was told, waited her father, with a powerful band, to force her from the abbey into the arms of a hated husband; and only the alternative of instantly taking the veil, could save her from the misery that pursued her. In a wild agony of terror, that had totally bereft her of her reason, she faintly bade them save her from her father's vengeance.

That instant the sacred, irrevocable vow was administered, and all its binding forms complied with by the lost St Anna, who, in the terror of her father, had for a moment forgot her previous engagements with the Stranger—forgot that she must, in a little time, become, perhaps, a wretched mother, and now was a still more wretched nun.***** Here again the papers were totally useless, as Rosaline could only make out here and there a word, by which it appeared, that the Baron Fitzmartin had accused the order, with breaking the vow of celibacy. At length she read as follows:

With difficulty he was prevailed upon to suspend his proceedings against the abbey till the succeeding morrow, whilst the holy sisterhood endured the most persecuting examination from the lady abbess. No signs of guilt, however, were found; and the fathers, rejoicing in their expected security, were debating on an ample defiance to the Baron, when news was brought that Sister St Anna had fallen senseless on the steps of the grand altar, and had been with difficulty removed to her cell. Thither the abbess instantly hastened; and as the insensible nun lay still reclined on her mattress, her outer garment unlaced to admit of respiration, the disfigurement of her person first forcibly struck the lady mother with suspicion. She started, frowned; then looked again; conviction flashed upon her eyes; and, regardless of pity for the still lifeless state of the hapless Anna, she commanded all to quit the cell, and send instantly the father abbot to her. The father hastily obeyed, and entered. The lady abbess murmured in a hollow voice, as frowns of fury darted from her now terrific countenance: 'Behold the guilty wretch that, with impious sacrilege, hath defiled our holy sanctuary, and brought destruction on the glory of our house's fame!—Say, holy father, how must we dispose of the accursed apostate?'

Before the abbot could reply, the unfortunate Anna awoke from the counterfeit of death's repose, and, wildly casting her eyes around her cell, beheld the forms of her inveterate destroyers.

Their fierce and angry looks of dreadful inquiry were bent upon the terrified nun, who, sickened with an unusual apprehension and dismay, whilst the abbot, fixing on the trembling Anna an increasing look of penetrating sternness, in a hollow, deep−toned voice, that sunk to her appalled heart, thus exclaimed: 'What punishment too terrible can await that guilty wretch who with sacrilege defiles our holy order?—say, lost one of God, art thou not guilty?'

Sinking on her knees, of every hope of life bereft, the unhappy Anna drooped her head to avoid the terrible scrutiny of truths pronounced, and looks unanswerable. No chance of escape was left her; she dared not prevaricate; and only with a groan of agony she feebly exclaimed—'I am, indeed!—Have mercy, holy father, as you shall hereafter expect to receive mercy from our heavenly Judge, on my involuntary crime!' She then turned to the frowning abbess her beseeching eyes, and piteously added, as she clung around her knees, 'Spare, oh gracious mother, spare a repentant daughter!'

In the countenances of her terrific judges poor Anna read the horrid mandate of her fate; for against the sacred order of the sisterhood she had sinned beyond atonement by any other punish−ment than death—Death the most horrible and excruciating! Vainly then she knelt, and clung to the robe of the abbess; she had slandered with sacrilege the purity of God's anointed house; its ministers and sacred devotees were sullied with a stain, that only the blood of a victim could wash away. Nor was the plea of marriage to a knight, who evidently never meant to claim her, admitted as the slightest expiation of her perjured vows to the abbey, and the disgrace she had brought on.its sanctified inmates. Her horrid crimes demanded instant punishment: and the dreadful vengeance of the insulted members of the church could only be appeased by the immediate extirpation of the heinous apostate. To dispose of the unfortunate nun for ever, beyond the possibility of her being produced as a living evidence of the Baron's censure, and the abbey's shame, was now become an event absolutely necessary to the safety and welfare of the order: the claims of mercy, or the melting pleadings of pity, were alike disregarded for the stronger interest

of the more immediate triumph of the abbey over its avowed and implacable enemy: and the father abbot, with the lady mother, having exhausted on the lost fair one the dreadful thunders of the church's vengeance, forcibly tore themselves from her distracted grasp, and prepared to inflict the terrific punishments that awaited their despairing victim, who, shrieking vainly for aid, and calling piteously on the Stranger for rescue and protection from her horrid fate, was borne by the tormentors from her cell to the dungeon of the south tower.

At the hour of midnight they dragged the miserable victim from her bed, and deep in the horrific dungeons of the prison plunged the distracted nun!—Groans, sighs, and shrieks, alternately rung echoing round the rugged walls: the torturing horrors of famine awaited the unfortunate nun; no pity alleviated her misery; and in the centre of the place stood the coffin destined for her; whilst round the walls and floor, in all directions, were strewed the ghastly ensigns of woe and torment.

A faint glimmering lamp, suspended from the massy bars of the roof (as if with a refinement of cruelty unequalled, to blast the sight of the victim, and shut out every contemplation but her immediate fate) served to shew her the horrors that overwhelmed her, and the terrific engines of her tortures. The implements of confession were placed on the lid of her coffin; for the fathers denied her even the last consolation of absolution; but these she only in moments of short intellect would use, when distracted sentences, and wild, unfinished exclamations and appeals were all that it produced, sufficiently depictive of the horrors of her fate.

Two days of lingering sufferings had passed, and the third was nearly closed. Shut from life, and light, and every means of existence, the pangs of hunger seized the frantic sufferer, and the perils of premature childbirth writhed her anguished frame. Shrieks of despair rang through the building, and echoed to the vault of heaven. Hark! again that soul−appalling cry!—Inhuman fiends, is mercy dead within you!—Is there no touch of pity in your obdurate souls!—And thou too, remorseless betrayer of trusting innocence, hear ye not yon soul−appalling cry of her thy fatal love has destroyed?—Hark! again she calls on thy unpitying name; and now, in the bitterness of her soul's sufferings, she curses thee, and imprecates heaven's just vengeance on thy perjured head! Heaven hears the awful appeal!—it will avenge thee, suffering Anna! Now sink to death appeased.— Again the shrieks—Sure it is her last! The holy sisterhood, appalled, fly wildly from the dreadful tower; but vainly supplicate the mercy of their superiors for its dying inmate. Nature is exhausted, and hark, again the groans grow fainter! Short breathed murmurs proclaim the welcome dissolution of life. The soul, though confined with the suffering frame within the massy bars of her prison, at length has burst its bonds—It mounts from death, and in a moment is freed for ever. A short prayer addressed to the throne of mercy, releases the sufferer, and wafts her soul from the persecution of the wicked. The cruel strife has ceased—Poor Anna is at rest—her voice is heard no more. In the coffin of penitence she laid her suffering form; perhaps, it will never be removed from thence. Her guilty judges tremble at the place, nor dare their unhallowed footsteps approach the sacred dust.

Again the papers were useless, but it seemed, by what she could make out, that the haughty Baron triumphed over the Fathers of the Abbey, to the entire seclusion of the order. At length she came to the following passage, which concluded the manuscript.

The vengeance of heaven hung heavily over the conscience of the wicked Baron, nor was he suffered ever after to partake of happiness. It was on the third evening after his removal from his castle to the abbey he had plundered, that, retiring earlier than usual to his unwelcome couch, he tried in the arms of sleep to lose the remembrance of his crimes, and the terrible vengeance they inflicted on his guilty conscience. The sullen bell had tolled the hour of midnight ere he could compose his mind to repose. On this night, however, unusual restlessness pervaded his frame; nor could he for some time close in forgetfulness his eye−lids. At length a kind of unwilling stupor lulled for a moment his tortured spirits, and he slept. Not long did the balmy deity await him:

troubled groans of anguish sounded through the apartment, and piercing shrieks rung bitterly in his ears. Starting in horror, he wildly raised himself, half bent, on his couch, and drew aside his curtains. The chamber was in total darkness, and every taper seemed suddenly to have been extinguished. At that moment the heavy bell of the abbey clock struck one. A freezing awe stole over the senses of the Baron: he in vain attempted to call his attendants; for speech was denied him; and a suspense of trembling horror had chilled his soul. His blood ran cold to its native source; his hair stood erect, and his countenance was distorted; for, as his eyes turned wildly, he beheld, standing close to the side of his bed, the pale figure of a female form, thinly clothed in the habiliments of a nun, and bearing in one hand a taper, whilst the other arm supported the ghastly form of a dead infant reclining on her breast. The countenance of the figure was pale, wan, and horrible to behold; for from its motionless eyes

no spark of life proceeded; but they were fixed in unmoving terrific expression on the appalled Baron. At length a hollow−sounding voice pronounced through the closed lips of the spectre, '0 false, false Vortimer! accursed and rejected of thy Maker! knowest thou not the shadowy form that stands before thee? knowest thou not thy wretched bride? seest thou not the murdered infant thou hast destroyed?—From the deep bosom of immensity, the yawning horrors of the grave, the spirit of St Anna comes to call for vengeance and retribution; for know, the curses of her latest moments, when writhing beneath the agonies, the torments of death, and devouring hunger, that she then called upon thy head, were heard; and never shalt thou, guilty wretch! enjoy one quiet moment more. My mangled form, as now thou seest me, and dreams for ever of affright and terror, shall haunt thy thoughts with horror; nor shall even the grave rescue thee from the tortures I await to inflict.—Farewell—farewell till next we meet. In the grove where first thy perjured soul won on my happy, unsuspecting nature, and drew my youthful heart from parental duty and obedience, there shalt thou again behold me!'

Suddenly the eyes of the spectre became animated—Oh! then what flashes of appalling anger darted their orbits on the horrorstruck Vortimer! three dreadful shrieks rung pealing through the chamber, now filled with a blaze of sulphureous light. The spectre suddenly became invisible, and the Baron fell senseless on his couch.