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150
years ago

Afflicting spectacle of insanity

An afflicting spectacle of insanity, followed by a melancholy result, was witnessed a few days ago at the Lunatic Hospital at Saumur. A lady and gentleman went to visit the establishment, accompanied by their child, a little girl of five or six years old. As they passed one of the cells, the wretched inmate, an interesting young woman of about 25, who had irrecoverably lost her reason, through the desertions of a seducer, and the death of their illegitimate offspring, suddenly made a spring at the little girl, who had approached within her reach. In the height of her delirium, the poor creature fancied the stranger's child her own long-lost darling, and, devouring it with kisses, bore it in triumph to the further end of the cell. Entreaties and menaces having proved equally ineffectual to induce her to restore the child to its terrified mother, the director of the establishment was sent for, and, at his suggestion, the maniac was allowed for a few moments to retain peaceable possession of her prize, under the impression that, exhausted with her own frantic violence, she would shortly fall asleep, when the child might be liberated from her grasp without difficulty or the employment of harsh measures. This calculation was not erroneous: in a few minutes, the poor sufferer's eyes closed in slumber, and one of the keepers watching the opportunity, snatched the child from her arms, and restored it to its mother. The shriek of delight uttered by the latter on recovering her treasure awakened the poor maniac, who, on perceiving the child gone, actually howled with despair, and, in a paroxysm of ungovernable frenzy, fell to the ground – to rise no more. Death had released her from her sufferings.

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