

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT SHELLEY



**THE
PILGRIMS**

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I.

The twilight of one of those burning days of summer whose unclouded sky seems to speak to man of happier realms, had already flung broad shadows over the valley of Unspunnen; whilst the departing rays of a gorgeous sunset continued to glitter on the summits of the surrounding hills. Gradually, however, the glowing tints deepened; then grew darker and darker; until they finally yielded to the still more sober hues of night.

Beneath an avenue of lime-trees, which, from their size and luxuriance, appeared almost coeval with the soil in which they grew, Burkhardt of Unspunnen wandered to and fro with uneasy step, as if some recent sorrow occupied his troubled mind. At times he stood with his eyes steadfastly fixed on the earth, as if he expected to see the object of his contemplation start forth from its bosom; at other times he would raise his eyes to the summits of the trees, whose branches, now gently agitated by the night breeze, seemed to breathe sighs of compassion in remembrance of those happy hours which had once been passed beneath their welcome shade. When, however, advancing from beneath them, he beheld the deep blue heavens with the bright host of stars, hope sprang up within him at the thoughts of that glory to which those heavens and those stars, all lovely and beauteous as they seem, are but the faint heralds, and for a time dissipated the grief which had so long weighed heavily upon his heart.

From these reflections he was suddenly aroused by the tones of a manly voice addressing him. Burkhardt advancing, beheld, standing in the light of the moon, two pilgrims, clothed in the usual coarse and somber garb, with their broad hats drawn over their brows.

"Praise be to God!" said the pilgrim who had just before awakened Burkhardt's attention, and who, from his height and manner, appeared to be the elder of the two. His words were echoed by a voice whose gentle and faltering accents showed the speaker to be still but of tender years.

" Whither are you going, friends? what seek you here, at this late hour? " said Burkhardt. " If you wish to rest you after your journey enter, and with God's blessing, and my hearty welcome, recruit yourselves."