

CHAPTER VI.

The Prince is in that mood,
 The offspring of a young and teeming fancy,
 That boys call love ; but no more like to love,
 Than the weak lightning of a summer night,
 That plays upon the horizon's edge, is like
 To that which issues from the loaded cloud,
 And rives the oak asunder.

LORD JOHN RUSSEL.

Gardez-vous d'écouter les paroles douces et flâteuses de Calypso, qui se glisseront comme un serpent sous les fleurs : craignez ce poison caché ; défiez-vous de vous-même.

FENELON.

NEARLY a month passed away in uninterrupted enjoyment, and in what might have been called a new, delicious, and more highly excited state of existence for Amherst. Every day he sallied forth with his gun, as soon as the family breakfast was over. But it was not to shoot, for, let the breeze blow as it would, or the noses of his pointers incline to lead him which way they

might, still he naturally and instinctively took his course in a straight line, as the crow would fly, over the enclosed country towards Brokenhurst-Hall. There he loitered off his day hanging over the guitar, or the drawing-table, or the embroidery frame of the beautiful Miss Delasaux; or reading verses to her as she lay stretched on a sofa; or lounging on a shaven bank, as she angled for the tiny brood of a little stream, that smoothly meandered, in many a maze, within a channel of a regularly defined breadth, through rich and highly perfumed shrubberies. Calypso's island was not more enchanting to the fascinated Ulysses, than were to Amherst the level lawns, the embowering evergreens, the terrace walks, the temples, and the unruffled liquid mirrors, which reflected these and all the other artificial beauties of Brokenhurst-Hall. Nor had the divine Calypso herself more powerful spells for detaining the Grecian chief, than the insidious nymph of these charming scenes employed, to induce Amherst to linger among them.

Thus glided away the happy hours of the lovers, for so they might well be called, although their tongues had yet been silent on the tender

subject; for their eyes had already spoken volumes in a language not to be misunderstood.

They were one day seated within the circle of a little Ionic temple; under the dome of which stood a finely-executed copy in marble of the Medicean Venus. The building arose from a piece of shaven turf of the richest green, surrounded by tall evergreens of the most luxuriant foliage, and sloping gently towards a considerable sheet of water, into which the rill that stole through the grounds was taught by human art to expand itself. On all sides of this little lake, the eye sank amidst the deep and softened shadows of thickly-tufted chesnuts, planes, and lime trees, closing it in at some distance behind; whilst here and there from the velvet margin, the spiral cypress, or tall poplar, contrasted their upright forms with those of the graceful weeping willows, and other pendulous trees, seeming to unite their long tendrils to their images reflected in the water. A thousand perfumes here mingled their fragrance. It was a spot of sweetness and of silence, the gentle sighing of the zephyr among the leaves, and the almost imperceptible ripple on the lake, being the only sound or mo-

tion that could be distinguished. The goddess to whom the temple was dedicated might well have chosen it as her abode, for love was breathed in the very air.

Amherst felt the full power of its influence. He was intoxicated with a combination of bewitching sensations. His pulse beat high ; his eyes swam with an ecstasy never before experienced ; and he was about to seize the hand of Miss Delassaux, to give vent to his feelings in a formal declaration of his passion, when they were interrupted by the appearance of a female, of prepossessing mien and countenance, but clothed in the ragged weeds of poverty, and whose person exhibited all the external marks of famine and wretchedness. The miserable creature tottered, in very weakness, forth from the dark walk leading into the retirement where they sat, and partly from respect, but more from the absolute failure of her limbs, dropped on her knees before them.

Miss Delassaux's large black eyes, melting with tenderness, were instantly kindled up with lightnings, such as Amherst had never before beheld in them.

“Wretch!” exclaimed she, unwarily permitting herself to be betrayed into a haughty and violent tone; “how could you dare to intrude on these my private walks?”

“Alas, my lady,” said the poor woman feebly, and holding up her emaciated hands in an attitude of supplication, whilst the tears poured in torrents over her wan cheeks, “I have made bold to come to you again. Husband was so crushed in trying to save poor Jem last races, when he was killed by the carriage going over him, that he has never been able to rise since. We have hardly had a morsel of food for some days, and my baby at the breast—and my poor man——”

“But why do you come to me with these complaints? why did you not go to Hawkins, my steward?” said Miss Delassaux, impatiently interrupting the supplicant; “I leave all such matters to Mr Hawkins—Did not I tell you so before?”

“You did indeed, my lady, and I went; but Mr Hawkins——”

“Well, begone, I say,” exclaimed Miss Delassaux, in the same unfeeling tone; “I have nothing to do with such a—a——” But here

she hesitated ; for her eyes chancing at this moment to fall on Amherst, she observed that a cloud had taken possession of his sunny brow. She coughed, to give herself time to recover a little ; and then, immediately changing her voice to a milder accent, she continued, “ I was saying, unfortunate woman, that I do not in general allow myself to interfere in such cases ; for the extreme sensibility of my heart will not permit me to witness human misery, without subjecting me to indescribable pain ; and I have suffered so much in this way, that I have been induced for some time to employ an agent in all such matters. — But, since you have thus forced your case upon me in person, I must give way to my feelings ; and — here ! — take this, and be happy.” And so saying, she drew from her pocket a green silk net purse, embroidered with gold, and heavy with guineas, and tossed it towards the poor woman ; then, shrowding her eyes in her white handkerchief, she seemed to give way to the emotions so suddenly and deeply excited, by a tale of woe she had refused to listen to.

The wretched woman threw herself forward upon the glittering prize, and grasped it with eagerness.

“ Heaven bless you !” she exclaimed, with energy ; “ my husband and my child may yet be saved.” Then, starting up, with a look of almost frenzied anxiety, she darted off with a rapidity her weakness was but ill calculated for.

She was no sooner gone than Miss Delassaux removed the handkerchief from her face, and looked round for the approbation of Amherst, with eyes re-illumed with the lambent fires of love. But in his they found no corresponding flames to mingle with. The rays which so lately shone upon her, like those of the morning sun, when his beams pour from the brow of an eastern mountain in one cheering flood of light over the gay flower garden, were now extinguished, and he seemed absorbed in a dream of gloomy thought. On him her acting had been thrown away, and even the moving tones she now assumed utterly failed to awaken his attention. At last, he seemed suddenly to recollect himself, and stammering out something about the hour, and bowing to Miss Delassaux with more formality than he had been lately wont to do, he hastily left her.

The magnificent gate of the park had closed

behind him, before his senses had altogether recovered from the shock they received. His eyes wandered almost unconsciously over the prospect now spread before him. It was one of those wide and extended vales, where a lazy stream glided along like a silvery serpent amongst the gay greens and yellows of the richest cultivation; where groves, and bean-fields, and gardens, and fragrant meadows, and hop-grounds, mingled their varied beauties; and where the curling smoke of many a vine-clad cottage, and snug farm-house, seemed to speak the existence of a thick-sown and happy population. Alas, how often does such a flattering picture, when more narrowly examined, prove but the deceitful gilding of misery!

A warm, misty-looking vapour, like a summer exhalation, arose from the middle of the scene, and melted into the blue sky; and immediately under it, a pointed spire or two, and a tall Gothic tower, together with some red-tiled roofs, and brick gables, peeping here and there in clusters from the trees they were interspersed with, showed that it proceeded from a little country town. A considerable extent of turf near it, having a

smooth swarded sweeping line traced over its surface, partly enclosed with a barrier of painted posts and rails, marked the race-ground. Amherst's eyes fell upon it. He retraced his steps to the gate, and, calling out the park-keeper's wife, he described the appearance of the female whom he had so lately seen, soon ascertained where she lived, and, impatient to follow the impulse of his heart, entered a narrow lane, leading, between hedges, towards the village.

The path he followed soon opened upon the race-ground; but it was some little time before he could discover the habitation he was in search of. At last he found it, under a great oak tree. It seemed to be one of those temporary edifices of turf, usually erected on the margin of the common by those low hucksters who frequent races and fairs, and generally left untenanted, except during the few days when the sports are going forward. The entrance was closed by a door of wattle. He stooped to go in; but as the opening, originally serving as a window, had been recently blocked up with sods, the inside was so dark, that objects were not at first discernible. As he stood for a moment in the aperture, a boy

of between three and four years old, with no other covering than a ragged shirt, and worn to a skeleton by famine, came creeping, like an apparition, into the stream of light that broke into the hut, crying, with a faint voice, “ Mammy ! mammy ! ”

Amherst spoke kindly to the poor child, and asked him where his mammy was ; but, “ Don’t know—Mammy ! Oh, my mammy ! Where’s my mammy ? ” was all the answer he could give.

As his eyes became accustomed to the twilight of the place, he was enabled to see better around him ; and nothing could equal the miserable interior. A broken table, propped by two large stones, two wooden stools, an old hamper, a couple of cracked vessels of brown earthenware, one of which seemed to contain water, and a great heap of straw and rushes in the obscurity at one end of the hovel, composed its whole furniture.

Whilst Amherst was surveying these objects, and looking in vain for the inhabitants of this wretched abode, his attention was attracted by the attitude of the little boy, who was hanging over the hamper, and gazing earnestly into it. He put in his little hands, to touch something,

and then clasping them together, he burst into tears, exclaiming, "Oh! Sally's cold, cold! Oh, mammy, mammy! Oh, come back, mammy!"

Amherst approached the hamper, when he perceived that it contained an infant of three or four months old. The head appeared from amidst a heap of rags and straw; and an old torn jacket, that seemed to have belonged to the little boy, was laid over the body of the child. The boy looked anxiously in Amherst's face, as he lifted up the little coat.

"Don't ye take it off," said he; "I put it on to make poor Sally warm."

But, alas! no heat could now be imparted to the little innocent. Death's icy hand had already extinguished her feeble spark of life. What was Amherst's horror when he discovered this? And how was it augmented, when, by moving the hamper a little towards the light, he surveyed the havock made on features naturally very lovely? Disease, terminating in extreme exhaustion from lack of the warm life-draught the parched bosom of the mother could no longer supply, had finally brought on spasms; and her eyes and mouth, open and contorted, were horri-

bly fixed by the last terrible convulsion, that had liberated her guiltless spirit from its earthly prison.

A faint, but lengthened groan, issuing from the heap of mingled straw and rushes in the obscurity at the farther end of the hovel, now informed him that something yet unseen remained of life within its walls. He hastened to ascertain from whom it proceeded. A ghastly eye, that seemed to have the settled glaze of death upon it, stared upon him from amongst the heaped up litter. He lifted a portion of it, and there, beneath a canvas sheet, he beheld the extenuated and livid body of a man, apparently of middle age, lying on an old horse-rug.

Gaunt famine seemed to have nearly completed its work upon him. The vital spark was still lingering there, however ; though all consciousness of existence seemed to be gone. Amherst's very soul was harrowed up with the sad spectacle he beheld, and he was so agitated and perplexed, that he knew not well what to do. He could not leave the miserable object before him to die without help ; and yet, if he staid, what help could he afford, without the means ? Life ebbed fast

with the unfortunate man ; his moans were now lower and less frequent, and occasionally interrupted by an involuntary effort to draw a deeper inspiration, which, when it took place, shook the whole frame. Amherst ran to the entrance, to see if any help was at hand ; but no human being was near. He then walked about the hut with hurried strides, perfectly bewildered, and unable to think of any thing that could afford even temporary relief. Meantime, the paleness of the countenance became more intense, the skin tightened over the nose and cheekbones, the slight spasm of a moment convulsed the features, and the death-rattle in the throat announced that all was over.

Footsteps were now heard approaching the hut ; —they came slow and heavily. Amherst again hastened to the door, to call for assistance, forgetting, in his agitation, that aid, alas, now arrived too late ! Two men appeared bearing the body of a female. It was the very woman he had so lately seen in the grounds of Brokenhurst.

“ This way—this way ;—this is all the home the poor soul has now,” said one of the men,

whose appearance and accent bespoke him an Irish labourer. “Softly—softly with her; let us lay her down on this bank, with her head up—so—And, do you hear, little boy?” addressing a lad, who had carried a small basket behind them; “do ye run and fetch a drop of water—or stay, maybe there’s something better there.” So saying, he rummaged hastily amongst the contents of the basket, and drew forth a pint bottle of wine, and after ineffectually trying to extract the cork with his teeth, he adroitly knocked off part of the neck of it with a smart blow on the edge of a great stone. He then put it to the woman’s mouth, and poured in a few drops of the liquid; and as he observed her to revive a little, he increased the quantity. He then busied himself in rubbing the palms of her hands and the soles of her feet, whilst Amherst and the other man gave him all the assistance in their power.

Life was soon restored; and, as recollection returned with it, she started up with an alacrity that in her weak state seemed miraculous.

“Where am I?” she exclaimed, looking wildly around her. “Oh, I see! Now I remember

all." Then, seizing the basket from the ground, she rushed into the hut.

Amherst and the men followed. Ignorant of what had taken place during her absence, she had hastened to her husband's straw bed, and had already lifted up his head, and was trying to pour some of the wine into his mouth. The teeth were locked together by the last spasm.

"Oh, he will die!" she exclaimed in anguish; "Oh, help me with him towards the light."

The two men did so. Amherst was too much overpowered by his feelings to be able to prevent them. They rested the body on their knees and on the floor. Again she in vain tried to insert the bottle. A deeper alarm seized her. Almost breathless, she ran her hand rapidly over his breast, and put her lips to his, and then her ear to his mouth—and then she earnestly gazed for some minutes on his ghastly eyes, till the sad truth burst upon her at once—and then she threw herself on the body in a paroxysm of grief.

Her little boy, whose cries of "Mammy! mammy!" had been hitherto disregarded, now came and pulled her by the sleeve. Still, overwhelmed in her present woe, she minded him not.

“ Mammy, mammy !” said she at last, “ little Sally’s cold, cold !”

A new cord of feeling was touched—was instantly touched, and hope mingled with the sound. She left the body at once, and ran to the hamper. But there the image of death was stamped in too horrible a form to be mistaken. She gazed on the infant with eyes stretching from their sockets ; and, uttering a piercing shriek, she snatched the body up from the straw where it was cradled. One wild look showed that reason had instantaneously forsaken her. She raised the infant corpse on high with both her hands, and burst into a loud laugh, that chilled the very blood of those around her. The laugh gradually subsided, and the expression of her countenance changed. She seated herself slowly on one of the settles ; a smile came over her features, far more heartbreaking than the laugh that preceded it ; and she began to fondle and nurse the baby, as if it had been still alive. The scene was more than human nature could stand. Even the poor Irishman, whose rough outside covered as much heart as ever warmed a Christian bosom, cried like an infant.

It was some time before Amherst could command himself so far as to be actively useful. At last he called one of the men aside, and putting a purse into his hand, begged of him, in words as intelligible as his choked utterance would admit of, to hasten to procure immediate female assistance. He gave him directions to find a conveyance for the unfortunate woman and her boy, and to see them taken to some comfortable lodging in the neighbouring village, to send for medical advice, and to administer every thing necessary. All which he readily undertook, and proceeded directly to execute.

The first part of his commission was very speedily performed, for not far from the hovel, he met with two women, whom he knew, and the afflicted widow and bereaved mother was committed to their care. She still sat fondling her baby with the fixed eyes and vacant stare of madness, and every now and then she burst into a heart-rending convulsion of maniac laughter.

Amherst having done all for her that present circumstances demanded, now called the Irishman to the door, believing, from something he had said, that he could give him the history of

the unfortunate female, on whom it had thus pleased Heaven to pour out the very dregs of the phial of human wretchedness. He was not mistaken, and the tale was told with so much feeling, and in a manner so ingenuous, as to impress Amherst with the most favourable opinion of the narrator. This is no time, however, to perplex the reader with his curious phraseology, and numerous circumlocutions. The story shall therefore be given in as concise a form as its nature will admit.

John Morley was an industrious man, who rented a small garden in the suburbs of the neighbouring village. By hard labour he maintained his wife and family on the produce of it. He had had several children, but he lost them all except one boy of eight or ten years old, and the younger one, with whom we have already been made acquainted.

It was now about eight or nine months since Miss Delassaux was proceeding to the race-ground in a sort of open phaeton, driven by a Neapolitan coachman, and followed by two outriders, one of whom was Cornelius O'Gollochar, the narrator of the story we are now telling. As

the equipage was driving down the lane, where Morley's cottage presented its smiling front, covered with vines and creepers, and where a broad gilded sign, with "FRUITS IN THEIR SEASON," invited passengers into the neatly dressed walks, and trim arbours of his garden, his eldest boy was crossing the way with a sackful of young cauliflower plants on his back. His head was so completely buried in his burden, that his ears were deafened by it, and the vehicle was upon him before he was aware of its approach. O'Gollochar, though he was riding behind, saw the whole transaction perfectly, and some minutes before it took place, shouted both to the coachman and the boy; but to no purpose, for the ruffian, who must have seen the lad as soon as he appeared, drove on with as much indifference as if the way had been perfectly clear.

A shocking scene ensued. The boy was knocked down. His distracted father sprang from the cottage to his rescue. But his attempt was vain. The villain swept onwards like a whirlwind, and crushed the lad to death under the wheels. The miserable father was struck by the pole, thrown down, and his body so dreadfully

bruised, that he was carried senseless to his bed, and never afterwards arose from the horizontal position. On moved the gay vehicle as if nothing had happened. Its mistress, arrayed in all the splendour and magnificence of unbounded wealth, her thoughts filled with dreams of conquest, scarcely seemed to notice the accident, as it was called. But when the carriage came to the stand, poor O'Gollochar was missing. He had remained behind to give all the assistance he could to the unfortunate sufferers, and compassion kept him so well employed, that he did not rejoin the lady all that day, and, consequently, incurred her severe displeasure.

On the Coroner's inquest there were no witnesses who could throw a proper light on the matter except O'Gollochar. The other groom was not present, having been sent on to select a good place for the carriage to draw up in. Morley himself was incapable of speaking, far less of attending. Miss Delassaux denied having seen the occurrence so as to form any judgment of the circumstances. Antonio the Neapolitan protested, and was ready to swear, that the whole was accidental, and that he did not even know till after-

wards that any such thing had happened. But the sturdy Irishman strenuously insisted on giving a very different complexion to the case; he even went so far as to declare, that there was something very like design in the manner in which the boy's death had been produced, and hinted something of a quarrel that had taken place between the Italian and Morley a few days before, arising from some insolence of the former to the latter on the occasion of a little entertainment given by the Italian to some of his female acquaintances in Morley's garden. But the Neapolitan was Lady Deborah Delassaux's favourite servant, and had accompanied her and her niece from Naples to England. Very great exertions were used therefore to have him cleared of all blame. O'Gollochar's evidence was done away by the circumstance of his having had a trifling dispute with Antonio, though, in fact, there was hardly a single individual, either amongst his fellow-servants, or in the neighbourhood, who had not quarrelled with him. In short, the result was a verdict of "accidental death," and honest O'Gollochar was punished for his resolute conduct,

by being turned off, and threatened with a prosecution for perjury.

The ruin of the Morleys was complete. The garden the unfortunate man had rented, which, until that fatal day, had been his pride and his support, was the property of a wealthy hop-merchant who resided in London, and who had no feeling but for his own pocket. Unable to do any thing for its culture, he was not only obliged to give it up, but to quit his cottage, whence he was carried to a more humble dwelling. There he continued to waste away in body, and to suffer the most excruciating torments, too plainly proving that he had received some desperate and incurable internal injury.

It is unnecessary to detail how his slender stock was consumed. Where there were apothecaries' bills to pay, mouths to feed, and no hands to labour, it soon vanished away. Even his furniture was sold piecemeal, and when his wife was confined of her infant, she could hardly be said to have a bed to lie on. In fine, he and his family were compelled to quit their house, and were reduced to the necessity of creeping into the wretched habitation we have described on the

edge of the common, where, still too proud to apply for parochial relief, they endeavoured to struggle against famine, upon the miserable pittance the poor woman could earn.

In this their final distress, Mrs Morley made various attempts to see Miss Delassaux, whom she viewed only as the innocent cause of all her misfortunes and misery. But she was always unsuccessful, until one day she met her in the grounds, and was repulsed by an imperious order to go to Mr Hawkins, without being allowed time to tell her sad tale. Hawkins had a heart of flint, too hard for the reception of any kindly impression. The honest Irishman, however, was still their friend; but he was now miserably poor, for his character having been blasted by the unjust imputations thrown on it at the inquest, he could not get a place, and was therefore compelled to work at any kind of country labour he could obtain.

Pressed by famine, and stimulated by the cruel spectacle of her husband sinking daily from want of proper nourishment and assistance, and of the child she was nursing drooping from her own weak state, Mrs Morley determined to make an-

other effort to procure aid from Miss Delassaux. With the result of this last attempt we are already acquainted. No sooner had she obtained the purse, than she ran with the utmost speed to a shop in the village, hastily purchased provisions and restoratives, and hurried breathless away. There was something so wild and unsettled in her manner, and she appeared so exhausted, that the shopkeeper was induced to follow her from motives of humanity. She flew at first with such incredible rapidity, that he had some difficulty in keeping sight of her. But at length he observed her steps to falter. She reeled—put her hands to her forehead, and staggering towards a wall leaned against it for a moment—then sinking down beside it, fainted away. The shopkeeper hastened to her assistance ; and O'Gollochar happening to come up at the instant, they lifted her by their united efforts, and giving her basket to a boy to carry, they bore her between them, as we have already seen, to the hut.