

## CHAPTER III.

In the Highlands I have met with some Lairds who surprised me with their good sense and polite behaviour.

*Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland to his Friend in London.*

THE good Sir Alisander and his Lady received Amherst with their usual kindness. The distressed state of his mind rendered him unfit to reply with the warmth corresponding to so much cordiality. He blundered out an explanation of his so speedy return to Sanderson Mains, and muttered something about Lord Eaglesholme's engagements, not very intelligible even to himself, but perfectly satisfactory to them. Cleaver was eager for a private conversation with him, though he secretly apprehended something unfortunate, from the melancholy countenance and manner betrayed by Amherst, in spite of all his endeavours to conceal it.

Having found some apology for retiring to his

apartment, Amherst led Cleaver out, and communicated to him the distressing turn his affairs had taken, giving way to the full tide of his affliction.

Cleaver, having heard him, and after recovering from the astonishment his narration threw him into, began, with all the enterprise of a British tar, to recommend an attempt to cut the little vessel out of the enemy's port, and make prize of her. But seeing that Amherst's sense of honour, and respect to the laws of hospitality, forbade him to commit so great an outrage against the feelings of the uncle, even although he should have the niece's consent, he dropped the proposal, and, seeing he had no other plan to offer, said all in his power to console him. But his words fell like drops of rain on the surface of an agitated ocean, and he desisted from a task which he saw was hopeless. He, however, urged him to rouse his self-command so far at least, as to hide his melancholy from observation, to avoid the risk of its being misinterpreted by those who were ignorant of the cause. Amherst exerted all his energy to comply with his advice, and he found it the more necessary to do so, as he understood from Cleaver

that Mr Macgillivray, to whom they owed their introduction to Sir Alisander, had arrived, and that, besides him, there were to be some other guests at dinner.

Amherst therefore hurried to his own chamber to endeavour to compose himself in private. But this he found of little benefit, his thoughts carrying him immediately back to the distressing conversation of the morning. But these agonizing reflections were interrupted by the entrance of O'Gollochar. The Irishman himself did not appear to be in the most cheerful mood; but Amherst had neither time nor inclination to question him as to his afflictions. The dinner-bell rang, and, summoning up all the resolution he was master of to conceal his painful feelings, he hastened down stairs to meet the company.

He had no sooner entered, than he was saluted by the graceful bow of Mr Macgillivray, whom he immediately recognized as one does an old acquaintance. After some cordial expressions had passed between them,

“ Mr Oakenwold,” said the Highland laird, “ your countenance brings to my recollection that of an English sea-captain, who bore the

same name as you do, and by whose humane exertions I was, many years ago, saved from a watery grave at Naples. He was, I think, Captain Oakenwold of the Grampus Man-of-War, then lying in the bay."

"I believe," said Amherst, "I think I remember having heard my father say, that he once commanded a ship of that name."

"The Grampus!" said Cleaver, who was within hearing of what had passed, "Aye, that he did! Surely no one knows better than I do, seeing I was his lieutenant at the time."

"Then, Mr Oakenwold," said Macgillivray, taking Amherst's hand, and pressing it to his bosom, "in you I certainly behold the son of my preserver. The story is short. When I was a young man, I happened to be riding along the rocks in the neighbourhood of Baia, on a stubborn runaway mule. The animal took fright at some accidental noise, and darting off with me along the edge of the precipice, lost his footing, and rolled over the rock into the sea. Stupified with the height of the fall, I was unable to make the effort necessary for swimming, and should infallibly have gone to the bottom, had not a man-

of-war's boat been passing at the very moment, within a few yards of the spot where I fell. In that boat was your father. He dragged me senseless from the waves, just as I was sinking for the last time. From that moment to the present, I have been under the pressure of unacknowledged gratitude. It is now my good fortune to have it in my power to express it to the son of my preserver; and I may say that it still exists as fresh here," putting his hand energetically to his breast, "as the day it was impressed upon me by the kind action."

"Why, faith, now you mention it, Sir," said Cleaver, "I do remember to have heard your father, Amherst, tell the story. If I recollect right, it happened the very day we sailed. He had gone to look at some of the wonders of that coast before leaving it."

"When I first saw you in the Cove of Eaglesholme," said Macgillivray to Amherst, "your name, as well as your strong family resemblance, recalled your father to my recollection. This was the cause of the apparently rude and impertinent manner in which I scanned your face. You may remember I had little opportunity of

satisfying myself with regard to you that night ; and business called me home next day, or soon afterwards ; but I was resolved, upon this occasion, not to leave the low-country without ascertaining whether you were a relation, if not the son of Captain Oakenwold. This, I must confess, was the chief object of my visit of this day, to my good friend Sir Alisander, and I need not say what satisfaction I have felt in the discovery."

Macgillivray followed up these speeches with a number of kind inquiries about the Admiral. Amherst being seated next to him at dinner, had a great deal of conversation with him. His manners were fashioned after that overstrained school of politeness, giving its character to those of the best bred Scotch people of the day ; but travel had given him the power of throwing its formality aside, whenever circumstances required him to do so, and his remarks were lively and entertaining. At first there appeared a certain slyness of expression in his countenance, that might have made one hesitate as to his sincerity, but a very little time only was necessary to wear away

this impression, and to set a stranger perfectly at ease with him.

He told Amherst, that since they had last met, he had been living quietly at home, on his Highland estate, whither he meant to set out on his return the following day. He spoke much of his strong attachment to the retirement and innocent pleasures of a country life, and expatiated in glowing terms on the wild beauties of the Highland country where his residence was situated. Having thus done all in his power to excite Amherst's curiosity,

“ If I mistake not, Mr Oakenwold,” said he, “ you told me, when I had first the good fortune to meet with you, that the object of your voyage to Scotland was chiefly to gratify curiosity. Now, if you mean to do poor Caledonia justice, you must not leave her without visiting some of her grander scenes ; for though not an unsightly nymph, she is coy, and must be followed into the innermost recesses of her wildest mountains, before she will condescend to unveil her charms. If you will deign to honour my humble mansion with your presence for a time, and vouchsafe to accept of the meagre hospitality I can afford,

and above all, if you will condescend to accompany me to-morrow, you will confer a lasting obligation on me, to be treasured up with that I already owe your father."

Amherst hesitated to accept so sudden an invitation ; but he returned a polite reply to it, expressing, in general terms, his doubts that it would not be in his power to go immediately, but throwing out a hope that he should be able to make out a visit to Mr Macgillivray before leaving the country.

After ruminating, during the course of the evening, upon the issue of his interview with Lord Eaglesholme, he began to think that it would be perhaps as well that he should accept of the civility of the Highland laird ; seeing that his present vicinity to the habitation of Miss Malcolm would only keep up a more lively and continued state of irritation in him, without improving his hopes, or brightening the present gloom of his prospects, and reflecting, that the intelligence of his having left that part of the country would rather be soothing to her uncle, on whom he knew that he had no chance of working in any other way than by time, and by ra-

tional and well-placed entreaty, aided perhaps by circumstances over which he had no control. He was firmly persuaded, that any attempt to move him at present would not only be fruitless, but would rather have the effect of fortifying him in the strong determination he appeared to have taken. For these reasons, he finally resolved to accept of Mr Macgillivray's invitation, and after consulting with Cleaver, he took an immediate opportunity of communicating to the Highland laird his compliance with his kind wishes.

Macgillivray received it with much apparent joy.

The arrangements for the journey were soon made. A servant was immediately dispatched to one of Sir Alisander's tenants, to procure two stout horses for Amherst.

O'Gollochar received his master's orders to pack up with manifest dismay. With a doleful visage, and still more doleful voice, he ventured to ask, whether his honour was going to travel? and on being informed as to the fact, he began blubbering.

“What, in the name of wonder, is the meaning of all this, Cornelius?” said his master.

“Och! and does your honour think it nothing,

now, to lave Aiglesholme Castle and all its pretty woods, its nate drawbridge, and iligant towers?"

"I did not indeed expect that you would have expressed regret at leaving a place, where not very long ago I had so much difficulty in persuading you to remain."

"Aye, in troth, your honour," replied he; "but sure enough now, that was before your honour laid all them ghosts and goblins that bothered me so o' nights."

"I understand you now," said Amherst; "I laid one set of ghosts, the cause of your terror, and you chose, immediately afterwards, to raise a fair, or rather, perhaps, I should have said a dark spirit for your own amusement."

"Why, troth, and sure enough, your honour has hit it there!—She is dark to be sure. But though she be an outlandish Frenchwoman, I'll be bound she is as warm-hearted as if she had been born in the coudest bog in all Ireland."

Here the poor fellow had recourse to the scrap of a red handkerchief he held in his hand, to wipe away a tear that was about to fall. Amherst, though so much in want of comfort himself, did not feel the less for his faithful follower, whom he

immediately endeavoured to sooth and comfort, by assuring him, that he did not anticipate that his present expedition would be of very long duration, and that, at all events, he should take care to secure him plenty of opportunity to bring his love affairs to a happy and honourable issue, before he should bid adieu to Scotland.

O'Gollochar's mind was apparently much relieved by these assurances on the part of his master. But still he did not seem to be quite satisfied.

“Och, then, dear master!” said he, “sure I thought your honour would have maybe had some small matter o' business, to settle over yonder yeresilf, afore you could think of laiving the castle in this soort o' fashion. All the Mounseers and Seignours, not forgetting Mr Robertson, who, for a matter o' that, is neither one nor the other, were so fond o' your honour, and so plaised wid yere civil ways, and your spaking to them each in his own lingo, that seeing all things going on so swimmingly in the parlour, made every soul of us merrry in the hall, all with the hopes of the ould castle being spunked up wid a merry wedding.”

Amherst was so suddenly taken by these simple

observations of his servant, that it was with difficulty he could restrain the feelings excited by them.

Next morning, Sir Alisander's tenant, Master Colley, was in waiting with two stout active little grey horses, fitted with tolerably good furniture. The price he demanded for them seemed to be perfectly reasonable. As he received it with his broad blue bonnet in his hand, he did not fail to season his thanks with many remarks upon the respective qualities of the "twa naigs." Brisk, as being the lighter and more spirited of the two, he recommended to Amherst for his own riding. Whilst Braidbottom's corporeal qualifications rendered him admirably adapted for a baggage horse.

"Tak my word for't, Sir, the waulees wull cling to his hinder-end just as gin they had grown there, an fient a flea will he care for the weight o' them an' the man, mair than gif they were as muckle strae."

Master Colley's advice was too good to be despised, and the arrangements were made accordingly. Macgillivray's horse was mouse-coloured, and something of the same description as those Amherst had just purchased. For him no mounted

lacquey attended, but a ragged, kilted, bare-legged, and bare-footed loon, with a bush of hair like a wisp of straw, held his stirrup, and shouldering a long peeled rung, he ran off before them with bent knees, employing his toes in a sort of limping trot, in which, though like a fox, he appeared to creep over the surface, he, in reality, went extremely fast, and with comparatively little exertion, occasionally applying the end of his rung, like a third leg, to the ground.

After mounting, Amherst bid Cleaver a hearty adieu. Then, accoutred in a sportsman's dress, girt with a handsome Spanish rapier, the gift of Lord Eaglesholme, when he first became his guest, and with his pistols at his saddle-bow, he rode on after Macgillivray. O'Gollochar followed upon Braidbottom, similarly armed, carrying a portman-teau behind, and bearing his master's rifle over his left shoulder.

Amherst jogged on with Macgillivray, listening to him rather than taking any weighty share of the conversation. Their way lay across a flat country of considerable extent, where cultivation was carried to as high a degree of perfection as was then known. The farm-houses and cottages were very

similar to each other in their architecture, except that some of the latter had stone instead of turf walls, and were thatched with bent grass from the sand hills instead of sods. Here and there appeared a gentleman's house, most of them single buildings of two or three stories, with a number of small windows, and thin gable ends, and grey-slate roofs. Some of the proprietors still contented themselves with a few straggling additions to the rugged tower, or keep, into which their ancestors had climbed for security in troublesome times. A few inexplicable dry-stone dikes, and a dozen or two of gnarled ash trees, generally formed all the embellishments of these mansions of the aristocracy.

Beyond this district, they began to rise gradually over a range of dreary moorlands, interspersed with peat bogs, swelling from the margin of the plain. As they proceeded, the landscape before them became monotonous in the extreme. Low, dull hills, of unvarying outline, and sombre hue, swept their long fatiguing lines in every direction, without offering a single object to interrupt their sameness of contour, except the smoke arising from miserable heaps of turf now and then

appearing, which Amherst, much to his surprise, learned were the houses of the inhabitants.

If this be a taste of the grandeur of Highland scenery, thought Amherst, I shall be soon satisfied with it. But, barren and dreary as it was, he felt that it was suited to the melancholy reflections into which, in defiance of the conversation of his companion, he was continually relapsing.

They rode on together for an hour or two, without any material change taking place upon the face of nature, until, coming to the brow of a hill, down which the path wound, Amherst's eyes were gladdened by one of the most beautiful scenes fancy can well imagine. They had now arrived at the edge of those hills, bounding a wide part of the valley, through which the river flowed. The vale was here more than half a mile across, and it continued to present nearly the same breadth, for about a mile downwards, to where it was closed in a precipitous pass, by the approach of the hills to each other. The plain in the bottom was partly cultivated, and partly diversified with groves, and gently swelling knolls, covered with oaks, from amongst which a little cot was seen peeping

out here and there. The river entering the valley at an abrupt angle, a view was thus obtained up the long vista of the glen it came from, where its wide stream was seen in spots, glistening from the depths of its wooded banks, the declining sun pouring a flood of yellow light down this part of its course.

The hills on the opposite side of the river were covered by an extensive natural forest of oak, pine, and birch, and the sides of those the travellers looked from were also wooded, though more partially. At the upper end of the valley, the larger river was joined by another, issuing from a deep glen, whence it came sweeping round a high conical hill.

As their beasts were painfully picking their steps down the steep and slippery path winding into the valley, through groups of trees and brushwood, Macgillivray called to Hamish, his gilly, or running footman, who had uniformly kept about ten or twelve yards before them during the whole day, and having given him some orders in Gaelic, he darted off like a weasel through the intricacies of the brushwood.

“ I have sent the fellow forward to provide for

our night's quarters, Mr Oakenwold," said he to Amherst, whose mind had been so occupied, partly with his distresses, and partly with admiration of the lovely scenery around him, that he had not once thought of the approaching night, now beginning to settle down upon them.