

CHAPTER VII.

Hark to the hurried accents of despair,
Where is my child !

Bride of Abydos.

Go, Syren, go—thy charms on others try ;
My beaten bark at length has reached the shore,
Yet on the rock my dripping garments lie ;
And let me perish, if I trust thee more.

LANGHORNE.

O'GOLLOCHAR had hardly finished his melancholy narrative, when the sound of wheels, and the glancing of the sun on its glittering windows, announced the approach of a chariot. It was Miss Delassaux's. Before Amherst could come to any determination how to avoid her, the vehicle was at the door.

The lady's manner betrayed her expectation of finding him there. Yet she affected surprise at what she pretended to call an accidental ren-

contre. On seeing O'Gollochar standing behind Amherst, her countenance underwent a considerable change, and she betrayed a genuine vexation not to be mistaken. It flashed, however, only for a moment from her eyes, and was immediately subdued, and veiled beneath a borrowed air of extreme sensibility.

“ Ah! Mr Oakenwold!” said she, “ I see your feeling heart has been beating in unison with mine. You will perhaps be surprised to see me here, but I was really so touched by the tale of woe we both heard so lately, that I could not rest until I should visit the poor woman, to endeavour to alleviate her affliction, and to administer in person to the wants of her and her family. I am resolved to have them put beyond the reach of misery. Her husband and child shall soon be restored to health; I mean to order my own physician to attend them.”

Amherst wanted words to frame a reply to so gross and unblushing an affectation of feelings which he knew were strangers to the bosom of her who uttered them. He hesitated—but he was spared the necessity of attempting it. Mrs Morley's little boy had come to the door to gaze with

childish curiosity at the gilded carriage. The mother's eye had caught a view of him, and of it from within. In the midst of her delirium, a confused recollection of her first day's affliction came suddenly upon her. She wildly threw the corpse of her baby into the lap of one of the women near her, and just as Amherst was in the act of assisting the lady with formal politeness to descend, she rushed precipitately to the door.

“ Oh Jem ! Jem ! Jem ! ” exclaimed she with frantic gestures, for in her madness she fancied it was her eldest son—“ the carriage ! the carriage ! —oh my boy ! ”

She snatched up the child in her arms, retreated two or three steps inwards, and stood with her body bent, and her eyes rolling round on the objects without, in a frenzy of terror. At last they rested on Miss Delassaux, and the sight of her seemed to give rise to a new train of ideas, for setting down the boy, and bursting into a maniac laugh, she went out to her curtsying, and composedly smiling.

“ Is it you, my Lady !—this is an honour indeed !—pray, walk in, my Lady. I dreamt a sad and frightful dream. I dreamt that poor Jem

was crushed beneath your wheels. But it was all a dream. Pray, walk in, my Lady—you have been kind, kind to me ;”—and taking Miss Delassaux by the hand with a pleased and happy smile, “ come in,” said she, “ pray, come in, my Lady ; our cottage is not so nice as it used to be—the vines and roses are all withered. But my husband and baby are quite well now ; your kind relief has saved them both. May Heaven, in its justice, reward you for it, and make you one day as happy as you have made me !”

Miss Delassaux appeared astonished and perplexed, but though young, she was an able actress. The part she was now playing was deep, and too important to be slighted. Turning half round, therefore, she said to Amherst with a look of extreme sentiment,

“ I am sure, Mr Oakenwold, you, who have doubtless often experienced such feelings, must envy me mine at this moment ;” and then putting her white handkerchief to her eyes, as if perfectly overcome, she permitted herself to be led into the hovel by the wretched lunatic.

Good Heaven ! what a scene ensued ! The corpse of Morley and the child were both lying

exposed. Amherst, anticipating what must follow, could not bear to remain to witness it. As he darted towards the lane, he heard the piercing shriek of Miss Delassaux, and the wild laugh of the maniac rang in his ears, as he hastily continued his retreat. He instinctively put up his hands to shut out the sound, but in vain, for fancy made him hear and see the whole that passed, and he shuddered to think of it.

On his way homeward, as he recovered himself, in some degree, from the agitated state of mind the melancholy and distressing events of the day had thrown him into, his thoughts naturally reverted to that brilliant dream of happiness he was lulled into, by the fascination of the enchanting Miss Delassaux, whilst he yet believed her to be an angel. How few hours had elapsed since that dream had fled!—He was almost tempted to hesitate whether he was not now under some delusion. That a heart so unfeeling should exist in the bosom of so lovely a person, and that so much art should be possessed by one so young, seemed to render her, in his eyes, a monster he could not have believed to have ex-

istence in nature. He trembled when he looked back to the precipice he had so recently stood on, and from which he had so narrowly escaped. He felt confounded, when he reflected how long, and how perfectly the mask had deceived him, and by what accident it had been at last torn off, so as to give him resolution and strength to burst the snares of her of whose hypocrisy he was now too surely convinced.

There was something in O'Gollochar's account of Antonio the Neapolitan, that gave him an air of mystery. Why should such a ruffian, as he appeared, be retained in the service of Lady Deborah and her niece, and cherished and protected, too, with all the care that might have been bestowed, with better justice, on the long tried worth of a faithful and respectable domestic? There was something very unaccountable and perplexing in this, nor could all his speculation bring him to any thing like a probable interpretation of it.

The result of Amherst's reflections was, that before he reached home, not only were all thoughts of connecting himself with Miss Delas-

saux decidedly and for ever abandoned, but as youth, in its impetuosity, pushes every thing to extremity, he determined to avoid every chance of meeting her again. As he never had been aware of his father's intentions regarding his marriage, he, of course, never once contemplated the necessity of making a confidant of the Admiral, whom he had not suspected of entertaining any idea of his transient passion, nor had it entered his head to communicate to him the resolution he had now taken, never again to set his foot within the precincts of Brokenhurst-Hall.

Amherst was sufficiently occupied for some days with the concerns of the unfortunate widow. He sent for Cornelius O'Gollochar, who became an active and willing agent in assisting the shop-keeper to provide for the decent interment of poor Morley and his infant. The widow herself had been removed to a comfortable house in the village, where the distress she had undergone produced a violent fever, during which she struggled for life for about sixty hours. The best medical advice that could be procured was sent to her by Amherst, and although she was more than once despaired of, the disease finally yielded to the

remedies employed. She was left in a very weak state for some days, during which she slept almost without intermission.

So much repose, no doubt, contributed to the reduction of her mental malady. As she began to recover strength of body, reason gradually resumed its full power over her. Her religion was of the purest and most rational description, and as the state of her mind began to permit the exercise of its influence, it became as a healing balm to her wounded soul. Having been made aware of all that had been done for her, she gradually brought herself to bow with humble submission to the will of Heaven, and breathed silent thanksgivings to that all-wise Being, who had raised her up a protector in the person of Amherst, to whom her gratitude was unbounded.

The old Admiral was for some time in happy ignorance, that his plans regarding his son's marriage were not working themselves out to his entire satisfaction. One morning, however, a servant arrived with an invitation to the family at Oakenwold Manor, to spend the next day, and to dine at Brokenhurst-Hall.

“ Amherst,” said Sir Cable, “ do you sit down,

and answer Lady Deborah's note. I don't feel myself over and above well, but I don't like to disappoint her, so you may say that we shall all come with the greatest pleasure."

"I think you had better not go, if you do not find yourself perfectly well, Sir," said Amherst.

The Admiral looked at him askance, and believing that his son dissuaded him from going, because he wished to enjoy Miss Delassaux's conversation, without being subjected to his prying eye, he became the more determined to go, were it only to see how the land lay, and, therefore, with an arch significant nod and wink Amherst did not observe, nor, if he had, could he have understood them, he said,

"No, no, Ammy, my boy, I am not quite so ill as to forego the pleasure of the society of a pretty girl; write, therefore, as I bid you."

Amherst accordingly sat down, and accepted the invitation in the name of his father and aunt, but apologized, in general terms, for himself, and the note was sealed and dispatched, without the Admiral's being aware that his son had refused to be of the party.

About half an hour after the servant was gone,

Sir Cable turned round to his son, who was reading,

“Methinks,” said he, “Lady Deborah is more than usually punctilious; a verbal message by you, when you returned from Brokenhurst-Hall yesterday, would have been just as well as that formal card.”

“I was not at Brokenhurst-Hall yesterday,” said Amherst.

“Not at Brokenhurst-Hall! where the devil were you then?”

“Some little business led me into the village,” said Amherst.

“And when did you see the Delassauxs last?” inquired the Admiral.

“It is now, I think, about a fortnight,” replied Amherst.

A prolonged whistle from the Admiral at once expressed his surprise and his vexation.—“Why, how the devil sits the wind now, young man? Why, zounds, you used to spend every day, and all the day there; what can be the meaning of this change?”

“I did, indeed, trifle off a good deal of time there, Sir, for which you must, no doubt, have

blamed me," said Amherst; "but I must now make up for my idleness, by devoting myself more to my studies. I have hardly opened Locke since I have been down here."

"Phoo, Phoo! damn Locke," said the Admiral peevishly; "you must now think of beginning to read that queer book called *Woman*, and to study the contradictions and riddles you will find in it."

"I am not altogether ignorant of it," said Amherst, with something like a sigh, "and, indeed, it does appear full of inexplicable riddles."

"Why, younker," said the Admiral, heating a little, "you seem to be somewhat of a riddle; but, perhaps, we shall have it all explained to-morrow, when you and Olivia meet. There has been some lovers' quarrel between you, I suppose."

"I do not intend being of the party to Brokenhurst to-morrow," said Amherst, "and as to being Miss Delassaux's lover, that is an honour to which I do not pretend."

The Admiral was astonished. His passion was at once blown up gunpowder height. Forgetting that he had never yet made his son ac-

quainted with the matrimonial plans which had so long occupied his own thoughts, he jumped up from his seat, shouldered his cane, and, as was usual with him on such occasions, walked violently backwards and forwards, on what he, in happier moments, called his quarter-deck, that is to say, on a breadth of the carpet, stretching in a straight line from his easy-chair to an Indian screen near the door, giving vent to a perfect whirlwind of rage.

“ What the devil, Sir ! after all I have done for you—after I had arranged and prepared, and, as I may say, as good as settled your marriage ! But it’s a lie—all a damn’d lie. Have I not seen you turning up your eyes, and languishing like a dying whiting, when the young woman was singing it, and harping it to you ? I tell ye it can’t be—after Lady Deborah and I had agreed between us that it should go on, even before you came home, ye ungrateful puppy ! Sir, I’ll have ye hanged—I’ll have ye disinherited. No, damn me, that I can’t do unfortunately ; but I’ll certainly have ye hanged, drawn, and quartered, you disobedient jackanapes—I will !”

Rage choked his farther utterance, and he

threw himself into a chair, overcome by a severe fit of coughing.

“ My dear father,” said Amherst, who had risen in absolute wonder, “ wherein can I possibly have offended you ?”

“ Offended me !” vociferated the Admiral, after recovering his breath, and resuming his quarter-deck movement—“ Is it not an offence, think ye, to run right down on my plans, to strike them a-midships, and to sink them at once in this manner, when they are in full sail with a fair wind, eh ?”

“ My dear father,” said Amherst calmly, “ I beseech you to recollect that this is the first time I ever heard of your having any plans, and I have yet to learn to what they refer.”

“ Why, aye,” said the Admiral, a little softened, “ there is something in that, Ammy ; perhaps, I have been a little hasty or so ; not that I was in any passion neither, but I am sometimes apt to speak a little high and fast when I am keen about any thing. The truth is, I thought I saw matters going on so swimmingly between you and Miss Delassaux, that I judged

it as well to keep my plans to myself for a while ; but now you shall have 'em all." He then proceeded to let his son into his schemes, and gave him a full account of his negotiations with Lady Deborah, concluding thus,

" And now, my boy, you know what I mean, and all that I intend regarding you, so I expect that we shall henceforth sail with the same wind, and to the same point of the compass, and not be running foul of each other again, by steering in the dark, as we have been doing hitherto."

Amherst had full time to recover himself during his father's long explanation. It opened to him a new view of the conduct of Lady Deborah and her niece, and accounted for all that winning attention he formerly believed to proceed from a natural kindness of disposition. But it now appeared to be merely a train of self-interested manœuvring, and it lowered both of them still more in his estimation, and very much increased the dislike he had lately taken to them. He therefore replied to the Admiral, in language the most respectful he could command, that his heart told him an union with Miss Delassaux was perfectly incompatible with his future happiness, for which

he hoped his father had too great a regard, to wish him to sacrifice it wantonly for the purpose of effecting a marriage of mere convenience.

There was, no doubt, a great deal of reason in all that the young man said. But Sir Cable was not much accustomed to listen to reason. Implicit obedience was what he had been used to, and his determinations, instead of being shaken, were always strengthened by opposition. He had thought his own arguments irresistible, and had been preparing himself, during his long harangue, to expect that his son would give an immediate compliance to his wishes, now they were fairly understood. He bit his lip during Amherst's short reply, and then giving way again to his rage, he jumped up to his quarter-deck again.

“What the devil—do ye mean to mutiny, younker?—I say, Sir, you are a silly jackanapes, and don't know what is good for you—Your heart tells you indeed!—I'll be hanged if you don't deserve a good round dozen at the gangway—Happiness truly!—just as if I don't know better than you what should make you happy—Why, what the deuce will make you happy if a fine girl and a good independent estate won't? Mayhap you

think that you won't be long of succeeding to mine, and that, when I am six feet under ground, you may do as ye like; but I tell ye, Sir, I'll live fifty years yet, were it only to torment you. But you are a silly boy—I won't allow you to make a fool of yourself and a fool of me—I say, you shall marry Miss Delassaux; do what you please, or think what you please, but marry Miss Delassaux you shall!"

Amherst was shocked at his father's expressions. He assured him that his only desire was to obey him in all things, but that in a matter on which the happiness or misery of his whole life depended, he must be permitted to exercise his judgment, and to make his own choice.

The calm resolution his son displayed served only to blow up the Admiral into a new and more boisterous whirlwind of wrath. Every reply on the part of the young man, however respectful in manner, or moderate in terms, was only throwing fresh oil on the highly excited flame of Sir Cable's ire. At last, the violence of his rage rendered his language so very offensive, that Amherst felt he had no alternative but to leave the room.

Taking up his cap as he passed outwards, he

walked down to the stables, and, ordering his servant to saddle his horse, he galloped briskly towards the coast, to dissipate the chagrin occasioned by his father's tyrannical behaviour, by the rapidity of the pace of his steed, and by inhaling the pure air of the ocean.