

CHAPTER IX.

Soavè per lo scoglio sconcio e erto
 Che sarebbe alle capre duro varco :
 Indi un altro vallon mi fa scoperto.

DANTE.

Deep in the bosom of the wood,
 Where art had formed the moated isle,
 An antique castle towering stood,
 In Gothic grandeur rose the pile.

CARTWRIGHT.

WE must now return to Scotland, where we left Amherst and his friend enjoying their repose at Sanderson Mains.

The morning was pretty far spent, when a respectable, hoary-headed domestic, whose comfortable corporeal conformation seemed like an earnest of the hospitality of his master's mansion, cautiously entered Amherst's bed-chamber, and, as if half afraid to disturb him, gently opened his window-shutters. He hastily arose, and under-

standing that Sir Alisander had not yet left his room, he walked forth to breathe the air.

Accident led him to a square garden of considerable size near the house, fenced with a high stone wall, and offering a very inviting appearance of fruit. Little seemed to be sacrificed to decoration, and the *dulce* gave place to the *utile* in every part of it. On one side, indeed, a door led into a small flower-garden, connected with a shrubbery surrounding two sides of the church-yard, where there was a private passage by a little gate, generally used when the family went to church. The view from a summer-house on the top of a small artificial hillock was extensive; but although the wide country the eye rambled over was, for the most part, highly cultivated, it was flat and uninteresting, having few or no trees, except two or three mathematically shaped plantations of young Scotch firs, no hedges or hedge-rows, and, indeed, little inclosure of any kind but dry stone walls, here called dikes, and occasional ditches, the soil being naturally wet, from the vicinity of a large lake, liable at certain seasons to flood the greater part of the plain. In the midst of the marshy ground, near the lake, appeared a green mound,

surrounded by a double moat, and having on it the remains of a square tower, and the other less important ruins of an ancient fortress. The inland view was every where bounded by low ridges of uninteresting moorland, and the sea was shut out by those high sandy downs that terminated in the abrupt cliffs forming the coast.

Whilst Amherst was returning to the house, he met a servant coming to announce breakfast; and as he entered the lobby, he was saluted by Sir Alisander, who had risen earlier than usual in compliment to him, though the good man complained of the effects of his riotous party, and his unseasonable walk. He talked of a swimming in his head, a shivering chill, and a general rheumatic feeling; but though he declared himself very much out of sorts, his good-humour did not abandon him. On entering the breakfast-room, they found Lady Sanderson, an unaffected sensible woman, of prepossessing countenance, to whom Amherst was immediately introduced.

Cleaver, who had appeared before they entered, had already introduced himself. He had found Lady Sanderson easy and lady-like, and he was in the best possible spirits,—a happy state of

mind, to which the liberal preparations for a Scotch breakfast no doubt largely contributed. He and Lady Sanderson already appeared to have been friends for many years.

Cleaver's eyes opened wider and wider, as he observed fresh and smoked haddocks, most invitingly broiled, kipper salmon, hot cockles, and delicately dressed mutton cutlets, placed smoking on the breakfast table, and still more when he saw the array of the rear-guard paraded on the side-board, consisting of plates of hung beef, cold bacon, and mutton hams, sliced tongue, cold round of beef, cold turkey, and cold pigeon pye. Then there appeared honey-comb, fruit jellies, and jams of various kinds, delicious butter with toast, and barley and oaten cakes, and *flour scones*, with the richest cream, and tea and coffee in abundance.

“ I have never been in Scotland before, Lady Sanderson,” said Cleaver, after he had seen the arrangement completed : “ but, if this be your style of living, I have only to say, that I think those who call it a poor country ought to be keel-hauled.”

“ You are pleased to flatter us, Captain

Cleaver," said her Ladyship; "I wish your politeness may not be subjected to some trials before you leave Scotland."

The breakfast passed off much to the satisfaction of all parties. The Baronet, seated in his arm-chair by the fire, with two or three night-caps on, and wrapped up in several ponderous robes-de-chambre, that swelled him to an enormous bulk, and protected by a large screen of green baize from the sifting airs of the door, sipped his coffee and eat his broiled fish at a little table placed for himself. His jokes were intermixed with occasional complaints about his health it is true, but still his jokes predominated, and they were always followed by his own good natured laugh. Amherst was delighted with his host, and no less so with the good sense and unobtrusive manners of Lady Sanderson, who, though she did not shun conversation, showed rather a desire to follow than to lead in it. Cleaver's epicurean propensities were pampered to the fullest extent; and, much to the gratification of his hostess, he tasted, and was lavish in his praises, of every thing at table.

The even tenor of the life of this worthy couple

was undisturbed by any of those cares of matrimony appearing in the shape of children. Lady Sanderson was equanimity personified, and the Baronet was reduced to the necessity of creating fanciful miseries for himself, in the shape of ailments, to relieve him from the ennui that must otherwise have devoured him ; as a physician can only banish one disease by inducing some other of a less serious description. The goodness of both the Baronet and his Lady having nothing to intercept its course, flowed out interruptedly upon all mankind. It is no wonder, then, that their English guests should have very soon felt perfectly at home under so hospitable a roof.

Being supplied with all the means of amusing themselves, they were left to spend the day according to their own fancy, and they generally devoted it to the sports of the field. Meanwhile Sir Alisander resumed his old habits, and rarely, if ever, left his bedchamber before the hour of dinner. This, however, must not be supposed to imply the hours of eight or nine o'clock, at present fashionable, but rather those of one or two, then in vogue. His conversation in the evening was so agreeable, that it made ample amends for

his non-appearance during the morning, and Amherst seldom permitted himself to lose any of it. Mr Macflae was almost a constant guest at the dinner table, which was often filled up by curious country characters, who dropped in almost daily, and were always heartily welcomed, and so admirably brought out by the Baronet, that an unceasing fund of rich amusement was thus provided for the strangers, so that Amherst never stirred from the house in the evening. As for Cleaver, repletion, and an excellent bottle of Bourdeaux, made moving after dinner quite out of the question with him.

The two friends had not been inmates of Sanderson Mains above a week, when it happened that an incessant rain confined them to the house during a whole morning. After accurately cleaning and oiling the lock of his gun, Cleaver had no resource but that of turning over the two huge folio volumes of Harris's Voyages, lying on one of the window seats. Amherst having retired to the library, buried himself amid the ample cushions of a large arm-chair, and was soon deep in the pages of a favourite author, which so occupied him, that he never moved un-

til the bell warned him to prepare for the family meal. Somewhat stupified by confinement, he observed, with satisfaction, that the rain had ceased, and that the clouds were dispersing, and, contrary to custom, he resolved to avail himself of the beauty of the evening, to make up for the want of his usual exercise during the day, by a walk after dinner.

He left the table as soon as he felt that he could do so with propriety, and sprang off towards the downs, which he climbed with all that uncontrollable elasticity of limb experienced by youth, after being cramped by a long seat, when, like a pressed up spring suddenly relieved, every muscle seems to do its office from a particular volition of its own. Having gained the ridge, he rambled along in a direction he had never taken before, until he reached the extremity of these high barren grounds, from whence he was surprised and delighted by a new prospect opening under his eyes, and exhibiting a considerable contrast to any thing he had yet seen since his arrival in the neighbourhood.

The point he stood on was opposite to that end of the lake farthest from Sanderson Mains,

and its waters, embracing the extremity of the rising ground, here retired behind it into a beautiful bay, where the banks gently sloping towards it were richly diversified with noble woods. A sprightly stream here escaped from the lake, and throwing itself soon afterwards over several ledges of rock, hastened to make its way towards the sea through a sequestered glen.

On a broad swelling promontory jutting into the lake, stood a Gothic castle of great extent, and bearing all the appearance of having been calculated for powerful resistance, when artillery had as yet no share in the havoc of war. It consisted of a large internal court-yard, formed by surrounding masses of irregular buildings, strangely combined with swelling round towers of different magnitudes, some of them rising boldly from the ground, and having their tall thin necks surmounted by curiously projected square tops of various architecture, and covered with high pitched roofs of grey slate. This inner court was entered through the deep shadow of a heavy Gothic gateway, and was again protected by an outer circumvallation of lower vaulted buildings, forming a strong wall of ex-

ternal defence. The entrance through this was by a gateway similar to that already mentioned, but strongly flanked by low loop-holed towers, and wherever the outer wall presented an angle, it was strengthened by a similar tower. A moat drawn across the neck of land cut off the peninsula transversely, and, when in a state of perfect repair, must have admitted the waters of the lake from either end of it, so as entirely to insulate the castle, and the point of the promontory it stood on. Over this an antique drawbridge gave access to the outer gateway. Some magnificent oaks and beeches, and a few gigantic and grotesquely-twisted fir-trees, almost coëval with the castle itself, rose in groups on that part of the peninsula connecting the castle with the land, and gave roost to a colony of rooks and daws that soared around the airy battlements, keeping up an incessant cawing.

The broad head jutting into the lake beyond the castle was laid out in old-fashioned terraced-gardens and walks, with huge hedges of yew and holly, fruit-trees, fountains, and trimmed ever-greens, and the centre was occupied by an ample bowling-green. These gardens were defended

all round by a terrace wall, and seemed to be kept in order with scrupulous nicety, but the extensive grounds sloping to the margin of the bay, and sweeping downwards into the glen, and upwards over the brow of the surrounding elevations, bore all the appearance of an ancient and neglected park.

Amherst stretched himself on the ground, that he might look down at leisure upon a scene at once so interesting and unexpected, wondering that accident had not before disclosed it to him. As he lay absorbed in contemplation, and watched the various lights shooting across the lake from the declining sun, his rays glowing through the ruddy clouds partially veiling him, and tinging the grey battlements of the castle with golden and purple hues, he observed a figure on one of the terrace walks behind the castle. The distance was such, that he could only be certain it was a woman; but the sprightliness of all her motions convinced him she was young, and the place where she walked argued that she must be at least above the rank of a domestic. She seemed to be busied about the plants bordering the walk, and fre-

quently stooped down as if to pluck the flowers, or to arrange those stems which had been weighed down by the rain. His youthful fancy was immediately employed in painting her lovely, and he watched every motion with lively attention. She loitered not long however, for, after taking two or three turns through the labyrinth of terrace-walks, she disappeared into the castle.

Amherst's curiosity would have probably led him to endeavour to explore the beauties of the park and the glen, and the hope of catching a nearer glimpse of the fair unknown of the castle, would have had no small share in tempting him to intrude into the grounds; but the same cause which had warned her to retire, induced him also to give up the thoughts of proceeding farther that evening. The sun was now hastening to sink below the western horizon, and the clouds which had accumulated towards that part of the sky, began to pile themselves up into heaps of a dark and lurid hue, portending an approaching storm. He hastily started from his seat, and turned his steps slowly homewards,

musings on the charming scene he had just left, its picture still fresh upon his imagination.

As he sauntered carelessly along, he was roused from the reverie he had fallen into, by a sudden whirlwind, that came sweeping along the ridge with such violence, as almost to throw him down, and carrying with it a volume of loose sand, coming so sharply against his face, that he was compelled to turn his back towards it, to save his eyes. In a very little time it had passed by. But the sun was now down, and the black opaque clouds, which had by this time spread themselves over the vault of Heaven, had completely annihilated that autumnal twilight, usually enduring, in the northern part of the island, for several hours after the departure of the orb of day. Amherst looked in vain for the track he had formerly pursued. All was darkness around him, and he was compelled to wander on in perfect uncertainty, totally ignorant where he was going, groping his way with the assistance of his *couteau-de-chasse*, and frequently stumbling over the sand heaps.

After exerting his strength in vain efforts for nearly an hour, he became so bewildered, that

he was compelled to sit down, in the conviction that he lost more than he gained by his attempts. Meanwhile, the gusts of wind were renewed at intervals, with tremendous, though temporary fury. The black canopy over his head now burst asunder in one particular part, and a broad glare of forked lightning darted from the edges of the rent clouds, transiently illuminating every part of the surrounding waste. It was followed by a roll of thunder that seemed to shake the earth. To Amherst's dismay, the glimpse he thus obtained led him to suspect that he had wandered within a few yards of the brink of the crags overhanging the sea, and the succeeding flashes showed him the wide stretched ocean heaved up into mountains, their foaming crests tinged of a murky red, borrowed from the gleam. Rain now fell in torrents, and drenched the thirsty ground, so that, although the fitful blasts still came at intervals, reciprocating with the peals of thunder, and flashes of lightning, they came without bearing along with them those volumes of sand which had so nearly overwhelmed him at first.

Again Amherst endeavoured to set forward,

and to gain ground by starts, after taking a rapid glance around him during the momentary illumination of each flash. But it is easy to imagine, that in this way he could make but little progress, being obliged to move with the greatest care, lest the smallest deviation might have precipitated him over the cliff. Having gained one of the sand heaps, rather larger than any he had met with, where a few tall furze bushes grew, he was overjoyed to find amongst them a little shelter-house of sods, the work of some shepherd boy, into which he found he was just able to creep, and where he resolved to lie until the fury of the tempest should abate, and the dispersion of the clouds, by permitting the moon to shine out, should enable him to find his way to Sanderson Mains without danger.

His situation was now a very strange one : housed in a little frail building about three feet by four, and of height in the roof barely sufficient to enable him to sit upright, perched within fifteen or twenty yards of the brink of a cliff three or four hundred feet in perpendicular height above the raging ocean : the blast howling through the furze bushes, the rain lashing on

the sandy downs, the thunder rattling over his head, and even overpowering for a time the roar of the waves, and every now and then the lightning blazing forth with splendour so dazzling, as to show the smallest bush that quivered on the wild waste.

His thoughts first recurred to the smiling scene that had so lately gladdened his eyes ; then to the comfortable fireside of the hospitable Sir Alisander ; and, lastly, he ran back in imagination to the time he had spent before his departure from England : and when he recalled the luxury of those hours he had loitered away, lolling on the voluptuous sofas, and in the midst of all the glitter of the gilded drawing-rooms of Brokenhurst-Hall, or listening to the soft music of the syren, and contrasted these with the whimsical lair accident had now driven him into, and for which he even felt grateful, he laughed within himself at the odd freaks fortune indulges in, and of which man is the sport.

Whilst thus employed, he looked out occasionally from the door of the sod-house, as each successive flash came, hoping it might be the last. But the storm continued unabated.

Finding his position somewhat irksome from having sat in it too long, he changed it in such a manner, that his head was placed nearer the door, and just as he had adapted himself to the angles of the place, a more than ordinarily vivid flash of lightning blazed forth. What was Amherst's astonishment, when it distinctly, though but for the fraction of an instant, displayed to him the figure of the very mysterious being he had twice before seen! The lightning itself passed not more swiftly than did her form. She seemed to have been borne by on the wings of the whirlwind, crossing his field of view, and coming and departing with the duration of the blaze. Yet he could not possibly have been deceived. The red fillet was on her head; and he had seen her ghastly features illumined by the blue gleam, and her long grey locks streaming behind her as she flew. Amherst instinctively scrambled out, and as another flash succeeded to the last, he looked in the direction she had taken—but no creature was visible on the long stretch of waste. He remained confounded. A loud thunder-clap rolled over his head, and the torrents of rain increasing, reminded him of the ne-

cessity of creeping back into his shelter. There he lay perplexed by the strange sight he had seen, almost doubting the evidence of his senses, yet convinced that he could not have been deceived by them, and half expecting that he would be again visited by this inexplicable phantom.