

LOCHANDHU.

CHAPTER I.

What stratagems, how fell, how butcherly !

SHAKESPEARE.

AMHERST found the Baronet seated, as usual, in his great leathern-chair, in his old corner by the fire-side, with all the comforts of his dishabille about him, while Lady Sanderson was engaged reading to him from some of the newly published pamphlets of the time, occasionally relieved by Macflea. His reception was much more kind than his own previous reflections had taught him to anticipate. He was the first to express the sense he entertained of his own apparent neglect; but he had so many excellent apologies to offer, grounded on the occupation Lord Eaglesholme had engaged him in, and the

difficulty he had found in deserting the castle, when he had, as it were, been left in charge of it by his father's old friend, that if the excellent couple had harboured any suspicions of lukewarmness on his part, they were immediately and satisfactorily removed.

Cleaver, who had just returned from shooting, entered the apartment as he had ended his explanation. He no sooner observed Amherst, than he stopped short, with the handle of the door still in his gripe, and expressing his surprise at the sight of him, in a whistle such as might have done honour to the pipe of a boatswain, he exclaimed,

“Why, Master Amherst, are you there?—May I never steer another league, if I did not suppose you had run from the good ship Dasher.—Why, what in the name of navigation has become of you all this time? Methinks, that considering the nearness of the harbours we are laid up in, ye might have taken a trip over, to see whether your old shipmate was dead or alive here, seeing that he could not come at you, being, as you were, in what may be called a forbidden port.”

Amherst perceiving, that the rough but right-hearted sailor felt somewhat sore at his apparent neglect, went up to him, and taking his passive hand, repeated to him all those apologies he had just given to Sir Alisander and his Lady, taking care to season them with every thing kind in manner and expression. Cleaver, who at first surveyed him with a countenance that exhibited considerable dissatisfaction, and who allowed him to lift his arm as if it had belonged to the body of a dead man, by degrees relaxed the almost ludicrous sternness of his honest weather-beaten features as he spoke, whilst the warm life-blood was gradually brought back into his fingers, by the repeated cordial squeezes they received from his young friend; until, at last, his paw regaining its usual share of nerve, he shook Amherst's hand with an intensity of grasp, betokening the full return of his affection.

“Why, look ye, my boy,” said he, “I am not very ready, d'ye see, to suspect you of want of regard for old Cleaver. But you must allow that appearances were confoundedly against you.—To leave me so long in strange seas, without ever thinking it worth your while to throw me

out a single civil signal of inquiry. It is true you knew that I was in a friendly harbour, where, let me tell you, I have not failed to be well dry-docked and victualled, in as princely a manner as one of his Majesty's yachts."

After some general conversation, Cleaver retired to his apartment to rid himself of his shooting-gear, and Amherst accompanied him at his request, to let him into a little of his history since they had parted. He did not think it quite time to make Cleaver his confidant, regarding his attachment to Miss Malcolm, and had, therefore, no intention of informing him of it at present. But when he came to mention her name, he spoke of her almost insensibly, in language so glowing, that the sly sailor, after listening to him for some time, eyed him with one of his arch and significant looks, and, after one of his long whistles, exclaimed,

"Oh ho! my boy! I see how the land lies. Now, after all your palavering apologies, I come at last to the understanding of your neglect of old Cleaver. Why, here is a pretty business!—not contented with running away from the wife your father chose for you, you are going to hook

yourself to one here, whom he knows nothing about."

Amherst was a little vexed that he had thus unwarily exposed his secret. At first he tried to shift the subject; but the rough tar was not to be so easily thrown out; nay, the confusion accompanying all Amherst's attempts had the effect of making Cleaver still more satisfied, that there was something in the suspicions he had hazarded. Reflecting, therefore, that it was perhaps, after all, due to one who had already shown so lively an interest in his happiness, and whose warm regard for him had induced him to take so decided a step in his behalf, to give him his full confidence, he proceeded at once to tell him all that had passed between him and Miss Malcolm; and concluded by saying that, to complete his happiness, he only waited for her uncle's consent, of which he was certain as soon as his Lordship should return to Eaglesholme.

Cleaver, who saw that the match was perfectly fitting in every respect, joined with Amherst in opinion that his father, having had sufficient time to cool on the disappointment in regard to the marriage planned for him with Miss Delassaux, would

certainly be delighted with the prospect of his forming so honourable a connection as that with the niece of his old friend Lord Eaglesholme. Amherst expressed to Cleaver his determination to acquaint his father with his intentions, as soon as he should have it in his power to announce Lord Eaglesholme's approval to him. Meanwhile, he entreated Cleaver to say nothing of the matter to any one; and his friend, with a hearty congratulation on the happy result of their voyage, readily promised to keep his counsel.

Cleaver had little to communicate to Amherst in return for the important and joyful intelligence he had just got from him. He declared it was impossible to describe the kindness he had received from the excellent Baronet and his Lady. The fact was, his society had been perfectly delightful to Sir Alisander, and his exhaustless store of naval anecdotes, and accounts of foreign countries, had made the worthy man's evenings pass with an interest they had rarely possessed. The highest compliment Sir Alisander could have paid Cleaver was that of quitting his bed for his leathern-chair, several hours earlier than he was wont to do before he knew him, whenever he

heard in the morning that the Captain had no intention of going to shoot. The first questions he usually asked his servant, when he came to his apartment, regarded the Captain's motions, that he might regulate his motion or rest accordingly.

As for Lady Sanderson, Cleaver had absolutely won her heart by his admirable disquisitions upon the rearing of poultry and pigs, as well as by the numerous receipts for culinary and other purposes he added to her family memorandum-book. Above all, he had conferred an everlasting obligation by giving her a plan for a new and highly improved poultry-house and piggery, both of which had arisen into being during Amherst's absence, and entirely under Cleaver's direction and superintendence, nay, in some degree by the operation of his own hands;—"These Sawnies," as he said himself, "absolutely understanding nothing of such matters, and having no more hands than the animals for the erection of whose dwellings they were vainly and ignorantly labouring."

He said, that he had indeed spoken of an intended trip to a neighbouring sea-port, but that

neither the Baronet nor Lady Sanderson would for a moment entertain the idea of permitting him to get his anchor a-trip.

Though the evening passed very pleasantly at Sanderson Mains, Amherst felt considerable impatience to be gone. He took his leave, therefore, as early as he well could, and, with many promises to Cleaver that he would inform him more regularly of his future history and plans, he cordially shook hands with him, and set out on his return to the castle.

The night was delightfully calm, but so dark as to make the earlier part of his walk rather slow and tedious. But as he got down near the shores of the lake, the moon rose in all its splendour. Its image trembled on the scarcely agitated bosom of the water, and its beams rested on the mossy stones, and moist patches of sand on its margin. Amherst was thankful for the light it afforded, for he anticipated the difficulty he should experience after diving into the threefold night of the overgrown avenue, running within the grounds from the old gate. And, indeed, when he arrived there, he found the shadows so deep, that his utmost attention was requisite to enable him

to scramble along among the bushes growing in the middle of the way.

He was about to emerge from the thicket upon one of those open glades we had formerly occasion to notice, when he observed two human figures crossing the broad field of moonlight towards the spot where he then was. Amherst had already proved himself to be no coward; but experience having lately taught him that the neighbourhood was infested by lawless ruffians, he deemed it prudent to remain in his present obscurity, until he should gather from circumstances whether he was about to meet with friends or foes. Such was the intensity of the shade, that he had only to step behind the trunk of an aged beech, sheltering a holly-bush beneath its wide-spreading boughs, to insure absolute invisibility, whilst, from the position he occupied, he commanded a full view of the open ground, as well as of the entrance to the avenue, near which he was posted.

He soon discovered that the two figures were men, though they were both wrapped up in cloaks, perfectly concealing their persons. They wore broad-brimmed slouched hats, and, from the moon being behind them, their faces were thrown so

much into shadow, that he was prevented from having a sufficient view of their features, to enable him to guess who they might be. They were engaged in earnest dialogue, and when they came within ear-shot of him, he distinguished that their conversation was interlarded with Italian. This circumstance led him to imagine they were two of Lord Eaglesholme's domestics, and he was on the eve of quitting his concealment, when some words reached him, that made him wish to gather a little more of their conversation, before he ventured to expose himself to their view.

“ You know very well,” said the taller man to his companion, “ that I am not over scrupulous about such matters. Yet I don't much like this job, seeing it may spoil my trade on this coast, and, besides that I have been out o' the way of doing such things, the risk is greater here than where we carried it on formerly. But, damn it, I won't refuse this venture neither—what is my life but risk?—hazard all! and perhaps the deeper and more devilish the game, the more suitable will it be for me. But you are a very fiend incarnate. To you this matter is mere sport.”

“ Sport !” cried the other with a hellish laugh,

“ *Madre di Dio!* this is but child’s play to the deeds I have done. But I needn’t tell you—*avete veduto voi stesso—non recordatevi?* Have you forgotten how he begged for mercy, and how his eyes started from their sockets like those of a flayed bullock, as I dragged him with the rope? Augh *corpo di San Gennaro!* how the foaming waves flashed in the red glare of Vesuvio, like the flaming billows of hell, when I hurled the carrion carcase into the sea!—*Avete dimenticato, eh!*—ha—ha—ha!”

“ Talk not of it now,” said the other villain, who seemed to be shocked by the recollections he called up—“ It was horrible!—I trust I shall never see such a scene again!”

“ Horrible! *padre!* ’twas but doing our work honestly. *Voleste diavolo,* that we had disposed of this little bit of goods at Naples—*ma non importa,* we shall have better price for it here. *Maledetto!*” exclaimed the villain, as he fell, tripped by a bush growing in his way, after they had entered the dark avenue.

“ *Cosa c’è?*” demanded the other in a tone of alarm, and at the same time drawing a sabre, as Amherst judged from the sound.

“ *Niente !—niente affatto !*—I have tumbled over a cursed bush, that’s all.—*Dove siete, amico ? —fa bujo come quello dell’ grotto della Sibilla !*”

“ Here,” said the other, “ here is my hand.”

“ *Dove ?*”

“ This way.”

“ *Maledetto !*”

“ *Guarda ! Guarda !*”

And so they went groping, and swearing, and stumbling on through the dark avenue. The sound of their voices, as well as of the crashing of the bushes, reached him at intervals from a distance, long after his ear had ceased to catch the import of their words.

Amherst removed into the open moonlight, from the dark shade where he had concealed himself, still haunted by the murderous expressions he had heard. At one time he had felt an inclination to spring upon the villains, and endeavour to seize them. But a moment’s reflection taught him, that such an attempt would not only be rash in itself, but altogether useless if successful. Their conversation, it is true, betrayed the perpetration of some dreadful murder, but it seemed to have been effected in a foreign country. They had also

some deed in contemplation ; but whatever it might be, the expressions of the taller ruffian implied that it was of a less black complexion. The features of the men had been perfectly concealed from him by the shade of their large foreign hats. But their voices struck his ear as if they were not altogether strange to him, though he could not remember where he had heard them before. The taller man seemed to be no foreigner ; his conversation, however, showed that he was acquainted with the language of Italy, in which his companion, evidently a native of that country, addressed him ; and the appeal to his recollection of the shocking transaction at which he had probably assisted, proved that he had been abroad.

He began to consider whether it would not be proper to give information of what he had heard ; but as he continued to turn the matter over in his own mind, he came at last to believe, that his imagination had hastily reared an airy phantom, out of some desperate smuggling transaction the ruffians had planned. He now remembered, that the path he was pursuing had been described to him as one very often used by the smugglers, when crossing into the country from a small haven, form-

ed by the river running through the glen. That such characters as are engaged in this illicit trade, in which villains of all nations are generally leagued, might have been guilty of murder at one period or another, he thought extremely likely, and to some such crime, perpetrated in the prosecution of their nefarious traffic, the words which fell from the Italian had probably reference. But there was nothing in what they had said, that could warrant any suspicion of an intention to repeat such an act. Nay, the tall man, in making up his resolution to what was now proposed, seemed to shudder at the recollection of murder. The very expressions, “*risk—venture—hazard—disposal of goods—higher price,*” &c. all appeared to bear allusion to some bold smuggling attempt they were deliberating. Having thus reasoned with himself, he finally resolved to say nothing about the matter until the return of Lord Eaglesholme.

As Amherst was approaching the castle, his ear was saluted by the sound of voices, accompanied by peals of laughter, giving him reason to hope for a conversation less appalling than that he had so lately listened to. He soon perceived O’Gollochar approaching, with the gay

Mademoiselle Epingle. Of late his servant's fears of the castle and its goblins seemed to have been very much dissipated, and the merriment, now supported between the smart Frenchwoman and the joyous Irishman, furnished a sufficiently adequate explanation of this remarkable change on the mind of the latter.

They came merrily along, arm in arm, through the checkered moonlight, under the tall groupe of trees, Cornelius chastening his usual triumphant stride, to accommodate it to the figurante trip of *la belle Parisienne*, whilst their *éclats de rire* partially disturbed the black squadrons roosting above.

“ Ah ! Monsieur Ogolhaire, you moss commence to stody la langue Française, by vat you call larn de vocabulaire of loove ; *il faut commencer vos études en apprenant le vocabulaire d'amour.*”

“ Och, botheration !” cried O'Gollochar, “ how can I understand your French now, when myself can't see your eyes ? Cavilaire of a Moor ! ar-rah, what mane ye be that now, my dear ? Sure I am no Moorish cavalier ; not a bit of the Moor have I about me that I knows on. Faith, may

be after all she manes to say that she would take me, though she found me in the middle of a moor, and without e'er a thing else but my own four quarters. Sure and isn't it very sinsible in her now, poor thing! Troth, my dear, and wouldn't I not take yourself now with never a bit of fortune but your pattens?—Och, master, is that you?" said he, as he now perceived Amherst. "Sure Miss Malcolm has been in such a quandary about your honour's honour, that nothing would sarve her but that mamsell and I should trudge out in sarch of ye."

"*Oui cest vrai,*" interrupted the loquacious Frenchwoman, "*à cause de l'absence de Monsieur, Mademoiselle reste actuellement abimè dans la sollicitude et dans une suspense effrayante.*"

On hearing this, Amherst stopped to inquire no further, but leaving them to the private enjoyment of their moonlight colloquy, he hastened to relieve Eliza from an anxiety, the existence of which, however, gave him a great deal of pleasure.

The fact was, that day-light no sooner began to disappear, than Eliza called to mind the attack upon her uncle, and the attempt upon her-

self; and reflecting that she had urged him to return that evening, she tormented herself and Madame Bossanville with a thousand apprehensions for his safety, and a thousand self-accusations, for having been the cause of exposing him to the danger she dreaded. At last her anxiety rose to such a pitch, that she had dispatched Epingle with orders to O'Gollochar, to set out immediately to meet his master. The amorous Irishman lost a good deal of time in flirtation with Mademoiselle, who forgot the fears of her mistress in her own amusement, and who, by way of making up for her neglect, and doubtless from pure good nature, offered to accompany Cornelius, to relieve him from the loneliness of his way.

Amherst was well repaid for his late walk, by the happy hour he spent with the ladies before retiring to rest. Forgetful of the presence of Madame Bossanville, he and his Eliza indulged in the tenderest conversation; and the old lady was obliged to give them more than one hint, before she could induce them to part for the night.