

CHAPTER IX.

La vertu est si nécessaire à nos cœurs, que quand on a une fois abandonné la véritable, on s'en fait une à sa mode, et l'on y tient plus fortement peut-être parcequ'elle est de notre choix.

J. J. ROUSSEAU.

THE charitable shades of night threw a veil over the more glaring defects of the mansion, and left it to the good natured imagination of the stranger to supply all deficiencies, yet it had no very flattering exterior. It seemed to consist of a plain and very low centre, hardly high enough for one story, but appearing, from its double row of small windows, to be divided into two. On each side was a lower wing, running out to the front at right angles, dedicated to a variety of domestic purposes.

Lochandhu lifted the latch. "Take care of your head, Mr Oakenwold," exclaimed he as Amherst was entering. But the caution came too

late, for, not having made due allowance for the lowness of the door, he struck himself a severe blow on the forehead, and at the same time slipped down an unseen step inwards, so that he staggered into the passage like a drunk man.

“ Preserve me ! if he binna bringin’ hame some o’ thae fu’ fouk, to put the house a’ in a steer !” exclaimed Mrs Macgillivray, a shrewd, acute, bustling little woman, who, in a dirty dark-printed gown, and a high cap, came hurrying from an adjacent room.

“ Mrs Macgillivray,” said Lochandhu, “ pray, bring a light with you.—I am afraid, Mr Oakenwold, you have hurt yourself.”

Amherst having assured him that he had suffered nothing, received his assistance in taking off his cloak, which was hung up on a deer’s horn, amongst the numerous hats, plaids, bonnets, and sticks, covering the wooden partition.

When Mrs Macgillivray came with the light, Lochandhu formally introduced Amherst to her, as his most particular friend, and, above all, as the son of that gallant sea-officer to whom, as she had often heard him tell, he had owed the preservation of his life when abroad. He concluded

by saying, that he had prevailed upon Mr Oakwold to honour his poor mansion with a visit, and he trusted she would assist him in doing all in his power to manifest to the son, how deeply sensible he was of the obligation he owed to the father.

“ And, therefore, my good woman, to begin— will you set Mary to work immediately, to cook something hot for supper, and see that clean sheets are put upon the stranger’s bed, and a fire in the room ?”

Mrs Magillivray stared at her husband for an instant, but, making her obeisance to Amherst, and stammering out something about the happiness she felt in seeing him as their guest, all the while smoothing her gown, and pinning her handkerchief, and applying the points of her fingers to her head-dress, with a consciousness of the want of proper arrangement in her drapery, she sidled out of the room.

She had no sooner left them, than she was heard issuing hasty and pointed directions to a female servant. These were the death-warrant to a pair of unfortunate fowls, at that moment reposing in fancied security, with their heads under their

wings, on the uppermost perch of the poultry-house, in the midst of their feathered associates. The remorseless maiden stole upon them like Macbeth, to “murder sleep—the innocent sleep.”

But she was by no means particular in the selection of her victims; for, climbing up to the place where the harmless society were reposing, she groped about, and seized upon the first brace she could lay her hands upon, and brought them struggling down, screeching in such a manner, that the slumbers of the whole flock were rudely broken, and a general fluttering and clamouring took place.

“Deil be in ye!” said she to one of those she had captured, “ye’ll no do, for ye’re the auld cock;” and, in her pet, she tossed the grandsire of this nation of pullets to the farther end of the place, and began a new attack upon them. But the garrison having been now alarmed, the second prisoner was by no means so easily taken, and before it was secured, the noise and cackling was so excessive, as almost to drown the conversation of the two gentlemen in the parlour.

Mary at last bore away two captives in triumph, and in a very few minutes they were split open, and lying like spread eagles broiling on the grid-

iron over the fire. Meanwhile Mrs Macgillivray was endeavouring, (to use her own words) "to mak hersell a wee decent," after which, she appeared as the prologue to the supper, dressed out in a silk gown, and in other respects equally magnificent.

The industrious Mary, who performed the parts of cook, footwoman, butler, and chambermaid, had no sooner prepared the supper, than, hastening to the dark hole of a garret she could call her own, she dressed herself, pretty much in the same at-random manner in which she had caught the fowls, and again hurrying down, she flew into the parlour, laid a fine linen cloth on the oaken table, and, with great celerity, spread out a parcel of broken horn-handled knives and forks, and a few plates, some of them chipped, and others cracked. Then, stumping away upon bare heels through the passage, she soon reappeared with the broiled fowls, and a smoking dish of fried ham and eggs, flanked by some oaten and bear meal cakes, and half a ewe-milk cheese, together with a bottle of brandy, and a large pewter jug of excellent claret. Amherst, though pressed by Lochandhu, was not inclined to drink, and after about an hour's conversa-

tion over a moderate potation of wine, to which they were left by Mrs Macgillivray, he expressed a wish to retire to rest.

A candle was accordingly called for, and Lochandhu preceding him up the wooden stair, ushered him into a bed-room, hardly more than large enough to contain a bed, so small, as to convince him at first sight, that he must double himself up in it. The roof of the chamber was so low, that he saw he could only be comfortable in it while sitting. There Lochandhu, after satisfying himself that his guest had bed-clothes enough, and that he wanted for nothing, left him and his servant together.

O'Gollochar's face very legibly expressed that he had something to communicate, but being occupied for some time with unpacking and arranging his master's things, some minutes elapsed before he opened the subject. At length, being able to hold no longer, he dropped on the bed the shirt he was unfolding, and, turning to Amherst,

“Och, dear Master,” exclaimed he, “who do you think I saw yonder at the inn where we baited?—faith, an' I need not say who, for the divil

a soul it was after all, unless it ware the divil himself, or one of his babes. But be that as it may, any how, may I never stir if it wasn't the same cratur or ghost we seen at the well, and in the Cove of Aiglesholme. I was all alone by myself in the stable, only Hamish, that's nobody at all, seeing he can't spake English, was lying snoring among the straw, in the dark stall at the farther end, when, as I was rising up, after examining Broadbottom's heels, who, by the bye, has got a plaguy cut under his fitlock amang some o' them stones, I happens to glance at an open hole in the wall, which would make a very good window in Ireland, and which, I see, often sarves the same purpose here, when, what does I see, but the horrid face of her girning thorough at me? Och, merciful Vargin! says I, and wid that down I swaps on my knees among the dung, when venturing to look up again, and seeing that the ugly face of her was gone, I makes bould to rise and look out at the door, but not a bone of her was there, either up or down, east or west."

Amherst thought it unnecessary to inform his servant that he also had seen this strange vision. He did what he could to laugh O'Gollochar out

of his superstitious fears by affecting to suppose it merely the accidental appearance of some poor old woman. But it would not do, for though he succeeded in silencing him, he saw that he had by no means shaken his belief that he had seen a supernatural being. He therefore changed the subject, by putting questions to him about the wound Broadbottom had received, which O'Gollochar assured him was so severe, as to have made him very lame for the latter part of the journey.

“ If I had gotten a word of your honour afore you went into the house, I would have axed you to look at it yourself,” said Cornelius.

Most young men are fond of pretending to a knowledge of farriery, and Amherst, partly from this cause, and partly to satisfy O'Gollochar, told him that he would willingly go out to examine the creature's limb even yet, if there was a light in the stable.

“ Sure, Hamish is there, your honour, waiting to help me to supper them up, and he has got mire fir torches burning, enough to set the stable on fire.”

Amherst, therefore, bade O'Gollochar show him

the way, and, in his slippers and dressing-gown as he was, he followed him gently down stairs, and across the court to the stable. After looking at the cut, and prescribing a bath of spirits and vinegar, he left O'Gollochiar to take his own time and way of procuring the materials from Mary. Believing that Lochandhu and his Lady were already long since asleep, he lifted the latch and let himself in with the utmost silence. As he had his foot on the first step of the stair, however, he heard Lochandhu's voice issuing in a low tone from the parlour, and he was surprised to hear that of Mrs Macgillivray also, who, to all appearance, had retired to bed more than two hours before. That he might not disturb them he slipped silently up stairs to bed. But if the reader will listen at the door, he will hear what would have chained Amherst to the spot, had he caught but a few words of the conversation.

——“ Do you think that he's asleep, wife ?” said Lochandhu.

“ Nae doubt but he is,” replied she ; “ for it's mair nor a quarter o' an hour sin I heard his man's foot going to the stable, after seeing him till his bed.”

“ Well, then, to return to what I was saying,”

continued Lochandhu, "Sandy, I tell you, shall never persuade me.—Whatever I may have done, or whatever I may yet do, I will never play the traitor to this young man.—I have my honour as well as other people, though perhaps it may be of a particular and convenient kind."

"I'm glad to hear ye say sae, Lochandhu," said Mrs Macgillivray; "I've seen some awfu' sights sin I cam to thae hills.—Oh my very heart grows sick at the thought!—And, troth, when I saw the bonny young lad come hame wi' you, I kentna what to think.—You have ta'en a heavy weight aff me. But what, after a', garred ye ask him to Lochandhu? ye might hae guessed afore-hand that Sandy wad bather yere vera life about him."

"Sandy is a perfect brute, wife," replied Lochandhu. "He already begins to be quite intolerable, and to presume beyond bearing upon his services. But I am resolved to hold him down. He shall never dictate to me. The fellow has more of the insatiable rapacity of the wolf about him, than the generosity of the lion. He cannot understand, that the pleasure of giving way to the common feelings of humanity, may sometimes

have a far greater relish, than the profit arising from acting contrary to them. I cannot describe to you what pleasure I felt when I first met this young man, and, above all, when I discovered that he was certainly the son of him who saved my life. The desire of having him under my roof, and of showing him what little kindness I could, was irresistible; and the satisfaction I experienced when he accepted my invitation, was such as I have not been blessed with for many a day. But Sandy is of so coarse a clay, that he cannot comprehend the luxury of indulging sentiments of this sort,—nay, he has not the slightest conception of their existence. When necessity drives, I have as little scruple as he has with the common herd of mankind. Then I am like the hunter who levels his rifle at the deer on the open mountain;—but who, that can call himself man, would strike down the tame stag that feeds from his hand? Then he cannot see, that even policy requires the occasional sacrifice of something, to the preservation of character. He does not consider, that the entertaining of a stranger thus, will silence all those suspicious floating reports, at least as far as they regard us, and will be the means of enabling us to pursue our

trade with double advantage, and with increased security, for many a day to come. But be easy, wife, regarding this young man; trust me I would sooner lose my own life than that a hair of his head should be harmed. This I have determined; and you know, that when my determination is once taken, nothing can shake it. As for Sandy, he is a savage dog. My indolence has made me allow him to take his own way; but you are well aware how easily I can muzzle him; and as for the rest, they are at my command."

"But are you sure," said Mrs Macgillivray, "that he has no suspicions?"

"Suspicious!—no!" replied Lochandhu—
"How should he?—Methought, indeed, he liked not over much the appearance of Macrory and his lads. But I put it all off by talking of a market. By the bye, Macrory has made a fine haul of Winklestraw's cattle; they will be on our hill to-morrow morning, and the fellow shall have a handsome share, for the clever way in which he has managed it. Better thriven beasts never were seen.—Suspicious!"—added he, after a long pause—"If he were to have suspicions indeed—self-preservation might—But no, it's impossible. He never can

have suspicions here. What can he see, or what can he hear, that should excite the smallest spark of suspicion? You know the proverb, 'A wise fox keeps his own hole clean.' Have not some of the best gentlemen of Scotland been my guests at times? And do I not visit in all the houses of note in the country? Who has a fairer character than the Laird of Lochandhu? Pshaw! trust me it shall never be the worse for this young man's visit. But, come," said he rising, "we'll talk more of this anon. Meanwhile, let's to bed, for I am somewhat tired."

In the middle of the night Amherst was awakened from a deep sleep, he knew not very well how, and starting up, he beheld, seated squat on the edge of the bed—the *Dwarfie Carline*!!!—The light of the moon shone powerfully upon her—the fore-finger of her right hand was at her lips commanding silence, and she waved it behind her towards the door, to indicate that the least noise would alarm the house, and cause her immediate disappearance.

"Speak!—what are you, mysterious being?—What would you with me?" said Amherst, in an under tone.

"No light matter makes me have converse

with mortal man!" said she, in a low murmuring, but distinct and solemn voice. "Thy vows are plighted to Eliza Malcolm—forget them not—they are already registered in Heaven!" and as she said so, she raised her hand slowly upwards.

Amherst uttered not a word, but remained with his eyes intently fixed on hers. She then pulled two long hairs from her head, and twisting them together in an instant, she hastily tied one end of them round his finger, whilst she held by the other.

"These two hairs," said she, "are as one—one cannot be broken without the other being snapt; so is your fate twined with that of Eliza Malcolm.—For her sake, you are at present the object of my care—deserve it then! This abode is not without danger. Yet be prudent and fear not!—But, mark!" said she, with a terrible frown—"happen what will—leave not these mountains till you again see me.—Remember!—your happiness is in my hands!—disobey my injunctions, and you are lost for ever!—Remember!" added she again, with an increased earnestness of manner, as pointing and raising the fore-fingers of both hands, she brought them quickly down, with

an action calculated to enforce her mysterious warning. Then, without assistance from her arms, she sprang backwards from off the bed, nearly to the door, yet so lightly as hardly to be heard. From the position in which Amherst lay, he could not see the door. He jumped from the bed to examine it—it was shut—the figure was gone, and he heard not a sound.

Some minutes had elapsed before Amherst could convince himself that he was not dreaming. He felt the pressure of the hairs, which still remained tied round his finger, and he became convinced of the reality of what had taken place. He knew not what to think of so extraordinary a visitation ; had she not made use of the talismanic name of Eliza Malcolm, it is probable he might have treated her solemn injunctions with very little respect ; but, as it was, he dwelt upon them with a serious determination to obey them. To explain their object, however, he found somewhat difficult. Why should she command his stay in a part of the country so far from her he loved? unless indeed it might be to give time for the removal of Lord Eaglesholme's mysterious objections, by circumstances of which she was

aware, though he was ignorant of them. If this was her object, then it was probable that she saw hope of their removal, and to this hope he clung. There was something so preternaturally overpowering in her appearance, words, and manner, that he was disposed to believe she not only possessed extraordinary means of information, but that she had substantial grounds for the advice she gave. There was something almost miraculous in her visit. The place where he had last seen her was twenty miles off. She had talked of the house of Lochandhu not being free from danger, yet she, though manifestly unwilling to be seen by its master, had fearlessly entered it,—how he knew not, more than he could guess whither she had gone.

Amherst lay perplexed with these conjectures for several hours; indeed, the moon had gone down, and the grey twilight of morning was beginning to appear, ere he again closed his eyes. When he did so, his dreams were haunted by the figure, now more minutely imprinted upon his recollection from being so long placed near his eyes.

When Amherst arose in the morning, he was so charmed by the beauty of the pastoral scenery,

on which he looked from his window, that he forgot for a moment the events of the preceding night in the ecstasy it awakened.

The back of the house stood but a few feet removed from the brink of a wooded bank, sweeping forwards from under it to right and left, and enclosing a lovely low meadow within its bosom. Beyond this appeared a portion of a very considerable lake, into which the great river of the valley expanded itself. At the distance of about a mile from the eye, the opposite shores presented every variety of knoll and hillock, rising one behind the other, and wooded with birches, hazles, and dwarf oaks. Over these some high mountains appeared, whilst, more to the left, the still loftier group of the Cairngorums rose in all their majesty.

The sun was dancing cheerily over the lake, and gilding its surrounding woods and pastures with gladness, and a large herd of cattle were feeding on the meadow. Every thing contributed to awaken ideas of rural purity and innocence in his mind ; and notwithstanding the caution he had received from his midnight visitor, he could hardly persuade himself that any thing like danger, or treachery, was to be apprehended from the

inhabitants of so soft a scene. From such thoughts he was speedily recalled by observing a number of men examining the cattle. Amongst these he descried Lochandhu, his natural brother Alexander, and Macrory. It was some little time before he was quite certain of his host, who having now relinquished the thraldom of the Lowland dress he had formerly worn, was clad in the more accommodating costume of the mountains.

After moving the animals about, and looking at them individually, the men began to drive them off in a long line, towards an opening in the wooded bank, where they disappeared, expressing, by frequent lowings, their unwillingness to leave the pasture. Lochandhu continued to walk backwards and forwards with his two companions for some time, as if in earnest conversation. Alexander Macgillivray and Macrory then followed the party who went with the cattle, and Lochandhu returned towards the house.

Amherst was received in the parlour by both his host and hostess, with every appearance of the kindest welcome. But the Carline's warning crossed his mind. He took care, however, to make a suitable return to their compliments and civilities. During breakfast, Lochandhu ran over to Am-

herst the various kinds of manly amusements the country afforded, leaving him to choose which he should first pursue.

“ Shall we to the hill, Mr Oakenwold, to kill a few grouse and black game,—or would you like to look nearer at home for a roebuck, where you may also get plenty of hares?—Or perhaps you would prefer salmon-fishing?—Or if you are fond of boating, you may shoot wild ducks upon the lake, and catch abundance of pike and trout. For ptarmigan or white hares, we must seek the highest tops of the mountains—as for red deer, we must have time to prepare for showing you a royal day with them.”

Amherst, like most young men, was extremely fond of such pursuits. This ample list of the animals of sport, made him forget the dubious situation he had placed himself in, by becoming an inhabitant of the house of Lochandhu. Remembering that he must wait the promised communication from his mysterious nocturnal visitant, he was rejoiced to find that he could do so without any risk of *tædium*. He felt the necessity of occupying himself, to keep down those distressing thoughts, resulting from his conversation

with Lord Eagleshome. He resolved, therefore, to partake of all these amusements in succession.

A good many days soon passed away, in making war upon the various creatures we have mentioned, Lochandhu generally acting as his guide and companion. His success was far beyond what he had ever before entertained any idea of. But much as he enjoyed such amusement, his pleasure was by no means confined to the mere trifling exultation arising from the extent of the murder committed, in which every sportsman has more or less felt the inclination of indulging himself. He had other and more exalted sources of delight from such excursions. As his foot trod lightly over the heathy hills in pursuit of his game,—as he inhaled the healthful breeze,—and as his eye roamed unconfined over the endless extent of brown moorland, where not a trace was to be seen of those pitiful barriers, raised by the sordid hand of all-grasping man, jealous of the intrusion of his fellow upon a few wretched feet of the surface of this earth,—he felt his soul expand with a freedom he had never before experienced. Nature seemed to be the only proprietor here, and her domain was without limits.

Such sentiments as these, more particularly suggested themselves to Amherst, during his expeditions to the Cairngorums, whither he went, nominally, indeed, in pursuit of ptarmigan and white hares, but, in reality, more for the purpose of enjoying the solemn scenery of the endless forest of pines, covering the stretch of country at their base, and of the wild lakes and glens in their hollows, as well as the boundless prospects to be had from their different summits. Amidst the enthusiasm of that rapture, excited in his ardent bosom by the contemplation of Nature, on a scale of savage grandeur he had never before an opportunity of beholding, he almost forgot what others would have considered as the chief object.

Often would he stop to give full scope to the pleasure he felt. Now, in the very depth of the forest, would he lean his back against the trunk of one of those gigantic fir-trees, of which there were many twenty or thirty feet in circumference, and looking out from beneath its bold free growing arms, and thick foliage, catch a view of some white summit, and watch the various effects produced by the light mists and clouds sweeping along its brow, like the fitful transitions of hu-

man emotions. Again, stretched upon a heathy bank, or moss-grown cairn, he would lie silently surveying the long drawn vista of one of those lonely woodless lakes, there so frequent;—its clear surface giving back the image of those overhanging cliffs, of height only accessible to the eagle, which sent down their foaming waterfalls, fed by the almost eternal beds of hardened snow hanging on their brow. Or lastly, rejoicing in those exhilarating feelings naturally arising from the occupation of a lofty and commanding position, he would throw his eyes from the ridge of the mountains, over the subjacent country, his field of vision reaching almost from sea to sea; and remarking how utterly all appearance of man and of his works was lost upon the face of the vast map below, he would think on the absolute insignificance of the creature, and on the vast—the immeasurable greatness,—the infinite power,—the eternity of the Creator!

It was after frequent instances of success in roe-shooting, that Lochandhu at length proposed to Amherst to try the nobler game.

“You have been well enough bled with the roebucks, Mr Oakenwold,” said Lochandhu to

him, one evening, as his guest returned from the woods; "we must now endeavour to flesh you with the deer. With your leave, we shall go to-morrow evening on an expedition against them."

Amherst readily agreed to Lochandhu's proposal, and every thing was arranged accordingly.