

CHAPTER XIII.

Que les moments que delivrent tout d'un coup le cœur et l'esprit d'une terrible peine font sentir un plaisir inconcevable.

MADAME DE SEVIGNE'.

Joy is such a foreigner,
So mere a stranger to my thoughts, I know
Not how to entertain him.

DENHAM.

As Amherst and his friend, Cleaver, were preparing to start for Oakenwold, a servant arrived from the old Admiral, with the following letter to his son:—

“ MY DEAR AMHERST,

“ I beg that, on receiving this, you will ride over to meet me at Brokenhurst Hall, where I am going on the affairs of Miss Delassaux, which have now come to a crisis. I know she is particularly desirous to see you, and, at such a time, you cannot refuse to gratify her. I, therefore, hope you will be there in the course of the day.

“ Your affectionate father,

“ CABLE OAKENWOLD.”

“What is the matter,” said Cleaver, who had just sat down to breakfast, and was in the act of opening a cold venison pasty, “I beseech you tell me what is the matter with you.”

“The most unaccountable letter from my father,” said Amherst, “I know not what to say to it. He asks me to go immediately to visit Miss Delassaux, and he talks of her affairs having come to a crisis. Good God! what is Miss Delassaux, and what are her affairs to me?”

“Her affairs!” said Cleaver, helping himself to some of the jelly, “then I suppose she’s ashore at last. I hope the Admiral has no intention of trying to tow her off. If the old hulk and she get him fairly hooked on, he may get aground himself in his endeavours to warp them off.—Any thing wrong with the Delassauxs, Joseph?” continued he, with his mouth crammed full of pie-crust, and addressing the groom who had brought the letter,—

“Wrong! Aye, Sur,” quoth Joseph, “why they do say, that they have ruined themselves with them balls and vigaries, and that Hawkins, who has taken care of himself, has got possession of the estates, and that he went last night to seize every thing in the house, even to the very beds

the poor ladies were lying on, the precious rascal !”

“ And is it come to this then !” said Amherst, a gleam of pity crossing his mind as he remembered the once dazzling splendour of the haughty Delassaux. “ Good Heavens ! how can such minds bear it !—Well, then, it is but a duty of charity my father wishes me to join him in performing, and such being the case, unfit as I am at present for any meeting of the kind, I shall not flinch from it. The horses to the door directly ! Will you go with me Cleaver ?”

“ I will, my dear fellow, with all my heart ; but eat something in the first place, will you. I have just ordered a warm veal cutlet.—Do stump to the kitchen, Phillips, my lad, and give the cook a hint to make haste ; but don't let him spoil the dish with his hurry, d'ye hear ?”

Amherst snatched some hasty refreshment. The horses came to the door, and, desirous to obey his father, he hastened to mount. Cleaver followed most unwillingly. As he was passing outwards he met the veal cutlet coming from the kitchen, giving out from under its china cover a steam of the most delicious odour. It was irresistible.

“ My dear fellow, I will follow you in an instant,” said he. “ A knife and fork, and a spoon, in a moment, sirrah !” and snatching, at the same time, the dish from the servant, and seating himself on a garden chair, he began to gobble up the contents with all haste.

The impatient Amherst rode off at a hand-gallop, leaving his friend to follow at his own leisure.

On approaching Brokenhurst Hall he remarked a number of queer-looking men hanging on about the door. To one of these he gave his horse, and instantly entered. A girl, whom he recognized as Miss Delassaux’s maid, who had often experienced his bounty when his visits to her mistress were frequent, came from one of the rooms towards him.

“ Gracious me !” exclaimed she, “ if there isn’t Mr Oakenwold !”

“ Is Miss Delassaux visible ?” inquired he.

“ Lawk ! to be sure she is,—that is, I am sure she will make herself visible to you, Mr Oakenwold ; and overjoyed will she be, no doubt, as I am, to see you here again.”

“ Your lady is, I presume, in the drawing-room ?” said Amherst, interrupting her.

“ She is in her own apartment at present,” said the girl.

“ Is not my father here ?” said Amherst.

“ Yes—the Admiral is in the drawing-room.”

“ Then I will step there and wait Miss Delas-saux’s commands,” replied he, taking the well-known way up stairs.

Meanwhile the maid hastened to her mistress, whom she found, as she had left her, buried in bed-clothes, tears, and mortification, having slept none all night.

“ Ma’am, Ma’am,” said she, “ I have such news for you!—Mr Oakenwold is here, and has gone up to the drawing-room to wait for you.”

The Lady no sooner heard this most consolatory and unlooked-for piece of intelligence, than she dried up her tears, and proceeded to the labours of the toilette with all manner of alacrity.

As Amherst reached the door of the drawing-room he heard his father’s voice, and as he entered his eyes caught the bulky form of the Admiral, who had already established his quarter-deck, and was walking backwards and forwards across the apartment with his hands behind his back. Amherst was hastening to embrace the old man,

with an eager and affectionate smile on his countenance, when he was suddenly arrested midway, by the sight of an unexpected object.—He beheld—Miss Malcolm!—Miss Malcolm, as lovely and smiling as he had ever seen her, and attired in a dress, the richness and taste of which at once showed that her personal appearance was not altogether unattended to, notwithstanding the bitter distress and cruel laceration of mind she had undergone. So sudden and unforeseen a meeting produced a violent agitation in a frame lately so much weakened by disease. He felt conscious of his own feeble state, and he could not help internally contrasting it with the healthful, the sprightly, nay, almost joyous, countenance of her whom he now saw,—of her whom he had pictured to himself sitting in the lonely towers of Eaglesholme, pining in misery, or drooping like a broken lily on its retired terrace walks. His reflections, it may be easily supposed, were rapid, but they produced more of pain than of pleasure. “Can she have so soon forgotten me,” thought he, “me whom she once so loved, and who so loved her, that I never can love another?—Can she so soon have forgotten her situation; and can she have already overcome those feelings of wretchedness she

declared must sink her to an untimely grave?— Oh! woman! woman!—are all then alike?—are all then angels in appearance, and devils in deception?”

Miss Malcolm was seated in the depth of a window, tête-à-tête with Miss Margery, so that his entrance was observed by neither of the ladies. In another window were Lord Eaglesholme and Sir William Percival, also deeply engaged in serious conversation. These various personages were made aware of Amherst's presence by Sir Cable, who, after having stood opposite to his son for several minutes, as if very much enjoying his confusion, at last exclaimed,

“Why, in the name of God, what can have come over the puppy, that he should stand in that manner staring and shaking like a man who has been keelhauled?—Why, Amy! what a devil's the matter with ye?”

“I beg your pardon, my dear father,” said he, advancing to embrace the Admiral, “I expected to have found you alone, and was naturally surprised, at first, on discovering that you had company with you.”

“Company?” said the Admiral archly,—“why aye, I have company with me, indeed. Mayhap

you may, and mayhap you may not know them, But if you do not," added he, with a significant leer, " why I can introduce ye.—Lord Eaglesholme, let me introduce my scapegrace of a son here.—This, Amy, is Lord Eaglesholme."

" I have already the honour of knowing Lord Eaglesholme," said Amherst, advancing with great warmth of manner and expression to his Lordship, who was much moved on seeing him ; " I have had the good fortune to experience too much of his Lordship's kindness and hospitality, ever to forget the obligations I owe him.—My Lord," said he, as they cordially shook hands, " I am delighted to see you so near Oakenwold Manor."

" Oh ho !" interrupted Sir Cable, " so you are old friends I perceive ;—well, I have lost my labour in being your master of ceremonies as to his Lordship. But here," turning to Miss Malcolm, whose agitation at the sight of Amherst was now becoming very great,—" here is a young lady of whom, at least, I presume, you will want some preliminary information ;—I'll bet a Spanish galleon against a Thames wherry, that you don't know who she is !"

" Make no rash wagers, father," said Amherst,

with a forced smile ; “ for you would lose as certainly in this case as you would had you betted in the other. It was impossible to live so long as I did under Lord Eaglesholme’s roof, without feeling the beauty and merit—I mean,” continued he, hesitating, as if he thought he had said too much—“ I—I—mean it was impossible to be so long at Eaglesholme Castle, without enjoying the honour of Miss Malcolm’s acquaintance.”

“ Miss Malcolm’s acquaintance !” —repeated the Admiral, with an air of triumph. “ There now, did not I tell you !—Well, how cursedly confident the puppy is after all—Miss Malcolm ! Come, come, give me your hand, ye ninny—give me your hand !” And then, with a great deal of mock ceremony and grimace, he led Amherst to the window where the young lady was seated, and began with great pomposity. “ This, Ma’am, is my son, Amherst Oakenwold, Esq., a damned, confident, hasty, good-for-nothing fellow, who ran away from his father, a quiet, easy-tempered, old sailor, because he wished to marry him to Miss Delassaux : —went off to Scotland with a rebellious old son of a gun of a shipmate of the old boy’s, and without

even asking his consent, was nearly marrying some bonny Scotch lassie, whom nobody knew anything about. And now, Sir!" turning to Amherst, " (why don't ye make a bow, and be damned t'ye.) And now, Sir, let me introduce you, not to Miss Malcolm, as you, in your ignorance and confidence, were disposed to call the lady, but to Miss Delassaux, only child and heiress of Sir Marmaduke Delassaux, of Delassaux and Brokenhurst, the rightful possessor of this noble mansion, these magnificent grounds, and these widely extended and fertile plains, lying so conveniently contiguous to Oakenwold Manor; and, besides all this, present heiress apparent of the domains of Eaglesholme, with the prospect (if Lord Eaglesholme does not prevent her, by having heirs of his own body) of being one day Countess of Eaglesholme in her own right!—Down upon your knees, you puppy, and see whether you can prevail upon the lady to bestow herself, and her estates, on such a jackanapes as yourself, unless, indeed, you mean to bolt off to Scotland again, as you did when I last made you the same proposal."

The Admiral's artillery being expended, he stood aloof to enjoy the effect of the broadside he

had poured out. His son, stupified with mingled astonishment and ecstasy, obeyed him mechanically, dropped upon his knees, and seizing Miss Delassaux's hand, he imprinted a thousand kisses upon it, and, as might be expected, gave way to an incoherent effusion of broken murmurs of delight and passion, responded to with a smile expressive of perfect happiness, and with all that ingenuousness, chastened by modesty, so strikingly characterizing the lovely and interesting Eliza.

CHAPTER XIV.

Muchos hay en el mundo que han llegado,
A' la engañosa alteza desta vida,
Que fortuna los ha siempre ayudado,
Y dadolos la mano á la subida ;
Para despues de haberlos levantado
Derribarlos con misera caida.

ERCILLA.

WHILST Amherst and his Eliza were giving way to those ecstatic emotions, occasioned by their being again so happily restored to each other, a step was heard. It was the lady we have hitherto known as Miss Delassaux who approached. She came sliding and smiling in with all the air of a woman of the highest fashion, appearing for a moment surprised to see so many people, and dropping a sort of general curtsey, rather to the walls of the apartment, than to the personages within them.

“ Sir Cable Oakenwold,” said she, “ this is an unexpected pleasure. I am overjoyed to see you once again at Brokenhurst Hall. Miss Oakenwold, I hope I see you perfectly well. I trust you have left all your darling little pets—your canaries—your piping-bulfinches—and your goldfishes in perfect health. Mr Oakenwold !” continued she, throwing a languishing glance towards Amherst, and walking up to the window, where he rose to acknowledge her, “ you have been a traveller since I had the happiness of seeing you ; indeed,” said she, with a half suppressed sigh, “ it is quite an age since I have had that pleasure—so long, in truth, that I own I feel quite as much fluttered, as if it were a new introduction. But,” continued she, without giving time for more than the common places of recognition from those she addressed, “ I see I have, indeed, some new acquaintances to make. This young lady—May I beg the honour of an introduction to her, Mr Oakenwold ?”

Amherst felt much embarrassed. Eliza grew pale and agitated. His presence of mind forsook him. He hesitated, and stammered out—

“ Miss Malcolm—I beg your pardon—a—a—
Miss Delassaux.”

“ Ha! ha! ha! what is the matter with you, Mr Oakenwold?” said the lady, mistaking his confusion. “ Well, ’tis no matter; Miss Malcolm. I hope we shall soon be better acquainted with each other; and, in the meanwhile, I beg to give you, as well as that gentleman,” bowing towards Lord Eaglesholme, (who, suffering under strong agitation, sat buried in an arm chair, as if wishing to escape observation,)—“ to give you my best welcome to this, my poor house. But, indeed, to any one introduced by our highly estimable friends of Oakenwold Manor, my welcome must ever be most cordial. Sir William Percival! I beg your pardon for not sooner observing you.—But why have we not some refreshment? Pray, do me the favour to ring the bell, Mr Oakenwold?”

Amherst rose to obey her, when she immediately placed herself in the chair he had occupied by the fair Eliza, and began surveying her with an overwhelming steadiness of stare.

No servant answered the summons. These poor people of both sexes were all huddled toge-

ther in a knot in the hall, eagerly discussing their hopes and fears, as to their chance of receiving long arrears' of wages, which Mr Hawkins, more attentive to his own interest than to theirs, had permitted to run up, by feeding them with promises he never meant to fulfil.

A noise was heard among them. Mr Hawkins himself had arrived, and they immediately opened on him like a hungry pack of hounds, when the huntsman enters the kennel about feeding-time. But the important little man brushed them from him. He had something more interesting to think of than any concerns of theirs. One of the bailiffs, whom he had left in charge of matters while he went home for the night, had just told him, that his execution was interrupted by the authority of Sir William Percival! Alarmed by this intelligence, he hastened up stairs.

After two or three preparatory hems, he entered the drawing-room, with that vulgarly presuming, yet somewhat subdued air, a low-bred man cannot avoid wearing, when in the company of persons of superior rank and birth, even when he wishes to be important in their eyes. He made two or three awkward bows in succession, with his

turnip-head, and thin face, thrust forwards with a motion more resembling the butting of a ram, than any thing else.

“ Your humble servant, Sir Cable Oakenwold! —Gentlemen all!—Sir William Percival, your very humble servant!—Ladies!—Miss Delas-saux!—Madam! your most obedient.—A pleasant morning, Gentlemen.—Any news with you, Sir Cable?”

The old Admiral answered him with a humph, and continued his quarter-deck. The rest of the party stared at him, but seemed not to consider it necessary to rise from their seats, or, indeed, hardly to notice him. His mistress alone eyed him with a countenance suddenly inflamed, as if by no very gentle feeling, and addressing him in the haughtiest tone and manner she could possibly assume:—

“ Mr Hawkins,” cried she, “ what important affair may I ask has procured me a visit from you at this time? You see I am engaged with guests.—I cannot go into any kind of business at present. I beg you will retire, therefore, and wait below in the steward’s room, until my leisure enables me to order your attendance.”

The little man's rage was painted in glowing colours on his countenance—even his nose seemed on fire.

“Madam—Miss Delassaux,” said he, “I assure you, Ma'am, I didn't come here upon your affairs—not, by no manner of means. It was a regard for my own interest that led me hither!”

“Aye, aye, little Goosequill,” muttered the Admiral between his teeth, making a momentary halt in the middle of his quarter-deck, and eyeing Hawkins askance over his left shoulder; “aye, aye—right there,—you seldom go anywhere, without that loadstone to attract you. I'll answer for it, you will follow it down, you know where, some of these days.”

“Admiral,” grinned the little man of parchment, with a forced laugh,—“Sir Cable Oakenwold, you are pleased to be merry.—One of your excellent jokes, Sir Cable.—Your jokes are always excellent.—Always cut two ways, like a double-bladed penknife.”

“Sir!” interrupted his mistress, in a louder tone; “I desire,—I insist, Mr Hawkins, that, whatever your business may be, you will postpone it until a more favourable opportunity.—I must,

and will be mistress of my own house. Leave the room, therefore, Sir, directly."

"Madam!" answered the little man, with increased anger, which he had great difficulty in keeping within the bounds of decency, "I cannot leave the room: My business is with Sir William Percival;—my affairs are too important to be delayed—I cannot leave the room."

"I protest, Sir," said the lady, rising from her chair, and ringing the bell, "I will order my servants to turn you out, if no gentleman here will rid me of so impudent an intruder."

This hint was too evidently directed to Amherst to be mistaken, nor could his gallantry permit him to see any lady so beset.

"Mr Hawkins," said he, advancing sternly to the scrivener, "Miss Delassaux must be obeyed.—I insist upon your quitting the room directly, or, by Heaven, Sir"—

"Sir William Percival!" cried Hawkins, in great alarm, "I demand your protection; I demand your authority, Sir, to prevent a breach of the peace against a man in his own house."

"Your own house!" exclaimed one or two

voices, the loudest of which was that of his indignant mistress.

“ Yes ! my own house,” replied he trembling, and gradually edging towards a large chair, which he very adroitly placed between him and Amherst ; “ I say again, my own house. This lady knows, that she some time ago made it over to me in consideration of certain monies lent ;—and, farther, the estates are mine ;—and yet, after all these securities, my fidelity and generosity have made me a severe loser by the vast sums I have advanced to save the credit of the family.”

“ To save the credit of the family, you rascal,” cried the Admiral, in a fury,—“ you have done your best to ruin them !—O ! that I had you at the gangway !”

“ Softly, gentlemen !” cried the venerable Sir William, advancing between them and Hawkins,—“ allow me to speak to him ;” then addressing the steward, who had once been a poor boy in his kitchen, and who had afterwards been educated by him, and fitted to fill the situation of a clerk, “ Hawkins,” said he in an authoritative tone, “ I shall protect you from violence, but, at the same time, I must protect this company from inso-

lence and intrusion. I ask you where you found such enormous sums of money, as could enable you to advance an equivalent for the magnificent domains, and extensive estates of Brokenhurst?—you who, a very few years ago, had nothing.”

Hawkins was appalled. He hesitated—hemmed,—and either was, or affected to be troubled with something in his throat, that choked his utterance.

“ Really Sir William,—in good truth, Sir,—ahem!—why you know, Sir,—I have been an industrious pains-taking plodding man, Sir,—I have toiled late and early, Sir,—the pen has never been out of my hand, or from behind my ear ——.”

“ Pshaw, Sir,” exclaimed Sir William,—“ such an explanation as this will never do : were there no stronger bar to your demands on the estates of Brokenhurst, I, for one, should insist upon a most scrupulous examination of the documents, and proceedings, on which you have founded this pretended claim. But to cut matters short, I have to inform you, that if you really have lent money to that lady, you can have no recourse upon this house, and these estates, since neither of them ever were her property.”

The effect of this declaration it is impossible to describe. The astonishment it produced on the supposed mistress of Brokenhurst Hall, and her unworthy agent, was simultaneous, though we are condemned to describe its symptoms in each of them successively. The lady stared for a few moments at Sir William, as if she had not heard him properly.

“What is it that you say, Sir?” exclaimed she at length, utterly confounded,—“not my property!—this house not mine!—do I exist?—for as soon should I expect to find my very existence doubted, as to hear my right to these my patrimonial estates brought into a moment’s rational question; the only child of Sir Marmaduke Delassaux, of Delassaux and Brokenhurst,—the representative of blood as ancient, and as pure, as any this kingdom can boast!—Oh! ’tis some quibbling piece of merriment, and yet methinks,” added she, with considerable irritation,—“to a Lady of my birth and bearing, and in my own house, too, such boyish jests are more impertinent than amusing, and but ill befit the gravity of Sir William Percival.”

“Miss Delassaux never the owner of Broken-

hurst," cried Hawkins, with a sort of yell—"Phoh!—I beg your pardon, Sir William,—but it is impossible,—I never saw stronger tenures,—parchments as firm as a rock, Sir,—holding blanch of the Crown, for the payment of four pounds of white wax, never exacted now, but, in the days of Popery, burnt in candles before Thomas à Becket's shrine, on the eve of his festival, as a penitential offering in behalf of the king,—and perhaps, too, for one of the early Delassaux's, who was said to have had a hand in the death of the prelate. Dover Castle, under favour, Sir William, stands not on a foundation more sure or enduring."

"Sir," replied Sir William Percival, with dignity and determination, "I question not the stability of the rights of Miss Delassaux; they are, I believe, most unimpeachable; but, while it gives me very great pain to be compelled to communicate such cruel information to any one, I must tell that Lady that she is not the daughter of Sir Marmaduke Delassaux, that she is, in fact, not Miss Delassaux, and, consequently, that she has, innocently, I believe, been all along usurping the rights of another."

On hearing these words, the young lady, who was the subject of them, uttered a shriek which graduated into a momentary and hysterical laugh, and staggering back a few paces, she was only prevented from falling on the floor by the exertions of Amherst, who sprang forward to catch her. As for Hawkins, the intelligence seemed to produce upon him a temporary delirium. He rushed from behind the chair, his little scratch wig rising from his scalp, by the mere force of the muscles of his brow and temples, which were thrown rigidly upwards, by the horror and dismay that struck him, as Sir William pronounced these fatal words. With the most frantic gestures, he threw himself on his knees before him, embraced his legs with an energy that almost threw the old gentleman down, and exclaimed:—

“ Oh, my dear master ! oh, don't say so !—I'm dead !—ruined !—undone !—if you say so !—My all is gone !—my life !—my soul !—the fruits of all my industry !—of all my !—ugh !—what am I going to say ?—but I am mad,—stark mad !—dead, and damned, and ruined !—”

“ Unhand me, Hawkins ;” said Sir William,

with some anger, to this grovelling reptile; “ I cannot make things otherwise than they really are, and what I have said will soon be put beyond doubt, by proofs irresistible.”

Hawkins threw himself on the floor, and rolled about in absolute agony, like the clown in a pantomime. Meanwhile all the anxiety of the company was turned towards the Ex-Miss Delassaux, who was now in strong fits. Her maid was rung for,—and Amherst, and Lord Eaglesholme, who had also hastened to her assistance, carried her to her apartment.