

CHAPTER X.

Ya los vierades juntos, ya apartados
 Ora tienden el cuerpo, ora la embeben :
 Por un lado y por otro recatados
 Se inquietan, cercan, buscan, y remuevan,
 Tientan, vuelven, revuelven, y se apuntan,
 Y al cabo con gran impetu se juntan.

ERCILLA.

Lady Ran.—How fares my Lord ?

Lord Ran.—That it fares well, thanks to this gallant youth.

Douglas.

THIS last peal of thunder seemed to be the final effort of convulsed nature, and, soon afterwards, the violence of the storm began to abate. The pitchy clouds broke up, and although some of them, as they divided themselves off in rolling detachments, like the flying squadrons of a routed army, still gave forth occasional flashes, followed by peals of more distant thunder, the rain ceased, and the moon burst forth in short fits of splendour.

Amherst, tired of his confined abode, was gladly preparing to leave it, when he was alarmed by the distant report of three pistols following one another at intervals of some seconds. The heavy sound of rapid steps advancing made him creep quickly from the sod-hut, but he hastily concealed himself among the furze, until he should judge from the event of the propriety of showing himself. He had little time to consider, for, by the partial light of the moon, he observed a tall man, wrapped up in a foreign cloak, running along the brink of the cliff towards the spot where he lay. He was pursued by two others, whose plaids bespoke them to be Highlanders. The foremost of the pursuers, as he ran, discharged a pistol after the fugitive without effect.

The tall man seemed now to be satisfied that he had no longer cause to fear the fire-arms of his enemies; for having already nearly reached the hillock, he halted, drew a long rapier from his side, and, twining the skirts of his cloak round his left arm, placed himself in a firm posture of defence, as if to await their onset. He judged rightly, for he had no sooner done this, than the broad claymores of the two Highlanders were seen

glittering over their heads in the moonlight, and they rushed on to the attack. Amherst hesitated no longer. He sprang from his concealment, armed with his *couteau-de-chasse*, and his unexpected appearance put a momentary stop to the battle. The assailants halted, as if they had seen an apparition, and the tall man in the cloak was staggered for an instant, from a doubt whether the new combatant was about to range himself on his side, or on that of his enemies. But seeing that Amherst proceeded instantly to attack one of the Highlanders, he rushed on against the other, and a desperate conflict ensued.

The weapons of the parties whom accident had thus brought into alliance were but ill adapted for encountering the weight of the tranchant claymore. Amherst's *couteau-de-chasse*, in particular, was but as a flimsy foil before it, and, notwithstanding his bravery and address, he was compelled to act very circumspectly, and very much on the defensive, to wait his opportunity, and to trust to his adversary exhausting his strength a little. The tall man in the cloak made a better fight of it. He seemed to be a most expert and practised swordsman, and by keeping his

point always opposed to his enemy, and using his guards with great adroitness, he not only perfectly protected himself, but, by repeated thrusts, wounded his opponent, and compelled him to give ground. Amherst, meanwhile, was too much occupied with his man to notice what the other combatants were doing. Though he fought with great determination, and with a perfect coolness, that enabled him frequently to wound his adversary with the edge of his weapon, yet he only exasperated him, without doing him any very material injury. He found it necessary to husband his strength and his skill, and to do so effectually, he was compelled to give way. But he retreated step by step, and readily seizing every advantage, he was enabled every now and then to inflict sudden and severe cuts upon the Highlander, when he was least prepared for them. The fury of the Celt grew into madness; he rained down his blows without judgment, and without effect, and Amherst, watching a favourable occasion, laid such a slash over his sword-arm, that he dashed the claymore from his adversary's hand, though his own weapon was shivered in the rude-

ness of the shock, by striking against the basket-hilt.

Like some furious beast of prey, who, when brought to bay by the hunter, puts forth all his fierceness and his strength, the Highlander gnashing his teeth, rushed upon Amherst, who was now unarmed, except that he still held the hilt, and a few inches of the blade, of his *couteau-de-chasse*. With one hand he seized Amherst by the throat, and with the other, drawing his dirk, he made an attempt to plunge it into the side of the young Englishman, who, grasping his enemy in his turn, warded the blow with the remains of his broken weapon, and then, fastening his fingers round the Highlander's wrist, endeavoured to prevent him from repeating it. The Highlander was a powerful man, and the struggle was desperate. They tugged, and toiled, and twisted their bodies, without either of them gaining any advantage. By this time they had got to some distance from the other combatants. All was silent around them; for the very demons of the elements appeared to have ceased their warfare, as if to watch the event of that which these mortals were waging. They uttered not a word, and the quick panting

of their breath, the stamping of their feet as they shifted their ground, and the grinding of their set teeth, were the only sounds to be heard. At length, as they wrestled, a furze-bush, or some such impediment, tripped up Amherst's feet; but both were so locked together, that they fell as one man to the earth.

Still they were twined together, still they held each other fast as with the gripe of death, and the murderous strife was continued on the ground with renewed strength. They heaved, they arched their backs, they rolled over and over, sometimes the one, and sometimes the other being uppermost, without either ever losing his vice-like grasp. The very brink of the precipice was within a yard of them, and one turn more must hurl both into eternity. Amherst, engaged as he was in this mortal combat, saw the fearful void yawning below him. Their faces were almost in contact,—the eyes of the Highlander glared on his like those of a tiger,—and, reckless of himself, he seemed bent on working the destruction of both, rather than not insure that of him with whom he was contending. Amherst already felt as if both were precipitated.

He was summoning all his strength into one last desperate effort, when, feeling the grasp of his opponent suddenly slacken, he instantly shook himself free from his lifeless arm. Looking upwards, he perceived the tall man in the cloak standing over him. His ready rapier had buried itself in the heart of the ruffian. With one blow of his foot, the stranger hurled the semi-inanimate wretch over the cliff.

Amherst instinctively thrust his nails into the soil; he felt as if still linked to the body. A hollow plunge, heard faintly from the vast depth below, told that it had found a watery bier, and every fibre shrank at the sullen sound.

Faint and breathless, he raised himself in a sitting posture, and his unknown ally, who seemed scarcely less toil-spent, seated himself opposite to him. They gazed at each other for some time before either could find breath to speak; and, as the stranger opened his cloak to take out a richly embroidered handkerchief to wipe his forehead, some precious jewels on his neck and breast sparkled in the moon-beams, their lustre being increased by the black dress he wore. A broad Spanish hat, looped up with diamonds, and

ornamented with a black plume, lay on the ground beside him. Amherst had now time to survey his person at leisure, and the moon shining bright, and full upon him, enabled him to subject it to the minutest scrutiny.

It has been already said that his height was remarkable ; but it was not vulgar height, for his whole appearance had in it something peculiarly dignified and commanding. Even as he sat thus lowly on the ground, his person betrayed a certain nobleness. He appeared to be past the prime of life ; but some secret sorrow seemed to have done more work upon him than age, and few grey locks had as yet mingled among the raven ringlets hanging amply over his neck and shoulders. His features were upon the great scale, but of the most perfect mould ; and his black eyes were full and speaking. The paleness of thought was over his countenance, and a certain cloud that sat on his brow added to the lofty seriousness of his expression.

The stranger, who had considered Amherst with as much attention as Amherst had considered him, was the first to break silence.

“ Young gentleman,” said he with a high but

courteous air, “ by what name must I know my preserver? By what name am I to salute him, but for whose timely and almost miraculous assistance, I must have had my safety set at the hazard of such odds, and whose young scion of life was so nearly sacrificed, to save a worthless, if not a withered stump? He that asks in gratitude is Lord Eaglesholme.”

“ My Lord,” said Amherst, “ whatever aid I may have rendered you at the beginning of this combat, has been more than compensated by what you have just done for me. I still shudder to think that, but for your prompt rescue, I should have accompanied the savage ruffian in his fall from this frightful precipice. The danger I have escaped was so dreadful, and so imminent, that I hardly yet feel in safety. Amherst Oakenwold shall never cease to remember this awful night, whilst the life he owes to Lord Eaglesholme shall endure.”

“ Oakenwold !” said his Lordship, as if endeavouring to recollect. “ Oakenwold? I had a friend of that name. He was a gallant officer of the British navy, and, I think, of a Kent-

ish family ;—may I ask whether you bear any relation to such a person ?”

“ I do, my Lord,” said Amherst ; “ my father, Sir Cable Oakenwold, is an admiral.”

“ The same, the very same, I have no doubt,” said Lord Eaglesholme ; “ though he was too young for that rank when I knew him. I rejoice,” said he, rising with eagerness to embrace Amherst, who, in his turn, also sprang to his feet,—“ I rejoice to find my deliverer identified with the son of my old friend. But say, how came you on this coast,—and, above all, how came you, stranger as you are, to be on these wilds in such a night, and at such an hour ?”

Amherst did not choose to make his father’s friend acquainted with the cause of his voyage to Scotland. He therefore gave his Lordship the same account of it he had given to Sir Alisander, namely, that he and his friend, Captain Cleaver, had come on an idle trip of pleasure. He then narrated shortly how they had become the inmates of Sanderson Mains, and hastily ran over the circumstances of his evening walk, until the moment of his rising in Lord Eaglesholme’s defence, sinking for the present, however, the strange ap-

pearance of the mysterious being who rode past him as it were on the lightning's wing.

His Lordship listened to him with attention, and when he had finished, "Mr Oakenwold," said he, "the castle you saw is that of Eaglesholme, where I hope you will put it in my power to prove to you, that I am not ungrateful for the signal assistance you have this night rendered me. I trust you will at all times consider it as your home, when you are pleased to make it so. At the same time, Sir, you must excuse me for being plain with you; my habits are retired, and were it not that I consider myself as in a great measure indebted to you for my life, to save which you have ventured yours in so gallant a manner, even the circumstance of your being the son of my friend would not have been sufficient passport into my mansion. Do not suppose that I say this to heighten the value of your admission there; I merely wish to inform you that I can see no one else, not even the companion of your voyage hither. My gates however, shall always be open to you, and if you are not afraid of the dulness of an old castle, and the want of all society save that of its master, it would give me pleasure to see

you make it your home. I dare say," said he, holding out his hand, and pressing that of Amherst with warmth, whilst something like a smile played over a countenance that seemed rarely to be softened by such a light,—“ I dare say you will have the good-nature to forgive me, should you sometimes be permitted to entertain yourself ; for I am not always master of my spirits, and I hope you will have charity enough to impute any strange behaviour of mine to any motives rather than ingratitude or unkindness. At present, I presume, you return to Sanderson Mains to relieve the anxiety of its inhabitants, naturally excited by your unlooked-for absence in such a stormy night. To-morrow, or as soon afterwards as you may find it convenient, it will give me pleasure to see you.”

Amherst warmly thanked Lord Eaglesholme for his invitation, of which he assured him his own inclination would not permit him to delay availing himself. He again repeated, that he should ever consider himself as indebted to his Lordship for his life, and many expressions of kindness and friendship passed between them.

As they were thus loitering along together in

conversation, the moon being now again obscured by a new veil of dense clouds, Amherst stumbled over something he immediately discovered to be a dead body.

“ ’Tis the corpse of the assassin who fell before my sword,” said Lord Eaglesholme ; “ ’twere better that he should sink or swim with his companion in iniquity.” So saying, he dragged the corpse to the edge of the cliff, and hurled it also over the precipice into the sea.

“ I must now see you safe,” said his Lordship. “ Follow me, I will be your guide ;” and with an alertness and decision of step that surprised Amherst, he moved across the pathless downs with as little hesitation as if it had been broad day, and with a speed that he had difficulty in keeping up with.

They had crossed about three-fourths of these wastes, when they descried two lights dancing at some distance before them. They soon discovered that they proceeded from lanthorns, carried by two men, and as they drew nearer, Amherst recognised the voice of his trusty servant O’Gollochar. He communicated this circumstance to Lord Eaglesholme, who immediately halted, seiz-

ed Amherst again by the hand, squeezed it with warmth, and hastily saying, "Remember, we part to meet soon again," he waited not for a reply, but darted off, and was lost amid the shades of night, before Amherst had time to recollect himself.

The lights now approached, and Amherst perceived that it was the old butler, Mr Duncan Brouster, who accompanied his servant. They were in earnest and loud conversation, and poor O'Gollochar was blubbering like an overgrown school-boy.

"Och! to go for to lose such a kind-hearted master, aye, and before I had well found him, as a body may say. Och! he was so good, and so kind to me! Sure he was an angel of light, and what had he to do with walking in such a dark and rumbunctious night as this, amongst fairies, and witches, and divils of all sorts and sizes, upon them wild and dreary downs. Och! then if he should be drowned! but no matter whether he be or not, I'll sarch all the shore for him, an I should be crossed by all the witches and divils in Scotland."

"For God's sake, dinna crack sae muckle

about thae kind o' cattle, Maister O'Gollochar," said Duncan Brouster, who seemed by his gait to have been doing the honours of the cellar to the Irishman, and afterwards to have taken an extra cup, to wind his courage up to the undertaking of assisting to search for Amherst. "Troth it's a sad pity, a very sad pity, that he should ha'e been drooned, as drooned he nae doot is. It's a very sad pity," said he, forgetting his own injunction to his companion, "that sic a noble gentleman should be food for the water-kelpies. I abhor and abominate a' sorts o' evil spirits; and, aboon a' thing, I abhor them that take pleeshur in swatterin in water, and swallowin their wames wi' sic unwholesome drink. Was I a kelpie, my certie! my element should be brandy toddy! But, believe me, it's a' nonsense to think o' seekin' for him the night, though, to be sure, they do say that a blue fire burns ower the place whare a drowned man's carcage is lyin' at the bottom."

Duncan Brouster had scarcely said this, when the ray from his lanthorn chancing to glance on Amherst's face as he was advancing, threw a palid gleam across it. The butler being already satis-

fied, in his own mind, that the Englishman had perished in the sea, had no doubt that what he saw was a spirit. He roared out, "Gude Heavens! A ghaist! a ghaist!" and staggering backwards in deadly fear upon O'Gollochar, he threw him down, and both rolled on the ground together. One of the lanthorns was extinguished, and the other on the eve of going out, had not Amherst immediately caught it up.

O'Gollochar knew his master, and actually danced like a madman for joy to see him in safety, but it required some time and argument to convince the terrified butler that he was really flesh and blood. At length his fears were overcome, and they began to move homewards. Amherst gave his servant the general outline of his night's adventures, slightly touching on the reappearance of the mysterious female dwarf. The old butler started. The very name of Lord Eaglesholme, and the allusion to the dwarf, seemed instantly to drive the fumes of the liquor from his brain. He stood quaking for a minute before he spoke, and then shook his head with a most portentous look.

"Lord, defend me frae siccan company in a

mirk night !” said he—“ Nae wonder than the storm raged, fan him and *the dwarfie carline o’ the cove* ware abroad ! Ise warrant they had been haudin some bonny rig thegither, gude keep us a’ !—wha kens but it was twa deevils the warlock lord was fightin’ wi’.—Troth, Maister Aikenwalls, it wad ha’e been better to ha’e lettin’ them tak their wull o’ him.—My certie, ye maun ha’e a stout heart to crack wi’ sic a billy as him in sic a night, on the tap o’ a craig, wi’ the sea ragin’ below, and the thunder rattlin’ owerhead.—Ugh ! I wuss we war weel hame ! Come awa’, sirs, come awa’.”

Amherst was very desirous to learn from Duncan, what he should have particularly apprehended from his meeting with Lord Eaglesholme; and, above all, he wished to have his curiosity satisfied about *the dwarfie carline o’ the cove*, of whose existence Duncan seemed to be already aware, but afraid to talk of either.

“ Ware I sittin’ ower a bowl o’ het toddy,” said he, in an under tone of voice, and drawing nearer to Amherst, that he might be the better heard by him; “ ware I in a easy arm-chair by the fireside, wi’ the candles lighted, an’ a wec

drap punch afore me, I might tell ye a' I ken'd, an' a' I ha'e heard ; but," continued he, looking fearfully around him, " this is nae place to crack about witches and warlocks."

On arriving at Sanderson Mains, Amherst found the whole house in a state of alarm, in consequence of his absence. Detachments of servants had been dispatched with lights in all directions, some of whom having already returned without any tidings of him, the general anxiety had been increased. His appearance gave universal joy. He found Cleaver and Sir Alisander occupying the arm-chairs on opposite sides of the fire, sipping their punch after supper, or, as Cleaver would have called it, putting on their night-caps. They had rung fifty times to make inquiry about him, and though it was late, Lady Sanderson was still sitting up with them, anxious to learn tidings of her young guest, before she should retire for the night.

They listened to his strange adventures with wonder. Amherst now succeeded in procuring that information from Sir Alisander about Lord Eaglesholme, which he had failed to elicit from his servant. He learned that his Lordship lived

in so retired a manner, and was so addicted to study, and otherwise so particular in his habits, that he was universally believed by the country people to be a necromancer, and that a residence for several years in foreign countries, and the circumstance of his having a number of foreign domestics, had contributed to augment this suspicion against him. For his part, he knew nothing of him, and from his having been himself so much of an invalid since his Lordship settled on his paternal estate in this country, he had, in fact, never seen him. But from all he had heard, he believed him to be a very good man, on whose mind some early and secret grief sat brooding, and that his melancholy, his abstraction, and his retirement, were to be attributed to some such unknown cause.

Amherst's curiosity was strongly excited by all he had seen and heard of this nobleman, and he resolved, if possible, to gratify it immediately, by going to Eaglesholme Castle the very next day.

As to *the dwarfie carline o' the cove*, though Sir Alisander had frequently heard of her appearance, he had hitherto believed that she was

no reality, but the creature of superstitious imagination. He therefore expressed very great surprise, when he heard Amherst mention that he had actually seen her that night on the downs, and still more when Cleaver and he joined in describing the mysterious appearances she had made on the night of their landing in Scotland. The Baronet could no longer doubt the truth of her existence, but he felt himself altogether unable to conjecture who or what she might be.