

CHAPTER XI.

It is a reverend thing to see an ancient castle not in decay, or to see a fair timber tree sound and perfect ; how much more to behold an ancient noble family, which hath stood against the waves and weathers of time ?

LORD BACON.

There are millions of truths that a man is not concerned to know ; as whether Roger Bacon was a mathematician or a magician.

LOCKE.

AMHERST was so full of his visit to Eaglesholme Castle, that, notwithstanding the harassing events of the preceding night, he was earlier astir than usual. He communicated his intentions to Cleaver, and he took an opportunity, during breakfast, to inform Lady Sanderson of the invitation he had received from his father's old friend ; and having strongly expressed the sense he entertained of the hospitality of Sanderson Mains, and charged her with similar compliments to Sir Ali-

sander, and with assurances that he would take an early opportunity of returning to thank him in person, he took his leave.

After giving a few hasty orders to his servant, he set out with Cleaver, who, taking his gun, walked with him a little way, that they might arrange their future plans together. Amherst determined to regulate the length of his stay at Eaglesholme by circumstances. Cleaver resolved to sojourn in the comfortable quarters he at present occupied, where he found himself very much at ease, and where he was a great favourite with both his host and hostess. In the event of Amherst's stay at Eaglesholme being longer than he at present anticipated, Cleaver said he might probably make a trip to a large neighbouring seaport, to visit his old shipmate Maccauley, stationed there on the revenue service. But he promised to return to Sanderson Mains to meet Amherst, who, on his part, resolved to devote some days to the good Sir Alisander, before bidding a final adieu to the neighbourhood.

The friends parted on reaching the shores of the lake, Cleaver returning along its reedy margin, with the hope of shooting wild-ducks, whilst

Amherst followed a grassy road that ran skirting it in an opposite direction towards the woods of Eaglesholme. These he now saw, rising before him over the outline of that abrupt termination of the elevated downs, whence he had enjoyed so charming a prospect the previous evening, and which now intervened between him, and the bay where the castle was situated.

The road soon brought him to an old, and somewhat dilapidated gateway, consisting of two gigantic square pillars, which, from their magnitude, might have been those of Hercules. An enormous rusty iron gate stretched across the broad space between the pillars, over which were the fragments of an iron eagle, in a soaring attitude, with the motto, "*Ad solem tendo.*" The gate was locked; but the remains of steps in the high wall enabled Amherst to scale it without difficulty, when he found himself in a labyrinth of wood, where trees of all kinds, but chiefly oaks and pines, of immense growth, produced an impervious leafy canopy overhead, whilst the ground between their stems was filled with almost impenetrable thickets of undergrowth. Even the avenue running from the old gate through this

wilderness was considerably overgrown ; but it was still sufficiently obvious to preclude the chance of his losing his way.

The ground to the right sloped gently towards the lake, and, as he proceeded, he began to have occasional peeps of it through glades of rough old pasture, opening widely in the woods. To the left these openings showed considerable sweeps of the neglected lawn, stretching up the side of the hill between masses of embowering trees. The whole wore the appearance of having been given up to the uncontested dominion of the wild animals. Herds of fallow-deer were seen feeding in the more open grounds ; he disturbed hundreds of hares too ; and his path through the thickets was frequently crossed by the roebuck, that stood to gaze at him for a moment before it plunged into the brake.

As he proceeded, the woods became thinner, and at length the trees began to straggle off into the park, forming fine foregrounds to the view of the interior of the bay, the peninsula, and the castle now appearing, backed by a grand amphitheatre of elevated grounds, rising in sloping pastures, richly, though irregularly diversified with

groups and masses of trees. Amherst, who was an enthusiast in his admiration of scenery, stood for a moment enraptured; and as he wandered on towards the neck of the peninsula, he was still more enchanted with all around him.

Having passed under the old trees of the rookery, he approached the worm-eaten draw-bridge, which he crossed to the first gateway. Here he was met by an old gate, formed of strong upright and transverse bars of iron, of immense proportions. A small iron chain hung dangling from a little slender turret over the arch of the gateway, where it communicated with a large bell, suspended under the open work of a surmounting coronet, very delicately carved in stone. Over the gateway was sculptured the eagle in flight, with the motto, as before, of "*Ad solem tendo.*"

Amherst pulled the chain, and the deep sound of the bell broke upon the silence that reigned around the walls, and, vibrating for some time, died away without any one appearing. But, as he was about to repeat the summons, a man advanced from within, habited in a blue cloak, and bearing in one hand a long cane, with a round head, and in the other a massive key. He stop-

ped within a yard or two of the gate, and, eyeing Amherst through the bars with a heavy apathetical countenance, seemed by his looks to inquire what the stranger wanted, before he thought it necessary to give him entrance. Amherst demanded if his Lord was at home ; but as the man did not give any reply, and appeared to be going away without answering, it occurred to him that he must be one of the foreigners of whom Sir Alexander had spoken. He, therefore, repeated his question in French, when the porter, who was in fact a Swiss, immediately turned round, and his leaden features relaxing into a grin, opened a mouth from ear to ear, and readily replied to him in a patois of the same language, that, if Monsieur would have the goodness to wait, he would go and ask Mr Robertson, the house steward ; and then, begging to have his name, he waddled away.

Amherst had not waited long when the porter again showed himself, accompanied by a tall, thin, old man, of very respectable appearance, clothed in black, his shrunk shanks covered with black silk stockings, and his shoes trimly brushed, and ornamented with huge silver buckles. His

head was partially covered with a few straggling grey hairs, and he wore those which could be collected behind in a black silk bag. He walked feebly, but erectly, assisting his steps with a long white rod. He ordered the porter in French to unlock the gate, and, bowing respectfully to Amherst as he entered, ushered him onwards in silence to the inner gateway.

Amherst was struck with the great strength of the masonry around him. Ivy, of very old growth, had climbed the walls to a great height, and festooned many of the loop-hole windows above. This seemed to have been planted by nature ; but art also had done something, for roses, and numerous creeping plants, had been introduced, and trained to intertwine their shoots with those naturally growing there. Indeed every thing within showed an attention to order and neatness, very different from the neglect he had observed in his way through the park.

Having entered the inner yard, the slow steps of his guide gave Amherst time to survey the architecture of its irregular quadrangle. The most prominent feature was a large square tower, that seemed to be the oldest part of the castle,

and was probably the ancient keep, round which the other buildings had grown, as the family waxed in greatness and consequence. It was now built up in one angle of the court, and identified in some measure with the masses to which it was linked. The windows in the various parts of the castle were ornamented with whimsical scrolls and carved work, and marked with coronets, crests, initials, cyphers, and dates, denoting the persons who had built them, and the period of their erection. The great door was of thick oaken timbers, studded with large iron nails, and over it were cut the full arms, supporters, coronet, and crest, of the ancient and noble family of Eaglesholme.

Robertson now showed the way up ten or twelve winding steps into a hall, the proportions of which astonished Amherst the more, from the meanness of the approach to it. It seemed to be eighty or ninety feet long, thirty or forty broad, and at least as much in height. A gloomy light streamed in upon it from three long narrow windows at the farther end. The roof was of black oaken beams, ingeniously jointed and arched, and their ends carved into rude and frowning heads. The floor

was paved with large flags. Half-way down its length there was an immense fire-place, having its yawning chimney thrown forwards over several feet of the pavement, so as to form a canopy capable of covering a large company. The voracious grate, calculated to swallow up a waggon-load of fuel at one meal, blazed and crackled with heaps of dried billets, throwing a gleam around, that was brilliantly reflected from a number of stars and martial trophies on the walls, of musquetoons, pistols, pikes, broadswords, battle-axes, and all manner of weapons, many of them of great antiquity. Some of the rarer specimens of those warlike tools, as well as a number of coats and shirts of mail, with helmets, headpieces, targets, &c. were hung in the more conspicuous places. On the side of the hall, opposite to the fire-place, stood three figures of horses, backed by three effigies of knights in complete armour, with shields braced, and lances in the rest. Numerous tattered and moth-eaten banners hung from on high, quivering with every undulation of air. At the farther end of the hall, about a fourth part of the length of the pavement was raised a few inches higher

than the rest. On this platform, in the days of feudalism, the table of the chief was laid transversely, where he and his heads of families were served with the best fare, whilst a long table, running at right angles to it down the hall, was occupied by the retainers, down to the lowest clansman. Though many years had now passed away since this custom was practised by the noble family of Eaglesholme, yet the chief's table, and several chairs of different forms, but all heavily carved in massive oak, and of such weight as almost to deprive them of any title to the name of moveables, still remained. To add to the general effect, a gallery for musicians, the front of which was also of deeply-carved black oak, ran along over the entrance doorway, from one corner quite to the other, and in more modern times, a magnificent organ had been placed in the centre of it.

Amherst was so struck with the grandeur of this hall, that he stopped to contemplate it with admiration, apologizing to the steward for doing so. Robertson bowed in silence; but a smile of conscious pride mantling in his face, showed how much he was gratified by the stranger's astonish-

ment, and he waited patiently for him, with evident satisfaction. He then ushered him through a side door into a gallery sixty or seventy feet in length. This was a library, where many thousand volumes filled the black oak book-shelves, and where the curious in bibliography might have revelled for months together, amongst tall copies, princeps editions, unique Caxtons, and illuminated manuscripts, all in superb old bindings. A number of old-fashioned tables stood in this library, and globes, maps, and various descriptions of mathematical and philosophical instruments, were carelessly disposed in different parts of it.

The steward, having led Amherst through the whole length of this room, opened a door at the farther end of it, and showed him into an arched chamber of proportions considerably smaller than those of the preceding. There, in a red velvet cushioned arm-chair, at one end of a long table, covered with phials, jars, air-pumps, and electrifying machines, was seated Lord Eaglesholme.

He wore a large Neapolitan *vesta di camera* of flowered cinnamon-coloured silk, completely enveloping his person, and on his head was a black

velvet cap, his hair appearing in profusion from underneath it. His right elbow was resting on the table, and the right hand half supported and half covered one side of his face, whilst his left was stretched over the margin of a folio lying open before him, and his intelligent eyes, piercing through the veil of his hair, were earnestly directed towards its page. He was so much absorbed in what he was reading, that he neither heard the opening of the door, nor observed their entrance.

Robertson hesitated before he ventured to announce Amherst. "Mr Oakenwold, my Lord," said he at last. Lord Eaglesholme slowly lifted up his eyes without moving, as if he had not exactly comprehended the nature of the interruption, and as if his mind were still pursuing the thread of the subject in which he was engaged. They rested at last upon Amherst; a faint smile of recognition played for an instant over his countenance, and, rising from his chair, he advanced towards him with all the grace of an accomplished gentleman, shook him kindly by the hand, and welcomed him in the warmest manner to Eaglesholme, expressing his gratitude to him for having thus speedily performed his promise.

“ My Lord,” said Amherst, “ I fear I have unwittingly broken in upon your hours of study ; if so, I hope you will be so free as to command me away. I think,” continued he, pointing towards the library, “ I have already seen friends and acquaintances enough in the room I have just passed through, to be security for my good behaviour whilst under your roof, and who will always be ready to relieve you from my company when it threatens to be troublesome. Perhaps I had better retire now ? I well know the torture of being interrupted when engaged with a favourite author.”

Lord Eaglesholme seemed pleased. “ Though I confess myself much addicted to sedentary study,” replied he, “ I pique myself too much upon good breeding, to be guilty of so great a rudeness as to turn you out of my room, the instant you have stepped over my threshold. No, Mr Oakenwold, I am desirous to improve the acquaintance we so strangely formed last night, and must therefore devote at least the first day of your visit to the enjoyment of your society. Hereafter, I conceive, I shall be doing you, as well as myself, a favour, by placing both at ease,

and by permitting you to follow your own inclinations, whilst I indulge myself in my usual habits. Our pursuits are probably very different. You know I warned you of this unsociability of mine."

" Pardon me, my Lord," said Amherst, " though a young student, I have hitherto been a very zealous one, and I should consider it a very fortunate circumstance in my life, were I to have an useful direction given to my studies by so able and agreeable a preceptor as your Lordship."

" And I," replied Lord Eaglesholme, who took what Amherst said as mere words of course, " I would have great pleasure in assisting you, were I not afraid that the pupil might be already too learned for the master."

This last speech of Lord Eaglesholme was entirely complimentary. He supposed, that however far the young man might have gone in mere classical reading, he could possess nothing more than such a smattering of science as a college course was capable of bestowing. The conversation, however, having naturally enough turned on such subjects, he was perfectly surprised with the depth of Amherst's knowledge in the higher

departments of the philosophy both of matter and mind. The discovery delighted him. But, yesterday morning, the very idea of a young man, and a stranger, becoming the inmate of his castle, even for a day, would have been most distressing to him, and he would have done all in his power to have averted so great an evil. Even after the strange occurrences of last night, he had felt that accident had brought him into a dilemma, and he could not help cherishing a secret hope, that Amherst might hear a rumour of the recluse and studious life he led, and that, afraid of being devoured by ennui at Eaglesholme, he might have been induced to satisfy himself with sacrificing a day or two there to politeness. He had, however, given Robertson the necessary orders for Mr Oakenwold's reception, should he find it convenient to come. But when he actually saw him in his study, although his natural feelings, his gratitude, and his good breeding, led him to receive him warmly, he yet experienced a secret twinge of disappointment, to find that he had been so eager to avail himself of the invitation, though it was in some degree counterbalanced by an at-

tendant hope that his visit was early, because it was to be of short duration.

But now he viewed Amherst with different eyes. Intense study was the only resource he had against that melancholy which preyed upon his mind, and mental occupation the only means he could employ to banish those recollections that nourished it. Though his early education had been liberal, it was not until after he had retired to the castle of his ancestors, that he had begun to take to his present philosophical pursuits, with that ardour with which he now followed them. He, who alone, and in the country, attempts to find out the path through the intricate mazes of science, where he is perplexed at every turning by contrariety of opinion, can make but slow progress, and must often be led astray by those false and dazzling meteors, which bewilder instead of illuminating the path. He becomes himself a discoverer ; nay, perhaps, the individual who discovered the way at first, had, in many particulars, a less embarrassing labour.

Lord Eaglesholme had long been sensible of this. But his objections to quitting his retreat were too strong to allow him to go to drink at the

general fountain of human knowledge, to mix again in society, to know how far science had proceeded in its march; and his repugnance to admitting a stranger to his privacy prevented him from procuring a companion, whose fresh acquaintance with the facts and doctrines already considered as established, might supply his own deficiency, and afford him a stable foundation for building future theory and experiment. In the short conversation he had with Amherst, he saw that he was just such a person. He already felt warmly towards him, as being in a great measure the preserver of his life at the risk of his own. He liked his open countenance, his ingenuous and unaffected manners; and if his mind was not already altogether made up to his being a guest at Eaglesholme for months to come, he was at least gratified to find, that his stay for a few weeks, if it should even last so long, might be suffered, and could give him little interruption, nay, might even be the means of removing some of those difficulties, which had hitherto encumbered his progress in his favourite studies. It was therefore with much more cordiality, that, after a long conversation, and as he rang the bell

for Robertson to show Amherst to his apartment, he again shook him by the hand, and expressed his hope that he would find it convenient and agreeable to make his stay as long as his other arrangements would admit of.

The apartments Amherst was shown into looked into the great central court. They exhibited sufficient signs of ancient grandeur. The bed had a superb canopy attached to the ceiling, whence the rich, though tarnished crimson damask curtains descended over it. The walls of both rooms were hung with tapestry that had once been fine, but the figures were so darkened by age, as to make it now difficult to discover what had been the original design. The chairs, tables, mirrors, cabinets, and other pieces of furniture, were of a taste and age corresponding to that of the bed. Amherst found O'Gollochar in waiting, attended by another person habited as a footman, who immediately left the room along with Robertson.

O'Gollochar listened till he heard their footsteps quit the gallery, before he ventured to address Amherst.

“Och, master dear!” said he, with a look of

extreme misery ; “ this is grappling with the very divil himself, to come into the very castle of the ould warlock, who can whistle Satan and all his invisible world upon us in the turning up of a potato-shaw. Sure your Honour doesn't mané in arnest to stay ; for, if you sleep here, the not an eye will you close all night for dæmons and cacathumpions, I'll engage.”

“ Why should I fear sleeping ?” said Amherst. “ If Lord Eaglesholme has all the power you suppose, I hope he will have the hospitality to exert it to insure our sleeping the sounder. I am now on a visit here for some days.”

O'Gollochar was silenced ; but his was the silence of deep disappointment and dismay. He groaned, threw up his eyes, shrugged his shoulders, and looked so forlorn whilst he assisted Amherst to dress, that the latter could hardly keep his gravity. His compassion, however, induced him to pour a few words of consolatory reasoning upon the perturbed mind of his domestic, but evidently without effect.

A loud bell rang within the castle, and immediately afterwards steps were heard coming along the gallery. They were those of Robertson and

the same man whom Amherst had found in his room. The former came to conduct him to Lord Eaglesholme, whilst the latter seemed to have returned for the purpose of waiting on O'Gollochar.

Robertson, who still maintained his silence, showed Amherst down into the great hall, where he was met by Lord Eaglesholme. His Lordship was now habited in a black Spanish dress, resembling that he wore the evening before, and admirably adapted to display his tall figure and noble port. He seemed, indeed, to be formed by nature to move beneath the majestic roof he was then walking under.

“ Mr Oakenwold,” said his Lordship, “ I have still a duty to perform ; I mean that of introducing you to the ladies.”

Amherst was surprised ; but instantly recollecting the figure he had seen in the gardens the night before, he bowed, and waited in suspense for an explanation.

“ I must now,” continued Lord Eaglesholme, “ introduce you to my niece, and a friend of hers, who has been for many years her preceptress. These form my whole family. My niece, Eliza

Malcolm, is the orphan child of a beloved sister who died abroad. You will find that her education has not been neglected. Thanks to Madame Bossanville, she is neither ignorant of books, nor of those accomplishments which form the amusement as well as the ornament of her sex. As she has lived from her infancy to the present moment in this solitude, she is little versed in what is the most useful of all knowledge, though the most dangerous in the acquirement; I mean," added he with a sigh, "the practical knowledge of the world."

Some melancholy reflections seemed here to cross his mind. He took out his handkerchief, and, turning hastily from Amherst, clapped his hand over his brow, and walked a few hurried steps down the hall. He returned more composed.

"This way, Mr Oakenwold," said he, motioning towards a door leading off into a suite of rooms opposite to [that containing the library; "we shall find my niece in the drawing-room. I thought it necessary to prepare you for seeing a girl who has hitherto met with no one in her

own rank of life but her uncle and Madame Bos-
sanville.”

Amherst's curiosity was excited to the highest
pitch by what had fallen from his noble host, and
he hastened to follow him.