

CHAPTER XIII.

Bid me discourse. I will delight thine ear,
 Or like a fairy trip upon the green ;
 Or like a nymph with bright and flowing hair
 Dance on the sands, and yet no footing seen.

SHAKESPEARE'S *Songs.*

Seule de la nature elle a su le langage
 Elle embellit son art, elle en changea les lois ;
 L'esprit, le sentiment, le gout fut son partage ;
 L'amour fut dans ses yeux, et parla par sa voix.

VOLTAIRE.

AMHERST descended as soon as he was dressed. When he had reached the hall, his feet somehow or other inclined to carry him towards the drawing-room. But, reflecting that the apartment was more particularly appropriated to Miss Malcolm and her friend, Madame Bossanville, delicacy forbade him to intrude upon them at so early an hour on so short an acquaintance, and he checked his steps. He looked at the door leading to it with a longing eye, however. It

was unfastened, and even an inch or two ajar, as if inviting him to enter. He thought of the delights of the previous evening, and why the recollection of them should have made him sigh it is not easy to conceive, but sigh he certainly did. He then thought of turning his steps towards the library; but he felt as if there was a fascination in the spot, and he could not leave it.

“Pshaw!” said he, “I have no head for reading this morning; I’ll walk here till somebody appears to announce breakfast.”

He took a single turn in the hall—he tried to interest himself with its grandeur, and with the curiosities it contained; but the hall and its ornaments had lost their relish for him. He now loitered up and down, altogether regardless of what had so powerfully arrested his attention but the day before. His whole soul was in the drawing-room. Again he stopped, almost unconsciously, to contemplate the door that led to it; it moved—it was gently opened to its full width, and Miss Malcolm, dressed in a hat and mantle, as if prepared for a walk, came tripping forth in all the blushing loveliness of Aurora herself. She seemed at first to hesitate for a moment, but it

was only for a moment, for immediately afterwards she came smiling towards Amherst, and exchanged the compliments and inquiries of the morning with him, in a manner at once modest, easy, artless, and kind. Amherst's heart expanded at the sight of her, like the disk of the sun-flower when it opens its bosom to the first ray of the morning; the vapours which had chilled it fled at her approach, and his eyes sparkled with a joy he had no desire to conceal. He inquired for Lord Eaglesholme.

“ I am just going to see how my uncle is,” said she with an air of seriousness. “ He does not always sleep well, and when he happens to be agitated, as he was last night, he sometimes ——” Here she paused, as if she suspected that she might be saying too much about him to a stranger. “ But,” added she, “ if I should find you here when I return, Mr Oakenwold, I hope I shall have it in my power to tell you that he is well.”

So saying, she curtsied and moved towards the door leading to the library, her affection for her uncle manifesting itself in her very steps, for, though so far from his apartment, she already

prepared herself, by moving on tiptoe, for approaching his bed with the least possible noise, so as not to disturb him.

Amherst looked after her with rapture, and her image continued to fill his soul, even when she had disappeared. "How amiable," thought he, "that anxiety for her uncle ! What a blessing is it for him to have a comforting angel like this to pour balm into his wounds !" He then thought of the sudden pause she had made when talking about him. He coupled her words with the circumstance of Lord Eaglesholme having hurried out of the room the previous night, and with that of his servant having seen him crossing the courtyard ; and recollecting his own rencontre with him on the cliffs, he could not doubt that she meant to have added, that he sometimes spent the night in the open air. His thoughts were deeply occupied with this mysterious conduct of his host, when he heard the fairy tread of Miss Malcolm, who again appeared advancing towards him on tiptoe.

"He still sleeps, Mr Oakenwold," said she in a whisper ; "I kissed his brow, yet he stirred not ; I trust he will be quite well at breakfast."

Then assuming a gayer air, “ Will you walk this morning ?” said she. “ Madame Bossanville and I are going into the garden, shall I show you my flowers ?”

Amherst gladly accepted so agreeable an invitation ; and his heart bounding with pleasure, he glided after Miss Malcolm through the chamber which propriety had formerly made him consider as sacred. There he found Madame Bossanville, who laid down her book, and rose to receive him with kind greetings. Amherst opened the glass-door for the ladies, and Eliza giving her arm with great solicitude to her friend, whose steps were feeble and infirm, the trio issued upon the terrace.

The morning was fresh and beautiful. All nature was in unison with Amherst’s feelings ; and all his thoughts and expressions partook of the stirring ecstasy of his heart. The fair Eliza listened to him with delight, as he expatiated on the varied beauties of the scenery, on the calm serenity of the lake, and the richness of the surrounding woods and green lawns, diversifying the shores of the bay, as the views opened on them in succession, through the evergreens of the gardens.

She seemed to enjoy something greatly beyond the mere satisfaction, arising from the praise bestowed on the spot she loved so well ; much was perhaps owing to the person who approved, that his approval was so very sweet to her. She led him from one point to another, until Madame Bossanville, perceiving that her young friend's motions were fettered by care for her, proposed to sit down on a bench to rest for a while, until Miss Malcolm should make the tour of the gardens with Mr Oakenwold.

Eager as Eliza was to exhibit all their beauties to Amherst, her apprehension lest Madame Bossanville's proposal should have arisen from any sudden increase of suffering, instantly robbed her countenance of its smiles, and she hastily inquired with serious earnestness if any thing was the matter.

“ Nothing, indeed, my love,” said Madame Bossanville ; “ at least nothing more than usual ; but I should wish Mr Oakenwold to see all these walks before breakfast, which he cannot possibly do if condemned to my crawling pace. Besides, you know, I am partial to this seat, and generally rest a while here.”

“ I know you are particularly fond of this seat,” said Miss Malcolm with apparent relief. “ Come, then, Mr Oakenwold, we shall soon be back.” And tripping off light as a zephyr, Amherst bounded after her.

Miss Malcolm stopped for a few moments at every spot and every object that had ever given pleasure to herself. She pointed out their several charms in animated language, and waited his reply, as if she wished to estimate the value of her own judgment by the test of that he should pronounce. Each particular scene, every sheltered nook, every favourite point of view, or plant, or flower, was shown to him in turn ; and as he was far from feeling any inclination to be fastidious at that instant, all Miss Malcolm’s admiration was re-echoed with interest by the enthusiastic Amherst. Every thing in succession yielded delight to their happy and congenial minds.

“ I can’t tell how it is, Mr Oakenwold,” said the artless girl ; “ but I feel as if every thing had new beauties for me this morning. The sun looks so smiling, and the lake is so peaceful ; the very water-fowl seem to have more than usual enjoyment in their pure element ; see how the light

glances from their white wings as they soar. How bright the reflection of their fair bosoms as they rest on the liquid mirror ! and how the water sparkles as they disturb its placid surface by gently dipping into it as they fly !—How often have I rambled round these terrace-walks, yet never before have I seen nature under circumstances so happy or effects so lovely !”

“ I feel all that you express, Miss Malcolm, and more than I can myself express,” said Amherst, gazing on her with rapture ; “ my feelings are more poignantly exquisite at this moment than any I ever before experienced. But my heart tells me that it is your presence, and your enthusiastic love of nature, that augments my present ecstasy, by harmonizing with it, and by bestowing additional charms on every thing around me.”

Miss Malcolm blushed and was silent ; she hastily walked on towards a mount near the end of the promontory, whence they enjoyed a view of the castle.

“ If you are an amateur in drawing, Mr Oakwold,” said she, “ here is a fine subject for your pencil.”

Amherst confessed that he was much attached to that amusement.

“Is not this a noble composition?” continued she—“the towers and battlements of the old chateau, stretching across in broad masses, backed by those groupes of ancient trees, and those beautiful swelling distances and softly tinted woods. The blue waters of the lake, seen trembling on either side of it through the tall intervening evergreens, and, to complete the picture, these grand and singularly twisted pines shooting up from this mass of rich foliage, and these groupes of holly-hocks and other broad-leaved plants, wildly disposed among them,—is not the whole charming?”

“It is indeed magnificent,” said Amherst; “and you describe its features with so much animation, that you cannot have neglected to transfer it to your portfolio. May I hope to be permitted to see it?”

“Oh, I am but a novice in the art, Mr Oakenwold; but you shall see all my attempts, if you will condescend to look at them. I shall benefit by your remarks, and perhaps you will be good-natured enough to give me some lessons. It

will be quite delightful to sketch with a companion."

Amherst admired her perfect innocence. "Though I shall prove but a wretched instructor," said he, "the pleasure of having such a pupil is too great a temptation for me not to make the attempt. What would I not attempt, indeed, that would procure me the enjoyment of Miss Malcolm's conversation?"

"Well," said Eliza, blushing, "I shall keep you to your promise, and some time, when you are quite disengaged, I shall claim your escort into the chace, and benefit by your taste in selecting a subject for my first lesson. But we must hasten to join my dear Madame Bossanville; I have shamefully forgotten her in my own happiness, and have left her longer alone than I should have done." And saying so, she again tripped away towards that part of the gardens where they had left her aged friend.

They had no sooner entered the castle, than Miss Malcolm again went on tiptoe to her uncle's apartment. She soon returned walking with him hand in hand. Her countenance glowed with smiles, that were but coldly reflected from the

surface of his, like the sun-beam from a frozen lake, and deep melancholy was underneath. His Lordship's salutations and inquiries were kind, though his words were delivered with a pensive manner, and in a languid tone, as if with considerable effort. Miss Malcolm's conversation, as they sat down to breakfast, was playful, and evidently intended to amuse her uncle. Amherst saw her object, and joined his endeavours to hers. The young lady no sooner perceived that he was really successful in his attempts to engage him, than she became silent; her looks were anxiously divided between Amherst and her uncle, and her eyes glistened with pleasure, as she observed Lord Eaglesholme's grief-worn expression gradually yielding to the interest he felt in those topics Amherst already knew how to select, as most attractive to him. Such was the effect of his endeavours, that before the meal was at an end, his Lordship's gloom seemed to have been in a great measure dispelled.

As the ladies rose from table, and as Amherst was opening the door for them, he reminded Miss Malcolm of their proposed drawing excursion,

for which the day seemed to be peculiarly favourable.

“ Oh ! Mr Oakenwold,” replied she in a whisper, but with the utmost energy of manner, “ another time, if you please. Leave not my uncle whilst you see that he seems to enjoy your company. You have done him more good than I can describe. Even I, much as he loves me, could not have made him forget his miseries, as you have done this morning. Indeed,” added she, with a sigh, whilst the tears trembled in her eyes, “ indeed, I sometimes think that the sight of me, somehow or other, augments his woe. Good-bye, till dinner. I feel I sacrifice much in resigning your society so long ; but what will I not sacrifice for so good an uncle ? Leave him not, I beseech you.”

Amherst hastily took her hand, and sealed a promise upon it. She had acknowledged that she was making a sacrifice, and that confession was like the music of Heaven to his ears.

“ Yes, sweet angel !” said he in soliloquy, as he turned back into the room ; “ yes, I will do thy bidding. To win thy favour I would tax

my talents, my ingenuity, and my patience to the utmost stretch. Were your uncle more stern than Pluto himself, I could bend myself to please him."