

CHAPTER XVI.

Oh! sacred fire, that burnest mightily
In living breasts, ykindled first above
Amongst th' eternal spheres and lamping sky,
And thence poured into men, which men call love ;
Not that same which doth base affections move
In brutish mindes, and filthy lust inflame,
But that sweet fit, that does true beauty love,
And choseth virtue for his dearest dame.

SPENCER.

THEY had not sat above an hour in conversation, when they were gratified by a message from Miss Malcolm, inviting them to the drawing-room. Thither they immediately went, and had the happiness to find her already perfectly recovered, fatigue being now the only remaining effect of the accident. Her uncle's inquiries were earnest and affectionate, and he was not satisfied until he again heard the particulars from her own mouth. When she spoke of the apparition, and

eagerly begged of him to explain it, he assumed the same serious and thoughtful aspect he had shown to Amherst, met her inquiries as he had done his, and at last adroitly got rid of the subject, by adverting to Amherst's share in the adventure. This, indeed, had the desired effect. Eliza immediately became eloquent; she dwelt on the circumstances with minute detail, and gave many particulars which Amherst's modesty had induced him to keep back; and, as if the tale had been endless, she again and again reverted to it. Amherst treasured up all she said, and all she looked, and he retired to bed in the delightful certainty, that his ardent, but as yet secret passion, was requited, though unconsciously, by the lovely object of it.

Next morning he arose from a sleepless pillow. The events of the preceding day, and the anticipation of future days of bliss, had kept his eyes unclosed. He hastily dressed himself, and made his way into the gardens, where he was now in the daily habit of enjoying the society of Miss Malcolm, during her morning walk. There he met her in all her glowing beauty,—her lovely face lighted up by the angelic smile of innocence.

After he had eagerly satisfied himself, by earnest inquiries, that she had suffered nothing from the accident, he led her to a seat in a bower at the further end of the garden. There Amherst dared to tell his tender tale; and there the soft confusion, and the blushing confessions of Eliza, made him the happiest of human beings.

When their first raptures were over, and they began to talk with a little more rationality, than such a subject usually permits, they agreed upon the propriety of immediately acquainting Lord Eaglesholme with their mutual attachment; and Amherst resolved to demand an audience of him that very day.

But he was disappointed. Eliza had no sooner returned to her apartment, than her uncle entered it in a riding-dress. After making the tenderest inquiries about her health, he told her he was called to visit some upland estates, where a failure of the crops had brought distress upon the tenantry.

“Extent of territory, my dear Eliza,” said he, “has extensive duties attached to it. I have confidence in the heart, as well as in the head of Marshall, my worthy steward, who is al-

ways alive to the interests of the poor, as well as to mine ; but in a case like the present, I should not feel justified in my own mind, if I did not examine into their miseries in person. I conceive they have a right to demand this of me, for whose ancestors theirs have often bled, and but for whose hardy deeds, I perhaps should not now have possessed the glens and mountains peopled by their descendants. The length of my stay at the hunting-lodge I cannot at present determine ; it will depend on the nature and extent of the affairs I must look into ; but you, who know my habitual unwillingness to mingle in the vulgar business of men, will easily imagine, that I shall not unnecessarily delay my return. I need not tell you and Madame Bossanville, to endeavour to entertain Mr Oakenwold to the best of your power, that he may not find the castle dull in my absence, as the occupation he had with me must necessarily cease until my return, that we may both pursue it together. His society is delightful, and has become so essential to me, that I know not what I should do if he were to go away ; I hope, therefore, I shall find him here on my return."

Eliza's face was overspread with blushes, as her uncle delivered, what she felt to be so unnecessary an injunction. She stammered out, that, with the assistance of Madame Bossanville, she would do the best she could to make up to Amherst for her uncle's absence. Lord Eaglesholme, who naturally enough imputed her apparent confusion to regret at the suddenness of his departure, warmly embraced her. As they passed through the great hall, Amherst appeared, and Lord Eaglesholme shortly explained to him the necessity of his absence, and the nature of his journey; and after squeezing him kindly by the hand, and begging of him to consider himself as master of his house till his return, when he hoped to find him still his guest, he descended to the court. Marshall was already on horseback, and Lord Eaglesholme, mounting a very fine animal, with all the grace of an accomplished cavalier, rode out, followed by several attendants.

The sound of their horses' feet, echoing through the arched gateways, had hardly died away, when the eyes of Amherst and Eliza met each other, and they mutually read each other's

thoughts. All chance of an immediate explanation with Lord Eaglesholme was at an end. But neither of them felt disappointed, for, from the growing regard his Lordship had manifested towards Amherst, it was certain that there could be no objection on his part to their union.

Much as Amherst valued and respected Lord Eaglesholme, he felt little ennui during his absence, nor was he at all distressed to learn, after he had been gone about a fortnight, that circumstances compelled him to prolong his stay for another week. Before her acquaintance with Amherst, Miss Malcolm could not have believed that she could have so easily supported her uncle's absence for so long a period. But she now knew the superior force of love.

Madame Bossanville, though advanced in years, was not blind to what neither of them had the power to conceal. Ladies, particularly at her time of life, are generally pretty sharp-sighted in such matters. She spoke to her young friend on the subject, with all the tender affection of the fondest mother, and Miss Malcolm had too much candour, not to lay open her heart to the dear guardian of her youth, nor did

she hesitate to tell her of the explanation that had taken place between her and Amherst. Her disclosure was met by the fullest approbation of their mutual attachment.

Madame Bossanville's whole happiness was now centered in her pupil. She was overjoyed to find, in the solitude to which her uncle's retired habits had condemned her, that a young man so well principled, so accomplished, so agreeable as Amherst, should have been sent, as it were, by Heaven, to discover so rare and sweet a flower, in the lonely wilderness where it grew. She reflected that Lord Eaglesholme could not live for ever; that he alone of all his family remained, like the venerable tower of some goodly edifice, once large and magnificent, but now ruined and dilapidated; and that, when time should have levelled his noble form with the dust, her dear Eliza must be left without a protector. She had often had many anxious thoughts on this subject, and many a tear had glistened in her mild eye, and moistened her furrowed cheek, when at times she had gazed in silent contemplation on the innocent and beloved object of all her care, who, ignorant of the cause of her weeping, in-

creased it by her fond efforts to soothe what she supposed to be some secret affliction. She firmly believed, that much of Lord Eaglesholme's melancholy and internal suffering, arose from such reflections. As she naturally enough imagined, that he was equally quick-sighted with herself, in perceiving the beginning and growth of the mutual passion between the young people, and as she knew that he entertained the highest opinion of Mr Oakenwold, she took it very naturally for granted, that much of that improvement she had observed in the ordinary state of his Lordship's spirits, since Amherst had been an inmate of the castle, was to be attributed, to his prospect of the future happiness of his beloved niece, being secured by so desirable a matrimonial connection. It cannot be matter of wonder then, that Madame Bossanville inwardly rejoiced that things were already matured ; nor is it surprising, that, far from throwing any obstacle in the way of the lovers, she should rather have given them all those opportunities of private conversation, which an attention to propriety permitted, and of which it was equally natural for the happy pair to avail

themselves, to the fullest extent of the licence she gave them.

It was not therefore to be imagined, that a visit Amherst proposed to make to his friends at Sanderson Mains, towards the conclusion of the third week of Lord Eaglesholme's absence, was owing to time hanging heavy with him in the old castle. The fact was, his conscience began to reproach him, that he had permitted so many days, nay, weeks to pass, without fulfilling his promise of going so short a distance to see Cleaver. And he even thought the kind Sir Alisander, and Lady Sanderson, might have reason to complain of so cold a return for their hospitality. Yet it required some exertion before he could think of a separation, for even a few hours, from the idol of his heart; and when he brought himself to mention the visit to her, her eyes told him that she suffered as much as he did in the sacrifice. But her uncle was expected at the castle on the evening of the ensuing day, when Amherst would find it still more difficult to get away. After much hesitation therefore, he at last resolved to go over to Sanderson Mains to dinner, and to return in the evening. The first parting of these

fond lovers, though for so short a time, was not effected without a considerable effort to both.

“ Do not go yet, dear Amherst ?” said Eliza tenderly ; “ it is but early. Come, make one circuit of the terrace garden with me ere you leave us. It were vain for me to go thither by myself, for, without you, my flowers would refuse to smile upon me, or to give forth their wonted fragrance.”

“ My beloved Eliza !” cried the impassioned Amherst, eagerly kissing her hand, as he gave her his arm to comply with her wishes, “ all nature would be a dull and dreary blank to me, were it not for the sunshine of your kind eyes, that throws a celestial light over every thing around them. Even the beauty of these gardens would be lost, were it not for your presence, which sheds the charms of paradise over their bowery terraces, and gay parterres. When I first beheld this spot, from yonder distant and elevated point, it was your figure, that, even then, gave the chief interest to it in my eyes. But little did I at that time guess, what powerful interest I should so soon feel, in the small white speck I then saw !”

“ And do you not remember,” said Eliza,

smiling artlessly in Amherst's face, "do you not remember, how much the beauties of these terraces, were enhanced to me by your presence, the very first morning we trod them together? What a glad walk was that for me! I had always considered myself the happiest of mortals before then; yet how much more touching have been my emotions of pleasure since I have known you! The small space of time, that has glided away since you first became my uncle's guest, now appears to me to have comprised my whole life; for the very remembrance of my former years of tame existence, has been obliterated by the exquisite delight, which has filled up the short period of our intercourse."

Having wandered round the garden, they sat down together on one of the seats, to listen to the song of a thrush.

"How sweetly that innocent bird pours forth his stream of melody, from the topmost spray of that tall tree!" cried Eliza, pointing to him; "I can actually perceive his little breast, thrilling with the efforts he makes, in modulating his melody."

"His mate is doubtless nestled in some of those

evergreens near him," replied Amherst. "It is for her that all these stirring notes of passionate love have utterance."

As the lovers sat observing him, a falcon came swooping down, neither of them could tell from whence, and striking his cruel talons, with inconceivable rapidity, into the unhappy warbler, bore him piteously off. Eliza shrieked, and Amherst shouted, with the hope of making the hawk drop his prey, but all in vain.

"Poor bird!" cried Eliza, bursting into tears at the spectacle. "How short lived was thy happiness!"

A shade of melancholy overspread her lovely brow, and she sat musing with an air of sadness.

"Be not so pensive, my love!" cried Amherst. "Let not this trifling incident break in on the calm delight we were indulging in. It can have no influence on us. You surely cannot suffer any thing like superstitious dread from such an accident?"

"No," replied Eliza, "it was but the reflections it awakened that disturbed me. I am almost ashamed to tell you what they were, lest you should think me silly for giving way to them.

—Yet why should I conceal even my weakness from you?—A transient thought flashed across me, that our present happiness might be more than Heaven can well permit to be enduring to mortals, and that it might be as short lived, as that of the poor bird we have this moment seen so cruelly destroyed. What will now become of his wretched mate? And what would become of me were you to be torn from me?”

“Dry your tears, my dearest, dearest Eliza,” exclaimed Amherst with great energy. “Let not any such gloomy forebodings disturb our present joy. Let not the heaven of your eyes be overcast, when the horizon of our fate is so bright and heart-cheering. Come my love, exert yourself to shake off such thoughts. Let me see you smile once more. Let us go in, and, ere I leave you, indulge me again with some of those sweet airs, I have so often importuned you to sing and play to me.”

Eliza yielded to her lover's wish, and being led back into the castle by him, she took her guitar, and they wiled away the time in singing together, till the advanced hour called on Amherst to depart for Sanderson Mains. Even then they lingered.

At length Eliza threw a shawl over her head, and went as far as the draw-bridge with him ; and when at last he tore himself from her, she stood gazing after him, until his form was lost within the shade of the distant trees ; and she returned into the castle, to pass the first few dull and irksome hours she had experienced, since Amherst had become an inmate of it. She tried to fix herself down to a book, but the effort was vain. She took up the guitar, which had so lately given pleasure to both her lover and herself ; but she could not find one note that was in harmony with her present feelings. All her little works had lost their relish for her ; nay, even the good Madame Bossanville's conversation was dry and uninteresting to her, and nothing could dispel the gloom of this wearisome evening.