DIGBY GRAND.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GUARDS.

An excellent dinner furnished at St. James's daily for those officers whose duty demands their presence there, is an economical substitute with her Majesty's Government for officers' barracks, allowances of coals, candles, &c., for all of which this very well-cooked repast is, by a pleasant fiction, supposed to be a complete equivalent. Eight o'clock strikes as two of the Blues come clinking up from the Horse Guards to join the mess. There is one vacant seat at the Colonel's disposal, and it is filled by a guest in plain clothes, of the mildest manners, and most unassuming deportment; and yet that quiet old grey-haired man is a major-general, who led three forlorn hopes in the Peninsula, and whose frame, scarred by sabre-cut and riddled by musket shot, has withered beneath the burning sun of our Indian peninsula. I face the Colonel, who takes the top of the table; and soon we are all engrossed in that lively and varied conversation so surely engendered by the good-fellowship of a mess. 'Grand! a glass of wine.' 'Maltby, have you been to Jem Burn's lately? They tell me he has got a black fellow that is to come out a wonder.' 'Hillingdon, do you like your box at the opera as well as the one we had last season?' 'How do you go to the Derby? Marigold can't win.' 'By the by, I saw a horse at Tattersall's yesterday that Maltby ought to buy.' 'Would he make a charger? Such is the recitative going on amongst the younger portion of the company; whilst, at the upper end of the table, the older officers are engaged in lively discussion on the merits of a newly-invented shell, and the general in describing, almost in a whisper, the particulars of an exploit from which he was taken away for dead, and for which he received 'the Bath.'

Presently the evening wears on, till, after a very temperate symposium (for we are on guard), the hoof of Napoleon's favorite charger, Marengo, set in gold, and converted into a gorgeous snuff box, makes its rounds. Ten o'clock strikes. The general departs; the officers betake themselves to their respective guards; and Colonel Grandison, in cloak and bear skin cap, proceeds to visit the different sentries.

Apollo does not always keep the bow strung to its utmost tension, nor are the clustering curls of the Guardsman—a crop farmed by Willis with such protective care—constantly concealed beneath the frowning terrors of his bear skin cap. The routine of military duty is pleasantly varied by the smiles of beauty, and wheeling evolutions in the field are gladly exchanged for the mazy dance. Ay, the lamented hero of a hundred fights, the iron warrior of the age, was himself a ball-goer and a ball-giver; nor was a card for Apsley House the least coveted invitation amongst the gaieties of the season. Such was 'the pasteboard' that greeted my eyes on a well-covered breakfast-table in my comfortable lodgings in Park Street, and for one of those magnificent fetes I attired my person with the utmost care some few evenings afterwards. From the sombre inside of a box upon wheels, from the dusky street and the dirty crowd, the transformation was instantaneous to a blaze of light illumining the splendors of the warrior's palace. It was dazzling, but delightful; and I felt within me the butterfly nature that experiences a keen sense of pleasure from the mere contemplation of a mob of well-dressed well-born men and beautiful women, met together avowedly for the purpose of appearing to the best advantage—always premising that the butterfly himself is part and parcel of such a pageant. Reflection is not a matter of hours in a dark room with a dry volume. Self-communing may take place in a second of time, surrounded by all that can enchant the eye and excite the feelings. In the short interval that elapsed between leaving my carriage and entering the ball-room, during the putting on of one kid glove, and the translation of my unassuming name from mouth to mouth as 'Mr. Grand,' 'Mr. Brand,' 'Mr. Lang,' until ushered into the presence of our noble host, under the aristocratic title of 'Mr Sam!'—in those few seconds I had time to say to myself, 'Digby, this is the life for you—this is the element in which you could really exist; for this he contented to sacrifice comfort, competence, friends, fortune, and self-respect.' I had not then applied the chemistry of experience to separate the metal from the alloy—the test of time to recognize the true from the counterfeit. I was satisfied to take things and people as they were, nor trouble myself about the period which, sooner or later, overtakes us all, when we are startled to discover that we have lavished all the worship of a lifetime upon idols—that we are lonely and helpless at our need—because, forsooth, 'our gods are clay.'

'What a pretty ball, my dear!' says fat Mrs. Frummet to shaky Mrs. Marabout.

'Well and Lady Jane is looking—quite shaky come with me. Mrs. Man-trap has asked to be introduced to you. A great compliment, by Jove! She is not much in my line; but I want to get away to go to Jem Burn's; so having performed one good action, I shall cut my stick with an easy conscience.' With these words, the good-natured peer brought me up to a particularly well-dressed lady, who, at the first glance, I could see was *creped*, 'flounced,' and 'got up,' in a manner which left no doubt of her aspirations after universal conquest. Notwithstanding a beautifully rounded figure—if it had a fault, somewhat too *embonpoint* for her height—notwithstanding a merry blue eye, a saucy smile, a skin like alabaster, and a profusion of showery light hair, my first impression of Mrs. Man-trap was disappointed at those charms of which I had heard so much; and I whispered to Maltby, as we approached, 'Not half so handsome as I expected, but devilish well-dressed.' Little did I suspect the fascination which she exercised over all that came within range of her artillery. How low, in my ignorance, did I estimate the power of the sorceress. But I was doomed, like many a wiser man, to fall down and worship where I came only to gaze and criticise. Gradually and insensibly the charm stole over me. Lights were glittering and fairy forms were flitting around; beauty and perfume steeped my outward senses in enjoyment; and the brazen refrain of some 'waltz of paradise' wafted ecstasy to my soul; and so I stood as one entranced, leaning over the chair in witch in muslin, and sustaining my part in a conversation that became every moment more dangerous. 'She don't care for him, the baby-bride!' said Mrs. Man-trap, speaking of a young couple who then passed us. 'Fresh from the nursery, and in all the first bloom of girlhood, depend upon it, she can spare no time from the world and its "engagements" to waste upon her husband. She has not yet learnt to feel, poor child! And if her mamma had told her to marry a bishop, she would have liked him just as well. A woman must have suffered, Mr. Grand, before she can really love; and then if her attachment is fixed upon a boy—on one younger than herself, who is, day by day, making good his footing in that world which is gliding from her, she is deserving of pity indeed;' and the blue eyes looked up into mine, with a soft, pleading expression that was irresistible, the saucy features changed for an instant, as a shadow of deep thought stole over her brow, investing her with that sorrowing, chastened beauty which the hand of Time reserves for those who are no longer in the early freshness of youth—rich amends for all the dimples and roses of laughing girlhood. What wonder that I forget our acquaintanceship was but of three-quarters of an hour!—that I gave myself up to the delirium intoxication of my position! and shutting my eyes resolutely to all I had heard of the lady herself—a runaway match, a divorced husband, a brother shot in a duel, and a father who died of a broken heart—that I talked sentiment deep and devoted as her own; and vowed, in the despicable hypocrisy of my heart, 'the love of a silly girl was unworthy of a man.' I spoke the last words in a somewhat louder tone than in which our whispered conversation had previously been carried on, so much so as to cause a lady who was passing to turn her head towards the impassioned speaker; with a thrill of shame and remorse amounting to agony, I recognized the massive black hair, the pale and care-worn features of Zoe de Grand-Martigny. Luckily, at that moment, I felt my arm touched by Colonel Grandison, who had come across the room to present me to his wife; and in the confusion of an introduction, my emotion escaped notice. I resolved, however, to seek an interview with Zoe immediately, to ascertain why she was in England, and express to her my unaltered feelings; for strange to say, that gentle, sorrowing face exercised the same power over me here in the midst of London's noblest revel, as beneath the silent moon and cloudless sky that look calmly down upon the turmoil of Via Ara.

From room to room I bowed, and glided and edged my way upon the fruitless search. I tore a countess's skirt, and trod upon a duke's toe. I passed Lady Overbearing, without the slightest token of recognition; my heart was with Zoe on the Lake of the Thousand Islands, and I toiled on in vain. Could it have been a vision sent to warn me, or was it my Canadian love thus assisting in the body of a London ball? I had pictured her to myself many thousand miles away; I had been haunted for months by that calm face, with the very same expression that it bore as she passed me a few minutes ago; the same, agonized look that had once seemed to bid me an eternal farewell; and now she was in the room, in the house, and I could not find her; it was heart-breaking—it was maddening. The lights danced around me, the gaudy crowds swam before my eyes, while ever and anon a strain of music from the dancing-room arose fitfully, like the wail of a lost spirit, or the mocking laugh of a demon, and combined to drive me well-nigh out of my senses. At length, in despair, I was compelled to seek the cooling atmosphere of the open street; and it was with a beating brain, and a sickness at my heart, that I staggered down those broad and stately steps which I had

centre, on which, as on a stage, the science and tactics of the ring were being displayed. On three sides of the lists were ranged the goodly company, none of the choicest, but numbering in their equivocal ranks some stalwart frames, and honest, courageous-looking countenances. On the fourth side a wooden bar stretched completely across the room, partitioning off an alcove at its extremity into a species of private box, where the hospitable 'Jem' received his more aristocratic visitors, and to which, as 'Corinthians,' or 'swells,' we were immediately admitted. Here we found Maltby completely in his element, an enormous cigar in his mouth, a comforting glass of brandy-and-water at his elbow, and his elaborate costume of white neck-cloth, studs, and ball-going suit of sable, covered by a rough and venerable pea-jacket. He was busily engaged in watching the preliminaries for an amicable set-to between the 'Battersea Snob,' and 'Nappy Jim,' or the 'Sprig of Seven Dials,' two dwarfish heroes, who were now exchanging a cordial shake of their gauntleted hands previous to an uncompromising encounter. 'Won't ye do as we do, gentlemen?' said our host, offering a tankard full of champagne and a box of tempting 'weeds.' We may as well wet our whistles, while these little chaps give and take a belly-full.' And as we lit our cigars, and prepared for a good view of the proceedings, we saw, by the manner in which pots of beer were set down untasted, and pipes removed from sundry queer-looking countenances, that each stunted Hercules was an object of intense interest and admiration to his own backers in that motley assemblage—a fine athletic exercise, it develops the muscular vigour, and, to a large extent, the mental resources, of the combatants, without any of the brutality, the butchery, of an actual prize-fight. It exhibits the same amount of activity, the same fine proportions and commanding attitudes, the same presence of mind in difficulties, the same generous forbearance to a fallen foe; nor does it disgust the eye and shock the feelings by the spectable of a brave man, reduced to helplessness through punishment and exhaustion, struggling gamely on, when overtaxed nature has cried, 'Enough!' It is, in short, a tournament in place of a combat *a l'ontrance*; and to those who owe to an affection for manly and athletic exercises, a rattling 'set-to' between two proficients cannot fail to be an interesting sight. There is much to be said for and against our national practice of prize-fighting. Its enemies do not hesitate to denominate it 'a brutal exhibition;' its friends and supporters seldom go further than admitting that it is 'a necessary evil;' but without entering upon the oft-repeated arguments, sustained by such expressions as 'Old English pluck,' 'British love of fair play,' 'cowardly recourse to the knife,' 'bull-dog courage,' and 'never hit a man when he's down,'—it must be acknowledged that the history of the P. R. records instances of gallantry and heroism that would not have disgraced the romantic chivalry of the middle ages. When the famous Jackson, 'champion' of England, breaking his leg in the second round of a prize-fight, requested to be allowed to sit down, and offered to finish the battle in a chair, he presented no bad specimen of that spirit which, under other circumstances, and with other opportunities, has made the name of Englishmen a type of all that is resolute, daring, and invincible. We have a high authority in the expression of Napoleon, that 'they never know when they are beaten.' But in the meantime, the 'Sprig of Seven Dials,' after a miraculous display of science, tactics, ingenuity, and activity—after many a sound thwack and lightning parry, at length finds his head under the griping arm of the 'Battersea Snob,' who rains down on that unprepossessing countenance a shower of blows that but for the muffle which covers his relentless knuckles, would present a ghastly spectacle indeed.

'The Sprig is in chancery,' says mine host, removing a cigar from his lips; 'walk round and show yourselves;' and the panting combatants, untwining from the close embrace of strife, proceed to regain their breath, as they strut round the arena, displaying to their admirers two very ugly faces, two wiry, muscular, and hardy-looking frames.

'A shower of browns,' the coppers mingled with silver from our private box, rewards their exertions; and a call of 'Time' from our landlord stimulates them to fresh activity, or, as Maltby says, putting on his hat to accompany us back to St. James' Street, 'They take a suck at the lemon, and at him again.'

We were in the act of leaving the door, when a tremendous 'hullabulloo,' and loud voices in angry altercation, caused us to return in time to see reduced to practice those principles of self defence which had lately been witnessed in theory. A tall, savage-looking negro was standing in the bar, and with all the volubility of his race when excited, was abusing all who came near him, and, as he dwelt upon some unintelligible grievance, working himself into a passion that was frightful to behold. At length, grinding his ivory teeth, while the whites of his eyes rolled with rage, he addressed an epithet to our hostess, a most respectable

more Sambo made his attack, butting with his woolly head at the active little combatant; and once more, foiled by science and agility, he measured his length upon the floor, this time in the immediate vicinity of the door, through which he found himself bundled into the street by the dexterous Buster, with no inclination to renew the contest, the waiter returning to his former employment of pot-filling and glass-wiping, as though such encounters were in the common course of his daily business.

Many a hearty laugh did we enjoy over the incident during our walk along the now silent and almost deserted streets, and we reached the broad steps and frowning portals of Crockford's pandemonium ere we had half done discussing the fighting qualities of the waiter and the speedy emancipation of the black. Good-natured Maltby would not suffer either of us to enter the club, insisting on our accompanying him home to his comfortable little batchelor's abode in Queen street. 'If Hillingdon once gets you in there,' said he to me, 'you will both begin "punting," sit up till five o'clock, lose three hundred a-piece, and go home disgusted. Much better come with me; I'll give you some supper, the best brew of cold punch in Europe, and then we'll smoke a cigar and have a good long talk about hunting.' We laughed heartily at our friend's devotion to his favorite pursuit, and with the easy readiness of youth to accept the first diversion that offers itself, we strolled on, arm-in-arm, to his abode, and finished the night in the manner he proposed.

CAAPTER V.

THE WORLD WE LIVE IN.

If ever man existed of whom it might be said 'that he knew the right, and yet the wrong pursued,' that man was Lord St. Heliers. With a high position, a large fortune, great abilities, a powerful fame and distinction enjoyed by few, and yet he made all these advantages subservient to the purposes of amusement and self-indulgence; whilst others of his own standing, far inferior in talents and acquirements, were taking 'the House' by storm with their eloquence, or convincing by the calm arguments of reason the unimpassioned judgments of 'Another Place,' St Heliers was betting at Newmarket or hunting at Melton; whilst the associates of his boyhood were winning fame and building reputations in the varied walks of public life, he was celebrated but for the cutting sarcasm of his witticisms, or the dissolute recklessness of his orgies. To the scoffer's requisites for living well, 'a bad heart and a good stomach,' he added a temper that nothing could ruffle, and nerves that no catastrophe could shake; perhaps a more good-natured man than St. Heliers never existed, nor one with a worse heart. He looked upon the world around him but to laugh at it, and measured by his own selfish guage, not only the conduct, but the very feelings of his neighbors. Did he see a kindly action, he set it down to the score of a far-seeing self-interest; did he hear a virtuous sentiment, he dubbed it a well-acted piece of consummate hypocricy. 'I never give any man credit for being a fool,'—such was one of his maxims; and he considered no piece of folly so glaring as that of inconveniencing self for the purpose of benefiting another. And yet was this man the most agreeable companion; in the language of the world, 'the best fellow' that was to be met with in the whole range of London society. His anecdotes were so well told, his satire of himself, as well as others—for he never spared his own failings—so lively and humorous, his dry, quaint manner so original, that as the ladies smiled at his repartees, and the clubs rang with his sallies, he was universally voted the most popular fellow in England. With his quick insight into character, and insatiable appetite for amusement, new faces and young companions were absolutely necessary; and from my first introduction to him, he 'took me up,' as people call it, and bestowed upon me the equivocal advantage of his intimacy. From my lively disposition and reckless habits he probably foresaw that I should contribute much to his amusement, so long as I could 'live the pace' with him; nor did he care that when ruin stared me in the face, I must eventually drop into the rear, beggared and dishonored through his friendship. What did it matter to him? There would be more young ones coming on.

Such was the man who invited me to accompany him to a dinner at Richmond, with a small party as he said, 'not composed entirely of men;' and as we were to go early, and enjoy the fine weather on the river during the afternoon, I had scarcely finished a late breakfast, consequent upon Maltby's prolonged hunting-lecture, ere it was time to adjourn to his lordship's house, whence we were to take our departure. A perfect little dwelling-place it was, too, with its front windows enjoying the comparatively fresh breeze from the park, and its hall opening into a quiet

in that attitude and costume; nor would the slyly humorous twinkle of his eye have been out of character with some sedate Mus[illegible] man, grave by profession and rollicking by nature. He received me with some joking allusion to military punctuality, and ran on in his dry, amusing manner into a most laughable account of the battalion to which I belonged, retiring in rather unseemly haste from a field-day, when caught in a tremendous shower of rain some days previously; and as he was quizzing the hurried retreat with an affectation of military language and detail, I interrupted with him 'Right in front, St. Heliers; you civilians can never understand these things—we marched into the barracks right in front.' 'So you did, my dear fellow,' was the instantaneous reply 'of course that was the reason that you were left behind;' and he went on with his description in a manner that brought tears of laughter into the eyes of his two listeners. Such readiness, such a happy knack of creating mirth, such a keen sense of the ludicrous, I never met in any one else. And yet this flow of wit, abundant as it was, never became obtrusive—never for an instant verged upon noise and vulgarity.

Nothing could go off better than did our dinner at Richmond. Lavish drove me down in one of St. Heliers' phaetons; he himself, Mdlle. de Rivolte (a danseuse of European celebrity), a much rouged German Countess, and another dandy completing the party, and travelling socially in a britska. I found my companion and charioteer a very agreeable, careless, good-humored fellow, and we struck up a great alliance, much cemented by sundry potations of champagne-cup, a beverage highly approved of by the fairer portion of the company. We agreed to dine early, so as to have the whole evening to enjoy upon the river, when the heat of the day was past. Jest, repartee, merriment, and broken English—the popping of corks, the ringing of glasses, half-blown roses, floods of sunshine, Venetian blinds, and cold currant-tart, made up a highly inspiriting scene. Mdlle. de Rivolte declared her determination to be sculled about upon the river by no one but *ce cher Grand*, an arrangement which St. Heliers did not seem entirely to approve, but which, with his usual imperturbable good humor, he immediately acceded to. Lavish got the others safely afloat in a punt, not without misgivings on the part of the German, whose unsteadiness was not wholly attributable to the water; and lighting our cigars, the two freights floated luxuriantly down the stream, as the last beams of sunset gilded the fresh green foliage of the merry month of May.

An occasional stroke of my sculls soon bore us far beyond the more tardy progression of the punt, and as I gazed at my companion, whose eyes sparkled and flushed with enjoyment of her holiday (for it was not an opera night), and whose tasteful dress, classical head and neck, silky dark hair, and long eyelashes, made amends for rather irregular features and a very inferior complexion, I could not help thinking that she was really fascinating, and that all this was uncommonly pleasant. 'You like England Mons. Grand,' she said, in her pretty broken English, after a long description of the sunny haunts she loved in la belle France; 'but you have nevare seen my contree,' and she warbled out the refrain of some melodious old French roman—

C'est l'esperance, qui fait l'avenir;
Sans esperance, mieux vaut, mieux vant mourir.

'Mieux vant, mieux vant Mourir,' she repeated, almost in a whisper, and relapsing into a dreamy reverie, she gazed downwards upon the water, as though its rippling current could bear her thoughts far, far away into the golden regions of the future. And here, thought I, is a women whose whole education has been for the public; whose appearance nightly on the stage is greeted by the applause of thousands; who cannot step into her carriage without hearing a passer-by exclaim, 'There goes Rivolte!' whose name is in every paper, as her picture is in every print-shop; who has achieved fame, for such she has been taught to consider this notoriety; who has arrived at the pinnacle of her ambition, and yet, in her woman's nature she pines for the domestic pleasure of a peaceful home; she anticipates the time when she shall retire from the public gaze, and hide her weary head beneath a husband's roof—probably when the time does come, it will bore her exceedingly, but that will be the fault of her previous education, not the law of her instinct. Meanwhile, she is melancholy and depressed; she must be consoled; and with this charitable view, I offered her those quiet and respectful attentions ever so much prized by a women who is not quite certain of her position, and doubly acceptable from their contrast to the obstrusive gallantries of which such women are generally the objects.

If you would make arrangements for a pic-nic, a fete champestre or any out-of-doors excursion in our native land, mind that, in addition to the corkscrew and the salt, you remember to take with you plenty of plaids, umbrellas, and Macintosh cloaks, for the three fine days of an English summer too surely end with their proverbial thunderstorm. We were far ahead of the party in