

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHOOTING PARTY.

It was now about the middle of August, and the excitement of our boat-race being over, London began to get insufferably hot, dusty, and stupid; everybody had left town, and the very waiters in the clubs were looking forward to their little excursion to the sea-side. St. Heliers had been absent on the Continent for the last six weeks, and was the person I should have least expected to meet, when, to my surprise, one hot and languid afternoon, as I sauntered listlessly down St. James's Street, I discovered that the only other individual occupying the pavement of that once-crowded resort was St. Heliers himself—on route, as he immediately informed me, for the best moor and the most comfortable shooting-lodge in the north of Scotland; 'where, Digby, my boy,' added the good-natured peer, 'if you will come down with me, I shall be happy to give you lots of grouse, an occasional deer, and a good deal of that old claret you so highly approve.'

I jumped at the offer, and having with little difficulty obtained sufficient leave from my military duties, that very night saw me, in company with my noble host, occupying a coupe of the London and North-Western Railway, and in defiance of directors' bye-laws, and forty-shilling penalties, filling it with the fumes of the choicest and most fragrant of cigars. And now, I think I cannot illustrate St. Heliers' views upon men and things, including women, better than by detailing a conversation which took place between us, as we sped along northward at the rate of forty miles an hour, and which he opened by an observation on which he called the mistaken notion of marrying at my time of life. 'What is this I hear, Digby,' said he, between the puffs of his cigar, 'about you and Miss Belmont? Of course you don't mean to marry her?'

'Well,' I replied, 'I certainly did think of it. But why not?'

'Why not!—why should you? Has she a very large fortune?'

'Not a sixpence, I believe, during her father's life,' I answered; 'but, of course, if I married, I should sell out, and go and live very quietly somewhere in the country.'

St. Heliers' face, at this proposal, would have been a picture.

'Have you considered how badly such a life would suit you?' he said, with more earnestness than he usually showed in any matters not bearing directly on himself; 'have you considered how very much disgusted you would be before two years had elapsed? Of course it is no business of mine, and I never like to bore people by giving them advice, but when I see an agreeable, pleasant fellow making, with his eyes shut, for the brink of a precipice, I cannot, in common charity, refrain from asking him if he knows where he is going.'

'Well,' I interposed, 'but I do not see the irrevocable step quite in that light.'

'That is because you do not in the least know what you are going to undertake. Trust me, I have seen a great deal of life, my dear Digby, and for a fellow like you, marriage on a small income would be worse than transportation. You like to come and dine with me, for instance, because I have a really good cook, and you meet a pleasant party, with whom you have lots of fun. Are you prepared to sit down—every day mind you—to a bad dinner, with the same individual, whatever may have occurred to damp the spirits or ruffle the good humor of that constant tete-a-tete companion? You hate being bothered about trifles, and looking into any items of expense—how shall you like to have to speak to the butcher about the mutton being too fat, and add up the grocer's book with a ready reckoner, to find out whether he has overcharged you for your tea? I conclude you are fond of what the lower orders call a day's pleasuring, as you are constant even at Hampton, and never

and disparaging ridicule, my better nature told me that St. Heliers was wrong. And yet—and yet, I pondered and hesitated, marriage was a serious undertaking; I would put it off a little; the present, as usual, was my first object. I had a delightful six weeks of sport to anticipate, and as many a wiser man has done on a far more important subject, I shrunk from coming to a final decision till 'some more convenient season.'

In the meantime, we soon arrived at St. Heliers' picturesque lodge in a far north, now, in these days of steam, brought within a comparatively easy distance of London, once a good fortnight's sail, and all rugged with its frothy precipices, boundless moors, and... as if civilization had never penetrated those fastnesses—the haunts of the black-cock and the mallard... the tameless eagle... met together to enjoy the best of both worlds and the most undisturbed... tramping and toiling... rugged mountain... assembled nightly... table. Jack Lavish... and the life and... Martingale, who could... Norfolk itself cannot... ever prepared to back... 'the grooves,' the... rod,' for any amount... credulous might choose... mean auxiliary on the... panion over the mahogany; and he, too, was one of the select assemblage. My kindest friend and favorite associate, the talented and romantic Hillingdon, who, with all his love of the picturesque and fondness for travel had never been in Scotland, was expected at the end of the week; and with such companions, Highland sport, Highland scenery, and, above all, Highland air, what more could mortal man desire? My first day's grouse-shooting, in company with our host himself, will serve as a specimen of the manner in which we passed our mornings; our evenings, alas! were devoted with excitement neither so healthy nor so harmless.

Everything St. Heliers did, whether in the way of sport, or in the graver matters of life, was done in the most efficient and, at the same time, in the most comfortable manner. He never began shooting till the 20th of August, instead of eagerly fore-stalling his sport on the 12th; consequently his birds were full-grown and fit to kill, and his annua 'bag' better than his neighbors'. Others, who could not boast half his bodily vigor, would toil and exhaust themselves before half the day was over, and return languid and weary, leaving the best part of their ground untouched. Not so, my lord; he snoot, as he said, 'for pleasure,' and a pleasant sight it was to see him mounted on the cleverest of shooting-ponies, whose back he never quitted till luncheon-time, knocking over his birds right and left from the saddle, with a merry smile and jovial remark, whilst ever and anon he refreshed himself from a huge wicker-covered jar of sherry-and-water, the element bearing small proportion to the wine, and carried by his 'gillie-Ganymede,' as he quaintly called a heather-legged retainer, told off for his especial duty, and strictly enjoined upon no account to quit for one moment his master's side. Two couple of highbred pointers, broke to hunt together without a mistake, obeyed the signals of a wary and silent keeper, to the woe of whose arm they instantaneously dropped; two more couple, straining in the leash, held by two active 'gillies,' were ready to relieve their companions; whilst, walking steadily in the rear, two lynx-eyed assistants were devoted solely to the duty of marking game and picking up dead birds. I walked upon St. Heliers' left, the position in which he always placed his friend, for as he once remarked, 'I can shoot him, but he can't shoot me.' And in this order we ranged our forces, to beat up the quarters of the grouse and the black-cock.

(To be Continued.)

When the mailed grasp of his... upon the knugly... small his degenerate fingers... the covetous pencil of a betting-book?... the venerable, the generous auxiliary, the very essence of the old champion's fame, to my independent but an unconscious... of fraud and disgrace? And yet to such buff as to be my bed-ridden the noblest... the hand, by a bad education and the... of a false position.

I have only stated the facts of the case... they may have come under the observation of most of you. Let wiser heads than mine propose the remedy.

But in return to Flora, as I now found myself... her in my day-dreams, the... sprang up amidst the noise and... of the row, grew and flourished... in the worldly atmosphere of a London... I avoided Mrs. Mantrap; I made... further inquiries as to Corahie, and the... first time I saw her again, proffering as a... splash in her vocation, she studiously... looking towards my box, and showed... inclination to renew our strange... acquaintance. I went less to Crockford's... when there, shunned the little room;... I had a good deal at Colonel Belmont's... which would have completely destroyed... the stomach of any man whose heart was... I took to morning-walks in... Kensington Gardens, where, quite incidentally... I used to come across Miss Belmont,... promenade, under the guardianship of a... particularly grim personage, who, having... been her maid in childhood, now acted as... waiting-maid and local duenna to my lady-love. These were very pleasant walks, and... I often look back to that peaceful time as a... sort of smiling oasis in the waste of my... reckless and tempestuous life. People may... sneer at the cockney-beauties of Kensington... Gardens, but for my part I love those trim... alleys and long deep glades as well as any... thing I have met with further afield; and... were it not that the stems of the fine old... trees become so engrained and blackened... with soot, you might fancy, in the heart of... that... century, that you were hundreds... of miles from London. The sun does not... shine now-a-days as it used to shine upon... those early strolls, and then, when the... woman's morning began about half-past five... p.m. we were wont to meet again, for it... was a time-honored custom with... the kind old Colonel to take his... during out for a ride in the park... regularly as the afternoon came round, and... partly from absence of mind, and... partly from smart signatness, a most... efficacious quack, I always received a hearty... welcome from papa, as an additional escort... I say the welcome, though not so loud... as papa's, was as warily murmured... from the lips of the daughter. The rides... were as agreeable as the walks, for... I used to skip and skip lively in a riding... dress, and being as new at a time... I could not do it with the air of an... and... which I was my delight to lavish... My mother was wonderfully susceptible... I used to talk at! are completely... upon my admirer, but I confess to a... part of my loss during fair one, whose... characteristic helplessness and dependence... on man are more agreeably manifested when... she eyes towards him for support and... encouragement, than when she kicks the dirt... up in his face, as she tears along before him... in all the triumph of holding a thorough-bred... one that its lord and master is unable to ride... but that carries her, with her light and gentle... hand quite enough.

I have seen women mounted and accoutred... at the very business... and... as the very hunt-man... himself, when the striking course... to the... of the pack. I have seen them... their... many, sitting steadily down in... their... as they got away alongside of... the leading hounds, skim the pastures, and... flit over the fences, like birds upon the wing;... and there have been instances of the weaker... sex winning the honor of 'going best' through... a run from 'find to finish,' and 'cutting... down,' from sheer nerve and determination,

...with... and... of an... in London, and furnish food for the... columns of the weekly sporting journals. My... old habits were sufficiently strong within me... to induce me to get, by every means in my... power, the best information as to the pace of... our antagonists, and the time in which they... did their several distances; on comparing... which with our own, it appeared to me that... there was money to be made out of the pro-... ceedings, and that if we could only keep... Tom Tuft from the decanters and the beer-... barrel, we ought to make a pretty good cer-... tainty of winning. After a great deal of dis-... cussion, called by the vulgar chaff, time, place, and distance were arranged, and our... respective crews having decided upon the... color of their Jerseys, and the capabilities of... their steers, went into strong training... forthwith. I cannot answer for the diet pre-... scribed to them, or the particular regimen... adopted by Messrs. Ruffles, Mallerd, Stret-... cher, and Bower, our four laborious adver-... saries, but I can only bear witness to the... perseverance with which our own crew dis-... cussed raw mutton-chops and porter at each... period when exhausted nature required re-... freshment. I have ever since loathed the... taste of beer, and appreciated most heartily... the scientific transformation of a skilful cook... Day after day we fed like cannibals, and... worked like Helots. Day after day, the skin... got clearer, the muscles harder, and the face... thinner, till at last we boasted that we were... not to be blown by pace or exhausted by... labor. Once only Tom Tuft was granted a... dispensation from the severity of our rules, and... allowed to dine out with an aunt in Eaton... Square, whom it would have been impolite... to offend. But the aunt possessed a store of... a certain dry old port, and by cross-examina-... tion of her butler, an office I took upon my... self, I discovered that Master Thomas had... drunk thereof two whole bottles to his own... cheek during the very short interval that he... was left alone in the dining-room, whilst... coffee was being prepared upstairs. We al-... lowed no more manner of indulgence till the... match was over, and our jovial bow was... obliged to... absti-... nence by anticipating the glorious... with which he was confident of celebrating... our coming victory. As the time for the... match drew nigher, so did the weather be-... come more and more unpropitious, till the... eventual downfall of rain that, if St. Swi-... then and anything to do with it, must have... truly gladdened the heart of that lacrymose... worthy. First of all, we thought it was sur-... to clear at noon, and when noon came, the... rain descended in straighter lines than ever, then we voted, as we suffered in the damp, dull atmosphere, it would be far pleasanter... to pull in the cool of the evening, and the... weather must improve by that time. Then... we had to look at the style of the... crew, as they came down with the tide in a... preparatory breacher—Maltby thinking it better... to reserve his own forces entirely for the... struggle. It was the longest and most un-... settled day I ever spent, and I felt quite re-... jected when, at seven in the evening, the... weather still clouded and drizzling, I found... myself seated in my own place in the boat, arranging my stretcher, and preparing for the coming tug of war.

It was seven o'clock ere the preliminaries... were fairly arranged, the judge appointed, and... the umpires placed. The dullness of the wea-... ther prevented our being honored with a... quantity of spectators, at which we were well... pleased, and the river for once was clearer of... craft than usual. Like a racehorse taking... his canters, ere he engages in the strife of... speed, we shot away for a half-mile 'spurt,'... to get thoroughly into our swing, before the... real contest should commence; and when we... felt our muscles elastic and our lungs clear, we wheeled the long narrow boat into... its appointed place, and, with beating hearts... and quivering limbs, sat watching eagerly... for the start. The signal shot is fired—and... we are off! From that moment, till, with... bent and aching back, with numbered arms, and... dripping brow, I staggered on to terra... firma, and knew by the congratulations of... my friends that we had won a severely con-

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