

The Interpreter.

CHAPTER IX.

(CONTINUED.)

'Do not hurry a man so, squire; pray ye, now, do not. I be only cut o' breath, and the lads they be safe enough by this time; but I wanted for you to speak up for me to the master, squire. I baint a morsel to blame. I went a-purpose to see as the young gents didn't get into no mischief; I did, indeed. I be an old man now, and it's a long walk for me at my years,' whined the old rascal, who was over at the Manor three nights a week when he thought the keepers were out of the way. 'And the dog, he was most to blame, arter all; but the keepers they've got the young gents safe enough—and that's all about it.' So saying, he stood bolt upright, like a man who has fired his last shot, and ready to abide the worst. Truth to tell, the King of Naples was horribly afraid of Ropsley.

The latter thought for a moment, put his hand in his pocket, and gave the poacher half a crown. 'Your hold your tongue,' said he, 'or you'll get into worse trouble than any of them. Now go home, and don't let me hear of your stirring out for twenty-four hours. Be off! Do you hear?'

Old Nap obeyed, and hobbled off to his cottage, there to spend the term of his enforced resider in his favorite occupation of drinking, whilst Ropsley walked rapidly on to the village, and directed his steps to that well-known inn, 'The Greyhound,' of which every boy at Everdon School was more or less a patron.

In ten minutes' time there was much ringing of bells and general confusion pervading that establishment; the curly-headed waiter (why do all waiters have curly hair?) rushed to and fro with a glass-cloth in his hand; the barmaid dropped her long ringlets over her own window-sill, within which she was to be seen at all hours of the day and night, like a pretty picture in its frame; the lame ostler stumped about with an activity foreign to his usual methodical nature, and a chaise and pair was ordered to be got ready immediately for Beverley Manor.

Richard the Third is said to have been born with all his double teeth sharp set, and in good masticatory order. It is my firm belief that Ropsley was also ushered into the world with his wisdom teeth in a state of maturity. He had, indeed, an old head upon young shoulders; and yet this lad was brought up and educated by his mother until he was sent to school. Perhaps he was launched into the world too early; perhaps his recollections of home were not vivid enough to soften his character or awaken his feelings. When I first knew him he had been an orphan for years; but I am bound to say that the only being of whom he spoke with reverence was his mother. I never heard him mention her name but twice, and each time a soft light stole over his countenance and altered the whole expression of his features, till I could hardly believe it was the same person. From home, when a very little boy, he was sent to Eton; and after a long process of hardening in that mimic world, was transferred to Everdon, more as a private pupil than a scholar. Here it was that I first knew him; and great as was my boyish admiration for the haughty, aristocratic youth just verging upon manhood, it is no wonder that I watched and studied his character with an intensity born of my own ardent disposition, the enthusiasm of which was all the stronger for having been so repressed and concealed in my strange and solitary childhood. Children are hero-worshippers, and my hero for the time was Ropsley.

He was, I think, the only instance I can recollect of a mere boy proposing to himself a certain aim and end in life, and going steadily forward to its attainment without pause or deviation. I often think now, what is there that a man with ordinary faculties might not attain, would he but propose to himself at fourteen that position which he would wish to reach at forty? Show me the hill that six and twenty years of perseverance would fail to climb. But no; the man never thinks of it at all—or if he does,

them just as he stored and cultivated that intellect which he valued not for itself, but as a means to an end.

'If I had fifty thousand a-year,' I once heard him say to Manners, 'I should take no trouble about anything. Depend upon it the real thing to live for is enjoyment. But if I had only forty-five thousand I should work like a slave—it would not quite give me the position I require.'

Such was Ropsley at the earliest period of our acquaintance.

'Drive to Beverly Manor,' said he, as he made himself thoroughly comfortable amongst the cushions, let down all the windows, and settled himself to the perusal of the last daily paper.

Any other boy in the school would have gone in a gig.

CHAPTER X.

BEVERLEY MANOR.

Why does a country gentleman invariably select the worst room in the house for his own private apartment, in which he transacts what he is pleased to call his business, and spends the greater part of his time? At Beverley Manor there were plenty of rooms, cheerful, airy, and well proportioned, in which it would have been a pleasure to live, but none of these were chosen by Sir Harry for his own; disregarding the charms of the saloon, the drawing-room, the morning-room, the billiard-room, and the hall itself, which, with a huge fire-place and a thick carpet, was by no means the least comfortable part of the house, he had retired to a small, ill-conceived, queer-shaped apartment, dark, dusty and uncomfortable, of which the only recommendation was that it communicated directly with a back staircase and offices, and did not require in its own untidiness any apology on the part of muddily visitors, who had not thought of wiping their boots and shoes as they came up. A large glass gun case, filled with double-barrels, occupied one side of the room, flanked by book-shelves, loaded with such useful but not entertaining works as the Racing Calendar, White's Fariery, and Hawker's Instructions to Young Sportsmen. In one corner was a whip stand hung round with many an instrument of torture. The knotted dog-whip that reduced Ponto to reason in the golden stubbles; the long-thonged hunting whip, that brought to mind at once the deep fragrant woodland in November, with its scarlet coats fitting down the distant ride; and the straight, punishing 'cut and thrust,' that told of Derby and St. Ledger, Ditch-In, Middle Mile, and all the struggles of Epsom and Newmarket. In another was an instrument for measuring land, and a roll of plans by which acres were to be calculated and a system of thorough draining established, with a view to golden profits.

'Draining,' remarked Sir Harry, in his younger days to an assemblage of country gentlemen, who stood aghast at the temerity of his proposition, 'I am no advocate for draining'—voices were raised, and hands uplifted in pious horror and deprecation—'all I can say is, gentlemen, that I have drained my property till I cannot get a farthing from it,' was Sir Harry's conclusive reasoning, which must have satisfied Mr. Mechi himself.

A colored engraving of the well-known Beverly short-horn Dandy, hung on one side of the fire-place, and on the other, a print of Flying Childers, as he appeared when going at the rate of a mile a minute, apparently by a highwayman in huge jack-boots and a flowing periwig. In the centre of the room was fixed a large leather-covered writing-table, and at this table sat Sir Harry himself, prepared to administer justice and punish all offenders. He was a tall, thin man, somewhat bent, and bald, with a hooked nose, and a bright, searching eye, evidently a thorough man of the world in thought, feeling, and opinion. The artificial will become second nature if long enough persisted in, and Sir Harry had served no short apprenticeship to the trade of fashion. His dress was peculiarly neat and gentleman-like, not the least what is now termed 'alang,' and yet with a something in it that marked the horseman. He was busy writing when we were ushered into the awful presence, and Victor and I had time to steal a look at each

hurried over here to assure you that they have had no evil intentions in trespassing on your property, and to apologize for their thoughtlessness, partly out of respect to you Sir Harry, and partly, I am bound to say, for the credit of the school. I am sure that neither Egerton nor De Bohan—'

Sir Harry started, 'Egerton! De Bohan! he exclaimed. 'Not the son of my old friend Phillip Egerton, not young Count de Bohan? really, Mr.—' (he looked at the card he held in his hand), 'really, Mr. Ropsley, I am very much obliged to you for rectifying this extraordinary mistake.' But even whilst he was speaking I had run round the table, to where he sat, and seizing his hand—I remember how cold it felt between my own little hot, trembling ones—exclaimed—

'Oh! do you know my papa? then I am sure you will not punish us. Only let us off this time, and give me back Boli, and we will promise never to come here again.'

The Baronet was not a demonstrative person, nor had he much patience with those who were; he paused me from, I thought rather coldly, and addressed himself once more to Ropsley.

'Why, these boys are sons of two of the oldest friends I have in the world. I would not have had such a thing happen for a thousand pounds. I must apologize to you, young gentlemen, for the rudeness of my servants—Good heavens! you were kept waiting in the hall. Why on earth did you not give your names? Your father and I were at college, together, Egerton; and as for you, Monsieur le Comte, had I known you were at Everdon, I would have made a point of going over to call upon you myself. But I have only just returned to the country, and that must be my excuse.'

Victor bowed graciously. Notwithstanding his torn jacket and disordered collar, he looked the young Count all over, and so I am sure thought Sir Harry. Ropsley was perfectly gentlemanlike, but Victor was naturally high-bred.

'Barralls, where are you going, Barralls?' resumed his master, for that discreet person, seeing the turn things were taking, was quietly leaving the room. 'You always were the greatest fool that ever stood upon two legs. Now let this be a warning to you—every vagabond in the country helps himself to my game whenever he pleases, and you never lay a finger on one of them. At last you insult and abuse two young gentlemen that any one but a born idiot could see were gentlemen, and bring them in here for poachers—poachers! as if you didn't know a poacher when you see one. Don't stand gaping there, you fool, but be off, and the other blockhead too. He! here; let the dog be attended to, and one of the watchers must lead him back to Everdon when he's well again. Now see to that, and never make such a stupid mistake again.'

'May I go and see Boli, sir?' said I, summoning up courage as my late captors quitted the room.

'Quite right, my little man,' replied the Baronet, 'so you shall, this evening. But in the meantime, I hope you'll all stay and dine with me. I'll write your master—what's his name?—and send you back in the carriage at night; what say you Mr. Ropsley? I can give you a capital bottle of claret.'

So here we were, who one short hour before had been making up our minds to endure with fortitude the worst that could happen,—who had expected to be driven with ignominy from Beverley, and handed over to condign punishment on our return to school, if indeed we were fortunate enough to escape committal and imprisonment in the County Gaol,—now installed as honored guests in the very mansion which we had so long looked upon as a terra incognita of fairyland; free to visit the 'hins and houts' of Beverley, with no thanks to the 'King of Naples' for his assistance, in short, raised at one step from the abyss of schoolboy despair to the height of schoolboy gratification. Victor's delight was even greater than mine as we were shown into a pretty little dressing-room overlooking the garden, to wash our hands before dinner. He said it reminded him of home, and made him feel 'like a gentleman' once more.

What a dinner that was to which we sat down in the stately old dining-room, served upon massive plate by a butler and two footmen, whose magnificence made me feel quite shy in my comparative insignificance. Ropsley of course seemed as much at home as if he was in the habit of dining there every

nor a Christian-like, and yet in my experience of life I have found many instances in which it has borne a strange semblance of truth.

Men feel by instinct swift as light
The presence of the foe,
Whom God has marked in after years
To strike the mortal blow.
The other, though his brand be sheathed,
At banquet or in hall,
Hath a foreboding of the time
When one or both must fall.

So sings 'the minstrel' in his poem of Bothwell, but Bothwell was not written at the time of which I speak, and the only poetry I had ever heard to justify my antipathies was the homely quairain of Dr. Fell. Still I felt somehow from that moment I hated Ropsley; it was absurd, it was ungrateful, it was ungentlemanlike, but it was undeniable.

So I buried myself in the contemplation of the picture, which possessed for me a strange fascination. The subject was Queen Dido transfixed on her funeral pyre, the very *infandum regina* to whose history I owed so many schoolroom sorrows. I began to think I should never hate Virgil again. The whole treatment of the picture was to the last degree unnatural, and the coloring, even to my inexperienced eye, faulty and overdone. Yet that face of mute sorrow and resignation spoke at once to the heart; the Queen lay gazing on the distant galleys which were bearing away her love, and curling their beaks and curvetting, so to speak, up-hill on a green sea, in a manner that must have made the task of Palinurus no easy one when he undertook to steer the same. Her limbs were disposed stiffly, but not ungracefully, on the fatal couch, and her white bosom was pierced by the deadly blade. Yet on her sweet and countenance the artist had depicted with wonderful skill the triumph of mental over bodily anguish; and though the features retained all woman's softness and woman's beauty, you read the breaking heart beneath. I could have looked at that picture for hours, I was lost in it even then, but the door opened, and whilst Ropsley got up with a flourish and his most respectful bow, in walked the young lady we had met under far different circumstances some three hours before in the shrubbery, and quietly took her place by the side of her papa.

As I looked from Queen Dido to Miss Constance I quite started: there was the very face as if it had walked out of the canvas. Younger certainly, and with a more childish expression about the mouth, but the same queenly brow, the same sad, serious eyes, the same delicate features and oval shape; the fascination was gone from the picture now, and yet as I looked at the child—for child she was then—I experienced once more the old well-known pang of self-humiliation which so often poisoned my happiness. I felt so dull and awkward amongst these bright faces and polished manners, so ungainly and out of place where others were gay and at their ease. How I envied Victor's self-possession as he addressed the young lady with his pleasant, foreign accent and a certain assurance that an English boy never acquires till he is verging on manhood. How willingly would I have exchanged places with any one of the party. How I longed to cast the outward show of timidity and constraint, to appear as I felt myself in reality an equal in mind and station and feelings to the rest. For the first time in my life, as I sat a mere child at that dinner table, came the thrilling, maddening feeling to my heart—

'Oh! that something would happen, something dreadful, something unheard of, that should strip from each of us all extraneous and artificial advantages; that should give us all a fair start on equal terms—something that should try our courage or our fortitude, and enable me to prove myself what I really am.'

It was the first spark of ambition that ever entered my boyish breast, but when once kindled, such sparks are never completely extinguished. Fortunate is it that opportunities are wanting to fan them into a flame, on we should ere long have the world in a blaze.

Miss Constance took very little notice of us beyond a cold allusion to the well-being of my dog, and it was not till Sir Harry bade her take charge of Victor and myself, and lead us out through the garden to visit our wounded favorite, that we had any conver-

turn the delights of a certain swing, and played a game at a battledore and shuttlecock in the echoing hall, we were becoming fast friends, and had succeeded in interesting our new acquaintance extremely in all the details of schoolboy life, and our own sufferings at Everdon. I remarked, however, that Constance took far less notice of me than of Victor; with him she seemed frank and merry and at her ease; with me, on the contrary, she retained much of her early reserve, and I could not help fancying, rather avoided my conversation than otherwise. Well, I was used to being thrown in the background, and it was pleasure enough for me to watch that grave, earnest countenance, and speculate on the superhuman beauty of Queen Dido, to which it bore so strange a resemblance.

It was getting too dark to continue our game. We had already lost the shuttlecock three times, and it was now hopelessly perched on the frame of an old picture in the hall, when the dining-room door opened, and Sir Harry came out, still conversing earnestly with his guest on the one engrossing topic.

'I am much obliged to you for the hint,' said the Baronet. 'It never struck me before. And if your information is to be depended on, I shall certainly back him. Strange that I should not have heard of the trial.'

'My man dare not deceive me, I assure you, answered Ropsley, his quiet, distinct tones contrasting with Sir Harry's, who was a little flushed and voluble after his claret. 'He used to do odd jobs for me when I was in the sixth form at Eton, and I met him unexpectedly enough the other day in the High-street at Bath. He is a mason by trade, and is employed repairing Beckford's tower; by the way, he has heard of Victor—' I am not sure that he hasn't read it, so the fellow has some brains about him. Well, I knew he hadn't been hanging about Ascot all his life for nothing, so I described the colt to him, and bade him keep his eyes open when perched in mid-air these bright mornings, with such a command of Lansdowne. Why, he knew the horse as well as I did, and yesterday sent me a full account of the trial. I destroyed it immediately, of course, but I have it all here' (pointing to his forehead, where, indeed, Ropsley carried a curious miscellany of information). 'He beat the mare at least fifty yards, and she was nearly that distance ahead of 'Slap-Jack,' so you may depend upon it he is a real flyer. I have backed him to win a large stake, at least, for a boy like me,' added Ropsley, modestly; 'and I do not mean to hedge a farthing of it.'

Sir Harry was delighted; he had found a 'young one,' as he called it, after his own heart; he declared he would not wish him 'good-bye'; he must come over again and see the yearlings; he must accompany him to the Bath races. If he was to leave Everdon at the end of the half-year, he must come and shoot in September; nay, they would go to Doncaster together; in short, Sir Harry was fascinated, and put us all into the carriage, which he had ordered expressly to take us back to Everdon, with many expressions of hospitality and good will.

Boli was lifted on to the box, from whence he looked down with his tongue hanging out in a state of ludicrous helplessness and dismay. Miss Constance bade us a quiet 'good-night' in tones so sweet that they rang in my ears half the way home, and so we drove off in state from the front door, as though we had not that very afternoon been brought in as culprits at the back.

Ropsley was unusually silent during the whole journey. He had established his footing at Beverley Manor, perhaps he was thinking how 'to make the most of it.'

CHAPTER XI.

DULCIBONUM.

I must skip a few years; long years they were then to me; as I look back upon them now, they seem to have floated away like a dream. Victor and I are still at Everdon, but we are now the senior boys in the school. De Bohan has grown into one of the handsomest youths you will often see. His blue eye is as clear and merry as ever, but the chestnut curls have turned dark and glossy, and the light smile that used to be on his