

## DIGBY GRAND.

CHAPTER III.

LIFE IN LONDON.

Tom, who had previously breakfasted, was, I felt, too deeply engrossed in his meditation as to whether his next eighteen miles, if done under the hour, was, or was not, too much for the hack, who would then be relieved by a fellow-sufferer sent on for the purpose to attend as he ought to have done under the same roof; but even he, impatient as he was, could not complain of any undue delay or unnecessary degree of formality in the chaplain who officiated. The gown had done its duty well, and the forbidden garment lurked beneath it unknown and unsuspected; but in his anxiety to be in time, as he was hurrying out of chapel he unfortunately took out his watch, and the act of doing so unavoidably disclosed a stained and crimsoned chest, but the very eyes of the astonished Dean, who at that moment, unknown to Tom, was close beside him. An immediate invitation to accompany the magistrate towards his rooms was the consequence, and thence, with another wistful glance at his timepiece, was the erstwhile culprit compelled to follow. But ere the morning portals closed upon them, the Dean, with a good-natured sympathy for the unmeted impatience of his companion, addressed him with his usual gentlemanlike courtesy of manner.

"I will not detain you long, Mr. Spencer; but I much wish to inquire upon what principle you have presumed to enter chapel in a garment of that unbecoming color and character?"

"Thus, sir?" inquired the unabashed undergraduate, pointing to the crimson so stained by wet and mire as to be a near approach to black! "this is an old Montmorency coat that I had at Eton, and sent to be dyed, for economy; they could make nothing of it but a mulberry, which I agree with you, sir, is highly unbecoming to a fair man. I should have wished it a shade nearer black, but *unum in eade color*."

In joke, the true quotation and the off-humor of the whole thing saved him, and the unbecoming mulberry was again that day in the front rank, as usual. But Tom might thank his habitual obedience to regulations, and the general good character which he had maintained since his matriculation, for bearing him harmless in a scrape which to others might have been fraught with serious consequences.

Many a merry laugh rung across our snug breakfast-table in my comfortable lodgings, over such University anecdotes as these, and over the Dean himself, in all his pomp and power and pride of place, might have been granted could he have heard with what energy and goodwill he was voted a downright tramp by my visitor and myself, for Tom Spencer was relaxing his mind and improving his worldly knowledge, under his Oxford labors, by spending the winter vacation with me in London. It had been a long promised visit when we were together at Havering; and after my ill advised disagreement with Sir Peregrine, it was a great comfort to me to have so old a friend with whom to talk over all my difficulties and disappointments, whose presence would counteract the depressing influence of a winter morning in the metropolis, so keenly felt by the solitary individual for whom the other hours of the twenty-four were with false and frivolous excitement, whilst to the visitor full of spirits, youth, and health, a month or six weeks spent within the Bills of Mortality was a realization of all that he considered most delightful.

A well-matched pair we were, in thoughts, feelings, and habits, as after a very late breakfast we devoted our customary hour to smoking and gossip, for which the previous evening's amusements or pursuits furnished an inexhaustible theme. Perhaps a brother officer or occasional visitor would drop in, with a good humored jest at our being still in our dressing gowns and slippers, the only costume for lounging in real comfort, and sitting down to a most sumptuous breakfast, would add his quota to the scandal of the hour. People in London are much in the secret in the winter, as they are in better sports and more readily amused; there is

May in the East wind, when weary glances, listless gestures, and suppressed yawns were paying their tribute of fagged admiration to the band of Her Majesty's 1st or 2nd Regiment of Life Guards, kindly lent by the Sovereign for the delectation of her lieges. The early twilight approaches with a crimson hue that promises a long continuance of the cold weather; and if oats are at thirty shillings a quarter, and you have no horses, you congratulate yourself internally on your prudence, as you step briskly homewards by the margin of the frozen waters, and contrast the merry stream of pedestrians that now throng the ring with the endless string of carriages "dragging its slow length along," that endangered your hack and covered yourself with dust the day before you started for Goodwood Races. Then the very dandies looked haggard, worn, and fagged; the ladies pale, listless, and dejected; whilst one and all complained of heat, and glare, and fatigue. Now the little face that peeps from out that mass of fur is rosy as the morning sky, what though the chiselled Grecian nose may be tipped with a faint tinge of pink, contrary to the established rules of colouring, those sparkling eyes and that elastic step may well make amends for any such trifling liberty on the part of John Frost; and as she moves briskly onwards by the side of her whiskered companion, twice the manly was in June, you catch a glimpse of the taper neck and arched instep that bear her so jauntily along, and ponder deeply in your own mind whether any costume yet invented by the daughters of Eve can be so becoming as a winter frock. Such a stroll by the Serpentine, such a lounge in Kensington Gardens, was the constant afternoon occupation of Tom Spencer and myself, though our morning engagements sometimes made it nearly dark ere we sallied forth for our daily walk. Tom was, like myself, a patron of all athletic sports and exercises, nor was the accomplished Oxonian any mean proficient with the gloves. "Mr. Spencer is a very hard hitter," said our instructor, the "Chelsea Champion," after a severe bout in my rooms, of which the brilliant professional had decidedly the worst. "What a pity he should have been born a gentleman! He might have made a very honest livelihood in the ring, and as the morning in question afforded a fair specimen of our usual mode of life, I may be allowed to describe the scene, as an illustration of the way in which the earlier part of his day is spent by a young gentleman loose in London. The first-floor of a moderately-sized house, not very far from Hyde Park—that being, in consideration of his military duties, the most convenient neighborhood for a guardsman—offered me ample accommodation in a suite of four comfortable rooms, one of which was now devoted to the service of my visitor. Folding-doors shut out the dormitories, and gave an air of snug privacy to the two sitting-rooms in which our mornings were spent. The one, tolerably cleared of furniture, afforded a space wherein were often waged such trials of strength and skill as those in which the "Chelsea Champion" had been worsted, whilst in the other, every description of appliance for ease and luxury was crowded in lavish provision. A print of "Ipsley Abbey in the Olden Time," that composition of all others most suggestive of feudal habits and the ancient field sports of merry England, occupied the place of honor over my chimney-piece. Two more of Landseer's exquisite designs—the stag challenging his approaching foe in the frosty moonlight, and the calm peaceful "Sanctuary," at which the exhausted hart has just arrived, with tottering limbs and dripping sides, flanked the more majestic print of the chivalrous-looking abbot and his welcome visitors. A spirited sketch of "Rivoltella," by a French artist, held an equally prominent position with a portrait by Herring of the winner of last year's Derby, and a series of moving accidents by flood and field graced the sportsman's eye, with Alkin's inimitable touches. "The Dying Gladiator," dying again in burnished bronze, as still he lives and dies in Byron's immortal lines, was the most valued of all the works of art I possessed, and on the pedestal that supported his god-like figure, relaxing, drooping, smiling, but all unconquered still, were inscribed those glorious stanzas that will survive even the mighty creation of the sculptor's art. In a niche above him stood a cast of Joan of Arc, clasping her cross-handled sword to her bosom, and looking intently forward, with a holy fervor beaming on that calm virgin face. Stags, hinds and horns, curious skins, and shaggy antlers, and various other

now here, now there, putting in play all the different manoeuvres of the Ring, which the initiated call 'moves,' and occasionally getting in a sounding thwack on Tom's ribs, generally returned by the young one with electric quickness on the champion's unpossessing physiognomy; a more noisy rally than usual being invariably followed by a vigorous application to a certain pewter-pot, which seemed to afford the combatants much consolation and refreshment. Hillingdon, with his hat on and his usual quiet smile impressed on those more than usually haggard features, was busily employed in sketching my Joan of Arc in chalks, a pursuit of which he was enthusiastically fond; and as he sat there, with his pale, handsome face looking upward towards the sweet, sad countenance of the Maid of Orleans, I could not help being struck with the resemblance between the copyist and the cast he was studying—the unearthly expression that threw a shade as of coming evil over my friend's brow, and the air of lofty resignation which seemed to anticipate the destiny of the ill-fated heroine. Jack Lavish, on whose well curled head care had never presumed to sit, who through good and ill-fortune, losses, reverses, and annoyances of every description, still showed his white teeth, with his own good-humored smile—still twirled his dark moustaches, and curled his ambrosial whiskers, as though whilst these treasures were left him, fate might do her wickedest—Jack, of whom his bitterest foe had never yet found ought to say worse than that, like Pons, he was "a good brother and a proper fellow of his hands," whom all the ladies voted so "good-looking," and of whom the severest of that cynical sex only added, "it was a pity he should be such a goose," a mode of praise the gentle creatures sometimes adopt, even when discussing their greatest favorites—Jack completed our party, and between the puffs of his cigar, imparted to us the important intelligence that he was going to be married, and disclosed the series of manoeuvres and the highly successful strategy by which he had secured the hand of the wealthy heiress to whom he was now affianced.

"One must stop somewhere," said Jack, "and I was getting tired of Melton and the shires, localities in which the glorious system of credit, the main-stay of our commercial country, has in my case been stretched a little too far; so having won a fair stake at Goodwood, and being thrown over by St. Heliers in a yachting cruise, I determined upon a course I have so often heard recommended to each other by the little boys in the street, and made up my mind to 'go to Bath.' Ever been at Bath, Digby?"

"Not I," was the reply; "and never wish to go."

"No place like it for getting into condition," said Jack. "I mean to stay there for a week every year before I go to the Highland. It is exactly like like living on a flight of steps. I can hardly walk along Pall Mall now—I tire so dreadfully over the flat. However, it was severe at first, but like the treadmill, and everything else of the kind, one soon gets used to it. Well, to Bath I went, with a thoroughbred hack of my brother's, and three horses from Tilbury; and the very first morning I arrived there I saw a flaming paragraph in the Bath Patriarch and Somersetshire Flying Express, to the effect that 'the numerous and valuable stud of the Hon. Captain Lavish has reached our now sporting locality. This distinguished and popular millionaire' (think of that, you fellows without a rap!) 'is expected shortly to follow, as the *avant courier* of a host of fashionable about to winter in our genial and health-restoring climate.' Well, I thought, if three screws and a pony are a valuable stud, and I, Jack Lavish, am a millionaire, there may be hopes for me yet; and accordingly I got myself up with more than usual care; and as I swaggered down Milsom Street in gorgeous apparel, I laid out the plan for my future campaign. This was only towards the close of October; and lo! in two short months my enterprising venture and spirited outlay has been crowned with success. In the first place, rather than not have two hunters out every day, I determined to limit my hunting to twice a week; and a second horse being an unheard-of luxury in these benighted regions, I was respected accordingly. The next step was to hire a sober looking dark-green drag, picked out with blue, and very heavy, which always looks wealthy. Into this I put the three Tilburys when not otherwise engaged, and my brother's hack, who did not relish the anus ment at all. I gave my valet attire

fair share of claret after dinner, as you know—I think it promotes digestion, and, in short, it suits my arrangements. I have found few men who, as the evening waned, became so thirsty in proportion to the approach of midnight, a peculiarity which I have remarked in my own organization, and which I shared with the worthy Alderman. Bottle after bottle came and went, and still the civic dignity sat, and conducted himself with becoming stateliness and 'propriety.' Claret was evidently of no use, but what its gentle influence had begun, some curious Maraschino and one of my regalia cigars, a blackish one, finished. The Alderman tottered, his eye wandered, and he moved uneasily on his chair. One more glass of liqueur, one more thick full flavored weed, and I saw my respectable guest home, and deposited him on his own couch with a caution and tenderness that entailed his everlasting gratitude. From that day Alderman Goldthread voted me the best fellow of his acquaintance, and, contrasting the charitable care which I took of him, as in duty bound after promoting his downfall, with the treatment he had once before experienced from some convivial companions of stronger brains, who had amused themselves considerably at his expense when under the influence of stimulants, and finished by shaving his honest head, decided that I had conferred upon him a favor of the greatest magnitude.

"After this I dined with him three times a week, and had every opportunity of ingratiating myself with Clementina, his niece and ward, a lady of great personal property and attractions, to whom I am now going to be married; there was one difficulty, however, which for a time appeared to me insuperable, and this was that Clemmy, though a nice girl, generally well-dressed, and not bad-looking, was undoubtedly blue, and to my horror I constantly heard her remark that she adored talent (that was the word) beyond everything, and vow that stupidity in a man was the only thing with which she had no patience."

"Rather a 'facer' for you, Jack," said I, "as you never were much of a bookworm, though you might have called upon several Israelites and other moneyed men to prove that you can write your own name."

"Besides," added Hillingdon, looking up from his Joan of Arc, now rapidly growing into beauty, "bar spelling, nobody writes a better letter than Jack; witness the invitations he constantly sends me to dine at mess."

"That was exactly the difficulty," said our good-humored friend, not the least affronted at our strictures upon his capabilities. "If I had had the advantage of a good education, like that young blunderer in the next room; if I could play whist and billiards like Digby; or sketch gothic arches, and string rhymes to a grasshopper, like yourself, Hillingdon, I should not be afraid of any amount of learning in a lady—do, not even if she was to write a book! But these are not my accomplishments, and except that I cut out all the patterns for my own coats, and know how to put four horses together, I think, in other respects, I can hardly call myself exactly clever. Well, I soon found that Miss Goldthread admired my moustaches, did not object to my society, and rather preferred dancing with me to being whisked about by any of her other dangles—by the way, the Bath swells are wretchedly bad goers—but still we never got any further; it was evident that she had not made up her mind as to whether I was clever, and if I could but establish that point, I say my way clearly. There was nothing for it but to take up some particular line, and the less she knew about the subject in which I was to appear a proficient, the better my chance of success. I thought of botany, conchology, moral philosophy—the latter, I believe, very easily acquired; but unfortunately Clemmy had a smattering of all these sciences, till in a lucky moment I hit upon politics, and that was the very thing—ladies never understand politics—and I became forthwith an embryo statesman. Like all fellows who live much in society, I know most of the leading men pretty intimately; and it is astonishing what an effect the familiar mention of such men's names, and an anecdote or two of their private lives and personal histories, will have with people who are not behind the scenes. Many of such little bits of gossip I had of course at my fingers' ends; whilst on all the great questions I preserved a discreet and ominous silence. If I was induced to give an opinion, it was delivered oracularly, and invariably wound up with

"And what of that?" rejoined Hillingdon, with glowing cheek, and sparkling eye. "What if he were? A thousand times better to linger out one's life even in the constraint and wretchedness of a debtor's cell than to endure the galling misery, the eternal slavery of a marriage for money. Day after day, year after year, never to be free from the oppressive presence of the loathsome object—and loathe her I should, however deservedly, had I married her on such terms, and for such a cause. Like the dead corpse chained to the living man, so would her presence blunt my energies, and dull my faculties, conscious but of the load which unceasingly oppressed them. And suppose she should love another," added the enthusiast, whilst his eye dilated with an expression which these moments of excitement had often given me painful forebodings. "Supposing two spirits should be doomed to misery by their accursed craving for luxury and wealth, because the one—the man—that should be the most vigorous and self-denying of the two, cannot resist the temptation of wearing out a few more short years in the career of idleness to which he has accustomed himself, till the silken fetters have grown strong and have as an iron chain. What an unnatural state this world has arrived at, when such unholy alliances are made every day, and called, forsooth, marriages of necessity—when half the men we know are driven, by their previous habits and the false position in which they find themselves placed, to do what I must of necessity call a career of dishonesty, by such a crowning disgrace as the deliberate prostitution of the heart. You know my belief in the communion we are sometimes permitted to hold with the other world, and it will not surprise you, Digby, to hear me declare, that rather than be guilty of the baseness which Lavish is about to commit, and of which he and the men amongst whom we think so lightly, I would beg my bread barefoot from door to door. Rather than be faithless in word or deed to my spirit-love, I would seek her in those regions to which my own death alone could give me access."

As Hillingdon ceased, his wasted features glowing with the energy of his feelings, and his form dilating as he touched upon the subject of death—a subject which to him always appeared fraught with interest and excitement, not unmingled with triumph, I could not help acknowledging to myself the truth of the well-known line,

"Great wits to madness often are allied"

as I reflected that the sentiments thus expressed by my gifted friend, would, by the mass of his fellow-creatures, the everyday denizens of this practical world, be considered but as the workings of an over-excited imagination, the vagaries of a diseased mind.

Like Hamlet, poor Hillingdon was one of whose nobility of sentiment, and acuteness of feelings, ill fitted him to mingle with beings formed of grosser clay. The ideal was to him what the real is to the rest of mankind, and such a temperament, undirected by the mild and steady light of true religion, schooled in the harsh but wholesome training of necessity, was but too prone to lose itself in the dreamy phantasies and vague conception of mysticism and superstition.

With varied talents of no common order, with a memory enriched with all of good and great that history has emblazoned on her undying page for the guidance and the emulation of unborn ages, with a gallant heart to that danger or difficulty might strive in vain to daunt or overcome, and nerves which, though cased in no iron frame, were yet not to be shaken by the direst catastrophe, I could not help thinking, when Hillingdon left my rooms that morning, what material for a hero were in him, spoilt and wasted by the accidental preponderance of a too susceptible imagination. Poor Hillingdon! how few amongst the associates who were charmed by his manners and delighted with his wit, to whom he was but the pleasant acquisition, the jovial companion—how few knew aught of his character, beyond his every-day power of making himself agreeable, or troubled themselves to look below that polished surface, and calm self-possessed exterior! I believe none know him as well as I did: to none had he opened his heart so freely, or disclosed his sentiments so entirely, as to myself; and none, despite the difference of our characters, the directly opposite views