

Miss Minim remarks that 'occasional wars are beneficial, nay, necessary for the welfare of the human race,' illustrating her position by the familiar metaphor of thunderstorms. Ac., but Ropsley, who has quite the upper hand of Miss Minim, breaks in upon her ruthlessly, as he observes, 'The funds gone down a fraction, Sir Harry, I see. I think one ought to sell. By the bye, I've a capital letter from De Rohan, at Paris. You would like to hear what he is about, Miss Beverley, I am very sure.'

Constance winced and colored. It was Ropsley's game to assert a sort of matter-of-course tendresse on her part for my Hungarian friend, which he insisted on so gradually, but yet so successfully, as to give him the power of making her uneasy at the mention of De Rohan's name. He wished to establish an influence over her, and this was the only manner in which he could do so; but Ropsley was a man who only asked to insert the point of the wedge, he could trust himself to do the rest. Yet, with all his knowledge of human nature he made this one great mistake, he judged of women by the other half of mankind; so he looked pointedly at Constance as he added, 'I'll read you what he says, or, perhaps, Miss Beverley, you would like to see his letter?'

He had now driven her a little too far, and she turned round upon him.

'Really, Mr. Ropsley, I don't wish to interfere with your correspondence. I hate to read other people's letters; and Count De Rohan has become such a stranger now that I have almost forgotten him.'

She was angry with herself immediately she had spoken. It seemed so like the remark of a person who was piqued. Ropsley would be more than ever convinced now that she cared for him. Sir Harry, too, looked up from his plate, apparently astonished at his daughter's unusual vehemence. The girl bit her lips, and wished she had held her tongue. Ropsley saw he had marked up another point in the game.

'Very true,' said he, with his quiet, well-bred smile; 'old playfellows and old school-days cannot be expected to last all one's life. However, Victor does not forget us. He seems to be very gay, though, and rather dissipated, at Paris; knows all the world and goes everywhere; ran a horse last week at Chantilly. You know Chantilly, Sir Harry.'

The baronet's face brightened. He had won a cup given by Louis Philippe, from all the foreigners there on one occasion, and he liked to be reminded of it.

'Know it,' said he, 'I should think I do. Why, I trained Phibbertigibbet in the park here myself—I and the old coachman. We never sent him to my own trainer at Newmarket, but took him over ourselves, and that them all. That was the cup you saw in the centre of the dinner-table yesterday. The ten-year-old we tried at Lansdowne was the grandson. Ah! Ropsley, I wish I had taken your advice about him.'

Ropsley was, step by step, obtaining great influence over Sir Harry. He returned to the subject of old friendships.

'By-the-bye, Miss Beverley, have you heard anything of poor Egerton? I fear his father's death will be a sad blow to him. I tremble for the consequences.'

And here he touched his forehead, with a significant look at Sir Harry.

Constance was a true woman. She was always ready to vigorously to defend an absent friend, but she was no match for her antagonist; she could not keep cool.

'What do you mean?' said she, angrily. 'Why should you tremble, as you call it, for Ver?'

Ropsley put on his most provoking air, as he answered with a sort of playful mock deference—

'I beg to remind you, Miss Beverley, I am continually mentioning you, this unlucky morning. First, I bore you about De Rohan, thinking you do care for your old friends; then I make you angry with me about Egerton, believing you don't. After all, I said no harm about him; nothing more than we all

have seen her in the privacy of her own apartment, which she had no sooner reached than she dashed his gift upon the floor, stamping on it with her little foot as though she would crush it into atoms, while her bosom heaved, and her dark eyes filled with tears, shed she scarce knew why? She had a vague consciousness of humiliation, and an undefined feeling of alarm that she could not have accounted for even to herself, but which was very uncomfortable notwithstanding.

The gentlemen put on their belts and shooting apparatus; and Ropsley, with the sneer deepening on his well-cut features, whispered to himself, '*pour le coup, papillon, je te tiens.*'

Bold and I strolled leisurely along; the dog indulging in his usual vagaries on the way, his master brooding and thoughtful, reflecting on the many times he had trod the same pathway when he was yet in ignorance of the fatal secret, and how it was all over now. My life was henceforth to be a blank. I began to speculate as I had never speculated before, on the objects and aims of existence. What had I done, I thought, that I should be doomed to be so miserable?—that I should have neither home nor relatives nor friends?—that, like the poor man whose rich neighbor had flocks and herds and vineyards, I should have but my one pet lamb, and even that should be taken from me?

Then I thought of my father's career—how I had been used to look up to him as the impersonation of all that was admirable and enviable in man. With his personal beauty and his princely air and his popularity and talent, I used to think my father must be too deeply happy. And now to find that he too had been living with a worm at his heart! But then he had done wrong, and he suffered rightly, as he himself confessed, for the sins of his youth. And I tried to think myself unjustly treated; for of what crimes had I been guilty, that I should suffer too. My short life had been blameless, orderly, and dutiful. Little evil had I done; but even then my conscience whispered—Much good had I left undone. I had lived for myself and my own affections; I had not trained my mind for a career of usefulness to my fellow-men. It is not enough that a human being should abstain from gross, palpable evil; he must follow actual good. It is better to go down into the market, and run your chance of the dirt that shall soil it, and the hands it shall pass through, in making your one talent ten talents, than to hide it up in a napkin, and stand aloof from your fellow-creatures, even though it should give you cause, like the Pharisee, to 'thank God that you are not as other men are.'

'Steady, Bold! Heel, good dog, heel! You hear them shooting, I know, and you would like well to join the sport. Bang! bang! there they go again. It is Sir Harry and his guest at their favorite amusement. We will stay here, old dog, and perhaps we may see her once more, if only at a distance, and we shall not have our walk for nothing.' So Bold and I crouched quietly down amongst the tall fern, on a knoll in the park from whence we could see the Manor House and the mere, and Constance's favorite walk in the shrubbery which I had paced with her so often and so happily in days that seemed now to have belonged to another life.

They were having capital sport in the island; it was a favorite preserve of Sir Harry; and although artificially stocked with pheasants—as indeed what coverts are not, for that most artificial of all sports which we call a *battue*—it had this advantage, that the game could not possibly stray from its own feeding-place and home. Moreover, as the fine-plumaged old cocks went whirring up out of the copse, there was a great art in knocking them over before they were fairly on the wing, so that the dead birds might not fall into the water, but be picked up on *terra firma*, dry, and in good order to be put into the bag. Many a time had I stood on the middle ride, and brought them down right and left, to the admiration of my old

pod at the very place where once before she had caressed Bold! she gathered a morsel of fern and placed it in her bosom; then she walked on faster, like one who wakes from a train of profound and not altogether happy reflections.

Meanwhile I had the greatest difficulty to restrain my dog. Good, faithful Bold was all anxiety to scour off at first sight of her, and greet his old. He whined piteously when I forbade him. I thought she must have heard him; but no, she walked quietly on towards the water, loosed her little skiff from its moorings, got into it, and pushed off on the smooth surface of the mere.

She spread the tiny sail, and the boat rippled its way slowly through the water. The little skiff was a favorite toy of Constance, and I had taught her to manage it very dexterously. At the most it would hold but two people; and many an hour of ecstasy had I passed on the mere in 'The Queen Mab,' as we sportively named it, drinking in every look and tone of my idolized companion; poison was in the draught, I knew it well, and yet I drank it to the dregs. Now I watched till my eyes watered, for I should never steer 'The Queen Mab' again.

A shout from the shore of the island diverted my attention. Sir Harry had evidently espied her, and was welcoming his daughter. I made out his figure, and that of Barrella, at the water's edge; whilst the report of a gun, and a thin column of white smoke curling upwards from the copse, betokened the presence of Ropsley among the beaters in the covert. When I glanced again at 'The Queen Mab,' it struck me she had made but little way, though her gossamer-looking sail was filled by the light breeze. She could not now be more than a hundred and fifty yards from her moorings, whilst I was myself perhaps twice that distance from the brink of the mere. Constance rises from her seat, and waves her hand above her head. Is that her voice? Bold hears it too, and starts up to listen. The white sail leans over. God in heaven! it is down! Vivid light glinting the ghastly truth flashes through my brain; the boat is waterlogged—she is sinking—my heart's darling will be drowned in my very sight; it is ecstasy to think I can die with her, if I cannot save her!

'Bold! Bold! Hee, boy; go fetch her; hee, boy; hee!'

The dog is already at the water-side; with his glorious, God-given instinct he has understood it all. I hear the splash as he dashes in; I see the circles thrown behind him as he swims; whilst I am straining every nerve to reach the water's edge. What a long three hundred yards it is. A lifetime passes before me as I speed along. I have even leisure to think of poor Ophelia and her glorious Dane. As I run I fling away coat, waistcoat, watch, and handkerchief. I see a white dress by the side of the white sail. My gallant dog is nearing it even now. The next instant I am overhead in the mere; and as I rise to the surface, shaking the water from my lips and hair, I feel, through all my fear and all my suspense, something akin to triumph in the long, vigorous strokes that are shooting me onwards to my goal. Mute and earnest I thank God for my personal strength, never appreciated till this day; for my hardy education, and my father's swimming lessons in the sluggish, far away Theiss; for my gallant, faithful dog, who has reached her even now.

'Hold on, Bold! her dress is floating her still. Hold on, good dog. Another ten seconds, and she is saved!'

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Once I thought we were gone. My strength was exhausted. I had reached the bank with my reasoned love. Her pale face was close to mine; her long, wet hair across my mouth; she was conscious still, she never lost her senses or her courage. Once she whispered, 'Bless you, my brave Vere.' But the bank was steep, and the water out of our depth to

manage people do not understand in England quite so thoroughly as abroad; the system was simple enough—'live and let live' being in effect the motto of an ill-matched pair, who had better never have come together, but who having done so, resolved to make the best of that which each found to be a bad bargain, and to see less of each other than they could possibly have done had they remained as formerly, simply an old cousin and a young one, instead of as now, husband and wife.

Prince Vocqsal was the best of fellows, and the most sporting of Hungarians. Time was, 'before the Revolution, *mon cher*'—a good while before it, he might have added—that the Prince was the handsomest man of his day, and not indisposed to use his personal advantages for the captivation of the opposite sex. His conquests, as he called them, in France, Spain, Italy, not to mention the fatherland, were, by his own account, second only to Don Juan in the charming opera which bears the name of that libertine; but his greatest triumph was to detail, in strict confidence, of course, how he had met with *un grand succes* amongst *ces belles blondes Anglaises*, whose characters he was good enough to take away with a sweeping liberality calculated to alter a Briton's preconceived notions as to the propriety of those praiseworthy whom he had hitherto been proud to call his countrywomen. I cannot say I consider myself bound to believe all an old gentleman, or a young one either, has to say on that score. Men are given to lying, and woman is an enigma better let alone. The Prince, however, clung stoutly to his fascinations, long after time, good living, and field sports had changed him from a slim, romantic swain, to a jolly, roundabout old gentleman. He dyed his moustaches and whiskers, wore a belt patented to check corpulence, and made up for the ravages of decay by the artifices of the toilet. He could ride extremely well (for a foreigner), not in the break-neck style which hunting men in England call 'going,' and which none except an Englishman ever succeeds in attaining; but gracefully, and like a gentleman. He could shoot with the rifle or the smooth bore with an accuracy not to be surpassed, and was an 'ace-of-diamonds man' with the pistol. Notwithstanding the many times his armours had brought him 'on the ground,' it was his chief boast that he had never killed his man. 'I am sure of my *coup*, my dear,' he would say, with an amiable smile, and holding you affectionately by the arm, 'and I always take my antagonist just below the knee-pan. I sight a little over the ankle, and the rise of the ball at twelve paces hits the exact spot. There is no occasion to repeat my fire, and he lives to be my friend.'

Added to this he was a thorough *bon vivant*, and an excellent linguist. On all matters connected with field sports he held forth in English, swearing hideously, under the impression that on those topics the use of frightful oaths was national and appropriate. He was past middle age, healthy, good-humored, full of fun, and he did not care a straw for Princess Vocqsal.

Why did he marry her? The reason was simple enough. Hunting, shooting, horse-racing, gaiety, hospitality, love, life, and libertinism, will make a hole in the finest fortune that ever was inherited, even in Hungary; and Prince Vocqsal found himself at middle age, or what he called the prime of life, with all the tastes of his youth as strong as ever, but none of its ready money left. He looked in the glass, and felt that even he must at length succumb to late.

'My cousin Rose is rich; she is young and beautiful; *une femme tres distinguee et tant soit peu coquette*. I must sacrifice myself, and Countess Rose shall become Princess Vocqsal.' Such was the fruit of the Prince's reflections, and it is but justice to add he made a most accommodating and good-humored husband.

Countess Rose had no objection to being Princess Vocqsal. A thousand flirtations, and at least half-a-dozen *grandes passions*,

must teach him better manners. A country man, too; it was a duty to be civil to him. And a fresh character to study, it would be good sport to subjugate him. Probably he would call to-day to apologise for being so remiss. And she rose and looked in the glass at those eyes whose power need not be enhanced by the dexterous touch of a rogue; at that long, glossy hair, and shapely neck and bosom, as a sportsman examining the locks and barrels of the weapon on which he depends for his success in the chase. The review was satisfactory, and Princess Vocqsal did not look at all bored now. She had hardly settled herself once more in a becoming attitude, ere Monsieur le Conte de Rohan was announced, and marched in, hat in hand, with all the grace of his natural demeanor, and the frank, happy air that seldom survives boyhood. Victor was handsomer than ever, brimful of life and spirit, utterly devoid of all conceit or affectation, and moreover, since his father's death, one of the first noblemen of Hungary. It was conquest worth making.

'I thought you would not go back without wishing me good-bye,' said the Princess, with her sweetest smile, and a blush through her rouge that she could summon at command—indeed, this weapon had done more execution than all the rest of her artillery put together. 'I missed you last night at my reception. Why did you not come?'

Victor blushed to. How could he explain that a little supper-party at which some very fascinating ladies who were not of the Princess's acquaintance assisted, prevented him. He stammered out some excuse about leaving Paris immediately, and having to make preparations for departure.

'And you are really going,' said she, in melancholy, pleading tone of voice—'good-bye to my dear Hungary. How I wish you could accompany you.'

'Nothing could be easier,' answered Victor, laughing gaily; 'if madame would condescend to accept my escort, I would wait her convenience. Say, Princess, what shall it be?'

'Ah, you are now joking,' she said, looking at him from under her long eyelashes; 'you know I cannot leave Paris, and you know that we poor women cannot do what we like. It is all very well for you men; you get your passports and you are off to the end of the world, whilst we can but sit over our work and think.'

Here a deep sigh smote on Victor's ear, began to strike him that he had made an impression; the feeling is very pleasant, first, and the young Hungarian was keen alive to it. He spoke in a much softer tone now, and drew his chair a little nearer to that of the Princess.

'I need not go quite yet,' he said, in embarrassed tone, which contrasted strongly with his frank manner a few minutes earlier. 'Paris is very pleasant, and—and—there are so many people here one likes.'

'And that likes you,' she interrupted, with an arch smile, that made her look more charming than ever. 'One is so self-humored,' she added, relapsing once more into her melancholy air; 'one meets so seldom with kindred spirits—people that understand one; it is like a dream to be allowed to associate with those who are really pleasing to us. A happy, happy dream; but the waking is so bitter, perhaps it is well not to dream at all. No! Monsieur De Rohan, you had better go back to Hungary, as I proposed.'

'Not if you tell me to stay,' exclaimed Victor, his eyes brightening, and his color rising rapidly; 'not if I can be of the slightest interest to you. Only tell me what I wish me to do, madame; your word shall be my law. Go or stay, I wait but for your commands.'

He was getting on faster than she had calculated; it was time to damp him a little now. She withdrew her chair a foot, and answered coldly—

To be continued.