

DIGBY GRAND.

CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD HOUSE AT HOME.

Just one field short of Waverley Ashbank—a trailing open strip of plantation, that seemed to be annually subjected to the axe—their hands, with a dash and gallantry, inseparable from a really good pack, had so far overthrown the scent, that when, with their hounds' assistance they again took it up, it was in a direction inclining towards the line they had already come. With the rapidity of lightning it seemed to dash across Joy's mind that they were running what is termed 'heel,' that is to say, although actually upon the track of the animal they pursued, in the reverse direction to that in which he was really travelling, and consequently at a disadvantage increasing with every yard. Two blasts of his horn, two cheers with his mellow voice, brought the well-disciplined and sagacious body about his horse's heels; and galloping off in an exactly contrary direction, towards the farther corner of the chert ash-bank, he drew his hounds quietly across the line, and taking it up this time the right way, they stooped one and all to the scent, congratulating each other with merry peal on having lost so little time. A distance by the strict double of their way was made. On they went, downwards into the vale, and along the level meadows, with an increasing speed, that sorely taxed the powers of the hounds, and above all, the training of the riders. And now there is a hollow from a laurel far across the brook which we are so rapidly approaching, and Cartouch, whose eyes rivals a hawk's in keenness, declares he has seen a fox travelling steadily across your lord's grass field, nearly half-a-mile ahead of us. I take a strong pull at 'Sir Benjamin,' reducing him to a moderate canter, for the hounds unhesitatingly stream down towards the brook, and it is evident that, as Tom Spencer predicted, we must charge the Squire. For an instant they disappear, as though the earth had swallowed them, and the next moment, straining up the opposite bank, they shake the wet from their draggled coats, and show their tongues in joyous content as they sweep on again. Cartouch and I are racing for the spot where they crossed, always, in the absence of other hounds, to be presumed the narrowest place in the park; and I hear the ring of their stirrup leathers as they fly over it together and abreast. On their left Lord Rasperdale declares that if he could see the fox, he would have a good turn upon the hounds, and charging it with tremendous effort, rolls, man and horse, into the ditch, but on the right side, and with but less of time in the saddle and away again. I glance my eye rapidly along the banks to select my place, as I dare not put 'Sir Benjamin' out of his stride to follow any of the others; and spying a sound looking oak off under a tree, steer the hounds and lead one towards that uncertain spot. No need to quicken the old horses' pace as he hears the difficulty. Many a brace would get over gallantly, and never yet a hound's nose has seen the surface gleaming in a momentary sunbeam catches his eye, he cocks his small ears, and pulling savagely at his bridle, rushes like a colt under a knot towards the cavity, and lands gloriously on the further side, the water glancing beneath him like a cataract, and a large piece of the bank cut away by his hind legs subsiding dully into the stream. It was touch and go, but he recovered himself at the moment I thought we must both have gone backwards, and with a snort of triumph, laid him down again to his work, whilst I said to myself for the twentieth time, 'Can anything be so awkward as riding a free-goer over a wide place? All our friends, however, were not so fortunate. Six or seven more gallant hearts charged it unflinchingly—two of them on horses so bad that they had no strength to Cooper to refuse, and overheard they went without a flinch to save themselves. Two galloped over, by dint of great good luck and a pitiless application of the spurs; and one, to the best of my recollection, is the only one that was not killed. At the same time, I have never yet known fulfilled.

ing on his head over a very moderate fence, and getting up again in a sadly incoherent manner, I would take no warning, and crossed the succeeding enclosure, a black, deep, boggy sort of field, with unreduced haste. That finished him. The fence at the further end was thick and strong, the ditch towards me deep, though narrow; and when I felt the old horse, usually so eager and elastic, make his effort as though he cared but little what became of him, I knew how the event must be. We hung for a few seconds entangled in the strong, unyielding blackthorn, struggled in vain with the slippery perpendicular bank, and as the rider glided off over the shoulder, his horse subsided into the ditch upon his back, from whence his four iron-shod feet protruded pitifully towards the heavens in an attitude of helpless supplication.

'Cast, I see,' said Lord Rasperdale, as he went by me; 'he'll struggle out when he gets his wind.'

'Can I help you, Digby?' good-naturedly asked Cartouch, at the same moment, on my other side—not that he waited for an answer.

Joy, of course, was too intent upon his hounds to take any notice of aught else under the skies; and although Tom Spencer and the clergyman, whose horses were both 'done to a turn,' would have stopped to render me any assistance in their power, I waved them on again towards the line of the fast-fading chase. Eight-and-forty minutes by my watch from the find, and see, the hounds are doubling down yon old hedgerow, two fields from the forest. 'He is running short for his life; he must be dead beat; I shall see them kill him?' I stood on the fatal bank with straining eyes, and viewed the hazy forms of the hounds flitting down one hedgerow and up another; whilst Joy, here urging his unwilling steed at a stilt, there blundering him through a gap, strove in vain to reach his darlings, and share with them their well-earned triumph. See! he is off his horse and amongst them; Rasperdale and Cartouch have sprung from their saddles, and the sighing November breeze wafts a faint who-whoop to my expectant ear. At the same instant 'Sir Benjamin,' awaking from his stupor, extricates himself from his awkward position by a tremendous effort, and a series of those laughable gymnastics with which a horse usually emerges from a scrape, and gives himself a hearty shake, as if to ascertain his own identity—a fact of which, judging by his scared eye and distended nostril, he seems by no means sure. Mounting him and jogging quietly on, three or four friendly handgates bring me up in time to be one of the triumphant six who see this gallant fox broken up after a run of fifty-five minutes, unprecedented for pace and straightness, nearly eleven miles from point to point, over the finest country in England, and with but one trifling check, if check it might be called, from find to finish!

CHAPTER XII.

FATHERS AND SONS.

In an unprejudiced observer, few performances would probably appear so thoroughly unaccountable as that of a long and wary ride, through lanes and by-ways, knee-deep in mud, upon a tired horse, with the small ram that so often accompanies the close of a November day, drizzling in one's face, and the prospect of the already dubious twilight becoming pitch dark, hours before it can be possible to reach one's home. The hunter, conscious of having done his duty, and knowing by experience how often the length of his homeward journey is most unfairly proportioned to the severity of his previous exertions, jogs on in a deliberate sort of compromise between trotting and walking, relapsing completely into the latter pace whenever a slight ascent or inequality of ground affords an excuse for the delay, and varying the monotony of such a method of travelling by an occasional alarming demonstration of throwing himself into the middle of the road upon his head—a threat that, for the honor of the noble animal, I am bound to believe that I have never yet known fulfilled.

antagonistic attributes, and that the exigencies of the fertile Lucma should be so inimical to the pursuits of the vigorous virgin of the woods. But such calculations enter not the teeming brain of twenty-one; and we plodded home in perfect contentment with ourselves, our horses, and our any's amusement. Every turn in the road brought us in contact with some less successful horseman, for whom the oft-told tale, though planting thorns of discontent and disgust in the breast of the auditor, thrilled with untarnished freshness from the lips of the historian. Here we were overtaken by one gentleman 'who had seen everything we did—was never more than a field behind us: and if hounds had only run straight, could have been with us at any time.' And a little further on we met an honest and more disconsolate sportsman, who confessed at having lost us altogether, and added, with desponding energy, that it was 'just his luck.'

Various and amusing were the excuses for their non-appearance, and far-fetched and ingenious the reasons insisted upon, to prove that there was no lack of courage or determination to be laid to the charge of the unwilling absentees. If Major Slasher had not been riding a young one (now in his third season), he could have had a capital start (the Major argued *ab initio*); and when that is the case, no man alive, so he thinks, can beat that gallant officer. Varnish, the dealer, 'had been going in front for the first half-hour,' and appealed to Squire Softly, who had unfortunately gone home, to corroborate the fact.

'Just as I came to the brook, Captain, with little Gohightly pulling "oudacious," for, as you know (I) he's a devil at water, my old snaffle-bridle broke off short at the mouth-piece; and I went four times round that identical field before I could stop him. He's a rare little horse, Captain—how he'd fly with your weight! Look at him now, how fresh he is!'

And on casting my eye over the exhausted steed alluded to, sure enough the bridle had come in two near the bit, and the broken pieces, looking very much as if they had been severed with a penknife, were fastened together with a bit of string. Mr. Cane had been deceived by a boy scaring crows, and rode to the urchin, under the impression it was a veritable 'holloa.' Whilst young Mylde, who was notorious for 'pottering in the gaps,' had ridden his own line gallantly at starting through a 'hand-gate'; but being unsuccessful in his search for an easy exit from the field he had so incautiously entered, was forced, after making a complete circuit, again to emerge through that inglorious portal. Lord Lately had been floored by a collision in mid-air with Farmer Bull—the peer getting considerably the worst of it. Sir Francis Fakeaway had stopped his horse (since dead) in the first twenty minutes; and young Fearless, after riding over two fallen sportsmen and three gates, had finally deposited his father's favorite hunter in the yielding mire of the bottomless Squelch. George Jealous, Old Venom, and Captain Snarl would not allow that the hounds ever went any pace at any time, but that when they did, there was nobody with them!—and listened to our unwelcome raptures with a savor of incredulous disgust. Poor Carambole was the only one who had the manliness to confess his misfortunes, without any attempt at concealment or palliation; and him we overtook vainly endeavoring, by the light of his cigar, to decipher some mysterious hieroglyphics on a time-worn sign-post, not too distinct at any period, and perfectly illegible in the dusk of a November evening. The active Frenchman had raised himself by his arms to a level with the important inscription, and when we discovered him, was perched in mid-air, puffing forth volumes of smoke, and blowing up a tremendous light from a huge Havana, wherewith to improve that typographical knowledge on which his dinner so entirely depended.

'Holloa! Carambole, have you lost your way?' and 'What have you done with your horse?' were our simultaneous inquiries.

'He very good horse,' was the reply, 'but I shall never see him again. *Il m'a joué un joli tour*—I galloped, I jump. *Nous arrivons ensemble* a un—"stake-humbound"—you call him "oxfence" *Je n'arrive mon chapeau sur ma tête, je m'assis sur la creche de la main, je lui dis, Montez,*

tend with, all the annoyances to which he must be subjected, in that unsportsmanlike country, seem unable to eradicate.

Ah, well! hunting is good fun, and so is moistening the recapitulation of your morning's exploits with bumpers of Bordeaux; nor did we spare the latter seductive fluid in the evening, after devoting the day so successfully to the former pursuit. But the realities of life entail sterner and more disagreeable duties than riding over a grass country and drinking claret in an arm-chair; and the more I reflected on my present position—the more I considered my existing relations with Flora Belmont, the more I felt that it only due to her that I should, as speedily as possible, come to some understanding with Sir Peregrine previous to making my proposal in form to her father. I was well aware that there would be many difficulties in our way—that the Old Colonel's bad opinion of my principles and conduct would prove a serious obstacle to our union; that 'money,' ever the first consideration in this business-like world, would be wanting on both sides, and I shuddered to think of my debts, and the large sums that I had squandered upon trifles, and worse than trifles. Young as I was, the veil was gradually falling from my eyes, and the career that had once seemed so jovial, careless, and high-spirited, now that I fondly hoped I had some one to think of besides myself—some one to depend entirely upon me for guidance and support—appeared selfish and contemptible in the extreme. Bitterly did I deplore my past follies, and the unworthiness of such a character as mine to mate with my gentle Flora. In shame and sorrow I recalled my feigned adoration of Mrs. Man-trap, and my heart died within me to think that Fate might have in store for me—alas! but too just a reprisal!—such a disappointment as I had inflicted on the high-minded Zoe. But, above all, I chafed and fretted to reflect that the filthy lucre which I had hitherto despised—the dross that I had hitherto considered as a necessary inconvenience attendant upon civilization—might now prove the one thing needful, the only insuperable obstacle to the triumph of my better feelings—to my entrance upon a nobler and purer state of being.

Stung by such thoughts as these, I placed as high a value upon gold as I had previously depreciated that very necessary commodity; and ever in extreme, thought myself capable of any exertion to attain that which I had often squandered so profusely. There is less difference than the world is apt to imagine between the spendthrift and the miser; the same selfish temperament that makes the youth greedy of pleasure and ungrudging of aught save his own enjoyment, produces in after-years an insatiable desire for the means by which such indulgences may be procured; and as the owner of 'the splendid shilling,' whilst the coin is his, possesses everything that a shilling can purchase, so the hoarding capitalist, though he may deny himself all the luxuries and most of the necessities of life, has the satisfaction of feeling that he can at any time command all that his fellow-creatures are striving so unceasingly to obtain. Thus it is that the same individual who at twenty risks hundreds on the turn of a die and thousands on the speed of a horse, nor suffers such excitement to impair his appetite or disturb his repose, shall at forty, with ten times the knowledge and twenty times the means, grudge to spend a penny upon the most simple economical of amusements; and whilst acres are fertilising to increase his rents, and consols accumulating to swell his ever-growing capital, shall remain, in the midst of all his wealth, continually haunted 'by the ghost of a shilling.'

Nevertheless an explanation must be come to, and an interview with Sir Peregrine, always rather a formidable undertaking, must be arranged for the purpose. Divers ceremonies required to be gone through on these occasions. In the first place a footman was despatched for Soames, who was charged with a viva voce appeal to his master for the honor of an interview, which invariably called forth the same reply, delivered with becoming pomposity by the messenger, 'Sir Peregrine will see you, sir, directly he is at leisure.' I was always at a loss to know the line which my father drew between his hours of what he called his leisure and his employment, for to business he had an immense and respectable aversion, and he seldom or never looked into a book. An hour or so of

more hopeless involved in his affairs, cheered by this vague hope which I had now dashed to the ground. In my indignation and despair I lost all self-command, and, to my shame be it said, forgot that reverence which under all circumstances is ever due from a son to his father. I vowed that I was utterly reckless of what should happen to me if this marriage was not to come off—that I would return to my dissolute courses and extravagant career. I scouted our dignities, and scoffed at 'our position.' I blasphemed the memory of Sir Hugo, and swore that I cared not what became of Haverly; that the estates might go to the Jews, and the family to the devil! and, in short, our interview concluded with so little prospect of reconciliation, after all that had taken place, that the next morning saw me posting back to rejoin my regiment in London, having quarrelled irretrievably with my father, vowing vengeance against Haverly and all belonging to it, and utterly regardless as to where I should go or what should become of me—a dangerous state of mind for a young man just turned one-and-twenty hurrying back to the seductive arms of the modern Babylon.

CHAPTER XIII.

LIFE IN LONDON.

There seems to be a charm in life at the University which, amongst all temperaments and all dispositions, extends its influence far into after-years, and the bright recollection of which smiles as the one green spot in many a cheerless destiny and disappointing career. Two old campaigners will sufficiently prose about their marchings and counter-marchings, their skirmishes, bivouacs, and general engagements. Two rural politicians will disagree for hours together upon the affairs of the nation, and insist volubly enough upon the arguments borrowed at second-hand from their respective morning papers. Farmers, fishermen, and fox-hunters, especially the latter, are extremely tiresome to an uninitiated listener, as they enter voluminously into the mysteries of their several crafts; nor are the frequenters of Newmarket free from an ill-judged tendency to monopolize the conversation, unawed by the frowns of grave seniors, who deem all money-getting practices but their own a grievous sin, and deterred by the suppressed yawns and weary glances of the ladies, who cannot be brought to interest themselves in the supposition that Plato is able to give Aristotle three pounds and a beating, or that Bustle's public running proves that singularly-named animal immeasurably inferior to Canezou.

But much as all these eloquent gentlemen love to dwell upon their favorite topics, they are not to be compared with two old University chums, meeting after an interval of a few years, and living over again in memory the wild jollities and rapid escapades of manhood's morning time. At it they go—p-mell—both together, without a moment's interval or cessation: how Crazenose hurried Oriel, and what the P... the desecration of P... plucked... how he liked the h... Tom Seba... been some wrangle... took a double... after 'hell... our own... tions app... Time is altogether... admiring and... advantages of a... to think that his own youth... ingloriously wasted.

No man can have had a larger store of these reminiscences than my old schoolfellow, Tom Spencer. With the fear of acedemical dons before my eyes, and a most exaggerated reverence for the legal powers of the University, I shall not specify the college to which my friend Tom belonged, but shall only mention that whatever opportunities were offered at Oxford amusement, excitement, or instruction, he took advantage of them all. The sharp and intelligent boy at Eton had developed himself into the sound and cultivated scholar, whilst the winner of the Sculling Sweeps takes at the Brecas was the staunchest oar of that gallant crew which struggled annually with the Cambridge eight. Everything he undertook appeared to crown him with success. Not