Kate Coventry.

CHAPTER II.

(CONTINUED.)

I pat Brilliant's smooth, hard neck, and he shakes his head, and strikes an imaginary butterfly with one black fore-leg, and I draw my rein a thought tighter, and away we go. much to the admiration of that good-looking man with moustachios who is leaning on his umbrella close to the rails, and smoking the cigar of meditation, as if the park was his own.

I often wondered who that man was. Morning after morning I have seen him at the same place, always with an umbrella and always with a cigar. I quite missed him on the Derby day, when of course he was gone to Epsom (by the by, why don't we go to the Derby as much as to Ascot?); and yet it was rather a relief, too, for I had got almost shy about passing him; it seemed so absurd to see the man every day and never to speak; besides, I fancied, though of course it could only be fancy, that he looked as if he were expecting me. At last I couldn't help blushing, and I thought he saw it; for I'm sure he smiled, and then I was so provoked with myself, that I sent Brilliant up the ride at a pace nothing short of a race-horse could have caught.

CHAPTER III.

I wonder whether any lady in England has a maid who, to use that domestic's own expression, is capable of giving satisfaction. If any lady does rejoice in such an Abigail, I shall be too happy to 'swap' with her, and give anything else I possess, except Brilliant, into the bargain. Mine is the greatest goose that ever stood upon two legs, and how she can chatter as she does with her mouth full of pins, is to me a perfect miracle. Once or twice in the week I have to endure a certain ordeal, which, although a positive pleasure to some women, is to my disposition intense martyrdom, termed dressing to go out; and I think I never hated it more than the night of Lady Horsingham's ball. Lady Horsingham is my poor uncle's widow; and as Aunt Deborah is extremely punctilious on all matters relating to family connections, we invariably attend these solemnities with a gravity befitting the occasion.

Now I may be singular in my ideas; but I confess that it does appear to me a strange way of enjoying one's self in the dog-days, to make one's toilette at eleven p.m., for the purpose of sitting in a carriage till twelve, and struggling on a staircase amongst a mob of one's fellow-creatures till half-past. After fighting one's way literally step by step, and gaining a landing by assault, one looks round and takes breath, and what does one see? Panting girls looking in vain for the right partner, who is probably not ten yards from them, but wedged in between substantial dowagers, whom he is cursing in his heart, but from whom there is no escape, or perhaps philosophically and perfidiously making the best of his unavoidable situation, and flirting shamefully with the one she likes next best to the imprisoned maiden on the staircase, or, the tables turned, young fledglings pining madly for their respective enslavers, and picturing to themselves how she may be even now wheeling round to that pearing waltz in the arms of some former adorer or delightfully new acquaintance, little heeding him who is languishing in his white neckcloth, actually within speaking distance, but separated as effectually as if he were in another country. By the-bye, it's fatal when people begin to think of each other as he's and she's, the softest proper names that ever was whispered is not half so dangerous as those demonstrative pronouns. In one corner is a stout old gentleman, wedged against the wall, wiping the drops from his bald head, and wondering what Jane and Julia can see in these gatherings to make them so wild about going to every ball for which they can get an invitation. Deluded father! both Jane and Julia have the best reasons in this very house. You grudge it to spend a broiling September day in the pursuit of your game, and

out what one's partner does say, than to prevent his being overheard by other people; but, I must confess, if anybody had anything very particular to say to me, I had rather hear it in the quiet country by moonlight, or even coming home from Greenwich by water, or anywhere, in short, rather than in the turmoil of a London ball. But that's all nonsense; and I hope I have too much pride to allow any man to address me in such a strain. Trust me for setting him down!

It's no wonder, then, that I was cross when I was dressing for Lady Horsingham's ball; and that silly Gertrude (that's my maid's name, and what a name it is for a person in that class of life!) put me more and more out of patience with her idiot conversation, which she tries to adapt to my tastes, and of which the following is a specimen:—

'Master John will be at her ladyship's ball, miss, I make no doubt;' brushing away the while at my back hair, and pulling it unnecessarily hard; no maid ever yet had a light hand.

No answer. What business is it of hers, and why should she call him Master John? Gertrude tries again; 'You look pale to-night, miss;—you that generally has such a color. I'm afraid you're tired with your ride.'

'Not a bit of it—only sleepy. Why, it's time one was in bed.'

'Lor, miss, I shouldn't want to go to bed, not if I was going to a ball. But I think you like 'orse exercise best; and to be sure, your 'orse is a real beauty, Miss Kate.'

The very name of Brilliant always puts me in good humor, so, of course, I can but answer, 'That he is, Gertrude, and as good as he's handsome;' on which my voluble handmaid goes off again at score.

'That's what I say, miss, when I see him coming round to the door, with his long black tail, and his elegant shape, and his thin legs.' Thin legs! I can't stand that; to hear my beautiful Brilliant's great strong legs called thin, as if he were made of paper. I feel I am getting savage again, so I cut Gertrude short, and bid her finish my hair, and hasten my dressing, for Aunt Deborah don't take long, and we shall be late for the ball. At the mention of the word ball, off goes Gertrude again.

'What a grand ball it will be, miss, as all her ladyship's is; and I know there'll be no young lady there as will be better dressed than my young lady, nor better looking neither; and I'm sure to see you and Master John stand up together, as you did last Christmas, when we was all at Dangerfield! and I says to the steward, "Mr. Musty," says I, "a handsomer couple than them two I never clapped eyes on. Master John, he looks so fresh, and so healthy and portly, as becomes a gentleman." And he says, "No doubt," says he; "and Miss Kate, she steps away like a real good one, with her merry eyes and her trim waist, as blooming," says he, "as a bean field, and as saucy as ——"

'There, that will do, Gertrude; now my pocket-handkerchief and some scent, and my gloves and my fan. Good night, Gertrude.'

'Good night, miss; I do humbly hope you'll enjoy your ball.'

Enjoy my ball, indeed! How little does the girl know what I enjoy, and what I don't enjoy! Lady Horsingham will be as stiff as the poker, and about as communicative. Cousin Amelia will look at everything I've got on, and say the most disgraceful things she can think of, because she never can forgive me for being born two years later than herself. I shall know very few people and those I do know I shall not like. I shall have a headache before I have been half an hour in the room. If I dance I shall be hot, and if I don't dance I shall be bored. Enjoy my ball, indeed! I'd much rather be going hay-making.

Up went the steps, bang went the door, and ere long we were safely consigned to the 'string' of carriages bound for the same destination as ourselves. After much cutting-in and shaving of wheels, and lashing of coach-horses, with not a little blasphemy, 'Miss Horsingham and Miss Coventry' were announced in a stentorian voice, and we were struggling in a mass of silks and satins, blonde and broadcloth, up the swarming staircase. Everything happened exactly as I had predicted, Lady Horsingham accosted Aunt Deborah with the most affectionate cordiality, and lent me two fingers of her left hand, to be returned without delay. Cousin Amelia looked me well over from head to foot, and complimented me on my health and Bril-

ner as by a reference to my favorite was sure to go on swimmingly; besides, we could not have got away from each other if we would; and ere long I found Mrs. Lumley—for that was the lady's name—a most amusing and satirical personage, with a variety of anecdotes about all her friends and acquaintance, and a sort of piquant charm of manner that was quite irresistible.

Besides all this, she was doubtless a very pretty woman—less striking perhaps than winning. At the first glance you hardly remarked her—at the second you observed she was very well dressed—at the third it occurred to you all of a sudden that she was far better-looking than half the regular red-and-white beauties of the season; and after five minutes' conversation, all the men were over head and ears in love with her. She was neither dark nor fair—neither pale nor ruddy—neither short nor tall. I never could succeed in making out the color of her eyes, but she had wonderfully long thick eyelashes with a curl in them (I wish mine had been cut when I was a baby), and a beautiful healthy-looking skin, and such good teeth. After all, I think her great attraction was her nose. It had more expression in its straight, well-cut bridge, and little sharp point, than all the rest of her features put together. I believe it was her nose that conquered everything, and that her small feet, and pretty figure, and white hands, and dashing ways, and piquante conversation, had much less to answer for than one saucy little feature. How she rattled on: 'You don't don't you know Lady Scapegrace, Miss Coventry, do you? There, that bold-looking woman in yellow. Beautiful black hair, hasn't she, false every bit of it! She'll bow to me to-night, because she sees me with your good aunt; there, I told you so! Since she and Sir Guy are living together again she sets up for being respectable—such stories, my dear! but I don't believe half of 'em. However I've seen her with my own eyes do the oddest things—at best, I'm afraid she's a shocking flirt! There's your cousin, Mr. Jones:—you see I know everybody: how black he look—he don't like me—a great many people don't,—but I return good for evil—I like everybody—it's never worth while to be cross;' and as she said so she smiled with such a sunny, merry expression that I liked her better and better.

Cousin John certainly did look very cross. 'Who introduced you to that horrid woman, Kate?' said he, as soon as a fresh convulsion in the crowd had stranded us a few steps higher up, and we were separated from Mrs. Lumley and her attractions.

'My aunt, sir,' I replied, demurely, telling a white one for the sake of teasing him. 'Why? Have you any objections?'

'Oh, of course, if my aunt did, it's all right,' replied he. 'I don't know a great deal of her, and what I do know I don't much like. But, Kate, there's a friend of mine wishes to be presented to you. You've often heard me mention Frank Lovell—well, there he is: do you se him?—turning round now to speak to Lady Scapegrace.'

Good heavens! it was the man I had seen in the park so often, if possible, better-looking with hat off than I had thought him in his morning costume, with the eternal cigar in his mouth. I have a sort of dim recollection of his making his bow to my aunt, who received him as she does all good-looking young men, with a patronizing smile, and a vision of John doing the polite, and laughing as he ceremoniously introduced Captain Lovell and Miss Coventry, and something said about the honor of the next waltz; and, although I am not easily discomposed, I confess I felt a little shy and uncomfortable till I found myself hanging on Captain Lovell's arm, and elbowing our way to a place amongst the dancers.

I must say he wasn't the least what I expected,—not at all forward, and never alluded to our previous meeting, or to Brilliant, till we went to have an ice in the tea-room, when Captain Lovell began to enlarge upon the charm of those morning rides, and the fresh air, and the beautiful scenery of Hyde Park; and though I never told him exactly, he managed to find out that I rode every day at the same early hour, even after a ball! and that I was as likely to be there to-morrow as any day in the week; and so we had another turn at the Colombetta waltz, and he took me back to my aunt, half-inclined to be pleased with him, and more than half-inclined to be angry with myself. I am afraid I couldn't help watching him as he loitered about amongst the crowd, now deep

CHAPTER IV.

'Now then, Kate, late as usual; my phaeton's at the door, and we've only an hour and five minutes to do the twelve miles,' said Cousin John's cheery voice, as he accosted me on the following morning, running up-stairs to change my dress, after my early ride. Yes, notwithstanding the ball the night before, I was not going to disappoint Brilliant of his gallop; besides, these things are all habit; if you once get accustomed to early hours, nothing is so easy as to keep to them. Why, even Captain Lovell was in the park as usual with his cigar—he seems regular enough about that, at all events—and he took his hat off so gracefully when he spied me cantering up the Ride, that I hadn't the heart to pass without stopping just to say, 'How d'ye do?' but of course I didn't shake hands with him.

'Come, Kate, bustle, bustle,' exclaimed that fidget, John; and in less time than my lady-readers would believe, I had put on my pink bonnet and my white dress, and was bowling down to Richmond by the side of my cousin, behind a roan and a chestnut that stepped away in a style that it did one good to see.

'What a clipper that off-horse is, John,' said I, as we cleared London, and got to the level road by Kew Gardens; 'let me take the reins for five minutes, they're going so pleasantly;' but John don't like me to drive anything more sporting than a pony-carriage, and he refused point blank, which, to say the least of it, was brutal on his part. If I hadn't thought it would make me sick, I should have liked to smoke, on purpose to provoke him. We did the distance with three minutes to spare, and as we pulled up in front of the Castle Hotel, I was proud to hear the admiration our *tout ensemble* elicited from a knot of idlers lounging round the door. 'Ere 's a spicy set-out, Bill,' said one. 'Crikey! vot a pretty gal!' said another. 'Vouldn't I like to be Vilikins with she for a Dinah!' exclaimed the dirtiest of the conclave; and although I appreciated the compliment, I was forced to turn my back on my unwashed admirer, and reply to the greetings of the pic-nic party we had come down to join.

There were Mrs. Molasses and her two daughters, to begin with, people of unheard-of wealth, of which they seemed to carry a large portion on their persons. The mamma, ample, black-eyed, fresh-colored, and brocaded, with an extremely natural wig. The eldest daughter, Mary, with whom I had afterwards reason to be better acquainted, pale, languid, very quiet, and low-toned, with fine eyes, and soft dark hair, and what people call an interesting look. She took the sentimental line—was all feeling and poetry, and milk and water, and as easily frightened as she was reassured again.

(To be Continued.)

DIGBY GRAND.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SETTLED AT LAST.

And with these words, she swept out of the room with a calm dignity seldom assumed by that gentlest of women; but with which, when she chose, for all her pale face, and soft, sweet eyes, she could have 'looked a lion down.'

To her own apartment she marched, with measured, unfaltering step; and there, we may be sure, her dignity gave way; and thither, we may be equally sure, Julia followed; and the two women wept in one another's arms, and, doubtless, administered sal-volatile and other remedies, and bathed their eyelids, and smoothed their hair; and made the Reverend Amos very uncomfortable at luncheon, and thoroughly ashamed of himself at dinner; and the skirmish ended, as usual, in the total rout and discomfiture of the master of the house; but yet to many such annoyances was Flora subjected, and still she remained faithful, unforgetting and uncomplaining, to the end.

Well, it is over now, I hope. Soon she shall again have a home—may it be a happy one! And, in the meantime, I people the little room in London with thick-coming fantasies and hopeful images, in which

say, statesman though you be, can you keep him at his best for twenty-four hours? You know you cannot, though thousands depend upon the result; if he is not improving, he is going back. So is it with the human mind; every day, every hour that passes has its influence on the god-like portion of man. If he is not storing his intellect from the past, or training his soul for the future, depend upon it both one and the other are imperceptibly but surely deteriorating from that lofty ideal which, though unattainable here, should ever be in view—are assimilating more and more with the grosser clay which covers them, and sinking deeper and deeper to the debasing level of the animal creation. Will you forfeit your birthright for a few short years of that which, even under its most favorable aspect, can scarce be called pleasure? Are not her most envied votaries, though exulting in joyous health, with boundless wealth, yet sickening of a vague disease?' and will you enter the lists, and strive with a vigor and assiduity that in other contests might win an immortal crown, for a prize that when obtained is utterly valueless, a victory more fatal than the most inglorious defeat? Shall your youth be wasted in disappointment, your manhood in disgust, your age in remorse? and all because you have not strength of mind to break through the customs of your kind, and embark upon your own career, in humble hope and honest independence.

Look at the mighty names which stand inscribed upon the roll of Fame—warriors, sages, and statesmen,—the beacons of the present, the examples of the past: think ye that to them the pastime of an hour could be the engrossing business of life?—that those vigorous minds could be concentrated upon idle follies and seductive pleasures? No. Taking the world as it came, they might here and there step aside to pick up the flower chance threw in their way; they might enjoy—none so much—the passing moments of amusement and relaxation; but the step was quickened after each refreshing pause—the mind more braced than ever for the glorious object still held uninterruptedly in view. Shall you, then, be content to make the giddy round of pleasure your all-in-all—to sink health, fame, and fortune in her Lethæan wave? Should such be your choice, repine not when you find, as I did, that your life has been spent in the pursuit of a shadow—that your treasures are but dross, your gods but clay. Rather be thankful should the bracing effects of adversity, the pressure of necessity, recall you to that career of toil, that laborious destiny which is the normal condition of man.

Exertion is the salt of our existence. Without it the blood thickens, the frame droops, the mind stagnates. Happier is the peasant, home-returning from his daily task—weary, indeed, in limb, but fresh and gladsome in heart—than his lord, tossing restless and discontented on his bed of roses—a pallid voluptuary, who has exhausted pleasure after pleasure, till his sated spirit yearns even for the languor of fatigue, vainly striving to deaden the aspiring impulse within—vainly hoping to escape from his accusing self—seeking rest and finding none. I cannot but believe that there are moments during which the men that we see about us every day—the thrifty bees that gather, and the careless drones that spend—must reflect and speculate on the ulterior object with which this immortal soul of ours is imprisoned for some threescore years and ten in its imperfect tenement of clay. It is not self-indulgence, for her votaries are most of all sick and weary of their engrossing task; it is not self-aggrandisement, for the slaves of ambition have never yet reached the topmost round of the ladder, and the draught of glory but irritates their fever, gasping still for more.

In all times, the wisest of mankind have deemed our present condition to be one of preparation, of training—severe it may be, but necessary, for a loftier and less material state of existence; and shall we, of all ages, virtually reject this noble prospect, and grovelling here below, in sensual indulgences or idle pleasures, forfeit the birthright of our race, the privileges of our station, only a little lower than the angels? We shall each and all of us see this clearly some day, when darkened rooms, and hushed whispers, and a wistful sympathy on the old familiar faces, warn our shrinking senses that for us there will be no to-morrow. Who would put off the preparation for his journey till the eve of departure? Let us make up the accounts and strike the balance while it be not too late