

It will be better that you should not answer this letter; and as this is the first time I shall ever write to you, forgive me if I venture to offer a few words of friendly advice to one in whom I shall always feel deeply interested. The fault of your character is want of purpose. Do not make the impetus of the moment for the true impulse of your heart, and do not throw away every part of your own success drawing upon you. Do not do that which I know you possess some definite object, and do not longer to embark on some vain project. Had I been a man, I should have been ambitious. Forgive me, my dear Digby, for the last time I call you not, forgive me for thus presuming to dictate to one whom I so humbly regard, and believe me your true well wisher.

ZOE DE GRAND-MARTIGNY.

And this was the woman I had thrown overboard. Mrs. Mantrap, this was the true and noble heart I had disregarded and forgotten. And now, forsooth, I had my reward. I should never see her more. I had lost her love, and was unworthy of her friendship. Ah, Zoe! it would indeed have been better had we never met. I was worthy of you, even in my thenceless and unpolluted boyhood; and now, alas! how can I dare to think of such purity as yours! My weak and vacillating character, ever acted upon by the influence of the moment, could never have matched with your high resolve, your noble and unselfish spirit. I am, in truth, a being of an inferior order. Ay, even now, when I am fresh from the perusal of your generous and forgiving letter—when my heart is sore with the thought of your utter sacrifice of all your hopes—a sacrifice which I am incapable of making, but which I can still appreciate—the image of Flora Belmont rises amidst the wreck of your happiness, and out of the wreck fresh beauty my earliest idol. Her low, unmanly, ungrate, heartless as may appear, despite of pity, despite of shame and remorse, something in my inmost soul whispers triumphantly—I am free! I am free!

Some people are determined believers in the truth of 'presentiments,' others assert that all such fancies are shadowings of the future, but the unscientific effect of such a theory is acted upon by an excited brain. By the way it may, I can only account for my visionary state of spirit during the day following the receipt of Zoe's letter—a communication which ought to have made me thoroughly unhappy, which did fill me with bitter regrets and burning self-reproach, by some vague prophetic sense of what was awaiting me at one of those solemn performances which take place at a county ball, immediately to take place. This ball, be it understood, was a joyous occasion, undergone by the nobility, gentry, and squires of the shire, with a fortitude and resignation worthy of a better cause. That their presence in the county assembly rooms—a spacious structure erected over the goal, where the votaries of the sports were disturbed with their revels the gloomy mal factor in his cell—was a voluntary discipline of the severest order, I gather from the fact that, excepting some of the sunnier set of the very young ladies, I never saw any one put in a good word for the unprofitable ball. It was a bore—it was a nuisance—the rooms were always hot, and the weather was always cold—the passages were ill-lighted, and the moon sure to be off duty—all the rooms in the vicinity were bad, and as for the music—don't talk of the music? But notwithstanding all these drawbacks, long consultations as to the propriety of attending were mysteriously wound up with the annual 'however, I suppose we must go; and thus the obligation served to bring a very considerable number of white satin dresses and shawls to cheer this to assist at the festival. I was indeed, with the exception of Caramel, who thought it *charmant*, we had severally and collectively expressed our

In the meantime the placid tranquillity of the room gradually fell. A pair of dancing partners fluttered in with their mincing broods; chattering young ladies, whose mouths, as Lavish would have said, don't bear looking into, smiled behind their fans, and seemed as if they wished somebody would ask them to dance; and while the country dances blushed and giggled, the London girls stood erect and scornful, under the conscious advantage of having experienced a season in town. Elderly gentlemen toddled comfortably up to the first place, and smiled blandly from behind their white waistcoats. I maintain that nobody enjoys a ball so much as a quiet old gentleman. Young would-be dandies stood in the doorway, and the more aspiring clung tenaciously to their hats; and still fresh arrivals kept pouring in, and quadrilles were being formed down the whole length of the room.

I had already executed sundry duty-dances, that to strictly enjoined by Sir Peregrine previous to my departure, and was in the midst of what has always been to me a favorite amusement—namely, watching the histrionic powers of my fellow-creatures when on their best behavior and attired in their company manners—I had ever been rewarded by witnessing a beautiful piece of acting on the part of Mrs. Gramp, who was addressing 'dear Anglim' in an affectionate whisper that would never have led one to suppose she worried the poor girl's life out at home—when, far off amongst the crowd, turning away from me, I caught the outline of a graceful head, the droop of a glossy ringlet that could belong to none upon earth but Flora Belmont. My head swam—I felt almost sick with excitement; but manning myself by a severe effort, I bowed my way across the room. I found myself face to face with Flora. I know not what I said—I have no recollection of what took place; but a few minutes later found me standing opposite to her in a quadrille, trembling like a girl, but nerving myself to the utmost to master that emotion which I could see was shared to no small extent by my partner. Hardly a word did we exchange—hardly once did our eyes meet during that shortest of quadrilles; yet something told me that silent, distant as she was, I had not been forgotten. She looked paler and thinner than when I had seen her in London; but hers was a loveliness which neither sorrow nor sickness could destroy—that winning beauty of expression, to which regularity of features is only an outward auxiliary, the setting of the opal, the becoming garnet of the soul within. Her hand shook as she rested it on my arm at the conclusion of the dance; and, with a nervousness equal to her own, I hesitatingly proposed to take her to the tea-room. We seated ourselves in an alcove somewhat removed from the rest of the dancers, and in shaking voice I found courage to ask her where she was staying, and whether Sir Angelo Parsons was one of their party? The look with which she replied served to show me how completely I had been mistaken—how cruelly I had misjudged her. 'On that hint I spoke.' The torrent that had for months been accumulating at my heart burst its banks at last: I told her of my love, of Cartouch's letter, of my utter misery and despair. I attributed my reckless habits, my deep play, all my misdeeds, to my hopeless wretchedness when I heard of her rumored marriage. She, in her turn, confided to me how heart-broken she had been at the many reports concerning my conduct and character which Mrs. Mantrap had taken care should reach her ears—how she had disbelieved for a time, till circumstances after circumstances, each corroborating the other, and ending with that dreadful duel with Major Martignole, had forced conviction upon her—how her father had warned her that I was a rascal and a gambler—and how she was at that moment happier than she had been for months! It would be a sacrilege to relate all that took place during that important interview; nor are scenes such as we then enacted for our mutual benefit, of much

importance when compared with the summits of our vigorous domestic, and the painful effort, so dreaded by the sluggard, termed 'getting out of bed.'

I could have sworn, on the morning after the ball, that my repose had only lasted five minutes—a brilliant five minutes truly, illuminated as it was by the image of my affianced Flora—when my uncompromising servant entered the room, under a burden of hot water, clean linen, top-boots and spurs, and snowy appliances thereto belonging, wherein it was my intention to over-ride as much as possible the Hark-Holloa hounds, advertised to 'meet' on that day at Haverley Hall. Oh the delight of that first moment of consciousness, ere I could gather from my scattered faculties what it was that made my heart bound so lightly in my bosom!—the first dawning of 'the sober certainty of waking bliss,' worth all the dreams ever yet sent by Proserpine through her 'ivory gate.' Could mortal man be happier than I was on that auspicious morning? Debts, difficulties, and annoyances were all forgotten; if I thought of Zoe, it was but a twinge of reproach which enhanced the joy succeeding so momentary a pang. Flora was mine! Such a thought alone was sufficient to fill my mental atmosphere with sunshine, nor was it an unpleasing undercurrent of ideas that I was that day to ride a capital horse, with as crack a pack of hounds as England could produce. The original young thoroughbred one, whose tuition first brought about that interview with old Bugon-t which obtained for me a commission in Her Majesty's Service, was now an experienced, steady, and very capital hunter—

'A matchless steed, though somewhat old, Prompt in his paces, cool and bold.'

and, in honor of the friendly old general, denominated 'Sir Benjamin.' Such a 'mount' was in itself an anticipation of success; and who that remembers the ideal hours which 'going well' through 'a fine run' confers upon the brow of imaginative twenty-one, will refuse to sympathize with my feelings of exhilaration and excitement, as I descended the stairs to partake of that merriest of meals, a hunting breakfast!

The party were assembled when I entered the dining-room, and my being five minutes later than the rest called down upon me many a jeering reproach for my 'dissipated London habits.' The ladies were all present, having expressed their intention of seeing as much fun as possible from the carriages, under the guidance of Sir Peregrine, who for the first time was unable to join 'the field' on horseback. Julia Batt was very anxious to have ridden, but the Reverend Amos—who dispensed all sports but shooting, and thought hunting very dangerous—would not hear of such a performance. Had it not been for these parental objections, Tom Spencer would never have seen as well as he did one of the finest runs that ever took place over that country. How the young lady looked in a hat, I am at a loss to say; but judging from what she was in a certain pink bonnet, I should imagine her riding-costume must have made her fascinating and piquante to a degree. Poor Tom Spencer! Sundry neighbors dropped in ere the hounds arrived, to pay their morning salutations to my father, or to talk over the previous evening, and its events past and to come, with that sort of retrospective scandal that makes half the pleasure of a ball in the country. Stained red coats dotted the steps at the hall-door; and booted gentlemen, whose nerves required a little bracing before encountering our Haverley fences, straggled into the house for a small glass of cherry-brandy, after their gallop to covert. Draggled and panting hacks were being led away, whilst silent sharp-looking grooms were whistling their own pocket-handkerchiefs to remove every speck or stain that might mar the glossy coats of those powerful high-bred hunters they had brought so carefully to the place of meeting.

them a little too light, but even such critical veterans must have confessed that they they looked 'all over like going.' The horses were well-bred, powerful animals, unusually sound, and with action that promised jumping capabilities to take them over that strongly-enclosed country. All the minor appliances were in keeping with the more important items of the establishment; and though last, not least, the noble master himself, a perfect specimen of his class, the high-bred English gentleman, was every inch a sportsman. Look at him now, as he comes galloping up, a little late; for a seat in Parliament entails its duties as well as its advantages, and letters must be answered, even though a field of eager horsemen may be kept waiting by the delay. Look at him now, with his manly, open bearing, his fine athletic form, the flush of health upon his cheek, and the sparkle of pleasure in his eye, as with frank courtesy and hearty good-humour he exchanges greetings with one and all, from the stately peer to the burly yeoman, ere he rides into the middle of the pack, who, with fawning countenances and waving sterno welcome that well known voice, and say if Lord Rasperdale is not the *beau ideal* of what a master of hounds should be. Joy touches his cap, glad to see him at first, for now we shall begin. My lord exchanges his back for his hunter—a powerful, thoroughbred chesnut, that it is not every man who could ride, but who, when hauled by a workman, can show 'how fields are crossed.' At that signal, there is a general move, and in the midst of fidgeting horses, mutual greeting, and much cigar-smoke, the hounds trot away to draw Haverley Gorse.

'How are you, Digby, my boy?' burst on my ear in well-remembered tones; and turning sharply round, I recognized my old friend Cartouch—the last person I expected to see at that particular moment. Hearty was our mutual greeting, and many were the inquiries as to our doings—past, present, and to come. Cartouch was fond of hunting as ever, and having got together a capital stud, was now commencing the season with all the ardour and enthusiasm of a boy. Save a few additional crows'-feet, and an occasional line of silver in the glossy black hair, the Colonel looked as young as ever; and although he could not then have been very far from the half-century, his fine figure, graceful seat, and daring horsemanship, would have led a stranger to suppose he was still considerably on the sunny side of middle age—whenever that very conventional period may be supposed to begin.

'There's a fox in that gorse, I'll take my oath,' suddenly exclaimed he, in the midst of a long Canadian conversation, in which we had got interested; 'look at those hounds, how keen they are,' as one after another, emerging from a large long strip of open wood, which they had been unsuccessfully drawing, rushed, with ears erect and rising bristles, towards the prickly covert. 'Sir Benjamin' seemed to partake of the excitement, for he fidgeted about, snatched impatiently at his bridle, and trembled under me almost as much as the evergreen branches which were shaking above the backs of the busy hounds. 'Always a fox at Haverley,' said Lord Rasperdale, as he galloped by to call some foot-people off from a highly commanding position they had taken up exactly against the spot at which the wily animal was likely to go away. Even while he spoke, a clear sonorous holla rang through the air, and though I crammed the spurs into 'Sir Benjamin,' and rattled him down the middle-ride of the covert at a pace which would have made some racehorses look foolish, I only reached the other end in time to see the hounds pouring like a cataract over a high stake-boned fence, which crested the opposite eminence, accompanied by the faint and unnecessary 'too-too' with which Joy indulged himself on his horn, and the flutter of 'my lord's' coat-tails, as he disappeared on the further side of the fence. 'Now for it,' I thought,—there will be a rare scent over

over everything a quadruped might find, and in condition was fit to run for the day with all these advantages, and no weight upon his back, the deep ridge furrow, the wet holding soil of Haverley tures, large enclosures of from 50 to acres, together with thick, blackthorn fences, sometimes adorned with two ditches, occasionally forfeited by a strong oak gave him, clipper as he was, quite enough do at the extra pace created by that scouting ground. I fancy none of us regretted the delay, when a ploughed field, just front of Waterley Ash-bank, just hounds and horses to a check, and after a little breathing time, sadly required by latter.

'What a capital thing,' said Cartouch, 'such a country.'

'The fastest fifteen minutes I ever saw in my life,' remarked Lord Rasperdale, peering out his watch; to which Tom Spencer replied, as he jumped off for one moment to relieve his panting steed, 'We have done yet; I'll bet my future bishopric over the vale, and we shall have the square to negotiate, twenty feet of water and a bank.'

Sure enough Joy hit off his fox, in his masterly manner, at the further end of Ash-bank, and we were soon cantering up the hill at a somewhat reduced rate, over an easier country—the hounds, had proved to us the pace at which they could run, now showing to admiration closeness with which they could hunt; so far in the distance, amidst the vivid green of the fertile water-meadows, a line of white disclosed the winding course of the razzless Squelch. Deep, silent, and sluggish, the waters of Lathie is that forbidding stream. Many a gallant hunter has cooled his steaming sides in its broad wave, and, extricated with difficulty by a team of his fellow-troopers and a stout cart-rop, has acquired high-bred disgust at the pure element never cleared a brook again. Many a aspiring youth, whose vaulting ambition never acknowledged neither difficulty nor danger, has here baptized the unpaid-for coat, and drooled to wretchedness the vainglorious leathers; while many a cautious veteran writhes under a twinge of sympathetic bago, as he recalls his ill-advised attempt to ford the treacherous Squelch. Bridles, stirrups, spurs, whips, and cigar-cases—many treasures lurk concealed in the waters of oblivion; and who can tell how many more they may close for ever that gloomy day—long, long may it be deferred!—when the last who-whoop sound over the decline of fox-hunting in merry England—merry then no more—see her sole remaining pack of hounds vanish before the uncompromising approach of an iron age. In the meantime, the sun is improving; we are all one more in the swing; the old grass on which we have again got is sound and springy; and horses, as may be supposed, completely sobered. There are ten men with hounds, and, of these, three are showing unmistakable symptoms of having 'enough.' Cartouch has got a dirty one, although he is unwilling to confess the fact, which no one seems to have witnessed. Lord Rasperdale is still slightly in advance of me, and 'Sir Benjamin' is striding away before me, as only thorough-bred horses can, when subjected to severe and sustained exertion. Joy is sailing along, never taking his eye off his hounds, and leaving nothing but the choice of pace to his horse, who repays each unlimited confidence by his best. The scent is so good that a man has to interfere but little, and only given us a specimen of his skill at Ash-bank, which proved him an adept in his art. Thus it was that, notwithstanding an instinctive cunning of his kind, we were still upon such good terms with our fox, promised to place him in hand ere he could reach the distant forest, now scarce visible in the far horizon.

(To be Continued.)