

DIGBY GRAND.

CHAPTER VI.

WAYS AND MEANS.

And his air was courtesy itself, as he requested us to sit down, and begged to know what he could be useful. I stated the case in a very few words, and expressed my willingness to make any arrangement—the term invariably used to express the hopeless engagement of one's affairs, only I insisted that the money must be forthcoming immediately. After a few pointed inquiries as to my expectations, it was decided that a post-obit bond was the only means of raising the necessary funds, and after some more unceremonious questions as to Sir Peregrine's age, health, habits, &c., it was finally agreed that I should give my bond, and all other necessary legal securities, for something like thirty thousand pounds, and was anxious to obtain, with a handsome premium into the bargain, to Mr. Shadrach, in consideration of which I was to receive the following Monday morning, after the deed was signed, &c., the sum of £1,000, being just one hundred over and above my losses on that unfortunate Queen of the May. This knotty point settled, a glass of rare Amontillado was produced to ratify our treaty—Lavinia whispering in my ear that I was fortunate not to be obliged to receive a butt of that straw-colored vintage which would assist but little in liquidating my debts at Hyde Park Corner.

Heavy as was the weight thus removed from my mind by Mr. Shadrach's assistance, I had still very considerable misgivings as to the course I was now pursuing. It was evident that paying three for one in my numerous extravagances would run the finest fortune in the world; and, with all my thoughtlessness, I was not quite a fool, and had already perceived that, with Sir Peregrine's habits of carelessness and total disregard to business, his successor would find himself considerably hampered and involved. These reflections were none of the pleasantest, and I was not sorry to join Lavinia, Hillingdon, and a few more, in what they called a quiet Greenwich dinner, where champagne and other exhilarating mixtures should drown all care, and where fun time should be a main party assembled for the express purpose of enjoying themselves, and a high chuckle. Hillingdon had said, "I have no down in his cab. Well, I don't know how long it may be before my spirit bride revisits me once more; but when that time does come, I shall know full well what it forebodes. I have a solemn presentiment in my own mind, that within four-and-twenty hours of the third warning, we shall meet never to meet again. And then people talk to me about the absurdity of believing in ghosts, as they call them, as if all the argument, all the reason in the world, could make me doubt that which I know to be a fact, not only by the evidence of my outward senses, but by the inborn conviction of my soul. However, here we are at Crockford's, and I only hope my dissertation on the supernatural will not affect your appetite for supper or your sacred thirst for gam."

prey to remorse and superstitious terrors—to say nothing of a well-grounded apprehension that she might be re-taken and immured alive being, besides, of a nervous, weak, and excitable temperament, terminated her existence by poison, and died in her lover's arms a few months after the ill-fated elopement. At twenty, Hillingdon entered the Guards, in point of feeling and experience, an old man. Nothing but gambling appeared to excite him. In all the sports and pleasures in which his comrades found such delight, he took part readily and successfully; but his heart was far away; and the only time his characteristic listlessness seemed to be overcome—the only moments in which he seemed to forget the past, and entered with energy into the present, were when dealing the cards upon which a fortune depended, or brandishing the dice-box whose imprisoned cubes should replenish or exhaust his yearly income.

Nor was it wonderful that such a character should be essentially a gambler. I have already adverted to his firm belief in ghosts; and his faith in "luck" or fortune, as he termed it, was not inferior to his superstition. Often have I seen him rise from the "board of green cloth," and turning his chair thrice, from right to left, re-seat himself at the play-table, confident that success would follow this mystical manoeuvre. Often have I known him object to pay in the company of certain individuals, whose faces, forms, or dress he fancied were inimical to his "destiny," and patiently would wait till such birds of ill-omen should take their flight, and allow him to enter unthwarted upon his speculations. With regard to his "spirit-creed," it was firm and unassailable. The very evening as we rattled through the busy streets of London—so gay and lightsome after the unillumined country highway—who would have supposed that the dashing, fashionable-looking dandy, driving that well-appointed cab from a jovial dinner-party to the glittering halls of Crockford's, was relating, in tones of awe and emotion, to his brother-in-law, the thrilling experiences of what he called his higher state of being. Yet so it was. "I gave you my sacred word of honor, Grand, he said, with an earnestness that impressed me with his own conviction of the truth of that which he related, 'that since she died in my arms I have seen her twice—ay, seen her clearly and distinctly as I now see you. She has spoken with me in words that I dare not and may not repeat, but with all the warmth and affection of her loving youth. Twice has she appeared to me, and each time has her visit been one of warning—each time has it been followed by some heavy and dreadful calamity. I saw her the night before my mother's death. I saw her the morning of that fatal duel, when I went out with Congrove as his second, and poor young De Valmont was shot dead upon the ground. And I shall see her once, and only once again. At Rome—at Paris—will the third time be in London? I cannot tell, I know not how long it may be before my spirit bride revisits me once more; but when that time does come, I shall know full well what it forebodes. I have a solemn presentiment in my own mind, that within four-and-twenty hours of the third warning, we shall meet never to meet again. And then people talk to me about the absurdity of believing in ghosts, as they call them, as if all the argument, all the reason in the world, could make me doubt that which I know to be a fact, not only by the evidence of my outward senses, but by the inborn conviction of my soul. However, here we are at Crockford's, and I only hope my dissertation on the supernatural will not affect your appetite for supper or your sacred thirst for gam."

Doubtless, if men must play, and in the days of which I write it certainly appeared to be one of the exigencies of human nature, Crockford's was the best place at which to indulge that fatal passion. Now, when so many fine fortunes have melted away, so many bright spirits been ruined, in the undeviating pursuit of the science of numbers, illustrated by innumerable contrivances of drollatory, in which certain combinations of numbers produce a "seven" when the quotient serves to be a "four," and vice versa in these more than ten times, of what at

'see what they were doing;' and I sauntered listlessly behind him into the little screened-off temple sacred to Fortune.

Business was going on rapidly, and apparently most prosperously for the proprietor, whose capital furnished the band. Every seat at the table was occupied, and a double rank of spectators, and occasional speculators, stood behind those who played. As I came in, a Russian prince was in the act of throwing aside the box in disgust—his eleventh hundred having been quietly disposed of by a deuce-acc. His next neighbor, an English earl, was as instantaneously placed hors de combat for the present by the monotonous twelve out, proclaimed by a lynx-eye official with a rake and a green shade; and his rising in ill-concealed vexation gave me a vacant chair, of which I immediately possessed myself. I was pretty well known as a fortunate player, and a glance went round the table which seemed to intimate that a change might not be looked for in the course of fortune—the bank having enjoyed an unprecedented run.

'I won't back him,' muttered old Lord Growler; 'he's out of luck. They say he lost five thousand pounds on the Oaks.'

Not much reassured by his lordship's remark, I asked modestly for a quiet hundred in counters; and with no vivid anticipation of success, waited till the box should come round to me in due course of the game.

Most of the players again throw out, amongst them Hillingdon and St. Heliers, who were sitting opposite, and my turn soon arrived to make my set, and call my main. I had remarked that "seven"—usually a favorite number amongst hazard players—had got into disgrace early in the evening, and was now seldom called. To this main I accordingly determined to nail my colours, and putting down a fifty as my set, whilst I threw away a pony on "the mek," I manfully shouted, "Seven's the main—Seven!" whilst the croupiers joined with their obtrusive with their buzzing repetition of "Make your game, gentlemen; the main is Seven." The dice rattled, the box fell, and a dotted eleven turned its welcome surface upward. I need not say this was what is termed a nick, and as such, won me four "ponies" for the one I had risked, as well as fifty pounds on my set. Again I repeated the auspicious number, and again with like success. In short, I was in a vein of good fortune; and as the players murmured accordingly as they won or lost—"What a capital caster!" or "What infernal luck!" I increased my stakes to the utmost limits allowed by the table, and pursued my triumphant career. If a four or ten came leaping from the box at the first intimation, instead of the seven I had invoked, so surely that four I dribbled over the baize—so surely that ten dashed thundering on the board once again, in time to win me, according to the rules of the game, twice my investment on the chance of its appearance; and, finally, ere I threw out with thirteenth main, I had what is termed "broken the bank," that is, exhausted the whole sum that they were prepared to lose on a single night, and had won, to my own share, upwards of four thousand pounds. How clean and crisp were the fresh, new notes that I thrust into my waistcoat pockets; how pleasant the rustle of those tangible witnesses of my success. What a thrill of delight did I experience, as I felt that the infernal post-obit might now be dispensed with, and I was again comparatively free. However, I was too well schooled in the manners of "my set" to allow my triumph to become apparent, and it was with an affectation of extreme carelessness that I received the congratulations of St. Heliers and Hillingdon, both large winners, and allowed that "I had been tolerably lucky, and had won a fairish stake;" much to the disgust of Lord Growler, who overheard my remark, and who was ready to cry with vexation, because his unbelief in my good star had induced him to bet against me, and had been the means of mulcting him to the amount of fourteen or fifteen pounds, a heavy loss to his lordship, with no family, and an income of £70,000 a year—the reason he never ventured more than a sovereign at a time was, dissatisfied if he won, and miserable if he lost!

I am not usually an early riser, but the following morning saw me astray with the milkmaids and the postmen's representatives

ful to my mind most assuredly be that of being 'talked to death;' and blue eyes, however languishing—showing curls, however glossy—forms of grace, and skins of alabaster—become wearisome, if accompanied by a tongue that 'onward rolls, and rolls for ever.' I used to drive away from her door at such a pace, when released from these courts of inquiry, that, upon one occasion, the safe and commodious wooden pavement being watered into a perfect glacierium, whilst the adjoining streets remained parched and dusty as the Great Desert, I lamed my cab-horse so badly as to be reduced to the necessity of throwing him out of work altogether, and replacing him immediately by a new purchase. Of course, there was but one emporium in London where a youth of my pretensions was likely to be able to suit himself, more particularly as the vulgar question of ready money was one with which the gentleman conducting the establishment was always unwilling to trouble a customer; and accordingly, the first time I found Maltby disengaged, I prevailed upon him to accompany me as far as Fitz-Andrews' yard, and give me the benefit of his judgment and experience in 'a deal.'

Time was that the horse-dealer, a race per se, was to be distinguished by his dress and appearance from all other trades and professions whatsoever. Slang, not to say vulgar manners, and apparel redolent of the stable, were the characteristics of the cloth; but nous avons change tout cela—the 'dealer,' for we have dropped the substantive prefixed—the 'dealer' of the present day would, we conceive, rather astonish those graudfatherly who have spent all our money, and entailed upon us only their love of horse-flesh and its appliances. A quiet suit of stables, a highly-polished exterior, and a choice vocabulary, are quite in keeping with the stall at the opera in London, and the second horse, silver cigar-case, and sandwich-box, which accompany them over the green uplands of Leicestershire. And surely this is a good exchange for the noise and vulgarity which betrayed the 'drunken couper' of the last century. We have now to deal with a man who is a gentleman, if not by birth, at least in manners and actions; and notwithstanding the proverbially sharp practice of those connected with the sale of horses, I will venture to say, that in no other trade will a customer meet with more fairness and liberality than will be shown him by the great dealers of London and 'the Shires.'

But here we are at the clean and dainty passage which leads into Fitz-Andrews' yard and ringing the counting-house bell, we are ushered into the presence of a good-looking, middle-aged man, extremely courtly in his manners, and particularly well-dressed, to whom we state our business and requirements. Notwithstanding the affliction of an intermittent deafness, he takes our meaning with surprising quickness, and ringing another bell, we are handed over to the care of a most respectable-looking family ostler, if we may use the expression, who, in his turn, having accompanied us across the yard, consigns us safely to the guardianship of Mr. Sago, the real mainspring of the establishment, the ostensible proprietor returning to prosecute his business in the counting-house.

'I have brought Mr. Grand to look at a cab-horse,' says Lord Maltby. 'Have you anything likely to suit him?'

To which Mr. Sago bows like an ambassador, and looks at Mr. Grand.

'Perhaps the Captain will like to walk round the stables, my lord,' says the man in authority; and forthwith a couple of helpers are summoned, the one to strip the other re-clothe, the horses submitted for an approval.

Before I can spare a glance for the animals, I inspect Mr. Sago, and it strikes me that never, no never, have I seen breeches and boots fit so marvelously well as those which encase his slender, well-turned limbs. Of course, he sleeps in them, and they are cleaned on his person, and such a fit cannot possibly be made 'to take off.' The man himself is moulded to be a horse-man, and when mounted can perhaps make more of the animal that carries him, both as to action and appearance, than any other equestrian in London. In the meantime, Maltby has selected a grey, that looks like what we want, and as he is being stripped, his make

suit me, I may return him for twenty-five pounds, which is a fair and liberal amount on all sides, and I walk out in yard with Maltby, congratulated by him upon my purchase, which he assures me is the most eligible cab-horse in London. His appearance and knee action; and with your "finger" upon him, Captain Grand, I trust him bend himself, he will be the joy of a thousand eyes!

CHAPTER VII.

MIMIC WAR.

There is a bon-mot, attributed, though I believe very unjustly, to F. M. the Duke of Wellington, to the effect that "there were to put 40,000 men in Hyde Park, he had no one general officer in the service who could get them out again;" and this military allusion has for years delighted the reverend and civilian, who imagines that large bodies of soldiers are to be moved simply by word of command—in other words, that it is unnecessary to holla at them, without the slightest regard to the technicalities of marching, 'distance,' and 'priority of station;' for with reference to the latter, should you would commit no greater violation of etiquette by walking Lady A. quickly off to dinner under the very nose of the Duchess of B., with whom, as host, the laws of society exact that you should lead the column, than would be laid to your charge, if in your arrangements for a field-day, you should put your infantry on the right of your artillery, and destine your smartest regiment of light dragoons to occupy the left of the line. I have been led into this digression by the recollection of the important matter with which my servant proffered the order-book to my notice, in the pages whereon it was distinctly enacted in 'brigade orders,' that on the following morning the three regiments of Guards should form 'contiguous columns' in the explosive neighborhood of Hyde Park powder magazine. While a regimental ukase announced that we were "to parade in review order," and that Captain Grand and a party would be appointed to keep the ground. And in compliance with these distinct commands, the following morning, at nine, saw me adorned with glittering epaulettes, sash of gold, and bear-skin cap—no pleasant covering under a sweltering summer's sky—offering my valuable assistance to a troop of Life Guards, and a handful of police, in restricting John Bull to a certain period of the Park's dried-up surface, and prevailing on him to abstain from resting his unwashed face and opaque figure between the reviewing general and the troops they were there to inspect. Certainly the good humor of an English mob is deserving of all praise; even under circumstances of political excitement they seldom lose their natural relish for fun and frolic; and when they are met together for anything in the shape of a sight—the Derby Mayor's show, the prorogation of Parliament at the Derby, or a spectacle such as the present—their sense of the ludicrous, and determination to enjoy themselves, are not to be surpassed. The temper displayed by our police, who are truly a long-suffering generation, assists largely in keeping up the feeling of good-fellowship; and though a certain squire may drop the butt of his heavy musket on a pair of sensitive toes, or the manager of a Life Guards' an desperate lance of idlers with his disciplined grenadiers and the whisk of his long, heavy tail, rears of laughter alone greet the sufferers, who in their turn can seldom refrain from joining in the general mirth. I was much struck with this on the morning in question, when having stationed myself at the point of greatest attraction, and consequently where there was most pressure from the crowd, I found that not even the size and weight of our British guardsmen were always sufficient to stand the rush of the populace, and I had occasionally to call in the assistance of a black charger and its immortal rider, the effect of which was instantaneous. But there was one figure that I observed two or three times to cross the forbidden line, and being a