

## DIGBY GRAND.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## WINDING UP.

But the untimely death of poor Hillingdon had awakened me from all such infatuated and unfounded self-delusions. The reality was too forcibly thrust upon my view to admit of my deceiving myself any longer as to my own present opinion and probable fate. The romance of life was over, the charm of youth dispelled, and the stern training of manhood, the ordeal ever forbidding, often severe, through which all must pass, had commenced. Hours stole unheeded by, as I revolved these bitter thoughts in my mind—alternately indulging in bursts of irrepressible grief as I thought of him whom I had that morning consigned to the grave, and chafing to the verge of madness at my own follies and imprudences, which had reduced me to such a state as made me envy my friend his undisturbed resting-place. The lamps were lit and the night advanced as I retraced my steps into busy London, and, fatigued with the conflict of my feelings, sought repose in the retirement of my own lodgings. But for me there was to be no rest. As I turned into the street, from the corner of which I could see my own house-door, I glanced around me with a caution and wariness that had never deserted me since the well-remembered arrest in the Channel, with the eager vigilance that I had learned as an Eton boy, when prying round corners for the dreaded form of a master, in the forbidden precincts of 'up town,' but which I never thought to be obliged to put in practice in after-life. Many a time since have I seen a gallant fox headed from the point at which he hoped to find a safe and impregnable refuge, whilst the cry of his pursuers swelled louder and louder on the breeze. Many a time since have I marked a well-dressed and fashionable-looking gentleman step forth 'point device' from his residence, and after one hasty glance at his shining boots—over the first care of a dandy got up for the day—look anxiously around him, up the street and down the street, under the porticoes and over the way, and finally bolt hurriedly back into his own sanctum from whence he cannot again emerge with any certain security until the seventh day of the week. But never have I watched the discomfiture of either predatory animal without a fellow-feeling for his embarrassment—a vivid recollection of my own forlorn condition on that evening when I found the very portals, so to speak, of my own citadel in possession of the enemy!

The scout was doubtless vigilant, but I was the better stalker of the two, saw him first, and thus, by a hasty retreat, was enabled to baffle his arrangements, and elude his grasp.

But now, indeed, I had arrived at the *ne plus ultra* of embarrassment. Weary and worn out, exhausted with grief, and stung by remorse, I had literally not a place wherein to lay my head. The clubs to which I belonged I felt ashamed to enter; nor, indeed, according to the wholesome rules that regulate such establishments, was I, properly speaking, a member of those associations, which repudiate the society of an individual whose subscriptions remain hopelessly in arrears. Should I present myself at St. Heliers' door, or that of any other fashionable friend, why, in my present dusty and travel-worn habiliments, the very porter would refuse me admittance; nor, did the master know how typical was the outward guise of the dilapidated state of affairs within, would he condemn his servant's zeal in thrusting such a shabby gentleman from the door. Hunger I had none, and my stock of cigars was not yet totally exhausted; but a burning thirst was raging in my throat, and I quenched it—I, the *ci-devant* dandy, to whom Amphitryon once appealed as to the purity of their claret, the flavor of their Sillery—at the stable-pump of a mews, where my horses had stood for many a long day—animals whose very shoes were worth more than all I now possessed in the world. This was literally the case, for my whole stock of ready-money was reduced to a few shillings:

smoke which streamed perpetually from their lips. The night wore on; the foreigners smoked and disappeared; the shabbiest of them had a garret somewhere that he could call a home; but to me there was but one door open in all that enormous city—but one roof under the shelter of which I should be welcome, as long as the few shillings I could call my own were forthcoming—I mean a silver hall. Not content with preying upon the highest and noblest of the land—not content with ever and anon the sacrifice of such a victim as the gallant spirit whose funeral I had that day attended—the demon of play hunts unglutted through the lower walks of life, seeking whom he may devour. If the student of human nature would see the passions working in their most frightful intensity upon his fellow-man, let him visit some of these lower haunts of infamy which are mightily open to lure the fool to his destruction.

Amongst the aristocracy, gambling is indeed a vice much to be reprobated; and great are the calamities which it entails upon its votaries; but still their losses, so to speak, are only those of superfluities—the death-struggle for existence is to them unknown; and even were it not so, the discipline of refinement, which in that rank, has become a second nature, would curb those outward demonstrations of violence and despair which in a silver hell rage unchecked. Here the starving mechanic, the outlaw'd refugee, the exposed sharper, crowd and jostle each other in the contest for the actual means of existence. It is as though the prodigal were scrambling for the husks upon his knees amongst the swine. Here the trembling hand may be seen clutching those paltry winnings on which, it may be, the suffering wife and children are dependent for their long-desired meal, or staking the last earnings of toil, in the vain hope that Fortune must smile upon such a cast. Here the impious execration may be heard rising furious from the blasphemer's lips, as he sees swept away from before him the means of stifling that conscience which to-night shall dog him, sleeping or waking, like a fiend, to whom the wretch has sold himself body and soul. Here may be traced the gradual ruin of the once respectable domestic servant, which, commencing with the habit of speculation for which the 'betting lists' that throng every corner of our streets afford a disgraceful facility, tends steadily on in its downward course, till recklessness merges into dishonesty, and that high character which was at once his pride and his livelihood, is blasted by the infamy of a police report, and lost in the degradation of the hulks. Well may these dens be called 'hells'; and who enters there may indeed leave hope behind. Lest the foul lust for gain should not of itself be sufficient to ensure the destruction of its votaries, alcohol lends its powerful assistance to the cause. On a rough deal table are laid out (alas! but in humble imitation of more luxurious haunts) the huge course joints that shall inspire an artificial thirst, to be quenched by potatoes, inflaming and maddening the humbler gamester to the necessary pitch of desperation; and the convulsed hideousness of passion is varied by the palsied stare of drunken imbecility.

Winding up a dark wooden staircase, I pushed my way through a shabby green baize door, and past a ponderous ruffian, whose huge unsightly frame was intended to form a living barrier should the party be disturbed, as was sometimes the case, by an invasion of the police into this temple of Fortune, frequented by the vilest of the vile; and as I did so, I could not help being struck by the resemblance, in some of its most striking points, which although so different in detail, the scene now before me bore to many other haunts in higher life, devoted, with all their outward refinement, to the same degrading purpose. The game was identical, and the well-known terms peculiar to hazard smote familiarly on my ear. Flaring tallow candles shed a glare upon a much-stained green table cloth, upon which the dice were descending with as much energy as I had ever seen exhibited when hundreds were at stake. To those eager unwashed faces the chances of the game were indeed of frightful importance, and hungry eyes glared upon the coins (for who would trust counters here?) as, few in number and small in value, they changed rapidly from one ragged hand to another. A savage altercation between an unfortunate-looking wretch, in close-buttoned coat and high threadbare stock, which looked ominous

wrist-buttons were at all times convertible into coin in such society as I was at present—always promising that the seller was disposed to make terms easy in proportion to the prompt liberality of the purchaser. Over a slice of reeking beef and a glass of brandy, I disposed of my watch to the proprietor of the establishment for the sum of three pounds ten shillings, about a twentieth of its original value; and as I did so, I could not help thinking I recognized the countenance of my generous customer. To be sure, it was Sarmiento! Despite the busy beard, the huge spectacles, the voluminous neck-handkerchief, and the Mosaic jewellery, I was sure I could not be mistaken in the well-remembered features of the stranger at the opera-house door, who seemed to possess such mysterious influence over the fascinating Coralie; and a crowd of recollections beamed in my brain as I remarked, not yet completely obliterated, the scar dealt by my own right hand. Well, it was his turn now! Had he recognized me, of which I was totally uncertain, and known my present circumstances, he might have held himself thoroughly avenged, even without waiting to see the produce of the watch find his way into his own possession, and the studs and shirt-buttons leave their owner without a farthing or the means of raising. My military friend having, doubtless, completed his tour of duty for the night, wished me a polite good-evening, remarking that I had been confoundedly unlucky, but should probably pull up again before the end of the week. The end of the week, indeed! I shuddered to think what was to become of me by the end of the day which had even now begun. Absorbed in the stern realities of what is mockingly called 'play,' the hours had gone by unheeded, and a bright summer sun was calling the world into life and light as I slunk, a penniless vagabond, out of the silver hell. The end had come at last! Leaning my head against the iron railings in Leicester Square, I groaned aloud, and was ordered by a policeman on duty to move on.

Half mechanically I strolled into Covent Garden, to mock my wretchedness with the sight of that earthly paradise of flowers, blooming and blushing in the gorgeous freshness of early morning. How their fragrance seemed to reproach me, as it recalled to my memory scenes long past, never to return! My childhood at Haverley, and the roses of its lawns and parterres, filling my romping infancy with delight and wonder. The glorious mid-summer holidays, when Latin and Greek held no existence, and all the world was fruit and flowers! the latter days of youth, how short a time ago! when I used to come to this very market, and select the choicest bouquets for my gentle Flora. And now! Had it not been for the pride of manhood I could have wept loud! The very market woman knew me, shabby as I was, and with her old courtesy, pointed out her freshest posies for the captain. I could not stand this, and turned away from these haunts of Pomona, with, I fear, a curse upon my lips. On I wandered through street and square, and, had I been in any other frame of mind, might have admired the fresh beauties of even a London Aurora. Amongst all the denizens of our great metropolis, how few there are conversant with her charms at the only period in the twenty-four hours when she is divested of her usual dusky mantle of smoke. The children of pleasure have just gone to bed; the sons of toil are not yet up and doing; and the early breakfast-stall-keeper, the sooty chimney-sweep, with here and there a particular thrifty milk woman, or an extra fast youth, looking very yellow, and very much ashamed of his white neckcloth, as he steals home to his virtuous couch—are the sole admirers of the architectural beauties and the vivid coloring displayed by sunrise in London. I could see the whole length of Oxford Street as I paced leisurely along, the sole occupant of that usually crowded thoroughfare; and the cool breeze sweeping unpolluted from the Park, fanned my heated temples and invigorated my languid frame, now sinking from the combined effects of excitement, abstinence, and want of sleep.

Hark! the cheering music of drums and fifes rouses the slumbering silence of morning, and a battalion of the Guards, with their clean white jackets and glancing firelocks, are seen defiling from the barracks in Portnam Street to their early drill in the Park. How I envied the stalwart, fresh, healthy-looking men, as they passed by me, and I

'I began life, sir,' he said, whilst the color rose on his wasted cheek, and the tear stood in his dim eye, as he thought of the past—'I began life as a small tradesman, and once did a steady, excellent business, that ought to have been a provision for a family. I occupied a good house in Green Street, and was then a respectable man. I lost my wife, sir, some three years ago—a good wife she was to me; and after that I never prospered. I was always fond of a bit of sport, horse-racing, and such like, but she kept me from harm's way; and if she had lived it might have been different. Well, sir, I should have won a deal of money when Skirmisher won the Derby, and when I went to ask for my own, the shutters were up, and the betting-list proprietors bankrupt. I lost what was to me a heavy sum, and was never paid a farthing. After that I got drinking, and speculated more and more. Still I had a bit of money to go on with, and I turned it as I best could to keep myself and my little girl, my little Flora. I went into partnership with a beerhouse-keeper, but things went bad, and I lost most of what was left. After that I got reckless, and in an evil hour I went into the place where you saw me last night. Day after day have I thought, and pondered, and calculated on the game; and night after night have I tried to make my calculations answer as they should do if there is any truth in figures. Last night I left my little girlsupperless, and pawned the only remaining coat I had, for a final chance. The dice were loaded, sir. I'll take my oath that scoundrel knew my plan, and loaded them to foil me. I have been walking about ever since, till you found me here. I cannot go home: I cannot face little Flora, asking for bread—for bread! and the child had no dinner yesterday. What shall I do? oh! what shall I do?' And the poor fellow's frame quivered as he pictured a scene of misery that filled my eyes to overflowing.

Now I felt how destitute I was. I had not even a sixpence to give the parent for his starving child. To think that there should never have been brought before me till I was unable to alleviate it; that I should have been giving pounds for cigars, and hundreds for horses, and never in my life had the opportunity of saving a fellow-creature from starvation till now! and in vain I ransacked my pockets, and racked my brain to discover a solitary coin or the means of getting one. Poor Hillingdon! you were indeed my good genius—your farewell gift, the last time I saw you alive, was offered on the altar of charity, and, valuing it as I did, I have never regretted the mode in which it was parted with. A small silver tinder-box, for the purpose of lighting cigars, beautiful in design and costly from its workmanship, had been presented to me a keepsake by my poor friend the last time we were together, and his sad fate had since enhanced a hundred-fold the value of the gift. When I lost my watch and ornaments, in the vain hope of winning a small sum for my present necessities, this little memorial remained, as may be supposed, sacred from disposal, and was now the sole occupant of a pocket never skilled in retaining for any length of time its necessary furniture. I knew that any pawnbroker would be glad to advance a few shillings upon so elaborate an ornament, and I thrust it into the distracted father's hand, and bid him go home and get bread for his child.

'I have been "cleaned out," like yourself,' said I, 'but I have no one at home dependent upon me; that is all I have left in the world—you are welcome to it—take it, and make the most of it—and, as you hope for heaven, never go into a hall again.'

The poor fellow's face of gratitude was worth a mine of gold; and I was forced to bid him a very abrupt farewell to get rid of his protestations and thankings. 'He may have been an impostor!' says that worldly prudence which appears to ignore entirely the existence of actual distress. Even if he were, I ought to have been much obliged to him for affording me the only pleasure I had experienced for many a long day.

I was too weary to ponder on the much-expected question of relief by almsgiving, and in five minutes after the disappearance of my fellow insolvent, was fast asleep under one of the wide-spreading elms that shade the powder-magazine, in the deep repose of physical exhaustion, from which I did not awake till the sun was high in the heavens. The

length within the magic ring, and which, to his rustic discomfiture, appears indeed to ceaseless roll, and roll for ever. Now I shared the solitude of the Park, with a single equestrian, evidently a horse-dealer, and a man with a dog, dripping from his late immersion in the Serpentine. But still my thoughts were crowding in the past; and, as if to enhance the illusion, see! a neat dark brougham, a fine bay horse, a white glove eagerly snatching at the check-string, the driver's elbows squared above his ears, the bay horse pulled upon his haunches, and, as the carriage stops close to the rack upon which I am leaning, the pretty face of Coralie de Rivolte peers from the dark recesses of the interior, and I am greeted with so cordial a salutation from the kind-hearted dancer, as, addressed to such a disreputable-looking dandy must have rather astonished the dignified conductor of the smart turnout already described.

'Digby, mon cher Digby!' she exclaimed, in her broken language, as she seized me by both hands, 'how long since I saw you! Mais qu'est ce qu'il y a donc? What a figure! You have been up all night. Ah, petit méchant, toujours le memere! Jump in, and I will take you home! Do you still live in—Street?'

And, regardless of my excuses and apologies the good-natured Frenchwoman insisted on my entering the carriage; and when, in answer to her inquiries, I told her I had no home to go to, she could scarcely be dissuaded from driving me straight off to the hotel where she and *mon cousin* were again domiciliated upon their eternal private and mysterious business. When, however, the whole truth came out, and I unbosomed myself to one who, with all her faults, had indeed a warm and generous heart, the brilliant metal, touched by the talisman of misfortune, came out, untinged with alloy, and the brazen creature, as I have heard them called, who blushed not to receive nightly the homage of an admiring public, offered a place at my disposal a sum of money that would have liquidated my debts, taken me abroad, and given me a fair start in any line of life I might choose to select. No one but a woman could have made so readily a magnificent offer, and no one but a woman could have veiled her generosity so gracefully as did Coralie, under the assumption that it was merely a loan, to be repaid with interest on my accession to the Herley estates.

I am thankful to say I refused it—refused it, though I had not a penny in the world. Why, I know not. Perhaps, in honest truth, my generosity was not equal to hers. Perhaps some spark of what the world calls gentlemanlike feeling forbade me to become dependent on the bounty of an actress! My heart smote me, my reason accused me of pride and unkindness, when I saw her dark eyes filled with tears at my repeated refusals of her assistance; and once I had the most given way. But no! come what might I would be, at least, answerable only to myself for my misfortune—come what might Flora Belmont should never hear my name coupled with another, under any pretence; and I resolved, if the worst came to the worst, to die like the wolf, untamed and uncomplaining.

'At least,' said Coralie, as I persisted in bidding her farewell, 'at least accept this souvenir, in case we should never meet again.' And she put into my hand a little ivory memorandum-case, with the leaves of which she had been playing for the last few minutes; and pressing my hand, I left the carriage, whispered, 'Adieu, my dear; think of me sometimes, and ever blessing attend you!'

The brougham rolled on, the white waves from its window as it turned on Piccadilly, and I was left standing on the pavement near Apsley House, like a man in a dream!

Poor Coralie! she had not been gone five minutes when I discovered that the keepsake she had so earnestly pressed upon me contained, probably, all the money she had with her at the time, which, in the shape of a five-pound note, she had slipped between its leaves, and which was indeed accepted in my starving condition. After the magnificent offers she had made me, I could feel no qualms in becoming thus far a recipient of her charity. I kissed the ivory viner again and again, as I took out the five-pound note, which would enable me, at