

...to the end, though exposed to the storm of obloquy and buffeted by the waves of misfortune.

“Welcome home, Master Digby,” said old Soames, chief butler ever since I could remember, and on whom the course of time seemed powerless to imprint marks of decay. His hair had been white and his face red when I used to run up and down stairs after him in a frock and bare legs, holding on by those broad coat-tails, or pitching for a ride on that sturdy shoulder; and now, though the countenance had deepened in hue, and the waistcoat increased if possible in volume, he was the same Soames still. “Welcome home, indeed, sir. This way, if you please, Master Digby. Sir Peregrine has been expecting you since three o’clock.” And he ushered me down the well-known passage leading to my father’s snugery, adding, with paternal affection, enhanced by an early dinner, “How you have grown, Master Digby,—quite a fine gentleman, and it seems but the other day as I made the bishop for your christening,” alluding to the exhilarating compound dignified by that ecclesiastical title. Ere Soames had concluded his reminiscences and reflections, I was face to face with my father, and my heart smote me to think of my infatigable and systematic neglect of him, when I saw so visible an alteration in the form and features of the old man. He was much bent and wasted in figure, whilst a drawn look about the eyes, and sharpened expression of the whole countenance, betokened increasing feebleness and decay. Still there was the same proud bearing, the same courtly gestures, above all, the same concise, forcible, and rather satirical manner, which marks the former associates of ‘the Prince Regent,’ and which is fast dying out with the remains of the ‘Carlton House School.’ Sir Peregrine was kindness itself, but his affectionate demonstrations were tempered with a degree of reserve and self-respect inseparable from one who was ever conscious of his position, and our greeting was something between that of father and son, monarch and heir-presumptive. Once, and once only, nature asserted her dominion over the parent and it was with faltering voice and moistened eye that my father expressed his desire to make some arrangement which, now that I had come of age, should render me to a certain extent independent, ‘and which,’ he added, with a momentary pang of self-reproach, ‘I fear I have too long neglected. But we will see about it. We must have Montman down, my dear Digby; and it is indeed strange,’ he continued, relapsing insensibly into the old vice-regal manner, ‘if, with our influence and in “our position,” we cannot place everything on a footing which shall be satisfactory to the future representative of the family.’

Such were the generalities in which my dear father was wont to indulge, and thus would he delude himself into a vague idea of prosperity which had vanished, and power which had never existed. As to Sir Peregrine’s influence, it was completely swamped, in a political point of view, by a neighboring earl, whose grandfather, an enterprising manufacturer, had bequeathed to his descendant, besides that knowledge (of business) which is better than ‘houses and farms,’ a very large proportion of the latter in error articles, and capital enough to buy every free and independent voter in the county nine times over; and as regarded that position of which from childhood I had heard so much, what was it but a large ill-regulated establishment, a discontented tenantry, and a property mortgaged to its full van? But this was no time to dwell upon such unimportant matters. A large party, including the aforesaid earl, were staying in the house, and a host of neighbors invited to dinner. The following morning, my birthday, was to witness merry-making and rejoicings for every class of the community within miles of Haverley. An ox was to be roasted whole for the poor, who prefer their meat under-done, and digestion to be pro-

well-wishers for the country, preserving a gravity for which I have ever since enjoyed the reward of an approving conscience. The Odd Fellows cheered my speech heartily, for which, as a very young orator, I was much obliged to them, since it requires a long apprenticeship indeed among the practical and experienced of our senate to bear unabashed the chilling silence, or worse still, the sarcastic applause, with which a brilliant and long-stained peroration is so often received in that assemblage.

This ceremony well over, the slaughtered ox was borne in procession, the aforesaid band performing in divers keys the air of ‘Oh, the roast beef of Old England!’ and having been about as much roasted as the woodcock which is allowed to see the fire ere introduced to a thorough epicure, was cut up and distributed in no very appetising-looking morsels to the poor of the parish, whilst stentorian voices pledged health and prosperity to the young squire, in floods of good strong Haverley ale. After which the shouters recreated themselves with wheel barrow races, the charioteers being blindfolded, and creating no small confusion from their furious driving; the ninthly climbed a pole, which emblem of ambition was well greased within a few feet of the top, and he who had struggled manfully to within an arm’s length of his aim, found that when almost within his grasp he was doomed to be disappointed, and to go down, as is usual in real life, a good deal faster than he came up. The prize surmounting this perpendicular difficulty, was at length wrested by a cunning chimney sweep, who, taking a pocketful of snot up with him, and refreshing his palms therewith at intervals, got them so completely grimed at last as to render any amount of soap of no effect, and thus succeeded in carrying off the huge leg of mutton that had tempted him so long. Nor were the fair dunsels of the district excluded from their share in these rural sports, an under-garment of snowy texture being provided for her whose dainty feet could brush the dew quickly from the lawn. This race, to use a turf expression, brought together ‘a capital entry;’ and after a severe struggle, and the production of many divers-colored, a nimble dairy-maid bore off the prize.

As the afternoon waned, and the hearty farmers began to feel that their usual dinner hour was long since gone by, many an eye was wistfully directed towards the tent prepared for our great repast, and many a vigorous appetite voted four o’clock the best part of the day, as they seated themselves at the three lengthy tables, of which a cross one at the top, raised upon a sort of dais, formed a nucleus for the great guns of the party, the rector of the parish, the member for the county, the neighboring earl, two or three adjoining squires, Sir Peregrine and myself.

Beef and venison were rapidly consumed, and strong port and sherry, varied by deep draughts of John Barleycorn, as rapidly disappeared; faces waxed red and apoplectic, and tongues, now loosened from the bands of shyness and reserve, chattered in deafening confusion. Toasts of loyalty and patriotism served to bring in the chief event of the evening, and the steward of the estate, rapping loudly on the table, obtains a dead silence, truly appalling to old Farmer Scales, who, in right of seniority, has taken upon him the office of proposing the young squire’s health. The sturdy yeoman has not, as he honestly confesses, ‘the gift of the gab;’ but when he wants a word he waits for it with a patience and determination that would drive a nervous man frantic. The pauses become longer and longer as the orator gets deeper into his subject, till an extremely abrupt conclusion and an ambiguous compliment, referring to the fatted calf bumping on my return, empties every bumper of ‘black starr’ like a shot, and vociferous cheering proves that Farmer Scales has completely expressed the feelings of his audience.

Now for the reply. ‘Honor—much flat-

ness, and merry-making without thee? What care I for the old hall, the rich and lovely domain? There is no beauty where thou art not!’

Mournful thoughts for twenty-one! Happy is he who hath not out-lived his boyhood, till ripened Prime brings with it the conviction that all is vanity; the experience that teaches us to expect no resting-place here below, to look steadfastly forward to the future—not the immediate future of our short span of existence, but the real future of eternity. Some men are boys all their lives, and as such are envied and enviable for the lightness of their spirits, their keen enjoyment of life. But these can never know the stern, severe training that leads direct to Truth. Perhaps for them such ordeal may not be necessary, and is mercifully dispensed with. For beneficial as may be the ultimate effects of disappointment and unhappiness, it cannot but seem hard that the unfurrowed brow should ache with thought, the beardless cheek waste and pale with care. Nor can we expect the youth, however fast he may have spent his boyhood, however dearly he may have purchased his knowledge, to arrive at once at that resigned and happy period, when man is enabled to say, in heartfelt thankfulness and humble confidence, ‘It is good for me that I have been in trouble.’

Who is there that delights in the deadly tubes, levelled with accuracy and quickness against the flying covery or the dodging coney. Who is there that loves to range the rich stubbles and the russet coppice, to start the frightened hare from her form, or flush the gaily pheasant from her covert, and doth not welcome with all his heart the keen, pur air of a bracing morning in October, when the outlying spinnies are to be beat, and the scattered partridges, wild, wary, and quick upon the wing, will prove no unworthy triumph? Haverley was the place of all others for a varied and enjoyable day’s shooting. Without the masses of game which swarm like locusts upon a Norfolk manor—with bouquets of pheasants, radiating in all directions from what is appropriately termed a ‘hot corner,’—there was a fair sprinkling of both winged and ground game, that might satisfy the keenest sportsman as to the sufficient number of objects whereon to exercise his prowess; whilst the large enclosures, double hedge-rows, and undulating surface of the land, imposed upon him that bodily exercise which so much enhances the pleasure of all field sports. Nor was the party marshalled in deadly array upon the steps of the old Hall, the second morning after the coming-of-age day, loth to enjoy to the utmost all the amusement our coverts could afford. A motley crew we were, lounging about under the portico or on the lawn, in every variety of costume yet invented for the slaughter of the beasts of the field, from old Ramrod’s antediluvian velvet jacket, with skirts to his heels, and pockets in whose yawning caverns you might almost stow away a red deer, to Carambole’s smart and fanciful tunic, picturesque as that of a Robin Hood, with its braid and facings, and har-mouising well with the Marquis’s carefully-trimmed beard, curling moustache, and redundancy of jewellery—not to mention his white kid gloves, and the enormous cigar which, ever glowing between his lips, seemed like a Phoenix to spring from the ashes of its predecessor. Nor was the Churchwarden present in our sporting assemblage. The Reverend Amos Batt, the shortest-sighted man that ever squinted over a gun-barrel, ‘a ride,’ was as usual the keenest to begin, in his excessive fondness for that amusement to which of all others he was least adapted by nature, and fidgeted about in his dark clerical shooting-dress in a manner that called down the contemptuous report of Mr. Flint, the keeper, who, grouped with his myrmidons and a half dozen spaniels, stood within ear-shot of the Hall door.

Never do to begin without Mr. Spencer,’ said Flint, probably in consideration of many

...a stick as long as himself, to ‘beat it out,’ touches his hat, and inquires into the amount of slaughter. Of course, a good many pheasants ‘went back,’ to that mysterious bourne from which no game ever returns; and of course, we ought to have an additional man somewhere else. ‘To stop,’ for who ever yet knew a keeper satisfied with the list of killed? But our party were flushed with success; and, walking in a line over a few intervening fields to the next covert, we picked up a stray hare, and two or three brace of wild partridges, that did credit to our aim, ere we again entered upon the woodland chace.

A fabulous report of a woodcock supposed to have been seen by Mr. Batt created much excitement in this locality, not diminished by ‘viewing away’ a magnificent old fox, which I had great difficulty in preventing Carambole from shooting. It did me good to see the gallant animal gliding easily along over the ridge and furrow of the adjoining field, his bright rich coat glistening in the sun, and his stealthy form the very impersonation of speed and symmetry. Ere I could give him a second ‘view holloa,’ he had disappeared, and I felt half-ashamed of my enthusiasm when I saw ‘the Marquis’s’ look of astonishment at the excitement he could not the least comprehend.

The love of fox-hunting is indeed an inexplicable passion; the man who has once really felt it, never forgets his attachment to the cause. Let him leave off his favorite pursuit for years—put him to any other sport, business, or excitement you will—place him in any position, or under any circumstances, which render it impossible for him to gratify his prevailing taste—but only mention the word ‘fox-hunting,’ only lead to some subject connected with that fascinating sport, and you will bring the color to his cheek, and the light to his eye, though age may have dimmed the one, and sorrow furrowed the other. But in the meantime, walking knee-deep in stubble, and stragling waist-deep through tangled brier and impervious covert, had made us all excessively hungry. Nor were we sorry to behold, on the lee-side of Upper Long-wood, a gipsy fire cheerfully burning, a pot of comforting soup hanging gracefully thereon; a screen cleverly constructed to keep off the wind, and a table laid out with sundry good things for the refreshment of the inward man; whilst Soames, who piqued himself much on these impromptu out-door arrangements, trotted about, greatly to his own satisfaction, with a jorum of a curiously compounded ‘mull,’ grateful beyond measure in the raw air of an October afternoon.

What a merry party we were. Our sport had been excellent. Ramrod, a regular old poacher, who always asked to take away what he killed, had amassed a capital bag, by dint of shooting hares sitting, taking unwary rabbits by surprise, and poking most perseveringly at game upon the wing. The rest of party had been equally successful in a more legitimate manner. Even Mr. Batt, after the expenditure of a vast deal of powder and shot, had succeeded in bagging a hen-pheasant and a wood-pigeon. Carambole had hardly missed a shot (I should be afraid to say how many cigars he had smoked), and his mercurial spirits were now at their highest—he would drink ‘encore un coup de ze mull,’ as called Soames’s fragment mixture—he would sing French bacchanalian songs, in a rich mellow voice, which delighted even the austere Flint, who allowed us more time than usual for our repast; and, in short, nothing could have gone off better than the whole thing, had it not been for an untoward accident, perhaps partly to be attributed to the jollity of our luncheon, which damped our afternoon amusement, and which might have had a very serious termination.

We were shooting the last covert, and twilight was rapidly approaching, when the Reverend Amos Batt, whom I had placed next to myself, in order, if possible, to moderate

lights of the flax twinkled on us through the shades of night, we had touched upon one subject after another, made reciprocal disclosures in the strictest confidence, as to our respective studs, and interchanged an abbreviated history of our first loves, till Tom at last intrusted me, in the openness of his heart, with the important secret that he was over head and ears in love with the fair Julia Batt; that he resolved to marry her as soon as he had taken orders and got ‘a living’—two events that young men, till undeceived by experience, are apt to consider synonymous—but that he had not yet declared his attachment to his lady-love; and he had a shrewd suspicion that, however agreeable they might be to the daughter, the Reverend Amos, in his paternal care, highly disapproved of my friend’s attentions.

‘If I can assist you any way, my dear Tom, command me,’ said I, as we entered the house, and stumped off to our respective dressing rooms. ‘To-morrow is our county ball, as you know, and you will have every opportunity of making play with the damsel, as I can undertake to keep papa in conversation, as to the respective merits of heavy and light guns, self-primers, revolvers, and other deadly weapons, long enough to enable you to propose, be accepted, ay, and carry her off in a postchaise-and-four to boot.’

So saying I opened the door of my comfortable snugery, where hot water, dry things, and a blazing fire, presented all the materials for restoring the outward man to state of gentlemanlike sleekness and order.

But, alas! the post—that remorseless emblem of Fate—had arrived during my absence; and with a blush of shame and remorse, with a vague feeling of unaccountable apprehension that made my heart beat and my breath come quick, I recognized, in a foreign letter that lay upon my toilet table, and well-known handwriting of Zoe de Grand-Martigny.

When Soames knocked at my door an hour afterwards to say dinner was on the table, I was still sitting in my arm chair, with that open letter in my hand. Thoughts, thoughts—those mysterious workings of the soul, which form alternately our blessing and our curse—were inundating my brain in countless succession, like the waves of the sea. In that hour I lived over a long and happy day of the irrevocable past. Again I saw that glorious girl in all the pride of her beauty, as I beheld her for the first time. Again I walked with her in the magnificent scenery of Niagara and heard her gentle voice thrilling to my very soul, despite the roar of the cataract. Again I gazed upon her graceful form, as long, black tresses, drooping over the still deep waves of the St. Lawrence, as many a time; and oft I had seen her, and sat with her by the margin of that mighty river, in the golden summer evenings of the West. Again I saw the glittering jet bracelet which clasped from that snowy arm; and once more was her gentle sorrowing face turned upon mine, in mute, appalling agony, as she bid me a long and last farewell. As then how maddening to think that I had never seen her once since, in the pompons revelry, the noisy frivolity of a London ball; and that our cursed fate had prevented me from so much as exchanging a syllable with one erst fondly loved.

But the letter—gentle, feminine, high-principled as hers—explained all this; and I sat out the tedious formal dinner, and strove to sustain my part in the forced and the vain nonsense that wore through my weary evening, I felt indeed unworthy that generous missive which reposed upon my heart. Not a word of reproach, not a word of reprimand did it contain; far above such feelings—far above the weakness of sex, was the pure, high-minded writer.

(To be Continued.)