

in the depths of Barkby Holt, to swell the ghoulding hall a that cheer away a fine old iron in the impervious far in the thick-
out corner of Glen Gorse.

The court of St. Peterburg has never been supposed entirely deficient in intrigue; to represent that court as a minister in England would argue no slight share of diplomatic dexterity, and no small tax upon the time and talent of the individual holding that responsible situation. But what shall we say of a statesman whose office it was to reside in a country, to watch the workings of that machinery, the wheels within wheels of which were every day in operation of the world, and to report to an irresponsible and absolute master every shadow of change that might arise, every breath that might ruffle the treacherous surface over which it was his duty to keep so vigilant an eye? Such an one can have had but small leisure to spare up his minutes in his, such an one would be the last man in the world whom you would expect to see day after day enjoying with enthusiasm in the delights of the chase, might a night entering with careless merriment into the conviviality of the dinner-table. Yet so it was—the Russian diplomatist would steal these hours from sleep that he was compelled to devote to his professional duties, and after riding all day in front rank, dining at eve amongst spirits jovial and light-hearted as himself, playing a sociable game at whist till far into the night, would sit up till the grey dawn of morning editing (a somewhat tedious lucubration) a state paper to his superior. Peace be to his ashes! Melton has known and appreciated many a talented sportsman, many an agreeable comrade, but none so clever, none so popular as he! One anecdote that St. Heliers told me of his good-humour and *sang froid* so completely illustrates the character of the man, that I cannot resist repeating it. He had been but a short time in England, and, good linguists as all Russians are, had not then acquired his later proficiency in our difficult language. He was mounted on a horse hired of Mr. Tilbury, and had nearly got to the end of a good run, but at the expense of his hunter, who was completely exhausted. Riding his own line gallantly, he came by himself to a large stone fence into a lane, which he charged without a moment's hesitation; but his horse, being frightfully blown, declined to make any exertion, and hung his head upon his rider's hand in a state of painful helplessness. Most men would have given up in despair, or vented their annoyance with whip and spur upon the poor animal. Not so the unmoved Russian—turning him quietly round to give him another run at the formidable obstacle, he addressed him in soothing accents, and a language he imagined the brute could best comprehend—'We will try again, my good friend—we will try again!' and this time tumbled neck and crop into the lane. There was no affectation in this stoicism, as he had no reason to suppose there was a soul within ear-shot, and it was the accidental circumstance of his being overheard by some one in the lane that brought to light this anecdote, so illustrative of the coolness and good-humour for which its hero was famous.

Everything that St. Heliers undertook was done in the best possible manner, and, as may be supposed, his little hunting establishment at Melton was wanting in none of those accessories which would have been considered indispensable in his house in town. Nothing could be more charming than the domicile to which I found myself invited for luxury, small enough for comfort, there was everything you could possibly want in the exact place in which you were likely to want it. The dressing-rooms boasted more baths, the drawing-rooms more easy-chairs, the library more writing-tables, and the cellar more claret, than any other house I was in the habit of frequenting. The apartments were low and warm, the walls hung round with portraits by Fernely of 'my lord's' favorite hunters, interspersed with sketches from the same prolific brush, of imaginary runs, and scurrils over an unmistakable Leicestershire country, with the same dark December sky,

conceivable party and a good dinner would be sold us for previous disappointments, whilst whist, that resource without which society must speedily come to a stand-still—whist professed her attractions, and dealt her honors upon no ungrateful or inconstant votaries. I had not been long at Melton, before I saw that this scientific game, played as it was there regularly every night, and always by the same individuals, average good performers, but nothing more, must, if persevered in, prove a mine of gold to one, who, like myself, was a player of the first-class, and who knew exactly his own strength. Alas, thus early in life had I learned the predatory lesson of turning to advantage the weaknesses of my companions, of adhering to the 'sharp practice' which holds for its chief maxim, 'never throw a chance away.' Here was I living with an open-hearted, jovial, hospitable set of fellows, whose horses I rode for my own four were of course insufficient for six days a week, whose dinners I attended, and whose claret might after might moistened my ungrateful throat, and yet it was from these very benefactors that I hesitated not to win as large sums as they could be induced to stake, at a game in which my own superiority made a certainty in my favor. Yet, had I not done so, had I not lit upon ways and means such as these to replenish my exhaustive coffers, I could not have lived among these very people, who seemed on their part to recognize the right, which a 'young fellow,' as they called me, of fast habits and no capital, had to lay them under contribution. Accordingly, regularly as tea and coffee made their appearance in the drawing-room, so regularly did I adjourn to the lucrative task, where shaded lights and a green-covered table were prepared for the thoughtful pastime; so regularly did care, science, and memory reap that golden harvest which, in the long run, they never fail to secure.

But the returns arising from successful whist are at best but slow, though tolerably sure, and the practice of playing invariably the same stakes, while it guarantees the loser from any starting deficiency, equally precludes the winner from netting any very large amount. Whist can be merely considered an accessory, and not a provision; other means must be sought for of permanently raising the wind and such was the opinion of St. Heliers, no bad judge of worldly prosperity, as, after a better day's sport than usual, we jogged our tired horses homeward in company, and the peer, contrary to his wont, gave me the benefit of his advice and experience.

'I wonder, Digby,' he began, lighting a cigar, and allowing his weary steed—the second he had exhausted that day—to relapse into a walk, 'I wonder you don't make up to some woman with money, cut the Guards, and have a house in London, with a hunting-box down here; that is the sort of life that would suit you—depend upon it, soldiering is all nonsense.'

'And so I would,' was my reply; 'but I don't see any of these here sees about; besides, I think hit you, St. Heliers, were a sworn enemy to marrying and giving in marriage.'

'*Cela depend*,' said the bachelor peer, 'it would not suit me; but I think it is your only chance. Mind, I don't want you to marry anything but a girl with a large fortune. As I told you once before, I don't think you are at all a fellow for a roast-mutton manag. But now there is that Miss Spinnithorne, who was out with us to-day, she will have seven thousand a year the instant she comes of age; to be sure, she rides like the devil, and that we know has not a softening effect on her person or manner; but the pill is well gilded, and she is really a good-looking girl. If I were you I should make a face and swallow it.'

'She wouldn't have me,' was my modest reply; 'she don't like good-looking men. She was riding all to-day with that Russian, whose name I cannot pronounce, and whose appearance would frighten a child into convulsions.'

'Not a bit of it,' said my Mentor; 'like Sir Anthonie Agulchick, board her, woo her, assid her; you may undertake her in this

given up that world, the myriads of which constituted my whole existence. I would have given up position, profession, friends, all and everything, without a murmur, for her. But this was a mere day-dream—thus did I argue with my dishonest heart—my father would never consent to my marriage with Miss Belmont. Should I carry her off in defiance of the opposition of our respective families, how were we to live? I could not bear to see that gentle girl subjected to the inconveniences and annoyances, if not the actual hardships of poverty; I could not stand a 'boy in buttons' waiting as her only servant on my aristocratic darling. Setting aside my own tastelessness and false ideas of comfort, it would have annoyed me dreadfully to see her tramping about in all weathers, with muddy feet and draggled gown, because I could not keep her a carriage; to see her wearing dark gloves and faded bonnets; to know that she was forced by necessity to deny herself those little luxuries which to a high-bred woman may be considered almost the essentials of life. All this would have been to me a source of real grief; and even as I thought over the possibility of such a marriage, these imaginary evils rankled by anticipation in my heart. I only mention this to show how much of real happiness may be, nay, often is, destroyed by the false ideas of refinement which are acquired by too many of us in early youth, and which are never afterwards to be wholly got rid of. Besides, I reasoned, surely it is my duty to abstain from drawing her I love into such discomfort, merely for my own selfish delight in her society. Far better would it be for her to remain single, or even to marry another who could support her in that station to which she has always been accustomed. Such is the sacrifice that honour and right feeling imperatively demand of me, and such is the sacrifice that I will not hesitate to make. And if I am never to possess Flora, if the force of circumstances compels me to forego the greatest blessing which life has to offer, is that any reason why I should likewise be deprived of a fair proportion of real comfort, and the many advantages which would arise to me from a wealthy connection? Surely not; under similar circumstances I would advise the friend who came to me for counsel, as St. Heliers has advised me. I would urge him to make up to the rich heiress, to secure for himself a position in the world, and a luxurious home—to grasp the positive good that hung within his reach, nor distress himself with vain longings after that superlative happiness which was unattainable; and if this is the course which I should recommend another to pursue, common sense points it out as the one which I should myself follow, and which is alike demanded of me for Flora's sake as for my own. Such was the vain sophistry with which I strove to delude my better nature into the mercenary creed of the many, with which I would fain excuse the treachery of which I was guilty to my own heart, the meditated injury to my affianced love, which I ought to have scouted and despised. And so I embarked like others in the venture—I, too, started in the race with the worshippers of Mammon. I paid devoted attention to Miss Spinnithorne, nor did I neglect the ruddy squire, her parent. I rode at the lady's bridle-rein, and talked to her papa concerning mangel-wurzel, when the chase was not too fascinating to make me neglect my interests for its absorbing pleasures. As we rode from covert to covert, or watched the wondrous instinct of the hound tracking his distant quarry by those symptoms which were becoming every moment more faint and fleeting—an exhibition of sagacity extremely pleasing to old Spinnithorne—as I have remarked it ever is to those on whom time and good living have impressed their seal of 'slow,' and who become more and more delighted with what they term hunting, in proportion as their nerves get too relaxed for the enjoyment of what they contemptuously dub mere riding; as we trotted slowly along within hearing of the bustling pack, whose movements in a cold scent gave us ample leisure for conversation, I had plenty of opportunities for pressing my suit, and ere many days had elapsed, thought I had fair reason to con-

with them all day. Nelly adores London, but would be happy anywhere with a person she liked—making frightful running!

March 6.—The Cottesmore at Roccart. Miss S. got an ugly fall in Owston Wood; picked her up and consoled her—leaned on me, feeling so faint. Lost a capital thing towards Somerby, and got rather compromised. Flora! Flora! one look of thine would save me, even now!

March 7.—The Quorn at Widmerpool. No sport; rode with Nelly all day. Her father praising her heavily whenever she rode before us. This looks like business. The girl is evidently smitten, but I cannot help drawing comparisons between her and Flora; the latter so gentle, so beautiful, so bewitching, with her large melancholy eyes and thoughtful brow,—the former so boisterous, so prosperous looking, so noisy. I believe I shall always hate fine teeth, fresh complexions, and sunny ringlets. Besides, nothing frightens her. She was riding a violent five-year-old horse, and sat him as if he was a shooting pony—complimented her on her prowess, and she looked so pleased. It must come off soon or later, and I shall lose Flora forever. Such is fate! Dined with Salamander, and drank oceans of claret—fellows all very noisy. Won £37 at whist.

March 8, Sunday.—Lay in bed till one p.m. Fearful dreams. Flora on a runaway horse—stopped her, and found she was suddenly transformed into old Mr. Spinnithorne—who gave me his daughter and his blessing. Breakfasted, and made up my whist-book. Shocking bad week—only won £46 on the six nights. Shall have to marry the heiress, after all. Put it off till after Croxton Park.

CHAPTER XVI.

CROXTON PARK.

Many and great as may be the failings of our English aristocracy, and in these days, truly, the more exalted a man's position the more surely are his peccadilloes brought to light, effeminacy and want of daring can never be charged against them by their greatest enemies. Without going into the invidious question, as to whether they are not more moral, better educated, and more intelligent than their Continental neighbors, there is no doubt that their sports and pursuits have a less enervating tendency, their frames are more athletic, and their habits more manly than those of a corresponding class in any other civilized nation. The sports of the field, and the training of the gymnasium, will ever have a beneficial effect on the moral tone, as well as the corporal health of those who assiduously follow them, and who 'live laborious days,' which bring their own reward; and there is a nearer connection than one might at first sight suppose between the bodily vigor which resists physical labour, and rises superior to fatigue, and the mental energy which overcomes moral difficulties, and battles strenuously against evil. I do not go so far as the absurdity of saying that the man of muscle is necessarily the man of virtue, but I only suggest, that in more cases than we are generally aware of, the 'sound body' is the most powerful auxiliary to the 'sound mind.' May we not, then, congratulate ourselves that in this country, and, I believe, only in this country, we see the young aristocracy unflinchingly take their share of all the buffeting inseparable from our rough and athletic amusements with a manly good humor not to be surpassed by the brawny clown, who, sooth to say, is of no more stalwart frame than his lordly competitor;—that we see the hereditary legislator laboring at the oar, with the pluck and endurance worthy of a toiling athlete training for the Olympic wreath, or standing up to the blows of a professional pugilist, which, muffled though they be, are still no unworthy imitations of the kick of the horse, with an unruffled countenance, that shows how self-reliance, accompanied by a quick eye and ready hand, can turn the rude struggle into a triumph of sci-

ence, whose youthful ardor was to be acted by the cool determination of that old man; I have seen one on whom they mantle has since descended, and whose will be remembered while French holds a bivouac—whilst the unconquered of the heroic Abdel-Kader pervades the of the desert—rehearsing in reality, his gorgeous vesture fluttered in the those stirring gallops that he has scribed so thrillingly in winged verse. I seen the graceful representative of England's most chivalrous horses without effort past the stand, and hailed by a thousand voices the artist-ner by a length, whilst the cordial congratulations he received on all sides proved popularity of the equestrian; and I have joyed to see that, let utilitarians cavil as will, the spirit of their fore-fathers is dormant in the gentlemen of England, sit at home at ease. Besides such defects as these, can anything be more different than a fine day in early spring, on a eminence commanding a rich and wooded country; and surrounded by friends and acquaintances, male and in such numbers as to enable one to the pleasantest as one's associates out risk of affronting the less neglect? Or should wooing be the of the day, and the fair object a lady heart and soul in horses, horse-manship, the mysteries of the saddle, coadj position be so advantageous for the pration of one's suit as a place at her corner of the grand stand during there Croxton Park?

Such was my position as regarded Spinnithorne, with whom I was now the best of terms, and who, I thought, vanity, was only waiting for the imp words that should bind me to her for These words I had quite made up my to speak, and was now only putting day to day the irremediable loss of my ty, and my eternal separation from Belmont. I had determined my fate be decided at the Croxton Park; this was the first day of that festival, morrow must see me 'booked.' Such the idea uppermost in my brain, as I Nelly's side, and listened to her remarks upon the pageant going on before eyes.

'Do tell me which horse will win, Grand,' she said, leaning half her body on the balcony, to witness the operation of a refractory chestnut. 'I like away,' only he has bad hocks; and Popples has better action for getting the dirt.'

'Right again, Nelly,' said a voice at elbow; which, on turning round, I perceived to come from her cousin Tom, and who, being a cousin, I was forced to tolerate. 'Polly's the card for you to stick to, she, Grand? I am to ride her; you I don't get hold of her cocoa-nut and her along!'

'A nice fellow this for one's wife's I ejaculated internally during this colloquy; the said Tom being my aversion—a sort of half-gentleman, but man—who would have been a 'br had he been an Irishman, but whose tershire was only that worst of all—a 'sporting snob.'

'Well, Tom,' said my good-future, 'I'll bet you two to one your mount.'

'Done in gloves,' said my aversion along with you little Nell! (I should have liked to choke him;) and if she don't I'll send you the spiciest pair of reins that Grantham can produce.' And a refined promise he went down to previous to mounting the annual which I sincerely hoped might be neck.

'Is that man a friend of yours? Overbearing, who had been lecturing Cousin Tom with her glass up, and a expression of intense amusement at haughty features.

'No—yes,' I stammered out, 'that sort of cousin of Miss Spinnithorne—in the pink bonnet.'