

MARKET HARBOURGH!

—OR—

How Mr. Sawyer went to the Shires.

CHAPTER XVII.

TRIMMED TO "JY."

"You will find them pretty good," said he, looking at a little *bijou* of briquet that hung to his watch chain. "I import them myself, it's the only way to ensure getting them first-rate, and it certainly is the cheapest in the long run."

"The cigar was indeed excellent. Mr. Sawyer thought this would be a good opportunity to draw his noble friend for a box. He might perhaps make him a present of a couple of pounds or so. At all events (as he said, it was the cheapest plan) there was no harm in risking the chance of having to pay for them. He asked him, accordingly, with some little hesitation, if he could do him the favor of procuring him a few?"

"Certainly, certainly," replied the other, in the most off-hand, good-humored way possible. "You shall have them from my man. I'll write to him to-night. How much shall I order? You can get anything like them at the money they only stand us in five guineas a pound!"

Mr. Sawyer modestly opined "one pound would be quite sufficient for the present," but he felt as if he had just lost a large double to him. Without being stingy, it was not the custom in the Old Country thus to throw money away. He fell back upon French snuff at the costly tobacco with considerable vehemence.

"Who is he?" said the nodding towards the rider of the five-year-old, then cauntering on ahead, and sitting well down in the saddle, as he prepared to "lark" over a large fence, to the admiration of the field, instead of defiling through the hand-gate.

"Why, you seem to know him very well," rejoined Major Bernal, smiling (as well he might) at the query: "I thought you seemed very thick, and were going to give him your custom."

Mr. Sawyer had not the heart to repudiate the soft impeachment. He liked to be "very thick" with a peer, and to have the credit of "giving him his custom" as a visitor and intimate.

"Yes," he said, "I am; but, somehow, I cannot, for the life of me, remember his title. I've no 'Debrecht' at Harborough; and I've such a bad memory for names. Lord—Lord—what the deuce is it? Some Irish peerage, if I remember right?"

Major Bernal fairly burst out laughing. "No more a lord than you are, Sawyer," said he. "Though, I grant you, he ought to be a Duke. I thought everybody knew Mr. Varnish, the horse-dealer!" And the Major went off at a score again, thinking what a capital story he had got against Sawyer for that day at dinner, and a good many days after. A joke, you see, lasts a long time in the hunting season, when the supply is by no means equal to the demand.

And Mr. Sawyer turned his horse's head out of the crowd, feeling a little humiliated, and not a little disgusted. The five guineas for the cigars stuck horribly in his throat. However, he and Mr. Varnish, as will presently be seen, had by no means closed accounts yet.

But where are the low spirits, blue devils, or wretched reflections that can hold their own for an instant against the cheering sound of "Come away!" Three notes on the huntsman's horn, five or six couples of hounds streaming noiselessly across a field, the rest more clamorous, leaping and dashing through a gorse, a rush of horsemen towards the point at which the fox has been seen, and the man who is really fond of hunting has not the vestige of an idea to spare for anything else in the world.

John Standish Sawyer could ride "about a bit" even in a strange country, and with hounds running "like smoke," he was not a man to shrink from taking his own line, and especially valuing the grey, perhaps, according to its deserts, he had no scruple in

daughter, were forward with the grey, though the former was already beginning to calculate on the check.

The double post-and-rails about Norton-by-Gilby were already visible; but the fox had evidently no intention of entering the gorse. Albeit much against the grain, and what he was totally unaccustomed to in the Old Country, when hounds were running, Mr. Sawyer found himself obliged to ride to the leader. The chestnut five-year-old was forever in front of him, now doing an "in-and-out" cleverly, now topping a flight of rails gallantly, then creeping under a tree, with a discretion beyond his years, and anon tacing and rasping through a bullfinch, in the successful temerity of youth, Mr. Varnish sitting very far back the while, with the graceful ease of a man who is playing a favorite instrument in an arm chair.

Presently the hounds checked, under Houghton-on-the-Hill; and Mr. Varnish, turning round to our friend, and casting his eye pitifully on the grey's sobbing sides, assigned them to reprobation for so doing, "just as the crowd was shook off, and the horses getting settled to their work!"

Mr. Sawyer's dander was up. It had been rising for the last two or three fences. He vowed, in his wicked heart, that the chestnut should be his own before nightfall; and the way in which the young one jumped out of the Billesdon Road, when they got to work again, only confirmed him in his determination.

Long before the crowd could come clatter up the high-road, the pack and the first flight had put a couple of grassy slopes once more between themselves and their pursuers. Considerable grief and discomfiture took place amongst the sportsmen, as must always be the case when hounds run straight, over Leicester-shire. The holding pace at which they kept on, and the straight running of the fox, forbade the slightest chance of any but such as had got a good start at first, and stuck to them through thick and thin. Even these, well-mounted and skilful as they were, had enough to do. The fox never turned but once, under the Coplow; and five minutes afterwards he was in hand, held high above the huntsman's head, with the pack baying round him in expectation of their reward.

Those who were there to see, it would be invidious to name. Sufficient for me to say that Mr. Sawyer was not, though he came up whilst Warrior and Woldsman were disputing the last bit of a hind-leg.

Despite his judicious riding and undeniable nerve, he had not the material under him that was quite adapted for so severe a country. The grey had neither pace for the extensive fields, nor scope for the large fences, each of which, though he did them so gallantly, entailed too great an exertion to bear frequent repetition. Notwithstanding two falls, however, he struggled gamely to the end; and it speaks well both for man and horse, that they should have got there at all.

Mr. Sawyer, however, was now thoroughly bitten. He had never felt so keen in his life. He would never hunt anywhere else. He could ride with any of them, he thought; he was determined to be as well mounted. Mr. Varnish and he discussed the subject in all its bearings, as they rode home; and the result of their conversation was—the arrival of the chestnut five-year-old and a good-looking brown at Mr. Sawyer's stables, and the transference to Mr. Varnish, in lieu thereof, of the Honorable Crasher's cheque, and another signed in full with the perfectly solvent name of John Standish Sawyer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DOVE-COTE.

Let us take a peep into Dove-cote Rectory, smiling in the wintry sun, as it lies snugly sheltered from the north winds by a thick plantation, and rejoicing in that most desirable advantage in our climate—a southern aspect. This house is one that would make any sportsman blivious of the tenth commandment. Who could refrain from coveting possession of those cheerful rooms; that fine extensive view; above all, the excellent

ingly bad goer, whose "form" must at once absolve him of intentional unpunctuality in the eyes of his lady-love. As a pendant to this work of art, hangs a portrait in crayons of Mrs. Dove, done some years ago, when people wore bunches of ringlets and a high comb at the back of the head—a fashion by no means unbecoming to the original, who must have been a sufficiently handsome young woman when she sat for this likeness. Indeed, the Reverend, no mean judge of "make-and-shape," always declared (at least in wife's presence) that Cissy could not hold a candle to what her mother had been in her best days.

That matron, though somewhat voluminous in person and too highly colored, is by no means bad-looking even now. As she sits at the window, shaping a little child's shirt for a poor parishioner (Mrs. Dove is a managing, bustling person—prejudiced, it may be, and deaf to argument, as what woman is not? but overflowing with the milk of human kindness), a judicious artist might tone her down into a very picturesque study of "A lady in the prime of life."

She looks up from her work, and casts her eye across the trim garden over many a mile of undulating prairie, to where a dim smoke in the far distance denotes the locality of Harborough.

"Cissy," observes the matron, "wasn't that Papa going round to the stables?"

Cissy raises those killing eyelashes from her crochet, and dutifully replies—"Yes, Mamma. He's only going to smoke his cigar as usual. I'm glad it's not a hunting day; we shall have him all to ourselves till luncheon."

Miss Dove pats her papa intently; and it is needless to remark that, although on occasions he runs rusty with his wife, his daughter can wind him round her little finger at will.

"That reminds me," continues Mrs. D., in the inconsequent manner in which ladies follow out the thread of their reflections—"that reminds me we haven't had any visitors lately from over there," nodding with her head in the direction of Market Harborough.

Cissy looks very innocent in reply, and observes that "Gentlemen seem to make hunting the one great business of life."

Mamma, whose rest for the last five-and-twenty years has been broken every winter whenever the nights have been symptomatic of frost, and who can scarcely be expected to share the anxiety which drives the Reverend at short intervals from the connubial couch to open the window and look out, is unable to controvert so self-evident a proposition; so she tries back on their Harborough friends.

"Mr. Crasher never comes except 'on Sundays, or when there is a hard frost; and the rest of the gang I would just as soon be without, for they will light their cigars in the hall—a thing I've quite broke your papa of doing, till the whole place smells like a public-house. But I do think that Mr. Sawyer, or whatever his name is, might have called in common civility, if it was only to ask how you were after your leg day."

Cissy was of the same opinion; but she adhered steadily to the crochet, and said nothing; perhaps she thought the more. She had confided to her mamma certain passages of the nocturnal ride into Market Harborough, and Mr. Sawyer's categorical answers to her very pertinent queries. I do not think, however, she had quite made what is called "a clean breast of it."

The mother, as is often the case in these days of improvement, had scarcely so much force of character as the daughter. She never dared cross-question "Cissy" beyond a certain point. Not that the girl was rebellious, but she had a quiet way of setting her mamma down, which was as uncomfortable as it was irresistible.

Mrs. Dove, however, was not without her share of maternally cunning. She had been young herself, and had not forgotten it; nay, she felt quite young again sometimes, even now. It does not follow that because a lady increases in bulk she should decrease in susceptibility. Look at a German baroness—fifteen stone good, in her ball dress, and athletic to the tips of her plump fingers. Mamma got up to fetch her scissors; cut the little boy's shirt to the true Corazza pattern, and holding up that ridiculous

ing smiles, which might have been too much for the young lady's equanimity, had not the entrance of the Reverend, bringing with him a strong perfume of tobacco, stables, and James's horse-blister, put an end to the tete-a-tete, and diverted Mrs. Dove's attack to her natural prey.

The Reverend was not in the best of humors. He had been feeling a horse's legs—the swelling of which no stimulant, however strong, seemed to be able to reduce. It was aggravating to make his hands smell like a chemist's shop, and at the same time to be aware that his favorite's legs were getting rounder and rounder under the application. It was not consolatory to be told by the groom that "the old oss was about wore out." Nor was it reassuring to reflect that he wanted for half-a-dozen other purposes the couple of hundred it would take to replace him. These, however, are the annoyances to which hunting men are subject; the metaphorical thorns that bristle round our rose and make her all the dearer—and the sweeter for their sharpness. As he returned to the house via., the pigsties, he could scarcely raise sufficient interest to examine the lately-arrived litter of nine. Spotted black and white, they reminded him of foxhound puppies; and to the Reverend, short of horses as he was, the association was but suggestive of annoyance.

When he entered the little drawing-room, Mrs. Dove knew by his face that the moment was an unpropitious one at which to demand a request for anything she wanted to obtain; but having managed him for a quarter of a century, it would have been odd if she had not known exactly how to get her own way with him now.

"My dear," she said, "I've a letter from that man at Brighton about the horse he had last year. He wants to know if we would like to engage it for a couple of months in the spring. It would be a good opportunity to give Cissy a little sea-bathing, you know."

Now, the Reverend had the same horror of that, as of other watering-places, which is usually entertained by middle-aged gentlemen of settled habits, who do not choose to accept second-rate dissipation and salt-water as equivalents for the comforts of a home. He had indeed, during the previous summer been seduced into spending two months at Brighton, under the erroneous impression that on those Sussex Downs the harriers hunted all the year round; but, having found out his mistake, had inwardly registered a vow never to be "let in" for such a benefit again. It was no wonder that he rose freely at the suggestion.

"Gracious Heavens! Mrs. Dove!" exclaimed the Reverend, plumping down into an arm-chair, and raising both hands in irritable deprecation, "knowing what you do, how can you ask such a question? Of course, if this house is too uncomfortable to live in, and it don't matter about the parish going to the dogs, and the Bishop is to be a nonentity, and my duties a farce, you are perfectly right to go gadding about from here to Brighton, and from Brighton to London, and from London to Halifax, if you like, and I shall be happy to indulge you. I only wish you would tell me where the money is to come from—where the money is to come from, Mrs. Dove—that's all!" And, having thus spoken, the Reverend took up the Leicester Journal, and looked over the top of it at his wife, as if he had indeed propounded a poser.

This was exactly what that dear artful woman wanted. She knew that when he had blown off his steam, her husband would settle down into his usual easy temper, and become perfectly malleable in about five minutes. So she folded the poor parishioner's bit of shirt with the nicest accuracy, and repaired in the most perfect good-humor:—

"Well, dear, I'm sure I don't want to move from here till we go to London. You know I'm so fond of my garden in the spring, and I like you to get your hunting as long as you can; it does you so much good. My idea is, London about the time of the Derby; to be absent for a week; and home again by the beginning of July. After all, we are wonderfully well situated here for the country as regards society, and Harborough never was so full as it seems this season. What should we do in this part of the world if it wasn't for the

to London by the express train. As for not liking to come, they'll jump at it! Mr. Crasher says yours is the best claret within three counties, and I'm sure you all sit long enough at it to appreciate its merits. How you will talk about hunting: won't they, Cissy? Well, we can't wonder at it—gentlemen are so enthusiastic. Why, if I was a man, with such wine as that, I'd sell 'em every horse in my stable before coffee came in."

The reverend burst out laughing. The last argument was irresistible. "Have it your own way, Dottie," said he: "I must be off to write my sermon." And he took himself to his study, accordingly, leaving his wife and daughter to issue the invitations.

Of these it is unnecessary for us to trace the delivery of more than one. Mr. Sawyer, eating devilled kidneys the following morning for breakfast, felt his heart leap in his mouth at the reception of a primrose-colored, highly-scented billet, in a long narrow envelope, bearing on the reverse what is called a "monogram"—a thing not unlike the puzzle-wit lock on a gate—consisting of the letter D and others twisted into every variety of shape. Though his experience in ladies' letters was limited, being indeed confined to one from Miss Mexico at the conclusion of their intercourse, in which she "wished to have no further communication with him, but hoped always to remain friends," something told him that the delicate, neatly-written superscription must have been indited by a fair hand. For an instant, the delightful suggestion flashed across him, that Miss Dove, forgetting maidenly reserve in the ardour of her affection, had plunged into a correspondence with himself, and he turned hot and cold by turns. Opening the missive with a trembling hand, it proved to be, if not from the young lady, at least from her mamma, and as it lay open all that day on his table, it is no breach of confidence on my part to publish its contents for the reader's benefit. Thus it ran:—

"DEAR MR. SAWYER,

"Can you give us the pleasure of your company at dinner on Tuesday next, at half past seven o'clock? Mr. Dove desires me to say that as you will probably drive, you had better not attempt the short way, but come by the high-road. My daughter united with me in hoping that your poor horse has recovered the hard day in which he carried you so well, and I remain,

Dear Mr. Sawyer,

Yours sincerely,

"DOROTHY DOVE.

"Dove-cote Rectory, Friday."

There is nothing ambiguous in the above. It seems a simple invitation to dinner enough; you or I can gather its drift at a glance. Why the man should have read it over at least half-a-dozen times is more than I can divine.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE BOOT ON THE OTHER LEG."

Meanwhile in the stable of the Honorable Crasher is considerable consternation and bewilderment. The helpers look wise, and wink at each other, as they pass from stall to stall, in the execution of their duties. Mr. Tiptop is completely at his wits' end. Can he, the knowing Tiptop, looked up to as the great unerring authority on training, pace, weight for age, and other racing mysteries—Newmarket all over—can he have made a mistake? He begins to think, not only that he can, but that he has.

First of all they gave the hapless Marathon a spin with Chance, as a mere breather, and I have already said with what result.

Mr. Tiptop being determined to get at "the rights of it," then tried the horses a mile at even weights; the consequences admitted of less doubt than ever. Marathon's "form" was so obviously bad, that the groom concluded he must be amiss.

"Why, he can't go no faster than our mare can trot," soliloquised Mr. Tiptop, as he contemplated the bay grinding away at