

DIGBY GRAND.

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

THE MORNING OF LIFE.

'He's no flincher,' said old-Brevet-Major Hubbard, a veteran tanned into mahogany by hard service, and a most reliable adherent to port wine and brandy-and-water in every climate of the globe—'he's no flincher, that lad,' as he eyed, with marked approbation, the steadiness with which I filled my eleventh tumbler of port.

'I think he'll do, at least for a young one,' replied Eusebio Spooner, a bearded warrior, some two years my junior, but whose six months' seniority in the Army List gave him all the advantage of comparatively an old hand.

I marked his flushed countenance and wandering eye, as he made his remark, and thought to myself, 'Dandy Grand will see you out, my boy, or his Eton education and his bill at "The Christopher" goes for nothing.'

'But, Major,' said Captain Levanter, resuming a conversation that our move to the fireplace had interrupted, 'you never finished that outpost story; and I daresay Mr. Grand and some of our young ones would like to hear it.'

'By all means, Major,' was the unanimous cry; 'let us have a yarn of the Peninsula.'

If the proverb, *In vino veritas*, has any truth, the officers of the British army must be devoted to their profession, as when they exceed their ordinary moderation in the pleasures of the table, their discourse invariably turns to what they call 'pope-clay,'—a term which must be explained to the civilian to mean all and everything connected with the stirring scenes, the lights and shades of military life.

'Well,' said the Major, 'if you young fellows like to hear it, you are welcome to the story, though it tells sadly against myself, since I was outwitted, by Gad!—outwitted by a Frenchman! But this was the way it came off. You were all children then, except my old friend Spirit; and he looked older than he does now, for he had not mounted a pig in those days. But I was, even at that period of history, a lieutenant in a regiment of light infantry; which, from one cause and another, was so short of officers, that I found myself, one fine morning, in command of an important outpost, close to the enemy's line. There was a mill near my position, and a rapid stream, pretty deep, too, which looked to me a tempting sort of place to throw a fly—a sport, my boys, that, in my humble opinion, beats cock-fighting! Well, I was smoking my weed, after a light and wholesome dinner off a piece of black bread and the outside of an onion, when a brown dirty-looking fellow, who swore he was a miller, and who talked Spanish, and stunk of garlic like a true "patriot," asked to have an interview with "my Excellency;" and with many compliments, and a great deal of translating my signs—for my knowledge of Spanish was not equal to my taste in sherry—he begged of me to allow him to place a couple of "pope-clay" across the stream, to enable him to carry his sacks to the mill. I never suspected a "plant" of any kind, and gave the beggar leave to do what he wished, more particularly as I could see the men grinning at his cursed volubility, and my bad Spanish and queer gestures, and I was in a hurry to get rid of him. Off he went, apparently well satisfied; and in an hour's time I saw a couple of planks had been placed across the mill-stream, and a very commodious foot-bridge constructed by their means. Whether my old colonel thought me too young for "the situation," or whether it was accidental, I know not, but I was providentially relieved that very evening by my own captain—poor fellow, I saw him afterwards killed at Badajoz—and the very first thing he did, on reconnoitring his ground, was to kick the miller's planks into the stream, and put two extra sentries within sight of the spot where he made his foot-bridge. Would you believe it?—the very

would exclaim this warlike enthusiast; 'half an inch, sir, makes all the difference; and no object in nature is more beautiful than a well-carried musket.' How people's ideas of the picturesque must vary!

However, the two months soon passed over, and as I was judged capable of being dismissed my drill, and taking my duty; but in the short period which I had spent in the society of my brother officers, I had gained an insight into their several habits, and into the character of the regiment, which convinced me that 'Dandy Grand' was destined for a higher flight than a marching corps in country quarters; and already I had formed hopes of obtaining an exchange to some crack cavalry regiment, or—summit of my ambition!—an appointment to the 'Guards.' The fact is, the 101st was a slang regiment; even the best of them, as I considered him, Captain Levanter, the only officer who, in my secret heart, I deemed a fit companion for Sir Peregrine's son—even he was given to driving tandems, and such other vulgar accomplishments; and one of my first triumphs, was the winning 'a pony' of the captain, as to the feasibility of driving a pair of hired horses, harnessed tandem-fashion, in and out of the barrack gate, a very awkward turn, placed at an acute angle with the street, a feat which I accomplished in a trot, according to the terms of the wager. Levanter never paid me, but was good enough to grant me his friendship ever after,—a boon of which I have no doubt he over-estimated the value,—and we soon became inseparable companions. The older officers shook their heads at our escapades, but amongst the young ensigns and lieutenants we were perfect demi-gods. I bought two very clever horses, which he and I drove by turns, to the admiration of the High Street. I won a pigeon-match of Mr. M'Doole, the sporting lawyer of that locality. I rode Major O'Toole's black mare, for a bet of half-a-crown, backwards and forwards over the gate that led to our parade-ground; and, as I was better dressed, smoked better cigars, and drank more wine than any member of the mess under the rank of a field officer, it is no wonder that I was considered rather 'a great card' at the depot of a marching regiment in country quarters.

The weeks slipped away pleasantly enough: one day will serve for a specimen of the rest, as they varied but little in the nature of the pursuits and amusements they afforded. A struggle to get up and be dressed in time for parade at nine, was the invariable commencement. I buckle my sword-belt and tie my sash as I run downstairs, and make my appearance on parade in time to salute the Major before the officers proceed to inspect their respective companies. The rear-rank of No. 2 is my especial charge, and I walk down the front and up the rear with the air of a perfect marinet. Brown's knapsack is hung too high, Smith's pouch is put on too low, and Murphy is sent to drill 'for untidiness in the ranks.' The Major walks down, and compliments me on the progress I make in my duty. The bugles sound—the band plays—the four companies we boast of form, and march past, saluting Major O'Toole as if he were the Duke of York; the officers fall out, the parade is dismissed, and I go to breakfast. When that elaborate meal is finished, Levanter kindly accepts one of my cigars, links his arm in mine, and we proceed down the town to play out our match at billiards in which he gives me five out of a hundred, and wins by a stroke. (Levantier can play billiards better than any man in England and what I have learnt of this crafty game I owe to his tuition, though I must confess my instructor did not teach me gratis.) The admiring Spooner looks on, and in his regard and affection for myself, loses a five-pound note, or as he calls it, 'a fiver,' to my antagonist. We return to the barracks to readjust our toilets before appearing at 'the gardens,' where our drums and fifes will delight the fair admirers of the military with all the last year's waltzes and polkas, and an occasional quick-step or 'gallop,' and here I devote my attentions to Miss Jones, the fort-major's daughter, a crafty young lady of two or three and thirty, with whom I fancy myself in love. Miss Jones hovers undecided between Levanter and myself, but thinks she has the most chance with the young one, and, as she herself would say, 'rather in-

vante to me; 'you and I dine with this provost because it suits us, but he is a very vulgar dog, and I should cut him if I were to meet him in London.'

'I do not agree with you,' was my reply. 'This man is an unaffected business-like fellow, a good specimen of a plain, hospitable Scotch tradesman, and he has up for nothing more. Where there is no pretension there can be no vulgarity; Levanter; and where I respect such a man as Mr. Intyre, there is nothing I have such a contempt for as a fellow who likes to be thought a greater man than Nature and position have made him.' This, I fear, was an unintentional thrust that my companion did not half relish, as I saw the colour settle for an instant in his cheek, and his brow darken with a second I had before noticed when anything occurred to displease him; but he was a man of the most perfect self-command, and if my unlucky observation had made him an enemy for life, he would not have allowed his feelings to be discovered for an instant by the expression of his countenance. He was facetious and as readable as ever during our drive, and ere we arrived at the ex-provost's villa, we were chatting in our usual familiar and uncontrained manner.

The dinner went off as dinners do when sped by Highland hospitality; and Levanter and I got into our tandem to drive home, with heated brains, and spirits somewhat too much exhilarated for that particular mode of progression.

As we rattled along by moonlight on our way to the barracks, and smoked our cigars at an hour when a cigar is most enjoyable, the conversation unfortunately turned upon the merits of my leader, a high-bred impetuous animal, that I fondly imagined would be capable of distinguishing himself in a lunking-country, and of whose jumping prowess I now boasted to my companion with interperate eloquence. Levanter, who seemed more inclined to be argumentative, and less good-humored than usual, rather nettled me by the taunting manner in which he doubted the powers of my horse, and, I imagined, by implication, the nerve of his owner. Young, reckless, and excitable, and more particularly now, when my blood was heated by the unusual strength of my potations, my spirits half-maddened by the exhilaration of 'the pace,' the moonlight, and the night air, this was more than I could stand; and I felt the devil rising within me, I only longed for some opportunity of giving vent to the wild excitement that was boiling in my veins. Hotter waxed our argument as we galloped on, and ere we neared the town, personalities were freely exchanged, though with a sort of mock-civility, that to a listener would have been inexpressibly ludicrous. At last, stung to the quick by the cool reply of Levanter to some proposition I made about the horse in question—'Perhaps he might, if you had nerve to ride him'—I burst out, 'Nerve! will you have nerve to sit still, if I drive him at the turnpike gate? I'll show you whether he can jump.'

I thought Levanter's cheek turned a shade paler in the moonlight, as he caught sight of the gate we were now rapidly approaching, looking most forbidding with its series of strong white-painted bars; but though his lip quivered for an instant, he only said, 'Drive on, and try; but hold them straight.' And ere the words were spoken, we were too near to be able to pull up at the pace we were going, even had we wished it. I shouted to my horses, and flogged the wheeler, who appeared inclined to waver in his desperate career; the calumniated leader pulling hard, and pointing his ears at the obstacle which he seemed determined to overcome. We were close upon the gate—I heard Levanter draw his breath hard, and felt the tension of the muscle of his leg against mine, I saw my leader's back, as he rose high in the air, and surmounted the barrier; I heard a tremendous crash, and two fearful bangs against the bottom of the dog-cart, as my wheeler strove to follow his example—and in another instant I was lying in the middle of the road, the surface of which, white as chalk in the moonlight, seemed spinning round and round—one grasp with my hands, to endeavor to keep my position on what appeared a sloping and revolving plane, and that is all I can recollect of my ill-advised attempt to jump a turnpike gate in a tandem.

I felt her breath upon my brow, as she busied herself upon my couch. I was not sure that all this was real; nor was it till at least a week afterwards that I was able to recollect any of the circumstances connected with the accident, or strange still, the scene that took place some hours before.

By degrees, I got better, then stronger, and at last, thanks to Squirt's skill and Fanny's nursing, I was able to sit up; but healed as were the outward wounds in my attenuated frame, an internal injury had been inflicted during my recovery, which it took me many a long day to get over—ay, which embittered as it did my earlier years, was remembered as a gloomy warning in after life, to the stifling and destruction of the purest, holiest feelings of my heart.

I need not now be ashamed to confess that I loved Fanny Jones—ay, loved her with an energy, an infatuation, in my then state of weakness, which was little short of insanity. What was she?—an old barrack-master's daughter, a garrison flirt, hardly a lady by birth, and certainly no fitting mate for haughty Sir Peregrine's son. Good heavens! he would have sunk into the earth could he have suspected the truth; and yet I loved her. With all the enthusiasm of boyhood—with all the sincerity and single-heartedness of a child—with the passionate adoration of a dreamer, I loved Fanny Jones. She managed it very cleverly. I have since learnt it was her last resource. But she was playing with edge tools, and came not herself scatheless out of the unequal contest. In vain Major O'Toole, performing what he considered his duty, warned me repeatedly that I was much too thick with Miss Jones. In vain old Halberd came to sit with me, for hours after parade, and laughed at me for being 'such a spoon.' In vain the young ensigns quizzed, and whispered, as much as they dared, 'What's flat Grand was, to be hooked by such a flirt as that!' The only person that seemed to encourage me in my folly, and to assist me with his counsel and friendship, was Levanter; and I found out in time that his was no disinterested aid.

It was some weeks before I could return to my own quarters in the barracks; and as I sat with Fanny, drinking in the summer air at the open window, and enjoying the fragrance of the flowers she knew so well how to dispose about the room—as I watched her graceful head bending over the work that those long, drooping ringlets half concealed—as I noticed the smothered sigh that would sometimes break upon these long delicious silences—as I almost shrunk from that upward glance that thrilled to my very soul—the poison gradually but surely worked its insidious way into my being; and ere my convalescence was declared established—ere I was removed by the doctor's fiat from that cherished scene, I had poured my love-tale into no unwilling ear, and had pledged my faith, the faith of a scapegrace of eighteen, to Fanny Jones. Well might I have said, with the st. gard who so quaintly reproves the undue punctuality of his valet: 'You have waked me too soon; let me slumber again.' Well might I have wished to dream on, though ruin and disgrace had been the penalty, rather than be awakened so roughly, as was my lot, from that delirious trance.

I have said that Levanter assisted me much in arranging that my interviews with my lady-love might be uninterrupted; and many a time did he detain the old fort-major over his eternal backgammon-board, while he and I enjoyed our lover-like tête-à-tête in what was now considered my own apartment. The captain generally appeared after parade, and kindly relieved the tediousness of my convalescence by a quiet game at 'carte' or 'lanquenet,' which, in the impossibility of the 'billiard lesson,' served well enough as a pastime to the instructor, who repaid himself to a very sufficient tune for his time and trouble. After this, he would good-naturedly devote himself to backgammon and the fort-major, by which means we were left in uninterrupted bliss, as my brother officers who would otherwise have kindly come to sit with me, thought I was in very good hands during the long visits of Levanter.

Things went on in this way prosperously enough. Fanny and I talked over our loves and our future ménage: I quite made up

ever is. Full of the happy surprise I should give Fanny, I stole noiselessly past the maid who was cleaning the major's white door-steps, and who was so accustomed to my presence that she never remarked me, and on tiptoe I crept up-stairs, and through the drawing-room, to the door of Fanny's boudoir. It was ajar, and on my startled ear broke the sob of one who loved one in distress. Another step in silence, and my young blood-rushed to my brain, till I heard each pulsation like the stroke of a church-clock upon the heart. My heart sickened; I gasped for breath; but I would not fall. With my hand grasping the back of a chair (her work), I steadied myself to gaze upon a sight that well-nigh broke my boyish heart. Fanny in the arms of Levanter!—her head upon his shoulder, and weeping as if in the bitterest anguish and despair. We have all a certain degree of energy—call it rather pluck—which, if we will but summon it, nerves us to bear; and, like an Indian at the stake, heedless of the dishonor that might be imputed to the act,—heedless of all but my burning, quenchless, eager thirst for the truth, to know the whole, to know the worst—I stood, unmoved, near the treacherous pair, and listened to her pleading voice. Sentence after sentence fell like ice upon my heart—sentence after sentence disclosed a scheme of guile and perfidy, of which I, the devoted, the true, the faithful, was to have been the victim. Levanter's low tones would occasionally grate upon my ear in exculpation or commentary, proving him not only an accomplice, but the originator of the plot. Between her broken sobs and caresses, she told her guilty tale; and when, at the conclusion of a passionate appeal to his honor, to his love, to his better feelings, to marry her while there was yet time to save her from an alliance with myself—to let her stray with him, her first, her only love, in any place, in any climate, she added, with a touch of womanly feeling that half redeemed her perfidy, 'Otherwise, dear, dearest Richard, I must marry him before it is too late. Poor Grand! poor fellow, so young, so handsome, and so devoted! Ah, Richard! had we never met I could have loved him dearly and faithfully; but now—I rushed from the house ere a burst of grief should unman and discover me, and speeding back to my barrack-room I locked the door, and threw myself on the bed in a passion of misery which well nigh approached madness. The whole of that day and night appear to me now to have been passed under the influence of some horrid night-mare, and it was not till the bugles sounded the Reveille the following morning that I returned to a thorough consciousness of my identity and my position. The worldling may sneer at woes such as were then mine—the boarding-school miss, with her overwrought sensibility, may wonder that I ever recovered from them; but he who studies human nature carefully—who looks below the surface—while he appreciates and pities my boyish agony, will see in my very youth the best restorative, the most potent antidote to despair.

My brother officers behaved most kindly to me in my distress. They saw I was afflicted, though they knew not, or only partially guessed, the cause. Major Halberd, whom I had the sense to take into my confidence, scouted the idea of 'calling out' Levanter, which was the first intention of my inexperience; and ere long his judicious kindness and sympathy won from me the confession that I had had an escape for which I ought indeed to be thankful. 'Better hush it all up, my boy,' said the old campaigner: 'Levantier is gone on leave, and when you meet again, I advise you not to allude to this ticklish subject; take my word for it, he won't, and this will be a good opportunity for you to break off your intimacy with him. I don't wish to say a word against a comrade, but Levanter knows a good deal, and you are just as well out of his hands. As for Miss Jones—what! And here the major gave vent to his feelings in a prolonged whistle, which cleverly showed his opinion of my faithless flame. But well-meant as all this consolation assuredly was, I confess that I was not thoroughly cured till, having officiated at a board, which granted our drum-major his discharge from the service one fine summer's day, the next morning startled the town with the intelligence that that about well-known and