

## DIGBY GRAND.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER.

All was unchanged save the lady herself—the choicest flowers, blocking up as of yore the carefully darkened windows, intercepted the blacks and shed their fragrance around. The rarest china, the quaintest oddities, crowded every corner of the apartment; the walls were covered with exquisite water-colors, and further decorated with cupids and poses, skirting the cornices, in the brightest colors and the most ingenious groups. A kit-cat of Mr. Man-trap, like Love among the roses, occupied an honored position where he could least escape observation; and although now in his grave, and even in the days when he sat for it a very artificial old gentleman, that portrait was made the subject of many a high-flown sentiment and romantic allusion by the lady who had deceived him as a fiancée and divorced him as a wife.

The weather was like the dog-days, yet a fire blazed and crackled in the grate, whilst a summer sun deepened the hue of the rose-tinted draperies and lined muslin curtains into a tone highly becoming the complexion of the human face. Alas! that Calypso herself should have been past all such adventitious aids! In vain for her to study how the upholsterer's art might assist the dress-maker's taste; in vain to sit perseveringly in that subdued light, which exposed fewest wrinkles, and modified an inch of rouge into the peach's bloom. There was no concealing the fact—despite teeth and hair purchased with a secrecy that is the more surprising as the lady's maid must necessarily be an accomplice in the fraud—despite caps and flowers and mechanical little coiffures which keep everything in its place—despite the graceful outline of horse-hair, and the rounded proportions of starch, with all the accessories of light and attitude and prestige—there was no disguising the unwelcome truth, that Mrs. Man-trap was an old woman, and, sharper still the pang, an ugly old woman to boot.

And is it to this, young ladies, you will be satisfied to come? Is this an image of age that youth can dwell upon with feelings of affection or respect—can think of imitating without a smile of mockery or a shudder of disgust? How different from the dear old grandaunt or grandmamma, whom you can all look back to as the patroness of your infancy, the recipient of all your little childish schemes and schoolroom sorrows—the busy, kind, affectionate old body, whose eye was as bright and whose laugh was as hearty as that of the youngest and merriest in the little troop that gave such bounteous welcome to her presence! How well you remember every item of her neat old-fashioned toilette! You were too young, perhaps, to appreciate all her good qualities, her patience, her piety, her gentle, unselfish disposition; but even in your thoughtless childhood you found yourselves wishing, though you knew not why, that if you should ever live to her advanced age, you might be even as she was, and now, though in the full, fresh bloom and confidence of youth, with the rosy light of morning brightening all around you, and the clouds of sorrow that must, sooner or later, gather round your human lot, still far below the horizon, unthought of and unwept for, you go once or twice a year to weep over her grave—think you that her girlhood was devoted to the round of frivolity, her maturity wasted in the labyrinth of fashion? Far from it. An evening of contentment and repose can only succeed a day of laborious usefulness and self-denial.

And you, affectionate mothers and cautious chaperons, who watch over your respective charge with such undisguised solicitude, who detail, not without covert smiles of triumph, the hard-won victory in which papa was worsted (papa, it must be owned, is very ridiculous about the horses, and the number of times by day and night that they and the carriage are required); who show cards so judiciously and reap invitations so successfully, who would pay morning visits to the Queen of Sheba, if she were going to give a ball, and let the Crown Prince or Congo marry your daughter, if he would take a house in Grosvenor Square—have you ever reflected for what you are

knees and nestled in her bosom? To be the plaything of the one, and the slave of the other; to be neglected for a mistress by the roue, when his fears are set at rest as to the failure of his line; or kept a close prisoner by the peevish valetudinarian, a martyr to the whims and caprices engendered by half a century of self-indulgence; or, worse still, exposed to the dangers that surround a wife who cannot love, and who has never learned to respect her husband.

And then, when years have glided down upon the stream of time; when you are laid at rest in your grave, and the darling whom you now cherish has grown old and faded, to think that she should subside into such an artificial wreck, such a skeleton in roses as poor, made-up, chattering Mrs. Man-trap, whose lovely boudoir and withered self have given rise to my tedious reflections!

But, weak as might be the frame, the spirit of the woman of fashion was volatile as ever. As though the twig she grasped and carried on with her could stay the tide that was bearing her too surely downward, she seemed to cling to every passing hour, to fling herself heart and soul into that world of which every moment was now becoming so precious. Such a flow of gossip, such an insight into every one's motives and actions, such scandal of celebrities whom I had known, and stars risen since my time, with whose private history I was made acquainted! When at last she suffered me to depart, and I took my homeward way into the City, Fleet Street was quiet by comparison; and I felt like a man who, having lived for a week in the neighborhood of a water-mill, wakes to a luxury of repose which is positively startling on the Sunday morning, when, to his comfort, he ascertains that the wheel has stopped.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## HASTE TO THE WEDDING.

Once more I was on the road to Haverley—this time in the depth of winter; yet how much brighter was all within than when I last took leave of my home on a glorious summer's afternoon. Then, I was reckless, degraded, and miserable; now, I felt that at least I was fulfilling my destiny as one of the laborers in this toiling world—and that, though there was much behind me I regretted in vain, much I would have given anything to undo, yet for me there was still a future; Pandora's box had indeed sent forth many a misfortune, but Hope, the sweetener of our cup, was at the bottom after all. The day was clear and bracing; a sharp white frost had crisped and powdered the leafless twigs of the stately old trees above me, and gomed the rustling grass under my feet with a thousand brilliants. It was just the day for a walk, when the blood glows with exercise, and the spirits rise just as you inhale the pure oxygen of the rarefied air. The sun shines brightly down upon your path, and feels hot against your tingling cheek as you emerge into his beams; but the hoar-frost sleeps undisturbed on the shady side of rail and gate-post, and the north banks under the fences are white as snow and hard as iron. If you are addicted to hunting, you congratulate yourself on not having sent Favorite on to the place where the hounds were advertised to meet; and, striding away upon your trusty supporters, you exult in the superior elasticity of your own action to the constrained, tottering motions of a high-conditioned horse, who feels each of his four legs gliding from under him in a different direction, and is obliged to restrain his inclination for a gambol, in fear lest it should terminate with a slide. The wagon bell on the high-road, two miles away, comes tinkling on your ear, sharp and distinct through the thin atmosphere—the distant spires are clearly defined against the sky; and you feel man enough to visit each and all them, and scour the intervening country before sunset, early though it be. This is the weather for five miles an hour, heel-and-toe; and if you can indeed accomplish that distance within the given time, I honor you as a pedestrian and respect you as a peripatetic.

It was quite a day for a walk, and leaving my impediments at the station, I determined to foot it to my destination, taking the well-known bridle-way that would lead me right across the park of Haverley. As I traversed the acres that ought to have been mine, and looked around upon the Eden I

even a woman, and a very pretty one to boot, aver that she would rather be complimented upon her horse than her looks. Can we then wonder at the doped man, albeit when old enough to know better, clinging to the fame of his successes as a Centaur rather than to a reputation for wisdom, morality, or science in the graver and more important pursuits of life? The four-year-old brought back to my mind the General from whom he took his designation, and saddened my retrospective triumphs as I remembered that he too, the thoughtless, kind-hearted old warrior, had passed away. His name is now a blank in the Army List; the place that hath known him knows him no more; his clasps and crosses have been returned to the Sovereign from whom they emanated, and Sir Tartar Trim, who succeeded to his vacant command, is countermanding his orders and revoking his regulations. The Dead March in Saul—the crape-covered charger—the cocked hat, sword, and epaulettes of the senseless corpse—two regiments under arms—a deafening salute that cannot wake the dead—and a lively quick-step melody, cheering the troops as they return to barracks—is this all that is left of half a century of war and pageantry, the thrilling excitement of the bivouac, the seductive pomp of the parade—a life of alternate idleness and danger, hardship and dissipation, and all those varieties of scene and society that make soldiering so dear to a careless mind? Poor old Burgonet! with all your faults you had indeed a warm, kind heart, and it is not for me to pry into the motives or pass judgment on the conduct of another.

If you please, good gentleman, to spare a trifle for a poor woman," said a voice close to me, as I bounded over the stile that terminated my bridle-way in the high-road.

There was something in the accent that smote upon my ear, a glance in the wild large eye that went straight to my heart. Poor thing! poor thing!—that strunken form, that pale wasted hand thrust out for an alms, can this be Lady Burgonet—can this be Fanny Jones?—a desolate tramp walking the high-roads, and bearing with her a wretched sickly infant, wrapped in that scanty shawl, of which, cold as is the day, she has deprived herself to shelter her child. Frivolity and vice, sin and misery, have made sad havoc with their victim, but she is a mother still. And that child's father, what has become of him?—the origin of all her misery, the first, the only love of that abandoned heart!

"O Sir Digby! Sir Digby!" cried the emaciated woman, blushing crimson over face, neck, and hands, as she recognized me; "have pity on me—lost, ruined, degraded—have pity on me—I am starving! It is God's truth; I am starving, and my child will die upon the road for want of a morsel of bread!"

Poor creature! the first kind words she had heard for many a long day brought on a fit of hysterical weeping, and a scene extremely unusual on the Queen's highway. She knelt before me on the cold ground; she covered my hand with kisses; she showered blessings on my head almost as volubly as the beggar who has been brought up to the trade, and whose beatitudes are of surprising eloquence; but her's came direct from the heart, for our timely encounter had saved the life of her child. She told me of Levanter—she called him Richard—there was no concealment now. She described to me all she had borne with him and for him; how they had cheated and swindled together, and lived first in one place then in another, on their dishonest profits; how they had been new in affluence, now in extreme want; and how, whilst Richard was kind to her, she had been happy through it all; how at last, when ill-luck seemed to pursue everything they undertook, he had become first morose, then savage; how he had cursed her as a clog round his neck, when she bore him the child that was even then in her arms; how he had struck her for going to old Burgonet's funeral; and her tears flowed afresh as she sobbed out, "for the old man was indeed kind to me!"—and how the bitterest drop in her cup was the assurance that Richard hated her and wished to get rid of her. How the gang to which he had attached himself was discovered and broken up, and he was at that very moment crossing the high seas, a transport for life; and even now, could she find the means, despite his neglect, despite his crimes, his false-heartedness, and his brutality, she would fain go out and join him once more in another hemisphere!

Woman is indeed a wondrous creation. Had this no any single redeeming quality

at defiance, and the grosser sex are carefully excluded from all those mysterious preparations and arrangements which seem indispensable to the occasion. Great gatherings are there of saints past praying for, and pretty cousins on their promotion, matrons skilled in the science of wife and motherhood, damsels not yet released from the black-board and music-stool, to say nothing of old maids whose hearts for all matters tending to marriage and giving in marriage must necessarily be of the most disinterested nature. Bonnets and shawls gather from the four winds of heaven. Silence flies terrified to take shelter in the clubs, and a hundred tastes pronounce their voluble decrees on the innumerable changes of raiment which custom has rendered it imperative to provide for a young lady about to be married.

When I arrived at Owlthorpe Rectory, the keen white frost of the morning had subsided into a dull, grey atmosphere, with a drizzling rain, and I found my friend Tom, the exulting bridegroom, whose shield I was to bear on the morrow, smoking a disconsolate cigar under the shelter of some dripping larches that overhung the rectory gate. The lawyers are in the library with Mr. Batt; said the intended, with rather a woful air for so happy a man. The bridesmaids are upstairs with Julia—eight of them, all to be dressed alike, my dear fellow, and I don't know one from the other as it is; there are seventeen ladies at cake and wine in the drawing-room; Julia's new maid, over whom I feel I shall never have the slightest authority, has turned me out of the study, which is besides completely impoised with clothes; is washingday at the farmhouse, where I have got a lodging in the cheese-room, and this is the only place I can find to smoke a cigar and wait patiently till dinner time.

Encouraging, truly! At dinner it was not much better. A family party is seldom a very lively reunion, and I think I may say, without self-conceit, that my arrival was most acceptable to all the relatives assembled at the Rectory. Old Mortmain, who of course had the entire management of settlements, was the only other disinterested person present; and though the Rev. Amos pushed his bottle of port round vigorously after dinner, and held forth as usual concerning his shooting, from which increasing blindness did not seem to wean him, I firmly believe the lawyer and myself were the only two people present that had the slightest idea of what we were drinking or what we were talking about.

A peal of bells awoke me on the morrow, and with a lively impression of the responsible office I had undertaken, and an indistinct feeling of relief as I reflected that I was only the second, and not the principal, I proceeded to endue myself in the gorgeous attire without which it is unlucky to attend either weddings or christenings; and after a hasty cup of tea, provided by the kind attention of Julia's new maid, all the rest of the female domestics being at sixes and sevens, I proceeded to the farm-house to look after my man.

Tom was nervous, undoubtedly nervous. His breakfast stood untouched upon the table, and his hand shook as he fastened the tie of his blue neck-cloth, and gave his whiskers their farewell twirl. All the females of his establishment were likewise on the move. The old dame that reigned over the farm eyed him with severe scrutiny as he left her threshold; and the blowy maid-of-all-work forgot the ribbons with which we had presented her, in her infatuated eagerness to get a look at the bridegroom. The village, too, of which we had to traverse the whole length, was up in arms; and still caps and gowns predominated over the male creation. Doubtless, there is something in a wedding that speaks directly to the sympathies of woman, reminds her of what has been, or kindles hopes of what may be, in her gentle bosom. Certainly she misses no opportunity of witnessing the fatal ceremony.

In the church, the same ministering angels thronged loft, aisle, and chancel, with inquiring countenances of every age and every hue; whilst many a whispered comment and open-mouthed stare did homage to the magnificent apparel of the bride. The men admired her beauty, the women her dress. The pen of fiction must not presume to describe the sacred ceremony; enough to say that the venerable clergyman, the quaint old church, the respectful congregation, were in harmonious keeping with the holy office then and there celebrated; but when the bride faltered out, as brides will do, the important words, "I will," a burst of weeping broke

we love her as well under her lately-acquired title! and in the meantime we all go to break-fast.

Now begins the triumph of the bridesmaids. Hitherto those uniformly-dressed young ladies have been so occupied with the various onerous duties of their position, that they have had but little leisure for idle thoughts or worldly speculations. They have accompanied their charge to church with the gravity becoming their years and office; they have marched up the aisle two and two, with a touching expression of sympathy for the martyr clouding their pretty faces; they, that is to say, two of them, told of that especial duty, have gravely mounted guard over her gloves and pocket-handkerchief, whilst the others have disposed themselves around, in groups so picturesque and attitudes so graceful, that it is difficult to believe they are so thoroughly unstudied and inartificial; but now they have their reward, now they vie in interest with their principal—*Le roi est mort—vive le roi!*

The Derby is over—the favorite has won, and speculation is rife as to the forthcoming event that day twelvemonth—for man lives in the future. So the bride is now a wife, and as such has just begun to lose the least shade of that enthusiasm with which she was regarded half an hour ago. But these charming young ladies in gauze and smiles are still on their promotion. You or I might marry any one of them, but perhaps we are too cautious to try—perhaps we are confirmed old bachelors, and have not entirely forgotten a prettier face than any of these, at least to our mind, that was dressed in smock for us some forty years ago. However, we may still look kindly on at the pretty faces here, and, doubtless, though our hearts be not quite so susceptible, our appetites are infinitely better than when we were lads, and fancied ourselves in love!

The Reverend Amos has provided a sumptuous breakfast. Champagne at noon would make an archaiche lively, and a wedding has been from time immemorial a fair subject for a certain number of stock jokes and clumsy innuendos, which never fail to obtain encouragement and applause. We sit down readily enough, and there is a good deal of confusion about places, and rustling of dresses which require liberal space in their arrangement. I sidle into my chair, so as not to compress pretty Miss Glover into the slim nymph which I believe her to be when divested of all those maudlin outworks, and rally that blushing upon the killing appearance of herself and sister bridesmaids. There is a vacant place on my other hand—a lady in half-mourning glides quietly into it. Her dress touches me as she sits down, and turning round, I behold the pale, sad face, the gentle, chastened beauty of Flora Belmont.

How changed from the laughing girl that I first met, kindling with enthusiasm at the review! how changed, and yet how inexpressibly lovelier! The deep blue eye was heavy and sorrow-laden, yet its glance was soft and winning as ever. The smooth cheek had lost something of its roundness and its dimples, yet the outline was faultless as a sculptor's model still; the low pale forehead had a shade of care, and a line or two of silver already streaked those masses of dark-brown hair; yet for spiritual beauty, for that indefinite indescribable something which makes woman lovable—there is no other word for it—how superior was the Flora of to-day to the fresh rosy girl of—it is needless to say how many years ago! Not that I perceived this all at once; no! that I turned round and took an inventory of Miss Belmont's charms, as of a portrait in the exhibition. Far from it; our greeting was indeed of the briefest and most formal nature, to a stranger it would have seemed something less than kind. I am not sure that we shook hands. And it is more from conviction than memory, that I am aware Flora was residing with an aunt not five miles from Haverley, or three from Owlthorps; that she had lost her father scarcely a year, and had been over-persuaded by Julia to come to the wedding breakfast, though her sable attire prevented her witnessing the ceremony in church.

To say truth, I have but a confused notion of the events of that morning. I have a dim recollection of much shouting and rapping of the table when we drank the health of the new-married couple, and Tom Spencer's breaking down sadly in a suitable reply. I know that I was much laughed at for absence of mind and dereliction of duty in per-