OUIDA

UNDER TWO FLAGS

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Содержание

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AVIS AU LECTEUR

This Story was originally written for a military periodical. It has been fortunate enough to receive much commendation from military men, and for them it is now specially issued in its present form. For the general public it may be as well to add that, where translations are appended to the French phrases, those translations usually follow the idiomatic and particular meaning attached to these expressions in the argot of the Army of Algeria, and not the correct or literal one given to such words or sentences in ordinary grammatical parlance.

OUIDA.

CHAPTER I
"BEAUTY OF THE BRIGADES."

"I don't say but what he's difficult to please with his Tops," said Mr. Rake, factotum to the Hon. Bertie Cecil, of the 1st Life Guards, with that article of hunting toggery suspended in his right hand as he paused, before going upstairs, to deliver his opinions with characteristic weight and vivacity to the stud-groom, "he is uncommon particular about 'em; and if his leathers aint as white as snow he'll never touch 'em, tho' as soon as the pack come nigh him at Royallieu, the leathers might just as well never have been cleaned, them hounds jump about him so; old Champion's at his saddle before you can say Davy Jones. Tops are trials, I aint denying that, specially when you've jacks, and moccasins, and moor boots, and Russia-leather crickets, and turf backs, and Hythe boots, and waterproofs, and all manner of varnish things for dress, that none of the boys will do right unless you look after 'em yourself. But is it likely that he should know what a worry a Top's complexion is, and how hard it is to come right with all the Fast Brown polishing in the world? How should he guess what a piece of work it is to get 'em all of a color, and how like they are to come mottled, and how a'most sure they'll ten to one go off dark just as they're growing yellow, and put you to shame, let you do what you will to make 'em cut a shine

over the country? How should he know? I don't complain of that; bless you, he never thinks. It's 'do this, Rake,' 'do that'; and he never remembers 'tisn't done by magic. But he's a true gentleman, Mr. Cecil; never grudge a guinea, or a fiver to you; never out of temper either, always have a kind word for you if you want, thoro'bred every inch of him; see him bring down a rocketer, or lift his horse over the Broad Water! He's a gentleman—not like your snobs that have nothing sound about 'em but their cash, and swept out their shops before they bought their fine feathers!—and I'll be d–d if I care what I do for him."

With which peroration to his born enemy the stud-groom, with whom he waged a perpetual and most lively feud, Rake flourished the tops that had been under discussion, and triumphant, as he invariably was, ran up the back stairs of his master's lodgings in Piccadilly, opposite the Green Park, and with a rap on the panels entered his master's bedroom.

A Guardsman at home is always, if anything, rather more luxuriously accommodated than a young Duchess, and Bertie Cecil was never behind his fellows in anything; besides, he was one of the cracks of the Household, and women sent him pretty things enough to fill the Palais Royal. The dressing-table was littered with Bohemian glass and gold-stoppered bottles, and all the perfumes of Araby represented by Breidenback and Rimmel. The dressing-case was of silver, with the name studded on the lid in turquoises; the brushes, bootjack, boot-trees, whip-stands, were of ivory and tortoiseshell; a couple of tiger skins were on

the hearth with a retriever and blue greyhound in possession; above the mantel-piece were crossed swords in all the varieties of gilt, gold, silver, ivory, aluminum, chiseled and embossed hilts; and on the walls were a few perfect French pictures, with the portraits of a greyhound drawn by Landseer, of a steeple-chaser by Harry Hall, one or two of Herring's hunters, and two or three fair women in crayons. The hangings of the room were silken and rose-colored, and a delicious confusion prevailed through it pell-mell; box-spurs, hunting-stirrups, cartridge cases, curb-chains, muzzle-loaders, hunting flasks, and white gauntlets, being mixed up with Paris novels, pink notes, point-lace ties, bracelets, and bouquets to be dispatched to various destinations, and velvet and silk bags for banknotes, cigars, or vesuvians, embroidered by feminine fingers and as useless as those pretty fingers themselves. On the softest of sofas, half dressed, and having half an hour before splashed like a waterdog out of the bath, as big as a small pond, in the dressing-chamber beyond was the Hon. Bertie himself, second son of Viscount Royallieu, known generally in the Brigades as "Beauty." The appellative, gained at Eton, was in no way undeserved; when the smoke cleared away that was circling round him out of a great meerschaum bowl, it showed a face of as much delicacy and brilliancy as a woman's; handsome, thoroughbred, languid, nonchalant, with a certain latent recklessness under the impressive calm of habit, and a singular softness given to the large, dark hazel eyes by the unusual length of the lashes over them. His features were

exceedingly fair—fair as the fairest girl's; his hair was of the softest, silkiest, brightest chestnut; his mouth very beautifully shaped; on the whole, with a certain gentle, mournful love-me look that his eyes had with them, it was no wonder that great ladies and gay lionnes alike gave him the palm as the handsomest man in all the Household Regiments—not even excepting that splendid golden-haired Colossus, his oldest friend and closest comrade, known as "the Seraph."

He looked at the new tops that Rake swung in his hand, and shook his head.

"Better, Rake; but not right yet. Can't you get that tawny color in the tiger's skin there? You go so much to brown."

Rake shook his head in turn, as he set down the incorrigible tops beside six pairs of their fellows, and six times six of every other sort of boots that the covert side, the heather, the flat, or the sweet shady side of "Pall Mall" ever knew.

"Do my best, sir; but Polish don't come nigh Nature, Mr. Cecil."

"Goes beyond it, the ladies say; and to do them justice they favor it much the most," laughed Cecil to himself, floating fresh clouds of Turkish about him. "Willon up?"

"Yes, sir. Come in this minute for orders."

"How'd Forest King stand the train?"

"Bright as a bird, sir; he never mind nothing. Mother o' Pearl she worreted a little, he says; she always do, along of the engine noise, but the King walked in and out just as if the station were

his own stable-yard."

"He gave them gruel and chilled water after the shaking before he let them go to their corn?"

"He says he did, sir."

Rake would by no means take upon himself to warrant the veracity of his sworn foe, the stud-groom; unremitting feud was between them; Rake considered that he knew more about horses than any other man living, and the other functionary proportionately resented back his knowledge and his interference, as utterly out of place in a body-servant.

"Tell him I'll look in at the stable after duty and see the screws are all right; and that he's to be ready to go down with them by my train to-morrow—noon, you know. Send that note there, and the bracelets, to St. John's Wood: and that white bouquet to Mrs. Delamaine. Bid Willon get some Banbury bits; I prefer the revolving mouths, and some of Wood's double mouths and Nelson gags; we want new ones. Mind that lever-snap breech-loader comes home in time. Look in at the Commission stables, and if you see a likely black charger as good as Black Douglas, tell me. Write about the stud fox-terrier, and buy the blue Dandy Dinmont; Lady Guinevere wants him. I'll take him down with me, but first put me into harness, Rake; it's getting late."

Murmuring which multiplicity of directions, for Rake to catch as he could, in the softest and sleepiest of tones, Bertie Cecil drank a glass of Curacoa, put his tall, lithe limbs indolently off his sofa, and surrendered himself to the martyrdom of cuirass

and gorget, standing six feet one without his spurred jacks, but light-built and full of grace as a deer, or his weight would not have been what it was in gentleman-rider races from the Hunt steeple-chase at La Marche to the Grand National in the Shires.

"As if Parliament couldn't meet without dragging us through the dust! The idiots write about 'the swells in the Guards,' as if we had all fun and no work, and knew nothing of the rough of the Service. I should like to learn what they call sitting motionless in your saddle through half a day, while a London mob goes mad round you, and lost dogs snap at your charger's nose, and dirty little beggars squeeze against your legs, and the sun broils you, or the fog soaks you, and you sit sentinel over a gingerbread coach till you're deaf with the noise, and blind with the dust, and sick with the crowd, and half dead for want of sodas and brandies, and from going a whole morning without one cigarette! Not to mention the inevitable apple-woman who invariably entangles herself between your horse's legs, and the certainty of your riding down somebody and having a summons about it the next day! If all that isn't the rough of the Service, I should like to know what is. Why the hottest day in the batteries, or the sharpest rush into Ghoorkhas or Bhoteahs, would be light work, compared!" murmured Cecil with the most plaintive pity for the hardships of life in the Household, while Rake, with the rapid proficiency of long habit, braced, and buckled and buttoned, knotted the sash with the knack of professional genius, girt on the brightest of all glittering polished silver steel "Cut-and-Thrusts," with

its rich gild mountings, and contemplated with flattering self-complacency leathers white as snow, jacks brilliant as black varnish could make them, and silver spurs of glittering radiance, until his master stood full harnessed, at length, as gallant a Life Guardsman as ever did duty at the Palace by making love to the handsomest lady-in-waiting.

"To sit wedged in with one's troop for five hours, and in a drizzle too! Houses oughtn't to meet until the day's fine; I'm sure they are in no hurry," said Cecil to himself, as he pocketed a dainty, filmy handkerchief, all perfume, point, and embroidery, with the interlaced B. C., and the crest on the corner, while he looked hopelessly out of the window. He was perfectly happy, drenched to the skin on the moors after a royal, or in a fast thing with the Melton men from Thorpe Trussels to Ranksborough; but three drops of rain when on duty were a totally different matter, to be resented with any amount of dandy's lamentations and epicurean diatribes.

"Ah, young one, how are you? Is the day very bad?" he asked with languid wistfulness as the door opened.

But indifferent and weary—on account of the weather—as the tone was, his eyes rested with a kindly, cordial light on the newcomer, a young fellow of scarcely twenty, like himself in feature, though much smaller and slighter in build; a graceful boy enough, with no fault in his face, except a certain weakness in the mouth, just shadowed only, as yet, with down.

A celebrity, the Zu-Zu, the last coryphee whom Bertie

had translated from a sphere of garret bread-and-cheese to a sphere of villa champagne and chicken (and who, of course, in proportion to the previous scarcity of her bread-and-cheese, grew immediately intolerant of any wine less than 90s the dozen), said the Cecil cared for nothing longer than a fortnight, unless it was his horse, Forest King. It was very ungrateful in the Zu-Zu, since he cared for her at the least a whole quarter, paying for his fidelity at the tune of a hundred a month; and, also, it was not true, for, besides Forest King, he loved his young brother Berkeley—which, however, she neither knew nor guessed.

"Beastly!" replied the young gentleman, in reference to the weather, which was indeed pretty tolerable for an English morning in February. "I say, Bertie—are you in a hurry?"

"The very deuce of a hurry, little one; why?" Bertie never was in a hurry, however, and he said this as lazily as possible, shaking the white horsehair over his helmet, and drawing in deep draughts of Turkish Latakia previous to parting with his pipe for the whole of four or five hours.

"Because I am in a hole—no end of a hole—and I thought you'd help me," murmured the boy, half penitently, half caressingly; he was very girlish in his face and his ways. On which confession Rake retired into the bathroom; he could hear just as well there, and a sense of decorum made him withdraw, though his presence would have been wholly forgotten by them. In something the same spirit as the French countess accounted for her employing her valet to bring her her chocolate in bed—"Est

ce que vous appelez cette chose-la un homme?"—Bertie had, on occasion, so wholly regarded servants as necessary furniture that he had gone through a love scene, with that handsome coquette Lady Regalia, totally oblivious of the presence of the groom of the chambers, and the possibility of that person's appearance in the witness-box of the Divorce Court. It was in no way his passion that blinded him—he did not put the steam on like that, and never went in for any disturbing emotion—it was simply habit, and forgetfulness that those functionaries were not born mute, deaf, and sightless.

He tossed some essence over his hands, and drew on his gauntlets.

"What's up Berk?"

The boy hung his head, and played a little uneasily with an ormolu terrier-pot, upsetting half the tobacco in it; he was trained to his brother's nonchalant, impenetrable school, and used to his brother's set; a cool, listless, reckless, thoroughbred, and impassive set, whose first canon was that you must lose your last thousand in the world without giving a sign that you winced, and must win half a million without showing that you were gratified; but he had something of girlish weakness in his nature, and a reserve in his temperament that was with difficulty conquered.

Bertie looked at him, and laid his hand gently on the young one's shoulder.

"Come, my boy; out with it! It's nothing very bad, I'll be bound!"

"I want some more money; a couple of ponies," said the boy a little huskily; he did not meet his brother's eyes that were looking straight down on him.

Cecil gave a long, low whistle, and drew a meditative whiff from his meerschaum.

"Tres cher, you're always wanting money. So am I. So is everybody. The normal state of man is to want money. Two ponies. What's it for?"

"I lost it at chicken-hazard last night. Poulteney lent it me, and I told him I would send it him in the morning. The ponies were gone before I thought of it, Bertie, and I haven't a notion where to get them to pay him again."

"Heavy stakes, young one, for you," murmured Cecil, while his hand dropped from the boy's shoulder, and a shadow of gravity passed over his face; money was very scarce with himself. Berkeley gave him a hurried, appealing glance. He was used to shift all his anxieties on to his elder brother, and to be helped by him under any difficulty. Cecil never allotted two seconds' thought to his own embarrassments, but he would multiply them tenfold by taking other people's on him as well, with an unremitting and thoughtless good nature.

"I couldn't help it," pleaded the lad, with coaxing and almost piteous apology. "I backed Grosvenor's play, and you know he's always the most wonderful luck in the world. I couldn't tell he'd go a crowner and have such cards as he had. How shall I get the money, Bertie? I daren't ask the governor; and besides I told

Poulteney he should have it this morning. What do you think if I sold the mare? But then I couldn't sell her in a minute–"

Cecil laughed a little, but his eyes, as they rested on the lad's young, fair, womanish face, were very gentle under the long shade of their lashes.

"Sell the mare! Nonsense! How should anybody live without a hack? I can pull you through, I dare say. Ah! by George, there's the quarters chiming. I shall be too late, as I live."

Not hurried still, however; even by that near prospect, he sauntered to his dressing-table, took up one of the pretty velvet and gold-filigreed absurdities, and shook out all the banknotes there were in it. There were fives and tens enough to count up 45 pounds. He reached over and caught up a five from a little heap lying loose on a novel of Du Terrail's, and tossed the whole across the room to the boy.

"There you are, young one! But don't borrow of any but your own people again, Berk. We don't do that. No, no!—no thanks! Shut up all that. If ever you get in a hole, I'll take you out if I can. Good-by—will you go to the Lords? Better not—nothing to see, and still less to hear. All stale. That's the only comfort for us—we are outside!" he said, with something that almost approached hurry in the utterance; so great was his terror of anything approaching a scene, and so eager was he to escape his brother's gratitude. The boy had taken the notes with delighted thanks indeed, but with that tranquil and unprotesting readiness with which spoiled childishness or unhesitating selfishness accepts

gifts and sacrifices from another's generosity, which have been so general that they have ceased to have magnitude. As his brother passed him, however, he caught his hand a second, and looked up with a mist before his eyes, and a flush half of shame, half of gratitude, on his face.

"What a trump you are!—how good you are, Bertie!"

Cecil laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"First time I ever heard it, my dear boy," he answered, as he lounged down the staircase, his chains clashing and jingling; while, pressing his helmet on to his forehead and pulling the chin scale over his mustaches, he sauntered out into the street where his charger was waiting.

"The deuce!" he thought, as he settled himself in his stirrups, while the raw morning wind tossed his white plume hither and thither. "I never remembered!—I don't believe I've left myself money enough to take Willon and Rake and the cattle down to the Shires to-morrow. If I shouldn't have kept enough to take my own ticket with!—that would be no end of a sell. On my word I don't know how much there's left on the dressing-table. Well! I can't help it; Poulteney had to be paid; I can't have Berk's name show in anything that looks shady."

The 50 pounds had been the last remnant of a bill, done under great difficulties with a sagacious Jew, and Cecil had no more certainty of possessing any more money until next pay-day should come round than he had of possessing the moon; lack of ready money, moreover, is a serious inconvenience when

you belong to clubs where "pounds and fives" are the lowest points, and live with men who take the odds on most events in thousands; but the thing was done; he would not have undone it at the boy's loss, if he could; and Cecil, who never was worried by the loss of the most stupendous "crusher," and who made it a rule never to think of disagreeable inevitabilities two minutes together, shook his charger's bridle and cantered down Piccadilly toward the barracks, while Black Douglas reared, curveted, made as if he would kick, and finally ended by "passaging" down half the length of the road, to the imminent peril of all passers-by, and looking eminently glossy, handsome, stalwart, and foam-flecked, while he thus expressed his disapprobation of forming part of the escort from Palace to Parliament.

"Home Secretary should see about it; it's abominable! If we must come among them, they ought to be made a little odoriferous first. A couple of fire-engines now, playing on them continuously with rose-water and bouquet d'Ess for an hour before we come up, might do a little good. I'll get some men to speak about it in the house; call it 'Bill for the Purifying of the Unwashed, and Prevention of their Suffocating Her Majesty's Brigades,'" murmured Cecil to the Earl of Broceliande, next him, as they sat down in their saddles with the rest of the "First Life," in front of St. Stephen's, with a hazy fog steaming round them, and a London mob crushing against their chargers' flanks, while Black Douglas stood like a rock, though a butcher's tray was pressed against his withers, a mongrel was snapping at his hocks,

and the inevitable apple-woman, of Cecil's prophetic horror, was wildly plunging between his legs, as the hydra-headed rushed down in insane, headlong haste to stare at, and crush on to, that superb body of Guards.

"I would give a kingdom for a soda and brandy. Bah! ye gods! What a smell of fish and fustian," signed Bertie, with a yawn of utter famine for want of something to drink and something to smoke, were it only a glass of brown sherry and a little papelito, while he glanced down at the snow-white and jet-black masterpieces of Rake's genius, all smirched, and splashed, and smeared.

He had given fifty pounds away, and scarcely knew whether he should have enough to take his ticket next day into the Shires, and he owed fifty hundred without having the slightest grounds for supposing he should ever be able to pay it, and he cared no more about either of these things than he cared about the Zu-Zu's throwing the half-guinea peaches into the river after a Richmond dinner, in the effort to hit dragon-flies with them; but to be half a day without a cigarette, and to have a disagreeable odor of apples and corduroys wafted up to him, was a calamity that made him insupportably depressed and unhappy.

Well, why not? It is the trifles of life that are its bores, after all. Most men can meet ruin calmly, for instance, or laugh when they lie in a ditch with their own knee-joint and their hunter's spine broken over the double post and rails: it is the mud that has choked up your horn just when you wanted to rally the pack; it's

the whip who carries you off to a division just when you've sat down to your turbot; it's the ten seconds by which you miss the train; it's the dust that gets in your eyes as you go down to Epsom; it's the pretty little rose note that went by accident to your house instead of your club, and raised a storm from madame; it's the dog that always will run wild into the birds; it's the cook who always will season the white soup wrong—it is these that are the bores of life, and that try the temper of your philosophy.

An acquaintance of mine told me the other day of having lost heavy sums through a swindler, with as placid an indifference as if he had lost a toothpick; but he swore like a trooper because a thief had stolen the steel-mounted hoof of a dead pet hunter.

"Insufferable!" murmured Cecil, hiding another yawn behind his gauntlet; "the Line's nothing half so bad as this; one day in a London mob beats a year's campaigning; what's charging a pah to charging an oyster-stall, or a parapet of fascines to a bristling row of umbrellas?"

Which question as to the relative hardships of the two Arms was a question of military interest never answered, as Cecil scattered the umbrellas right and left, and dashed from the Houses of Parliament full trot with the rest of the escort on the return to the Palace; the afternoon sun breaking out with a brightened gleam from the clouds, and flashing off the drawn swords, the streaming plumes, the glittering breastplates, the gold embroideries, and the fretting chargers.

But a mere sun-gleam just when the thing was over, and the

escort was pacing back to Hyde Park barracks, could not console Cecil for fog, wind, mud, oyster-vendors, bad odors, and the uproar and riff-raff of the streets; specially when his throat was as dry as a lime-kiln, and his longing for the sight of a cheroot approaching desperation. Unlimited sodas, three pipes smoked silently over Delphine Demirep's last novel, a bath well dashed with eau de cologne, and some glasses of Anisette after the fatigue-duty of unharnessing, restored him a little; but he was still weary and depressed into gentler languor than ever through all the courses at a dinner party at the Austrian Embassy, and did not recover his dejection at a reception of the Duchess of Lydiard-Tregoze, where the prettiest French Countess of her time asked him if anything was the matter.

"Yes!" said Bertie with a sigh, and a profound melancholy in what the woman called his handsome Spanish eyes, "I have had a great misfortune; we have been on duty all day!"

He did not thoroughly recover tone, light and careless though his temper was, till the Zu-Zu, in her diamond-edition of a villa, prescribed Crème de Bouzy and Parfait Amour in succession, with a considerable amount of pine-apple ice at three o'clock in the morning, which restorative prescription succeeded.

Indeed, it took something as tremendous as divorce from all forms of smoking for five hours to make an impression on Bertie. He had the most serene insouciance that ever a man was blessed with; in worry he did not believe—he never let it come near him; and beyond a little difficulty sometimes in separating too many

entangled rose-chins caught round him at the same time, and the annoyance of a miscalculation on the flat, or the ridge-and-furrow, when a Maldon or Danebury favorite came nowhere, or his book was wrong for the Grand National, Cecil had no cares of any sort or description.

True, the Royallieu Peerage, one of the most ancient and almost one of the most impoverished in the kingdom, could ill afford to maintain its sons in the expensive career on which it had launched them, and the chief there was to spare usually went between the eldest son, a Secretary of Legation in that costly and charming City of Vienna, and the young one, Berkeley, through the old Viscount's partiality; so that, had Bertie ever gone so far as to study his actual position, he would have probably confessed that it was, to say the least, awkward; but then he never did this, certainly never did it thoroughly. Sometimes he felt himself near the wind when settling-day came, or the Jews appeared utterly impracticable; but, as a rule, things had always trimmed somehow, and though his debts were considerable, and he was literally as penniless as a man can be to stay in the Guards at all, he had never in any shape realized the want of money. He might not be able to raise a guinea to go toward that long-standing account, his army tailor's bill, and post obits had long ago forestalled the few hundred a year that, under his mother's settlements, would come to him at the Viscount's death; but Cecil had never known in his life what it was not to have a first-rate stud, not to live as luxuriously as a duke, not to order the

costliest dinners at the clubs, and be among the first to lead all the splendid entertainments and extravagances of the Household; he had never been without his Highland shooting, his Baden gaming, his prize-winning schooner among the R. V. Y. Squadron, his September battues, his Pytchley hunting, his pretty expensive Zu-Zus and other toys, his drag for Epsom and his trap and hack for the Park, his crowd of engagements through the season, and his bevy of fair leaders of the fashion to smile on him, and shower their invitation-cards on him, like a rain of rose-leaves, as one of the "best men."

"Best," that is, in the sense of fashion, flirting, waltzing, and general social distinction; in no other sense, for the newest of debutantes knew well that "Beauty," though the most perfect of flirts, would never be "serious," and had nothing to be serious with; on which understanding he was allowed by the sex to have the run of their boudoirs and drawing-rooms, much as if he were a little lion-dog; they counted him quite "safe." He made love to the married women, to be sure; but he was quite certain not to run away with the marriageable daughters.

Hence, Bertie had never felt the want of all that is bought by and represents money, and imbibed a vague, indistinct impression that all these things that made life pleasant came by Nature, and were the natural inheritance and concomitants of anybody born in a decent station, and endowed with a tolerable tact; such a matter-of-fact difficulty as not having gold enough to pay for his own and his stud's transit to the Shires had very rarely

stared him in the face, and when it did he trusted to chance to lift him safely over such a social "yawner," and rarely trusted in vain.

According to all the canons of his Order he was never excited, never disappointed, never exhilarated, never disturbed; and also, of course, never by any chance embarrassed. "Votre imperturbabilite," as the Prince de Ligne used to designate La Grande Catherine, would have been an admirable designation for Cecil; he was imperturbable under everything; even when an heiress, with feet as colossal as her fortune, made him a proposal of marriage, and he had to retreat from all the offered honors and threatened horrors, he courteously, but steadily declined them. Nor in more interesting adventures was he less happy in his coolness. When my Lord Regalia, who never knew when he was not wanted, came in inopportunely in a very tender scene of the young Guardsman's (then but a Cornet) with his handsome Countess, Cecil lifted his long lashes lazily, turning to him a face of the most plait-il? and innocent demureness—or consummate impudence, whichever you like. "We're playing Solitaire. Interesting game. Queer fix, though, the ball's in that's left all alone in the middle, don't you think?" Lord Regalia felt his own similarity to the "ball in a fix" too keenly to appreciate the interesting character of the amusement, or the coolness of the chief performer in it; but "Beauty's Solitaire" became a synonym thenceforth among the Household to typify any very tender passages "sotto quartr' occhi."

This made his reputation on the town; the ladies called it very

wicked, but were charmed by the Richelieu-like impudence all the same, and petted the sinner; and from then till now he had held his own with them; dashing through life very fast, as became the first riding man in the Brigades, but enjoying it very fully, smoothly, and softly; liking the world and being liked by it.

To be sure, in the background there was always that ogre of money, and the beast had a knack of growing bigger and darker every year; but then, on the other hand, Cecil never looked at him—never thought about him—knew, too, that he stood just as much behind the chairs of men whom the world accredited as millionaires, and whenever the ogre gave him a cold grip, that there was for the moment no escaping, washed away the touch of it in a warm, fresh draft of pleasure.

CHAPTER II
THE LOOSE BOX, AND THE TABAGIE

"How long before the French can come up?" asked Wellington, hearing of the pursuit that was thundering close on his rear in the most critical hours of the short, sultry Spanish night. "Half an hour, at least," was the answer. "Very well, then I will turn in and get some sleep," said the Commander-in-Chief, rolling himself in a cloak, and lying down in a ditch to rest as soundly for the single half hour as any tired drummer-boy.

Serenely as Wellington, another hero slept profoundly, on the eve of a great event—of a great contest to be met when the day should break—of a critical victory, depending on him alone to save the Guards of England from defeat and shame; their honor and their hopes rested on his solitary head; by him they would be lost or saved; but, unharassed by the magnitude of the stake at issue, unhaunted by the past, unfretted by the future, he slumbered the slumber of the just.

Not Sir Tristram, Sir Caledore, Sir Launcelot—no, nor Arthur himself—was ever truer knight, was ever gentler, braver, bolder, more stanch of heart, more loyal of soul, than he to whom the glory of the Brigades was trusted now; never was there spirit more dauntless and fiery in the field; never temper kindlier and

more generous with friends and foes. Miles of the ridge and furrow, stiff fences of terrible blackthorn, double posts and rails, yawners and croppers both, tough as Shire and Stewards could make them, awaited him on the morrow; on his beautiful lean head capfuls of money were piled by the Service and the Talent; and in his stride all the fame of the Household would be centered on the morrow; but he took his rest like the cracker he was—standing as though he were on guard, and steady as a rock, a hero every inch of him. For he was Forest King, the great steeplechaser, on whom the Guards had laid all their money for the Grand Military—the Soldiers' Blue Ribbon.

His quarters were a loose box; his camp-bed a litter of straw fresh shaken down; his clothing a very handsome rug, hood, and quarter-piece buckled on and marked "B. C."; above the manger and the door was lettered his own name in gold. "Forest King"; and in the panels of the latter were miniatures of his sire and of his dam: Lord of the Isles, one of the greatest hunters that the grass countries ever saw sent across them; and Bayadere, a wild-pigeon-blue mare of Circassia. How, furthermore, he stretched up his long line of ancestry by the Sovereign, out of Queen of Roses; by Belted Earl, out of Fallen Star; by Marmion, out of Court Coquette, and straight up to the White Cockade blood, etc., etc., etc.—is it not written in the mighty and immortal chronicle, previous as the Koran, patrician as the Peerage, known and beloved to mortals as the "Stud Book"?

Not an immensely large, or unusually powerful horse, but with

race in every line of him; steel-gray in color, darkening well at all points, shining and soft as satin, with the firm muscles quivering beneath at the first touch of excitement to the high mettle and finely-strung organization; the head small, lean, racer-like, "blood" all over; with the delicate taper ears, almost transparent in full light; well ribbed-up, fine shoulders, admirable girth and loins; legs clean, slender, firm, promising splendid knee action; sixteen hands high, and up to thirteen stone; clever enough for anything, trained to close and open country, a perfect brook jumper, a clipper at fencing; taking a great deal of riding, as anyone could tell by the set-on of his neck, but docile as a child to a well-known hand—such was Forest King with his English and Eastern strains, winner at Chertsey, Croydon, the National, the Granby, the Belvoir Castle, the Curragh, and all the gentleman-rider steeple-chases and military sweepstakes in the kingdom, and entered now, with tremendous bets on him, for the Gilt Vase.

It was a crisp, cold night outside; starry, wintry, but open weather, and clear; the ground would be just right on the morrow, neither hard as the slate of a billiard-table, nor wet as the slush of a quagmire. Forest King slept steadily on in his warm and spacious box, dreaming doubtless of days of victory, cub-hunting in the reedy October woods and pastures, of the ringing notes of the horn, and the sweet music of the pack, and the glorious quick burst up-wind, breasting the icy cold water, and showing the way over fence and bullfinch. Dozing and dreaming pleasantly; but alert for all that; for he awoke suddenly, shook himself, had a

hilarious roll in the straw, and stood "at attention."

Awake only, could you tell the generous and gallant promise of his perfect temper; for there are no eyes that speak more truly, none on earth that are so beautiful, as the eyes of a horse. Forest King's were dark as a gazelle's, soft as a woman's, brilliant as stars, a little dreamy and mournful, and as infinitely caressing when he looked at what he loved, as they could blaze full of light and fire when danger was near and rivalry against him. How loyally such eyes have looked at me over the paddock fence, as a wild, happy gallop was suddenly broken for a gentle head to be softly pushed against my hand with the gentlest of welcomes! They sadly put to shame the million human eyes that so fast learn the lie of the world, and utter it as falsely as the lips.

The steeple-chaser stood alert, every fiber of his body strung to pleasurable excitation; the door opened, a hand held him some sugar, and the voice he loved best said fondly, "All right, old boy?"

Forest King devoured the beloved dainty with true equine unction, rubbed his forehead against his master's shoulder, and pushed his nose into the nearest pocket in search for more of his sweetmeat.

"You'd eat a sugar-loaf, you dear old rascal. Put the gas up, George," said his owner, while he turned up the body clothing to feel the firm, cool skin, loosened one of the bandages, passed his hand from thigh to fetlock, and glanced round the box to be sure the horse had been well suppered and littered down.

"Think we shall win, Rake?"

Rake, with a stable lantern in his hand and a forage cap on one side of his head, standing a little in advance of a group of grooms and helpers, took a bit of straw out of his mouth, and smiled a smile of sublime scorn and security. "Win, sir? I should be glad to know as when was that ere King ever beat yet; or you either, sir, for that matter?"

Bertie Cecil laughed a little languidly.

"Well, we take a good deal of beating, I think, and there are not very many who can give it us; are there, old fellow?" he said to the horse, as he passed his palm over the withers; "but there are some crushers in the lot to-morrow; you'll have to do all you know."

Forest King caught the manger with his teeth, and kicked in a bit of play and ate some more sugar, with much licking of his lips to express the nonchalance with which he viewed his share in the contest, and his tranquil certainty of being first past the flags. His master looked at him once more and sauntered out of the box.

"He's in first-rate form, Rake, and right as a trivet."

"Course he is, sir; nobody ever laid leg over such cattle as all that White Cockade blood, and he's the very best of the strain," said Rake, as he held up his lantern across the stable-yard, that looked doubly dark in the February night after the bright gas glare of the box.

"So he need be," thought Cecil, as a bull terrier, three or four Gordon setters, an Alpine mastiff, and two wiry Skyes dashed

at their chains, giving tongue in frantic delight at the sound of his step, while the hounds echoed the welcome from their more distant kennels, and he went slowly across the great stone yard, with the end of a huge cheroot glimmering through the gloom. "So he need be, to pull me through. The Ducal and the October let me in for it enough; I never was closer in my life. The deuce! If I don't do the distance to-morrow I shan't have sovereigns enough to play pound-points at night! I don't know what a man's to do; if he's put into this life, he must go the pace of it. Why did Royal send me into the Guards, if he meant to keep the screw on in this way? He'd better have drafted me into a marching regiment at once, if he wanted me to live upon nothing."

Nothing meant anything under 60,000 pounds a year with Cecil, as the minimum of monetary necessities in this world, and a look of genuine annoyance and trouble, most unusual there, was on his face, the picture of carelessness and gentle indifference habitually, though shadowed now as he crossed the courtyard after his after-midnight visit to his steeple-chaser. He had backed Forest King heavily, and stood to win or lose a cracker on his own riding on the morrow; and, though he had found sufficient to bring him into the Shires, he had barely enough lying on his dressing-table, up in the bachelor suite within, to pay his groom's book, or a notion where to get more, if the King should find his match over the ridge and furrow in the morning!

It was not pleasant: a cynical, savage, world-disgusted Timon derives on the whole a good amount of satisfaction from his

break-down in the fine philippics against his contemporaries that it is certain to afford, and the magnificent grievances with which it furnishes him; but when life is very pleasant to a man, and the world very fond of him; when existence is perfectly smooth,—bar that single pressure of money,—and is an incessantly changing kaleidoscope of London seasons, Paris winters, ducal houses in the hunting months, dinners at the Pall Mall Clubs, dinners at the Star and Garter, dinners irreproachable everywhere; cottage for Ascot week, yachting with the R. V. Y. Club, Derby handicaps at Hornsey, pretty chorus-singers set up in Bijou villas, dashing rosieres taken over to Baden, warm corners in Belvoir, Savernake, and Longeat battues, and all the rest of the general programme, with no drawback to it, except the duties at the Palace, the heat of a review, or the extravagance of a pampered lionne—then to be pulled up in that easy, swinging gallop for sheer want of a golden shoe, as one may say, is abominably bitter, and requires far more philosophy to endure than Timon would ever manage to master. It is a bore, an unmitigated bore; a harsh, hateful, unrelieved martyrdom that the world does not see, and that the world would not pity if it did.

"Never mind! Things will come right. Forest King never failed me yet; he is as full of running as a Derby winner, and he'll go over the yawners like a bird," thought Cecil, who never confronted his troubles with more than sixty seconds' thought, and who was of that light, impassible, half-levity, half-languor

of temperament that both throws off worry easily and shirks it persistently. "Sufficient for the day," etc., was the essence of his creed; and if he had enough to lay a fiver at night on the rubber, he was quite able to forget for the time that he wanted five hundred for settling-day in the morning, and had not an idea how to get it. There was not a trace of anxiety on him when he opened a low arched door, passed down a corridor, and entered the warm, full light of that chamber of liberty, that sanctuary of the persecuted, that temple of refuge, thrice blessed in all its forms throughout the land, that consecrated Mecca of every true believer in the divinity of the meerschaum, and the paradise of the nargile—the smoking-room.

A spacious, easy chamber, too; lined with the laziest of divans, seen just now through a fog of smoke, and tenanted by nearly a score of men in every imaginable loose velvet costume, and with faces as well known in the Park at six o'clock in May, and on the Heath in October; in Paris in January, and on the Solent in August; in Pratt's of a summer's night, and on the Moors in an autumn morning, as though they were features that came round as regularly as the "July" or the Waterloo Cup. Some were puffing away in calm, meditative comfort, in silence that they would not have broken for any earthly consideration; others were talking hard and fast, and through the air heavily weighted with the varieties of tobacco, from tiny cigarettes to giant cheroots, from rough bowls full of cavendish to sybaritic rose-water hookahs, a Babel of sentences rose together: "Gave him too much riding,

the idiot." "Take the field, bar one." "Nothing so good for the mare as a little niter and antimony in her mash." "Not at all! The Regent and Rake cross in the old strain, always was black-tan with a white frill." "The Earl's as good a fellow as Lady Flora; always give you a mount." "Nothing like a Kate Terry though, on a bright day, for salmon." "Faster thing I never knew; found at twenty minutes past eleven, and killed just beyond Longdown Water at ten to twelve." All these various phrases were rushing in among each other, and tossed across the eddies of smoke in the conflicting tongues loosened in the tabagie and made eloquent, though slightly inarticulate, by pipe-stems; while a tall, fair man, with the limbs of a Hercules, the chest of a prize-fighter, and the face of a Raphael Angel, known in the Household as Seraph, was in the full blood of a story of whist played under difficulties in the Doncaster express.

"I wanted a monkey; I wanted monkeys awfully," he was stating as Forest King's owner came into the smoking-room.

"Did you, Seraph? The 'Zoo' or the Clubs could supply you with apes fully developed to any amount," said Bertie, as he threw himself down.

"You be hanged!" laughed the Seraph, known to the rest of the world as the Marquis of Rockingham, son of the Duke of Lyonnesse. "I wished monkeys, but the others wished ponies and hundreds, so I gave in; Vandebur and I won two rubbers, and we'd just begun the third when the train stopped with a crash; none of us dropped the cards though, but the tricks and the scores

all went down with the shaking. 'Can't play in that row,' said Charlie, for the women were shrieking like mad, and the engine was roaring like my mare Philippa—I'm afraid she'll never be cured, poor thing!—so I put my head out and asked what was up? We'd run into a cattle train. Anybody hurt? No, nobody hurt; but we were to get out. 'I'll be shot if I get out,' I told 'em, 'till I've finished the rubber.' 'But you must get out,' said the guard; 'carriages must be moved.' 'Nobody says "must" to him,' said Van (he'd drank more Perles du Rhin than was good for him in Doncaster); 'don't you know the Seraph?' Man stared. 'Yes, sir; know the Seraph, sir; leastways, did, sir, afore he died; see him once at Moulsey Mill, sir; his "one two" was amazin'. Waters soon threw up the sponge.' We were all dying with laughter, and I tossed him a tenner. 'There, my good fellow,' said I, 'shunt the carriage and let us finish the game. If another train comes up, give it Lord Rockingham's compliments and say he'll thank it to stop, because collisions shake his trumps together.' Man thought us mad; took tenner though, shunted us to one side out of the noise, and we played two rubbers more before they'd repaired the damage and sent us on to town."

And the Seraph took a long-drawn whiff from his silver meerschaum, and then a deep draught of soda and brandy to refresh himself after the narrative—biggest, best-tempered, and wildest of men in or out of the Service, despite the angelic character of his fair-haired head, and blue eyes that looked as clear and as innocent as those of a six-year-old child.

"Not the first time by a good many that you've 'shunted off the straight,' Seraph?" laughed Cecil, substituting an amber mouthpiece for his half-finished cheroot. "I've been having a good-night look at the King. He'll stay."

"Of course he will," chorused half a dozen voices.

"With all our pots on him," added the Seraph. "He's too much of a gentleman to put us all up a tree; he knows he carries the honor of the Household."

"There are some good mounts, there's no denying that," said Chesterfield of the Blues (who was called Tom for no other reason than that it was entirely unlike his real name of Adolphus), where he was curled up almost invisible, except for the movement of the jasmine stick of his chibouque. "That brute, Day Star, is a splendid fencer, and for a brook jumper, it would be heard to best Wild Geranium, though her shoulders are not quite what they ought to be. Montacute, too, can ride a good thing, and he's got one in Pas de Charge."

"I'm not much afraid of Monti, he makes too wild a burst first; he never saves on atom," yawned Cecil, with the coils of his hookah bubbling among the rose-water; "the man I'm afraid of is that fellow from the Tenth; he's as light as a feather and as hard as steel. I watched him yesterday going over the water, and the horse he'll ride for Trelawney is good enough to beat even the King if he's properly piloted."

"You haven't kept yourself in condition, Beauty," growled "Tom," with the chibouque in his mouth, "else nothing could

give you the go-by. It's tempting Providence to go in for the Gilt Vase after such a December and January as you spent in Paris. Even the week you've been in the Shires you haven't trained a bit; you've been waltzing or playing baccarat till five in the morning, and taking no end of sodas after to bring you right for the meet at nine. If a man will drink champagnes and burgundies as you do, and spend his time after women, I should like to know how he's to be in hard riding condition, unless he expects a miracle."

With which Chesterfield, who weighed fourteen stone himself, and was, therefore, out of all but welter-races, and wanted a weight-carrier of tremendous power even for them, subsided under a heap of velvet and cashmere, and Cecil laughed; lying on a divan just under one of the gas branches, the light fell full on his handsome face, with its fair hue and its gentle languor on which there was not a single trace of the outrecuidance attributed to him. Both he and the Seraph could lead the wildest life of any men in Europe without looking one shadow more worn than the brightest beauty of the season, and could hold wassail in riotous rivalry till the sun rose, and then throw themselves into saddle as fresh as if they had been sound asleep all night; to keep up with the pack the whole day in a fast burst or on a cold scent, or in whatever sport Fortune and the coverts gave them, till their second horses wound their way homeward through muddy, leafless lanes, when the stars had risen.

"Beauty don't believe in training. No more do I. Never would train for anything," said the Seraph now, pulling the long blond

mustaches that were not altogether in character with his seraphic cognomen. "If a man can ride, let him. If he's born to the pigskin he'll be in at the distance safe enough, whether he smokes or don't smoke, drink or don't drink. As for training on raw chops, giving up wine, living like the very deuce and all, as if you were in a monastery, and changing yourself into a mere bag of bones—it's utter bosh. You might as well be in purgatory; besides, it's no more credit to win then than if you were a professional."

"But you must have trained at Christ Church, Rock, for the Eight?" asked another Guardsman, Sir Vere Bellingham; "Severe," as he was christened, chiefly because he was the easiest-going giant in existence.

"Did I! men came to me; wanted me to join the Eight; coxswain came, awful strict little fellow, docked his men of all their fun—took plenty himself though! Coxswain said I must begin to train, do as all his crew did. I threw up my sleeve and showed him my arm;" and the Seraph stretched out an arm magnificent enough for a statue of Milo. "I said, 'there, sir, I'll help you thrash Cambridge, if you like, but train I won't for you or for all the University. I've been Captain of the Eton Eight; but I didn't keep my crew on tea and toast. I fattened 'em regularly three times a week on venison and champagne at Christopher's. Very happy to feed yours, too, if you like; game comes down to me every Friday from the Duke's moors; they look uncommonly as if they wanted it!' You should have seen his face!—fatten the Eight! He didn't let me do that, of course; but he was very glad of

my oar in his rowlocks, and I helped him beat Cambridge without training an hour myself, except so far as rowing hard went."

And the Marquis of Rockingham, made thirsty by the recollection, dipped his fair mustaches into a foaming seltzer.

"Quite right, Seraph!" said Cecil; "when a man comes up to the weights, looking like a homunculus, after he's been getting every atom of flesh off him like a jockey, he ought to be struck out for the stakes, to my mind. 'Tisn't a question of riding, then, nor yet of pluck, or of management; it's nothing but a question of pounds, and of who can stand the tamest life the longest."

"Well, beneficial for one's morals, at any rate," suggested Sir Vere.

"Morals be hanged!" said Bertie, very immorally. "I'm glad you remind us of them, Vere; you're such a quintessence of decorum and respectability yourself! I say—anybody know anything of this fellow of the Tenth that's to ride Trelawney's chestnut?"

"Jimmy Delmar! Oh, yes; I know Jimmy," answered Lord Cosmo Wentworth, of the Scots Fusileers, from the far depths of an arm-chair. "Knew him at Aldershot. Fine rider; give you a good bit of trouble, Beauty. Hasn't been in England for years; troop been such a while at Calcutta. The Fancy take to him rather; offering very freely on him this morning in the village; and he's got a rare good thing in the chestnut."

"Not a doubt of it. The White Lily blood, out of that Irish mare D'Orleans Diamonds, too."

"Never mind! Tenth won't beat us. The Household will win safe enough, unless Forest King goes and breaks his back over Brixworth—eh, Beauty?" said the Seraph, who believed devoutly in his comrade, with all the loving loyalty characteristic of the House of Lyonnesse, that to monarchs and to friends had often cost it very dear.

"You put your faith in the wrong quarter, Rock; I may fail you, he never will," said Cecil, with ever so slight a dash of sadness in his words; the thought crossed him of how boldly, how straightly, how gallantly the horse always breasted and conquered his difficulties—did he himself deal half so well with his own?

"Well! you both of you carry all our money and all our credit; so for the fair fame of the Household do 'all you know.' I haven't hedged a shilling, not laid off a farthing, Bertie; I stand on you and the King, and nothing else—see what a sublime faith I have in you."

"I don't think you're wise then, Seraph; the field will be very strong," said Cecil languidly. The answer was indifferent, and certainly thankless; but under his drooped lids a glance, frank and warm, rested for the moment on the Seraph's leonine strength and Raphaelesque head; it was not his way to say it, or to show it, or even much to think it; but in his heart he loved his old friend wonderfully well.

And they talked on of little else than of the great steeple-chase of the Service, for the next hour in the Tabak-Parliament, while the great clouds of scented smoke circled heavily round; making

a halo of Turkish above the gold locks of the Titanic Seraph, steeping Chesterfield's velvets in strong odors of Cavendish, and drifting a light rose-scented mist over Bertie's long, lithe limbs, light enough and skilled enough to disdain all "training for the weights."

"That's not the way to be in condition," growled "Tom," getting up with a great shake as the clock clanged the strokes of five; they had only returned from a ball three miles off, when Cecil had paid his visit to the loose box. Bertie laughed; his laugh was like himself—rather languid, but very light-hearted, very silvery, very engaging.

"Sit and smoke till breakfast time if you like, Tom; it won't make any difference to me."

But the Smoke Parliament wouldn't hear of the champion of the Household over the ridge and furrow risking the steadiness of his wrist and the keenness of his eye by any such additional tempting of Providence, and went off itself in various directions, with good-night iced drinks, yawning considerably like most other parliaments after a sitting.

It was the old family place of the Royallieu House in which he had congregated half the Guardsmen in the Service for the great event, and consequently the bachelor chambers in it were of the utmost comfort and spaciousness, and when Cecil sauntered into his old quarters, familiar from boyhood, he could not have been better off in his own luxurious haunts in Piccadilly. Moreover, the first thing that caught his eye was a dainty scarlet silk riding

jacket broidered in gold and silver, with the motto of his house, "Coeur Vaillant se fait Royaume," all circled with oak and laurel leaves on the collar.

It was the work of very fair hands, of very aristocratic hands, and he looked at it with a smile. "Ah, my lady, my lady!" he thought half aloud, "do you really love me? Do I really love you?"

There was a laugh in his eyes as he asked himself what might be termed an interesting question; then something more earnest came over his face, and he stood a second with the pretty costly embroideries in his hand, with a smile that was almost tender, though it was still much more amused. "I suppose we do," he concluded at last; "at least quite as much as is ever worth while. Passions don't do for the drawing-room, as somebody says in 'Coningsby'; besides—I would not feel a strong emotion for the universe. Bad style always, and more detrimental to 'condition,' as Tom would say, than three bottles of brandy!"

He was so little near what he dreaded, at present at least, that the scarlet jacket was tossed down again, and gave him no dreams of his fair and titled embroideress. He looked out, the last thing, at some ominous clouds drifting heavily up before the dawn, and the state of the weather, and the chance of its being rainy, filled his thoughts, to the utter exclusion of the donor of that bright gold-laden dainty gift. "I hope to goodness there won't be any drenching shower. Forest King can stand ground as hard as a slate, but if there's one thing he's weak in it's slush!" was Bertie's last conscious thought, as he stretched his limbs out and

fell sound asleep.

CHAPTER III
THE SOLDIERS' BLUE RIBBON

"Take the Field bar one." "Two to one on Forest King." "Two to one on Bay Regent." "Fourteen to seven on Wild Geranium." "Seven to two against Brother to Fairy." "Three to five on Pas de Charge." "Nineteen to six on Day Star." "Take the Field bar one," rose above the hoarse tumultuous roar of the ring on the clear, crisp, sunny morning that was shining on the Shires on the day of the famous steeple-chase.

The talent had come in great muster from London; the great bookmakers were there with their stentor lungs and their quiet, quick entry of thousands; and the din and the turmoil, at the tiptop of their height, were more like a gathering on the Heath or before the Red House, than the local throngs that usually mark steeple-chase meetings, even when they be the Grand Military or the Grand National. There were keen excitement and heavy stakes on the present event; the betting had never stood still a second in Town or the Shires; and even the "knowing ones," the worshipers of the "flat" alone, the professionals who ran down gentlemen races and the hypercritics who affirmed that there is not such a thing as a steeple-chaser to be found on earth (since, to be a fencer, a water-jumper, and a racer were to attain an equine perfection impossible on earth, whatever it may be in

"happy hunting ground" of immortality)—even these, one and all of them, came eager to see the running for the Gilt Vase.

For it was known very well that the Guards had backed their horse tremendously, and the county laid most of its money on him, and the bookmakers were shy of laying off much against one of the first cross-country riders of the Service, who had landed his mount at the Grand National Handicap, the Billesdon Coplow, the Ealing, the Curragh, the Prix du Donjon, the Rastatt, and almost every other for which he had entered. Yet, despite this, the "Fancy" took most to Bay Regent; they thought he would cut the work out; his sire had won the Champion Stakes at Doncaster, and the Drawing-room at "glorious Goodwood," and that racing strain through the White Lily blood, coupled with a magnificent reputation which he brought from Leicestershire as a fencer, found him chief favor among the fraternity.

His jockey, Jimmy Delmar, too, with his bronzed, muscular, sinewy frame, his low stature, his light weight, his sunburnt, acute face, and a way of carrying his hands as he rode that was precisely like Aldcroft's, looked a hundred times more professional than the brilliance of "Beauty," and the reckless dash of his well-known way of "sending the horse along with all he had in him," which was undeniably much more like a fast kill over the Melton country, than like a weight-for-age race anywhere. "You see the Service in his stirrups," said an old nobbler who had watched many a trial spin, lying hidden in a ditch or a drain; and indisputably you did: Bertie's riding was superb, but it was still

the riding of a cavalryman, not of a jockey. The mere turn of the foot in the stirrups told it, as the old man had the shrewdness to know.

So the King went down at one time two points in the morning betting.

"Know them flash cracks of the Household," said Tim Varnet, as sharp a little Leg as ever "got on" a dark thing, and "went halves" with a jock who consented to rope a favorite at the Ducal. "Them swells, ye see, they give any money for blood. They just go by Godolphin heads, and little feet, and winners' strains, and all the rest of it; and so long as they get pedigree never look at substance; and their bone comes no bigger than a deer's. Now, it's force as well as pace that tells over a bit of plow; a critter that would win the Derby on the flat would knock up over the first spin over the clods; and that King's legs are too light for my fancy, 'andsome as 'tis ondeniable he looks—for a little 'un, as one may say."

And Tim Varnet exactly expressed the dominant mistrust of the talent; despite all his race and all his exploits, the King was not popular in the Ring, because he was like his backers—"a swell." They thought him "showy—very showy," "a picture to frame," "a luster to look at"; but they disbelieved in him, almost to a man, as a stayer, and they trusted him scarcely at all with their money.

"It's plain that he's 'meant,' though," thought little Tim, who was so used to the "shady" in stable matters that he could hardly persuade himself that even the Grand Military could be run fair,

and would have thought a Guardsman or a Hussar only exercised his just privilege as a jockey in "roping" after selling the race, if so it suited his book. "He's 'meant,' that's clear, 'cause the swells have put all their pots on him—but if the pots don't bile over, strike me a loser!" a contingency he knew he might very well invoke; his investments being invariably so matchlessly arranged that, let what would be "bowled over," Tim Varnet never could be.

Whatever the King might prove, however, the Guards, the Flower of the Service, must stand or fall by him; they had not Seraph, they put in "Beauty" and his gray. But there was no doubt as to the tremendousness of the struggle lying before him. The running ground covered four miles and a half, and had forty-two jumps in it, exclusive of the famous Brixworth: half was grassland, and half ridge and furrow; a lane with very awkward double fences laced in and in with the memorable blackthorn, a laid hedge with thick growers in it and many another "teaser," coupled with the yawning water, made the course a severe one; while thirty-two starters of unusual excellence gave a good field and promised a close race. Every fine bit of steeple-chase blood that was to be found in their studs, the Service had brought together for the great event; and if the question could ever be solved, whether it is possible to find a strain that shall combine pace over the flat with the heart to stay over an inclosed country, the speed to race with the bottom to fence and the force to clear water, it seemed likely to be settled now. The Service and the

Stable had done their uttermost to reach its solution.

The clock of the course pointed to half-past one; the saddling bell would ring at a quarter to two, for the days were short and darkened early; the Stewards were all arrived, except the Marquis of Rockingham, and the Ring was in the full rush of excitement; some "getting on" hurriedly to make up for lost time; some "peppering" one or other of the favorites hotly; some laying off their moneys in a cold fit of caution; some putting capfuls on the King, or Bay Regent, or Pas de Charge, from the great commission stables, the local betting man, the shrewd wiseacres from the Ridings, all the rest of the brotherhood of the Turf were crowding together with the deafening shouting common to them which sounds so tumultuous, so insane, and so unintelligible to outsiders. Amid them half the titled heads of England, all the great names known on the flat, and men in the Guards, men in the Rifles, men in the Light Cavalry, men in the Heavies, men in the Scots Greys, men in the Horse Artillery, men in all the Arms and all the Regiments that had sent their first riders to try for the Blue Ribbon, were backing their horses with crackers, and jotting down figure after figure, with jeweled pencils, in dainty books, taking long odds with the fields. Carriages were standing in long lines along the course, the stands were filled with almost as bright a bevy of fashionable loveliness as the Ducal brings together under the park trees of Goodwood; the horses were being led into the inclosure for saddling, a brilliant sun shone for the nonce on the freshest of February noons; beautiful women

were fluttering out of their barouches in furs and velvets, wearing the colors of the jockey they favored, and more predominant than any were Cecil's scarlet and white, only rivaled in prominence by the azure of the Heavy Cavalry champion, Sir Eyre Montacute. A drag with four bays—with fine hunting points about them—had dashed up, late of course; the Seraph had swung himself from the roller-bolt into the saddle of his hack (one of these few rare hacks that are perfect, and combine every excellence of pace, bone, and action, under their modest appellative), and had cantered off to join the Stewards; while Cecil had gone up to a group of ladies in the Grand Stand, as if he had no more to do with the morning's business than they. Right in front of that Stand was an artificial bullfinch that promised to treat most of the field to a "purler," a deep ditch dug and filled with water, with two towering blackthorn fences on either side of it, as awkward a leap as the most cramped country ever showed; some were complaining of it; it was too severe, it was unfair, it would break the back of every horse sent at it. The other Stewards were not unwilling to have it tamed down a little, but he Seraph, generally the easiest of all sweet-tempered creatures, refused resolutely to let it be touched.

"Look here," said he confidentially, as he wheeled his hack round to the Stand and beckoned Cecil down, "look here, Beauty; they're wanting to alter that teaser, make it less awkward, you know; but I wouldn't because I thought it would look as if I lessened it for you, you know. Still it is a cracker and no mistake;

Brixworth itself is nothing to it, and if you'd like it toned down I'll let them do it—"

"My dear Seraph, not for worlds! You were quite right not to have a thorn taken down. Why, that's where I shall thrash Bay Regent," said Bertie serenely, as if the winning of the stakes had been forecast in his horoscope.

The Seraph whistled, stroking his mustaches. "Between ourselves, Cecil, that fellow is going up no end. The Talent fancy him so—"

"Let them," said Cecil placidly, with a great cheroot in his mouth, lounging into the center of the Ring to hear how the betting went on his own mount; perfectly regardless that he would keep them waiting at the weights while he dressed. Everybody there knew him by name and sight; and eager glances followed the tall form of the Guards' champion as he moved through the press, in a loose brown sealskin coat, with a little strip of scarlet ribbon round his throat, nodding to this peer, taking evens with that, exchanging a whisper with a Duke, and squaring his book with a Jew. Murmurs followed about him as if he were the horse himself—"looks in racing form"—"looks used up to me"—"too little hands surely to hold in long in a spin"—"too much length in the limbs for a light weight; bone's always awfully heavy"—"dark under the eye, been going too fast for training"—"a swell all over, but rides no end," with other innumerable contradictory phrases, according as the speaker was "on" him or against him, buzzed about him from the riff-raff of the Ring, in no way disturbing

his serene equanimity.

One man, a big fellow, "'ossy" all over, with the genuine sporting cut-away coat, and a superabundance of showy necktie and bad jewelry, eyed him curiously, and slightly turned so that his back was toward Bertie, as the latter was entering a bet with another Guardsman well known on the turf, and he himself was taking long odds with little Berk Cecil, the boy having betted on his brother's riding, as though he had the Bank of England at his back. Indeed, save that the lad had the hereditary Royallieu instinct of extravagance, and, with a half thoughtless, half willful improvidence, piled debts and difficulties on this rather brainless and boyish head, he had much more to depend on than his elder; old Lord Royallieu doted on him, spoilt him, and denied him nothing, though himself a stern, austere, passionate man, made irascible by ill health, and, in his fits of anger, a very terrible personage indeed—no more to be conciliated by persuasion than iron is to be bent by the hand; so terrible that even his pet dreaded him mortally, and came to Bertie to get his imprudences and peccadilloes covered from the Viscount's sight.

Glancing round at this moment as he stood in the ring, Cecil saw the betting man with whom Berkeley was taking long odds on the race; he raised his eyebrows, and his face darkened for a second, though resuming its habitual listless serenity almost immediately.

"You remember that case of welshing after the Ebor St. Leger, Con?" he said in a low tone to the Earl of Constantia, with whom

he was talking. The Earl nodded assent; everyone had heard of it, and a very flagrant case it was.

"There's the fellow," said Cecil laconically, and strode toward him with his long, lounging cavalry swing. The man turned pallid under his florid skin, and tried to edge imperceptibly away; but the density of the throng prevented his moving quickly enough to evade Cecil, who stooped his head, and said a word in his ear. It was briefly:

"Leave the ring."

The rascal, half bully, half coward, rallied from the startled fear into which his first recognition by the Guardsman (who had been the chief witness against him in a very scandalous matter at York, and who had warned him that if he ever saw him again in the Ring he would have him turned out of it) had thrown him, and, relying on insolence and the numbers of his fraternity to back him out of it, stood his ground.

"I've as much right here as you swells," he said, with a hoarse laugh. "Are you the whole Jockey Club, that you come it to a honest gentleman like that?"

Cecil looked down on him slightly amused, immeasurably disgusted—of all earth's terrors, there was not one so great for him as a scene, and the eager bloodshot eyes of the Ring were turning on them by the thousand, and the loud shouting of the bookmakers was thundering out, "What's up?"

"My 'honest gentleman,'" he said wearily, "leave this. I tell you; do you hear?"

"Make me!" retorted the "welsher," defiant in his stout-built square strength, and ready to brazen the matter out. "Make me, my cock o' fine feathers! Put me out of the ring if you can, Mr. Dainty Limbs! I've as much business here as you."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before, light as a deer and close as steel, Cecil's hand was on his collar, and without any seeming effort, without the slightest passion, he calmly lifted him off the ground, as though he were a terrier, and thrust him through the throng; Ben Davis, as the welsher was named, meantime being so amazed at such unlooked-for might in the grasp of the gentlest, idlest, most gracefully made, and indolently tempered of his born foes and prey, "the swells," that he let himself be forced along backward in sheer passive paralysis of astonishment, while Bertie, profoundly insensible to the tumult that began to rise and roar about him, from those who were not too absorbed in the business of the morning to note what took place, thrust him along in the single clasp of his right hand outward to where the running ground swept past the Stand, and threw him lightly, easily, just as one may throw a lap-dog to take his bath, into the artificial ditch filled with water that the Seraph had pointed out as "a teaser." The man fell unhurt, unbruised, so gently was he dropped on his back among the muddy, chilly water, and the overhanging brambles; and, as he rose from the ducking, a shudder of ferocious and filthy oaths poured from his lips, increased tenfold by the uproarious laughter of the crowd, who knew him as "a welsher," and thought him only too well

served.

Policemen rushed in at all points, rural and metropolitan, breathless, austere, and, of course, too late. Bertie turned to them, with a slight wave of his hand, to sign them away.

"Don't trouble yourselves! It's nothing you could interfere in; take care that person doesn't come into the betting ring again, that's all."

The Seraph, Lord Constantia, Wentworth, and may others of his set, catching sight of the turmoil and of "Beauty," with the great square-set figure of Ben Davis pressed before him through the mob, forced their way up as quickly as they could; but before they reached the spot Cecil was sauntering back to meet them, cool and listless, and a little bored with so much exertion; his cheroot in his mouth, and his ear serenely deaf to the clamor about the ditch.

He looked apologetically at the Seraph and the others; he felt some apology was required for having so far wandered from all the canons of his Order as to have approached "a row," and run the risk of a scene.

"Turf must be cleared of these scamps, you see," he said, with a half sigh. "Law can't do anything. Fellow was trying to 'get on' with the young one, too. Don't bet with those riff-raff, Berk. The great bookmakers will make you dead money, and the little Legs will do worse to you."

The boy hung his head, but looked sulky rather than thankful for his brother's interference with himself and the welsher.

"You have done the Turf a service, Beauty—a very great service; there's no doubt about that," said the Seraph. "Law can't do anything, as you say; opinion must clear the ring of such rascals; a welsher ought not to dare to show his face here; but, at the same time, you oughtn't to have gone unsteadying your muscle, and risking the firmness of your hand at such a minute as this, with pitching that fellow over. Why couldn't you wait till afterward? or have let me do it?"

"My dear Seraph," murmured Bertie languidly, "I've gone in to-day for exertion; a little more or less is nothing. Besides, welshers are slippery dogs, you know."

He did not add that it was having seen Ben Davis taking odds with his young brother which had spurred him to such instantaneous action with that disreputable personage; who, beyond doubt, only received a tithe part of his deserts, and merited to be double-thonged off every course in the kingdom.

Rake at that instant darted, panting like a hot retriever, out of the throng. "Mr. Cecil, sir, will you please come to the weights—the saddling bell's a-going to ring, and—"

"Tell them to wait for me; I shall only be twenty minutes dressing," said Cecil quietly, regardless that the time at which the horses should have been at the starting-post was then clanging from the clock within the Grand Stand. Did you ever go to a gentleman-rider race where the jocks were not at least an hour behind time, and considered themselves, on the whole, very tolerably punctual? At last, however, he sauntered into the

dressing-shed, and was aided by Rake into tops that had at length achieved a spotless triumph, and the scarlet gold-embroidered jacket of his fair friend's art, with white hoops and the "Coeur Vaillant se fait Royaume" on the collar, and the white, gleaming sash to be worn across it, fringed by the same fair hands with silver.

Meanwhile the "welsher," driven off the course by a hooting and indignant crowd, shaking the water from his clothes, with bitter oaths, and livid with a deadly passion at his exile from the harvest-field of his lawless gleanings, went his way, with a savage vow of vengeance against the "d–d dandy," the "Guards' swell," who had shown him up before the world as the scoundrel he was.

The bell was clanging and clashing passionately, as Cecil at last went down to the weights, all his friends of the Household about him, and all standing "crushers" on their champion, for their stringent esprit de corps was involved, and the Guards are never backward in putting their gold down, as all the world knows. In the inclosure, the cynosure of devouring eyes, stood the King, with the sangfroid of a superb gentleman, amid the clamor raging round him, one delicate ear laid back now and them, but otherwise indifferent to the din; with his coat glistening like satin, the beautiful tracery of vein and muscle, like the veins of vine-leaves, standing out on the glossy, clear-carved neck that had the arch of Circassia, and his dark, antelope eyes gazing with a gentle, pensive earnestness on the shouting crowd.

His rivals, too, were beyond par in fitness and in condition, and

there were magnificent animals among them. Bay Regent was a huge raking chestnut, upward of sixteen hands, and enormously powerful, with very fine shoulders, and an all-over-like-going head; he belonged to a Colonel in the Rifles, but was to be ridden by Jimmy Delmar of the 10th Lancers, whose colors were violet with orange hoops. Montacute's horse, Pas de Charge, which carried all the money of the Heavy Cavalry,—Montacute himself being in the Dragoon Guards,—was of much the same order; a black hunter with racing-blood in his loins and withers that assured any amount of force, and no fault but that of a rather coarse head, traceable to a slur on his 'scutcheon on the distaff side from a plebeian great-grandmother, who had been a cart mare, the only stain on his otherwise faultless pedigree. However, she had given him her massive shoulders, so that he was in some sense a gainer by her, after all. Wild Geranium was a beautiful creature enough: a bright bay Irish mare, with that rich red gloss that is like the glow of a horse chestnut; very perfect in shape, though a trifle light perhaps, and with not quite strength enough in neck or barrel; she would jump the fences of her own paddock half a dozen times a day for sheer amusement, and was game for anything[1]. She was entered by Cartouche of the Enniskillens, to be ridden by "Baby Grafton," of the same corps, a feather-weight, and quite a boy, but with plenty of science in him. These

[1] The portrait of this lady is that of a very esteemed young Irish beauty of my acquaintance; she this season did seventy-six miles on a warm June day, and ate her corn and tares afterward as if nothing had happened. She is six years old.

were the three favorites. Day Star ran them close, the property of Durham Vavassour, of the Scots Greys, and to be ridden by his owner; a handsome, flea-bitten, gray sixteen-hander, with ragged hips, and action that looked a trifle string-halty, but noble shoulders, and great force in the loins and withers; the rest of the field, though unusually excellent, did not find so many "sweet voices" for them, and were not so much to be feared; each starter was, of course, much backed by his party, but the betting was tolerably even on these four—all famous steeple-chasers—the King at one time, and Bay Regent at another, slightly leading in the Ring.

Thirty-two starters were hoisted up on the telegraph board, and as the field got at last underway, uncommonly handsome they looked, while the silk jackets of all the colors of the rainbow glittered in the bright noon-sun. As Forest King closed in, perfectly tranquil still, but beginning to glow and quiver all over with excitement, knowing as well as his rider the work that was before him, and longing for it in every muscle and every limb, while his eyes flashed fire as he pulled at the curb and tossed his head aloft, there went up a general shout of "Favorite!" His beauty told on the populace, and even somewhat on the professionals, though his legs kept a strong business prejudice against the working powers of "the Guards' Crack." The ladies began to lay dozens in gloves on him; not altogether for his points, which, perhaps, they hardly appreciated, but for his owner and rider, who, in the scarlet and gold, with the white sash across

his chest, and a look of serene indifference on his face, they considered the handsomest man in the field. The Household is usually safe to win the suffrages of the sex.

In the throng on the course Rake instantly bonneted an audacious dealer who had ventured to consider that Forest King was "light and curby in the 'ock." "You're a wise 'un, you are!" retorted the wrathful and ever-eloquent Rake; "there's more strength in his clean flat legs, bless him! than in all the round, thick, mill-posts of your halfbreds, that have no more tendon than a bit of wood, and are just as flabby as a sponge!" Which hit the dealer home just as his hat was hit over his eyes; Rake's arguments being unquestionable in their force.

The thoroughbreds pulled and fretted and swerved in their impatience; one or two overcontumacious bolted incontinently, others put their heads between their knees in the endeavor to draw their riders over their withers; Wild Geranium reared straight upright, fidgeted all over with longing to be off, passaged with the prettiest, wickedest grace in the world, and would have given the world to neigh if she had dared, but she knew it would be very bad style, so, like an aristocrat as she was, restrained herself; Bay Regent almost sawed Jimmy Delmar's arms off, looking like a Titan Bucephalus; while Forest King, with his nostrils dilated till the scarlet tinge on them glowed in the sun, his muscles quivering with excitement as intense as the little Irish mare's, and all his Eastern and English blood on fire for the fray, stood steady as a statue for all that, under the curb of a hand light

as a woman's, but firm as iron to control, and used to guide him by the slightest touch.

All eyes were on that throng of the first mounts in the Service; brilliant glances by the hundred gleamed down behind hothouse bouquets of their chosen color, eager ones by the thousand stared thirstily from the crowded course, the roar of the Ring subsided for a second, a breathless attention and suspense succeeded it; the Guardsmen sat on their drags, or lounged near the ladies with their race-glasses ready, and their habitual expression of gentle and resigned weariness in nowise altered because the Household, all in all, had from sixty to seventy thousand on the event; and the Seraph murmured mournfully to his cheroot, "that chestnut's no end fit," strong as his faith was in the champion of the Brigades.

A moment's good start was caught—the flag dropped—off they went sweeping out for the first second like a line of Cavalry about to charge.

Another moment and they were scattered over the first field. Forest King, Wild Geranium, and Bay Regent leading for two lengths, when Montacute, with his habitual "fast burst," sent Pas de Charge past them like lightning. The Irish mare gave a rush and got alongside of him; the King would have done the same, but Cecil checked him and kept him in that cool, swinging canter which covered the grassland so lightly; Bay Regent's vast thundering stride was Olympian, but Jimmy Delmar saw his worst foe in the "Guards' Crack," and waited on him warily, riding superbly himself.

The first fence disposed of half the field; they crossed the second in the same order, Wild Geranium racing neck to neck with Pas de Charge; the King was all athirst to join the duello, but his owner kept him gently back, saving his pace and lifting him over the jumps as easily as a lapwing. The second fence proved a cropper to several, some awkward falls took place over it, and tailing commenced; after the third field, which was heavy plow, all knocked off but eight, and the real struggle began in sharp earnest: a good dozen, who had shown a splendid stride over the grass, being down up by the terrible work on the clods.

The five favorites had it all to themselves; Day Star pounding onward at tremendous speed, Pas de Charge giving slight symptoms of distress owing to the madness of his first burst, the Irish mare literally flying ahead of him, Forest King and the chestnut waiting on one another.

In the Grand Stand the Seraph's eyes strained after the Scarlet and White, and he muttered in his mustaches, "Ye gods, what's up! The world's coming to an end!—Beauty's turned cautious!"

Cautious, indeed—with that giant of Pytchley fame running neck to neck by him; cautious—with two-thirds of the course unrun, and all the yawners yet to come; cautious—with the blood of Forest King lashing to boiling heat, and the wondrous greyhound stride stretching out faster and faster beneath him, ready at a touch to break away and take the lead; but he would be reckless enough by and by; reckless, as his nature was, under the indolent serenity of habit.

Two more fences came, laced high and stiff with the Shire thorn, and with scarce twenty feet between them, the heavy plowed land leading to them, clotted, and black, and hard, with the fresh earthy scent steaming up as the hoofs struck the clods with a dull thunder—Pas de Charge rose to the first: distressed too early, his hind feet caught in the thorn, and he came down, rolling clear of his rider; Montacute picked him up with true science, but the day was lost to the Heavy Cavalry man. Forest King went in and out over both like a bird and led for the first time; the chestnut was not to be beat at fencing and ran even with him; Wild Geranium flew still as fleet as a deer—true to her sex, she would not bear rivalry; but little Grafton, though he rode like a professional, was but a young one, and went too wildly; her spirit wanted cooler curb.

And now only Cecil loosened the King to his full will and his full speed. Now only the beautiful Arab head was stretched like a racer's in the run-in for the Derby, and the grand stride swept out till the hoofs seemed never to touch the dark earth they skimmed over; neither whip nor spur was needed, Bertie had only to leave the gallant temper and the generous fire that were roused in their might to go their way and hold their own. His hands were low, his head a little back, his face very calm; the eyes only had a daring, eager, resolute will lighting them; Brixworth lay before him. He knew well what Forest King could do; but he did not know how great the chestnut Regent's powers might be.

The water gleamed before them, brown and swollen, and

deepened with the meltings of winter snows a month before; the brook that has brought so many to grief over its famous banks since cavaliers leaped it with their falcon on their wrist, or the mellow note of the horn rang over the woods in the hunting days of Stuart reigns. They knew it well, that long line, shimmering there in the sunlight, the test that all must pass who go in for the Soldiers' Blue Ribbon. Forest King scented water, and went on with his ears pointed, and his greyhound stride lengthening, quickening, gathering up all its force and its impetus for the leap that was before—then, like the rise and the swoop of a heron, he spanned the water, and, landing clear, launched forward with the lunge of a spear darted through air. Brixworth was passed—the Scarlet and White, a mere gleam of bright color, a mere speck in the landscape, to the breathless crowds in the stand, sped on over the brown and level grassland; two and a quarter miles done in four minutes and twenty seconds. Bay Regent was scarcely behind him; the chestnut abhorred the water, but a finer trained hunter was never sent over the Shires, and Jimmy Delmar rode like Grimshaw himself. The giant took the leap in magnificent style, and thundered on neck and neck with the "Guards' Crack." The Irish mare followed, and with miraculous gameness, landed safely; but her hind legs slipped on the bank, a moment was lost, and "Baby" Grafton scarce knew enough to recover it, though he scoured on, nothing daunted.

Pas de Charge, much behind, refused the yawner; his strength was not more than his courage, but both had been strained too

severely at first. Montacute struck the spurs into him with a savage blow over the head; the madness was its own punishment; the poor brute rose blindly to the jump, and missed the bank with a reel and a crash; Sir Eyre was hurled out into the brook, and the hope of the Heavies lay there with his breast and forelegs resting on the ground, his hindquarters in the water, and his neck broken. Pas de Charge would never again see the starting flag waved, or hear the music of the hounds, or feel the gallant life throb and glow through him at the rallying notes of the horn. His race was run.

Not knowing, or looking, or heeding what happened behind, the trio tore on over the meadow and the plowed; the two favorites neck by neck, the game little mare hopelessly behind through that one fatal moment over Brixworth. The turning-flags were passed; from the crowds on the course a great hoarse roar came louder and louder, and the shouts rang, changing every second: "Forest King wins!" "Bay Regent wins!" "Scarlet and White's ahead!" "Violet's up with him!" "A cracker on the King!" "Ten to one on the Regent!" "Guards are over the fence first!" "Guards are winning!" "Guards are losing!" "Guards are beat!"

Were they?

As the shout rose, Cecil's left stirrup-leather snapped and gave way; at the pace they were going most men, aye, and good riders too, would have been hurled out of their saddle by the shock; he scarcely swerved; a moment to ease the King and to recover his equilibrium, then he took the pace up again as though nothing

had chanced. And his comrades of the Household, when they saw this through their race-glasses, broke through their serenity and burst into a cheer that echoed over the grasslands and the coppices like a clarion, the grand rich voice of the Seraph leading foremost and loudest—a cheer that rolled mellow and triumphant down the cold, bright air like the blast of trumpets, and thrilled on Bertie's ear where he came down the course, a mile away. It made his heart beat quicker with a victorious, headlong delight, as his knees pressed close into Forest King's flanks, and, half stirrupless like the Arabs, he thundered forward to the greatest riding feat of his life. His face was very calm still, but his blood was in tumult, the delirium of pace had got on him, a minute of life like this was worth a year, and he knew that he would win or die for it, as the land seemed to fly like a black sheet under him, and, in that killing speed, fence and hedge and double and water all went by him like a dream; whirling underneath him as the gray stretched, stomach to earth, over the level, and rose to leap after leap.

For that instant's pause, when the stirrup broke, threatened to lose him the race.

He was more than a length behind the Regent, whose hoofs as they dashed the ground up sounded like thunder, and for whose herculean strength the plow had no terrors; it was more than the lead to keep now, there was ground to cover—and the King was losing like Wild Geranium. Cecil felt drunk with that strong, keen west wind that blew so strongly in his teeth, a passionate

excitation was in him, every breath of winter air that rushed in its bracing currents round him seemed to lash him like a stripe —the Household to look on and see him beaten!

Certain wild blood, that lay latent in Cecil under the tranquil gentleness of temper and of custom, woke and had the mastery; he set his teeth hard, and his hands clinched like steel on the bridle. "Oh, my beauty, my beauty!" he cried, all unconsciously half aloud, as they cleared the thirty-sixth fence. "Kill me if you like, but don't fail me!"

As though Forest King heard the prayer and answered it with all his hero's heart, the splendid form launched faster out, the stretching stride stretched farther yet with lightning spontaneity, every fiber strained, every nerve struggled; with a magnificent bound like an antelope the gray recovered the ground he had lost, and passed Bay Regent by a quarter-length. It was a neck-and-neck race once more, across the three meadows with the last and lower fences that were between them and the final leap of all; that ditch of artificial water with the towering double hedge of oak rails and of blackthorn, that was reared black and grim and well-nigh hopeless just in front of the Grand Stand. A roar like the roar of the sea broke up from the thronged course as the crowd hung breathless on the even race; ten thousand shouts rang as thrice ten thousand eyes watched the closing contest, as superb a sight as the Shires ever saw; while the two ran together —the gigantic chestnut, with every massive sinew swelled and strained to tension, side by side with the marvelous grace, the

shining flanks, and the Arabian-like head of the Guards' horse.

Louder and wilder the shrieked tumult rose: "The chestnut beats!" "The gray beats!" "Scarlet's ahead!" "Bay Regent's caught him!" "Violet's winning, Violet's wining!" "The King's neck by neck!" "The King's beating!" "The Guards will get it!" "The Guard's crack has it!" "Not yet, not yet!" "Violet will thrash him at the jump!" "Now for it!" "The Guards, the Guards, the Guards!" "Scarlet will win!" "The King has the finish!" "No, no, no, no!"

Sent along at a pace that Epsom flat never eclipsed, sweeping by the Grand Stand like the flash of electric flame, they ran side to side one moment more; their foam flung on each other's withers, their breath hot in each other's nostrils, while the dark earth flew beneath their stride. The blackthorn was in front behind five bars of solid oak; the water yawning on its farther side, black and deep and fenced, twelve feet wide if it were an inch, with the same thorn wall beyond it; a leap no horse should have been given, no Steward should have set. Cecil pressed his knees closer and closer, and worked the gallant hero for the test; the surging roar of the throng, though so close, was dull on his ear; he heard nothing, knew nothing, saw nothing but that lean chestnut head beside him, the dull thud on the turf of the flying gallop, and the black wall that reared in his face. Forest King had done so much, could he have stay and strength for this?

Cecil's hands clinched unconsciously on the bridle, and his face was very pale—pale with excitation—as his foot, where the

stirrup was broken, crushed closer and harder against the gray's flanks.

"Oh, my darling, my beauty—now!"

One touch of the spur—the first—and Forest King rose at the leap, all the life and power there were in him gathered for one superhuman and crowning effort; a flash of time, not half a second in duration, and he was lifted in the air higher, and higher, and higher in the cold, fresh, wild winter wind, stakes and rails, and thorn and water lay beneath him black and gaunt and shapeless, yawning like a grave; one bound, even in mid-air, one last convulsive impulse of the gathered limbs, and Forest King was over!

And as he galloped up the straight run-in, he was alone.

Bay Regent had refused the leap.

As the gray swept to the Judge's chair, the air was rent with deafening cheers that seemed to reel like drunken shouts from the multitude. "The Guards win, the Guards win!" and when his rider pulled up at the distance with the full sun shining on the scarlet and white, with the gold glisten of the embroidered "Coeur Vaillant se fait Royaume," Forest King stood in all his glory, winner of the Soldiers' Blue Ribbon, by a feat without its parallel in all the annals of the Gold Vase.

But, as the crowd surged about him, and the mad cheering crowned his victory, and the Household in the splendor of their triumph and the fullness of their gratitude rushed from the drags and the stands to cluster to his saddle, Bertie looked as serenely

and listlessly nonchalant as of old, while he nodded to the Seraph with a gentle smile.

"Rather a close finish, eh? Have you any Moselle Cup going there? I'm a little thirsty."

Outsiders would much sooner have thought him defeated than triumphant; no one, who had not known him, could possibly have imagined that he had been successful; an ordinary spectator would have concluded that, judging by the resigned weariness of his features, he had won the race greatly against his own will, and to his own infinite ennui. No one could have dreamt that he was thinking in his heart of hearts how passionately he loved the gallant beast that had been victor with him, and that, if he had followed out the momentary impulse in him, he could have put his arms round the noble bowed neck and kissed the horse like a woman!

The Moselle Cup was brought to refresh the tired champion, and before he drank it Bertie glanced at a certain place in the Grand Stand and bent his head as the cup touched his lips: it was a dedication of his victory to the Queen of Beauty. Then he threw himself lightly out of saddle, and, as Forest King was led away for the after-ceremony of bottling, rubbing, and clothing, his rider, regardless of the roar and hubbub of the course, and of the tumultuous cheers that welcomed both him and his horse from the men who pressed round him, into whose pockets he had put thousands upon thousands, and whose ringing hurrahs greeted the "Guards' Crack," passed straight up toward Jimmy

Delmar and held out his hand.

"You gave me a close thing, Major Delmar. The Vase is as much yours as mine; if your chestnut had been as good a water jumper as he is a fencer, we should have been neck to neck at the finish."

The browned Indian-sunned face of the Lancer broke up into a cordial smile, and he shook the hand held out to him warmly; defeat and disappointment had cut him to the core, for Jimmy was the first riding man of the Light Cavalry; but he would not have been the frank campaigner that he was if he had not responded to the graceful and generous overture of his rival and conqueror.

"Oh, I can take a beating!" he said good-humoredly; "at any rate, I am beat by the Guards; and it is very little humiliation to lose against such riding as yours and such a magnificent brute as your King. I congratulate you most heartily, most sincerely."

And he meant it, too. Jimmy never canted, nor did he ever throw the blame, with paltry, savage vindictiveness, on the horse he had ridden. Some men there are—their name is legion—who never allow that it is their fault when they are "nowhere"—oh, no! it is the "cursed screw" always, according to them. But a very good rider will not tell you that.

Cecil, while he talked, was glancing up at the Grand Stand, and when the others dispersed to look over the horses, and he had put himself out of his shell into his sealskin in the dressing-shed, he went up thither without a moment's loss of time.

He knew them all; those dainty beauties with their delicate cheeks just brightened by the western winterly wind, and their rich furs and laces glowing among the colors of their respective heroes; he was the pet of them all; "Beauty" had the suffrages of the sex without exception; he was received with bright smiles and graceful congratulations, even from those who had espoused Eyre Montacute's cause, and still fluttered their losing azure, though the poor hunter lay dead, with his back broken, and a pistol-ball mercifully sent through his brains—the martyr to a man's hot haste, as the dumb things have ever been since creation began.

Cecil passed them as rapidly as he could for one so well received by them, and made his way to the center of the Stand, to the same spot at which he had glanced when he had drunk the Moselle.

A lady turned to him; she looked like a rose camellia in her floating scarlet and white, just toned down and made perfect by a shower of Spanish lace; a beautiful brunette, dashing, yet delicate; a little fast, yet intensely thoroughbred; a coquette who would smoke a cigarette, yet a peeress who would never lose her dignity.

"Au coeur vaillant rien d'impossible!" she said, with an envoi of her lorgnon, and a smile that should have intoxicated him—a smile that might have rewarded a Richepanse for a Hohenlinden. "Superbly ridden! I absolutely trembled for you as you lifted the King to that last leap. It was terrible!"

It was terrible; and a woman, to say nothing of a woman who was in love with him, might well have felt a heart-sick fear at sight of that yawning water, and those towering walls of blackthorn, where one touch of the hoofs on the topmost bough, one spring too short of the gathered limbs, must have been death to both horse and rider. But, as she said it, she was smiling, radiant, full of easy calm and racing interest, as became her ladyship who had had "bets at even" before now on Goodwood fillies, and could lead the first flight over the Belvoir and the Quorn countries. It was possible that her ladyship was too thoroughbred not to see a man killed over the oak-rails without deviating into unseemly emotion, or being capable of such bad style as to be agitated.

Bertie, however, in answer, threw the tenderest eloquence into his eyes; very learned in such eloquence.

"If I could not have been victorious while you looked on, I would at least not have lived to meet you here!"

She laughed a little, so did he; they were used to exchange these passages in an admirably artistic masquerade, but it was always a little droll to each of them to see the other wear the domino of sentiment, and neither had much credence in the other.

"What a preux chevalier!" cried his Queen of Beauty. "You would have died in a ditch out of homage to me. Who shall say that chivalry is past! Tell me, Bertie; is it very delightful, that desperate effort to break your neck? It looks pleasant, to judge by its effects. It is the only thing in the world that amuses you!"

"Well—there is a great deal to be said for it," replied Bertie musingly. "You see, until one has broken one's neck, the excitement of the thing isn't totally worn out; can't be, naturally, because the—what-do-you-call-it?—consummation isn't attained till then. The worst of it is, it's getting commonplace, getting vulgar; such a number break their necks, doing Alps and that sort of thing, that we shall have nothing at all left to ourselves soon."

"Not even the monopoly of sporting suicide! Very hard," said her ladyship, with the lowest, most languid laugh in the world, very like "Beauty's" own, save that it had a considerable indication of studied affectation, of which he, however much of a dandy he was, was wholly guiltless. "Well! you won magnificently; that little black man, who is he? Lancers, somebody said?—ran you so fearfully close. I really thought at one time that the Guards had lost."

"Do you suppose that a man happy enough to wear Lady Guenevere's colors could lose? An embroidered scarf given by such hands has been a gage of victory ever since the days of tournaments!" murmured Cecil with the softest tenderness, but just enough laziness in the tone and laughter in the eye to make it highly doubtful whether he was not laughing both at her and at himself, and was wondering why the deuce a fellow had to talk such nonsense. Yet she was Lady Guenevere, with whom he had been in love ever since they stayed together at Belvoir for the Croxton Park week the autumn previous; and who was beautiful

enough to make their "friendship" as enchanting as a page out of the "Decamerone." And while he bent over her, flirting in the fashion that made him the darling of the drawing-rooms, and looking down into her superb Velasquez eyes, he did not know, and if he had known would have been careless of it, that afar off, while with rage, and with his gaze straining on to the course through his race-glass, Ben Davis, "the welsher," who had watched the finish—watched the "Guards' Crack" landed at the distance—muttered, with a mastiff's savage growl:

"He wins, does he? Curse him! The d–d swell—he shan't win long."

CHAPTER IV
LOVE A LA MODE

Life was very pleasant at Royallieu.

It lay in the Melton country, and was equally well placed for Pytchley, Quorn, and Belvoir, besides possessing its own small but very perfect pack of "little ladies," or the "demoiselles," as they were severally nicknamed; the game was closely preserved, pheasants were fed on Indian corn till they were the finest birds in the country, and in the little winding paths of the elder and bilberry coverts thirty first-rate shots, with two loading-men to each, could find flock and feather to amuse them till dinner, with rocketers and warm corners enough to content the most insatiate of knickerbockered gunners. The stud was superb; the cook, a French artist of consummate genius, who had a brougham to his own use and wore diamonds of the first water; in the broad beech-studded grassy lands no lesser thing than doe and deer ever swept through the thick ferns in the sunlight and the shadow; a retinue of powdered servants filled the old halls, and guests of highest degree dined in its stately banqueting room, with its scarlet and gold, its Vandykes and its Vernets, and yet —there was terribly little money at Royallieu with it all. Its present luxury was purchased at the cost of the future, and the parasite of extravagance was constantly sapping, unseen, the

gallant old Norman-planted oak of the family-tree. But then, who thought of that? Nobody. It was the way of the House never to take count of the morrow. True, any one of them would have died a hundred deaths rather than have had one acre of the beautiful green diadem of woods felled by the ax of the timber contractor, or passed to the hands of a stranger; but no one among them ever thought that this was the inevitable end to which they surely drifted with blind and unthinking improvidence. The old Viscount, haughtiest of haughty nobles, would never abate one jot of his accustomed magnificence; and his sons had but imbibed the teaching of all that surrounded them; they did but do in manhood what they had been unconsciously molded to do in boyhood, when they were set to Eton at ten with gold dressing-boxes to grace their Dame's tables, embryo Dukes for their cofags, and tastes that already knew to a nicety the worth of the champagnes at the Christopher. The old, old story—how it repeats itself! Boys grow up amid profuse prodigality, and are launched into a world where they can no more arrest themselves than the feather-weight can pull in the lightning stride of the two-year-old, who defies all check and takes the flat as he chooses. They are brought up like young Dauphins, and tossed into the costly whirl to float as best they can—on nothing. Then, on the lives and deaths that follow; on the graves where a dishonored alien lies forgotten by the dark Austrian lakeside, or under the monastic shadow of some crumbling Spanish crypt; where a red cross chills the lonely traveler in the virgin solitudes of

Amazonian forest aisles, or the wild scarlet creepers of Australia trail over a nameless mound above the trackless stretch of sun-warmed waters—then at them the world "shoots out its lips with scorn." Not on them lies the blame.

A wintry, watery sun was shining on the terraces as Lord Royallieu paced up and down the morning after the Grand Military; his step and limbs excessively enfeebled, but the carriage of his head and the flash of his dark hawk's eyes as proud and untamable as in his earliest years. He never left his own apartments; and no one, save his favorite "little Berk," ever went to him without his desire. He was too sensitive a man to thrust his age and ailing health in among the young leaders of fashion, the wild men of pleasure, the good wits and the good shots of his son's set; he knew very well that his own day was past; that they would have listened to him out of the patience of courtesy, but that they would have wished him away as "no end of a bore." He was too shrewd not to know this; but he was too quickly galled ever to bear to have it recalled to him.

He looked up suddenly and sharply: coming toward him he saw the figure of the Guardsman. For "Beauty" the Viscount had no love; indeed, well-nigh a hatred, for a reason never guessed by others, and never betrayed by him.

Bertie was not like the Royallieu race; he resembled his mother's family. She, a beautiful and fragile creature whom her second son had loved, for the first years of his life, as he would have thought it now impossible that he could love anyone, had

married the Viscount with no affection toward him, while he had adored her with a fierce and jealous passion that her indifference only inflamed. Throughout her married life, however, she had striven to render loyalty and tenderness toward a lord into whose arms she had been thrown, trembling and reluctant; of his wife's fidelity he could not entertain a doubt; though, that he had never won her heart, he could not choose but know. He knew more, too; for she had told it him with a noble candor before he wedded her; knew that the man she did love was a penniless cousin, a cavalry officer, who had made a famous name among the wild mountain tribes of Northern India. This cousin, Alan Bertie—a fearless and chivalrous soldier, fitter for the days of knighthood than for these—had seen Lady Royallieu at Nice, some three years after her marriage; accident had thrown them across each other's path; the old love, stronger, perhaps, now than it had ever been, had made him linger in her presence—had made her shrink from sending him to exile. Evil tongues at last had united their names together; Alan Bertie had left the woman he idolized lest slander should touch her through him, and fallen two years later under the dark dank forests on the desolate moor-side of the hills of Hindostan, where long before he had rendered "Bertie's Horse" the most famous of all the wild Irregulars of the East.

After her death, Lord Royallieu found Alan's miniature among her papers, and recalled those winter months by the Mediterranean till he cherished, with the fierce, eager, self-torture of a jealous nature, doubts and suspicions that, during her

life, one glance from her eyes would have disarmed and abashed. Her second and favorite child bore her family name—her late lover's name; and, in resembling her race, resembled the dead soldier. It was sufficient to make him hate Bertie with a cruel and savage detestation, which he strove indeed to temper, for he was by nature a just man, and, in his better moments, knew that his doubts wronged both the living and the dead; but which colored, too strongly to be dissembled, all his feelings and his actions toward his son, and might both have soured and wounded any temperament less nonchalantly gentle and supremely careless than Cecil's.

As it was, Bertie was sometimes surprised at his father's dislike to him, but never thought much about it, and attributed it, when he did think of it, to the caprices of a tyrannous old man. To be jealous of the favor shown to his boyish brother could never for a moment have come into his imagination. Lady Royallieu with her last words had left the little fellow, a child of three years old, in the affection and the care of Bertie—himself then a boy of twelve or fourteen—and little as he thought of such things now, the trust of his dying mother had never been wholly forgotten.

A heavy gloom came now over the Viscount's still handsome aquiline, saturnine face, as his second son approached up the terrace; Bertie was too like the cavalry soldier whose form he had last seen standing against the rose light of a Mediterranean sunset. The soldier had been dead eight-and-twenty years; but the jealous hate was not dead yet.

Cecile took off his hunting-cap with a courtesy that sat very well on his habitual languid nonchalance; he never called his father anything but "Royal"; rarely saw, still less rarely consulted him, and cared not a straw for his censure or opinion; but he was too thoroughbred by nature to be able to follow the underbred indecorum of the day which makes disrespect to old age the fashion. "You sent for me?" he asked, taking the cigarette out of his mouth.

"No, sir," answered the old lord curtly; "I sent for your brother. The fools can't take even a message right now, it seems."

"Shouldn't have named us so near alike; it's often a bore!" said Bertie.

"I didn't name you, sir; your mother named you," answered his father sharply; the subject irritated him.

"It's of no consequence which!" murmured Cecil, with an expostulatory wave of his cigar. "We're not even asked whether we like to come into the world; we can't expect to be asked what we like to be called in it. Good-day to you, sir."

He turned to move away to the house, but his father stopped him; he knew that he had been discourteous—a far worse crime in Lord Royallieu's eyes than to be heartless.

"So you won the Vase yesterday?" he asked pausing in his walk with his back bowed, but his stern, silver-haired head erect.

"I didn't—the King did."

"That's absurd, sir," said the Viscount, in his resonant and yet melodious voice. "The finest horse in the world may have his

back broke by bad riding, and a screw has won before now when it's been finely handled. The finish was tight, wasn't it?"

"Well—rather. I have ridden closer spins, though. The fallows were light."

Lord Royallieu smiled grimly.

"I know what the Shire 'plow' is like," he said, with a flash of his falcon eyes over the landscape, where, in the days of his youth, he had led the first flight so often; George Rex, and Waterford, and the Berkeleys, and the rest following the rally of his hunting-horn. "You won much in bets?"

"Very fair, thanks."

"And won't be a shilling richer for it this day next week!" retorted the Viscount, with a rasping, grating irony; he could not help darting savage thrusts at this man who looked at him with eyes so cruelly like Alan Bertie's. "You play 5 pound points, and lay 500 pounds on the odd trick, I've heard, at your whist in the Clubs—pretty prices for a younger son!"

"Never bet on the odd trick; spoils the game; makes you sacrifice play to the trick. We always bet on the game," said Cecil, with gentle weariness; the sweetness of his temper was proof against his father's attacks upon his patience.

"No matter what you bet, sir; you live as if you were a Rothschild while you are a beggar!"

"Wish I were a beggar: fellows always have no end in stock, they say; and your tailor can't worry you very much when all you have to think about is an artistic arrangement of tatters!"

murmured Bertie, whose impenetrable serenity was never to be ruffled by his father's bitterness.

"You will soon have your wish, then," retorted the Viscount, with the unprovoked and reasonless passion which he vented on everyone, but on none so much as the son he hated. "You are on a royal road to it. I live out of the world, but I hear from it sir. I hear that there is not a man in the Guards—not even Lord Rockingham—who lives at the rate of imprudence you do; that there is not a man who drives such costly horses, keeps such costly mistresses, games to such desperation, fools gold away with such idiocy as you do. You conduct yourself as if you were a millionaire, sir; and what are you? A pauper on my bounty, and on your brother Montagu's after me—a pauper with a tinsel fashion, a gilded beggary, a Queen's commission to cover a sold-out poverty, a dandy's reputation to stave off a defaulter's future! A pauper, sir—and a Guardsman!"

The coarse and cruel irony flushed out with wicked, scorching malignity; lashing and upbraiding the man who was the victim of his own unwisdom and extravagance.

A slight tinge of color came on his son's face as he heard; but he gave no sign that he was moved, no sign of impatience or anger. He lifted his cap again, not in irony, but with a grave respect in his action that was totally contrary to his whole temperament.

"This sort of talk is very exhausting, very bad style," he said, with his accustomed gentle murmur. "I will bid you good-

morning, my lord."

And he went without another word. Crossing the length of the old-fashioned Elizabethan terrace, little Berk passed him: he motioned the lad toward the Viscount. "Royal wants to see you, young one."

The boy nodded and went onward; and, as Bertie turned to enter the low door that led out to the stables, he saw his father meet the lad—meet him with a smile that changed the whole character of his face, and pleasant, kindly words of affectionate welcome; drawing his arm about Berkeley's shoulder, and looking with pride upon his bright and gracious youth.

More than an old man's preference would be thus won by the young one; a considerable portion of their mother's fortune, so left that it could not be dissipated, yet could be willed to which son the Viscount chose, would go to his brother by this passionate partiality; but there was not a tinge of jealousy in Cecil; whatever else his faults he had no mean ones, and the boy was dear to him, by a quite unconscious, yet unvarying, obedience to his dead mothers' wish.

"Royal hates me as game-birds hate a red dog. Why the deuce, I wonder?" he thought, with a certain slight touch of pain, despite his idle philosophies and devil-may-care indifference. "Well—I am good for nothing, I suppose. Certainly I am not good for much, unless it's riding and making love."

With which summary of his merits, "Beauty," who felt

himself to be a master in those two arts, but thought himself a bad fellow out of them, sauntered away to join the Seraph and the rest of his guests; his father's words pursuing him a little, despite his carelessness, for they had borne an unwelcome measure of truth.

"Royal can hit hard," his thoughts continued. "'A pauper and a Guardsman!' By Jove! It's true enough; but he made me so. They brought me up as if I had a million coming to me, and turned me out among the cracks to take my running with the best of them —and they give me just about what pays my groom's book! Then they wonder that a fellow goes to the Jews. Where the deuce else can he go?"

And Bertie, whom his gains the day before had not much benefited, since his play-debts, his young brother's needs, and the Zu-Zu's insatiate little hands were all stretched ready to devour them without leaving a sovereign for more serious liabilities, went, for it was quite early morning, to act the M. F. H. in his fathers' stead at the meet on the great lawns before the house, for the Royallieu "lady-pack" were very famous in the Shires, and hunted over the same country alternate days with the Quorn. They moved off ere long to draw the Holt Wood, in as open a morning and as strong a scenting wind as ever favored Melton Pink.

A whimper and "gone away!" soon echoed from Beebyside, and the pack, not letting the fox hang a second, dashed after him, making straight for Scraptoft. One of the fastest things up-wind

that hounds ever ran took them straight through the Spinnies, past Hamilton Farm, away beyond Burkby village, and down into the valley of the Wreake without a check, where he broke away, was headed, tried earths, and was pulled down scarce forty minutes from the find. The pack then drew Hungerton foxhole blank, drew Carver's spinnies without a whimper; and lastly, drawing the old familiar Billesden Coplow, had a short, quick burst with a brace of cubs, and returning, settled themselves to a fine dog fox that was raced an hour-and-half, hunted slowly for fifty minutes, raced again another hour-and-quarter, sending all the field to their "second horses"; and after a clipping chase through the cream of the grass country, nearly saved his brush in the twilight when the scent was lost in a rushing hailstorm, but had the "little ladies" laid on again like wildfire, and was killed with the "who-whoop!" ringing far and away over Glenn Gorse, after a glorious run—thirty miles in and out—with pace that tired the best of them.

A better day's sport even the Quorn had never had in all its brilliant annals, and faster things the Melton men themselves had never wanted: both those who love the "quickest thing you ever knew—thirty minutes without a check—such a pace!" and care little whether the finale be "killed" or "broke away," and those of the old fashion, who prefer "long day, you know, steady as old time; the beauties stuck like wax through fourteen parishes, as I live; six hours, if it were a minute; horses dead-beat; positively walked, you know; no end of a day!" but must

have the fatal "who-whoop" as conclusion—both of these, the "new style and the old," could not but be content with the doings of the "demoiselles" from start to finish.

Was it likely that Cecil remembered the caustic lash of his father's ironies while he was lifting Mother of Pearl over the posts and rails, and sweeping on, with the halloo ringing down the wintry wind as the grasslands flew beneath him? Was it likely that he recollected the difficulties that hung above him while he was dashing down the Gorse happy as a king, with the wild hail driving in his face, and a break of stormy sunshine just welcoming the gallant few who were landed at the death, as twilight fell? Was it likely that he could unlearn all the lessons of his life, and realize in how near a neighborhood he stood to ruin when he was drinking Regency sherry out of his gold flask as he crossed the saddle of his second horse, or, smoking, rode slowly homeward; chatting with the Seraph through the leafless, muddy lanes in the gloaming?

Scarcely; it is very easy to remember our difficulties when we are eating and drinking them, so to speak, in bad soups and worse wines in continental impecuniosity; sleeping on them as rough Australian shake-downs, or wearing them perpetually in Californian rags and tatters—it were impossible very well to escape from them then; but it is very hard to remember them when every touch and shape of life is pleasant to us—when everything about us is symbolical and redolent of wealth and ease—when the art of enjoyment is the only one we are called on to

study, and the science of pleasure all we are asked to explore.

It is well-nigh impossible to believe yourself a beggar while you never want sovereigns for whist; and it would be beyond the powers of human nature to conceive your ruin irrevocable while you still eat turbot and terrapin, with a powdered giant behind your chair daily. Up in his garret a poor wretch knows very well what he is, and realizes in stern fact the extremities of the last sou, the last shirt, and the last hope; but in these devil-may-care pleasures—in this pleasant, reckless, velvet-soft rush down-hill—in this club-palace, with every luxury that the heart of man can devise and desire, yours to command at your will—it is hard work, then, to grasp the truth that the crossing sweeper yonder, in the dust of Pall Mall, is really not more utterly in the toils of poverty than you are!

"Beauty" was never, in the whole course of his days, virtually or physically, or even metaphorically, reminded that he was not a millionaire; much less still was he ever reminded so painfully.

Life petted him, pampered him, caressed him, gifted him, though of half his gifts he never made use; lodged him like a prince, dined him like a king, and never recalled to him by a single privation or a single sensation that he was not as rich a man as his brother-in-arms, the Seraph, future Duke of Lyonnesse. How could he then bring himself to understand, as nothing less than truth, the grim and cruel insult his father had flung at him in that brutally bitter phrase—"A Pauper and a Guardsman"? If he had ever been near a comprehension of it, which he never

was, he must have ceased to realize it when—pressed to dine with Lord Guenevere, near whose house the last fox had been killed, while a groom dashed over to Royallieu for his change of clothes—he caught a glimpse, as they passed through the hall, of the ladies taking their preprandial cups of tea in the library, an enchanting group of lace and silks, of delicate hue and scented hair, of blond cheeks and brunette tresses, of dark velvets and gossamer tissue; and when he had changed the scarlet for dinner-dress, went down among them to be the darling of that charmed circle, to be smiled on and coquetted with by those soft, languid aristocrats, to be challenged by the lustrous eyes of his chatelaine and chere amie, to be spoiled as women will spoil the privileged pet of their drawing rooms whom they had made "free of the guild," and endowed with a flirting commission, and acquitted of anything "serious."

He was the recognized darling and permitted property of the young married beauties; the unwedded knew he was hopeless for them, and tacitly left him to the more attractive conquerors, who hardly prized the Seraph so much as they did Bertie, to sit in their barouches and opera boxes, ride and drive and yacht with them, conduct a Boccaccio intrigue through the height of the season, and make them really believe themselves actually in love while they were at the moors or down the Nile, and would have given their diamonds to get a new distraction.

Lady Guenevere was the last of these, his titled and wedded captors; and perhaps the most resistless of all of them. Neither of

them believed very much in their attachment, but both of them wore the masquerade dress to perfection. He had fallen in love with her as much as he ever fell in love, which was just sufficient to amuse him, and never enough to disturb him. He let himself be fascinated, not exerting himself either to resist or advance the affair till he was, perhaps, a little more entangled with her than it was, according to his canons, expedient to be; and they had the most enchanting—friendship.

Nobody was ever so indiscreet as to call it anything else; and my Lord was too deeply absorbed in the Alderney beauties that stood knee-deep in the yellow straw of his farmyard, and the triumphant conquests that he gained over his brother peers' Shorthorns and Suffolks, to trouble his head about Cecil's attendance on his beautiful Countess.

They corresponded in Spanish; they had a thousand charming ciphers; they made the columns of the "Times" and the "Post" play the unconscious role of medium to appointments; they eclipsed all the pages of Calderon's or Congreve's comedies in the ingenuities with which they met, wrote, got invitations together to the same houses, and arranged signals for mute communication: but there was not the slightest occasion for it all. It passed the time, however, and went far to persuade them that they really were in love, and had a mountain of difficulties and dangers to contend with; it added the "spice to the sauce," and gave them the "relish of being forbidden." Besides, an open scandal would have been very shocking to her brilliant ladyship,

and there was nothing on earth, perhaps, of which he would have had a more lively dread than a "scene"; but his present "friendship" was delightful, and presented no such dangers, while his fair "friend" was one of the greatest beauties and the greatest coquettes of her time. Her smile was honor; her fan was a scepter; her face was perfect; and her heart never troubled herself or her lovers; if she had a fault, she was a trifle exacting, but that was not to be wondered at in one so omnipotent, and her chains, after all, were made of roses.

As she sat in the deep ruddy glow of the library fire, with the light flickering on her white brow and her violet velvets; as she floated to the head of her table, with opals shining among her priceless point laces, and some tropical flower with leaves of glistening gold crowning her bronze hair; as she glided down in a waltz along the polished floor, or bent her proud head over ecarte in a musing grace that made her opponent utterly forget to mark the king or even play his cards at all; as she talked in the low music of her voice of European imbrogli, and consols and coupons, for she was a politician and a speculator, or lapsed into a beautifully tinted study of la femme incomprise, when time and scene suited, when the stars were very clear above the terraces without, and the conservatory very solitary, and a touch of Musset or Owen Meredith chimed in well with the light and shade of the oleanders and the brown luster of her own eloquent glance—in all these how superb she was!

And if in truth her bosom only fell with the falling of Shares,

and rose with the rising of Bonds; if her soft shadows were only taken up, like the purple tinting under her lashes, to embellish her beauty; if in her heart of hearts she thought Musset a fool, and wondered why "Lucille" was not written in prose, in her soul far preferring "Le Follet"; why—it did not matter, that I can see. All great ladies gamble in stocks nowadays under the rose, and women are for the most part as cold, clear, hard, and practical as their adorers believe them the contrary; and a femme incomprise is so charming, when she avows herself comprehended by you, that you would never risk spoiling the confidence by hinting a doubt of its truth. If she and Bertie only played at love; if neither believed much in the other; if each trifled with a pretty gossamer soufflet of passion much as they trifled with the soufflets at dinner; if both tried it to trifle away ennui much as they tried staking a Friedrich d'Or at Baden, this light, surface, fashionable, philosophic form of a passion they both laughed at, in its hot and serious follies, suited them admirably. Had it ever mingled a grain of bitterness in her ladyship's Souchong before dinner, or given an aroma of bitterness to her lover's Naples punch in the smoking room, it would have been out of all keeping with themselves and their world.

Nothing on earth is so pleasant as being a little in love; nothing on earth so destructive as being too much so; and as Cecil, in the idle enjoyment of the former gentle luxury, flirted with his liege lady that night; lying back in the softest of lounging-chairs, with his dark, dreamy, handsome eyes looking all the eloquence

in the world, and his head drooped till his mustaches were almost touching her laces, his Queen of Beauty listened with charmed interest, and to look at him he might have been praying after the poet:

> How is it under our control
> To love or not to love?

In real truth he was gently murmuring:

"Such a pity that you missed to-day! Hounds found directly; three of the fastest things I ever knew, one after another; you should have seen the 'little ladies' head him just above the Gorse! Three hares crossed us and a fresh fox; some of the pack broke away after the new scent, but old Bluebell, your pet, held on like death, and most of them kept after her—you had your doubts about Silver Trumpet's shoulders; they're not the thing, perhaps, but she ran beautifully all day, and didn't show a symptom of rioting."

Cecil could, when needed, do the Musset and Meredith style of thing to perfection, but on the whole he preferred love a la mode; it is so much easier and less exhausting to tell your mistress of a ringing run, or a close finish, than to turn perpetual periods on the luster of her eyes, and the eternity of your devotion.

Nor did it at all interfere with the sincerity of his worship that the Zu-Zu was at the prettiest little box in the world, in the neighborhood of Market Harborough, which he had taken for

her, and had been at the meet that day in her little toy trap, with its pair of snowy ponies and its bright blue liveries that drove so desperately through his finances, and had ridden his hunter Maraschino with immense dash and spirit for a young lady who had never done anything but pirouette till the last six months, and a total and headlong disregard of "purlers" very reckless in a white-skinned, bright-eyed, illiterate, avaricious little beauty, whose face was her fortune; and who most assuredly would have been adored no single moment longer, had she scarred her fair, tinted cheek with the blackthorn, or started as a heroine with a broken nose like Fielding's cherished Amelia. The Zu-Zu might rage, might sulk, might even swear all sorts of naughty Mabille oaths, most villainously pronounced, at the ascendancy of her haughty, unapproachable patrician rival—she did do all these things—but Bertie would not have been the consummate tactician, the perfect flirt, the skilled and steeled campaigner in the boudoirs that he was, if he had not been equal to the delicate task of managing both the peeress and the ballet-dancer with inimitable ability; even when they placed him in the seemingly difficult dilemma of meeting them both, with twenty yards between them, on the neutral ground of the gathering to see the Pytchley or the Tailby throw off—a task he had achieved with victorious brilliance more than once already this season.

"You drive a team, Beauty—never drive a team," the Seraph had said on occasion, over a confidential "sherry-peg" in the mornings, meaning by the metaphor of a team Lady

Guenevere, the Zu-Zu, and various other contemporaries in Bertie's affections. "Nothing on earth so dangerous; your leader will bolt, or your off-wheeler will turn sulky, or your young one will passage and make the very deuce of a row; they'll never go quiet till the end, however clever your hand is on the ribbons. Now, I'll drive six-in-hand as soon as any man—drove a ten-hander last year in the Bois—when the team comes out of the stables; but I'm hanged if I'd risk my neck with managing even a pair of women. Have one clean out of the shafts before you trot out another!"

To which salutary advice Cecil only gave a laugh, going on his own ways with the "team" as before, to the despair of his fidus Achates; the Seraph being a quarry so incessantly pursued by dowager-beaters, chaperone-keepers, and the whole hunt of the Matrimonial Pack, with those clever hounds Belle and Fashion ever leading in full cry after him, that he dreaded the sight of a ballroom meet; and, shunning the rich preserves of the Salons, ran to earth persistently in the shady Wood of St. John's, and got—at some little cost and some risk of trapping, it is true, but still efficiently—preserved from all other hunters or poachers by the lawless Robin Hoods aux yeux noirs of those welcome and familiar coverts.

CHAPTER V
UNDER THE KEEPER'S TREE

"You're a lad o' wax, my beauty!" cried Mr. Rake enthusiastically, surveying the hero of the Grand Military with adoring eyes as that celebrity, without a hair turned or a muscle swollen from his exploit, was having a dressing down after a gentle exercise. "You've pulled it off, haven't you? You've cut the work out for 'em! You've shown 'em what a luster is! Strike me a loser, but what a deal there is in blood. The littlest pippin that ever threw a leg across the pigskin knows that in the stables; then why the dickens do the world run against such a plain fact out of it?"

And Rake gazed with worship at the symmetrical limbs of the champion of the "First Life," and plunged into speculation on the democratic tendencies of the age, as clearly contradicted by all the evidences of the flat and furrow, while Forest King drank a dozen go-downs of water, and was rewarded for the patience with which he had subdued his inclination to kick, fret, spring, and break away throughout the dressing by a full feed thrown into his crib, which Rake watched him, with adoring gaze, eat to the very last grain.

"You precious one!" soliloquized that philosopher, who loved the horse with a sort of passion since his victory over the Shires.

"You've won for the gentlemen, my lovely—for your own cracks, my boy!"

And Rake, rendered almost melancholy by his thoughts, went out of the box to get into saddle and ride off on an errand of his master's to the Zu-Zu at her tiny hunting-lodge, where the snow-white ponies made her stud, and where she gave enchanting little hunting-dinners, at which she sang equally enchanting little hunting-songs, and arrayed herself, in the Fontainebleau hunting costume, gold-hilted knife and all, and spent Cecil's winnings for him with a rapidity that threatened to leave very few of them for the London season. She was very pretty, sweetly pretty; with hair that wanted no gold powder, the clearest, sauciest eyes, and the handsomest mouth in the world; but of grammar she had not a notion, of her aspirates she had never a recollection, of conversation she had not an idea; of slang she had, to be sure, a repertoire, but to this was her command of language limited. She dressed perfectly, but she was a vulgar little soul; drank everything, from Bass' ale to rum-punch, and from cherry-brandy to absinthe; thought it the height of wit to stifle you with cayenne slid into your vanilla ice, and the climax of repartee to cram your hat full of peach stones and lobster shells; was thoroughly avaricious, thoroughly insatiate, thoroughly heartless, pillaged with both hands, and then never had enough; had a coarse good nature when it cost her nothing, and was "as jolly as a grig," according to her phraseology, so long as she could stew her pigeons in champagne, drink wines and liqueurs that

were beyond price, take the most dashing trap in the Park up to Flirtation Corner, and laugh and sing and eat Richmond dinners, and show herself at the Opera with Bertie or some other "swell" attached to her, in the very box next to a Duchess.

The Zu-Zu was perfectly happy; and as for the pathetic pictures that novelists and moralists draw, of vice sighing amid turtle and truffles for childish innocence in the cottage at home where honeysuckles blossomed and brown brooks made melody, and passionately grieving on the purple cushions of a barouche for the time of straw pallets and untroubled sleep, why—the Zu-Zu would have vaulted herself on the box-seat of a drag, and told you "to stow all that trash"; her childish recollections were of a stifling lean-to with the odor of pigsty and straw-yard, pork for a feast once a week, starvation all the other six days, kicks, slaps, wrangling, and a general atmosphere of beer and wash-tubs; she hated her past, and loved her cigar on the drag. The Zu-Zu is fact; the moralists' pictures are moonshine.

The Zu-Zu is an openly acknowledged fact, moreover, daily becoming more prominent in the world, more brilliant, more frankly recognized, and more omnipotent. Whether this will ultimately prove for the better or the worse, it would be a bold man who should dare say; there is at least one thing left to desire in it—i. e., that the synonym of "Aspasia," which serves so often to designate in journalistic literature these Free Lances of life, were more suitable in artistic and intellectual similarity, and that, when the Zu-Zu and her sisterhood plunge their white arms

elbow-deep into so many fortunes, and rule the world right and left as they do, they could also sound their H's properly, and knew a little orthography, if they could not be changed into such queens of grace, of intellect, of sovereign mind and splendid wit as were their prototypes when she whose name they debase held her rule in the City of the Violet Crown, and gathered about her Phidias the divine, haughty and eloquent Antipho, the gay Crates, the subtle Protagorus, Cratinus so acrid and yet so jovial, Damon of the silver lyre, and the great poets who are poets for all time. Author and artist, noble and soldier, court the Zu-Zu order now; but it must be confessed that the Hellenic idols were of a more exalted type than are the Hyde Park goddesses!

However, the Zu-Zu was the rage, and spent Bertie's money, when he got any, just as her willful sovereignty fancied, and Rake rode on now with his master's note, bearing no very good will to her; for Rake had very strong prejudices, and none stronger than against these fair pillagers who went about seeking whom they should devour, and laughing at the wholesale ruin they wrought while the sentimentalists babbled in "Social Science" of "pearls lost" and "innocence betrayed."

"A girl that used to eat tripe and red herring in a six-pair pack, and dance for a shilling a night in gauze, coming it so grand that she'll only eat asparagus in March, and drink the best Brands with her truffles! Why, she ain't worth sixpence thrown away on her, unless it's worth while to hear how hard she can swear at you!" averred Rake, in his eloquence; and he was undoubtedly right

for that matter; but then—the Zu-Zu was the rage, and if ever she should be sold up, great ladies would crowd to her sale and buy with eager curiosity at high prices her most trumpery pots of pomatum, her most flimsy gew-gaws of marqueterie!

Rake had seen a good deal of men and manners, and, in his own opinion at least, was "up to every dodge on the cross" that this iniquitous world could unfold. A bright, lithe, animated, vigorous, yellow-haired, and sturdy fellow; seemingly with a dash of the Celt in him that made him vivacious and peppery; Mr. Rake polished his wits quite as much as he polished the tops, and considered himself a philosopher. Of whose son he was he had not the remotest idea; his earliest recollections were of the tender mercies of the workhouse; but even that chill foster-mother, the parish, had not damaged the liveliness of his temper or the independence of his opinions, and as soon as he was fifteen Rake had run away and joined a circus; distinguishing himself there by his genius for standing on his head and tying his limbs into a porter's knot.

From the circus he migrated successively into the shape of a comic singer, a tapster, a navvy, a bill-sticker, a guacho in Mexico (working his passage out), a fireman in New York, a ventriloquist in Maryland, a vaquero in Spanish California, a lemonade seller in San Francisco, a revolutionist in the Argentine (without the most distant idea what he fought for), a boatman on the bay of Mapiri, a blacksmith in Santarem, a trapper in the Wilderness, and finally, working his passage home again,

took the Queen's shilling in Dublin, and was drafted into a light-cavalry regiment. With the —th he served half a dozen years in India; a rough-rider, a splendid fellow in a charge or a pursuit, with an astonishing power over horses, and the clearest back-handed sweep of a saber that ever cut down a knot of natives; but —insubordinate. Do his duty whenever fighting was in question, he did most zealously; but to kick over the traces at other times was a temptation that at last became too strong for that lawless lover of liberty.

From the moment that he joined the regiment a certain Corporal Warne and he had conceived an antipathy to one another, which Rake had to control as he might, and which the Corporal was not above indulging in every petty piece of tyranny that his rank allowed him to exercise. On active service Rake was, by instinct, too good a soldier not to manage to keep the curb on himself tolerably well though he was always regarded in his troop rather as a hound that will "riot" is regarded in the pack; but when the —th came back to Brighton and to barracks, the evil spirit of rebellion began to get a little hotter in him under th Corporal's "Idees Napoliennes" of justifiable persecution. Warne indisputably provoked his man in a cold, iron, strictly lawful sort of manner, moreover, all the more irritating to a temper like Rake's.

"Hanged if I care how the officers come it over me; they're gentlemen, and it don't try a fellow," would Rake say in confidential moments over purl and a penn'orth of bird's-eye,

his experience in the Argentine Republic having left him with strongly aristocratic prejudices; "but when it comes to a duffer like that, that knows no better than me, what ain't a bit better than me, and what is as clumsy a duffer about a horse's plates as ever I knew, and would almost let a young 'un buck him out of his saddle—why, then I do cut up rough, I ain't denying it; and I don't see what there is in his Stripes to give him such a license to be aggravating."

With which Rake would blow the froth off his pewter with a puff of concentrated wrath, and an oath against his non-commissioned officers that might have let some light in upon the advocates for "promotion from the ranks," had they been there to take the lesson. At last, in the leisure of Brighton, the storm broke. Rake had a Scotch hound that was the pride of his life; his beer-money often going instead to buy dainties for the dog, who became one of the channels through which Warne could annoy and thwart him. The dog did no harm, being a fine, well-bred deerhound; but it pleased the Corporal to consider that it did, simply because it belonged to Rake, whose popularity in the corps, owing to his good nature, his good spirits, and his innumerable tales of American experience and amorous adventures, increased the jealous dislike which his knack with an unbroken colt and his abundant stable science had first raised in his superior.

One day in the chargers' stables the hound ran out of a loose box with a rush to get at Rake, and upset a pailful of warm

mash. The Corporal, who was standing by in harness, hit him over the head with a heavy whip he had in his hand; infuriated by the pain, the dog flew at him, tearing his overalls with a fierce crunch of his teeth. "Take the brute off, and string him up with a halter; I've put up with him too long!" cried Warne to a couple of privates working near in their stable dress. Before the words were out of his mouth Rake threw himself on him with a bound like lightning, and, wrenching the whip out of his hands, struck him a slashing, stinging blow across his face.

"Hang my hound, you cur! If you touch a hair of him, I'll double-thong you within an inch of your life!"

And assuredly he would have kept his word, had he not been made a prisoner and marched off to the guardroom.

Rake learned the stern necessity of the law, which, for the sake of morale, must make the soldiers, whose blood is wanted to be like fire on the field, patient, pulseless, and enduring of every provocation, cruelty, and insolence in the camp and barrack, as though they were statues of stone—a needful law, a wise law, an indispensable law, doubtless, but a very hard law to be obeyed by a man full of life and all life's passions.

At the court-martial on his mutinous conduct, which followed, many witnesses brought evidence, on being pressed, to the unpopularity of Warne in the regiment and to his harshness and his tyranny to Rake. Many men spoke out what had been chained down in their thoughts for years; and, in consideration of the provocation received, the prisoner, who was much liked

by the officers, was condemned to six months' imprisonment for his insubordination and blow to his superior officer, without being tied up to the triangles. At the court-martial, Cecil, who chanced to be in Brighton after Goodwood, was present one day with some other Guardsmen; and the look of Rake, with his cheerfulness under difficulties, his love for the hound, and his bright, sunburnt, shrewd, humorous countenance, took his fancy.

"Beauty" was the essence of good nature. Indolent himself, he hated to see anything or anybody worried; lazy, gentle, wayward, and spoilt by his own world, he was still never so selfish and philosophic as he pretended but what he would do a kindness, if one came in his way; it is not a very great virtue, perhaps, but it is a rare one.

"Poor devil! Struck the other because he wouldn't have his dog hanged. Well, on my word, I should have done the same in his place, if I could have got up the pace for so much exertion," murmured Cecil to his cheroot, careless of the demoralizing tendency of his remarks for the army in general. Had it occurred in the Guards, and he had "sat" on the case, Rake would have had one very lenient judge.

As it was, Bertie actually went the lengths of thinking seriously about the matter; he liked Rake's devotion to his dumb friend, and he heard of his intense popularity in his troop; he wished to save, if he could, so fine a fellow from the risks of his turbulent passion and from the stern fetters of a trying discipline; hence, when Rake found himself condemned to his cell, he had

a message sent him by Bertie's groom that, when his term of punishment should be over, Mr. Cecil would buy his discharge from the service and engage him as extra body-servant, having had a good account of his capabilities; he had taken the hound to his own kennels.

Now, the fellow had been thoroughly devil-may-care throughout the whole course of the proceedings, had heard his sentence with sublime impudence, and had chaffed his sentinels with an utterly reckless nonchalance; but somehow or other, when that message reached him, a vivid sense that he was a condemned and disgraced man suddenly flooded in on him; a passionate gratitude seized him to the young aristocrat who had thought of him in his destitution and condemnation, who had even thought of his dog; and Rake the philosophic and undauntable, could have found it in his heart to kneel down in the dust and kiss the stirrup-leather when he held it for his new master, so strong was the loyalty he bore from that moment to Bertie.

Martinets were scandalized at a Life-Guardsman taking as his private valet a man who had been guilty of such conduct in the Light Cavalry; but Cecil never troubled his head about what people said; and so invaluable did Rake speedily become to him that he had kept him about his person wherever he went from then until now, two years after.

Rake loved his master with a fidelity very rare in these days; he loved his horses, his dogs, everything that was his, down to his

very rifle and boots; slaved for him cheerfully, and was as proud of the deer he stalked, of the brace he bagged, of his winnings when the Household played the Zingari, or his victory when his yacht won the Cherbourg Cup, as though those successes had been Rake's own.

"My dear Seraph," said Cecil himself once, on this point, to the Marquis, "if you want generosity, fidelity, and all the rest of the cardinal what-d'ye-call-'ems—sins, ain't it?—go to a noble-hearted Scamp; he'll stick to you till he kills himself. If you want to be cheated, get a Respectable Immaculate; he'll swindle you piously, and decamp with your Doncaster Vase."

And Rake, who assuredly had been an out-and-out scamp, made good Bertie's creed; he "stuck to him" devoutly, and no terrier was ever more alive to an otter than he was to the Guardsman's interests. It was that very vigilance which made him, as he rode back from the Zu-Zu's in the twilight, notice what would have escaped any save one who had been practiced as a trapper in the red Canadian woods; namely, the head of a man, almost hidden among the heavy, though leafless, brushwood and the yellow gorse of a spinney which lay on his left in Royallieu Park. Rake's eyes were telescopic and microscopic; moreover, they had been trained to know such little signs as a marsh from a hen harrier in full flight, by the length of wing and tail, and a widgeon or a coot from a mallard or a teal, by the depth each swam out of the water. Gray and foggy as it was, and high as was the gorse, Rake recognized his born-foe Willon.

"What's he up to there?" thought Rake, surveying the place, which was wild, solitary, and an unlikely place enough for a head groom to be found in. "If he ain't a rascal, I never seen one; it's my belief he cheats the stable thick and thin, and gets on Mr. Cecil's mounts to a good tune—aye, and would nobble 'em as soon as not, if it just suited his book. That blessed King hates the man; how he lashes his heels at him!"

It was certainly possible that Willon might be passing an idle hour in potting rabbits, or be otherwise innocently engaged enough; but the sight of him, there among the gorse, was a sight of suspicion to Rake. Instantaneous thoughts darted through his mind of tethering his horse, and making a reconnaissance, safely and unseen, with the science of stalking brute or man that he had learned of his friends the Sioux. But second thoughts showed him that was impossible. The horse he was on was a mere colt, just breaking in, who had barely had so much as a "dumb jockey" on his back; and stand for a second, the colt would not.

"At any rate, I'll unearth him," thought Rake, with his latent animosity to the head groom and his vigilant loyalty to Cecil overruling any scruple as to his right to overlook his foe's movements; and with a gallop that was muffled on the heathered turf he dashed straight at the covert, unperceived till he was within ten paces. Willon started and looked up hastily; he was talking to a square-built man very quietly dressed in shepherd's plaid, chiefly remarkable by a red-hued beard and whiskers.

The groom turned pale, and laughed nervously as Rake pulled

up with a jerk.

"You on that young 'un again? Take care you don't get bucked out o' saddle in the shape of a cocked-hat."

"I ain't afraid of going to grass, if you are!" retorted Rake scornfully; boldness was not his enemy's strong point. "Who's your pal, old fellow?"

"A cousin o' mine, out o' Yorkshire," vouchsafed Mr. Willon, looking anything but easy, while the cousin aforesaid nodded sulkily on the introduction.

"Ah! looks like a Yorkshire tyke," muttered Rake, with a volume of meaning condensed in these innocent words. "A nice, dry, cheerful sort of place to meet your cousin in, too; uncommon lively; hope it'll raise his spirits to see all his cousins a-grinning there; his spirits don't seem much in sorts now," continued the ruthless inquisitor, with a glance at the "keeper's tree" by which they stood, in the middle of dank undergrowth, whose branches were adorned with dead cats, curs, owls, kestrels, stoats, weasels, and martens. To what issue the passage of arms might have come it is impossible to say, for at that moment the colt took matters into his own hands, and bolted with a rush that even Rake could not pull in till he had had a mile-long "pipe-opener."

"Something up there," thought that sagacious rough-rider; "if that red-haired chap ain't a rum lot, I'll eat him. I've seen his face, too, somewhere; where the deuce was it? Cousin; yes, cousins in Queer Street, I dare say! Why should he go and meet his 'cousin' out in the fog there, when, if you took twenty cousins home to the

servants' hall, nobody'd ever say anything? If that Willon ain't as deep as Old Harry–"

And Rake rode into the stable-yard, thoughtful and intensely suspicious of the rendezvous under the keeper's tree in the outlying coverts. He would have been more so had he guessed that Ben Davis' red beard and demure attire, with other as efficient disguises, had prevented even his own keen eyes from penetrating the identity of Willon's "Cousin" with the welsher he had seen thrust off the course the day before by his master.

CHAPTER VI
THE END OF A RINGING RUN

"Tally-ho! is the word, clap spurs and let's follow. The world has no charm like a rattling view-halloa!"

Is hardly to be denied by anybody in this land of fast bursts and gallant M. F. H.'s, whether they "ride to hunt," or "hunt to ride," in the immortal distinction of Assheton Smith's old whip; the latter class, by the bye, becoming far and away the larger, in these days of rattling gallops and desperate breathers. Who cares to patter after a sly old dog fox, that, fat and wary, leads the pack a tedious, interminable wind, in and out through gorse and spinney, bricks himself up in a drain, and takes an hour to be dug out, dodges about till twilight, and makes the hounds pick the scent slowly and wretchedly over marsh and through water? Who would not give fifty guineas a second for the glorious thirty minutes of racing that show steam and steel over fence and fallow in a clipping rush, without a check from find to finish? So be it ever! The riding that graces the Shires, that makes Tedworth and Pytchley, the Duke's and the Fitzwilliam's, household words and "names beloved"—that fills Melton and Market Harborough, and makes the best flirts of the ballroom gallop fifteen miles to covert, careless of hail or rain, mire or slush, mist or cold, so long as it is a fine scenting wind—is the same riding that sent

the Six Hundred down in to the blaze of the Muscovite guns; that in our fathers' days gave to Grant's Hussars their swoop, like eagles, on to the rearguard at Morales, and that, in the grand old East and the rich trackless West, makes exiled campaigners with high English names seek and win an aristeia of their own at the head of their wild Irregular Horse, who would charge hell itself at their bidding.

Now in all the service there was not a man who loved hunting better than Bertie. Though he was incorrigibly lazy, and inconceivably effeminate in every one of his habits; though he suggested a portable lounging-chair as an improvement at battues, so that you might shoot sitting; drove to every breakfast and garden party in the season in his brougham with the blinds down lest a grain of dust should touch him; thought a waltz too exhaustive, and a saunter down Pall Mall too tiring, and asked to have the end of a novel told him in the clubs, because it was too much trouble to read on a warm day; though he was more indolent than any spoiled Creole—"Beauty" never failed to head the first flight, and adored a hard day cross country, with an east wind in his eyes and the sleet in his teeth. The only trouble was to make him get up in time for it.

"Mr. Cecil, sir; if you please, the drag will be round in ten minutes," said Rake, with a dash of desperation for the seventh time into his chamber, one fine scenting morning.

"I don't please," answered Cecil sleepily, finishing his cup of coffee, and reading a novel of La Demirep's.

"The other gentlemen are all down, sir, and you will be too late."

"Not a bit. They must wait for me," yawned Bertie.

Crash came the Seraph's thunder on the panels of the door, and a strong volume of Turkish through the keyhole: "Beauty, Beauty, are you dead?"

"Now, what an inconsequent question!" expostulated Cecil, with appealing rebuke. "If a fellow were dead, how the devil could he say he was? Do be logical, Seraph."

"Get up!" cried the Seraph with a deafening rataplan, and a final dash of his colossal stature into the chamber. "We've all done breakfast; the traps are coming round; you'll be an hour behind time at the meet."

Bertie lifted his eyes with plaintive resignation from the Demirep's yellow-papered romance.

"I'm really in an interesting chapter: Aglae has just had a marquis kill his son, and two brothers kill each other in the Bois, about her, and is on the point of discovering a man she's in love with to be her own grandfather; the complication is absolutely thrilling," murmured Beauty, whom nothing could ever "thrill"—not even plunging down the Matterhorn, losing "long odds in thou'" over the Oaks, or being sunned in the eyes of the fairest woman of Europe.

The Seraph laughed, and tossed the volume straight to the other end of the chamber.

"Confound you, Beauty; get up!"

"Never swear, Seraph; not ever so mildly," yawned Cecil, "it's gone out, you know; only the cads and the clergy can damn one nowadays; it's such bad style to be so impulsive. Look! You have broken the back of my Demirep!"

"You deserve to break the King's back over the first cropper," laughed the Seraph. "Do get up!"

"Bother!" sighed the victim, raising himself with reluctance, while the Seraph disappeared in a cloud of Turkish.

Neither Bertie's indolence nor his insouciance was assumed; utter carelessness was his nature, utter impassability was his habit, and he was truly for the moment loath to leave his bed, his coffee, and his novel; he must have his leg over the saddle, and feel the strain on his arms of that "pulling" pace with which the King always went when once he settled into his stride, before he would really think about winning.

The hunting breakfasts of our forefathers and of our present squires found no favor with Bertie; a slice of game and a glass of Curacoa were all he kept the drag waiting to swallow; and the four bays going at a pelting pace, he and the rest of the Household who were gathered at Royallieu were by good luck in time for the throw-off of the Quorn, where the hero o' the Blue Ribbon was dancing impatiently under Willon's hand, scenting the fresh, keen, sunny air, and knowing as well what all those bits of scarlet straying in through field and lane, gate and gap, meant, as well as though the merry notes of the master's horn were winding over the gorse. The meet was brilliant and very large; showing such a

gathering as only the Melton country can; and foremost among the crowd of carriages, hacks, and hunters, were the beautiful roan mare Vivandiere of the Lady Guenevere, mounted by that exquisite peeress in her violet habit and her tiny velvet hat; and the pony equipage of the Zu-Zu, all glittering with azure and silver, leopard rugs, and snowy reins: the breadth of half an acre of grassland was between them, but the groups of men about them were tolerably equal for number and for rank.

"Take Zu-Zu off my hands for this morning, Seraph; there's a good fellow," murmured Cecil, as he swung himself into saddle. The Seraph gave a leonine growl, sighed, and acquiesced. He detested women in the hunting-field, but that sweetest tempered giant of the Brigades never refused anything to anybody—much less to "Beauty."

To an uninitiated mind it would have seemed marvelous and beautiful in its combination of simplicity and intricacy, to have noted the delicate tactics with which Bertie conducted himself between his two claimants—bending to his Countess with a reverent devotion that assuaged whatever of incensed perception of her unacknowledged rival might be silently lurking in her proud heart; wheeling up to the pony-trap under cover of speaking to the men from Egerton Lodge, and restoring the Zu-Zu from sulkiness, by a propitiatory offer of a little gold sherry-flash, studded with turquoises, just ordered for her from Regent Street, which, however, she ungraciously contemned, because she thought it had only cost twenty guineas; anchoring

the victimized Seraph beside her by an adroit "Ah! by the way, Rock, give Zu-Zu one of your rose-scented papelitos; she's been wild to smoke them"; and leaving the Zu-Zu content at securing a future Duke, was free to canter back and flirt on the offside of Vivandiere, till the "signal," the "cast," made with consummate craft, the waving of the white sterns among the brushwood, the tightening of girths, the throwing away of cigars, the challenge, the whimper, and the "stole away!" sent the field headlong down the course after as fine a long-legged greyhound fox as ever carried a brush.

Away he went in a rattling spin, breaking straight at once for the open, the hounds on the scent like mad: with a tally-ho that thundered through the cloudless, crisp, cold, glittering noon, the field dashed off pell-mell; the violet habit of her ladyship, and the azure skirts of the Zu-Zu foremost of all in the rush through the spinneys while Cecil on the King, and the Seraph on a magnificent white weight-carrier, as thoroughbred and colossal as himself, led the way with them. The scent was hot as death in the spinneys, and the pack raced till nothing but a good one could live with them; few but good ones, however, were to be found with the Quorn, and the field held together superbly over the first fence, and on across the grassland, the game old fox giving no sign of going to covert, but running straight as a crow flies, while the pace grew terrific.

"Beats cock-fighting!" cried the Zu-Zu, while her blue skirts fluttered in the wind, as she lifted Cecil's brown mare, very

cleverly, over a bilberry hedge, and set her little white teeth with a will on the Seraph's attar-of-rose cigarette. Lady Guenevere heard the words as Vivandiere rose in the air with the light bound of a roe, and a slight superb dash of scorn came into her haughty eyes for the moment; she never seemed to know that "that person" in the azure habit even existed, but the contempt awoke in her, and shone in her glance, while she rode on as that fair leader of the Belvoir and Pytchley alone could ride over the fallows.

The steam was on at full pressure, the hounds held close to his brush,—heads up, sterns down,—running still straight as an arrow over the open, past coppice and covert, through gorse and spinney, without a sign of the fox making for shelter. Fence and double, hedge and brook, soon scattered the field; straying off far and wide, and coming to grief with lots of "downers," it grew select, and few but the crack men could keep the hounds in view. "Catch 'em who can," was the one mot d'ordre, for they were literally racing; the line-hunters never losing the scent a second, as the fox, taking to dodging, made all the trouble he could for them through the rides of the woods. Their working was magnificent, and, heading him, they ran him round and round in a ring, viewed him for a second, and drove him out of covert once more into the pastures, while they laid on at a hotter scent and flew after him like staghounds.

Only half a dozen were up with them now; the pace was tremendous, though all over grass; here a flight of posts and rails

tried the muscle of the boldest; there a bullfinch yawned behind the blackthorn; here a big fence towered; there a brook rushed angrily among its rushes; while the keen, easterly wind blew over the meadows, and the pack streamed along like the white trail of a plume. Cecil "showed the way" with the self-same stride and the self-same fencing as had won him the Vase. Lady Guenevere and the Seraph were running almost even with him; three of the Household farther down; the Zu-Zu and some Melton men two meadows off; the rest of the field, nowhere. Fifty-two minutes had gone by in that splendid running, without a single check, while the fox raced as gamely and as fast as at the find; the speed was like lightning past the brown woods, the dark-green pine plantations, the hedges, bright with scarlet berries; through the green low-lying grasslands, and the winding drives of coverts, and the boles of ash-hued beech trunks, whose roots the violets were just purpling with their blossom; while far away stretched the blue haze of the distance, and above-head a flight of rooks cawed merrily in the bright air, soon left far off as the pack swept onward in the most brilliant thing of the hunting year.

"Water! Take care!" cried Cecil, with a warning wave of his hand as the hounds, with a splash like a torrent, dashed up to their necks in a broad, brawling brook that Reynard had swam in first-rate style, and struggled as best they could after him. It was an awkward bit, with bad taking-off and a villainous mud-bank for landing; and the water, thickened and swollen with recent rains, had made all the land that sloped to it miry and

soft as sponge. It was the risk of life and limb to try it; but all who still viewed the hounds, catching Bertie's shout of warning, worked their horses up for it, and charged toward it as hotly as troops charge a square. Forest King was over like a bird; the winner of the Grand Military was not to be daunted by all the puny streams of the Shires; the artistic riding of the Countess landed Vivandiere, with a beautiful clear spring, after him by a couple of lengths: the Seraph's handsome white hunter, brought up at a headlong gallop with characteristic careless dash and fine science mingled, cleared it; but, falling with a mighty crash, gave him a purler on the opposite side, and was within an inch of striking him dead with his hoof in frantic struggles to recover. The Seraph, however, was on his legs with a rapidity marvelous in a six-foot-three son of Anak, picked up the horse, threw himself into saddle, and dashed off again quick as lightning, with his scarlet stained all over, and his long fair mustaches floating in the wind. The Zu-Zu turned Mother of Pearl back with a fiery French oath; she hated to be "cut down," but she liked still less to risk her neck; and two of the Household were already treated to "crackers" that disabled them for the day, while one Melton man was pitched head foremost into the brook, and another was sitting dolorously on the bank with his horse's head in his lap, and the poor brute's spine broken. There were only three of the first riders in England now alone with the hounds, who, with a cold scent as the fox led them through the angular corner of a thick pheasant covert, stuck like wax to the line, and working him

out, viewed him once more, for one wild, breathless, tantalizing second; and through the straggling street of a little hamlet, and got him out again on the level pasture and across a fine line of hunting country, with the leafless woods and the low gates of a park far away to their westward.

"A guinea to a shilling that we kill him," cried the flute-voice of her brilliant ladyship, as she ran a moment side by side with Forest King, and flashed her rich eyes on his rider; she had scorned the Zu-Zu, but on occasion she would use betting slang and racing slang with the daintiest grace in the world herself, without their polluting her lips. As though the old fox heard the wager, he swept in a bend round toward the woods on the right; making, with all the craft and speed there were in him, for the deep shelter of the boxwood and laurel. "After him, my beauties, my beauties—if he run there he'll go to ground and save his brush!" thundered the Seraph, as though he were hunting his own hounds at Lyonnesse, who knew every tone of his rich clarion notes as well as they knew every wind of his horn. But the young ones of the pack saw Reynard's move and his meaning as quickly as he did; having run fast before, they flew now; the pace was terrific. Two fences were crossed as though they were paper; the meadows raced with lightning speed, a ha-ha leaped, a gate cleared with a crashing jump, and in all the furious excitement of "view," they tore down the mile-long length of an avenue, dashed into a flower garden, and smashing through a gay trellis-work of scarlet creeper, plunged into the home-paddock and killed with

as loud a shout ringing over the country in the bright, sunny day as ever was echoed by the ringing cheers of the Shire; Cecil, the Seraph, and her victorious ladyship alone coming in for the glories of the "finish."

"Never had a faster seventy minutes up-wind," said Lady Guenevere, looking at the tiny jeweled watch, the size of a sixpence, that was set in the handle of her whip, as the brush, with all the compliments customary, was handed to her. She had won twenty before.

The park so unceremoniously entered belonged to a baronet, who, though he hunted little himself, honored the sport and scorned a vulpecide, he came out naturally and begged them to lunch. Lady Guenevere refused to dismount, but consented to take a biscuit and a little Lafitte, while clarets, liqueurs, and ales, with anything else they wanted, were brought to her companions. The stragglers strayed in; the M. F. H. came up just too late; the men, getting down, gathered about the Countess or lounged on the gray stone steps of the Elizabethan house. The sun shone brightly on the oriole casements, the antique gables, the twisted chimneys, all covered with crimson parasites and trailing ivy; the horses, the scarlet, the pack in the paddock adjacent, the shrubberies of laurel and araucaria, the sun-tinted terraces, made a bright and picturesque grouping. Bertie, with his hand on Vivandiere's pommel, after taking a deep draught of sparkling Rhenish, looked on at it all with a pleasant sigh of amusement.

"By Jove!" he murmured softly, with a contented smile about

his lips, "that was a ringing run!"

At that very moment, as the words were spoken, a groom approached him hastily; his young brother, whom he had scarcely seen since the find, had been thrown and taken home on a hurdle; the injuries were rumored to be serious.

Bertie's smile faded, he looked very grave; world-spoiled as he was, reckless in everything, and egotist though he had long been by profession, he loved the lad.

When he entered the darkened room, with its faint chloroform odor, the boy lay like one dead, his bright hair scattered on the pillow, his chest bare, and his right arm broken and splintered. The deathlike coma was but the result of the chloroform; but Cecil never stayed to ask or remember that; he was by the couch in a single stride, and dropped down by it, his head bent on his arms.

"It was my fault. I should have looked to him."

The words were very low; he hated that any should see he could still be such a fool as to feel. A minute, and he conquered himself; he rose, and with his hand on the boy's fair tumbled curls, turned calmly to the medical men who, attached to the household, had been on the spot at once.

"What is the matter?"

"Fractured arm, contusion; nothing serious, nothing at all, at his age," replied the surgeon. "When he wakes out of the lethargy he will tell you so himself, Mr. Cecil."

"You are certain?"—do what he would his voice shook a little;

his hand had not shaken, two days before, when nothing less than ruin or ransom had hung on his losing or winning the race.

"Perfectly certain," answered the surgeon cheerfully. "He is not overstrong, to be sure, but the contusions are slight; he will be out of that bed in a fortnight."

"How did he fall?"

But while they told him he scarcely heard; he was looking at the handsome Antinous-like form of the lad as it lay stretched helpless and stricken before him; and he was remembering the death-bed of their mother, when the only voice he had ever reverenced had whispered, as she pointed to the little child of three summers: "When you are a man take care of him, Bertie." How had he fulfilled the injunction? Into how much brilliantly tinted evil had he not led him—by example, at least?

The surgeon touched his arm apologetically, after a lengthened silence:

"Your brother will be best unexcited when he comes to himself, sir; look—his eyes are unclosing now. Could you do me the favor to go to his lordship? His grief made him perfectly wild—so dangerous to his life at his age. We could only persuade him to retire, a few minutes ago, on the plea of Mr. Berkeley's safety. If you could see him–"

Cecil went, mechanically almost, and with a grave, weary depression on him; he was so unaccustomed to think at all, so utterly unaccustomed to think painfully, that he scarcely knew what ailed him. Had he had his old tact about him, he would have

known how worse than useless it would be for him to seek his father in such a moment.

Lord Royallieu was lying back exhausted as Cecil opened the door of his private apartments, heavily darkened and heavily perfumed; at the turn of the lock he started up eagerly.

"What news of him?"

"Good news, I hope," said Cecil gently, as he came forward. "The injuries are not grave, they tell me. I am so sorry that I never watched his fencing, but—"

The old man had not recognized him till he heard his voice, and he waved him off with a fierce, contemptuous gesture; the grief for his favorite's danger, the wild terrors that his fears had conjured up, his almost frantic agony at the sight of the accident, had lashed him into passion well-nigh delirious.

"Out of my sight, sir," he said fiercely, his mellow tones quivering with rage. "I wish to God you had been dead in a ditch before a hair of my boy's had been touched. You live, and he lies dying there!"

Cecil bowed in silence; the brutality of the words wounded, but they did not offend him, for he knew his father was in that moment scarce better than a maniac, and he was touched with the haggard misery upon the old Peer's face.

"Out of my sight, sir," re-echoed Lord Royallieu as he strode forward, passion lending vigor to his emaciated frame, while the dignity of his grand carriage blent with the furious force of his infuriated blindness. "If you had had the heart of a man, you

would have saved such a child as that from his peril; warned him, watched him, succored him at least when he fell. Instead of that, you ride on and leave him to die, if death comes to him! You are safe, you are always safe. You try to kill yourself with every vice under heaven, and only get more strength, more grace, more pleasure from it—you are always safe because I hate you. Yes! I hate you, sir!"

No words can give the force, the malignity, the concentrated meaning with which the words were hurled out, as the majestic form of the old Lord towered in the shadow, with his hands outstretched as if in imprecation.

Cecil heard him in silence, doubting if he could hear aright, while the bitter phrases scathed and cut like scourges, but he bowed once more with the manner that was as inseparable from him as his nature.

"Hate is so exhausting; I regret I give you the trouble of it. May I ask why you favor me with it?"

"You may!" thundered his father, while his hawk's eyes flashed their glittering fire. "You are like the man I cursed living and curse dead. You look at me with Alan Bertie's eyes, you speak to me with Alan Bertie's voice; I loved your mother, I worshiped her; but—you are his son, not mine!"

The secret doubt, treasured so long, was told at last. The blood flushed Bertie's face a deep and burning scarlet; he started with an irrepressible tremor, like a man struck with a shot; he felt like one suddenly stabbed in the dark by a sure and a cruel hand.

The insult and the amazement of the words seemed to paralyze him for the moment, the next he recovered himself, and lifted his head with as haughty a gesture as his father's, his features perfectly composed again, and sterner than in all his careless, easy life they ever yet had looked.

"You lie, and you know you lie. My mother was pure as the angels. Henceforth you can be only to me a slanderer who has dared to taint the one name holy in my sight."

And without another word, he turned and went out of the chamber. Yet, as the door closed, old habit was so strong on him that, even in his hot and bitter pain, and his bewildered sense of sudden outrage, he almost smiled at himself. "It is a mania; he does not know what he says," he thought. "How could I be so melodramatic? We were like two men at the Porte St. Martin. Inflated language is such bad form!"

But the cruel stroke had not struck the less closely home, and gentle though his nature was, beyond all forgiveness from him was the dishonor of his mother's memory.

CHAPTER VII
AFTER A RICHMOND DINNER

It was the height of the season, and the duties of the Household were proportionately and insupportably heavy. The Brigades were fairly worked to death, and the Indian service, in the heat of the Afghan war, was never more onerous than the campaigns that claimed the Guards from Derby to Ducal.

Escorts to Levees, guards of honor to Drawing rooms, or field-days in the Park and the Scrubs, were but the least portion of it. Far more severe, and still less to be shirked, were the morning exercise in the Ride; the daily parade in the Lady's Mile; the reconnaissances from club windows, the vedettes at Flirtation Corner; the long campaigns at mess-breakfasts, with the study of dice and baccarat tactics, and the fortifications of Strasburg pate against the invasions of Chartreuse and Chambertin; the breathless, steady charges of Belgravian staircases when a fashionable drum beat the rataplan; the skirmishes with sharpshooters of the bright-eyed Irregular Lancers; the foraging duty when fair commanders wanted ices or strawberries at garden parties; the ball-practice at Hornsey Handicaps; the terrible risk of crossing the enemy's lines, and being made to surrender as prisoners of war at the jails of St. George's, or of St. Paul's, Knightsbridge; the constant inspections

of the Flying Battalions of the Ballet, and the pickets afterward in the Wood of St. John; the anxieties of the Club commissariats, and the close vigilance over the mess wines; the fatigue duty of ballrooms, and the continual unharnessing consequent on the clause in the Regulations never to wear the same gloves twice; all these, without counting the close battles of the Corner and the unremitting requirements of the Turf, worked the First Life and the rest of the Brigades, Horse and Foot, so hard and incessantly that some almost thought of changing into the dreary depot of St. Stephen's; and one mutinous Coldstreamer was even rash enough and false enough to his colors to meditate deserting to the enemy's camp, and giving himself up at St. George's—"because a fellow once hanged is let alone, you know!"

The Household were very hard pressed through the season—a crowded and brilliant one; and Cecil was in request most of all. Bertie, somehow or other, was the fashion—marvelous and indefinable word, that gives a more powerful crown than thrones, blood, beauty, or intellect can ever bestow. And no list was "the thing" without his name; no reception, no garden party, no opera-box, or private concert, or rose-shadowed boudoir, fashionably affiche without being visited by him. How he, in especial, had got his reputation it would have been hard to say, unless it were that he dressed a shade more perfectly than anyone, and with such inimitable carelessness in the perfection, too, and had an almost unattainable matchlessness in the sangfroid of his soft, languid insolence, and incredible, though ever gentle, effrontery.

However gained, he had it; and his beautiful hack Sahara, his mail-phaeton with two blood grays dancing in impatience over the stones, or his little dark-green brougham for night-work, were, one or another of them, always seen from two in the day till four or five in the dawn about the park or the town.

And yet this season, while he made a prima donna by a bravissima, introduced a new tie by an evening's wear, gave a cook the cordon with his praise, and rendered a fresh-invented liqueur the rage by his recommendation, Bertie knew very well that he was ruined.

The breach between his father and himself was irrevocable. He had left Royallieu as soon as his guests had quitted it and young Berkeley was out of all danger. He had long known he could look for no help from the old lord, or from his elder brother, the heir; and now every chance of it was hopelessly closed; nothing but the whim or the will of those who held his floating paper, and the tradesmen who had his name on their books at compound interest of the heaviest, stood between him and the fatal hour when he must "send in his papers to sell," and be "nowhere" in the great race of life.

He knew that a season, a month, a day, might be the only respite left him, the only pause for him, 'twixt his glittering luxurious world and the fiat of outlawry and exile. He knew that the Jews might be down on him any night that he sat at the Guards' mess, flirted with foreign princesses, or laughed at the gossamer gossip of the town over iced drinks in the clubs.

His liabilities were tremendous, his resources totally exhausted; but such was the latent recklessness of the careless Royallieu blood, and such the languid devil-may-care of his training and his temper, that the knowledge scarcely ever seriously disturbed his enjoyment of the moment. Somehow, he never realized it.

If any weatherwise had told the Lisbon people of the coming of the great earthquake, do you think they could have brought themselves to realize that midnight darkness, that yawning desolation which were nigh, while the sun was still so bright and the sea so tranquil, and the bloom so sweet on purple pomegranate and amber grape, and the scarlet of odorous flowers, and the blush of a girl's kiss-warmed cheek?

A sentimental metaphor with which to compare the difficulties of a dandy of the Household, because his "stiff" was floating about in too many directions at too many high figures, and he had hardly enough till next pay-day came round to purchase the bouquets he sent and meet the club-fees that were due! But, after all, may it not well be doubted if a sharp shock and a second's blindness, and a sudden sweep down under the walls of the Cathedral or the waters of the Tagus, were not, on the whole, a quicker and pleasanter mode of extinction than that social earthquake—"gone to the bad with a crash"? And the Lisbonites did not more disbelieve in, and dream less of their coming ruin than Cecil did his, while he was doing the season, with engagements enough in a night to spread over a month, the best known horses in the town, a dozen rose-notes sent to his

clubs or his lodgings in a day, and the newest thing in soups, colts, beauties, neckties, perfumes, tobaccos, or square dances waiting his dictum to become the fashion.

"How you do go on with those women, Beauty," growled the Seraph, one day after a morning of fearful hard work consequent on having played the Foot Guards at Lord's, and, in an unwary moment, having allowed himself to be decoyed afterward to a private concert, and very nearly proposed to in consequence, during a Symphony in A; an impending terror from which he could hardly restore himself of his jeopardized safety. "You're horribly imprudent!"

"Not a bit of it," rejoined Beauty serenely. "That is the superior wisdom and beautiful simplicity of making love to your neighbor's wife—she can't marry you!"

"But she may get you into the D. C.," mused the Seraph, who had gloomy personal recollection of having been twice through that phase of law and life, and of having been enormously mulcted in damages because he was a Duke in future, and because, as he piteously observed on the occasion, "You couldn't make that fellow Cresswell see that it was they ran away with me each time!"

"Oh, everybody goes through the D. C. somehow or other," answered Cecil, with philosophy. "It's like the Church, the Commons, and the Gallows, you know—one of the popular Institutions."

"And it's the only Law Court where the robber cuts a better

figure than the robbed," laughed the Seraph; consoling himself that he had escaped the future chance of showing in the latter class of marital defrauded, by shying that proposal during the Symphony in A, on which his thoughts ran, as the thoughts of one who has just escaped from an Alpine crevasse run on the past abyss in which he had been so nearly lost forever. "I say, Beauty, were you ever near doing anything serious—asking anybody to marry you, eh? I suppose you have been—they do make such awful hard running on one" and the poor hunted Seraph stretched his magnificent limbs with the sigh of a martyred innocent.

"I was once—only once!"

"Ah, by Jove! And what saved you?"

The Seraph lifted himself a little, with a sort of pitying, sympathizing curiosity toward a fellow-sufferer.

"Well, I'll tell you," said Bertie, with a sigh as of a man who hated long sentences, and who was about to plunge into a painful past. "It's ages ago; day I was at a Drawing room; year Blue Ruin won the Clearwell for Royal, I think. Wedged up there, in that poking place, I saw such a face—the deuce, it almost makes me feel enthusiastic now. She was just out—an angel with a train! She had delicious eyes—like a spaniel's you know—a cheek like this peach, and lips like that strawberry there, on the top of your ice. She looked at me, and I was in love! I knew who she was—Irish lord's daughter—girl I could have had for the asking; and I vow that I thought I would ask her—I actually was as far gone as that; I actually said to myself, I'd hang about her a week or two,

and then propose. You'll hardly believe it, but I did. Watched her presented; such grace, such a smile, such a divine lift of the lashes. I was really in love, and with a girl who would marry me! I was never so near a fatal thing in my life–"

"Well?" asked the Seraph, pausing to listen till he let the ice in his sherry-cobbler melt away. When you have been so near breaking your neck down the Matrimonial Matterhorn, it is painfully interesting to hear how your friend escaped the same risks of descent.

"Well," resumed Bertie, "I was very near it. I did nothing but watch her; she saw me, and I felt she was as flattered and as touched as she ought to be. She blushed most enchantingly; just enough, you know; she was conscious I followed her; I contrived to get close to her as she passed out, so close that I could see those exquisite eyes lighten and gleam, those exquisite lips part with a sigh, that beautiful face beam with the sunshine of a radiant smile. It was the dawn of love I had taught her! I pressed nearer and nearer, and I caught her soft whisper as she leaned to her mother: 'Mamma, I'm so hungry! I could eat a whole chicken!' The sigh, the smile, the blush, the light, were for her dinner—not for me! The spell was broken forever. A girl whom I had looked at could think of wings and merry-thoughts and white sauce! I have never been near a proposal again."

The Seraph, with the clarion roll of his gay laughter, flung a hautboy at him.

"Hang you, Beauty! If I didn't think you were going to tell one

how you really got out of a serious thing; it is so awfully difficult to keep clear of them nowadays. Those before-dinner teas are only just so many new traps! What became of her—eh?"

"She married a Scotch laird and became socially extinct, somewhere among the Hebrides. Served her right," murmured Cecil sententiously. "Only think what she lost just through hungering for a chicken; if I hadn't proposed for her,—for one hardly keeps the screw up to such self-sacrifice as that when one is cool the next morning,—I would have made her the fashion!"

With which masterly description in one phrase of all he could have done for the ill-starred debutante who had been hungry in the wrong place, Cecil lounged out of the club to drive with half a dozen of his set to a water-party—a Bacchanalian water-party, with the Zu-Zu and her sisters for the Naiads and the Household for their Tritons.

A water-party whose water element apparently consisted in driving down to Richmond, dining at nine, being three hours over the courses, contributing seven guineas apiece for the repast, listening to the songs of the Café Alcazar, reproduced with matchless elan by a pretty French actress, being pelted with brandy cherries by the Zu-Zu, seeing their best cigars thrown away half-smoked by pretty pillagers, and driving back again to town in the soft, starry night, with the gay rhythms ringing from the box-seat as the leaders dashed along in a stretching gallop down the Kew Road. It certainly had no other more aquatic feature in it save a little drifting about for twenty minutes before

dining, in toy boats and punts, as the sun was setting, while Laura Lelas, the brunette actress, sang a barcarolle.

"Venice, and her people, only born to bloom and droop."

> "Where be all those
> Dear dead women, with such hair too; what's become of all the gold
> Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old;"

It did not set Cecil thinking, however, after Browning's fashion, because, in the first place, it was a canon with him never to think at all; in the second, if put to it he would have averred that he knew nothing of Venice, except that it was a musty old bore of a place, where they worried you about visas and luggage and all that, chloride of lim'd you if you came from the East, and couldn't give you a mount if it were ever so; and, in the third, instead of longing for the dear dead women, he was entirely contented with the lovely living ones who were at that moment puffing the smoke of his scented cigarettes into his eyes, making him eat lobster drowned in Chablis, or pelting him with bonbons.

As they left the Star and Garter, Laura Lelas, mounted on Cecil's box-seat, remembered she had dropped her cashmere in the dining room. A cashmere is a Parisian's soul, idol, and fetich; servants could not find it; Cecil, who, to do him this justice, was always as courteous to a comedienne as to a countess, went himself. Passing the open window of another room, he

recognized the face of his little brother among a set of young Civil Service fellows, attaches, and cornets. They had no women with them; but they had brought what was perhaps worse—dice for hazard—and were turning the unconscious Star and Garter unto an impromptu Crockford's over their wine.

Little Berk's pretty face was very flushed; his lips were set tight, his eyes were glittering; the boy had the gambler's passion of the Royallieu blood in its hottest intensity. He was playing with a terrible eagerness that went to Bertie's heart with the same sort of pang of remorse with which he had looked on him when he had been thrown like dead on his bed at home.

Cecil stopped and leaned over the open window.

"Ah, young one, I did not know you were here. We are going home; will you come?" he asked, with a careless nod to the rest of the young fellows.

Berkeley looked up with a wayward, irritated annoyance.

"No, I can't," he said irritably; "don't you see we are playing, Bertie?"

"I see," answered Cecil, with a dash of gravity, almost of sadness in him, as he leaned farther over the windowsill with his cigar in his teeth.

"Come away," he whispered kindly, as he almost touched the boy, who chanced to be close to the casement. "Hazard is the very deuce for anybody; and you know Royal hates it. Come with us, Berk; there's a capital set here, and I'm going to half a dozen good houses to-night, when we get back. I'll take you with me.

Come! you like waltzing, and all that sort of thing, you know."

The lad shook himself peevishly; a sullen cloud over his fair, picturesque, boyish face.

"Let me alone before the fellows," he muttered impatiently. "I won't come, I tell you."

"Soit!"

Cecil shrugged his shoulders, left the window, found the Lelas' cashmere, and sauntered back to the drags without any more expostulation. The sweetness of his temper could never be annoyed, but also he never troubled himself to utter useless words. Moreover, he had never been in is life much in earnest about anything; it was not worth while.

"A pretty fellow I am to turn preacher, when I have sins enough on my own shoulders for twenty," he thought; as he shook the ribbons and started the leaders off to the gay music of Laura Lelas' champagne-tuned laughter.

The thoughts that had crossed his mind when he had looked on his brother's inanimate form had not been wholly forgotten since; he felt something like self-accusation whenever he saw, in some gray summer dawn, as he had seen now, the boy's bright face, haggard and pale with the premature miseries of the gamester, or heard his half-piteous, half-querulous lamentations over his losses; and he would essay, with all the consummate tact the world had taught him, to persuade him from his recklessness, and warn him of the consequences. But little Berk, though he loved his elder after a fashion, was wayward, selfish, and unstable

as water. He would be very sorry sometimes, very repentant, and would promise anything under the sun; but five minutes afterward he would go his own way just the same, and be as irritably resentful of interference as a proud, spoiled, still-childish temper can be. And Cecil—the last man in the world to turn mentor—would light a cheroot, as he did to-night, and forget all about it. The boy would be right enough when he had had his swing, he thought. Bertie's philosophy was the essence of laissez-faire.

He would have defied a Manfred, or an Aylmer of Aylmer's Field, to be long pursued by remorse or care if he drank the right cru and lived in the right set. "If it be very severe," he would say, "it may give him a pang once a twelvemonth—say the morning after a whitebait dinner. Repentance is generally the fruit of indigestion, and contrition may generally be traced to too many truffles or olives."

Cecil had no time or space for thought; he never thought; would not have thought seriously, for a kingdom. A novel, idly skimmed over in bed, was the extent of his literature; he never bored himself by reading the papers, he heard the news earlier than they told it; and as he lived, he was too constantly supplied from the world about him with amusement and variety to have to do anything beyond letting himself be amused; quietly fanned, as it were, with the lulling punka of social pleasure, without even the trouble of pulling the strings. He had naturally considerable talents, and an almost dangerous facility in them; but he might

have been as brainless as a mollusk, for any exertion he gave his brain.

"If I were a professional diner-out, you know, I'd use such wits as I have: but why should I now?" he said on one occasion, when a fair lady reproached him with this inertia. "The best style is only just to say yes or no—and be bored even in saying that—and a very comfortable style it is, too. You get amused without the trouble of opening your lips."

"But if everybody were equally monosyllabic, how then? You would not get amused," suggested his interrogator, a brilliant Parisienne.

"Well—everybody is, pretty nearly," said Bertie; "but there are always a lot of fellows who give their wits to get their dinners—social rockets, you know—who will always fire themselves off to sparkle instead of you, if you give them a white ball at the clubs, or get them a card for good houses. It saves you so much trouble; it is such a bore to have to talk."

He went that night, as he had said, to half a dozen good houses, midnight receptions, and after-midnight waltzes; making his bow in a Cabinet Minister's vestibule, and taking up the thread of the same flirtation at three different balls; showing himself for a moment at a Premier's At-home, and looking eminently graceful and pre-eminently weary in an ambassadress' drawing room, and winding up the series by a dainty little supper in the gray of the morning, with a sparkling party of French actresses, as bright as the bubbles of their own Clicquot.

When he went upstairs to his own bedroom, in Piccadilly, about five o'clock, therefore, he was both sleepy and tired, and lamented to that cherished and ever-discreet confidant, a cheroot, the brutal demands of the Service; which would drag him off, in five hours' time, without the slightest regard to his feelings, to take share in the hot, heavy, dusty, searching work of a field-day up at the Scrubs.

"Here—get me to perch as quick as you can, Rake," he murmured, dropping into an armchair; astonished that Rake did not answer, he saw standing by him instead the boy Berkeley. Surprise was a weakness of raw inexperience that Cecil never felt; his gazette as Commander-in-Chief, or the presence of the Wandering Jew in his lodgings would never have excited it in him. In the first place, he would have merely lifted his eyebrows and said, "Be a fearful bore!" in the second he would have done the same, and murmured, "Queer old cad!"

Surprised, therefore, he was not, at the boy's untimely apparition; but his eyes dwelt on him with a mild wonder, while his lips dropped but one word:

"Amber-Amulet?"

Amber-Amulet was a colt of the most marvelous promise at the Royallieu establishment, looked on to win the next Clearwell, Guineas, and Derby as a certainty. An accident to the young chestnut was the only thing that suggested itself as of possibly sufficient importance to make his brother wait for him at five o'clock on a June morning.

Berkeley looked up confusedly, impatiently:

"You are never thinking but of horses or women," he said peevishly; "there may be others things in the world, surely."

"Indisputably there are other things in the world, dear boy; but none so much to my taste," said Cecil composedly, stretching himself with a yawn. "With every regard to hospitality and the charms of your society, might I hint that five o'clock in the morning is not precisely the most suitable hour for social visits and ethical questions?"

"For God's sake, be serious, Bertie! I am the most miserable wretch in creation."

Cecil opened his closed eyes, with the sleepy indifference vanished from them, and a look of genuine and affectionate concern on the serene insouciance of his face.

"Ah! you would stay and play that chicken hazard," he thought, but he was not one who would have reminded the boy of his own advice and its rejection; he looked at him in silence a moment, then raised himself with a sigh.

"Dear boy, why didn't you sleep upon it? I never think of disagreeable things till they wake me with my coffee; then I take them up with the cup and put them down with it. You don't know how well it answers; it disposes of them wonderfully."

The boy lifted his head with a quick, reproachful anger, and in the gaslight his cheeks were flushed, his eyes full of tears.

"How brutal you are, Bertie! I tell you I am ruined, and you care no more than if you were a stone. You only think of yourself;

you only live for yourself!"

He had forgotten the money that had been tossed to him off that very table the day before the Grand Military; he had forgotten the debts that had been paid for him out of the winnings of that very race. There is a childish, wayward, wailing temper, which never counts benefits received save as title-deeds by which to demand others. Cecil looked at him with just a shadow of regret, not reproachful enough to be rebuke, in his glance, but did not defend himself in any way against the boyish, passionate accusation, nor recall his own past gifts into remembrance.

"'Brutal'! What a word, little one. Nobody's brutal now; you never see that form nowadays. Come, what is the worst this time?"

Berkeley looked sullenly down on the table where his elbows leaned; scattering the rose-notes, the French novels, the cigarettes, and the gold essence-bottles with which it was strewn; there was something dogged yet agitated, half-insolent yet half-timidly irresolute, upon him, that was new there.

"The worst is soon told," he said huskily, and his teeth chattered together slightly, as though with cold, as he spoke. "I lost two hundred to-night; I must pay it, or be disgraced forever; I have not a farthing; I cannot get the money for my life; no Jews will lend to me, I am under age; and—and"—his voice sank lower and grew more defiant, for he knew that the sole thing forbidden him peremptorily by both his father and his brothers was the thing he had now to tell—"and—I borrowed three ponies

of Granville Lee yesterday, as he came from the Corner with a lot of banknotes after settling-day. I told him I would pay them to-morrow; I made sure I should have won to-night."

The piteous unreason of the born gamester, who clings so madly to the belief that luck must come to him, and sets on that belief as though a bank were his to lose his gold from, was never more utterly spoken in all its folly, in all its pitiable optimism, than now in the boy's confession.

Bertie started from his chair, his sleepy languor dissipated; on his face the look that had come there when Lord Royallieu had dishonored his mother's name. In his code there was one shameless piece of utter and unmentionable degradation—it was to borrow of a friend.

"You will bring some disgrace on us before you die, Berkeley," he said, with a keener inflection of pain and contempt than had ever been in his voice. "Have you no common knowledge of honor?"

The lad flushed under the lash of the words, but it was a flush of anger rather than of shame; he did not lift his eyes, but gazed sullenly down on the yellow paper of a Paris romance he was irritably dog-earing.

"You are severe enough," he said gloomily, and yet insolently. "Are you such a mirror of honor yourself? I suppose my debts, at the worst, are about one-fifth of yours."

For a moment even the sweetness of Cecil's temper almost gave way. Be his debts what they would, there was not one among

them to his friends, or one for which the law could not seize him. He was silent; he did not wish to have a scene of discussion with one who was but a child to him; moreover, it was his nature to abhor scenes of any sort, and to avert even a dispute, at any cost.

He came back and sat down without any change of expression, putting his cheroot in his mouth.

"Tres cher, you are not courteous," he said wearily; "but it may be that you are right. I am not a good one for you to copy from in anything except the fit of my coats; I don't think I ever told you I was. I am not altogether so satisfied with myself as to suggest myself as a model for anything, unless it were to stand in a tailor's window in Bond Street to show the muffs how to dress. That isn't the point, though; you say you want near 300 pounds by to-morrow—to-day rather. I can suggest nothing except to take the morning mail to the Shires, and ask Royal straight out; he never refuses you."

Berkeley looked at him with a bewildered terror that banished at a stroke his sullen defiance; he was irresolute as a girl, and keenly moved by fear.

"I would rather cut my throat," he said, with a wild exaggeration that was but the literal reflection of the trepidation on him; "as I live I would! I have had so much from him lately—you don't know how much—and now of all times, when they threaten to foreclose the mortgage on Royallieu—"

"What? Foreclose what?"

"The mortgage!" answered Berkeley impatiently; to his

childish egotism it seemed cruel and intolerable that any extremities should be considered save his own. "You know the lands are mortgaged as deeply as Monti and the entail would allow them. They threatened to foreclose—I think that's the word—and Royal has had God knows what work to stave them off. I no more dare face him, and ask him for a sovereign now than I dare ask him to give me the gold plate off the sideboard."

Cecil listened gravely; it cut him more keenly than he showed to learn the evils and the ruin that so closely menaced his house; and to find how entirely his father's morbid mania against him severed him from all the interests and all the confidence of his family, and left him ignorant of matters even so nearly touching him as these.

"Your intelligence is not cheerful, little one," he said, with a languid stretch of his limbs; it was his nature to glide off painful subjects. "And—I really am sleepy! You think there is no hope Royal would help you?"

"I tell you I will shoot myself through the brain rather than ask him."

Bertie moved restlessly in the soft depths of his lounging-chair; he shunned worry, loathed it, escaped it at every portal, and here it came to him just when he wanted to go to sleep. He could not divest himself of the feeling that, had his own career been different,—less extravagant, less dissipated, less indolently spendthrift,—he might have exercised a better influence, and his brother's young life might have been more prudently launched

upon the world. He felt, too, with a sharper pang than he had ever felt it for himself, the brilliant beggary in which he lived, the utter inability he had to raise even the sum that the boy now needed; a sum so trifling, in his set, and with his habits, that he had betted it over and over again in a clubroom, on a single game of whist. It cut him with a bitter, impatient pain; he was as generous as the winds, and there is no trial keener to such a temper than the poverty that paralyzes its power to give.

"It is no use to give you false hopes, young one," he said gently. "I can do nothing! You ought to know me by this time; and if you do, you know too that if the money was mine it would be yours at a word—if you don't, no matter! Frankly, Berk, I am all down-hill; my bills may be called in any moment; when they are I must send in my papers to sell, and cut the country, if my duns don't catch me before, which they probably will; in which event I shall be to all intents and purposes—dead. This is not lively conversation, but you will do me the justice to say that it was not I who introduced it. Only—one word for all, my boy; understand this: if I could help you I would, cost what it might, but as matters stand—I cannot."

And with that Cecil puffed a great cloud of smoke to envelope him; the subject was painful, the denial wounded him by whom it had to be given full as much as it could wound him whom it refused. Berkeley heard it in silence; his head still hung down, his color changing, his hands nervously playing with the bouquet-bottles, shutting and opening their gold tops.

"No—yes—I know," he said hurriedly; "I have no right to expect it, and have been behaving like a cur, and—and—all that, I know. But—there is one way you could save me, Bertie, if it isn't too much for a fellow to ask."

"I can't say I see the way, little one," said Cecil, with a sigh. "What is it?"

"Why—look here. You see I'm not of age; my signature is of no use; they won't take it; else I could get money in no time on what must come to me when Royal dies; though 'tisn't enough to make the Jews 'melt' at a risk. Now—now—look here. I can't see that there could be any harm in it. You are such chums with Lord Rockingham, and he's as rich as all the Jews put together. What could there be in it if you just asked him to lend you a monkey for me? He'd do it in a minute, because he'd give his head away to you—they all say so—and he'll never miss it. Now, Bertie—will you?"

In his boyish incoherence and its disjointed inelegance the appeal was panted out rather than spoken; and while his head drooped and the hot color burned in his face, he darted a swift look at his brother, so full of dread and misery that it pierced Cecil to the quick as he rose from his chair and paced the room, flinging his cheroot aside; the look disarmed the reply that was on his lips, but his face grew dark.

"What you ask is impossible," he said briefly. "If I did such a thing as that, I should deserve to be hounded out of the Guards to-morrow."

The boy's face grew more sullen, more haggard, more evil, as he still bent his eyes on the table, his glance not meeting his brother's.

"You speak as if it would be a crime," he muttered savagely, with a plaintive moan of pain in the tone; he thought himself cruelly dealt with and unjustly punished.

"It would be the trick of a swindler, and it would be the shame of a gentleman," said Cecil, as briefly still. "That is answer enough."

"Then you will not do it?"

"I have replied already."

There was that in the tone, and in the look with which he paused before the table, that Berkeley had never heard or seen in him before; something that made the supple, childish, petulant, cowardly nature of the boy shrink and be silenced; something for a single instant of the haughty and untamable temper of the Royallieu blood that awoke in the too feminine softness and sweetness of Cecil's disposition.

"You said that you would aid me at any cost, and now that I ask you so wretched a trifle, you treat me as if I were a scoundrel," he moaned passionately. "The Seraph would give you the money at a word. It is your pride—nothing but pride. Much pride is worth to us who are penniless beggars!"

"If we are penniless beggars, by what right should we borrow of other men?"

"You are wonderfully scrupulous, all of a sudden!"

Cecil shrugged his shoulders slightly and began to smoke again. He did not attempt to push the argument. His character was too indolent to defend itself against aspersion, and horror of a quarrelsome scene far greater than his heed of misconstruction.

"You are a brute to me!" went on the lad, with his querulous and bitter passion rising almost to tears like a woman's. "You pretend you can refuse me nothing; and the moment I ask you the smallest thing you turn on me, and speak as if I were the greatest blackguard on earth. You'll let me go to the bad to-morrow rather than bend your pride to save me; you live like a Duke, and don't care if I should die in a debtor's prison! You only brag about 'honor' when you want to get out of helping a fellow; and if I were to cut my throat to-night you would only shrug your shoulders, and sneer at my death in the clubroom, with a jest picked out of your cursed French novels!"

"Melodramatic, and scarcely correct," murmured Bertie.

The ingratitude to himself touched him indeed but little; he was not given to making much of anything that was due to himself—partly through carelessness, partly through generosity; but the absence in his brother of that delicate, intangible, indescribable sensitive-nerve which men call Honor, an absence that had never struck on him so vividly as it did to-night, troubled him, surprised him, oppressed him.

There is no science that can supply this defect to the temperament created without it; it may be taught a counterfeit, but it will never own a reality.

"Little one, you are heated, and don't know what you say," he began very gently, a few moments later, as he leaned forward and looked straight in the boy's eyes. "Don't be down about this; you will pull through, never fear. Listen to me; go down to Royal, and tell him all frankly. I know him better than you; he will be savage for a second, but he would sell every stick and stone on the land for your sake; he will see you safe through this. Only bear one thing in mind—tell him all. No half measures, no half confidences; tell him the worst, and ask his help. You will not come back without it."

Berkeley listened; his eyes shunning his brother's, the red color darker on his face.

"Do as I say," said Cecil, very gently still. "Tell him, if you like, that it is through following my follies that you have come to grief; he will be sure to pity you then."

There was a smile, a little sad, on his lips, as he said the last words, but it passed at once as he added:

"Do your hear me? will you go?"

"If you want me—yes."

"On your word, now?"

"On my word."

There was an impatience in the answer, a feverish eagerness in the way he assented that might have made the consent rather a means to evade the pressure than a genuine pledge to follow the advice; that darker, more evil, more defiant look was still upon his face, sweeping its youth away and leaving in its stead a

wavering shadow. He rose with a sudden movement; his tumbled hair, his disordered attire, his bloodshot eyes, his haggard look of sleeplessness and excitement in strange contrast with the easy perfection of Cecil's dress and the calm languor of his attitude. The boy was very young, and was not seasoned to his life and acclimatized to his ruin, like his elder brother. He looked at him with a certain petulant envy; the envy of every young fellow for a man of the world. "I beg your pardon for keeping you up, Bertie," he said huskily. "Good-night."

Cecil gave a little yawn.

"Dear boy, it would have been better if you could have come in with the coffee. Never be impulsive; don't do a bit of good, and is such bad form!"

He spoke lightly, serenely; both because such was as much his nature as it was to breathe, and because his heart was heavy that he had to send away the young one without help, though he knew that the course he had made him adopt would serve him more permanently in the end. But he leaned his hand a second on Berk's shoulder, while for one single moment in his life he grew serious.

"You must know I could not do what you asked; I could not meet any man in the Guards face to face if I sunk myself and sunk them so low. Can't you see that, little one?"

There was a wistfulness in the last words; he would gladly have believed that his brother had at length some perception of his meaning.

"You say so, and that is enough," said the boy pettishly; "I cannot understand that I asked anything so dreadful; but I suppose you have too many needs of your own to have any resources left for mine."

Cecil shrugged his shoulders slightly again, and let him go. But he could not altogether banish a pang of pain at his heart, less even for his brother's ingratitude than at his callousness to all those finer, better instincts of which honor is the concrete name.

For the moment, thought—grave, weary, and darkened—fell on him; he had passed through what he would have suffered any amount of misconstruction to escape—a disagreeable scene; he had been as unable as though he were a Commissionaire in the streets to advance a step to succor the necessities for which his help had been asked; and he was forced, despite all his will, to look for the first time blankly in the face the ruin that awaited him. There was no other name for it: it would be ruin complete and wholly inevitable. His signature would have been accepted no more by any bill-discounter in London; he had forestalled all, to the uttermost farthing; his debts pressed heavier every day; he could have no power to avert the crash that must in a few weeks, or at most a few months, fall upon him. And to him an utter blankness and darkness lay beyond.

Barred out from the only life he knew, the only life that seemed to him endurable or worth the living; severed from all the pleasures, pursuits, habits, and luxuries of long custom; deprived of all that had become to him as second nature from childhood;

sold up, penniless, driven out from all that he had known as the very necessities of existence; his very name forgotten in the world of which he was now the darling; a man without a career, without a hope, without a refuge—he could not realize that this was what awaited him then; this was the fate that must within so short a space be his. Life had gone so smoothly with him, and his world was a world from whose surface every distasteful thought was so habitually excluded, that he could no more understand this desolation lying in wait for him than one in the fullness and elasticity of health can believe the doom that tells him he will be a dead man before the sun has set.

As he sat there, with the gas of the mirror branches glancing on the gold and silver hilts of the crossed swords above the fireplace, and the smoke of his cheroot curling among the pile of invitation cards to all the best houses in town, Cecil could not bring himself to believe that things were really come to this pass with him. It is so hard for a man who has the magnificence of the fashionable clubs open to him day and night to beat into his brain the truth that in six months hence he may be lying in the debtors' prison at Baden; it is so difficult for a man who has had no greater care on his mind than to plan the courtesies of a Guards' Ball or of a yacht's summer-day banquet, to absolutely conceive the fact that in a year's time he will thank God if he have a few francs left to pay for a wretched dinner in a miserable estaminet in a foreign bathing-place.

"It mayn't come to that," he thought; "something may happen.

If I could get my troop now, that would stave off the Jews; or, if I should win some heavy pots on the Prix de Dames, things would swim on again. I must win; the King will be as fit as in the Shires, and there will only be the French horses between us and an absolute 'walk over.' Things mayn't come to the worst, after all."

And so careless and quickly oblivious, happily or unhappily, was his temperament, that he read himself to sleep with Terrail's "Club des Valets de Coeur," and slept in ten minutes' time as composedly as though he had inherited fifty thousand a year.

That evening, in the loose-box down at Royallieu, Forest King stood without any body-covering, for the night was close and sultry, a lock of the sweetest hay unnoticed in his rack, and his favorite wheaten-gruel standing uncared-for under his very nose; the King was in the height of excitation, alarm, and haughty wrath. His ears were laid flat to his head, his nostrils were distended, his eyes were glancing uneasily with a nervous, angry fire rare in him, and ever and anon he lashed out his heels with a tremendous thundering thud against the opposite wall, with a force that reverberated through the stables and made his companions start and edge away. It was precisely these companions that the aristocratic hero of the Soldiers' Blue Ribbon scornfully abhorred.

They had just been looking him over—to their own imminent peril; and the patrician winner of the Vase, the brilliant six-year-old of Paris, and Shire and Spa steeple-chase fame, the knightly

descendant of the White Cockade blood and of the coursers of Circassia, had resented the familiarity proportionately to his own renown and dignity. The King was a very sweet-tempered horse, a perfect temper, indeed, and ductile to a touch from those he loved; but he liked very few, and would suffer liberties from none. And of a truth his prejudices were very just; and if his clever heels had caught—and it was not his fault that they did not—the heads of his two companions, instead of coming with that ponderous crash into the panels of his box, society would certainly have been no loser, and his owner would have gained more than had ever before hung in the careless balance of his life.

But the iron heels, with their shining plates, only caught the oak of his box-door; and the tete-a-tete in the sultry, oppressive night went on as the speakers moved to a prudent distance; one of them thoughtfully chewing a bit of straw, after the immemorial habit of grooms, who ever seem as if they had been born into this world with a cornstalk ready in their mouths.

"It's almost a pity—he's in such perfect condition. Tip-top. Cool as a cucumber after the longest pipe-opener; licks his oats up to the last grain; leads the whole string such a rattling spin as never was spun but by a Derby cracker before him. It's almost a pity," said Willon meditatively, eyeing his charge, the King, with remorseful glances.

"Prut-tush-tish!" said his companion, with a whistle in his teeth that ended with a "damnation!" "It'll only knock him over for the race; he'll be right as a trivet after it. What's your little

game; coming it soft like that, all of a sudden? You hate that ere young swell like p'ison."

"Aye," assented the head groom with a tigerish energy, viciously consuming his bit of straw. "What for am I—head groom come nigh twenty years; and to Markisses and Wiscounts afore him—put aside in that ere way for a fellow as he's took into his service out of the dregs of a regiment; what was tied up at the triangles and branded D, as I know on, and sore suspected of even worse games than that, and now is that set up with pride and sich-like that nobody's woice ain't heard here except his; I say what am I called on to bear it for?": and the head groom's tones grew hoarse and vehement, roaring louder under his injuries. "A man what's attended a Duke's 'osses ever since he was a shaver, to be put aside for that workhus blackguard! A 'oss had a cold—it's Rake what's to cure him. A 'oss is entered for a race—it's Rake what's to order his morning gallops, and his go-downs o' water. It's past bearing to have a rascally chap what's been and gone and turned walet, set up over one's head in one's own establishment, and let to ride the high 'oss over one, roughshod like that!"

And Mr. Willon, in his disgust at the equestrian contumely thus heaped on him, bit the straw savagely in two, and made an end of it, with a vindictive "Will yer be quiet there; blow yer," to the King, who was protesting with his heels against the conversation.

"Come, then, no gammon," growled his companion—the "cousin out o' Yorkshire" of the keeper's tree.

"What's yer figure, you say?" relented Willon meditatively.

"Two thousand to nothing—come!—can't no handsomer," retorted the Yorkshire cousin, with the air of a man conscious of behaving very nobly.

"For the race in Germany?" pursued Mr. Willon, still meditatively.

"Two thousand to nothing—come!" reiterated the other, with his arms folded to intimate that this and nothing else was the figure to which he would bind himself.

Willon chewed another bit of straw, glanced at the horse as though he were a human thing to hear, to witness, and to judge, grew a little pale; and stooped forward.

"Hush! Somebody'll spy on us. It's a bargain."

"Done! And you'll paint him, eh?"

"Yes—I'll—paint him."

The assent was very husky, and dragged slowly out, while his eyes glanced with a furtive, frightened glance over the loose-box. Then—still with that cringing, terrified look backward to the horse, as an assassin may steal a glance before his deed at his unconscious victim—the head groom and his comrade went out and closed the door of the loose-box and passed into the hot, lowering summer night.

Forest King, left in solitude, shook himself with a neigh; took a refreshing roll in the straw, and turned with an appetite to his neglected gruel. Unhappily for himself, his fine instincts could not teach him the conspiracy that lay in wait for him and his; and

the gallant beast, content to be alone, soon slept the sleep of the righteous.

CHAPTER VIII
A STAG HUNT AU CLAIR DE LA LUNE

"Seraph—I've been thinking," said Cecil musingly, as they paced homeward together from the Scrubs, with the long line of the First Life stretching before and behind their chargers, and the hands of the Household Cavalry plying mellowly in their rear.

"You don't mean it. Never let it ooze out, Beauty; you'll ruin your reputation!"

Cecil laughed a little, very languidly; to have been in the sun for four hours, in full harness, had almost taken out of him any power to be amused at anything.

"I've been thinking," he went on undisturbed, pulling down his chin-scale. "What's a fellow to do when he's smashed?"

"Eh?" The Seraph couldn't offer a suggestion; he had a vague idea that men who were smashed never did do anything except accept the smashing; unless, indeed, they turned up afterward as touts, of which he had an equally vague suspicion.

"What do they do?" pursued Bertie.

"Go to the bad," finally suggested the Seraph, lighting a great cigar, without heeding the presence of the Duke, a Field-Marshal, and a Serene Highness far on in front.

Cecil shook his head.

"Can't go where they are already. I've been thinking what a fellow might do that was up a tree; and on my honor there are lots of things one might turn to–"

"Well, I suppose there are," assented the Seraph, with a shake of his superb limbs in his saddle till his cuirass and chains and scabbard rang again. "I should try the P. R., only they will have you train."

"One might do better than the P. R. Getting yourself into prime condition, only to be pounded out of condition and into a jelly, seems hardly logical or satisfactory—specially to your looking-glass, though, of course, it's a matter of taste. But now, if I had a cropper, and got sold up–"

"You, Beauty?" The Seraph puffed a giant puff of amazement from his Havana, opening his blue eyes to their widest.

"Possible!" returned Bertie serenely, with a nonchalant twist to his mustaches. "Anything's possible. If I do now, it strikes me there are vast fields open."

"Gold fields!" suggested the Seraph, wholly bewildered.

"Gold fields? No! I mean a field for—what d'ye call it—genius. Now, look here; nine-tenths of creatures in this world don't know how to put on a glove. It's an art, and an art that requires long study. If a few of us were to turn glove-fitters when we are fairly crushed, we might civilize the whole world, and prevent the deformity of an ill-fitting glove ever blotting creation and prostituting Houbigant. What do you say?"

"Don't be such a donkey, Beauty!" laughed the Seraph, while

his charger threatened to passage into an oyster cart.

"You don't appreciate the majesty of great plans," rejoined Beauty reprovingly. "There's an immense deal in what I'm saying. Think what we might do for society—think how we might extinguish snobbery, if we just dedicated our smash to Mankind. We might open a College, where the traders might go through a course of polite training before they blossomed out as millionaires; the world would be spared an agony of dropped h's and bad bows. We might have a Bureau where we registered all our social experiences, and gave the Plutocracy a map of Belgravia, with all the pitfalls marked; all the inaccessible heights colored red, and all the hard-up great people dotted with gold to show the amount they'd be bought for—with directions to the ignoramuses whom to know, court, and avoid. We might form a Courier Company, and take Brummagem abroad under our guidance, so that the Continent shouldn't think Englishwomen always wear blue veils and gray shawls, and hear every Englishman shout for porter and beefsteak in Tortoni's. We might teach them to take their hats off to women, and not to prod pictures with sticks, and to look at statutes without poking them with an umbrella, and to be persuaded that all foreigners don't want to be bawled at, and won't understand bad French any the better for its being shouted. Or we might have a Joint-Stock Toilette Association, for the purposes of national art, and receive Brummagem to show it how to dress; we might even succeed in making the feminine British Public drape itself properly, and the

B. P. masculine wear boots that won't creak, and coats that don't wrinkle, and take off its hat without a jerk, as though it were a wooden puppet hung on very stiff strings. Or one might—"

"Talk the greatest nonsense under the sun!" laughed the Seraph. "For mercy's sake, are you mad, Bertie?"

"Inevitable question addressed to Genius!" yawned Cecil. "I'm showing you plans that might teach a whole nation good style if we just threw ourselves into it a little. I don't mean you, because you'll never smash, and one don't turn bear-leader, even to the B. P., without the primary impulse of being hard-up. And I don't talk for myself, because, when I go to the dogs I have my own project."

"And what's that?"

"To be groom of the chambers at Meurice's or Claridge's," responded Bertie solemnly. "Those sublime creatures with their silver chains round their necks and their ineffable supremacy over every other mortal!—one would feel in a superior region still. And when a snob came to poison the air, how exquisitely one could annihilate him with showing him his ignorance of claret; and when an epicure dined, how delightfully, as one carried in a turbot, one could test him with the eprouvette positive, or crush him by the eprouvette negative. We have been Equerries at the Palace, both of us, but I don't think we know what true dignity is till we shall have risen to headwaiters at a Grand Hotel."

With which Bertie let his charger pace onward, while he reflected thoughtfully on his future state. The Seraph laughed till

he almost swayed out of saddle, but he shook himself into his balance again with another clash of his brilliant harness, while his eyes lightened and glanced with a fiery gleam down the line of the Household Cavalry.

"Well, if I went to the dogs I wouldn't go to Grand Hotels; but I'll tell you where I would go, Beauty."

"Where's that?"

"Into hot service, somewhere. By Jove, I'd see some good fighting under another flag—out in Algeria, there, or with the Poles, or after Garibaldi. I would, in a day—I'm not sure I won't now, and I bet you ten to one the life would be better than this."

Which was ungrateful in the Seraph, for his happy temper made him the sunniest and most contented of men, with no cross in his life save the dread that somebody would manage to marry him some day. But Rock had the true dash and true steel of the soldier in him, and his blue eyes flashed over his Guards as he spoke, with a longing wish that he were leading them on to a charge instead of pacing with them toward Hyde Park.

Cecil turned in his saddle and looked at him with a certain wonder and pleasure in his glance, and did not answer aloud. "The deuce—that's not a bad idea," he thought to himself; and the idea took root and grew with him.

Far down, very far down, so far that nobody had ever seen it, nor himself ever expected it, there was a lurking instinct in "Beauty,"—the instinct that had prompted him, when he sent the King at the Grand Military cracker, with that prayer, "Kill

me if you like, but don't fail me!"—which, out of the languor and pleasure-loving temper of his unruffled life, had a vague, restless impulse toward the fiery perils and nervous excitement of a sterner and more stirring career.

It was only vague, for he was naturally very indolent, very gentle, very addicted to taking all things passively, and very strongly of persuasion that to rouse yourself for anything was a niaiserie of the strongest possible folly; but it was there. It always is there with men of Bertie's order, and only comes to light when the match of danger is applied to the touchhole. Then, though "the Tenth don't dance," perhaps, with graceful, indolent, dandy insolence, they can fight as no others fight when Boot and Saddle rings through the morning air, and the slashing charge sweeps down with lightning speed and falcon swoop.

"In the case of a Countess, sir, the imagination is more excited," says Dr. Johnson, who had, I suppose, little opportunity of putting that doctrine for amatory intrigues to the test in actual practice. Bertie, who had many opportunities, differed with him. He found love-making in his own polished, tranquil circles apt to become a little dull, and was more amused by Laura Lelas. However, he was sworn to the service of the Guenevere, and he drove his mail-phaeton down that day to another sort of Richmond dinner, of which the lady was the object instead of the Zu-Zu.

She enjoyed thinking herself the wife of a jealous and inexorable lord, and arranged her flirtations to evade him with

a degree of skill so great that it was lamentable it should be thrown away on an agricultural husband, who never dreamt that the "Fidelio-III-TstnegeR," which met his eyes in the innocent face of his "Times" referred to an appointment at a Regent Street modiste's, or that the advertisement—"White wins—Twelve," meant that if she wore white camellias in her hair at the opera she would give "Beauty" a meeting after it.

Lady Guenevere was very scrupulous never to violate conventionalities. And yet she was a little fast—very fast, indeed, and was a queen of one of the fastest sets; but then—O sacred shield of a wife's virtue—she could not have borne to lose her very admirable position, her very magnificent jointure, and, above all, the superb Guenevere diamonds!

So, for the sake of the diamonds, she and Bertie had their rendezvous under the rose.

This day she went down to see a dowager Baroness aunt, out at Hampton Court—really went, she was never so imprudent as to falsify her word; and with the Dowager, who was very deaf and purblind, dined at Richmond, while the world thought her dining at Hampton Court. It was nothing to anyone, since none knew it to gossip about, that Cecil joined her there; that over the Star and Garter repast they arranged their meeting at Baden next month; that while the Baroness dozed over the grapes and peaches—she had been a beauty herself, in her own day, and still had her sympathies—they went on the river, in the little toy that he kept there for his fair friends' use; floating slowly along in

the coolness of evening, while the stars loomed out in the golden trail of the sunset, and doing a graceful scene a la Musset and Meredith, with a certain languid amusement in the assumption of those poetic guises, for they were of the world worldly; and neither believed very much in the other.

When you have just dined well, and there has been no fault in the clarets, and the scene is pretty, if it be not the Nile in the afterglow, the Arno in the moonlight, or the Loire in vintage-time, but only the Thames above Richmond, it is the easiest thing in the world to feel a touch of sentiment when you have a beautiful woman beside you who expects you to feel it. The evening was very hot and soft. There was a low south wind, the water made a pleasant murmur, wending among its sedges. She was very lovely, moreover; lying back there among her laces and Indian shawls, with the sunset in the brown depths of her eyes and on her delicate cheek. And Bertie, as he looked on his liege lady, really had a glow of the old, real, foolish, forgotten feeling stir at his heart, as he gazed on her in the half-light, and thought, almost wistfully, "If the Jews were down on me to-morrow, would she really care, I wonder?"

Really care? Bertie knew his world and its women too well to deceive himself in his heart about the answer. Nevertheless, he asked the question. "Would you care much, chere belle?"

"Care what?"

"If I came to grief—went to the bad, you know; dropped out of the world altogether?"

She raised her splendid eyes in amaze, with a delicate shudder through all her laces. “Bertie! You would break my heart! What can you dream of?”

“Oh, lots of us end so! How is a man to end?” answered Bertie philosophically, while his thoughts still ran off in a speculative skepticism. “Is there a heart to break?”

Her ladyship looked at him an laughed.

“A Werther in the Guards! I don’t think the role will suit either you or your corps, Bertie; but if you do it, pray do it artistically. I remember, last year, driving through Asnieres, when they had found a young man in the Seine; he was very handsome, beautifully dressed, and he held fast in his clinched hand a lock of gold hair. Now, there was a man who knew how to die gracefully, and make his death an idyl!”

“Died for a woman?—ah!” murmured Bertie, with the Brummel nonchalance of his order. “I don’t think I should do that, even for you—not, at least, while I had a cigar left.”

And then the boat drifted backward, while the stars grew brighter and the last reflection of the sun died out; and they planned to meet to-morrow, and talked of Baden, and sketched projects for the winter in Paris, and went in and sat by the window, taking their coffee, and feeling, in a half-vague pleasure, the heliotrope-scented air blowing softly in from the garden below, and the quiet of the starlit river in the summer evening, with a white sail gleaming here and there, or the gentle splash of an oar following on the swift trail of a steamer; the quiet, so still

and so strange after the crowded rush of the London season.

"Would she really care?" thought Cecil, once more. In that moment he could have wished to think she would.

But heliotrope, stars, and a river, even though it had been tawny and classical Tiber instead of ill-used and inodorous Thames, were not things sufficiently in the way of either of them to detain them long. They had both seen the Babylonian sun set over the ruins of the Birs Nimrud, and had talked of Paris fashions while they did so; they had both leaned over the terraces of Bellosguardo, while the moon was full on Giotto's tower, and had discussed their dresses for the Veglione masquerade. It was not their style to care for these matters; they were pretty, to be sure, but they had seen so many of them.

The Dowager went home in her brougham; the Countess drove in his mail-phaeton—objectionable, as she might be seen, but less objectionable than letting her servants know he had met her at Richmond. Besides, she obviated danger by bidding him set her down at a little villa across the park, where dwelt a confidential protegee of hers, whom she patronized; a former French governess, married tolerably well, who had the Countess' confidences, and kept them religiously for sake of so aristocratic a patron, and of innumerable reversions of Spanish point and shawls that had never been worn, and rings, of which her lavish ladyship had got tired.

From here she would take her ex-governess' little brougham, and get quietly back to her own home in Eaton Square, in due

time for all the drums and crushes at which she must make her appearance. This was the sort of little device which really made them think themselves in love, and gave the salt to the whole affair. Moreover, there was this ground for it, that had her lord once roused from the straw-yards of his prize cattle, there was a certain stubborn, irrational, old-world prejudice of pride and temper in him that would have made him throw expediency to the winds, then and there, with a blind and brutal disregard to slander and to the fact that none would ever adorn his diamonds as she did. So that Cecil had not only her fair fame, but her still more valuable jewels in his keeping when he started from the Star and Garter in the warmth of the bright summer's evening.

It was a lovely night; a night for lonely highland tarns, and southern shores by Baiae; without a cloud to veil the brightness of the stars. A heavy dew pressed the odors from the grasses, and the deep glades of the avenue were pierced here and there with a broad beam of silvery moonlight, slanting through the massive boles of the trees, and falling white and serene across the turf. Through the park, with the gleam of the water ever and again shining through the branches of the foliage, Cecil started his horses; his groom he had sent away on reaching Richmond, for the same reason as the Countess had dismissed her barouche, and he wanted no servant, since, as soon as he had set down his liege lady at her protegee's, he would drive straight back to Piccadilly. But he had not noticed what he noted now, that instead of one of his carriage-grays, who had fallen slightly lame, they had put

into harness the young one, Maraschino, who matched admirably for size and color, but who, being really a hunter, though he had been broken to shafts as well, was not the horse with which to risk driving a lady.

However, Beauty was a perfect whip and had the pair perfectly in hand, so that he thought no more of the change, as the grays dashed at a liberal half-speed through the park, with their harness flashing in the moonlight, and their scarlet rosettes fluttering in the pleasant air. The eyes beside him, the Titian-like mouth, the rich, delicate cheek, these were, to be sure, rather against the coolness and science that such a five-year-old as Maraschino required; they were distracting even to Cecil, and he had not prudence enough to deny his sovereign lady when she put her hands on the ribbons.

"The beauties! Give them to me, Bertie. Dangerous? How absurd you are; as if I could not drive anything? Do you remember my four roans at Longchamps?"

She could, indeed, with justice, pique herself on her skill; she drove matchlessly, but as he resigned them to her, Maraschino and his companion quickened their trot, and tossed their pretty thoroughbred heads, conscious of a less powerful hand on the reins.

"I shall let their pace out; there is nobody to run over here," said her ladyship.

Maraschino, as though hearing the flattering conjuration swung off into a light, quick canter, and tossed his head again; he

knew that, good whip though she was, he could jerk his mouth free in a second, if he wanted. Cecil laughed—prudence was at no time his virtue—and leaned back contentedly, to be driven at a slashing pace through the balmy summer's night, while the ring of the hoofs rang merrily on the turf, and the boughs were tossed aside with a dewy fragrance. As they went, the moonlight was shed about their path in the full of the young night, and at the end of a vista of boughs, on a grassy knoll were some phantom forms—the same graceful shapes that stand out against the purple heather and the tawny gorse of Scottish moorlands, while the lean rifle-tube creeps up by stealth. In the clear starlight there stood the deer—a dozen of them, a clan of stags alone—with their antlers clashing like a clash of swords, and waving like swaying banners as they tossed their heads and listened.[2]

In an instant the hunter pricked his ears, snuffed the air, and twitched with passionate impatience at his bit; another instant and he had got his head, and, launching into a sweeping gallop, rushed down the glade.

Cecil sprang forward from his lazy rest, and seized the ribbons that in one instant had cut his companion's gloves to stripes.

"Sit still," he said calmly, but under his breath. "He had been

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[2] Let me here take leave to beg pardon of the gallant Highland stags for comparing them one instant with the shabby, miserable-looking wretches that travesty them in Richmond Park. After seeing these latter scrubby, meager apologies for deer, one wonders why something better cannot be turned loose there. A hunting-mare I know well nevertheless flattered them thus by racing them through the park: when in harness herself, to her own great disgust.

always ridden with the Buckhounds; he will race the deer as sure as we live!"

Race the deer he did.

Startled, and fresh for their favorite nightly wandering, the stags were off like the wind at the noise of alarm, and the horses tore after them; no skill, no strength, no science could avail to pull them in; they had taken their bits between their teeth, and the devil that was in Maraschino lent the contagion of sympathy to the young carriage mare, who had never gone at such a pace since she had been first put in her break.

Neither Cecil's hands nor any other force could stop them now; on they went, hunting as straight in line as though staghounds streamed in front of them, and no phaeton rocked and swayed in a dead and dragging weight behind them. In a moment he gauged the closeness and the vastness of the peril; there was nothing for it but to trust to chance, to keep his grasp on the reins to the last, and to watch for the first sign of exhaustion. Long ere that should be given death might have come to them both; but there was a gay excitation in that headlong rush through the summer night; there was a champagne-draught of mirth and mischief in that dash through the starlit woodland; there was a reckless, breathless pleasure in that neck-or-nothing moonlight chase!

Yet danger was so near with every oscillation; the deer were trooping in fast flight, now clear in the moonlight, now lost in the shadow, bounding with their lightning grace over sward and

hillock, over briar and brushwood, at that speed which kills most living things that dare to race the "Monarch of the Glens." And the grays were in full pursuit; the hunting fire was in the fresh young horse; he saw the shadowy branches of the antlers toss before him, and he knew no better than to hunt down in their scenting line as hotly as though the field of the Queen's or the Baron's was after them. What cared he for the phaeton that rocked and reeled on his traces; he felt its weight no more than if it were a wicker-work toy, and, extended like a greyhound, he swerved from the road, swept through the trees, and tore down across the grassland in the track of the herd.

Through the great boles of the trunks, bronze and black in the shadows, across the hilly rises of the turf, through the brushwood pell-mell, and crash across the level stretches of the sward, they raced as though the hounds were streaming in front; swerved here, tossed there, carried in a whirlwind over the mounds, wheeled through the gloom of the woven branches, splashed with a hiss through the shallow rain-pools, shot swift as an arrow across the silver radiance of the broad moonlight, borne against the sweet south wind, and down the odors of the trampled grass, the carriage was hurled across the park in the wild starlight chase. It rocked, it swayed, it shook, at every yard, while it was carried on like a paper toy; as yet the marvelous chances of accident had borne it clear of the destruction that threatened it at every step as the grays, in the height of their pace now, and powerless even to have arrested themselves, flew through the woodland, neither

knowing what they did, nor heeding where they went; but racing down on the scent, not feeling the strain of the traces, and only maddened the more by the noise of the whirling wheels behind them.

As Cecil leaned back, his hands clinched on the reins, his sinews stretched almost to bursting in their vain struggle to recover power over the loosened beasts, the hunting zest awoke in him too, even while his eyes glanced on his companion in fear and anxiety for her.

"Tally-ho! hark forward! As I live, it is glorious!" he cried, half unconsciously. "For God's sake, sit still, Beatrice! I will save you."

Inconsistent as the words were, they were true to what he felt; alone, he would have flung himself delightedly into the madness of the chase; for her he dreaded with horror the eminence of their peril.

On fled the deer, on swept the horses; faster in the gleam of the moonlight the antlered troop darted on through the gloaming; faster tore the grays in the ecstasy of their freedom; headlong and heedless they dashed through the thickness of leaves and the weaving of branches; neck to neck, straining to distance each other, and held together by the gall of the harness. The broken boughs snapped, the earth flew up beneath their hoofs; their feet struck scarlet sparks of fire from the stones, the carriage was whirled, rocking and tottering, through the maze of tree-trunks, towering like pillars of black stone up against the steel-

blue clearness of the sky. The strain was intense; the danger deadly. Suddenly, straight ahead, beyond the darkness of the foliage, gleamed a line of light; shimmering, liquid, and glassy—here brown as gloom where the shadows fell on it, here light as life where the stars mirrored on it. That trembling line stretched right in their path. For the first time, from the blanched lips beside him a cry of terror rang.

"The river!—oh, heaven!—the river!"

There it lay in the distance, the deep and yellow water, cold in the moon's rays, with its further bank but a dull gray line in the mists that rose from it, and its swamp a yawning grave as the horses, blind in their delirium and racing against each other, bore down through all obstacles toward its brink. Death was rarely ever closer; one score yards more, one plunge, one crash down the declivity and against the rails, one swell of the noisome tide above their heads, and life would be closed and passed for both of them. For one breathless moment his eyes met hers—in that moment he loved her, in that moment their hearts beat with a truer, fonder impulse to each other than they had ever done. Before the presence of a threatening death life grows real, love grows precious, to the coldest and most careless.

No aid could come; not a living soul was nigh; the solitude was as complete as though a western prairie stretched round them; there were only the still and shadowy night, the chilly silence, on which the beat of the plunging hoofs shattered like thunder, and the glisten of the flowing water growing nearer and nearer every

yard. The tranquillity around only jarred more horribly on ear and brain; the vanishing forms of the antlered deer only gave a weirder grace to the moonlight chase whose goal was the grave. It was like the midnight hunt after Herne the Hunter; but here, behind them, hunted Death.

The animals neither saw nor knew what waited them, as they rushed down on to the broad, gray stream, veiled from them by the slope and the screen of flickering leaves; to save them there was but one chance, and that so desperate that it looked like madness. It was but a second's thought; he gave it but a second's resolve.

The next instant he stood on his feet, as the carriage swayed to and fro over the turf, balanced himself marvelously as it staggered in that furious gallop from side to side, clinched the reins hard in the grip of his teeth, measured the distance with an unerring eye, and crouching his body for the spring with all the science of the old playing-fields of his Eton days, cleared the dashboard and lighted astride on the back of the hunting five-year old—how, he could never have remembered or have told.

The tremendous pace at which they went swayed him with a lurch and a reel over the off-side; a woman's cry rang again, clear, and shrill, and agonized on the night; a moment more, and he would have fallen, head downward, beneath the horses' feet. But he had ridden stirrupless and saddleless ere now; he recovered himself with the suppleness of an Arab, and firm-seated behind the collar, with one leg crushed between the pole

and Maraschino's flanks, gathering in the ribbons till they were tight-drawn as a bridle, he strained with all the might and sinew that were in him to get the grays in hand before they could plunge down into the water. His wrists were wrenched like pulleys, the resistance against him was hard as iron; but as he had risked life and limb in the leap which had seated him across the harnessed loins of the now terrified beast, so he risked them afresh to get the mastery now; to slacken them, turn them ever so slightly, and save the woman he loved—loved, at least in this hour, as he had not loved her before. One moment more, while the half-maddened beast rushed through the shadows; one moment more, till the river stretched full before them in all its length and breadth, without a living thing upon its surface to break the still and awful calm; one moment—and the force of cool command conquered and broke their wills despite themselves. The hunter knew his master's voice, his touch, his pressure, and slackened speed by an irresistible, almost unconscious habit of obedience; the carriage mare, checked and galled in the full height of her speed, stood erect, pawing the air with her forelegs, and flinging the white froth over her withers, while she plunged blindly in her nervous terror; then with a crash, her feet came down upon the ground, the broken harness shivered together with a sharp, metallic clash; snorting, panting, quivering, trembling, the pair stood passive and vanquished.

The carriage was overthrown; but the high and fearless courage of the peeress bore her unharmed, even as she was flung

out on to the yielding fern-grown turf. Fair as she was in every hour, she had never looked fairer than as he swung himself from the now powerless horses and threw himself beside her.

"My love—my love, you are saved!"

The beautiful eyes looked up, half unconscious; the danger told on her now that it was passed, as it does most commonly with women.

"Saved!—lost! All the world must know, now, that you are with me this evening," she murmured with a shudder. She lived for the world, and her first thought was of self.

He soothed her tenderly.

"Hush—be at rest! There is no injury but what I can repair, nor is there a creature in sight to have witnessed the accident. Trust in me; no one shall ever know of this. You shall reach town safely and alone."

And, while he promised, he forgot that he thus pledged his honor to leave four hours of his life so buried that, however much he needed, he neither should nor could account for them.

CHAPTER IX
THE PAINTED BIT

Baden was at its brightest. The Victoria, the Badischer Hof, the Stephanie Bauer were crowded. The Kurliste had a dazzling string of names. Imperial grandeur sauntered in slippers; chiefs, used to be saluted with "Ave Caesar Imperator," smoked a papelito in peace over "Galignani." Emperors gave a good-day to ministers who made their thrones beds of thorns, and little kings elbowed great capitalists who could have bought them all up in a morning's work in the money market. Statecraft was in its slippers and diplomacy in its dressing-gown. Statesmen who had just been outwitting each other at the hazard of European politics laughed good-humoredly as they laid their gold down on the color. Rivals who had lately been quarreling over the knotty points of national frontiers now only vied for a twenty-franc rosebud from the bouquetiere. Knights of the Garter and Knights of the Golden Fleece, who had hated each other to deadliest rancor with the length of the Continent between them, got friends over a mutually good book on the Rastadt or Foret Noir. Brains that were the powder depot of one-half of the universe let themselves be lulled to tranquil amusement by a fair idiot's coquetry. And lips that, with a whisper, could loosen the coursing slips of the wild hell-dogs of war, murmured love to

a princess, led the laugh at a supper at five in the morning, or smiled over their own caricatures done by Tenniel or Cham.

Baden was full. The supreme empires of demi-monde sent their sovereigns, diamond-crowned and resistless, to outshine all other principalities and powers, while in breadth of marvelous skirts, in costliness of cobweb laces, in unapproachability of Indian shawls and gold embroideries, and mad fantasies and Cleopatra extravagances, and jewels fit for a Maharajah, the Zu-Zu was distanced by none.

Among the kings and heroes and celebrities who gathered under the pleasant shadow of the pine-crowned hills, there was not one in his way greater than the steeple-chaser, Forest King —certes, there was not one half so honest.

The Guards' Crack was entered for the Prix de Dames, the sole representative of England. There were two or three good things out of French stables,—specially a killing little boy, L'Etoile,—and there was an Irish sorrel, the property of an Austrian of rank, of which fair things were whispered; but it was scarcely possible that anything could stand against the King and that wonderful stride of his which spread-eagled his field like magic, and his countrymen were well content to leave their honor and their old renown to "Beauty" and his six-year-old.

Beauty himself, with a characteristic philosophy, had a sort of conviction that the German race would set everything square. He stood either to make a very good thing on it or to be very heavily bit. There could be no medium. He never hedged in his life; and

as it was almost a practical impossibility that anything the foreign stables could get together would even be able to land within half a dozen lengths of the King. Cecil, always willing to console himself, and invariably too careless to take the chance of adverse accident into account, had come to Baden, and was amusing himself there dropping a Friedrich d'Or on the rouge, flirting in the shady alleys of the Lichtenthal, waltzing Lady Guenevere down the ballroom, playing ecarte with some Serene Highness, supping with the Zu-Zu and her set, and occupying rooms that a Russian Prince had had before him, with all the serenity of a millionaire, as far as memory of money went; with much more than the serenity in other matters of most millionaires, who, finding themselves uncommonly ill at ease in the pot-pourri of monarchs and ministers, of beau-monde and demi-monde, would have given half their newly turned thousands to get rid of the odor of Capel Court and the Bourse, and to attain the calm, negligent assurance, the easy, tranquil insolence, the nonchalance with Princes, and the supremacy among the Free Lances, which they saw and coveted in the indolent Guardsman.

Bertie amused himself. He might be within a day of his ruin, but that was no reason why he should not sip his iced sherbet and laugh with a pretty French actress to-night. His epicurean formulary was the same as old Herrick's, and he would have paraphrased this poet's famous quatrain into

Drink a pure claret while you may,

Your “stiff” is still a-flying;
And he who dines so well to-day
To-morrow may be lying,
Pounced down upon by Jews *tout net*,
Or outlawed in a French *guinguette!*

Bertie was a great believer—if the words are not too sonorous and too earnest to be applied to his very inconsequent views upon any and everything—in the philosophy of happy accident. Far as it was in him to have a conviction at all,—which was a thorough-going, serious sort of thing not by any means his “form,”—he had a conviction that the doctrine of “Eat, drink, and enjoy, for to-morrow we die” was a universal panacea. He was reckless to the uttermost stretch of recklessness, all serene and quiet though his pococurantism and his daily manner were; and while subdued to the undeviating monotone and languor of his peculiar set in all his temper and habits, the natural dare-devil in him took out its inborn instincts in a wildly careless and gamester-like imprudence with that most touchy tempered and inconsistent of all coquettes—Fortune.

Things, he thought, could not well be worse with him than they were now. So he piled all on one coup, and stood to be sunk or saved by the Prix de Dames. Meanwhile, all the same, he murmured Mussetism to the Guenevere under the ruins of the Alte Schloss, lost or won a rouleau at the roulette-wheel, gave a banknote to the famous Isabel for a tea-rose, drove the Zu-Zu four in hand to see the Flat races, took his guinea tickets for the

Concerts, dined with Princes, lounged arm-in-arm with Grand Dukes, gave an Emperor a hint as to the best cigars, and charmed a Monarch by unfolding the secret of the aroma of a Guards' Punch, sacred to the Household.

Bertie who believed in bivalves but not in heroics, thought it best to take the oysters first and eschew the despair entirely.

He had one unchangeable quality—insouciance; and he had, moreover, one unchangeable faith—the King. Lady Guenevere had reached home unnoticed after the accident of their moonlight stag-hunt. His brother, meeting him a day or two after their interview, had nodded affirmatively, though sulkily, in answer to his inquiries, and had murmured that it was "all square now." The Jews and the tradesmen had let him leave for Baden without more serious measures than a menace, more or less insolently worded. In the same fashion he trusted that the King's running at the Bad, with the moneys he had on it, would set all things right for a little while; when, if his family interest, which was great, would get him his step in the First Life, he thought, desperate as things were, they might come round again smoothly, without a notorious crash.

"You are sure the King will 'stay,' Bertie?" asked Lady Guenevere, who had some hundreds in gloves (and even under the rose "sported a pony" or so more seriously) on the event.

"Certain! But if he don't I promise you as pretty a tableau as your Asnieres one; for your sake, I'll make the finish as picturesque as possible. Wouldn't it be well to give me a lock of

hair in readiness?"

Her ladyship laughed and shook her head; if a man killed himself, she did not desire that her gracious name should be entangled with the folly.

"No; I don't do those things," she said, with captivating waywardness. "Besides, though the Oos looks cool and pleasant, I greatly doubt that under any pressure you would trouble it; suicides are too pronounced for your style, Bertie."

"At all events, a little morphia in one's own rooms would be quieter, and better taste," said Cecil, while he caught himself listlessly wondering, as he had wondered at Richmond, if this badinage were to turn into serious fact—how much would she care.

"May your sins be forgiven you!" cried Chesterfield, the apostle of training, as he and the Seraph came up to the table where Cecil and Cos Wentworth were breakfasting in the garden of the Stephanien on the race-day itself. "Liqueurs, truffles, and every devilment under the sun?—cold beef, and nothing to drink, Beauty, if you've any conscience left!"

"Never had a grain, dear boy, since I can remember," murmured Bertie apologetically. "You took all the rawness off me at Eton."

"And you've been taking coffee in bed, I'll swear!" pursued the cross-examiner.

"What if he have? Beauty's condition can't be upset by a little mocha, nor mine either," said his universal defender; and the

Seraph shook his splendid limbs with a very pardonable vanity.

"Ruteroth trains; Ruteroth trains awfully," put in Cos Wentworth, looking up out of a great silver flagon of Badminton, with which he was ending his breakfast; and referring to that Austrian who was to ride the Paris favorite. "Remember him at La Marche last year, and the racing at Vincennes—didn't take a thing that could make flesh—muscles like iron, you know—never touched a soda even–"

"I've trained, too," said Bertie submissively; "look how I've been waltzing! There isn't harder work than that for any fellow. A deuxtemps with the Duchess takes it out of you like any spin over the flat."

His censurers laughed, but did not give in their point.

"You've run shocking risks, Beauty," said Chesterfield; "the King's in fine running-form; don't say he isn't; but you've said scores of times what a deal of riding he takes. Now, can you tell us yourself that you're in as hard condition as you were when you won the Military, eh?"

Cecil shook his head with a sigh.

"I don't think I am; I've had things to try me, you see. There was that Verschoyle's proposal. I did absolutely think at one time she'd marry me before I could protest against it! Then there was that shock to one's whole nervous system, when that indigo man, who took Lady Laura's house, asked us to dinner, and actually thought we should go!—and there was a scene, you know, of all earthly horrors, when Mrs. Gervase was so near eloping with

me, and Gervase cut up rough, instead of pitying me; and then the field-days were so many, and so late into the season; and I exhausted myself so at the Belvoir theatricals at Easter; and I toiled so atrociously playing 'Almaviva' at your place, Seraph—a private opera's galley slave's work!—and, altogether, I've had a good many things to pull me down since the winter," concluded Bertie, with a plaintive self-condolence over his truffles.

The rest of his condemning judges laughed, and passed the plea of sympathy; the Coldstreamer alone remained censorious and untouched.

"Pull you down! You'll never pull off the race if you sit drinking liqueurs all the morning!" growled that censor. "Look at that!"

Bertie glanced at the London telegram tossed across to him, sent from a private and confidential agent.

"Betting here—two to one on L'Etoile; Irish Roan offered and taken freely. Slight decline in closing prices for the King; getting on French bay rather heavily at midnight. Fancy there's a commission out against the King. Looks suspicious." Cecil shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows a little.

"All the better for us. Take all they'll lay against me. It's as good as our having a 'Commission out'; and if any cads get one against us it can't mean mischief, as it would with professional jocks."

"Are you so sure of yourself, Beauty?"

Beauty shook his head repudiatingly.

"Never am sure of anything, much less of myself. I'm a chameleon, a perfect chameleon!"

"Are you so sure of the King, then?"

"My dear fellow, no! I ask you in reason, how can I be sure of what isn't proved? I'm like that country fellow the old story tells of; he believed in fifteen shillings because he'd once had it in his hand; others, he'd heard, believed in a pound; but, for his part, he didn't, because he'd never seen it. Now that was a man who'd never commit himself; he might had had the Exchequer! I'm the same; I believe the King can win at a good many things because I've seen him do 'em; but I can't possibly tell whether he can get this, because I've never ridden him for it. I shall be able to tell you at three o'clock—but that you don't care for–"

And Bertie, exhausted with making such a lengthened exposition—the speeches he preferred were monosyllabic—completed his sins against training with a long draught of claret-cup.

"Then what the devil do you mean by telling us to pile our pots on you?" asked the outraged Coldstreamer, with natural wrath.

"Faith is a beautiful sight!" said Bertie, with solemnity.

"Offered on the altar of the Jews!" laughed the Seraph, as he turned him away from the breakfast table by the shoulders. "Thanks, Beauty; I've 'four figures' on you, and you'll be good enough to win them for me. Let's have a look at the King. They are just going to walk him over."

Cecil complied; while he lounged away with the others to the

stables, with a face of the most calm, gentle, weary indifference in the world, the thought crossed him for a second of how very near he was to the wind. The figures in his betting-book were to the tune of several thousands, one way or another. If he won this morning it would be all right, of course; if he lost—even Beauty, odd mixture of devil-may-care and languor though he was, felt his lips grow, for the moment, hot and cold by turns as he thought of that possible contingency.

The King looked in splendid condition; he knew well enough what was up again, knew what was meant by that extra sedulous dressing-down, that setting muzzle that had been buckled on him some nights previous, the limitation put to his drink, the careful trial spins in the gray of the mornings, the conclusive examination of his plates by a skillful hand; he knew what was required of him, and a horse in nobler condition never stepped out in body clothing, as he was ridden slowly down on to the plains of Iffesheim. The Austrian Dragoon, a Count and a Chamberlain likewise, who was to ride his only possible rival, the French horse L'Etoile, pulled his tawny silken mustaches as he saw the great English hero come up the course, and muttered to himself, "L'affaire est finie." L'Etoile was a brilliant enough bay in his fashion, but Count Ruteroth knew the measure of his pace and powers too thoroughly to expect him to live against the strides of the Guards' gray.

"My beauty, won't you cut those German fellows down!" muttered Rake, the enthusiast, in the saddling inclosure. "As for

those fools what go agin you, you'll put them in a hole, and no mistake. French horse, indeed! Why, you'll spread-eagle all them Mossoos' and Meinherrs' cattle in a brace of seconds—"

Rake's foe, the head groom, caught him up savagely.

"Won't you never learn decent breeding? When we wins we wins on the quiet, and when we loses we loses as if we liked it; all that braying, and flaunting, and boasting is only fit for cads. The 'oss is in tip-top condition; let him show what he can do over furren ground."

"Lucky for him, then, that he hasn't got you across the pigskin; you'd rope him, I believe, as soon as look at him, if it was made worth your while," retorted Rake, in caustic wrath; his science of repartee chiefly lay in a successful "plant," and he was here uncomfortably conscious that his opponent was in the right of the argument, as he started through the throng to put his master into the "shell" of the Shire-famous scarlet and white.

"Tip-top condition, my boy—tip-top, and no mistake," murmured Mr. Willon for the edification of those around them as the saddle-girths were buckled on, and the Guards' Crack stood the cynosure of every eye at Iffesheim.

Then, in his capacity as head attendant on the hero, he directed the exercise bridle to be taken off, and with his own hands adjusted a new and handsome one, slung across his arm.

"'Tis a'most a pity. 'Tis a'most a pity," thought the worthy, as he put the curb on the King; "but I shouldn't have been haggravated with that hinsolent soldiering chap. There, my boy!

if you'll win with a painted quid, I'm a Dutchman."

Forest King champed his bit between his teeth a little; it tasted bitter; he tossed his head and licked it with his tongue impatiently; the taste had got down his throat and he did not like its flavor; he turned his deep, lustrous eyes with a gentle patience on the crowd about him, as though asking them what was the matter with him. No one moved his bit; the only person who could have had such authority was busily giving the last polish to his coat with a fine handkerchief—that glossy neck which had been so dusted many a time with the cobweb coronet-broidered handkerchiefs of great ladies—and his instincts, glorious as they were, were not wise enough to tell him to kick his head groom down, then and there, with one mortal blow, as his poisoner and betrayer.

The King chafed under the taste of that "painted quid"; he felt a nausea as he swallowed, and he turned his handsome head with a strange, pathetic astonishment in his glance. At that moment a familiar hand stroked his mane, a familiar foot was put into his stirrup, Bertie threw himself into saddle; the lightest weight that ever gentleman-rider rode, despite his six-foot length of limb. The King, at the well-known touch, the well-loved voice, pricked his delicate ears, quivered in all his frame with eager excitation, snuffed the air restlessly through his distended nostrils, and felt every vein under his satin skin thrill and swell with pleasure; he was all impatience, all power, all longing, vivid intensity of life. If only that nausea would go! He felt a restless sickliness stealing

on him that his young and gallant strength had never known since he was foaled. But it was not in the King to yield to a little; he flung his head up, champing angrily at the bit, then walked down to the starting-post with his old calm, collected grace; and Cecil, looking at the glossy bow of the neck, and feeling the width of the magnificent ribs beneath him, stooped from his saddle a second as he rode out of the inclosure and bent to the Seraph.

"Look at him, Rock! The thing's as good as won."

The day was very warm and brilliant; all Baden had come down to the race-course; continuous strings of carriages, with their four or six horses and postilions, held the line far down over the plains; mob there was none, save of women in matchless toilets, and men with the highest names in the "Almanac de Gotha"; the sun shone cloudlessly on the broad, green plateau of Iffesheim, on the white amphitheater of chalk hills, and on the glittering, silken folds of the flags of England, France, Prussia, and of the Grand Duchy itself, that floated from the summits of the Grand Stand, Pavilion, and Jockey Club.

The ladies, descending from the carriages, swept up and down on the green course that was so free from "cads" and "legs"; their magnificent skirts trailing along without the risk of a grain of dust; their costly laces side by side with the Austrian uniforms of the military men from Rastadt. The betting was but slight, in odd contrast with the hubbub and striking clamor of English betting rings; the only approach to anything like "real business" being transacted between the members of the Household and those

of the Jockey Clubs. Iffesheim was pure pleasure, like every other item of Baden existence, and all aristocratic, sparkling, rich, amusement-seeking Europe seemed gathered there under the sunny skies, and on everyone's lips in the titled throng was but one name—Forest King's. Even the coquettish bouquet-sellers, who remembered the dresses of his own colors which Cecil had given them last year when he had won the Rastadt, would sell nothing except little twin scarlet and white moss rosebuds; of which thousands were gathered and died that morning in honor of the English Guards' champion.

A slender event usually, the presence of the renowned crack of the Household Cavalry made the Prix de Dames the most eagerly watched-for entry on the card; and the rest of the field were scarcely noticed as the well-known gold-embroidered jacket came up at the starting-post.

The King saw that blaze of light and color over course and stands that he knew so well by this time; he felt the pressure round him of his foreign rivals as they reared and pulled and fretted and passaged; the old longing quivered in all his eager limbs, the old fire wakened in all his dauntless blood; like the charger at sound of the trumpet-call, he lived in his past victories, and was athirst for more. But yet—between him and the sunny morning there seemed a dim, hazy screen; on his delicate ear the familiar clangor smote with something dulled and strange; there seemed a numbness stealing down his frame; he shook his head in an unusual and irritated impatience; he did not know what ailed him.

The hand he loved so loyally told him the work that was wanted of him; but he felt its guidance dully too, and the dry, hard, hot earth, as he struck it with his hoof, seemed to sway and heave beneath him; the opiate had stolen into his veins and was creeping stealthily and surely to the sagacious brain, and over the clear, bright senses.

The signal for the start was given; the first mad headlong rush broke away with the force of a pent-up torrent suddenly loosened; every instinct of race and custom, and of that obedience which rendered him flexible as silk to his rider's will, sent him forward with that stride which made the Guards' Crack a household word in all the Shires. For a moment he shook himself clear of all the horses, and led off in the old grand sweeping canter before the French bay, three lengths in the one single effort.

Then into his eyes a terrible look of anguish came; the numb and sickly nausea was upon him, his legs trembled, before his sight was a blurred, whirling mist; all the strength and force and mighty life within him felt ebbing out, yet he struggled bravely. He strained, he panted, he heard the thundering thud of the first flight gaining nearer and nearer upon him; he felt his rivals closing hotter and harder in on him; he felt the steam of his opponent's smoking, foam-dashed withers burn on his own flanks and shoulders; he felt the maddening pressure of a neck-to-neck struggle; he felt what in all his victorious life he had never known—the paralysis of defeat.

The glittering throngs spreading over the plains gazed at him

in the sheer stupor of amazement; they saw that the famous English hero was dead-beat as any used-up knacker.

One second more he strove to wrench himself through the throng of the horses, through the headlong crushing press, through—worst foe of all!—the misty darkness curtaining his sight! One second more he tried to wrestle back the old life into his limbs, the unworn power and freshness into nerve and sinew. Then the darkness fell utterly; the mighty heart failed; he could do no more—and his rider's hand slackened and turned him gently backward; his rider's voice sounded very low and quiet to those who, seeing that every effort was hopeless, surged and clustered round his saddle.

"Something ails the King," said Cecil calmly; "he is fairly knocked off his legs. Some Vet must look to him; ridden a yard farther he will fall."

Words so gently spoken!—yet in the single minute that alone had passed since they had left the Starter's Chair, a lifetime seemed to have been centered, alike to Forest King and to his owner.

The field swept on with a rush, without the favorite; and the Prix de Dames was won by the French bay L'Etoile.

CHAPTER X
"PETITE REINE."

When a young Prussian had shot himself the night before for roulette losses, the event had not thrilled, startled, and impressed the gay Baden gathering one tithe so gravely and so enduringly as did now the unaccountable failure of the great Guards' Crack.

Men could make nothing of it save the fact that there was "something dark" somewhere. The "painted quid" had done its work more thoroughly than Willon and the welsher had intended; they had meant that the opiate should be just sufficient to make the favorite off his speed, but not to make effects so palpable as these. It was, however, so deftly prepared that under examination no trace could be found of it, and the result of veterinary investigation, while it left unremoved the conviction that the horse had been doctored, could not explain when or how, or by what medicines. Forest King had simply "broken down"; favorites do this on the flat and over the furrow from an overstrain, from a railway journey, from a touch of cold, from a sudden decay of power, from spasm, or from vertigo; those who lose by them may think what they will of "roping," or "painting," or "nobbling," but what can they prove?

Even in the great scandals that come before the autocrats of the Jockey Club, where the tampering is clearly known, can the

matter ever be really proved and sifted? Very rarely. The trainer affects stolid unconsciousness or unimpeachable respectability; the hapless stable-boy is cross-examined, to protest innocence and ignorance, and most likely protest them rightly; he is accused, dismissed, and ruined; or some young jock has a "caution" out everywhere against him, and never again can get a mount even for the commonest handicap; but, as a rule, the real criminals are never unearthed, and by consequence are never reached and punished.

The Household, present and absent, were heavily hit. They cared little for the "crushers" they incurred, but their champion's failure, when he was in the face of Europe, cut them more terribly. The fame of the English riding-men had been trusted to Forest King and his owner, and they, who had never before betrayed the trust placed in them, had broken down like any screw out of a livery stable; like any jockey bribed to "pull" at a suburban selling-race. It was fearfully bitter work; and, unanimous to a voice, the indignant murmur of "doctored" ran through the titled, fashionable crowds on the Baden course in deep and ominous anger.

The Seraph's grand wrath poured out fulminations against the wicked-doer whosoever he was, or wheresoever he lurked; and threatened, with a vengeance that would be no empty words, the direst chastisement of the "Club," of which both his father and himself were stewards, upon the unknown criminal. The Austrian and French nobles, while winners by the event, were

scarce in less angered excitement. It seemed to cast the foulest slur upon their honor that, upon foreign ground, the renowned English steeple-chaser should have been tampered with thus; and the fair ladies of either world added the influence of their silver tongues, and were eloquent in the vivacity of their sympathy and resentment with a unanimity women rarely show in savoring defeat, but usually reserve for the fairer opportunity of swaying the censer before success.

Cecil alone, amid it all, was very quiet; he said scarcely a word, nor could the sharpest watcher have detected an alteration in his countenance. Only once, when they talked around him of the investigations of the Club, and of the institution of inquiries to discover the guilty traitor, he looked up with a sudden, dangerous lighting of his soft, dark, hazel eyes, under the womanish length of their lashes: "When you find him, leave him to me."

The light was gone again in an instant; but those who knew the wild strain that ran in the Royallieu blood knew by it that, despite his gentle temper, a terrible reckoning for the evil done his horse might come some day from the Quietist.

He said little or nothing else, and to the sympathy and indignation expressed for him on all sides he answered with his old, listless calm. But, in truth, he barely knew what was saying or doing about him; he felt like a man stunned and crushed with the violence of some tremendous fall; the excitation, the agitation, the angry amazement around him (growing as near clamor as was possible in those fashionable betting-circles, so free from roughs

and almost free from bookmakers), the conflicting opinions clashing here and there—even, indeed, the graceful condolence of the brilliant women—were insupportable to him. He longed to be out of this world which had so well amused him; he longed passionately, for the first time in his life, to be alone.

For he knew that with the failure of Forest King had gone the last plank that saved him from ruin; perhaps the last chance that stood between him and dishonor. He had never looked on it as within the possibilities of hazard that the horse could be defeated; now, little as those about him knew it, an absolute and irremediable disgrace fronted him. For, secure in the issue of the Prix de Dames, and compelled to weight his chances in it very heavily that his winnings might be wide enough to relieve some of the debt-pressure upon him, his losses now were great; and he knew no more how to raise the moneys to meet them than he would have known how to raise the dead.

The blow fell with crushing force; the fiercer because his indolence had persisted in ignoring his danger, and because his whole character was so naturally careless and so habituated to ease and to enjoyment.

A bitter, heartsick misery fell on him; the tone of honor was high with him; he might be reckless of everything else, but he could never be reckless in what infringed, or went nigh to infringe, a very stringent code. Bertie never reasoned in that way; he simply followed the instincts of his breeding without analyzing them; but these led him safely and surely right in all his dealings

with his fellow-men, however open to censure his life might be in other matters. Careless as he was, and indifferent, to levity, in many things, his ideas of honor were really very pure and elevated; he suffered proportionately now that, through the follies of his own imprudence, and the baseness of some treachery he could neither sift nor avenge, he saw himself driven down into as close a jeopardy of disgrace as ever befell a man who did not willfully, and out of guilty coveting of its fruits, seek it.

For the first time in his life the society of his troops of acquaintance became intolerably oppressive; for the first time in his life he sought refuge from thought in the stimulus of drink, and dashed down neat Cognac as though it were iced Badminton, as he drove with his set off the disastrous plains of Iffesheim. He shook himself free of them as soon as he could; he felt the chatter round him insupportable; the men were thoroughly good-hearted, and though they were sharply hit by the day's issue, never even by implication hinted at owing the disaster to their faith in him, but the very cordiality and sympathy they showed cut him the keenest—the very knowledge of their forbearance made his own thoughts darkest.

Far worse to Cecil than the personal destruction the day's calamity brought him was the knowledge of the entire faith these men had placed in him, and the losses which his own mistaken security had caused them. Granted he could neither guess nor avert the trickery which had brought about his failure; but none the less did he feel that he had failed them; none the less did the

very generosity and magnanimity they showed him sting him like a scourge.

He got away from them at last, and wandered out alone into the gardens of the Stephanien, till the green trees of an alley shut him in in solitude, and the only echo of the gay world of Baden was the strain of a band, the light mirth of a laugh, or the roll of a carriage sounding down the summer air.

It was eight o'clock; the sun was slanting in the west in a cloudless splendor, bathing the bright scene in a rich golden glow, and tinging to bronze the dark masses of the Black Forest. In another hour he was the expected guest of a Russian Prince at a dinner party, where all that was highest, fairest, greatest, most powerful, and most bewitching of every nationality represented there would meet; and in the midst of this radiant whirlpool of extravagance and pleasure, where every man worth owning as such was his friend, and every woman whose smile he cared for welcomed him, he knew himself as utterly alone, as utterly doomed, as the lifeless Prussian lying in the dead-house. No aid could serve him, for it would have been but to sink lower yet to ask or to take it; no power could save him from the ruin which in a few days later at the farthest would mark him out forever an exiled, beggared, perhaps dishonored man—a debtor and an alien.

Where he had thrown himself on a bench beneath a mountain-ash, trying vainly to realize this thing which had come upon him —and to meet which not training, nor habit, nor a moment's

grave reflection had ever done the slightest to prepare him; gazing, blankly and unconsciously, at the dense pine woods and rugged glens of the Forest that sloped upward and around above the green and leafy nest of Baden—he watched mechanically the toiling passage of a charcoal-burner going up the hillside in distance through the firs.

"Those poor devils envy us!" he thought. "Better be one of them ten thousand times than be trained for the Great Race, and started with the cracks, dead weighted with the penalty-shot of Poverty!"

A soft touch came on his arm as he sat there; he looked up, surprised. Before him stood a dainty, delicate little form, all gay with white lace, and broideries, and rose ribbons, and floating hair fastened backward with a golden fillet; it was that of the little Lady Venetia,—the only daughter of the House of Lyonnesse, by a late marriage of his Grace,—the eight-year-old sister of the colossal Seraph; the plaything of a young and lovely mother, who had flirted in Belgravia with her future stepson before she fell sincerely and veritably in love with the gallant and still handsome Duke.

Cecil roused himself and smiled at her; he had been by months together at Lyonnesse most years of the child's life, and had been gentle to her as he was to every living thing, though he had noticed her seldom.

"Well, Petite Reine," he said kindly, bitter as his thoughts were; calling her by the name she generally bore. "All alone?

Where are your playmates?"

"Petite Reine," who, to justify her sobriquet, was a grand, imperial little lady, bent her delicate head—a very delicate head, indeed, carrying itself royally, young though it was.

"Ah! you know I never care for children!"

It was said so disdainfully, yet so sincerely, without a touch of affectation, and so genuinely, as the expression of a matured and contemptuous opinion, that even in that moment it amused him. She did not wait an answer, but bent nearer, with an infinite pity and anxiety in her pretty eyes.

"I want to know—you are so vexed; are you not? They say you have lost all your money!"

"Do they? They are not far wrong then. Who are 'they,' Petite Reine?"

"Oh! Prince Alexis, and the Duc de Lorance, and mamma, and everybody. Is it true?"

"Very true, my little lady."

"Ah!" She gave a long sigh, looking pathetically at him, with her head on one side, and her lips parted; "I heard the Russian gentleman saying that you were ruined. Is that true, too?"

"Yes, dear," he answered wearily, thinking little of the child in the desperate pass to which his life had come.

Petite Reine stood by him silent; her proud, imperial young ladyship had a very tender heart, and she was very sorry; she had understood what had been said before her of him vaguely indeed, and with no sense of its true meaning, yet still with the quick

perception of a brilliant and petted child. Looking at her, he saw with astonishment that her eyes were filled with tears. He put out his hand and drew her to him.

"Why, little one, what do you know of these things? How did you find me out here?"

She bent nearer to him, swaying her slender figure, with its bright gossamer muslins, like a dainty hare-bell, and lifting her face to his—earnest, beseeching, and very eager.

"I came—I came—please don't be angry—because I heard them say you had no money, and I want you to take mine. Do take it! Look, it is all bright gold, and it is my own, my very own. Papa gives it to me to do just what I like with. Do take it; pray do!"

Coloring deeply, for the Petite Reine had that true instinct of generous natures,—a most sensitive delicacy for others,—but growing ardent in her eloquence and imploring in her entreaty, she shook on to Cecil's knee, out of a little enamel sweetmeat box, twenty bright Napoleons that fell in a glittering shower on the grass.

He started, and looked at her in a silence that she mistook for offense. She leaned nearer, pale now with her excitement, and with her large eyes gleaming and melting with passionate entreaty.

"Don't be angry; pray take it; it is all my own, and you know I have bonbons, and books, and playthings, and ponies, and dogs till I am tired of them; I never want the money; indeed I don't. Take it, please take it; and if you will only let me ask Papa or

Rock they will give you thousands and thousands of pounds, if that isn't enough. Do let me!"

Cecil, in silence still, stooped and drew her to him. When he spoke his voice shook ever so slightly, and he felt his eyes dim with an emotion that he had not known in all his careless life; the child's words and action touched him deeply, the caressing, generous innocence of the offered gift, beside the enormous extravagance and hopeless bankruptcy of his career, smote him with a keen pang, yet moved him with a strange pleasure.

"Petite Reine," he murmured gently, striving vainly for his old lightness, "Petite Reine, how some man will love you one day! Thank you from my heart, my little innocent friend."

Her face flushed with gladness; she smiled with all a child's unshadowed joy.

"Ah! then you will take it! and if you want more only let me ask them for it; papa and Philip never refuse me anything!"

His hand wandered gently over the shower of her hair, as he put back the Napoleons that he had gathered up into her azure bonbonniere.

"Petite Reine, you are a little angel; but I cannot take your money, my child, and you must ask for none for my sake from your father or from Rock. Do not look so grieved, little one; I love you none the less because I refuse it."

Petite Reine's face was very pale and grave; a delicate face, in its miniature feminine childhood almost absurdly like the Seraph's; her eyes were full of plaintive wonder and of pathetic

reproach.

"Ah!" she said, drooping her head with a sigh; "it is no good to you because it is such a little; do let me ask for more!"

He smiled, but the smile was very weary.

"No, dear, you must not ask for more; I have been very foolish, my little friend, and I must take the fruits of my folly; all men must. I can accept no one's money, not even yours; when you are older and remember this, you will know why. But I do not thank you the less from my heart."

She looked at him, pained and wistful.

"You will not take anything, Mr. Cecil?" she asked with a sigh, glancing at her rejected Napoleons.

He drew the enamel bonbonniere away.

"I will take that if you will give it me, Petite Reine, and keep it in memory of you."

As he spoke, he stooped and kissed her very gently; the act had moved him more deeply than he thought he had it in him to be moved by anything, and the child's face turned upward to him was of a very perfect and aristocratic loveliness, far beyond her years. She colored as his lips touched hers, and swayed slightly from him. She was an extremely proud young sovereign, and never allowed caresses; yet she lingered by him, troubled, grave, with something intensely tender and pitiful in the musing look of her eyes. She had a perception that this calamity which smote him was one far beyond the ministering of her knowledge.

He took the pretty Palais Royal gold-rimmed sweetmeat box,

and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket. It was only a child's gift, a tiny Paris toy; but it had been brought to him in a tender compassion, and he did keep it; kept it through dark days and wild nights, through the scorch of the desert and the shadows of death, till the young eyes that questioned him now with such innocent wonder had gained the grander luster of their womanhood and had brought him a grief wider than he knew now.

At that moment, as the child stood beside him under the drooping acacia boughs, with the green, sloping lower valley seen at glimpses through the wall of leaves, one of the men of the Stephanien approached him with an English letter, which, as it was marked "instant," they had laid apart from the rest of the visitors' pile of correspondence. Cecil took it wearily—nothing but fresh embarrassments could come to him from England—and looked at the little Lady Venetia.

"Will you allow me?"

She bowed her graceful head; with all the naif unconsciousness of a child, she had all the manner of the veille cour; together they made her enchanting.

He broke the envelope and read—a blurred, scrawled, miserable letter; the words erased with passionate strokes, and blotted with hot tears, and scored out in impulsive misery. It was long, yet at a glance he scanned its message and its meaning; at the first few words he knew its whole as well as though he had studied every line.

A strong tremor shook him from head to foot, a tremor at once of passionate rage and of as passionate pain; his face blanched to a deadly whiteness; his teeth clinched as though he were restraining some bodily suffering, and he tore the letter in two and stamped it down into the turf under his heel with a gesture as unlike his common serenity of manner as the fiery passion that darkened in his eyes was unlike the habitual softness of his too pliant and too unresentful temper. He crushed the senseless paper again and again down into the grass beneath his heel; his lips shook under the silky abundance of his beard; the natural habit of long usage kept him from all utterance, and even in the violence of its shock he remembered the young Venetia's presence; but, in that one fierce, unrestrained gesture the shame and suffering upon him broke out, despite himself.

The child watched him, startled and awed. She touched his hand softly.

"What is it? Is it anything worse?"

He turned his eyes on her with a dry, hot, weary anguish in them; he was scarcely conscious what he said or what he answered.

"Worse—worse?" he repeated mechanically, while his heel still ground down in loathing the shattered paper into the grass. "There can be nothing worse! It is the vilest, blackest shame."

He spoke to his thoughts, not to her; the words died in his throat; a bitter agony was on him; all the golden summer evening, all the fair green world about him, were indistinct and unreal to

his senses; he felt as if the whole earth were of a sudden changed; he could not realize that this thing could come to him and his—that this foul dishonor could creep up and stain them—that this infamy could ever be of them and upon them. All the ruin that before had fallen on him to-day was dwarfed and banished; it looked nothing beside the unendurable horror that reached him now.

The gay laughter of children sounded down the air at that moment; they were the children of a French Princess seeking their playmate Venetia, who had escaped from them and from their games to find her way to Cecil. He motioned her to them; he could not bear even the clear and pitying eyes of the Petite Reine to be upon him now.

She lingered wistfully; she did not like to leave him.

"Let me stay with you," she pleaded caressingly. "You are vexed at something; I cannot help you, but Rock will—the Duke will. Do let me ask them?"

He laid his hand on her shoulder; his voice, as he answered, was hoarse and unsteady.

"No; go, dear. You will please me best by leaving me. Ask none—tell none; I can trust you to be silent, Petite Reine."

She gave him a long, earnest look.

"Yes," she answered simply and gravely, as one who accepts, and not lightly, a trust.

Then she went slowly and lingeringly, with the sun on the gold fillet binding her hair, but the tears heavy on the shadow

of her silken lashes. When next they met again the luster of a warmer sun, that once burned on the white walls of the palace of Phoenicia and the leaping flame of the Temple of the God of Healing, shone upon them; and through the veil of those sweeping lashes there gazed the resistless sovereignty of a proud and patrician womanhood.

Alone, his head sank down upon his hands; he gave reins to the fiery scorn, the acute suffering which turn by turn seized him with every moment that seared the words of the letter deeper and deeper down into his brain. Until this he had never known what it was to suffer; until this his languid creeds had held that no wise man feels strongly, and that to glide through life untroubled and unmoved is as possible as it is politic. Now he suffered, he suffered dumbly as a dog, passionately as a barbarian; now he was met by that which, in the moment of its dealing, pierced his panoplies of indifference, and escaped his light philosophies.

"Oh, God!" he thought, "if it were anything—anything—except Disgrace!"

In a miserable den, an hour or so before—there are miserable dens even in Baden, that gold-decked rendezvous of princes, where crowned heads are numberless as couriers, and great ministers must sometimes be content with a shakedown—two men sat in consultation. Though the chamber was poor and dark, their table was loaded with various expensive wines and liqueurs. Of a truth they were flush of money, and selected this poor place from motives of concealment rather than of necessity. One of

them was the "welsher," Ben Davis; the other, a smaller, quieter man, with a keen, vivacious Hebrew eye and an olive-tinted skin, a Jew, Ezra Baroni. The Jew was cool, sharp, and generally silent; the "welsher," heated, eager, flushed with triumph, and glowing with a gloating malignity. Excitement and the fire of very strong wines, of whose vintage brandy formed a large part, had made him voluble in exultation; the monosyllabic sententiousness that had characterized him in the loose-box at Royallieu had been dissipated under the ardor of success; and Ben Davis, with his legs on the table, a pipe between his teeth, and his bloated face purple with a brutal contentment, might have furnished to a Teniers the personification of culminated cunning and of delighted tyranny.

"That precious Guards' swell!" he muttered gloatingly, for the hundredth time. "I've paid him out at last! He won't take a 'walk over' again in a hurry. Cuss them swells! They allays die so game; it ain't half a go after all, giving 'em a facer; they just come up to time so cool under it all, and never show they are down, even when their backers throw up the sponge. You can't make 'em give in, not even when they're mortal hit; that's the crusher of it."

"Vell, vhat matter that ven you have hit 'em?" expostulated the more philosophic Jew.

"Why, it is a fleecing of one," retorted the welsher savagely, even amid his successes. "A clear fleecing of one. If one gets the better of a dandy chap like that, and brings him down neat and clean, one ought to have the spice of it. One ought to see him

wince and—cuss 'em all!—that's just what they'll never do. No! not if it was ever so. You may pitch into 'em like Old Harry, and those d–d fine gentlemen will just look as if they liked it. You might strike 'em dead at your feet, and it's my belief, while they was cold as stone they'd manage to look not beaten yet. It's a fleecing of one—a fleecing of one!" he growled afresh; draining down a great draught of brandy-heated Roussillon to drown the impatient conviction which possessed him that, let him triumph as he would, there would ever remain, in that fine intangible sense which his coarse nature could feel, though he could not have further defined it, a superiority in his adversary he could not conquer; a difference between him and his prey he could not bridge over.

The Jew laughed a little.

"Vot a child you are, you Big Ben! Vot matter how he look, so long as you have de success and pocket de monish?"

Big Ben gave a long growl, like a mastiff tearing to reach a bone just held above him.

"Hang the blunt! The yellows ain't a quarter worth to me what it 'ud be to see him just look as if he knew he was knocked over. Besides, laying again' him by that ere commission's piled up hatsful of the ready, to be sure; I don't say it ain't; but there's two thou' knocked off for Willon, and the fool don't deserve a tizzy of it. He went and put the paint on so thick that, if the Club don't have a flare-up about the whole thing–"

"Let dem!" said the Jew serenely. "Dey can do vot dey like;

dey von't get to de bottom of de vell. Dat Villon is sharp; he vill know how to keep his tongue still; dey can prove nothing; dey may give de sack to a stable-boy, or dey may think themselves mighty bright in seeing a mare's nest, but dey vill never come to us."

The welsher gave a loud, hoarse guffaw of relish and enjoyment.

"No! We know the ins and outs of Turf Law a trifle too well to be caught napping. A neater thing weren't ever done, if it hadn't been that the paint was put a trifle too thick. The 'oss should have just run ill, and not knocked over, clean out o' time like that. However, there ain't no odds a-crying over spilt milk. If the Club do come a inquiry, we'll show 'em a few tricks that'll puzzle 'em. But it's my belief they'll let it off on the quiet; there ain't a bit of evidence to show the 'oss was doctored, and the way he went stood quite as well for having been knocked off his feed and off his legs by the woyage and sich like. And now you go and put that swell to the grindstone for Act 2 of the comedy; will yer?"

Ezra Baroni smiled, where he leaned against the table, looking over some papers.

"Dis is a delicate matter; don't you come putting your big paw in it—you'll spoil it all."

Ben Davis growled afresh:

"No, I ain't a-going. You know as well as me I can't show in the thing. Hanged if I wouldn't almost lief risk a lifer out at Botany Bay for the sake o' wringing my fine-feathered bird myself, but I

daren't. If he was to see me in it, all 'ud be up. You must do it. Get along; you look uncommon respectable. If your coat-tails was a little longer, you might right and away be took for a parson."

The Jew laughed softly, the welsher grimly, at the compliment they paid the Church; Baroni put up his papers into a neat Russia letter book. Excellently dressed, without a touch of flashiness, he did look eminently respectable—and lingered a moment.

"I say, dear child; vat if de Marquis vant to buy off and hush up? Ten to von he vill; he care no more for monish than for dem macaroons, and he love his friend, dey say."

Ben Davis took his legs off the table with a crash, and stood up, flushed, thirstily eager, almost aggressive in his peremptory excitement.

"Without wringing my dainty bird's neck? Not for a million paid out o' hand! Without crushing my fine gentleman down into powder? Not for all the blunt of every one o' the Rothschilds! Curse his woman's face! I've got to keep dark now; but when he's crushed, and smashed, and ruined, and pilloried, and drove out of this fine world, and warned off of all his aristocratic race-courses, then I'll come in and take a look at him; then I'll see my brilliant gentleman a worn-out, broken-down swindler, a dying in the bargain!"

The intense malignity, the brutal hungry lust for vengeance that inspired the words, lent their coarse vulgarity something that was for the moment almost tragical in its strength; almost horrible in its passion. Ezra Baroni looked at him quietly, then

without another word went out—to a congenial task.

"Dat big child is a fool," mused the subtler and gentler Jew. "Vengeance is but de breath of de vind; it blow for you one day, it blow against you de next; de only real good is monish."

The Seraph had ridden back from Iffesheim to the Bad in company with some Austrian officers, and one or two of his own comrades. He had left the Course late, staying to exhaust every possible means of inquiry as to the failure of Forest King, and to discuss with other members of the Newmarket and foreign jockey clubs the best methods—if method there were—of discovering what foul play had been on foot with the horse. That there was some, and very foul too, the testimony of men and angels would not have dissuaded the Seraph; and the event had left him most unusually grave and regretful.

The amount he had lost himself, in consequence, was of not the slightest moment to him, although he was extravagant enough to run almost to the end even of his own princely tether in money matters; but that "Beauty" should be cut down was more vexatious to him than any evil accident that could have befallen himself, and he guessed pretty nearly the terrible influence the dead failure would have on his friend's position.

True, he had never heard Cecil breathe a syllable that hinted at embarrassment; but these things get known with tolerable accuracy about town, and those who were acquainted, as most people in their set were, with the impoverished condition of the Royallieu exchequer, however hidden it might be under an

unabated magnificence of living, were well aware also that none of the old Viscount's sons could have any safe resources to guarantee them from as rapid a ruin as they liked to consummate. Indeed, it had of late been whispered that it was probable, despite the provisions of the entail, that all the green wealth and Norman Beauty of Royallieu itself would come into the market. Hence the Seraph, the best-hearted and most generous-natured of men, was worried by an anxiety and a despondency which he would never have indulged, most assuredly, on his own account, as he rode away from Iffesheim after the defeat of his Corps' champion.

He was expected to dinner with one of the most lovely of foreign Ambassadresses, and was to go with her afterward to the Vaudeville, at the pretty golden theater, where a troupe from the Bouffes were playing; but he felt anything but in the mood for even her bewitching and—in an marriageable sense—safe society, as he stopped his horse at his own hotel, the Badischer Hof.

As he swung himself out of saddle, a well-dressed, quiet, rather handsome little man drew near respectfully, lifting his hat—it was M. Baroni. The Seraph had never seen the man in his life that he knew of, but he was himself naturally frank, affable, courteous, and never given to hedging himself behind the pale of his high rank; provided you did not bore him, you might always get access to him easily enough—the Duke used to tell him, too easily.

Therefore, when Ezra Baroni deferentially approached with,

"The Most Noble the Marquis of Rockingham, I think?" the Seraph, instead of leaving the stranger there discomfited, nodded and paused with his inconsequent good nature; thinking how much less bosh it would be if everybody could call him, like his family and his comrades, "Rock."

"That is my name," he answered. "I do not know you. Do you want anything of me?"

The Seraph had a vivid terror of people who "wanted him," in the subscription, not the police, sense of the word; and had been the victim of frauds innumerable.

"I wished," returned Baroni respectfully, but with sufficient independence to conciliate his auditor, whom he saw at a glance cringing subservience would disgust, "to have the opportunity of asking your lordship a very simple question."

The Seraph looked a little bored, a little amused.

"Well, ask it, my good fellow; you have your opportunity!" he said impatiently, yet good-humored still.

"Then would you, my lord," continued the Jew with his strong Hebrew-German accent, "be so good as to favor me by saying whether this signature be your own?"

The Jew held before him a folded paper, so folded that one line only was visible, across which was dashed in bold characters, "Rockingham."

The Seraph put up his eye-glass, stopped, and took a steadfast look; then shook his head.

"No; that is not mine; at least, I think not. Never made my R

half a quarter so well in my life."

"Many thanks, my lord," said Baroni quietly. "One question more and we can substantiate the fact. Did your lordship indorse any bill on the 15th of last month?"

The Seraph looked surprised, and reflected a moment. "No, I didn't," he said after a pause. "I have done it for men, but not on that day; I was shooting at Hornsey Wood most of it, if I remember right. Why do you ask?"

"I will tell you, my lord, if you grant me a private interview."

The Seraph moved away. "Never do that," he said briefly; "private interviews," thought he, acting on past experience, "with women always mean proposals, and with men always mean extortion."

Baroni made a quick movement toward him.

"An instant, my lord! This intimately concerns yourself. The steps of an hotel are surely not the place in which to speak of it?"

"I wish to hear nothing about it," replied Rock, putting him aside; while he thought to himself regretfully, "That is 'stiff,' that bit of paper; perhaps some poor wretch is in a scrape. I wish I hadn't so wholly denied my signature. If the mischief's done, there's no good in bothering the fellow."

The Seraph's good nature was apt to overlook such trifles as the Law.

Baroni kept pace with him as he approached the hotel door, and spoke very low.

"My lord, if you do not listen, worse may befall the reputation

both of your regiment and your friends."

The Seraph swung round; his careless, handsome face set stern in an instant; his blue eyes grave, and gathering an ominous fire.

"Step yonder," he said curtly, signing the Hebrew toward the grand staircase. "Show that person to my rooms, Alexis."

But for the publicity of the entrance of the Badischer Hof the mighty right arm of the Guardsman might have terminated the interview then and there, in different fashion. Baroni had gained his point, and was ushered into the fine chambers set apart for the future Duke of Lyonnesse. The Seraph strode after him, and as the attendant closed the door and left them alone in the first of the great lofty suite, all glittering with gilding, and ormolu, and malachite, and rose velvet, and Parisian taste, stood like a tower above the Jew's small, slight form; while his words came curtly, and only by a fierce effort through his lips.

"Substantiate what you dare to say, or my grooms shall throw you out of that window! Now!"

Baroni looked up, unmoved; the calm, steady, undisturbed glance sent a chill over the Seraph; he thought if this man came but for purposes of extortion, and were not fully sure that he could make good what he said, this was not the look he would give.

"I desire nothing better, my lord," said Baroni quietly, "though I greatly regret to be the messenger of such an errand. This bill, which in a moment I will have the honor of showing you, was transacted by my house (I am one of the partners of a

London discounting firm), indorsed thus by your celebrated name. Moneys were lent on it, the bill was made payable at two months' date; it was understood that you accepted it; there could be no risk with such a signature as yours. The bill was negotiated; I was in Leyden, Lubeck, and other places at the period; I heard nothing of the matter. When I returned to London, a little less than a week ago, I saw the signature for the first time. I was at once aware that it was not yours, for I had some paid bills, signed by you, at hand, with which I compared it. Of course, my only remedy was to seek you out, although I was nearly certain, before your present denial, that the bill was a forgery."

He spoke quite tranquilly still, with a perfectly respectful regret, but with the air of a man who has his title to be heard, and is acting simply in hie own clear right. The Seraph listened, restless, impatient, sorely tried to keep in the passion which had been awakened by the hint that this wretched matter could concern or attaint the honor of his corps.

"Well! speak out!" he said impatiently. "Details are nothing. Who drew it? Who forged my name, if it be forged? Quick! give me the paper."

"With every trust and every deference, my lord, I cannot let the bill pass out of my own hands until this unfortunate matter be cleared up—if cleared up it can be. Your lordship shall see the bill, however, of course, spread here upon the table; but first, let me warn you, my Lord Marquis, that the sight will be intensely painful to you.

"Very painful, my lord," added Baroni impressively. "Prepare yourself for—"

Rock dashed his hand down on the marble table with a force that made the lusters and statuettes on it ring and tremble.

"No more words! Lay the bill there."

Baroni bowed and smoothed out upon the console the crumpled document, holding it with one hand, yet leaving visible with the counterfeited signature one other, the name of the forger in whose favor the bill was drawn; that other signature was —"Bertie Cecil."

"I deeply regret to deal you such a blow from such a friend, my lord," said the Jew softly. The Seraph stooped and gazed—one instant of horrified amazement kept him dumb there, staring at the written paper as at some ghastly thing; then all the hot blood rushed over his fair, bold face; he flung himself on the Hebrew, and, ere the other could have breath or warning, tossed him upward to the painted ceiling and hurled him down again upon the velvet carpet, as lightly as a retriever will catch up and let fall a wild duck or a grouse, and stood over Baroni where he lay.

"You hound!"

Baroni, lying passive and breathless with the violence of the shock and the surprise, yet kept, even amid the hurricane of wrath that had tossed him upward and downward as the winds toss leaves, his hold upon the document, and his clear, cool, ready self-possession.

"My lord," he said faintly, "I do not wonder at your excitement, aggressive as it renders you; but I cannot admit that false which I know to be a for—"

"Silence! Say that word once more, and I shall forget myself and hurl you out into the street like the dog of a Jew you are!"

"Have patience an instant, my lord. Will it profit your friend and brother-in-arms if it be afterward said that when this charge was brought against him, you, my Lord Rockingham, had so little faith in his power to refute it that you bore down with all your mighty strength in a personal assault upon one so weakly as myself, and sought to put an end to the evidence against him by bodily threats against my safety, and by—what will look legally, my lord, like—an attempt to coerce me into silence and to obtain the paper from my hands by violence?"

Faint and hoarse the words were, but they were spoken with quiet confidence, with admirable acumen; they were the very words to lash the passions of his listener into unendurable fire, yet to chain them powerless down; the Guardsman stood above him, his features flushed and dark with rage, his eyes literally blazing with fury, his lips working under his tawny, leonine beard. At every syllable he could have thrown himself afresh upon the Jew and flung him out of his presence as so much carrion; yet the impotence that truth so often feels, caught and meshed in the coils of subtlety—the desperate disadvantage at which Right is so often placed, when met by the cunning science and sophistry of Wrong—held the Seraph in their net now. He

saw his own rashness, he saw how his actions could be construed till they cast a slur even on the man he defended; he saw how legally he was in error, how legally the gallant vengeance of an indignant friendship might be construed into consciousness of guilt in the accused for whose sake the vengeance fell.

He stood silent, overwhelmed with the intensity of his own passion, baffled by the ingenuity of a serpent-wisdom he could not refute.

Ezra Baroni saw his advantage. He ventured to raise himself slightly.

"My lord, since your faith in your friend is so perfect, send for him. If he be innocent, and I a liar, with a look I shall be confounded."

The tone was perfectly impassive, but the words expressed a world. For a moment the Seraph's eyes flashed on him with a look that made him feel nearer his death than he had been near to it in all his days; but Rockingham restrained himself from force.

"I will send for him," he said briefly; in that answer there was more of menace and of meaning than in any physical action.

He moved and let Baroni rise; shaken and bruised, but otherwise little seriously hurt, and still holding, in a tenacious grasp, the crumpled paper. He rang; his own servant answered the summons.

"Go to the Stephanien and inquire for Mr. Cecil. Be quick; and request him, wherever he be, to be so good as to come to me instantly—here."

The servant bowed and withdrew; a perfect silence followed between these two so strangely assorted companions; the Seraph stood with his back against the mantelpiece, with every sense on the watch to catch every movement of the Jew's, and to hear the first sound of Cecil's approach. The minutes dragged on; the Seraph was in an agony of probation and impatience. Once the attendants entered to light the chandeliers and candelabra; the full light fell on the dark, slight form of the Hebrew, and on the superb attitude and the fair, frank, proud face of the standing Guardsman; neither moved—once more they were left alone.

The moments ticked slowly away one by one, audible in the silence. Now and then the quarter chimed from the clock; it was the only sound in the chamber.

CHAPTER XI
FOR A WOMAN'S SAKE

The door opened—Cecil entered.

The Seraph crossed the room, with his hand held out; not for his life in that moment would he have omitted that gesture of friendship. Involuntarily he started and stood still one instant in amaze; the next, he flung thought away and dashed into swift, inconsequent words.

"Cecil, my dear fellow! I'm ashamed to send for you on such a blackguard errand. Never heard of such a swindler's trick in all my life; couldn't pitch the fellow into the street because of the look of the thing, and can't take any other measure without you, you know. I only sent for you to expose the whole abominable business, never because I believe–Hang it! Beauty, I can't bring myself to say it even! If a sound thrashing would have settled the matter, I wouldn't have bothered you about it, nor told you a syllable. Only you are sure, Bertie, aren't you, that I never listened to this miserable outrage on us both with a second's thought there could be truth in it? You know me? you trust me too well not to be certain of that?"

The incoherent address poured out from his lips in a breathless torrent; he had never been so excited in his life; and he pleaded with as imploring an earnestness as though he had been the

suspected criminal, not to be accused with having one shadow of shameful doubt against his friend. His words would have told nothing except bewilderment to one who should have been a stranger to the subject on which he spoke; yet Cecil never asked even what he meant. There was no surprise upon his face, no flush of anger, no expression of amaze or indignation; only the look which had paralyzed Rock on his entrance; he stood still and mute.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.