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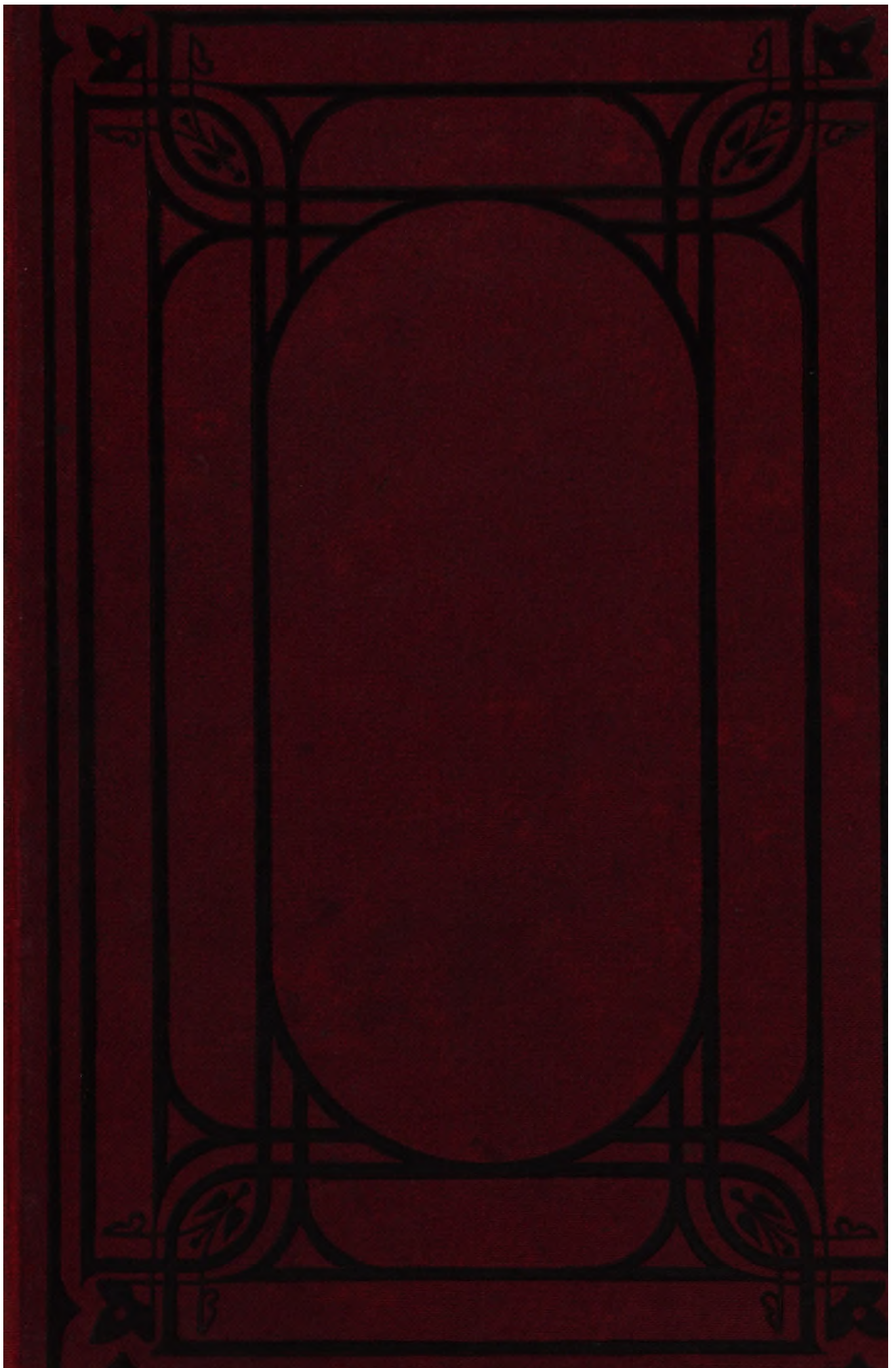
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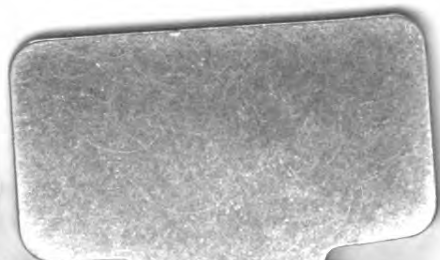


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VERE OF OURS,

THE EIGHTH OR KING'S.

A Novel.

BY

JAMES GRANT,

AUTHOR OF 'THE ROMANCE OF WAR,' 'UNDER THE RED DRAGON,'
'ONE OF THE SIX HUNDRED,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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VERE OF OURS, THE EIGHTH OR KING'S.

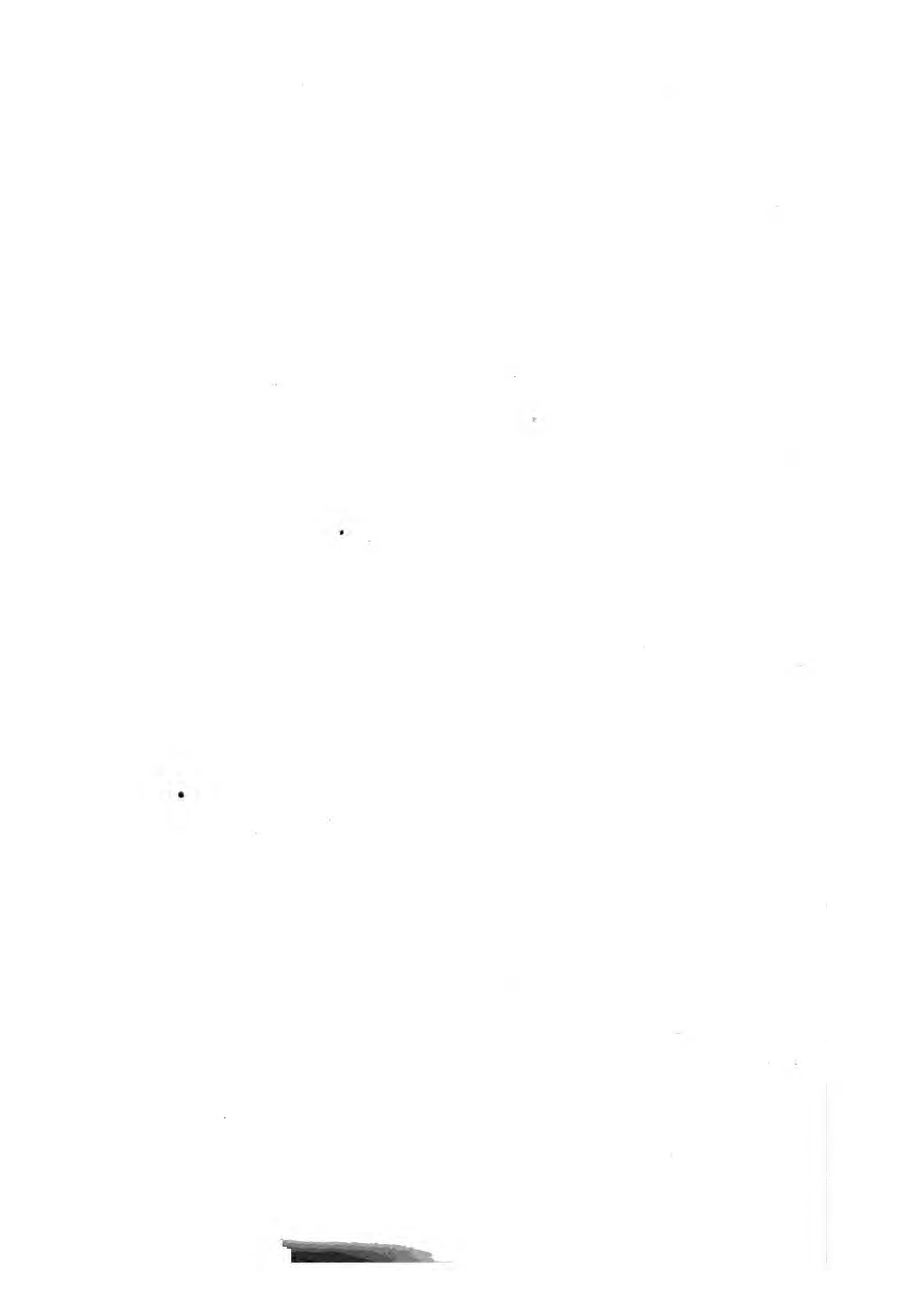
CHAPTER I.

IN THE LINES OF THE FIRST BRIGADE.

HALF-PAST nine at Aldershot on a dull January evening.

From Gun Hill the twenty-four-pounder had pealed its warning boom away over the far-stretching lines of huts which comprise the Infantry Camp, and farther away over the desolate wastes of swamp and heath that lie in the direction of Crookham, Fleet, and Farnham.

In the wretched little wooden-walled and felt-roofed hut wherein they chummed, within their regimental lines, Herbert Vere and Kyrle Desborough, having quitted the mess betimes, were idling and talking over certain



VERE OF ST. ...

THE EIGHTEENTH ...

CHAPTER I

IN THE LINES OF THE FIRST REGIMENT

HALF-PAST THREE IN THE EVENING

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affairs of their own, particularly those of the former, through the pleasant medium of a box of cigars with brandy-and-water. Both the friends were in the flush of spirit and life, though Desborough, the captain, was five years the senior of Vere, his subaltern, and both were handsome young men, fully aware of the fact that they were so, and also fully possessing that which a writer describes as 'the unsought self-possession which is a sure sign of good breeding, not in England only, but everywhere else in the civilised world.'

Above the middle height, Herbert Vere had a face and figure on which the appreciative eyes of more than his mother had rested with regard and admiration; and though every muscle was well developed by the use of the bat, the oar, and the saddle, he was slender, and looked still more so in his mess-jacket laced with gold and faced with blue. With a small and closely-shorn head, compact and intellectual in contour, his features were delicately cut, and, like those of his chum Desborough, well browned by exposure in the famous Hampshire camp, where drill and other out-of-door exercises are incessant. Closely

shaven, all save the dark moustache that concealed his short upper lip, he had a curved nostril, and much of resolution in a frequently-knitted brow that betokened pride, perhaps disappointment, and strong feelings and passions unsubdued.

With a brighter expression of face, and evidently of a lighter temperament, Captain Desborough had, like Vere, all the air of a linesman, but also that of a well-bred and well-born one. His trim and shapely figure was well set up; his handsome bronzed face, with clear dark-gray Irish eyes; his jetty hair closely shorn and carefully parted; the easy sit of his full uniform (for he was on duty), his faultlessly-fitting gloves, and heavy dark-brown moustache, were voted by the ladies to be perfect; while a general air and expression of self-assured confidence and imperturbable good-humour, and of being perfectly equal to any occasion that might present itself, were the leading characteristics of Kyrle Desborough, who was now lounging back on a hard Windsor chair, and, with his heels planted on an overland trunk, was idly watching the concentric rings that curled from his

havannah towards the dingy ceiling of their hut, an edifice which, despite the commanding R. E., was not at all times either wind- or water-tight.

‘Such a bore,’ said he, after a pause, ‘that the untimely frost stopped the hunting this morning just when the covert-hacks came after parade too; so instead of having a jolly rush across country we’ve been reduced to dawdling at the club, and studying the Queen’s Regulations or the divisional orders—both about as lively as *Bradshaw*. We got rid of drill on the common, however, as the rain that followed converted it, as usual, into a morass of black mud.’

‘The frost was scarcely untimely in the first days of January,’ observed Vere; ‘but it stopped more than the hunting—my expected meeting with—you know whom.’

‘Gertrude Templeton.’

‘Yes; the ladies were to drive to Minneley to see the hounds throw off.’

‘But their ball at Ringwood to-morrow night may make amends for your disappointment.’

‘I hope so; yet I greatly missed her this

morning. How that girl sits her horse!' exclaimed Vere, as he prepared another cigar, with great energy.

'Yes; between Prince's Gate and Hyde Park Corner, even in the most crowded day of the season, a more graceful or lovely rider will seldom be seen; but—'

Vere's eyes sparkled at the warm approval of his choice expressed by his friend, and then said,

'But what? Come, Kyrle, I don't like *buts*.'

'No more do I.'

'Then what did you mean to say?'

'Only that the mess-cook put too much cayenne pepper in the red-devil, and not enough of oil in the *sauce tartare* with the fish to-day,' replied Desborough, still eyeing the concentric rings intently.

'Now, Kyrle, don't be a humbug,' exclaimed Vere, not with anger, but with animation; 'that was *not* what you were about to say!'

'You know what Adam wished for in the Garden of Eden?' asked Desborough, with an evasive kind of tone and a laugh.

‘A helpmate; yes.’

‘Well, but even with the Honourable Gertrude you could not make an Eden of her Majesty’s camp at Aldershot, though section 10 of the divisional orders does make special reference to the “flowers and standard roses.”’

‘Now don’t chaff, Kyrle. I should not think of such a thing, but would send in my papers—that is, if all goes well and on the square with me and my uncle Sir Joseph. Yet I suspect your “but” referred to something else.’

‘Before the late London season was over?’

‘Yes,’ said Vere impatiently.

‘Well, old friend, perhaps it did. The season has ended, of course, in many losses and disappointments—’

‘Barely yet to me,’ urged Vere earnestly, with all his assumed coolness, finding that his fresh cigar required much care and management, and much hard puffing, to make it work properly.

‘But doubtless to thousands, if that is any consolation.’

‘By Jove, Kyrle, I don’t quite understand you!’ said Vere, shading his dark eyes, and

sharply scanning his friend by the light of the table-lamp. 'You have some *arrière-pensée*—what is it?'

'Well,' resumed Desborough, who, not being in love, and not believing much, perhaps, in such an emotion, usually adopted a tone of banter in reference to what he termed 'the same old game,' 'you know I spent three days last week in town—that "great mart, where souls are exchanged for gold, and hearts are regarded as less valuable than stock." I was doing Regent Street and Bond Street with my pretty cousins, and learning the expense of keeping a wife—'

'Do stop this banter, Kyrle,' said Vere, throwing down his cigar petulantly, 'and say what you *have* to say.'

'Well, old fellow, excuse me; I was, indeed, loth to say what I heard; but it was something about Gertrude Templeton.'

'And this something?' demanded Vere, with lips that became compressed.

'Was her engagement—let us call it alleged engagement.'

'And your authority, Desborough?' asked the other, in a low but concentrated tone.

‘Big Jocelyn Derinzy of the Guards.’

‘The tall idiot who is here on the divisional staff?’

‘Yes; he has been allowing it to be distinctly inferred, by admissions at his club and at the Senior, that she is engaged.’

‘To whom?’

‘Himself.’

‘Can the man be such an utter snob?’

Kyrle Desborough could see that Vere’s moustache seemed to bristle and quiver, though his lips were tightly compressed; that his brow had grown darker as he listened; and that when he spoke there came into his voice a dry and hard tone, which told of intense feeling and strong passions, barely repressed by good breeding and the power of will.

‘Excuse me in telling you this; but, my dear fellow, how do *you* stand with the lady herself?’

‘I scarcely know,’ replied Vere gloomily, and applying himself to the brandy-and-water.

‘Well, don’t wear your heart on your sleeve for daws to peck at. Even her elder sister Maud has said something of this matter to my cousins; and we must not forget that

Derinzy is next heir to the viscount his grandfather.'

'Maud is cold and hard and proud.'

'Yes, and she must be a mild thirty now. I don't think she ever was younger—seems never to have been a girl; yet, by Jove, she is handsome still!—a Templeton of Ringwood couldn't be otherwise. Her two sisters are so much younger that there must have been a ten years' gap in the family—deaths, perhaps, as Gertrude is twenty and Rosamund just eighteen; so say *Burke* and *Debrett*.'

'Lady Templeton's stud-books,' said Vere bitterly. 'By carrying her tuft-hunting schemes too far she entangled a young earl in his minority for Maud—at least so Toby Finch of ours told me; but guardians interfered, and Maud's prospects have been marred ever since; hence she has become bitter as a salted olive now. Ah, Kyrle, had I a fortune such as you possess, with what confidence it would inspire me!'

'And such transcendent merit it would give you in the dowager's eyes. So the world wags! But you have expectations, Vere—every fellow has.'

‘Expectations? True; my uncle Sir Joseph is good and kind to me; I may be his heir to all, but cannot say.’

‘Is not the old gentleman ill?’ asked Desborough encouragingly.

‘Yes, nigh unto death.’

‘Where?’

‘At Mentone.’

‘And you don’t know how his will stands?’

‘Don’t know even that he has made one; but I have written to his agents for some possible information.’

‘And you have never spoken distinctly to Gertrude, with all your opportunities?’

‘No; my position with her mother seems so hopeless. Why the deuce did she ask me, six weeks ago, to this affair at Ringwood Hall to-morrow night?’

‘Because, six weeks ago, ere she left town for Hants, matters had not taken so decided a turn. For one opportunity in town you have had ten here, and your attentions to Gertrude have since been undeniable. There was the general’s fancy dress calico-ball; and then, at the last game of polo in the park close by, a

mole might have seen how matters stood, and certainly the fair Maud did.'

'Her eyes are everywhere.'

'On the admirers of her sisters, at all events.'

'How can you be so insensible to the attractions of Rosamund?' asked Vere, after a pause, during which they had smoked and sipped for some time in silence.

Desborough laughed at the question, and though totally devoid of vanity, said,

'Do you really think the little girl is fond of me?'

'Yes; it is painfully, foolishly palpable.'

'Now, Vere, I am a modest fellow, and cannot think so; at least I was once—'

'Until your lady-worshippers robbed you of the virtue.'

'Nay, but as I have not a coronet, and see how you stand with Mère Templeton, I am studiously indifferent to the attractions of her youngest horn,' replied the handsome but heedless fellow, laughing at some conceit of his own, and displaying a row of teeth a belle might envy.

'It is patent—perhaps too absurdly patent,

particularly to her sisters—how that girl loves you,’ urged Vere; ‘hence your invitation-card for to-morrow is a puzzle to me.’

‘Well?’ said the other, toying with his moustache and laughing, as if the idea amused him.

‘Would you not like such a girl for a wife?’

‘None more creditable, even in London; but I should prefer her for a sister or sister-in-law; but as for a wife, with that noble thunder-cloud Lady Templeton for a mother-in-law, I would rather be excused. Besides, after your little experiences, I have not the courage to come forward.’

Desborough could then little foresee where and how the secret regard he laughed at was to end.

‘But can it be credible,’ he said, ‘what I heard in town, that the horrible old woman (excuse my calling your proposed relative by such a term) means, *bon gré mal gré*, to marry that blooming young girl to Sir Ayling Aldwinkle?’

‘Who is he?’

‘Baronet of Winklestoke — a venerable

duffer, who was much on the staff of the family in town.'

'I have barely heard of him.'

'Well, the old fellow—he is sixty if he is a day—was an admirer of Lady Templeton's long ago.'

'How long?'

'Don't know; long before flint-locks went out of fashion; and now she wishes to secure him for Rosamund. Toby Finch was cover-shooting at his place in Bucks, and says his *cuisine* is conducted after the most approved recipes of Lucullus, Soyer, and Meg Dods; that his cellar and stud are perfect, yet he neither drinks nor rides. Now, Vere, one half of this world knows not how the other lives, and how often apparent wealth may be poverty, and apparent grandeur mere sham; but I know this, that of the late Lord Templeton's boasted timber nothing remains but the tenants.'

'The tenants?'

'Yes, the rooks; but the timber has gone to the children of Israel; and you may see the rooks looking in vain for the old chase under which the first Lord Templeton rode

from Ringwood to fight for the king at Edgehill. Thus I should not wonder but the present dowager may be up to the eyes in debt. Else whence this rampant desire for rich and titled—rich, most certainly—sons-in-law?’

‘Be all that as it may, at the ball to-morrow night, despite the rumour of the clubs, I shall certainly put my fate with Gertrude to the issue.’

‘And perhaps the mess of the Eighth will lose the best fellow that ever put legs under its mahogany.’

‘I have trifled with myself—perhaps with her—too long,’ said Vere, unheeding his friend’s complimentary remark.

‘And you think to take arms against a sea of troubles, and end them?’

‘Yes, by Jove!’

‘I don’t think you will, old fellow.’

‘Why?’ asked Vere sharply.

‘La Mère Templeton is too wide-awake to afford you a chance, though the conservatories *are* spacious; moreover, a dance is an awkward event amid which to come to a complete understanding, especially with—with—’

‘What?’

‘So active a staff-officer as Derinzy in attendance.’

Vere muttered something bitter under his moustache.

‘Past two!’ said his friend, rising, and assuming his cap, sword, and belt, selecting a last cigar, and buttoning up his gray overcoat; ‘and now I must be off like a bird.’

‘Why this hurry?’

‘Because, old boy, I’m captain of the day, and have to visit the brigade guard before turning in. So ta-ta, and keep up your courage at the ball.’

CHAPTER II.

VERE'S RESOLVE.

THERE was, perhaps, no man in the whole regiment for whom Vere of ours had a greater regard or friendship than Kyrle Desborough; yet much that the latter had said, and the happy-go-lucky, free-and-easy way in which he had spoken of matters near and dear to the heart of Vere, left him full of thoughts that were angry, bitter, and dubious.

Vere had contrived to give full swing to a *grande passion*, conceived and matured while idling on leave in town, and now had fallen more hopelessly 'over head and ears' therein at Aldershot, where certainly time is not permitted to hang heavy on one's hands, particularly if one happens to be of subaltern rank.

Vere sat immersed in thought, while the light of his shaded lamp sank low, and became gradually eclipsed by that of the moon. The vast camp was sunk in perfect silence now;

even the voices and laughter of some who had lingered in an adjacent mess-hut and the click of their billiard-balls had passed away. Beyond the camp—now the Alma Mater of the British soldier—beyond the stately barracks that abut upon the little brick town, away over the verandahs of the club-house, over Redan Hill, Cove Common, the slopes of the Long Valley, and those green pastures which in the past summer had been white with the tents of thousands of Linesmen, Militia, and Volunteers, the fleecy clouds were rolling through a serene and moonlit sky before a soft west wind, throwing alternate light and shadow over the wild and heathy country that stretches away towards the north, tufted with willow, gorse, dwarf trees, and stern Scottish firs.

The calmness of the time, and the crisis that seemed to approach in his love-affair, induced reverie, and Herbert Vere thought deeply.

Gertrude Templeton—the reader has to be introduced to her yet—and he had met frequently in London, at those places where, as the phrase is, ‘everybody meets everybody;’

often, through Desborough, he had obtained a card to a brilliant garden-party given by the dowager her mother—such a party as can be seen in London only.

One of three sisters, all wonderfully handsome, she was singularly attractive in manner and bearing, and without exertion, and perhaps without intention, completely won the heart of Vere, who, though aware that he was not without rivals for her notice, had one particular bugbear, the Colonel Derinzy mentioned by his friend. Times there had been when he felt certain that he was not indifferent to her—perhaps that she loved him in return—as a hundred ‘trifles light as air’ seemed to indicate. At others her tone and manner were constrained—even cold—to him; but when puzzled, piqued, or grieved by this, he knew nothing of the home influences that were brought to bear upon her, though Desborough did, and had now overnight given him some inkling of the tuft-hunting and match-making proclivities of Lady Templeton.

Gertrude by nature was soft, affectionate, pliable, and too yielding; while Maud, her

sister, taller in stature, maturer in years, was cold, unsympathetic, sinister, and cynical; and Rosamund, the youngest, a charming girl in her first season—of whom more anon—was what the irreverent Kyrle Desborough denominated 'a gusher.'

There is a certain honest pride—shall I call it so?—which should animate every human being; and of all others in this world a poor gentleman—comparatively Vere was one—feels this emotion in the keenest degree; and the more he came in contact with the Templetons, the more, by some undefinable tone she adopted, did their mother make him feel that, though he moved in the same circle, there was a gulf between him and her daughter; and, for a woman of undoubted rank and position, she was absurdly vain of her title as Lady Templeton of Ringwood, taken from a place of that name on the Avon, in Hants, but in which the family had no territorial interest, as Ringwood Hall, a magnificent mansion, stood in quite another part of the county.

Despite those barriers to which he could not shut his eyes, Vere loved Gertrude with a

passion all the deeper for the opposition it was likely to excite, unless old Sir Joseph came to his aid. Father Lacordaire has said that every man has three guardian angels—his mother, his wife, and his daughter. Now Vere had none of these, but one, unthought of by the great Dominican, in the person of Gertrude Templeton; and the soft illusion of his love for her kept his heart pure, and himself out of a hundred scrapes and toils that other subalterns of his age were so often entangled by, and in some instances lured to their ruin.

His great love for her, moreover, took a practical turn. In the vague hope of being more able to win her, aware that now in the service the chief road to highest promotion lies through a course of instruction at the Staff College, despite the allurements of dances, meets, polo, and other parties, where he might see her—despite the amusements of hunting and shooting, and so forth—he had duly performed that course, and won after his name the enigmatic letters *p.s.c.* in the *Army List*; and was willing even to quit the regiment, which had been so long his happy home,

and with which all his other wishes and hopes were garnered up. And hard indeed had he worked; for, as a writer says, 'a candidate for a staff appointment is expected to be an accomplished linguist, to be well read in English literature, to be a skilled tactician, and to have Hamley and Jomini at his finger ends.'

All this he had done with singular industry, yet with the solid enough conviction now that it did not advance his interests one iota with my Lady Templeton of Ringwood; for, as Desborough, who knew the family well, assured him, their means, though ample, were only moderate for their rank in the peerage, as all, or nearly all, after her jointure and a slender allowance to her daughters, was reserved for the young lord then at Eton; and hence it was a *sine quâ non* that her three daughters should meet with most eligible parties only, and that in her eyes small means, or what she rather deemed them, poverty, were quite an eighth deadly sin.

Of late in their intercourse, amid the chances afforded by society, Vere had been painfully sensible that the old lady simply

tolerated him, and doubtless would have hailed with joy an order which sent the Eighth or King's to Cape Coast, or to beat up the quarters of his Majesty of Dahomey; and that her manner was very different to Derinzy and others of 'her set;' different indeed from the tone of polite indifference, and almost condescending familiarity, which she and (as some one has it) such denizens of Vanity Fair can at times adopt to those whose position is less assured, or whose fortunes are small. Yet he bore and endured it for the sake of Gertrude, though his naturally proud spirit resented it fiercely in secret.

Gertrude, we have said, was beautiful—ay, beautiful enough to be the heroine of any romance; but she possessed much that proves better than any beauty—purity and sweetness of character, with great goodness of heart, an even mind, and well-balanced temper; she was, however, unfortunately too facile, too unresolved in purpose, and too much under the iron control of her ambitious mother.

Vere had begun to see and to know all this, and to dread the sequel, and almost to envy the easy indifference with which Kyrle

Desborough viewed the ill-concealed preference of Rosamund for himself.

The alleged club rumours stung Vere deeply; for, aware that Colonel Derinzy had the full countenance of Lady Templeton, that *insouciant* personage was calm, quiet, assured, and deliberate in his rivalry of Vere, as the latter had felt on more than one occasion; and he detested this *blasé* Guardsman, the staff colonel, as much as his honest and generous nature was capable of detesting any one, and the sentiment marred sadly the illusions that love had begun to shed over his waking hours. 'If,' says Washington Irving—'and of this there is no doubt, for wise men have said it—if life is but a dream, happy is he who can make the most of the illusion.'

But Vere failed to do this with either his life or his love now.

'By this hour to-morrow,' thought he, 'my doubts as to how I stand with Gertrude will have ended, for good or for evil, for sorrow or joy. But her mother! Never can I hope, save through her means, to succeed with *her*. Yet, though Gertrude may never be mine, it will be something at least to hear that she

loves me, and to think sweetly over all that *might* have been. That once achieved, I shall commit the rest to Fate!

Then something like a malediction escaped him, as he remembered that Kyrle Desborough had openly hinted of the supervision to which his attentions might be subjected on the morrow.

Till he had ascertained that Ringwood Hall was not far from Aldershot, Vere had looked forward with genuine disgust to being stationed in that camp (though it is alleged that all the phases of a soldier's life may be seen there, and that of all places it is the best to prepare the soldier for grimmer work; but that remains to be seen), situated amid a dreary district, so wet and swampy in winter, so dry and dusty in summer; and certainly it is not a place that the rank and file doat on, as, besides drills and duties, they have so much hard work to do, in the way of road-making and camp-cleaning, that they are ever in debt for destroyed uniforms, while the brigade guard-rooms, often crowded by thirty or forty noisy prisoners, are the horror of a quiet recruit.

Eight months had elapsed since Vere's battalion had marched in, to replace the Pompadours; and the aspect of the camp, with its lines of wooden huts, all lettered and numbered, painted red, with black-felt roofs, and cook-houses of zinc at intervals; the movable fire-screens on wheels at the guard-houses, the whole place generally, when seen under the glare of a July sun, was strange and most un-English—all the more so that in the distance lay the hills of Farnborough, covered with heath and clumps of red-stemmed Scottish pines. But most miserable is the aspect of the Lines when viewed amid the fog and rain or the sleet and snow of winter.

Since then he had gone through all the usual career of hard duty, the weary sham-fighting, in the knee-deep silver dust of the Long Valley, which turns even rifle uniforms white, the skirmishing amid the golden gorse and purple heather, varied by duck-shooting and boating on Fleet Pond, balls at the club-room, a ride with the hounds, polo and cricket; but more than all by a run up to town (when he could get Finch or Desborough to take his duties), during which it went hard

with him if he did not contrive in the Row, or somewhere else, to meet with Gertrude Templeton, but quite as often to encounter Derinzy with her and her sisters; and often too he had the bitterness of leaving that formidable rival quite in possession of the field.

Selecting from his dressing-case a valuable diamond ring that had once been his mother's, and which as such he highly prized, he resolved to cast all upon the hazard of the die, and, however Sir Joseph's will might stand, to leave the mystic hoop on *the* particular finger of Gertrude to-morrow.

But what if, with his many opportunities, the inevitable colonel had anticipated him in this? He thrust the thought aside, and strove to think of other things.

CHAPTER III.

AT RINGWOOD HALL.

ON this night, which was to be so full of interest to Vere, brightly shone the moonlight on the lozenged and heraldically painted glass of the mullioned oriels of Ringwood Hall, on the acute gables and clustered chimney stacks of the early Stuart days, and on the walls, which in summer were always covered with masses of clematis and Virginia creepers, hop and jasmine. In the foreground were the shrubberies of Portugal laurels, bays green and spotted, mingled with dwarf pine, cypress, and many a coming flower, the pride of the heart of the gardener, old Davis Dibble; and notwithstanding what Kyrle Desborough said concerning the old lord's timber, wood in plenty shaded the park of Ringwood Hall and the long stately avenue that led thereto; hence, if the dowager were in monetary

troubles, signs of it were no more apparent here than at her mansion in Belgravia.

And through the mullions shone countless lines of many coloured light, as all the house was *en fête* to-night, and many guests were expected.

One of the chief seats in the county, statisticians and artists had described it again and again on paper and canvas: its beautiful staircase, with a magnificent flight of four landings, all carved and ornamented in good old British oak, that might have been in leaf when Cerdic the Saxon was King of Wessex; its picture-gallery, with portraits by Lely, Kneller, and Vandyke, Zuccherò and Reynolds, depicting some grave and quaint Templetons of other times; its library, full of curious books, not to be found elsewhere, 'out of print, in fact,' as Kyrle Desborough alleged, 'because they wouldn't be worth reprinting;' the relics of the feudal days scattered all over the house; its gardens and vineyards that were famous in the days of Evelyn and Pepys; while in the avenue were two grand and stupendous old trees, gray with age, vast in girth, and with the antiquity of unknown years, called King

James's oaks—so called for there, when Duke of York and Albany, he had tarried to have a cup of sack with the fourth Lord Templeton, when *en route* to Portsmouth to take command of the English fleet and 'have it out with the Dutch.'

Ringwood Hall was certainly, as a habitation, somewhat the antipodes of a hut in the lines of the First Brigade, and so thought Herbert Vere, as with Desborough he drove up the avenue to the balustraded terrace, from the gravelled plateau of which flights of white steps descended to the garden.

We have said that times there were when he had felt certain—or all but certain—that he was far from indifferent to Gertrude Templeton, and that with her the warmest esteem and friendship had become insensibly blended with emotions more sweet and tender, and that certain trifling yet momentous indications had been given him of this ; yet, despite these, and despite his hopes in his kinsman, old Sir Joseph de Quincey Vere, he felt his courage sinking fast, and lower would it have fallen could he have known all that was then passing among some of the ladies of the family.

So prior to the arrival of other guests we will take a peep indoors.

Gertrude, like her sisters, was in her charming dressing-room, arraying herself for conquest, with the assistance of her maid (till she was joined by busy bustling little Rosamund), who had her rich dress and jewels all ready for use, and many of the latter were family heirlooms, only worn on special occasions. The former in hue, with all its rich white lace, became her beauty; her hair was dark brown, with a natural ripple; her skin was snowy, and her features clearly cut and regular; while her eyes of violet-blue, though ever soft and sometimes shy, had usually a clear, bright, straightforward expression, that was very winning; and when she smiled, the smile began in her eyes ere it reached her firm pouting lips. Her nose was perhaps too small, yet perfect in form; and she was not without her faults of character, as we shall show—what girl who knows she is pretty is ever without them?—and Gertrude Templeton had perhaps quite as many as some girls.

She was a daughter of a proud race, and,

like her sister Maud, she looked it, yet all unconsciously; she had a figure of perfect symmetry, a queenly bearing in her twentieth year, a sweet grace of motion, and a certain ladylike dignity that never deserted her.

‘You may go now, Phyllis,’ said she to her maid, when the last diamond bracelet had been clasped on her white rounded arm; and she took up her jewelled fan, her laced handkerchief, and bouquet of the rarest flowers that old Davis Dibble could cull for her, and, giving a last glance at herself in the pier-glass, saw reflected there a picture of girlish loveliness, combined with womanly beauty not often equalled; and then she stood for some minutes lost in thought.

Herbert Vere was coming. With every jewel she had placed upon her arms, round her slender neck, and amid the masses of her elaborately-dressed hair, she repeated this to herself; but too well she knew her mother’s wishes, for they were openly avowed. Great moral courage was, perhaps, not one of the attributes of the gentle Gertrude, and when an evil she dreaded, like this *affaire* with Derinzy, was not a proximate one, or at least

deferable, she trusted to chance to avert it altogether, or somehow change her fate.

The gold-mounted and elaborately-cut crystal bottles reposing in the blue-velvet trays of a beautifully-jewelled dressing-case had been a Christmas gift from Jocelyn Derinzy, and, as her eyes wandered over it, she thought how would Herbert Vere, poor fellow, have viewed her acceptance thereof from his rival.

But her mother had impetuously forced it upon her; and on the fact as it stood the colonel, naturally vain enough, based some high ulterior hopes indeed.

It is difficult to say precisely what was passing in the heart of the girl. She knew, of course, as we have said, that Vere was coming to-night; more than that, she knew that he loved her, and the desire to shine before him grew coquettishly strong in her heart; yet, knowing Lady Templeton as she did, she dared not acknowledge to herself any other motive or desire, or any other hope.

She sighed and was about to leave the room, when two slender snowy arms were gently placed round her neck—so gently as not to

ruffle her array—and her bright and happy little sister, a beautiful blonde, with shining golden hair, and laughing eyes of violet-blue, with dark eyebrows and darker lashes, a girl who possessed high spirits without the requisite amount of judgment to balance them, kissed Gertrude again and again, and began to ‘talk confidence,’ as she phrased it.

‘O you silly impulsive little thing!’ said Gertrude, readjusting her diamond necklace, which had been displaced.

‘Little! I am quite as tall as you, Gerty, and Captain Desborough told me so,’ replied the girl, pouting, yet with one of her brightest smiles; for she also had but one thought that night, while arraying herself in an adjoining room: ‘*He* will be here, and will see how others can, and do, admire me!’ ‘Now, dearest, you look charming, but do you admire me?’

‘You look like a veritable queen of the fairies in your blue and lace—it so suits your fair complexion.’

‘See, dear old Dibble has got me some lily-of-the-valley and stephanotis for my bouquet.’

‘Why stephanotis, Rosamund?’

‘Desborough likes the perfume.’

‘Always Desborough. I own he is dangerously handsome and taking in manner; but don’t let Maud or mamma hear you speak of him.’

‘Yet he comes to-night!’ urged Rosamund earnestly.

‘That matters little—mamma wished for the band of the Eighth.’

The lip of Rosamund curled—the ‘fair Rosamund’ she was frequently called—for pride that was unintentional mingled with the beauty of both the younger Templetons; and in silence she slightly drew up her dress, as she placed for warmth upon the fender a pretty foot, in a slipper so small and faultless that Cinderella might have worn it at the royal ball, while Gertrude looked lovingly at her, and approvingly too.

Rosamund was in all the bloom, freshness, glory, and happiness of the *first season*. Gertrude had seen three in town, and she could recall her simplicity, her little blunders, that were to others sweet and attractive; her charming *naïveté*, which all men said was peculiarly her own; and she could remember

how soon all this passed away! How the thrill at the opera, the little flirty meetings at the Royal Academy, the open-eyed wonder at the theatre, were ere long followed by languor and listlessness; how the anticipated joy of the ballroom became replaced—from its very iteration—by weariness and *ennui*; and how even the daily ride in the Row, or a drive through the noblest park in the world, became only an unexhilarating bore, till—till that sunny garden-party, at which she first met a man so different from all those about her—Herbert Vere, to whose decided preference for herself a piquancy was now given by the spirit of opposition with which her mother had viewed it since the family came to Ringwood Hall at the close of the season.

‘Well,’ said Rosamund, adjusting the last button of a glove, ‘the night of the ball has come now; all the important and irritating consultations as to who should, and who should not, be invited are long since over (how I detested mamma’s boudoir at that time, Gerty!), and the gloom of the house will now pass away.’

‘Gloom, Rosamund?’

‘Yes. How scarce visitors have been for weeks past! Those we invited did not call because we had done so, and those who were not invited have naturally stayed away in a pet, lest it might be supposed they came to fish for cards. But mamma is now in the drawing-room; let us join her.’

As the sisters passed on, Gertrude, used though she had been from infancy to the stately old house of her ancestors, now all brilliantly lighted up for the *fête*, was struck by its internal aspect, with something of the same hopeless ideas that occurred to Vere when, some time after, he and laughing Kyrle Desborough drove up the avenue in a hired fly from the camp. Warmth, fragrance, and grandeur were everywhere around her. There were the stately staircase, with its broad steps covered with crimson cloth, its chastened tints and shadowy full-length portraits contrasting with the white statues that upheld lamps on every landing, and the great *jardinières* or majolica vases, that contained rare flowers which filled the long corridors with their perfume; the shadowy corridors themselves, with all the feudal relics and statuary; and the vast

double drawing-room, furnished singularly with black ebony inlaid with ivory, the walls covered with blue silk and satin damask, softly floored with a gorgeous carpet, and having old portraits of some determined-looking fellows in half armour, frowning or glancing proudly askance from their antique frames.

From all this, as if by association of ideas, her mind reverted to the comfortless huts in the Infantry Camp, with their red-painted walls, odious roofs, and general air of wigwam-like squalor; and a shiver, caused by what she could scarcely define, passed over her, especially when she met the cold, inquiring, and yet approving glitter of her mother's eye—approving because she saw her toilette, like that of Rosamund, was perfect on all points.

Still handsome, stately, and even graceful, though past middle age, the perfectly regular face of the dowager was singularly young-looking to have a daughter of the age of the Honourable Maud, and she seemed to possess the valuable faculty of belying her years and never growing older. Her eyes were as bright as when she was sixteen, though doubtless their expression was harder and colder than in

those days. The contour of her features was eminently aristocratic, but they were smooth, colourless, and destitute of a single line that was indicative of thought or care, reflection or even kindness of heart. Her face was but a handsome mask, and yet behind it lurked more than, to any casual or even close observer, met the eye; for, with all her apparent wealth, her undoubted position in good society, and her perfectly unruffled bearing and calm passionless exterior, Lady Templeton was not without her 'skeleton in the house.'

As the two girls entered, their sister Maud was with their mother, and though they would never again celebrate her thirtieth birthday, Maud was armed for conquest too. Her white sloping shoulders and slender throat were perfect in form and colour, and set off by her dress of rose-coloured silk with white lace, and all her movements were graceful; but her bearing was haughty; her pale-gray eyes looked out with a species of serene stateliness upon the world; her lips had a scornful expression, and too often words of scorn, that bordered on decidedly bad taste, dwelt on them.

She had the reputation of being a quietly-working mischief-maker, and it was alleged that she was never so happy as when, by art, innuendo, or otherwise, she succeeded in detaching a man from a woman he loved or admired, even though she failed to attach him to herself.

Since the failure in 'hooking' the young peer, season after season had passed, and, whether inspired by jealousy or honest emulation, Maud had certainly done her best. But still no sound of marriage bells came to her ears, and she had now, perhaps, ceased to care greatly; yet she still spoke of herself and her sisters as 'we girls,' and was not above studying little airs and graces, rounding her arms — which she knew to be undeniably handsome — while coquettishly arranging a bracelet, or getting a glove buttoned by some man who was not so young as he had been.

Educated as they had been, the three sisters could not fail to have much of their mother's absurd, almost 'snobbish,' pride of birth; but the two younger had certainly none of her matchless selfishness and hardness of heart, nor had they caught her spirit

of match-making, though eligible *partis* were her incessant theme; and now, prior to the appearance of some guests who were staying with them, she and Maud had been discussing the old topic.

‘You are right, Maud,’ Gertrude heard her mother say, as she and Rosamund drew near the fireplace; ‘he *is* so poor that I greatly regret having asked him.’

Then Gertrude’s heart told her that Herbert Vere was referred to, and she pressed her open fan, which was made of the white plumage of some tropical bird, upon her breast to conceal its heaving less from the eyes of her mother than those of Maud.

‘Of whom are you talking, mamma?’ asked Rosamund, in all innocence.

‘Of that — of Mr. Vere,’ replied Lady Templeton, with a scarcely perceptible glance at Gertrude.

‘Mr. Vere has more than his pay,’ said Rosamund.

‘I should hope so, child.’

‘He has private means, mamma.’

‘Yes,’ said Maud; ‘but so very private that no one knows anything about them.’

‘O Maud—such a tone to adopt!’ urged Rosamund, to whom Gertrude felt intensely grateful; ‘if Mr. Vere is far from rich, he has good expectations, and has come—’

‘Of poor but respectable parents, like Robinson Crusoe and ever so many other heroes,’ said Lady Templeton.

‘And he occupies a hut like Robinson Crusoe—a hut in the Infantry Camp,’ added Maud, laughing, and showing nearly all her glittering teeth.

‘There is a baronetcy in the family,’ said Lady Templeton; ‘but ever so many stand between it and him.’

‘So you have been looking in *Debrett*, mamma?’ asked Gertrude timidly.

‘Yes,’ replied her mother, with a cold steely glitter in her eyes that was meant for a smile; ‘though I seldom look among the baronets, for I know no greater sticklers for their rank and precedence than they are, those tiresome little baronets.’

‘Then how comes Sir Ayling Aldwinkle to be your especial favourite, mamma?’ asked Gertrude pointedly.

‘Think of his enormous wealth, my dear!’

‘Among the “casuals” who are coming here to-night,’ said Maud, in her mocking tone, with a furtive glance at Rosamund, ‘there are Clive, Finch, and Desborough, all of the Eighth—’

‘Finch is only a younger son,’ observed Lady Templeton.

‘And younger sons you deem a mistake in the scheme of Nature, mamma,’ laughed Maud, who saw that Rosamund had changed colour at the name of Desborough. How little could that handsome heedless fellow really know, or perhaps care, that the mere utterance of his name possessed a magic power to stir her heart! And yet, as Vere had more than once told him, ‘the half of Rosamund’s heart was worth the whole of another girl’s.’

‘The wealth of Desborough might find him favour even with you, mamma,’ resumed Maud; ‘but though an admirer he is barely a dangler, Rosamund, and I fear you are doomed to be an old man’s darling, after all.’

‘I must trust perhaps to your experience, Maud,’ said Rosamund; ‘you are twice as old

as I am nearly, and so must be twice as wise; yet I do hope you may be mistaken, after all.'

Never had the girl spoken so bitterly before, but she felt that her sister referred mockingly to a foregone conclusion. And now the rolling of wheels, the jarring of hoofs on the gravelled terrace without, and certain noises and voices in the hall and great staircase, announced the arrival of guests; after which the drawing-rooms filled rapidly, and the buzz of insipid commonplaces was heard on all sides.

Now the band of the Eighth was in the vestibule adjoining the dancing-room, and they were preparing for the 'Lucknow Quadrille,' a composition of the bandmaster, and so named from the last achievement on the regimental colours, and the ball in all its brilliance was beginning, while the rooms were fast becoming crowded.

Vere and Desborough entered together, and the first on whom the eyes of the former fell was Gertrude, who, giving place to the guests, declined dancing as yet. With those who were present there is no need to trouble

the reader, who may never meet with them again, save one or two exceptions.

As he drew near her, none could have guessed that these two were more to each other than the merest acquaintances or friends; yet their eyes told tales that each could read in those of the other, and their pulses quickened as their hands met.

With something of royal condescension Lady Templeton gave Vere her hand; then waving her fan involuntarily, almost as a seeming hint that nothing more was required of her, she turned to address an elderly but fashionable-looking man who was stooping confidentially over her chair—Sir Ayling Aldwinkle—and of whom we shall hear more anon.

If anything could have clouded a man's hopes of the future, it would have been the prospect of such a mother-in-law as Lady Templeton; but Vere's love for Gertrude was strong and earnest. And yet, with all his knowledge of life and the world, and all his experience thereof, he felt himself speaking huskily as he addressed the girl, and as if his lips were parched, as perhaps they were; for

on the events of that night too probably hung his fate, or what he considered to be such. So, with his mind thus preoccupied, he found himself gazing into the depths of her dark-blue eyes, and talking the merest commonplace the while: how unluckily the frost had stopped the hunting; whether there would be rain to-morrow, and of the weather peculiar to Hants in general, and the vicinity of Aldershot in particular; the mud of the common, and the dust of the Long Valley.

Yet few men had a greater power of pleasing a woman he admired than Vere, and no man seemed less vain or sensible of that power than he; and even now, as he spoke, there was in the face of her who listened her own peculiar smile, the nameless and indescribable charm that won the admiration, if not the love, of all who looked on her.

Though occupied with Gertrude, and Gertrude alone, Vere politely strove to insure himself a few dances on Maud's card, which she accorded him graciously enough, as his good dancing and fine figure made him always an acceptable partner; but, up to the moment he addressed her, Maud, through a tiny eye-

glass, had been scanning, with cool and insufferable *insouciance*, many of those guests who had been invited as local notorieties or local necessities, from policy, in connection with the estate, the locality, and the future political interests of the family, but chiefly those, of course, of the young lord her brother.

Vere then approached Rosamund, but her card was full already. Vere could perceive that Kyrle Desborough's name appeared thereon far too often, and he thought that, under all the circumstances, 'it was a downright shame of Kyrle.' But Rosamund saw not the clouds of the future, and when Desborough addressed her the girl's heart swelled with happiness and joy.

After securing himself partners with those to whom he was bound by duty or courtesy, Vere again turned to Gertrude, gave his arm, and led her to the other room, as their dance had begun; and aware that the eyes of Maud, of Derinzy, and most assuredly of Lady Templeton, were upon her and Vere, the manner of Gertrude to the latter, even amid the crowded room, was, in spite of herself, painfully constrained, even nervous.

CHAPTER IV.

WAS THE RING ACCEPTED?

As yet Vere had avoided Derinzy, whom he detested for more than being his rival, as their apparent cordiality before strangers was a mere sham, induced by good breeding, and as there had already been 'bad blood' between them on more than one brigade-day during the past summer. 'But,' says some one, 'alas for the shams and deceptions of society! paste-board and tinsel are more real than its hollow-hearted seemings.'

The noble dancing-room, with its elaborately-painted ceiling, every panel of which was decorated with heraldic blazonry, fruits, or flowers, the waxen lights, the perfume of rare exotics in *jardinières* between the draped oriels, the pictures and statuary, barely won a glance from Vere, whose mind was full of her whose hand rested in his, and whose slender

waist he clasped as they glided away over the polished floor among the flying waltzers.

In the intoxication of the flying dance and the brilliant yet familiar music of his own regimental band Herbert Vere half forgot his troubles and fears, but not the joy of having his arm round the floating figure of Gertrude, her hand in his, her breath upon his cheek.

Many of his brother officers were present, and more were coming, as they were in great repute as good round-dancing men, and Desborough had secured the attendance of the band, in obedience to a note from Lady Templeton; moreover, he was president of the band committee.

His first waltz over with Gertrude, Vere hastened to fulfil an engagement with the terrible Maud, whom he was most solicitous to please, and who, in the intervals of the dance, indulged her spirit of satire or ill-nature, first in quizzing unmercifully a flirtation in an oriel between young Prior of the Eighth and a girl of sixteen—‘two chits that, be they ever so much in love, could not marry for the next ten years;’ and then an engaged couple,

whom she was sure would be bored to death in less than a week.

Another couple, who sat somewhat apart, she informed Vere, had been married for some time ; but the gentleman who was hovering behind the lady's chair had been her first love, and now sought sedulously to be platonically her third love—but most platonically, of course.

Vere looked with some surprise at the handsome woman who permitted her tongue to run on in this sharp fashion, and regretted that she was a sister of Gertrude ; but now Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, who still indulged in square dances, claimed her for the Lancers, and led her away with a somewhat tremulous hand.

The baronet was a tall, thin old man, with snow-white hair, which he had not the bad taste to attempt to dye. His figure had already begun to droop, but his well-lined face was delicate, refined, and eminently aristocratic ; his nose was high and thin ; his teeth were good, for they were of the newest fashion from Paris ; and his watery gray eyes had still, it was owned, 'a wicked look' in them ;

for though his chin was pendulous, his shoulders round, and his thin and delicate hands a little shaky, it was still—by mere force of habit perhaps—his desire to be thought rather ‘a sad dog’ yet, and not without designs upon the weaker vessels.

And now Vere had to fill up his time with another partner, as Gertrude was engaged with his especial *bête noire*, Colonel Jocelyn Derinzy, late of the Guards, now unattached and on the camp divisional staff.

‘How didoo, Vere?’ he lisped, in his most languid and lisping manner, as he led his partner off, and nodded superciliously; ‘hot, isn’t—aw—aw!’

Big Jocelyn, as he was named, was handsome, decidedly fashionable and *distingué* in bearing, with a kind of Life Guardsman look that was undeniable. He was nearly six feet in height; his hair, light brown and thick, was parted faultlessly, like a girl’s, over a lineless forehead, that never was guilty of exhibiting thought or reflection; he had full, dreamy, and yet insipid, blue eyes, a bright, yet ever vapid, smile; a splendid moustache, which was darker than his hair, and sedulously

cherished, and under which he showed at times a brilliant set of teeth, that, unlike those of Sir Ayling, were naturally his own; and only that he was too lazy, his chest, shoulders, and limbs would have declared him an athlete.

With all his Guard's air, in mufti he looked like what he was—less a soldier than a *blasé* indolent man about town, famous for the cut of his coat, the fitting of his spotless gloves, and wonderful boots. Vere and Derinzy felt each other to be rivals and enemies, for the latter had contrived, by a confusion of orders, to 'make a figure' of the former lately, during a sham fight in the Long Valley; and in the general bearing of the staff colonel there was a quiet air of property and assumed personal interest in Gertrude that was intensely galling to Vere, as it seemed to corroborate the club rumours; and even when he yielded her up to him, when their dance was over, it was done in a way as if 'it didn't matter.' And after the dance was ended, poor Gertrude, with her mother's icy and inquiring eyes fixed on her, could only urge feebly to Maud that 'Herbert Vere was very unlike the men she usually met.'

No exact opportunity had occurred for Vere having the coveted few words apart with Gertrude; and meanwhile Rosamund, the heedless youngest, oblivious of mamma and every one, was enjoying herself thoroughly with Desborough, and 'going the pace,' as Toby Finch of ours phrased it.

Kyrle Desborough, in his thirtieth year, seemed almost middle-aged to the *débutante* of eighteen—yet he was the 'god of her idolatry'—and as a schoolboy when compared with Sir Ayling, with whose name Maud would so odiously insist upon coupling hers; and now, in a pause of the galop, she was listening to an opinion of Kyrle's on something, as she hung flushed and palpitating on his arm, and hanging too on his words, eye to eye; and he did this more than was right under the circumstances, as he simply meant—nothing.

'Why have you not on your medals and the V.C.?' she asked, in a low voice.

'We don't sport these toys in mufti.'

'It is a mistake,' said she, turning aside for a moment.

'Don't play with the poor girl,' whispered Vere.

‘What the deuce *can* I do? I should not have come at all,’ responded Kyrle, in a low voice, and looking as much as to say, ‘Girls in her set have neither hearts to lose nor break.’

‘And you won the V.C. at—at—where was it?’ asked the bright face, turning again to his.

‘Fighting against the hill-tribes in Bengal.’

‘How weak you must think me, Captain Desborough, you who have seen so much!’

‘Weak?’

‘Yes, and—and young-lady-like.’

‘The latter indeed you are. We can’t be all men, unfortunately, but Nature could never make another like you.’

Rosamund coloured at words which he would never have addressed to Maud; but to her Desborough was the *beau idéal* of all that a man and a lover should be. His winning manner, his handsome person, the softness of his dark Irish eyes, and his mellow voice—subdued when addressing all women—his V.C., and the story of how he won it, fighting against fabulous odds to rescue Toby Finch,—made her feel that she was in the presence of

a master spirit, who could rule and guide her for good or evil, happiness or misery; how much, she little foresaw *then!*

Yet Rosamund felt intuitively that he did not love, though he might admire her. Could he but have looked into her heart, and seen how she loved *him!* She knew that to love thus was forbidden her; but surely she might have friendship warm and tender, elevated and spiritual; and so the charming little sophist argued in her heart of hearts, if such a phrase may be permitted.

It did, however, often occur to her that she had surely lost proper pride, feeling, and spirit, to love in secret a man who cared nothing for her; yet not so secretly either, for Maud could read her thoughts, and by many a quiet but stinging remark could turn her into stone, as it were.

‘There are men who are worth dying for, I have been told,’ she once ventured to urge in reply; ‘and surely Kyrle Desborough is one of these men? How strange that he is one of those whom all women love! and if so, why should I be an exception?’

‘Don’t be a romantic goose, and don’t fret

over your own fancies,' would be Maud's cold rejoinder.

And now he was translating for her freely and for his own amusement the Chinese characters on her ivory fan, with a facility that would have startled a Civil Service examiner, till the terms of the pretended love-letter—for such he averred it to be—grew a little *apropos*, and she suddenly said,

'Please pick up my glove—where is it?'

'In my hand. Such an absurdly tiny glove it is! May I keep it?' he whispered.

'Till to-morrow.'

He took it, and from that moment forgot all about it; but his arm went round her again, and she whirled away in the waltz with him, her eyes half closed and her whole soul 'in a dreamy state of uncalculating happiness;' while the baronet, senile as he was, and as an old man doting too, had not the bad taste to hover about the almost unsuspecting girl, or to follow her, save enviously, perhaps angrily, with his wicked old eyes. And yet there were good-natured friends in Ringwood Hall that night, who averred that some of the brilliants then sparkling on the white neck and arms of

Rosamund were the gifts of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle—to Lady Templeton, added others, but in past times.

‘I know nothing more absurd,’ Maud heard the baronet say to the latter, as the young lady in question went floating past, ‘nothing indeed, or more insolent in fact, than for a man without—aw—aw—a social position, attempting to engage the affections of one who may—nay, might—engage herself with undoubted advantage and honour to another. Don’t you think so, Lady Templeton?’

‘Think so? of course I do, Sir Ayling.’

Maud knew the drift of these remarks, and smiled one of her own malevolent smiles as the words of a writer occurred to her, ‘Hoodwinking is not pleasant even when performed by a mistress in the art of falconry; but it is still more aggravating to be blindfolded by a mere chit, who ought to be busy with her embroidery-frame, instead of meddling with lures and jesses.’

But there was certainly no effort at hoodwinking so far as the happy Rosamund and indifferent Desborough were concerned.

‘How *dare* he?’ was the thought of the

haughty Maud, as she watched the half self-satisfied and wholly amused expression and bearing of Desborough towards her thoughtless sister. This playing at love-making seemed genteel comedy, that might end in melodrama, and irritated her intensely. At last she suddenly missed them from amid the glittering maze of dancers, and still more would she have been irritated had she known all that was passing.

For coolness, they had wandered into the picture-gallery. And now Rosamund's gloveless hand was in that of Desborough, though it leant upon his arm, and they were talking, the girl scarcely knew of what, but supposed it was the pictures, as they paused before one, a full-length of a fair and handsome young girl attired richly, but in the studied negligence, the elegant dishabille, of the days of Charles II. Her golden hair, adorned by a single rose, escaped from a bandeau of pearls and fell upon a neck of snow.

'An ancestress, I presume?' said Desborough.

'Yes, a few generations back,' replied Rosamund.

‘You are wonderfully like her.’

‘I would I were half so lovely!’ said Rosamund, looking up with her brightest expression, yet coyly, into the face of Desborough, for this effort of Lely’s pencil was famous for its loveliness; ‘it was she who, when the Duke of York passed this way to Southampton, wearing his buff coat and velvet-covered steel cap (just as he is described by Mr. Pepys), gave his highness a kiss, as a bribe to beat the Dutch; whereat my Lord Templeton was much amazed, as were my Lords Churchill and Sandwich, who stood by.’

‘A kiss! Well, it leaves no mark, externally at least.’

Now Kyrle Desborough was very wrong, and we suppose we must say he was; but ‘mistakes will occur in a hurry and shock;’ and so, somehow, very unjustifiably under all the circumstances, he kissed Rosamund Templeton. Her little mouth was so near, what could he do? The girl trembled and grew pale, but not with anger.

So passed the first—would it be the *last*?—kiss between those lips that might have clung to each other for a lifetime. We shall see.

A few minutes—only three perhaps—were passed in that shady picture-gallery; yet in that brief time were sown seeds that, as they took root, sprouted and budded, bore with them sleepless nights, and days of aching and sorrow, doubt, anger, and perhaps hate!

Meanwhile Vere of ours had recaptured Gertrude, and had the Honourable Maud been less occupied in watching Rosamund and her handsome partner, she might have missed *her* too.

The night was far advanced by this time—even the first hour of morning was nearly past; the guests were all crowded into the old-fashioned dining-hall, where supper was laid, and these two, for whom somehow there was no space amid the crush around the tables, and who more probably made no effort to find it, took refuge, as if by tacit consent, in the long and half-lit conservatory, which lay between the hall and the now empty dancing-room; and Vere led his companion to a sofa, in a place where her light dress would be less conspicuous amid the greenery which surrounded her.

Vere was no coxcomb, but as Gertrude

seated herself and looked up their eyes met, and he knew that now had come the time so long wished for, and yet so dreaded, though both in that glance felt that the moment was one of those that do not occur often in a lifetime, when the interpretation of the tongue becomes weak as compared with the silent sympathy of the eye; and through a long time of weary sorrow, separation, and doubt the glance of that moment was forgotten by neither. 'If engaged to Derinzy, why does she look at me thus?' thought Vere; and with that thought the avowal that trembled on his lips died away. And yet unconsciously she led up to it, by asking,

'What do those curious letters, *p.s.c.*, after your name in the *Army List*, signify?'

His heart quickened; she *had* been looking at his name. Then she added,

'I asked Derinzy, and he made me some jocular answer.'

'It means, passed the Staff College.'

'For what—a staff appointment?'

'Yes.'

'Where?'

'Oh, in the Colonies, or anywhere.'

‘Surely you have formed this resolution abruptly.’

‘No, far from it,’ replied Vere, whom her mention of Derinzy’s name had piqued; and he thought the glance he had read must be fancy, as her eye was calm and steady now, though her white bosom heaved under the fan which she pressed against it.

‘Are you likely to go soon?’ she asked quietly.

‘I cannot say.’

‘How much we shall miss you!’

‘Oh, my place may be easily filled.’

She looked up at him reproachfully, and then cast down her eyes sadly. He could not see the latter expression, but felt that the conversation had taken a turn he did not intend, in tone at least. With some quickness, it might be irritation, of manner she drew the gloves off her hands—white, delicate, and faultless hands they were, that told alike of birth and culture.

She had rings on both hands, but none whatever on the engaged finger—the third of the right hand—and hence, by ‘the laws of the ring,’ Vere saw that she was *not* engaged,

and that the rumour of the clubs was false. And now indeed he felt that the time had come. 'Probably there is no instance,' says Sir Arthur Helps, 'in which two lovers have made love in exactly the same way as any other two lovers since the world began.' But it all comes to the same thing in the end.

She seemed intuitively to know what was coming now, for as he took her hand between his own she permitted him to retain it, as if there were that magnetism or delight in the touch which a writer has described as being 'like a pulse in the soul.' She grew paler and paler, whiter and whiter, till the dark-brown hair seemed to deepen in its hue by very contrast.

Leaning over her till his moustache almost touched the close white division of the parted hair on her graceful head, he told her rapidly, hurriedly, and in broken sentences, that he loved her, that the dearest wish of his heart was to call her his own—that his passion for her had in it an intensity of which he had not believed himself capable, but that he dreaded the opposition of her family; and, that romance might not be without the prac-

tical, he added that all his hopes for the future—and they were many—were based upon the will and intentions of his uncle, Sir Joseph Vere, at Mentone.

To all this she made no reply; but remained with downcast face, her white bosom palpitating painfully, and her little hands trembling as if palsied.

‘Speak to me,’ he whispered imploringly, ‘only one word.’

Still the girl, usually so self-asserted, or rather self-possessed, was calm, though apparently much agitated; and Vere eyed her with an anxious and loving, yet almost haggard, expression, as he said,

‘I see it is in vain that I have urged all this; your studied silence tells me that I have been presumptuous—’

‘Oh, no—no—no!’ she exclaimed, in a hushed voice.

‘That I am without hope, then?’

‘I have not said so.’

‘But you think it?’

‘You are unjust to say so,’ she continued, in a broken voice. ‘You do me a great honour, Mr. Vere—a girl is always honoured by such

an offer; I always thought you preferred me to others—were very fond of me indeed—but that you loved me—’

‘My eyes have ever told you so; and now you know that I love you dearly and deeply, dearest Gertrude, tell me, may I hope?’

Never before had he called her by her Christian name. In doing so he passed the Rubicon of friendship altogether, and it sounded sweetly to himself and to the girl, whose agitation pained and, for a time, perplexed him.

‘May I hope, Gertrude?’ he urged, with one arm round her now; ‘tell me—tell me—ere fools interrupt—’

‘Not to-night—another time.’

As her eyes met his, he saw that they were full of tears. She gave a kind of gasp as his hand tightened on her waist, and making an effort to be calm, said, in a low voice,

‘When I say to you that I am a victim to the most odious tyranny, I admit more than I have ever done to mortal man.’

‘Tyranny!’

‘Let us understand each other. Mamma—ah, you don’t know mamma as I do;

she wields her power over Rosamund on behalf of Sir Ayling, and over me as regards the attentions of Colonel Derinzy.'

'Rosamund will never yield?'

'I think not.'

'Then why should you?'

'Money and a prospective coronet are an apology for *his* suit; while my love or inclination is not consulted in the matter. Could you expect it with mamma and her advisers?' added the girl bitterly.

'I *have* hope, then, Gertrude?' said Vere, in a low voice, full of joy.

'Oh, hush—we are observed!'

'By whom?'

'Mamma—and—and—'

But it was not mamma whose image the girl's fears had conjured up, but Colonel Derinzy, who appeared in the far vista of the conservatory.

'Please to be reasonable with me,' she urged piteously.

'I can but think of love, not reason, when I think of you. Give me an answer, for mercy's sake, Gertrude.'

'The day after to-morrow, then.'

‘Ah, why such delay? Oh, name a place—a time!’

‘After luncheon I have to visit the rectory; be at the stile where last we saw the hounds throw off, and, be it fair or rain, I shall be there.’

All her usual bearing of coolness and placid self-possession came back to her, as she made this remarkable appointment in a hurried whisper, drew on her gloves, and rose with a smile to greet Derinzy, who came lounging up to them, and said, with a little pout,

‘You evidently prefer to sit out the square dance, Miss Gertrude.’

‘I knew not that dancing was resumed.’

‘Yet that band of the Eighth makes row enough for anything.’

‘Our dance, I think, Miss Gertrude,’ said Vere.

‘Pardon me, Vere, it is *mine*,’ said the colonel quietly; ‘permit me, Miss Gertrude.’

The cards were examined, and Derinzy proved right, while the lady’s name on Vere’s card seemed a species of hieroglyphic.

‘Never mind, Vere; there is nothing in this life worth getting excited about,’ was the

—so far as Gertrude was concerned—not very complimentary remark of the fashionable Yahoo Derinzy, as he drew the girl's hand through his arm and led her away, with something brighter than one of his usual ready-made smiles rippling over his face, as if he felt that 'now he had the best of it.'

So Vere had said all that he had nerved himself to say, and even more; but an answer was yet to be given. Why this weary delay? he thought; why, after such admissions made on her part?—admissions that too fatally corroborated all that Kyrle Desborough had said, and which filled Vere's mind with doubt and dread and pain, the greater after all that passed in the conservatory. Why this delay? he continued to ask of himself; what difference would four-and-twenty or six-and-thirty hours make in their affairs? He could but wait and hope, and pass these lagging hours as best he might.

But the best of the ball was over now, and to linger near her was only to see her with Derinzy—and that, after what she had said, was torture. He resolved to dance no more that night; indeed, the programme was nearly

over, and the ever-thirsty band looked weary in the draughty vestibule; while already carriages were arriving at the *porte cochère*, taking up and departing.

So he joined Desborough and Toby Finch, who were having some champagne-cup ere departing; and the former was quizzing the latter, as he generally did.

‘A lovely girl that was you addicted yourself to half the night, Toby.’

‘Yes; deuced hard that I could only get the cold-meat train from Waterloo. I’d have made my innings else. She is a Miss Fenn.’

‘Any of the Lincolnshire Fens?’

‘I believe so.’

‘Precisely, Toby; your fortune’s made. They are the same whom Prince Puckler Muskau, in his *Travels*, asserted to be the oldest family in England.’

‘You infantry fellows have been nowhere to-night,’ said a cheeky young Hussar, who had imbibed more wine than was good for him.

‘Of course,’ said Kyrle; ‘all toilette preparations of the ladies were only to “receive cavalry;” I hope they haven’t done so kneel-

ing. Well, Vere,' he added, drawing that personage aside, 'have *you* made your innings to-night?'

'Yes,' replied Vere, but with a dubious smile.

'What says the Scotch ballad?'

"Long have I sought sweet *Gertrude's* heart,
And dropped the tear and heaved the sigh;
But vain the lover's wily art
Beneath a sister's watchful eye."

'I outflanked the fair Maud to-night, though, Kyrle.'

As he bade the family adieu, muttering, in the usual fashion, how much he had enjoyed the ball, and so forth, he read a cold inquiring glance in the haughty eyes of the dowager; but a quick bright smile in those of Gertrude, so much as to say, 'I shall not forget;' and that smile haunted him as he hurried away.

'Any one for the South Camp?' cried a voice. It was that of Toby Finch, who had some vacant places in his hired vehicle. These were speedily filled by Vere, Desborough, and Clive. The drive home was a pretty long one; and Vere, sunk in a species of dream, seemed to hear the voice of Gertrude mingling

with half-tipsified remarks of Finch and Clive, two of the most rackety subs in the regiment.

Though no snow had fallen, the surrounding landscape looked white under the gleaming stars of the early morning; for the frost was sharp, and everything seemed to sparkle in a network of silver, and great icicles hung from cottage eaves and garden gates, and over all the locality through which the party drove there seemed to brood a sleepy calm and silence; so, oblivious of the chaffing conversation of his friends, Vere gave full swing to his own thoughts.

He loved Gertrude honestly, faithfully, and with genuine affection. What to him were the cold-blooded schemes of her mother, the 'snobbish' selfishness inculcated by their 'set,' save that it was his duty to save her from them? As he thought of the latter he felt almost republican—and in this age of the world the said ideas seem more than ever absurd, and, though behind the age and its spirit, they are peculiarly of the age and a part of it; yet there is no blood in the peerage so noble that much of it will not mingle with that sprung from the gutter, if the said

‘gutter-blood,’ as the Scots call it, has gold with it.

The events of that ball were fraught with thought to others as well as him. There were Kyrle Desborough’s kiss and the glove begged with so much apparent *empressement*. Kyrle thought little of the kiss, if he thought at all; and as for the glove, it was forgotten, or found by his servant, Private Smith, and taken by him, like others, to clean his rifle or polish his accoutrements—he had often found such stray gloves in the captain’s pockets ‘come handy.’ But with poor Rosamund the kiss had burnt into her heart!

Her ‘set’ do not think much of such things, would have been the scornful reflection of Desborough, if he had reflected about it at all. A kiss! bah! So the girl was no more thought about seriously than the last year’s snow, or only remembered as a means of helping him to spend a pleasant hour or two. The affectations of such people as Lady Templeton and ‘her lot’ had brought a really good fellow to view them with contempt and to steel his heart against. ‘*A bas les aristocrats!*’ he was wont to say, as he had learned to despise their

cold-blooded selfishness and snobbery; but it was currently thought in the regiment that at some period or other Kyrle had met with some sharp affront or bitter disappointment.

‘By Jove, Desborough, but you did go the pace with the little Templeton!’ said Toby Finch.

‘And you with the prize widow, Toby.’

‘A thirty-thousand-pounder and perfection!’

‘With all her pride,’ said Desborough, ‘the fair Maud does lean on her partner’s shoulder in a mode more suggestive of the girl one meets in a dancing *salon* than one of England’s honourable misses.’

‘But, Kyrle, old man,’ said Clive, ‘I saw that you missed two or three dances, and sat in the conservatory with the fair Maud.’

‘Spooning, by Jove!’ exclaimed Finch.

‘Not at all. I was only enjoying statistics.’

‘How?’

‘I had all the petty scandals and so forth affecting the *débutantes* of the last season, with hints as to how some of their paternal acres stood.’

‘Ah! Anything more?’

‘A few stupid matches made and separations about to come off; yet all told with a hauteur blended with natural spite that, to say the least of it, was very amusing to me.’

‘You are very severe, Desborough.’

‘Not at all; but it would do some of these folks good to hear how their best friends speak of them.’

‘But the fair Rosamund is a gem!’

‘Though bored to death by that wretched old baronet.’

‘How old is the noble Methuselah?’

‘Don’t know; even *Burke* and *Debrett* don’t, I think. But it is touching to see the old fellow spooning after a golden-haired girl, and affecting to get up the mutual lover business. But here we are at the camp, and there goes the morning gun!’ added Kyrle Desborough, as they swept up the Farnborough road and past the ‘Tumble-down-Dick.’

‘Fair laughed the morn and soft the zephyr played,’ exclaimed Finch, in reply to a sentinel’s challenge, and then they bowled into the silent lines of the South Camp. ‘I haven’t lost my heart over-night; and yet there were

some girls there worth throwing the handkerchief to.'

'The Lincolnshire Fens, eh?' said Vere.

'Yes; and Gertrude Templeton too, friend Herbert,' retorted Toby. 'But here is my wigwam, and, happy thought! we must each have a pick-me-up; the best is b.-and-s., or soda-water with milk and a good dash of curaçoa. Ugh! how dark it is, and how cold! These infernal Aldershot huts are mere booths,' he added, as they stumbled into the dark and narrow passage, where each in succession knocked his shins against the iron coal-box of the double establishment—each hut being for two officers. But matches and a candle were found on the small deal shelf, which projected about three inches above Toby's dingy little grate; and a greater contrast than his 'den,' with its appurtenances, presented to the abode they had just quitted it would be difficult to imagine. Yet they were all, even Vere, as jolly and noisy as possible, being soon joined by others who had been at the ball; and now it was brandy-and-soda over and over again, as if to correct all they had taken before and steady them for the work of the day. It was

not much to face, certainly, then; there were no musketry practice, judging-distance drill, or anything else to be done, but simply to appear on parade, the morning bugles for which sounded ere they separated to 'tub' and assume their uniform.

So the diamond ring was *not* put on the pretty finger after all; but Herbert Vere sighed hopefully as he replaced it in his dressing-case. A time might come!

CHAPTER V.

IN LADY TEMPLETON'S BOUDOIR.

THOUGH the boom of the morning gun was unheard amid the woodlands round Ringwood Hall, it was not till about the time it pealed over the double camp that Lady Templeton and her daughters followed the example of their resident guests, and retired, as they, but more especially the former, were disposed to linger and talk over the events of the ball, some of which were not without results.

After any ball, especially such as that at Ringwood Hall, which had been given of necessity in return for many, there must always be a sinking of the spirit consequent to reaction, and of this most sensibly were Gertrude and Rosamund aware, all the more as a winter storm in all its dreariness came on during the subsequent day, and chained up the household.

Short and sharp showers of winter sleet swept over the heathy wastes and fallow fields, to pour their strength upon the ivied walls and painted windows of the old mansion. The blast swelled at times into hurricanes, and boughs and branches from the ancient trees—even from King James's oak—torn by the eddy wind, came sweeping against the projecting oriels. It was very depressing, all the more so as sad, bitter, and angry thoughts had succeeded to the gaiety and brilliance of the scene, the music of the Eighth's band, and the crush of the jolly supper, while Gertrude trembled in her heart lest the meeting of the morrow might thus be marred. Yet what would it avail? what had she to tell?

We have said that Lady Templeton and her daughters lingered together after their guests had departed; but, weary and sick of the family conclave, Gertrude was not long in following their example, as she feared to be taken—as poor little Rosamund was—to task for certain errors, or what their mother chose to consider as such.

As for Colonel Derinzy, but little reference was certainly made to him by Lady Templeton,

who had begun to deem the engagement between him and Gertrude as a settled point—a nearly accomplished fact; and as the latter heard it referred to in this manner, and then dismissed, the earnest eyes and pleading voice of Vere came painfully and upbraidingly back to her memory.

So Gertrude retired to commune with her own thoughts, and give way to her tears unseen. In her heart she acknowledged that she loved Vere, and never could love Derinzy; but she had no hope of her iron-hearted mother ever consenting that she should receive the addresses of the former, so to what end was the scene in the conservatory or the secret meeting to which it was to lead?

Her heart was wrung and painfully agitated.

To-morrow—it was to-morrow now—she would see him, however, though perhaps for the last time. The last time! Could it be so? Happy it is for us that the future is a sealed book; how otherwise should we be able to face all, or anything—even the events of the morrow?

So far into the remainder of that morning

she lay awake, brooding fondly over the past, and bitterly over the future; awake, striving to unravel the tangled skein of care, a prey to doubt and love, perplexity and sorrow, while from time to time the murmur of voices came from her mother's boudoir, and her heart foreboded much of what was passing there; for she knew that she was not the only victim to circumstances then in Ringwood Hall, and knew it well.

Rosamund had enjoyed herself so much—oh, so much! She had danced through all the programme, and more; she had ever so many dances with Kyrle Desborough, and was dreaming over them all again, and of the hope that he would but love her truly, as she loved him, and that he was rich enough to please even her mamma, when the latter summoned her to the boudoir, just as she began to divest herself of her jewelry, having followed the saddened Gertrude.

Rosamund felt alarm: had they been overheard or seen in the gallery? That kiss! 'There are moments which people would sometimes give a whole lifetime to recall and use differently, but in vain;' and that moment

in the short life of Rosamund was one of them. That kiss, so lightly taken, so blushing given—the kiss that should never have been given at all—burned, we have said, into the girl's heart. If Kyrle did not love her, why did he dare to touch her lips? If it were only sport, still more how did he dare? 'Oh, yes—yes; he must love me, and shall yet save me from that which I know is coming!' she murmured on her lips and in her heart, as it were, when she sought her mother's presence with sure forebodings.

During the ball Rosamund had perceived that of which no one else was sensible—that Lady Templeton was somewhat *distracte*; and even Maud too, but much less so; and this she attributed to the last of several visits lately paid by the family solicitor.

'I am displeased with you, Rosamund,' said her mother; 'you danced too much with that Captain Desborough—'

'O mamma, I only did so when he asked me.'

'He filled half your card at the beginning of the evening, which was most unfair to other guests, as even Sir Ayling Aldwinkle remarked.'

‘Well, round dancing is not much in his way now, I fancy; and as for Captain Desborough—’

‘He, Sir Ayling tells me, has long been set down as a *non-marrying* man, who looks upon women as toys, and their society as a pastime, to be enjoyed when he has not in his hand the sword, the whip, or the gun. It is even whispered that he is a woman-hater, yet is one of those men who pretend to have eyes only for one woman’s eyes, and ears for only one woman’s voice—’

‘O mamma, you wrong him! Kind, considerate, tender, and courteous to all women, Kyrle—’

‘Kyrle!’

‘Captain Desborough is only so to me,’ added poor Rosamund, colouring painfully.

‘It was not, however, to praise or reprehend Captain Desborough I sent for you, Rosamund; I have a matter of more importance to speak about concerning yourself.’

‘About *me*, mamma?’

‘Yes,’ replied Lady Templeton sharply, yet with a sigh, as if in weariness of the opposition she anticipated.

If this hard-hearted old woman of the world had a weakness or tenderness in her composition, it was regard for Rosamund; and yet she felt in the inner core of her heart—or the useful article which passed for such—that for the emergencies of position and the requirements of society, and most imperatively those of the family exchequer, she would make a *suttee* of her in the end; but delayed until *now* the formal revelation she had to make, and which, perhaps, the advent of Kyrle Desborough had brought to an issue.

Her ladyship proceeded at once—as Rosamund's heart foreboded—to open the trenches, and a spirit of opposition at once grew in the girl's heart, but opposition that failed to last under the pressure put upon it.

'My darling, what do you think of Sir Ayling Aldwinkle?'

'I think he is a funny old thing, mamma.'

'Old?'

'Yes; he must be twenty years older than you.'

'Not quite; but I shall be well pleased if you approve of him, darling. He is only a baronet, certainly; but his title is one of the

oldest in England, and his wealth is enormous, while Winklestoke is one of the finest mansions in the country.'

'What have I to do with all that?' asked Rosamund, dismayed, though not unprepared for this.

'He loves you, my child; and I have hinted as much before.'

'Absurd! I might be his grand-daughter, exclaimed the girl, cresting up her head in supreme disdain. 'Even were he young and handsome—'

'Like Kyrle Desborough,' suggested Maud.

'Yes, like Kyrle Desborough,' repeated Rosamund, with sparkling eyes, 'I would not have him. I am in no hurry to marry; there is plenty of time for that.'

'But not time enough to avert ruin, perhaps,' said Lady Templeton, with increasing gravity.

'Ruin! O mamma, cease to urge me on this most displeasing subject; it is impossible that I could love him, however much he may fancy that he loves me. He could never, with all his vanity—and he has plenty of that—imagine that, or that he could ever win me;

and if he ventures to speak to me on the matter I shall distinctly refuse him—the silly absurd old thing.’

‘Rosamund!’

‘Mamma, I am out of all patience, and very sleepy.’

‘If you venture to refuse him, do so softly, I beseech you, at first.’

‘I don’t think his heart will break,’ said Rosamund, laughing.

‘I am not so sure of that. However, leave him a chance, lest you should—as I fully expect you will be obliged to do—change your mind. The dreams of romantic affection, instilled by novels chiefly, are no longer suited to modern society—’

‘But to nature, mamma.’

‘We don’t live in a state of nature,’ replied Lady Templeton, with more asperity than she usually permitted herself to assume. ‘Considering Sir Ayling’s vast wealth, and the splendour of the establishment he can give you, some gratitude is certainly due to him for the honour of his proposal.’

‘Honour! I am Lord Templeton of Ringwood’s daughter, mamma! Gratitude I may

give, perhaps; but love—oh, the idea is too absurd!' ('Love,' she thought in her heart; 'alas, perhaps mine is bestowed where it is little valued.')

Perceiving that her mother eyed her gloomily, sadly, and with growing anger, she said,

'I am so tired, mamma. May I go, or have you more to say on this disagreeable subject?'

'Much,' replied Lady Templeton sharply.

'I won't marry for money, mamma; I won't marry for a title. A title! what is a mere baronet's wife? I don't want to be married at all. I would rather—'

'What—what?'

'O mamma, I don't know—I don't know!' exclaimed Rosamund, in anger, beginning to knot up the masses of her glorious golden hair with white and trembling fingers that all but failed in their office.

'Starve in the obscurity of some continental town; for it may come to that, perhaps—nay, too surely.'

'Starve? I do not understand you,' exclaimed Rosamund, pausing in her perplexity,

and letting the masses of her hair roll over her snowy shoulders.

‘Then understand this. Listen to me,’ replied her mother, through her set teeth.

Kyrle Desborough was right in the suspicion he had expressed to Herbert Vere; for now Lady Templeton unfolded to Rosamund that they had far, far exceeded their income; that debts had accumulated on every hand; and that even could they part with the family plate, jewels, pictures, and timber—none of which they were permitted to touch—they could not be saved from shame, and the deprivation of carriages, horses, servants, dresses, and entertainments, and their house in town. That Sir Ayling Aldwinkle—good, worthy, kind Sir Ayling—was now fully aware of their crying necessities, and was willing to come to the rescue, and could save them by a dash of his pen, if she, Rosamund, would but listen with favour to his proposal, and accept the splendid settlements he could make upon her.

The girl heard her mother in bewilderment, growing whiter and whiter as she proceeded; for in the genuine selfishness of her nature, in her terror of how ‘society’ would

regard the collapse of her affairs and a retreat to Wiesbaden or some obscure continental town, Lady Templeton waxed earnest, almost tender and beseeching, and well-nigh eloquent.

‘Are matters indeed so bad with us, mamma?’ asked the startled girl, after a pause, and trying to realise a state of affairs of which she had not the faintest conception; for that all they enjoyed in the way of equipage, service, state splendour, position in town and country, with all the elements of ease and luxury, should pass away at one fell swoop for ever, or even for years, seemed as incomprehensible and impossible as that the sun should cease to rise on the morrow.

‘Are matters so bad?’ she repeated.

‘So bad that, when the storm breaks, Rosamund, we may all have to quit Ringwood Hall, without having one maid to attend us instead of four.’

‘And Sir Ayling can save us from all this dreadful ruin and disgrace?’

‘Yes,’ said Lady Templeton eagerly, and with the first approach to a tear Rosamund had ever within her memory seen in the cold steel-gray eyes.

‘O mamma, if one of us must be sacrificed—for it is the sacrifice of a life, of existence itself—would he not take Maud?’

‘No; you, and you only,’ replied Lady Templeton; and Maud, who had hitherto silently watched her younger sister with a mingled expression of face, now repeated the sentence, and smiled with disdain at the suggested alternative.

The fair young brow of Rosamund grew dark and troubled.

Monetary perils, the result of extravagance and vanity on one hand, with the prospect of immediate relief therefrom on the other, together with a noble settlement for one of her daughters, so inflamed Lady Templeton’s temper at the appearance of opposition to her will from one who had no right, she deemed, to have a will of her own, and in whose face she saw the spirit of silent opposition gathering, that she began to exhibit more fury in her eyes than her daughters had ever seen there before, as all exhibitions of emotion, of any kind whatever, she deemed ‘bad form.’

Derinzy, Gertrude’s open admirer, and, as

many supposed, *fiancé*, had only a handsome allowance besides his pay, and could not avail her in this emergency, though he had a viscounty in certain prospect. Thus to Sir Ayling Aldwinkle she was compelled to turn, as the man who alone could avert the coming crisis; and was willing to do so, provided the required sacrifice were made.

And all this had been suddenly and, save when selfishness woke emotion, callously unfolded to the poor girl at the very time when a mighty and absorbing passion had been kindled in her impulsive heart, filling it and thrilling it, 'and teaching it the lesson which is as old as Time, yet which each new-born child must perforce learn for itself—the lesson that delight is twin with pain, and that to live is to suffer.'

Rosamund had heard the story of their impending ruin, but was still silent. She had been compelled to hear all this, with the music of the ball yet making her pulses vibrate, with the memory of Kyrle Desborough's kiss upon her lip, the knowledge that he had still her glove, but that no word of love had escaped him; and yet she loved him so!

Lady Templeton banned in her heart the day that brought our battalion of the Eighth or King's to Aldershot Camp, as she feared, and justly, that Desborough's handsome eyes—'wild dark Irish eyes' she had heard them called—and his winning manner had much to do with the silent opposition and expression of disgust and despair she could now perceive in the face of Rosamund; but she was too politic quite to treat her as a child, and urge, in the usual terms, her submission to the dictum of those who were older and wiser than herself, or to hint that she had any secret or unworthy reason for declining the offer of Sir Ayling's hand and settlement.

Though a domestic despot of a very high kind, she never gave way to violent manifestations of authority. Such she would have deemed unbecoming; but 'as the water-drop wears out the stone,' so, she resolved, would she quietly grind Rosamund to her purpose, and most studiously would she be from home when Captain Desborough and one or two more rode over from that obnoxious camp.

Thus dissembling her real nature and purpose, she took her daughter's hand with more

pretended emotion than she was really capable of feeling, and said,

‘I hope, darling, you quite understand all this, and the difficulty and delicacy of our position. With regard to an engagement and marriage with Sir Ayling, you are at liberty to fix your own time. With all his love he will not hurry you. So we will not speak more on the subject till you have become accustomed to the thought, and to receive him as your future husband. I see that the proposal—though you must have expected it—has startled you, and taken you by surprise; but you don’t know how happy you will be when it is all over. And now God bless you, darling. Good-night—or morning rather, and a sound sleep to you.’

Then, kissing her daughter on each cheek, Lady Templeton retired, to find her luckless abigail sound asleep in her dressing-closet.

Rosamund stood for a few minutes like one turned to stone; she then shivered, uttered a strange bitter laugh, and turned away to her own room, to think over all she had heard.

Could it be that ruin and disgrace—the

disgrace, at least, of debt—were hanging over them all? and the closing of their house in town, the disappearance of their equipage from the Park, and of themselves from every public place, was to prove a nine days' wonder and source of contemptuous speculation and mock commiseration for 'the set' among whom they moved and for whom they lived? A nine days' wonder it would be indeed, as she knew by her own brief experience of what 'society' is. And could it be that she, and she alone, could save them all from this? But at what a price!

From the time she had been a baby in her lace berceau she had ever been surrounded by luxury and magnificence. Could it be that all their triumphs and pleasures were over? that all must go—jewels, admirers, the splendid equipages, and the gay crowds amid which they moved—unless—

'Oh, that Desborough would save me! He is rich—rich enough, they say, even to suit mamma,' she wailed in her heart.

From that time her long persecution and misery began; and spoiled and indulged as she had been by prosperity, wealth, and posi-

tion, her first lessons in the realities of life were hard and trying ones.

On the day subsequent to the ball, Sir Ayling, after a long interview with Lady Templeton, took his departure from Ringwood Hall, for three reasons. It was thought advisable to let Rosamund get accustomed to think of him as her intended in his absence, which he deemed the more necessary, as he had caught a cold with a hacking cough, and had also certain premonitory twinges of gout; and he had no desire that Rosamund might discover him with a shawl over his old shoulders, his feet rolled up in flannel, and his valet giving him thin toast, dry sherry, and colchicum.

Well muffled up in a coat lined with Russian sables, and a hot-water bottle in his carriage, he drove off for Winklestoke, leaving his formal proposals as yet unmade, but with a pretty present for the acceptance of Rosamund; thus showing that he would not adopt her cold reception of his attentions, and hoped to be on a better and more tender footing with her in the time to come.

But he ground his set of beautiful Parisian

teeth, as he saw from a distance the huts of the South Camp, and knew that a curly-headed Irishman, named Kyrle Desborough, dwelt there.

CHAPTER VI.

VERE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

ON the stormy day subsequent to the ball Vere was on duty as 'brigade officer of the day,' and as such he had not much more to do than to visit and inspect the guards and canteens of the brigade, as at that season there was no bathing picket at Claycart Hill; so his time passed slowly, all the more so that Desborough was on guard, Clive had gone up to town, and Toby Finch, in suit of waterproofs, asserting 'it was a glorious day for a nibble,' had betaken himself to Fleet Pond in search of the gregarious roach and the pike.

Cast thus upon himself, the day was a long one to Vere, and full of alternate doubts and hopes; for thus it is that 'human weakness, if it has not real trials, invents imaginary ones, and, with a persistent desire to suffer, accepts the imaginary for the real.' With intense eagerness he looked forward to the interview

—the meeting—so frankly accorded to him by Gertrude Templeton, and gathered hope from the fact that it had been so accorded. Anon hope died, when he thought of her mother and all that lady's ambitions, powers, plans, and influence. Of her dire necessities he, fortunately, knew nothing; but fear of her influence over one so gentle as Gertrude oppressed him like a nightmare, and haunted him sleeping or waking. When shaving, the mirror seemed to reflect the face of Lady Templeton and not his own, so he gave his chin an unpleasant gash. She came between him and his appetite at breakfast; and when he made his round of the guards, their fixed bayonets reminded him of the cold steely glitter of her proud inquiring eyes.

He got through the day somehow, after sundry pick-me-ups at the mess-hut. Evening came, when he had to parade the inlying pickets of the brigade and the fire-screen parties, while the massed drums and fifes of the brigade, with their drum-majors in front, beat 'the retreat' along the lines, with swarms of children scampering and trundling hoops before them.

This ended the duty for the day; and as stillness began to settle over the hushed camp, and the twilight was clear and frosty, Vere, sunk in thought, strolled away to the utmost boundary of the lines—beyond which, as being on duty, he could not go—to indulge in his fancies and a fragrant havannah together.

His mind was ever recurring to all that had passed in the conservatory, and he conned over it, communed over it, and re-acted it in fancy again and again, with happiness in his heart and a sunny smile in his eyes, till he *did* stray beyond the boundaries of the camp, and found himself in a narrow path, between clumps of wiry and gloomy Scotch firs and masses of gorse, and to return was his instant thought—return without delay—lest he should be missed or required; for in a great camp like that at Aldershot one never can know what may happen at any time.

He was about to retrace his steps more quickly than he had come, when two figures—a woman and that of a mounted man—appeared at the end of the path where it diverged from the road that led direct to the camp; and in the latter—gloomy though the

twilight, and in a place made darker by the branches of the great firs overhead—he recognised Jocelyn Derinzy, but in plain clothes. He was stooping from his horse, so low that his arm was round the neck of the female, whose upturned face was perilously close to his, and they seemed in close, tender, and earnest conversation. This placed Vere in a dilemma.

If he remained where he was he must play the part of eavesdropper; to retire was to increase the distance between him and the camp. Thick hedgerows and stake-fences precluded any detour, and to advance might put him in the power of a senior officer, who knew that he was on duty, and by whom he was secretly detested as a rival, though they never met without smiles and much apparent cordiality, for such is the necessary hypocrisy of well-bred society; and now to put himself in that rival's power was a move to be avoided if possible.

‘He surely would not be such a beastly cad as to take advantage of the situation, and put me under arrest,’ thought Vere; ‘but better not trust to *his* good-nature anyway,’ he added, and shrank a little back.

‘You were kinder to me when the gorse was in all its golden bloom,’ he heard the girl say; for she was a mere girl, but a very pretty one, as she assumed an upbraiding tone.

‘Don’t say so, darling Phœbe,’ exclaimed the Colonel, as he stooped and kissed her; ‘you know the proverb?’

‘When the gorse is out of bloom kissing is out of fashion,’ was the inviting rejoinder.

‘Exactly—for the gorse is never entirely out of bloom, darling. But you should not have come so far as this alone—tipsy fellows or a patrol may meet you, and something unpleasant might occur.’

‘I came, as you know, to meet *you*,’ said the girl, in a tender voice, as their meeting seemed about to end.

‘You foolish little pet, when I am just going to where you have so nearly come from!’

‘Ringwood Hall?’

‘Yes—I dine there this evening. Return by rail—be wary, silent, and remember your promise of secrecy—that must be observed at all hazards.’

Then stooping again, he kissed her with great apparent affection, put spurs to his

horse, and galloped down the Farnborough road.

That Derinzy was going to dine with the Templetons was not an unusual circumstance; but Vere would rather have known nothing about his movements, and that he would be privileged to spend so many hours, with a mother's approval, in the society of the girl he—Vere—loved; but when this emotion of pique, and then his surprise, passed away, he resolved to ascertain who this girl—she was not a lady, though pretty and graceful enough to be so—was upon whom the great lumbering heir of Viscount Derinzy bestowed so much tenderness, and, as he thought, so secretly.

The girl seemed lost in thought, so much so that she knew not the approach of Vere, who heard her muttering,

‘He is deceiving me; but ere I go home to-night I will learn the truth of what he means by Miss Gertrude—I will, I will!’ Then she began to weep, and uttered a slight cry of alarm, when Vere stood suddenly before her in the fading light; for in his gray regimental overcoat and shako, to her untutored eye, she

knew not whether he was an officer or one of the rank and file, but most probably concluded he was the latter.

‘Pardon me if I have startled you,’ said he, in his most reassuring tone; ‘but, as your friend who has just left you has hinted, this is an awkward locality at such an hour for a girl who is alone and so attractive as you.’

‘Thank you, sir; but my business is my own,’ replied the girl rather sullenly and coldly.

‘Of course, and I have no desire to intrude; but as you named a friend of mine, may I ask who you are, my girl?’

‘Phœbe Bagshaw. Are you the wiser for knowing?’

‘Where do you live?’

‘Not far from Ringwood Hall; my father is the gamekeeper. And now, sir, will you answer a question or two of mine? Is that road the direct way to the South Camp?’

‘Yes; but the sentinels will not admit you—a stranger—at this hour; to do so would be against orders.’

‘Then I have come on a bootless errand,’ said the girl sorrowfully.

‘Whom do you wish to see?’ asked Vere, in all kindness.

‘An officer in the F lines of the South Camp.’

‘My regiment is in those lines,’ said Vere, turning away with a laugh that implied a good deal.

‘Perhaps you know him, sir?’ asked the girl, ignorant of his suspicion.

‘Very probably; what is his name?’

‘Vere—Mr. Herbert Vere.’

‘Vere of the Eighth?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘I know him very well,’ said the other, laughing again; ‘do you?’

‘Yes,’ she replied, blushing; ‘you must have seen us part.’

‘Us?’

‘Yes—a moment ago; he was mounted.’

‘What the deuce are you talking about, girl?’ said he, now becoming grave; ‘I am Vere of the Eighth, and there is not another of the name in the whole camp.’

‘This may be chaff, but it isn’t gentlemanly to a poor girl, who is quite alone here.’

‘There is more in all this than meets the

ear,' said he, now becoming seriously angry. 'I assure you, on my honour, that I am he of whom you speak—Lieutenant Vere of the Eighth or King's.'

'Very likely!' replied the girl, with pert incredulity; 'then *who* is he that has just left me?'

'Colonel Jocelyn Derinzy of the staff.'

The girl laughed scornfully now.

'Have you known him long?' asked Vere earnestly.

'For four anxious months,' she replied sadly.

'As Derinzy?'

'No, as Mr. Vere of the South Camp; and only yesterday I heard he was in the Eighth or King's.'

'And you are the daughter of the game-keeper at Ringwood Hall?'

'Yes, sir.'

'There is some monstrous piece of rascality in all this—a rascality which I must unravel!' exclaimed Vere, as, with an emotion of rage, he took in the whole situation, and saw much therein that might prove perilous and troublesome to himself.

‘By what right do you say all this?’ demanded the girl, firing up in defence of her lover. ‘I have heard that you *both* were sweet upon our Miss Gertrude, and all the family say that *you*, colonel, are to be married to her, though they say she doesn’t care a fig about you; and as for attempting to pass yourself off as Mr. Vere, it is a low shabby trick, for which I hate you—that I do!’

And, snapping her pretty little fingers directly in his face in token of her angry contempt, Phœbe Bagshaw hastened away in a fume; at the same moment a hasty and impatient bugle-call, the ‘fire-alarm’ (it proved to be a false one), made Vere forget his indignation and rush back to the camp, where the inlying pickets were getting under arms, and the engines being brought forth.

This discovery ‘knocked Vere into a cocked hat,’ as he phrased it, when telling the story to Finch and Desborough some time after; but he resolved that the following day should see the colonel brought to book: he meant to threaten to expose him to the whole service and to every club in town; to upbraid him with his treachery and falsehood, and wring some

explanation or satisfaction from him at all hazards. But among these very hazards prudence suggested that, while carried away by his passion, might not the name of Gertrude Templeton get somehow involved with the affair? while he himself might be accused by the ignorant and unthinking of rivalry and revenge; as it can never be foreseen what turn a disreputable story may take, or what may grow out of it. Yet, at all risks, he resolved to be face to face with the Honourable Jocelyn at an early hour on the morrow, and confound him if possible.

CHAPTER VII.

BAFFLED.

'IT is easier to conceive than describe the complicated sensations which are felt from the pain of a recent injury, and the pleasure of approaching vengeance,' says Goldsmith, with much truth; and with some such emotions in his mind, the moment that morning parade was over on the following day, Vere set forth to 'have it out' with the colonel.

His ideas of vengeance were as vague as his hopes of obtaining 'satisfaction.' Once upon a time, the mode of getting the latter was plain enough, easy enough, and understood by all; but duels—in England at least—are as much behind the age as chain-mail or Scotch moss-troopers, never having been heard of since Munro of the Blues fought his fatal one at Chalk Farm; but be they behind the age or not, Vere felt it in his heart to have paraded Derinzy at the Beacon Hill or by

the margin of Fleet Pond with extreme pleasure.

It was daring indeed of the latter to play the game he was doing in a country district, and within a circle so narrow (though there are usually above six hundred officers in Aldershot), and not—as he might have done it more safely—in the wilderness of London; more than all with one of Lady Templeton's household—for though resident in a solitary cottage on the estate, the keeper's daughter might almost be deemed so; while the substitution of Vere's name for his own showed in Derinzy a recklessness of consequences on the one hand, with considerable meanness, spite, and animus on the other; and all these thoughts crowded the brain of the former as he approached the colonel's residence, a pretty little villa on the verge of the camp, embosomed among bays and rhododendrons in winter, and equally so by roses in summer.

That Derinzy was lax in morals and dissipated all men knew; yet Vere was unprepared for the trickery he had discovered. It was rather notorious that there was a villa in one of the prettiest of London suburbs, which was

not taken in his own name, and occupied by a lady who did not take his name either, and whose tiny equipage, with its horses and harness, was so perfect in style as to create a sensation even in the Park.

The lady with the bijou villa and brougham is so familiar to those who know London life, that no excuse is necessary for mentioning her; but we are sorry to say that, with all his pretensions to the hand of Gertrude Templeton, the existence of this establishment was known to the dowager, and in her estimation formed no blot on the escutcheon of the future viscount. Men will be men, thought her ladyship, and when married be finished sowing their wild oats; 'a species of seed,' says a writer, 'which, being universally acknowledged to contain, besides every small vice extant, the germs of the seven deadly sins, has this remarkable peculiarity, that, being once sown, it is popularly supposed to bring forth a plentiful crop of all the domestic virtues.'

Late though the hour for such a meal, the colonel was at breakfast in a luxurious and sunny little room, the oriel windows of which

faced the far extent of the Long Valley, terminated by the green summit of Twiseldown Hill and the race-ground. A bright fire blazed on the hearth, above which hung a chalk drawing of the lady referred to. Close by was drawn a sofa, on which, wrapped in a dressing-gown of the richest brocaded silk, lounged the bulky well-fed form of Jocelyn Derinzy.

There were coffee, rolls, and marmalade on the breakfast-table, but therewith were a bottle of brandy and liqueur-glass, with a few cigars. The colonel did not hear his visitor announced, so absorbed was he in a book, the contents of which did not add to his amiability of mind, as it was his betting one; and in addition to losing some hundreds at *écarté*, after returning from Ringwood Hall last night, he had heard some very strange rumours concerning one or two horses which he had backed heavily in certain events that were yet to come off; and he had been going through his calculations again and again, and, referring to the latest odds, muttered,

‘It must go right, the mare is sure to run—there is not a horse that can come near her—or else I am in a devil of a hole!’

He thrust the book with a curse into his pocket, and placed his hand again upon the brandy decanter, just as Vere approached him, and certainly his face expressed surprise.

‘Oh — aw — aw — the deuce — didn’t hear you announced. Good-morning, Vere — be seated; what is up?’

The latter question was sufficient to indicate that Herbert Vere was not one of the colonel’s visitors. He neither took a seat nor Derinzy’s hand; neither did he respond to the insipid but well-bred smile that rippled over the fair stupid face of the latter.

‘Hope you enjoyed the Templetons’ ball,’ he began, with a puzzled expression at that which he read in the face of his visitor; ‘hale old fellow Sir Ayling Aldwinkle — aw — aw —’

‘Yes; his liver has certainly outlasted his heart, if he ever had one,’ replied Vere grimly.

‘He has still an eye for a pretty girl, though.’

‘Perhaps; but I did not come here to speak about him, or the ball either.’

‘About — the ladies?’

‘No.’

‘What then?’

‘Yourself!’ replied Vere, in a tone of undoubted sternness, as he placed his forage-cap on his head.

Regarding him steadily with his great china-blue eyes, the colonel rose to his feet, planted them on the hearthrug, and, placing his back to the chimneypiece, seemed to await an explanation, and it came speedily to pass.

‘Colonel Derinzy,’ said Vere, ‘what is the man who appends another’s name to a cheque, a bill, or a calumnious letter?’

The colonel’s face expressed blank astonishment, though he was one of those vapid, unimpressionable, and languid dandies who consider the exhibition of any emotion as a bad style of manner.

‘Answer me!’

‘I don’t understand the drift of your question,’ replied the colonel, with cool *insouciance*, ‘and as little do I pretend to understand your present tone and bearing in my quarters; but I should say that the person you describe would be a forger, a felon, a trickster, and all that sort of thing.’

‘Exactly! Then what is he who assumes

another's name in any dark, dishonourable, or nefarious transaction?'

Derinzy made no reply, but threw the skirts of his long dressing-gown over his arms, and for a moment, casting aside the cold air of reserve which was habitual to him by training and by nature, he certainly looked disturbed, yet defiant, as he knew Vere's meaning now.

'For your obscure and treacherous amours among the domestics of your friends,' said the latter, with intense scorn and sternness, 'Snooks, Jones, Smith, or any of the stereotyped names of the usual low dodger, might have suited your purpose; but to substitute *my* name for your absurd French or Jewish one has been, to say the least of it, the act of an impertinent scoundrel.'

Derinzy started and almost gasped on hearing this epithet applied to him and in no measured tones—for all Vere's genuine dislike for, and jealousy of, him had bubbled up to boiling heat; but drawing himself up to his full height, he threw back his head with an air of defiance, and said mockingly,

'So you have been with little Phœbe, eh?

Well, I should advise you to betake yourself off to her at once, or, by Heaven, I'll throw you out of the window !'

As he made this menace he placed his hand on a riding-whip that lay near, on which Vere grasped the hilt of his sword, made a pace forward, and said, with an expression of eye there was no mistaking,

'By the Heaven that hears us, Colonel Derinzy, if you touch me with that whip, or even dare to lift it in menace, I will pin your body to that wall.'

Derinzy drew back his hand and changed colour, but began loftily,

'When a madman applies such an epithet to me—'

'I will repeat it.'

'Aw, aw—will you do so in the hearing of my servants or of the orderly in the hall?' asked Derinzy, placing his hand on a bell.

'Most decidedly not.'

'And why?'

'You might indulge yourself in the pleasures of a court-martial. You should be a lawyer, colonel; you would shine at the bar if not in the dock. I shall bandy words no

more with you; my object and my source of complaint are patent to you. You have neither the honesty to explain, the good-nature to attempt to palliate, nor the gentlemanly spirit to apologise for a most unwarrantable liberty; yet there has been a time when a pistol-ball might have compelled you to do so. But cunning or clever as you may think yourself, you must be aware that any way this matter cannot end here.'

'How then?' asked Derinzy, stroking his long fair moustache.

'I shall take the sense of our mess on the subject.'

'Indeed, and what may its opinion matter to me?' was the haughty and insolent response.

'It will matter much, when through the lieutenant-general commanding it goes to the Commander-in-Chief at the Horse Guards.'

'There it will never go.'

'Why not?'

'Miss Gertrude Templeton's name would be sure to crop up in the girl's jealousy of me, and our names would all be mingled in a way that would neither suit your book nor mine ;

so that I don't think, Mr. Vere, that the sense of your august mess will ever be taken on the subject. Good-morning.'

Choking with rage, Vere withdrew, and as he walked slowly back to the lines where his hut stood he had time to reflect on the subject. The colonel, in his cunning and cowardice, was right. To make a public *esclandre* of the affair might involve the name or names of the family at Ringwood Hall, and perhaps he had said enough to prevent the use of his name by the colonel in future.

Had he chosen, he conceived that he had now the power of crushing for ever the chances of Derinzy's favour with Gertrude, though not with the dowager, who, if she made light of the villa and its occupant in Westburnia, would have thought still less about little Phœbe Bagshaw, the keeper's daughter. But beside the aversion which any man of honour has to act the part of talebearer, Vere, though wronged and imperilled in the progress of his love, shrank instinctively from even the appearance of seeking jealous vengeance upon his rival by injuring him with the family at Ringwood Hall.

To seek out Phœbe and attempt to expostulate with her before she had seen Derinzy again would be, he felt, of no avail, and might only complicate matters, or end in bringing suspicion on himself; and he was glad to find that Desborough and Finch eventually took the same view of the matter. But then they had less at stake than Vere.

How long or how far the debauchee would have carried his game (unless Phœbe had really visited Vere in his hut, as she had intended), it is impossible to say, and also as to how it found a finale, as Vere heard no more of the matter then, or for long after; for doubtless the colonel had discovered some means of silencing the girl, or diverting her suspicions, while events that followed each other quickly now gave Vere more than enough to think of after his important meeting with Gertrude.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘THE HEART KNOWETH ITS OWN BITTERNESS.’

THE day of irritation and much serious thought after his bitter interview with Derinzy passed away, and the time drew near when Vere was to have his meeting with Gertrude—that interview on which so much depended, and which he was never to forget—and as afternoon approached he left the camp betimes to keep his appointment.

He felt himself degraded, and he felt that the service was degraded too, by such an interview as that which he had with Derinzy, a titled snob and coward, yet bearing the Queen’s commission, and one who would ultimately sit in the Upper House, among the rulers of the land—for that he was personally a coward by his meanness, Vere could not doubt. But whatever he was, once upon a time, in the days of ‘the pistol,’ how different an ending the whole affair must have had!

He thought less and less of it, however, as the time for meeting Gertrude drew near. If she should fail to come, or be prevented? if she should have changed her mind, or be hampered by an escort? He was to get an answer to those questions which were so momentous to him—whether she loved him, and whether she was to be his wife. He could scarcely, after all that was past and gone, doubt the former; but the latter, alas! If her answer were adverse, would it be to present hope, or would it be final?

Another idea flashed upon his mind. If he, who was a man of will and determination, with strength of character, felt a passion so deep as that which inspired him for Gertrude, might not the latter, whose nature was so soft, impulsive, and tender, in the ardour of *her* love for him, forget her mother's ambition, defy her authority, and relinquish future rank, riches, and all the world itself to become his wife?

Yet, unless aided by the ample means which were at the disposal of his uncle Sir Joseph, would it be consistent with honour and duty thus to avail himself of the love of

a weak yet brave-hearted girl? No, no; Gertrude Templeton must be won otherwise, or not won at all.

A train on the Winchester line deposited him within a little distance of Ringwood Hall, and his heart leaped as he saw the clustered chimneys, the gilded vanes, and the quaint ogee gables of her abode, as he hastened towards the place of tryst, where last they had seen the hounds throw off.

It was a winter afternoon certainly, one of the last in January; but the sky was blue, clear, and nearly cloudless, and the sunshine fell aslant upon the upland slopes and Hampshire woodlands, brightening the leafless hedgerows, and tinting with touches of gold the huge stems of the old chestnuts and beeches, which in that locality remind one of the days when Norman William made his vast forest in the land of the crushed and conquered Saxons.

The dead and rotting leaves of the past year lay thick under the hedges where the winter winds had swept them; the snowdrop was evolving its white and pendent petals beside the white, yellow, or blue spring crocus in the tiny gardens of the wayside cottages;

but the little white daisy—La Belle Marguerite—was lingering yet beneath the soil, though the pipe of the thrush was heard from the topmost bough of a leafless tree, responding to the hardy robin and tomtit in the hedgerow beneath.

Vere had barely reached the old and rustic wooden stile that barred the way between two fields, when he found himself face to face with Gertrude. He sprang towards her, lifted his hat, said something—he knew not what—and drew her hand within his arm, retaining it there in his own.

Her toilette was a perfect one; her hat was smart and piquant; and how lovely she looked when flushed and palpitating with natural excitement, and her walk in the keen air of the winter day! The conventional smile—for it was not a real one—with which she had greeted Vere died away as he gazed upon her, and she said:

‘I trust, Mr. Vere, that you are not surprised at my arranging to meet you here; but I shall have no other opportunity for saying that—which—which—I have to say.’

She spoke rapidly and nervously, like one

who had schooled herself to a task; and the heart of Vere began already to sink when he found that *she* was taking the initiative in the conversation, and when he saw how painfully her bosom heaved beneath her sealskin jacket, while her little gloved hands were trembling.

‘Gertrude!’ said he appealingly and as if surprised, for she seemed to be acting under some influence beyond her own control. Under his gaze her colour deepened, then paled again; her eyes drooped and she sighed heavily, while something like an hysterical spasm rose in her slender white throat.

‘What *is* the matter, my own beloved Gertrude?’ exclaimed Vere tenderly, as he could no longer resist the impulse to press her to his breast, and cover her soft face and silky hair with kisses. For a moment he thought the latter were returned. Then suddenly she shrank back and held up her hands before her deprecatingly, and how tremulous were those small and shapely hands, one of which he again captured!

‘Let go my hand,’ she urged piteously; ‘this must not be!’

Yet her soft fingers closed on those of

Vere, and her head drooped on his shoulder for a moment, but a moment only, for again she drew back, as she saw the look of passionate love and wistfulness in the handsome face of Vere, who felt that somehow the interview was taking a turn on which he had not calculated.

‘Let me take your arm; let us be sensible and talk while we walk a little way,’ she urged.

‘You love me, then?’

‘God knows I do, Herbert,’ said the girl, in a broken voice; and sweetly sounded his Christian name to him on the lips that for the first time uttered it.

‘Bless you, my darling, for saying so. O Gertrude, to make you my wife is the one longing and passionate desire of my heart!’

But notwithstanding her admission, Gertrude shook her head mournfully, and attempted to withdraw her hand again.

‘How shall I say what I *have* to say?’ exclaimed the girl, covering her face for a moment with her muff. ‘Mr. Vere—’

‘Mr. Vere!’

‘I must not call you Herbert again; the

name escaped me amid my emotion ;' and as she spoke her soft but naturally proud bright eyes strove, yet in vain, to gaze serenely into his. 'You know not how ambitious, how worldly—alas that I should say so!—how vain and selfish mamma is, and how completely we are all—Maud, poor little Rosamund, and myself—at her mercy, by the tenor of papa's will, if we marry without her full consent. You know all now—no, not all quite,' added the girl drearily, as the conversation in the boudoir after the ball came back to memory. 'So press me no further, dearest—yes, dearest Herbert; but let us part here, till—till—till—'

'When?'

'Happier times,' she replied, sobbing.

'These are but wild words, my darling. There is no law in the land which can force you to marry when you do not wish it.'

'None, I know; but there are moral force, domestic tyranny, the use and wont of parental authority—yes, and other pressure.'

'Other?'

'Yes.'

Vere looked at her uneasily; for pride of

birth and family prevented her from making a more direct allusion to those affairs that were likely to break the heart of Rosamund. Gertrude only leaned her head against the stem of an old chestnut-tree, and closed her beautiful eyes, while seeking vainly to keep back those tears that oozed under her long dark lashes—tears which her imperious mother would have despised her for shedding.

‘To mamma wealth and rank are as the necessities of life.’

‘Rank I have not, and too probably shall never have; but there is my uncle Sir Joseph—’

‘Have you heard of him lately?’ interrupted Gertrude anxiously.

‘No, poor old gentleman. I would that he knew you, Gertrude.’

‘Why?’

‘Can you ask?—is not to see you to love you?’

‘Heaven help me!’ moaned the girl, as if communing with herself; ‘I am very miserable. This meeting is wrong; I should not have granted it. Yet how otherwise could I say what I have said?’

‘Gertrude, be strong; do not yield to any false principle of duty. You permit me to love you, and have avowed that you love me. Think, then, Gertrude, of the marriage service, and the love and honour it inculcates. To no other man than me could you promise what that service contains. My life is yours, and with that life only will I give you up!’

Again his arms went round her, and again she was sobbing while strained closely to his breast. For a little space neither spoke; but he pressed wild kisses upon her lips, her cheek, and hair; and during that sweet sad space of time she lay quite still, but sobbing heavily.

‘Now all is over, and, Herbert, we must never meet again—thus, at least,’ said she, suddenly recovering herself. ‘Let us be as dear friends.’

‘Love may end in hate; friendship may end in love; but, O Gertrude, love in friendship—never!’

‘All this interview is but fraught with pain to us both,’ said she, making an effort to be calm, and pressing her hand on her left side, as if she felt a pang there.

Vere tried again to draw her to him; but resisting with a murmur, she added,

‘Urge me no further. I have promised—I have solemnly promised—’

‘What, Gertrude?’

‘Obedience to mamma in all things.’

‘Even in the matter of marriage?’

‘In that most distinctly.’

‘Have you promised to accept Colonel Derinzy?’

Distasteful though the question—at such a time especially—he asked it firmly and earnestly; but Gertrude’s only reply was a species of hysteric gasp, so painful to hear that Vere shrank from repeating the question, or pressing her for an answer. But her silence stung him to the very soul, it left so much to be implied; for there was more in all this than was apparent to either ear or eye; and he regarded her with a haggard expression, and then with something of anger, which she failed not to see.

‘O Gertrude,’ said he, ‘love that is successful may indulge in words that are flattering; but a love that is hopeless, as I now find mine is—’

‘After all I have said?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well?’

‘Can but speak the words of sadness and truth. Perhaps your heart may really soften to me in the time to come; and with that hope—delusive it may be—I shall leave England and go abroad,’ said Vere, all unaware that his departure from England was nearer than he thought.

‘Rather try to forget your ill-fated attachment for me, and win a heart that, all untrammelled, may love and honour you as you deserve. Farewell, Herbert, Vere, and God bless you!’

Then, as if she feared to trust herself again within the sound of his voice, she turned quickly into a bypath and hastened homewards, to where the lights were already appearing in the mullioned windows of Ringwood Hall; while Vere, as if rooted to the spot, stood gazing after her, till in a minute or two she disappeared—gazing with much of sorrow and more of jealous mortification in his heart. Yet chivalrously he had disdained, as we have said, to take advantage of his knowledge of

Derinzy's secret character by exposing it to the girl for whom her mother too evidently intended him; and perhaps, in the ardour of the time, he forgot all about the use made, and perchance still being made, of his own name by that audacious personage.

Most unwonted though the meeting had been, and the whole tone and tenor thereof, to Gertrude it was deprived of all romance, not by the sorrow, but by the prosaic and worldly bitterness of it, and by the stab which she knew she had been, by force of circumstances, compelled to school herself to give a loyal and honest gentleman, who only loved her too well.

Bitter though the wrench to her heart that she had bidden him farewell for ever, and that never more would his voice fall on her ear, more bitter was the conviction that she had left him with a false, even vile and worldly, idea of herself; for they had barely been parted ten minutes when she made up her mind, as she thought, that, despite Lady Templeton, she would never marry Derinzy or any one else, and that no power on earth should make her do so.

Poor Gertrude ! But Vere was gone now, and she could not undeceive him by unsaying what she had said, and, more than all, by saying what she had left *unsaid*.

That she could ever be the wife of Vere was hopeless; but she would rather now, by ten thousand degrees, that their farewell had been without that fatal sting in it, which must infallibly make him think the less of her, and that she was as selfish and as worldly as what Kyrle Desborough called 'her set.'

The girl rushed home, with a heart full of shame and upbraiding, to her room, locked herself in it, and fell on her bed in a passion of tears and unuttered reproaches.

Should she write ere it was too late? No; it would be futile now, the deed had been done !

'Let Fate have its way,' she thought, as the image of her mother rose before her; 'but the heart knoweth its own bitterness.'

CHAPTER IX.

KYRLE DESBOROUGH AS A 'COMFORTER.'

As he turned away Herbert Vere lifted his hat, and allowed the cool breeze of the winter evening to play about his heated and throbbing temples.

Thrown over for Jocelyn Derinzy, thought he,—the fop, the fool, the debauchee, who had dared to use his name—a use some version of which might reach the ear of Gertrude, whom in his heart he could not relinquish after all that had just passed between them. How deep was the bootless wrath he cherished, and cherished in vain, situated as he was, being so junior in rank, and with that rank at the mercy of his enemy and rival, if he indulged in any just and indignant, but jealous, fiasco!

Gertrude had hinted of some extraordinary pressure 'other' than that of Lady Templeton being put upon her; and in the anger and

gloom of his mind Vere deemed this must be, in some way, the influence of Derinzy; of monetary matters he never dreamed.

The kisses, the embraces, the clasp of her hand, and all the tender details of that passionate interview, seemed graven on the very brain of Vere, and were destined to haunt him for many a day to come, as the fact that they had existed, with the mutual avowals and confidences, made a tie between them. Yet he would haunt her and taunt her no more.

Her mother's insane pride of ancestry and inordinate desire for titles, as much as wealth, were quite beyond him. That Gertrude loved him was certainly ground for hope; but in hope he would indulge no more, after all he had seen, for she had literally discarded him—bade him adieu; and henceforth in this world their paths, like their graves, must lie far apart.

The camp was some miles distant, yet the report of the evening gun from Gun Hill came distinctly on the breath of the frosty wind over the level heaths and fields of that part of Hampshire, and sounded as a hint to Vere

that the world, at Aldershot as elsewhere—the busy, cruel, heartless, and work-a-day world—was going on pretty much as usual; so he awoke from his reverie, and set out on his return.

Around him the scenery was flat and depressing, and doubly depressing now seemed the blackness of the evening, the mud of the past day's storm of rain and sleet, and the dead leaves of the departed year, that lay thick in the cart-ruts and under the bare brown hedgerows.

On entering his hut and procuring a light, the first object that attracted his attention was a letter in a black-edged envelope, addressed to himself in an unpleasantly business-looking handwriting, which, though formal, seemed not unfamiliar. It was from Messrs. Wolfe, Fox, & Graball, of Gray's Inn, his uncle's solicitors, and he tore it open.

'This may resolve all—may turn all in my favour yet.'

His uncle, Sir Joseph de Quincey Vere, whose favourite nephew he had ever deemed himself, 'had died at Mentone, bequeathing by will about 100,000*l.*, all he possessed in money,

and movable property, plate, pictures, &c., to you—'

'To me! Bravo, dear old uncle Joe! how I always loved him!' exclaimed Vere; 'but—but,' he turned the leaf, 'a codicil leaves everything thus disposed to his housekeeper, to whom, it appears, he had been privately married, and who nursed him on his death-bed, while all that is heritable goes with the baronetcy of course to the next heir, your elder cousin.'

How cruel—how bitter was this disappointment!

His hand trembled violently as he read over the brief and legal scrawl, and then held it to the candle till it was consumed to ashes.

'So, so,' he muttered; 'matters are no better, but no worse, than they were, save that all "expectations," as my Lady Templeton would call them, are gone; and there is nothing for it now but pipeclay for life.'

Bitter though we have said the disappointment was after turning over that fatal leaf, it fell lighter on the heart of Vere after the bitterness of his late interview with Gertrude, to which he would revert again and again,

during the conversation that ensued with Kyrle Desborough, who anathematised uncle Joseph and his designing housekeeper in no measured terms.

‘It is a strange coincidence,’ said Vere, ‘that, for the first time, to-night she asked me if I had heard from Sir Joseph lately; and here comes this letter.’

‘Nothing strange at all,’ said Desborough, as he struck a match viciously and lit a cigar; ‘they have seen his death in some fashionable paper; the rooms of these lawyer fellows in Gray’s Inn adjoin those of the family solicitor, and Mère Templeton knows thereby the whole *carte du pays*.’

‘Oh, that is a wild speculation, Kyrle, and I cannot think so meanly of Gertrude, with all her tears and tenderness, that she could be under such influences.’

‘All acting,’ persisted the cynic; ‘they like it.’

‘Ah, Kyrle, you know not how I love her!’

‘And this is the result. With all the coquetry of a flirty young girl, she, knowing right well her mother’s views—perhaps necessities—has lured you into a proposal to

gratify her own vanity, and then put you off—coarsely thrown you over, by Jove!

‘I have loved her tenderly and truly!’

‘Begging a glove from her hand, a bud from her bouquet, a stray ringlet of hair, to cherish and treasure and have buried with you—placed next your heart, and all that sort of thing. I know it well; but I am past all such perilous stuff now. Do you remember what Francis I.—he who declared that a court without ladies was like a spring without flowers—wrote with his ring upon a window in the old gloomy palace of Rambouillet?’

“Lovely sex, too given to range;
Lovely sex, too prone to change;
Alas, what man can trust your charms,
Or seek his safety in your arms?”’

‘Hackneyed,’ retorted Vere, uncorking a bottle of Moselle.

‘Not at all—don’t believe you ever heard the verse before. But to return to the melody. If Derinzy is the real god of her idolatry, she will deserve all the misery a marriage with such a fellow can bring upon her.’

‘Don’t say so, Kyrle.’

‘Come now, don’t be a softy, but let me

congratulate you on your escape. In this age of double-dealing, of veneer, of paper collars and electro-plate, what can you expect?' continued Desborough, who was giving vent to one of his gusts against society. 'You think, no doubt, that the fair Gertrude is not electro, but the genuine article, stamped with a coronet. Nobility—pshaw! I am not a Radical—a man of my family and means never is—but I do believe, with Burns, that "rank is but the guinea stamp," and "a man's a man for a that." And moreover, I think that not a few of the boasted nobility of England deserve to be sent back to "the vile dust from whence they sprung," if gambling, black-legism, crimes on the turf and in every way against honour and morality, can degrade a class! I have known more than one noble snob in my time.'

'By Jove, Kyrle, it must be this strange and distorted spirit or view of yours that renders you so oblivious of the preference and attractions of such a girl as Rosamund Templeton.'

'I am not oblivious, but I have a strong idea of the defects of her mother and sister—Maud at least.'

‘But you would not marry them?’

‘Nor any one else, old fellow.’

‘What the deuce has come to you, Kyrle? you’ve been soured in your youth.’

Desborough twirled his heavy dark moustache and was silent, while there crept into his handsome face an expression that rendered Vere silent too. It spoke of scorn, hauteur, and sorrow; so even the gay lady-killer Desborough *had* his secret and his untold story.

‘There are many lovable and right-minded women in this world, Kyrle,’ said Vere.

‘Very probably, but they don’t come much in my way; and, moreover, I don’t believe in household angels. But, granting what you aver, what does Wilkie Collins say on such a matter as yours?’

‘I cannot tell, and don’t care.’

‘Ah, but you should. “You choose a cigar, you try it, and it disappoints you. What do you do upon that? You throw it away and choose another. Now observe the application. You choose a woman, you try her, and she breaks your heart. Fool, take a lesson from your cigar-case! Throw her away and try another!” After the spring drills have licked

us into shape—not that the Eighth or King’s ever require to be so—we shall leave this hole, called Aldershot, behind us, and, amid fresh woods and pastures new, you will forget all about Gertrude Templeton, and find the idea that there is only *one* woman in the world for you at least mighty absurd, my boy. And now I think we have talked enough on this matter to-night.’

As Kyrle departed it seemed to Vere that he had been somewhat of a ‘Job’s comforter’ after all.

In his present mood Vere shunned even the jovial mess, for there the usual light-heartedness of all would have jarred upon his nerves, so he preferred to mope and moon in the solitude of his hut; and this he did far into the night, long after the ‘roll’ had been called at tattoo and the orderly sergeants had seen the gas-lamps extinguished—at that season at eleven. In his easy-chair, without thinking of bed, he sat sunk in his own corroding thoughts, undisturbed by the sentries challenging the reliefs, the measured tread of the latter as they passed; crushed by the double blow that had come upon him, he heard

not even the boom of the morning gun, or the rattle of the drums and the sweet shrill fifes playing the *reveille*; he had not heard even a row in the adjacent lines, which had actually brought the inlying picket under arms, when some fellow, obnoxious to certain tipsy youngsters of his corps, had resisted being 'drawn,' and fiercely resented a quart bottle of ink being put into his shower-bath, which turned him into a species of Othello, and prevented his appearance on parade till he had been operated upon by the doctor with a lemon.

Feverish alike in mind and body, he continued to toss restlessly in his chair till utter exhaustion induced sleep, and he slumbered heavily; yet not so much so as to be without some dreams that were bright and happy enough to make life seem darker and gloomier when he awoke, and he was suddenly roused by his astonished servant saying loudly,

'Officers' call has sounded, sir; the adjutant is telling off the battalion!'

Then he had to change his dress, accoutre, and rush to parade, or he would have the colonel, as the saying is, 'jumping down his throat with his spurs on.'

During the past hours of that feverish and dreary night, while he had been thinking of Gertrude, Vere could scarcely have realised the idea, or adopted the conviction, that she had been sleepless too and thinking of him. She had sat long at the window of her room, muffled in a fur-lined robe, long after her fire had died out and she should have been abed, gazing dreamily in the direction where, some five miles off, she knew the great camp lay.

The night was serene, and the bright stars looked calmly down from the blue dome of heaven, as if in their silent and peaceful beauty contrasting with the bitterness of the hollow world below them. The winter breeze had died away, and all was still. The long shadows of the trees in the avenue, and of King James's oak, were cast by the waning moon across the frosty sward of the park, and there was a depth of stillness in everything that left her heart all undisturbed in the consciousness of her first great sorrow—of her first humiliation; for in her heart and conscience Gertrude felt that, in acting to Vere as she had done, under the influence of family circumstances and the artificial requirements of 'her

set,' she had acted vilely and ungenerously. But the act was now, so far as she was concerned, beyond her recall.

And so she sat there, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, acting—even as he was doing in his hut—over and over again, in fancy, that interview by the stile; for Gertrude was unselfish by nature, though not so by training and the habits of her circle; and she wept as she thought of the happiness that now could never be realised, and sadness stole over her musings as 'she pondered the solemn questions which have ere now presented themselves to many a mourning spirit, and longed to penetrate the secrets of the grave, and learn things which death alone can teach us.'

CHAPTER X.

A LETTER LOST AND FOUND.

‘HE will call after the ball at least,’ was the thought of Gertrude next day.

Vere did *not*—men are not entirely masters of their own time at Aldershot; thus some days elapsed ere he could send cards with Toby Finch and Clive, while to Rosamund’s great disappointment—almost dismay—Desborough did the same. He too was on duty; ‘but we are always on duty at Aldershot,’ added Toby.

Vere would too probably call no more, thought Gertrude; and, after all that had happened, situated as they were, what good could accrue from their ever meeting again?

Poor Rosamund, with all her loveliness, was not like many young girls, who, after that or any other ball, could, with intense self-complacency, find much gratification in conning over their engagement-card and counting the

lists of conquests—or victories of those dreary, vapid, and languid youths in funereal evening costume, with parted hair and lisping tongue, who implored the favour of her hand for certain dances. She had only looked at her programme to count how often the name of the heedless Kyrle Desborough was scrawled thereon, and to treasure it in consequence, for had he not her glove?

‘As for Mr. Finch,’ said Lady Templeton, after the two visitors had bowed themselves out and ridden off, ‘I understand he has nothing but his pay and his debts; yet, Rosamund, you danced with him four times the other night.’

‘He has more than you say, mamma,’ said Maud.

‘More?’

‘Yes, he has love for the turf, unlimited loo, and no doubt a thorough knowledge of good wine and good cigars.’

‘O Maud, how can you speak thus!’ expostulated Gertrude, in a tone of irritation. ‘Mr. Finch is a gentleman in every way, and of a long descent too, for he comes of the Sussex Finches of Henry VI.’s time.’

‘Gertrude,’ said Lady Templeton, ‘you seem almost excited. Such displays of emotion are bad form, very; and what can it possibly matter to us who or what this person is?’

‘But surely, mamma, such remarks as those of Maud are worse in form and taste too!’ replied Gertrude, as she retired into an oriel, where she sat *distracte*, and reading a book—upside down—till suddenly Maud, who had been idling over a newspaper, raised her voice, a thin one at all times, as if she had lighted on something important, and then read aloud a notice, under the heading of ‘Wills and Bequests,’ relative to the ‘Will and Codicil of Sir Joseph de Quincey Vere, Bart., of Quincey Court, Blankshire, lately deceased at Mentone,’ proved by, &c., together with all the intelligence already conveyed by the letter of Messrs. Wolfe, Fox, & Graball to the luckless Herbert Vere.

‘And there is no word of his favourite nephew?’ asked Lady Templeton, her eyes wandering in malicious triumph to Gertrude.

‘Not one word. Singular, is it not, mamma?’

‘Very.’

A smile was exchanged between the dowager and her eldest daughter, and then the subject was dropped, as if unworthy of further consideration.

The early days of spring were creeping on, and they passed in their old routine at Ringwood Hall. Like her sister with regard to Vere, Rosamund fully shared, but dared not show, her thirsty craving to hear even the most slender tidings of Desborough, or of his movements. But she was helpless, bound hand and foot as it were; yet the love she bore him protected her against herself, and prevented her from loving others, in the dark time we shall have to record, when she had ever a restless gnawing at her heart, a clamorous fear of expectation, she knew not of what. And it was in those early spring days, when she knew that the now permanently absent Kyrle was immersed in hard drill at the Long Valley, that her intended marriage with Sir Ayling Aldwinkle was formally brought again on the *tapis*, and she was informed that he was coming to propose in person. Indeed, the old baronet would have done so long before, but a terrible fit of the

gout had enforced a protracted residence amid the woody seclusion of Winklestoke.

‘He and I have arranged everything, Rosamund,’ said Lady Templeton; ‘you will be nearly nineteen in August, and we propose that the marriage shall take place in that month, and in town, of course.’

The girl heard her sentence in silence with a heart that felt crushed and unnaturally still.

‘I trust that when Sir Ayling comes here, my dear child,’ resumed the dowager, ‘that you will exhibit no affectation of indifference, of wilfulness, or coquetry. But I know too well that no daughter of mine would have the bad taste to adopt that *rôle*.’

‘O mamma,’ urged the pale and trembling girl, ‘I cannot do what you ask of me—so soon, at least—so very soon. I shall implore him not to marry me yet.’

‘This would be the very affectation against which I warn you,’ said Lady Templeton, thinking of her debts and difficulties with quiet exasperation.

‘And to pretend that I loved him would be an insult to common sense.’

‘And to good taste and morality, Miss Rosamund. I do not expect that any daughter of mine, or of the line of Ringwood Hall, will be so improper, so bad in form, as to love any man until he has placed the wedding-ring upon her finger!’

With this dictum, Lady Templeton crested up her haughty and handsome head, with its lace gear fastened by two large opal pins, and sailed away, leaving Rosamund with her poor little hands buried amid the masses of her golden hair, as she bent her face over the nearest table and gave way to a passionate outburst of weeping; for so potent by early habit of submission to it had the power of her mother become that, ruled as she had thus been from her merest childhood, she felt unable to resist.

‘Oh, that papa had lived, or that Kyrle Desborough would save me!’ she whispered to herself. But the late Lord Templeton had been as much a slave to the will of his wife as her children had become; and as for Kyrle, he had, notwithstanding all the hints of Vere, no more idea of the passionate love his half-mocking tenderness—for it was no better—

with all his assumed earnestness, had kindled in the girl's heart than of what was being transacted in the moon.

It seemed, to those who heard of it, a dreadful fate for this bright little creature, who was all heart, enthusiasm, and romance; who when at Ringwood Hall was never without some hoydenish excuse to rush out of doors as she had been wont to do when she trundled her hoop on the terrace—now it was a blackbird or lark singing, or the perfume of the rosaries, the moon rising above Twisel-down Hill, the sun setting behind the spire of the village church, or the twilight or the starlight; and all the buoyancy and freshness of this young heart were to be chilled and crushed for ever in the lap of age and winter.

Oh, what a contrast between Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, so wan and worn, so feeble in gait and slouching in figure, and Kyrle Desborough, in his dark handsome beauty and free bearing in the full glory of his middle manhood!

'Oh, what is this life that is before me—destiny, fate, chance, or what?' wailed Rosamund. Then she would muse, and leaning her throbbing brow upon a little white hand,

strove to think coherently. But a terrible passage she had read in a book, a passage most applicable and apposite to herself and her situation, seemed ever to be before her. It was on marriage, and urged that to wed one man whilst loving another was the most serious and grievous fault a woman could commit. 'It involves double treachery and cruelty,' said this casuist; 'it involves wounding the spirit, withering the heart, perhaps blighting and soiling the soul of one who is abandoned and betrayed. It involves the speedy disenchantment of the one who is mocked by the shadow when he is promised the substance, and who grasps only the phantom, soulless beauty, and the husk, the shell, the skeleton of a dead affection. It entails ceaseless deception at home and abroad, by day and by night, at downsitting and at uprising; deception in every relation; deception in the tenderest and most endearing moments of existence. It makes the whole of a life a weary, degraded, and unrewarded life. A right-minded woman can scarcely lay deeper sin upon her soul, or one more certain to bring down a fearful expiation.'

In this she read her fate, her future—the fate into which her mother and her mother's necessities thrust her.

About this time Gertrude was relieved of Colonel Derinzy's society, and well-nigh daily visits, for a space. The colonel had begun to fear some 'doocid row' about Phœbe Bagshaw if his little affair cropped up again; and so, perhaps, leaving Vere to face any *esclandre* on the subject as best he might, he got a few weeks' leave and went up to town, whither the girl flatly refused to accompany him.

The colonel's exchequer at present was shaky. He had backed the wrong horse at the last Derby for an enormous amount, and had got a heavier book on the race than ever he had before. At the last Newmarket meeting he was hit hard, and, as he was unable to hedge on the first hint, he was, as he averred, 'in a hole.'

'As for Derinzy,' said Desborough to Vere, when the spring drills began, 'you'll require to be careful, my boy. He won't likely forget the visit you paid him that morning, and the complimentary things you said to him. So he'll have ample opportunities,

as a staff colonel, of nagging you and seeking his revenge. So keep a bright look out, Vere, old man!

But Derinzy's departure freed Vere of this dread; and ere he returned, and ere the course of drills were fairly over, the state of events had altered the relative situations of several of our *dramatis personæ*.

Not many weeks after Vere had been reading the letter of the legal sharks, which crushed his hopes more than even the fears of Gertrude or the ambitious doctrine of her mother, the latter was perusing *another* epistle, the terrible effect of which upon the former, and on their affairs altogether, he could little have conceived.

On the day subsequent to Derinzy's farewell visit there was found in the conservatory—where, by the date, it was supposed to have lain a considerable time—a letter on note-paper, without an envelope, thus compelling the finder, who was Maud Templeton, to read, which she did, with various mingled emotions, in which mischief and satisfaction were perhaps the highest; and then she rushed away in search of her mother.

Without troubling the reader with a verbatim copy of this scrawl—for such it was: ungrammatical and ill-spelled, but not without some pathos of expression, born of the painful circumstances under which it was written—the letter proved to be from Phœbe Bagshaw to Herbert Vere, beginning with ‘My dear, dear Mr. Vere,’ and ending with ‘Your despairing Pheebie,’ in which she bitterly upbraided him with delaying their marriage, after all his vows and promises, adding, in touching terms, that their story could no longer be concealed; and if he did not save her from the fury of her father, the old keeper, who was a proud, cruel, and passionate man, she would cast herself into the nearest canal.

With what elation my Lady Templeton laid this precious document before the startled and horrified Gertrude may be imagined. Sorrow, disappointment, humiliation, and disgust—disgust of the man who had showered those passionate kisses on her lips and eyes, and who had poured into her ears those tender speeches, known to herself alone—coursed rapidly through her mind; and disdain to notice the malicious expression that glittered

in the proud and serenely scornful eyes of Maud, she said after a time, and having read the epistle more than once, though half-blind with tears that did not fall, she said calmly,

‘I beg your pardon, mamma—beg it sincerely, for all the annoyance I have given you concerning this gentleman. Oh, perfidy!’ she added in her heart, ‘what an escape I have had!’

‘I am seldom wrong in my first judgments, my dear Gertrude, and I never liked this person Vere from the first moment I saw him disposed to be attentive to you.’

‘That is all over now, mamma,’ said the girl sadly, yet calmly.

‘There will be no necessity for ordering his name to be struck off the list of visitors, as since the ball he has unaccountably ceased to be one.’

‘Doubtless Miss Phoebe Bagshaw can account for this,’ said Maud. ‘Of course you will have her turned off the estate?’

‘Her father is an old and faithful servant; we must remember that on one hand, and we are not supposed to be cognisant of his daughter’s affairs on the other. It is fortunate

that none of the servants found this,' she added, tossing into the fire the letter which had dropped from the pocket of the colonel—perhaps drawn forth with his handkerchief on the day of his last visit to Ringwood Hall.

'And *this* is the man for whom I have despised Jocelyn Derinzy, and for whom I have been burning out my own heart!' thought Gertrude.

'Ah,' said Lady Templeton, as if reading in her daughter's face the bitter thought that passed through her mind, 'he is one of the middle class, and they are not much unlike the *canaille*, my love.'

'O mamma,' exclaimed Gertrude, placing her interlaced fingers above her head and looking upward, as if the dream of her life had departed, 'do with me now as you will!'

'Then you will accept Derinzy, darling, when his monetary affairs are quite settled, and his dear old grandfather, the viscount, arranges the increase to his allowance as heir to the title.'

Lady Templeton's voice became almost tender as she spoke.

CHAPTER XI.

‘GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART, GOOD-BYE!’

BOISTEROUS March had succeeded February, and Valentine’s-day had brought its usual playful reminders to sundry subs. at Aldershot, in the form of penny naked dolls duly labelled, red herrings in collar boxes, or it might be a box of soot, side by side with hot-house camellias and violets in lace-paper; and Desborough had received a single white-kid glove, without having the most remote idea from whom it had come, or remembering that it might be—nay was—the neighbour of the one so heedlessly begged from Rosamund Templeton on the night of the ball. But March had come, bringing with it the burst of freshness, the spirit of tenderness, that the life of the new season infuses in the breasts of all; for then the fields and upland slopes are becoming greener, the buds are swelling in hedge and tree, the carol of the lark sounds

louder amid the blue air, and the blackbird and thrush respond joyously to each other from the topmost boughs. Now the lengthening days proclaimed that the hunting season was drawing to its close; and Vere had remarked that since that morning referred to in our opening chapter, when a frost had spoiled the scent and stopped the hunt, the Ringwood carriage had been absent from every meet: thus Vere had looked for it in vain.

Should he ever see *her* again? he asked of himself.

There seemed no chance of that, as in a Hants paper a paragraph announced that the family had left the Hall for London, where Derinzy was lingering still on extended leave.

‘Gone to London at this season—for what?’ said Desborough.

Vere’s heart not unnaturally suggested settlements and trousseau; for what else could take them up to town when nothing in particular was on the *tapis*? Yet his present alarm was a false one; the visit was merely a flying one; even their West End mansion was not opened; and he was destined to see her once again ere he left Aldershot; and that unex-

pected meeting nearly obliterated all the tenderness of the twilight interview by the lonely stile.

One evening towards the end of the month, when he and Finch had returned after a ride as far as Basingstoke, past that same stile between the hedgerows, which to Finch was only associated with the throwing off of the hounds, but to Vere was painfully connected with the 'throwing off' of himself, they were met by Desborough, who came hurrying from the mess-hut to meet them.

'Hurrah!—heard the news?' he asked breathlessly.

'News!' repeated Vere, whose heart vibrated painfully with one thought; 'what news? We've been out of camp since morning parade. What is up?'

'We're off to the West Indies, old fellow; that is all.'

'This is a joke, Kyrle; we are not due for foreign service just yet.'

'Fact, though, my boy; it is in this evening's orders. Three companies under me—*me*, my man—start at once for Jamaica, *viâ* Southampton!'

‘Why three?’

‘The rest of the battalion to follow, if required.’

‘Required for what?’

‘The suppression of an expected shindy among the Niggers; some artillery go with us. Thank Heaven, we’ll escape the silver dust of the Long Valley—dust worse than that of Delhi—the sham-fighting, and field-ma-nœuvres, anyhow. Dismount, and we’ll have a quiet drink over it.’

In the assembly-room of the mess-hut all the officers of the battalion had already gathered, and were discussing the news, mostly through the medium of many brandy-and-sodas, and Vere found Kyrle’s news, which he was at first disposed to view as a hoax, fully confirmed; their company and two others were actually detailed to depart at once, and under Kyrle, as senior captain.

‘So, my boy, the devil a doubt about it,’ added that officer gaily.

‘I wish it had been for Bengal,’ said Clive.

‘Why? we’ve had enough of Bengal,’ said a red-faced captain.

‘Because the Bengal side of the punkah is the best—you know the saying.’

‘By Jove, it is all one to me!’ shouted Toby Finch, as the mess-waiter poured him out a foaming glass of seltzer-and-curaçoa; ‘one requires money or credit to carry on the civil war here; and unluckily I have more of the latter than the former, and the sooner I’m off to see the world again, the better.’

‘In three days we shall be gone,’ said some one reflectively.

‘Much may be done in three days,’ exclaimed Kyrle. ‘Why, man alive, I started for service against the hill tribes from Bahar on a three hours’ notice, and that during the hot season, when the west wind is scorching, and the water nearly boiled in the men’s canteens. Now our nags must go to Tattersall’s, unless some confiding fellows take them off our hands here. But we’ll have enough to do—outfits to select for self and men, baggage to reduce, and love-letters to burn—’

‘Yours, Kyrle, will make a blaze like that of old Marshal de Bassompierre,’ said Clive.

‘They were numerous, then?’

‘About six thousand, somebody has it.’

‘By Jove, Clive has been cramming for a little exam.,’ said Kyrle. ‘There goes the dressing-drum for mess—the last day but one that we shall dine together for a while, and have,’ as he sang, with a full mellow voice,

“One bumper at parting, though many
Have been at this board since we met ;
The fullest, the saddest of any
Remains to be quaffed by us yet.”

As a soldier accustomed to the exigencies of the service, with all its sudden starts and transitions, this unexpected order for the West Indies did not take Vere by surprise. With the enforced and active occupation it gave him among his men it rather afforded a relief and refuge from his own thoughts; yet all was past, he deemed—long since past and over—between him and Gertrude Templeton; and the sooner the sea rolled between them, the better. Still, as he thought this in bitterness of heart, he could not regret that he had ever met or learned to love her.

The preparations for departure were all the more elaborate that the detached companies were starting for the West Indies at the wrong end of the year, and not in October, the month

when troops usually embark for these tropical isles, and for Africa, Malta, and Gibraltar.

The necessary lists were made up of the officers and men, with a separate one of the women and children to be embarked, in order that each person might be entered on the ship's books, and that not an hour's delay might take place in the issue of their provisions. Then there were the embarkation returns, with the number of arms, accoutrements, and the quantities of clothing, camp equipage, ammunition, and so forth, and providing the men with coarse canvas frocks or other fatigue dresses to wear while on board the transport; and many other details to civilians unknown, including the little bill for 'barrack damages' done to John Bull's princely huts in the North Camp.

The eventful day soon came; the baggage had already gone, with the artillery, by rail to Southampton; and on a fine sunny morning, after the men had breakfasted, the three companies of the Eighth or King's fell in before the lines of the First Division, fully accoutred and in heavy marching order, with their greatcoats rolled on the top of the knapsacks,

as was then the fashion, their canteens and haversacks, for the last inspection of the colonel and brigade-major, whose duty it was to see them marched from the camp to the railway station, punctually as the hour was changed by the famous Sebastopol bell, on which the hours are, or were, announced to the troops at Aldershot. They mustered some 250 bayonets — all handsome, well-trained, and stalwart young fellows, and all in the highest animal spirits; and thus even Herbert Vere caught the infection from those around him.

Arrivals at, and departures from, Aldershot are too common to excite general interest either in the vast double camp or its vicinity; but our battalion of the Eighth had been popular both among the thousands quartered there and in the neighbourhood. Nearly all the officers were fond of field sports, rode well to hounds, and all had given more than one brilliant ball; thus the sudden movement of the companies in question excited much speculation. It was an important matter for those who were left behind and were soon to follow; and thus there was an unusual gathering to see them off.

A crowd of soldiers belonging to many regiments assembled for this purpose; among them might be seen more than one woman or girl, with eyes red and inflamed by weeping—the wife or sweetheart who was inexorably to be left behind.

‘I hope the rest of the regiment will soon follow,’ said Kyrle to the adjutant, after the inspection at open order with fixed bayonets was over.

‘Then you evidently hope, Desborough, that the shindy with the Niggers won’t be soon over?’

‘Of course not. Why the blazes should we go out for nothing? But here comes the band—and now good-bye to everybody.’

‘God speed Captain Desborough!’ cried some of those who were left behind, waving their forage-caps, for Kyrle was a favourite officer.

‘Good-bye, boys! God bless you all!’

‘Hurrah!’ mingled with the crash of the band, as the companies broke into sections of fours and proceeded past the long line of huts, vehemently cheered; and at the entrance of the camp fresh shouts greeted them from a

crowd of rustics and other civilians, who accompanied them on the Farnborough road, when the echoing woodlands replied to the strains of 'Good-bye, sweetheart, good-bye;' but save among the poor women referred to, who strove to keep abreast of certain sections, and pressed some fellow's hand ever and anon, or perhaps affectionately retained it, nothing but jollity was seen and laughter heard on every side.

As the companies drew near the railway station and were halted for a few minutes, and while the engine of their special train was giving the usual preliminary snorts, one or two private carriages were drawn up by the wayside to let their occupants observe the scene. So occupied was Vere by the complaints or requests of a number of soldiers' wives who crowded about him, that these few minutes nearly elapsed before he saw that one of those vehicles was the carriage of Lady Templeton.

With something of resolute indifference to what either of her younger girls might feel, she and Maud had contrived to combine a visiting expedition to Basingstoke with a view

of the departing soldiers; so they duly came in the magnificent family chariot, with its hammercloth covered with armorial bearings, which—like the noble pair of three-hundred-guinea steppers that drew it, all flecked with foam under the chafing of the bearing-rein, the coachman with wig and bouquet, and the two tall powdered footmen—were all a portion of the state that still survived the late lord of Ringwood Hall.

Kyrle Desborough was going—in a few minutes more would be gone for ever—and two ideas filled the soul of Rosamund Templeton: she would never, never see him again, too probably; and he did not love her. Of that she was becoming convinced at last. Pride and dignity had evaporated, and, in the fullness of her great passion—a passion mixed with self-upbraiding—the poor child, as she watched him bustling about, sword in hand, with his V.C. and medal on his breast, with all its clasps—the ladder of glory (or of poverty, as Maud more wisely deemed it)—Rosamund was repeating and thinking to herself,

‘He is going away—away to the West Indies—to Jamaica, and I shall see him no

more; and I love him so! It is hard to bear—hard to bear! How mean I am! Oh, if Maud knew all—and of that kiss! Why did he not speak then? Was it fear of mamma? Just a word; after that kiss Kyrle might have told me anything. If he did not love, why dared he to kiss me? and if he loved me, why did he not say so?’

Poor little Rosamund knew nothing of Madame de Staël, yet she thought with her that ‘love is only an episode in a man’s life. It is the whole object of a woman’s.’ Then ever recurred the thought, Did Desborough love her, but feared her mother’s ambition? He was going away to where he would form new and other ties, and thus in the years to come—the vista that looks so long to a girl of eighteen—she would fade utterly out of his memory. She had not even touched his fancy, and would pass out of it for ever, even as the echoes of the departing drums would die away upon the road. ‘What a fool I am!’ she would think, with a bitter smile; ‘but I cannot help it—I cannot help it; I am a poor weak little thing!’

Suddenly the eye of Vere caught the car-

riage with its occupants. There they sat, Lady Templeton and Maud on one side, and Gertrude and Rosamund with their backs to the portly old bewigged coachman, fresh, serene, and bright-eyed, fair in face and graceful in form, with toilettes that were perfection, looking as only highly-bred Englishwomen can look, with Sir Ayling, the genuine type of an antiquated beau, mounted on a quiet old roadster, beside them, and a very feeble escort he seemed.

As Kyrle Desborough commanded the departing troops, Vere led his company, and, under the strictness of Aldershot discipline, he could not then quit his place in the ranks to say even a word of farewell, and he somehow signally failed to catch the eyes of any of the Templeton party; even old Sir Ayling ignored him, which was perplexing, as he knew that the few officers of the detachment must be conspicuous enough.

He was pained as well as perplexed; they seemed to look over, past, or anywhere but at him! He had hoped for at least a farewell bow from all—for a parting smile—a sad one perhaps from *her*; but when he was

at last enabled to approach, and their eyes, as if by fascination, *did* meet, she accorded him a quiet and serene, but brief, stare of utter non-recognition, and—turned her gaze away!

Vere fell back into his place, and a full minute elapsed ere he became aware that Toby Finch was talking to him.

‘And that is Aldwinkle with them,’ he was saying; ‘by Jove, a game old gentleman.’

‘If he heard you, you would never have your legs under his mahogany again,’ said Clive.

‘Never likely I shall, so what are the odds? The chief thing I respect about the old fellow is, his perfect taste in burgundy and cigars. I tasted both when covert shooting at Winklestoke.’

Vere looked towards the carriage of the Templetons no more; but his six brother officers, all of whom had enjoyed the hospitality of Ringwood Hall, went forward in succession, bade the ladies adieu, heard them murmur some well-bred good wishes, and then sprang into the train, which shot away out of the station amid the reiterated cheers of those it bore and of those who beheld it.

Among the women in the crowd who watched their departure, and watched in vain for the tall handsome figure of her betrayer among them, was Phœbe Bagshaw—for Derinzy was still in London.

Amid that crowd were many whose sad eyes followed the swiftly speeding train—eyes that might never again look on those they loved and wept for. Many of these were women in worn and faded attire, and some with children in their arms, but all poverty-stricken; and these were unfortunate creatures who were either beyond the proportion or number allowed to go per company, or were married without the colonel's leave; and from these something of a wail of despair mingled with the last cheer of the on-lookers, as the train, diminished to a speck, vanished in the distance.

‘Cut you dead, did she? after all that scene at the stile, by Jove!’ exclaimed Kyrle Desborough to Vere, who had secured a compartment for himself and friend; ‘bah, old fellow! you have felt a deeper wound than this.’

‘When?’

‘In the Terai of Nepaul.’

‘The shot there broke my arm, but this shot of hers seems to have broken my heart!’

‘Stuff, man! how can you run on so? Hearts don’t break; it’s all bosh. Look—these walls covered with ivy are the ruins of Basing House, left just as Cromwell’s people battered it.’

But Vere was in no mood for archæology. By that stolid stare it was but too evident that she had schooled herself—if indeed she required schooling, which he now doubted—to renounce him. He felt intense humiliation and bitterness, but little anger, and forced himself to own that he was suffering a greater depth of sorrow than he had yet encountered; and heedless of all Kyrle’s well-meant and rattling attempts to rouse him, he gave way to reverie, recalling all the sweetness of the past with its hopes, and imaging a future that had but one idea in it—the figure of Gertrude Templeton for ever blotted out, so far as he was concerned. He was thus indulging in the luxury of griefs real and imaginary, when he was roused by Kyrle shouting,

‘Here’s Winchester—five minutes’ stop

for a brandy-and-soda. Rouse yourself, Vere; if she is able to tolerate, even think of,—nay, how much more to love?—this fellow Derinzy, is she worthy of *your* affection? Look alive; Regulus rolled in his tub of nails is nothing to you! Jump out—by Jove, there is a stunning girl at the refreshment-bar!’

Under the influence of Desborough, Vere began to feign an indifference which he did not feel, and often smiled to hide his real and secret emotion. Her stony stare haunted him, yet, singular to say, he never in any way connected her changed demeanour with the real source of it. In the course of events he had somehow forgotten his meeting with Phœbe Bagshaw—forgotten even her very existence.

All the rest of that day, however, proved somewhat of a dream to him; nothing seemed to stand out very prominently but the serene cold glance of Gertrude; and everything and everybody else came to be vague and misty in outline. And yet it was a day of much bustle, hurry, and excitement.

In speaking of Gertrude to Vere, never once did Desborough mention Rosamund. He

was one of those easy-going pleasant fellows who flirt, coquette, dance, say pretty nothings in a pleasing way, yet have no desire to marry any one and relinquish their liberty; but to whom *the* girl, whether found early or late, becomes all the world at once. She could never be that particular girl to him; and it was all too late now.

‘Here is the Itchen Viaduct, and there is Southampton,’ said he, as the train glided across the river; ‘a long good-bye, I hope, to Aldershot. I leave it with all the virtues I possessed when I entered it.’

From the station to the tidal dock, where H.M. steam transport Bannockburn lay, with blue-peter flying at the fore, was but a short distance; and as Desborough’s companies had only drums and fifes, they did not attract much attention; no great crowd was collected. The soldiers speedily poured along the gangway and were formed up on the main deck, till told off to the berths in the ‘lobster-pot,’ as the transport was termed by the crews of the adjacent craft.

The berths were soon allotted; the accoutrements hung up, the arms racked, the

watches and guard formed, countless returns signed by Desborough on the table in the cabin, on the head of the capstan, or on the back of any one who chanced to be near; and then the officers, with those of the artillery, some staff, and others who were going to Jamaica, all adjourned to the nearest hotel, to fraternise and dine together for the last time in old England; and a jovial dinner they had.

‘Ah, Toby, my boy,’ said Clive, ‘no more runs up to town, and coming down by the cold-meat train.’

‘No more quiet little dinners for two at Richmond or Greenwich,’ added Kyrle; ‘no sly meetings at St. Paul’s, to count the two hundred and sixty steps to the whispering gallery. Poor St. Paul’s! to what strange uses may we come at last!’

‘To-morrow must see us on the ocean,’ said Toby Finch, whose speech had become somewhat inarticulate; ‘on the deep and dark-blue—’

‘Stomach-stirring ocean,’ interrupted Kyrle.

‘And what then?’ asked Toby sharply.

‘You’ll be mighty white about the gills, Toby, my boy, and singing dolorously,

“Steward, hasten, bring a basin ;
What the deuce is ailing me ?
If it's handy, get some brandy—”

But you know the rest.’

That night Vere drank as deeply as any of them, but failed to drown thought. He had been taught a cruel and fatal lesson—that one he deemed pure and good and true could play a species of double part, and prove fickle, worldly, and insulting; so the seeds of mistrust—bitter mistrust—were sown and grew fast.

Would they ever wither and die? Time will show.

The party separated—or broke up—after singing a portion of ‘Rule Britannia,’ of which no man among them could recollect the whole.

Vere passed a night—or morning rather—of fever and restlessness, and expended countless matches to see how the weary hours succeeded each other, one aching thought ever before him, and sleep rendered still more impossible by the row going on in the hotel, where Finch, Clive, Prior, and other madcaps were having in the corridors and on the staircase a free fight with pillows, snatched some-

times from under the heads of infuriated sleepers, whose boots were shied all over the house; and for hours, amid singing and laughter, their pranks continued, till day stole in, and brought with it no relief to Vere, for still the bitter sense of mortification, love, and wounded self-esteem were strong within him; and he was glad when, for change of scene, he could hasten on board the transport, which was now ready for sea, and had all the horses for the artillery slung on board in their horse-hammocks.

The soldiers were all on deck, and many of them looked pale in the light of the morning, for already the order had been given to clear the ship; and on the quay stood some women weeping — poor creatures who had come all the way from Aldershot to have one more glance at their departing husbands, and more than one held up her baby to poor Tom, or Bill, or Joe, who might never kiss it more.

Many of the soldiers, who had no such regrets or cares to oppress them, looked bright and gay enough, uttering jests on every side; for they were full of life, and change of scene was before them, whether in Jamaica or Japan

was all one to them; but the gayest there were the group of officers with some ladies on the poop, talking and laughing together like old friends already, and taking their last view of bustling Southampton.

‘Now then,’ shouted the boatswain, ‘stand by and clear the gangway! By your leave, gentlemen—by your leave, ladies; all for shore must go at once.’

At that moment a tatterdemalion wild-looking Irishwoman—a poor creature who had evidently travelled far afoot—perhaps all night—too late to bid her son adieu, came rushing along the jetty just as the boatswain spoke. She uttered a shrill shriek as she was rather roughly thrust back from the gangway, while a handsome young soldier, with streaming eyes, waved his cap to her.

Then, oblivious of all around, she cast herself on her knees, with her gray hair dishevelled, and throwing her eyes and bare arms upward, cried in a piercing voice,

‘May God and His blessed mother preserve you, Pat, from danger and evil! And they will too,’ she added, ‘if ye never forget the prayers I’ve taught you.’

‘I’ll look after him, mother,’ cried Kyrle Desborough cheerily. ‘By Jove, Vere,’ he added, ‘poor Paddy forgets many things, but his religion never!’

The gangway was run on shore, a hawser forward thrown off, falling with a splash into the water; while a few revolutions of the screw and a turn of the wheel, grasped by a strong burly fellow, canted the ship’s head to seaward.

‘Cast off that hawser astern!’ cries a voice from the bridge.

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ is the ready response. It is uncoiled from the timber head, and as it too falls splash into the water, all feel and know instinctively that the last tie with the shore—the last link with old England—is broken, and that they are fairly off.

‘Good-bye, Mary darling!’ cries a soldier.

‘The Lord in heaven bless you, Pat!’ feebly responds a voice from the receding shore, where the figures of the weepers are diminishing fast, for already the middle of the basin has been reached.

Conspicuous on the poop in his scarlet tunic was the tall figure of Kyrle Desborough,

waving his cap, not to the crowd of on-lookers, but to those women of the Eighth who were left behind, and among whom, ere he stepped on board, he had emptied the contents of his purse, always an ample one; for with all his pretended cynicism, there was no warmer heart than Kyrle's in the service.

Objects on the shore blended fast; already the tall and slender octagonal tower of St. Michael's church—that famous landmark for ships—began to sink; and to the eyes of those who watched her, the mists of the morning gradually shrouded and seemed to swallow up the Bannockburn, as with all her living freight she glided down Southampton Water with her head towards Calshot Castle.

The general bustle of the scene on board, the rousing of the fore-and-aft canvas out of its nettings, and setting the topsails when the wind served, the necessity for seeing to the comforts and arrangements of the soldiers below, had the usual mechanical effect on the mind of Vere, and stifled many of those tender thoughts in which he might have indulged amid solitude. But ere long perfect quietness stole over the great ship; every rope was

coiled away in its place, and every man ere midday was past seemed to have settled down into *his* place; and when the drums beat at sunset, it seemed an illusive dream that Vere was so far from Aldershot, from Ringwood Hall, and all that had so lately filled his thoughts; and that but four-and-twenty hours had elapsed since he had last looked into the dark-blue eyes of the girl he loved so dearly and so hopelessly.

CHAPTER XII.

JANUARY AND MAY.

A ROMANTIC interest is stirred in every breast when witnessing the departure of troops for foreign service at any time, but more than all in a season of strife; and how much must love and affection for one of the departing deepen the interest, especially in the heart of an enthusiastic girl! Every one travels nowadays, the appliances for which are so cheap and swift; but every one is not a soldier, and every one is not going far away, to face cannon-balls and rifle-shot!

The statesman, says Major Rankin in his *Sketches*, devotes his time, talent, and health, his days and nights, to his country. 'Who can appreciate his labours and anxieties, his noble abnegation of self, the magnitude of his sacrifices and his services? But,' adds this gallant fellow, the *last* man killed in the Crimea,—'but the women of Britain—the wives,

the mothers, the sisters of soldiers—what do they contribute to the war? One gives the father of her children; another her dear son, the pride of her old age; a third a brother; a fourth, perhaps one who stood in a dearer relation still, whose loss would crush her young heart, make life a blank to her, and leave her the sorrow, too deep for utterance, of unwedded widowhood.'

If Kyrle Desborough fell, this was what Rosamund would feel herself in her heart to be—an unwedded widow—so fully had the passion for him filled her soul; yet it was on the very day he quitted Aldershot, for ever, as it proved to many, and when Rosamund saw Kyrle's handsome dark face and heard his pleasant voice for the last time, that her *bête noire*, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle, made his proposal in due form, and nearly as coolly as if he had been rising to address the House.

Seated alone in the recess of one of the many oriels of Ringwood Hall, with her cheek resting on her hand, she was gazing out on the sunny level landscape, lost in thought, and still seeming to hear in her ears the hurrahs of the departing soldiers, and the cadence of the

band with its farewell airs, when Lady Templeton stood beside her, and, though all unused to tenderness or to the melting mood, even when having her own selfish ends to serve, put one arm caressingly around her.

‘You know for what purpose, my darling child, Sir Ayling Aldwinkle is here?’ said the dowager.

‘I cannot, I do not dare to think, mamma.’

‘Impossible; guess!’ (with a grim attempt at being arch.)

‘I care not even to guess,’ replied Rosamund wearily; and her little pale face fell, and she seemed ready to weep, but controlled herself by a disdainful effort.

‘He wrote to you, under cover to me.’

‘I know, mamma.’

‘And you read his letter?’

‘Scarcely.’

‘In that letter he announced that he would see you personally, and propose.’

‘Yes.’

‘Think of his enormous wealth, my dear, and of what that can do for us *all*. Your papa, Rosamund, was as obstinate as a mule before I married him; poor Sir Ayling has no

will of his own, and you might do anything with him—'

'But love him.'

'Love has nothing to do with the matter in hand.'

'Nothing whatever, certainly, on my part at least.'

'Nor should it, until you are married. He will formally propose for your hand to-day. You must have expected this?'

'Yes, mamma,' said the girl, shivering; 'but oh, dearest mamma, he is *so* old!'

'All the better; he will be a quiet, easy-going, respectable husband, whose wild oats were sown long ago.'

'Yes, very long ago!' thought Rosamund contemptuously.

'Your position, even as the daughter of Lord Templeton, will be vastly improved, for his settlements are magnificent. But here he comes, and—I shall leave you.'

And quietly, as if she had been acting a part in 'genteel comedy,' *exit* Lady Templeton, leaving her daughter very miserable and with many conflicting thoughts.

Sir Ayling approached the girl with a little

would-be juvenile skip, and a bright simper rippling over the puckers of his colourless old face; while Rosamund, in rapid succession, became pale, then red, then pale again; then flurried and trembling, cold and weary, and finally defiant; for, as if by very contrast, there came vividly before her the handsome face and figure of the soldier she had seen that morning, with his delightful voice, gallant bearing, and high animal spirits—the man who, she believed in her heart, loved her, yet feared, for her mother, to avow it. Thus, for a time, stronger grew the spirit of defiance in the heart of the girl, but it was a spirit fated not to last.

‘You—you got my letter, Miss Rosamund?’ said Sir Ayling, drawing near her a chair, and jauntily seating himself thereon.

‘Yes, under cover to mamma.’

‘Precisely so, under cover to mamma; and what have you thought of it?’ he asked insinuatingly.

‘That it was droll.’

‘Droll?’ his heart beat, but not with pleasure; ‘droll?’ he added. ‘Come now, my dear Miss Rosamund—’

‘Yes, Sir Ayling,’ replied Rōsamund, beating the carpet with a pretty foot, and with difficulty restraining her tears, as he took one of her plump little hands between his very white but thin and shrivelled fingers.

‘Was it not clear in its purport?’

‘Quite.’

‘Rosamund, dearest Rosamund—but may I call you so?’

‘Do.’

‘Thanks, darling.’

‘Papa always called me so.’

Though quite apposite, this remark of Rosamund’s was unpleasant, and a shade of annoyance crossed the aristocratic old face of the lord of Winklestoke.

‘But what were you about to add to your letter?’ asked Rosamund, facing him fully, as if brought to bay.

The same noonday sun that streamed in broad beams through the oriel, lighting up the golden hair of the young girl, who was not yet in the noon of life, and was naturally buoyant in spirit, bright and beautiful as the Aurora of Guido, also lighted up, but as if with silver frost, the thin white hair and withered cheek

of 'the lean and slippered pantaloon' who addressed her; though he did not wear slippers then, but glazed boots, the daintiest that Regent Street could produce.

'What more have you to say to me than the letter contained?' repeated Rosamund, as he had paused irresolutely.

'That all my future happiness depends upon your reply to it.'

How much more he had now of the past than of the future, that glorious inheritance of the young!

'I know,' he urged, 'my own unworthiness of your hand and of your heart, though happily it can have formed no other attachment; but every endeavour of my future life shall be to love, to serve, and watch over you.'

She raised her humid eyes from the vacant task of tracing the carpet pattern, and saw that those of the old man were regarding her earnestly, even ardently.

'You may deem that there is some disparity in our years,' continued Sir Ayling, feeling doubtless that it was piteous to have to pay his court in this fashion; 'yet I do not think it impossible for a marriage to be per-

fectly and serenely happy, without all that rapture—that—that—aw—you know all I mean, described by poets and novelists: those glows of passion which never last, and are often followed by the weariness and disappointment of years. Thus, dearest Rosamund, with your good mamma's permission—'

'O Sir Ayling, why torment me with mamma's permission? What do you—what can you—see in me? I have no heart. I am not good enough for you. In town there are hundreds more suitable for you than I.'

'No, no, my dearest girl; I am surely old enough to know my own mind.'

'Quite; but not old enough to know mine. I must own,' she added, willing to conciliate, 'to having much esteem and great friendship for you, with gratitude for the honour you do me.'

'Surely these sentiments will be changed in time for those of greater tenderness? They must yield, dear Rosamund, to the ardour of mine.'

She looked in the faded face, with its thin aristocratic nose and brilliantly-white Parisian teeth, and with difficulty restrained an emo-

tion to laugh or to weep, she scarcely knew which.

‘I like you in one way well enough, because you are good, kind, gentle, and—and—’

‘What, my darling?’

‘You remind me of papa.’

Sir Ayling winced again; but he pressed to his lips the hand he held, on which she drew it away; yet, nothing daunted—he had made love to scores in his time, and could do so by rote—he said,

‘You will know your own mind ere long, my dear girl. Already, thanks to your mamma and family, I look upon you as my affianced wife: even the petty matter of the settlements has been fully adjusted.’

Rosamund shivered, and muttered,

‘Such torment, such tyranny it is—in this age of the world too! O Kyrle, Kyrle, you might have saved me from it, and you would not!’

A strange hardness stole into the expression of her eyes; and Sir Ayling, who watched her attentively, felt himself at a disadvantage—she was so cool, so unimpressed by all his attempted blandishments. Yet he returned

to the charge, and, taking her face caressingly between his hands, in a fatherly way, said,

‘I will not hurry you, darling: you have to name *the day*; and ere long I shall teach you to love me, and you will be happier when it is all over.’

‘All over! Would that I could die!’ thought Rosamund, as he printed a cold kiss on her fair forehead, and jauntily tripped away on tip-toe, humming an air, and rubbing his old withered paws, as much as to say, ‘Egad, that’s all settled at last!’

In her indignant, defiant, and desperate view of the whole situation, Rosamund had been forgetting all about her promise of obedience to her mother—about the perilous state of their monetary matters, and the threatened shame, ruin, and deprivation of all the state and luxury to which they had, by use and wont, been accustomed as a second nature—till suddenly the whole gulf seemed to open at the feet of the unhappy girl, and, bowing her face upon her hands, she gave way to a passion of bitter tears.

Then, desirous of solitude, and to avoid all her family—even the gentle Gertrude, for she

had been changed sorely and taking odd views of human ones of men—she hurried the cool recesses of the ch grand old trees were budding ing into leaf with the ten spring; and long she wandered corroding thoughts—on thro wood, by the windings of a joined the Whitewater; and the glare of the sun, she sat of an old tree, with a hun her eye, as if some one was down in a place surrounded of those bushes from the lo camp obtained its Saxon na the copse of alders.

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had been changed sorely and strange of late, taking odd views of human nature, and bitter ones of men—she hurried forth and sought the cool recesses of the chase, where all the grand old trees were budding now and bursting into leaf with the tender greenery of spring; and long she wandered there, sunk in corroding thoughts—on through the tangled wood, by the windings of a tiny stream that joined the Whitewater; and, seeking to avoid the glare of the sun, she sat down by the root of an old tree, with a hunted expression in her eye, as if some one was pursuing her—sat down in a place surrounded by a literal grove of those bushes from the locality of which the camp obtained its Saxon name—*alder holz*, or the copse of alders.

She felt that to marry Sir Ayling Aldwinkle was her inevitable doom, unless—she knew not what intervened.

Was such a marriage as this her mother had cruelly planned the consummation of that all-engrossing thought which ever fills the bosom of the young, especially the ardent and imaginative, from the monarch on his throne to the peasant at his plough? Could such be

the realisation of that soft dream which makes the pulses of the heart to quicken, the nerves to thrill, and of all that poet, painter, and novelist have striven to depict—of two persons so suited to each other in thought, in heart, and temperament, that their union alone was required to make one perfect and harmonious whole—the union that, if left to God or Nature, and not to man, might become so indeed?

And then she thought of the cold world, of the tyrannical bugbear called ‘society,’ and what would be said of such a marriage when announced in the *Morning Post*, and all were free to canvas its merits and demerits—how the old would pity, the young mock, and both revile, it might be slander, her. Oh, no, no! she would escape if she could—escape; but how? And with this thought she bowed her fair bright head as if the black waves of ruin and misfortune were rolling over it.

Her resolution was speedily taken—a strange, wild, and desperate one. She would write to Kyrle, she thought, and implore him to save her—write to him ere it might be too late. And in the solitude of her own room, with door locked, as if she was engaged in

something nefarious — with hot trembling hands, hot throbbing temples, and while her eyes were blinded ever and anon by hot scalding tears—she began a letter to him. But more than twenty were commenced, abandoned, and destroyed ere she could pen one that was sufficiently clear or coherent: even it fell far, far short of what she wished it should be, and it was necessarily without prefix:

‘I trust to Heaven that this letter may reach you ere your ship, the Bannockburn—I have learned its name—leaves Southampton, that you may at least telegraph to me. I care not what people—even mamma—may think, for, Kyrle, I am desperate! I entreat you, by the memory of all that you have said to me, in London and here; by the memory of your love for me (for that you love me in secret I never for a moment doubted); by the remembrance of that night at the ball, when you kissed me so tenderly and took away my glove—to save me from the doom before me—a marriage with Sir Ayling Aldwinkle. I know the strangeness, wildness—yes, the madness

and impropriety—of such a letter as this; but as your wife, dearest Kyrle, I should be safe from all the world—safe even from mamma—’

Thus far had she got when she grew deadly pale, with shame at the promptings of her own fear, and tossed the letter, like its predecessors, into the fire, after which she abandoned herself to despair and to her fate. Better would her fate perhaps have been had she sent it.

Cynical as he was in his views of the aristocracy in general, and in those of the morals of their women in particular; soured and disappointed as he had evidently been in the beginning of his career—had that sweet and brilliant girl’s letter come to the hands of Kyrle Desborough, he would certainly, unless barred and hedged in by the exigencies of the service, have done what she wished, and have striven to save her from a terrible fate—a fate in which he was eventually to become himself involved.

But so little was his heart touched then, so little did he suspect the right state of the whole situation, and so little did he think or

care on the subject, that at the very time Rosamund was penning that letter in her agony of heart he was walking to and fro on the poop of the transport, cigar in mouth, and replying laughingly thus to some remark made by Vere about her :

‘Yes, by Jove ! it is a pity for the poor little girl to be compelled to play Juliet to a Romeo in stays and pads, with false teeth and goloshes : January and May in juxtaposition.’

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDECEIVED WHEN TOO LATE.

So it was settled at last that Rosamund Templeton was to be the victim surrendered to Mammon ; and even the family solicitor sighed at the thought, as he dipped his pen in the ink-horn to scheme out the monetary arrangements—the deeds of sale they might be called.

Gertrude had been upbraiding herself for her treatment of Vere, and of his avowed love for her, when the terrible revelation of his supposed perfidy and base *liaison* with Phœbe Bagshaw came upon her. Thus, in the first instance, acting in terror of and under pressure of her mother, she had schooled herself to tell him that hopes of successful love between her and himself were vain ; and, in the second, she had again, but with more care certainly, schooled herself to ignore—even to insult him on the day he left Aldershot.

He was gone now, as it seemed most surely

for ever, and she sorrowed, in spite of her just anger, that the man she really loved should thus have had the mask of deceit so torn from his face, and his secret life laid bare, as it had been by the discovered letter of such a girl as Phœbe Bagshaw.

Yet her mind ran perpetually upon him, and that it did so was made too apparent, on more than one occasion, to her mother, and, what the latter considered of course much more, even to Colonel Derinzy. Thus one evening, when she was seated at the piano, and the tall staff officer was stroking his long tawny moustache with one hand, and turning over the leaves of her music with the other, while his half-vacant eyes of china-blue wandered approvingly over the braids of her rich brown hair, the form of her little white ears, and the outline of her delicate neck and shoulders, and thinking how 'a fellah might do worse than show such a wife to society, by Jove—aw, don't you know,'—Gertrude suddenly—despite the well-bred English horror of a scene on the discovery of any genuine emotion—broke off in the middle of a very creditable performance, and burst into tears.

The colonel was as much amazed as his lazy and languid nature permitted him to be, and Lady Templeton was horrified, but not the least alarmed.

‘Oh, what is this I have been singing?’ she exclaimed.

‘Only a melody from an opera,’ said Derinzy.

‘I am surely very nervous to-night, mamma,’ she urged, endeavouring to laugh.

Unconsciously she had, as Lady Templeton knew, by mere force of habit or by train of thought, been singing one of Herbert Vere’s favourite songs; and now his name appeared written on the upper right-hand corner of the front page thereof.

The colonel raised his fair eyebrows, and muttered, ‘By Jove—aw!’ and said nothing more.

Gertrude resolved that she would be more careful in future, and Lady Templeton had the same idea; for when the girl was looking over her music-stand next day, she discovered that every piece given to her by Vere, or which they had been in the habit of singing or playing together, had vanished and

gone. She smiled bitterly, and said, with a sigh,

‘Perhaps it is better that this should be so; regrets are alike unavailing and unbecoming now.’

But the saddest heart in Ringwood Hall was that of poor Rosamund, who knew that her grotesque marriage was to take place during the height of the London season; and she heard, as one in a dream, the voice of the family solicitor reading over the scroll of the princely settlements that were made upon her and ‘her heirs,’ &c.—heard them all as if they referred, not to herself, but to some other person. The very *day* was named; and though she had yet many weeks’ respite, it would come inexorably, unless she or Sir Ayling died; and she looked forward to it as a culprit may to the day of doom.

She saw that Gertrude was not without her own sorrow; she knew that her sweet sister had lost doubly the only man she ever loved, and was apparently apportioned, destined to become the wife of another, who was totally indifferent to her, and who seemed to be too lazy to love or admire any one but himself.

‘My poor Rosamund,’ said Gertrude caressingly, drawing the girl’s head upon her bosom and interlacing her slender fingers over it, ‘I must take a leaf from mamma’s book, and lecture you.’

‘Surely I have had enough of that, Gerty.’

‘Your spirits have fled—you eat nothing,’ resumed Gertrude, who felt her sister’s hot tears oozing between her fingers; ‘it makes me truly wretched to see you as you are now, and contrast you with the once bright merry girl you were.’

‘I was not a slave then—a slave to be sold and bought; my hand was my own, Gerty.’

‘Poor tiny hand,’ said Gertrude, caressing it; ‘white and soft as ever, but it is getting sadly thin. How I wish all this had never, never been, or that it were all over!’

‘Over and ended—over and ended!’ wailed Rosamund. ‘But you, Gerty darling, are not *you* changed too?’

‘I have had my own sorrows.’

‘And disappointment?’

‘Yes, my little pet sister, and disappointment too.’

And now, as they often did, unknown to Lady Templeton, they mingled their tears together, and felt a strange but softening solace in such sad communings and companionship.

Poor Rosamund, whatever she did now—when at dinner, seated in boredom by the side of Sir Ayling as his *fiancée*; at balls (though she strove to avoid them now); at church, when he sat in the family pew; at riding-parties, when he contrasted so unfavourably with others; at polo-parties in the camp, when the young subs, among themselves, made scathing and cutting remarks upon ‘the Fair Rosamund and her Lothario’—seemed ever as one in a dream, who acted and lived in this world, yet appeared to belong to another, and to have neither share nor interest in the concerns of this; though such are the enforced exigencies of society that she did her best—her very best—to look and talk and laugh like other people. But, despite all the training of Lady Templeton, she proved an indifferent actress; and her hollow or ghastly attempts at disguise were apparent to all, to none more so than Gertrude, whose heart so bled for her sister’s

sorrow that there were times when she forgot her own.

And concerning the latter there came a time which she never forgot.

Some notice of Vere's troopship having been passed and spoken with at sea had casually met her eye in a paper overnight, and brought vividly back all the bitter past to her, and she spent a restless and dreamy night.

Unsoothed in mind and unrefreshed in body, she was roused from a half-waking, half-sleeping state by the morning sun shining brightly into her room, thus destroying all further chance of sleep. The morning was beautiful, for the first days of summer were at hand; and commencing her toilette quickly and alone, she finished it without summoning her maid, and, impelled she scarcely knew by what, took her garden-hat and sunshade, and went forth for a stroll in the fresh, dewy, and balmy atmosphere.

If she was ever disposed to think less of or to forget the man whom she believed to have deceived her, Ringwood Hall was just the place to have his memory by association of

ideas thrust upon her; for at this season of the year, as it was within a few miles of Aldershot, the roads were teeming with manœuvring troops. Columns of infantry on the march—twice she had seen thus the remainder of *his* regiment, the Eighth; squadrons of cavalry, galloping with sabres flashing in the sun, swept hither and thither amid whirlwinds of dust; the commissariat wagons and the brigades of artillery thundered along the highways; and ever and anon the heavy patter of infantry file-firing or the crashing boom of cannon would announce that some village was surrounded, to the bewilderment of its rustic inhabitants, or that some bridge on the line to Vauxhall or the nearest canal in the mimic warfare had been fiercely contested, till a flag was hoisted thereon in token that it had been ‘blown up,’ or deemed so.

On this morning the call of a distant bugle or trumpet, or the long roll of a brass drum, floating past on the ambient air, showed that the inmates of the North and South Camps were at their usual work of indulging in ‘alarms and excursions;’ and thinking of the absent, now so far away, she listened rather

to these sounds than to the voice of the birds; for there was no sympathy in Nature for her heavy heart.

Rich masses of light and deep shadows too checkered the solitary path she unconsciously pursued; and through the openings in the already leafy copsewood came ever and anon picturesque glimpses of old Ringwood Hall, with all its oriels glittering in the sunshine, cresting the gentle slope of the surrounding lawn, which had been rolled and mown, mown and rolled again and again, till it looked like the richest velvet, and was the pride of the heart of old Davis Dibble the gardener.

Gertrude, lost in reverie, now found that all unconsciously she approached and was close to the stile—the same stile near which she had last met Herbert Vere, and which had so many associations that were sweet and sad for her, till the infusion of bitterness and disappointment came.

By the stile a female figure was seated, apparently lost in thought; another pace or two showed Gertrude that she was a girl, young, and smartly dressed—too smartly for her station; and another glance showed that

she was Phœbe Bagshaw, the keeper's daughter. Gertrude paused, for she had every way an aversion for and a genuine horror of this girl—an aversion in which perhaps jealousy and envious pride formed a part; nay, she would have been either more or less than woman had they failed to do so.

Nevertheless she was compelled to pass her, and was doing so, with her skirt gathered in one hand and the ivory handle of her sunshade twirling impatiently in the other, when Phœbe rose and curtsied deeply; and then, with an emotion of commiseration, Gertrude perceived that she was in tears—tears that were irrepressible, for she failed to control them even under her serene and scrutinising eye.

‘You seem in distress,’ said she.

‘Yes, Miss Gertrude,’ sobbed the girl, lifting her handkerchief, as if by that means to control her emotion.

‘Can I—can mamma assist you?’

‘No, miss.’

‘Or advise you?’ asked Gertrude, with some sternness, or rather coldness, of manner.

‘No, miss; no one can advise me or help me now but God!’

‘You have fallen into error, Phœbe, and repent when too late.’

Phœbe made no reply but by a fresh outburst.

‘Pardon me speaking of your affairs, Phœbe—but I suppose the cause of your grief is Mr. Vere?’

‘Yes—yes, Miss Gertrude.’

The latter felt her heart swelling with indignation against him; but she said calmly,

‘You see I know your secret, Phœbe—how I came to do so matters not; but,’ and her lip quivered scornfully as she spoke, ‘of course Mr. Vere has not married you?’

‘No, miss.’

‘Nor is likely to do so now that he has gone to Jamaica.’

‘Gone to Jamaica!’ repeated the girl, with surprise.

‘Of course—weeks ago; did you not know that?’

‘Impossible, Miss Gertrude; he has *just* left me.’

‘When?’ asked Gertrude, with genuine astonishment.

‘Now just a moment ago; left me, as usual, with fine promises, and seeking to take me to London; but I know precisely what that means. I should never see Hampshire, Ringwood Hall, or my poor old father again.’

‘You rave, girl! Mr. Vere of the Eighth or King’s sailed from Southampton weeks ago.’

‘Oh, no, he didn’t, miss,’ replied the girl, with a strange but bitter smile of half triumph; ‘for I was there, and saw the soldiers depart.’

‘And he is here, you say—*here*?’

‘Yes; and see—see, there he goes, this moment, on that beautiful white horse; and doesn’t he look handsome, miss?’

Two staff officers in undress uniform, who were evidently taking part in the military movements then in progress among the green lanes, dashed at full speed along the highway, and one of them was Jocelyn Derinzy on his well-known white charger.

‘And *he* is the person who has called himself Mr. Vere to you?’ asked Gertrude, after a pause, when both horsemen had vanished.

‘As God hears me, miss, he is!’ replied the girl, in growing alarm, fear, and bewilderment, a sentiment in which Gertrude certainly shared, while her manner greatly impressed Phœbe Bagshaw, whose haggard and tearful eyes were fixed with a hungry and inquiring expression upon her beautiful face; for now both women had made a discovery which filled the heart of one with rage and bitterness, and the heart of the other—Gertrude—with joy and triumph.

‘Heaven be thanked for what this chance meeting has revealed, and Heaven give me patience to consider it!’ thought she, and turned again to the unfortunate Phœbe Bagshaw, who, in one sense, had been doubly deceived.

Gertrude’s indignation at the part so daringly played by Derinzy, in so wantonly assuming the name of another, and maintaining this low intrigue while affecting to love herself, was almost forgotten in her supreme satisfaction on discovering the innocence of Herbert Vere. But what could that discovery avail her now?

‘How have I been deceived!’ she said al-

most aloud, as she hastened homeward; 'I have crushed and insulted a noble heart that loved me only too well and too hopelessly, and now I am powerless to tell him so!'

Breathless with haste she returned to Ringwood Hall, and seeking Lady Templeton in her dressing-closet, lost no time in acquainting her with the discovery she had made, and who the real person for whom the letter was intended proved to be; and her mother heard her with more of cold disdain than either surprise or indignation.

'O mamma,' added Gertrude, 'are you not glad?'

'Are you?'

'Of course, mamma.'

'Well, so far as that Mr. Vere is concerned, and the use made of his name—culpably, I admit—by Colonel Derinzy, I am neither glad nor sorry, but totally indifferent on the subject. Really, my dear Gertrude, it all matters nothing to me now.'

'Well, mamma, but if Derinzy can be so base?'

'Only sowing the last of his wild oats, my dear—sowing the last of them; he will be

guilty of no more *faux pas* when he is Viscount Derinzy, and has Gertrude to guide him with a silken rein. But let us go down-stairs; the breakfast bell has rung,' she added, and totally dismissed the subject, so far as her daughter was concerned.

She did not, however, throw over the colonel, who, on receiving a little explanatory private note from her, contrived to absent himself from Ringwood Hall for a time.

Acting under her mother's iron influence, Gertrude had been weak up to a certain point, and schooling herself, as we have said, acted as she did in that farewell meeting at the stile; but there her weakness ceased. She had resolved that she would not marry Viscount Derinzy's heir, even before this degrading *dénouement*; a serious and feverish illness saved her from farther annoyance for a time, and ere she recovered he was consoling himself at a spa in Germany.

And Vere was gone now with a belief in her selfishness, her ambition, avarice, and all but perfidy; for though she had given him no promise and had broken no plighted troth, still he knew that she loved him, or had done

so; and now he would suppose that, with that love in her heart, she had accepted the shallow Derinzy!

With how much contrition now she recalled the serene cold stare of indifference, it might be scorn, with which she had met for a moment the poor fellow's earnest and wistful gaze when he was departing at the head of his company, it might be to die in action, to perish amid other perils of a soldier's life, and to return no more!

'Women, they say, act first and think afterwards, and truly I have been one of these!' she exclaimed to Rosamund.

Now, again and again, her thoughts wandered back to him, whom really she loved well and dearly; and she recalled fondly many a delightful though brief time spent with him, and many a remark deemed trivial then, but so full of tender meaning now, and tender interest too.

In the first burst of her contrition for having wronged him and so cruelly 'cutting him dead,' as Kyrle Desborough phrased it, she felt that she could do anything and risk anything to see him once again, to hear his

voice once more. She felt now that at all hazards she could devote her life to him, and seek by her love and affection to bring back sunshine to his soul; and much more to the same purpose, of which she had read in novels, occurred to her, with the ever-recurring conviction that the conventional fetters of society bound her to certain rules and observances, that the waters of the North and South Atlantic separated them, and that it was all too late for regrets now; and perhaps the first tidings she should have of him might be his marriage with another, for he had left her with a sore and embittered heart, and red coats, she had heard, were always at a premium in the colonies.

Lady Templeton had some of the latter thoughts combined with hopes too. She had carried her point triumphantly with the miserable Rosamund, and, knowing herself, felt assured that, even without the aid of Maud, she should yet do so with Gertrude.

Chance and the fortunes of the service had suddenly achieved one good point for her. Vere was happily despatched to the West Indies, where some fighting was going on,

she scarcely knew with whom, and cared less; the yellow fever proved fatal sometimes, and—ah well, none knew what might happen; and certainly she cared little what *did* happen, provided Herbert Vere came within her orbit no more.

Separated from her, apparently for ever, Vere had his own sorrowful convictions to endure. Gertrude might relent; but whatever she did or thought, he could move in the matter no more now; and circumstanced as she was—hedged in by the natural dictates of maidenly modesty and the barriers of society—neither could she; so, in tears and bitterness of heart, she committed the event to Fate, and meanwhile he was sailing towards the tropics.

CHAPTER XIV.

H.M.S. BANNOCKBURN.

WE have said that, ere noon on the day of departure, every rope on board H.M. troopship Bannockburn had been coiled away in its place, and every one seemed to have settled down into his proper place; and much more so did the latter seem the case when they had seen the last of old England, the lighthouses on the bold and lofty Lizard Point fade out amid the tumbling waves of a sombre evening sea, while the twilight darkened into night; and already, by the very isolation from the rest of the world, many of the passengers seemed to have become quite old friends, for, as all belonged to, or were connected with, the service, they had a thousand topics and sympathies in common, and a mutual knowledge of many places and persons, thus affording a source of conversation even to the most taciturn.

In an ordinary ocean-going steamer such qualities for easy companionship would not develop themselves till the third or fourth day of the voyage; but in a crowded transport it is altogether different, and everybody rapidly becomes acquainted with everybody else, through the freemasonry of the service, and the general habit of knocking about the world.

In the former instance, the passengers are often shy, and seem to view each other with ill-concealed distrust, and look generally forward with gloom and doubt to the twenty days' run to the West Indies—it used to be two months under sail. After a time, however, the men get their 'sea-legs,' the women begin to look less plain, and the pretty to seem perhaps beautiful; alliances spring up and coteries are formed; friendships, though they cannot be very lasting, are cemented amid the discomforts incident to a sea-voyage, and the necessary attentions these contingencies elicit.

But in a transport most of the men, and many of the women too, have been at sea before; and among the former several are sure to have met in past times, somewhere 'up country' or in remote stations—it is all

one when from Portsmouth to Patna, Dublin to Delhi; and then that delightful evening reunion, the mess, 'the perfection of dinner society,' as it has been justly named, cements all.

As the senior officer on board, Kyrle Desborough had a cabin to himself, and it was, in rough weather, the chief resort of the few officers of the Eighth on board; for Kyrle was a hospitable fellow, and his decanters and cigar-box were never off the table.

Some years' career of service by land and sea had long since cured Kyrle of any bashfulness, if he ever had any; and he was wont to boast that he could make any man, 'by a slap on the back, his comrade in a brace of shakes;' and, as others averred, any woman his sister, or something more tender, whatever it might be, in the same time.

The ladies were certainly not now Kyrle Desborough's weakness, whatever they, or one in particular, might have been to him in times past; yet it was difficult for him to abstain from making himself, by mere force of habit, agreeable to everything he came across in the shape of a petticoat; and their glances, hand-

pressure, and all that sort of thing, he returned with interest, all the more that he was heart-whole; and likely to remain so.

In that isolated little floating circle—for little it was by comparison, though the Bannockburn was a large troopship of 500-horse power—Desborough was the lion; he was so handsome, so full of genuine good humour and *bonhomie*. Careless of attraction, yet, as usual, he attracted the women—the newly wedded and ‘the old soldiers,’ accustomed to barrack and bungalow life, alike—to an extent that poor little Rosamund would have repined to see. He evoked no tribute, because he cared nothing about it. No man was more destitute of personal vanity, yet they strove to feed it by a species of inferred adulation and compliment which should have come from him, and which he laughed at, but might have missed, had it been withdrawn. Yet a time was to come when Kyrle Desborough was to find himself in the most serious love scrape a man could be involved in.

Some of the ladies on board were newly married, and were new also to military life; yet it seemed very charming from this point

of view, and to have hourly so many handsome young fellows in attendance upon them, though they were, of course, very much absorbed in their husbands; but there were some 'oldsters' who had been in half the garrison towns of India, and thus, as Desborough had it, there was no one in the ship whom Vere 'could legitimately spoon on,' and, as if by counter irritation, cure his 'complaint,' in the three weeks the voyage out was likely to last.

'I'll bet a cool fifty you will get over your fancy for that girl just as you got over the measles and hooping cough,' said Kyrle, as they were having a breezy smoke on the bridge one evening. 'By Jove, I thought you had knocked about enough, and seen enough of life, and all that sort of thing, not to let your heart run away with your head; for you moon after this bit of muslin or tarlatan, or whatever it is, like a schoolboy of seventeen!'

If Vere had duly booked Kyrle Desborough's bet he would have won it in some sense, but in some sense only, as our narrative will show.

'Yes, yes, old fellow,' continued Des-

borough, 'after we have had a shy at the Niggers, you will substitute the laurel for the willow in your cap, and become, like me, a reasonable being. And, now that the last of the ladies have left the poop, we will have a quiet smoke there,' he added, filling his brier-root pipe from a pouch, the pretty beading of which was the work of Rosamund Templeton, though then, perhaps, he never thought about it.

Already new constellations were rising, and it became a species of luxury to lounge on the poop when the night was fine, and watch the shifting lights and shadows that gleamed about the great ship, from the binnacle lamps, the engine-house, and occasionally from the cabin along the main-deck, where the watch in their greatcoats trod to and fro or loitered in groups, and to trace the outline of great sails bellying out against the starry sky, or the long wake of pale green fire that the revolutions of the screw left far astern amid the dark waves of the tumbling sea.

The idea of limitless space, the singular silence that is not all silence, for there are the occasional sounds in the ship, the hum of the

wind through the rigging aloft, the rush of the bow through the water, and its wash under the counter to mingle with the foam of the revolving screw, are conducive to reflection and thought; and thus Vere and Desborough spent many an hour on the moonlit or starlit deck, and seldom exchanged a word, in the quiet companionship of having a pipe together; while the daily repetition of sea and sky did not prove very conducive to banish the image which haunted the imagination of the former, as he frankly admitted to Desborough.

‘It is not in hearts that sink soonest—female hearts especially,’ said Kyrle—‘that sorrow and love have their most powerful or lasting effects. With many, a shower of tears cures—or at least for the time soothes—everything. It is from the remembrance of joys we have lost, says some one, that the arrows of affliction are chiefly pointed,’ he added, for, when not in a cynical or chaffing mood, Desborough could be sensible enough. ‘I can’t comprehend how you can let this girl’s image haunt you as it does. She broke no promise made to you; she simply allowed you to love her with all your heart, or lured you into

doing so; and then, because it was mamma's wish, threw you over heartlessly for a fellow with a handle to his name.'

'Not quite heartlessly,' urged Vere, as the memory of that meeting by the stile came back in all its force; 'but I go now to Jamaica in the full hope that change of scene, absence, and the excitement of a little fighting, if it goes on, will enable me to forget her.'

'As we have all forgotten others.'

'Nay, speak for yourself, Kyrle.'

'I am sure that the elements you refer to *do* effect a species of cure by forcing a man's attention to the present, and thus compelling him to substitute it for the past.'

'And to forget her?'

'Perhaps not.'

'What then?'

'To think with patience, as distance and novelty come to one's aid. But *apropos* of this subject, Vere, your young English lady is, after all, an enigma—like the sex everywhere else,' he continued, lapsing into his general tone. 'She is, we shall say, a highly-finished article—thoroughbred and all that sort of thing—perfect, pure, innocent, and sweet as

a mountain rose, though reared in Mayfair or Tyburnia; she may be plucky as Lady Fanshawe, or Lucy Hutchinson, or Joan of Arc herself; or as that brave Douglas girl, so "tender and true," who put her snowy arm in the place from where the murderers of James I. had stolen the bar away; and she may act as—as Gertrude Templeton has acted to you, by making you play the fool. Besides, for all you know, you may have had an escape.'

'How?'

'Half the men in this world are married to the wrong woman.'

'Kyrle, such a misanthrope you are!'

'Not at all, but a philosopher,' replied the other, carefully cleaning out his brier-root and depositing it in a velvet case. 'Look at a P. and O. liner rounding the Sand Heads, or working out of Bombay Harbour for Aden. The poor devil of a husband, who can't get leave as yet, has barely waved a last affectionate farewell to the wife of his bosom, before Jones of the Rifles, Smith of the Lancers, or Robinson of the Artillery, is shawling her shoulders, placing a cushion at her back, or a hassock under her pretty feet, and beginning a most

brotherly intercourse that doesn't always end with the voyage.'

'You'll be hit hard some day, Kyrle,' said Vere, laughing.

'Not a bit of it, though I have been in my time; and now let us go back to the mess-table for a glass of dry sherry. Who on earth is that singing?' he added, as a cheery and hearty voice, though somewhat indistinct, issued from the mess-cabin.

'Toby Finch.'

'Of course. The song he knows so well and sings so badly always comes off about this time—his old Meltonian ditty.'

And Toby's voice was heard trolling a song in this style:

'On, on! for the bitches are racing before us—

Not a nose to the earth, not a stern in the air;
And we know, by the notes of that modified chorus,
How straight we must ride if we wish to be there!

They had now passed the Azores, having run near Fayal and seen Villa Orta, situated at the bottom of a beautiful semicircular bay, overlooked by an amphitheatre of mountains, clothed to their summits with myrtles, laurels, and many flowering shrubs.

Quickly now they began to draw near the tropics, the regions of daily sunshine, and Vere felt his spirits rise and his pulses quicken in spite of himself; for even regret, sorrow, and disappointment are brighter in sunshine than in shadow, so true it is that there is 'an analogy between the sunlight of the cloudless skies and the sunshine that gleams into the darkened chambers of the human soul.'

How long, long ago it all seemed now since that sweet epoch in Vere's life; those chance meetings in London, when love was developing itself between them, and the secret understanding was coming about; and those in Hants, at Aldershot and Ringwood Hall! There seemed a strange unnatural remoteness now between the present and that period, of which Vere had forgotten all idea of what occurred beyond it—the time he had known and learned to love Gertrude Templeton.

CHAPTER XV.

THE REGIMENT OF ANNE OF DENMARK.

THE routine of duties entailed by the transport regulations for troops on board ship served to kill time. The periods for exercise, when the men were beat to quarters, or moved by squads of twenty double-quick round the deck, were a species of novelty to the ladies on the poop, and all other kind of rounds and inspection, as if in barracks, till the bugles blew tattoo; when the subaltern of the day went between decks, with a sergeant carrying a lantern, to see that every man was in his hammock and all lights extinguished, save those in the officers' cabins. Then, as the ship got into warmer latitudes, the wind-sails were rigged to throw streams of cold air between decks—a means to health which soldiers frequently, and oddly, try to defeat, by tying up the bottom of them, unless prevented by the sergeant

of the watch; but in fine evenings the band, on the poop, was a never-failing source of pleasure, frequently eliciting a hearty cheer from a passing ship, as her head-sails were thrown in the wind and her crew lined her side to hear, perhaps, familiar strains wafted over the waves; and then dipped their ensign three times from the gaff-peak in farewell to the Queen's redcoats, as the great transport sped unerringly on her watery way towards the Greater Antilles.

Kyrle Desborough, who was animated by a very high degree of that glorious spirit, *esprit de corps*, for the 'Eighth or King's,' in which he was the third of his family who had borne a commission, was never tired of conversing with Vere, or any other who would listen to him, on the past achievements of the regiment, the history of which he loved to trace (and would often do so, over a social glass in his cabin, or with a quiet weed on the lee-side of the poop, when all were turned in save a few lingerers, like Finch or Clive) from the days when it was first raised in 1685, on the rebellion of the unfortunate Duke of Monmouth, by Robert Lord Ferrars of Chartly, as

the Regiment of Anne of Denmark, afterwards the Good Queen Anne of glorious memory. And in these our days, when a cold-blooded and utilitarian government threatens to sweep away and obliterate all distinctions of corps and numbers, with their gallant badges and historic mottoes—the heraldry of the service—won in countless fields of battle—such traditions as those which Kyrle fostered must ever be of interest.

Though named after the Princess of Denmark, the Eighth was raised in Hertfordshire; and at its first muster the captains, cuirassed and plumed, carried pikes, the lieutenants partisans, the ensigns half pikes, and the sergeants ponderous halberds; and in every company there were thirty pikes and seventy-thrée matchlock men. And such was the motley equipment of ‘Ours’ when, three years after, the great Duke of Berwick was colonel, and the corps deserted, like the other British troops, *en masse*; to join the invading Dutch under William of Orange, for whom, in the foolish spirit of those days, they fought in Holland—as the succeeding century saw them do, at Kaiserworth, Venloo, Blenheim, Ramil-

lies, and Oudenarde, in the defence of that wretched Electorate of Hanover for which so much British blood and treasure were wasted from generation to generation.

At Dunblane the corps was swept off the field by the Highland swordsmen, but won that quadruped so costly to the British Isles—the *white horse*—for its cognisance, though its colonel, Archibald Douglas, Earl of Forfar, fell at its head covered with wounds. At Culloden the Eighth was in the second line, under the brutal Brigadier Huske. It served in the wars of Egypt and America, capturing two colours at Ogdenburg in 1813; yet it is one of the few regiments that did not serve under the glorious old Iron Duke in the Peninsula, though it had fighting and hard knocks enough elsewhere.

It was in 'Ours'—the Eighth or King's—as Desborough had often heard his father relate, that, after Culloden occurred, the now-forgotten episode of two deserters, whose story made so much noise, taking a cast of the dice for life when *both* were sentenced to die—a custom as old as the days of Oliver Cromwell, as we learn from an old periodical, the *London*

Scout, printed in 1654. A reference is made to the story in the papers of Mr. Mason, who was secretary to the 'Butcher Duke,' as he is still called; but he omits the names, localities, and many other details, which were well known to Kyrle Desborough.

At the time when General Edward Wolfe (father of the hero of Quebec) was colonel of the Eighth, there enlisted in the corps two young Lancashire lads, natives of a secluded village among the range of hills called 'the Backbone of England,' which runs northward from Ashton-under-Lyne to Hornby.

In education and birth, these young men, named respectively Willie Ashton and Tom Cleveley, were much above the usual kind of persons who then enlisted as soldiers; and though fast friends and old schoolfellows, they took 'the King's shilling' from very different motives. They marched together, save when on duty, were never separate, and shared the same tent in the camp at Inverness, when the dreadful ravage of the adjacent country was in progress.

Willie Ashton became a soldier because his parents interfered to prevent his marriage

with a sweet and pretty, but humble, girl of the village—a Lancashire witch, with dark eyes and many winning ways. But Tom Cleveley, who was a lad of spirit, with an unsettled and roving disposition, attracted by the splendour of a party recruiting by beat of drum, with swords drawn, and cockades streaming, as was then the fashion and for long after the accession of Queen Victoria, and believing the life of a soldier to be all that the recruiting officer and his sergeant—a veritable Sergeant Kite—depicted it to be, took the coin of Fate, after hearing a harangue, which we give verbatim, from the orders issued for such an occasion, and which the sergeant addressed to the crowd:

‘To all bold and aspiring heroes, who have spirits above slavery and trade, and incline to become gentlemen by bearing arms in his Majesty’s Eighth or King’s, commanded by the magnanimous General Edward Wolfe, let them repair to the drumhead’ (*Tow-row-row-row* went the drum), ‘when each gentleman volunteer will be honourably entertained, receive instant pay, and good quarters, with a guinea in advance, and a crown to drink the

health of his Majesty King George. God save their Majesties and the House of Hanover!

Then the 'point of war' was beaten, the grog went freely round, and, despite the tears of his mother, a widow, the cockade was soon streaming from the hat of Tom Cleveley, who departed to join the regiment, with her blessings and her unavailing tears. While Lois Winsford from a window—for no nearer approach was permitted—now watched the departure of her lover, as the recruiting party, with drums beating, steel glittering, and ribbons flaunting, accompanied by a noisy herd of smock-frocked rustics, disappeared on the road that led to Manchester.

The two friends had not been long in that wretched winter camp at Inverness, exposed to the cold and bitter blasts from the Murray Firth, ere they had sorrowful proof that there was a vast difference between the ideal 'gentleman volunteer' of the sergeant's harangue and a real private soldier of George II., with his sixpence per diem wherewith to supply alike the necessities and luxuries of life—the latter being in this instance reduced to blackball and pipeclay.

But most miserable of the two was the lover, Willie Ashton, who, in addition to selling himself into that which now appeared hopeless and life-long peril and slavery, was separated, apparently for ever, from the girl he loved — from Lois Winsford, whom he knew to love him well and tenderly.

They were both sick of their existence, and sick too of the daily task of rapine and outrage entailed by the Duke's orders on the Jacobite districts, and the butchery often of unarmed Highlanders, whom they had to shoot down like dogs, even after they had, in the old Roman fashion, muffled their heads in their plaids, in token of surrender; and, in short, after much communing together, they took the fatal resolution of deserting—a difficult task to achieve in these pre-railway times, at least with final success.

They fled homewards, travelling by night, and concealing themselves by day in thickets, fields, or morasses. They left Scotland behind them, crossed the Tweed at Carlisle, and, after enduring an infinity of hardships, came at last in sight of their native hills that divide Lancashire from Yorkshire, and worn, weary,

despairing, and desperate—rather than overjoyed, the one with the hope of embracing his mother, the other by the desire of embracing the girl he loved—when incapable of further exertion, they flung themselves on the floor of a barn, just as evening was closing, and the sun of the pleasant summer time lit up the distant walls, the windows, and the ivy-covered church-spire of the village in which they were born, and in which all their desires were centred.

The hay harvest was just over; the work people were having a jovial supper in a field close by; but though perishing with hunger and fatigue, now that they had reached that village home for which their repentant souls had thirsted and panted, they dared not, for fear of recognition, approach these happy rustics to beg a slice of bread or a draught of ale, which doubtless would both have been freely accorded. So there they lurked in the barn, an old building which they both knew well; it had seen generations of rustics come and go, and the grain of many a year garnered and winnowed under its crazy roof, now brown and covered with mosses of many tints.

And all around them spoke of home ; the full growing cornfields, with scarcely a foot-way left between the rich grain and the leafy hedgerows, where the great green dock leaves, the bindweed, and the long feathery grass grew together, with cornflowers and poppies ; and as the sunset died away over the hills, the familiar chimes—familiar as the voices of old friends—came floating softly towards the sinking lurkers on the evening air.

But they had been traced from Carlisle ; and ere they could make those they loved so well aware of their vicinity, the unhappy creatures were overtaken by a cavalry patrol, and afterwards tried by a court-martial and condemned to death.

Both were equally guilty ; but Edward Wolfe was a gentle and humane officer, and ordered—according to a custom then prevalent in the service—that the two prisoners were to cast lots by dice, and that one only should suffer the terrible penalty.

At the appointed time the regiment was formed in three sides of a hollow square. On the fourth side, which was open, a grave had been dug, and beside it was placed a plain

black coffin, to hold the remains of the loser. In the centre of the square stood the bass drum, with a box and dice upon its head, and near it stood the chaplain, Bible in hand, and clad in his surplice.

The morning was cold and chill; damp and wetting mist was rolling lazily up from the valleys; the sun was enveloped in cloud; all Nature seemed cold and cheerless; and in the ranks of the Eighth the soldiers, who had never quailed at Fontenoy or Dettingen, or when the Highland swordsmen came swooping down upon them at Culloden, had faces that were blanched and pale; for the whole scene and all its concomitants proved grim and repulsive.

Prior to the prisoners Ashton and Cleveley being brought forth, they had both passed a night of dark and brooding horror. Their friendship for each other, we are told, was real and tender, though not of the classic and romantic or Damon and Pythias kind as to lead each to desire that he should die for the other. Both were practically most desirous to live; but the soul of each was naturally harrowed by the terrible thought that he

could only do so by the death of his friend; and both were pale as ashes, ghastly, and wan, when under escort they came to the fatal drumhead, when each, in a voice all unlike his own, requested the other to begin.

At the tiny ivory instruments of death Willie looked nervously, as he thought of his black-eyed Lois and all that depended on the first, and to him only, cast of the dice. He shuddered, covered his face with his hands, and drew back, while Edward Wolfe, a veteran of the wars of Marlborough and Eugene, and latterly of Wentworth's terrible expedition to the Antilles, stood near in his brigadier wig and Kevenhuller hat, looking grimly, yet pityingly, on.

He then ordered Tom Cleveley to advance and throw. The prisoner took up the box in which the dice were heard to rattle, so tremulous was his hand; and with an invocation to Heaven for strength to guide him, he was about to throw, when the shrieks of women were heard; and from the open side of the hollow square, where the yawning grave and coffin lay, there rushed forward, with hair dishevelled, garments worn, torn, and stained,

and faces distorted by fear—well nigh frenzy—the girl Lois Winsford and the widowed mother of Tom Cleveley.

It was indeed Lois Winsford, but not the Lois that Willie Ashton had last seen, with a laughing mouth, a merry *piquante* face. The eyes were dark as ever, but dimmed with tears, and the perfect but small features were convulsed by grief.

The tender eyes and appealing face, that had ever haunted and followed him since the time he had left the village, were before him again, and nestling on his neck. But now it filled him with vague terror; for what use or purpose had she come but to behold the death of one—it might be both!

Lois was wont to have the most fascinating little ways, the most silvery little laugh and sweet little voice that ever existed; but all were gone now, and misery alone remained; for after a momentary transport of joy and hope at finding the two comrades alive, she and the mother of Cleveley were soon aware of the dreadful uncertainty of what was to follow now.

Heedless of the many eyes around them,

Lois Winsford clung to the neck of her lover.

‘Willie—O Willie!’ she murmured, in a breathless voice.

‘My little Lois, my sweet little Lois!’ he said, in broken accents, while caressing her and smoothing her dishevelled hair.

‘Mother! mother!’ cried Tom Cleveley.

‘My son—O my son!’ was all the poor woman could utter again and again; while the staff officers stood restlessly and uneasily beside the fatal drum, watching from time to time the face of Edward Wolfe, who again commanded Cleveley to throw the dice.

‘Throw for me, sir,’ said the latter, and hid his face in his mother’s breast (as he had been wont to do in boyhood), till she fell on her knees, pouring forth prayers to Heaven.

Wolfe signed to the adjutant, who took up the box for Cleveley, and threw *nine*; and then—such is the selfishness of human love—a gleam of hope and imperfect joy spread over the haggard visage of the widow; while the lovers, believing that now all was over with them, clung to each other desperately and

fatuously, till they were forcibly torn asunder, and Willie Ashton was imperatively commanded to throw.

Impelled by the force of that discipline which becomes a second nature to the soldier, he advanced sternly and rigidly to the drum-head, rattled the dice-box, and threw; but stepped back, for the sound emitted by the instrument seemed as his own death-knell.

‘*Ten!*’ said the adjutant.

‘*Ten!*’ cried Lois, and rushed again into the arms of Willie; and while both fainted, the provost-marshal advanced to take possession of Cleveley, to whom his frantic mother clung with all her strength, clasping him round the knees as she lay upon the earth.

Then it was that Edward Wolfe—the father of the gallant and gentle Wolfe who fell on the Heights of Abraham—could no longer hold out—for, sooth to say, many officers and soldiers were now sobbing in the ranks, and all were deeply moved—and, raising the old woman with his own hands, he said,

‘Your son is pardoned. *You*, Ashton, however, shall be a prisoner still, but in the

custody of this pretty damsel, to whom the chaplain shall bind you for life.'

And so this episode, which might have ended so tragically—and for the final consummation of which, in a very different way, the chaplain stood by, Bible in hand—ended joyously for the four most deeply concerned in it, and to the supreme satisfaction of the Eighth or King's, who simultaneously burst into three hearty cheers. And Edward Wolfe was wont to say, he felt more genuine pleasure and true glory from this act of clemency than when he hoisted the British colours on the Castillo Grande.

The voyage towards the Antilles was a pleasant and prosperous one, though, after the tropic of Cancer was passed, those who inhabited the lower deck complained bitterly of the port-holes being closed, however high the sea might run—complaints heard by the hard-hearted quartermaster and boatswain with sublime indifference and equanimity.

On a glorious day of tropical sunshine, the transport passed among the Caycos, a cluster of islands at the tail of the Bahama bank, and

not far from San Domingo, places so sterile by perpetual want of rain, that even canes fail to grow there. Rough weather followed, when the topsails were close-reefed and lowered on the caps, and the Bannockburn shipped so many heavy head seas, that the Robert Bruce, which formed her figure-head, had both its crown and battle-axe torn away; but fine weather followed, and on a lovely evening, which Herbert Vere never forgot, the transport, under half-steam, was slowly gliding between Cuba and San Domingo, but nearer to Cape St. Nicholas, a headland of the latter. The scene was one of those that can be found in the tropics only, and when the sun, as it was then, was about setting.

Through streaks of amber vapour, that finally blended in a blaze of glory, illuminating sea and shore, the sinking sun seemed to linger at the horizon till the whole waves around the ship were changed to molten gold, while in some places the coast of San Domingo was sunk in deep and purple shadow, in others tipped with crimson fire.

‘Jamaica is right ahead now,’ said the captain; ‘but we have a run of three hundred

miles yet, ere we shall see the Blue Mountains rising from the water, and round Morant Point—this cape which you see depicted here in a photo,' he added, showing Vere an album of views and *cartes de visite*, with H.M. Bannockburn under sail, steam, at anchor, and in every imaginable way, all placed together pell-mell; and as people usually do with such volumes, Vere began, with half-listless curiosity, to turn over the pages, till one arrested and fixed his attention.

Vere, we have said, never forgot that evening; yet it arose from the very simple circumstance of a photo in the captain's album; but it was the photo of a singularly lovely girl, whose face riveted his attention and compelled his interest in some indefinable manner; for after going through the volume, he turned to look on that sweet yet haughty face again and again.

A living and speaking face—if we may use such terms of an inanimate picture—giving the conviction that it must be a good likeness; and to Vere it had—for the life of him he could not have said why—a pleasing and indefinable charm. Where had he seen that

photo before—or the original? Who was it like that he had ever seen? No one; Gertrude perhaps; but he dismissed that idea too. This girl was a dark beauty, with strongly defined eyebrows indicative of character, and with features as proud and soft and aristocratic as those of Gertrude; but more of waggery, it might be witchery, in her bright eyes, and more of humour in her soft and mobile lips, for that they were very soft and mobile Vere felt assured.

‘She is stupid-looking, and her eyes are dreamy.’

‘They are not,’ replied Vere to Desborough, who had been critically looking over his shoulder.

‘I don’t think that girl could flirt judiciously were it to save her life.’

‘She is too natural to be a coquette; but she can flirt in her way, and to perfection,’ said the captain of the transport, a jolly silver-haired old fellow.

‘Not much of a recommendation,’ said Kyrle. ‘Has she ever done so with you?’

‘With me! Why, man alive, I am her godfather, and old enough to be her real father!’ replied the sailor, laughing.

‘And who is she?’ asked Vere, looking up.

‘Virginia Bellingham, daughter of old Bellingham, the planter near Morant Bay. She is the belle of Jamaica, and one of the richest heiresses there.’

‘An heiress!’ said Toby Finch, striking in; ‘then I suppose she has no sisters.’

‘Sisters—no; and if she had, Nature could not have made another like her. She is an only child.’

‘A little dash of the tar-brush, I think; just the slightest *soupçon*,’ said Desborough detractingly.

‘Not at all,’ replied the captain testily; ‘she is a pure Creole, without one drop of dark or even Spanish blood in her—a West Indian girl of genuine and good old European parentage. It is odd what ignorant notions English folks have of what a Creole is.’

‘Look again at the photo, old fellow,’ said Kyrle, a little while after; ‘it is time that you began to live on something else than Gertrude Templeton and tobacco, and to think it treason to the absent if your pulses quicken when the drums beat for mess and the sea-breeze gives

you a relish for the viands. You are in the way of being cured, I think; and, by Jove, Virginia—what's her name?—Bellingham is a pretty girl; shouldn't object to her as a god-daughter even.'

'Could you not think of her as a wife now, Kyrle?'

'I should as soon think of sending in my papers and quitting the Eighth or King's,' said he, with one of his quiet mocking laughs.

And more would the handsome cynic have laughed had he known that Vere *did* come again and again to look at the photo in the captain's album, as it had a pleasant fascination for him, and to this, remembering the way he had been treated in Hampshire, he felt not indisposed to yield. Had he been detected by Kyrle, he would have been prepared to declare that he saw in it a likeness to Gertrude, though he had himself become assured that such was not in the slightest degree the case. To admire a beautiful face, animate or inanimate, could be no treason to that young lady who had so utterly cast him off.

'Treason!' thought he bitterly; 'what faith or fealty do I owe her?'

It was not like Gertrude—not a bit; yet in the sophistry of fancy, or superstition of the heart, he tried hard to think that it was, and would boldly have asserted to Kyrle Desborough that he thought so. Of Gertrude Templeton he did not possess a single relic to bring her image before him; nor was such necessary, as it still seemed to be, as it were, photographed on his very brain.

‘*Eureka!* Tumble up, Vere; Jamaica is in sight!’ cried Toby Finch at the poop-door about dawn one morning when he was lieutenant of the watch on deck. ‘Look alive if you wish to see

“The *Blue* Mountains glow in the sun’s golden light.”’

The welcome announcement of ‘Land ahead!’ brought all on deck betimes; and fast, with every revolution of the screw, it rose from the pale azure of the morning sea in the form of three great peaks—those of the Cold-ridge, the mighty mass of the Blue Mountains, which run across the island of Jamaica from the south-east to the north-west; and towards them every eye was turned and every glass levelled.

As the day wore on the transport was steered in an easterly direction; and gradually the mountain-peaks began to blend into one mass as she drew near and began to round Morant Point, with its iron lighthouse and all its morasses and cane-jungles; after which, as eve was closing, she hauled up for Kingston Harbour, which lies about sixty miles distant from it.

None grew weary of looking on the famous Blue Mountains, which most of those on board now beheld for the first time. In some parts they are more remarkable for beauty than boldness, particularly on the north, where they have a gentle acclivity, and are interspersed with vales, amid which the field-glasses could discover the most romantic and luxuriant scenery—groves of pimento, the deep tints of which were deliciously relieved by the verdure of the turf, seen in countless openings below. Through all these woody vales there pour a profusion of fertilising streams, that end in white cascades of foam as they fall from projecting rocks into the Caribbean Sea. Farther inland rise the greater hills, all covered with wood, peak upon peak, becoming fainter in

outline and tint, till they are blended with the light floating clouds.

Under the guidance of a coloured pilot of somewhat ferocious aspect, the transport glided past the long neck of land known as Palisades, with the sandy Keys to port; and thence between Port Royal Point and Fort Augustus, till, just as the moon rose in all its wonderful radiance, her anchors were let go, and she swung at her moorings in the magnificent harbour of Kingston, which is no less than twenty-five miles in circumference, and is one of the finest and most secure in the world. The myriad lights of the town were glittering amid its busy streets, and shedding long lines of tremulous radiance across the water; its white-walled edifices stood vividly out in the light of the gorgeous moon, with the Liguanea Mountains, about six miles distant, as a background.

The sentinels had now strict orders to keep all shore-boats and canoes at a distance from the side, as the natives are wont to come off with fruit and plantains, yams, pomegranates, and pine-apples, which are frequently green and bad, and also to preclude any chance of

'sucking the monkey,' by the purchase of cocoa-nut shells filled with coarse Jamaica rum, which is drunk from the orifice that resembles the monkey's mouth.

After the transport had been duly visited by the brigade-major and a medical officer, and reports given as to the health of all on board, preparations were immediately made for disembarkation; and by the noon of the next day, Kyrle Desborough's companies, surrounded by a capering crowd of blacks and mulattoes, mulattoes and blacks, over and over again, and of very Christy Minstrel aspect in externals, all greeting the 'new buckra sojers,' marched into those noble barracks called Up Park Camp, which are situated in the beautiful Liguanea Plain, northward of the city of Kingston; and Vere found himself surrounded by scenes and people of an entirely new description—different, at least, from any among which he had ever served before.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE LAND OF ETERNAL SUMMER.

‘ALL travel has its advantages,’ says Dr. Johnson: ‘if it lead a man to a better country, he learns to improve his own; if to a worse, to enjoy it.’ After the soreness of heart he had undergone, Vere enjoyed to the full the change of scene Jamaica afforded him—its gorgeous landscapes, its mountain vistas, and the luxuriance of its foliage and flowers; while the different occupations incident to being quartered in Up Park Camp were not without a beneficial effect upon his mind and spirits.

He did not forget his love affair with Gertrude; but he ceased to feel bitter on the subject, and could think of it without irritation or worry.

Disturbances certainly were expected among the negroes; but as yet all remained quiet. The duties were easy, and the planters

hospitable. So time passed pleasantly away. There was the morning ride as far as Spanish Town, or Santiago de la Vega, which stands in a beautiful plain, through which the railway runs to Kingston; or it might be a bath in the clear waves of the Caribbean Sea, provided there were no sharks about. There were expeditions, with Kyrle, Toby Finch, and others, to fish for eel and mullet at Ferry Moss, where they could idly whip the water with the lines while drinking iced champagne and lounging under the cool and luxuriant shadow of a silk cotton tree, that spread its stately foliage far and wide above their heads.

There were plenty of dinner invitations to the houses of wealthy planters, at whose banquets the new arrivals were always treated as old friends, welcomed amid bumpers of Madeira,—banquets never without turtle and punch; for turtle is the soul of the West Indian dinner-table, and no more to be taken without punch than roast beef without mustard. Then there would be an occasional review when the major-general commanding, or the governor, who is also captain-general, was seized with a fit of zeal; and even to those

who, like Vere, had been in India, the troops presented a fine sight as the glittering columns went past under the splendid blaze of a tropical sun, with the deep-blue sky of Jamaica overhead, flecked by fleecy clouds, and all the fair and languid Creoles of Kingston and Santiago de la Vega surveying the Europeans critically from the windows of their carriages, drawn up in lines by the saluting point. These exhibitions were generally followed by a garrison ball, or one given at the Admiral's Pen, the residence of the naval commander-in-chief, when always a good and characteristic display of Creole beauty was presented—a beauty ever 'rich in all the fascinations of tropical girliness,' as Coleridge has it; their dark hair radiant with diamonds and pearls—girls whose heart and soul were in the dance, and whom no amount of it seemed to fatigue, even when the boom of the morning gun announced that it was five o'clock, and the carriages came for those who would willingly have danced it all over again.

'If any of us have the bump of matrimony among our organs, it will be sure to be developed under a West Indian sun,' said Desbo-

rough, as he and some of the Eighth made their way back to barracks from one of those balls as the sun was rising above the ridges of Port Royal. 'If this sort of thing goes on we can't all escape—not even you, Vere.'

'Why me particularly, Kyrle?' asked the other.

'By force of habit—mere force of habit,' replied Kyrle; and then, with a waggish air, he sang:

“The heart like a tendril accustomed to cling,
Let it grow where it will, cannot flourish alone;
But will lean to the nearest and loveliest thing
It can twine with itself and make closely its own.”

'Jamaica is hot, certainly,' added Kyrle, as he turned his handsome and flushed face to the delicious morning breeze that came from the Caribbean Sea; 'but, by Jove, it is not so hot as the land of the death-blast!'

'Where is that?' asked Clive, who was a little unsteady in his gait, and around whom the barrack-square seemed to be revolving in a circle.

'In Bundelcund, where Vere and I have been.'

‘Then it’s a hot place?’

‘Hot! I should think so! “Like being on a sand-heap under a burning-glass,” as somebody says in *David Copperfield*.’

When not in uniform, Vere and his friends seemed to have left Regent Street in reality far behind them; and even the smartest young officers were glad to wear the standard suit of white, which is light, cool, and adapted to those regions of eternal summer; and, moreover, they were compelled to endure philosophically the bites of mosquitoes and sand-flies.

But Vere and his brother-officers soon began to find that this life in Jamaica was not to be all *couleur de rose*; for on all hands nothing was now spoken of but the expected rising of the Maroons and other negroes; and ere the spring of the year was over, the whole colony resembled, as Professor Tyndall phrased it, ‘the dried grass of a prairie, ready to be set on fire from beginning to end by a spark of successful insurrection,’ and, moreover, seemed on the eve of becoming another Hayti; for there were only 13,000 whites in the island against 450,000 negroes.

The causes of the local discontent are foreign to our story; suffice it to say that, with the terrible experience of the Indian Mutiny fresh in the minds of all, a sure knowledge of the savage nature of the West Indian negroes and mulattoes, and the reports that were now heard on all hands were sufficiently alarming, seditious meetings for a general revolt being held in all directions under the auspices of men—dark alike by nature and colour—named Gordon, Paul Bogle, and an active young fellow of colour named Manuel Moreno, of Spanish descent, who had already been involved in many desperate outrages, brawls, and quarrels, and of whom more anon.

‘Since emancipation,’ says a writer on this subject, ‘the negro, so far as he himself is concerned, has permitted his offspring to grow up neglected in mind, neglected in body, neglected as to education and religion, neglected as to all moral principles and treatment—neglected in everything, in fact, and wilfully given up to moral and spiritual ruin and destruction. The transition from slavery to unlimited freedom was too sudden. Experi-

ence was not wanting in so momentous a matter; and hence the great experiment, on which the whole world looked with expectant gaze, has proved a failure, involving alike in its ruin planter and peasant, European and Creole.'

The demagogues we have named, and others, called upon all men of African descent to unite themselves into societies for mutual defence. Illegal drillings were reported to be going on all over the island, under the immediate control of the most daring agitators; negroes were being enlisted and sworn, officers over them elected—captains of fifty men each; arms and ammunition were being procured and concealed; and negotiations were made with an officer of the Confederate navy to land these, with other stores, at Black River. And thus originated those troubles with which the unfortunate Governor Eyre had to contend.

According to the parliamentary Bluebooks, one of the rebel leaders is said to have stated in August 1865 that he 'could swear that in less than five years there would not be a white man in Jamaica; that the black men would

not hurt the white ladies, but have them as their wives, and just do with them as they did in Hayti ;' adding, that instead of destroying the whites in detail, 'the better way would be for them (the blacks) to agree throughout the island, and in one night massacre them; that the blacks should go to each estate in parties and murder them all.'

This state of matters, which developed itself fast, caused a considerable increase of military duty, much alertness, and no small anxiety in the minds of all in command, as it was evident that a crisis was coming and shots would soon be exchanged.

In this wretched West Indian broil or civil war there would be hardships to be undergone, peril and massacre to be faced, together with cruel torture and wounds; but no such glory could be won as in combating European troops. Do what one might, no medal, clasp, or ribbon would be given for conquest or victory over desperate and miserable negroes, however brave and reckless they might be; and so far as interest in the heart of Gertrude was concerned, Vere regretted this contingency of colonial service.

Apart from the circumstance of being safely landed at the end of a pleasant voyage, he at first had felt a growing sense of satisfaction, and looked forward with sincere pleasure to garrison duty in Jamaica, where the grandeur, sublimity, and teeming fertility of the scenery exceeded all he had ever seen, save when serving on the lower slopes of the Himalayas.

As yet no outbreak had taken place, and Vere and his friends rode, fished, and shot as usual whenever they had permission to do so; but once, having ridden further than he was wont to do alone, he had a rencontre which was not without interest at such a time.

From Hunt's Bay he had one day ridden for several miles into the country alone and unattended, till he found himself under the shadow of the steep hills that look down on the Rio Pedro, and then discovered that he had lost his way—a discovery which was the more annoying that he was in plain clothes, and consequently quite unarmed; and of that fact he had been uncomfortably reminded, by the saucy bearing of several negroes whom he had passed upon the road.

They were all on their way to Kingston,

apparently carrying on their woolly heads great baskets of fruit and vegetables to sell in the market. The monotonous singing with which they cheered each other, the laughter and the clatter of their tongues, died away, as Vere passed them, and their black eyes gleamed with malevolence and hate as they surveyed the 'buckra man,' lolled out their red tongues at him, and pursued him with strong invectives and epithets as long as he was within hearing.

Lest he might be provoked to use his whip, he had no desire to meet these fellows again, or to overtake them; so, prior to returning, as the afternoon was one of intense heat, he gladly dismounted at a little wayside hotel, kept by a fat old negress named, as the sign-board informed all passers, Miss Sabina Snowball, who grinned fearfully as she welcomed him, and called him 'an 'andsome tight buckra,' as she ushered him into a cool apartment on the ground-floor, where the windows, partly shaded by green jalousies, opened to a shady verandah, beyond which was seen a stately but natural avenue of cabbage trees stretching away towards the Rio Pedro.

A young man of colour, who was seated at the table smoking, and drinking weak rum-and-water, on seeing Vere enter, rose politely, bowed, offered him a chair, and then his open cigar-case, from which Vere selected a fine havanna, thanked him and proffered his own, and then some of the usual commonplaces on the heat of the day and so forth passed, while Vere ordered a bottle of Moselle; but Miss Sabina could only produce some tolerable Madeira, in which he asked his new acquaintance to join him, and the latter frankly did so.

He was rather handsome, both in face and figure, with a brown complexion that was remarkably pure and clear, with a certain amount of rose tint in each cheek. His hair and moustache were jetty black. His eyes had long and silky lashes that a belle might have envied; but these failed to soften their wild devil-may-care and occasionally snake-like expression, while the lines about his mouth, when not concealed by his moustache, were hard and indicative of severity.

The darkness of his complexion was increased by his white dress, and by the shadow

cast over his face by a broad straw hat. A diamond glittered on the little finger of his right hand, and he had large ruby studs in the breast of his shirt. That he was a young man of colour, athletic in person, and, as we have said, handsome, were perfectly apparent; that he was dissipated was apparent too, and also that he was prepared for any mischief incident to the time, as he had a double-barrelled rifle lying on the table, while the outline of a revolver was distinctly visible in the inner breast-pocket of his white-linen jacket.

As such weapons are not usually worn or used by British subjects in these isles, it attracted the attention of Vere, and led him to examine closely his new companion.

‘You travel well armed,’ said he.

‘So much discontent is about just now that one requires to be prepared,’ replied the other, smiling.

After a pause, he said,

‘I am sure that I have the pleasure of addressing one of the Queen’s officers?’

‘I belong to the garrison at Up Park.’

‘Been long in Jamaica?’

‘A few weeks only.’

‘I trust you like it, for we are somewhat vain of our island?’

‘Oh, exceedingly, the people are as delightful as the climate; but unpleasant scenes are likely to be cut out for us, for all that.’

‘By whom?’ asked the young man abruptly.

‘Manuel Moreno and other discontented rascals.’

‘You have just arrived?’ said the stranger, frowning.

‘A few weeks ago, I said.’

‘With your whole regiment?’

‘No, three companies only. We were despatched here, oddly enough, in a hurry—some two hundred and fifty bayonets or so.’

‘No more?’

‘Except some artillery—a half battery.’

‘Ah, the Captain-general expects a row, then?’

‘Evidently, with Gordon, Bogle, Moreno, and that lot. The latter is, I hear, an outlaw already.’

‘I have the misfortune to know him but too well,’ remarked the man of colour bitterly,

while a kind of gleam passed over his dusky eyes.

‘Indeed! Is he as great a rascal as the public prints make out?’

‘That time may show; at present Moreno, who is supposed to be concealed in Hispaniola, is just what circumstances have made him.’

‘The Madeira stands with you; fill your glass again,’ said Vere.

‘Thanks, sir. But from all I know of Manuel Moreno, if he joins in any insurrection among the blacks, it will not be because he sympathises with their colour or their cause.’

‘For what, then?’

‘Revenge upon some of his own people, a revenge which is withheld him so long as the Queen’s laws are in force. If blows are struck, that he will prove troublesome to the authorities I know well—for I have known Manuel from his infancy—and that he is not likely to stick at trifles when his hand is in.’

Manuel Moreno, he proceeded to tell Vere, was early left an orphan to the care of his uncle, a wealthy planter in the Surrey district of Jamaica, and in boyhood proved a wild and unmanageable fellow, that made him alike the

bane and favourite of the household ; but he was the peculiar pet of all the negroes on the estate, not only because he was the son of a coloured man of old Spanish descent and of Maroon blood (for the Maroons were the original slaves of the Spaniards), but also because he was by nature open, joyous, inspired by reckless courage and a propensity for fun that bordered on mischief—some averred, even on crime ; and in this wild spirit he one day, after having a quarrel with the old planter, galloped off with the horse of a gentleman visitor, an animal of great value, and selling it for a good round sum at Puerto Maria, on the other side of the island, resolved to enjoy himself with the proceeds, together with the contents of a saddle-bag, which he speedily converted into cash.

Manuel had now gone too far to make any attempt to conciliate his uncle, or hope to regain his favour, nor did he attempt to do so ; and having made the acquaintance of one of those girls of that class peculiar to the West Indies, who are too proud of having some European blood in their veins to ally themselves with a mulatto, and yet whom no pure Euro-

pean will marry, he became besotted by her beauty, and thought of home no more—at least while his money lasted.

These girls are born of white fathers and Mustee women, and are almost European in their fairness of complexion.

They are usually brunettes, with soft pretty features, beautiful eyes, and elegant forms, with exquisite long black hair. The love of Manuel Moreno possessed all these in perfection, but she had neither their affection nor constancy; for ere he could marry her—and the infatuated lad would have done so—his money was nearly spent, and with the little that was left she made her escape from Puerto Maria, and, leaving him to shift for himself, was seen no more—by Moreno at least.

That spark of devilry which lurks in every man's breast now blazed into a flame in the heart of Manuel Moreno, and could he have laid hands on his deceiver, in his jealous fury and resentment he would have acted some terrible tragedy; but luckily she eluded him, and when the spell in which she had held him was broken he became sensible of the follies and crime he had committed, with the

necessity for obtaining relief lest he should starve.

He resolved now to cast himself on the clemency of this uncle whom he had outraged, and after travelling afoot some sixty miles reached the estate amid the mountains of the Surrey district, and was welcomed with open arms by his old friends the negroes.

His uncle was absent in Kingston, where he remained for several days; but in his place there reigned at home one of whom Manuel had often heard, but barely seen in her childhood—his uncle's only daughter, a girl of great beauty, and verging on the bloom of womanhood, who had just returned to Jamaica, after having spent some years in an educational establishment at the West End of London.

Ignorant of much that Manuel had been guilty of, this handsome cousin received him as a returned prodigal, with much kindness—even tenderness—for was not he the son of her aunt, though that relation had lost caste by marrying a man of colour? and she could not fail to see, even amid his rags and misery, that the lad was the possessor of great personal attractions, with a very winning manner. But

this emotion went no further, for she was highly educated and brilliantly accomplished, while he was simply a wild and uncultured colt.

‘Personal attractions most girls possess to a sufficient degree to render them attractive to somebody,’ says a writer; ‘for though there are standards and models of beauty, yet these do not prevail with all persons, and there is something wonderful in the difference of aspect which the same face wears to different beholders.’

But by all, and under all aspects, the rare beauty of Manuel’s cousin was undeniable; and now he—sore and soured by his recent cruel desertion, dazzled by her loveliness, soothed by her sisterly kindness and protection, and lured by the whole situation—ere a week had passed was madly in love with her, all the more so that she only laughed at the whole affair, though grieved by the angry course matters took on her father’s return.

‘Manuel Moreno,’ said he sternly, ‘you are my dead sister’s only son, and, more than all, you are the only one of our race who ever brought shame, for crime, upon us; but

doubtless that comes of your Maroon blood—the curse of Heaven upon it!’

At this taunt, which was rather a cruel one, the young man trembled and grew deadly pale, for he was aware that pride in his pure European blood, and in his unbroken descent from a Colonel Bellingham, who came in 1655 with the first English conquerors and settlers under Admirals Penn and Venables, was the ruling passion and unceasing boast of the speaker.

‘I came hither, uncle, to ask your pardon, and to seek for food, as I was literally starving,’ urged Manuel piteously. ‘Speak for me, my sweet cousin.’

‘She shall not, nor would it avail you,’ exclaimed the other furiously, as he detected an expression in his nephew’s eyes there could be no mistaking. ‘A warrant is out against you for horse-stealing and robbery, and your Maroon instincts are no palliation for these, as you shall find when in the hands of justice—and to justice I shall certainly deliver you if I find you linger within the boundaries of my estate another day. I will give you money to leave the island. Go when you will and

whither you will; all I insist is that you go quickly.'

The old man gave him a few pounds, but was otherwise inexorable; he shut the door in his face, threatening him with his own personal power and authority as a Justice of the Peace; but Manuel, unknown to him, lingered for many days on the plantation, living in secret among the negroes. He was compelled eventually, without again seeing his cousin, to take the steamer, disguised as a perfect mulatto, for Hispaniola, where he had since, no doubt, had correspondence with Bogle, Gordon, and others who were supposed to be developing an insurrection among the men of colour, on the plea that rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.

'The fellow will certainly be hanged,' said Vere, as the stranger's horse was announced; and they both mounted to proceed in opposite directions.

'I trust not,' said the other, laughing, as he slung his double-barrelled rifle behind him.

'Why?'

'For this very sufficient reason, sir, that

I am Manuel Moreno, and have now the pleasure of wishing you good-evening.'

And with a reckless laugh he put spurs to his horse and galloped off in the direction of the Rio Grande, leaving Vere looking after him, with considerable doubts in his mind.

If this young fellow was actually the desperado Manuel Moreno, the thief, outlaw, and conspirator, how dared he go about so openly, and whence, unless he had some secret means of support, came his horse and arms, his accurate costume and jewelry? Perhaps his pretty cousin or his negro friends supplied him in secret.

'Any way,' thought Vere, as he gathered up his reins from the hand of the negro ostler, 'if he is actually Manuel Moreno, I have allowed him to pick some information that I should have withheld. Hah! this may throw some light upon the subject,' added Vere aloud, as his eye fell upon a pocket-book which his late companion had dropped on the road. 'Here, Sambo, Quashy, or whatever your name is, hand me up that,' he cried, holding forth a half-crown to the ostler, who reluctantly and sullenly handed him the article in ques-

tion; and as he rode off grinned savagely, and muttered to another negro,

‘De buckras hab de guns, but we hab de negro mascheat and fire-stick, and all de power ob de Obeah man—yaas, yaas!’

The contents of the morocco pocket-book proved beyond a doubt that its owner *was* Manuel Moreno the outlaw.

There were notes of night meetings for secret drill in various quarters; names of negroes enrolled as volunteers, particularly in St. Thomas in the East; a copy of a proclamation about to be issued to the negroes generally, calling on them to shake off their sloth, to rise against a jesuitical priesthood who sought to deceive them, and against a government that was taxing them to death, more especially denouncing ‘an unscrupulous and oppressive foreigner, Mr. Custos Ketelhodt,’ of whom Vere knew nothing, save that he was an active magistrate; and calling upon them to remember that they were no longer slaves, but free men; to rise in arms against Governor Eyre and his band of custodes; and promising the women of the island to be the wives and slaves of all negroes who served the

cause of Jamaica, which was yet fated to rival the free black island of Hispaniola.

Among other things in a pocket of the book he found the photo of a beautiful girl—a photo quite familiar to him, for it was a copy of the same he had seen and frequently admired in the album of the captain of the transport—that of Miss Bellingham, whom he averred to be the belle of Jamaica.

While Vere regarded it with equal interest and pleasure, he thought with astonishment, Was this girl the beautiful cousin of Moreno's story—her father the unforgiving uncle?

The portrait he resolved to keep, but the other contents of the book he should at once forward to the authorities; and lest the owner thereof might discover his loss, and returning, demand their restitution by force of arms, Vere, who was quite defenceless, put spurs to his horse and departed at a flying gallop along the road to Up Park Camp.

'Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God!' was a sentence that often occurred among the papers of Moreno, an aphorism evidently taken from the inscription on the old cannon near which the ashes of President John Brad-

shaw were placed on the summit of a high hill near Martha-Brae, a small town on the north side of the island, and which (according to Randall's *Life of Jefferson*) is supposed to be one of Dr. Franklin's spirit-stirring inspirations.

Vere had continued to look from time to time so admiringly on the photo found in the pocket-book that it was not until he was nearing the barrack-gates that he discovered something written on the back of it, and in the bold clear hand of Moreno.

It was a vow conceived in savage, ferocious, and blasphemous terms—a vow which he called upon Heaven to hear and register—that in the strife to come he would win the original for his wife, and put to death without mercy all who came between them, even her father, if again he dared to stand in the way.

Vere and his comrades were in the land of eternal summer certainly; yet unpleasant work seemed likely to be cut out for them in it. But what had they come for if not to serve the Queen and do their duty as her soldiers?

CHAPTER XVII.

ON DETACHMENT.

THAT evening Vere found himself and Finch in garrison and regimental orders detailed for duty, with a detachment of fifty, to a place in the neighbourhood of Morant Bay, where a serious outbreak was confidently expected, as the Custos, Baron Ketelhodt—the same official whose name appeared among the treasonable papers of Moreno—had reported to the governor of the island.

Detachment duty is never very lively at any time, and in the present instance Vere especially disliked separation from the mess and the society of his brother-officers, and that of Kingston generally; but the dawn of the following day saw him parading his men, under the eye of the adjutant, previous to departure, while Desborough and some others came forth to see him off.

‘Now, old fellow, for glory at last!’ said Kyrle, laughing, as they shook hands.

‘Danger rather, and no place in Westminster Abbey.’

‘But perhaps in that other temple of fame.’

‘Where?’

‘In Baker Street—the Tussaud Valhalla.’

Quitting Kingston by the eastern road, after passing Rock Fort on his right flank, he struck into the highway which leads round the base of the Long Mountain towards Morant. The morning air and the breeze from the sea were delightful, but after the sun rose up in his glory the day became one of intense heat, and his heavily-accoutred soldiers, among whom he and Finch distributed all their cigars, so far as they would go, began to fag and tread slowly.

It was a breathless day,

‘When, with the sun’s excess, earth seemed to swoon ;’

and Vere could not help thinking that if attacked by the negroes, while such was the state of the thermometer, at what sore disadvantage they would be. No current of air

stirred the foliage of the trees, and the fierce Caribbean sun poured down a flood of yellow light—a scorching glare, beneath which all Nature seemed to shrivel and quiver.

Masses of insect life buzzed and teemed amid the leaves and greenery by the wayside, brought into existence for a few brief hours by that unnatural heat, an existence that would end with sunset; and while sighing for iced drinks or bitter beer, Toby Finch was exclaiming for the thousandth time since he had landed, ‘By Jove, it *is* warm—*another* scorching day!’ when Vere, ere they had yet passed the base of the mountain, halted his party in a grove of mango-trees.

These are always stately in form, noble in dimension, and grow almost everywhere in Jamaica. Towering and compact, with a conical head of foliage dense and dark, through which no ray of the sun can penetrate, the shadow of this grove proved grateful and pleasing to the thirsty and sunbaked Britons; all the more so that there flowed through it towards the Cane River a cool little streamlet, amid the water of which some wild lilies were floating.

On this march Vere observed that the negroes at work in the fields did not, as usual, come hurrying forward to see or welcome, with broad grins and merriment, 'the buckra soldiers,' but eyed them in sullen silence; and more than once he was certain that this march was watched, but for what purpose it was difficult to determine, as more than once, at different parts of the road, he saw the face of a negro peering at him, between those fences which divide fields in Jamaica, and are so singularly beautiful, as they are woven up with great wild flowers that never lose their bloom.

To Vere's unaccustomed eye all negroes, with their black glossy skins and woolly heads, seemed pretty much alike; yet he had an uncomfortable idea that the steps of his party were dogged by one in particular. But as nothing came of it then he soon forgot all about it, though he discovered ere long that the march of his detachment, its strength, and destination, were known previously at every negro village, hamlet, and plantation he passed through.

The generally hostile aspect of the black

population convinced Vere that ere long the machinations of Gordon, Moreno, and Bogle would have their effect, and he would be face to face with a sable enemy; but he could not anticipate how much and how keenly his interest would be involved in these coming events—events that were yet to make a noise, not only over all the Antilles, but at home in the British Isles. And the negroes, usually so studiously polite, had totally ceased to say, ‘Huddie, massa buckra?’ or ‘Gar-a’mighty bless you!’ at meeting and parting, meaning, ‘How do you do, white master?’ and ‘God Almighty bless you!’ but they could loll out their red tongues and be saucy enough.

By a route mostly within sight of the sea on their left flank, past several salt-ponds, and after crossing the White and Morant Rivers, Vere’s party reached the town of Morant Bay, in the district of St. Thomas in the East, after three days’ marches, though it could have been done in less.

The town had the usual appearance of a West Indian one; the houses, built chiefly of wood, were roofed with shingles, not tiles, and were painted white, with green venetian

blinds, all suggestive that they would burn well if set in flames, as the negroes were threatening should be the case. The next peculiarity of West Indian houses is that they are nearly incapable of affording any species of privacy to the occupants, as the apartments all open into each other, and are so laid out that a stranger on entering—after rattling with his knuckles or umbrella handle, as bells are uncommon—may have a panoramic view of every one, from the lady in her drawing-room to the sable cook in the kitchen; a style of construction adopted for the free circulation of air, and incident also to those days when a watchful eye was necessary over the slaves of the household.

As Vere marched in, with bayonets fixed, and a single drummer and fifer making all the music they might, the idlers in the streets gathered from every point, and presented the usual shades of visage peculiar to these localities, from the pure pallor of the albino to the deep sable of the Mandingo; while, on the other hand, his soldiers, by their still fresh complexions, showed that they were 'Johnny Newcomes,' and fresh from England.

By the whites and people of colour they were greeted with warm welcome, by the negroes in ominous silence, as they were halted in front of the Court-house. Having duly reported his arrival to the ill-fated Baron Von Ketelhodt, Vere saw his men told off to their billets, after fixing upon a place of muster and parade (most necessary in case of any sudden alarm); and then he and Toby Finch took up their quarters in an hotel, and settled for the evening in a large and airy room, the windows of which opened on one side to the broad waters of Morant Bay, where many a gliding sail was visible on the blue expanse; and on the other side to fine plantations and groves of trees, terminated by the eastern peaks of the Blue Mountains, whose solemn and magnificent ranges present generally a scene of grand desolation, towering cliffs, abrupt precipices, and dark woody gorges—a very chaos of creation, as they have been left doubtless by some mighty convulsion or throes of Nature.

Toby Finch was busy looking in this direction through his double-barrelled field-glass; *not* at the famous Blue Mountains, but some

groups of handsome coloured girls, taking their evening walk under one of the lofty cabbage - tree avenues so common in the vicinity of West Indian towns; and as all these girls—like their fairer sisters elsewhere—are extremely fond of dress, their toilettes are often made with equal taste and extravagance.

Few of them wore bonnets, but many had a kind of turban twisted gracefully round the head; their dresses of white silk or muslin girt with a brilliantly-coloured ribbon, and their pretty ankles having sandals tied over stockings of spotless white silk; and, despite the more than Italian darkness of their complexions, these, with their languishing eyes, were enough to excite even the admiration of Toby Finch and his senior officer too.

The former resolved to lose no time in having himself introduced somehow to at least a couple of these fair promenaders; and this he very soon achieved, for Toby was equal to any occasion. But Vere, who was less frivolous, and had, moreover, several detachment orders to write, remained with his cigar at the window, indulging in his own thoughts

amid that drowsiness and languor which were the effect of the climate, while Toby enjoyed his flirtation amid the cabbage trees, where the sea-breeze cooled the moonlit atmosphere, and the red fire-flies began to flit to and fro.

Whatever Toby was 'up to,' his brother-officer—save upon parade—did not see much of him for some time after this; but sooth to say Vere found occupation in another quarter, and had his hours pretty well occupied too.

A day or so after their arrival, finding himself alone, Vere resolved to explore the scenery of the district; and putting a carefully-loaded revolver in his pocket, in case of accidents—for the time was one of peril—he set forth for an evening ramble, and, turning his back on the town and sea, struck into a path that led towards the hills.

Though the day did not pass without an adventure, it was more a pleasing than a perilous one, and Vere went, as we have said, armed; it was not because he had any actual fear of instant danger. A 'row' was brewing, but its time seemed remote; and although there had been a revolt in India terrible beyond all parallel, Vere could not realise the

idea that the dangerous conspiracy among the Jamaica blacks was so widely spread, and that it had been gathering to a head for three years, and for the three months preceding his arrival had been conducted with a secrecy so skilful that its ramifications and strength were unknown to, though suspected by, the government.

Its real object was the establishment of a black commonwealth, and 'its means,' says a writer, 'the murder, not only of all the white males, but of all the males of mixed blood, and the negro appropriation of their women, lands, and personal property. This would have proved, had it been successful, a revolution of more sweeping cruelty than that at Hayti, which spared the people of colour. The only ground assigned for the conspiracy was over-taxation; but as the taxes of Jamaica consist chiefly of import duties—heaviest on luxuries—of which the negroes, from their position, cannot be consumers, the assignment of that cause was transparently without shadow of foundation.'

Gordon and Bogle, though men of some position, and having both Scottish names,

were men of negro blood; but their tool Moreno was a man of colour, and was doubtless doomed to perish with the rest, as perhaps we may show in time.

END OF VOL. I.

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