

CHAPTER XII.

SCARCELY had Herbert arrived in London ere he received a note from the Baroness, requesting him to go down to Beau-Regard, where he no sooner made his appearance, than, to his great surprise, she at once entered upon the subject of Miss Manby, and communicated all she knew, interspersing her detail with her usual droll remarks, though she rather artfully omitted to mention the resolution Emily had avowed of refusing to assent to any proposal until the return of Sir Herbert. Added to this, Madame de Geigenklang drew a lively picture of the anxiety Alfred had expressed that his cousin's wishes might be happily realized, and of the assurance he had given of using his utmost endeavours to assist him, by every means in his power, in obtaining his uncle's consent, which he thought, upon proper representation, would be a matter of the greatest facility. Upon Herbert's expressing his surprise that his cousin, as well as the Baroness herself, should have discovered his attachment for Emily, Madame de Geigenklang told him that she had found it out long before he left England, and that probably Alfred had not been many weeks before he observed the same thing, but from motives of delicacy had most probably abstained from taking any notice of the subject, naturally expecting that if Herbert had any desire to make Alfred his confidant, the former would have seized an early opportunity of opening his heart to him.

The Baroness then wound up her peroration by launching forth in Alfred's praise—who, to use the proper term, had completely "surprised her religion"—and by then making Herbert sing through three or four of Rossini's newest operas. In short, it was late ere he arrived in London, where he was engaged to dine with an old school-fellow, celebrated for his cook, and who had invited Herbert to meet a party of young men, members of White's, where it was intended the whole party should adjourn after

dinner to ballot for their host, who was an anxious candidate for a seat in the Bay Window. During his ride to London, Herbert reproached himself with having withheld his confidence from his cousin. Instead of any suspicions of Alfred's sincerity being awakened by what he had heard, his relation's conduct appeared still more delicate and amiable from his abstaining to make any allusions to the subject, without being in some measure authorized by himself. It was now, however, too late to discuss the question ere he accompanied his mother to Milton, their departure being fixed for the following morning. But Herbert resolved to take advantage of his cousin's arrival in the country, where he was to join them in a few days, to confide the whole business to him; and resolved to be guided, in a great measure, by his advice, both as to his present and future conduct.

In the mean time, Herbert made up his mind to sound Lady Milton and to communicate to her his attachment for Emily, for which an admirable opportunity would occur during their long drive to Milton Park. On his part, Alfred showed an equal determination to avoid every allusion to Miss Manby, unless an opening was fairly given, or his opinion solicited by his cousin. Indeed, had not Herbert been so positively informed by the Baroness of the discovery Alfred had made, it never would have entered his head that his cousin entertained the most distant suspicion of the real state of his feelings.

Alfred carried his tenacity so far, that he not only abstained from alluding in the slightest degree to the name of Emily, but he mentioned those of several other persons, who he told Herbert were prepared to open the fire of their batteries upon him, immediately upon his appearance next season. As they drove to dinner, Alfred mentioned, among others, the names of two or three ladies who had already consulted him on their chance of success, not directly, but by those artful means which well practised mothers in London know so well how to employ.

"There's Lady Dossington," said Alfred, "drilling her young ladies to fall upon you by platoons, Berty! and Lady Susan is to lead—"

"The forlorn hope," answered Herbert, interrupting him.

"But she intends you to surrender by capitulation," rejoined Alfred, "to save the effusion—"

"Not of her daughter's blushes, certainly!" again interposed Herbert. "Come," continued he, "for God's sake! do not talk to me longer about any thing half so disagreeable. I used to pay dearly enough for my Almack's tickets, by being now and then obliged to dance with the girls; but I must beg, in future, to retire from her list. I hate girls who are brought up as they are, and who put on two faces—one for their mamma and papa, and the other for their partner; for they are no longer the same persons when abstracted from the side of the old woman. I detest that kind of deceit."

"Well, then," rejoined Alfred, "there are the Miss Brambles. By-the-by, I heard from the mamma, that you have been in constant correspondence with her during your absence; that looks like business, Berty?"

"She constantly plagued me to death with her letters," replied Herbert, "and I could not shake her off."

"How did you become so intimate?"

"Why the best is," rejoined the other, "I never saw her thrice in my life! The first time I ever met her was on board the packet between Dublin and Holyhead, when she introduced herself as a great friend of my mother's, and she said she knew her intimately."

"She dropped her glove once at a party," replied Alfred, "I naturally picked it up, and she then immediately struck up an acquaintance, and in three days after wrote to me to get her tickets for Almack's."

"Well, then," said Colonel Milton, "she afterwards introduced me to her daughters, who were really very fine young women."

"Who hunt for husbands as dogs hunt for truffles!" exclaimed Alfred.

"Not under ground surely?" rejoined his cousin.

"No; but with the usual hope of their not long remaining above it; but where was the *padre* in the mean time?" demanded Alfred.

"Oh! his turn came last," responded Herbert, "he

being then occupied in boring the unfortunate captain with his endless questions. He is a perfect walking catechism!"

"Worse still! He is the drum to his own fife; the echo to his own noise; a composition of the scum and dregs, the roots and remnants, the top and bottom crusts of all the jokes he picks up at White's or Brooks's, or those he gleans from the Jester's Vade-Mecum, which he reads every day for an hour or two before dinner."

"As, I remember," replied Herbert, "was the case with an old French ensign, who studied the '*Almanach des Gourmands*,' and used to occupy himself with writing out the *menu* for the most exquisite dinners, till at last his mind was so impressed with the phantoms of the dishes he had been studying, that in fact he every day mistook his *soup-maigre* and dish of *caravansas*, for a part of the *plats* which he had ordered in his imagination."

"But how came she to write to you?" again demanded Alfred.

"Why," replied Herbert, "I am almost at a loss to remember, but I think she commenced by requesting me to procure her some very scarce music, which, by-the-by, she might have bought for half-a-crown at Boosey's. I sent her what she wanted, and since that time she has cost me a fortune in postage."

"That is what she calls keeping up a connexion," observed Alfred; "I know half-a-dozen men who either have, or will have fortunes, with whom she endeavours in the same way to maintain a correspondence."

"Oh, I am aware of that," was Herbert's reply; "Sidney told me she had regularly hunted him two seasons, till at last, to use his own words, he shyed, and refused his fence!"

"I'll lay any wager," said Alfred, "that she writes to your mother, offering to take Milton Park on her way to the north, east, or south, since all points of the compass are equally convenient when she wishes to saddle herself upon her friends, whose houses, of course, are immediately situated close to the road she pretends to be travelling; and then, if once she sets her foot in your house, nothing

will dislodge her until you declare there is not a single man left in the county."

"Nor then even,—so I have heard," added Herbert, "unless you pretend that your cook is ill and your claret exhausted."

"True, though even that will not do," retorted Alfred, "since old Bramble will then say, that he can manage very well for two or three days with port and a joint, until your cook and your cellar are recovered and replenished."

The dialogue between the young men was now interrupted by their arrival at the house of their host, situated in one of the most fashionable streets in the vicinity of Berkeley-square. This gentleman, Mr. Samuel Silvertone, or Sham Silvertone, as he was familiarly called by his friends, was one of that smart race of young men who have only sprung into ostensible existence within the last few years, before which period they had not attempted to gain a footing in the aristocratic vicinity of the squares, being then content with showing themselves on a Sunday, and passing the rest of the week within the circle of the city walls. Sam was a junior partner in a banking-house,—one of those amphibious creatures who, after passing their days in the East, amidst bills, brokers, smoke, and discounts, generally make their appearance about half-past five among the belles, beaux, dust, and splendour of the West. Here they arrive in semi-military costume of young Guardsmen, and are more conspicuous even than those gentlemen for the smartness of their cabriolets, the fine action of their horses, and the stiffness of their own;—not to forget the quantity of under-waistcoats, the length of their spurs, and the apparently painful tightness of their black stocks. Sam yielded in nothing to his brotherhood; the splendour of whose small houses,—of course west of Bond and south of Oxford-street,—the excellence of whose cooks, and the merit and variety of whose cellars, render them so great an acquisition to the fashionable part of the metropolis. To judge by their opera-boxes; their hunters, at Croydon or Salt-hill; their purchasing all the buhl, marqueterie, and carving at Baldock's; all the Dresden, Sevres, and enamels at Jarman's; all the or-moulu and bronzes at Fogg's; their bidding for all the best pictures at Christie's.

and all the rare books at Evans's ;—one has sufficient proof that theirs is the only career in which a man has any chance of enjoying the good things of this world, ere he is too old for any thing but Bath waters or Malvern air.

Sam was so far advanced in the science of fashionable accomplishment, as to make it a point to be always too late to receive visitors at his own house, and never in time when he dined out, unless, indeed, it chanced to be with some wealthy old hunks, whose dividends he was anxious to see figure in his own ledger. When the cousins arrived, he was not, of course, apparently ready ; though in fact he had been dressed for some time when their carriage drew up at the door, and had retired from his drawing-room, where he had been occupied in making a little confusion, and preparing a few books and maps in his library for inspection, as if, in fact, he had himself been occupied in reading until the last moment. Herbert had therefore plenty of time to examine the abode of his old schoolfellow, who, at the period of the departure of the former, had not yet exchanged the humble form of an eastern chrysalis for the gay colours of a western butterfly. Colonel Milton had often dined with his friend when on duty at the Tower, which was contiguous to Sam's house in Cucumber lane; yet the latter rarely ventured to invite young men of fashion thither, as they all declared they could not go there without post-horses :—in fact, a great commotion was once created in his vicinity by two or three young men arriving at his house to dinner in a post-chaise-and-four, which was supposed by the speculators to be an express from abroad; the consequence was, that there were several bargains done in the funds upon the strength of the reports which were said to have been brought by them, and poor Sam had some difficulty to preserve himself from the imputation of an intended hoax on the money-market.

Silverton's present abode was a charming two windowed small house, well adapted for a bachelor, but fitted up with a degree of massy splendour better suited to a baronial castle. The first thing which struck the attention of Herbert was the vestibule, which, being about eight feet square, was converted into a sort of Gothic hall, the walls being grained and painted in imitation of oaken pannels, against

which, in lieu of the usual conveniences for suspending hats, great-coats, and umbrellas, there glittered half-a-dozen helmets, as many cuirasses, and a collection of swords and daggers ; while four or five high-backed Gothic chairs stood against the sides, with all the uncomfortable formality of the days of King Clovis. The door which led to the interior was of painted glass, on which the arms of the Silvertons, their crest, motto, and achievements, were emblazoned, multiplied, turned, twisted, and repeated in fifty different ingenious methods. The shields which filled the angles, as well as the mullions and rosettes which crowned the architraves and cornices, were also emblazoned with the same proofs of hereditary virtue. The staircase, at the foot of which stood a very highly carved antique table, slabbed with marble, and supporting an immense buhl clock, was also painted and pannelled to correspond with the hall. Each landing-place was decorated with a profusion of fine specimens of Gibbon's inimitable serving, either forming garlands round a small collection of ancient daggers and pistols, or serving as frames to three pictures, destined to represent an equal number of Sam's ancestors : there being only two unfortunate circumstances in opposition to this conclusion ; the one, from its being well known that Sam's father was the founder of his family, and the other from Sam himself having been seen in the act of bartering for these pictures with a broker near Soho, who wished to pass them off as the portraits of a Flemish burgomaster, his wife and son, *d'apres Vandyck*. The drawing-room, near the door of which stood a handsome marble pedestal, supporting a colossal bust of Napoleon, was somewhat more modern, but still intended to give an idea of a saloon in the luxurious age of Louis XIV. The walls were divided by gold figured mouldings into compartments of rose-coloured silk, representing various subjects from the *Tales of Boccaccio*, and were said to have once adorned the *boudoir* of the regent Orleans. The ceiling was decorated with a profusion of rich plaster mouldings of fruits and flowers, which in a room twenty times the size might have had a very happy effect ; but here they overpowered the apartment, and appeared to menace the pericraniums of the visitors. The curtains,

and covers of the chairs, ottomans, and *fauteuils* were of the same costly material as the hangings, but of sky blue and silver, ornamented with figures of birds and flowers, of the most delicate workmanship and brilliant colours. The framework of the different-shaped chairs was of white and gold, and appeared intended for any other purpose than use; indeed, Sam appeared to be so well aware of this, that a few light straw-chairs were placed as *aides* to their more splendid kindred. These were, in truth, from Genoa; but Sam, whose ideas of straw manufactory were confined to his sister's hats, always called the attention of his visitors to his Leghorns. A splendid seven-branched Argand chandelier was suspended by a massive gold cord from the ceiling, and was, in itself, admirably adapted for the hall of Northumberland House; but here it was not only useless but dangerous, inasmuch as its proximity to the ceiling rendered its being lighted a matter of impossibility without endangering the house and risking the neck of the proprietor as guilty of arson, while its approach towards the floor made it difficult for any person more than five feet four to walk beneath it, without the probability of being trepanned. The angles of the room were filled with some beautiful specimens of marqueterie and inlaid encoignures, supporting rich morsels of most costly Sevre, or bits of invaluable Dresden. Splendid buhl cabinets glittered in the recesses on either side the fire, while a beautiful *console*, inlaid with lapis-lazuli, porphyry, and varied coloured marbles occupied the space between the windows, and was strewed with filagree figures in gold and silver, vases of porcelain, snuff-boxes, and enamels. A few rare books of engravings were thrown carelessly on a rosewood table which stood in the centre of the room, the lower end of which was occupied by one of two beautiful Claudes and Correggios, reflected in the mirror over the chimney; in which the visiting cards and invitations of Sam's aristocratic friends, an old Almack's voucher, and an invitation to dinner with the Lord Mayor, were conspicuously placed.

The inner room, fitted up as a small library, contained a rare collection of first editions, as well as Elzevirs, Alduses, and Variorum, which Sam, whose bibliological

knowledge was pretty much confined to his own vernacular, had commissioned Mr. Evans to purchase for him by the foot. Here the tables and chairs were all of a description well suited to Mr. Silvertown's taste for reading, but certainly not for that of a very studious man, it being morally impossible for one to seat himself on any of the latter, without falling asleep forthwith. Mahogany cases, filled with maps, supplied the place of cornices to the walls. Globes crowned the book-cases, together with marble busts of eminent men, upon the pedestals of which Sam had prudently directed some symbolic mark to be engraved, in order that he might not mistake Newton for Shakespeare, or Sir Cloudesly Shovel for the Chancellor, when he acted as cicerone to his own rarities. The splendid tables, inlaid with brass, were loaded with buhl inkstands, seals, trays, and all the other paraphernalia of a correct writing-table. The chimney-piece sustained several rare specimens of bronze, divided by a curious antique clock, over which was suspended the picture of a very beautiful woman, mysteriously veiled by a green silk curtain. This was, in reality, the production of an eminent artist from the study of a Trastivirina; but Sam, when asked whom it was intended to represent, generally replied, with an attempt to blush, "Oh, pray do not ask me!" In short, nothing could present a more delightful picture of literary luxury than this apartment, where Sam always hurried to receive his visitors, though he rarely entered the room for any purpose but to place a book open on the stand, to make people believe that he really not only could but did read.

Several young men had now arrived, who were in the first place annoyed at the idea of being themselves in time; and in the next, were highly indignant at their host's daring to be too late. Whilst poor Sam, who had long been ready, and had, as we have said, retired to his dressing-room when the first carriage arrived, was flattering himself that his dear friends were occupied in admiring the arrangement of his apartments, these gentlemen were amusing themselves in criticising both their host and his house in the most unmerciful manner.

"What an idea!" exclaimed one, "to fit up a sort of

two-stalled hole of this kind, as if it were Lowther Castle!"

"Oh Belvoir, *ça sent le parvenu*," added another.

"I have no idea," said a third, "of the impertinence of these city people not being in readiness to receive one at the door, when one comes to dine with them! If one does not keep them in order, if one permit oneself the slightest civility towards them,—they immediately become as familiar as if they were one of us."

"Oh! but of course he is not going to dine at home," said another seriously,—“that would indeed be the very climax of bad taste.”

"If he does, I shall certainly black-ball him!" rejoined another.

"That I shall do, at all events," exclaimed two or three voices.

"Not after dining with him for the express purpose of balloting in his favour, surely?" said Herbert,—“that would scarcely be fair!”

"*Raison de plus* for his daring to corrupt us," rejoined Alfred: "if one were to admit all the people whom one is civil enough to dine with, White's would be worse than a jungle of tigers."

"Besides, the idea of letting in a sort of pawnbroker!" added another.

"A pawnbroker! who ever heard of one without balls?" exclaimed another; "ergo, I shall give him a black one most assuredly."

In short, more than half of the party had declared their resolve to reject poor Sam, who in the mean time felt himself so certain of admission through the interest of so many intimate friends, that he had already written two or three rather long notes, and had dated them by anticipation from White's.

At last he made his appearance, and was received by the generality of his guests in the sort of way in which a party at a tavern meets their host, when he enters the room without announcing dinner.

"How d'ye do?—So good of you to come! Dear me! I am afraid I'm rather late."

"Not in the least!" answered a voice maliciously.

"Well, that's very kind of you, my Lord," rejoined Sam; "but the fact is, I galloped into the country to get a little fresh air."

"Pray, ventilate yourself a little earlier in future, Silverton," replied the Peer; "the fact is, you ought not to go into the city when you have any body to dine with you, or else dine before. Indeed, I did not think you were in town."

"Come! that's very good of you," answered Sam. "You are always so absurd! but you know I do not mind your jokes." Then he added, "That's a good bit, ain't it, Milton?" as he saw Herbert examining a Sevre vase; "it once belonged to Madame de Sevigné."

"Why, you told me it was Madame de Montespan's the other day!" answered Alfred.

"Egad, I believe I did," was the host's answer, "but I have so many of these rare things that I quite forget whether they were the property of people in the time of Charlemagne or King Clovis."

"King Cole, you mean," rejoined the nobleman who had spoken before, and who knew that Sam's father had amassed a considerable fortune by the sale of coals.

Samuel was preparing to make an answer, when fortunately he was for the present spared any farther raillery by dinner being announced, and in a few minutes the party were seated in the dining-room.

It is but justice to Mr. Silverton to say, that whatever incongruity and disproportion he might have evinced upstairs, here every thing was in the perfection of good cooking and good taste, if I except the mania of poor Sam for covering his walls with the portraits of dead worthies, who he swore were ancestors of his family, and which, more than one of his guests had told him, looked very much like eminent chimney-sweeps or coal-heavers in their black dresses.

If the various viands which emanated from the classic fingers of Silverton's artist were calculated to gratify the most *blazé* palate, the contents of his cellar were not less admirable for their variety and flavour; nor were the ornaments of his table less pleasing to the eye, though their profusion was in some measure detrimental to their ef-

fect. The most lovely Saxon damask was covered with the varied productions of Sevre vieing in beauty with the richest Dresden, and the fantastical and classical genius of Lewis rivalled with the more solid and substantial taste of Rundell. Sam had adopted the foreign mode of serving up his dinner;—that is to say, not in the arrangement of his courses, but in directing all the different meats to be taken off the table, carved, and presented in regular succession; nor was he backward in his praises of a bill of fare which almost rivalled in length, variety, and novelty of baptism, the *carte* at Very's or the *Rocher de Cancale*.

After a dozen oysters had been presented to each of the guests, and a glass of very "curious" *Chably* administered as an accompaniment, the covers were taken off two splendid Sevre tureens of mazarine blue; the one containing a *purée de faisans à la petit Trianon*, and the other a *soupe sauté à la pastorelle*. To these succeeded a dish of red mullets *à la ça ira*, and a magnificent turbot, which Sam's purveyor had carried off in triumph (for the moderate price of four guineas), after a spirited contest with the *maîtres d'hôtel* of Lord Dossington and Sir Gore Cramwell. These were removed by a superb haunch, which recently belonged to a noble buck, who for more than four years had made his "midnight lair" in a celebrated Northamptonshire park; and a *bechamelle* of veal, ten weeks old, from an Essex farm. After this the different *entrées* were uncovered and exposed to view, and as the chased silver covers were removed there appeared, not an eternal round of "*potatoes papa*," but a *torse* of *Chevreuril mariné à la St. Hubert*, *des filets de chapon de Caen à l'Italienne*, a *fricassée de volaille aux ecrivisses à la douarière*, a *vol au vent de Cabilhou à la Dominicaine*, an *arliquinde de goles et merlins à la financière*, a *turban de lapereaux de Garenne à la Sublime Porte*, *des cotelettes d'agneau precoce aux petits pois tardifs*, *des rodomontades de Porceau au sauce tomate à la Bordoloise*, a *salmi de pérdicieux aux truffes à la Condé*, and a *gallimathias de becasse saux morelles à la Pompadour*.

The digestion of these most *recherché* dishes was aided by some of the finest sherry which had ever been compressed from the vines of Xeres; Madeira which was fully quali-

fied for the Travellers' Club by having visited the East and West Indies; Hocheimer, Markbrunner, and Stein, whose bouquet perfumed the whole apartment; and Johanisberg which would have even vivified the Apostolic palate of the Prince Vintner himself. The forces of the "Rhenish confederation," as Sam facetiously christened the Hocks, were supported by detachments of Moselle and Bleichart, and bodies of light troops from Sauterne, Bourdeaux, and Hermitage; a rocket brigade from Champagne; a heavy battery from Chambretin, Volnay, and *Lachrymæ Christi*, and a *corps de reserve* of delicious Tokay, forty years old, with Malaga, Lafitte of the Comet, and Chateau Margot of 1814.

During the interregnum between the first and second course, the conversation of the party, which had hitherto been principally confined to the discussion of the dishes, was now either devoted to the merits of the wine which flowed, as usual, during this interval with greater rapidity, or was directed by the different personages in attacking each other in that species of half-personal warfare, which is so fashionable among the most correct set of men in town. Nor did the host neglect this opportunity of giving way to his favourite topic, which consisted of praising every thing in his own possession; not an article,—potable, comestible, or ornamental,—escaped his laudatory remarks, and his greatest vanity was shown by stating the prices which each article had cost him, and this he always did accompanied by his own regrets at his poverty preventing his purchasing a greater quantity, or exhibiting greater splendour in his taste.

"This Rudesheimer is fine," observed one of the guests; "is it 1808?"

"I beg your pardon," replied the host "it is Johanisberg of 11, warranted. I paid seventeen shillings a bottle for it at Frankfort. Transport-duty and other expenses included, I may say you drink it at about twenty-seven shillings per bottle."

"I don't think it dear!" exclaimed another, "Have you much of it? I should like to get some uncommonly."

"Unfortunately," rejoined Silverton, "I merely purchased a few dozens; though it is not much money, yet we poor citizens must be economical."

"Where did you get this champagne?" demanded another. "It is rather too sweet."

"Sweet!" exclaimed the host; "it's some of the dryest wine in London. - It's extremely curious, I got six cases as a particular favour: the remainder of the parcel was purchased for the Emperor."

"I should have thought this had been destined for the same purpose," observed Alfred coolly; at the same time overturning a glass of Sauterne, upon which Sam particularly piqued himself, into the cooler at his side.

"It tastes much more like Imperial *certaine*," added a young nobleman who sat next to him.

"Well then," said Silverton, "will you do me the pleasure, Lord Ernest, of taking a glass of this with me?"

"I'll drink one," rejoined his Lordship, "but I am not aware that one takes any thing but physic or leaps."

"That is to say, when your horse, or rather your friend's, does not take the latter without you," observed another of the party. Lord Ernest being much more famed for his precision, and his purism in conversation, than his skill in facing a brook or topping a wall fence.

"Then will you drink some Hermitage," rejoined the host, yielding to the lesson of the noble grammarian.

"One drinks porter, tea, and *tisane*," rejoined the imperturbable purist.

"Well then," answered Samuel, who dreaded lest he should be black-balled if he thwarted his guest, "will you have some of that by you?"

"Have!" responded the other, "one has the gout, the tooth-ache, or a run of ill-luck! I'll try the Chambretin, if you please?"

"Come, come!" exclaimed Alfred, "I thought you would have said one only tried a coat or a horse, but you stopped in time; you never attempt the latter now. The dealers say you rode a whole spring upon trial, but never purchased! Dyson would, I believe, as soon see the glanders walk into his stables as yourself."

"Talking of horses, Alfred, I know no one whose modest merits so justly qualify him as *premier ecuyer* to those of St. Marc; you would not require to be re-cast!" replied Lord Ernest, extremely satisfied with this repartee.

"Indeed," rejoined the other, "such an appointment would spoil all your pleasure if you went to Venice; for, being aware of your skill in equitation, I should certainly prevent your trying my steeds. I verily believe you would contrive even to throw them down."

"Apropos!" exclaimed Herbert, "so I hear Lord Nettley has bought all Colonel Tilton's stud?"

"Poor Tilton!" rejoined another; "he is obliged to travel for his health."

"And I take it his complaint is incurable," observed a third.

"I thought he would have cured himself with bark?" rejoined Alfred.

"There is not a stick of timber left on his property," answered the other. "He was very hard hit last season. This year, I know, he was out more than thirty-five thousand at Watier's; and though he expected to land himself by the Ledger, owing to a bad book he is at least minus by the year fifty thousand; and I hear his attorney, who was his father's butler's son, was the highest bidder for the estate."

"Is it true," demanded one of the party, "that Nettley is going to be married to Miss Longdale?"

"That depends on the weather," answered the former.

"The weather!" exclaimed Herbert; "what! does he make love and marry by the barometer?"

"Not exactly; but I would not give much for Fanny Longdale's chance, if it should happen to thaw within the next week. He would not stay in town for Venus herself if there was any chance of a fine scenting morning."

"What brought him up to town, then?" answered Alfred; "I thought he was still under the *haute surveillance* of mamma. She never allows him to move from her side, unless it is to hunt, with his tutor riding close to him."

"Indeed, I believe she selected Nettley's surveyor, not from his classic acquirements, or from his taking a first degree; but because he was indisputably the fastest parson across the country she could hear of."

"Why, I confess," replied the other, "that my aunt did require, as a *sine qua non*, that the gentlemen who presented themselves for the important function of bear-

leader to my worthy cousin, should have regularly hunted two seasons at least, either with Sir Thomas or the Duke."

"But how does this matrimonial project agree with your cousin's engagements with the huntsman's daughter? Is there any truth in the report we heard in Oxfordshire?" demanded Sidney.

"Why, I believe," rejoined Lord Nettle's cousin, "there was some truth in his having been overheard saying tender things to Peg Rasper, in the boiling-house; and there is no knowing if she might not have been Lady Nettle by this time, had not the feeder, who is a discarded admirer of Peggy's, betrayed their intimacy and correspondence to my aunt."

"So to prevent accidents, or a *mesalliance*," said Alfred, "she has, I suppose, taken advantage of a hard frost, and his coming of age, to bring him up to see London, and if possible to induce him to marry Fanny Longdale."

"I would have given any thing to have seen his letter," exclaimed Herbert. "It must have cost him some trouble to indite an epistle: for, from all I have heard, he is much better qualified to ride straight across country, than to write straight across a sheet of paper."

"Fortunately for the honour of the family," rejoined Mr. Nettle, "it was more easy for him to write, than for his Dulcinea to decipher, his composition—that being a part of her education which old Rasper luckily considered superfluous in a huntsman's daughter."

"Well, then, how in Heaven's name did they contrive to correspond? Who was her amanuensis?" demanded Herbert.

"Why," replied the other, "poor Peggy, who found herself extremely perplexed, it appears, made a confidante of one of the house-maids; who, being no blue stocking, called in to her assistance the whipper; who, likewise, not having the talent of Champellon, requested the aid in *hora mala* of the feeder; who, in his turn, being no scholar, but at the same time burning with jealousy, communicated the autograph to the steward;—and thus it came into my aunt's possession. I was called in to reason with Nettle; and if you wish to hear the epistle, I will read it, as I have a copy in my pocket-book."

"By all means, read, read!" exclaimed several voices. Mr. Nettley then drew forth his book, and read as follows:—

"My dear Peg,

"As I rode by the kennel, I saw you a crying at the window, which vexed me as much as if my Bellingham mare had broken her knees. Never mind what they say in the servants' hall about the London vixen, for they're all on a wrong cast. I don't love a fine open scenting morning more than I do you, and I hate her as I do a hard frost. I use the whip you pointed for me every hunting-day, and I don't crack it, for fear I should wear it out; so don't cry. If you'll front me a snaffle, I'll only just use it as a keepsake, when I ride to church. I couldn't see you last Sunday, for mother's maid's big bonnet: I'll snick the brim of it, if she serves me that trick again; so don't cry. Don't you care a bottle neither about what my black whipper tells you about mother's being angry with you for wearing a silk gown: I'll give you twenty to spite 'em; so don't cry. Egod! I shall be of age next month, and then I'll let them know who's huntsman; and if Master Tollocks gives tongue again, I'll draft him, I will! I'll take up a link in his curb, as sure as he likes living in clover; and if that don't check him, why I'll just take off his saddle, and turn him loose on the common. What's the use of my being a lord, Peg, my dear! if I can't make who I love a lady? so don't you cry. It's all a proper fudge about my going to marry the thorough-bred thing up in town. No, no! they won't catch me there; she sha'n't have so much as a pat of the hand from me. Mother must get up overnight if she thinks to bag me; and I'll break away, if they bring all the earth-stoppers in Oxfordshire to stop me; so don't be down-hearted. As you can't write, I suppose, and I don't get very quick across the fallow, meet me down at the Dingle-bridge, and I'll marry you when I come to my fortune, as sure as you have got hazel eyes; and I never cracked a nut this harvest without thinking of them. So don't cry; but love me as I love you, until we're in at the death: from your loving friend,

"NETTLEY."

VOL. I.—R

"I say, though, Peg, if you let the feeder come yelping to you in the airing ground, I'll just round his ears, that's all. It's no good my being a lord, if I can't keep poachers off: so don't cry."

As soon as Mr. Nettley had concluded the perusal of this tender missive, which excited the pity rather than the risibility of Herbert, the latter observed that it was much better expressed than he had been led to expect either from the young nobleman's manners or conversation; "But," added he, "what could have induced your aunt, who has the reputation of being a very sensible woman, to bring up her son in such an extraordinary manner, among stableboys and game-keepers?"

"Why," rejoined Mr. Nettley, "she had, I believe, heard that Lord Ernest and Alfred, and other depraved young men, were educated at a public school; so, to shield my cousin's morals from contamination, and to prevent his following their wicked ways, she resolved neither to send him to Eton nor Christchurch, but to educate him under her own eye, in the country, far from the vanities and corruptions of the world."

"So," exclaimed Lord Ernest, "in lieu of speaking Greek with an Ionic dialect, he can scarcely make himself intelligible in Gloucestershire *patois*; instead of whipping tops at Eton with gentlemen's children, he has been whipping dogs, and spinning cockchafers, with stableboys in a kennel; instead——"

"Granted, granted!" exclaimed Nettley, interrupting Lord Ernest; "but, after all, he is a good-hearted, kind creature; and although the mistaken indulgence of my aunt, the accommodating blindness of his tutors, the adulation of servants, and the society of farmers, may have gone far to make him a complete Tony Lumpkin, yet it is to be hoped, that the future Lady Nettley will have influence enough to wean him from the low company in which he has hitherto passed his life, and restore him to that situation in society to which his rank and fortune entitle him. I assure you, I have done my best to co-operate in the reform."

"You had much better buy him a runaway horse or

two, and let him break his neck out hunting, Charles," exclaimed Alfred; "you would do more credit to your ancestors, and more honour to the senate. Egad! if the old worthies, whose portraits, in their Vandyke dresses and armour, adorn the oak gallery at Nettley, could look upon their present representative, I believe they would all, simultaneously, jump from their frames and smother him. What will you give me, Charles, to have him kidnapped and done away with?"

"I believe," answered Nettley, "that you are quite equal to perform what you propose. Egad!" added he, laughing, "I would not give twopence for Fanny Longdale's chance of becoming Countess of Nettley if you were in my situation: I'd back your being my Lord before she became my lady. Herbert," continued he, still joking, "I'd have you look sharp, and bind him over to keep the peace; he is a most desperate personage when ten thousand a-year are at stake!"

For a moment Alfred turned extremely pale, and remained silent: Nettley's joke had struck much deeper than the latter could have imagined. Fortunately, however, Alfred was relieved from the necessity of answering by his cousin himself; so he had time to recover his composure without any one remarking his vexation except Sidney, in whose mind doubts of Alfred's sincerity had long since arisen.

"I believe," replied Herbert, somewhat sharply, "that Alfred would do as you have done Charles, had he the misfortune to have such an uncouth cub for a cousin;—but tell me, is it true that he refused to dine with the Longdales because he was engaged to sup with Mr. Cross, to see the wild beasts fed?"

"No," answered Nettley; "he said he had a prior engagement, to see the famous dog Billy kill two hundred rats, while his master ate half-a-score pounds of beef-steaks and drank three pots of porter. However, I am doing my best to make him more tractable: I have shown him the Horse Bazaar, Tatersall's, the mare with six legs, and the little Indian pony. And please Heaven the frost lasts, we shall marry him before the moon's at the full."

"From what he told me this morning," said Sidney,

"he will be off for the country the moment the weather breaks. He is as anxious to migrate back to Peggy, as a nightingale in a cage to return to its mate in the woods. If it thaws, I fear poor Fanny's chance of the coronet will be gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed Lord Ernest; "I wish she were, with all my heart; she has been going ever since the year one. Why, her mother proposed to me the first season after I left Christchurch. I was, however, obliged to be cruel. I had no inclination to marry the whole family; besides, I was aware that Mrs. Longdale attacked all the young men, as caterpillars devour the green leaves in spring."

"What," rejoined Sidney, "I suppose you wanted a trial, as usual, before you purchased?"

"I like his talking of cruelty!" added Herbert; "he never had an opportunity in his life of being cruel to any thing but hen pheasants, and upon them he has no mercy."

"I will venture to affirm, that I did not kill more hens last season than yourself, Alfred!"

"No, my good fellow," answered Alfred, "that was not more your fault than Joe Manton's; but, although you are the worst shot in Norfolk, if your brother's keepers had not luckily cried out 'Cock,' every time a bird rose, I believe you would not have left a hen on the estate."

Lord Ernest, who knew his weakness on this point, prudently made no reply.

The second course, during this time, was already in process of delivery. I shall not occupy the patience of my readers, or attempt "*leur faire venir l'eau à la bouche*," by describing the merits of the sauces and *coulis*, or the perfections of each dish;—suffice it to say, that the games were removed by *soufflets* as light as gossamer, and *fondus* with the flavour of ambrosia. Among the *entremets* were vegetables of the rarest kinds, from the *truffe au vin de Champagne*, and *cardon au beurre d'Anchois à la Sefton*, to the *cul d'artichaux à la Lyonnaise*. Amidst the *hors d'œuvres* there appeared *pâtés* from every department of France; sausages from Westphalia and Bologna; a

superb *hure de sanglier*, attended by *Cavera*, *Boutarga*, and, in short, every rare comestible which the gastronomic genius of France could invent, or Messieurs Chevet or Morell purvey.

"Your plan of serving your dinner," said Herbert to his host, "is admirable; I wish it were more generally adopted:—surely, since we imitate our neighbours as much as possible in the concoction of their dishes, why should we not carry on our plagiarism to the mode of distribution?"

"Nothing can be more disgusting," exclaimed another gentleman, "than to see a parcel of people cutting and slashing at the unfortunate *plats* which chance to be near them; splashing the sauce into one lady's eye, and leg of a bird into another's lap."

"Yes; I was thinking of the dreadful misery of being placed opposite to two tough-boiled fowls, by way of a side dish," replied Lord Ernest, "with a blunt knife, and six or seven young girls asking for more wings!"

"Talking of boiled fowls," said Nettley, "what think you of my finding myself, the other day, at a dinner in Russel Square?"

"Russel what!" exclaimed three or four beaux;—"impossible!"

"True though, however," continued Charles; "and moreover with a huge *soi-disant* sucking pig placed close to me, as a side-dish in the second course."

"Did you call the man of the place out?" demanded Sidney; "or did you quit the vile cook-shop forthwith?"

"Really, Charles," added another, "if you frequent those kind of places, one must take the precaution of talking to you, as Pyramus and Thisbe did, through a hole in a wall! How can you permit such low persons to invite you?"

"They did not," quietly answered Nettley; "I dropped in by accident."

"What sad misfortune, what *egarement de l'esprit humain*, could have carried you into the land of the Philistines?—you, who are such a perfect *Bursch*!"

"Why," replied Alfred, in answer to this query addressed to Charles, "Nettley's diffidence is so great that