

THE SECRET OF HER POWER;

Or, A TRUTH NEVER OLD.

CHAPTER XII.—(Cont'd)

"My dear Babe, how exactly you are like the head of a department!" says Blanford, who has followed them out of the house and comes up behind them. "According to the head of a department, it is never the head that is at fault, always the understrappers. May I inquire since when it has become the fashion to set sunflowers with their heads downward?"

"I wanted to see if the roots would turn after the sun," says the Babe, and regards his explanation as triumphant.

"And they only die! How perverse of them! You would become a second Newton, if your destiny were not already cast, to dazzle the world by a blending of Beau Brummel and Sir Joseph Paxton."

The Babe looks a little cross; he does not like to be laughed at before his princess. He has got his opportunity; but it vexes him; he has an impression that his companions will soon drift into forgetting both him and his garden. Since the approach of Blanford, the latter has said nothing.

The children's gardens are in a rather wild and distant part of the grounds of Surrenden. It is noon; most people staying in the house are still in their own rooms; it is solitary, sunny, still; a thrush is singing in a jessamine thicket, there is no other sound except that of a gardener's broom sweeping on the other side of the laurel hedge.

The Babe feels that it is now or never for his coup de maitre.

He plucks a rose, the best one he has, and offers it to Madame Sabaroff, who accepts it gratefully, though it is considerably earwig-eaten, and puts it in her corsage.

The eyes of Blanford follow it wistfully.

The Babe glances at them alternately from under his hair, then his small features assume an expression of cherubic innocence and unconsciousness. The most ruse little rogue in the whole kingdom, he knows how to make himself look like a perfect reproduction of Sir Joshua Reynolds' Artlessness or Infancy. He gazes up in Xenia Sabaroff's face with angelic simplicity admirably assumed.

"When you marry him," says the Babe, pointing to Blanford, with admirably affected naivete, "you will let me hold your train, won't you? I always hold up my friends' trains when they marry. I have a page's dress, Louis something or other, and a sword, and a velvet cap with a badge and a feather; I always look very well."

"Oh, what an odious petit-maitre you will be when you are a man, my dear Babe!" says Xenia Sabaroff. She does not take any notice of his opening words, but a flush of color comes over her face and passes as quickly as it came.

"Petit-maitre,—what is that?" says the Babe. "But you will let me, won't you? And don't marry him till the autumn, or even the winter, because the velvet makes me so hot when the day is hot, and the dress wouldn't look nice made in thin things."

"Could I only add my prayer to his," murmurs Blanford, "and hope that in the autumn—"

Xenia Sabaroff looks at him with a strange gaze; it is penetrating, dreamy, wistful, inquiring.

"We jest as the child jests," she says, abruptly, and walks onward. "I do not jest," says Blanford.

The Babe glances at them under his thick eyelashes, and, being a fine mouche, only innocent in appearance, he runs off after a butterfly. He has not been brought up in a feminine atmosphere of poudre de riz and lait d'iris without learning discretion.

CHAPTER XIII.

"The Babe is a better courtier than gardener," says Xenia Sabaroff, as she shakes a green aphid out of her rose: her tone is careless, but her voice is not quite under her command, and has a little tremor in it.

Blanford looks at her with impassioned eyes: he has grown very pale.

"It is no jest with me," he says under his breath. "I would give you my life if you would take it?"

The last words have the accent of

an interrogation, of an appeal.

"That is to say a great deal," replies Xenia Sabaroff; she is startled, astonished, troubled; she was not expecting any such entire avowal.

"Many men must have said as much to you who have more to recommend them than I. Say something to me: what will you say?"

She does not immediately reply; she looks on the ground, and absently traces patterns on the path are people who believe that I have been the delaisse of Lord Gervase? They do not phrase it so roughly, but that is what they say."

Blanford's very lips are white, but his voice does not falter for one moment as he answers, "They will not say it in my hearing."

"And, knowing that they say it, you would still offer me your name?"

"I do so."

"And you would ask me nothing save what I choose to tell you?"

The sunny air seems to turn round with him for an instant: his brain grows dizzy; his heart contracts with a sickening pain; but in the next moment a great wave of strong and perfect faith in the woman he cares for lifts his soul up on it, as a sea-wave lifts a drowning man to land.

"Do you know," she says, at last, after a silence which seemed to him endless, "do you know that there with the end of her long walking-stick."

"You shall tell me nothing save what you choose," he says, clearly and very tenderly. "I have perfect faith in you. Had I less than that, I would not ask you to be my wife."

She looks at him with astonishment and with wondering admiration.

"Yet you know so little of me!" she murmurs, in amaze.

"I love you," says Blanford; then he kisses her hand with great reverence.

The tears which she had thought driven from her eyes forever, rise in them now.

"You are very noble," she replies, and leaves her hand for an instant within his.

The Babe, who has been watching from behind a tuft of laurel, can control his impatience no longer, but comes out of the ambush and runs towards them, regardless of how undesired he may be.

"Dodo says that women never marry anybody they love," he says, breathlessly; "but that is not true, is it and you will let me carry your train?"

"Hush, my dear," says Xenia Sabaroff, laying her hand on the child's shoulder, while there is a sound in her voice which subdues to silence even the audacious spirit of the Babe.

"Give me time to think," she says, in a low tone to Blanford; and then, with her hand still on the little boy's shoulder, she turns away from him and walks slowly toward the house.

The child walks silently and shyly beside her; his happy vanity troubled for once by the sense that he has made some mistake, and that there are some few things still in the universe which he does not quite entirely understand.

"You are not angry?" he asks her, at last, with a vague terror in his gay impudent little soul.

"Angry with you?" says Xenia Sabaroff. "My dear child, no. I am perhaps angry with myself,—myself of many years ago."

The Babe is silent; he does not venture to ask any more, and he has a humiliating feeling that he is not first in the thoughts of Madame Sabaroff,—nay, that, though his rose is in her gown and her hand upon his shoulder, she has almost, very nearly almost, forgotten him.

Blanford does not attempt to follow her. Her great charm for him consists in the power she possesses of compelling him to control his impulses. He walks away by himself through the green shadows of the boughs, wishing for no companionship save hers. He is fully aware that he has done a rash, perhaps an utterly unwise, thing in putting his future into the hands of a woman of whom he knows so little, and has, perhaps, the right to suspect so much. Yet he does not repent.

He does not see her again before dinner. She does not come into the

library at the tea-hour; there is a large dinner that night; county people are there, as well as the house-party. He has to take in a stupid woman, wife of the Lord-Lieutenant, who thinks him the most absent-minded and unpleasant person she has ever known, and wonders how he has got his reputation as a wit. He is so seated that he cannot even see Xenia Sabaroff, and he chafes and frets throughout the dinner, from the bisque soup to the caviare biscuit, and thinks what an idiotic thing the habits of society have made of human life.

When he is fairly at rare intervals goaded into speech, he utters paradoxes, and suggests views so startling that the wife of the Lord-Lieutenant is scandalized, and thinks the lunacy laws are defective if they cannot include and incarcerate him. She feels sure that the rumor about the Hindoo women at St. Hubert's Lea is entirely true.

After dinner he is free to approach the lady of his thoughts, but he endeavors in vain to tell from her face what answer he will receive, what time and meditation may have done or undone for him. She avoids the interrogation of his eyes, and is surrounded by other men as usual.

The evening seems to him intolerably long and intolerably tedious. It is, however, for others very gay. There is an improvised dance, ending in an impromptu cotillion, and following on an act of comic opera given with admirable spirit by Lady Dawlish, Mrs. Curzon, and some of the younger men. Every one is amused, but the hours seem very slow to him: Gervase scarcely leaves her side at all, and Blanford with all his chivalrous refusal and unchanging resolution to allow no shadow of doubt to steal over him, feels the odious whispers he has heard and the outspoken words of Litroff recur to his memory and weigh on him like the incubus of a nightmare.

With a sensation of dread, he realizes that it is possible, do what he may, that they may haunt him so all his life. A man may be always master of his acts, but scarcely always of his thoughts.

"But I will never ask her one syllable," he thinks, "and I will marry her to-morrow, if she chooses."

But will she choose?

He is far from sure. He pleases her intelligence; he possesses her friendship; but whether he has the slightest power to touch her heart he does not know. If he loved her less than he does, he would be more confident.

As the interminable hours wear away, and the noise and absurdities of the cotillion are at their height, she, who never dances anywhere, drops her fan, and he is before the others in restoring it to her. As she takes it, she says, in a low voice: "Be in the small library at eleven to-morrow."

Soon after she leaves the ball-room altogether, and goes to her bed-chamber.

Blanford goes to his before the cotillion is over, but he sleeps very little. He longs for the morrow, and yet he dreads it. "Quand meme," he murmurs, as from his bed he sees the white dawn over the dark masses of the Surrenden woods. Tell him what she may, he thinks, he will give her his life, if she will take it. He is madly in love, no doubt; but there is something nobler and purer than the madness of love, than the mere violent instincts of passion, in his loyalty to her. Before anything else, he cherishes the honor of his name and race, and he is willing, blindfold, to trust her with it.

That morning it seems to him as if the hours would never pass, though they are few until the clocks strike eleven. The house is still, almost every one is asleep, for the cotillion, successful as only unprepared things ever are, had lasted till the sun was high and the dew on the grass of the garden was dry.

With a thickly-beating heart, nervous and eager as though he were a boy of sixteen seeking his first love-tryst, he enters the small library far before the hour, and waits for her there, pacing to and fro the floor. The room is full of memories of her; here they have talked on rainy days; and have strolled out on to the lawns on fine ones; there is the chair which she likes best, and there the volume she had taken down yesterday; could it be only ten days since, standing here, he had seen her first in the distance with the children? Only ten days! It seems to him ten years, ten centuries.

(To be continued.)

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CHARGED BY ELEPHANTS

ADVENTURE IN THE JUNGLES OF WEST INDIA.

A Hunter's First Experience in Dangerous Big Game Shooting.

While the writer's ship was detained for duty off the west coast of India he and his friend, indifferently armed, set out for the Nilgiri Hills, where they were told sambur were plentiful, writes a correspondent of the London Spectator. They spent a night at the foot of the hills and at daylight next morning were aroused by the owner of the house, who was very excited and said that during the night one of the villagers had been killed by a wild elephant.

It appears that the man who was a keeper of tame elephants used for the purpose of hauling timber in the surrounding jungle, awoke hearing a noise in his compound, and presumably thinking that one of his elephants was eating his plantain trees went out to drive the beast into its proper quarters, only to realize his mistake too late to save his life, as the elephant was a wild one, and turned on him and killed him.

My informant, who was an old shikari, told me that there was a herd of elephants in the vicinity and that they had done a lot of damage to the crops, and asked me if I would care to have

A SHOT AT THEM,

Previous to this I had had no really dangerous big game shooting, and my companion very little experience of any sort of shooting at all, and moreover I did not feel overconfident with regard to my weapons and ammunition, but I realized that it was the chance of a lifetime and concluded that the opportunity was too good to miss. Accordingly I arranged for the best shikari in the village to accompany me and for three of the jungle people to track the animals, and by 8 o'clock we started off.

About a mile outside the village, while going through some paddy fields toward the hills, we came upon the tracks of elephants in the soft mud, and for some distance afterward until well into the jungle we had no difficulty in following their footmarks, which steadily went up hill; the track was some four feet broad and the walking easy, although very hot, so that we made good progress for some five miles or so.

We began to think that the herd had probably travelled some miles since morning and that it was exceedingly unlikely that we should see anything of them, when suddenly our trackers came back to tell us that there was

A HERD OF ELEPHANTS

feeding in some bamboos about half a mile off. All was now excitement. We jumped up at once and looked to our rifles: I gave my shotgun to my shikari, one barrel being loaded with ball, the other being choke, with orders to him to keep close behind me and hand it to me if I required it. We went slowly and cautiously forward, our luncheon carriers staying behind up a tree for safety.

The jungle now became denser and the track difficult to follow, and all up hill. There was dead silence all around us and we knew not at what moment we should come on the herd. We slowly came to the spot where our trackers had seen the elephants but there was no sign of them. They had evidently moved off. We crossed a depression in the ground where there was nothing but bamboos, some upright, others lying across our path, making our progress very slow.

Gradually we emerged from it, each step taken with caution. The ground became steeper again and we took advantage of every opening between bamboo clumps, wild tapioca and trees to proceed. We again came to a slight clearing some few yards in extent, and my shikari was whispering to one of the trackers to go ahead and see

if he could locate where the elephants were, and particularly where the longest tusker was, when suddenly in the dead silence, we heard right in front of us some distance ahead

A TERRIFIC NOISE—

trees coming down, and the crash of them coming closer and closer.

My friend C. dived into a bamboo clump to my right front. I had barely time to get behind a small tree some twelve inches in diameter, where I tried to make myself as small as possible, when I saw the head and shoulders of a huge elephant making straight for me and directly over the bamboos where C. was lying. I threw up my rifle and fired as near as I could judge low down at the centre of his forehead by the juncture of his trunk. My doing so brought the beast up all standing; its ears went out like a bat's wings and I shot again with my left barrel at the same spot. I threw out the empty cartridges, put in two more, tried to close the breech of my rifle and could not. I looked round for my second gun—my shikari had disappeared and there was no one in sight.

As I turned my head back I was aware of a large cow elephant with a young one about four feet high standing right underneath her—both with their heads turned toward me and looking straight at me—some five and a half yards distant. She trumpeted and came toward me. I could not close the breech and quite realized I was

IN A TIGHT PLACE.

I turned and bolted, falling on my face a few feet away over some wild tapioca across my path and expecting that any second might be my last.

During my flight and fall I was still wondering why I could not close the breech of the rifle, and only after I was down did I realize that my rifle had not got rebounding locks, to which I was accustomed, and that before I could close the breech I must recock the hammers. In less time than it takes to relate I did so and stood up, only to find that all was silence around.

My friend C. came out of the bamboos and stated that he had had the narrowest shave of his life, as he was actually waiting to roll over on one side or the other when the animal came over him, as he expected it must.

The natives came up and stated that they had seen eight elephants, which appeared to have charged right through us. We went forward and found a pool of blood twelve and a half yards from my tree, where the first elephant had been sighted, not two yards from the bamboos. The second elephant had evidently missed sight of me when I fell, hence my escape from her. The one I shot was picked up three miles off with two bullets in its head, and so ended a most exciting day's shooting.

PIRACY IN CHINA.

River Pirates of Manchuria are Numerous and Bloodthirsty.

Piracy still flourishes in Manchuria, according to advices from Vladivostok. The Sungari River appears to be infested by desperate bands of "Chunchuses," whose raids on passing steamers are becoming a terror to Russian travelers.

Recently a bloodthirsty horde boarded a Russian steamer, overpowered all resistance from the native crew, which was somewhat feeble, and murdered two Russian male passengers. They were about to put a Russian woman and two children to death, but the Chinese passengers interfered, and the pirates contented themselves with robbing them of everything they possessed, even their clothing. After throwing the bodies of the two murdered men overboard, the pirates made off, and it is quite impossible to hope for any punitive action from the Chinese officials who are either terrorized by, or in league with, these marauders.

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