

THE BLACK PIN.

“ I’LL never love another woman—no—let her be ever so beautiful I’ll hate her;” exclaimed Charles Romer, as, having quitted one ball-room where things had gone wrong, he entered another of those assemblies, which chanced, though at the close of the London season, to be given during the same night.

“ I detest raven tresses,” he continued; “ fair hair, blue, black, hazel, and all manner of coloured eyes—dimples—blushes—ruby lips, white teeth, pretty feet, pressures of the hand, soft sighs, and gentle accents. ‘ Othello’s occupation’s gone’—and they may all fly to the four quarters of the globe for all I care. In future, nothing shall affect my heart but horses, hounds, dogs, guns, nets, flies, rods, and otter spears. I’ll have no society but that of port drinking parsons, who neglect their parishes, and annoy their neighbours six days out of seven, having nothing else to do. Yes, though there are *some* gentlemanlike, efficient, and religious men, who drink nothing but port wine, I’ll eschew even their society, and live with red nosed rectors of the wrong sort, and crafty curates; who cheat the church, and laugh at the bishop, because breach of all the laws that regulate civilized society, beating their wives, boxing with their parishioners, bullying the poor, and lying and slandering, are not considered in the eye of ecclesiastical law, as clerical delinquencies sufficient for expulsion from the House of God.”

Just as our hero had arrived at this doughty resolution and lamentable conclusion, and had reclined against a door-post, to give stability to any further reflection, his wandering eye was attracted by a very beautiful figure moving gracefully to the air of one of his favourite waltzes. The room was getting

thin, and every moment he had better opportunities of observing her. Dressed in the most approved fashion, her fine person, from its position against her partner's right hand, appeared to its full advantage; and the velocity of the dance causing her dark ringlets to play round her rather oval face, in spite of his newly formed resolution to detest the sex, our hero could not help envying the man whose hand was on her waist: a feeling which was rapidly increased, as at this moment, the waves of her glossy hair seemed almost, if not quite, to touch her partner's apparently *unconscious* cheek.

It was the last waltz of the evening. The dancing soon ceased; but the object of our hero's unwilling admiration, still held her partner's arm, awaiting the announcement of the carriage. There were now but three or four persons left in the room, when Rosa Newardine, for such was her name, encountered the gaze of Charles, and she became aware of his earnest and fixed observation. Feeling abashed by this discovery, her eyes fell on the ground; and, as if at a loss for a better subject of conversation to avert his detection of her slight confusion, she touched with her little foot, a black pin which lay on the floor; and calling her companion's attention to it, made hastily the following remark:

“The nonsense and heartless folly which have been uttered in this room to-night will by to-morrow no more be recollected by those who have spoken them, than I shall ever again remember that I once beheld that black pin.”

Her carriage was then announced; but ere she reached the door she turned her head, and saw Charles stoop—pick up—and place in the breast of his coat, the very pin that had elicited her remark.

The last carriage had rolled down the street; and the host and the hostess with their daughters were sitting on a sofa in a little crimson boudoir, much amused by our hero's deep and

lonely reverie. He seemed to be making melancholy observations on the site of the now silent band, on the empty chairs and benches, and on the waning candles struggling with the rosier light of morn: in short, his mind was evidently lost in contemplation of spangles, pins, and crushed and faded flowers, the mournful relics of departed pleasure. After remaining some moments thus, starting from his trance he bade his friends adieu, when, having previously dismissed his carriage, he walked home, striking, with his jewelled cane, at every cat that ventured to run across his path.

The London season was concluded: fashion had finished her last white bait, water parties were over, chaperons were turned out to grass, Crockford's laid no more suppers up stairs, and White's boasted only one or two hats in its bay window, and not above half a head. Our hero had been to every thing and every where, but the fair girl whom he now found himself forced by the wilfulness of his heart, to remember, was not again to be seen: so, with renewed determination to devote himself to the woods and wilds, he left town; and once more ensconced himself in the country.

He had not long enjoyed his rural felicity, when he received an invitation to a visit of some weeks from a friend of his, in the adjacent county of Wilts; which invitation he accepted.

It was a beautiful day, about the 29th of August, on which, having sent forward his servant and his luggage, he arrived on horseback, in sight of Little Langford Manor House. During the last half mile, his path had led him by the side of Grovely Wood; when now, entering the grounds of Langford, he approached its ancient pile by a still, shady, and sequestered path, and presently came in sight of a grotto. Here, reposing from the heat of the sun, he found his host, Sir John Heatherfield, and his two daughters.

“Welcome, Charles—thrice welcome,” exclaimed the latter gentleman in his usual hearty style—“how wags the world with you? faith, after your fatigues in town you must be glad of a little quiet. Here we are,” he continued, “much the same as usual, only I’ve lost old Henderson, my head game-keeper; and my best greyhound, who won the cup at the Deptford coursing meeting last year, is dead. Lots of young ones coming on though; and loads of game, the account of which shall serve to season our wine. Adieu, then, till dinner. My girls will entertain you, as my steward waits some orders.”

Thus saying, off flew the good Sir John; leaving our hero to make the best of the fag end of a discourse, in which it was his resolution to find delight, and to enjoy the conversation of his amiable companions. The better to do this, Charles fastened his horse to the bough of a tree behind the grotto, and seated himself between his friends.

“Now,” he exclaimed, addressing Emma Heatherfield, “tell me all about the sweet fresh country, how have you been? what have you been doing? and whom have you seen? and have you any one staying with you? I detest London, foh—the name of it is sooty.”

The first interrogatories having been duly answered—in reply to the last, the young ladies exclaimed together—“Oh! Charles, we have such a delightful companion to introduce to you, such a friend of ours, so good natured, so beautiful”——

“Stop!” cried Charles, interrupting them, “let me guess what *it* is.”

“*It!*” exclaimed his companions.

“Yes, I know,” he continued, regardless of their surprise—“*it* wags its tail—*it* sits on its hinder legs—*it*”——

“Oh, you very great love,” exclaimed a soft sweet voice

behind the grotto, "you dear good tempered thing, I must pat you," and a little hand was heard caressing the arching and sleek neck of our hero's steed.

"There she is—that's our friend," cried the two ladies, running forth, closely followed by their guest—"Rosa, let me introduce to you Mr. Charles Romer, Miss *Newardine*."

She was looking still more lovely than when he last saw her in town. Early hours and the fresh air of the country had heightened the perfections of her figure, and added to the bloom upon her cheek, which was covered with blushes, when she recognised the man whose ardent gaze she knew herself to have attracted.

They were proceeding to the house when Emma Heatherfield culled a rose, and stopped to place it in Charles' button-hole.

"Oh, how appropriate!" she exclaimed, "here I declare, is a large black pin ready to fasten it. Why, my dear Charles, you must have *expected* a bouquet."

Rosa raised her head; perhaps, it was the flower that excited her curiosity; but in gratifying it, she looked at Charles; and her blue eyes seemed more lustrous than ever.

The hour of dinner arrived; and though Charles did not sit by Rosa, he found it very difficult to adhere to his sporting resolutions, or to control his imagination to follow his host over fields and fences. His mind would neither gallop nor jump; but at every turn of the conversation he found it ambling softly back to summer houses, little feet, and glossy ringlets; and finally pausing on the black pin, which still confined the flower. How happy was Charles when coffee was announced, and the party joined the ladies in the drawing room! How he hung over the pianoforte and dwelt on the rich tones of Rosa's soft but rather melancholy voice, as she sang some of Moore's melodies! When Rosa's eyes met his during the

sweetest passages of the song, as if in search of a sympathy beyond the vacant admiration of the majority of the guests, how those glances, though cursorily bestowed, found their way to his heart, and expelled every ruder emotion! Oh, love! what a world of strength hast thou, when thou wingest thy shaft from the song of beauty! Melody on melody succeeded, while the rest of the male visitors played whist, or mutually secured by the button-hole, gathered themselves in corners, and canvassed the sports of the field; thus leaving Charles to enjoy a delicious but a dangerous trance.

It is not my intention to detail each succeeding circumstance; a course which would be as uninteresting to the general reader, as displeasing to the Editor of this miscellany; who, with a hardness of heart common to gentlemen in his capacity, cares not for the length of the author's face, provided he can secure the shortness of his story, and thus reserve full space for other contributors. Let it suffice then to say, that on the following morning Charles heard with dismay, that Rosa had for some time been engaged to wed the hero of *the unconscious cheek*, Mr. Vortex, with whom he had seen her waltzing. He, was rich in lands and money; while she was poor in all but friends and beauty. The match, therefore, had been deemed, by all save one, a desirable alliance. That one was Rosa.

The vehemence and severity of her relations had been too much for her gentle disposition; and her objections had for a time been silenced. Thus matters stood, and at the expiration of one short month, she would be called upon to fulfil her engagement.

I have often thought it a pity, that when ladies are engaged to be married, they do not wear some symbol or ornament in their hair, or on their dress, to show that they are affianced. How many fascinating creatures do we see at balls, dancing almost every dance, and apparently unattended by their des-

ted husbands, with whom it is possible for unsuspecting youths to fall in love. The heart of man, or at least of many men, is not unlike to a headstrong and pulling horse: it is easy enough to prevent his running away if never let out of hand; but once suffer him to get his head down, or the bit fairly betwixt his teeth, and the arm of Hercules himself would be insufficient to restrain him.

We will now pass over a fortnight which had intervened since Charles' arrival, as well as the many excuses he made to escape from participation in the sports of the field: but at the end of that time we must resume the thread of our discourse.

Towards the middle of the day, a carriage was seen approaching the hall by the usual avenue; it had neared the ancient porch, and Charles was proceeding to the same place by a laurel walk, in some anxiety to ascertain who the visitor might be. At a turn of the path, he met Rosa hastening from another direction, but evidently intent on the same object; her haste was so great, that ere she could stop herself she was encircled by Charles' arm, which he had outstretched to prevent a more serious concussion. In the moment of their meeting he recognised also the expression of her lovely face—it was that of consternation and grief.

Ere she had time to extricate herself from his arm, he exclaimed, "Good heavens! Miss Newardine, what has happened—nay, you cannot support yourself—rest on me, and tell me, I conjure you, whence this distress?"

They were within fifty yards of the back of the house, and the carriage had by this time reached the door, the steps had been let down, and the guest, whoever he was, had descended.

"Let me go!" she exclaimed—"I beseech you let me go—

I cannot tell you now—you will know all too soon; loose me—I *am* recovered."

In spite of her words, she would have fallen if Charles had not persisted in his support; a step was heard approaching; she attempted to move—for the arm had ceased to hold her—in vain; a double black pin in the breast of Charles' coat, had become entangled in her dress, and it held her fast till a person came in sight. With a desperate effort, at length she broke away and fled; but not until her intended husband reached the spot.

"So, sir," exclaimed Mr. Vortex, when recovered from his surprise, "you seem on excellent terms with that *amiable* young lady?"

"Sir," replied Charles, "I *am* on terms of friendship with Miss Newardine, and I feel myself honoured in being able to make this avowal. But if you mean to insinuate aught against the nature of that friendship, I have only to assure you, sir, that you mistake."

"All very fine, sir," rejoined Mr. Vortex, "but in the relation in which I stand to that young lady, I have some reason to doubt the propriety of the situation in which I found her—your arm encircling her waist."

"I entreat you," interrupted Charles, "as you value justice, sir, form no hasty conclusions, respecting Miss Newardine. You have my honour as a guarantee to my assertion, that the situation in which you discovered us, was purely accidental. We were both hastening to the house from different directions; at a turn of the path we came into sudden contact; she was overcome by some emotion, and would have fallen had I not supported her."

"A most improbable story," resumed Mr. Vortex, "but your honour, sir, is pledged to the truth of it, and I trust that

your feelings of propriety will lead you to adopt a line, the necessity of which is evident. I conclude, sir, that you are a guest of Sir John; after what has happened, for the sake of the young lady's feelings and mine, you will of course quit this house immediately. Indeed, circumstances require that I should *insist* on your adoption of this course."

"Indeed, sir," replied Charles, "from the *tone* of the request, and the turn the matter has taken, I feel myself compelled to refuse my compliance to your obliging proposal."

"Then, sir, your remaining here I shall conceive as personally insulting to myself," bitterly rejoined Mr. Vortex.

"Of that you are the best judge;" and with this remark, Charles turned on his heel and proceeded to the house.

The imperial was but just off Mr. Vortex's carriage, ere the owner ordered it on again; and leaving some excuse for a temporary absence, he flung himself into the vehicle and was driven to the Deptford Inn. Arrived there, and having procured a friend, he dispatched him to Charles, with the following message.

"That unless Mr. Romer quitted Langford Manor House that afternoon, and by so doing set at rest all suspicions as to his views regarding Miss Newardine, Mr. Vortex must consider his refusal as an avowed intention to supplant him in that young lady's affections, and require satisfaction accordingly."

The reply to this intemperate message was a direct negative; and consequently Charles had only to seek for a second, in whom he might confide.

During the time that he was sending a messenger for this purpose, the hour of dinner arrived. The party sat down; and Rosa's eyes could not disguise the trace of tears, nor could she conceal her anxiety. She was sad, very sad; and more than once had to endure the well-meant, unsuspecting, and mistaken

rallying of Sir John, as to her disappointment at her intended's sudden but temporary disappearance.

With Charles it was different; he was more cheerful than ever, though in society always gay; trusting by such means to dispel any anxiety which Rosa might feel as to the situation in which he might be placed with her affianced husband. During the evening, Charles was more than once called from the room to receive disappointments to his applications for a friend. None of those to whom he had written were at home; and all resource having failed him, he was forced to send to Deptford inn to say, that as he could not find a friend to act for him, he would be perfectly content if Mr. Vortex's second would appear for both; in which case they would find him at Yarnbury Castle at two hours after midnight, the moon giving ample light by which to settle such an affair. Being the party challenged, Charles had a right to name his weapon; and he decided on small swords for the purpose.

The reason why he selected the sword in preference to the pistol was, that being well skilled in its use, he good naturedly hoped either to disarm or lightly touch his antagonist; while he also trusted to defend his own person from any serious consequences, which, had the pistol been used, he could not have been so certain of doing. Mr. Vortex being in haste to dispose of the matter, accepted the proposition; and the meeting, strange to say, was thus finally arranged.

It was midnight ere the family had retired to rest; Rosa had not an opportunity of speaking to Charles; and she retired to her room in doubt and uncertainty of the course the affair had taken. The house had been hushed for some time, when Charles stole softly to the entrance hall, the walls of which were decorated with every description of sword, from the long rapier down to the more modern cutlas; and selecting two small

swords of equal length, prepared to set forth to the place of appointment. He approached the hall door, and having carefully undone the bolts, turned to a recess wherein to deposit his taper; when, to his surprise, he beheld Rosa herself observing his motions from the other end of the hall. The strong light from the lamp in her hand fell on her now pale but expressive features, contrasted as they were with the long black hair which in all its natural beauty lay unrestrained on each side of her well turned shoulders, reaching far beneath her waist. The outline of her figure alone was visible, as she had hastily wrapped herself in a large, spotless, and not ungraceful robe.

As he paused in astonishment, she approached him, and laying her hand on the hilt of the swords which he had gathered under his arm, with an energy almost supernatural, yet speaking in a whisper—"Charles," she said, "you shall not go—I thought it was thus; and have sent a letter to Mr. Vortex renouncing him for ever. What is the anger of my relations—what are poverty and distress—what is the temporary condemnation of man when compared to a life of heartless degradation, and personal abandonment, and the frown of God! No, no, no; better to renounce the world and live in seclusion, than be a splendid and a guilty slave. Stir not, Charles, stir not to-night; but, as a favour to me, quit this house to-morrow, and forget the existence of one who knows both your worth and her own duty too well to wish to be longer in your society."

As she said this she laid her small fair hand tenaciously on his arm. What was he to do? he could not shake her roughly off, yet he could not obey her commands. Advancing, therefore, sufficiently to reach and open the door, he placed the swords on the outer side, Rosa still holding him by the left arm. Having accomplished this, he turned and entreated her

to leave him; assured her that her presence could be of no avail; that his honour, which was dearer to him than his life, was at stake, and that he had but one course to pursue.

While he said this he gently pressed his own fingers beneath the hand which she had placed upon his arm, and by a sudden effort, though careful not to hurt her, he removed the pressure of her little palm. Then, holding for an instant her slender wrists in one of his hands, and loosing her suddenly, he slipped through the door; when, having snatched up the swords, and sped, with the swiftness of a deer, in the direction of the place of meeting, he crossed the downs, and approached the little trout stream which glided through the valley.

The moment he had left her, Rosa sank upon the cold stones of the ancient hall, and burst into a paroxysm of tears. The thought that she was about to be the cause of bloodshed and of death, was as terrible to endure as the supposition that she was to be the object of contention between two men, was revolting to her delicacy. The body of Charles Romer, pierced and bloody, his fine countenance pale in the agony of death, yet bearing its mild and handsome expression, seemed to lie before her; she seemed even to hear the clash of swords—when, rising frantically from the spot, she resolved to seek the apartment of Miss Heatherfield. In regaining her feet, her hand had been pressed upon the floor, and in the act she had grasped a letter—this being mechanically secured, a few moments more saw her seated at the bed side of her equally alarmed friends.

It was resolved at once to consult Sir John; and Miss Heatherfield hastened to his room for that purpose. She knocked at his door, twice—thrice—when, receiving no reply, she entered, and discovered that he was not there; and from the absence also of a stout bludgeon which usually stood in one corner, she concluded that he had gone out for the night to see that his gamekeepers were doing their duty, knowing

that it was his wont occasionally to make these nocturnal inspections. Miss Heatherfield returned to communicate her disappointment to her friend; but Rosa had left her sister, and had passed to her own room. Miss Heatherfield followed, but found her not; called her by her name, searched for her, in vain, and then, descended to the hall. There, the door was ajar, and on looking forth she perceived the traces, on the moonlit dew, of two persons having egressed.

We must now return to Charles.

Having reached and crossed the little trout stream, he ascended the opposite down. The morning was still as death, not a cloud was to be seen; and the clear, full, and rather frosty moon, threw her broad beams unchequered over the undulating downs, rendering visible every knoll and tuft of furze on their brown and sun-burned surface. Not a sound was to be heard, but the occasional and lonely cry of the lapwing, scared by our hero's unseasonable advance. At length, with a firm and unhesitating step, he passed the ditch of Yarnbury Castle, and entered the vast area of the deserted camp. It was a situation well calculated for the passage of arms, or for any deed of blood; the turf smooth as velvet, yet buoyant and firm, yielded the best foothold; while the huge mounds of earth thrown up around, seemed calculated to shut out the rest of the living world, and exclude the hope of succour. Such a place, and so well calculated for violence, might it seem, when looked upon by moonlight, and with the eye of a gladiator; but observed in a more peaceful and Christian spirit, when the soft rays of the setting sun were kissing, here and there, the points of its defences, and the lamb and hare were cropping the daisied grass, then it might seem a sin to suffer it to suggest aught but silent and thankful contemplation.

Charles' mind was busied with such conflicting thoughts as

these, when the opposite entrance to the camp was darkened by the approach of figures; and Mr. Vortex and his friend stood before him.

Not a moment was lost ere they advanced to meet each other; and the swords having been measured, the principals divested themselves of their coats and waistcoats; then, cast aside their braces, tied a handkerchief round their waists, and assumed their weapons. The second having placed them about four yards asunder, asked them whether they were ready; and receiving a reply in the affirmative, gave the signal which was to authorise the commencement of the strife.

Each party advanced, and Charles offered his sword to be crossed by that of his opponent; but instead of adopting this usual preliminary, Mr. Vortex, shortening his arm a little, kept the point of his weapon directed against his antagonist's face, and seemed resolved to act upon the defensive. Charles was immediately aware that Mr. Vortex was not skilled in the use of the sword; and that he had adopted this dangerous method of meeting him in the face, during a lunge, as his only chance of victory.

Many feints were now made by Charles to provoke his enemy to action, or to induce him to change the plan of his address; but to no good end, for Mr. Vortex remained cool and determined. Thus, they stood for several minutes, Charles good-naturedly manœuvring for a favourable opportunity of disarming or slightly drawing blood from his opponent; while the latter waited on his efforts with a dogged resolution and a bitterness of purpose which rendered the combat one of most uncertain issue. After many ineffectual attempts, Charles, as he thought, struck the point of Mr. Vortex's sword sufficiently out of the line to enable him to draw blood from his shoulder; and he lunged accordingly. He had however miscalculated the activity of the man with whom he had to deal; for, with

a quickness he did not expect, the sword of his antagonist recovering its level, met him beneath the eye, and snapped upon the cheek-bone. But, as Mr. Vortex had thrown his whole weight upon the thrust, the hilt of the broken weapon struck Charles so severely on the head, that he went down; at the very moment that his own sword drew blood from his adversary's shoulder. Mr. Vortex looked as if he would have struck at Charles again with such portion of the blade as yet remained to the hilt; but his second pushed him back, desiring him to speed to the inn, and having sent assistance, to quit the neighbourhood without delay. Mr. Vortex retired slowly from the scene, his bitterness unsubdued, and anger still at his heart: while his more noble foe lay bleeding on the ground from a wound which his own generosity had entailed upon him.

Charles having assured Mr. Vortex's second that his hurt was not dangerous, asked for some water; and the latter having taken from his pocket a hunting flask, and departed in search of it, our hero was left by himself. He had not lain thus for many moments, when he felt a gentle pressure on his hand—so soft—so tenderly applied—so unlike the touch of man, that he anxiously turned his face to see from whom it proceeded; when, kneeling at his side, he beheld Rosa. She did not weep—she did not speak; her face was pale, but there was not an appearance of emotion further than might be gathered from her tearless eye.

“Good heaven! Miss Newardine, is it possible that you have ventured hither?” was the question faintly asked by Charles, as the blood gushed out afresh from the stab in his face.

Motioning him to be silent, she took a scarf warm from her beautiful neck, and endeavoured to staunch the wound. She stooped so close to him in her efforts to serve him, that her breath, like the soft summer air stealing through a wilderness

of sweet and dewy flowers, fanned his feverish brow; and as she watched the expression of his countenance, she heard him murmur, "Rosa, *dearest* Rosa, my life, my *love*, how knew you where to seek me?"

She had only time to hold before his eyes the letter which he had let fall, and which she had found on the floor of the entrance hall at Langford; when a chaise was heard approaching, and several people arrived to their assistance.

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The village bells of little Langford were ringing merrily on the succeeding first of May, and the labouring classes, dressed in their best attire, were standing in groups round the ancient portico of Langford Manor House. Before the door waited a chariot and four post horses, in the dickey of which was already seated a smartly dressed lady's maid.

The neighbouring downs decked in the emerald hue of spring, and spangled with innumerable cowslips, were smiling up at the soft blue sky; while Langford and Grovely woods were alive with wild untutored melody, the dove, the lark, the blackbird, nightingale, and thrush, each vying with the other who should more sweetly sing the bounties of creation. Oh! what a happy face had nature then put on!

There was a bustle among the domestics in the Hall; the carriage steps were let down with much display; a lusty cheer was given by the crowd; and then, amid the waving of hats, and blessings from all, Rosa, blushing and beautiful, and beloved, was handed to the carriage by Charles, who had made her his bride. The good old Sir John and his amiable daughters, with a host of friends and relations, were crowding the steps of the portico; and, as the carriage drove off, waving a thousand kind and affectionate adieux.