

In to all other appeals his patrons had mostly turned a deaf ear. Dick Kynaston was a bright exception. Like most buccaneers, the Major, as before said, was free-handed. He had been fortunate during the autumn months, whether by cards or racing matters little; and had contrived in his own vernacular, "to land a nice little pot." He replied to Prance's piteous cry for assistance by sending him a five-pound note, and the man felt more than ever grateful for such help in his present extremity. With the season Mr. Prance resumed his regular avocations; he was by turns tolt, betting-man, and tipster. As a tout he had no information to impart, to resume the calling of a betting-man he must first acquire some small amount of capital, but to be a tipster requires nothing beyond pen, ink, and paper, and a modest amount of postage stamps. But Mr. Prance was dead out of luck, and even his guesses at the winners of the Lincolnshire Handicap, &c., proved unfortunate.

Men are not given to reward the giver of information which leads to the loss of their money. And, therefore, this latter industry, let him cultivate it never so sedulously, brought little glist to Mrs. Prance's mill. But April brought a change in his fortunes; he was walking gloomily up the Strand, when he suddenly ran across a bookmaker with whom he had done business in more prosperous days. The thought struck him; he stopped him, and exclaimed,

"Mr. Black, give a poor devil, who is clean broke, a chance."

"Well, you do look 'dead stoney' and that's a fact," rejoined the bookmaker. "What is it you want?"

"Give me a tip, and a trifle to back it. I can't pick a winner myself now."

"Well," replied Mr. Black, "there's half a sovereign for you. As for the tip, remember, I don't know much about it, but I advise you to put it on Belisarius for the Two Thousand. You'll get something like twelve or fourteen to one; at least, they were laying hundreds to sevens an hour ago in there," and Mr. Black jerked his thumb in the direction of the Victoria Club.

How Belisarius won the Two Thousand we already know, and it is almost needless to say that Sam Prance profited a little thereby. From that on he haunted the neighborhood of Wellington Street in the hopes of once more coming across that good natured bookmaker. It was some days before he succeeded in doing that; though, thanks to the few sovereigns he had won over the Two Thousand, he was now more respectably attired, yet he had not the audacity to call at the club and ask for Mr. Black. When you have been half-starved and half-frozen through a long winter you do not recover your assurance all at once. Prance had been so utterly brow-beaten in his misery that he had not as yet thoroughly recovered his nerve, and shrank from meeting a rebuff. However, his patient vigilance was at last rewarded, and he once more encountered Mr. Black. He, of course, stopped him to thank him for the turn he had done him, and wound up by asking him whether he fancied Belisarius for the Derby.

"No," rejoined the bookmaker, "I don't. I know no more than I did last time. I am guided entirely by the money-market. On his Newmarket performance he ought to be a much hotter favourite than he is. What they are going on I don't know, but there are certain men, who seldom make a mistake, who seem to have the amount of the National Debt to lay against Belisarius. That's all I know about it, Prance, and I should not be at all surprised to see Belisarius go back in the betting at the last. If he don't, it will be a very warm Monday indeed for two or three of them."

Sam Prance, as he walked away, cogitated deeply upon how he might best turn Mr. Black's hint to his profit. He had neither capital nor credit to make much of laying against Belisarius, and certainly, after what he had heard, had no wish to back him. It occurred to him that the best thing he could do was to carry his news to Major Kynaston.

The Major would understand how to make the most of such intelligence as well as any man, and he knew from past experience that when his patron won a good stake he was liberal to any of his dependants who conducted to the result. He had recommended Kynaston to back Belisarius for The Guineas, and found it quite as profitable as backing it himself.

"The hint has proved well worth paying for, Sam," the Major had said to him upon that occasion. "I told you last summer to keep a sharp look-out as to whether they had got a good two-year-old in the North. You got hold of him a little late—we ought to have been on at double the odds."

But when Mr. Prance made his appearance in Mayfair, and communicated his new intelligence, Dick Kynaston exclaimed:—

"If you're sure of what you say there is more money in this than there is in the other; but look here, Sam, there must be no mistake about it. The reason I have stood to you rather is that whatever your information might be, you have always told me exactly where you got it, and I could depend upon its accuracy; now, no nonsense, tell me the precise grounds you have for saying Belisarius won't win the Derby."

Prance, in reply, detailed his conversation with the bookmaker, winding up with, "And, as you know, sir, the tip about Belisarius for The Guineas came from the same man."

"Yes," observed the Major meditatively, "I know Black; he's as shrewd as close an observer as there is in the Ring. I'll just watch this horse for a few days myself, and when I have noted who are the colt's most resistant opponents, shall quite know what to think about it. That'll do for the present, Sam. You're not given to running riot, and I need scarce say this is nothing to give tongue about."

"Never fear, Major, I'm not given to talk unless I am paid for it."

"Oh! one thing more," exclaimed Kynaston, "if you happen to hear that it is the opponents of the favourite are going on, let me know."

(To be continued.)

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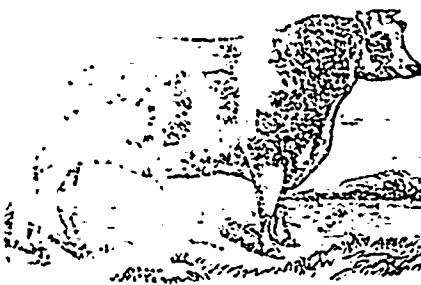
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