

THE STRAW

"No. He wasn't out. I heard he had run up to London," said someone else, and a third struck in.

"He didn't. He was going out with the Belvoir; said he was sure they'd manage a gallop in the Vale."

"If ever a man was desperate," said the first, "he looks it. Ruin staring him in the face at every turn. He must have gone all to smash."

"It was his own fault," said Burkinshaw magisterially. "Gambling and racing, and——"

The man laughed.

"Lucky for you, Burkinshaw, that Lauder wasn't in that affair the other night. He'd have helped himself to something more useful than your great-great-grand-aunt. He's in a mood to stick at nothing."

Burkinshaw ignored the ribald remark. He was still in a condition of elephantine uncertainty whether to roar with the community at the joke, or to rage at its perpetrators. His mind rocked between the two.

"After all," said the first man, "it's horrible to go under. And Lauder isn't the kind of man—he can't pull himself together. No ballast, nothing to keep him straight. He's