

CHAPTER II.

A Pair of Rogues.

When big Bill Blingham left him, Mr. Lomas immediately hurried away in the direction of the Horse and Hound Hotel, which was the rendezvous of the numerous inhabitants of Bloxham.

He passed quickly in, and made his way into the coffee-room, where a tall man of military bearing was sitting, idly glancing over the morning paper.

"Well?" inquired the latter, anxiously, springing to his feet as Lomas entered.

"It's all right, captain," returned Lomas quickly. "There'll be no need for any fine work of our own this time," he went on with a laugh. "He's as lame as ever we could wish, and has as much chance of seeing the starting-post as this chair," he ended, slapping the arm of the easy chair into which he had flung himself.

"Capital," murmured Captain Fansham. "But is the coast clear? Has my uncle taken his departure, I mean?" he ended with a smile.

"He went off with Joe Lambert to the stables," replied Lomas, shortly, as his eyes glittered evilly.

"Look here, Lomas; we can make a bit out of this. Wire your brother to lay Starlight for all he's worth for the Two Thous'. We'll go halves, of course, as it will be on our information."

"Too late, captain. Your uncle sent a wire to scratch him for the 'Guineas' as he passed through the village," returned Lomas, refraining from adding that he had himself also sent a wire which would, however, through the colonel's prompt action, prove of no value.

"Well, let's get back to town at once. There must be some way of making money out of this. We must back Warlock at once for all we can get on. Now Starlight is out of it we have nothing to fear. How did the old man take it?" he asked, curiously.

"Pretty coolly, I can tell you. Why, he backed it with Blingham to win him ten thousand while the horse was walking before his very eyes on three legs."

"What!" exclaimed the captain, sharply. "Then there can't be much wrong with the horse. If there's any doubt about the matter, we'd better adhere to our original plan."

"There's no need to be uneasy," replied Lomas, soothingly. "I think he only did it out of bravado. You know

what he is. I offered to lay him a price, too."

"Well?" inquired Captain Fansham, with a faint smile.

"He refused," returned Lomas, tartly.

"Hard lines," laughed the captain. "But we'll get a bit out of him yet some way or another before we've finished. I'll ring for my car. We may as well be starting."

In a few moments the car was before the door, and an hour and a half later the two worthies, who were so anxious that Starlight should not win the Derby, were seated in Captain Fansham's chambers in Piccadilly.

"Now, look here," the captain said, after they had both helped themselves to a cigar, "we must decide now what we are to do to-night. I propose that we go to the club separately, and you start at one end of the room and I at the other, then at an arranged signal between ourselves we start backing Warlock. Does that suit you?"

"Yes; that's all right. If we do it quietly we can get a few good wagers before the rest tumble to the fact that we are working a commission. But we want another to help us, and we would do better."

"That's so," admitted the captain. "D'you know anyone you can trust?" he asked, with a whimsical smile.

"There's my brother——" began Lomas.

"Out of the question!" retorted the captain, sharply. "He's too well-known as a book-maker, and directly he opened his mouth they'd cut the price."

"Well, do you know anyone you can trust?" inquired Lomas, testily.

"Don't think I do," returned the captain, with a grin.

"Then we must manage it by ourselves. How much shall we back him to win?"

"He's at twenty-five to one now. Can we get on five hundred each, do you think, at that price?"

"It might be done," replied Lomas, thoughtfully, "but we shall have to start very carefully. Of course, we must take what they'll lay as casually as we can, then when they begin to tumble to what we're after we go a bit faster, eh?"

"Gad! we'll gamble!" almost shouted the captain, his eyes blazing with the greedy excitement of a born gambler. Then he went on in a cooler tone: "But, remember, twenty to one is the shortest price we're to take."

"All right," muttered Lomas. "Then that's settled. What time will you put