

reached his dressing-room and rang the bell, that he might give his man final orders for the morning, he felt quite a little touch of regret that he had been so skilful in his diplomacy.

When Kerneval left his room, Wrexford lit another cigar and drew the curtain from a window. In what strange whirl his whole busy life swam before him as he sat and looked out! And how delightful was all this crown and charm of civilization,—this rounded crystal in which one could see reflected so much that is best of such life! How easily could a man stay his foot at such place! And then, with some inexplicable alertness, his fancy brought before him the vision of Kitty Marling. He had noticed with what interest she had listened to what he had said of his affair with the Tarks. And there was such a charm about her,—it was as if a tinge of purple giving tone to sunshine falling upon pure white,—and her soft eyes, languid a little at times, as might be a violet in the morning kept awake all night by the chatter of a wild rose. And there was something else that he now understood after Kerneval had told him that she was a great heiress. Was there not even a strange significance given to her by her unavoidable consciousness of her great wealth?—an aureate coloring that slightly tinged with golden richness all that she was,—a mere thing, however, a shadow almost, nothing like the bees-wings of gold-leaf that float in *eau de vie de Dantzig*. And Wrexford, laughing at his disconnected thoughts, turned from the window.

Rain had fallen in the night, but in the early morning a brisk wind, now subdued to a whispering breeze, had cleared the sky of all clouds save for a few plainly defined and purely white that lay in diminishing perspective along the horizon. A strong, and heady smell arose from the wet and matted leaves and grasses. The most of the fields were bare, with only the stubble rising from the brown earth, but in some the winter wheat had sprung up bright in glowing verdigris. The afternoon was either just bracingly cool or pleasantly warm, as your blood ran or your spirits were. The country was at its best, and the "meet" was the largest of the season. Bobby Chatto counted thirty-two who were to "follow," without including the "whips,"—a "field," too, that looked like "going." All the Kerneval party were horsed as originally intended; but Wrexford, who had not come into the first count, was obliged to take what was left in the stables. Parsifal had been given him as a mount. He was a large, solemn animal of the highest respectability. His regular work was dragging the express cart to and from the village. But he was not wholly untried. Sure enough at an ordinary jump, he had been known to do some surprisingly good things in a sedate, meditative, and wholly self-satisfied manner. Indeed, there ran a rumor among the grooms that a little good blood trickled in his veins.

"I hope," said Mrs. Kerneval, as she drove Mrs. Trevor to the "meet," "that Mr. Wrexford won't do anything absurd."

"Oh, he'll be all right," observed Mrs. Trevor cheerfully. "I can tell a man that can ride a horse as well as I can tell a horse that a man can ride. Parsifal isn't exactly what one would choose, but he's not so very bad, and I'll answer for his rider."

Men were arriving singly and in parties. Some were driven, but the most came on their hunters at a walk or an easy trot. Grooms led about the horses that had been sent on ahead, or those belonging to the riders who had not yet mounted. Many carriages stood around the gowns and sunshades giving the color lacking in an American hunt where the "pink" does not appear. By the side of the road, the hounds were gathered, restless, turbulent, requiring all the efforts of the huntsmen to keep them from straying.

"Oh," cried Miss Lyddington excitedly, for it was her first hunt, "she watched the swaying tails. 'Look at the cunning things. Each dog must have half a dozen tails at least.'"

It was some time since Wrexford had been on a horse,—a long time since he had been in a hunting-field. Parsifal was not one to excite the spirit of a rider, but he was far better than nothing, and Wrexford felt much of the exhilaration of every true horse-lover when he feels himself carried by four stout equine legs instead of his own pitiful two. His thoughts flew back to his Kentucky childhood when he had been lifted almost out of his cradle on to the back of a pony, his own from that moment; to his boyhood when, hardly more than twelve, he had run his clever little sorrel against the grav of Colonel Judson's nephew, with thousands on the event; to his youth, when he had ridden in the famous steeplechase, and landed his horse a winner amid cheering crowds. He remembered the day when his father's horses were sold,—when everything was given up,—when he turned from the stables for the last time. And then he thought of his long rough ride with Gourko across the Balkans; of his long gallop—a day and night—over the Egyptian sands, that he might telegraph an account of Hicks's defeat to his paper; of how, in all the glory of "pink," he had ridden with Sir Redvers Hope through the most famous hunting ground in the world. The cool, aromatic breeze blew in his face; the fresh fairness and glad brightness of the time inspired him. He had been depressed of late. His life, that had been everywhere, seemed to lead him nowhere. But now such shadows were lost in the absorption,—in the loss of all self-consciousness. Who could be querulous, doubtful in vexing inspection, or gloomy back-look, or dejected forecast, with the glowing, grandly-rolling country about him; with the eager crowd at one with himself in the single interest of the hour; with clear,

glad voice and quick laughter on the air; with faces that were as gems making the daylight brighter? The most obstinate pessimist that ever misinterpreted the book of life could not here misread its lines. His doleful questioning, his whence, his why, his whither—would seem but idle caviling. Whence? From some good source and with adequate cause, when the untired world has spun on so long, and offers this very scene to prove its worth. Why? The happiness of such an hour is reason enough for existence. Whither? Good in its origin, good in acts, why shall not the end be as is the world's birth and life? What more can one wish to know than that he is in his mind and body to ride away across the glorious country in full possession of the best that Mother Nature has to give,—youth, and strength, and hope?

Looking up, Wrexford saw Miss Marling looking down at him from the break.

"How I wish I were going with you," she said.

"Why do you not?" he asked.

"I promised before I came that I would not."

"There's no chance for me to win the brush to-day."

And then there Wrexford knew that Parsifal had work cut out for him; that all that a man could do would be done, and that, his worthy horse willing, the chief trophy of the day's chase should be handed up over the wheel of that break before nightfall.

It takes quite a number of words to re-echo that kind of a vow but it was made in the infinitesimal of an electric flash. If would only have given Wrexford, if possible, firmer determination, had he known that Everest had come to a like resolve ten minutes before.

Crack, went a huntsman's whip, and at the sharp sound even Parsifal stirred uneasily. With a short "toot-toot" of the horn, the Master of the Hunt

trots quickly down the road,—the pack at his horse's heels. Now there is a quick yelp, and the first hound

has jumped, caught the top of the fence under his fore-paws, and is over; all the rest tumbling in a sort of canine torrent after him. Well together,—

"a blanket might cover them,"—they start across the first field. There is a rush,—three or four horses

clear the fence at once. Chatto comes first of the Kerneval party. His mount is a fidgety little mare,

and jumps with a light spring that more than takes her over, and brings Bobby—unaccustomed to her

as he is, a trifle on her neck at landing. But he recovers in an instant, and rides steadily on. Everest

follows. He is a well-known rider, a distinguished member of the Myopia, and, with his powerful

animal, jumps almost from the road. It is a splendid performance, clean, clear, and complete,

looking, perhaps, more difficult than it really is, and Kitty Marling claps her hands approvingly. Kerneval,

Etheridge, and Dakayne follow in the crowd

unnoticed. Wrexford, who has been farthest from the start, is left alone. He attempts to bring up

Parsifal, but that worthy beast, apparently thinking that the jump has not been approached with

sufficient deliberation, "refuses." It is one of those little things that, after all, are so great.

Wrexford has never felt so humiliated in his life.

He turns the sedate animal with vigorous determination, and, starting him from the opposite side of

the road, horse and rider are over in really a splendid leap. It is as fine a performance as

Everest's, and again Kitty Marling claps her hands.

And now they are really off. The pace at first is not great, and, as Parsifal settles down to his

work, Wrexford looks back. Carls and carriages

and drags have started, and are tearing along the highway. It is a "gallery hunt," and all are anxious

to reach a cross-road which the hounds will doubtless cross. Parsifal, so to speak, transacts a slow,

lumbering, business pace, and Wrexford, almost

with starting anger, feels that he has little chance

of being in the "first flight,"—no hope at all of being

in at the "kill"; that there is no possibility that he

can keep his promise to himself that he will give the

brush to Miss Marling. If, he thinks, as he pounds

on, he only had under him one of his father's blue-

grass steeplechasers, the one on which he made his

famous water-jump so easily, so long ago; or the

thoroughbred that, a shorter time past, had borne

him so lightly over the hedges in the Leicestershire

fields! But slowly his animosity toward his mount

commences to wane. A "Virginia creeper" lies

ahead. Parsifal begins to find out with what manner

of rider he has to deal, gets over his first "sulk,"

and clears it nicely. Whatever has quickened him,

he addresses himself soberly, determinedly, to the

matter in hand, and now takes his jumps in a style,

large and ponderous perhaps, but with a strength and

certainity that more than win Wrexford's confidence.

Parsifal begins even to show such possibilities of speed that Wrexford feels some slight

return of hope. The glories of the run may not be

for him, but he feels that his horse will not disgrace

him,—that he will not be in the "ruck,"—will not

be wholly "out."

The "field" keeps well together; the bounds run

freely. The pace is not great, neither is it slow,—

an easy swinging canter that brings a man up

squarely and well to his jumps. The country is

fairly cut up. The fences claim constant attention,

—they keep the horses sharply up to their work,

but do not vex them. One or two "raspers" have

been encountered, but as yet there have been no

"checks." On they go, over every-changing ground

and amid swiftly-shifting surroundings; now in

half-cleared land and past scattering trees; now

through the underbrush of scarce-touched woods;

now over the springing swales of the river

in the ridged, ploughed fields, and now along the hard

banks, almost echoing the hoof-beats, of the river

rushing on and away below. The wind is dead

ahead, and meeting it straight, at such speed, it

seems to blow with greater velocity,—to charge the

riders in arrayed battalion and with leveled lances.

Over all falls the glorious autumn day, deepening

into the distance where the blue haze hangs over and along the far-away hills.

Ascending a slight incline, the hounds, at an increased speed, cross a level pasture, so closely grazed by the cattle—that now stand at gaze, or start with shaking heads out of the way of the pack—as to be as closely shaven as a lawn, and approach a road. The carriages have reached the place, and are gathered near the spot where the hounds will cross. Above them all rises the Kerneval break, and Wrexford, as he comes on, can see Miss Marling standing, and holding the rail of the driver's seat. He calls to Parsifal, pats his broad shoulder, and feels the quick strain and play of muscle and tendon. Parsifal must not fail him here; and there passes between the horse and the rider that something that, in such junctures, assures that there shall be no failure. Again Everest, on his better horse, leads, and again takes the jump in great form. On the other and farther side of the road is an ordinary board fence with a closed gate. Those who are leading make for the panel next the gate on the right, for the "take-off" seems better there. Everest goes over gloriously. Etheridge follows, but, either because his horse is winded or has grown careless, he fails to clear and does not break the topmost board, and falls with his rider. Parsifal is following closely,—too closely, perhaps, but his blood is up at last, and he will not be checked. The fallen, struggling horse and the entangled man are directly in his line. On the left is the gate, a foot higher than the fence, and on the right a panel, lower, to be sure, than the one directly in front, but near which are loosely-pledged stones making a jump impossible. There is but one way. With a quick turn Wrexford calls upon old Parsifal, and the call is honored. They are safely over the gate,—safely over, but with nothing to spare, as a splinter flying from the top makes evident. It is more than a good jump,—it is the best and boldest thing of the day. All who follow shout approval; and Wrexford, turning in his saddle as Parsifal lands in the field, sees Miss Marling unclasp her hands, and hears her laugh a little excitedly as she applauds wildly. Etheridge rises from the ground, and, mounting his horse almost before he has scrambled to his feet, again takes up the chase.

And now the character of the run changes. Now it is over no predetermined course. The pace quickens, and the carriages in the road not far off are left a long way behind. A ditch lies on either side of the fences. Huge boulders, like the uplifted shoulders of giants at toil in the earth, rise all around. Thick bushes in places almost cover the ground, and no one knows what they may conceal. There is a "check" for an instant upon a broken stretch, but the hounds quickly pick up the scent and are again away. The handful who are "well up"—the pace has told, and "tailing" has begun—are at last at maddening speed. A lagging crowd, taking line of flight above their course, seems to stream like a black wind-straightened flag behind. Wrexford and Everest are leading. That animosity that had sprung up between them the night before had taken form, and they have ridden and now ride in direct rivalry. Kerneval, who is close behind, marvels at Parsifal, and concludes that after all he would not sell him. It is the fastest thing, so far, of the season,—Kerneval says it in the smoking-room that night, and all agree with him,—fast, short and brilliant. Now only the best horses—Parsifal has won his place and the best riders are "in." Parsifal stumbles, and for an instant slackens his pace. Wrexford falls back beside Kerneval, and for a few minutes they ride over the grassy ridges of the meadow side by side. And now there springs up in Wrexford the old racing feeling. He will not be left behind. He feels as he had felt long ago, when he had caught, between the flat ears of his horse, the glint of the shoes on the hoofs flying before him. As if he had received some sudden infusion of his rider's hot spirit, Parsifal makes one great effort. He lengthens his stride—he "collars" Everest's horse,—has passed him. The hounds are clambering over a fence along a narrow strip of woodland, and through the scattered trees Wrexford notices, in the field just beyond, a spot of yellow gliding swiftly over the brown earth. Glancing along the fence, he sees, farther along, a gate with an opening beyond that seems to promise better landing. But to reach this he must swerve from his course, and to swerve is to lose time. The hounds will kill in a minute, and to lose time is to lose all. Which shall it be? Such, and the like, are the quick questions that come to the cross-country rider, questions to be answered on the instant, with horse and pulse at full gallop. Wrexford holds straight on. In an instant he is at and over the fence. The wind has not dried the earth, and the ground is slippery. Parsifal almost comes down, but with convulsive action he staggers to his feet and picks up the running. The fence that bounds the thicket on its farther side is low and insignificant. Wrexford is again in the open, and the course across the level nothing to be considered. But Parsifal is old; he has done wonders; he can do no more. He is "pumped;" he "throws up his tail." His speed lessens, and he strikes a walk. Wrexford sees Everest pass him; sees him in the next field spring from his horse amid the tumbling, tearing, yelping mass of the hounds, and lay about him with his crop,—the winner of the brush.

(To be continued.)

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