

SADDLE AND SABRE.

(Continued.)

It was very rarely that any of Dick Kynaston's friends were made welcome to what was conventionally called "the study." Nor was it exactly the room in which a man would elect to receive any one but an extreme intimate. In Chester Street this sanctuary was simply the back dining room, and after the books and cigar-boxes, the chief characteristics were a leathern armchair and a large, plain, substantial writing-table.

The Major had no connection whatever with literature, but he was certainly a man with very extensive correspondence. The letters he received and the replies thereto were generally of the briefest, and a great many of them were apparently from people to whom the handling of a pen was a strange and toilsome labor. Their spelling, like their caligraphy, was of a doubtful order. There was much uncertainty amongst them as to the orthodox way of spelling "Major," and they discovered more varieties on that point than one would think so simple a title was capable of. These correspondents not uncommonly followed their letters. Quiet, unassuming people, as a rule; whose dress might prompt a well-drilled servant to keep his eye on the umbrellas in the hall, but who otherwise were unmistakably business visitors; and they were a strange and curious lot, these jackals of the Major's.

It was a sad revelation of how educated men who have sunk beneath life's stormy waters are driven to get their living, to find that amongst this little band several of them were men well educated, and who once held a good position; ruined mostly by their own mad folly, they had descended to the depths of racecourse touts, or still more often had become the tools of the professional usurers, who in former days had helped them to their ruin. The Major himself, very indignant though he would have been had any one ventured to hint so, was simply one of these latter in a very large way of business. If he had burnt his fingers considerably he had not come to utter financial grief. He had never forfeited membership of his clubs, he still held his own very fairly socially, and it was essential to his scheme of life that Mrs. Kynaston should take her place in the world, and be seen where that world of some ten thousand people do please to congregate. The difference between him and his employees is obvious. To the well-dressed denizens of Clubland the spendthrift of family and expectations was easily accessible, which, of course, he was not to those more ragged of his brethren long since cast out from the gay scenes of their undoing. What hardly pressed young man would not welcome the prosperous gentleman in broadcloth and clean linen, who sympathised with his embarrassments over a cigar, and wound up by saying, "Deuce of a mistake, borrowing. But, Lord! what's the use of preaching! Young blood will run its course. I never argue with a man who *must* have money, unless he is trying to demonstrate the possibility of having it out of me. I'll give you a line to old Moggs if you like. He'll rob you, naturally—they all do. It's their trade, but he'll let you have it as cheap as any man in London."

Amongst Dick Kynaston's habitual visitors was that luckless individual who has already twice flitted across the pages of this narrative. We have seen him righteously struck to the earth by Furzedon outside the supper-house in the Haymarket. Unjustifiable though the provocation was, it was questionable whether the striker should not have refrained from that blow. We have met him again as a mere racecourse tout at Lincoln Races, speaking in the slang vernacular of his tribe, and yet Prance was a man of good education, who had known a much better position, and who, though some years older than Ralph Furzedon, had been tempted by that precocious young gentleman to his undoing. How that happened will appear later; for the present it suffices to say that to Dick Kynaston he is a mere purveyor of racing intelligence, picked up it is impossible to say how, but at all times worth listening to, as the Major has discovered from experience. That there had ever been the slightest connection between Furzedon and Mr. Prance Kynaston was totally unaware. Had he been a spectator of that scene in the Haymarket no one would have been keener to know what called forth the final malediction launched against Ralph Furzedon, and what had been the previous relations between the pair to warrant the bitter intensity in which it was couched. The ordinary rough who, in his avocation of robbery, gets knocked down, may swear a little, but takes it usually after the manner of his betters, as a mishap in the matter of business, but as we know the casual lookers on had felt that no ordinary discomfiture in a street row could have brought forth the animosity concentrated in Mr. Prance's curse.

It is the morning after the Major's little dinner at the Thermopolium that, while engaged in those mystic calculations somewhat akin to the researches of the old alchemists in their untiring, though unavailing, endeavors to transmute baser metals into gold, the Major was informed that "a person" wanted to see him. Like the old alchemists, Kynaston had discovered that much more human but baser secret, that it is quite possible to induce the weaker portion of humanity to part with their small store of wealth with a view to increasing it. Now, "a person to see you" is an announcement disturbing to a considerable portion of society generally. The "person to see you" is apt to be a very undesirable person to interview—apt to either want money in some form, or be the bearer of disagreeable intelligence. We all know it except those affluent past redemption, and for whom some special paradise of their own must be preserved, or those, and they are a very limited number, whose record is so entirely blameless that they can laugh at the idea of the limelight being turned upon it. But the Major was used to this curt announcement. He neither dreaded that Miss Minnever had called to say that unless she had one hundred on Mrs. Kynaston's account she should be compelled to take legal proceedings; nor had

he any fear of similar threats from creditors on his own account. Dick Kynaston was a business man in this wise: whatever he might have done once, he was a pretty rigidly ready-money man now. He made his wife a fairly liberal allowance, but he had given her pretty sharply to understand that this must never be exceeded. Therefore this announcement brought no misgivings to his mind.

Another minute, and the servant had ushered into his room Mr. Prance. "Well," said the Major, "what is it? Sit down, and don't let us waste any time about it. We know one another pretty well now. If you want money, say so. You know I'm usually good for a trifle, and I will tell you at once what I can let you have. If you've brought me information, you know very well that you can trust me to pay for it, if I find it valuable."

"Well, Major," replied Prance, as he seated himself in a chair. "I've brought you a bit of 'Turf' information which, I think, is worth your taking note of. I can't say it's valuable, probably never may be. You're a business man, and I don't expect you'll ever think you owe me anything on that account. But I've got something else to say to you. I believe you were hunting up in the wolds of Lincolnshire last year. Didn't you make the acquaintance of a Mr. Devereux? We both saw him ride at Lincoln, and, mind you, he will ride some day, but he's got to practise a bit yet. Now, I've heard something about that young gentleman. He's got into trouble a bit, and, from the little that I can learn, is falling into about the worst hands that could happen to any young man starting in life."

It took a good deal to astonish the Major, but that Prance should be aware that he was mixed up in Charlie Devereux's affairs did surprise him. He hesitated a little before he made answer. It was scarcely likely that a man like Prance would presume to come and tell him to his face that he was no fit mentor for youth. Prance, with a direct pecuniary interest in keeping on goods terms with him, was hardly likely to commit himself in this fashion. What did he mean? What did he know? What could the fellow be driving at?

"Yes," replied the Major, slowly, "I know Mr. Charles Devereux and all his people, but I am not aware that he has fallen into particularly bad hands."

"Did you ever come across a man of the name of Furzedon?" said Prance lowering his voice.

"I know a gentleman of that name," replied Kynaston, as he rose from his chair and assumed a lounging attitude against the mantelpiece.

"Gentleman!" retorted the other with a bitter sneer. "You may call him that if you like. There's a good many travel under that name who, if it means anything like straightforwardness and honesty, have little right to it. From the little I've seen, but more from what I've heard, I believe that Furzedon is a great friend of Mr. Devereux's."

"Mr. Furzedon you mean," observed the Major, quietly.

"No, sir, I don't," rejoined Prance, doggedly. "I'll call him 'that Furzedon.' But if you're a friend of Mr. Devereux's tell him to take care of himself, for that he's intimate with as slippery a young scoundrel as ever trod the Heath at Newmarket."

"Surely Mr. Furzedon does very little in that way?"

"Look here, Major," said his visitor, "you go about a good deal, and are supposed to have cut your eye teeth, just judge for yourself. Another hint, and it's worth a sovereign, too. I don't know what sort of a card-player you are, but if ever you take a hand with Furzedon, don't be too sure of getting the best of it."

"Ah," rejoined the Major, "I don't suppose that is very likely to happen, but it is worth a trifle to know that your antagonist is of the highest class when you sit down. Now you recollect what I asked you to find out if possible. Have you succeeded?"

"I don't know that I can quite say that," replied Prance, diffidently, "and I shall have to write to you again on the subject, still as far as I can make out they have got no first-class two-year-old in the Northern stables."

"All right," replied the Major, as he handed the tout a gratuity. "If you discover one later on, you must let me know. And now, good-bye," and a curt nod of dismissal indicated to Mr. Prance that his audience was terminated.

"Ah," said the Major to himself, after his visitor had left the room, "I was somewhat deceived in that young man. I did not think him a fool, but I had no idea he was so treacherously clever. I must study him a bit. I wonder how much he has had to say to young Devereux's losses? I shouldn't wonder if my friend Prance knows an ugly story or two about him, the possession of which would render him very amenable to reason if he and I should ever happen to differ? And it's a quarrelsome world," mused the Major, "and men lose their temper as often as they do their money, and sometimes, sad to say, both simultaneously." Mr. Prance's hint was quite a revelation to the Major. He had regarded Furzedon as a quiet, tolerably well-mannered young man, not at all likely to exhibit speculative tastes, but, according to this informant, Mr. Furzedon was an exceedingly astute young one, with a decided taste for gambling in every form. Dick Kynaston had been brought up too much amongst "the right people" not to detect that there was a dash of Brummagem about Ralph Furzedon. He was a very good imitation, but the initiated could not fail to see that he was not quite genuine. The base coin appears good money to the eye, but it won't ring, it jars upon the ear when put to that test, and similarly Furzedon, though at first he thoroughly passed muster, when you came to associate with him jarred a little on the feelings. You couldn't quite indicate the flaw, but you felt intuitively that he was not quite a gentleman.

Suddenly a thought flashed across the Major's mind. A confederate might be useful in many of the transactions in which he was habitually engaged, especially a confederate over whom he had a hold. And this, he thought, through Prance very possible in the case of Ralph Furzedon. There was plenty of time to make inquiries, for he had no particular scheme