

SADDLE AND SABRE.

(Continued.)

"All right!" replied young Devereux, "I'm good to start whenever you give the word." And accordingly, the morning of that day the pair took their places in the express for town, Charlie almost smothered in the sporting papers he had bought with which to beguile the way.

The vaticinations of the various writers on the coming race afforded him considerable comfort, as most of the prophets predicted the success of Belisarius—and with Charlie the victory of that colt meant extrication from a very unpleasant scrape. As for Bertie Slade, he was very silent; except for his companion's sake, he felt rather indifferent as to the result of the Derby. His mind was absorbed in the one question, Could this thing be true? Was Lettice Devereux really engaged to that fellow Furzedon? He would know for certain this week—ay, know from her own lips. And yet, when he thought of that, it did not seem quite so easy as he had first pictured it. He did not feel that he could ask her the question unless he could plead his own love, and the hope that he had not told his own tale too late. To offer her formal congratulations, and so get at the truth that way, would, he felt, be a mockery—almost an insult. Was it likely that either Mrs. Kynaston or Charlie would be misinformed about a thing like this? No; he had been a fool—he might have known that a girl like Lettice Devereux would not be left to wait long for the gathering. He had flattered himself that he had a chance, and thought he had stood high in her good graces; but then he had not declared himself. Still, to be cut out by a fellow like Furzedon—a brute whose only redeeming point was, apparently, that he had money. He knew next to nothing of Furzedon, and had no knowledge whatever of the many objectionable points connected with that gentleman's career; but a rejected suitor—and, if this story of Charlie's was true, he might regard himself in that light—rarely forms a just estimate of his successful rival.

How it would have stirred Bertie Slade's pulses could he but have known that his rival was deeply interested in this race that he was travelling all the way from York to see—interested, but in just the contrary way. Chiefly as a means of wringing a reluctant consent from Miss Devereux, Furzedon was awaiting, with no little impatience, the defeat of Belisarius. He was prepared to go, indeed, no little length to compass it, should he only see his way without much risk of detection. He turned the thing over again and again in his mind, and at last thought he saw his way to assist at that conclusion. To attempt to bribe Bill Smith would be useless—the horse was his own; and even supposing he could be bought, it would probably require a large sum to make it better worth his while to lose than to win. Then too, Bill Smith was a notoriously queer-tempered man, difficult to approach on so delicate a subject, and quite likely to denounce him at once to the stewards of the meeting, an open scandal which Furzedon shuddered to think of. But he might be got at through his besetting weakness, and the emissaries he employed would leave no tangible evidence behind them. Genial souls, only too pleased to fill the wine cup and hob nob with the famous jockey, who could suspect them of ulterior motives?

Peculiarly also Furzedon desired the favorite's defeat. Dick Kynaston had warned out that the shrewd speculators who so persistently opposed Belisarius were acting upon the belief that when it came to the point Bill Smith would be in no condition to ride, and that at the eleventh hour the securing of even a decent jockey would be impossible. Ralph Furzedon and the Major, acting on this inspiration, had followed suit, and now stood numbered amongst the pronounced opponents of Belisarius; in fact, that colt's victory would cost them both a considerable sum of money. Furzedon had very little doubt that the two or three book makers who so persistently laid against the horse would endeavor to assist their own forecast of Bill Smith's probable state on the Wednesday morning. Still he thought that it would be quite as well if he also did what little he could to contribute to the defeat of Belisarius. There was no necessity for taking the Major into his confidence; on the contrary, it was far better that he should know nothing whatever about it. Furzedon knew very well where to lay his hand amongst his myrmidons on a couple of the sort he wanted; rollicking men, who would go down, flatter the great Northern jockey to the very top of his bent, swear that there never was such a horseman as he, and never such a colt as Belisarius; that they had got their very shirts on him. "And now, Mr. Smith, we'll just have a glass to drink luck on 'Wednesday'." If the colt's other enemies were only taking like steps to ensure his defeat, then, thought Furzedon, with a grim smile, "wherever Bill Smith may finish it won't be first, unless the devil takes care of his own. And then, Miss Lettice, we'll see whether you're too proud to give me the right to help your brother out of his scrape."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DIRE MISGIVINGS.

The Derby week has come at last. The leading competitors for the great race have all got safely to Epsom, and the papers teem with reports of the morning gallops, and comment freely on how the horses do their respective work. All are unanimous in praising the favorite, pronounced to have improved much since he won the Two Thousand, and reported as having galloped the whole course in rare style on the Monday morning. Tattersall's is a great bustle that day. Not only was there all the business of comparing to be got through; and this checking off of their various bets takes some little time with extensive speculators; but towards the finish there was some rather smart wagering on the coming event. There

was plenty of money both for and against Belisarius; but, as Mr. Black had said, it did not seem to matter how much money the public heaped upon the colt, there was still always plenty to be laid against him. The stable commission had been long ago exhausted—it was a small stable. Mr. William Smith was a poor man, and he and his friends had very soon succeeded in getting all the money they could afford on at highly remunerative prices. The greater part of their commission had been negotiated before the horse had made his successful debut at Newmarket; and, though they had not hesitated—notably Sir Ronald—to put down a considerable portion of their winnings in support of the colt's Epsom chance, yet that soon came to an end, and it was the public now who were backing Belisarius.

Outside the subscription-room, waiting up and down in earnest conference, were Furzedon and Dick Kynaston.

"It's true, Major. I can thoroughly depend upon my man. Those fellows who got the hint were quite right to never leave Belisarius, and we were quite right to follow their lead. Old Bill Smith is located at the Red Lion at Epsom, and well upon the drink. If the secret leaks out, the horse will be at double the price before the flag drops."

"They can't get anybody else to ride," rejoined the Major, "at this time of day. And, if Bill Smith gets up in that state, it will be all the odds against his being in the first three, much less winning. I suppose there is not much chance of his pulling himself together between this and then?"

"No," replied Furzedon, glancing sharply around, to be sure that there was nobody within earshot. "My informant says that he is surrounded by a little knot who wouldn't give him the chance, even if he were so minded."

"I can't think what his friends are about," replied Kynaston, moodily. "Norman Slade and Radcliffe are his two chief supporters, and there are no keener hands on the Turf. They know Bill Smith better than any of us, and Radcliffe, we know, at all events, is standing to win a lot of money over it. Are you sure they have not a second string?"

"Such a thing has never even been hinted at," replied Furzedon; "besides, my good fellow, the bill of the play is out now. We know what every one rides—what all the leading jockeys are booked for. Of course there is always the stable-boy; but we know what a muddle he usually makes of it."

"I'll tell you what it is, Furzedon," said the Major. "I've seen some queer dodges take place at the last moment. There is such a thing, remember, as a friendly recognition of claim upon a jockey's services. I can't help thinking men like Slade and Radcliffe would be prepared for such a probable contingency as Bill Smith's inebriety. If the horse looks well, and I see anybody else up on it, I shall take back the money I have laid against him at the last moment."

"That you must do as you like about," replied his companion, "but I've done here. Are you going westwards?"

"Not yet," replied Kynaston.

"Then for the present adieu," said Furzedon; and as he strolled homewards through the Park he wondered whether there was a chance of such a

as the Major hinted at having been set for the opponents of Belisarius. Trap it could not be called. If Sir Ronald Radcliffe or Slade had made some such arrangement with another jockey, they were only doing their best for owner, trainer, horse, and the public.

Charlie Devereux, incited by a lot of youthful acquaintance at Limmer's, to which hostelry Bertie and himself had betaken themselves on their arrival in the metropolis, had backed the favorite for a good deal more money. He had been further moved to do this by Norman Slade's laconic reply to Bertie's inquiry as to how Belisarius was. "Never was better" had been his uncle's rejoinder, but he was not disposed to be diffuse on the subject, and Bertie knew him too well to ask further questions.

Charlie Devereux had persuaded himself that he might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, and, therefore, that it would be his best policy to thoroughly clear himself; he would go for the gloves; in fact, he ran through all the gamut of such phrases applicable to the situation. If it came off it would be all right; if it did not, well, then the smash had come; and if his friends would not rescue him there must be an end of his soldiering, and he would have to strike out some other path in life. He had said nothing of all this to Bertie, and determined that he should be left in ignorance, at all events until the race was over; and Bertie, immersed in his own worries, took little heed of the doings of his mercurial brother officer.

The Derby morning broke clear and bright. The sun was barely well above the horizon when the vast horde of pleasure-seekers began to pour out of London on their way to the Downs. There were those who came to gamble, those who came for an outing; those who came because it was the proper thing to do; those who came because other people were going, those who came because they always did; and that vast crowd who yearly travelled down on the chance of picking up a little money during the week in ways of which even they themselves had as yet but hazy conception. Could the racing public have looked that morning, about breakfast-time, into the private sitting-room of the Red Lion at Epsom, they would have been sore bewildered. Seated at the table whereon still stood the debris of breakfast was Sir Ronald Radcliffe; whilst pacing restlessly up and down the room was Norman Slade, with that glint in his eyes and half snarl about his mouth which those who knew him well were aware presaged bitter humor on his part.

"Yes," he said, in evident pursuance of their conversation, "he is just about in his very worst humor this morning. He can be, as you know, as obstinate as a pig; and there is a certain stage he arrives at when he is in this way when he is neither fit to drive nor to lead, and that is just where Bill has got to this morning. He is sulky drunk, and, whatever we may want him to do, that above all others is the thing he will set his face against."