

CHAPTER II

THEY had not long to wait. The messenger stood outside the door. At a sign from Warr, he strode into the room, and curious loungers in the passage edged in behind him.

The crowded room became silent again. The gathering had forgotten the old in the new interest, and looked eagerly at the man who stood up, towering above the puzzled face of old Will Warr.

He was a young man of twenty-six. There were signs, chiefly about his clothes, that he came from the country, for he was tanned and freckled too. He carried in his hand a soft white hat almost shapeless and very much soiled. He wore a coat that might have been a coachman's, reaching down to his heels, but following the lines of his figure. He stood there erect and confident; his was a quiet, mettlesome confidence distinctly pleasing. His face, round and ruddy, was wonderfully good-humoured—almost merry; but the lines of his mouth were for the moment set and stern. Withal there was the mark over him recognised by every man in the room. It was in his face, in his clothes, in his carriage, and in the big, blue, bird's-eye handkerchief knotted round his throat. The stamp they recognised was that elusive quality seen in all game animals or men—the spirit of the fighter. He stood something like three inches short of six feet; his

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