

...with many... God... and... from... crowding in, they emerged on... Grand Stand, at a... excellent view of... panorama of such... eye, is un-... by any part of the world.

The rain had cleared off. White fleecy clouds, drifting across the sky before a soft west wind, threw alternating lights and shadows over a wild expanse of country that stretched to the horizon, in range on range of undulating pastures, broken only by scattered copses, square patches of gorse, and an occasional gully, marking the course of some shallow stream from the distant uplands, coyly avoiding, as the mist that rested on their brows rolled heavily away. Far as sight could reach, the landscape was intersected by thick irregular lines, denoting those formidable fences, of which the nature was to be ascertained by inspecting the leaps that crossed the steeplechase-course. These were of a size to require great power and courage in the competing animals, while the width of the ditches from which the banks were thrown up necessitated that repetition of his effort, by which the Irish hunter gets safely over these difficulties much as a runner jumps a gate. A very gallant horse mounted on the first two or three such obstacles in his stride, but the tax on his muscles would be too exhaustive for continuance, and not to "change," as it is called, on the top of the bank, when there is a ditch on each side, would be a certain downfall. With thirty such leaps and more, with a sufficient brook and a high stone wall, with four Irish miles of galloping before the judge's stand can be passed, while the runner forced from end to end by some thoroughbred flyer not intended to win, and with the best steeplechase horses in Great Britain to encounter, a conqueror at Punchestown may be said to win his laurels nobly—laurels in which, as in the wreath of many a twy-legged hero, the shamrock is profusely intertwined.

"The boys has got about the big double as thick as payse," observed Mr. Sullivan, shading his eyes under his hat-brim while he scanned the course. "It's there the Englishman will renage, likely, an' if there's wan drops in there 'll be forty of them tumblin' one above the other, like Brian O'Raferty's pigs. Will the Captain keep steady now, and never loose her off till she marks with her eye the very sod she's after kickin' with her fat?"

"I'll go bad he will!" answered Denis. "The Captain he'll draw her back smooth an' easy on the snaffle, and when one'st he lets her drive—Whooroo! Begorra! It's not the police barracks nor yet the County Gaol would hold her, av' she gets a fair offer! I tell ye that black mare,—Whist—will ye now? Here's the quality comin' into the stand. There's Jane's bird ones, Mr. Sullivan, shape an' action, an' the ould blood at the back of it all."

An Irishman is no bad judge of good looks in man or beast. While the Roscommon farmer made this observation, Miss Douglas was leaving Lady Mary Macormac's carriage for the stand. Her peculiar style of beauty, her partial self-possession, the mingled grace and pride of her bearing, were appreciated and admired by the bystanders, as with all her triumphs they had never been on her own side of the Channel.

The crowd were already somewhat hoarse with shouting. Their Lord Lieutenant, with the princely politeness of punctuality, had arrived half an hour ago. Being a hard-working Viceroi, whose relaxation chiefly consisted in riding perfectly straight over his adopted country, he was already at the back of the course disporting himself amongst the fences to his own great content, and the unbounded gratification of "The Boys." Leaping a five-foot wall, over which his aide-de-camp fell neck and crop, they set up a shout that could be heard at Naas. The Irish jump to conclusions, like women, and are as often right. That a statesman should be wise and good because he is a bold rider, seems a position hardly to be reasoned out;

...with a... throw as it... Comether was the pride of that well-known western hunt, once so celebrated as "The Blazers." Each animal was ridden by a good sportsman and popular representative of its particular district. The little Galway horse made all the running, took his leaps like a deer, finished like a game-cock, but was beaten by the mare's superior stride in the last struggle home, through a storm of voices, by a length.

The crowd was in ecstasies. The gentle-folks applauded with far more enthusiasm than is customary at Bedford or Lincoln. A lovely Galway girl, with eyes of that wondrous blue only to be caught from the reflection of the Atlantic, expressed an inclination to kiss the plucky little animal that had lost, and blushed like a rose when a gallant cornet entreated he might be the bearer of that reward to the horse in its stable. The clouds had cleared off, the sun shone out. The booths emptied themselves into the course. A hungry roar went up from the betting-ring and everybody prepared for the great race of the day—"The United Service Handicap, for horses of all ages, bona fide the property of officers who have held Her Majesty's commission within the last ten years. Gentleman riders. Kildare Hunt Course and rules."

Betting, alas! flourishes at every meeting, and even Punchestown is not exempt from the visits of a fraternity who, support racing, it may be, after a fashion, but whose room many an Irish gentleman, no doubt, considers preferable to their company. On the present occasion they made perhaps more noise than they did business; but amongst real lovers of the sport, from the high-bred beautifully-dressed ladies in the stand, down to lads taking charge of farmers' horses, and "raising a lep off them" behind the booths, speculation was rife, in French gloves and Irish poplins, as in sixpenny pieces and "dandies" of punch. Man and woman, each had a special fancy, shouted for it, beheld in it, backed it through thick and thin.

The race had created a good deal of attention from the time it was first organized. It showed a heavy entry, the terms were fair, a large sum of money was added, public runners were heavily weighted, the nominations included many horses that had never been out before. In one way and another the United Service Handicap had grown into the great event of the meeting.

The best of friends must part. Denis could not resist the big double, taking up a position whence he might hurl himself at it, in imagination, with every horse that rose. Mr. Sullivan, more practical, occupied a familiar spot that commanded a view of the finish, and enabled him to test the merits of winner or loser by the stoutness with which each struggled home.

Neither had such good places as Miss Douglas and Miss Macormac. Norah knew the exact angle from which everything could best be seen. There, like an open-hearted girl she insisted on Blanche taking her seat, and planted herself close by. The General leaned over them, and Mrs. Lushington stood on a pile of cushions behind. She had very pretty feet, and it was a pity they should be hid beneath her petticoats.

A bell rang, the course was cleared (in a very modified sense of the term), a stable-boy on an animal sheeted to its hocks and hooded to its muzzle (erroneously supposed to be the favorite), kicked his way along with considerable assurance, a friendless dog was hooted, a fat old woman jeered, and the numbers went up.

"One, two, five, seven, eight, nine, eleven, fifteen, and not another blank till you come to twenty-two. Bless me, what a field of horses!" exclaimed the General, adding, with a gallant smile, "The odd or the even numbers, ladies? Which will you have? In gloves, bonnets, or anything you please."

The girls looked at each other. "I want to back Satanella," was on the lips of both, but something checked them, and neither spoke.

Macormac, full of smiles and good humor, in boots and breeches, out of breath, and splashed to his waist, hurried up the steps. "See now, Norah," said he. "I've just

...down the... course, shorting, playing... to her... bending to acknowledge the caresses Daisy lavished on her beautiful neck with no sparing hand.

The mare looked as fine as a star. Trained to perfection, her skin shining like satin, her muscles salient, her ribs just visible, her action, though she trotted with rather a straight knee, stealthy, cat-like, as if she went upon wires.

It is the first quality of a rider to adapt himself easily to every movement of the animal he bestrides, but this excellence of horsemanship is much enhanced when the pair have completed their preparation together, and the man has acquired his condition, morning after morning, in training walks and gallops on the beast; This was Daisy's case. Satanella, to a sensitive mouth, added a peculiar and irritable temper. Another hand on her rein for an hour would undo the work of days. Nobody had therefore ridden her for weeks but himself, and when the two went down the course at Punchestown together, they seemed like some skilful piece of mechanism, through which one master-spring set all parts in motion at once.

"He's an illigant rider," groaned Mr. Sullivan, who stood to win on Leprauchan. "An' a give-and-take horseman's 'the pick of the world when there's leps. But it's not likely now they'd all stand up in such a 'rookawn,'" he added, "an' why wouldn't the Captain get throw'd down with the rest?"

Such admiration was excited by the black mare's appearance, particularly when she broke into a gallop, and Daisy with pardonable coxombry, turned in his saddle to salute the ladies smiling on him from the Stand, that few but those immediately interested noticed a little shabby, wiry-looking horse come stealing behind the crack with that smooth, easy swing which racing men, though they know it so thoroughly, will sometimes neglect to their cost.

This unassuming little animal carried a plain snaffle in its mouth, without even a restraining nose-band. It seemed quiet as a sheep, and docile as a dog. There was nothing remarkable about it to those who cannot take a horse in at a glance, but one of the Household left his Excellency's Stand and descended into the Ring with a smile on his handsome, quiet face. When he returned the smile was still there, and he observed he had "backed Shaneen for a pony, and had got four to one."

Mr. Sullivan, too, as he marked the little animal increase its stride, while its quick, vibrating ears caught the tootfall of a horse galloping behind it, drew his mouth into many queer shapes suggestive of discomfiture imparting to himself in a whisper, "that if he rightly knawed it, may-be Sir Giles wasn't too free with his offer at all, for such a shabby little garron as that!"

So the cracks came sweeping by in quick succession, St. George, perhaps, attracting most attention from the Stand. A magnificent bay horse of extraordinary beauty, he possessed the rich color and commanding size of the "King Tom" blood, set off by a star of white in his forehead, and a white forefoot. No sooner did he appear with his scarlet-clad jockey, than the ladies, to use Macormac's expression, were "in his favor to a man!" The property of a popular English nobleman, a pillar of support to all field-sports, ridden by a gentleman jockey, capable, over that course, of giving weight to most professionals, in the prime of blood, power, and condition, he was justly a favorite with the public as with the Ring. In the whole of that multitude, there were probably but two individuals who wished he might break his neck at the first fence, and these two sat in the Ladies' Stand.

"They're all weighed and mounted now but one," observed the General, studying his card. "What is it? Fandango? Yes, Fandango; and here he comes. What a hideous drab jacket! But I say, I'll trouble you for a goer! Why this is Derby form all over!"

"He's a good mile horse anywhere," said the quiet man, who had backed Shaneen; "but he's not meant to win here, and

"See now, Norah," said he. "I've just

...common farmer on a knoll that commands it, and watch with him the gallant sight offered by such a field of horses charging a fence like the side of a house at racing pace.

"Augh, Captain! keep steady now, for the love of the Virgin!" roared Denis, as if Daisy, a quarter of a mile off, and going like the wind, could possibly hear him. "More power to the little barse! He's leadin' them yet! Nivir say it! the Englishman has the fat of him! Ah, catch houl't of his head, ye omadawn! He'll never see to change av' you're lousin' him off that way! Now, let the mare at it, Captain! She's doin' beautiful! An' little Shaneen on her quarters! It's keepin' time, he is, like a fiddler! Ah, be aisy, you in scarlet! By the mortal, there's a lep for ye! Whooroo!!! Did ever man see the like of that?"

It was indeed a heavy and hideous fall. St. George—whose education in the country of his adoption had been systematically carried out—could change his footing with perfect security on the narrowest bank that was ever thrown up with a spade. To the astonishment of his own and every other jockey in the race, his "on and off" at all the preceding fences had been quick and well-timed as that of Shaneen himself; but his blood got up when he had taken the brook in his stride. He could pull hard on occasion. Ten lengths from the Big Double he was out of his rider's hand, and going as fast as he could drive. Therefore Denis desired that gentleman to "catch houl't;" but with all his skill—for never was man less "on omadawn" in the saddle—his horse had broke away, and was doing with him what it liked.

Seeing the enormous size of the obstacle before him, St. George put on a yet more infuriated rush, and with a marvellous spring, that is talked of to this day, cleared the whole thing—broad-topped bank, double ditches, and all—in his stride, covering nearly eleven yards, by an effort that carried him fairly over from field to field; nothing but consummate horsemanship in his jockey—a tact that detects the exact moment when it is detrimental to interfere—enabled the animal to perform so extraordinary a feat. But, alas! where he landed the surface was poached and trodden. His next stride brought him on his head; the succeeding one rolled him over with a broken thigh, and the gallant, generous, high-couraged St. George never rose again!

The appearance of the race was now considerably altered. Fandango dropped into the rear at once—there was nothing more for him to do in the absence of his stable-companion, and indeed he had shot his bolt ere half the distance was accomplished. The pace decreased slightly after the accident to St. George, and as they bounded over the wall, nearly together, not a man on the course doubted but that the contest lay between the first three, Satanella, Leprauchan, and Shaneen. Of these, the mare, so far as could be judged by spectators in the stand, seemed freshest and fullest of running. Already they were laying a trifle of odds on her in the Ring.

Now Daisy had planned the whole thing out in his own mind, and hitherto all had gone exactly as he wished. In Satanella's staying powers, he had implicit confidence, and he intended, from the first, that if he could have the race run to suit him, he would win it about a mile from home. After crossing the wall, therefore, he came away faster than ever, the leaps were easy, the ground inclined in his favor, and he rattled along at a pace that was telling visibly on Leprauchan, who nevertheless kept abreast of him, while little Shaneen, lying four lengths behind, neither lessened nor increased his distance from the leaders, but galloped doggedly on, in exactly the same form as when he started.

"Never saw a steeplechase run so fast!" said everybody in the stand. "Why, the time will be as good as the Liverpool."

"It can't go on!" thought Leprauchan's jockey, feeling the chestnut beginning to roll, while pulling more than ever. "If I can but keep alongside, she must run herself out, and there's nothing else left in the race."

"You fool!"

Poor Daisy! Everybody was sorry for him, everybody except the owner and a few friends who won largely on Shaneen, regretted his disappointment, and shrugged their shoulders at the heavy losses it was known to have entailed. His brother officers looked grave, but bestirred themselves, nevertheless, for the next race. His trainer shook his head, glancing wistfully at the spur marks on the mare's reeking sides. The very crowd condoled with him, for he had ridden to admiration, and the accident that discomfited him was patent to all. Even Mr. Sullivan whose own hopes had been blighted by the defeat of the chestnut, expressed an opinion that "Av' it could be run again, though there wasn't a pound between them, it was his belief the mare would win!"

Mr. Walters, however, true to his nature, kept a bold face over a troubled heart, yet had a difficult task to control his feelings, when he emerged from the enclosure after weighing, and found his hand seized by the Roscommon farmer in a grip that inflicted no slight physical pain.

"Ah! now Captain," exclaimed Denis, who had flung himself on a horse, and galloped back from the Big Double, just too late to witness the finish. "Sure ye rode it beautiful! An' the mare, I seen her myself, come out from the all in wan blaze, like a sky-rocket! Bate, says they, by a neck? I'll niver believe it! Annyways, ye'll need to pay the wagers. See, now, Captain, I parted a s. o' heifers, only last Friday was it, by good luck, an' I've got the money here—rale Dublin notes—inside my coat-tail pocket. Take as much as ye'd be likely to want, Captain. What's a trifle like that betwixt you an' me? Oh! the mare would have wan safe enough, av' she had fair play. See to her now, she's got her wind back. Begorra! She's ready to go again!"

Daisy was no creature of impulse,—the last man in the world to be fooled by any sentiment of the moment,—yet tears filled his eyes, and he could scarce find a voice to thank his humble friend, while he declined an offer that came straight from the farmer's warm and generous heart.

Denis looked disappointed, swung the Captain's hand hard, and vanished in a convenient booth to console himself with another "dandy" of punch.

Patting the mare fondly, and even laying his cheek against her warm, wet neck, the losing jockey retired to change silk and dooskin for his usual dress, in which, with his usual easy manner, he swaggered up to the stand. Here, as has been said, his defeat excited considerable sympathy, and, indeed, in one quarter, positive consternation. Two young ladies had accompanied him through the race, with their hearts as with their eyes. When his efforts ended in defeat, both were deeply affected, though in different ways. Norah Macormac could not refrain from tears, but conscious that mamma was on the watch, hid her face in a ridiculously small pocket-handkerchief, pretending to sneeze and blow her nose, as if she had caught cold. Blanche Douglas, on the contrary, looked round fierce, wistful, and defiant, like a wild creature at bay. Even Daisy, approaching jauntily to receive his friends' condolences could not but observe how pale she was, yet how collected and composed.

"I've not punished her much," said he, addressing himself, in the first instance, to the real owner of the vanquished mare. "She's as good as I told you, Miss Douglas. It was no fault of hers. If I hadn't been a muff I'd have killed the old woman, and won in a canter! Never mind; your favorite, at least, has not disgraced her name, and I'm very glad I called her Satanella."

She laid her hand softly on his arm, and looked straight into his eyes. "Did you stand it all?" said she. "Is it as bad as you said? Tell me! Quick! I cannot bear suspense."

"Never laid off a shilling," he answered lightly. Never even backed her for a place. I swore I'd be a man or a mouse, as you know, and its come up—mouse!"