

WON IN A CANTER.

(CONTINUED.)

"That's not the point, if I knew who was on the side of the horse and it was a good man I could afford to take the odds more readily; but I don't like working in the dark. Now if Mr. Charles was fit and well—which he is, I'll be all up but shouting for me, that a quarter of an hour after the start I should be able to shy my hat up and sing out 'Won in a Canter'; but you see he's not able to get up, and the one that does ride the horse may not know him. He may be a stranger to the country; the animal may not take kindly to him, and a hundred things; the odds offered now against the horse are very short, too short for me, they must pile on the agony a little thicker before I have much to do with 'em; but I think I'll leave Sultan alone anyhow."

"There's a couple of horses I could be well paid for to send across," said Pastern, "but I'm not such an ass as to do it; in the first place I could not get at them, and in the second they're not dangerous."

"Whose might they be?" asked Nobbleall.

"Lady Verriest's," replied Pastern.

"And who wants you to do this little job?"

"Ah, that's telling Nobbleall; a cove who can pay at any rate."

"What a fool you must think me, Pastern, it does not require much thought to know who it is—it's a Shirkington Duffer, of course; my Lady refused him, it's a little spite and revenge. I thought you were a cuter hand; why you might make fifty easy out of him and do nothing."

"How do you mean, Nobbleall?" asked Pastern, eagerly, but almost in a whisper.

"Why, look here, he knows me, but mind I goes half if he stumps up; s'pose you and I drive over in the tax cart and see him; you tell him you can manage it, and leave me to tell him how."

"All right, Nobbleall, I'm your man, but I must have Jim Crow cleaned and fed. I will return with you, have a bit of something to eat, and canter home before dark."

"That's your sort," replied the other, as he left the room to order the cart, in which they were presently seated bowling along at twelve miles an hour.

"Two gentlemen wish to see me!" exclaimed Shirkington, waking up from his afternoon's nap. He was somewhat lonely by himself, and having nothing to do, had fallen asleep. "Who the deuce are they?"

"One, sir, is Mr. Pastern," returned the servant, "the other is a gentleman I don't know."

"Very well. Mary, show them in."

"Servant, sir, servant," said Nobbleall, briskly; called to see you, sir, confidentially."

"Oh, did you, Nobbleall? what might it be about? Take a seat—sit down, Pastern."

This they did, placing their hats before them; and seating themselves on the extreme edge of the chairs, which is the company way of such gentlemen. Then before they commenced, polished their foreheads with large cotton handkerchiefs, which, when they had finished, were placed in the hats again.

"Now then, Nobbleall, fire away, let me hear what it is."

"Well, the fact is, sir," commenced Pastern in a gentle voice, "you mentioned to me a short time back, that—ah—m—you—you—ah—m—would be glad to see Lady Verriest's horses—to see them in fact," he was somewhat puzzled how to put it, "not too near the winning-post."

"Ah, did I?" said Shirkington, carelessly, "well, I cannot say I recollect it; there's the gin and water on the table, help your selves."

"Pastern and I have been over to see her Ladyship's horses," said Nobbleall, in his city way. Shirkington knew he had been a stud groom and was up to racing. "They're doing beautiful, and it's my opinion nothing will beat them, leastways, the one his Lordship gave her; her own horse, Marmaduke, is by no means a bad one, or a slow horse; but 'My Lord,' which she calls her new one, is an out-and-outer. A magnificent fencer, a great turn of speed, and will stay for a week; all that blood will—he's by Rataplan out of a Barlecatcher mare, as thorough-bred as Eclipse, nothing else in the race will have a chance with him."

"Do you really think so, Nobbleall?" asked Shirkington; "they seem to say Miss Thornhill's 'Sultan' is the favorite."

"Ha, ha! excuse my laughing, Mr. Duffer,

coin to you and us; it's not reasonable for you to pay till you know you're safe, or us to expect it. Five-and-twenty guineas down, and five-and-twenty after it is all over."

Duffer mused before he gave an answer. And at last after a long talk, beating down on one side, raising the figure on the other, and emptying the gin bottle whereby each gentleman's face was considerably inflamed, it was agreed forty pounds was to be the price—twenty down and twenty after the meeting.

"But how are you going to do it?" asked Duffer. "Nothing killing?"

"Do you suppose we're greenhorns, sir? No, nothing as will toll tales, or do any harm. A drug, the painted bit, the water or a dozen other things will stop 'em. Good-evening, sir; don't you fear, keep quiet and wait." And the two worthies quitted the room.

"How on earth are you going to do it?" asked Pastern of his friend, as they drove towards the "Hunt and Spear."

"I never did see such a muff as you are, Pastern, in all my born days; there, take your half," handing him ten sovereigns. "How am I going to do it? easily, by doing nothing at all; here we are twenty pounds to the good, the rest shall take its chance. Do you suppose I'm going to risk crossing the herring-pond for twenty pounds? The horses are not likely to win, and we can gammon him that we coopered them."

"But by any chance one of 'em should win, Nobbleall, what then?"

"Why, Pastern, if he said anything, which he would not, we should threaten to split; but they won't win nor anything like it, and we shall land the other score as easy as may be."

"What a couple of infernal rascals they are!" muttered Duffer to himself. "I suppose they will do it all right, though. I hate that woman, to throw me over as she did, and all for money too—shameful!"

He quite forgot he had done the same thing at Brighton; for when he found out Bessy Sprightly had nothing, he took his departure without a word; and he also quite forgot that, in spite of his solemn word to Alice, who was getting everything ready for him, he had proposed to and was accepted by Miss Bullion—that directly the steeplechases were over he was to marry her for her hundred thousand pounds.

Alice did not yet know that her swain was unfaithful to her, for the simple reason that as yet it was a secret. Shirkington had made his betrothed promise not to say a word about it. "Wait till after the steeplechases," he said, "and then all the world may know it."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIRST LEG UP THIRTY YEARS AGO.

"The St. Alban's steeplechase, fiddle-dee-dee! ours will be a far better one than that ever was. Talk of your Osbaldestons, your Beechers, your Sefferts, why they can't hold a candle to the Captain's son. I'd like to see the man who could beat Jack Sullivan and Tom Tit over a country; it ain't in the order of things I tell you."

Such was the opinion expressed pretty loudly by Farmer Dawes, jolly Bob Dawes, one of the best shots and cricketers in Surrey; now, alas! dead and gone.

Yes, the Feltham grand steeplechase at the time I speak of was almost an unheard of luxury, the *acme, la creme de la creme*, a sporting dish *par excellence*, an *entree* that few could partake of.

"Now look there," continued Dawes, pointing to a slim, wiry, nice-looking lad, who was walking towards him, "there's the very boy a-coming" (it was market day at C—y, and the company he addressed was numerous); "tell me he ain't cut out to lick all as was ever foaled—gammon!"

The lad he pointed to was a fair-haired, healthy-complexioned, compact, well-made youth of about seventeen summers; his step was short, sharp, and decisive, he carried his head well up, and looked every one fully and fearlessly in the face with his clear blue eyes.

"Ah, Dawes," said the boy, as he came close to where the burly yeoman was standing, "how are you? I'm getting Tom Tit into famous fettle; he is only a little one, but he can go and stay. I hope I shall not be far behind, but you know I am only a youngster, and this will be my first appearance in public. I can stick on, and I know what my horse can do, but with such tip-top sawyers as Black Tom (Oliver), Jim Mason, Dan Seffert, the Squire (Osbaldeston), the Captain (Beecher), and a host of others, I

could beat him; he was deadly with the tubes; only a year before we introduced him to the reader, he had blown off two fingers by the bursting of a gun at a pigeon match.

His father, the Captain, was a man of means, grudging his son nothing in reason, and had some time before given him "Tom Tit," a little Irish horse he had picked up; no one knew anything about him, but the lad soon found out that he had not only a fine turn of speed, but could stay, gallop through dirt, and was an admirable fencer. He had got his father's permission to enter his horse at the forthcoming Feltham steeplechase.

"It only ten sovereigns' entrance, sir," he said—he did not call his father governor; in those days children addressed and talked of their parents with respect—"I have the money saved up."

"No, my boy, no, you shall not spend your money; I will make you a present of the entrance fee—yes, you shall enter and ride your own horse, and I really thank you have a very good chance."

It was so arranged, and the lad at once commenced putting his horse through the mill.

"Well, Master John, I was a-wondering where you could have got to!" exclaimed Bullfinch, the Captain's old groom, coachman and factotum, as his young master entered the stable-yard. He had been in the family upwards of fifty years, and was a privileged person on the premises; he did and said as he liked, and kept the other men servants in order. "Here's Brown Windsor, Shippery Brown, Master John, in the harness room, waiting to see you; he wants to look at our oss; but that can't be on no account whatsoever; you be careful of him, sir, he's an out-and-out rascal; don't tell him anything."

"Not I, Bullfinch, come along with me, and we will tackle Mr. Brown. Well, Windsor, what may you want with me?" he said as entered the room, which was a large, low, old-fashioned one, harness on one side, and corn-bins on the other, with a fire-place and and fire in it at the end, before which Mr. Shippery Brown was seated, smoking a pipe, which he put away as the lad entered. He was a cunning, low, beetle-browed fellow, who always seemed to be looking over your head, but never at you; he was dressed in the sporting fashion of the day; had his clothes been in good order and on a gentleman they would have looked well, but on the fellow that wore them they gave him the appearance of what he was, a low blackguard.

A green cut-away coat, somewhat seedy, with tarnished gilt buttons, a white hat, none the better for wear, a blue bird's-eye tie, canary-colored waistcoat, and drap cloth trousers, very tight, with a couple of buttons on each side at the bottom, completed his costume.

"Good morning, sir," commenced the man, "glad to see you looking so well, Mr. John. As fresh as a three-year-old, as one might say. Could I have a few moment's conversation with you alone?"

"Well, Brown, I do not know what you have to say that Bullfinch may not hear. I should be sorry my father knew you were about, for you know he is not pleased at the way you served him with that cow some time since, and requested you never to come on the premises again."

"Well, but Mr. John; I've come to do you a service, s'help me bob I have."

"Very well, Brown, I'm much obliged, but what you have to say, say before Bullfinch; I want no confidences."

"I'm not going to say anything before that old cock," remarked the fellow insolently, "he'd be piping all to the world. I ain't such a fool as that. Goldfinch ought to be his name, for I s'pose he's saved a fortune, and has feathered his nest with ten pound notes."

"That's more than you can say, my seedy buck," retorted the old man, "your pockets ain't over well lined, I guess; generally to let, I s'pose. I'm not a greenfinch, to be gammoned by sitch chaps, sitch a hawfinch as you. You'll find me a chaffinch. You wants to see our oss and know all about him, don't you? Well, I wish you may get it, Mr. Shippery Brown; praps you'll tell us why you're called Shippery, you oily dog you."

"I take a pride in being called Shippery," replied the fellow, cocking his hat on one side, "it's because no one can catch me out in anything, they never have and never will, I've always clean 'ands, I have—there now, can you say as much?"

"Glad to hear it, glad to hear it," replied the other, "a little Brown Windsor wouldn't do them any harm, they're dirty enough at the present moment. Now, get out of this, I won't have no here no longer, he'd it

Harry England might be seen walking about. Lord Dolly had cantered down on his back. Ginger Stubbs and Jemmy Ducks from Hampton. Where are they all now? Gone, gone, gone!

How different is a steeple-chase ground of the present day; the roar of the bookmakers, the earnest gesticulations of fellows with bands round their hats, or at movable desks, with an umbrella over their heads, laying odds which, if they lost, they had not the means or the slightest idea of paying—all there were wanting on a course thirty years ago, and how well could we dispense with them now.

The turf is not what it was, and never will be again till the maddening, the fatal passion for betting is put a stop to—it is the death dirge of the turf.

The hour is getting on; well-appointed drags are being toiled down, beautiful horsewomen are cantering gracefully along on their spicy nags, and all is bustle and excitement.

Who is that with the blue frock-coat—his hat set jauntily on one side—talking to the tall aristocratic man in black, with well-made wrist-fitting black buckskin trousers? It is Lord Chesterfield conversing with Lord Geo. Bentinck.

Who is that black-whiskered, swarthy-looking man in earnest conversation with a pale, fair-haired youngster? It is Tom Oliver taking instructions from his employer, who knows as much about steeple-chasing as he does about flying.

"I must ride him, my Lord, according to my own judgement or not at all!" exclaims Black Tom, and he turns carelessly away, humming the air of his favorite song, the "Gipsy King."

Amongst the crowd might be seen Slippery Brown, in confidential chat with two or three suspicious looking characters.

"Have you got at him, Brown?" asked one.

"Got at him," answered the other, "no I've not—it was impossible. I went up to the place, but had it from old Bullfinch; the young one is fly too. Night after night I tried the stable, but the old one slept there—it was no go, not the ghost of a chance."

"And do you think him dangerous? Who put you on to noble him?"

"That's my business," returned the other shortly. "You don't think I'm such an ass as to split, do you? Dangerous! I fancy he is; he wins as sure as I'm a—I'm a—" he was lost for an expression, so said, "as sure as I'm a cove—he can ride as well as any of the others; he's light on his horse, is as fresh as a pink and can stay, he knows every inch of the country, and I don't see what's to stop him. Lord George starts 'em, and he won't stand any nonsense. No it will be run out on the straight from end to end. It lays between Jim Mason, Tom Oliver, and young Jack Sullivan, and he will win it with 'Tom Tit.' I don't believe the old 'uns can out-jockey or out-ride him—he's a wonder is that boy."

There goes the bell for saddling; and away scamper scores to the different leaps. The water jump is the centre of attraction. Others scramble up on their vehicles where they could command a good view.

"You do not feel nervous, do you, Jack?" asked a fine-looking man, addressing a slender youth in a great coat.

"Not at all, sir. I've weighed out all right."

"Now then, my boy, off with your coat, and I'll give you your first leg up;" and he beckoned an elderly man who was leading a corky-looking little bay horse about.

"All right, Captain," said old Bullfinch, coming up with "Tom Tit."

The Captain swept the sheet of the animal, and vaulted his son into his saddle.

"One word, Jack," whispered his father, "you're against the very best men of the day. Mind what I tell you, wait."

Gallant and proud did the lad look in his scarlet jacket and black cap; and gallant did his little horse appear—his coat shone like satin, and he seemed eager to get away.

Look at the others. How careless Mason seemed on his steeple-chaser, yet he was ready on the instant if the animal showed any restiveness. There was Black Tom humming his favorite "Gipsy King," he kicks his horse into a trot and then into a canter, and it is then seen what a fine seat he has. They keep coming out of the saddling enclosure, all the colors of the rainbow, black, green, blue, yellow, crimson—nineteen in all. A cheer rends the air as the popular squire appears, every inch a gentleman-rider and sportsman; then there is the Captain, a hard man to beat—how square and solidly he sits in his saddle.

"Now then, gentlemen!" exclaims Lord George jumping on to his back "come along

easily and well is the game little horse "Tom Tit." As yet no spur or whip has touched him. He has popped in and out of the double in a manner that has excited the admiration of all the beholders, and called forth a remark from the Squire (Osbaldeston) "Well ridden; indeed, young gentleman."

The boy's face is flushed with excitement; but he rides as patiently and as steady as a rock. The water jump is not far distant now—the roar of the mass of people assembled there is heard—"Here they come!" The five great artists of the day appear—Mason, Oliver, Beecher, Osbaldeston, and Seffert—but another in a scarlet jacket and black cap is close behind them. The pace is good now; and as they approach the water each man is seen to catch his horse by the head and steady him. As they do so, a scarlet jacket and black cap shoots by them and clears the eighteen feet of water two lengths in advance.

"That is the won of Tom Tit," mentally exclaims his rider, "he will always rush so at water. No, my boy, you gave them the lead over, I must pull you back now. I was told to wait, but you shall come at the proper time."

Some of the horses are riderless; others have refused and have been pulled up—there are only eight now in it.

They have to pass the saddling enclosure again, and where the great mass of people are assembled. What shouts greet their ears! What a hoarse unearthly yell: "Go it yaller! blue has it! Mason has it! hurra for the squire! bravo red! good boy! that's your sort!" Jack's father looks on silently; his face is flushed; he is afraid to trust his voice. There is a choking sensation in his throat. Old Bullfinch is standing close by him.

"I never see anything better ridden in my life," he whispered in his master's ear; "he's going beautiful is Master John—the little oss is as fresh as paint too. Lord, how thirsty I am—blessed if I shan't choke."

The horses are streaming away over the meadows, taking their jumps with beautiful precision. There is no shalung off scarlet—about five lengths is he kept behind; the gentle strain on his jaws is never relaxed—he is to wait.

"I must first at the water again," mentally exclaimed Jack. "Some of them are sure to get a cropper there, and I may be knocked over in the scramble, I'll lead again."

And he did, the little horse jumped it beautifully; not so with all the others, two were in.

"Now, my man," said Jack, patting his horse's neck, "the worst is over now, I think you have the speed of them all, and I know you can stay."

"Here they are," shouts the multitude as the horses are seen again approaching. Jack's father is now fearfully excited. "Do you think he will pull through, Bullfinch?" he hoarsely demands of that worthy.

"Safe as ninepence, sir, they're all a riding of their osses now, and Master John's a-holding of his own famous."

What yells greet their ears as the horses are seen approaching.

"Jim has it—Mason has it—no, no, Oliver for a thousand—it's the Squire's, who can beat him?" is shouted out frantically by the partizan's of each. The last fence is jumped, a gorse topped hurdle—now begins the struggle, the tails of some of the animals are hanging out signals of distress, and whips are at work. "Now then, Tommy," exclaims his owner, the steady strain on the gallant little horse's bridle is relaxed, his rider shakes him the least bit in the world; but no whip is laid over him, or spurs gall his sides, he responds to the call, shoots away from the others, and is landed a winner by eight lengths.

Cheer after cheer rends the air. "Well ridden, magnificently ridden," exclaims Harry England, no mean judge. "By George, that lad is the finest horseman in Europe."

Jack's father rushes through the crowd, and leads his proud and triumphant son's noble little horse back to the enclosure.

Old Bullfinch is busting with impatience by his young master's side. Slippery Brown is pressing forward to congratulate the winner.

"Keep away," roars the old groom. "Keep away, or by the Lord Harry I'll knock you down," but the man still presses forward; a heavy hand was laid on his collar and he is hurled violently aside.

"If you go nigh him," exclaims Bob Dawes, "I'll thrash the life out of you—none of your hankey-pankey tricks here."

"Right," said the clerk of the scales, as Jack was weighing out, "right."

What a wonderful day!