

Every two or three days brought Norman Slade a mysterious telegram from Bellaton Moor, couched in agricultural language, that must have somewhat mystified the clerks engaged in the transmission of the message. Such intelligence as "Sheep doing well," "Mutton still commands a good price," &c., &c., seemed hardly worth flashing through the wires, but all such messages conveyed to Slade the assurance that Belisarius was progressing favorably, and was in the best of health.

There are two more of our acquaintance who are also much interested in the coming result of the Two Thousand, and these are Bertie Slade and young Devereux. Norman, as was his custom, had written to his favorite nephew, some three or four weeks back, and informed him that if he would like to have a bet upon The Guineas he could stand a tanner in his, Norman's, book. Now it so happened that when he received this letter Charlie Devereux was sitting in his quarters, and had just been unbosoming himself of his troubles with regard to those bills. The Major's friendly assistance had, of course, proved only temporary; the question had, as it inevitably must, reopened itself once more, with the unpleasant addition that, like the snowball, these bills had gathered in bulk as time rolled on. Charlie had taken very much to Slade almost from the very first. To begin with, he might have been said to almost owe his commission to Gilbert; then, again, he had all the admiration that a facile disposition always has for a hard, efficient character so exactly its antithesis. The trouble of these bills weighed heavy on the young man, as it is wont to do with young men who are so free with their autograph in the dawn of pecuniary difficulties. He had just made a clean breast of it to Gilbert.

"I can't go to the governor about it. You see, he has just had to shell out an awful lot of money for the outfit, horses, &c., to say nothing of his having had to pay up a good bit for me when I left Cambridge."

"Well, you see, Master Charlie, this is rather a stiff order; to get you out of your scrape requires a thousand pounds, and I tell you honestly, unless your father will assist you, I don't see to whom you can apply. Very few of us are blest with a relation whom we can ask to help us over such a shocking tall stile as this. Let me think," and for a few minutes Gilbert Slade stared into the fire, and seemed wrapped in thought.

To do Charlie justice, no idea of seeking any other aid than advice had ever crossed his brain when he confided his troubles to his new friend. As for Gilbert, if only half a dozen years older in age, he was many years older in knowledge of the world than his comrade. "A deuced bad start," he thought, "for a young one to join hampered in this way; of course he must come to his governor in the end, but, as he says, it is rather an inopportune moment to bring his necessities before him just now."

"Now, Devereux," he said, at last, "I've thought it all over, and I'll tell you what you must do. It is clear as noonday that your father will have to pay those bills sooner or later. You ought to have made a clean breast of it when you were gazetted, and told him then and there, that, unless he was prepared to pay that sum for you, your joining the regiment was an impossibility. No use talking any more about that, you didn't do it. The question is, what you had better do now. First of all, you must write to Kynaston, and ask him on what terms he can make arrangements for carrying over those bills for another six months; secondly, I can put you in the way of a chance of winning as much money as might suffice for that purpose. It won't pay them, but it will possibly obviate the necessity of going to the home authorities for another six months."

"That would be a great point," replied Charlie, ever willing to postpone the unpleasant explanation if possible, and at the same time keen to learn what it was his friend was about to recommend, for he already conjectured that the opportunity of winning money Gilbert spoke of was in some way connected with the Turf.

"I've just heard from my Uncle Norman," replied the other, "and he has offered to let me stand in ten pounds with him about a horse he has backed for The Guineas. Now, if you like, this time I'll ask him to let me have a pony, and we will go halves in it. It won't make much difference to you if you do lose those few pounds."

"What's the horse?" exclaimed Charlie.

Gilbert Slade laughed as he replied.

"When my Uncle Norman distributes his benefits he takes very good care there shall be no idle babbling. I can't tell you, because I don't know. He makes me that offer, and all he says is, 'The horse will run well, and stands at very much longer odds at present than he has any business to do.' Those who know Norman Slade will tell you that's a good deal for him to say, and I put much more faith in it than I should in the most glowing account from any one else."

"It's very good of you, and I'm only too glad of the chance. I hope we shall have the excitement of knowing what the horse is before the race is run."

"Never fear," replied Bertie; "there's no more business-like man than my uncle. Two or three days before the race I shall get a line containing the exact note of the bet; but Uncle Norman is always as mute as the grave about stable secrets till it is too late for their disclosure to be of any consequence."

It is the morning of the Two Thousand, and the fever for Belisarius had somewhat cooled down. The horse had arrived at Newmarket all right a couple of days previous, and had duly galloped and been looked over on the Heath. But he failed to please the cognoscenti. Newmarket, ever prejudiced against a horse not trained in their midst, picked all sorts of blemishes in Belisarius. His action was lumbering; he was coachy; he looked like a non-stayer; he would tire to nothing in the last two hundred yards. Such were the verdicts of the horse-watchers, and also of others who ought to have been better judges of the Northern colt's powers.

(To be continued.)

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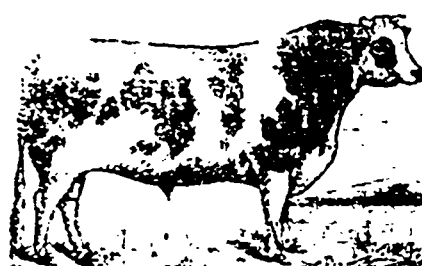
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