

MARKET HARBOROUGH

Now Mr. Sawyer went to the Shires.

CHAPTER I.

ONE OF THE "OLD SORT."

Mr. Sawyer had a sunny spot to which they had been passing at Eton, with others at the University. Here a quiet, mild clergyman glared over the yesterday's days he spent as a Cornet in the Hussars; there an obese old gentleman...

With some fellows the golden age seems to have been passed at Eton, with others at the University. Here a quiet, mild clergyman glared over the yesterday's days he spent as a Cornet in the Hussars; there an obese old gentleman...

Now, Mr. Sawyer, too, will descend into the vale of years, with a laudmark which to fix his failing eyes, an era shall serve as a date for his reminiscence, and a starting point for his after-dinner years.

Touching Mr. Sawyer's early history, I have collected but few particulars, not enjoying the advantage of that gentleman's acquaintance till he had arrived at years of maturity. I gather, however, that he matriculated at Oxford, and was rusticated from that pleasant University for some breach of college discipline...

"Si quis infamem mihi nunc juvenem," and so on to the end of the stanza. As, although Mr. Sawyer's fluency in all Saxon expletives is undeniable, I never heard him make use of any language but his own, I confess to my mind this bears upon the face of it the stamp of improbability...

It is a good old fashion to commence a narrative by a personal description of its hero; such as you would see in the "Hue and Cry," or the advertisements for that missing gentleman in the "Times" who has never been found yet, and whose humble costume of half boots, twined trousers, and an old cap...

Mr. Sawyer is a well-built, able-bodied personage, standing five feet eight in the worsted stockings he usually effects, with a frame admirably calculated to resist fatigue, to perform feats of strength rather than agility, and to put on beef, the last tendency he keeps down with constant and severe exercise...

Our friend's admirers term his person "the old sort," and he has a few "old sort" certainly his hands and feet are large, his hums robust, but in a way...

jauntily down to the starting post, as if he speculated like the Leviathan, and owned a string like Sir Joseph Hawley's; but all this is simply ex officio. Whichever horses are concerned, Mr. Sawyer deems it incumbent on him to make a demonstration, and he goes to Tattersall's as regularly on the Sunday afternoons in the summer, as you and I do to dinner. Like the Roman Emperor, the horse is his high-priest, and the object of his idolatry.

I am afraid hunting is going down hill. I do not mean to say that there is not an ever increasing supply of ambitious gentlemen who order coats from Poole, boots from Bartley, and horses from Mason, to display the same wherever they think there are few specimens left of the old hunting sort, who devoted themselves exclusively to their favorite pursuit, and could not ever bear to hear it mentioned with any thing of levity or disrespect; men who only claim to social distinction was that they hunted, who looked upon their red coat as a passport to all the society they cared to have, and who divided the whole community, in their own minds, into two classes—"men who hunt," and "men who don't."

In these days people have so many irons in the fire! Look at even the first flight with a crack pack of hounds; ten to one, amongst the half-a-dozen who compose it you will find a soldier, a statesman, a poet, a painter, a Master in chancery, whilst "maddening in the rear" through the gates come a posse of authors, actors, amateurs, artists, of every description, till you think of Juvenal's stinging lines, and his Protean Greek, who was

"Grammaticus, rhetor, gemetress plotor, alipets, Augur, schoobates, medicus, magus," etc., and a fox-hunter the conglomeration of all these different accomplishments.

But Mr. Sawyer did not trouble himself much about Juvenal or his opinions. Finding his classical career a failure, and what was more disappointing, his anticipated season with Mr. Drake cut short in consequence of his misadventure with the bull, he gave up the little reading which he had been compelled to take in hand, and confined his studies exclusively to 'Bell's Life,' 'The Field,' with its questions and answers to correspondents, suggestive alike of inventive ingenuity as of exhaustive research, and the 'Sporting Magazine.' The fact is, what with hunting three and four times a week, talking of it the remaining days, and thinking of it all the seven, with constant visits to the stable and a perpetual feud with his blacksmith, Mr. Sawyer's mind was completely filled with as much as that receptacle could be thought capable of containing.

My hero, like the champions of Round Table, is perhaps seen to the greatest advantage on horseback. Let me introduce him to my reader, riding like a knight through the wilds of Lyonnasse, up a deep muddy lane, as he returns from hunting in the dull November twilight.

"Capital bit of stuff," says Mr. Sawyer, knocking off the ashes of his cigar with his dogskin-clad finger, and apostrophizing his "mount," a very little gray horse, with an arched neck and light mouth, and a tail set on high on his quarters. "Capital bit of stuff," he repeats, dangling his feet out of the stirrups; "as game as a pebble, and as neat as a pink." "Two hundred—two hundred and fifty! You're worth two hundred and fifty, every shilling of it" (he had bought him of a fishmonger for forty pounds and a broken-winded pony). "Worth as much as any horse can be to carry thirteen stone. Hang it; you'd fetch all the money at Tattersall's if any of the customers could only have been seen you go to-day!"

Then Mr. Sawyer placed his feet in the stirrups, and fell to thinking of his day's sport. They had really had a good run—a fine, wild, old-fashioned fox-hunting sort of run—from two hundred acres of woodland, down a couple of miles of bottomless ravine, and away over deep stiff ploughs and frequent straggling fences, till they reached the far-stretching downs. Here their fox had made his point, good up-wind, and the pace even of those square-headed, deep-ribbed, heavy-timbered hounds had been liberal enough to satisfy the most exacting. Mr. Sawyer remembered, with a glow of pride, how, when they descended into the low country once more, he had led the field, and jumped an awkward stile, into a lane, to the admiration of all beholders. He could ride, to give him his due; and, moreover, he knew what hounds were doing, and was familiar with the country. Therefore he had slipped away with them, when the pack, after three or four turns round the huge woodland, had forced their fox into the open; therefore he had kept on the downwind side of the ravine aforesaid, and therefore he had been fortunate enough to see the fox handsomely run into, in an old double hedge-row, after an hour and forty minutes, during which he had unquestionably "gone last" from end to end.

longer and longer, he began to think so much talent was quite wasted in "the province"—that he was capable of better things than "showing the way" to the half-dozen of red-coats and couple of farmers who constituted his usual "gallery"—that he was too good for the Old County, as its sportsmen affectionately designate that picturesque locality in which they follow the chase—and that he was bound to do himself and the little grey horse justice by visiting the wide pastures, the prairie-like grazing-ground of the crack counties; to use his own vernacular, that he ought to cut the whole concern for a season, and have a turn at the Shires. His cogitations took some such form as the following:—"Here am I, still on the sunny side of forty—in the prime of my life, of my pluck, of my strength, and—ahem!—of my appearance—none so dusty neither, on horseback, whatever Miss Mexico may think, with her olive skin and her stuck-up airs. After all, I don't know that I'd have had her, though she was a thirty-thousand-pounder! I don't like 'em touched with the tar-brush, I'm all for the thorough-bred ones—women, as well as horses. Well, here I am, wasting my life in these deserted ploughs. Even if we do get a run, such as we had to-day, I have no one to talk to about it. The Grange is a crafty crib enough, and I'm as comfortable there as a bachelor need to be; I can't go home, night after night, to bolt my dinner by myself, smoke by myself to digest it, and go to bed, at ten o'clock, because I'm so bored with John Sawyer, and its the only way to get rid of him. No, hang it! I'll emigrate. I'll go and hibernate in the grass. I'll make Isaac a stud-groom; I'll buy a couple more nags, the right sort too—show these dandified chaps how to ride, and perhaps sell the lot for a haul of money at the end of the season, and have all my fun for nothing." Deluded man! how feasible the last project sounds—how difficult to realize!

The idea once having taken possession of our friend's mind, soon found itself cramped for room in that somewhat circumscribed area. All dinner-time he was absent and preoccupied; even Scotch broth, a beef-steak pudding, a damson tart, and toasted cheese, did not tend to settle him. Two of the Laranagas were converted into smoke and ashes before he could come to anything like a definite conclusion. Though a temperate man habitually (for the sake of his nerves), he rang for the old brandy labelled V.O.P., and mixed himself a real stiff one, with boiling water and one lump of sugar. I have my suspicions that his final decision was partly its result. The great difficulty was where to go. A man of limited acquaintance and reserved manners has at least this advantage—that all parts of England are equally attractive as regards society. That he had hunted too much to believe newspaper accounts of sport, so that looking up the old files of 'Bell's Life' assisted him no whit to a conclusion; also being of an inquiring turn of mind, wherever fox-hunting was concerned, he had amassed such a quantity of information concerning the "flying countries," that it took him a considerable time and another glass of brandy and water to digest and classify his facts. Altogether it was a complicated and puzzling question. First he thought of Leamington and the Warwickshire North and South, with regular attendance on the Alherstone and one field-day per week with the Pychleys; but many considerations combined to render the Spa unfeasible as his headquarters. In the first place, the evening gaites made his hair stand on end. Since his rejection by Miss Mexico, Sawyer was no dancing man; and indeed even in the first flush of his courtship he was seen to less advantage in a white neckcloth than a blue bird's-eye. Some men's hands and feet are not made to fit boots and gloves as constructed by our neighbour the fiery Gaul, and for such it is wise to abstain from "the mazy," and to rest their hopes of success on another and more sterling qualities than the rapid demeanour and cool assurance which triumph in a ball-room. Then, with all his fondness for the applause of his fellow-creatures, he did not quite fancy making one of that crowd of irregular-horse who appear on a Wednesday at Crick at Mislerton, to the unspeakable dismay of the Pychley lady pack, who, if there is anything like a scent scud, away from them as if for their very lives; and although it is doubtless a high compliment that two hundred gentlemen in scarlet should patronize the same establishment, Mr. Sawyer thought that as far as he was concerned, the number might as well stop at one hundred and ninety-nine.

I believe, however, that the dread of those wide and fathomless rivers which are constantly jumped, in Warwickshire, by at least one amphibious sportsman out of a daring field, and of which the width from bank to bank, according to the newspapers, is seldom less than seven-and-twenty or more than seven-and-thirty feet, was what principally terrified our friend.

KATERFELTO,

A STORY OF EXMOOR.

CHAPTER XXIX.

REMEMORS.

In a moment the girl slipped out behind him, and, lightly clad as she was, sped through the sleeping encampment, swift and noiseless as a deer. Her grandmother, waking from a doze, never doubted but that Thyra had returned to her own tent, and, unwilling to face the night-air, composed herself to sleep again with the pipe still in her mouth. Fin Cooper, rising steadily up the coombe, clucked to think how he had outwitted his bride, and stifled the pangs of jealousy it seemed so unreasonable to entertain, now that a lapse of an hour or two must deliver his rival into his hand, while the swarm of gypsies he left behind him, huddled up in their blankets under their canvas coverings, snored healthily and loud, thinking little, and caring less, about the pearl of their tribe, her anguish, her sorrows, her coming espousals, or, indeed, anything but their own warmth, comfort, and repose.

So Waif speeded on, fast as her supple limbs could carry her, through the copse, and up the coombe, and across the moor, wrapped in its cheerless shroud, stretching as it seemed in her impatience, to a limitless expanse that mortal foot could never compass. Her eye was powerless to scan. Oh! for the wings of the curlew! Oh! for the speed of the red deer! She would give all the rest of her life, willingly, thankfully, for two leagues, only two leagues less to traverse, for two hours' only two hours more to spare. Was it the snow that showed everything so distinctly, or was this really the light of morning stealing, cold and pitiless, over a world of white? Toiling, hurrying, panting, all agape with pain and fear, she yet found breath to curse the coming day. And still she hardly knew how or why she was straining nerve and sinew in this desperate race. There could be nothing in common now between herself and the man whom she hated so bitterly, yet loved so well. He had deceived her, ay, as he had deceived many another before it came her turn (here Waif's small white teeth closed hard on her dainty lip), and would deceive more, no doubt, hereafter, with the same alluring smile, if through her agency he would escape the penalty of his misdeeds, and survive for future treachery. How could he be so false, so cruel, so heartless? Were all men like this, Fin Cooper and the rest, or was John Garnet a vile exception to his kind? She knew not, she cared not. Good or bad, she loved him! she loved him! how could she ever have thought otherwise? and she would do all in her power to save him, cost what it might.

Oh, that endless stretch of moor—those weary, dragging miles! Curse them! Curse them! It was broad daylight already, and she had only now caught sight of the Severn Set, lowering a dark and sullen line beyond the snowy waste. A band of iron seemed to enclose her head, a weight to drag at each other limbs, a cold hand to tighten round her heart. What if her strength were to fail, and she should be too late after all? To see him once again!—once again! Only to look in his face and die! She would be content then, and ask for nothing more. But the time passed, ah! so quickly, and her lagging feet so labored in the snowdrifts, that he might be taken long before she could arrive at Porlock, and even then the only mercy she asked of heaven might be denied.

Her lips were parched and dry, her knees trembled, she could hold out such exhausting speed no longer, and yet she had scarce accomplished half the distance to her goal. She knew that deep, dark ravine well, narrowing yonder in her front to some eight or nine yards from bank to bank. It would save more than a mile could she cross it at that point where the blighted fir-tree stood. Above and below it widened into a deep, precipitous coombe, tangled with brushwood, through which silver threads of running water laughed and whispered, many a fathom down in its slippery bed of stones. No, it was far to leap, and she must go round. She lost heart utterly; and the wind, ranging once more in mocking gusts, seemed to flout and buffet her, driving another snow-storm in her face.

But on its wings it carried a dull, smothered heat, faint and distant, yet drawing nearer with each regular monotonous foot-fall. It was the tramp of horses, galloping at speed over the snowy surface of the moor; and Waif, eager, erect, motionless, listening with every nerve, as the red hind listens to the tufters, made out distinctly that the

the deep precipitous edge at its narrowest part, and waived for the man she loved her signal to come on.

How like him, she thought, to spare a hand, even at such a crisis, and raise his hat for from his comely head ere he forced it firmly down and set his horse going for the leap!

"By George! you are a flyer!" said John Garnet, as Katerfelto, pricking his ears and shortening his stride while he increased his pace, bounded freely from bank to bank, detaching, however, with his feet a large portion of earth and shingle, that went rumbling and rattling down many a perpendicular fathom into the abyss. So that, even while the words were on the rider's lips, the horse stumbled and fell as he leaped, rolling forward on his side and shoulder in the snow.

John Garnet, who never let go his reins, was up in an instant; whilst the horse rose almost as nimbly, with wild eye and spreading nostril, snorting in terror and defiance, scared alike by his exploit and his fall.

Plunging forward, the buckle of his throat-lash gave way, the bit slipped out of his mouth, and Katerfelto scoured riderless into the waste, leaving John Garnet standing on his feet, with the bridle in his hand. A shout of triumph from his pursuers, who were already rounding the head of the coombe, warned him that they had seen the catastrophe, and were prepared to take advantage of it. Unarmed and dismounted, they could ride no more, they thought, at their leisure, let the gray horse go where he might.

Among the many faults of his character, none could tax Abner Gale with want of promptitude or decision in an emergency. No sooner was he satisfied that his enemy meant to charge boldly the obstacle in front, than he too, urged no less by vanity than hatred, made up his mind, while he caught hold of the black horse's head, to ride at it, neck-or-nothing, and take his chance.

John Garnet was hardly down and up again, ere the Parson, sitting firmly in the saddle, had forced his horse at the leap, even to the very brink. But, wiser than his master, poor Cassock was fain to be excused. Alas! the rider's strength of seat and hands and limbs, above all, his indomitable will, would take no denial, and the gallant old horse made his effort too late! Chasing the opposite bank, the concussion shot the hapless pair, as if from a catapult, to the very bottom of a chasm.

Even in the turmoil of her feelings, Waif turned sick, while her imagination, rather than her senses, told her the hideous truth; but John Garnet, peering over the brink to where a dead man and horse, with hardly a bone unbroken in either of their frames, lay rolled up in a ghastly heap, could not help murmuring, "Tis a pity sure, for vile as he is, a scoundrel not worth hanging, no better rider, nor holder, ever buckled a pair of spurs!"

CHAPTER XXX.

REPARATION.

But there was no time for interchange of sentiments, regretful or otherwise, at such a crisis. Fin Cooper and Dick Boss had already coasted round the coombe, and were hastening down its side to the fatal spot. Katerfelto, carrying his rider's saddle, valise, and pistols, galloping across them masterless, into the waste. John Garnet, dismounted and disarmed, for even the short sword he wore had been jerked out of its belt in his desperate ride, felt that he must surrender at discretion. What chance had he against two resolute men on horseback, who knew the moor, were provided with fire arms, and had legal authority to use them if required?

"The game's up, Waif," said he, "but you and I have played it out, my lass, to the very last card! I was thinking of you only this morning at daybreak when I stole away from Porlock, and my friends over yonder set up a shout of rage to see my tracks not three minutes old in the snow! If I had but known the country! Well, well! 'Twas a rare burst and a noble leap! You showed me the only spot where it could be done, and I understood with the first wave of your arm; but how came you to be here, my pretty Waif, in the nick of time?"

Oh! the kind, cruel voice! the kind, cruel words! It was snowing fast, and the wet Waif dashed from her eye-lashes might not have been tears after all.

"I knew they meant to kill you!" she sobbed. "I heard their vile, wicked plot, and Fin kept me a prisoner in his tent lest I should warn you. Ay! your little knew Waif, if they thought she could..."