

DERBY DICK

A Thrilling Story of the Race-Course

by the author of

"THE WHISKY RUNNERS."

CHAPTER I.

The Derby Favourite.

"Stick to him, youngster, stick to him for all you're worth," shouted Joe Lambert, excitedly.

The lad to whom the words were addressed seemed very small for the task he had in mind. He was perched on the back of a great raking thoroughbred, who was indulging in a series of big jumps which threatened to unseat the diminutive form of humanity on its back.

But Dick Carden, small though he was, possessed more nerve and strength than many who were thrice his age and size. Instead of getting excited and losing his head, he bore with his mount and kept his seat, to the great surprise of Joe Lambert, the trainer of the horse, and of a tall, military-looking gentleman, who had accompanied the latter to the Downs to see this horse, which he owned, do a gallop.

"Gad, Lambert!" said the owner, heartily, "you've got a jewel in that lad!"

"I believe I have, Colonel Fansham," replied the trainer, quietly.

"At any rate, he's the only one of my lads that can manage Starlight. By thunder! he's got the best of him now, though!" he went on, excitedly, as the horse, suddenly yawning his head from side to side, succeeded in getting the bit between his teeth, and was off across the rolling Downs in a flash.

The colonel emitted almost a groan of despair as he observed that his favorite was completely out of control and galloping directly towards the little village which skirted the famous training-grounds.

"My cob, quick!" he shouted to a stable-boy, who was holding the two steeds which Joe Lambert and he had been riding.

Lambert was ready on his cob, and in a second the colonel and he were speeding in the direction the runaway had taken.

They were both very white, for each had staked more than they cared to think of on Starlight winning the Derby, some six weeks ahead.

Yet they glided their hardest after the fast-disappearing fugitive, buoyed up with the thought that in the "great game" they had each played so long, there was always hope while there was life.

Starlight was making towards the village of Bloxham, after taking a circular gallop on the Downs, and the two pursuing horsemen, observing the direction he was now galloping, were able, by taking a short cut, to follow him through the little scattered village, almost on his heels.

They saw, with a feeling of relief, that the principal street was devoid of traffic, and also that Dick Carden appeared to be regaining control over his mount. Then, with sigh of thankfulness, they perceived that he was slowly but surely bringing the excited animal to a stop.

A few moments more and he would be safe.

Then suddenly the toot of a motor-horn sounded ahead. A smothered expletive escaped the colonel's lips as he saw a great yellow car dash round a bend of the road ahead.

Starlight was still moving swiftly, and as the car passed him on the right side, he swerved nearly into the gutter on the left, and started off once again.

By a miracle, Dick Carden retained his seat, but he knew that his previous efforts had been in vain, for the mettlesome steed was now snorting with excitement.

The villagers had all turned out at the sound of the galloping hoofs, and when they saw that Colonel Fansham and his trainer were in pursuit, they began to dawn upon them that they were beholding an historical sight, and that the runaway must be the Derby favorite.

But no further mishap occurred, and the horse emerged from the village, so far unhurt, on to the Down on the further side.

It seemed as if the incident might close without accident; but it was now more evident than before that little Carden was unable to get the maddened animal under control.

The colonel and Lambert were still galloping, in a stern chase, when sud-