

MARKET HARBOROUGH!

How Mr. Sawyer went to the Shires.

CHAPTER IX.

"Tiptop," said his master, raising himself from his seat on the corn bin, and taking the dog from his lips, "Tiptop, as they're all pretty fit, you may send on Catamount and Catamount tomorrow."

"Catamount's hardly got over his physick yet, and I'm keeping confidence for you on Thursday," replied the master of the hounds.

"Well, then, the mare and old Plantagenet," urged the Honorable. "I can ride Plantagenet first, and send him home by two o'clock."

"The mare's had a gallop this morning, and we want Plantagenet second boss for Friday," objected Mr. Tiptop.

"Well, then, the old Plantagenet," pleaded the proprietor. "I have a ride on the old Plantagenet, and I'll see the Banker would do very well for second."

"I'll fight Topsy Turvy and Chance," declared Mr. Tiptop somewhat imperiously, and the Honorable's face lengthened considerably at the announcement. To do him justice, he was one of those sportsmen who will describe in the Cheahiro hunting song—

"To whom nought comes amiss—  
One horse or another, that country or this;  
Who through fairs and bad starts undauntedly  
Ride up to the motto—*Be with them I will!*"

But Mr. Tiptop himself was mortal, and Topsy Turvy was a very awkward mare to ride on a cross. With great pace and jumping power she had all the irritability of her high-born race, and more than all the jealousy of a favorite. Her ears in her ears annoyed her, and she never thoroughly comfortable, and as sailing away by herself with the lull and lull, it is only fair to add, that she was quite capable of keeping Chance, by Gallopster out of Happy-go-lucky, was no sater a mount. Just out of training, she was never less at her fences with considerable audacity; but was prone to over-jump herself when she didn't run through them. As Struggles observed of her, "It was a safe bet to lay five to two on the Caster."

However, the Honorable never dreamed for an instant of disputing Mr. Tiptop's fiat; so he consoled himself by thinking what a start he would get, and how he hoped the hounds would keep out of his way. By the time Topsy Turvy's clothes had been replaced, and a handsome pony examined and approved of, the party, much to old Isaac's disgust, adjourned to Mr. Sawyer's stables, where they were good enough to express their approval of the roan and his companions in that conventional tone which is so much less flattering than one of sincere abuse. These gentlemen hardly knew Mr. Sawyer well enough yet to give their honest opinion; and perhaps it was fortunate for the sake of Isaac's peace of mind that they did not.

"Useful horses, Sawyer!" observed Mr. Savage, considerably sparing the groom the favor of stripping them.

"Useful horses," repeated Captain Struggles and Major Brush in a breath, the latter adding, "and seem pretty fit to go." While the Honorable Crasher, who had not ventured further than the door, remarked that "the old Plantagenet's Dandy the best shaped one of the lot," but conceded, in a faint whisper, that the rest of them looked "very like horses; remarkably useful horses indeed!"

Our friend was not deficient in penetration, and by no means a person to have been nearly a week in the Shires without finding out what this epithet means. "When a man says me he has got a useful horse," Mr. Sawyer was once heard to observe, "I interpret it that he is the owner of a useless brute, which he wishes to sell me!" And Mr. Sawyer was not deceived by the politeness of his companions. He held his tongue however, but more than once he caught him self brooding over the offensive adjective during the evening.

"If the roan is only half as good as I take him to be, and I can't get a start tomorrow, thought our friend, "I'll show them what my useful horse can do! Miss Dove will be out soon, and that cursed fellow of Putty has just sent down my new boots! Never mind—I've got the right spurs at any rate, and it won't be my fault tomorrow if I don't go for the gloves, as we used to say in the Old Country."

blood dances through their veins, and he children would fain leap and shout aloud for joy. What freshness in the smell of the salted pastures! What beauty in the softened tints and shadows of the landscape—leafless though it be! How those bare hedges seem ready to burst forth in the bloom of spring, and the distant woods on the horizon melt into the sky as softly as in the hot haze of a July noon. The thud of our horses' hoofs strikes pleasantly on the ear, as we canter over the undulating pastures, swinging back the hand-gates with a dexterity only to be acquired by constant practice, and on which we plume ourselves not a little. He is the sweetest hack in England, and shakes his head and rolls his shoulders gaily, as we restrain the canter from becoming a gallop. Were he not the sweetest, etc., he would begin to plungo from sheer exuberance of spirits; we could almost find it in our heart to indulge him. The scared sheep scour off for a few paces, shaking their woolly coats, and then turn round to gaze at us as we fleet from field to field. A couple of magpies, after a succession of jerks and bows, while they make up their minds, dive rapidly away over the hedge to our right (for we confess the superstition) ominous of sport. A scarlet coat glances along the lane in front; and, as this is our last bit of grass, and moreover the furrows lie the right way, we catch hold of the sweetest's head, and treat ourselves to a gallop. Soon we emerge on the high-road, and relapse into a ten-mile-an-hour trot; who thinks nothing of twelve, going well on his haunches, and quite within himself. All the best fellows in England seem to have congregated in this highway. Some in dog-carts, some in phaetons, half-a-dozen on a four horse drag, and others on horseback, like ourselves. With the latter we speedily join company. Yesterday's gallop,—the Ministerial Crisis—the Rifle Volunteers—all the topics that interest us for the time, are touched on, and we learn the latest news of each. By a quarter before eleven we have had pleasure enough for the whole twenty-four hours, and yet our day is only just beginning. Now the plot thickens rapidly. Grooms with led horses are overtaken by their masters, and we recognize many a well-known flyer and honest servant's face.

"How fresh the old horse looks, John: none the worse for the Lilbourne day, when he carried your master so well!"

"Never was better, sir," answers gratified John, with a touch of his hat; partly out of compliment to ourselves, partly out of respect for the good horse. Now we observe a scarlet group collected in a knot, where the hounds meet in the centre of the village, and the church clock points to five minutes before eleven, as we bid the cherry huntsman "Good-morning," and exchange our hack for our hunter.

Mr. Sawyer probably felt very much the sort of sensations I have endeavored to describe, as he dashed along on the free-going Dandy, in company with some of his new companions. If so, he kept them to himself. Our friend was a man of few words at the best of times; and when, as in the present instance, "big with high resolve," taciturnity personified. Also, notwithstanding the want of the new boots, he had "got himself up" to-day with peculiar care. The result, I am bound to admit, was not entirely satisfactory; and, when that is the case, a man's loquacity is apt to decrease in proportion. However, the roan, or "Hotspur," as we must now call him, made a pretty good figure, as far as appearance went, even among a bevy of considerable accession of confidence when he found himself fairly mounted and ready for the fray. Miss Dove, too, had arrived in company with her papa. There was no doubt about it; she did look remarkably well in her riding-habit.

Mr. Sawyer, a little nervous and rather ashamed of it, doffed the velvet hunting-cap, and rode up to accost her. "I need scarcely observe that the young lady's greeting was of the coldest and most reserved. The last time she had been all smiles and sunshine; so, on the principle of rotation, to-day must be one of frigidity and decorum. It's a way they have, you see; and one that seldom fails to put the inexperienced to utter confusion. A man cannot be said to know what the ague really is till he has suffered from the fits—both hot and cold. Take warning, John Standish Sawyer! you who have once before burnt your fingers, and had cause to dread the fire. Miss Mexico, with her quadruple stam and her thirty thousand pounds, was a queerish one to manage; but she was a fool to Miss Dove."

"Confound the girl! what does she mean by it?" said the humiliated swain to himself as the hounds moved off towards the gorse. He felt a little disgusted, and not a little irritated; just in the humor that makes a man ready for a bit of excitement rather keener than ordinary. He thought he had never

and stoop all together to the scent, when after a cherry twang, the huntsman returns his horn to its case, and the master, relieved, for an instant, from the weight of care, which none but an M. F. H. knows, takes his place alongside of his favorites, and observes mentally, though he wouldn't say it aloud for a thousand. "Now, my fine fellows, ride on their backs if you can!" In short, at that delicious moment when the wise bethink them of a fox's pout, and a convenient lane, and the enthusiasts glance exultingly at each other, and say, "All right, old fellow! I think we're landed! then hush each a fair field and no favor, and if a man's hardihood, or his vanity, or his ambition, prompt him to assume a place in the front rank, he has nothing to do but go and try."

As Mr. Sawyer rode down to the gorse, he was pleased to feel Hotspur step so lightly and vigorously under him. The hounds shook his bit, and cocked his ears, and reached at his bridle to get near the hounds. He felt like a good one, and we all know what confidence that education imparts to the rider. Mr. Sawyer forgot all about Miss Dove, and the unprovoked manner in which she had snubbed him. It was cheerful to hear one or two complimentary remarks exchanged between the passing sportsmen.

"That's a clever horse," said a tall heavy man, amidst admirably loud d. indicating the roan with a nod, addressing a supercilious looking person in a black coat, whose attention was much taken up with the appearance of his own legs and feet, which he was looking at alternately on profile.

"Rather," answered the supercilious person, glancing up for an instant from his occupation—"Who's the man? Never saw such a man; never saw such boots; never saw a fellow so badly put up altogether."

At this juncture the Honorable Crasher, cantering by on Topsy Turvy, accosted our friend with good-humored familiarity, and the supercilious man, changing his mind all in a moment, about Mr. Sawyer and his boots, resolved to take the first opportunity of making the stranger's acquaintance. In effect he followed the last corner to prosecute this intention. The Honorable C. disappearing through a bullfinch, on Topsy Turvy, whom he thus hoped to put in good humor, was ere this in a field alongside of the hounds, which he was likely to have all to himself.

Soon a hand-gate stems the increasing cavalcade, and the stoppage becoming more obstinate, owing to Mr. Sawyer's abortive attempts to open the same, a good deal of conversation, rhetorical rather than complimentary, is the result.

"Put your whip under the latch," says one.

"Got the wrong hand to it," sneers another.

"What a tarnation muff!" vociferates a third.

"Ware heels!" exclaims a fourth, as a wicked little bay mare, in the thick of them, leaps out with unerring precision; and one man says, "What a shame it is to bring such a devil as that into a crowd!" and another opines "The kick will be out of her before two o'clock!" and the owner, profuse in apologies, is only thinking of slipping through the gate, and going on to get a start.

Meanwhile Hotspur makes himself profoundly ridiculous, pushing the gate when the latch is down, and wincing from it when he ought to shove; also finding himself totally unassisted by the crook of his master's whip, which keeps slipping on the wet green wood, waxes irritable, rars up, and threatens to vary the entertainment, by performing a somersault into the next field.

"Let me do it for you, sir," says a good-natured young farmer; and Mr. Sawyer wisely abandons his office of door-keeper, and after about forty people have hustled by him, manages at last to edge his way through.

By this time the hounds have been put into the gorse. Nineteen couple are they of ladies, with the cleanest of heads and necks, straight and fair on their legs and feet as so many ballet-dancers, and owning that keen wistful look, which is so peculiar to the countenance of the fox-hound. They dash into the covert as if sure of finding, and Parson Dove, standing erect in his stirrups, watches them with a glow of pleasure lighting up his clean shaven face. "There's a fox, Charles, I'll lay a bishopric!" says he, and a whimper from Tracelove confirms the parson's opinion on the spot.

"Not a doubt on it! sir, not a doubt on it! one if not a brace!" replies that functionary, with immense rapidity. He loses very little time indeed, at his phrases, or his fences, or anything else. In another moment he is up to his girls in the gorse, the ring on the beauties, who are working the scent with a vast deal of music. Argy-

from which he could command the proceedings, and try to get a good start. Nevertheless, a watchful eye was on his movements. The master was even then deliberating whether he should holla to him to "Come back, sir," and was hoping in his own mind, "that chap in cap wouldn't go on, and head the fox!"

The Honorable Crasher and Topsy-Turvy had already fallen out, as to a cigar, which the former wanted to light. No! the mare would not stand still, and an impatient jerk at the curb-rein but not tended to adjust this difference. So she was bucking and sidling and shaking her head, and making herself intensely disagreeable, whilst the Honorable, who soon recovered his equanimity, scanned a certain stile just in front of her with a critical eye, and employed himself by vaguely calculating how many yards before she came to it she was likely, in her present humor, to "take off," also whereabouts he should land if they did make a mass of it, and whether more than two or three fellows would be on his back at once.

He has by no means solved the problem, when a violent rush is made towards the lane. Somebody has seen somebody else gallop, who has seen a cheap-dog run; this is a sufficient reason for some eighty or ninety horse-men to charge furiously in the same direction, their leaders finding no bounds, then pull up, and the crowd proceed leisurely back again. But this false alarm has been in favor of the fox, who perceiving a clear space before him, and having obtained, by a dexterous turn round the covert, a little lull of his pursuers, takes advantage of the lull, to slip away unobserved by any one but the first whip, and that official is far too discreet to make a noise. He telegraphs mutely to the huntsman, who has the ladies out of covert, and dashing to the front, with three blasts of his horn. Ere the Honorable Crasher has had time to indulge Topsy-Turvy with a fling at the stile, which she jumps as if there was a ten-foot drain on each side, the pack are settled to the scent, and racing away a clear field ahead of every one but the huntsman and whip. The Honorable Crasher, however, is coming up hand-over-hand, Topsy Turvy laying herself out in rattling form. The master, with a backward glance at the crowd, is alongside of him, and Mr. Sawyer, sailing over the first fence, in such good company, with a tight hold of his horse's head, and an undeniable start, thinks he is "really in for it at last!"

CHAPTER XI.

"A MERRY GO-ROUNDER."

A mile-and-a-half of grass, some six or eight fences, and the sustained brilliancy of the pace, have had their usual effect on the moving panorama. A turn in his favor, of which his old experience has prompted him to take every advantage, enables Mr. Sawyer to pull Hotspur back to a trot, and look about him. He is in a capital pace, and has every reason to believe the new horse is "a flyer." Hitherto, he has only asked him to gallop, best pace, oversound turf, and take a succession of fair hunting fences in his stride. Hotspur seems to know his business thoroughly, and though a little eager, he allows his rider to draw him together for his leaps, and the way in which he cocks his ears when within distance denotes a hunter. Mr. Sawyer is full of confidence. He has been riding fence for fence with the Honorable Crasher, whose pale face wears a smile of quiet satisfaction. The latter has indulged Topsy-Turvy with two awkward bits of timber, and an unnecessary gate; the mare is consequently tolerably amiable, and, though she throws her head wildly about in any other horse comes near her, may be considered in an unusually composed frame of mind. The huntsman has been riding close to his hounds, in that state of eager anxiety which the philosopher would hardly consider enjoyment, and yet which is nevertheless not without its charms; all his feelings are reflected, in a modified form, in the breast of the master. The latter, riding his own line, as near the pack as his conscience will permit him, is divided between intense enjoyment of the gallop and a host of vague apprehensions lest anything should turn up to mar the continuance of the run. He has already imbibed a qualified aversion for Mr. Sawyer, whom the instinct peculiar to his office prompts him to suspect as "a likely fellow to press them at a check;" while he knows his friend Crasher so well, as to feel there is but one chance with that mild enthusiast, viz., that Topsy-Turvy should come to a difficulty before the hounds do. Besides these four, Captain Struggles and Major Brush are very handy, whilst Mr. Savage heads another detachment in the next field, of which Miss Dove, riding with considerable grace, is at once the ornament and the ad-

emerge again, throwing their tongues as they take to running, and looking darker and less distinct than before.

"Is there a ford, Charles?" halloos Major Brush, who has shaken to the front, and would fain continue there without a wetting. "Never a one for miles," answers Charles with inconceivable rapidity, catching his horse by the head, and performing a running accompaniment with his spurs.

In a few seconds, he is over with a considerable effort, a certain scramble and flourish when they land, showing there are very few inches to spare.

The ill-fated Major has no idea of refusing. His horse, however, thinks differently; so they compromise the matter by sliding together, and climbing up separately, dragged, disgusted and bemired.

"There is no mistake about it," thanks Mr. Sawyer; "I must jump or else go home!" He may take a liberty, he hopes with a friend; so he puts the roan's head close behind the Honorable Crasher, and devoutly trusting that gentleman will get over, drives Hotspur resolutely at the brook.

Topsy-Turvy, wild with excitement, throws her head in the air, and takes off a stride too soon. Consequently she drops her hind legs, and rolls into the opposite field. The roan, who jumps as far as ever he can, lands on Crasher's reins, of which the latter never lets go, and drives them into the turf.

"Line, sir! line!" expostulates the Honorable, not knowing who it is. "Oh! it's you, is it?" he adds, picking himself up, and re-mounting. "All right! Go along, old fellow! The hounds are running like smoke!"

Mr. Sawyer apologizes freely as they gallop on. In his heart he thinks Crasher the best fellow he ever met, and contrasts his behavior with that of Sir Samuel Suffy in the Old Country, on whom he once played the same trick, and whose language in return was more Pagan than Parliamentary.

The master and Struggles get over also, the latter not without a scramble. Those who are not in the first flight wisely diverge towards a bridge. For five minutes and more there are but half-a-dozen men with the hounds. Those run harder than ever for another minute, then throw their leads up, and come to an untoward check.

"What a pity!" exclaims Mr. Sawyer. Not that he thinks so exactly; for Hotspur wants a puff of wind sadly!

"Turned by them sheep!" says Charles, and casts his hounds rapidly forward and down wind. No; he has not been turned by the sheep; he has been cursed by a dog. Charles wishes every dog in the country was with Cerberus, except the nineteen couple now at fault.

"Pliant has it," observes the master, as Pliant, feathering down the side of a hedge, makes sure she is right, and then flings a note or two off her silvery tongue, to apprise her gossips of the fact. They corroborate her forthwith, and the choros of female voices could scarce be outdone at a christening. Nevertheless, they are brought to hunting now, and must feel for it every yard they go.

But this interval has allowed some twenty equestrians, amongst whom a graceful form in a habit is not the least conspicuous; to form the chase once more. Great is the talking and self-congratulations. Watches are even pulled out, and perspiring arrials announce the result of their observations, each man timing the burst to the moment which he himself came up.

"How well your horse carried you!" said a soft voice at Mr. Sawyer's elbow; did he, Papa?" added the siren, appealing to Reverend Dove, who was eagerly watching the hounds. "We all agreed that the best cap had the best of it."

She wanted to make amends to him for her rudeness in the morning, and this is the opportunity to choose. The hard male heart is sufficiently malleable under a combined influence of heat, haste, and excitement, though how this girl should have made the discovery it is beyond ingenuity to guess. How do they discover thousand things, of which we believe this to be ignorant?

Mr. Sawyer smiled his gratitude, as he opened a gate for the lady, and very nearly let it swing back against her knees. He had not acquired sufficient practice yet at his gates; that's the truth; and perhaps there were other portals wherein his inexperience had better have forbidden him to venture. Miss Dove was fast luring him into a country which, to use a hunting metaphor, was very cramped and blind, full of "doubles," "squire-traps," and other pitfalls for the unwary.

Hounds are apt to be a little unsettled after so rapid a burst as I have attempted to describe, and it takes a few fields of persevering attention to steady them again.