

MARKET HARBOROUGH!

—OR—

How Mr. Sawyer went to the Shires.

CHAPTER XXII.

A WET NIGHT.

"All right, old fellow!" said he; "drive on, if you like, to the devil!"

"It's a rare plucked one," thought the Honorable to himself, as he started the horses in a gallop, apparently with no other view than that of arriving at the destination proposed. The night was dark, and threatening rain as it clouded over rapidly; the way intricate, full of turns and difficulties; and The Boy, it is needless to observe, helplessly drunk in the ramble. He would have been a venturesome speculator who had taken five to one that they arrived safe at Market Harborough.

The wheels flew round with frightful velocity, scattering the mud profusely over the occupants of the carriage. The horses with lowered heads laid themselves down to their work, pulling wildly. The Honorable's arms were extended, and his feet thrust forward. He would not have admitted it, but it looked very much as if they were running away with him.

"Ain't they getting a little out of your hand?" asked Mr. Sawyer, barding the question in its mildest form, as he recognized Marathon's well known manner of putting down his head when he meant mischief; and concluded if anything should give way, was reabsorb his own body would shoot to, at that pace.

"Only going free," answered Crasher with the utmost composure, though his cigar was burnt all the way down one side to his lips by the current of air created in the rapidity of their transit. "Remarkably free—but I like phaeton horses to run up to their bit."

"Do you?" thought Mr. Sawyer; but, despite the enthusiasm and the claret, and the romance of the whole evening, he wished himself anywhere else. Independent of the ignominious ending of being dashed to pieces out of a plin-ton, it would be hard lines never to see Cis-y Dove again. However, there was nothing for it but to sit still and trust to Crasher's coachmanship. Anything like expostulation with that gentleman he would be worse than useless.

I recall to have seen or heard somewhere an anecdote of the celebrated "Hell-fire Dick," which exhibits such sanfroid in a dangerous predicament as to be worth repeating. Dick, then, who had attained his flaming sobriquet by the dashing pace and general recklessness with which he drove, was not only one of the most skilful of the old-fashioned Long coachmen, but was equally noted for the cool imperturbability of his demeanor and the suavity of his replies. One very dark night, whilst proceeding at his usual pace, he was so unfortunate as to get off the road on a common where several gravel pits yawning on each side for his reception, made the mistake as dangerous as it was disagreeable. With a tremendous lurch the coach swung over one of these readily made graves, and there was just light enough to perceive the fifteen feet or so of sheer descent yawning for its victims. "Where have you got so now, Dick?" exclaimed the box-passenger, in accents of pardonable irritation and alarm. "Can't say, sir," replied Dick, with the utmost politeness, while they were all turning over together—"Can't say, I'm sure—never was here before!"

Now, if the Honorable Crasher had been going to be shot the next minute, it is my firm conviction that impending destruction would not have ruffled his plumes, nor agitated the languor of his accustomed manner in the slightest degree. Whether such a temperament is entirely natural, or is not rather to a certain extent the result of education, is debated by what we must call the affectionate peculiar to a class, it is not our business to inquire; but we may fairly acknowledge to a respectable country gentleman who finds his neck committed to the keeping of one of the most imperturbable, placid, yet utterly reckless adventurers.

The wind was getting up, and a heavy

as if somebody had knocked him down and he did not know whom to be angry with.

As he rose and shook himself to ascertain that no bones were broken, much struggling and groning as of an animal in distress, mingled with weeping and lamentation from a human voice, smote on his ear. The former arose from Marathon, who couldn't get up, with the other horse and the pole and part of the carriage atop of him: the latter from The Boy, who, frightened for the moment into a spurious sobriety, thus gave vent to his feelings of utter despondency and desolation.

"I thought the brute could jump timber," said a calm voice in the surrounding darkness. "Let us see: here's the carriage—there are the horses—and that must be The Boy. Where are you, Sawyer?"

"Here!" answered our friend, coming forward, rubbing his elbows and knees, to discover if he was hurt; the Honorable, who had never abandoned his cigar, endeavoring to extricate the horses—a measure only to be accomplished by dint of cutting their harness—and to estimate the amount of damage, and the impossibility of putting it to rest.

Our friend set to work with a will. By their joint endeavors they succeeded at last in getting the hapless Marathon and his companion clear of the wreck. Both were obviously lamed and injured: the carriage, as far as could be made out in the darkness, broken all to pieces.

Two Boy, after flickering up for a few minutes, had become again unconscious. As the old watchman used to sing out, it was "Past one o'clock and a stormy morning!"

"Whereabouts are we?" asked Mr. Sawyer in dolorous accents, as he tried to persuade himself he ought to be thankful it was no worse. "Whereabouts are we, and what had we better do?"

"Over a hundred miles from London," answered the Honorable, "that's all I know about it. Holloing, I suppose, would be no use—there can't be a house within hearing, and the fly has gone the other road. Have a cigar, old fellow! I aud, just to keep the sun going, perhaps you wouldn't mind singing us a song?"

It was only under a calamity like the present that the Honorable condescended to be facetious.

Mr. Sawyer was on the verge of making an angry reply, when the sound of a horse's hoofs advancing with considerable rapidity changed it into a vigorous call for assistance.

"Hilli-ho! ho!" shouted Mr. Sawyer. "Hilli-ho! ho!" answered a jolly voice, as the hoofs ceased, and came clattering on again, denoting that the rider had pulled up to listen and was coming speedily to help. "What's up now?" asked the jolly voice, in somewhat convivial accents, as an equestrian mass of drab and leggings, which was all that could be made out through the darkness, loomed indistinctly into the foreground. "What's up now, mates? got the wrong end uppermost this turn, sure-lie."

"Come to grief at the gate," explained the Honorable. "Didn't go quite fast enough at it, Sawyer," he added, half reflectively, half apologetically, to his friend.

"Why, it's Muster Crasher!" exclaimed the jolly voice, in delighted tones. "Well, to be sure! Not the first gate, neither, by a many—only to think of it, well, well! But come, let's see what's the damage done—dear I dear I you'll never get home to-night. You must come up to my place, 'tain't above a mile through the fields—we'll get you put up, nags and all, and send down for the trap first thing in the morning. How lucky I was passing this way! Coming back from market, you see, I'd just stopped to smoke a pipe with neighbor Mark down at The Holt, and was maken for home in a hurry, 'cause it's rather past my time, you know, when I hear this gentleman a hollerin' murder! Up I comes and finds the ship overboard with a vengeance. What a start it is, sure-lie!"

Thus moralizing, and never leaving off talking for an instant, the jolly yeoman jumped off his horse, and lent his powerful assistance to clear away the wreck; shaking The Boy into life again with considerable energy. In a few minutes the four men, leading the two damaged carriage-horses, were stumbling and groping their way across the fields towards the new arrival's farm.

Ere they reached their destination, the owner with considerable politeness introduced himself to our friend. "No offence, sir," said he, "my name's Trotter—Trotter of Trotter's Lodge, and that's my place."

might be expected in such a rapid turn-out. These trifling drawbacks detracted not the least from the bustling hospitality with which she received her guests. It was only by the most pathetic entreaties that the Honorable dissuaded her from having a fire lighted in the best parlor, and extorted her permission for them to sit in the kitchen.

Dry slippers were soon provided for the guests. The horses, inspected by the stable lantern, were discovered not to be irremediably injured, though Marathon's chance was out for the steeple-chase, "if indeed," as his former and present owners remarked in a breath, though with different emphasis, "he ever had one." The Boy was put to bed, where he might be heard snoring all over the house. What Mr. Trotter called a "snack" was set on the table, consisting of a round of beef, a ham, some cold pork-pie, and Eddish cheese, and a few other trifles of a like nature adapted for a late meal as being light and easy of digestion. Port and sherry were produced and declined in favour of huge steaming beakers of hot brandy-and-water. Arrangements were entered into for forwarding the two gentlemen to Harborough in the farmer's gig "first thing to-morrow morning." Mr. Trotter produced a box of cigars and announced his intention of "making a night of it."

A faint scream from his wife promised to a certain extent to modify the conviviality of the meeting. "She couldn't bear the sight of blood," she said, with many excuses for her feminine susceptibility, and drew the company's attention to the personal appearance of Mr. Sawyer, which everybody has hitherto been too busy to observe, and which indeed presented a sufficiently ghastly aspect to excuse the good dame reiterated assurances that it "had given her quite a turn."

A severe contusion on the eyebrow, accompanied by a cut extending to the cheekbone, and which had covered one side of his face with dried blood, made him look much more damaged than he really was, and though kindly Mrs. Trotter quickly recovered her equanimity and brought him warm water and vinegar and balsam, and eventually plastered him up with about half a sheet of diachylon, she could not help shuddering during the operation, and so med glad when it was over. Our farmers' wives of the present day are not quite as much accustomed to broken heads as bonny "Ailie," the helpmate of immortal Dandie Dinmont.

The borderer, however, could not have been more hospitably inclined than was the jovial Leicestershire farmer. Setting aside the difference of time and locality, they had indeed many qualities in common. The same love of hunting, the same daring in the saddle, the same open-hearted hospitality and tendency to push good-fellowship a little over the bounds of sobriety. The only difference perhaps was this, that Dandie Dinmont would have been getting up before Mr. Trotter was thinking of going to bed.

I am not going to recapitulate the sayings and doings of those jovial small-hours after Mrs. Trotter had betaken herself once more hopelessly to our couch. The Honorable Crasher, always a gentleman, though rather a torpid one, was equally at home with a duke and a drayman, perhaps more in his element with a hunting friend like Trotter than either. The good runs they recapitulated, the horses they remembered, the gray that was bought by Mr. G., and the chestnut that had carried Lord W.—so well for years, the fences they had negotiated—nay the very toasts they proposed and did justice to, would fill a chapter. It is sufficient to say that when Mr. Sawyer awoke in the best bed-room about sunrise the following morning, he had a racking headache, his mouth felt like the back of a Latin grammar, and the only distinct recollection with which he could charge his memory of the previous night's conversation was his host's recipe for making a young horse a safe fencer, which he certainly did not then feel in a condition to adopt.

"If you've got a green horse as you're not very confident on at strong timber," said Mr. Trotter, about the fourth glass of brandy-and-water, "you tackle him my way. You take him him out o' Sundays or any afternoon as you've nothing particular to do, and pick him out some real stiff ones. Give him two or three good heavy falls, and I'll warrant you'll have very little trouble afterwards. That's the way to make 'em rise!—ain't it, Mr. Crasher?"

wheels behind them caused the old horse to prevent the pursuing carriage from gaining on them rapidly. Mr. Sawyer looked back. Oh for a gig umbrella! It was none other than Parson Dove driving his daughter to the meet, that young lady's very becoming costume denoting that it was her intention to join in the pleasures of the chase. Here was a predicament! To be detected by the queen of his affections, with whom he had parted at midnight, in all the correct decorum of evening costume, still in the same dress, so inappropriate at 10:30 a. m., bearing obvious tokens of having been out all night, and worse than all, with an inflamed countenance, blood-shot eyes, and a face half-obscured in plaster! Perdition! It was not to be thought of!

With the energy of despair he snatched the whip from the Honorable's astonished grasp, and applied it with such good will to the old horse's ribs, that the animal broke incontinently into a gallop, and turned into the high-road some fifty yards ahead of its pursuers, who would cross that thoroughfare directly, whereas Mr. Sawyer and his driver would follow its broad track to Harborough. "Cover me up!" exclaimed our friend to his laughing companion, as he crouched in the bottom of the carriage, under the scanty gig-apron, and devoutly hoped he had escaped recognition—"cover me up! I wouldn't be seen in this plight by any of that family for a hundred pounds!" Nevertheless, he resolved, so to speak, to substantive his alibi by swearing the Honorable to secrecy, and abstaining altogether for that day from the chase.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DOUGHTY DEEDS.

About this period there might have been—and indeed, by his intimates, there was—remarked an obvious change in the appearance, habits, and general demeanor of our friend. No longer dressed in the rough-and-ready style which had heretofore been at once his glory and his peculiarity, Mr. Sawyer now began to affect a strange refinement of costume, bordering on eff-mineacy. His boots were thinner and much tighter than of old; he turned his collars over his neckcloth, after the prevailing fashion, thereby imparting to his physiognomy an expression of romantic vacuity; annointed his head till it shone again; affected gloves on all occasions; and set up a ring. Altogether, his exterior was as symptomatic of his disorder as that of Benedict. Also he purchased, at a print-seller's over the way, a representation of a young person washing her feet in a stream, and purporting to be a "Highland Lassie," but of a meretricious aspect which, it is only fair to state, is rarely to be observed amongst the Scottish mountaineers. It was one of those startling accidental likenesses to the lady of his affections, which a man must be as hard hit as Mr. Sawyer to detect. In the hunting-field, too, he adopted an ambitious style of riding, totally at variance with his previous quiet, straightforward form; and a considerable interval of bad-scenting weather enabled him to distinguish himself to his heart's content. When hounds run best pace, horses have not wind for extraordinary exertions in the matter of fencing; and, moreover, such salutary exploits as are out of the common way can be witnessed but by few, and those are completely engrossed in their own doings; but when the pack checks in every field, a man who chooses to single himself out by charging the ugliest bullfinches and the stiffest rails, either because he wants to attract attention, or to sell his horse, has every opportunity of showing up the latter, and calling down upon himself the animadversions of all true sportsmen. Our friend, with the two horses he bought from Mr. Varnish—both capital leapers—in addition to Hotspur and the grey, had no lack of material on which to flourish away in too close proximity to the chase. Charles Payne, though with a strong fellow-feeling for "keenness," began to hate the sight of him, Mr. Tailby to dread his appearance as he would that of a black frost, and Lord Stamford to find that even his imperturbable good-humor might be exhausted at last.

What is to be expected, however, of a gentleman who has taken to repeating Montrose's well-known lines—

"If doughty deeds my lady please,
Right soon I'll mount my steed;
And keen his lance, and strong his arm.

who has ever paid a groom's book, will bear witness to the extraordinary rapidity with which its different items accumulate. Naphtha alone is as dear as a cinder, and consumed with equal liberality; sponges, rubbers, currycombs, and dandy-brushes require to be replaced with astonishing frequency; and, what with shoeing and removing, the blacksmith's bill is as long as his stalwart arm. When you add to all this an every-day dinner of the best, with champagne and claret a discretion—if such a quantity, indeed, can be said to exist in a bachelor party—you will not share Mr. Sawyer's surprise at discovering that his present expenditure far exceeded his calculations. The four hundred he had paid to Mr. Varnish for two horses completed a good round sum; and for a minute or two, he thought he had better have remained at The Grange.

The last item, however, in his outlay, suggested to him a method by which he might combine fame with money-making, and, if Fortune stood his friend, have his season almost for nothing. The chestnut five-year-old, whom, out of compliment to Miss Dove, he had resolved to call "Wood Pigeon," was really a good nag. He was a quick and fine fencer; could gallop fast, and go on. Altogether, Mr. Varnish was not beyond the mark, when he described him to the purchaser as adapted for "safety, punctuality, and dispatch." Why not put him into this steeple-chase they made such a fuss about, win a hatful of money in stakes, bets, etc., to say nothing of the "honor and glory," and then sell the whole stud, and retire upon his laurels? Should Fortune smile, and land him first past the post, it would be the proudest day of his life; and even in the event of failure, why, "If doughty deeds my lady please," etc.; and Miss Dove could not but look upon him with a more favorable eye, when he had worn her colors in the race.

Old Isaac must be taken into consultation. For the first time, his master shunned the glance of that keen, hard eye. He walked into the stable one evening, after hunting, and began to sound his servant on the important question.

"By the bye, Isaac," said he, in an off-hand tone, "they're talking of a steeple-chase here. Only amongst the gentlemen, you know: we shan't want much training. I think I should have a fair chance with Wood-Pigeon?"

Isaac shook his head. "Well, sir," said he, "you know best. Who's to ride?" "Oh, I should ride him myself, of course," replied his master, with a toss of the head that as much as said, "With such a jockey, he's sure to win." "Ride him myself, and do all I know, you may depend," he added facetiously.

Old Isaac reflected. "Have you ever ridden a steeplechase?" he added, after a moment's consideration.

Mr. Sawyer was obliged to admit that he never had.

"Well, then, I have," said the groom. "You don't know what it is. Such a blazin' pace through the fields! and such an owdacious scuffle at the fences! Nuthin' but a professional can keep his head at that work; and he often gets it broke. Better not try it, master: better let it alone. They'll only make a fool of ye."

Mr. Sawyer waxed indignant. "That's my business," said he; "yours is to get the horse fit. I tell you I've entered him—Wood-Pigeon by Wapiti. He'll be first favorite the day of the race. Do you hear?" I depend upon you to get him thoroughly fit."

Isaac scratched his head. "Fit!" he repeated. "Yes—I'll get the horse fit: you get the rider. If you must have a turn at it, take my advice, master. You get yourself in good wind; keep your head clear; jump off the moment the flag drops; never let his head go; and, above all, sit still."

After this, Isaac could never again be brought to open his mouth on the subject.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BALL.

When a man has not been provided by Nature with more than an average share of personal advantages, that same process of dressing for a ball after a bachelor's dinner-party is an affair of considerable trouble and dissatisfaction. To devote those minutes, that are wont to pass so pleasantly in the