

## A RACE FOR A WIFE!

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A TRAINING-GROUND AT DAYBREAK.

A little after six in the morning, The April sun has just succeeded in breaking through the morning mist, and the air still has a crackle of frost in it. At the foot of a small knoll, surmounted by a little clump of Scotch fir, stand three men engaged in earnest conversation. Carefully sheeted, with hampers of stable-boys on their backs, some seven or eight thoroughbreds pace majestically round and round the little knoll. On the side these men are standing stretches a considerable expanse of velvety turf-down. A series of slender white poles mark out a wide oval road, somewhere about a mile in circumference. The centre of this oval is interspersed with furze-bushes and a few scattered and stunted thorns. That broad, green, ribbon-like track is what is termed the Mannersley Gallop, and the ground upon which Mr. Pearman's horses take their daily exercise. The dash of hoar-frost melts rapidly before the hot yet fitful gleams of the sun-god, and the soft herbage sparkles with glittering dew-drops.

The gentleman in the pepper and-salt suit, single-breasted coat, longish waistcoat, and low-crowned hat, is Martin Pyroft, trainer. He fiddles with the ash-plant in his hand, and seems rather to demur to something that his companion—whom, though enveloped in a loose overcoat on account of the chilliness of the morning, we have no difficulty in recognizing as Sam Pearman—seems to insist on. As for the third member of the conference, a slight, wiry, dark little man, he confines himself to sacking the top of a straight-cutting whip, and looks as if his opinion must be asked pretty decidedly before he intends committing himself on any point. He is a jockey of some considerable eminence in his profession, and, judging from his abstracted look, apparently giving his whole attention to something taking place a few hundred miles off.

'Can't do any harm, Martin. He might just as well have a spin with the old horse as go his usual gallop.'

'Well I'd rather, Mr. Pearman, wait till he is quite wound up before trying him. You must do as you please, sir. No horse can be doing better, but continually trying does take the heart out of them, you know, sir.'

'Of course it does, but mind, we haven't galloped Coriander beside another this year. We suppose him to be quite as good and better than he was last autumn, but we've never ascertained. I mean to know this morning. See, I've brought the saddle-cloths down with me; and he touched a small carpet-bag that lay at his feet with his stick. What do you think, Jim?' and he turned to the jockey.

'I, Mr. Pearman?—I never think till I get my orders, and then I do my best to ride to 'em. Wish some people'd think a little before they give 'em. Why, here's Martin to-day at Northampton puts me up on that Jeremy Diddler, and tells me to make a pace. Why, the colt couldn't go quicker than a rooking horse. If I ever did think, I should get a-wondering what you keeps that brute for.'

'Never mind,' laughed Pearman; 'you shall be on something a little better before three weeks are over. I've made up my mind, Martin; so it's no use talking. Let the others strip and begin their work. Coriander and Loadstone can walk about till they've done, and then we'll see what they can make of each other over three-quarters of a mile.'

Mr. Pyroft knew his employers too well to argue further. Father and son were alike on that point. They would always listen patiently and attentively to all he had to say, and, moreover, give it due consideration, but they decided for themselves. They were not amateurs, the Pearmans, who trusted implicitly to their trainer, they attended (or rather, I should now say, Sam did) pretty closely to their business. He was at the foot of the knoll quite three mornings a week, and was a very good judge when there of how his horses looked and went. Mr. Pyroft

off the sheets with a dexterous hand, and proceeds to adjust a light racing-saddle on that equine celebrity's back. Jim, assisted by Pearman, performs the same office for Loadstone. A few minutes, and the horses, their coats looking like burnished satin, stand ready for their morning's work.

'Now, sir,' says Martin, 'before we see how they are together, we had better just let 'em have a quiet canter. Jim, you get up on Coriander.—You, young 'un,' he continued, addressing the lad who had been upon Loadstone, 'get on your own horse, and led round a nice strong canter, making it a little quicker from the bush home than in the dip; but no galloping in earnest, mind.'

'Looks and moves well, sir, don't he?' said Martin, as Coriander, under Jim's masterly hands, after two or three angry snatches at his bit, settled down into the long, low, sweeping stride characteristic of most thoroughbred horses that distinguish themselves on a race-course. I say most, for there are exceptions—horses that get over the ground in a manner of their own that deceive the best judges—that puzzle you as they come in first, to know how they ever got there with that clumsy, fighting, or what-not action. As with some men, so you must simply regard what they have done, and not look into how they did it. Like ourselves they do good work in all shapes. Some of our greatest heroes have been far from the feminine standard of masculine beauty.

And now the pair come striding along towards the knoll, where they are pulled up.

'Go kind?' inquires Mr. Pyroft.

'Nice 'oss to ride—can put him anywhere,' observes Jim, sententiously.

'Walk 'em about a bit, while we get the saddle-cloths ready,' and Martin commenced rummaging in the carpet-bag before mentioned.

Let us for one second look at the first favorite for the Two Thousand—Coriander, by Sweatmeat, out of Gapesped—a grand dark chestnut, about fifteen-three, with a pair of white heels; a little slack loined, perhaps, and rather light below the knee, but not one you can pick many faults in. He has a beautiful clean head, with a bold, steady eye that says volumes for his courage and temper. A judge of a horse would pronounce him to be honest, every bit of him. He may be beaten, but he will try all he can. Those slack loins may bring him to grief on a severe hill; but, though not quite thing, he is not so deficient there that it ought to go much against him. His companion, Loadstone, is an iron-gray four-year-old, a good deal plainer to look at on the first glance, but full of good points when you come to pick him to pieces. His great thighs and quarters would alone command a certain amount of respect. He was, moreover, what is termed a wear-and-tear look about him that always delights a connoisseur. He has won three or four pretty good handicaps cleverly, and the Pearmans rather tatter themselves that neither the handicappers nor the public as yet know how good he is.

'Now, sir, what's it to be?' inquires Mr. Pyroft, who is busy slipping long and short bits of lead into the pockets of the saddle-cloths. 'These pieces are all strapped, and weigh 2 lbs., 3 lbs., 1 lb. and 1/2 lb., as the case may be. I should think if Loadstone gives him 10 lbs., and he makes a good race of it, that will be near enough for the present.'

'Not quite. I believe he can beat the old horse at even, but it will be good enough to-day if he can do it at 6 lbs.,' replied Pearman. 'Did you weigh Jim and that boy Allen before you came out?'

'I weighed the boy, and I have leaded his saddle cloth to make him up to 8 st., 10 lbs. Jim says he weighs 8 st., but I've had the scales brought out. You weigh 'em, Mr. Pearman, while I mind the horses, and we'll adjust the saddle-cloths afterwards.'

Jim and the boy were now called up and duly got into the scale. Another muttered conversation between Pyroft and his master; then the saddles were removed, the leaded cloths carefully adjusted, the saddles replaced over them, the long surcingle passed carefully over, and Coriander and Loadstone were ready for their trial.

Give them their orders, Martin, and then come here and see it. Mind, they're to start from the three-quarter-a-mile post. Be

at even that as a great rise in his profession. It is true he had ridden in two or three trials before, but then he had generally been on something that had had no earthly chance to win. Suppose he should make a mess of it this morning; Mr. Pyroft would never give him another chance, perhaps.

No wonder the boy looks rather serious. But they are at the post. A couple of false starts take place in consequence of young Allen's eagerness to get well off.

'Stop a bit, young 'un,' said Jim, laughing; 'be a little steady. Mind, it ain't a race, and I don't want to get the best of you. I only want to get fair away. Lor', how a starter would walk down your throat if you carried on like this!'

The remonstrance had the desired effect, and the next time they were away, Jim having a little the best of it, though not much. Once off, the boy's nerves steadied directly. He waited patiently till he came to the quarter-post, and then ran up abreast of Loadstone. Locked together, they went for the next two hundred yards, and then Jim began what is termed, in racing parlance, 'filling' at his horse: it means riding him a little. He drew near a length ahead, but the boy sat still. 'Wait till within fifty yards of home whatever Jim does,' he muttered, 'and I will if I'm beat for it.'

A few strides more, and he saw that Loadstone could hardly hold the lead he had obtained. Gradually he was creeping up to him again, though still quiet on his horse. A little more, and Jim began to ride his horse in earnest, and this was the hardest trial the boy had undergone yet. For a moment Jim forged ahead, and looked like leaving him altogether; then he seemed to hang; and now surely he was within fifty yards of home. Was he? Yes! He sat down and shook up Coriander, passed Jim easily, and went past the knoll a couple of lengths in front.

'You'll do, young 'un,' said Jim good-naturedly, as they pulled up their horses. 'Don't quite know what orders you got, but can pretty well guess. You stick as close to what you're told to do, and keep your head as cool as you did this time, and you'll find yourself first past the post at Epsom some of these days.'

There is a fierce flush of triumph through the system when we make our first great score at any thing—cricket, literature, politics, the drama, the bar, what you will; that sense of being, for the moment, a man of mark in your avocation; the feeling of having, for the time being, brought down the gallery of this cynical world we live in. But I should fancy that the public schoolboy making his first great score at Lord's, and the youthful jockey winning his first great race, perhaps taste the mad intoxication of success as much as anybody. Excepting, perhaps, on the stage, such triumphs come to us later in life. They are sweet then, but we can't exult over them as we do in those days when everything looks so bright and sunny. We have modest misgivings as to whether, perhaps, we have not done our best. We know all about 'going up like the rocket, coming down like the stick.' We can put our hands on so many different failures. 'Written himself out, sir!' 'Ah! you should have seen him at his best!' 'If you could have heard him a few years ago! he was worth listening to then!' Our best speakers, writers, actors, etc., all suffer, in their turn, from this. You are always tried by your highest standard. All men culminate at some time, but it is often before their work is done. Moreover, bread and cheese has still to be earned.

'Well, Martin, I think that'll about do,' laughed Pearman, as the trial finished. 'It will be a good horse that has the best of Coriander three weeks from this.'

'Yes, sir; he's better even than I thought he was, and I know I haven't worked him up to his best yet. I've no fear of his not going on well, for I never trained a better-constituted colt in my life; and, though we didn't try him quite the full distance this morning, I've no doubt of his getting the Rowley Mile as well as he's done his three-quarters this morning. You did that very well, my lad,' he continued, addressing Allen. 'This morning's ride will be a little in your pocket if we've luck, and you pay attention to my next orders, and they are—hold your tongue. You'll get riding before you're many months older.—Well, Jim,

social step they might achieve. Of course the decision still lay entirely in Miss Denison's hands; and really, if the foreclosing of that mortgage was the slightest inconvenience to Mr. Denison, he was truly sorry that, in his ignorance of Mr. Denison's affairs, he should have occasioned the least uneasiness to an old and valued client. All those proceedings would, of course, be at once done away with, and things could remain as they were at present, whether Sam or Miss Denison made a match of it or not.

That he was talking the veriest balderdash, the wily old attorney was quite aware of. That the squire was, of course, equally cognizant of it, this "fisher of men" knew well. But he also felt it was a *sine qua non* that Mr. Denison's descent from his stults must be made as easy as possible; that the genuine fact of the mortgage being cancelled, or left forever in abeyance conditional on Miss Denison marrying his son, must be delicately veiled. *Dorer la pilule* was an art Pearman had devoted a good deal of time to. That an honest rough tonic was wholesomer a good many of his clients could have testified.

The squire felt quite grateful to his visitor for the tact and delicacy with which he paved the way for his retreat from an awkward position. It was, perhaps, this wonderful quality which had helped Pearman on in the world more than anything. Even those who were most closely shorn were always impressed to their dying day that, if they could have been pulled through the swamp of their impecuniosity their recklessness had plunged them into, Pearman would have done it. These poor innocents, in their nakedness, still bas'd the praises of the wolf in sheep's clothing who had assisted at their shearing.

Denison was no fool where his interests were concerned. He had, it is true, been guilty of the grossest folly in squandering a fine property; but he was not weak enough to look upon the lawyer as a benefactor.

'Well, Mr. Pearman,' he replied to the latter's exordium, 'we had best let bygones be bygones. It is sharp upon you the other day in speech, you retaliated on the mortgage; and, gad! you had the best of it. Come in and lunch.'

So the old gentleman lunched at Glinn, and was introduced to Mrs. Denison and his future daughter-in-law. Maude took but little notice of him; but her mother, having now made up her mind to the match, was favorably impressed. Mr. Pearman, in fact, dressed quite as the old respectable confidential solicitor, and acted the part extremely well. Poor Mrs. Denison, having made up her mind to meet her ideal of a low turf attorney, derived principally from novels, was most agreeably astonished.

That the son would quickly follow in his father's footsteps was a matter of course; and here again the Glinn family were destined to be pleasantly surprised. Sam Pearman, though he had not all, yet inherited a fair proportion of his father's tact. The old gentleman, too, had given him one or two valuable hints, and a most thorough *carte blanche*. He presented himself very quietly, was very subdued and respectful—the least thing impressive, but by no means demonstrative in his attentions to Maude; talked just a shade of racing to gratify the squire, letting it drop as quickly as opportunity served; chatted pleasantly on all the topics of the day, and took his departure after the delivery of a neat anecdote, that made even Mrs. Denison smile.

Poor Maude, she sat very triste and pale through the visit; but even she felt a species of mild gratitude for the little her accredited suitor had sought from her on this occasion. She felt—what I presume most girls would under the circumstances—that she could marry the man to save Glinn to her parents, but that any love-making beforehand would be unendurable. If he would continue to treat her with quiet courtesy she could bear it, but to yield her lips to him she felt was beyond her. That lovers claim such favors she knew; but the girl had a strong touch of romance in her (absurd, if you like, in these days), and vowed no kiss should be laid on her cheek until she was irrevocably severed from Grenville Rose. She still clung to an undefined hope that he might rescue her yet, and that her lips should meet his unpolliuted. Poor child! her eyes look sad enough now:

and giving vent to jubilant duck-sonnets; he turned up his imperfect tail in his some sets. The rat had carefully swam round the destined prey, so as to cut him off from his family. His wicked eyes gleamed full as fierce as he neared his unconscious victim. At this moment the wether rushed across the pond, one part swimming, three flying as we have often seen ducks do. But, as she reached it, the rat had disappeared. Maude sprang to her feet; she knew what that meant, and that that reckless duckling would be seized from her below. Soon dead sticks lay ready to her hand, and she flung them furiously in the direction of the duckling. Their splashing and the efforts the mother were crowned with success, as Maude caught but one glimpse of the baffling water-pirate's brown back as he made the bank discomfited.

And then Maude once more sat down, re-joining in the escape of that scapegraced duckling. Her hat had fallen off in the excitement of the scrimmage, and the glossy brown tresses were in wild confusion, and leaning her cheek on her pretty white hand, she fell asleep—as fair a dryad as ever was gazed upon. Maude not only slept—she dreamed, and she pictured to herself that she was drowning in some big lake: she was going down, down ever so far, and suddenly she clasped a spar of some kind, and felt that she was saved. Then a big brown man with fierce red eyes threatened her and struck her, and, just as she was about to let go the big brown man vanished, and Grenville Rose stood in his place, caught her by the hand, and drew her to him. She fell into his arms, and, as he bent over her and kissed her, his lips were cold as those of a corpse, and with a half cry she awoke only to find her father, Dan, most sagacious of setters, rubbing his black nose against her face.

Maude sat up, and turned over her dream in her mind. It cheered her. She accepted it as a *sortilege*, and thought it foretold the triumph of Gren over Pearman, and every thing all light and sunshine for the future. The clay-cold lips of her lover seemed an awkward point to get over, but she attributed them lightly to Dan's cold and healthy nose. Dreams I hold to be but the reflex of our waxing thoughts. The scene on the pebbles she witnessed just before she fell asleep, she joined to her relations with Grenville Rose and Pearman, easily accounted for her vision.

As for *sortilege*, do not think there are no believers in it the present day. We all are at it, but many of us put trust in arguements our secret souls as implicitly as did those pagans in the centuries so long rolled by. Gamblers are notorious in this way. Mr. a man, from some auspicious circumstances in the early morning, has predicted, 'I'm in luck to-day'—the speculator on his way to the Stock Exchange, the farmer on his way to market, though the bucolic mind is imaginative. Did not that half-crazed genius Rousseau throw stones at a big tree from short distance to see if he should ultimately be among the elect people of heaven?

But Sam Pearman in the meanwhile has no time in prosecuting his suit. Diffidence is not one of his failings, and in such no courtship as this there is little fear of the result. Before a week had gone by he was formally engaged to Maude Denison, at the discussion of when the wedding should take place is pre-eminently between the contracting parties. Maude listens, and assents to everything in a quiet, listless way. She treats her betrothed with calm courtesy, but avoids all occasion of being alone with him. She shows tact upon the point that would seem past comprehension to one who was unaware that her mother was her pledged aider and abettor in the prevention of a *tete-a-tete*. So far, Sam Pearman can boast of receiving but scant favour from the hands of his bride-elect. Her father is as yet innocent of his caresses, and a pressure of the hand the extent of his attentions.

No news—not a sign of Grenville Rose and warily Maude commenced going through all the ordeal of preparing the trousseau. They were to be married the first week in May.

But one morning a groom came over in hot haste from Mannersley with a few lines for the squire from Sam Pearman, that his father was dead. The son had been a day or two before that the old