

SADDLE AND SABRE.

(Continued.)

To begin with, she was suffering from a severe cold, and that, as a rule, may be pronounced quite sufficient grievance without going into any others that may possibly afflict us; moreover, she had been compelled, from some cause or other, to have the workmen into the house; and what Londoner, who has had experience of him, does not know what a terrible Old Man of the Sea is the British workman when he once gets within your gates?

"I hope," said Mrs. Connop, "it has never been your lot to know what having the work people in means. The British workman has been often abused, and deserves every bit of it. He breaks my rest with hideous regularity. He dawdles about all day; shows great capacity for beer; is profuse in assurances that he shall have finished the job by the end of the week. He looks at it, I suppose thinks over it, but he never works, and *he never goes.*"

"Ah! fortunately we have no experience of that sort of thing. We haven't a house of our own, but always rent one; and Dick would take very good care that there was no necessity for that during our tenancy, but I've always heard that the work-people are very trying. Do you expect Lettie to visit you this year? She was rather looking forward to it, I think, the last time I saw her."

"And I am always very glad to have her with me," rejoined Mrs. Connop, "but it's impossible while the house is in such a muddle as it is now. If I had had an idea what it was going to be I'd have slipped down to Brighton for a month and got out of the way of it all. But they assured me it would take less than a week, and I was foolish enough to believe them. However, they vow that it really is very nearly finished now, and, forsworn as they have often proved themselves, I try to believe them this time. I shall write for Lettie as soon as ever I am rid of them. How was she looking when you saw her last?"

"Oh! she was well enough when we left The Firs, but she finds North Leach rather dull now the hunting is over. She gets a glimpse of the world with you; and, as is only natural, she longs for the fun and gaiety of London in preference to the monotony of her life in the wolds; besides, she made rather a sensation last year—she had quite a train of admirers."

"Yes," rejoined Mrs. Connop, "she is pretty, and she was no doubt popular, and got on well at all the dances I took her to. But Mr. Slade was the only pronounced admirer that I saw. He, I think, was a good deal struck with her."

"Oh! she had others besides him, and more profitable ones to boot."

"I like Mr. Slade," replied Mrs. Connop sharply.

"I think most people do," said Kate; "he is very good-looking and a most agreeable cavalier. I was only speaking from a matrimonial point of view; but, from what I hear about him, Mr. Slade is in no position to take unto himself a wife at present."

"Lettie has plenty of time before her to think about that."

"No doubt," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston. "But it is a thing that naturally crosses a girl's mind as soon as she is introduced. Mr. Furzedon, I should say, was quite as much struck with Lettie as Mr. Slade, and only wanted a little encouragement to declare himself."

"I don't like him as well as the other," said Mrs. Connop sententiously.

"Perhaps not," replied Kate Kynaston; "but when it comes to an eligible *parti*, Mr. Furzedon is preferable. He is a man very well off, and perfectly independent."

"Ah, well! As I said before, Lettie has no cause to hurry herself as yet."

"No, indeed," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, rising. "I am so very glad to have been fortunate enough to get in. I trust your cold will soon be better, and that you will bring Lettie round to see me before many days are over. Do come, if it is only to show that you are delivered from this incubus that besets you. Good-bye." And as Mrs. Kynaston descended to her carriage she murmured, "Yes, my dear friend, I want these workmen out of the house quite as much as you do."

Furzedon, after duly thinking over Mrs. Kynaston's advice, and what she had told him about Charlie's difficulties, had fully made up his mind as to the plan of his campaign. Nobody knew the story of Charlie's difficulties better than he did; but it was news to him that young Devereux contemplated a "plunge" on Belisarius—a means of extrication from his embarrassments. He resolved that he would boldly ask Lettie to marry him as soon as she appeared in London. He had a very tolerable share of self-esteem, but he hardly expected to be successful upon this occasion, if possible, he determined to avoid positive rejection, but to withdraw his pretensions discreetly as soon as he saw it imminent; then, only let Belisarius be beaten for the Derby, and he would make another attempt. Charlie would be then deeper in the mire than ever. And he might urge upon Miss Devereux that it lay with her to make it possible for him to pay his brother-in-law's debts.

Belisarius! He hadn't troubled his head much as yet to think about that colt's prospects for the Derby, but now it dawned upon him that, as far as he was concerned, the success of Belisarius would be inimical to his interests. He must make inquiries; the horse was not going very well in the market; he wondered whether there was anything wrong with him, he had had no hint of such a thing himself; perhaps Dick Kynaston might have heard something about it—he must ask him. Now it so happened that his visit to Mrs. Kynaston had been made the afternoon before Prance related to the Major what Mr. Black had told him; and when Prance espied Furzedon knocking at the Kynastons' door, that gentleman was calling

there expressly to learn what his Turf confederate thought of the favorite's chance at Epsom, and was speedily put in possession of the Major's newly-acquired information.

"Wants inquiring into a bit, you know; but that fellow Black has the eye of a gled for the market, and the nose of a bloodhound for a dead 'un. I should be very sorry to back a horse of which he held this opinion."

"Then," said Furzedon, "we had better lay against Belisarius this time, instead of backing him. It's safer, as a rule, and at his present price there is a good bit of money to be made. Moreover, if Black is right, he will go back in the betting before the race, and there will be no difficulty about covering our money; besides, it jumps with my own inclinations; not that I'm such a fool as ever to be swayed by them in matters of business, but it's pleasant when they happen to run hand in hand. I've private reasons of my own for hoping Belisarius will not win."

"Would it be indiscreet," rejoined Kynaston, "to ask those reasons?"

"Very, Major," said Furzedon, laughing; "let's say I don't know how to pronounce his confounded name, dislike his color, the cut of his tail—anything."

"That's settled then," rejoined Kynaston; "if my inquiries are satisfactory, we decide to 'pepper the favorite,' to what extent depends upon what I hear."

"All right," replied the other, as he took his leave. "There's no hurry, I think. I shall see you again in the course of a day or two."

Ralph Furzedon had not overlooked Prance in the street, although he had taken no notice of him; but he had not seen that he came out of the Kynastons' house, nor had he the slightest idea that the Major even knew of such a person's existence.

Suspicious by nature, had he known this he would have been at once on his guard. He was thoroughly aware of Prance's enmity, and knew that, though the man could do him no positive harm, yet he could tell stories concerning him which he, Furzedon, would just as soon were buried in oblivion. He regarded Prance as innocuous, simply because any disclosures he chose to make could only be made to that scum of the Turf with which he habitually consorted. He was utterly unaware that in his character as tout Sam Prance was acquainted with many men, like Kynaston, who held a fair *status* in society.

To say that Gilbert Slade had been astonished at the news young Devereux had brought back from London would feebly express his feelings. He was thunderstruck—he had never thought of that—he barely knew Furzedon, had seen very little of him, and felt very indisposed to see more. He knew that he was intimate with the Devereuxs, had been at Cambridge with Charlie, had stayed at North Leach, and all that, but he never pictured him as a possible pretender to Lettie's hand. It might be said that he never pictured himself in that capacity; he had admired Miss Devereux very much, he thought her a very nice girl, would be delighted to meet her again, and was quite in earnest in accepting old Tom Devereux's invitation to North Leach.

It had been no fault of his that visit had not been paid. His answer to Charlie, when the latter suggested it, had been perfectly straightforward; he did not think the Colonel was likely to look favorably upon an application for leave from the new recruit at present, unless he could advance some very serious cause for requiring it. He did not quite see his way into going to North Leach by himself, and so that visit had never been paid; but now that he heard Miss Devereux was engaged to be married to somebody else, he discovered that his feelings towards her were very much stronger than admiration.

It was true that he had never thought of marrying her, but then he had never thought of marrying anybody. Marriage was a thing that had taken no definite shape in his mind—a ceremony that he might or might not go through in years to come. Even if he had ever contemplated it, he knew it was a thing that would be warmly opposed by, at all events, one of his relations. It was only the other day that his uncle Bob, when joking him about Miss Devereux, had reminded him that he would give no consent to his marriage before he got his troop; and although he was within very measurable distance of that much-desired piece of promotion, still there was no immediate prospect of its taking place, and two or even three years might elapse before he saw himself in the *Gazette*. He couldn't understand it; well, he supposed money was everything nowadays, and yet he had thought Lettie not a girl of that sort either. He was not likely ever to be a man of more than moderate means himself; and though he would probably inherit his uncle Braddock's property eventually, yet, in the ordinary course of things, that was not likely to take place for many years. Well, if the thing was done, there was an end of it. Charlie was not likely to be misinformed on such a subject as this. However, they were both going to London at the end of the month to see Belisarius win; Miss Devereux would, no doubt, be in town about that time. He would see her then, and judge for himself; he would, at all events, discover whether it was true that she was engaged to Furzedon.

XXVI.

FURZEDON PROPOSES.

"No hap so hard but cometh to an end," as the old poet sings.

The workmen are out of the house at last, the long-looked-for invitation has been despatched, and Lettie Devereux responds to it—has made her curtesy in Onslow Gardens, little knowing how anxiously her appearance in town was looked forward to by well-nigh half-a-dozen people. Her arrival was speedily notified to Mrs. Kynaston, and through her, directly