

But her ladyship was evidently not convinced, she was given to be some what suspicious of unfair play when her racing calculations proved fallible.

At this juncture Gilbert caught sight of Miss Devereux, and as he was by no means such an enthusiast about the "sport of kings" as his companions, he at once raised his hat and proceeded to join her.

"How d'ye do, Miss Devereux? Rather different weather from that when I last saw you. How long have you been in town?"

"Only about a week," rejoined Lettie; "but let me introduce you to my aunt, Mrs. Connop, with whom I am staying."

Gilbert bowed, and muttered something about "doing himself the pleasure of calling," and then turning to Lettie, said, "I suppose now you'll see the reason out."

"Oh yes," replied the girl. "I want to go everywhere and do everything, see all there is to be seen, and meet all my friends. I suppose, Mr. Slade, that your intentions are somewhat similar."

"Ah! it doesn't signify what my intentions may be. When you're a soldier you find the Horse Guards interfere with such things in ruthless fashion. No, I regret to say that I only got a month's leave, and that a week of it is already gone. Has Polestar won his spurs yet, Miss Devereux?"

"No," rejoined Lettie; "how can you recall that day of disgrace to me?"

"Not disgrace," rejoined Gilbert; "you were defeated, as we all are at times; but, I fancy, if the race had been run over again, your brother would have made a closer thing of it."

"Ah! I daresay Charlie will have another opportunity of distinguishing himself in the autumn. Is there any likelihood of your being present at the Autumn Meeting on the Carholme?"

"It is very likely," rejoined Gilbert. "I am quartered at York, and I should think it is easy to slip down from there. However, it is a long way off as yet."

"Who was that gentleman you were talking to, Mr. Slade?" inquired Miss Devereux.

"That was my uncle Norman," replied Gilbert. "It is not often that he leaves his usual haunts for anything of this sort, but, for some reason, he is very fond of the Ramsburys—he has known them a good many years, and I've a vague suspicion that Sir John did him a kindness at some period of his life. All I know is that, though he is a real good fellow, my Uncle Norman is peculiar, and it is by no means every one that could lure him to their dinner-table; not many people, I fancy, who would have got him to do a thing of this kind."

"I am sure it is charming," replied Miss Devereux laughing; "such pretty grounds, so many people, and such a good band to listen to; I don't think your good uncle is much to be pitied."

"No," said Gilbert; "but people differ in taste, and this is not much in my Uncle Norman's line." And the conversation turned upon military affairs; for, not a little to Gilbert's surprise, Miss Devereux manifested no small curiosity about "soldiering." It was easy of explanation. During the winter she and her brother Charlie had had many a talk together as to what line of life he was to pursue, and he had more than once spoken seriously of the army as a profession calculated to suit him when his career at Cambridge was done with. Lettie warmly approved of that determination. She had a very vague idea of what a soldier's life was like; but thought that a man who was a good horseman ought to make a likely Dragon.

Norman Slade continued to talk in his lazy way to Lady Melfort. The Countess always amused him, while he usually acted as a pleasing irritant upon her. He listened to her vehement protestations of the iniquities of the Turf with a quiet smile, and invariably exasperated her by claiming a high position for the main part of those connected with it, and declaring that people who lose a little money shrieked and made bitter wail over the treachery that they had encountered, forgetting about the extreme uncertainty that distinguishes racing beyond even most mundane affairs.

"My dear Countess," he would say, "you don't rail against M. Blanc when you lose your money at Monte Carlo, and yet when you come to gambling on the Turf—and you know, Lady Melfort, you are a gambler—you don't bet merely upon the races you understand and can form an opinion about, but you bet on all sorts of handicaps and selling races, of which, concerning the merits of the competitors, you know nothing."

"Well, I hate to see a race, Mr. Slade, without having something on it."

"Just so," rejoined Norman; "then you couldn't bear to see the ball spinning round at Monte Carlo without having a stake on it, but whether you back the red or the black, it is just about as great a lottery as some of these races you speculate on."

If Norman somewhat irritated her, Lady Melfort had a profound respect for his judgment. She believed him to be able to elucidate many a Turf mystery that had puzzled racing people profoundly, and in this wise she was right; there were few men perhaps more behind the scenes than Norman Slade. There were not many Turf robberies of which he could not explain the history. Pray don't think for one moment he was a participator in them. Like the general public, he had occasionally been a victim; but when the scandal connected with such events was once blown over, a story in Turf circles is pretty certain to leak out in more or less accurate form, and he sometimes regaled Lady Melfort with the true history of one of these bygone surprises. Like many men of his type, good-hearted fellow though he was at bottom, he would hardly have interfered to save any one in whom he was not interested from being awfully taken advantage of.

(To be continued.)

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