

SADDLE AND SABRE.

(Continued).

"Certainly, they would, if they thought there was any probability of the case being taken up; but they are poor men, Mr. Slade."

"Ah! and don't speak unless they are paid for it," interrupted Norman, sharply. "Now, sir; first of all, what's your name?—and, secondly, why do you come to me at this time of day?"

"To begin with, my name is Prance; and, secondly, it took me a long time to collect the proofs of what I only suspected."

"Good!" rejoined Slade, "it looks a little to me as if you and your confederates, having made all that you possibly could out of a successful conspiracy, are now exceedingly anxious to put the coping stone on your villainy by selling your employer."

"I give you my word, Mr. Slade, that I had nothing to do with it, and knew nothing about what was being done till after the race," rejoined Prance earnestly.

"Then what the deuce is your object in coming to me?" said Norman, sharply.

For a second Prance hesitated; then, as an almost demoniacal expression spread across his countenance, he hissed between his teeth:—

"I hate Furzedon!"

Slade looked at him for a moment, and then exclaimed, almost involuntarily, "By heaven! he is speaking the truth now."

"Yes!" continued Prance, in a voice hoarse with passion, "you gentlemen think that we poor devils care for nothing but money; but there's one thing that comes far before money to most men—revenge! Furzedon has ruined me!—struck me!—desolated my home!—and for years I have lived only to be revenged upon him!"

"That will do for the present," replied Slade quietly, "if you can prove what you say, and I take this case up, I think, socially speaking, you will about attain your end."

"Yes," replied Prance; "and I have a good deal more to tell you about him than that. He passes in the world as a wealthy, well-to-do gentleman; in reality he is only a money-lender."

"Give me your address," rejoined Slade, and as he spoke Norman took his betting-book from his pocket, and carefully noted down Mr. Prance's town residence. "I have no time to go into the matter here, but I will write to you in London; and if I am satisfied with the proofs you produce, and that your story is *bona fide*, I think I can at all events promise you that Mr. Furzedon will be warned off the Turf, and be no longer received in decent society."

"Thank you, sir;" and, touching his hat, Mr. Prance accepted his dismissal, and with an exultant heart vanished into the crowd.

As for Norman Slade, he paced up and down in the Paddock, revolving the whole story in his mind for some minutes. He had vowed, if he could but get proof of this thing, to follow up the matter to its bitter end, and here was proof ready to his hand, if Prance's tale was to be trusted. This scoundrel Furzedon, moreover, was figuring in society, and had actually forced an acquaintance upon Bertie Slade, his—Norman's—nephew. Now it was high time the disguise was torn off this impostor. This fraudulent money-lender should be shown up in his true colors, and, if he was beyond the reach of the ordinary law, he was still open to the judgment of the Turf Senate; and, if when the facts were brought before them, they should think fit to pass sentence, Mr. Furzedon would find that there were malpractices in racing that could not be committed with impunity.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SINISTER RUMORS.

Charlie's exile is a source of sore trouble to Lettie Devereux, and of infinite mortification to her aunt. They both, perhaps, unduly exulted at that young scapegrace's appointment to the —th Hussars. They had been so proud of their young Dragoon! and now that was all over. He was in a far country, engaged in what was apparently little better than police-work. Mrs. Connop, indeed, had been so melted by what she called the misfortunes of her favorite nephew, that she had been ready to contribute very handsomely towards extricating him from his difficulties; if her brother would furnish two-thirds of the requisite money, she would find the remainder; but old Tom Devereux, taking counsel from shrewd and worldly Major Braddock, was obstinate. Charlie had made his own bed, and must lie on it. Major Braddock was by no means averse to welcoming a return of the prodigal in due season; but what he did object to was a premature mincing of veal in his behalf.

"No such schoolmaster as experience!" quoth the Major. "Let him feel thoroughly for a time the change of position his folly has cost him. Let him discover what slow work chivying dacoits is compared to a gallop with the York and Ainsty! And, by the Lord, sir, let him know the difference between living on his rations and dinner at the mess of his old regiment."

So Lettie had to make up her mind that a long time would pass before she should see her favorite brother again. That he was dissatisfied with his lot she felt certain, although there was not the slightest complaint in any one of his letters; but there was a want of go in his correspondence, very

different from the letters he had written from the University, or those he penned when he first joined the regiment at York. Once only had he been betrayed into impatience of his present life, and that was when he said "that he only wished that he had better work to do than that he had been employed in." Another thing, too, which considerably discomposed Miss Devereux was that Gilbert Slade seemed to have totally disappeared from her ken. She not only never met him, she never even heard of him now. She was back again at North Leach, and, indeed, had been for some time; but how different it all was from the winter before! when Charlie was looking forward to joining his regiment at York, and bringing back Bertie Slade with him to wind up the season by a last fortnight with the Brocklesby. And then Lettie thought the world was getting very dull, as we all do when things don't run quite in accordance with our desires, and finally resolved that she would ride across and see Kate Kynaston—for the Kynastons had once more taken The Firs for the hunting season—and, though there had been a relaxation of that great friendship which had suddenly sprung up between that lady and herself, still, strange to say, a common trouble had once more drawn them together. Mrs. Kynaston had schemed and plotted successfully—she had succeeded in detaching Gilbert Slade altogether from Miss Devereux, but she had also, unluckily, lost touch of him herself. She had failed to realise that both she and Lettie owed in great measure their intimacy with Bertie Slade chiefly to his being a brother officer of Charlie, and that now that youthful cornet had disappeared from the scene, they heard no more of Gilbert's movements. Both ladies thought—and Lettie with good reason—that she, for her own sake, would have proved sufficiently attractive to ensure seeing and hearing a good deal of him, while Kate Kynaston's vanity enabled her to take a similar view of the situation.

Miss Devereux wondered whether the rumor that she was engaged to be married to Mr. Furzedon had anything to say to Gilbert Slade's persistent avoidance of her—avoidance was perhaps hardly the right term, for he had certainly tried twice to see her during the Derby week. Still, he could have managed to meet her easily enough had he wished it; he could have found plenty of excuses for writing to her; but no, from the week he had paid those two bootless visits to Onslow Gardens, Gilbert Slade had given no sign of his very existence. She knew how persistently the story of her engagement had been circulated—of the shameful persecution, for it amounted to that, she had been subjected to by Mr. Furzedon. Was it not possible this infamous falsehood had been brought designedly to Gilbert Slade's ears, and would not that account for his never coming near her?

She might have been more disposed to accept this theory but for Mrs. Kynaston, who was continually impressing upon her that in affairs of the heart soldiers were not to be put faith in. A great propounder of the doctrine that "he loves and rides away" was Mrs. Kynaston, but then just now she had a purpose to serve, and she was relentless in her determination to crush out any feeling for Gilbert Slade that might be lurking in Miss Devereux's bosom. True, Mrs. Kynaston was not forwarding her own flirtation in any way. And, what was more, although that lady had not in the least abated her caprice for Gilbert Slade, she was utterly nonplussed as regards further pursuit of it. It was not likely that the fiction of Lettie's engagement to Mr. Furzedon could be much longer kept up; and Mrs. Kynaston had only the other day been compelled to write that gentleman a stinging rebuke for what she denominated his ill-advised audacity. Persistent in his determination to marry Miss Devereux, Furzedon had actually written to her father and volunteered a visit to North Leach; but, upon hearing this, Lettie blazed out indignantly.

"It can't be, father! it *mustn't* be! He has asked me to marry him, and he won't take 'No' for an answer. Already he has spread abroad the report that I am engaged to him. His proposing this visit is all a part of his scheme. It would give an air of truth to the rumor. If he was a gentleman he would cease from persecuting me. My 'No' was not only said clearly and distinctly to start with, but has been quite as decisively repeated."

"Say no more, Lettie! If he is distasteful to you, my girl, he shan't come to North Leach. But as he is an old friend of Charlie we must make some civil excuse."

Although in the first instance Mrs. Kynaston had been the suggester and promoter of Furzedon's suit, yet now that she had attained her end she had become a very half-hearted ally. She began to see now that nothing was likely to shake Lettie's determination; and, though such a marriage would have suited her very well, she was getting very doubtful of its ever being brought about. Mrs. Kynaston had always a shrewd eye to the future. She liked wealthy friends, and Mr. and Mrs. Furzedon would have been always sure to have a pleasant house where she could claim a welcome. She had seen so many young women say "No" in the first instance to wealthy wooers, and afterwards change their minds, that she thought it might be so with Miss Devereux; but she thought so no longer, and considered that any such decided step on Mr. Furzedon's part as volunteering himself to North Leach might rend aside that flimsy fiction of his engagement, which it, for the present, suited Mrs. Kynaston to maintain.

She had told Mr. Furzedon that perseverance is all very well, but that it must be accompanied by tact. Given that, as long as a woman is unwed, no man need despair of winning her for a wife; and then Mrs. Kynaston, her platitudes got done with, relieved her own disappointment by administering as many pin-pricks to the rather pachydermatous Furzedon as she could compass.

In pursuance of her resolution, Miss Devereux cantered over to The Firs, and found Kate Kynaston both at home and a prey to that unmitigated boredom which is apt to steal over sparsely-populated country neighborhoods with the last days of the hunting season; when the hot sun and bleak nor'easter have so dried up the ground that there is no scent, when those on one side the cover are shivering, while those on the other are mopping the perspiration from their brows, and a general feeling obtains that sylva