

SADDLE AND SABRE.

(Continued.)

Adhering to his plan, Mr. Furzedon made his way out towards South Kensington that afternoon, and in Piccadilly he passed Gilbert Slade. Now he had never seen that gentleman except at Lincoln races, and the Slades as a race were not people who knew you lightly. Furzedon even on that occasion had hardly exchanged half-a-dozen words with him, but, constant to the principle he had laid down, he nevertheless nodded genially to Gilbert. That gentleman's face simply expressed blank recognition, and then he returned the salutation by slightly touching his hat. Gilbert Slade, in good truth, had no recollection of who it was that had bowed to him; but Mr. Furzedon had two points invaluable to him in the rôle he proposed to play—he had a capital memory for both names and faces.

That afternoon witnessed the *début* of Mr. Furzedon in Onslow Gardens. The defunct pawnbroker's son had, at all events, mastered one of the mysteries of fashion: he had learnt how to knock. One may think the knocking at a door is of no consequence, perhaps not to the proprietors of the house, who may or may not hear it, and who very likely, if they do, pay little attention to it. I am not going to enter into that vast question so intelligible to those conversant with the history of the knocker, to whom the knock of the post, the dun, the taxes, the begging petitioner, the borrower, the wealthy but exasperated relative, &c., are as easy to read as telegrams. I am alluding only to the visitor's knock. And in the servants' hall this is interpreted on a mutely acknowledged scale accordingly. On those of the nervous, timid, and hesitating knock, they invariably bestow arrogance and contumely, but to the donor of the bold, audacious roudade on the knocker they are invariably cap in hand. Delicious are the errors into which these clumsy menials constantly fall, unless they are servants of the very best class: the swaggering manner and a certain gorgeousness of dress will constantly impose upon them. They kootoo to the confident stockbroker, and turn up their nose at the more diffident Peer.

Mr. Furzedon, in all the gorgeousness of his summer raiment, preceded by his dashing peal on the knocker, was just the sort of man that quiet servitors would be startled by. There was nothing *outré* about his garments, but everybody will understand what I mean when I say that they were just a little too glossy. It is difficult to explain, but a well-dressed man of the world never seems to put on a new coat. Furzedon was wont to have the appearance of having received his clothes only the night before from his tailor.

Yes, Miss Devereux was staying there, and Mrs. Connop would be very glad to see Mr. Furzedon, was the answer that came down in acknowledgment of his cards. Mr. Furzedon lost no time in responding to the invitation, and as he entered the drawing-room Lettice advanced to meet him, and, after shaking hands with him, at once presented him to her aunt.

"Very glad, indeed, Mr. Furzedon, to make your acquaintance. I am always pleased to see any friends of my family; and Lettice tells me that you have been staying at North Leach all winter, and are now quite a known man with the Brocklesby."

"I am afraid Miss Devereux is a little laughing at me when she says that. I certainly can claim in one sense to be a well-known man in that country, namely, that I was a constant attendant at their meets, and had capital good fun; but a well-known man is usually translated into a very prominent horseman with such hounds. I am afraid I wasn't quite that. They were all a little too good for me down there."

"Ah, Auntie, you must not trust to this mock humility. Mr. Furzedon held his own with most of us."

"Very good of you to say so, Miss Devereux, and I'll not be such a fool as to argue that view of the case with you. Anyway, Mrs. Connop, I had a capital time at North Leach, and two very jolly days at Lincoln afterwards, although, sad to say, the family banner—that is metaphorical for colors, you know—was not triumphant."

"Never mind," exclaimed Mrs. Connop. "I wasn't born a Devereux without knowing something of these things. I didn't see it, but Charlie's young, and I'll go bail he does better yet. From my recollection of all those cheery Hunt Steeplechases, the young ones were apt to get a little the worst of it at first, but a few years' practice and they turn the tables. There is no truer adage, Mr. Furzedon, than that youth will be served. I don't call myself an old woman, and never mean to, but if you ask me whether Lettice can walk me down—well—I suspect she can."

"No," said Furzedon; "nobody ever does grow old in these days. Why look at all our leading public men—boys still, in spite of what their baptismal registers assert to the contrary. By the way, Miss Devereux, have you seen anything of the Kynastons since you have been in town?"

"Not as yet," rejoined Lettice, "but I have only been here three days as yet. In fact, I am rather surprised at your having heard of my arrival."

"Well," replied Furzedon, "that is a piece of pure good fortune on my part. I remember that you said in the winter you very often spent a few weeks with Mrs. Connop about this time of the year, so I thought I would call."

"Charlie tells me you have done with Cambridge."

"Yes," rejoined Furzedon, "I never intended to take a degree, but my guardians were right—it is good for a man to go to the University for a time. It opens his eyes, and gives him a glimpse of the world."

Mr. Furzedon's guardians were shadowy people to whom he only alluded when it suited his purpose. They had interfered very little indeed with him, and the going to Cambridge had been entirely his own idea, and of his object in doing so we are already aware. He had been, moreover, of age now some little time, and was consequently emancipated from the very

light control his guardians had ever attempted to exercise. After a little more desultory talk, Mr. Furzedon rose to take his leave, and received from Mrs. Connop, as he did so, a cordial intimation that she would be glad to see him whenever he chose to call. He had also learnt from Lettice that the Kynastons had taken a house in Chester Street, Mayfair.

"Not a bad beginning," thought Mr. Furzedon, as he strolled eastwards. "I've got my foot fairly inside that house, and it will be my own fault if I don't establish myself on Mrs. Connop's visiting list. Mrs. Kynaston, too, can be a very useful woman to me if she likes. I don't suppose that they entertain much, but I fancy they have a very numerous acquaintance in London, and that Mrs. Kynaston could introduce me pretty widely if she chose."

VIII.

LADY RAMSBURY'S GARDEN PARTY.

More hospitable people than the Ramsburys never existed. They lived in a great red brick house in Chelsea—one of those modern imitations of the old Elizabethan style of house such as you may see in Pont Street. It stood in the midst of a large garden, and the Ramsburys delighted in big dinners during the winter months, and in large garden-parties in the summer. What Sir John Ramsbury had been knighted for was rather a mystery. He was known as a "warm" man in the City, was Alderman of his Ward, and although he had never passed the chair, it was always regarded that was an honor he might aspire to any day. However, he had attained the distinction of knighthood, the why could be only explained by the fact that he had been the chairman of several commercial enterprises, supposed to have resulted in much benefit to the country, and, what was rather more to the point, in considerable benefit to Sir John Ramsbury.

Lady Ramsbury's "gardens" were a well known feature in the London season. The company might be a little mixed, but there were plenty of right good people always to be found there. Sir John, as director of various companies, had come across a good deal of the salt of this earth, and in this latter half of the nineteenth century, when the struggle for existence waxes harder and harder, both to those with the bluest of blood in their veins and to those born in the gutter, the man with the capability of putting money into his friends' pockets is a power.

There has never been a time when Fashion in pursuit of its follies did not grovel at the feet of Plutus. How our Parisian neighbors bowed down at the shrine of Law, and many of us can remember when to sit at the table of the Railway King was matter of gratulation to half the best society in London. Who could whisper such auriferous secrets into dainty ears as he could? and though irreverent guardsmen might put up their gasses at some of the social solecisms he was wont to commit, yet their seniors and the mothers that bore them were too worldly-wise not to overlook such trifles as those. In similar fashion, Sir John Ramsbury commanded a considerable number of guests at his parties. He did the thing right well—there was never any lack of everything of the best in the commissariat department at his parties, and it must, in justice to the worthy knight and his lady, be added that they were unconventional people, but by no means vulgar. Lady Ramsbury and Mrs. Connop were old friends; the lamented Connop had been mixed up with various business speculations in Sir John's early days, before he blossomed into knighthood and the dignity of a house at Chelsea, so that there was nothing singular in Lettice and her aunt finding themselves in that pleasant old garden one fine June afternoon.

After shaking hands with their hostess, Mrs. Connop and her niece began to slowly pace the lawn. They met plenty of acquaintances, and were enjoying themselves in a careless, gossiping way, when Lettice's eye was caught by a group of three people who were occupying a garden-bench, and conversing somewhat earnestly. The centre of the group, and the person who had at first attracted her attention, was a slight, elderly man, with a decided stoop, and an eye like a hawk. Seated on one side of him was a stout elderly lady, richly dressed, but who evidently considered that Nature was a handmaid to Art. The merest tyro would have known her color was not that of fresh air and superabundant life, and made a shrewd guess that her exuberant tresses came straight from her hairdresser's. But Lady Melfort was a well-known and very popular person. Ascot or Newmarket, Epsom or Doncaster would have seemed incomplete without the presence of that dashing and evergreen Countess. On the other side was Gilbert Slade. As far as Lettice could see, the conversation rested principally with the lady, who was declaiming volubly, while Norman Slade, who was the central figure of the group, merely threw in an interjectional word now and again.

Norman Slade had no objection to fighting the Turf battles of bygone days over again with any one who really understood racing, and the sporting Peeress, who was a thorough enthusiast, was by no means a bad judge.

"I don't agree with you, Lady Melfort," he ejaculated, in reply to some story of her ladyship's, the gist of which appeared to be that she had lost her money when she thought she ought to have won it. "It is true, on his previous form the horse ought to have won, but it by no means follows there was any foul play connected with his running; horses, like ourselves, are not always quite themselves, and the cleverest trainer sometimes fails to detect that his charge is a little off. I know that people connected with Lucifer backed him upon that occasion."

"I should like to know what his jockey did," rejoined her ladyship, sharply.

"His best, I think," rejoined Norman; "he's a steady, civil boy enough, and we are rather too apt to make the jockey answerable for the shortcomings of the horse."