

# SADDLE AND SABRE.

(Continued.)

And then Mr. Furzedon would chuckle to himself at what was to him an exquisite jest, to wit, that these young innocents would shortly be brought round to his pen to be shorn; and that Kynaston was in complete ignorance that he, Furzedon, was in reality the shearer.

Kynaston had not seen Prance for some months after their interview, and had pretty well dismissed the subject from his mind; he thought it was impossible that Prance could know anything more of his connection with Furzedon than that they were to some extent Turf confederates. Still, when the succeeding spring in London Prance once more made his appearance at the little house in Mayfair, the Major reverted to the subject. But he soon found that the tout knew little more than that Furzedon and himself were acquainted; that he had small knowledge of the Devereux; and that his main motive was a rabid hostility and distrust of Ralph Furzedon. Prance had, indeed, no particular object in rescuing Charlie Devereux from Furzedon's clutches other than the hatred he bore the latter, and, although he considered his patron well able to take care of himself, yet he thought it was better to give him an insight into Furzedon's real character. Dick Kynaston had taken due note of the caution, and said to himself, "I've had to do with some queer customers in my time, but it is always a great advantage to know when you are sitting down to play with 'Ah Sin'!" This had been all Prance had intended by his warning, and he had thought no more of the matter until he saw Furzedon call at the house in Mayfair just after he had left it.

But now all Prance's curiosity was aroused. Two strong passions urged him on to discover what was the connection between the two men—his enmity to Furzedon and his gratitude to Kynaston. Blunted and seared as all his better feelings were, he still held a dogged fidelity towards the Major. He had always been liberal to him, and the unfortunate man felt very grateful to him for the assistance he had rendered in the bitter need of last winter. Still Mr. Prance, as he sits alone in his modest apartment in Great Coram Street, does not exactly see his way to arriving at what he wants.

"What can have brought these two men together?" and as he turns this knotty point over in his mind, the man puffs vigorously at his short clay pipe. Sam Prance's domicile was by no means luxuriously furnished. A bed; a washstand; a chair, by courtesy called easy; and a table or two, comprised its contents, but it was clean, and the proprietor regarded it as princely compared to some of the lodgings he had slitted in and out of during the past few months. One of the tables was littered with a few old Turf Guides, a blotting-pad, pens, ink, and paper, and at length, by way of penetrating the mystery, Prance sat himself down, and, taking up his pen, determined to what he called, "Run off Ralph Furzedon's performances," as he would have gone through those of a race-horse with a view of getting a line through him of some other horse.

"Yes," he muttered, after scribbling fast for ten minutes or more, "it's a very nice sheet, it reads well; it's a pity his swell friends can't see it. His sire, a pawnbroker. Two-year-old performances: trafficking in the sale of unredeemed pledges; backing horses on the Turf; making love to his friend's wife, and urging that friend to neglect an honest occupation for gambling and horse-races—pretty well that for a young 'un who had not reached his eighteenth year. Three-year-old performances: laughing at his friend when he was kicked out of his situation; mocking at him and remarking it was his own fault when his wife ran away, refusing him assistance when he was in difficulties, gibing at him; and, finally, knocking him down because in his extremity, he asked him in pity's sake for a sovereign."

There was no doubt a basis of truth underlying Prance's summary, but the man's morbid antipathy to Furzedon must be allowed for; the coloring was more bold and vivid than the facts warranted, and that Prance should attribute every evil that has befallen him to Furzedon's malign influence must be taken very much *cum grano salis*. He had contributed a fair share himself to his own undoing; and the defalcations which had cost him his situation and blasted his character were in nowise due to any suggestion of Ralph Furzedon. However, painting his enemy in the darkest tints did not serve to elucidate the problem he had sat down to consider. That the Major was fond of a game of cards he thought was likely; that the Major preferred winning to losing he had no doubt, he never knew anybody who did not. That the Major was capable of assisting fortune he deemed probable, and thought none the worse of him for that. In his own easy code of morality he regarded cheating and all games of chance as cleverness, and he was the best player who concealed most cards up his sleeve without detection. Horse racing the same; he saw no harm in a robbery, provided you were in it—it was a rascally thing if you were not; and, if publicly discovered, there was always the chance of your paying the penalties, and not being paid the money. But then there it was again; clever people were not discovered, it was the bunglers that were found out. Now, whatever Furzedon had done—and remember, there was no enormity of this sort that Prance believed he had not committed—he had never been found out. Surely Major Kynaston could not have fallen into the mistake that this was a young gentleman from whom there was money to be won. No, no; the Major was far too 'cute not to have found out for himself long ago that there was nobody about better able to take care of his money than Mr. Furzedon. What could be the link that bound the two men? Nothing but chance is likely to throw light upon one phase of their connection; but it will be odd if Mr. Prance is not shortly acquainted with their confederacy on the Turf, and when that comes to pass there will be slight doubt of Sam unbosoming himself. Of such partnership he will feel certain that his patron must eventually get the worst.

"Because he is young," muttered Mr. Prance to himself, even now in ignorance of all the facts, "the Major thinks he is green. He little guesses he is dealing with the foxiest devil he ever met, who makes capital out of his youth and inexperience. The Major is wary, up to trap, no doubt; thinks, I dare say, that he is not to be had by any one alive. It's a queer world, and it seems a farce to suppose that, sitting here in a room like this, my experience can be good for much; but, for all that, I've learnt this, that the biggest sharper in a skittle-alley is generally the youngest and most innocent-looking yokel. I must get to the bottom of this; for cleaned out by such a robber as Furzedon I'm blessed if I see the Major."

Dick Kynaston was in no very great danger; he was much too wise not to have taken a pretty accurate estimate of his new partner by this time; he was quite aware that, young though he might be, Furzedon was already considerably more rook than pigeon; and, whatever his original intention might have been, had thoroughly abandoned any idea of a snatch at his quill-feathers. The revelation that Furzedon was practically Jordan & Co. would certainly have surprised him, but would have made very little other difference to him, save in one respect, it mattered little to the Major to what money-lenders he took his young friends, his profits in the transaction were pretty much the same in any case. But Dick Kynaston had been born, and, however shady his avocation might now be, still clung to the status of a gentleman. He was ready to interview the money lender in his own den, but let him once recognize that Furzedon was numbered of the usurers, and the Major would take good care that he never crossed the threshold of Mrs. Kynaston's drawing-room again.

Although Sam Prance was not aware, as yet, that Furzedon had inherited and taken up his uncle's business, it stands to reason that his old connection with the pawnbroking business might throw that knowledge in his way at any moment. Should anything prompt him to inquire, it would, of course, be as easy as possible for him to ascertain who was really at the present moment Jordan & Co. His former apprenticeship had taught him the freemasonry of the trade; and what that means we all know, let the trade or profession be what it may.

Revenge upon Furzedon was interwoven into Sam Prance's very being. It might slumber for a time, but it never died. He would brood, in his morbid way, over all the misery that man had cost him, till he wound himself up to that state of mind in which men contemplate taking the life of their fellows. But Prance had considerable regard for his own neck, an apprehension more preservative of life than it usually gets credit for. To say that he had hardly the tigerish temperament of which murderers are composed would be absurd. Murderers seem composed of every possible fibre, from the ruffian who slays his fellow from sheer brutality down to the cringing reptile who does away with his foe simply from terror. No; Mr. Prance in his solitary musings had often muttered to himself with passionate execrations, "How I should like to kill him!" But he had never seriously contemplated anything of the kind. He would have liked to drag Furzedon down to his own level, but of that he felt there was small prospect. His foe was wealthy, and a man likely to keep a strong hand on his gear, let it be well gotten or ill. There was little likelihood of his being able to menace Furzedon's ruin in that wise. In one way only did Mr. Prance see an opportunity of gratifying his hatred, and that was in socially exposing him. He did not quite know as yet even how that was to be brought about, but he was conscious that he knew a good many shady transactions of Furzedon's, and he had little doubt that eventually others would come to his knowledge if he only kept ceaseless watch upon his quondam friend. Not such transactions as would place Mr. Furzedon within reach of the law—Prance considered him too cunning for that; but it might be in his power to proclaim to the world things that would cause Ralph Furzedon's swell acquaintances to turn their backs upon him. And Prance had somehow divined his enemy's weakness in this respect.

It was so. A desire to rub shoulders with the *haut monde* was the aim of Ralph Furzedon's life. With this object he had gone to the University. The furtherance of this design had a good deal to say to his going on the Turf. It was something to know a lord, if it was only on a racecourse; to pass the time of day to a real swell even if it was at Tattersall's. Furzedon had tact, was pachydermatous, and, though pushing, not obtrusively so. He did not force an acquaintance, but he wriggled into one with all the sinuous twistings of an eel. Men found themselves gradually committed to a bowing recognition with Ralph Furzedon, while at the same time they wondered how the deuce they came to know him. Instinct had told Prance how to strike his enemy; it wanted only that fortune or his own exertions should give the weapons to his hand. Furzedon, too, and with some reason, flattered himself that he was making his way slowly but surely in the path he had marked out, and should Mr. Prance ever compass his projected *exposé* he will have the satisfaction of knowing that he could have dealt his adversary no bitterer blow.

As for Ralph Furzedon, he was very well contented with the way things were going with him. Most especially was he well pleased with his new allies the Kynastons. The Major promised to prove profitable to him all round. It was from him that the inspiration came concerning Belisarius for the Two Thousand, and Furzedon had won a very nice little stake over that race; then, as for Mrs. Kynaston, she looked like being of much value to him from a social point of view. She had procured him invitations in more than one direction that he coveted, and, cunning and suspicious as he was by nature, he placed unlimited reliance on Mrs. Kynaston's advice concerning this unknown country which he was now entering. It was at her instigation that he had determined to woo Leticia Devereux, and he had resolved to be guided by her advice in every stage of the matter. It must be observed in Kate Kynaston's defence that she knew nothing of Furzedon's antecedents, and believed him to be no more than a racing confederate of her husband's. In spite of that indescribable something about