

WON IN A CANTER.

[CONTINUED.]

It was settled. The Major was to send in his papers as soon as possible. They were to make out the week in London, and then be off on a house-hunting expedition.

The Major could not resist the temptation of retreating on Shirkington, and answering his note, which he did next morning.

Long's Hotel, March 19.

My poor Duffer,

Your receipt, most kind of you. You know, doubtless, long ere this will reach you that the rumour of Mr. Bullion's failure was a canard. He has settled a hundred thousand on my wife, he is now with us; and in a few days we are off to look for some place which he intends purchasing. We live with him, at any rate for a time, and I am going to sell out.

If you should be in town before we leave, which will be in five or six days, come and dine with us, and I will give you a receipt for sticking to your pigskin. We are as jolly as sand boys. Is it true Alice Lee is going to be married shortly?

Yours, old boy,

F. RASPER.

"There!" exclaimed the Major to himself "is a rap over the knuckles for him—a Roland for his Oliver. Poor Devil, what a rage he will be in about Alice! That was not badly put in."

So saying, he sealed the letter and despatched it.

Long before he received it, Shirkington was aware that Bullion was better off than he had ever been, and his temper was not improved by the news. But when he received the Major's letter he was quite beside himself. He knew how he was laughed at, so, packing up his traps, settling with his landlord, and despatching his two men with his horses, he betook himself off to Brighton. There he sold his screws pretty well, only reserving the two he had bought from Allsnob.

The Major, his wife, and her father were busy with house agents, in getting the particulars of those modern places replete with every comfort and elegance, of which so many are for immediate sale. After a month's hunting and looking at no end of houses, and the old gentleman pitched on one to his fancy—a very nice place; and which happened to be within a mile or two of Alice Lee's farm.

The old cotton king lost no time in furnishing it in first-rate style. There was madam's boudoir; and the Major's den, wherein were placed his guns, fishing-rods, pipes, endless cigar boxes, his sword, sabretache, and some of his barrack furniture, which he would not part with.

Alice Lee knew of their arrival; but in her position she could not put herself forward.

"I am sure," she said, "if the Major should happen to see me he will remember me, and then I shall hear some news of Duff. I was treated so cruelly. He has been properly served; but after all I cannot help pitying him. Ah! he will find no one who would have been truer to him than I should."

She still had a hankering after her quondam lover, and, if the truth was known, hardly a day passed but what she thought of him. So little knew how close he was to her, for she was within a dozen miles of Brighton.

Brighton, at the time our friend returned, was exceedingly dull and empty; and there were but few people for him to show off before, and exhibit his winning horsemanship.

"Hang me!" he exclaimed one morning, "if I don't go over and beat the lioness in her den, and pay a visit to Alice. If I could only get over there again, but then she is so dreadfully pale, and will never forgive me the least."

He had a little to ride his horse, when he came to a place less a person than Mr. Bullion.

"Hallo, father, what the devil brings you here? In a cab? Left the Colonel?"

"Yes, yes. Couldn't stand him no longer; awful temper; always a-croaking in the stable; a looking at the old pony and that screw, 'Jim Crow.' No, sir, a stud-groom's professing to pride couldn't stand it no longer, so I gave warning." He had been sick lately on the Colonel for getting drunk

time, cold breakfasts, no button on a fellow's shirt—it's horrible! I wonder if she will have anything more to say to me."

He rode along, pondering and thinking of the future, till he had ridden some ten miles. Then he began to ask for Thorley Farm, and at last came in view of it.

It was situated in a nicely wooded dell, well sheltered by hills. It was not only pretty, but had a thorough air of comfort about it. The garden and lawn looked so nice and well kept—walks well rolled and weeded. It was in every respect a nice pretty little place. There were the farm-yard and buildings well away from the house in the rear, the pigeons flying about in a cloud in the keen air, and the whole place bore the air of what it was—a thorough well-to-do English farm.

Shirkington dismounted at the rustic porch and rang the bell. Miss Lee was in; would the gentleman tie his horse to the hook there till one of the men came round and took charge of it? What name should she say? She knew Bluster, for he had been there pretty often already.

"What name? Oh, say an old friend." And he seated himself in one of the comfortable arm-chairs.

"Tip-top this," he thought; "well-furnished and in capital taste; it's beautiful. What an ass I've been!"

Alice was more than astonished when she came into the room.

"Shirk—Mr. Duffer, I mean," said the poor girl, turning crimson, "I had no idea it was you."

"No, Alice, I suppose not—thought it was Bluster, eh?"

"I did not think anything about it. May I ask what brings you here?"

"Well, Alice, I've come to see you."

"What I after all your craft, heartless behaviour to me?"

"Well, well, Alice, let bygones be bygones. You will not turn me out, will you, after my long ride?"

"No, Mr. Duffer, I will not turn you out, and her eyes filled with tears.

Shirkington thought this a good omen, and tried to take her hand, but she indignantly withdrew it.

"No, sir," she said, "nothing of that sort, if you please. The day is gone by for that. Will you take anything?"

"Well, yes, I will, Alice. I suppose you have thrown me over for that fellow Bluster?"

"And pray, Mr. Duffer, who did you throw me over for? For one who in her turn threw you over. It is no use denying it; I know all."

"From that infernal Lady Verriest?"

"Yes, it was, and I need hardly call to your memory how you treated her. Upon my word, Shirk—Mr. Duffer, I mean, you are a regular Lothario. Now, if you will take something, do. And you can lunch with me whilst I dine at two o'clock, and I will show you the place which might have been yours."

"But tell me, Alice—Bluster—is he anything to you?"

"I don't know that you have any right to put such a question; but this I say, he is very kind and good-natured; but he is nothing more to me than he was, nor is he likely to be."

"But he comes here very often, Alice."

"You would not have me turn him away? but as I cannot see that you have any right to dictate to me, I refuse to answer any further questions."

Duffer saw she was in earnest, so pressed her no further. She took him all over the house, which was most comfortable; but one door she avoided. It was a red-brick one.

"And what room is this, Alice?" he said, touching the baize door with his stick.

"Oh, that is a little sitting-room; a very small one."

Without saying a word he opened the door. There was another red baize beyond it, which he had to pass through before he entered a beautifully fitted-up little room. There were the red cloth curtains, beautiful easy chairs, a red morocco, with the others to correspond. There was a gun-rack, a rack for pipes, a writing table—it was a complete gentleman's den.

"What a lovely little crib," exclaimed Duffer. "I never saw anything better done in my life. This was not your uncle's, Alice, for it is all new."

The poor girl burst into tears. "I had felt fit up for you," she sobbed.

Shirkington was going to speak to her, when the servant entered, saying Mr. Blus-

little-dessert set on the table, a bottle was put before Duffer. Alice had often heard him say brown sherry was his wine.

"What is this, Alice, in this jolly old musty-looking bottle? Something precious by your not decanting it." And he helped her and then himself. "Brown sherry, by all that's glorious, and magnificent wine too."

So it was; the poor girl had got six dozen of it for him at fifty-eight shillings the dozen, from a first-class London house.

"I'm glad you like it, Mr. Duffer." Her eyes filled with tears as she said this. Shirkington saw it, and forbore to ask any further questions, but after he had swallowed two or three glasses, moved round to the fire. Then she placed the bottle and his glass on the little bracket beside him. He was wonderfully at ease in the luxurious arm-chair, and then he opened the proceedings by imploring Alice to forgive him. He used every endeavor to turn her, but she was firm.

"I should be very sorry, Mr. Duffer," she said, to be inhospitable, but you must not come here any more; it is perfectly useless. Nothing can change me, neither shall I permit any visits from Mr. Bluster. I have no wish to be talked about."

"But you will marry some one?" he asked, "that would kill me."

"Don't talk nonsense, Mr. Duffer; you are not so easily killed." She little imagined how easy it was to be done.

Shirkington, seeing that no impression was to be made, thought it would be the wisest plan not to press her any further, at least, at present, so he sat sipping his wine.

The clock ticked on the mantel-piece, and they sat opposite each other without speaking. At last he arose, saying:

"Well, Alice, it serves me right, but I will never marry any other woman but you. Now I must go. You will let me come and see you now and then, not often, you know, but occasionally."

"Far better you did not, sir; but you may come if you like now and then."

Shirkington had his horse brought round, and rode slowly away. There was a something came over him he could not account for; he felt sad, and a foreboding of evil oppressed him. He regretted leaving Alice and the pretty little place, and as he turned in his saddle saw her standing at the rustic porch, watching his departure.

The poor girl's heart ached as she watched his receding figure, but he had wounded her pride so that she could not forgive him. "I could have been happy with him; I think I could have altered him," she murmured, and she took one last look at him before entering her house. As she did so she gave a piercing shriek, for she saw Duffer's horse shy at something white that ran across the path, rear up, and throw him heavily.

She ran screaming along the road, followed by one of her maid-servants; but before she could reach him a labouring lad ran up.

"What is it, John?" she breathlessly exclaimed, and turning deadly pale as she looked at the pool of blood which was welling from his temple. "Is he dead?"

"Yes, ma'istis, I am afraid he is."

CHAPTER XXX.

"A LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE."

About the middle of May, one fine evening, a slashing fore and aft schooner, carrying a nice breeze with her, sailed into the Bay of Naples and dropped anchor. At her mast head flew the burgee of the Royal Yacht Squadron, and at her taffrail the white ensign floated.

It took but a short time before the sails were eased, the awning over the quarter-deck put up, and all made snug for the night.

Few people are aware of the comforts of a large and well-kept English yacht. It is not long you will have a greasy underdone mess coming from the fore-castle fire, which is called dinner, or great thick junks of bread which have been held before the stove for a few moments, and then by courtesy called toast, or an odour of burnt fat pervading the whole ship. Lord Verriest did not manage things in this way. He had a French chef, with his assistant; there was his captain, his sailing master, first and second mate, boat-swain, steward, second steward, and a full complement of hands, who kept regular watch, as in her Majesty's service. He had also a band of eight on board—not any of your common street musicians, but men who could play, and were not lying in their borths

of nothing, but hunting and shooting in the winter, and cricket, golf, fishing, and racing in the summer.

"And I think," retorted his Lordship, "that some ladies like hunting in the season and flower shows, archery, croquet, picnics, and so on, as well as race meetings. I was thinking of taking you, in the autumn, to Goodwood for the week; we have an invite, but—"

"You silly fellow," interrupted his wife, "don't talk nonsense; of course we will go. Here is Williamson with the cigars and grog. Now you gentlemen will be happy."

It was a lovely night, and all were on deck. Charlie was looking quite lumsy if again. He had picked up wonderfully during his voyage. Both he, his uncle, Lord Verriest, and Sir Jon were smoking. Lady Verriest and Mary were seated in low lounging chairs, as were all the rest.

"This yachting puts me in mind of my late stockbroker," said Sir John, "he died, leaving his son well off. Nothing would suit this gentleman but he must have a yacht. I'll tell you all about it, Lady Verriest and Mary, if you like."

"Oh do, Sir John!" exclaimed both.

"Very well, listen to this," said the Baronet.

"Going through a regular course of sporting, are you? It will be a regular course of physic, for you don't know anything about it. This comes of young men having unlimited control of a large quantity of ready money."

"But, uncle, a fellow must have a beginning, you know, at everything."

"So they must, Harry; but not to commence with everything at once, though. What do you mean by a regular course of sporting?"

"Well, uncle," replied Mr. Harry Simpleman, "yachting, fishing, shooting, hunting—"

"And I suppose racing," interrupted his uncle.

"Well, no; I don't think I shall go into racing, I'm hardly up to that form. I may make an occasional bet or two, but nothing more."

"Look here, Harry, said the old gentleman; "of course I know you will have your way, and I'm not going even to try and prevent you. Your poor father, my brother, was a stock-broker—so am I—you, by his death, come into a couple of thousand a year and three or four thousand of ready money; why don't you go and live quietly at your pretty little place in Berkshire? There you can have your horses, shooting, boating, and hunting; but now from what I have heard you want a yacht, and to cruise down the Mediterranean. Well do so, if you like; but hire one; you'll be deuced glad to give it up before you have had it a month. Then, as to fishing, your idea is Norway. Now, what do you know about salmon and fly fishing? You are all very well in a Thames punt for reach and gudgeon; give up Norway, at any rate. Then, as to shooting, a moor in Scotland is your mark! what do you know of dogs or shooting?—nothing. You have popped at a few finches on Barnes Common, but you have never taken a heavy day's walking in your life, so give up Scotland, and take a bit of shooting near your own place. Leicestershire, I suppose, is your idea of a hunting quarter. Melton Mowbray, for instance; even if you could ride to hounds, you would want ten or twelve horses there. With what you propose to do, you would require at least twenty thousand a year; luckily, my boy, save this loose cash, all your property is tied up, and you can't play ducks and drakes with it. You are just thirty; and a man of your age cannot learn to do all these things. Take to one or two; suppose you go in for fishing and shooting—hunting, absurd! You can ride along a road in a fashion, but not across country. Think it over, Harry. Now I must be off."

Harry did think of it, and determined to hire a yacht, at any rate for a month. It was now April, so he had lots of time to think about shooting, fishing, &c.

The first thing was to get a Captain who could put him in the way. This the secretary of a yacht club soon did. Captain Wideawake, late of the "Sea Foam," was the captain and sailing-master recommended.

Captain Richard Wideawake was a good man though relatively a very little one; five feet in his sea boots was all he could measure, though what he wanted in height he made up in breadth. He was about fifty years of age, grizzly hair—what

would cost you a fortin in harbor dues. No difficulty in getting you into the Windy-Weather Club."

This was a famous club, none of its members ever went out in a six-knot breeze; they preferred laying at anchor when it was at all rough, and when it was fine they gave luncheons on board; were great in claret cups, flags, and burgees; wore blue serge clothes, with a profusion of buttons, and knowing straw hats; and when their boats did go for a race, took very good care not to be on board, but watched it from the deck of a steamer, or the roof of their club-house.

"Well, I'm sure, Captain Wideawake, I hardly know what sized boat I ought to have."

"Well, sir, nothing under a hundred ton, then you get comfort. Let's see, ye'll want a captain, a steward, steward's boy, cook, and cook's boy, that's five, mate, and nine hands, fifteen in all, little enough; but as I should not like to see you imposed on, or put to useless expense, I'll manage it for you. Well, sir, I know a vessel that will just suit; if you will let me arrange it, all will be ready in a fortnight."

"Very well, Captain, then do so, and get her ready as soon as possible."

A boat was soon procured; as Simpleman had stated he was going cruising, Wideawake got hold of an old tub just suited for that. He liked comfort and a roomy vessel.

"Drat them narrer coffins! I can't abide 'em. Give me a vessel with a good floor and plenty of beam; not one of those wedges, as is always wet and drowning of a feller; I like 'em full above the water-line, and bluff at the bow; them's the sorts of boats for comfort," said Captain Wideawake.

It is needless to say he received a pretty good douceur for getting a victu for the old "Sea Wave." As she was found, Simpleman had nothing to buy except stores, but the Captain insisted on a piano for the state cabin.

"You'll be 'aving young ladies on board, in course, sir, to dine and lunch, and to see the regattas; the saloon would be nothing without a pianer."

So a piano was got.

Behold Simpleman now on board his yacht, dressed in the correct and modern yachting costume, made of blue serge, with the club buttons, a glass slung across his shoulders, white canvas shoes, and straw hat; all his men with the "Sea Wave" embroidered on their guernseys. In fact, Wideawake had done the thing correctly. It certainly cost a little money, as Simpleman's cheque-book testified. What of that? all amusements cost money.

Harry was not in a particularly good humour the morning after he had slept on board; his face looked as if it was going to break out with small pox.

"Captain!" he called out, as that individual made his appearance up the companion, "I don't know what to do. I cannot stand another night in this infernal vessel. I'm bitten all to pieces—eaten up—look at my face."

"Well, sir, there is no denying as them B flats has been at you. All vessels has 'em."

"But all my toes, Wideawake; sea air does not agree with me. All my toes are so sore I can hardly put my feet to the ground. I never was in such a state in my life."

"That's them cussed cock-roaches. Never you mind, sir—we'll settle all them. That's the worst of not having a new vessel; but there's plenty of paraffin oil aboard. Just you well rub yourself all over with it, sir, afore you goes to bed, and you won't be troubled any more with them jokers."

"By George! you don't mean to say I must rub myself all over with that nasty stuff. Why, I shall smell like a lamp."

"What's the odds of that, sir? It will all come off when you takes your tub in the morning. You'll get used to it in a couple of days. Anyways it's the only plan to keep 'em away."

Harry had a cruise or two down to the Nab and back. He was almost afraid as yet to go round the Wight—he feared the state of his stomach and the activity of his sea-legs; and as yet had not given a thought of the Mediterranean. A walk to Ryde pier to see the youth and beauty, suited him far better; and he began to think that after all yachting was not such an enchanting amusement; and very costly. He liked his money, and he did not, as the term goes, part freely. The weekly wages were something frightful.

Harry Simpleman did not sleep much on board now—he had taken a bedroom at