

## XVIII.

## TRIAL OF BELISARIUS.

As Norman entered the house his host called out to him from the parlor, "Is that you, Mr. Slade? Come along in, and we'll have breakfast up in a twinkling. I feel more like myself this morning than I have done for some time; the talk with you last night did me good."

"Glad to hear it," replied Norman, "I'll just run upstairs and wash my hands, and be with you in less than five minutes."

No sooner had Slade entered his bedroom than he dashed at once to his portmanteau, and eagerly took from it a volume of the Calendar, bearing the title of "Races to Come." He turned over the leaves quickly. Yes, there it was, Belisarius, by Triumph, out of Darkness. It didn't take Slade's practised eye long to run over the horse's engagements. "By heavens!" he exclaimed, "if I should prove right, and my opinion be confirmed at the subsequent trial, I've discovered a gold mine. Here's a three-year-old entered for all the big races of the year, whose name has never been even whispered among racing-men, who has never run, and whose very owner regards him as good for nothing. Now this is real fun. If we have got hold of a flyer, what a dressing we will give those South-country stables. As for money, we can win as much as we please over him. Properly worked, Radcliffe, Bill, and myself may stand to win perfect fortunes with very little risk." And, so saying, Norman Slade went downstairs to breakfast.

"Well, Mr. Slade," exclaimed the jockey, as Norman entered the parlor, "I hope you found an appetite upon the moor if you found nothing else. I suppose you saw all my rubbish."

"Rubbish, are they?" ejaculated Norman, "perhaps so. I wonder what you'd take for the three-year-olds Knight of the Whistle led in their gallop this morning?"

"Have you got a commission?" inquired the jockey, eyeing his guest keenly. "If you have, you may take those three for a monkey, and I shall think myself well out of them."

"Well, Bill, you take my advice, don't you be in a hurry to part with those three for five hundred until you know a little more about them. How did you try them last back end?"

"They had a six-furlong spin with old Knight of the Whistle, as true a trial horse as ever was foaled. Two of 'em were tried at weight-for-age, but Belisarius I rather fancied, so I put him in at seven pounds less. The old horse cleaned out the lot, and as for my fancy, he finished last of all."

"You neither saw it nor rode in it, I suppose," rejoined Slade.

"I certainly didn't ride in it, and I only half saw it. I was very ill, and it was a very misty day, and I left the management of the whole thing to Parrott."

"Well, then," retorted Slade, "I maintain your trial is no trial at all, and that you know nothing about your own young ones."

"You're a very jidy judge, Mr. Slade, and know a bit what you're speaking about," rejoined the jockey, not a little nettled, "but if you think you can teach me my business you are confoundedly mistaken."

"Never supposed I could teach you anything, Bill," replied Norman, perfectly unmoved, "but no man ever lived who didn't make a mistake at times; and he never did so without there being a looker-on with half his brains who could point it out to him. If you had been well enough to ride in it yourself, I should look upon that trial as conclusive. You weren't, and I look upon it as all skittles."

"I know what I'm about," rejoined the jockey, sulkily. "I'll come to you when I want to know the time of day, thank you; in the mean time you can't say you're invited to risk money on anything of mine."

"Now, do listen to reason, Bill," rejoined Norman, quietly, "don't say anything now, just turn it over in your mind. Give me three or four days to worm out what I can about that trial. You have got nothing to do, remember, but to get well, and just before I leave you get on that brown colt, and see whether Knight of the Whistle can give him twenty-one pounds over a mile."

At first the jealous irritable old jockey bluntly refused, said that he had satisfied himself about the brutes, that he was not going to trouble himself to get into the saddle to see how far Belisarius was behind a good horse, that Slade had better not waste his time in the experiment of turning Yorkshire geese into Epsom swans, but in his innermost heart Bill Smith began to ponder over what his guest had said; he knew that Norman Slade was a really right good judge of a thoroughbred. He had had in the first instance a great opinion of Belisarius himself, and in his best days the man's natural egotism had invariably prompted him to little belief in a trial in which he had not taken part. No man had more often expressed his disbelief in the issue of what he designated a "mooddling gallop," and he was forced to admit that this trial of his might strictly be described as such. As for Slade, he was much too clever a man of the world to touch upon the subject for a couple of days. He was up every morning to see Belisarius do his work, and the more he saw of him the more convinced he was that he was a good horse. He had got hold of the boy who rode him in that rough Yorkshire gallop at the back end of last year, and by dint of bribery, cajolery, and intimidation, had at last wrung from him the confession that he had been so bad with boils on that occasion as to be perfectly unfit to ride, and quite unable to do justice to his horse.

Norman Slade communicated his discovery to Smith, who received the intelligence with a savage execration and a muttered growling, in which strong expletives and such terms as "Break every bone in his body," "Cut the little devil in two," &c., were alone audible; but Slade eventually smoothed him down, and pleaded that he had pledged himself the boy should go scatheless if he told the whole truth.

(To be continued.)



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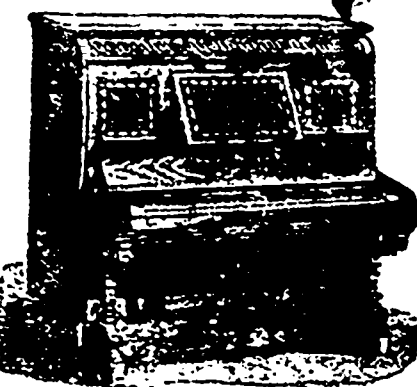
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