

SADDLE AND SABRE.

(Concluded.)

He was but slightly wounded, and was the far more powerful man of the two. The struggle between them, if brief, was desperate. The one was battling for his life, the other mad with the lust of revenge; but Prance's pistol-hand was powerless now. Once more, indeed, the revolver cracked harmlessly in the air, and then Furzedon succeeded in wrenching it from his antagonist's hand and throwing it away; but he stuck to his man with the pertinacity of a bulldog, and in another two or three minutes had borne him backwards, and the pair fell to the ground together, Prance undermost. All the brutal passions of Furzedon's instincts were aroused, and with his clenched fists he rained a shower of blows on the unhappy wretch's countenance, and speedily made it hardly recognisable.

"I've a great mind to kill you, you cowardly hound," he growled between his set teeth; "I've a right to do it, you did your best to murder me. Don't dare to get up till I tell you." And as he spoke Furzedon rose from the body of his prostrate foe, and, stepping two or three paces back, began to take stock of what damages he had received in the encounter.

Already a small crowd, attracted by the shots, were hurrying to the scene of the conflict. Deeming his foe disarmed, and a little distracted by the ejaculations and questions rapidly addressed to him by the new comers, Furzedon took his eyes off his assailant, who had by this raised himself to a sitting posture. Suddenly Prance sprang to his feet, and drawing a knife from his breast, threw himself upon Furzedon, exclaiming with almost a shriek, as he buried the knife twice in Furzedon's chest, "Done my best to kill you! Not yet, but I will now!" and, as Furzedon fell lifeless to the ground, he flourished his blood-stained weapon in the face of his horrified spectators, and then, with a burst of maniacal laughter buried it in his own throat.

CONCLUSION.

The fray was over, there was nothing now but to reckon up the cost and the fruit of the victory. The dacoits had died hard, and fought like wild cats in their rocky den, and the state in which Charlie Devereaux had been found had not inclined the hearts of the soldiers to mercy. There were marvellously few prisoners, and among Slade's troopers the casualties also had been heavy. It had required all Hobson's authority to save Shere Ali's life, and the robber chieftain had good reason to feel little grateful for his preservation; he knew it was forfeited, and thought, rightly, it would have been as well to make an end of it amidst the rocks of Ruggerbund, sword in hand, as to be hanged in face of the multitude, which fate he was well aware was in store for him. The doctor's report, too, was somewhat serious, he told Hobson that many of the wounded were bad cases, and it was desirable to get them within the shelter of a regular hospital as soon as might be. "Captain Slade," he continued, "will soon be all right, his arm is broken by a pistol shot, and he has one or two slight flesh-wounds. It will be some time before he recovers the use of his sword-arm, but one can feel easy about him. I only wish I could say as much for some of the others."

"What about young Devereux?" asked Hobson, anxiously.

"Ah! that's serious," replied the doctor, "it must be a touch-and-go thing with him, he seems weak as a rat from his wound, which has never been properly attended to, and these wretches have driven him into a raging fever to wind up with. It is a question whether he will have strength to pull through that, anyway, the sooner I can get my sick back to the cantonments the better."

Hobson had accomplished his mission, and after giving his men a few hours' rest, and thoroughly ransacking the robbers' strong-hold, he started with his prisoners and wounded for the nearest cantonment, where he received much congratulation of his capture of the ferocious bandit, whom a military tribunal shortly relegated to the death he had so well deserved.

Charlie Devereaux's battle for life was long and painful. More than once the doctors thought he was gone, and nothing but the most unwearied care and attention snatched him from the very jaws of death. When at last the delirium had left him he was so weak, so utterly prostrated in mind and body, that the doctors unhesitatingly agreed that there was nothing for it but to send him home.

"Let him go round the Cape," said the medical officer who had principal charge of him. "A long sea voyage will do more to set him on his legs than anything else," and as Gilbert Slade, though doing well, was still unfit for duty, it was arranged that the two friends should proceed to England together.

"Good-bye Devereux," said Hobson, as he shook hands with his subaltern. "English air, and especially English beef, will soon put you all to rights. My dream wasn't quite accurate, which I attributed to the fact of my never having seen Shere Ali. It was, however, most unpleasantly near the truth."

"Yes," said Charlie, with a faint smile, "I was destined to be cut down by a dacoit, and whether it was Shere Ali or one of his lieutenants made little difference."

The news of Furzedon's death offered a facility for the arrangement of Charlie Devereaux's affairs, which Major Braddock at once took advantage of. Furzedon's heirs had no desire to continue the bill discounting business, and were only too glad to accept the money due to them, with a reasonable rate of interest.

Mrs. Kynaston gave free vent to her malicious tongue, and would have prevented the marriage of Gilbert Slade and Lettie had she been able, but, for all that, the two were made man and wife a few months after the former landed in England, Charlie Devereux being sufficiently recovered to act best man on the occasion.

The breakfast took place at Mrs. Connop's house; and, as that lady had consulted Major Braddock on the occasion, it was pronounced a great success; that distinguished officer having thrown himself into the affair with great energy, and been at immense pains to see that the champagne was of an exceptional brand, and "not usually kept for wedding breakfasts, my boy."

PATIENCE.

BY RACHEL E. CHALLICE.

CHAPTER I.

"My dear Harold, I wish you could have patience," said an elderly gentleman to his son as they sat at breakfast in the oak panelled dining-room of an old-fashioned country house.

"You can't wish it as much as I do sir," replied the young man addressed, whilst his face before moody and clouded now became bright with pleased astonishment at his father seeming to understand his wish of winning for his wife Patience, the daughter of Mr. Dacre, Vicar of the large straggling village of Hersdon, "Well, why don't you try, my boy?" returned the squire, as he laid down the knife and fork with which he had been carving the fore ham in front of him. "I have no patience with a young fellow like you giving up without a trial."

"But my dear father, how can I ask her to have a man like me without a profession and only very little money? It is no use, I can't do it." Then rising from the table, as he grew warm with his argument he continued, "It is not as if you had been able to help me about my painting, which is the only real taste I have, but lately if I have found time to use my brush a bit, you have looked at me as if I were on the road to perdition; and I daresay that Patience and her father have almost the same opinion."

"Tut, tut, tut," said the old gentleman, pushing away his plate, "is that the Patience you are talking about? When I was thinking you were getting a little sense into your head at last, and wishing for patience in learning something about our farm, on which our bread and cheese depend. But that's how it is with the young men of the present day, the father may slave and slave for the best years of his life, that the son may make daws, and fall in love with nothing to marry on."

"Why" continue the old man, as he walked to the large bow window, and pulled up the blind with a jerk, "I suppose the next object of your life will be to make ducks and drakes out of the whole concern, and bring me to the workhouse; that's about what such ideas generally bring people to. No I tell you I won't have it, you must just take to the farming or turn out."

And having worked himself into a rage, and feeling rather astonished at his own fury, the squire pulled himself up to his full height and looked straight and sternly at his son, who having now stopped his restless pacing to and fro on the shadow which the sun cast upon the faded carpet, stood with his hands in the pockets of his grey jacket, whilst an expression of dogged determination swept over his handsome features.

Then noticing that his father's shoulders seemed more bent than formerly, and that his hair looked very grey in the sunlight, the young man's face softened, and repressing the defiant words which rose to his lips, he said in a subdued tone. "I tell you what, dad, it won't do for you and me to take to quarrelling; you see we have no one else to have a breeze with, if we fall out, so let us make a compact. I'll try, I really will, to learn farming, since you have set your heart on it. I'll put myself under the bailiff and work like a nigger; but you must let me have my afternoons to myself for three months, and if by the end of that time I have not been successful with painting, I'll renounce it once for all." "That's a good lad, said the squire, holding out a well formed but rather withered hand to his son, who took it in a hearty clasp. "That's what your mother would have asked you to have done. You know if poor Charles had stayed," and here the old man's voice rather quivered, "you should have stopped in London, and painted as much as you like. But I couldn't be here quite alone, thinking that there would be nobody to take my place when I'm gone, understanding my ways and the men. For myself I should have thought a good gallop across country would have been better than painting after a long morning's work, but if you prefer trying to make a picture, I won't stand in your way for three months, as long as the farming comes first. But I can't see how you'll find here to paint, unless you care to take some of the beasts."

The squire was here interrupted in his discourse upon art, by the entrance of the quaint, white-capped figure of the house-keeper, on her morning visit to receive orders for the day.

The young man, rather glad to be free to pursue his own thoughts, went up to the attic at the top of the house, which, from the miscellaneous collection of canvases and paintings, he had dignified by the name of "studio." There, seated on an old oak chest, he was soon absorbed in contemplating the possibilities of being able to paint the picture of his heart. Only yesterday he had surprised Patience, as she pensively sat in the oriel window of the parsonage, her lap filled with fresh coloured flowers, whilst her dog with one eager paw resting on the knee of his mistress, seemed called upon to exercise the virtue which the name of the girl expressed.

To anybody else the rough sketch, hastily made in charcoal, would not have betokened much, but as Harold gazed on the few bold lines, his eyes became dark with enthusiasm, for they brought before him the face of the girl who was ever in his thoughts. If he could only re-produce on the canvas those lovely features he now saw in his imagination, his father seeing the beauty of art, must relent in his opposition to the pursuit of it. What a pity Charles had been so hot headed and gone off nobody knew where!