

SADDLE AND SABRE.

(Continued.)

The Major had a tremendous idea of his own astuteness; he was always vaunting that nobody ever got over Dick Kynaston, and fell, as such men invariably do, into the mistake of thinking he could turn his fellows inside out. He thought Norman Slade might give him many a valuable hint in Turf matters. He had heard of that gentleman's reputation for reticence, but only let him—Dick Kynaston—make his acquaintance, and he would very soon worm out of him what he knew.

Norman Slade literally swelled with indignation at that dinner, when, under an affectation of boisterous jocularly, he recognised that the Major was actually attempting to pump him: Can you fancy what the feelings of a crack leader at the Old Bailey would be at being cross examined by Mr. Briefless? But after a while Norman began to take a saturnine pleasure in the operation, though the Major would have been hardly reassured could he have heard Slade's remark to himself as he walked home:

"If that chattering beast puts together all he has got out of me, he'll find it amounts to very little, and more calculated to mislead him than not."

The Major, on the contrary, went home with the impression that he had quite subdued the slight prejudice against him on the part of Norman Slade to commence with; that he had parted with that gentleman on the most friendly terms, and had already possessed himself to some slight extent with Slade's views on forthcoming Turf events. We do at times go home pluming ourselves on the favorable impression we have produced, serenely unconscious that our host or hostess may have mutually agreed that as it was the first, so should it be the last time we are present at their hospitable board. There is no end to the limit of human vanity, and the people who honestly recognise that they have, to use a slang phrase, not "come off" in a social gathering are few and far between. Most of us believe that it is our jest or repartee that gave brilliancy to the meeting, or that it was our never being vouchsafed an opportunity clothed the gathering with such unmitigated dullness. No man had a higher opinion of himself as a conversationalist than the Major. He had a good stock of stories, and not hackneyed stories, which he told well, and he had a jovial off hand sort of manner, very apt to impose on those who were not shrewd observers. He never made a greater mistake than when he thought he had imposed upon Norman Slade. That gentleman, who had carefully avoided knowing him for some years, was never so thoroughly convinced of the correctness of his judgment as at this moment.

Suddenly a tall, haggard-looking man stopped abruptly opposite Norman, and with a curt, "How d'ye do, Slade?" sat himself down on the adjacent chair. The merest novice could have made no mistake about the status of the newcomer. He was certainly a man about whose position in the world there could be little doubt, though the worn and haggard face was that of a man who, though still in his prime, was living a life that must break the strongest constitution if persisted in. The dark circles under the eyes, and the careworn lines about the mouth, were indicative of a man who kept abnormal hours, and never ceased battling with fortune, and his face did not belie him—play in some shape was pretty much Sir Ronald Radcliffe's idea of existence.

"Nice morning, Slade," he said, as he settled himself in a chair. "Not often you come amongst the trees and the dicky birds, and you're about right. Awful bore, you know, if it's only the taking you're hat off. Don't know why I come here, knowing such a lot of women as I do. Heard anything of old Bill Smith lately?"

"Yes," said Norman, gravely. "I'd a few lines from him not long ago, in which he said he had small hopes of his half-dozen two-year-olds this year, that they were all backward, and he belived most of them bad—in short, I am afraid, Radcliffe, that Bill has gone to the deuce. There isn't such a horseman on the Turf, there isn't such a judge in a trial in England, but I hear from up in the North that they can trust him no longer. I don't mean that he isn't square enough, but that drink has laid hold of him, and there's no depending on his being sober when wanted."

"End of everything when it comes to that," said Sir Ronald. "A fellow gets mistaking the winning-post and all sorts of games."

"Ah, well," said Slade, dreamily, "you and I, Radcliffe, have landed many a pretty *comp* out of poor Bill's inspirations. I shall go up and stay with him about the back end, and I'll slip you a line then, and tell you what I think of him. As for the horses, I don't suppose his young ones are worth looking at."

"It's getting about time I had a turn over something," replied the Baronet, moodily. "Money is getting scarce as corn was in the bad times of Pharaoh. Don't know how the deuce you manage, Norman; things never seem to fly up and hit you in the face."

"Well, Radcliffe," rejoined Slade, "I neither bet nor spend money like you—haven't got it, and never had it, so I can't. I go for a *comp* now and again, as you know, but then it is on the strength of very excellent information, and I always stand to win a good stake at comparatively a small risk. My usual betting is a thing that never makes me uncomfortable, and as for my whist, shillings and half-crowns content me."

"By Jove!" said Sir Ronald, turning half round in his chair and surveying his companion in languid astonishment. "What a deuce of a lot of time you must have to spare. Why it would take you hours, and be a sinful waste of luck, to collect a few pounds at that price!"

"Never you mind," rejoined Slade, "I only play for amusement."

"Of course, so does everybody; whist is a healthy recreation. My dear Norman, beware of indolence, and whist, for such pitiful points as you mention, is a waste of those golden hours, concerning which that impostor,

the bee, is always dangled before our eyes. Don't know much about that insect myself, but a fellow conversant with his habits told me the other day that the bee was nothing like such a fool as these ballad-mongers made him out; that when he had the chance, he infinitely preferred stealing honey from the nearest grocer's to toiling for it on his own account."

"Well, Radcliffe," rejoined Slade; "you and I are old friends, and I'm not likely to leave you out in the cold whenever I get a chance. You can work a commission as well as anybody, and I know, from experience, don't cackle. But, honestly, at the present moment I know nothing more than most racing men about coming events; and as for what you want, a real good chance at long odds, have no conception of such a thing."

"Well," rejoined the Baronet, "much obliged to you for your good opinion, old man. The financial crisis presents its constantly-recurring aspect, but there's nothing more to be done than, in the words of the ballad, 'Fear not, but trust in Providence,' and devoutly hope my creditors will trust in me;" and with this Sir Ronald picked himself out of his chair, and, with a slight nod to his companion, strolled onwards.

"Good fellow that," muttered Slade; "and for all his swagger and languid airs, just as 'cute a man about racing as I know. They tell me he plays a capital rubber besides; but it must all beat him at last. He's an extravagant man, and perpetually playing for stakes out of all proportion to his capital. I wonder what Sir Ronald began the world with. He had a fair income, no doubt, to start with, but I should think he has reduced it a good deal since he came into the property, and, from all accounts, her ladyship is not likely to make his income go further."

As for the subject of these remarks, he strolled in his usual listless fashion towards Hyde Park Corner, exchanging greetings right and left on his way. Everybody seemed to know him, and with every one did he seem popular. Women smiled and bowed to him with *empressment*; men greeted him heartily, and not with that careless nod that signifies utter indifference at meeting one. Radcliffe was as popular a man as any in London; but how he had lasted so long with his extravagant habits was an enigma that puzzled those who knew him best extremely.

VII.

FURZEDON ENTERS SOCIETY.

"Well, Lettice, I am very glad to have you with me again, though I don't quite know how I shall amuse you now you are here."

"Nonsense, auntie," rejoined Miss Devereux laughing. "You London people always seem to us country folks to go out so much. I am sure when I pass six weeks with you I go out more than I do in all the remaining weeks of the year."

"I am a sociable being," laughed Mrs. Connop; "and as Providence has given me the wherewithal to keep up a good house, I like to see people about me. I like to see young people, too, about me. It keeps one from getting rusty, and I have no idea of settling down into an old woman before my time."

Nobody certainly would have described Mrs. Connop as an old lady. She carried her fifty years wonderfully well; without affecting any undue juvenility, she was as sprightly a woman of her age as any in London. Fond of society, full of go, and a fluent talker, she had got together a large if somewhat mixed acquaintance. She went everywhere, and though it is quite possible that fastidious people would have pronounced her not in society, she mixed freely in an extensive social world of her own. She might be unrecognised by the queens of the fashionable world, but there are various circles in London that exchange the most friendly relations, although their names never figure in the *Morning Post*. A young lady under Mrs. Connop's chaperonage would be certain to have a good time of it, although, perhaps, she would not be seen in the stately mansions of Belgravia. Lettice made no disguise about it; she always looked forward eagerly to an invitation to Onslow Gardens.

The Devereuxs were an energetic family, and never allowed themselves to be bored anywhere, they were people who could always make for themselves occupation, and although North Leach was a quiet enough place when the hunting season was over, yet Miss Devereux never found her time hang heavily on her hands. Lettice invariably regarded her London visit as one of the best "bits" in her year. There was, too, just a little bit of uncertainty about it, that gave a zest to the invitation. Although her aunt had asked her regularly since she had left school, yet there was always a possibility that that enterprising lady might take it into her head to go abroad for a time. This year Lettice was looking forward to seeing a good deal of the Kynastons while in town; she did not care very much about the Major, but she had struck up a great friendship with Mrs. Kynaston. That lady reciprocated the feeling. There was a freshness about Lettice which though it a little amused her, she could not but regret the loss of in herself. Married to a man like the Major, she had not been likely to retain the quality long; and there were times when Kate Kynaston felt bitterly sick of the life she was condemned to lead. The only daughter of fashionable but impecunious parents, it had been impressed upon her from her childhood that she was bound to marry the first eligible suitor that presented himself. Captain Kynaston, as he was then, a fast young man in a crack Dragoon regiment, and with the reputation of considerably more money than he had ever possessed, seemed to Kate's father to fulfil all reasonable expectations; it is true, when they came to the settlements, that battered old *roue* felt somewhat disappointed, but things had gone too far to retreat, and he could do no more than see that such settlement as Kynaston could or would make was tightly tied up. There is much virtue in a settlement of gentlemen of the Kynaston type, as it not uncommonly becomes to them after a few years the sole source of income upon which they can confidently rely. The Major's case was not exactly so bad as that, but with his tastes