

# Touch and Go

(Continued from page 8.)

pointing to the name and colours on the car. "It's a trick to ruin us."

"Don't argue," said Paul, angrily and authoritatively. "Seconds are important."

Captain Barclay was already getting in, and the Colonel was compelled to follow, though he did it reluctantly and suspiciously.

"If I find this is a trick—" he said, addressing Paul, but the speech was never finished, for the sudden leap forward of the car flung him heavily back in the tonneau and drove all the breath out of him, and before he could recover himself they were running smoothly and rapidly through the streets, the horn hooting almost constantly, people staring at the unusual spectacle of Colonel Sledmer and his candidate being driven in an opposition car by Paul Crompton.

A few minutes later they were outside the town, and a long, hard stretch of road was before them. Paul put on power, and the great car literally bounded forward, and trees and houses seemed to dash past them.

"He's mad!" the Colonel exclaimed, as the breeze smote him and seemed to drive the words back in his throat, and his hat went careering away behind.

A mile outside the town a policeman suddenly appeared in the middle of the road, waving his arms wildly. There was just one hoot of the horn, and the officer slipped on one side, just in time to let the car thunder by.

"Got you!" the policeman said, as he brushed his clothes with his hand, and proceeded to book the number of the flying car.

Then there came a village, and by all rules of the road Paul should have slackened speed. It was dangerous to fly through at that mad pace, but it must be done, for there might be other obstacles further on.

The Colonel only seemed to catch a glimpse of the village before they were through, the only thing he noticed being another constable shouting and gesticulating, and apparently bidding them draw up and be arrested.

Then there was a long, zigzag descent, and the driver began to draw in a little, for at the bottom there was a sharp turn, and the most dangerous part of the drive.

"You'll smash us here!" the Colonel managed to yell, as they approached.

The next instant he was flung heavily against his companion, for the car had swerved suddenly into the bend. It was touch and go, for the wheels grazed the bank as they swung round. But Paul had well calculated his skill, and he had reduced the speed just enough to enable him to turn. For an instant the off-wheels left the road; then the car was running on again with gathering speed.

"How much yet?" Paul yelled, half-turning his head.

Captain Barclay looked at his watch, and at the same instant released his hold on his hat, which went whirling backwards.

"Thirteen minutes to twelve!" he belated back, and Paul nodded.

It was not possible to talk, for the car was rocking and jumping, and the wind was singing past their ears as if a tornado was blowing.

Then a load of straw in front blocked the way, and the motor-horn sent forth a blast insistent and piercing. The driver of the heavy waggon looked back with startled eyes, and began, in his clumsy, lumbering way, to draw on one side. The passengers in the tonneau grasped each other and shivered, for their wild chauffeur seemed bent on whirling them to destruction. Again it was touch and go, but they managed to get safely by.

So with narrow escapes and reckless driving they came to the outskirts of Cleveleys, and the throb of the engine grew a little more gentle, for it was quite impossible to negotiate the streets in that wild fashion.

"What time is it?" Paul yelled.

"Five minutes to twelve," came back Captain Barclay's voice, for the Colonel was speechless. The breakneck pace, the extraordinary escapes, the roaring of the wind, the clouds of dust, had reduced

him to a state akin to prostration. He quite believed they were in the power of a madman, who was bent on their destruction as the simplest means of winning the election.

An instant later a vigorous exclamation of disgust came from Paul's lips. A hundred yards away a barricade stretched across the road and beyond that the level street had been torn up for repairs. The car sensibly slackened speed as they approached. Then there was a screech from the horn, and the next instant the car was whirling to the right into a narrow side street.

Three minutes later they drove into the square in front of the Shire Hall.

"One minute," Paul said as he nodded towards the clock tower.

A considerable crowd had assembled, for the news had got abroad that it was not improbable Captain Barclay's papers might be too late.

For nearly half an hour the excitement had been growing every moment. It was known that the line was blocked, and Colonel Sledmer and his friend could not arrive by that means. Speculation had run riot as to how they would arrive, but as the seconds fled and the minute hand of the Shire Hall clock travelled relentlessly on, blank despair fell on one party and an unveiled jubilation on the other, with tense excitement on both.

Slowly the minutes of grace diminished—five, four, three, two, one, and then there was a sudden commotion at one end of the square and a burst of mingled hooting and cheering as a car bearing Mr. Mason's colours, driven by Paul Crompton, and carrying Colonel Sledmer and Captain Barclay—hatless, excited, covered with dust—came dashing for the steps. A wild yell of mingled execration and delight sprang from the waiting crowd, and it seemed for an instant as if everybody had gone mad.

As the car stopped at the steps a man bearing Captain Barclay's colours dashed out, and hurried up the steps. For a moment it looked as if there would be a free fight, for the infuriated supporters of Mr. Mason seemed as if they were inclined to block the way, and seconds only were left. But a determined rush of the other side carried the Colonel and Captain Barclay to the doors.

The returning-officer was just inside, and held out his hand. The papers were put into it, and as he received them the first stroke of the hour boomed out above them.

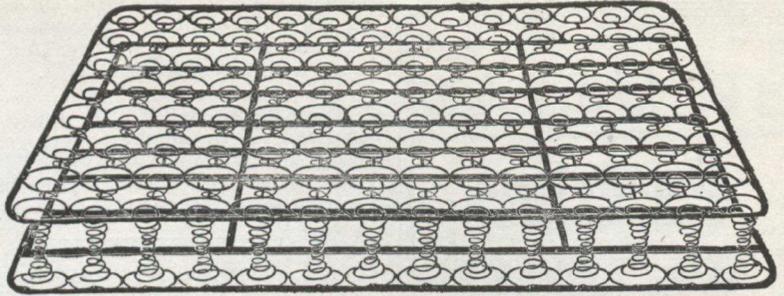
"Just in time, gentlemen," the Sheriff said, pleasantly.

"Thanks to Paul Crompton," said the Colonel. "Crompton, your son is a glorious fellow. I'm proud of him. Shake hands, sir!"

Outside Mr. Mason's disappointed supporters had turned on Paul. He expected it. He knew that he had snatched victory from his own side, and he suspected that in some way or other the affair had been planned, though he did not know how. Party feeling had run high. A few minutes before his side had believed their man would be returned unopposed. Was it surprising, therefore, that they should be angry at the loss of the easy victory at the last moment, and that one of their own side should have done it? A storm of hooting burst out, and there was an ugly sway in his direction.

"Traitor!" "Turncoat!" together with other expressions even less complimentary burst out as Paul, with hard-set, white face, started his engines again and began to move through the crowd. As he did so an unsavoury missile struck him, and a shower of others followed. Most of them missed, for he was gathering speed, and the crowd were driven to make way. A few seconds later, with a hoot that sounded like defiance, he had vanished into the lane from which he had emerged, and was on his way home.

It is all very well to speak of a noble action bringing a glow of pleasure to the heart of the man who is unselfish enough to make sacrifices for his enemy. Doubtless there is a sense of duty done in it; but Paul Crompton felt none of the glow of pride and delight as he went



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