

A RACE FOR THEMSELVES.

“RECK card, sir! 'Ere you are, sir. Card of this day's races, sir. Winners marked, sir, if you like.”

“Then mark the winners, please,” said the gentleman whom the lad addressed as he stepped on to the platform, at Carlisle Station. “And see that you mark them right, for I've not been able to back a winner for many a day.”

The lad seized the pencil which was proffered him, and speedily ran his eye down the card, marking, as he did so, the horses which he believed would prove victorious over the day's racing.

“Well, is Gingerbeer doing them right for you, then? Spotting the winners, eh, Ginger?” said a gentleman who approached them from the other side of the station.

“Hilloah, Tom,” said the card buyer, laughing. “I've a horse in every race, and so I'm just having a little information. Gad, it's queer, but these fellows seem to know more about the horses than the men who own them.”

“It's a fact, Quarrier, that's the very reason I dropped it. I never did any good at the hay and corn business. One good tout lets you know about every horse, and your trainer can only tell you about those you *have*, which, as a rule, he does after he has served himself, and that too with a grudge. Talk of first calls on a jockey. Bah, the first claim of the trainer on the market is a deuced sight more costly.”

“And that's a moral, sir,” said the half-tout, half-cardseller, jockey's shoe-black and general blackguard of the day, without taking any notice of the remarks which were being made. “And Mister Brownside, you just have a bet on that,” he said, turning to the gentleman whom Mr. Quarrier had addressed as Tom. “I owes you a good turn ever since that time I was stone-broke, and you paid my fare back to Newcastle.”

“And what's your strong tip, Ginger?” said the other, seizing hold of the card.

The lad ran his finger down the card till he came to “a Selling Stake,” and pointed to the entry, “Mr. W. Freestone's 'Back-

biter,' £50." "You back that, Mr. Brownside, and I tell you, you won't do wrong; back it—yes—for all you have."

"If you do, Tom," said Mr. Quarrier, laughing, while the lad ran away to catch a fresh customer, "you'll be a far bigger fool than I take you for."

"Has he not a chance, then?"

"Chance!" said the other contemptuously. "If it was a donkey-race, Tom, and last to win, I'd back him for a thousand and I don't mind laying you a new hat to a shilling hat guard and all—that he's not in the first four."

"Done with you, and let me tell you my opinion; I'll back him for a good bit of money."

"Against my own advice."

"What the deuce do I care about your advice? You're only the owner, and as likely as not the most ignorant man in the business."

"Does *he* know I'm the owner?" said the other aside.

"Who? Ginger? No, or he wouldn't maybe have tipped ye. He knows well enough you are Mr. Quarrier, but he hasn't the slightest idea that you are the Mr. Freestone, the owner of horses, and the owner of 'Backbiter.' Here, hey, Ginger!" he shouted, "is that really right? 'Backbiter' for the last race?"

"S'help me, sir," said the card-seller, who was rushing past in a hurry, "he'll win unless he breaks his legs, yes, sir, he'll crawl in on a couple of legs, if it comes to that. A certain winner. Back him, sir! Back him!" and Ginger disappeared in the direction of a newly-arrived train which was bringing in a crowd of "Geordies," from canny Newcastle.

This last bit of advice was greeted with a genuine roar of laughter from Mr. Quarrier, who could not help thinking that the whole thing was a capital joke. "I tell you what, Tom Brownside, 'Backbiter' couldn't win a race, supposing he had a start of a distance, with a clever shadow on his back."

"'Backbiter' will carry my money," was the reply. "You're *only his owner*, and know nothing, I tell you."

"Well, here's his *trainer* then. We'll ask him Has 'Backbiter' a chance, Bittocks?"

"Not the slightest, sir. Fact is, I've arranged to let Flapps off by the half-past four train, to ride at Carington, and Harry Hudson's boy will ride him for me, but there's not the slightest

chance of his winning the 'Selling Stakes.' What made you think he had, sir?"

"Well, that card-selling fellow, Gingerbeer, says he has; for he's just marked my card for me."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the trainer. "Ha! ha! ha! it's a great joke, this card-marking. Joe Sydney, of Newmarket, and me had a rare go with one. We had two hosses in a match, and we'd pretty well arranged it, when hang me if we didn't get a fellow who didn't know us, to mark our cards for us. The fellow went for Joe's, which was the wrong 'un, and we asked his reasons. 'Well,' says he, 'I'm nowt, but fellows as knows tells me that this 'ere Joe Sydney would sell his grandfather, and that Bittocks had squared him.' You should have heerd Joe swear, you don't mind much, sir, what these fellows say, more especially that Gingerbeer. If that 'ere Gingerbeer had a-been on the turf, like you or me, sir, instead of hanging over it brushing boots and wiping muddy racing jackets, he would ha' been warned off, sir, long ago. Yes, sir; and they might ha' warned him off, and kicked him off, and drummed him off, soger-ways; but he would always ha' found his way back."

"Just so, Bittocks," said Mr. Brownside. "But I'll back your bad one, 'Backbiter,' all the same."

"Do as you please, sir, and, seeing you are in the throwing-away game, you might let me have a little to pay my corn and hay bills. Backing 'Backbiter' is like flinging your money down a old coal pit, sir, believe me; but just have your own way. Good-day, sir, I'll see you on the course."

"Willie Quarrier," as he was familiarly termed by those who knew him well, made his way out to the course accompanied by his old friend Tom Brownside. They refused all the cheap offers of the local Jehus to drive them, preferring to walk and enjoy the humours of the crowd and the fun of the fair. They had a quiet peep into the interior of many of the old coaching hotels, where the talk was all about the forenoon's wrestling matches, and the coming races. The Newcastle birr was heard on every side, for the men of Geordie Stephenson's town make a point of seeing Carlisle races every year, and bring too their wives and sweethearts with them. The natives of the merry town itself, so renowned in Border song and story, and so fond of the drop of good Scotch whisky, though represented

by Sir "Watery" Wilfrid, are all keen sportsmen, and will talk for years about final courses at Langtown, of struggles for the "Cumberland Plate," and of stout matches on the morn when all was "hying and skyiping" and "cross buttocking," and "Cumberland Grips." Who does not recollect old days at Carlisle, and old chats with the men of a bygone age—the old mail-coach drivers and guards, of Powley and Eade and Jim Byrnes, and many others who were full of anecdotes of the old times of Caller Ou and Warlock, and of Royalist and Sim Templeman, the "Archer" of his day? In due time they reached the course and got into the paddock, where, already, the betting clamour had commenced, for the weights had just been hoisted for the "Trial Stakes."

"I've one in this race, Tom," said Mr. Quarrier, "that will just about win, and my advice to you is to back it. Flapps, I see, has just weighed out for it. You back mine, the filly, by 'Jolly Beggar' out of 'Frail Sister,' and leave 'Backbiter' alone."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," said the other, "I've made up my mind to back Gingerbeer's tips, and he hasn't gone for yours in this race, I can see from your card."

"Bah! you heard what Bittocks said."

"Oh," was the reply, "he's only the trainer; what can he know?"

"Well," said the other, "I do like your impudence, I tell you the horse is an incapable brute; and you tell me *I'm but the owner*; and the trainer, he comes and backs me up, and you say he knows nothing, he's only the trainer. Who the devil knows if we know nothing?"

"Those in the swindle, whatever swindle is on—but I can easily see you're out of it."

"How can I be out of it if my horse is to win?"

"Lord knows, wait and see; but one thing I know about these poor hangers-on, is, that they're not ungrateful. Gingerbeer owes me three pounds which I gave him in the streets of Edinburgh, when he was starving, and he told me, with tears in his eyes, that the first good thing he got he would let me have it. I haven't seen him till to-day again, and your horse is the one he has given me. He's given it to you too, yourself, because he doesn't know who you are, I expect, but that's no matter, *back it.*"

Their conversation was suddenly interrupted by the saddling bell, and the cry "They're off," so they rushed up the Stand to see the 'Frail Sister' filly go out of sight behind the drinking booths at the far side of the course in a truly winning style. Great was Mr. Quarrier's disappointment, however, to see the jockey hard at work on her when they came into view again.

"You're not in it, Quarrier," was the call of his companion at his side. "She can't stay, Gingerbeer was right and his tip has won. You and your trainer are a couple of knowing worthies, aren't you? Oh dear, it's a nice thing to own race-horses, and a common shoe-black can let you know more for a sixpence than you know yourself."

"It would really seem so, Tom. I'm hanged if the turf isn't getting altogether into a condition to frighten men away from it through the babbling of stable secrets."

"It can only get a little worse through one thing, Quarrier, my man."

"What's that, Tom?"

"The employment of female jockeys, and then they'd tell so many lies that no one would believe them. If we had only a race of deaf and dumb lads for stable boys we might get in, but 'Blab' rules the stable nowadays. Still, you follow Gingerbeer's tips, blackleg though he be."

With small fields, punctuality at the scales, and ready starts, the programme was soon got down and the "Selling Race" was arrived at. Flapps, along with others of the most noted riders present, had left with the view of getting on to Carington to fulfil engagements next day, and Harry Hudson's youngest apprentice soon weighed out in the well-known yellow and red belt of Mr. Freestone. Contrary to expectations, everyone of the horses went to the post, and to Mr. Quarrier's astonishment, and the apparent astonishment of Bittocks, 'Backbiter' was backed to win a good round sum at a nice price, a well-known sharp's bookmaker having the working of a commission for somebody. No one could understand it, but Gingerbeer, who, as soon as the horses were at the post, went rushing about telling everybody to be on to "Backbiter."

"Have you backed it?" shouted Brownside to his friend as he joined him in the Stand.

"Certainly not; I wouldn't back him, though you went down

on your knees and prayed for me to do it. I'll tell you what I'll do too, I'll back my old pony Peter, that I drive at home, to give him a stone at a mile and beat him in a canter."

"They're a wretched bad lot altogether, you must bear in mind, Mister," said a man who had the reputation of knowing something,

"And as bad a set of blackguard boys on the backs of 'em," shouted another, "as ever sat on horses; I just had a look at 'em going out, and I said that I had not seen such a crooked lot of men and horses for many a day. Still Jack Gingerbeer has told me this 'Backbiter's' a certainty, and he's rarely out."

"Jack Gingerbeer again," said Mr. Quarrier to himself rather savagely. "Why, I'd better give him the management of my horses altogether."

Soon came the call "They're off," and in less than a minute they came rattling down past the Stand, "Bird's Eye," which was favourite in the betting at even money, leading and "Backbiter" last of all.

"There, Tom, there," shouted his owner excitedly, "there, I told you so—where's your Gingerbeer man now?"

The latter bit his lip and held his tongue, for he was not prepared to see the horse in such a position. On disappearing behind the hill, "Backbiter" was a good four lengths in rear of everything, and his chance seemed utterly hopeless. For a quarter of a mile nothing can very well be seen on the Carlisle course from the smaller Stand, and so all kept waiting with strained eyes to see what would come first into view.

"There they come," was the call, "and what's in front?" was the eager query from those who couldn't see.

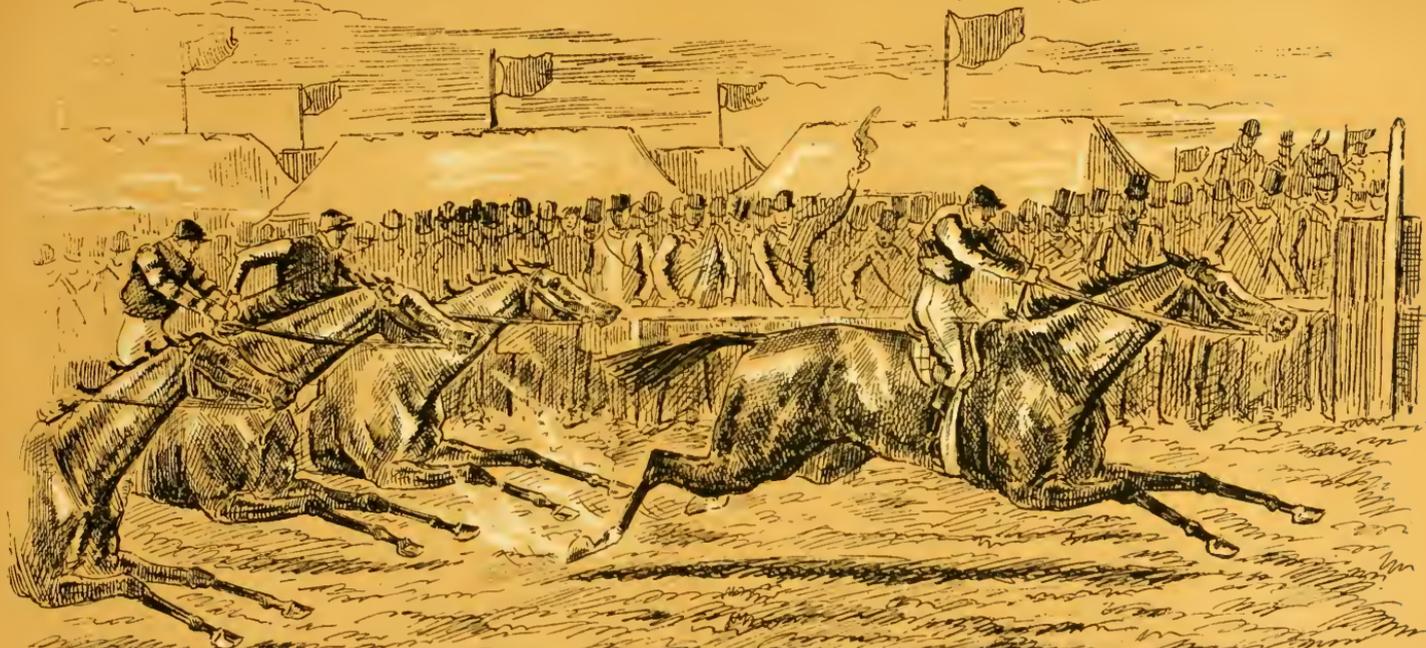
"Why something in yellow, and a red belt."

"Yellow and red belt, 'Backbiter,'" shouted Brownside. "Backbiter! 'Backbiter' wins—'Backbiter' walks in."

"She does, by all that's holy," cried Mr. Quarrier, as he saw his horse pass the first. "I must try and get to the bottom of this. It's the queerest thing I've ever experienced in racing."

"Eh? What about Gingerbeer now?" shouted his friend, "I've sixty to ten about him—my old hay and corn man. Nice owner of horses you are to give a fellow tips."

"Tom, you must help me to get to the bottom of this. I must know out of sheer curiosity, even though it should cost me a ten pound note. That Gingerbeer does not know who



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"Backbiter walks in!"

I am, so get a hold of him and over a bottle for a fiver he'll tell us all about it."

Half an hour afterwards, Mr. Quarrier and Mr. Brownside were seated in a room in that well-known old hostelry, the "Grey Goat," in Carlisle, with a bottle of Moët and Chandon, and champagne glasses on the table.

"So you would like to know how I knew about this 'Backbiter.' Well, you promises not to tell, so I'll let you hear. Mr Bittocks who trains for this Mr. Freestone——"

"Hang the scoundrel," said Mr. Quarrier to himself, "has he sold me, I wonder?"

"He comes," said the other, laying down his champagne which he had been swilling, "down here, and he says, 'Flapps is going off to Carington to ride there with the half-past four train, and the "Selling Race" is at five o'clock. You see Jack Wilson (that's Harry Hudson's lad), Ginger, and tell him I want him to ride "Backbiter," so he's not to go away in the morning if he's nothing else keeping him.' Well, I tells Wilson, and Gardner and some of his pals about this, and we found out all that were likely to go and who was to ride.

"Well, none of us have had a rosy time of it,' so says Jem Blount with a wink, says he, 'Boys, we hain't had a go for ourselves for a long time, now we've done so much pulling and roping and riding weight off, and all that for them, and then, unless the thing is all right, they sends for Mister Harcher and Mister Georgie Fordham to do the winning game. Suppose we've a race to ourselves and this "Selling Stakes" is the game? What's about the worst one of the lot?' says he. 'Backbiter,' says everybody. 'He's about as slow as they can breed 'em nowadays,' said Jack Wilson. 'Then,' says Joe, 'they can't see what we're doing here from the Stand, I vote we plank our money down on "Backbiter," every copper, and rope all the rest,' says he. 'Done,' says everyone. So we got Flash Jim to do the commission, and there, well—you backed him, sir, I hope you did, and you saw the race. Good-night, gentlemen, I'm off, I've to catch the train for London. I know a thing of the same kind coming off at Alexandra Park."

"Tom," said Mr. Freestone Quarrier, "you may spend thousands keeping race horses, I see, but the sharps will have occasionally one race for themselves."