


WELL WON, BUT THE WRONG WAY:

OR,

HOW I WAS LAUGHED OFF THE COURSE.

“ND so you are up for the Cattle Show, eh? Got some Southdowns, like myself, I suppose? Well, who would have thought it, after all these years? Let me see—ten, fifteen, twenty—ay, hang me if it is not twenty years since you and I were in the saddle together—twenty years! and here we are, like a couple of old Southdown wethers, sitting in the smoking-room of the Tavistock Hotel, as anxious to get hold of a red ticket from a Show Committee as we were once to get the heads of our horses in front at Aintree and Croydon.”

The speaker was John Woolbrain, well known to all members of the Smithfield Club to be one of the most successful exhibitors of Hampshire Down sheep at Islington, and in days gone past as one of the ablest men across a country or between the flags that ever set his hands down to the starter's signal; and his companion was a fellow-exhibitor, whom he had ridden against in years gone past in many an exciting contest.

“Yes, Jack Woolbrain,” said the other, “we were a fair good couple both of us, but you were always rather the better over a country. How was it, however, that you gave it up all of a heap? We used to wonder at that, for you were just in your prime at the time.”

“How did you give it up yourself?” was the reply.

“Ah!” was the response. “I was carried home on a hurdle with my thigh-bone broken, and I thought that it was about time to give it up. As to you, you dried up from a huff or something of that sort I have heard.”

“Who told you that?”

“I can't just remember exactly, but I know I was told *that*. A man can't, you know, tell everything that happened twenty years ago.”

“And a good thing too, James Rapcake, that folks forget it—good thing, at least, for my peace o' mind. It was a rascally

piece of business, it was, from first to last, I can tell you, and no huff at all about it."

"Then, as the night's young, let's hear it—it does make me feel lively to be alongside of a man I've worn the silk against on many a nice Spring-day, when we were as fresh as the grass that was springing in the hedgerows, or the larks singing overhead. Eh, man! we can ne'er have such things again! Just cattle shows and fairs, and such cold, serious work; none of the old fire we used to have, when the eyes were clear, the head was light, and the heart was eager to be off and over everything. Nay, John Woolbrain, there's nowt left for us but bargain-driving and canny rides home."

"Nowt! James, nowt! They were good old days they were. When you talk like that you almost make me feel the saddle under me, but there's no use crying back, though they were the happiest days of my life, those riding days. Then I didn't care who or what I was alongside of, and felt a stranger in no country as long as I had something good under me. Ay, indeed, those were the days.

THE DAYS WE RODE THE FLAGS BETWEEN, O'ER GRASSLAND AND O'ER PLOUGH.

Come listen, lads, unto my song while you your glasses sip,
And show me the old cap again, the jacket, and the whip;
And I will tell to you, my lads, of days when I was young,
When many a time my view-haloo loud through the woodlands rung,
Of where we met, and how we found, and when we ran to view,
And how we cast again and hit, and how we killed him too;
But I'll say nay if you'll but stay, far better to tell now,
The way we rode between the flags, o'er grassland and o'er plough.

There was Jack from York and Ainsty, there was Bill, too, from the
Quorn,

As good as e'er cried, Tally ho! or ever blew a horn;
And Will from Warwick, he was there, and White Horse Hal' and all,
And Belvoir Bob, and Yarborough Sam, as game as e'er topped wall
There ne'er was such a pounding lot: I'd travel miles to see
Just such a rare game lot again—but, lads, it cannot be!
There cannot be such men again, you haven't got 'em now,
As good as they who rode that day o'er grassland and o'er plough.

There were fifteen of us good and true determined for to win,
With game good hearts in every breast just beating to begin.
No gorse-topped fences, circus-jumps, but just a country course :
Your courses now just suit a cow, they never test a horse.
Our hedges, they were well grown then, our ditches deep and wide,
And sometimes there were stout oak rails to fly on either side,
The flag we faced, then down it went, the starter he said " Now ! "
And away we went between the flags o'er grassland and o'er plough.

The fields were long, the fences strong, the pace it was not slow,
Though some did fall, amongst them all did none refuse to go ;
We ditches flew, crushed hedges through, the rails were topped in style,
And then we settled on the grass to do the last home-mile.
In voices loud, the eager crowd, they raised a maddening roar :
You should have heard the noise it was—like waves upon the shore.
" Won by a neck," the judge did say—you must not ask me how,
But ask the men that rode that day o'er grassland and o'er plough."

As Jack Woolbrain sung the last verse he raised his voice, and the men in the smoking-room of the Tavistock who had just come in from Evans's next door, gave him a ringing cheer, finishing up with shouts of " Hoicks ! " and " Well done old boy ! " to which he responded by raising his glass and making the remark: " We're all Jack Goodfellow's children at hunting, no matter what country we belong to." " Yes," said his companion, " but your song hasn't let me know how you left off riding and turned to soft-woolled sheep, like myself."

" Ah, well, it's a long story ; but listen, and I'll make it as short as I can. You knew old Major Jones, didn't you ? "

" I did," was the response, " and a bigger sharp never was on the British turf or under it—where I hope he is living yet ! "

" I believe," was the response, " I'll prove him to be what you say, every inch, if you'll only hearken. I needn't ask you if you know the course at Batterick—I mean the flat racecourse—for you've ridden over it. Well, you know, it's two miles round, or rather more, with the winning-post on what you might call the tapping-part of the egg. Well, my old landlord he asked me to be so good as go up there for him and ride a mare of his in a Welter handicap, and of course I couldn't refuse. Well, up I went overnight by train, for I had to be in Lincoln market all day before ; and, what with trains being late and me a bit con-

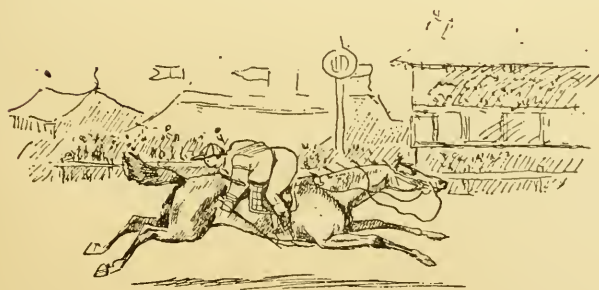
fused driving out to the course, my head was, maybe, not just what it should have been. However, I got into the paddock just as they were ringing the first bell, and there was my landlord's brother, a tall Army chap, waiting for me, with honest Jack Lawson, the trainer, and both fuming and fretting because I had not been forward in time. Ye see I had bred the mare myself, ridden her too, and knew her ways better than anybody. However, I got dressed and weighed out somehow. It was the first race on the card. Well, the landlord's brother backed the mare, and of course the public followed, and I put down the price of a score o' rams myself; but for all that Major Jones kept on backing a big, upstanding, strange bay horse, which was ridden by that notorious scamp Sam Jamestown—he's warned off now, and a good job too! There was a third in the race, which wasn't backed, it was said to belong to Major Jones's gang too, so that there really after all was to be a match and no match either, mind you, for it was a hundred to one on the mare. Well, we saddled and got out and cantered past, and then I followed Jamestown up the course, which was all strange to me. As I did, I heard Major Jones say, 'He's an old cove,' meaning me, 'and if you do what I say you will win in a walk.' 'Hilloah,' say I to myself, 'I see your game. Your other horse is to get off in front, and keep bustling and bothering me all the road, but I'll jump off as soon as the flag is down, and you'll never see me again, that you won't.' Well, I followed the two right round to the starter, when Sam wheeled sharp about, looking like business, the flag went down, and away I went with something thundering hard behind me, but what it was I never looked over my shoulder to see. On I went, and passed the winning-post an easy winner, for when I finished there was nothing near me. Well, I walked back to get my congratulations and weigh in, when my landlord's brother and Jim Lawson started swearing at me awful. 'Why! haven't I won?' said I. 'Won! you infernal old fool!' said Jim, 'you've sold us completely!' 'How?' says I, firing up. 'How!' says he, 'you've ridden the course the wrong way round, you ass! Get back to the post as fast as you can.' Well, back to the post I cantered, and there was Sam and the other fellow grinning like mad. The flag was lowered and away we galloped on the right side of the course, that is exactly the opposite way you see I had just done, but



F. T. Wood

"Back to the post I cantered"

the mare was of no use, and Sam's mount won easy. I could see the whole game afterwards. Sam walked the wrong way up the course on purpose, and the starter, like the rider of the other horse, who had raced for a bit behind me, must have been in the game. As to me, I was chaffed unmercifully, and to this day my landlord believes I was drunk, whereas I had never touched a drop. I never rode again and you now know how I never will; but, if ever you have anything in a race, see that your jockey knows the course, or he may win like me, the wrong way round.



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