

CHAPTER VIII.

It was nearly four o'clock in the afternoon when Isaacs and I emerged from the narrow road upon the polo ground. We were clad in the tight-fitting garments which are necessary for the game, and wrapped in light top-coats; as we came out on the green we saw a number of other men in similar costume standing about, and a great many native grooms leading ponies up and down. Miss Westonhaugh was there in her gray habit and broad hat, and by her side, on foot, Lord Steepleton Kildare was making the most of his time, as he waited for the rest of the players. Mr. Currie Ghyrkins was ambling about on his broad little horse, and John Westonhaugh stood with his hands in his pockets and a large Trichinopoli cheroot between his lips, apparently gazing into space. Several other men, more or less known to us and to each other, moved about or chatted disconnectedly, and one or two arrived after us. Some of them wore coloured jerseys that showed brightly over the open collars of their coats, others were in ordinary dress and had come to see the game. Farther off, at one side of the ground, one or two groups of ladies and their escorting cavaliers haunted at a short distance

by their saices in many-coloured turbans and belts, or *cummer-bunds*, as the sash is called in India, moved slowly about, glancing from time to time towards the place where the players and their ponies were preparing for the contest.

Few games require so little preparation and so few preliminaries as polo, descended as it is from an age when more was thought of good horsemanship and quick eye than of any little refinements depending on an accurate knowledge of fixed rules. Any one who is a first-rate rider and is quick with his hands can learn to play polo. The stiffest of arms can be limbered and the most recalcitrant wrist taught to turn nimbly in its socket; but the essential condition is, that the player should know how to ride. This being established, there is no reason why anybody who likes should not play the game, if he will only use a certain amount of caution, and avoid braining the other players and injuring the ponies by too wild a use of his mallet. Presently it was found that all who were to play had arrived — eight of us all told. Kildare had arranged the sides and had brought the other men necessary to make the number complete, so we mounted and took up our positions on the ground. Kildare and Isaacs were together, and Westonhaugh and I on the other side, with two men I knew slightly. We won the charge, and Westonhaugh, who was a celebrated player, struck the ball off cleverly, and I followed him up with a rush as he raced after it. Isaacs, on the other side, swept

along easily, and as the ball swerved on striking the ground bent far over till he looked as though he were out of the saddle and stopped it cleverly, while Kildare, who was close behind, got a good stroke in just in time, as Westonhaugh and I galloped down on him, and landed the ball far to the rear near our goal. As we wheeled quickly, I saw that one of the other two men on our side had stopped it and was beginning to "dribble" it along. This was very bad play, both Westonhaugh and I being so far forward, and it met its reward. Isaacs and Kildare raced down on him, but the latter soon pulled up on finding himself passed, and waited. Isaacs rushed upon the temporising player and got the ball away from him in no time; eluded the other man, and with a neat stroke sent the ball right between the poles. The game had hardly lasted three minutes, and a little sound of clapping was heard from where the spectators were standing, far off on one side. I could see Miss Westonhaugh plainly, as she cantered with her uncle to where the victors were standing together on the other side, patting their ponies and adjusting stirrup and saddle. Isaacs had his back turned, but wheeled round as he heard the sound of hoofs behind him and bowed low in his saddle to the fair girl, whose face, I could see even at that distance, was flushed with pleasure. They remained a few minutes in conversation, and then the two spectators rode away, and we took up our positions once more.

The next game was a much longer one. It was

the turn of the other party to hit off, for Kildare won the charge. There were encounters of all kinds; twice the ball was sent over the line, but outside the goal, by long sweeping blows from Isaacs, who ever hovered on the edge of the scrimmage, and, by his good riding, and the help of a splendid pony, often had a chance where another would have had none. At last it happened that I was chasing the ball back towards our goal, from one of his hits, and he was pursuing me. I had the advantage of a long start, and before he could reach me I got in a heavy "back-hander" that sent the ball far away to one side, where, as good luck would have it, Westonhaugh was waiting. Quick as thought he carried it along, and in another minute we had scored a goal, amidst enthusiastic shouts from the spectators, who had been kept long in suspense by the protracted game. This time it was to our side that the young girl came, riding up to her brother to congratulate him on his success. I thought she had less colour as she came nearer, and though she smiled sweetly as she said, "It was splendidly played, John," there was not so much enthusiasm in her voice as the said John, who had really won the game with masterly neatness, might have expected. Then she sat quietly looking over the ground, while we dismounted from our ponies, breathless, and foaming, and lathery, from the hard-fought battle. The grooms ran up with blankets and handfuls of grass to give the poor beasts a rub, and covering them carefully after removing the saddles, led them away.

The sun leaves Annandale early, and I put on a coat and lit a cigarette, while the saice saddled our second mounts. There are few prettier sights than an English game, of any kind, on a beautiful stretch of turf. The English live, and move and have their being out of doors. A cricket-match, tennis, a race-course, or a game of polo, show them at their greatest advantage, whether as players or spectators. Their fresh complexions suit the green of the grass and of the trees as naturally as a bed of roses, or cyclamens, or any fresh and healthy flower will combine with the grass and the ferns in garden or glen. The glorious vitality that belongs to their race seems to blossom freshly in the contact with their mother earth, and the physical capacity for motion with which nature endows them makes them graceful and fascinating to watch, when in some free and untrammelled dress of white they are at their games, batting and bowling and galloping and running; they have the same natural grace then as a herd of deer or antelopes; they are beautiful animals in the full enjoyment of life and vigour, of health and strength; they are intensely alive. Something of this kind passed through my mind, in all probability, and, combined with the delightful sensation any strong man feels in the pause after great exertion, disposed me well towards my fellows and towards mankind at large. Besides we had won the last game.

"You look pleased, Mr. Griggs," said Miss Westonhaugh, who had probably been watching me for a

moment or two. "I did not know cynics were ever pleased."

"I remember who it was that promised to crown the victors of this match, Miss Westonhaugh, and I cherish some hopes of being one of them. Would you mind very much?"

"Mind? Oh dear no; you had better try. But if you stand there with your coat on, you will not have much chance. They are all mounted, and waiting for you."

"Well, here goes," I said to myself, as I got into the saddle again. "I hope he may win, but he would find me out in a minute if I tried to play into his hands." We were only to play the best out of three goals, and the score was "one all." All eight of us had fresh mounts, and the experience of each other's play we had got in the preceding games made it likely that the game would be a long one. And so it turned out.

From the first things went badly. John Westonhaugh's fresh pony was very wild, and he had to take him a breather half over the ground before he could take his place for the charge. When at last the first stroke was made, the ball went low along the ground, spinning and twisting to right and left. Both Kildare and Isaacs missed it and wheeled across to return, when a prolonged scrimmage ensued less than thirty yards from their goal. Every one played his best, and we wheeled and spun round in a way that reminded one of a cavalry skirmish. Strokes

and back-strokes followed quickly, till at last I got the ball as it came rolling out between my horse's legs, and, hotly pursued, beyond the possibility of making a fair stroke, I moved away with it in front of me.

Then began one of those interminable circular games that all polo players know so well, round and round the battlefield, riding close together, sometimes one succeeding in driving the ball a little, only to be foiled by the next man's ill-delivered back-stroke; racing, and pulling up short, and racing again, till horses and riders were in a perspiration and a state of madness not to be attained by any peaceful means. At last, as we were riding near our own goal, some one, I could not see who, struck the ball out into the open. Isaacs, who had just missed, and was ahead, rode for it like a madman, his club raised high for a back-stroke. He was hotly pressed by the man who had roused my wrath in the first game by his "dribbling" policy. He was a light weight and had kept his best horse for the last game, so that as Isaacs spun along at lightning speed the little man was very close to him, his club well back for a sweeping hit. He rode well, but was evidently not so old a hand in the game as the rest of us. They neared the ball rapidly and Isaacs swerved a little to the left in order to get it well under his right hand, thus throwing himself somewhat across the track of his pursuer. As the Persian struck with all his force downwards and backwards, his adver-

sary, excited by the chase, beyond all judgment or reckoning of his chances, hit out wildly, as beginners will. The long elastic handle of his weapon struck Isaacs' horse on the flank and glanced upward, the head of the club striking Isaacs just above the back of the neck. We saw him throw up his arms, the club in his right hand hanging to his wrist by the strap. The infuriated little arab pony tore on, and in a moment more the iron grip of the rider's knees relaxed, Isaacs swayed heavily in the saddle and fell over on the near side, his left foot hanging in the stirrup and dragging him along some paces before the horse finally shook himself clear and scampered away across the turf. The whole catastrophe occurred in a moment; the man who had done the mischief threw away his club to reach the injured player the sooner, and as we thundered after him, my pony stumbled over the long handle, and falling, threw me heavily over his head. I escaped with a very slight kick from one of the other horses, and leaving my beast to take care of himself, ran as fast as I could to where Isaacs lay, now surrounded by the six players as they dismounted to help him. But there was some one there before them.

The accident had occurred near the middle of the ground, and opposite the place where Miss Weston-haugh and her uncle had taken up their stand to watch the contest. With a shake of the reins and a blow of the hand that made the thoroughbred bound his length as he plunged into a gallop, the girl rode

wildly to where Isaacs lay, and reining the animal back on his haunches, sprang to the ground and knelt quickly down, so that before the others had reached them she had propped up his head and was rubbing his hands in hers. There was no mistaking the impulse that prompted her. She had seen many an accident in the hunting-field, and knew well that when a man fell like that it was ten to one he was badly hurt.

Isaacs was ghastly pale, and there was a little blood on Miss Westonhaugh's white gauntlet. Her face was whiter even than his, though not a quiver of mouth or eyelash betrayed emotion. The man who had done it knelt on the other side, rubbing one of the hands. Kildare and Westonhaugh galloped off at full speed, and presently returned bearing a brandy-flask and a smelling-bottle, and followed by a groom with some water in a native *lota*. I wanted to make him swallow some of the liquor, but Miss Westonhaugh took the flask from my hands.

"He would not like it. He never drinks it, you know," she said in a quiet low voice, and pouring some of the contents on her handkerchief, moistened all his brows and face and hair with the powerful alcohol.

"Loosen his belt! pull off his boots, some of you!" cried Mr. Currie Ghyrkins, as he came up breathless. "Take off his belt—damn it, you know! Dear, dear!" and he got off his *tat* with all the alacrity he could muster.

Miss Westonhaugh never took her eyes from the face of the prostrate man—pressing the wet handkerchief to his brow, and moistening the palm of the hand she held with brandy. In a few minutes Isaacs breathed a long heavy breath, and opened his eyes.

"What is the matter?" he said; then, recollecting himself and trying to move his head—"Oh! I have had a tumble. Give me some water to drink." There was a sigh of relief from every one present as he spoke, quite naturally, and I held the *lota* to his lips. "What became of the ball?" he asked quickly, as he sat up. Then turning round, he saw the beautiful girl kneeling at his side. The blood rushed violently to his face, and his eyes, a moment ago dim with unconsciousness, flashed brightly. "What! Miss Westonhaugh—you?" he bounded to his feet, but would have fallen back if I had not caught him in my arms, for he was still dizzy from the heavy blow that had stunned him. The blood came and went in his cheeks, and he hung on my arm confused and embarrassed, looking on the ground.

"I really owe you all manner of apologies——" he began.

"Not a bit of it, my dear boy," broke in Ghyrkins, "my niece was nearest to you when you fell, and so she came up and did the right thing, like the brave girl she is." The old fellow helped her to rise as he said this, and he looked so pleased and proud of her that I was delighted with him. "And now," he went on, "we must see how much you are hurt—

the deuce of a knock, you know, enough to kill you — and if you are not able to ride, why, we will carry you home, you know; the devil of a way off it is, too, confound it all.” As he jerked out his sentences he was feeling the back of Isaacs’ head, to ascertain, if he could, how much harm had been done. All this time the man who had done the mischief was standing by, looking very penitent, and muttering sentences of apology as he tried to perform any little office for his victim that came in his way. Isaacs stretched out his arm, while Ghyrkens was feeling and twisting his head, and taking the man’s hand, held it a moment.

“My dear sir,” he said, “I am not in the least hurt, I assure you, and it was my fault for crossing you at such a moment. Please do not think anything more about it.” He smiled kindly at the young fellow, who seemed very grateful, and who from that day on would have risked everything in the world for him. I heard behind me the voice of Kildare, soliloquising softly.

“Faith,” said he, “that fellow is a gentleman if I ever saw one. I am afraid I should not have let that infernal duffer off so easily. By-the-bye, Isaacs,” he said aloud, coming up to us, “you know you won the game. Nobody stopped the ball after you hit it, and the saices say it ran right through the goal. So cheer up; you have got something for your pains and your tumble.” It was quite true; the phlegmatic saices had watched the ball instead of the falling

man. Miss Westonhaugh, who was really a sensible and self-possessed young woman, and had begun to be sure that the accident would have no serious results, expressed the most unbounded delight.

“Thank you, Miss Westonhaugh,” said Isaacs; “you have kept your promise; you have crowned the victor.”

“With brandy,” I remarked, folding up a scarf which somebody had given me wherewith to tie a wet compress to the back of his head.

“There is nothing the matter,” said Ghyrkens; “no end of a bad bruise, that’s all. He will be all right in the morning, and the skin is only a little broken.”

“Griggs,” said Isaacs, who could now stand quite firm again, “hold the wet handkerchief in place, and give me that scarf.” I did as he directed, and he took the white woollen shawl, and in half a dozen turns wound it round his head in a turban, deftly and gracefully. It was wonderfully becoming to his Oriental features and dark eyes, and I could see that Miss Westonhaugh thought so. There was a murmur of approbation from the native grooms who were looking on, and who understood the thing.

“You see I have done it before,” he said, smiling. “And now give me my coat, and we will be getting home. Oh yes! I can ride quite well.”

“That man has no end of pluck in him,” said John Westonhaugh to Kildare.

“By Jove! yes,” was the answer. “I have seen

men at home make twice the fuss over a tumble in a ploughed field, when they were not even stunned. I would not have thought it."

"He is not the man to make much fuss about anything of that kind."

Isaacs stoutly refused any further assistance, and after walking up and down a few minutes, he said he had got his legs back, and demanded a cigarette. He lit it carefully, and mounted as if nothing had happened, and we moved homeward, followed by the spectators, many of whom, of course, were acquaintances, and who had ridden up more or less quickly to make polite inquiries about the accident. No one disputed with Isaacs the right to ride beside Miss Westonhaugh on the homeward road. He was the victor of the day, and of course was entitled to the best place. We were all straggling along, but without any great intervals between us, so that the two were not able to get away as they had done on Saturday evening, but they talked, and I heard Miss Westonhaugh laugh. Isaacs was determined to show that he appreciated his advantage, and though, for all I know, he might be suffering a good deal of pain, he talked gaily and sat his horse easily, rather a strange figure in his light-coloured English overcoat, surmounted by the large white turban he had made out of the shawl. As we came out on the mall at the top of the hill, Mr. Ghyrkens called a council of war.

"Of course we shall have to put off the tiger-hunt."

"I suppose so," muttered Kildare, disconsolately.

"Why?" said Isaacs. "Not a bit of it. Head or no head, we will start to-morrow morning. I am well enough, never fear."

"Nonsense, you know it's nonsense," said Ghyrkens, "you will be in bed all day with a raging headache. Horrid things, knocks on the back of the head."

"Not I. My traps are all packed, and my servants have gone down to Kalka, and I am going to-morrow morning."

"Well, of course, if you really think you can," etc. etc. So he was prevailed upon to promise that if he should be suffering in the morning he would send word in time to put off the party. "Besides," he added, "even if I could not go, that is no reason why you should not."

"Stuff," said Ghyrkens.

"Oh!" said Miss Westonhaugh, looking rather blank.

"That would never do," said John.

"Preposterous! we could not think of going without you," said Lord Steepleton Kildare loudly; he was beginning to like Isaacs in spite of himself. And so we parted.

"I shall not dine to-night, Griggs," said Isaacs, as we paused before his door. "Come in for a moment: you can help me." We entered the richly carpeted room, and he went to a curious old Japanese cabinet, and after opening various doors and divi-

sions, showed a small iron safe. This he opened by some means known to himself, for he used no key, and he took out a small vessel of jade and brought it to the light. "Now," he said, "be good enough to warm this little jar in your hands while I go into the next room and get my boots and spurs and things off. But do not open it on any account—not on any account, until I come back," he added very emphatically.

"All right, go ahead," said I, and began to warm the cold thing that felt like a piece of ice between my hands. He returned in a few minutes robed in loose garments from Kashmir, with the low Eastern slippers he generally wore indoors. He sat down among his cushions and leaned back, looking pale and tired; after ordering the lamps to be lit and the doors closed, he motioned me to sit down beside him.

"I have had a bad shaking," he said, "and my head is a good deal bruised. But I mean to go tomorrow in spite of everything. In that little vial there is a powerful remedy unknown in your Western medicine. Now I want you to apply it, and to follow with the utmost exactness my instructions. If you fear you should forget what I tell you, write it down, for a mistake might be fatal to you, and would certainly be fatal to me."

I took out an old letter and a pencil, not daring to trust my memory.

"Put the vial in your bosom while you write: it must be near the temperature of the body. Now

listen to me. In that silver box is wax. Tie first this piece of silk over your mouth, and then stop your nostrils carefully with the wax. Then open the vial quickly and pour a little of the contents into your hand. You must be quick, for it is very volatile. Rub that on the back of my head, keeping the vial closed. When your hand is dry, hold the vial open to my nostrils for two minutes by your watch. By that time, I shall be asleep. Put the vial in this pocket of my *caftán*; open all the doors and windows, and tell my servant to leave them so, but not to admit any one. Then you can leave me; I shall sleep very comfortably. Come back and wake me a little before midnight. You will wake me easily by lifting my head and pressing one of my hands. Remember, if you should forget to wake me, and I should still be asleep at one o'clock, I should never open my eyes again, and should be dead before morning. Do as I tell you, for friendship's sake, and when I wake I shall bathe and sleep naturally the rest of the night."

I carefully fulfilled his instructions. Before I had finished rubbing his head he was drowsy, and when I took the vial from his nostrils he was sound asleep. I placed the precious thing where he had told me, and arranged his limbs on the cushions. Then I opened everything, and leaving the servant in charge went my way to my rooms. On removing the silk and the wax which had protected me from the powerful drug, an indescribable odour which

permeated my clothes ascended to my nostrils; aromatic, yet pungent and penetrating. I never smelt anything that it reminded me of, but I presume the compound contained something of the nature of an opiate. I took some books down to Isaacs' rooms and passed the evening there, unwilling to leave him to the care of an inquisitive servant, and five minutes before midnight I awoke him in the manner he had directed. He seemed to be sleeping lightly, for he was awake in a moment, and his first action was to replace the vial in the curious safe. He professed himself perfectly restored; and, indeed, on examining his bruise I found there was no swelling or inflammation. The odour of the medicament, which, as he had said, seemed to be very volatile, had almost entirely disappeared. He begged me to go to bed, saying that he would bathe and then do likewise, and I left him for the night; speculating on the nature of this secret and precious remedy.

CHAPTER IX.

THE Himalayan *tonga* is a thing of delight. It is easily described, for in principle it is the ancient Persian war-chariot, though the accommodation is so modified as to allow four persons to sit in it back to back; that is, three besides the driver. It is built for great strength, the wheels being enormously heavy, and the pole of the size of a mast. Harness the horses have none, save a single belt with a sort of lock at the top, which fits into the iron yoke through the pole, and can slide from it to the extremity; there is neither breeching nor trace nor collar, and the reins run from the heavy curb bit directly through loops on the yoke to the driver's hands. The latter, a wiry, long-bearded Mohammedan, is armed with a long whip attached to a short thick stock, and though he sits low, on the same level as the passenger beside him on the front seat, he guides his half broken horses with amazing dexterity round sharp curves and by giddy precipices, where neither parapet nor fencing give the startled mind even a momentary impression of security. The road from Simla to Kalka at the foot of the hills is so narrow that if two vehicles meet, the one has to