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Chapter 45 - The Foot-Race

A SOLITARY foreigner, drifting about London, drifted toward Fulham on the day of the Foot-Race.

Little by little, he found himself involved in the current of a throng of impetuous English people, all flowing together toward one given point, and all decorated alike with colors of two prevailing hues--pink and yellow. He drifted along with the stream of passengers on the pavement (accompanied by a stream of carriages in the road) until they stopped with one accord at a gate--and paid admission money to a man in office--and poured into a great open space of ground which looked like an uncultivated garden.

Arrived here, the foreign visitor opened his eyes in wonder at the scene revealed to view. He observed thousands of people assembled, composed almost exclusively of the middle and upper classes of society. They were congregated round a vast inclosure; they were elevated on amphitheatrical wooden stands, and they were perched on the roofs of horseless carriages, drawn up in rows. From this congregation there rose such a roar of eager voices as he had never heard yet from any assembled multitude in these islands. Predominating among the cries, he detected one everlasting question. It began with, "Who backs--?" and it ended in the alternate pronouncing of two British names unintelligible to foreign ears. Seeing these extraordinary sights, and hearing these stirring sounds, he applied to a policeman on duty; and said, in his best producible English, "If you please, Sir, what is this?"

The policeman answered, " North against South--Sports."

The foreigner was informed, but not satisfied. He pointed all round the assembly with a circular sweep of his hand; and said, "Why?"

The policeman declined to waste words on a man who could ask such a question as that. He lifted a large purple forefinger, with a broad white nail at the end of it, and pointed gravely to a printed Bill, posted on the wall behind him. The drifting foreigner drifted to the Bill.

After reading it carefully, from top to bottom, he consulted a polite private individual near at hand, who proved to be far more communicative than the policeman. The result on his mind, as a person not thoroughly awakened to the enormous national importance of Athletic Sports, was much as follows:

The color of North is pink. The color of South is yellow. North produces fourteen pink men, and South produces thirteen yellow men. The meeting of pink and yellow is a solemnity. The solemnity takes its rise in an indomitable national passion for hardening the arms and legs, by throwing hammers and cricket-balls with the first, and running and jumping with the second. The object in view is to do this in public rivalry. The ends arrived at are (physically) an excessive development of the muscles, purchased at the expense of an excessive strain on the heart and the lungs--(morally), glory; conferred at the moment by the public applause; confirmed the next day by a report in the newspapers. Any person who presumes to see any physical evil involved in these exercises to the men who practice them, or any moral obstruction in the exhibition itself to those civilizing influences on which the true greatness of all nations depends, is a person without a biceps, who is simply incomprehensible. Muscular England develops itself, and takes no notice of him.

The foreigner mixed with the assembly, and looked more closely at the social spectacle around him.

He had met with these people before. He had seen them (for instance) at the theatre, and observed their manners and customs with considerable curiosity and surprise. When the curtain was down, they were so little interested in what they had come to see, that they had hardly spirit enough to speak to each other between the acts. When the curtain was up, if the play made any appeal to their sympathy with any of the higher and nobler emotions of humanity, they received it as something wearisome, or sneered at it as something absurd. The public feeling of the countrymen of Shakespeare, so far as they represented it, recognized but two duties in the dramatist--the duty of making them laugh, and the duty of getting it over soon. The two great merits of a stage proprietor, in England (judging by the rare applause of his cultivated customers), consisted in spending plenty of money on his scenery, and in hiring plenty of brazen-faced women to exhibit their bosoms and their legs. Not at theatres only; but among other gatherings, in other places, the foreigner had noticed the same stolid languor where any effort was exacted from genteel English brains, and the same stupid contempt where any appeal was made to genteel English hearts. Preserve us from enjoying any thing but jokes and scandals! Preserve us from respecting any thing but rank and money! There were the social aspirations of these insular ladies and gentlemen, as expressed under other circumstances, and as betrayed amidst other scenes. Here, all was changed. Here was the strong feeling, the breathless interest, the hearty enthusiasm, not visible elsewhere. Here were the superb gentlemen who were too weary to speak, when an Art was addressing them, shouting themselves hoarse with burst on burst of genuine applause. Here were the fine ladies who yawned behind their fans, at the bare idea of being called on to think or to feel, waving their handkerchiefs in honest delight, and actually flushing with excitement through their powder and their paint. And all for what? All for running and jumping--all for throwing hammers and balls.

The foreigner looked at it, and tried, as a citizen of a civilized country, to understand it. He was still trying--when there occurred a pause in the performances.

Certain hurdles, which had served to exhibit the present satisfactory state of civilization (in jumping) among the upper classes, were removed. The privileged persons who had duties to perform within the inclosure, looked all round it; and disappeared one after another. A great hush of expectation pervaded the whole assembly. Something of no common interest and importance was evidently about to take place. On a sudden, the silence was broken by a roar of cheering from the mob in the road outside the grounds. People looked at each other excitedly, and said, "One of them has come." The silence prevailed again--and was a second time broken by another roar of applause. People nodded to each other with an air of relief and said, "Both of them have come." Then the great hush fell on the crowd once more, and all eyes looked toward one particular point of the ground, occupied by a little wooden pavilion, with the blinds down over the open windows, and the door closed.

The foreigner was deeply impressed by the silent expectation of the great throng about him. He felt his own sympathies stirred, without knowing why. He believed himself to be on the point of understanding the English people.

Some ceremony of grave importance was evidently in preparation. Was a great orator going to address the assembly? Was a glorious anniversary to be commemorated? Was a religious service to be performed? He looked round him to apply for information once more. Two gentlemen--who contrasted favorably, so far as refinement of manner was concerned, with most of the spectators present--were slowly making their way, at that moment, through the crowd near him. He respectfully asked what national solemnity was now about to take place. They informed him that a pair of strong young men were going to run round the inclosure for a given number of turns, with the object of ascertaining which could run the fastest of the two.

The foreigner lifted his hands and eyes to heaven. Oh, multifarious Providence! who would have suspected that the infinite diversities of thy creation included such beings as these! With that aspiration, he turned his back on the race-course, and left the place.

On his way out of the grounds he had occasion to use his handkerchief, and found that it was gone. He felt next for his purse. His purse was missing too. When he was back again in his own country, intelligent inquiries were addressed to him on the subject of England. He had but one reply to give. "The whole nation is a mystery to me. Of all the English people I only understand the English thieves!"

In the mean time the two gentlemen, making their way through the crowd, reached a wicket-gate in the fence which surrounded the inclosure.

Presenting a written order to the policeman in charge of the gate, they were forthwith admitted within the sacred precincts. The closely packed spectators, regarding them with mixed feelings of envy and curiosity, wondered who they might be. Were they referees appointed to act at the coming race? or reporters for the newspapers? or commissioners of police? They were neither the one nor the other. They were only Mr. Speedwell, the surgeon, and Sir Patrick Lundie.

The two gentlemen walked into the centre of the inclosure, and looked round them.

The grass on which they were standing was girdled by a broad smooth path, composed of finely-sifted ashes and sand--and this again was surrounded by the fence and by the spectators ranked behind it. Above the lines thus formed rose on one side the amphitheatres with their tiers of crowded benches, and on the other the long rows of carriages with the sight-seers inside and out. The evening sun was shining brightly, the light and shade lay together in grand masses, the varied colors of objects blended softly one with the other. It was a splendid and an inspiring scene.

Sir Patrick turned from the rows of eager faces all round him to his friend the surgeon.

"Is there one person to be found in this vast crowd," he asked, "who has come to see the race with the doubt in his mind which has brought us to see it?"

Mr. Speedwell shook his head. "Not one of them knows or cares what the struggle may cost the men who engage in it."

Sir Patrick looked round him again. "I almost wish I had not come to see it," he said. "If this wretched man--"

The surgeon interposed. "Don't dwell needlessly, Sir Patrick, on the gloomy view," he rejoined. "The opinion I have formed has, thus far, no positive grounds to rest on. I am guessing rightly, as I believe, but at the same time I am guessing in the dark. Appearances may have misled me. There may be reserves of vital force in Mr. Delamayn's constitution which I don't suspect. I am here to learn a lesson--not to see a prediction fulfilled. I know his health is broken, and I believe he is going to run this race at his own proper peril. Don't feel too sure beforehand of the event. The event may prove me to be wrong."

For the moment Sir Patrick dropped the subject. He was not in his usual spirits.

Since his interview with Anne had satisfied him that she was Geoffrey's lawful wife, the conviction had inevitably forced itself on his mind that the one possible chance for her in the future, was the chance of Geoffrey's death. Horrible as it was to him, he had been possessed by that one idea--go where he might, do what he might, struggle as he might to force his thoughts in other directions. He looked round the broad ashen path on which the race was to be run, conscious that he had a secret interest in it which it was unutterably repugnant to him to feel. He tried to resume the conversation with his friend, and to lead it to other topics. The effort was useless. In despite of himself, he returned to the one fatal subject of the struggle that was now close at hand.

"How many times must they go round this inclosure," he inquired, "before the race is ended?"

Mr. Speedwell turned toward a gentleman who was approaching them at the moment. "Here is somebody coming who can tell us," he said.

"You know him?"

"He is one of my patients."

"Who is he?"

"After the two runners he is the most important personage on the ground. He is the final authority--the umpire of the race."

The person thus described was a middle-aged man, with a prematurely wrinkled face, with prematurely white hair and with something of a military look about him--brief in speech, and quick in manner.

"The path measures four hundred and forty yards round," he said, when the surgeon had repeated Sir Patrick's question to him. "In plainer words, and not to put you to your arithmetic once round it is a quarter of a mile. Each round is called a 'Lap.' The men must run sixteen Laps to finish the race. Not to put you to your arithmetic again, they must run four miles--the longest race of this kind which it is customary to attempt at Sports like these."

"Professional pedestrians exceed that limit, do they not?"

"Considerably--on certain occasions."

"Are they a long-lived race?"

"Far from it. They are exceptions when they live to be old men."

Mr. Speedwell looked at Sir Patrick. Sir Patrick put a question to the umpire.

"You have just told us," he said, "that the two young men who appear to-day are going to run the longest distance yet attempted in their experience. Is it generally thought, by persons who understand such things, that they are both fit to bear the exertion demanded of them?"

"You can judge for yourself, Sir. Here is one of them."

He pointed toward the pavilion. At the same moment there rose a mighty clapping of hands from the great throng of spectators. Fleetwood, champion of the North, decorated in his pink colors, descended the pavilion steps and walked into the arena.

Young, lithe, and elegant, with supple strength expressed in every movement of his limbs, with a bright smile on his resolute young face, the man of the north won the women's hearts at starting. The murmur of eager talk rose among them on all sides. The men were quieter--especially the men who understood the subject. It was a serious question with these experts whether Fleetwood was not "a little too fine." Superbly trained, it was admitted--but, possibly, a little over-trained for a four-mile race.

The northern hero was followed into the inclosure by his friends and backers, and by his trainer. This last carried a tin can in his hand. "Cold water," the umpire explained. "If he gets exhausted, his trainer will pick him up with a dash of it as he goes by."

A new burst of hand-clapping rattled all round the arena. Delamayn, champion of the South, decorated in his yellow colors, presented himself to the public view.

The immense hum of voices rose louder and louder as he walked into the centre of the great green space. Surprise at the extraordinary contrast between the two men was the prevalent emotion of the moment. Geoffrey was more than a head taller than his antagonist, and broader in full proportion. The women who had been charmed with the easy gait and confident smile of Fleetwood, were all more or less painfully impressed by the sullen strength of the southern man, as he passed before them slowly, with his head down and his brows knit, deaf to the applause showered on him, reckless of the eyes that looked at him; speaking to nobody; concentrated in himself; biding his time. He held the men who understood the subject breathless with interest. There it was! the famous "staying power" that was to endure in the last terrible half-mile of the race, when the nimble and jaunty Fleetwood was run off his legs. Whispers had been spread abroad hinting at something which had gone wrong with Delamayn in his training. And now that all eyes could judge him, his appearance suggested criticism in some quarters. It was exactly the opposite of the criticism passed on his antagonist. The doubt as to Delamayn was whether he had been sufficiently trained. Still the solid strength of the man, the slow, panther-like smoothness of his movements--and, above all, his great reputation in the world of muscle and sport--had their effect. The betting which, with occasional fluctuations, had held steadily in his favor thus far, held, now that he was publicly seen, steadily in his favor still.

"Fleetwood for shorter distances, if you like; but Delamayn for a four-mile race."

"Do you think he sees us?" whispered Sir Patrick to the surgeon.

"He sees nobody."

"Can you judge of the condition he is in, at this distance?"

"He has twice the muscular strength of the other man. His trunk and limbs are magnificent. It is useless to ask me more than that about his condition. We are too far from him to see his face plainly."

The conversation among the audience began to flag again; and the silent expectation set in among them once more. One by one, the different persons officially connected with the race gathered together on the grass. The trainer Perry was among them, with his can of water in his hand, in anxious whispering conversation with his principal--giving him the last words of advice before the start. The trainer's doctor, leaving them together, came up to pay his respects to his illustrious colleague.

"How has he got on since I was at Fulham?" asked Mr. Speedwell.

"First-rate, Sir! It was one of his bad days when you saw him. He has done wonders in the last eight-and-forty hours."

"Is he going to win the race?"

Privately the doctor had done what Perry had done before him--he had backed Geoffrey's antagonist. Publicly he was true to his colors. He cast a disparaging look at Fleetwood--and answered Yes, without the slightest hesitation.

At that point, the conversation was suspended by a sudden movement in the inclosure. The runners were on their way to the starting-place. The moment of the race had come.

Shoulder to shoulder, the two men waited--each with his foot touching the mark. The firing of a pistol gave the signal for the start. At the instant when the report sounded they were off.

Fleetwood at once took the lead, Delamayn following, at from two to three yards behind him. In that order they ran the first round, the second, and the third--both reserving their strength; both watched with breathless interest by every soul in the place. The trainers, with their cans in their hands, ran backward and forward over the grass, meeting their men at certain points, and eying them narrowly, in silence. The official persons stood together in a group; their eyes following the runners round and round with the closest attention. The trainer's doctor, still attached to his illustrious colleague, offered the necessary explanations to Mr. Speedwell and his friend.

"Nothing much to see for the first mile, Sir, except the 'style' of the two men."

"You mean they are not really exerting themselves yet?"

"No. Getting their wind, and feeling their legs. Pretty runner, Fleetwood--if you notice Sir? Gets his legs a trifle better in front, and hardly lifts his heels quite so high as our man. His action's the best of the two; I grant that. But just look, as they come by, which keeps the straightest line. There's where Delamayn has him! It's a steadier, stronger, truer pace; and you'll see it tell when they're half-way through." So, for the first three rounds, the doctor expatiated on the two contrasted "styles"--in terms mercifully adapted to the comprehension of persons unacquainted with the language of the running ring.

At the fourth round--in other words, at the round which completed the first mile, the first change in the relative position of the runners occurred. Delamayn suddenly dashed to the front. Fleetwood smiled as the other passed him. Delamayn held the lead till they were half way through the fifth round--when Fleetwood, at a hint from his trainer, forced the pace. He lightly passed Delamayn in an instant; and led again to the completion of the sixth round.

At the opening of the seventh, Delamayn forced the pace on his side. For a few moments, they ran exactly abreast. Then Delamayn drew away inch by inch; and recovered the lead. The first burst of applause (led by the south) rang out, as the big man beat Fleetwood at his own tactics, and headed him at the critical moment when the race was nearly half run.

"It begins to look as if Delamayn _was_ going to win!" said Sir Patrick.

The trainer's doctor forgot himself. Infected by the rising excitement of every body about him, he let out the truth.

"Wait a bit!" he said. "Fleetwood has got directions to let him pass--Fleetwood is waiting to see what he can do."

"Cunning, you see, Sir Patrick, is one of the elements in a manly sport," said Mr. Speedwell, quietly.

At the end of the seventh round, Fleetwood proved the doctor to be right. He shot past Delamayn like an arrow from a bow. At the end of the eighth round, he was leading by two yards. Half the race had then been run. Time, ten minutes and thirty-three seconds.

Toward the end of the ninth round, the pace slackened a little; and Delamayn was in front again. He kept ahead, until the opening of the eleventh round. At that point, Fleetwood flung up one hand in the air with a gesture of triumph; and bounded past Delamayn with a shout of "Hooray for the North!" The shout was echoed by the spectators. In proportion as the exertion began to tell upon the men, so the excitement steadily rose among the people looking at them.

At the twelfth round, Fleetwood was leading by six yards. Cries of triumph rose among the adherents of the north, met by counter-cries of defiance from the south. At the next turn Delamayn resolutely lessened the distance between his antagonist and himself. At the opening of the fourteenth round, they were coming side by side. A few yards more, and Delamayn was in front again, amidst a roar of applause from the whole public voice. Yet a few yards further, and Fleetwood neared him, passed him, dropped behind again, led again, and was passed again at the end of the round. The excitement rose to its highest pitch, as the runners--gasping for breath; with dark flushed faces, and heaving breasts--alternately passed and repassed each other. Oaths were heard now as well as cheers. Women turned pale and men set their teeth, as the last round but one began.

At the opening of it, Delamayn was still in advance. Before six yards more had been covered, Fleetwood betrayed the purpose of his running in the previous round, and electrified the whole assembly, by dashing past his antagonist--for the first time in the race at the top of his speed. Every body present could see, now, that Delamayn had been allowed to lead on sufferance--had been dextrously drawn on to put out his whole power--and had then, and not till then, been seriously deprived of the lead. He made another effort, with a desperate resolution that roused the public enthusiasm to frenzy. While the voices were roaring; while the hats and handkerchiefs were waving round the course; while the actual event of the race was, for one supreme moment, still in doubt--Mr. Speedwell caught Sir Patrick by the arm.

"Prepare yourself!" he whispered. "It's all over."

As the words passed his lips, Delamayn swerved on the path. His trainer dashed water over him. He rallied, and ran another step or two--swerved again--staggered--lifted his arm to his mouth with a hoarse cry of rage--fastened his own teeth in his flesh like a wild beast--and fell senseless on the course.

A Babel of sounds arose. The cries of alarm in some places, mingling with the shouts of triumph from the backers of Fleetwood in others--as their man ran lightly on to win the now uncontested race. Not the inclosure only, but the course itself was invaded by the crowd. In the midst of the tumult the fallen man was drawn on to the grass--with Mr. Speedwell and the trainer's doctor in attendance on him. At the terrible moment when the surgeon laid his hand on the heart, Fleetwood passed the spot--a passage being forced for him through the people by his friends and the police--running the sixteenth and last round of the race.

Had the beaten man fainted under it, or had he died under it? Every body waited, with their eyes riveted on the surgeon's hand.

The surgeon looked up from him, and called for water to throw over his face, for brandy to put into his mouth. He was coming to life again--he had survived the race. The last shout of applause which hailed Fleetwood's victory rang out as they lifted him from the ground to carry him to the pavilion. Sir Patrick (admitted at Mr. Speedwell's request) was the one stranger allowed to pass the door. At the moment when he was ascending the steps, some one touched his arm. It was Captain Newenden.

"Do the doctors answer for his life?" asked the captain. "I can't get my niece to leave the ground till she is satisfied of that."

Mr. Speedwell heard the question and replied to it briefly from the top of the pavilion steps.

"For the present--yes," he said.

The captain thanked him, and disappeared.

They entered the pavilion. The necessary restorative measures were taken under Mr. Speedwell's directions. There the conquered athlete lay: outwardly an inert mass of strength, formidable to look at, even in its fall; inwardly, a weaker creature, in all that constitutes vital force, than the fly that buzzed on the window-pane. By slow degrees the fluttering life came back. The sun was setting; and the evening light was beginning to fail. Mr. Speedwell beckoned to Perry to follow him into an unoccupied corner of the room.

"In half an hour or less he will be well enough to be taken home. Where are his friends? He has a brother--hasn't he?"

"His brother's in Scotland, Sir."

"His father?"

Perry scratched his head. "From all I hear, Sir, he and his father don't agree."

Mr. Speedwell applied to Sir Patrick.

"Do you know any thing of his family affairs?"

"Very little. I believe what the man has told you to be the truth."

"Is his mother living?"

"Yes."

"I will write to her myself. In the mean time, somebody must take him home. He has plenty of friends here. Where are they?"

He looked out of the window as he spoke. A throng of people had gathered round the pavilion, waiting to hear the latest news. Mr. Speedwell directed Perry to go out and search among them for any friends of his employer whom he might know by sight. Perry hesitated, and scratched his head for the second time.

"What are you waiting for?" asked the surgeon, sharply. "You know his friends by sight, don't you?"

"I don't think I shall find them outside," said Perry.

"Why not?"

"They backed him heavily, Sir--and they have all lost."

Deaf to this unanswerable reason for the absence of friends, Mr. Speedwell insisted on sending Perry out to search among the persons who composed the crowd. The trainer returned with his report. "You were right, Sir. There are some of his friends outside. They want to see him."

"Let two or three of them in."

Three came in. They stared at him. They uttered brief expressions of pity in slang. They said to Mr. Speedwell, "We wanted to see him. What is it--eh?"

"It's a break-down in his health."

"Bad training?"

"Athletic Sports."

"Oh! Thank you. Good-evening."

Mr. Speedwell's answer drove them out like a flock of sheep before a dog. There was not even time to put the question to them as to who was to take him home.

"I'll look after him, Sir," said Perry. "You can trust me."

"I'll go too," added the trainer's doctor; "and see him littered down for the night."

(The only two men who had "hedged" their bets, by privately backing his opponent, were also the only two men who volunteered to take him home!)

They went back to the sofa on which he was lying. His bloodshot eyes were rolling heavily and vacantly about him, on the search for something. They rested on the doctor--and looked away again. They turned to Mr. Speedwell--and stopped, riveted on his face. The surgeon bent over him, and said, "What is it?"

He answered with a thick accent and laboring breath--uttering a word at a time: "Shall--I--die?"

"I hope not."

"Sure?"

"No."

He looked round him again. This time his eyes rested on the trainer. Perry came forward.

"What can I do for you, Sir?"

The reply came slowly as before. "My--coat--pocket."

"This one, Sir?"

"No."

"This?"

"Yes. Book."

The trainer felt in the pocket, and produced a betting-book.

"What's to be done with this. Sir?"

"Read."

The trainer held the book before him; open at the last two pages on which entries had been made. He rolled his head impatiently from side to side of the sofa pillow. It was plain that he was not yet sufficiently recovered to be able to read what he had written.

"Shall I read for you, Sir?"

"Yes."

The trainer read three entries, one after another, without result; they had all been honestly settled. At the fourth the prostrate man said, "Stop!" This was the first of the entries which still depended on a future event. It recorded the wager laid at Windygates, when Geoffrey had backed himself (in defiance of the surgeon's opinion) to row in the University boat-race next spring--and had forced Arnold Brinkworth to bet against him.

"Well, Sir? What's to be done about this?"

He collected his strength for the effort; and answered by a word at a time.

"Write--brother--Julius. Pay--Arnold--wins."

His lifted hand, solemnly emphasizing what he said, dropped at his side. He closed his eyes; and fell into a heavy stertorous sleep. Give him his due. Scoundrel as he was, give him his due. The awful moment, when his life was trembling in the balance, found him true to the last living faith left among the men of his tribe and time--the faith of the betting-book.

Sir Patrick and Mr. Speedwell quitted the race-ground together; Geoffrey having been previously removed to his lodgings hard by. They met Arnold Brinkworth at the gate. He had, by his own desire, kept out of view among the crowd; and he decided on walking back by himself. The separation from Blanche had changed him in all his habits. He asked but two favors during the interval which was to elapse before he saw his wife again--to be allowed to bear it in his own way, and to be left alone.

Relieved of the oppression which had kept him silent while the race was in progress, Sir Patrick put a question to the surgeon as they drove home, which had been in his mind from the moment when Geoffrey had lost the day.

"I hardly understand the anxiety you showed about Delamayn," he said, "when you found that he had only fainted under the fatigue. Was it something more than a common fainting fit?"

"It is useless to conceal it now," replied Mr. Speedwell. "He has had a narrow escape from a paralytic stroke."

"Was that what you dreaded when you spoke to him at Windygates?"

"That was what I saw in his face when I gave him the warning. I was right, so far. I was wrong in my estimate of the reserve of vital power left in him. When he dropped on the race-course, I firmly believed we should find him a dead man."

"Is it hereditary paralysis? His father's last illness was of that sort."

Mr. Speedwell smiled. "Hereditary paralysis?" he repeated. "Why the man is (naturally) a phenomenon of health and strength--in the prime of his life. Hereditary paralysis might have found him out thirty years hence. His rowing and his running, for the last four years, are alone answerable for what has happened to-day."

Sir Patrick ventured on a suggestion.

"Surely," he said, "with your name to compel attention to it, you ought to make this public--as a warning to others?"

"It would be quite useless. Delamayn is far from being the first man who has dropped at foot-racing, under the cruel stress laid on the vital organs. The public have a happy knack of forgetting these accidents. They would be quite satisfied when they found the other man (who happens to have got through it) produced as a sufficient answer to me."

Anne Silvester's future was still dwelling on Sir Patrick's mind. His next inquiry related to the serious subject of Geoffrey's prospect of recovery in the time to come.

"He will never recover," said Mr. Speedwell. "Paralysis is hanging over him. How long he may live it is impossible for me to say. Much depends on himself. In his condition, any new imprudence, any violent emotion, may kill him at a moment's notice."

"If no accident happens," said Sir Patrick, "will he be sufficiently himself again to leave his bed and go out?"

"Certainly."

"He has an appointment that I know of for Saturday next. Is it likely that he will be able to keep it?"

"Quite likely."

Sir Patrick said no more. Anne's face was before him again at the memorable moment when he had told her that she was Geoffrey's wife.