

HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES.

THE JOCKEY.

By WILFRED WEMLEY.

HE was rather a tall youth, but there was precious little flesh upon his bones when he came into the drying-room of the Turkish bath; and his talk was flavoured with those niceties of expression which hedge about the horse. I had not exchanged ten words with him before I knew that he was a jockey, and that his home was upon his native heath, Newmarket to wit. Indeed, my knowledge of the place, and the fact that I had once killed a horse when driving to the race-course from the University town, bred a great confidence in him; and he began to speak of his own affairs.

"Ah," said he, "Cambridge isn't what it was, is it? Too many old women in the shop now, to my way of thinking. Do you know the little Turkish bath there? Many's the time I've walked over to that bath, years back, when sweating had to be done. You see my natural weight is just on ten stun, and when you've got to ride under eight, you want to get it off quick."

It was not a nice way of putting things, and I thought that he might have used the word "perspire"; but he interested me, and I went on to ask him some questions.

"Is it a pleasant business, that of riding?" said I.

"Well," replied he, as he lighted a very big cigar and called for wine, "it's pleasant and it isn't pleasant. Plenty of corn and plenty of bran-mash, so to speak; but hard work at all times, and more than hard when you've got to get the flesh off. From March until November I hardly know what it is to eat a decent meal. For breakfast a bit of bread and butter and a cup of tea; a mouthful of fish and a snatch at the pudding for dinner; tea ditto to breakfast; and supper—don't you wish you may get it! This is a slack time, as you know—that's why I'm here in London drinking port. I reckon to put on thirty pounds between November and Easter; and it's got to come off again in a week when business begins."

"Well," said I, "there isn't the wasting there was among jockeys, is there?"

"Not the wasting that men like Daly did—certainly not. You see, there's no stable worth calling such that hasn't ten or twelve boys who can ride all the weights down to the feather of the handicaps. Men like me they keep for the eight stun and over mounts. I turn the scale pretty near at ten stun now, but I shall have twenty pounds off before the bell rings at Lincoln, and more after. Not that there's anything wonderful in throwing twenty pounds. Daly himself was not far short of eleven stun the winter before he rode Hermit at a weight of eight stun ten."

"How do you get the weight down?" I inquired.

"Many ways," said he; "according to taste. They say of John Arnall that when he wanted to ride six pounds under his usual in the Prince of Wales's Stakes he had no more food than eight apples for eight days. Never touched a bite of anything else the whole week before the race. There's others, again, that walk with five sweaters on; and, when they've done five miles, they roast themselves over a big fire. That's poor business. I prefer thick wool and a horse. You can get it off galloping quick enough if there's not over much to come; and a bath like this winds the job up properly for you. It's a dreadful life, though, while you're at it."

"But well paid?" said I.

"Oh, well paid enough," said he, with something of a sneer. "A fourth-rate jockey can make a thousand a year, which is more than a fourth-rate sawbones or a fourth-rate parson can make. The nonsense of it is that the public fancies every stable-boy drawing a few bob a week is a jockey, and he ain't, Mister, not by a long way. Why, look at it—there's hundreds of boys on Newmarket Heath, hundreds—but the jockeys you may count on your hand. Any youngster who can sit on a mule may get some sort of a job in a stable, yet not one in a hundred will ever ride a great race."

"Then how does a jockey come to be a jockey?" I inquired. "Is it luck, or push, or influence, or what?"

"Bracket them all together—and that's your answer. Take my own case. I signed articles down in Yorkshire, and served my time with one of the smartest men that ever judged a horse. When my indentures were out, they put me on to ride trials at two guineas apiece; and one day I caught the eye of John Porter, and he fancied me, and gave me a chance. From that I got other mounts, and then shifted to Newmarket to ride for the last Lord Falmouth. There was never a better sportsman lived, and I've seen many of them."

"Yours is a typical case, I suppose?"

"Exactly. We all begin by being kids about the stable. After that, we're apprenticed to some trainer, and we do all sorts of work in his stables—groom's work, exercise, gallops, canters. We learn to ride, if ever we're going to learn; and when our years are up, it is luck or horsemanship, or both, that brings us to the front. And, you must remember, every master is on the look-out for clever hands. When 'Borderer' had horses down at Epsom, he saw one day a bright lad who didn't scale more than four stun seven. He took a fancy to him, and told his trainer to let the kid ride the trial next day. The trainer said the boy wasn't heavy enough, that he was new to the work, got kicked off twice a week, and that sort of thing; but 'Borderer' stuck to his guns, and the lad rode for him. Who do you think he was? Why, Constable, one of the best that ever put on silk. It's the same in other stables too. One lad in fifty shows hands as gentle as a woman's, and plenty of devil in his gallops. He begins to be watched; they give him charge of the nasty colts; he is chosen for trials, and when he is out of his time, he is on the road to be a jockey."

"He doesn't make very much money at first, of course?"

"Depends what you call 'much money.' He may pick up a 'monkey' a year fast enough; and that's bread and cheese to a boy of two-and-twenty—or ought to be. By and by, if he has any luck, his mounts will multiply, and then he will make a thousand per annum while he is still almost a nipper."

"How are jockeys paid," I asked next.



"THERE'S OTHERS, AGAIN, THAT WALK WITH FIVE SWEATERS ON."

"Five guineas a winner, three guineas a loser, and, in the ordinary course, two guineas for riding a trial. Work out how much the winning jockey on the flat made in fees alone last year, and you won't find it far short of three thousand guineas. This is just about half of what his takings are. Then you must know there are the presents. Two years ago, after one of the big autumn handicaps at Newmarket, the lad who rode the winner received five hundred

pounds anonymously. I've known the late Fred Archer get as many as three diamond pins a week, while I myself had two gold watches given me last year. It's really funny to see the way the public gives you money if you score a big win. Before I left the course on the second day of the October meeting, two years ago, I'd had ten pounds in single sovereigns put into my hand, and next morning I got a diamond ring worth fifty, and a bank note for a hundred. That's all right so far as it goes, but it's mild to some of the things I know. Hermit's Derby brought Daly four thousand in hard cash, as well as sufficient jewellery—principally from the women—to stock a shop. It's rare that the winner of the Derby receives less than a thousand from his owner, and that sum has been paid to the jockey of the Cesarewitch three times in the last five years."

"Then," said I, with some humility, "it is better to be a jockey than a Cabinet Minister."

"You can't compare them," said he. "And look at the life! Fair and square, I've known at least six horsemen who've made ten thousand a year. When you get down to roguery, you may find some of them who made thirty thousand; but, in the main, the Turf is clean to-day, as any man who lives on it will tell you."

"It must be difficult to pull a horse," said I, feeling my way gently to dangerous ground.

"It's difficult for the mug, no doubt," said he, "but any old horseman will fake it so that you'd bet your life he was riding all out when in reality he's sawing the horse's jaw off. Whip your boot hard and let your elbows go, and, glasses or no glasses, they can't spot you in the stand. I've seen many a race lost that could have been won, and there's nothing easier in creation. But you must wear your nag out before the distance-bell or you'll be marked in the rings. Ride all you know in the last hundred yards and you may play the rogue for years with no man to find a word against you."

"Then how were the rogues of ten years ago discovered?"

"Like most rogues are discovered. There were too many of them. They made a round table of it, and one day there was a man underneath to listen. You understand—the ring did them. If they'd have worked single, they might be working now."

He was rather irascible on this subject, so I turned it deftly.

"I am curious to know," said I, "what it feels like to ride a horse galloping forty miles an hour. Is it a pleasant sensation?"

"When you're used to it, it's better than champagne. What you've got to do is to keep your mouth shut and your head low. Otherwise you'd be winded in a couple of furlongs. I can't describe the feeling better than by telling you to put your head out of a railway carriage window next time you're in an express, and just take a mouthful of air then. That will give you a good idea of riding a race-horse. And don't forget that you've need of hands gentle as silk threads, and of all the judgment and nerve in your body. A good jockey can tell by the touch of his nag's mouth exactly how the race stands. He knows when his mount is tiring long before his mount shows it. And sometimes he will kid the youngsters by riding just as if there wasn't another ounce in his horse, when really he is winning hands down. It's part of the art never to show your game, while, if possible, you learn all about the game of the other man. And what with watching the others and getting an opening for yourself and using your judgment about the nag, racing wants a head and a nerve, I can tell you."

"I suppose that a first-rate jockey could give one some magnificent 'tips' if he chose."

"He could tell you what the horses in his stable were worth; and when all the nags have been out before, he might be relied on to name the winner. What beats him are the unknown horses—those kept dark as two-year-olds, and sprung on him for the classics. I've been upset by a dark one many a time, a nag I wouldn't have put twopence on, and so have all of us. With all that, a jockey who chooses to bet may win pots, and often does."

"In addition to which he is made the centre of some substantial hero-worship," I suggested.

"A pretty sight too substantial sometimes," he remarked: "what with the touts who try to corner you, and the kids who come round for tips, and the women and other fools, it's awful to a man with feelings."

"Do the touts ever try to get at you—drug you, in the way popular novelists describe jockeys being drugged?"

When I put this question he had one arm in a garment of wool and one out, but his gesture was superb, and his "Faugh!" most decisive. "I'd like to see the man that would drug me or any old hand," he

cried ; " I guess I'd flatten him out like a carpet ! I don't say such things have not been done ; but it's a game to play with kids and not with men. Do you think I'd drink with a stranger during the week before I rode a big race ? Not me—not if he was an archbishop. And if I went under there'd be twenty more to

take my place, so where does the drug come in ? "

I admitted that it was difficult to say, and not being an archbishop, or even an archdeacon, I feared to ask him more, and left him to his meditations—and to the brougham which was waiting for him at the door of the Turkish bath.



" I'D LIKE TO SEE THE MAN THAT WOULD DRUG ME OR ANY OLD HAND."