

# "BY THE GRACE OF CHANCE."

By W. A. FRASER.

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Lieutenant Layton had a friend, and the friend had peculiarities. One of the peculiarities was an absorbing love of getting into debt and consequent kite flying. It's as easy to get into debt in India as it is to get into sunshine. He was known by the cheerful name of "Gaiety."

With Lieutenant Layton's name on the back of a note and his friend's on the face of it it was an easy hunt to stalk a Marwarie money lender with cash enough to discount it. But that transaction didn't really help them very much. It tided the friend over settling day after the Bungalow races, but it didn't provide the ways and means against settling day with the Marwarie.

With nothing tangible in sight chances had to be taken, and one or two little fliers on the part of Gaiety had only worked them down deeper in the debt mire.

That was why Layton was wandering about on the maidan close to the Lucknow race course one evening when he should have been at the "gym" or the "mess" or almost anywhere except mooning about on the dismal smoke scented plain.

He was doing something that no officer in the whole service would have given him credit for—he was fretting.

The friend who had used up the money and who would most likely



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come a-smash if the thing wasn't met was enjoying himself with his brother officers as though he hadn't a minute to spare from the arduous duty of spending his income.

"It's a devil of a hole that we're in," mused Layton, as he flicked at the dry grass with his stick. "Gaiety can't raise the wind, not a piece of it, to pay that bloodsucking Marwarie, and he'll be down on us for his pound of flesh like an Afghan Ghazi. I wouldn't care, only poor old Nell will have to wait till God knows when—wait till never day, I fancy, for the infernal thing will break me too."

He threw up his head and listened. Something was pounding the turf behind him on the course. It was not the mixed, excited shuffle of ekka ponies. It was the clean, powerful stroke of thoroughbred hoofs, strong horses hammering the sod in eager gallop. His racing ear knew that.

"By Jove, it's a trial!" he muttered. He could see a blurred mass gliding along in the moonlight on the far side of the course. He quickened his pace and drew up in the shadow of the lime plastered grand stand.

Two men were standing at the "finish post," 20 yards past the stand. In the uncertain light he could not distinguish who they were.

The Marwarie and Gaiety slipped from his mind for an instant, and his sporting blood bounded hot through his veins in the excitement of watching the horses race neck and neck up the stretch.

It was a glorious tussle. "They're riding for blood," he muttered. "It's no blind, this trial."

Two horses were hugging each other like twins. Behind, a dozen lengths, beaten off, galloped something that had been put in to make the running.

As they smashed past Layton one, a big bay, shot out as though the jockey had just let his head go and swung between the "finish post" and the judges' stand a clean length in front of his mate.

It was pure sport that made Layton take so much interest in the dash up to that time. "The bay could have galloped over the other fellow at any time," he thought. "I wonder who he belongs to?"

Just then a high pitched, drawing voice came up to him from one of the two men. There could be no mistaking it. That voice was known from one end to the other of the military racing world of India. It belonged to Captain Frank Johnson. He was saying: "By gad, Dick, he'll do for the big handicap if they don't smother him with weight. Two stun and a beating to the other!"

Layton hurried away, his brain in a whirl. He was like a man who had picked up a diamond of great value and was afraid of finding the owner.

It was all clear enough. The bay was Frank Johnson's Zigzag, with the captain's jockey, Dick Richmond, in the saddle.

He remembered the horse perfectly now. Frank Johnson was one of the cleverest racing men in India. His knowledge had cost him something, for to have a free hand at the game he had resigned

his commission in the Ninth Hussars. If the trial had satisfied him that Zigzag was good enough for the "open handicap," there could be very little doubt about it whatever.

Layton realized what it meant. It was the very softest kind of a snap. With this knowledge he could back the horse for more than enough to pay off Gaiety's debts with the Marwarie.

But it would be hardly honorable toward Johnson. He had blundered upon the captain's secret, almost stolen it. He could scarcely do it.

And then, on the other hand, the greasy, covetous face of the money lender peered at him from the thick folds of a peepul tree and sneeringly asked why the sahibs signed notes they could not pay.

It meant ruin and shame and all the rest of it, and even the face of his friend, of Gaiety, all the happy boyishness gone, was there in the evening dusk, drawn and white and pleading.

It was a bitter struggle, for Layton had honor, plenty of it, but the odds were too great. He could not fight against it, and besides Johnson had not confided in him, had not trusted him, had not put him on his honor. It was his luck that he had seen the trial. Fate had drawn him there to show him a way out of his difficulty.

Also, if he bought Zigzag in the lotteries Johnson could claim half every time. They could both win quite enough, for the lotteries would be very heavy.

This was the day before the opening of the Lucknow spring meeting.

It was the next morning Frank Johnson was walking home from the course after having seen his string exercised, when he was stopped by one Harvey, trainer to the rajah of Jagnat.

"Good mornin, Meester Johnson," began Harvey, and in his manner was much of the I've got something behind all this style.

"What is it, Harvey?" said Johnson, scenting the something at once.

"Well, sir, you know Simpkin, don't you?"

"Is he any good?" asked Johnson. "He's never done anything yet."

"That's all right, sir," answered the trainer with a wink, "and 'e's in the big 'andicap here, the same race as your Zigzag's in."

"Well?" queried Johnson.

"The 'andicapper don't know much about 'im 'ere' sir, and if you 'appened to be hanywhere near when the weights was been made hup and could get a tidy weight hon him we could land the stuff."

"What weight'll do you?" asked the owner of Zigzag.

"Hanything under 8 stone 7 pounds. With 8 stone 4 pounds on 'is back he could gallop right away from the bothers."

Then Harvey explained to the captain all about the trials Simpkin had given them down at Jagnat; how he had beaten horses that quite outclassed Zigzag, until Johnson saw that with a light weight on his back there certainly was nothing in it but Simpkin.

He knew that Zigzag on his past form would certainly not get less than 9 stone 7 pounds in the handicap, perhaps 10 stone.

This was a game after his own heart. They could make a coup with Simpkin, and Zigzag would have less weight another time.

Besides, Zigzag would fetch a pretty good price in the lotteries, and it would take a lot of money to back him to win a fair amount. That would be too risky if Simpkin were as good as Harvey said.

"You can buy your 'orse in hevery lottery," said the trainer, "and we'll take 'alf or three-quarters, just as you like. He'll never be backed 'eavily, for nobody but the stable knows nout about 'im."

Always when things of this sort happen the recipient of the favor credits it to fate. That's just what the captain did. "The gods are bound to thrust this purse in my pocket," he mused as he traveled down the tree shaded road toward a big white bungalow.

And fate laughed a little and went to sleep again, for he was not to act really till the day of the race.

Johnson knew that three officers were framing the handicaps that very morning in Mai Jim's bungalow.

He didn't quite know how he was going to get a hand in the business, but if he could make any excuse to get in among them something was pretty sure to turn up.

When he stepped up on the veranda, the rough dark green door of the bungalow was closed. He gave a knock and shoved it abruptly open and walked in, pretending to be mighty surprised at finding anybody but his friend, Major Jim, there.

"Awfully sorry, gentlemen," he exclaimed in his lazy, drawling way. "Had no idea that I was spooling sport. My dogcart didn't turn up at the race course, and I thought I'd come in and have breakfast with the major. I'll clear out, though, and let you finish up your work."

"Have a peg, Johnson?" said Major Jim, getting up from the table. "We are busy, and breakfast won't be on till we finish. Sorry I can't ask you to stay in the room, but we're making the handicaps, you know."

"I say, you fellows," exclaimed one of the others as the captain slipped leisurely at his whisky and soda, "Johnson likely knows something about this Simpkin they've sent up from Jagnat. He knows every gee-gee in the country."

"Yes," added the major. "What about this brute Harvey has entered for Jagnat? We've got none of his performances to go on."

"Oh, that crock," said the captain with fine scorn. "Stick a postage stamp on his back—shove him in at anything you like, 7 stone 10 pounds. Good morning, gentlemen," he added as he set his glass down and opened

the door. "Don't put a load of bricks on Zigzag's back."

As he walked away from his bungalow he whistled softly under his breath. "May I fall in love with Kall if ever I saw a chance to beat that?"

When the handicap was posted that evening on the notice board on the course, Zigzag had the rather heavy impost of 10 stone, while Simpkin had a weight to gladden Harvey's heart. He was in at 8 stone.

Harvey assured Johnson that the horse couldn't lose at that weight.

To make the good thing a greater certainty Johnson let the trainer have his own jockey, Richmond, for Simpkin and determined to ride Zigzag himself.

If the game had been Zigzag, this would not have mattered so very much, for he was one of the best riders in India.

That the owner was riding Zigzag confirmed Layton in his determination to have a plunge on the horse.

At the lotteries the night before the race Layton bought Zigzag in the first lottery.

When the secretary asked if the owner claimed anything, Johnson answered, "Nothing, thanks."

"He'll come to me after it's all over," thought Layton, "and ask for a half throughout. He knows I'll have to give it to him too. It wouldn't be safe to have his horse running with none of the owner's money on."

When Simpkin was sold, Johnson bought him through another party.

And so it was through every lottery, and there were many of them, for the handicap was a big betting race, with eight horses in it.

Layton bought Zigzag steadily every time, and Johnson's agent took Simpkin.

After it was over Layton rather wondered that Zigzag's owner made no sign—did not come and ask for his half.

He could understand Johnson's refusing to take any interest in him in the lotteries, for the effect of that was to reduce his betting price. But why did he not come forward now when it was all over?

"He'll come around in the morning," he thought. "He won't let him run unbacked after that trial."

But in the morning Johnson still made no sign. Layton was getting a little uneasy. Racing was such an uncertain business at best. What if something had gone wrong with Zigzag? He would be utterly ruined if he failed to win the race. Not only the Marwarie's debt, but the present lottery account. He would be posted as a defaulter. At least it would take every rupee he could rake together in the world to square up, and he would certainly have to send in his papers.

Fifteen minutes before the race no offer had come from Johnson to take a share in Zigzag's chances. The suspense was too great for Layton.

He went to the little dressing room just under the stand where Johnson was putting on his slim riding boots and colors.

"See here, Frank," he said, "I've got Zigzag in every lottery, and I stand to win a big pot over him. Do you want any of it? You haven't taken a bit of it yet."

Johnson was noted for two things, his superb riding and his exquisite cynical humor.

"Who the merry hades told you to back my horse?" he asked.

"I backed him because I thought he could win and you were riding him," answered Layton, coloring slightly.

"Well, he hasn't the ghost of a chance," said Johnson, tightening the strings in his racing cap, "and I don't want a bit of him in anything. He hasn't a thousand to one chance."

Layton was dumfounded.

"If he doesn't win," he said, "I shall come a cropper."

Johnson looked at him queerly for a minute; then he said: "Now go and square yourself on Simpkin. You can hedge on him, for he's a sure winner."

"And if he's beaten," said Layton almost angrily, "I shall be in a worse hole than ever. I won't do it. I'll stand or fall by Zigzag, and I'll lay you 5,000 rupees to nothing against his winning."

"I won't do it that way," said Johnson quickly, "for that isn't a bet. If I



"Don't put a load of bricks on Zigzag's back."

can't lose, I can't win. That's the rule in betting, but I'll take 5,000 rupees to 10.

"Here, Dick," he called sharply. "You witness this bet. Mr. Layton lays me 5,000 rupees to 10 against Zigzag. If the horse wins, he pays me 5,000; if he doesn't, I pay him 10. That's a clear understanding, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered Layton cheerfully.

"It's the only bet I've got on my mount," added Johnson, "and it's just throwing 10 rupees in the sea."

As they rode over to the post Johnson

said to Dick: "I'll carry them along for you half a mile, for with your light weight it will be better for something to make the running. When I'm done for, you can go to the front and canter home. I think you'll have an easy job."

"I'd rather be on Zigzag, sir," replied the jockey. "I know what ae can do, and I don't like the feel of this fellow under me. He's shifty."

The race was a mile and a quarter. As the horses made their way over to the starting post across the course from the stand Gaiety came up to Layton and said, "There's a tremendous rush on Simpkin."

And so there was. The stable money being all on Harvey had told a few of his friends, and the ring was nooding the bookmakers with money for Simpkin.

Very few were backing Zigzag, and he was traveling out in the betting.

"Ten to one, Zigzag!" the bookmakers were howling in vain; there were no takers.

At the start Johnson was playing to get away in front to make the running and keep a nice place for Simpkin to drop into when his horse was beaten.

At the third attempt they got away, very much as the captain desired.

"They're off!" went up from the grand stand in a hoarse cry, and glasses were leveled at the bright splashes of color twisting in and out, as the eight horses scrambled for places.

A black jacket, with red and yellow sleeves, shot to the front immediately. "Zigzag leads," somebody exclaimed, and Layton rubbed his glasses with his handkerchief and focused them on the leader of the rushing troop.

He could see the red and yellow quartered cap leaning far over the withers of the big bay. Yes, it was Zigzag.

"He's got away well," said Layton to Gaiety, without lowering his glasses. "He's trying anyway, and if it comes to any brain work at the finish Johnson can give all the boys seven pounds at that game."

When they had traveled a quarter of a mile, the black jacket was a length in front of everything. Layton's heart lay like lead in his breast. That was not Johnson's tactics when he was out to win a mile and a quarter race. With 10 stone up, he wouldn't be making his own running.

Layton knew then that he had lost. It was almost a relief to know just where he stood. He had cast the die and lost.

Some fool near him was croaking. "Zigzag'll win all the way." He felt pity in his heart for the man's utter ignorance of racing. Perhaps, though, after all, it were better that way; he almost envied him. It was the knowledge of racing that broke so many of them.

At the three-quarters Zigzag was still leading.

"He'll win! He'll win!" the other man was saying exultantly. "I took 10 to 1 about him."

Then something crept up on Zigzag—crept up until the horses were lapped head and head. The glasses showed the white jacket and red cap of the Jagnat's stable.

"Simpkin is coming now!" went up a cry from many throats—the throats of the many who had backed him when the tip was spread about.

At the mile Simpkin's Arab head showed in front. The two were a clear length in front of the field.

The stand was wild with delight, for Simpkin had started favorite.

Over on the horses Johnson and Dick were riding so close together that they could speak in short, gasping words as the wind cut at their breath.

Three furlongs from home they were together, nose and nose—Simpkin had dropped back a head.

Johnson could hear something closing up on them from behind.

"Go on, Dick!" he gasped. "I'll pull back and let you up next the rail."

"I can't," answered Dick helplessly. "I can't go any faster; I'm done for."

A great rage came into the heart of the captain. This was the "sure thing" they had put him on to. Beaten a quarter of a mile from the finish, and the others closing up on them. Already a chestnut head was lapped on the quarters of Simpkin.

Zigzag was still full of running, fighting for his head. Slowly, inch by inch, the chestnut was creeping up. His nose was at Dick's girths now.

"I'm done," he heard Dick say again, and then he gripped the saddle with his knees and rode for Layton's 5,000 rupees.

A furlong from home he was clear of Simpkin, but the chestnut was still there, lapped on his quarters now, and beside the chestnut, on the outside, was an iron gray, coming very fast too.

How he cursed the folly that had made him take so much out of Zigzag to make the running for Simpkin.

If the gallant old horse would only last home, the 5,000 rupees would pay his losses.

In the stand the cry of "Zigzag wins!" went up as the horses clung to each other up the straight.

Layton was tugging at his blond mustache, and even Gaiety's face was solemn and still as he realized what that struggle meant to the two of them—meant more to them than to all the others in the stand together. Not only the money, but honor—life itself—was at stake.

As they flashed past the stand Zigzag's big bony head, with its wide red nostrils, was still in front.

And so they caught the Judge's eye. The stout heart of the gallant horse and the cool head of the steel nerved rider had won the race that was all but thrown away.

Few things are impossible in themselves. It is not so much means as perseverance that is wanting to bring them to a successful issue.—Rochefoucauld.

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