



HE'D BEEN, he said, in the racing game since he was a toddler, from the day nearly fifty years ago when he held a horse while his father undid the girth and slipped off the saddle. At that time he could hardly walk. Since then he had been a stable lad, an apprentice jockey, a jockey, jockey and trainer, private trainer, and trainer under his own name. He had worked on stud farms. Now he was head stableman in one of the largest training establishments in the country. He sat, legs dangling, hat down on his eyes, on the white railings of the fence. For half an hour at a time there was a blue cloud of smoke from the foulest pipe in the land. He talked; we listened.

At seventeen years he was an apprentice jockey riding for his father, a trainer. Things weren't going well. Prices and costs were high; horses were scratchy in their training; there were several breakdowns and several mishaps. Bills had been coming in; with them later there had been letters impatiently worded.

It was a district in Poverty Bay. There was to be a meeting on Friday and one of his father's horses had accepted for the last race. On the Tuesday his father told him he would have to have the ride. And more than ride—he had to win. The horse was the lightweight of the field. If necessary, he would have to reduce his own weight to avoid carrying any extra burden. "Son," his father said, "I've mortgaged the house: the rest, the future of your mother and sisters, I leave to you."

He realized the seriousness of the position. In three days he reduced his weight by 16 lb. Worry and lack of

sleep weren't enough; he spent hours in the sweatbox and jogging along miles of road; he ate no more than a few mouthfuls of food. Even then he was 1 lb. over the handicap weight.

Never had the first seven races passed so slowly or with so little interest. He was nervous. The thought of his family without a house to live in worried him almost to distraction. He imagined the villain of a mortgagee gloating in the crowd. At last the parade round the birdcage, the preliminary canter past the stand, the line-up for the start. The first time he broke the tapes he was warned by the starter; the second time he was fined £2; the third time he was fined £3 and threatened with disqualification.

He was £5 in debt and his father on the rocks before the race was started. The crowd roared and they were off.

That night his mother and sisters slept with a roof over their heads. He won the race by a furlong.

Although not as improbable as some, the story is typical of those we heard from the racing men at the country meeting we attended. We went with Royal Victor, the three-year-old colt by Siegfried from the Magpie mare Goorabul, who descends from Eulogy. We went from the stable where Royal Victor is trained; with us in the horse train were Ted, the head stableman, and the two lads, Stooze and Ray.

On that race day there was a crowd of several thousands. Among them were butchers, lawyers, shoemakers, labourers, clerks, dentists, and engine-drivers; there were two priests; there were men in uniform (admitted free) and girls in summery frocks, members of Parliament,