

The Annexation Society

(Continued from page 14.)

ing met her at your sister-in-law's shop, where I went to buy a hat for my sister."

"Yet monsieur takes her out, privately, to dinner," said Monsieur Charles, elevating his eyebrows. "Eh, well, the English are, of course, different."

"Quite different," answered Jimmie, in English. "Utterly! The English do just what they please. Shall we proceed to discover the miscreant who muddled the matter of the goose, monsieur?"

Monsieur Charles hailed this proposal with delight, and they returned to the station. There they passed in review a regiment of porters of all sorts and sizes. Jimmie professed his inability to recognize any of them. In the end, feeling convinced that he had thrown Monsieur Charles off the track, he remarked drily that he did not know if the man they wanted was dark or fair, tall or short, fat or thin, and that he was afraid they would never find him. Monsieur Charles turned on him with eyes of reproach. "But, monsieur, my goose!" he exclaimed.

Jimmie spread out his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

"There it is, monsieur!" he said. "I have done my best. Amidst all these men, amidst all this confusion, what more can I do? The hamper has evidently gone astray, it has probably got mixed up with other affairs. Possibly by this hour it has arrived at Cannes, or Biarritz, or is in Switzerland or Italy. It would, I am sure, Monsieur Charles, be far better if you would permit me, as it was through me it was lost, to replace its contents."

MONSIEUR CHARLES drew himself up, removed his hat, and bowed stiffly.

"Monsieur!" he said. "I thank you and decline your offer. I also offer my apologies for occupying your valuable time. Monsieur will now permit me to continue my investigations in my own way—alone."

"Just so," replied Jimmie, phlegmatically. "Good-day, then."

He went away and got into a cab and drove back to the Rue de la Paix, and was fortunate enough to find Eva Walsden alone. She looked an inquiry as he entered the shop. Jimmie shook his head.

"Not a trace of it!" he said. "Bless me!—does it so much matter? A mere—goose! Ridiculous!"

"But he is so angry," she replied. "He is furious! And madame, in London, she will be very, very angry. I dread returning to her."

"Talking about that," observed Jimmie, "when do you return?"

"To-morrow morning," she answered. "The day-mail."

"Then to-night," said Jimmie, "you will dine with me again? And we will go to one of the theatres afterwards."

The pretty hat-maker looked thoughtfully at some ribbons and laces which she held in her hand.

"I should like to," she said, demurely, "but—"

"No buts," commanded Jimmie. "Same place, you know, in the Rue Royale. Half-past six o'clock. Now I must go—piles to do."

"Your sister's hat?" she said.

"Ah!—I'll tell you what we'll do about that," said Jimmie. "You get the hang of the right thing, don't you know, and the stuff, and all that, and all the rest of it, and then you can make it in London. I've wasted so much time on that old ass and his goose that I'm pressed now, and I shall have to run. Half-past six, mind!"

But when Jimmie got out of the shop he fell into a very leisurely walk. He had but one business—to get rid of the goose now lying in his wardrobe at the hotel. How was that to be done? He could not leave a dead goose in his room; he could not give it to a chamberlain as he might have given a coat or a pair of boots. He must do something with it, that was certain. But what?

"The devil!" he muttered as he strolled along. "Now, what would ex-

actly happen if Charles found out that that hamper had really come into my possession? Of course, he'd realize it at once that I'd found the things. All I can see just now is that it might be jolly bad for the girl if he found it out. It might also be bad for me. This is a worse mess than I thought."

In order to solve the problem thus presented, Jimmie turned into a cafe, sat down in a quiet corner and considered matters with the help of a drink and a cigar. He had long since come to the conclusion that Monsieur Charles, whoever he might be, was not a person to be trifled with. For that reason he had hoped that he would accept the theory that the wickerwork hamper had really been lost. He knew very well that Monsieur Charles dared not advertise for it, that it was most improbable that he would take more than the simplest steps to recover it. What Jimmie dreaded was that Charles should discover that it was in his possession—that indeed would lead to complications in which Eva Walsden, innocent enough of these goings-on, would inevitably be involved. Therefore, the plain thing to do was to get rid of both valuables and hamper, and goose, as quickly as possible.

Arrived at this determination, Jimmie set forth again, intent on carrying it out. He called in at a stationer's shop, purchased several sheets of stout wrapping paper, a few sticks of sealing wax, a quantity of twine and two heavy glass paper weights. With these things he returned to the hotel. Locking himself into his room he went systematically to work. He made the Tsar's cross, the Book of Hours, and the gold chain into one parcel; he replaced the goose in its hamper, and made the hamper into another. He corded and sealed both parcels: the one containing the stolen goods he addressed to himself at the Carlton Hotel in London. And then, leaving the larger one on his table, he carried the smaller to the nearest post-office, and sent it off by registered post. It was with a sigh of relief that he saw the clerk who received it place it indifferently aside amongst similar packets.

Now for the hamper and its ridiculous contents. Jimmie had already made up his mind what he would do with respect to that problem. He had enclosed the heavy paper weights in the hamper. As soon as dark fell he would sally forth to the quays which run along side the Seine, choose a quiet spot, and drop the parcel into the river, in whose limpid flood he devoutly hoped it would sink for ever. It could be done; it must be done. Meanwhile he went for a stroll around the heart of Paris.

It was five o'clock, and dusk was approaching when Jimmie returned to the hotel. He mounted to his room, and turned on the electric light. And as its brightness flashed about him he realized, in one comprehensive glance, that the second parcel had disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

The Telephone Bell.

JIMMIE sat down on the side of the bed and stared fixedly at the table on which he had left the parcelled hamper. For a moment he had wild notions that his eyes were deceiving him, or that his memory had gone wrong. It seemed inconceivable that the hamper could have disappeared during the two hours in which he had been absent. Here he was in one of the best hotels in Paris; the floor on which the room was situated was much frequented at all hours; he had carefully locked the door when he went out, and it was the only door which admitted to the room; further, it was impossible for anyone to gain entrance by the windows. Yet, the parcel was gone.

In order to make assurance doubly sure, Jimmie rose and searched the room thoroughly. He knew very well that it was an unnecessary task, but he wanted to prove to himself that he

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