

The Annexation Society

OR THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE TRICKETT.

BY J. S. FLETCHER.

The Marquis of Scraye at his historic country seat in England is much bewildered over the sudden and mysterious disappearance of the Tsar's Golden Cross, which was a relique presented to his grandfather by the Tsar of Russia. The Cross was kept in a cabinet in Queen Elizabeth's room, made famous by visits from the great Queen to the Scrayes. To solve the mystery the Marquis wires to Nicholson Packe, a novelist friend in London, to meet him at Brychester Station. Packe takes with him his clever friend Jimmie Trickett, whose adventures form a considerable part of the story to follow. Scraye suspects Mrs. X., one of his guests. He tells Packe his suspicions and the reasons why, and asks him to shadow Mrs. X's movements in London. Packe invites Trickett into the plot. The two of them shadow Mrs. X in London. Trickett lands in a millinery shop—one of Mrs. X's haunts—and decides suddenly to go to Paris. Scraye has unearthed two other important and similar thefts. Trickett explains his belief that the golden cross is in the hat-shop. He goes to Paris, in company with Miss Walsden from the hat-shop, who has a mysterious hamper containing an alleged Michaelmas goose, etc., which he volunteers to see delivered along with his own things. In the hamper he finds—the cross!

CHAPTER X.

Monsieur Charles.

TRICKETT awoke next morning to find himself immediately confronted by as difficult and embarrassing a set of problems as he had ever had to deal with in his life. He sat up in bed and checked them off on the tips of his fingers; each, being duly specified and enumerated, seemed to assume vaster and gloomier proportions. First—should he make a clean breast of everything to Eva Walsden? Second, should he restore the goose to its hamper, carry the hamper to the Rue de la Paix, hand it over, and say nothing whatever about the valuables which he had found in it? Third, should he immediately send for Packe and Lord Scraye and consult them? Fourth, should he get rid of the goose, profess to Eva that he knew nothing whatever about its fate, and leave matters to take their course?

These were the main points of Jimmie's presentment of the situation. But they were capable, too much so, of sub-division. Supposing he told Eva Walsden everything? They had become somewhat confidential during the previous evening, and he had learned a good deal about her. She was the orphan daughter of a poor clergyman; she had to earn her own living, she had also to help to support a younger brother, a schoolboy. Jimmie Trickett foresaw trouble for this girl if he told her the truth. If she found out through him that she was being made the catpaw of a gang of unscrupulous thieves she would certainly throw up the situation at the London establishment of Valerie et Cie, a situation, she had told him, which was highly paid. Moreover, if she did so throw up that situation she would probably become an object of suspicion to Madame Charles, especially as the valuables had disappeared with the goose. Clearly, this was a matter which required great delicacy of treatment, infinite finesse.

Things seemed to be no plainer on the second point. Supposing he carried the hamper, with the goose restored to it, but minus the stolen property, to Eva? She would, of course, hand it over to Monsieur Charles, unconscious that it did not contain all that Madame Charles had put into it. But Monsieur Charles would not be unconscious; in Jimmie's opinion,

Monsieur Charles was probably very well aware, by virtue of telegraphic or telephonic message, or by ordinary letter, of what it was that his sister-in-law's assistant was innocently bringing to him. He would proceed to the shop in the Rue de la Paix ostensibly to receive a Michaelmas goose; in reality to take possession of the stolen property. What, demanded Jimmie of himself, would happen when Monsieur Charles found that the hamper did indeed contain nothing but a goose? Of a certainty he would make inquiry; he would want to know all sorts of things, such as—had the hamper ever been out of Eva's possession—had she seen it tampered with—oh, there was no end to the embarrassing questions which Monsieur Charles might put! As receiver of goods of so much value, he would certainly make some, probably some very serious, effort to gain possession of them.

At one period of these cogitations, Jimmie was on the point of bounding out of bed and ringing up Packe or Scraye on the telephone. Two considerations restrained him. To begin with, he did not want either of these men to know, just then at any rate, why he had come to Paris; to end with, he had an instinctive desire to make this particular score off his own bat. He was quite conscious of his own ability to engineer things if left to himself; the adventure was exciting, amusing, interesting; at that moment he had no desire to share it with anyone. Luck had favoured him unexpectedly; it might continue to favour him. All his life he had believed in his star; he believed in it now. And in the end he got out of bed repeating these words:

"LET things happen!" he said. "Let things happen!"

In pursuance of this resolve, Jimmie, having locked up goose and hamper in a wardrobe, key of which he carefully pocketed, took his bath, made a careful toilet, broke the accepted rules of continental travel by eating a typically British breakfast, and smoked a few cigarettes on the steps of the hotel while he watched the life of Paris at that point wake up to another morning. And eventually, nerving himself to unknown adventures, he strolled off to keep his appointment with Eva Walsden at the establishment in the Rue de la Paix. It was precisely half-past ten o'clock when Jimmie walked into the elegantly appointed Maison of Valerie et Cie. He had taken a careful look at it before he approached the threshold; in outward appearance it was very like the shop in South Molton Street; that is to say, it looked much more like a private residence than a business establishment.

Jimmie entered a reception room furnished very like that in which, two days before, he had encountered the buxom lady in the beautiful sables. And he at once saw that he had walked into the midst of a scene. There, distressed and troubled almost to the verge of tears, stood Eva Walsden, nervously clasping and unclasping her fingers; behind her, an assistant, unmistakably French and very pretty, was staring with alarmed eyes at a third person, a little, stoutish, fierce-eyed man who was gesticulating almost as excitedly as he talked. Jimmie calmly took this person in. His boots were by no means in the best state of repair; his principal garment appeared to be a somewhat dingy overcoat, which came well down below his knees; his chin was blue from need of a razor; his hat, which he wore, despite the presence of ladies, was of a melodramatic cast,

well pulled down about his eyes and much the worse for wear. Nevertheless, this person wore new lemon-coloured kid gloves, carried a fine gold-mounted walking cane, much betasselled, and sported a flower in one lapel of his coat as a set-off to a fragment of ribbon in the other. And disregarding the entrance into the shop of a possible customer, he continued his indignant harangue.

"How, then, ma'amselle?" he exclaimed with fervour. "Do I understand that you confide my goose, my fine, fat goose of Michaelmas, the seasonable present of madame your employer, my respected sister-in-law!—to the care of a stranger. My faith! it is incredible, it is—"

Eva Walsden glanced at Jimmie. The glance wandered appealingly to the irate person between them, who, after one glance at the new-comer, had turned his back upon him with an indifference which almost amounted to contempt. She tried to interrupt his angry diatribe.

"Monsieur!" she said. "If you would only allow me to explain; if—"

"Explain, ma'amselle! How can that be explained which admits of no explanation? Your instructions, ma'amselle, were to deliver my goose to me, myself! Instead, you give my goose to—ah, just heaven! if only one knew to whom you had so thoughtlessly confided it!"

"But, Monsieur Charles, the gentleman is here, and has no doubt come to say that your goose is safe," exclaimed Eva. She turned to Jimmie with hopeful looks. "Mr. Trickett!" she continued imploringly. "The hamper was not delivered here last night with my other things. Do you know anything of it? Monsieur Charles has come for his goose—"

JIMMIE looked calmly at the furious little man who had turned suddenly upon him.

"Monsieur, then, is unhappy at the loss of his goose?" he said, with well-simulated sang froid and in his best French. "It discommodes him?"

Monsieur Charles took the young Englishman in with a swift, keen glance, which Jimmie was not slow to appreciate. This was not the look, he said to himself, of a gourmand deprived of his dinner; it was the sharp, demanding inspection of a man who wanted to know what and who he was dealing with. And Monsieur Charles's next words were slightly altered in tone.

"Monsieur!" he said. "My sister-in-law, knowing my circumstances, sends me her little present by the hands of her employee, this young lady, who is charged to deliver it to me. Instead—"

"Instead," interrupted Jimmie, as coolly as before, "instead, monsieur, this lady charges me with the duty of sending her luggage to this address. And I, monsieur, depute that duty to a porter. Hence arises the mistake. The hamper becomes—missing. But mistakes will arise, monsieur, in spite of all the care in the world, they will arise. After all, then, it is only a goose."

Monsieur Charles gave the young man another glance. He assumed a dignified attitude and expression.

"You forget, monsieur, that we are speaking of a present from my sister-in-law to myself," he said. "A present, monsieur, that should have been delivered personally to me by the person who carried it. I come for my goose—it is not here."

He shook his head as he might have shaken it if he had heard of some irreparable national disaster; his voice shook a little.

"If you only knew how sorry I am, Monsieur Charles," said Eva, with genuine repentance. "I am so grieved that—"

"Monsieur," said Jimmie, "this is my fault. Ma'amselle must be absolved of all blame. She is not in any way to blame. I took upon myself to see that her luggage, including the hamper of the goose, was delivered. It has not been delivered. Accordingly, I am the culprit. Monsieur will accept my profound apologies. Also, with profound respect, I beg monsieur's acceptance of the finest and fattest goose which Paris can supply. To replace, monsieur, the lost one."

MONSIEUR Charles bowed but shook his head mournfully. He straightened himself.

"Monsieur!" he answered with renewed dignity. "I thank you. But, monsieur, it would not be the same goose. Monsieur will understand and respect my feelings of sentiment? The goose which monsieur would so generously offer would not, however arouse in me the tender feelings which that presented by my sister-in-law, the thoughtful, the affectionate, could have created in my bosom. I must regretfully decline monsieur's offer, so kindly made. But—" Here Monsieur Charles gave Jimmie another of his sharp glances—"if monsieur would do me a service—"

"With the greatest pleasure, monsieur," said Jimmie. "It has but to be named."

"Then if monsieur would but accompany me to the station where this hamper was given in charge of that careless imbecile of a porter?" suggested Monsieur Charles. "I should be infinitely obliged to monsieur, and the goose may yet grace my poor table."

"With pleasure, monsieur," replied Jimmie. He was not so convinced as he made it appear that his pleasure would be real, but he saw that there was no escape. He must go with Monsieur Charles to the Gare du Nord, submit to the inquiry-making process, and trust to luck to get out of it. "Shall we proceed to the station at once?" he continued. "I am at your service."

"Your sister's hat, Mr. Trickett?" remarked Eva, softly.

"Ah, I interrupt your business? You are a customer?" exclaimed Monsieur Charles.

"Mr. Trickett," said Eva, pointedly, "is one of our London customers, Monsieur Charles. He has come here specially this morning to see about a hat for his sister, a lady who lives in India."

"Never mind that, now," said Jimmie. "I can call later on. Will you come to the station, Monsieur Charles?" He manoeuvred the Frenchman to the door, and himself turned at the threshold and gave Eva a look. "I shall call again about noon," he remarked, and in order to save time he signalled to a passing taxi-cab and ushered his companion into it. "I hope, monsieur," he said politely, as they rolled off northward, "that our expedition in search of the goose will not prove to be a wild-goose chase!"

Monsieur Charles turned eyes of genuine alarm upon Jimmie.

"My faith, monsieur, indeed I trust not!" he exclaimed. "I shall be desolated if I do not find my little present. But how can it be that we shall not, monsieur? Chut! the matter is easy. You will find the porter to whom you gave these baggages, you will question him—oh, yes, then everything will be of the easiest sort."

"I suppose there are many porters, scores of them, perhaps hundreds at the station," said Jimmie. "I did not

A TRUE STORY.

A member of the staff of Canadian Courier was asked to write an advertisement for the University Book Co. (the one that appears on the back cover of this issue.) He became so interested in his task that on its completion he ordered a set of the books. They are certainly excellent value, and meet the requirements of all book lovers.