

The Annexation Society

(Continued from page 14.)

wanted; he became still more confused in an endeavour to decide on the varieties which were offered to him, and to keep an eye on the figure in the olive-green livery outside.

"Oh, anything—anything!" he found himself exclaiming. "Yes—yes—those will do!" And he flung down a sovereign, seized the package which the tobacconist held out to him, and snatching his change rushed out in answer to an unmistakable signal from Trickett. "She hasn't got away?" he demanded excitedly as he made a dash at the door of the brougham. "She hasn't slipped you?"

"Keep your hair on!" said Trickett, touching his cap. "No slipping me. You can look at that bit of paper now, Packe."

He touched his cap again, mounted to his perch, and glided away up Regent Street, while Packe, thus suddenly reminded of its existence, drew out and unfolded the crumpled scrap of paper on which Trickett had pencilled a line which was at once bet and prophecy. He started when he read it:

"J.T. bets N.P. a new hat that Mrs. X's first call in London after arriving at Victoria is at a post office."

"Clever of Jimmie," mused Packe as he put the scrap of paper in his pocket again. "He deserves a new hat for that. But what made him guess it, and why a post office? Well, that's call one—where's the next going to be?"

That question was settled in the next few minutes. Mrs. Wythenshawe's taxi-cab went up Regent Street, turned west through Hanover Square, crossed New Bond Street, and came to a stop in South Molton Street. Jimmie Trickett pulled up his brougham a little distance in its rear and presented himself at the door.

"Keep your wits about you, Packe," he growled. "Don't get flustered as you did down there; take your time and depend on me. She's gone into that hat-shop across the way. See the name, Valerie et Cie. Now then, you dodge into this old furniture shop—do something—buy a couple of those brass candlesticks, or an old chair—anything, and keep an eye on me. You'll probably have plenty of time."

Packe obediently entered the old furniture shop which Trickett pointed out. Trickett remounted his driver's seat and pulling out a newspaper affected to read. But out of his eye-corners he kept a watch on both sides of the narrow street. He saw Packe examining old candlesticks; he watched the door into which Mrs. Wythenshawe had disappeared. And his sharp eyes had already noticed that the small parcel which Mrs. Wythenshawe had brought out of the post office was in her hand when she entered the quiet looking shop in the window of which three smart hats were displayed against a background of silk curtain.

Ten minutes passed. Trickett saw Packe hovering on the threshold of the old furniture shop with a small parcel in his hand making conversation with the shopman and obviously waiting for a signal. Suddenly Mrs. Wythenshawe reappeared, accompanied to her cab by a girl. The girl was so pretty, so undeniably charming that Jimmie Trickett for a full minute forgot the business in hand. But while he stared and felt his heart suddenly smitten with admiration, Mrs. Wythenshawe got into her cab, the cab moved off, and the pretty girl with a smile and a nod retreated into the hat-shop. The next moment Packe was back in the brougham and the pursuit began again.

From thence onward, however, the original excitement of the morning disappeared. For Mrs. Wythenshawe's cab then took her straight to her house in Wilton Crescent.

CHAPTER VI.

The Hat Shop.

JIMMIE TRICKETT, seeing Mrs. Wythenshawe alight at her own door, put on a little speed, passed the taxi-cab as a servant came out to

pay the driver, and drove forward into Belgrave Square. At the further end he pulled up, got down, and opened the door.

"As you'd notice," he said, maintaining his character of chauffeur for the benefit of lookers-on, "we've run her to earth. She's gone home. What next?"

Packe shook his head.

"I don't know," he answered. "We've done all that Scraye wanted doing. We can't do anything until we've seen him to-night. I say, Jimmie, you've won your new hat all right. But what made you think of—"

"Can't go into those things now," said Trickett. "Afterwards. Look here, I'll drop you at the corner of St. James' Square, and then I'll get rid of this brougham and these togs. After that I've some business of my own—see you at the Ritz this evening."

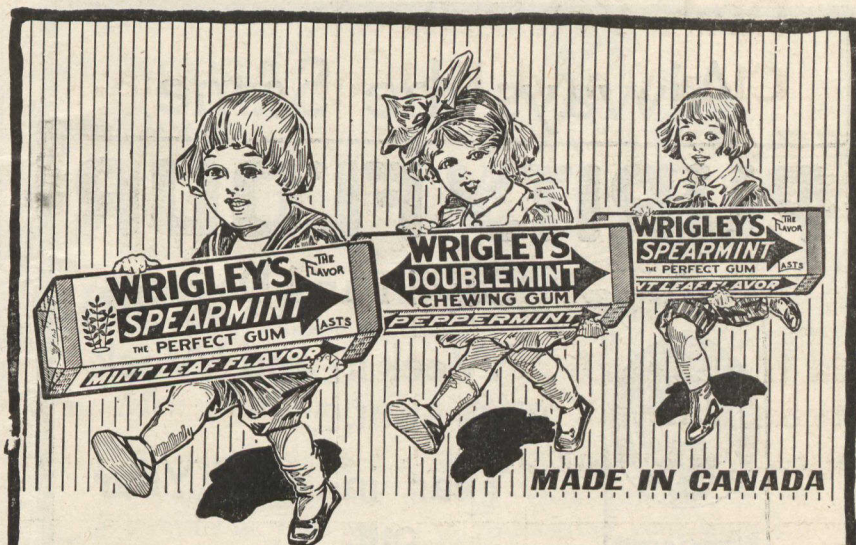
HE went through the cap-touching ceremonial with punctilious exactitude, remounted his seat and drove Packe off. When he set him down it was without further exchange of words; it seemed to Packe that Jimmy was in a hurry; the highly respectable motor-brougham disappeared towards the centre of the town at an accelerated rate of speed. And Jimmie Trickett, half an hour later, the brougham being returned to the garage in Long Acre from whence he had borrowed it, and his olive-green livery exchanged for a smart tweed suit in the office of the manager, sallied forth in as much haste as he had come. Since the time of waiting in South Molton Street he had developed an idea and a scheme of his own and he was intent on improving both.

As a young gentleman of large means, single, and a lover of life, Jimmie Trickett chose to dwell in what he called the thick of things. He accordingly resided at the Cairo Hotel, where he rented a complete suite of rooms that had taken his fancy and wherein he had accumulated a choice collection of sporting prints, a select library of sporting books and French novels, and a wardrobe which had been contributed to by the best tailors and haberdashers in London. For the purpose of having the last-named possession thoroughly looked after, he employed a valet, a middle-aged person named Kentover, who in his time had served many young gentlemen of fortune, and considered his present employer the most remarkable of the lot. Kentover deemed himself in clover in Mr. Trickett's employ; there was little to do; the surroundings were luxurious, the perquisites many. Consequently he studied his youthful master's whims and anticipated his wants, and Jimmie considered him invaluable.

Nevertheless, on this particular day and at this particular hour of it, Kentover failed to comprehend what young Mr. Trickett was after. To start with, he requested the hasty preparation and appearance of a mere sandwich—a strange thing in itself, considering that Kentover knew him to be a trencherman of undoubted capacity, always up to three large meals a day. Then he became fidgetty and worried over the laying out of his very best town clothes—things which, as a rule, he never put on more than once a week, and then only under the provocation of some unavoidable duty call. He hesitated in his choice between a dozen pairs of new trousers; he was irresolute in coming to a decision about a fancy waistcoat; he turned over box upon box of cravats before he got what he wanted; he fussed about his gloves and worried about his silk hat in a fashion new to the valet. Finally, when he went away in the most immaculate style, Kentover, glancing at the litter of the dressing-room, scratched his bald head and voiced his sentiments.

"Either there's a girl in the case or he's come to that stage when he doesn't know what he wants," reflected Kentover. "Never known him like this before, anyhow."

The valet, however, was wrong in



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