

He was about to remove the picture from the easel when Fintry said—

"Just a moment, Charlie. I can sell my soul, too." Taking a small scribbling block from his pocket, he smote his forehead with it, made a few grimaces, and began to write. At the end of a couple of minutes he detached a page and, rising, presented it to Trent. "Perhaps it may make the pounds guineas," he said, modestly.

Trent read the following:

*At party or picnic,
Behold the guests grah
At Trumpington's Toffee—
One penny per slab!*

"If Trumpington prefers it, he can have 'jump' and 'lump,' you know. Or, I daresay, I could work in 'packet,' if necessary."

Trent folded the paper and put it carefully in his vest pocket. "I've no doubt it will help a lot to sell the picture," he said, gravely. "Well, Bob, there'll be sixpence for keeping that taxi waiting—"

"I'll pay it, I'll pay it!" cried Fintry. "I've got a half sovereign intact and a couple of bob."

"Get out!" Trent rejoined, and cautiously taking hold of his masterpiece, he bore it from the studio.

IN spite of Trent's hopeful prophecy of two hours, it was about five o'clock when he returned to the studio. At the first sound on the stair, Fintry, who had been waiting in the gathering gloom, lit a couple of candles and put a light to the gas fire, having previously propitiated the genius of the meter with the customary coin. He was shivering, but less with cold than anxiety, lest his friend should have encountered disappointment. It was with a shout of relief that he saw the artist enter without any burden.

Trent's smile was subdued, yet cheerful. "Six guineas," he said, exhibiting the gold and silver. "Less than I hoped for, but it will see us through. After all, it was my first deal with Trumpington."

"The swine!" exclaimed Fintry, indignantly. "Then my verse didn't help."

"Oh, but I'm sure it did. I fancy you will be asked to make a few slight alterations," said Trent, rather hurriedly, "but I'm sure it encouraged Trumpington to take the picture." It did not seem worth while to explain to the poet then that his lines were to be altered to the simple, direct and original phrase—"Trumpington's Toffee is the Best."

"Oh, well, I'm quite prepared to make any alteration in reason," said Fintry, mollified.

Whereupon Trent proceeded to give an account of his experiences of the afternoon. Only through patience and perseverance had he obtained audience of the advertising manager. "You see, they were tidying up to get away for Christmas, and couldn't be bothered with callers like myself," Trent explained. "I was nearly giving up in despair when old Trumpington himself passed through the office and caught sight of the picture and also, I think, of my miserable self. At any rate he gave orders that I was to see the advertising manager there and then, said he thought the picture wasn't bad, though he was no judge of such things, he and shook hands quite cordially. I've a feeling," he concluded, with a sigh, "that I'd never have sold the thing at all if it hadn't been Christmas Eve."

"Rot!" said Fintry.

"Anyway they'd never have paid me on the spot. I shouldn't wonder if I've to thank old Trumpington for that, also. He was fairly bubbling over with the spirit of Christmas. The advertising manager was pretty sulky—no wonder. I'm afraid I made him lose a train." Trent dropped the money into his pocket. "Let's get out and have a cup of tea," he said, with a yawn. "Somehow I can't feel that I'm about to handle two hundred pounds, Bob."

"Same here. But has it occurred to you that we have eaten nothing since breakfast?"

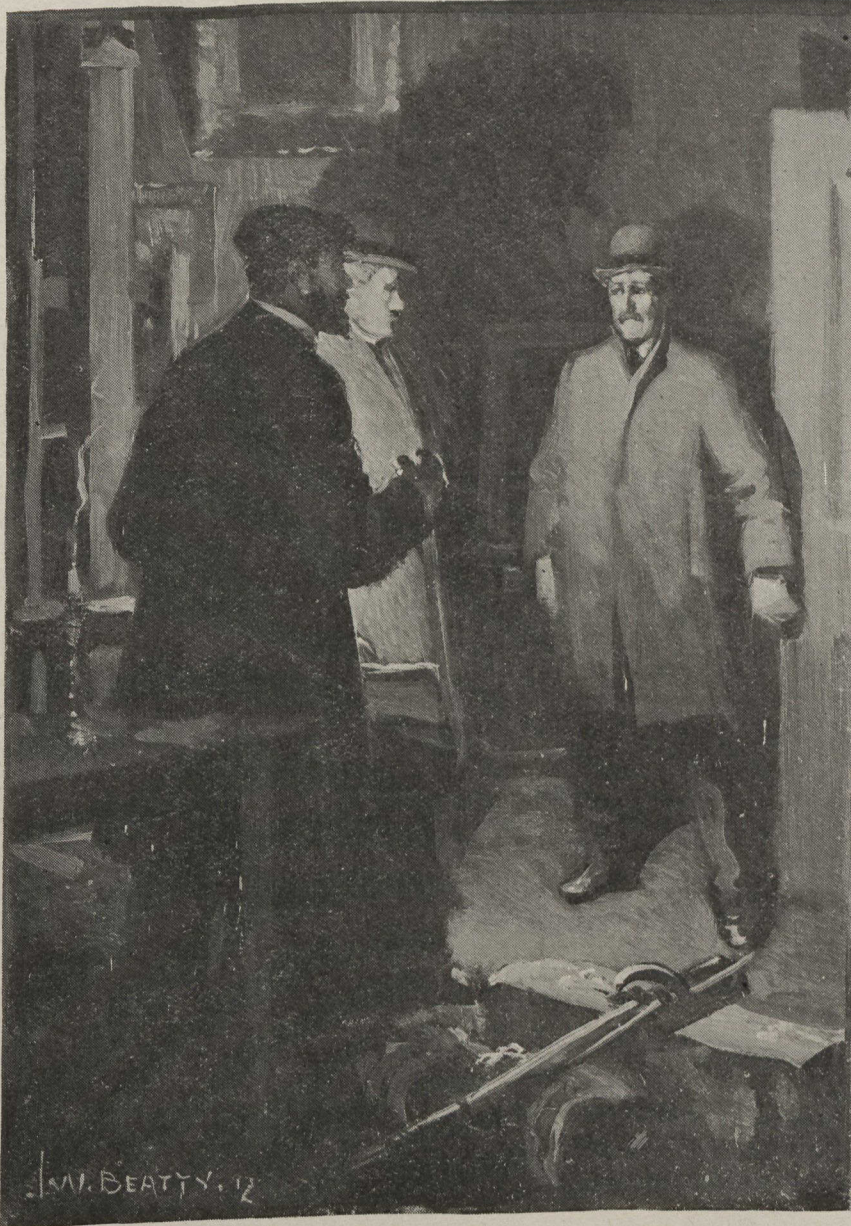
"Oh, that's the trouble!" said Trent, with a short laugh. "And now I realize that we can afford a rattling good dinner. Tea be blowed! Come along, Bob."

"I've been thinking," said Fintry, rising slowly, "that you ought to do the Antwerp trip by yourself

—I'll tell you all about the train and so on presently. I don't see why I should cost you—"

"Use your valuable breath to blow out those candles, old chap," Trent interrupted, turning off the gas fire as he spoke. "If it hadn't been for you, we'd have had a pretty sorry Christmas to face. Now, thanks to your wisdom in writing for that prize list, we're going to have the merriest on record. Buck up! Think of it, Bob! Think of Antwerp—apart from the cash altogether. Think what the trip itself will mean to fellows like you and me! Think of those wonderful old buildings. I suppose I'll be horribly seedy on the steamer—but what of that? Meantime we are going to dine as we have not dined for many a long day."

They proceeded to a small retired restaurant where appetites were tempted as well as satisfied at a cost not exceeding a couple of shillings, including the waiter. Trent ordered a bottle of Beane, "with the chill off." Their spirits began to ascend ere they tasted the wine.



"Hullo, Sedley—!"

"That soup did the trick," Fintry remarked. "I suppose it was hunger that depressed us. I must say I was down to the limit. Of course, it must have been rough on you, having to sell 'The Picnic.'"

"I've got over it. I was lucky to notice Trumpington's advertisement in that magazine. In fact, the whole thing was a blessed inspiration. Imagine if we had had to post our lucky ticket to a person we knew nothing about! Think of us waiting for days, wondering whether he would stick to the money or send it on. I suppose it says on the list where the prizes are payable?"

"Oh, yes; that's all right. The money is as good as ours. You'll have to remember some French, Charlie."

TRENT laughed and held up his glass which the waiter had just filled.

"Merry Christmas, Bob!"

"Hooray! . . . Man, but that tastes good!

It's almost worth the misery of being broke. I wish my aunt saw me now."

Later Trent remarked: "I confess I'm glad you thought Sedley was hopeful when you saw him yesterday."

"Oh, ay; he was fine and hopeful. You see, his people can well afford to help him and his family. He told me he had a notion of emigrating if he could raise the wind sufficiently. He has never done any good in Fleet Street, and I doubt if he ever will. All the same—here's to him! And if he decides to go abroad, you and I will give him a hand—eh, Charlie?"

"Rather! At first I felt a bit uncomfortable about the ticket, but now I see we're quite entitled to our luck."

"Of course we are. As a matter of fact, such a lump of money would probably be the final ruin of Sedley. He couldn't take care of it. If his people help him, I hope they'll do it on the installment plan."

"You know him better than I do," said Trent, filling up his friend's glass. "By the way, Bob, what do you say to coming home by Brussels and Paris?"

"I'm with you, my lad! So long as I come home with enough to get my bookie published—"

"Oh, we're not going on a racket," said Trent, laughing.

"But we're going to have a jolly good time," returned Fintry; "a time to remember. I know one or two fellows in Paris. My goodness, we're a pair of lucky beggars, aren't we? I say—no, I don't want any cheese—I say, let's jot down what we're going to do." He produced pad and pencil. "Turn about with suggestions. Waiter, bring some cigarettes. You begin, Charlie."

For the ensuing hour or so they were immersed in their plans. Doubtless the bottle of Burgundy had something to do with the increasingly elaborate nature thereof; at the same time it is but fair to remember that these two young men had been starved of all luxuries and pleasures for many a day, wherefore their spirits actually went ahead of the wine's stimulation.

Fintry had covered a dozen pages with notes involving an expenditure of something like a thousand pounds when Trent, happening to notice the clock, started and called for the bill.

"We had better get back to the studio, collect our bags and be at the station early," he said.

"Right! Remember you promised to lend me a shirt, Charlie. I've left plenty of room in my bag," laughed Fintry, "for the best of reasons! I must get some raiment as soon as we cash that ticket. Thanks for that good dinner, lad. Never enjoyed myself so much. My goodness! What a time we're having!—what a time we're going to have!"

Presently they were on their way to the studio, arm in arm, as happy a pair of young men as breathed in London that Christmas Eve.

"WELL, are you ready?" Fintry asked the question, half an hour later.

"I am!" answered Trent, in a tone of the highest satisfaction, and blew out the candles. He inflated his cheeks to extinguish the other.

"I say, Charlie, someone's coming up the stair."

Trent stood up, listening. "I wonder who can want me to-night," he said, slowly. "Pity I haven't a back door. We've little enough time."

"We must just explain we've got a train to catch," said Fintry, in a hushed voice. "Whoever it is is coming up mighty slowly. I've a feeling—"

"What if it should be—"

Neither man finished his sentence. They looked at each other in the dim light. Their eyes sought the floor. Somehow they knew who was coming up so slowly.

"Hullo, Sedley!" they said, together, in poorly feigned astonishment, when the luckless journalist opened the door at last.

Sedley held on to the door; he swayed slightly. His eyes were those of a hunted creature; his face was white and moist.

"Sit down, man," said Trent, suddenly, and stepped forward. "You're ill."

Sedley allowed himself to be led to a chair. He wet his lips and, glancing from one man to the other, said—

(Concluded on page 47.)