

Ten Thousand Francs.

(Concluded from page 9.)

"Can you let me have five shillings?" There was a short pause before Trent and Fintry replied together — "Of course!" It seemed so little for Sedley to ask.

Sedley struggled to his feet. "God bless you," he said. "If—if you can give me it now, I'll go at once. My wife is very ill."

"Sit still a moment," said Fintry. "Make him sit down again, Charlie." He opened his bag and brought out a small flask. "Here, Sedley, take a sup of this first."

"If you wouldn't mind giving me the money. My wife——" Sedley, ignoring the flask, tried to rise in spite of Trent's hold on his shoulder.

"Drink, man," commanded Fintry, and Sedley weakly obeyed.

"You'd better have a sovereign," said Trent, putting the coin into the trembling hand.

"And this, too," Fintry added his half-sovereign.

At that Sedley broke down. "Oh, God bless you both," he sobbed. "You were my last hope—my last hope. My people have chucked me altogether. I came back from seeing them two hours ago, to find a new-born baby, and my wife desperately ill, in those awful rooms. I had spent the last of my money on the train fare. Oh, Trent, oh, Fintry, what should I have done without you? God bless you, God bless you both." Next moment he dashed the tears from his eyes. "Forgive me leaving you like this, but I must get the things for my wife."

They did not attempt to detain him. Indeed, they let him go without a word. Nor did they utter a word till the sound of stumbling footsteps had entirely died away.

Then Trent went over to the extinguished candle and with a match that quivered relit it.

"Well, Bob?"

Fintry groaned. "It's all up," he said, and threw the foreign envelope on the table. "We can't take it. A sick wife, four kids, a new-born infant, no money, and Christmas Eve—oh, my God, we can't take it!"

Trent seemed to require occupation. He bent down and fiddled with the cock of the gas fire. "You know his present address, Bob?" he enquired casually.

"Yes."

"We'll toddle along presently—what do you say?"

Fintry considered. "We'll put the whole thing in a fresh envelope, leave it in his hands, and bolt," he said at last.

"Good idea!"

After that they were silent for a space.

Sedley, who emigrated with his family as soon as his wife and the baby were fit to travel, always meant to send Trent and Fintry ten pounds apiece as a small token of his appreciation of their generosity. So we must give him all the credit possible for his good intentions.

Trent sells quite a number of pictures nowadays, at fairly decent prices, and the sale of Trumpington's Toffee doubtless owes its steady increase to them as well as to its own excellence. Fintry still lives for poetry on his execrable prose, and continues to share his joys and sorrows with Trent, whose work he admires more than ever. At present it is a profound secret, but one is tempted to whisper that Trent hopes by next Christmas to have accumulated enough spare cash to pay for the publication of his friend's volume of poems—or "bookie," as Fintry fondly calls it.

And talking of Christmas, the friends are, strangely enough given to assuring each other that the Christmas when they nearly went to Antwerp was not such a rotten Christmas after all—not precisely merry, perhaps, but really quite happy in its way.

May none of us spend a worse one.

Avoiding Danger.—Mrs. Jones—"Why are you going home so soon? Surely your husband can get along without you."

Mrs. Smith—"I know it. But I don't want him to find out that he can."—New York World.



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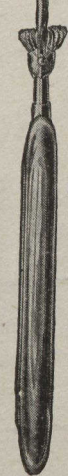
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