

MACMILLAN'S MAGAZINE.

NOVEMBER, 1898.

THE TREASURY-OFFICER'S WOOING.

By **CRCIL LOWIS.**

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was some three or four days before the date fixed for the wedding that Waring was sitting writing in the drawing-room. His mother and sister, enticed by the beauty of the weather which had begun to take a decided step summerwards, had gone out together, and he had had the house virtually to himself since luncheon-time. For the information of those who may wonder why our friend should have elected to stop indoors for the better part of one of the balmiest afternoons of the year it must be explained that he had felt, ever since the morning, a vague but pervading conviction that the day was just such a Tuesday as Ethel would be likely to choose for her expedition to town; and he trusted that she might, in the course of her shopping, pass near enough to his mother's house to think of paying her promised visit. So firmly rooted was this idea that when, about half-past three, the bell rang, and a visitor, who was not to be deterred by the maid's shrill intimation that Mrs. and Miss Waring were out, began to mount the stairs, he rose to his feet with quickening pulse, in the full expectation of seeing Ethel enter. However, it was not Miss Smart but Miss Dudley-Devant whom the servant announced, and Waring's

face fell, with his hopes, lamentably, as he saw the tall slim figure in the doorway, though he made a manful effort to hide his mortification.

Millicent entered the room hesitatingly on seeing that it was occupied. "I hear Gertrude is not in," she said, in a tone of embarrassed apology. "I'm so sorry. She said she would be in about now, if I wanted to ask her anything, so, as I wished to consult her about dresses, I thought I would sit here and wait for her a moment,—that is, if I may. They didn't tell me you were here. I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Not at all; please sit down. I'm very glad you came in. It isn't often I'm in the drawing-room alone," said Waring, his disappointment sunk in the wish to make Miss Devant feel that she was not intruding. He was obliged to confess that, as she sat near him, looking in front of her with big, melancholy eyes, she was a strikingly well-featured girl. His flow of ideas was not, however, stimulated by his keen perception of his visitor's good looks, and for several minutes the conversation stumbled painfully along, from Gertrude to the wedding, from the wedding to the weather, from the weather at home to the weather abroad,—in the East,—in India,—in Burmah, and there it had stuck, on Waring's suddenly realising

that he was treading on dangerous ground; but, as he was racking his brain during the pause that ensued for some less perilous topic and wishing that his sister would arrive on the scene quickly, he found himself relieved of all responsibility by his visitor, who during the silence had been looking fixedly at the carpet, beginning in a strained, nervous voice, as though she had set herself to some unpleasant duty,—“Talking about Burmah, you knew Mr. Heriot at Tatkin, didn't you?”

“I did,” replied Waring, wondering what his fair visitor expected him to be able to tell her about her late betrothed.

“Well?” she asked, just as Hexham had done a few days before; and as to Hexham, so to her he made answer, “Fairly well.”

“You haven't heard when he's coming home, I suppose,” she continued, in the same unnatural tone.

“No,—that is,—not definitely,” stammered Waring, in doubt as to how he was to evade a downright untruth in answering the question he felt absolutely certain she was going to put to him next. She did not, however, as he expected, go on to ask him exactly what it was that he had heard, but said, looking suddenly up, “Is it true that he has arrived in England already?”

“No,—at least not that I've heard of,” exclaimed Waring, this time with such decision and in a tone of such genuine surprise that Miss Devant lowered her eyes with a sigh of conviction. “I suppose you would have heard if he had,” she murmured, fingering a corner of her neat, well-made jacket.

“I'm pretty sure I should have,” he replied.

There was another pause,—this time a very long one—and Waring, in no enviable frame of mind, silently

watched the girl's pale handsome face, waiting for her to say something, for he felt there was more coming. At last she spoke, but without looking up, tapping restlessly on the floor the while with the point of her parasol.

“I hope you will excuse my asking you about Mr. Heriot,” she said. “You know, I suppose, that,—he was once engaged to me?” He gravely nodded assent as she looked at him for a moment, and she went on. “Of course that's all past now, and I am going to,—to marry Mr. Hexham”—(here she gave an awkward, nervous laugh)—“but you will understand, I think, that I still,—that I must take some interest in what he has been doing, and so I thought that perhaps you might—you know I have never quite understood why he—why he should have—you said you knew him fairly well—”

Her voice died away, and something dangerously like a sob rose into her throat. The sound showed what agony it must be to this shy, reserved girl to lay bare the inmost recesses of her heart to a comparative stranger. She was forcing herself to speak, he could see, humbling herself to a thing from which her soul revolted. Every look, every action recalled to him the occasion months before when he had sat in Mrs. Jones's drawing-room at Tatkin, goaded by his insatiable yearning for fuller knowledge into an abject condition of inquisitiveness. He knew well enough what it was that she wanted to know, but for the life of him he did not see how he could help her out, and it was with a sense of inexpressible relief that at that moment he heard the door-bell ring again and fancied he recognised his mother's voice in the hall.

The sound below served to spur Miss Devant to speech. She broke the silence, uttering her words with

effort, but swiftly, as though there were no time to lose in saying what had to be said. "He must have had good reasons. Tell me, there was a girl at Tatkin, wasn't there, a sister of one of the men there?"

"Yes," Waring made reply; "the Deputy-Commissioner's sister, Miss Smart."

"Do you think he liked her?"

"That I cannot say for certain."

"But what do you think? You've seen them together, I suppose."

"Yes, he certainly did admire her, but of course——" and he broke off with an indefinable sense of disquiet. For a moment, as he pictured to himself Ethel in Heriot's company, he could realise something of the anguish his questioner must be feeling.

"Thanks,—that's all I wanted to know. I was sure there must be some good reason, I mean that that was why—— Did you say the name was Smart?"

"Smart,—yes, Miss Smart," said Waring, as the door opened behind him.

"Mrs. and Miss Smart," pronounced the servant incisively, with an emphasis on the *Mrs.*, as though she were correcting Waring, and the young man started, with a burning face, to his feet, and turned, to see Ethel and her mother being ushered into the drawing-room.

The succeeding few minutes passed by him as in a dream. He was but half aware of how he stumbled through the ceremony of introduction, but across the haze of swiftly rushing thoughts came a vision of the deliberate searching look that each of the girls gave as he pronounced the two names, though, as he was obliged to turn to speak to Mrs. Smart, he felt rather than actually perceived the mutual magnetic attraction the one had for the other. His first distinct recollection was of listening to

Mrs. Smart, who, seated on the sofa at his side, was explaining in a plaintive treble how it was that she and her daughter had ventured to come in even after they had heard that Mrs. and Miss Waring were out, and of trying in a kind of stupor to follow what she said while eye and brain were concentrated on the two girls, who had gravitated instinctively towards each other, and of whose talk he, ever and anon, caught a fragment in the pauses between the elder lady's slowly delivered sentences.

"So as we knew that you were in," said Mrs. Smart, "and that your mother would be back directly, and that there was a lady waiting for her up-stairs, we thought,——" and then his mind wandered away, for he heard his sister's name mentioned, and Miss Devant say, "She is going to be my bridesmaid, you know," and marked the note of startled inquiry in Ethel's voice as she exclaimed, "Bridesmaid! What! are you going to be married?" And then Mrs. Smart's insistent tones were borne in upon him again, and he could only gather a disjointed phrase of the girls' talk here and there, such as—"a Mr. Hexham"—"Less than a week now"—"As soon as that?"—"Get it over soon"—"Suppose I must congratulate you, then," and observe that Ethel's voice waxed more and more cheerful and her bright face brighter as the conversation took its onward course and new conceptions dawned upon her. A fresh peal on the door-bell roused him more fully to himself, and he had just begun to quake at the prospect of a further feminine invasion, when a familiar voice below told him that this time it was without doubt his mother and sister who had arrived. Mrs. and Miss Waring's entrance was the signal for a general redistribution of the assembled company. Millicent lost no time in seizing hold of Gertrude

and leading her away to a window to discuss a vital point connected with the trimmings of a hat, and Waring, having entrusted to his mother the task of entertaining Mrs. Smart, who was only too ready to enter into a second detailed explanation of her reasons for having come into the house, turned his own attention, with a sense of duty nobly done, to Ethel.

"I am very glad indeed that you have been able to look us up," he exclaimed, sinking into a seat by her side. "I had a kind of presentiment that you would call to-day. In fact, that is partly the reason why I stayed in."

"Did you stay in specially?" she said. "On such a lovely afternoon that was indeed a sacrifice. In that case, I am very glad we came in, although your mother and sister were out. I hope your mother does not mind."

"Not a bit. She would have been very disappointed if you had not come in, and so, of course, should I."

"Thank you," she smiled, and then went on. "What a very nice-looking girl Miss Devant is. She is *the* Miss Devant, I suppose; I mean the one Mr. Heriot used to be engaged to?"

"Yes, the same."

"I thought it must be,—and yet I could hardly believe it when she told me she was going to be married. Isn't it very sudden? It can only be a short time since her engagement to Mr. Heriot was broken off."

"Yes. She certainly has been pretty quick in getting engaged again, but of course she has known Mr. Hexham for a long time. He's the man she's engaged to, you know."

"Yes, she told me. What is he like? Anything like Mr. Heriot?"

"Not in the least. A sandy-haired brat of a boy, without an idea of his own. I should like you to see and compare."

"Poor thing, I am sorry for her," exclaimed Ethel. "By the by, I got a letter from him a short time ago," she added.

"From Heriot?"

"Yes. It came a day or two after you were down at Crookholme. He gives all kinds of news. He says Captain Pym and Mr. Stevens got a tiger the other day,—a man-eater. They sat up all night to get him, and were nearly bitten to death by mosquitoes. Mr. Stevens is back again in Tatkin, you know. The Sparrows are transferred to Bhamo and another married couple are coming in their place, and,—let me see, what else did he say?"

"Did he say anything about coming home shortly?" asked Waring, struck with a sudden thought.

"Yes," said Ethel, looking up at him. "He has got his leave."

"Is he likely to be home soon,—I mean within a week or two?"

"Not that I know of; he did not say. Why do you ask?" She looked up at him again, this time with a look of puzzled inquiry.

"Oh, it's nothing,—merely curiosity on my part," returned Waring. He felt that he could not tell her all the embarrassing thoughts that the news of Heriot's early return to England had conjured up in his mind; and fortunately there was no call for him to do so. At this moment Miss Devant, who had transacted her business with Gertrude and had shaken hands with the two elder ladies, came up to them. "Good-bye, Mr. Waring," she said.

"What, are you off already?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. I haven't been long settling, have I? I am very busy, and I'm afraid I can't stop to tea. Good-bye, Miss Smart; I'm delighted to have made your acquaintance," and she held out her hand with a stiffness

which accorded but poorly with the graciousness of the speech.

"Good-bye," said Ethel. "I'm sure I wish you every happiness."

Millicent's lips moved in thanks and she turned away towards the door.

Waring followed her down-stairs and stood by her in the hall, helping her to collect a medley of small parcels which she had left there.

"That was a most marvellous coincidence," she said impressively, with her large eyes fixed upon him.

"Wasn't it, by Jove?" returned Waring. "It quite took my breath away,—just at the very moment that we were talking about her!"

"It was quite uncanny," she said looking away with a shiver. Her parcels were all collected; he had opened the front door for her and they had shaken hands. On the threshold she stopped and with her face still averted she murmured, "Do you think her pretty?"

"Yes," said Waring.

"So do I. I think—I can understand now,—why he broke it off. Good-bye," and with this tribute to Miss Smart's charms, she left him to his cogitations on the doorstep.

Ethel was talking brightly to his sister when he rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, and during the rest of her visit he had no opportunity of resuming his conversation with her. He was pleased to see, however, that Gertrude seemed favourably impressed with her brother's friend, and that Mrs. Smart and his mother appeared to have found interests in common. Still even this knowledge could not allay the unsatisfactory feeling which the news of Heriot's advent, coupled with Miss Devant's parting words, had produced. What was the fellow coming home for just now, confound him! And why should he himself imagine that the

fellow's object was to marry Ethel? Was it because Millicent had found in Ethel an answer to the question that had been exercising her mind? Was it because Ethel was so radiant and so well informed as to Heriot's movements? He could not say; all he could be sure of was that the unsatisfactory feeling was there, and that it detracted considerably from the pleasure afforded him by Miss Smart's long-expected visit.

Ethel and her mother left later on, their shopping being completed, to catch a train at Waterloo, and Waring walked with them to the corner of the street to show them exactly where they would be picked up by the omnibus that was to take them to the station. Gertrude looked significantly at her mother when they were alone together after their guests had departed. Mrs. Waring smiled a meaning smile back at her daughter but said nothing. There was no need for speech; mother and daughter had seen enough that afternoon to perceive exactly how the land lay with regard to a young man in whom they were both interested.

"It fully explains one thing that has been puzzling me for the last few days," said Gertrude.

"What is that?"

"Why, that he should have suddenly left off disliking red hair. It really is a very pretty auburn."

Mrs. Waring laughed. "She seems a nice, quiet girl," was all she said.

"He might have done worse."

"Though I don't think she will make him as good a wife as Laura Simmonds."

"Oh bother Laura," said Gertrude impatiently; "he'll never look at her. And how are we to know, mother, that she,—*she*, I mean, will ever look at him? There we go, talking as though both parties had made up their minds. There may be all kinds of

complications. I'm not sure yet that I can make out where Millicent's faithless young man comes in," and then, unconsciously re-echoing the sentiment to which Millicent had shortly before given voice she added, "I'm not at all certain, now that I've seen her, that she,—*she* of course I mean again—doesn't explain why it was broken off."

The two women sat for some time in thought. To Gertrude, if not to her mother, it seemed clear that the case presented difficulties. In any case there was a tacit understanding between them that the subject was not to be touched upon lightly. Thus it was that on Waring's return home, although he found himself rallied by his sister on having been discovered surrounded, like the giddiest of lady-killers, by a bevy of fair dames in the drawing-room, he was not, as he expected to be, chaffed by that ordinarily unmerciful young woman for his devotion towards the younger of his visitors from Crookholme.

Both mother and daughter, however, called him severely to task for not having told them that he had saved Miss Smart's life in Burmah, and treated his assurance that he had done nothing of the kind with severe disdain.

CHAPTER XIX.

AFTER what two of his visitors had said about Heriot's coming to England, Waring was in a manner prepared for what the day following Ethel's expedition to London had in store for him. He had just come in from his morning walk on that day and was in the act of settling down in his den to a pipe and a novel when his solitude was broken in upon by the servant, with the information that there was a gentleman in the hall who wished to speak to him. Following

on the heels of the hand-maiden, treading with a firm leisurely tread over the oil-cloth came the said gentleman, and, even before his visitor's spare straight form was visible, Waring had a vivid foreknowledge of his identity. There was a kind of fatality about the course events were taking against which he felt that he was powerless to struggle, and he could only ejaculate rather helplessly when Heriot entered, "I didn't think you would be in England yet."

"You knew I was coming home, then," said Heriot standing opposite his friend, well-groomed, unruffled, and sedate as ever, with the air (so it seemed to Waring) of having been in England for months.

"Yes," said Waring, "Miss Smart told me. She was here yesterday."

"Ah—Miss Smart. She was here yesterday, was she? I hope she is well. She is at Crookholme still, I suppose?"

He supposed she was still at Crookholme! He did not know for certain then! That did not sound as if his object in coming home was what Waring dreaded. He must have been mistaken after all, and a great load seemed lifted off his heart as he said: "Yes. She came up yesterday for the day only."

"H'm. That reminds me, I must see her within the next few days, or write to her," and the visitor stood thoughtfully jingling the silver in his pockets, with his eyes on the hearth-rug. "And how are you, Waring?" he continued, looking up. "Shoulder all right by this time, I hope?"

"Quite fit and strong, thanks, and having a very good time. How are you? You look uncommonly well. I say, won't you sit down?"

"No, thanks; I'll stand if I may. So you're having a good time; that's capital."

"First-rate, — never thought I

should enjoy a spring so much. You've come in for the pick of the weather. What are you home on?"

"Urgent private affairs, very urgent," and he laughed a short dry laugh as he looked up again. "I've got six months to do them in too."

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Charing Cross Hotel. I'm only in town for a few days looking up old friends, at least such of them as I can find. May I light a cigarette?"

"Do. You won't have a cheroot, I suppose? I have some Burmans here."

"No, thanks; I carry my own tobacco about with me always." He lit his cigarette as he spoke and, holding the match up, gazed at it pensively while it flared itself out. "It's nice to get hold of a wax match again," he said. "By the by," he added, as though the thought had at the moment occurred to him, "talking of old friends, I think you said once that you,—or your sister—knew Miss Dudley-Devant?"

"My sister,—yes, I did," said Waring. He was beginning to have an inkling of how the land lay.

"I suppose you have met her?" continued Heriot. "She is up in town, I believe."

"Yes, she is."

"You don't happen to know her address, I suppose?"

"No," said Waring, slowly and with deliberation, "I don't."

Such is the innate perversity of certain pig-headed specimens of the human breed! What Waring said was absolutely correct. He did not know the address; he had, so far as he could recollect, never heard it, but perhaps it is needless to say that it would not have been a very difficult matter for him to find it out for Heriot. His mother was up-stairs and knew it, he had no doubt; in

any case there was a little red morocco-bound book in the drawing-room bearing the title *Where is it?* which would certainly have given it in a moment, for his sister kept it religiously up to date; and yet he made no attempt to assist the Forest-Officer by asking his mother or referring to the address-book. And his refusal to help was no act of stupid churlishness. Some words that his sister had once uttered came back to him now: "I understand that Mrs. Dudley-Devant is in a terrible fright lest the old love should come to England before the wedding and Millicent should change her mind." It looked as if the worthy matron's apprehensions were about to be realised, and if so, who, it might well be asked, could wish them to be realised more than he? Yet for all this he held his peace; and the only reason he could have assigned for so doing was that his suspicion regarding the motive for Heriot's question and the hope of the advantage to himself that might come of the meeting between Heriot and Millicent seemed to make it a dishonourable thing for him to give the address. It was precisely the same mulish feeling that had silenced him once before when in his heart of hearts he would have liked to tell Ethel of Heriot's engagement.

"Ah, well, it's of no consequence," said Heriot, with a nonchalance that showed that he had regained the perfect command over his voice and features that, as Waring remembered, he seemed to have partially lost at Thonzè. "There were some other addresses, though, that I wanted to get out of you. Let me see now, what were they? Ah yes, there was that skin-man you told Pym about at Tatkin. I've brought home a couple of leopard-skins that I want done up, and your friend would probably be the man for me. Can you tell me where he lives?"

"That I can," replied Waring; "I've got a bill of his somewhere," and he turned to search among the papers on his writing-table. "It's not down here," he said presently, after a fruitless examination of several bundles. "I'll tell you where it is, though; it's up-stairs. Do you mind waiting a minute while I go up to my bedroom and fetch it? Make yourself comfortable while I am gone, will you?"

Heriot watched the door close behind Waring's back and, sitting down, swore softly to himself. He was evidently put out about something. For a minute or two he sat puffing moodily at his cigarette, then, as Waring did not return, he rose, and taking from a shelf the first book that came to hand, a copy of Shakespeare's works, seated himself again, opened it, and began to read. After a while he stopped and gazed abstractedly out over the volume at the dreary black piles of bricks and mortar visible outside the window. He had just come by the merest chance across a passage which he felt exactly represented his feelings at the moment. They were well-known lines; he was pretty sure he had come across them before, but never till now had they appealed to him with such insistent force. He read them through slowly again.

—For it so falls out

That what we have we prize not to the worth,

Whiles we enjoy it; but being lacked and lost,

Why, then we rack the value; then we find

The virtue that possession would not show us

Whiles it was ours.

He repeated the words softly to himself two or three times, and then drew a letter from his pocket and gazed long and reflectively at the

envelope. If he could ever have looked pathetic, he would have at that moment. He was reviewing the past.

He had been engaged to Millicent while in England on short leave some two years before, about eighteen months prior to the events chronicled on the earliest of these pages. He and the young lady had seen very little of each other before the engagement. Heriot's leave terminated shortly after that happy consummation was reached: his pay was insufficient then to allow him to support a wife; and he had to bid farewell to his betrothed for a period of not less than two years, after an acquaintance that barely extended over a month in all. It may safely be said that, when they parted for an indefinite time, they were as devoted to each other as two lovers well could be, and, in Heriot's case, it was more than a year before the inevitable reaction set in; but by the beginning of the previous December he had begun to accept as inevitable the knowledge that his ardour had suffered a very appreciable diminution, the more appreciable as, with Ethel's arrival at Tatkin, he was brought in agreeable contact with a fresh and, for him, particularly attractive type of English girlhood. It was the feeling he experienced as, day after day, he saw more and more of the new-comer, which told him first, not only that there were other girls in the world than Millicent Devant, but also that there were other men than John Heriot; for, as he reflected how readily he had found that after all life without his betrothed might be bearable, he began to understand how easy, if not natural, it must have been for Millicent to have by that time made a corresponding discovery. The thought led him, by simple stages, to imagine that he detected

in Millicent's letters, now less numerous than of yore, the cankering growth of indifference under which he himself lay, so that, when at length he determined to free himself once for all from the engagement, he felt charitably sure that, whatever outward display of reluctance the young lady might make, she would at heart be only too glad to meet him half way. He did not know how the prospect of marriage with Hexham (of old an importunate wooer), which the helpless Millicent felt could be the only other alternative, had served to strengthen the bond that united her to the man she loved. What had at the best of times been for him a tie of but moderate strength was for her the cable that linked her to her anchor of hope, the severing of which spelt ruin. What she thought she did her best to show in the letter a portion of which we have read over Heriot's shoulder, and, as we have seen, her cry for pity he took for what he considered it was worth. But it was soon after this that, his bridges once burned behind him, the revulsion set in that proved the eternal truth of the lines he was at that moment repeating to himself. For some days after the decisive step had been taken all his feelings were swallowed up in the sense that Ethel was the one woman in the world to make him as happy as he deserved to be, and, had it not been for Smart's sudden death, there is no doubt that he would have put a momentous question to her before the close of the expedition to Thonzè, nor would there be much difficulty in guessing what the reply to that question would have been. But, as it was, with the Deputy-Commissioner's murder came delay, and with delay came reflection, and with reflection misgiving as to the actual depth of his passion; and with the way made smooth with his

only possible rival removed from his path, and with his prize daily within easy reach, he began to discover that the situation often failed to provide friction sufficient to keep the warmth of his admiration for Ethel at the glowing-point, and soon found himself calling regretfully to mind those virtues in Millicent to which the sense of ownership had so obstinately blinded his eyes. Thus it was that he said no word to Ethel before she quitted Tatkin for England, and let her go with but little to support her fond hopes but the recollection of past devotion and the knowledge that the writing to her of an occasional business-letter about her brother's affairs would prevent her image slipping entirely from his memory.

It is possible that, after she had gone, the same forces might have operated to endear Ethel as had made themselves felt in the case of Millicent, had not Heriot's renewed passion for the latter been stimulated by the receipt of a copy of an *Isle of Wight* newspaper setting forth in a paragraph, carefully marked, that a marriage had been arranged between Miss Millicent Dudley - Devant, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Dudley-Devant of St. Cuthbert's, Ventnor, and Mr. Frederick Hexham of Compton Hall, Shanklin. In this delicate attention our friend thought he detected the handiwork of Mrs. Devant, who had throughout been opposed to his suit, and might be expected to take a malicious pleasure in proving to him that the wound he had inflicted had not been long in healing; and the desire to thwart her added fuel to the flames. He would, however, have taken no definite action had not a piteous letter,—the letter he was holding in his hands as he sat in Waring's chair—come from Millicent, saying that she had learnt what her mother had done,

and assuring him that her coming marriage was odious to her, and that, so far as he was concerned, her feelings were unchanged. This last communication brought forcibly home to Heriot what a power of steadfastness there was in the writer's love for him. A quarter of an hour after he had read it he had made out his application for leave on urgent private affairs (a death in the family afforded a suitable pretext), and before the middle of April he had left Burmah for England, with the intention of seeing the victim before her marriage.

How to get speech with Millicent before the eventful day was the problem he had now set himself to solve, and he found it by no means an easy one. His first step on reaching London had been to travel to Ventnor, and there try to ascertain the latest news of Millicent; but, as events proved, his journey to the Isle of Wight was practically fruitless. A sprightly and communicative servant at the house informed him, on inquiry, that Mrs. and Miss Devant had gone to London, that she understood that Miss Millicent was going to be married there shortly, though exactly when she could not say, that she did not know the address the ladies were stopping at in town, though she dared say that he would like to come in and see Mr. Devant, who, she was sure, would be able to give him all the information he required. Heriot liked Millicent's father, and would ordinarily have been ready enough to have a chat with the elderly invalid, but for reasons of his own he had no wish to see him on that particular occasion, and left without giving his name, to formulate a fresh plan of action in London. It was not till after his return to town that he suddenly remembered that Waring's sister was acquainted with Miss Devant, and that he might conceiv-

ably be able to get the address from his friend. He felt certain that Waring would gladly further any action tending to show that he was going to be left alone in the running for the prize they had both been competing for hitherto, and he lost no time in looking him up. He was surprised when the time came to find his friend professing total ignorance of Millicent's address; but so sure was he of Waring's perception of what was to his own interest, that on hearing his emphatic denial he thought it mere waste of valuable time to press him further on the point. Now that he had a second time been foiled, it was necessary to consider his next move seriously; but, cast about him as he would, no delicate inspiration came. He could think of no one else in London who was at all likely to be able to give him the information he required regarding Miss Devant's whereabouts. A reference to their few common friends in the country must of necessity involve delay, and every moment, he felt, was inestimably precious. It almost seemed as though he would have to acknowledge himself beaten.

Suddenly, as he thus chewed the cud of bitter reflections, there came to him guidance from an unexpected source in the shape of a bustling young woman who, entering rapidly after a perfunctory knock, gave a low exclamation of startled surprise as the receding smoke-wreaths showed the figure in the arm-chair to be not her brother but a distinguished stranger with dark hair slightly sprinkled with grey.

"I beg your pardon," she explained. "I thought my brother was here. I imagined you were him for a moment. Is he in? I suppose you have come to see him."

"It is I that should beg your pardon for having startled you," re-

turned Heriot rising. "Yes, your brother is in; he has gone up-stairs for a moment to get me an address."

"Oh, that's all right. I suppose he will be back again directly," said Gertrude. "I must apologise," she went on, "for rushing in so unceremoniously, but I'm so busy just at present that I find not a moment to spare for formalities."

"Ah," observed Heriot, "it seems to me that everybody is horribly busy in England. You are no exception, I can assure you."

"Oh, but I'm extra busy just now getting ready for a wedding, you see. I'm bridesmaid, you know, and really with one thing and another I don't know which way to turn."

"Bridesmaid! Ah, Miss Dudley-Devant's wedding, I suppose," said Heriot, tossing the end of his cigarette into the fire and facing Gertrude with his hands behind his back. The idea came to him with a flash of inspiration.

"Yes," returned Gertrude, "I suppose you——," and then a sudden perception of who the visitor was and what his presence at this eventful epoch might mean swept over her and she stopped short with a very near approach to a gasp.

"To be sure," exclaimed Heriot, pursuing his advantage with airy grace, "I know her well; I may say very well. In fact, curiously enough, one of the reasons I came here for was to find out her address in town in order to present my congratulations. Can you by any chance tell me where she is stopping now?"

"Number eleven, Roxburghe Gardens," replied Gertrude glibly. She did not stop to consider what the result of the disclosure might be. She mentally compared the tall well-looking man who stood before her with the misbegotten puppy to whom Millicent was doomed to be united, and resolved that, come what would, it should not

be her fault if her friend had not a full and free choice given her, were it at the eleventh hour. She even went so far as to add gratuitously: "I am going to meet her directly after lunch at the corner of Oxford Street and Bond Street for some shopping."

"Many thanks," exclaimed Heriot. "I shall not forget the address."

He was not likely to forget it. He had got what he wanted, but only just in time. A moment later, before the words had died away from the speaker's lips, Waring appeared, full of apologies at having been away so long, but with the naturalist's address, which Heriot made some show of taking down in his pocket-book, though anyone who had looked over his shoulder while he wrote, would have made the discovery that the address noted was not the one that Waring had just read out to him, but another in Roxburghe Gardens.

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged," he exclaimed, shutting his note-book with a snap when he had written what he wanted. "It will probably save me a deal of trouble," and for the rest of his stay he made no secret to Waring of the fact that he was on very much better terms with himself than he had been ten minutes before. He did not, however, stop long, for very soon after Gertrude had gone up-stairs, wondering, with a delightful sense of guilt, what was to come of all this, he rose to go, refusing Waring's invitation to lunch on the ground that he had an important engagement immediately after that meal, some little distance away.

"By the way, will you dine with me at the Criterion to-morrow at half-past seven, old man?" he said with his hand on Waring's shoulder as he took his leave. "I want to see something of you."

And Waring said "Yes," though, if the truth be told, he was not par-

ticularly anxious to go. Heriot's overtures were friendly, almost affectionate, but Waring was not sure enough, even yet, of the Forest-Officer's intentions to feel very desirous for much of his company. He almost wished he had given him Millicent's address. It might have saved him a deal of trouble.

CHAPTER XX.

"By the way," said Waring, "I have never yet asked you what the result of the trial was. What did they all get? I mean the beggars that were tried for Smart's murder."

He was sitting opposite to Heriot at a small table in the Criterion Restaurant, sipping his coffee to the accompaniment of an excellent cigar, while assiduous waiters glided past his chair, and the unrestrained babel of the diners around him mingled with the clatter of their dining in his ears. The hour was nine, the concluding courses of an irreproachable meal had brought with them a serenely beatific frame of mind, and to the general feeling of placid content induced by his dinner was added the pleasing sense of temptation successfully defied, which the sight of his silent but attentive host kept ever before him. Earlier in the evening he had been moved to wonder from time to time whether, after all, he had rightly interpreted Heriot's desire to get hold of Miss Devant's address, and whether, supposing he were mistaken, his own love-affair was going to be as simple a matter as it had promised to be the day before; and his wonder increased when, believing that the time for action must have passed, he had given Heriot what he thought would be a piece of news, namely that Millicent was going to be married the next day, and had

found his friend, unfeignedly indifferent or at most regarding the information as food for smiling reflection. After dinner, however, there was no room in his mind for plaguy thoughts as to what Heriot still felt towards Ethel. He was now surer than ever that he had not been mistaken the day before as to Heriot's designs, and began to recognise that, in giving him so excellent a meal, his host was acting most nobly towards one whom he might well suspect of having helped to thwart them.

Heriot looked up from his plate at Waring's question. "The case was finished after you left, was it?" said he. "I had forgotten that. Well, they hadn't enough evidence for anything, so every one of the lot they arrested was discharged."

"Couldn't they prove anything against the disappointed claimant—what's his name?—Maung Waik?"

"Absolutely nothing. His charming nephew tried hard to make out that the gun found on the *dacoit* who was shot was his uncle's, but he could get nobody to speak to it definitely and our friend got off."

"Do you think he really had nothing to do with it?"

"I doubt it. My own opinion is that the man whom the sentry shot, if not Bo Chet himself, was hiding in Maung Waik's house a good bit of the time we were in Thonzè, and that Maung Waik put them up to the job; but Mullintosh said that he could get no conclusive evidence to prove it. If they were there, they must have lain very low for the nephew to know nothing about it."

"Could nothing be got out of the man who was shot?"

"They tried to pump him before he died,—trust Mullintosh to badger the poor beggar to the last—but it was no good, as of course you heard. He would say nothing."

"What did they give the policeman who shot him?"

"A first-class constableness and a reward, I'm not sure how much, but at any rate it was enough to allow of his giving a most gorgeous *pièce* at Thonze. The show came off the last day of the Sessions, and the first thing Maung Waik and party did on their release was to hurry off to the village, so as to be in time for it. I believe they were more exercised in their minds over the prospect of losing the fun there than over anything else connected with their imprisonment."

"Well, it's a comfort they have got some change out of the gang. Poor old Smart! Have you wound up his affairs by this time?"

"Not quite, but very nearly. There are one or two things to do still, but they can keep till the end of the year when I go out again,—that's to say, if I do go out again. If not, I must ask you to do them."

"If you do go out again! Is there any chance of your not going?"

"It's just possible that I may not; in fact I may say it's very possible. It depends on circumstances. I had an uncle."

"Oh!" said Waring and sat waiting, in case Heriot should think fit to explain this not over lucid statement. He did not, however, deign to do so, but went on, as though desirous of avoiding an explanation. "Which reminds me that I want you to do something for me, Waring."

"And that is——?"

"I suppose you will be seeing Miss Smart again before long."

"I suppose so," returned Waring, conscious of the faintest flush as he looked at his interlocutor.

Heriot drew a square thickish packet from his pocket. "I had hoped," he said, tapping the table-cloth gently with it as he spoke, "to go down myself to Crookholme and make

this little parcel over to Miss Smart, but I am not at all sure now that I shall be able to do so before,—well, before you are able. I should particularly like to have it delivered personally, and what I want to know is whether you will undertake postman's duty. It contains papers of Smart's which will certainly be of interest and may be of value to the Smart family. I have addressed the packet to Miss Smart, not being personally acquainted with her estimable father; but of course, if you take charge of it, you may use your discretion as to which member of the family it goes to. Would you care to make yourself responsible? Of course I should be obliged if you would. There is no hurry about it; any time will do. In any case there's a note for Miss Smart in the parcel which I should like her to have."

"I will take it to Miss Smart," said Waring, holding out his hand for the packet. His heart gave a bound, for he believed that by this act Heriot intended to show once and for all that he had renounced all claim to be considered a claimant for Ethel's hand.

"Mind, I don't want it to be sent by post," said Heriot, giving the packet to Waring.

"All right," returned Waring, "I will see that it is safely delivered." Emboldened by this mark of confidence, he was about to ask Heriot what it was that made him think it very possible that he would not return to Burmah when his attention was diverted to the last of a party of three gilded youths in spotless raiment who had risen from a table some little distance from them, and were filing past the one at which he and Heriot sat. There was something familiar in the young man's features, and for a moment he wondered where it was that he had seen them before; then, as the object of his scrutiny turned a

vacant glance towards him and the recognition became mutual, he exclaimed, "Why, it's young Hexham!"

It was indeed young Hexham, not a little exhilarated by his dinner. "Hullo Waring," he cried, "how are you old chap? How's, — how's, — bridesmaid?"

The last word came out with an effort, which betokened that his tongue was proving itself even at this early stage of the evening an unruly member. The speaker came up to the table unsteadily and leant over the back of one of the unoccupied chairs. His round eyes were fixed and glassy, but the wine had loosened his tongue. He had been transformed suddenly, from the restless conciliatory youth Waring had seen a few days before, into a reckless voluble young debauchee.

"The bridesmaid is very well," returned Waring shortly. "You seem to be having a good time of it here, young man; making the most of your opportunities, I suppose."

"Yes, going strong, thanks. Got couple o' chaps dining with me here to-night, — having final bust, — last day of bach — bachelorship, y' know — *hood* I mean, not *ship*. I know, — I'm all right. I say, you chaps," and he turned half round to where he imagined his brace of boon-companions would be, "let me introduce you bride, — bridesmaid's, — brother, — hullo, where the devil have they gone to?"

The couple referred to had marched steadily on, without noticing that their host had stopped, till they reached the door, where they halted and began looking round the room with preternaturally solemn faces for their missing comrade.

"They are waiting for you," said Waring, only thinking of how to get rid of the bridegroom elect with all expedition; "we'd better not be keep-

ing you. Good-bye; I shall see you to-morrow."

"Oh, they're all right," returned Hexham nonchalantly. "They'll find their way to the Empire right enough by themselves. You chaps come too. Have a drink though first — must have a drink — last day of bach — bach — can't get my tongue round these beastly words, but you know well enough what I mean, don't you?" He sank into the chair he was leaning on and, resting his elbows on the table and his chin on his hands, looked at Waring and then away from Waring to Heriot. "Introduce me friend," he said turning suddenly to Waring. "Friend must have drink too."

Waring gazed in desperation towards the door, but Hexham's associates had vanished. It looked as if they were going to be saddled with this strayed reveller for the night. "This is Mr. Heriot," he said. "I dare say you may have heard about him."

"Heriot! I should think so," ejaculated Hexham. "Pleased — meet you, Heriot — most pleased," and he leant over the table and shook the Forest-Officer effusively by the hand. "Engaged Mil — Millicent once upon a time; I know all 'bout you."

Waring was by this time so used to Heriot's doing exactly the reverse of what anybody else would do that he was hardly surprised when his companion returned Hexham's salutation with apparent fervour, saying with thinly veiled sarcasm, "Ah, this is indeed an unexpected honour."

"That's right," exclaimed Hexham. "No ill-will — that's right. Never do to bear will — ill-will." For a moment he seemed to be trying to collect his thoughts and sat silent with his face in his hands, then looking up at Heriot he continued: "All same you're precious fool — chuck that girl over. Simple ripper, I can tell

you. Going to t'morrow her to-m—marry her t'morrow, I should say. Not t'morrow yet, I suppose," and he plucked a watch from his pocket and gazed at it with lack-lustre eye.

"Ah, then I must congratulate you," replied Heriot in the same calm voice, while Waring hurriedly interposed with, "I say, Hexham, those fellows will be waiting for you."

But Hexham was recalcitrant. He sat for some time glaring emptily in front of him, and then, "I'm not going without you two chaps," he asserted stoutly. "Told you already those other chaps all right. Both as drunk as can be, but quite able look after themselves; find 'em at the Empire or somewhere. We'll go after 'em directly, but must have a drink with Heriot first, to show no ill-will."

He seemed to have conceived a sudden affection for Heriot (who in a moment entered into the spirit of the comedy), and would not quit the table till he had extorted a promise from them both to come with him and have a drink below, and when they had left the restaurant clung lovingly to the Forest-Officer's arm while the latter piloted him out into the open and across the road to the nearest music-hall in the expectation of being able there to make him over to his guests. But the wandering pair were not there and, once inside, Hexham insisted on stopping to see a portion of the entertainment and drinking whisky and soda-water with his companions to an extent which rendered his condition more distressing than ever. Waring had scant pity for the young fool whom fate had chosen to inflict upon him; but as the evening slipped on and Heriot plied Hexham ever more and more with liquor and made himself ever more and more agreeable, he tried

to interpose, though in vain. An adjournment to another place of entertainment in search of the missing couple was proposed by Hexham and acquiesced in by Heriot. Waring demurred, and hinted at its being time for all concerned to go home, but a whisper from Heriot,—“Stop a bit and see me through with him; he won't be long now”—prevailed on him to remain and watch the affair out, as much in Hexham's interests as in those of his elder companion. The attempt to run the lost ones to earth at another music-hall (for which Hexham asserted roundly that they had arranged to take tickets) bore no fruit; but the complacent youth was little moved at the poor success of the search and again sought consolation in the flowing bowl, with such assiduity that towards the end he threatened to become uproarious, and Waring had a vision, as the audience streamed out of the building at the close of the performance, of his being with difficulty restrained by Heriot from violently avenging some imaginary insult on a cheerful individual with a red face and a powerful command of the vernacular. They took the bridegroom elect between them when they were in the street, and having, after much argument, persuaded him that there was nothing more to see and that, all things considered, he might do worse than go to bed, prevailed on him to walk with them to the address in Jermyn Street he gave, instead of, as he wished, traversing the couple of hundred yards or so to the spot in a hansom.

"You'll come in and have a drink—lots of stuff up-stairs," he said thickly, as they stood together opposite the house, and when they both declined, he exclaimed: "P'raps you're right—won't do—mustn't do—drink too much jus' before wedding. Is it t'morrow yet?"

Heriot referred to his watch and assured him that the eventful day had arrived.

"Well, see you t'morrow—no, not t'morrow—t'morrow morning I mean. Don't f'get bring bridesmaid, Waring. You too Heriot, old man, must come, y' know, frold sake's sake."

"I'm afraid I can't," said Heriot. "I leave town to-morrow,—to-day, I mean."

"Put it off, put it off," urged Hexham. "Must come t'wedding—sha'n't go up-stairs till you say you're coming t'wedding."

But Heriot was firm, turning a deaf ear to the young Bacchanalian's assertion that he must still bear a grudge against him if he would not come to see him married; and the bridegroom, finding that blandishment and obloquy were alike of no avail, staggered up the steps and disappeared through the door, showering benedictions on his two guardians as he went.

The two guardians turned slowly away when the door had shut behind Hexham and passed without a word into a quiet street leading towards Charing Cross. As they paced together over the pavement Waring was reminded irresistibly of the evening when Heriot and he had walked together from the Tatkin mess to dine with the Smarts. It was a balmy night. The moon hung motionless amid fleecy clouds overhead, and the distant whirr of traffic on the still crowded thoroughfares behind them seemed a kind of urban parody of the cicada's ceaseless note.

"To think that that young sweep is to marry Miss Devant in a few hours' time," cried Waring impatiently. He was angry with himself now for having refused to give Heriot the information which might have saved Millicent, and with Heriot for bowing

so readily and with so good a grace to the tide of circumstance. "I'm precious sorry for the girl."

Heriot made no comment on this outburst but gave a sigh, whether of despondency or of relief at having rid himself of Hexham, Waring could not say. They walked silently on till they reached the corner of the street and were aware of a belated hansom bearing steadily down upon them. Waring signed to the driver and the vehicle drew up on the roadway opposite them. "Good-night," he said abruptly to Heriot. "I think I shall drive home." He felt he could not say more at the moment, but he shook his friend's hand with a grasp that spoke volumes.

"Good-night," said Heriot automatically, and as Waring stood with one foot on the step of the hansom about to get in he added, "I think you will find that she is not so very much to be pitied after all."

An hour later Waring was in bed, in his dreams delivering and again and again re-delivering a shadowy packet at a certain white-walled country rectory; but for Heriot there was no sleep that night. He walked slowly back to his hotel, changed his dress-clothes for a sober suit of grey, and till daybreak was occupied in his bedroom in writing and packing his bag. Early dawn found him shaved, alert, and unwearied, with a formidable pile of letters on his table as evidence of his labours, and soon after sunrise he strolled across Charing Cross Bridge towards Waterloo, his footsteps ringing clear in the empty morning air as he paced along the silent footway. Arrived at the labyrinthine South-Western terminus, where his bag was consigned to the custody of a yawning porter, he made his way to the booking-office, demanded a ticket,—on second thoughts, two tickets—to Ventnor, pocketed them and took up his posi-

tion at the steps outside where the vehicles for the main line drive up to deposit their passengers, waiting, with his customary solace between his lips, for some one to arrive. He had to renew this solace several times, for none of the cabs that drove up to the steps during the next hour brought any interest for him, and as the minutes slipped by his equanimity seemed to filter away. He began to show signs of impatience, took to striding firmly up and down, referred several times to his watch, the hands of which were creeping on towards half-past six, and at last, as though despairing of the arrival of the person he was expecting, turned in through the booking-office on the main line platform,—there to make the discovery that other and wiser people have in their day made, that Waterloo is of all Metropolitan stations the most fatal for making appointments at. He had not stood looking about him for more than ten seconds before a thickly veiled figure in a long dark cloak moved shyly forward, and a moment later there was a glance of mutual recognition.

He raised his hat. "How long have you been here?" he asked.

"About a quarter of an hour," was the reply. "I've been looking about everywhere for you."

"I was outside there," he said. "I thought you would drive up at those steps. I was afraid you hadn't been able to pull it off after all."

"I didn't come that way; they brought me in to quite a different part of the station."

"Ah, that's because you didn't tell them the main line. Well, never mind, better late than never. You have five minutes yet before the train starts. I've got your ticket. Is that bag all you've brought?"

"That's all; I had no time to collect more things. It was terribly

risky. I don't know now how I managed to slip away without the servants hearing me. I'm sure the banging of the front door behind me must have disturbed some of them, and I had ever so far to walk before I could get a cab."

"I ought to have met you at the house," he said. "Have you had anything to eat?"

"No. I should have got something at the refreshment-room, if I hadn't been afraid of missing you. I should like something." There was a sound of tears in the voice behind the veil and a white ungloved hand fumbled nervously with a pocket-handkerchief.

"All right, I'll get you something," he exclaimed. "This is your train and here's your ticket. If you get into the carriage I'll fetch you some tea or something. Don't bother about the bag; I'll see about that when I come back."

She was seated in a first-class compartment when he returned to her with a cup of coffee and a roll which he watched her consume, standing at the carriage-door. "You're better now, aren't you?" he said tenderly, when she had finished the coffee and was drawing the veil down over her face again. "No need to keep that veil down," he added. It makes you look terribly funereal with that cloak; they will be putting you out at Brookwood if you don't take care."

She smiled a weary smile at this sally. "I'm bright enough underneath," she said, drawing up her cloak a few inches and displaying a hand's-breadth of the brightest of skirts below its lower edge.

"By Jove you are, and no mistake!" he ejaculated. "What dress is that? It's surely not your——"

"Yes, it's my going-away dress. It's sweet, isn't it?" And, as though revived by the coffee she regarded it pensively. "Gertrude Waring helped

me choose it. It was the only thing I had to put on; there was nothing but it and my wedding-dress in the room with me. I couldn't get at anything else without disturbing mother. She was sleeping next door, you know. It seems wrong, doesn't it? But of course there was nothing else to be done. I couldn't wear my wedding-dress."

Heriot chuckled softly to himself and drew up the cloak so as to have a more unimpeded view of the glories of the skirt. "Of course there was nothing else to be done," he said. "By-the-bye, Millicent," he added, looking up suddenly, "that reminds me; I've just left a friend of yours,—well, not just; it's several hours ago now, but it seems only a few minutes."

"Who? Where? Mr. Waring, I suppose. You were dining with him last night, weren't you?"

"Yes, but I don't mean him. Somebody a good more interested in you than Waring."

"Not Freddy Hexham, surely!"

"The very same."

"Oh Jack! Where?"

"At the Criterion."

"Was he dining there? He didn't tell me."

"I should think he was."

"Did he see you?"

"Yes."

"And speak to you?"

"Of course."

"And knew who you were?"

"To be sure. Who was I that I should wish to conceal my identity? Really, Millicent, I must commiserate you on having lost such a jewel. Such spirits! such a flow of language! and so passionately devoted to your humble servant! He was quite unhappy because I said I couldn't come to his wedding,—going to be married to-day, if you please! Honestly now, Millicent, have you really considered all you are giving

up for me? Think it over now, and if you still——"

"Don't, please don't! Did he really talk so much? I suppose then, that he was——"

"Delightfully so! Don't blame him; in that particular state he is really fascinating—one in a million."

"Please don't talk about him," cried the girl with a shudder. "He had no suspicion of what we were going to do, had he?"

"Bless his innocent heart, no; not a shadow. If you had seen his effusive affection for me you wouldn't ask that question."

"One never knows. Do you know, when I did sleep last night I did nothing but dream he was coming after me! Jack, I'm frightened to go down by myself! Can't you come with me?"

"Impossible."

"Do you think so really? Of course you know best; but it does seem to me that there would be no harm in your coming too,—in another carriage,—can't you?"

"Quite out of the question. It would never do; it would look exactly like that most improper thing, an elopement, and you know I wish to avoid all occasion for a scandal. We must go down separately. Keep your heart up; you will be home by noon. I have lots to do in town before I follow you."

"Very well; I'll do as you wish. You'll telegraph to Father to say I'm coming, won't you? And you'll let Mother know where I am; I don't want her to imagine all kinds of things. I ought to have left a note to say where I was going, only I hadn't time."

"I'll see to that. I'll write a note at the hotel and take it round myself to Roxburghe Gardens. There will be time to do that before my train——"

"What is it?" she asked, clutching the arm that rested on the carriage-window. He had stopped and was gazing down the platform at something she could not see from where she sat.

"Nothing," he said, turning an impassive face towards her. "You needn't be frightened. Your train ought to be off by this time," he continued after a pause of a brief duration which he occupied in tapping the pavement nervously with his foot. "You're overdue; I never saw anything like this line for unpunc—ah! there's the whistle, good, you're off now! *Au revoir*; be brave, I shall see you this afternoon."

"George!" exclaimed an individual in green corduroy and a scarlet necktie to a comrade, as the train snorted out of the station. "S'welp me, George! that chap's missed 'is train after all." At this early hour business was slack and the porters had ample time to take an intelligent interest in their surroundings.

"Who?" enquired George stopping in his manipulation of a milk-can to gaze in the direction of the first speaker's eyes. "What chap?"

"'Im in a grey suit with a cigarette out yonder under the clock. 'Im as was talkin' to that girl and brought 'er a cup of tea just now."

"Missed 'is train," was the scornful rejoinder, "plucky lot of trains 'e's missed! 'E wouldn't be walkin' away so peaceful if 'e'd missed 'is train. 'E was seeing 'er off, that's all."

"What did 'e buy two tickets for then?"

"Did 'e buy two? Never!"

"Straight, 'e did; I see 'im at the bookin'-office with two; and just now he took two tickets out of 'is pocket, and give the girl one, and put back the other."

"P'raps the other was for the old girl 'e's talkin' to now," hazarded George. "That's what it is. There, d'yer see 'er, just by the cloak-room? Fat old thing, only just come up, might be the mother of the girl 'e's just seen off. *She* don't like losin' trains any way. Lor', ain't she givin' it 'im 'ot! Just as though it was 'is fault she come too late. Just like a woman! Not that 'e minds, though; takes it calm and sweet enough, don't 'e? Take a lot to ruffle that bloke, I'll lay. Come along, 'ere's the six thirty-three."

(To be continued.)