

## BOOK OF THE WEEK.

## "CAPTAIN DIEPPE."\*

It is a long time since we have enjoyed any long story from Mr. Anthony Hope's pen.

"Captain Dieppe" is a romance peculiar to his style, and written with his peculiar grace.

It is not perhaps on as high a platform of merit as some of his earlier works, but he cannot help being charming, nor can his characters fail to either attract or repel.

"Captain Dieppe" is full of improbabilities and impossible situations; were it not so it could not be the product of Mr. Hope's pen. Its plot is elusive, and difficult to bring into the matter-of-fact atmosphere of criticism.

Who and what Captain Dieppe was doesn't seem to matter much, suffice it to say he was an attractive, so it is implied, gentleman in the thirties, who carried on his person papers of importance. Our readers will learn as much about him as we know ourselves from the following paragraphs.

Fresh from the failure of important plans, if not a fugitive, still a man to whom recognition would be inconvenient and perhaps dangerous, with fifty francs in his pocket, and his spare wardrobe in a knapsack on his back, without immediate prospect of future employment or replenishment of his purse, he marched up a long, steep hill in the glowing dusk of a stormy evening.

The Captain whistled and sang. What a fright he had given the ministers, how nearly he had brought back the Prince, what an uncommon and intimate satisfaction of soul came from carrying under his wet coat lists of names, letters and what not, all capable of causing tremors in high places. He broke off whistling to observe aloud:

"Mark this, it is to very few there comes a life so interesting as mine," and his tune began again with almost rollicking vigour.

Thus Captain Dieppe!

The drenched, but unquenchable Captain finds himself shortly afterwards entertained in a handsome house, and quite easily became the guest of the young Count Fieramondi.

"Stay with me," said the Count, "for to-night at least, and as much longer as you will. Nobody will trouble you. I live in solitude, and your society will lighten it. Let me ring and give orders for your entertainment."

Dieppe looked up at him. "With all my heart, dear host. Your only difficulty shall be to get rid of me."

He was accommodated in the "Cardinal's Room," which his host informed him he had himself until lately occupied.

"I left it owing to—er—circumstances."

"His Eminence is restless?"

"I beg pardon?"

"I mean—a ghost?"

"No, a cat!" was the Count's surprising answer.

And the cat was connected with a lady, and the lady was the Count's wife, and the relations between them were somewhat strained.

"My wife and I are not in agreement. She lives in the right wing with two servants, and I live in the left with three."

Captain Dieppe being of an enquiring turn of mind is not long before he makes (*sub rosa*) the acquaintance of the lady in the right wing, and the meeting is described in Mr. Hope's best inconsequent manner.

"Sir," said a timid voice at his elbow.

Dieppe shot round, and then and there lost his heart. One sight of her a man might endure and be heart-whole—not two. There, looking up at him with the most bewitching mouth, the most destructive eyes, was the lady he had seen at the end of the passage.

"Madame la Comtesse?" stammered the dazzled Captain.

"Yes, yes; but never mind that. Who are you?"

"My name is Dieppe, madame. Captain Dieppe at your service."

As the gallant Captain had surprised an interview between the lady and a young man, evidently of a secret nature, he is sharply rebuked for his blundering.

"Tell me what I must do," implored the Captain.

She looked at him kindly, partly because he was a handsome fellow, partly because it was her way, and she said with the prettiest, simplest air, as though she were making the most ordinary request and never thought of refusal:

"Will you give me fifty thousand francs?"

To this modest request the Captain replied that he had but fifty in the world, but he set himself to retrieve the compromising papers from Paul de Roustache, by more exciting and decidedly less dull means than by merely paying the price in cash.

And these two went through a wild adventure to attain their object, and Dieppe having done his part handsomely found himself in the extremely awkward position of being deeply and profoundly in love with his host's wife.

And then comes the grand *finale*, when Dieppe discovers that his charming lady is not the Countess after all, but her cousin; and that she and the real Countess have for involved reasons of their own been hoaxing both him and the Count.

"I am the happiest fellow in the world," he declared; "and that," he added, as though it were a rare and precious coincidence, "with my conscience quite at peace."

As to the consciences of the two very ingenious young ladies—the Countess of Fieramondi and her cousin, Countess Lucia—the problem is more difficult. The Countess never confessed and Lucia never betrayed the secret.

What their secrets really amounted to we must beg our readers to discover for themselves.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)