

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"NINETY-SIX HOURS' LEAVE."

The dedication is to F. P. C., "who may still remember the days when the world was at peace, and a night when Prince Boris Alexandrovitch of Bosnia, so announced and so described in the visitor's book, entered a London caravanserai, with four aides-de-camp. The retinue is scattered, the prince of a night perished with that night."

A romance worthy of the name. "Ninety-six Hours' Leave" can hardly be outdone for dash and adventure, the three dashing young officers who figure in this thrilling and amusing story cannot be said to have spent a dull or uneventful time during their short leave.

Markham, "The Kitten," alias Christopher, is altogether charming, fascinating and incorrigible. A young man of many loves and an appreciative eye.

He began as soon as he landed at Dover (he had a sheaf of telegrams to send off for his superior officer) with the telegraph girl, but she was unresponsive, and refused to make any reduction on a quantity. Perhaps partly the reason may have been the one of his own he threw in to make the half-dozen, as he explained to Captain Fenwick. "There's a girl . . ."

Fenwick bridled like a man whose religion is insulted.

"Cheer up, Nap," exhorted Markham; "I'm not asking you to meet her. I've never met her myself yet, but she's frightfully lovely. She's been writing to me and all that sort of thing. Bang went ninepence. I signed myself "A Lonely Lieutenant," and invited her to lunch at the Semiramis Grille to-morrow."

Long before to-morrow and the Grille, Kitten was off on a new trail. At the London end of the evening journey he was on the alert again.

"I take charge here," announced Fenwick, in his rasping voice. "No one leaves the carriage till the platform is clear."

Markham turned to him despairingly. "But there are girls advancing in close order," he exclaimed. "Some of them frightfully lovely, too."

"They've not come to meet you."

Markham shrugged his shoulders and subsided into his corner, flattening his nose against the window. He looked with wistful eyes at the vanishing stream of people.

"Some of them were frightfully lovely," he said.

A girl stood at the entrance of a canteen, buttoning her fur coat and putting on her gloves.

Markham stood rooted to the platform until the taxi she entered disappeared from sight.

"If you'd concentrate on getting the luggage aboard instead of running after women you'll never see again," said Fenwick hotly.

* By Stephen McKenna. (London: Methuen & Co.)

"I shall, Nap," Markham answered, his brown eyes shining with excitement. "She's staying at the 'Semiramis.'"

"How d'you know?" said Osborne, with lazy interest.

"She's just gone there, fathead," answered Markham.

"Kitten, where are you off to? That's the wrong taxi."

"Bet you a pony I meet her to-night," he called back, with his foot on the step.

"You idiot! You'll be late for dinner!" shouted Fenwick.

Markham picked up the speaking tube.

"Semiramis Hotel," he said.

Great events turn on small matters. If Kitten had not made himself late by his manoeuvres to get introduced to this latest lovely one, he would have been dressed for dinner, and the civilian reach-me-down in which he elected to clothe himself on the way would not have barred his admission to the select grille of the "Semiramis." (By the way, his short and hurried interview with the cheap tailor, and his natty suitings, is delightful.) Osborne leant down and rested a hand on his shoulder. "You—won't—be—admitted—in—morning-dress," he said.

"Say I'm a distinguished foreigner."

"I've never seen anyone look less distinguished," said Fenwick.

"You don't know a natty suiting when you see one," rejoined the Kitten.

But Fenwick decided that as Kitten could speak fluent Italian it was perfectly simple.

"Prince Cristoforo of Catania, who has not had time to dress."

The real man was expected, but the Channel sailings were cancelled.

Now begins the real excitement. It may be readily imagined that it would be a risky thing to impersonate a royal scion at a public restaurant.

The farce is deliciously told, and Fenwick adds to his audacious plot when he instructs the orchestra to play the Italian National Anthem, and with his fellow "aides-de-camp" rose solemnly to his feet.

But Kitten is rather deeply involved when he has to pose as a prince to his latest "lovely" girl, because it was rather serious this time.

Added to this the real prince arrives during his "leave," and there was a plot on hand to assassinate him. We wish we had more space to recount graceless Kitten's adventures, but we can only say that they are real adventures. We prophecy that our readers will one and all lose their hearts to him.

H. H.

WORD FOR THE WEEK.

The angel that presided at my birth,
Said: "Little creature, formed of joy and mirth,
Go, live without the help of anything on earth."

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