

XXV.

Mr. Hoopdriver conducted the rest of that night's journey with the same confident dignity as before, and it was chiefly by good luck and the fact that most roads about a town converge thereupon, that Chichester was at last attained. It seemed at first as though everyone had gone to bed, but the Red Hotel still glowed yellow and warm. It was the first time Hoopdriver had dared the mysteries of a 'first-class' hotel.' But that night he was in the mood to dare anything.

"So you found your Young Lady at last," said the ostler of the Red Hotel; for it chanced he was one of those of whom Hoopdriver had made inquiries in the afternoon.

"Quite a misunderstanding," said Hoopdriver, with splendid readiness.

"My sister had gone to Bognor But I brought her back here. I've took a fancy to this place. And the moonlight's simply dee-vine."

"We've had supper, thenks, and we're tired," said Mr. Hoopdriver. "I suppose you won't take anything,--Jessie?"

The glory of having her, even as a sister! and to call her Jessie like that! But he carried it off splendidly, as he felt himself bound to admit. "Good-night, Sis," he said, "and pleasant dreams. I'll just 'ave a look at this paper before I turn in." But this was living indeed! he told himself.

So gallantly did Mr. Hoopdriver comport himself up to the very edge of the Most Wonderful Day of all. It had begun early, you will remember, with a vigil in a little sweetstuff shop next door to the Angel at Midhurst. But to think of all the things that had happened since then! He caught himself in the middle of a yawn, pulled out his watch, saw the time was halfpast eleven, and marched off, with a fine sense of heroism, bedward.