

IN A BIG HOTEL.

BY M. PAYNE SMITH.



IT is hot ! Not to say baking ! and the clatter of voices comes up from under the trees in the courtyard in a most exasperating fashion. When one is among the chatters it is rather amusing, but here, not seeing one of them, but looking across the leafy screen to the calm blue lake and the solemn mountains, it is incongruous

and wearisome. My neighbour is talking, too ; he is full of conversation, and pours out his eloquence on to the head of his friend in the grey coat. The grey man is distinctly nice-looking, and as the two converse from opposite sides of a rather thick wall, I hear everything one speaker says, and a good deal from the further one. Sometimes I wish they would open the door of communication, and then I should not be quite deafened, nor should I have to hear all their private affairs. I feel absurdly in my neighbour's confidence, though when he sat next me at dinner yesterday he did not condescend to speak to me, but I could have told him a good deal had I chosen. I know what newspapers they take in, and what their washing bills come to ; and now they are discussing their lady friends, and something is going on about a licence, which makes me long to inquire on whose behalf it is to be procured.

Two hours rolled up in a blanket is the daily portion of each one of us, and the calm way some of us ignore it when the process is concluded for the time being, is only equalled by the composure with which others discuss the entire bathing arrangements publicly. There is a lively old bachelor who describes his experiences, not only to his neighbours, but to about a dozen others every day at dinner ; and then goes to the casino and dances half the night, so that he does not give his cure much chance. But as his conversation is a graphic representation of what we all have been going through, it wakes a responsive echo in all hearts.

In the morning we are all invalids, with one exception, for there is an exasperatingly healthy girl who drives us all wild with envy by her abominably robust appearance. How she can have the face to show her blooming countenance among so many jaded ones is a mystery to me, and though she spends a certain amount of time with the sisters she is supposed to be taking care of, she manages to take long walks, and come back laden with flowers, looking cool and fresh, while we are all panting with the heat.

When the daily bathing and blanketing is over, we

get through a good deal of amusement, and the study of life here is most entertaining. In the course of an afternoon on the terrace one sees enough little comedies to last one a month. First there is the shabby man and the mischievous girl he has fallen in love with. As she won't speak to him in private, he has to pay his little attentions across the table at meals : and *déjeuner* is generally enlivened by a series of remarks to which she invariably returns a calm, "I beg your pardon" (she is not deaf, by the bye). Then he repeats his words, which is not conducive to eloquence, and then she snubs him, for she has a decided taste for repartee, and is well used to wooers. Another adorer of hers is a young Roumanian, who has not enough English to talk to her, but evidently understands part of what she says ; and the beaming countenance which he turns upon her, while she laughs and chats with half-a-dozen friends, is beautiful to behold. He will go back to Roumania thinking scorn of his countrywomen, I fear.

Soon after *déjeuner* the carriages come round. First



"MY NEIGHBOUR IS TALKING, TOO."



A LIVELY OLD BACHELOR.

that an insufficient defence, they would break out suddenly into a lively conversation with each other, though as a rule they have a truly English gift of silence.

There are a dozen other groups worth notice : the gambling old woman, who tries hard to make acquaintance with the quiet well-born English ladies, who keep themselves apart. The boastful editor of a second-rate society paper, who talks very big, and produces the proofs of his new novel for the admiration of the illiterate. The railway director with the fascinating eyeglass, and more than middle-aged wife ; the quiet man from the North of Ireland, who has Quaker blood in his veins, and is perpetually horrified by the goings-on of his neighbours ; the dowdy country cousins bewildered by the crowd ; the London people who don't want acquaintances, lest they should have to look them up when they get back to town ; and half-a-dozen different kinds of American.

the Spanish count solemnly hands his wife into her victoria, and she arranges her parti-coloured skirts (she habitually dresses in checks, eight inches square), gives a parting glance to the weedy youth, whose society she most affects, and settles down with a calmly bored expression for her conjugal tête-à-tête. Then comes a smart mail phaeton, and the strong-minded lady appears. She is an Austrian of high rank, and her attire (*à l'Anglaise*), short hair, plain skirt, tight jacket, and masculine collar and tie, looks well on the driving seat, though she has to wait till her groom gets up, as he has not mastered the art of climbing to his place after the horses have started.

After all, they are fair samples of the world in general, with the great advantage that we are not introduced, and can be friendly or not as we feel inclined. As I am neither attractive or interesting, few

The four English officers play cards all the afternoon, and as soon as dinner is over, rush off to the casino to baccarat. How dull they will be when they get home and have duty to do ! By the way, the dark one lives in the room next mine (on the other side from my conversational neighbour). As a rule, he is a silent personage, but there is one subject on which he waxes eloquent, and that is "boots." Nicolas, our *garçon*, does not shine as a bootblack, and I polish my own. But the captain gives his orders again and again, as if he were dealing with a soldier servant. "*Ils ne sont pas bien faits,*" he says. "You must do them again ; no ! not that pair, *les autres*—the patent leathers." And Nicolas walks off with them, and brings them back rather worse than before.



The captain and his friend are a quaint couple ; they suffer from a positive terror of womankind in the abstract, and *table d'hôte* was a penance to them till they got a table to themselves. Their fear lest someone should speak to them was ludicrous ; and when the captain sat next a magnificent old marquise, a relic of the Monarchy, with a surprising wig and marvellous hats, his fear lest she should address him was most amusing. Sometimes they brought a sporting paper to meals with them, and studied it attentively between the courses, or, as if they thought

The Strong-minded lady appears



“THE BOASTFUL EDITOR OF A SECOND-RATE SOCIETY PAPER.”

people trouble about me, so I can sit and study human nature at my ease; and I am not sure that I don't get more pleasure than most people out of

the comings and goings, the manners and customs, the quips, cranks, and humours generally of life in a big hotel.



THE TOWER BRIDGE.

BY HENRY FRITH, AUTHOR OF “THE ROMANCE OF ENGINEERING,”
ETC. ETC.



As one pauses upon London Bridge or saunters upon Tower Hill the most prominent object in the middle distance is the wondrous Bridge which was opened to the public on the 30th of June last.

The Tower Bridge has occupied about eight years in construction,

and altogether ten in incubation, for it was in 1884 that the Bill of the Corporation was brought before the Committee of the House of Lords, and was so vehemently opposed by wharf-owners and traders, upon the plea of interference with the Thames traffic.

Whether it interferes with it we shall presently see; but leaving that question for the moment there is no doubt of the advantages it confers upon the road traffic, and the boon and blessing it is to land-carriers. Fortunately, therefore, the arguments of the water-side opponents were overcome, the Corporation persevered, and have now expended nearly a million sterling upon the bridge.

There is the result! Look at this “bascule” from the Surrey side, and confess that it is a magnificent achievement. Solid, handsome, useful, it com-

bins attributes which are not generally present in engineering monuments. Utility, not beauty, is usually the aim of the engineer, who is nothing if not practical, but Mr. Wolfe Barry, who with the late Sir Horace Jones designed the structure, has contrived to give London a strikingly pleasing bridge, the largest of its kind in the world.

Independently of its utility, it affords to the ordinary pedestrian a delightful panorama. As we halt on London Bridge we admire the busy scene upon the river but when we saunter over the upper roadway of the Tower Bridge we obtain a view of London, its life and its monuments, its traffic and its commerce, which no other coign of vantage can provide. St. Paul's and the Monument can give us satisfaction for our outlay; but the Tower Bridge surpasses them in its situation, and excels them in the variety of the scenes it presents so widely yet so nearly—so near and yet so far.

Take what the late Richard Doyle would have termed “a Bird's Eye View of Society” from the platform, watch the river-traffic beneath and “below” the bridge, traffic above it and beyond, the old legend- and ivy-clad Tower, the Pool, Horselydown, and the Surrey side so celebrated by Dickens. Gaze your fill upon the prospect, which save for the “Betterment” bogie would not fail to please on both sides, and then ask your conductor in astonishment—“How can this