

## HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

By  
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McCutcheon

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## A Fool and His Money

In the opening chapter of "A Fool and His Money," George Barr McCutcheon's charming novel, serial rights for which have been specially obtained for the Home and Farm Magazine Section, we learn of the young man who is telling the story. He has just written his first novel, and at the same time has fallen heir to an immense fortune left him by his uncle. He is 35 years of age. The story continues:

(Continued From Last Week.)

FOR the past year I have done little or no work. My books are few and far between, so few in fact, that more than once I have felt the sting of dilettantism inflicting my labors with more or less increasing sharpness. It is not for me to say that I despise a fortune, but I am constrained to remark that I believe poverty would have been a fairer friend to me. At any rate I now pamper myself to an unreasonable extent. For one thing, I feel that I cannot work—much less think—when opposed by distracting conditions such as women, tea, disputes over luggage, and things of that sort. They subdue all the romantic tendencies I am so parsimonious about wasting. My best work is done when the madding crowd is far from me. Hence I seek out remote, obscure places when I feel the plot boiling, and grind away for dear life with nothing to distract me save no unconquerable habit acquired very early in life which urges me to eat three meals a day and to sleep nine hours out of twenty-four.

A month ago, in Vienna, I felt the plot breaking out on me, very much as the measles do, at a most inopportune time for everybody concerned, and my secretary, more wide-awake than you'd imagine by looking at him, urged me to coddle the muse while she was willing and not to put her off till an evil day, as frequently I am in the habit of doing.

It was especially annoying, coming as it did, just as I was about to set off for a fortnight's motor-boat trip up the Danube with Elsie Hazzard and her stupid husband, the doctor. I compromised with myself by deciding to give them a week of my dreamy company, and then dash off to England where I could work off the story in a sequestered village I had had in mind for some time past.

The fourth day of our delectable excursion brought us to an ancient town whose name you would recall in an instant if I were fool enough to mention it, and where we were to put up for the night. On the crest of a stupendous crag overhanging the river, almost opposite the town, which isn't far from Krems, stood the venerable but unvenerated castle of that high-handed old robber baron, the first of the Rothhoefens. He has been in his sarcophagus these six centuries, I am advised, but you wouldn't think so to look at the stronghold. At a glance you can almost convince yourself that he is still there, with battle-axe and broadsword, and an inflamed eye at every window in the grim facade.

We picked up a little of its history while in the town, and the next morning crossed over to visit the place. Its antiquity was considerably enhanced by the presence of a caretaker who would never see eighty again, and whose wife was even older. Their two sons lived with them in the capacity of loafers and, as things go in these rapid times of ours, appeared to be even older and more sere than their parents.

It is a winding and tortuous road that leads up to the portals of this huge old pile, and I couldn't help think how stupid I have always been in execrating the spirit of progress that conceives the funicular and rack-and-pinion railroads which serve to commercialize grandeur instead of protecting it. Half way up the hill, we paused to rest, and I quite clearly remember growling that if the confounded thing belonged to me I'd build a funicular or install an elevator without delay. Poor Elsie was too fatigued to say what she

ought to have said to me for suggesting and even insisting on the visit.

The next day, instead of continuing our delightful trip down the river, we three were scurrying to Saalsburg, urged by a sudden and stupendous whim on my part, and filled with a new interest in life.

I had made up my mind to buy the castle!

The Hazzards sat up with me nearly the whole of the night, trying to talk me out of the mad design, but all to no purpose. I was determined to be the sort of fool that Uncle Bilas referred to when he so frequently quoted the old adage. My only argument in reply to their entreaties was that I had to have a quiet, inspirational place in which to work and besides I was quite sure we could beat the impoverished owner down considerably in the price, whatever it might turn out to be. While the ancient caretaker admitted that it was for sale, he couldn't give me the faintest notion what it was expected to bring, except that it ought to bring more from an American than from any one else, and that he would be proud and happy to remain in my service, he and his wife and his prodigiously capable sons, either of whom if put to the test could break all the bones in a bullock without half trying. Moreover, for such strong men, they ate very little and seldom slept, they were so eager to slave in the interests of the master. We all agreed that they looked strong enough, but as they were sleeping with some intensity all the time we were there, and making dreadful noises in the courtyard, we could only infer that they were making up for at least a week of insomnia.

I had no difficulty whatever in striking a bargain with the abandoned wretch who owned the Schloss. He seemed very eager to submit to my demand that he knock off a thousand pounds sterling, and we hunted up a notary and all the other officials necessary to the transfer of property. At the end of three days, I was the sole owner and proprietor of a feudal stronghold on the Danube, and the joyous Austrian was a little father on his way to the dogs, a journey he had been negotiating with great ardour ever since coming into possession of an estate once valued at several millions. I am quite sure I have never seen a spendthrift with more energy than this fellow seems to have displayed in going through with his patrimony. He was on his uppers, so to speak, when I came to his rescue, solely because he couldn't find a purchaser or a tenant for the castle, try as he would. Afterwards I heard that he had offered the place to a syndicate of Jews for one-third the price I paid, but luckily for me the Hebraic instinct was not so keen as mine. They let a very good bargain get away from them. I have not told my most intimate friends what I paid for the castle, but they are all generous enough to admit that I could afford it, no matter what it cost me. Their generosity stops there, however. I have never had so many unkind things said to me in all my life as have been said about this purely personal matter.

Well, to make the story short, the Hazzards and I returned to Schloss Rothhoefen in some haste, primarily for the purpose of inspecting it from dungeon to battlement. I forgot to mention that, being very tired after the climb up the steep, we got no further on our first visit than the great baronial hall, the dining-room and certain other impressive apartments customarily kept open for the inspection of visitors. An interesting concession on the part of the late owner (the gentleman hurrying to catch up with the dogs that had got a bit of a start on him)—may here be mentioned. He included all of the contents of the castle for the price paid, and the deed, or whatever you call it, specifically set forth that I, John Bellamy Smart, was the sole and undisputed owner of everything the castle held. This made the bargain all the more desirable, for I have never seen a more beautiful assortment of antique furniture and tapestry in

Fourth Avenue than was to be found in Schloss Rothhoefen.

Our second and more critical survey of the lower floors of the castle revealed rather urgent necessity for extensive repairs and refurbishing, but I was not dismayed. With a blithesome disregard for expenses, I despatched Rudolph, the elder of the two sons, to Linz with instructions to procure artisans who could be depended upon to undo the ravages of time to a certain extent and who might even suggest a remedy for leaks.

My friends, abhorring rheumatism and like complaints, refused to sleep over night in the drafty, almost paneless structure. They came over to see me on the ensuing day and begged me to return to Vienna with them. But, full of the project in hand, I would not be moved. With the house full of carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, locksmiths, tinsmiths, plumbers, plasterers, glaziers, joiners, scrub-women and chimney-sweeps, I felt that I couldn't go away and leave it without a controlling influence.

They promised to come and make me a nice short visit, however, after I'd got the castle primped up a bit; the mould off the walls of the bedrooms and the great fireplaces thoroughly cleared of obstructive swallows' nests, the beds aired and the larder stocked. Just as they were leaving, my secretary and my valet put in an appearance, having been summoned from Vienna the day before. I confess I was glad to see them. The thought of spending a second night in that limitless bed-chamber, with all manner of night-birds trying to get in at the windows, was rather disturbing, and I welcomed my retainers with open arms.

My first night had been spent in a huge old bed, carefully prepared for occupancy by Herr Schmiek's frau; and the hours, which never were so dark, in trying to fathom the infinite space that reached above me to the vaulted ceiling. I knew there was a ceiling, for I had seen its beams during the daylight hours, but to save my soul I couldn't imagine anything so far away as it seemed to be after the candles had been taken away by the caretaker's wife, who had tucked me away in the bed with ample propriety and thoroughness combined.

Twice during that interminable night I thought I heard a baby crying. So it is not unreasonable to suppose that I was more than glad to see Poopendyke clambering up the path with his typewriter in one hand and his green baize bag in the other, followed close behind by Britton and the Gargantuan brothers bearing trunks, bags, boxes and my golf clubs.

"Whew!" said Poopendyke, dropping wearily upon my doorstep—which, by the way, happens to be a rough hewn slab some ten feet square surmounted by a portcullis that has every intention of falling down unexpectedly one of these days and creating an earthquake. "Whew!" he repeated.

My secretary is a youngish man with thin, stooping shoulders and a habit of perpetually rubbing his knees together when he walks. I shudder to think of what would happen to them if he undertook to run. I could not resist a glance at them now.

"It is something of a climb, isn't it?" said I, beamingly.

(To Be Continued Next Week.)

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