HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

By George Barr McCutcheon

A Fool and His Money

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS.

In the opening installments 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 John Bellamy Smart, 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 years of age.

After a visit to London Smart takes a trip on the river Danube. After finding an old-world town, he discovers an ancient castle, which he purchases from its owner, the Count. With his secretary, Poopendyke, he takes possession of the immense structure, which is supposed to be tennanted only by the caretaker and his family, the Schmicks. To Smart's amazement, the first night, he hears the cry of a baby.

Looking out at a balcony one night Smart sees the white figure of a woman silhouetted. He immediately begins a hunt for Schmick, the caretaker, to solve the mystery of who the woman may be. The story continues:

(Continued From Last Week.)

WE FOUND the four Schmicks in the vast kitchen, watching Britton while he pressed my trousers on an oak table so large that the castle must have been built around it.

Herr Schmick was weighted down with the keys of the castle, which never left his possession day or night.

"Herr Schmick," said I, "will you be so good as to inform me who the dickens that woman is over in the east wing of the castle?"

"Woman, mein herr?" He almost dropped his keys. His big sons said something to each other that I couldn't quite catch, but it sounded very much like "der duyvil."

"A woman in a white dress,—with a dog."

"A dog?" he cried. "But, mein herr, dogs are not permitted to be in the castle."

"Who is she? How did she get there?"

"Heaven defend us, sir! It must have been the ghost of —"

"Ghost, your granny!" I cried, relapsing into English. "Please don't beat about the bush, Mr. Schmick. She's over there in the unused wing, which I haven't been allowed to penetrate in spite of the fact that it belongs to me. You say you can't find the keys to that side of the castle. Will you explain how it is that it is open to strange women and—and dogs?"

"You must be mistaken, mein herr," he whined abjectly. "She cannot be there. She — Ah, I have it! It may have been my wife. Gretel! Have you been in the east—"

"Nonsense!" I cried sharply. "This won't do, Mr. Schmick. Give me that bunch of keys. We'll investigate. I can't have strange women gallivanting about the place as if they owned it. This is no trysting place for Juliets, Herr Schmick. We'll get to the bottom of this at once. Here, you Rudolph, fetch a couple of lanterns. Max, get a sledge or two from the forge. There is a forge. I saw it yesterday out there back of the stables. So don't try to tell me there isn't one. If we can't unlock the doors, we'll smash 'em in. They're mine, and I'll knock 'em to smithereens if I feel like it."

The four Schmicks wrung their hands and shook their heads, and, then, repairing to the scullery, growled and grumbled for fully ten minutes before deciding to obey my commands. In the meantime, I related my experience to Poopendyke and Britton.

"That reminds me, sir," said Britton, "that I found a rag-doll in the courtyard yesterday, on that side of the building sir—I should say castle, sir."

"I am quite sure I heard a baby crying the second night we were here, Mr. Smart," said my secretary nervously.

"And there was smoke coming from one of the back chimney pots this morning," added Britton.

I was thoughtful for a moment. "What became of the rag-doll, Britton?" I inquired shrewdly.

"I turned it over to old Schmick, sir" said he. He grinned. "I thought as maybe it belonged to one of his boys."

On the aged caretaker's reappearance, I bluntly inquired what had become of the doll-baby. He was terribly confused.

"I know nothing, I know nothing," he mumbled, and I could see that he was miserably upset. His sons towered and glowered and his wife wrapped and unwrapped her hands in her apron, all the time supplicating heaven to be good to the true and the faithful.

From what I could gather, they all seemed to be more disturbed over the fact that my hallucination included a dog than by the claim that I had seen a woman.

"But, confound you, Schmick," I cried in some heat, "it barked at me."

"Gott in himmel!" they all cried, and, to my surprise, the old woman burst into tears.

"It is bad to dream of a dog," she wailed. "It means evil to all of us. Evil to—"

"Come!" said I, grabbing the keys from the old man's unresisting hand. "And, Schmick, if that dog bites me, I'll hold you personally responsible. Do you understand?"

Two abreast we filed through the long, vaulted halls, Rudolph carrying a gigantic lantern and Max a sledge. We traversed extensive corridors, mounted tortuous stairs and came at length to the sturdy oak door that separated the east wing from the west: a huge, formidable thing strengthened by many cross-pieces and studded with rusty bolt-heads. Padlocks as large as horseshoes, corroded by rust and rendered absolutely impracticable by age, confronted us.

"I have not the keys," said old Conrad Schmick sourly. "This door has not been opened in my time. It is no use."

"It is no use," repeated his grizzly sons, leaning against the mouldy walls with weary tolerance.

"Then how did the woman and her dog get into that part of the castle?" I demanded. "Tell me that!"

They shook their heads, almost compassionately, as much as to say: "It is always best to humour a mad man."

"And the baby," added Poopendyke, turning up his coat collar to protect his thin neck from the draft that smote us from the halls.

"Smash those padlocks Max," I commanded resolutely.

Max looked stupidly at his father and the old man looked at his wife, and then all four of them looked at me, almost imploringly.

"Why destroy a perfectly good padlock, mein herr?" began Max, twirling the sledge in his hand as if it were a bamboo cane.

"Hi! Look out there!" gasped Britton, in some alarm. "Don't let that thing slip!"

"Doesn't this castle belong to me?" I demanded, considerably impressed by the ease with which he swung the sledge. A very dangerous person, I began to perceive.

"It does, mein herr," shouted all of them gladly, and touched their forelocks.

"Everything is yours," added old Conrad, with a comprehensive sweep of his hand that might have put the whole universe in my name.

"Smash that padlock, Max," I said after a second's hesitation.

"I'll bet he can't do it," said Britton, ingeniously.

Very reluctantly Max bared his great arms, spit upon his hands, and, with a pitiful look at his parents, prepared to deal the first blow upon the ancient padlock. The old couple turned their heads away and put their fingers to their ears, cringing like things about to be whipped.

"Now, one—two—three!" cried I, affecting an enthusiasm I didn't feel.

The sledge fell upon the padlock and rebounded with almost equal force. The sound of the crash must have disturbed every bird and bat in the towers of the grim old pile. But the padlock merely shed a few scabs of rust and rattled back into its customary repose.

"See!" cried Max, triumphantly. "It cannot be broken." Rudolph, his broad face beaming, held the lantern close to the padlock and showed me that it hadn't been dented by the blow.

"It is a very fine old lock," cried old Conrad, with a note of pride in his voice.

I began to feel some pride in the thing myself. "It is indeed," I said. "Try once more, Max."

It seemed to me that he struck with a great deal more confidence than before, and again they all uttered ejaculations of pleasure. I caught Dame Schmick in the act of thanking God with her fingers.

"See here," I exclaimed, facing them angrily, "what does all this mean? You are deceiving me, all of you. Now, let's have the truth—every word of it—or out you go tomorrow, the whole lot of you. I insist on knowing wh othat woman is, why she is here in my hou—my castle, and—everything, do you understand?"

Apparently they didn't understand, for they looked at me with all the stupidity they could command.

"You try, Mr. Poopendyke," I said, giving it up in despair. He sought to improve on my German, but I think he made it worse. They positively refused to be intelligent.

"Give me the hammer," I said at last in desperation. Max surrendered the clumsp, old-fashioned instrument with a grin and I motioned for them all to stand back. Three successive blows with all the might I had in my body failed to shatter the lock, whereupon my choler rose to heights hitherto unknown, I being a very mild-mannered, placid person and averse to anything savouring of the tempestuous. I delivered a savage and resounding thwack upon the broad oak panel of the door, regardless of the destructiveness that might attend the effort. If any one had told me that I couldn't splinter an oak board with a sledge-hammer at a single blow I should have laughed in his face. But as it turned out in this case I not only failed to split the panel but broke off the sledge handle near the head, putting it wholly out of commission for the time being as well as stinging my hands so severely that I doubled up with pain and shouted words that Dame Schmick could not put into her prayers.

(To be continued.)

$225,000 Paid to Farmers.

The Cashmere, Wash., Fruit Growers' Union has just paid to the growers $15,500, making the total payment on apples in the 1913 pools up to the immense sum of $225,000. Based on 181,217 boxes handled by the union in its fall pools this amount represents an average pyament to date of $1.24 per box. This is a net figure to the grower.

The union has recently closed three of its four unreported pools, leaving now only the Winesap variety unclosed. Of this variety the management reports 11 cars are still outstanding, nine being in cold storage in the East and two entransit sold already at good prices f. o. b. Cashmere. From the present indications it will be about May 1 when the final results of the Winesap pool become known.

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