

HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

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By Geo. Barr
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A Fool and His Money

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS.

In the opening installments of "A Fool and His Money," Geo. 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 this 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.

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 tenanted 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. With the Schmicks he endeavors to break down a heavily barred door into that section of the castle, but fails. Smart learns that souvenir hunters from New York are demanding to buy the castle heirlooms. Smart's visitors demand to buy the curiosities of the castle although he assures them time and time again they are not on sale. They think he is holding out for a higher price, he would be buyers are insulting, and are roughly ejected from the castle. The story continues.

THIS IS MOST DISTRESSING, most distressing, Mr.—Mr.—ahem! I've never been so outraged in my life. I—but, wait! He had caught the snap in my atavistic eye. "I am not seeking trouble. We will go, sir. I—I—I—I think my wife has quite recovered. Are—are you all right, my dear?"

I stood aside and let them file past me. Mrs. Riley-Werkheimer moved very nimbly for one who had just been revived by smelling-salts. As her husband went by, he half halted in front of me. A curious glitter leaped into his fishy eyes.

"I'd give a thousand dollars to be free to do what you did to that insufferable puppy, Mr.—Mr.—ahem. A cool thousand, damn him!"

I had my coffee upstairs, far removed from the onions. A racking headache set in. Never again will I go without my coffee so long. It always gives me a headache.

CHAPTER III.

I Converse With a Mystery.

LATE in the afternoon, I opened my door, hoping that the banging of hammers and the buzz of industry would have ceased, but alas! the noise was even more deafening than before. I was still in a state of nerves over the events of the morning. There had been a most distressing lack of poise on my part, and I couldn't help feeling after it was all over that my sense of humor had received a shock from which it was not likely to recover in a long time. There was but little consolation in the reflection that my irritating visitors deserved something in the shape of a rebuff; I could not separate something myself from the conviction that integrity as a gentleman had suffered in a mistaken conflict with humor. My headache, I think, was due in a large measure to the sickening fear that I had made a fool of myself, notwithstanding my efforts to make fools of them. My day was spoilt. My plans were upset and awry.

Espying Britton in the gloomy corridor, I shouted to him, and he came at once.

"Britton," said I, as he closed the door, "do you think they will carry out their threat to have the law on me? Mr. Rocksworth was very angry—and put out. He is a power, as you know."

"I think you are quite safe, sir," said he. "I've been waiting outside since two o'clock to tell you something, sir, but hated to disturb you."

"Thank you, Britton, my head was aching dreadfully."

"Yes, sir. Quite so. Shortly before two, sir, one of the porters from the hotel came over to recover a gold purse

Mrs. Riley-Werkheimer had dropped in the excitement, and he informed Mr. Poopendyke that the whole party was leaving at four for Dresden. I asked particular about the young man, sir, and he said they had the doctor in to treat his stomach, sir, immediately after they got back to the hotel."

"His stomach? But I distinctly struck him on the verso."

"I know, sir; but it seems that he swallowed his cigarette."

To my shame, I joined Britton in a roar of laughter. Afterwards I recalled, with something of a shock, that it was the first time I had ever heard my valet laugh aloud. He appeared to be in some distress over it himself, for he tried to turn it off into a violent fit of coughing. He is such a faithful, exemplary servant that I made haste to pound him on the back, fearing the worst. I could not get on at all without Britton. He promptly recovered.

"I beg pardon, sir," said he. "Will you have your shave and tub now, sir?"

Later on, somewhat refreshed and relieved, I made my way to the little balcony, first having issued numerous orders and directions to the still stupefied Schmicks, chief among which was an inflexible command to keep the gates locked against all comers. The sun was shining brightly over the western hills, and the sky was clear and blue. The hour was five I found on consulting my watch. Naturally my first impulse was to glance up at the still loftier balcony in the east wing. It was empty. There was nothing in the grim, formidable prospect to warrant the impression that any one dwelt behind those dismantled windows, and I experienced the vague feeling that perhaps it had been a dream after all.

Far below at the foot of the shaggy cliff ran the historic Donau, serene and muddy, all rhythmic testimonials to the contrary. With something of a shudder I computed the distance from my eerie perch to the rocks at the bottom of the cliff. Five hundred feet, at least; an impregnable wall of nature surmounted by a now rank and obsolete obstruction built by the hand of man; a fortress that defied the legions of old but today would afford no more than brief and even desultory target practice for a smart battery. To scale the cliff, however, would be an impossibility for the most resourceful general in the world. All about me were turrets and minarets, defeated by the ancient and implacable foe—Time. Shattered crests of towers hung above me, grey and forbidding, yet without menace save in their senile prerogative to collapse without warning. Tiny windows marked the face of my still sturdy walls, like so many pits left by small-pox, and from these in the good old feudal days a hundred marksmen had thrust their thunderous blunderbusses to clear the river of vain-glorious foes. From the scalloped bastions cross-bowmen of even darker ages had shot their random bolts; while in the niches of lower walls futile pikemen waited for the impossible to happen—the scaling of the cliff!

Friend and foe alike came to the back door of Schloss Rothhoefen, and there found welcome or stubborn obstacles that laughed at time and locksmiths; monstrous gates that still were enough to defy a mighty force. There was my great stone-paved courtyard, flanked on all sides by disintegrating buildings once occupied by serfs and fighting men; the stables in which chargers and beasts of burden had slept side by side until called by the night's work or the day's work, as war or peace prescribed, ranged close by the gates that opened upon the steep, winding roadway that now dismayed all modern steeds save the conquering ass. Here too were the remains of a once noble garden, and here were the granaries and the storehouses.

Far below me were the dungeons, with dead men's bones on their dripping floors; and somewhere in the heart of the peak were secret, unknown passages, long since closed by tumbling rocks and earth, as darkly mysterious as the streets in the buried cities of Egypt.

Across the river and below me stood the walled-in town that paid tribute to

the good and bad Rothhoefens in those olden days—a red-tiled, gloomy city that stood as a monument to long-dead ambitions. A peaceful, quiet town that had survived its perilous centuries of lust and greed, and would go on living to the end of time.

So here I sat me down, almost at the top of my fancy, to wonder if it were not folly as well!

Above me soared huge white-bellied birds, cousins german to my dreams, but alas! infinitely more sensible in that they roamed for a more sustained nourishment than the so-called food for thought.

I looked backward to the tender years when my valiant young heart kept pace with a fertile brain in its swiftest flights, and pinched myself to make sure that this was not all imagination. Was I really living in a feudal castle with romance shadowing me at every step? Was this I, the dreamer of twenty years ago? Or was I the last of the Rothhoefens and not John Bellamy Smart, of Madison Avenue, New York?

The sun shone full upon me as I sat there in my little balcony, but I liked the dry, warm glare of it. To be perfectly frank, the castle was a bit damp. I had had a pain in the back of my neck for two whole days. The sooner I got at my novel and finished it up the better, I reflected. Then I could go off to the baths somewhere. But would I ever settle down to work? Would the plumbers ever get off the place? (They were the ones I seemed to suspect the most.)

Suddenly, as I sat there ruminating, I became acutely aware of something white on the ledge of the topmost window in the eastern tower. Even as I fixed my gaze upon it, something transpired. A cloud of soft, wavy, luxurious brown hair eclipsed the narrow white strip and hung with spreading splendor over the casement ledge, plainly, indubitably to dry in the sun.

My neighbor had washed her hair! And it was really a most wonderful head of hair. I can't remember ever having seen anything like it, except in the advertisements.

For a long time I sat there trying to pierce the blackness of the room beyond the window with my straining eyes, deeply sensitive to a curiosity that had as its basic force the very natural anxiety to know what disposition she had made of the rest of her person in order to obtain this rather startling effect.

Of course, I concluded, she was lying on a couch of some description, with her head in the windows. That was quite clear, even to a dreamer. And perhaps she was reading a novel while the sun shone. My fancy went to the remotest ends of probability—she might even be reading one of mine!

What a glorious, appealing, sensuous thing a crown of hair—but just then Mr. Poopendyke came to my window.

"May I interrupt you for a moment, Mr. Smart?" he inquired, as he squinted at me through his ugly bone-rimmed glasses.

"Come here, Poopendyke," I commanded in low, excited tones. He hesitated. "You won't fall off," I said sharply.

Although the window is at least nine feet high, Poopendyke stooped as he came through. He always does it, no matter how tall the door. It is a life-long habit with him. Have I mentioned that my worthy secretary is six feet four, and as thin as a reed? I remember speaking of his knees. He is also a bachelor.

"It is a dreadful distance down there," he murmured, flattening himself against the wall and closing his eyes.

A pair of slim white hands at that instant indolently readjusted the thick mass of hair and quite as casually disappeared. I failed to hear Mr. Poopendyke's remark.

"I think, sir," he proceeded, "it would be a very good idea to get some of our correspondence off our hands. A great deal of it has accumulated in the past few weeks. I wish to say that I am quite ready to attend to it whenever—"

"Time enough for letters," said I, still staring. (To Be Continued.)

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