

By
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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 instalments 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. Later he discovers a woman's face at an upper window. He is too much interested to attend to his correspondence, as is desired by his secretary. Smart determines to solve the mystery of the east wing of the castle and enters a window by means of a ladder. He is blocked by a stout door on which is pinned a note reading: "Please keep out. This is private property." Later he meets the woman, who greatly puzzles him.

"No tourists enter this place tomorrow or any other day," I declared, firmly.

"Well, I'd suggest waiting just the same, sir," said he, evidently inspired.

"Confound them," I growled, somehow absorbing his presentiment.

He hesitated for a moment near the door.

"Will you put in the telephone, sir?" he asked very respectfully.

Very curiously, I was thinking of it at that instant.

"It really wouldn't be a bad idea, Britton," I said, startled into committing myself. "Save us a great deal of legging it over town and all that sort of thing, eh?"

"Yes, sir. What I was about to suggest, sir, is that while we're about it we might as well have a system of electric bells put in. That is to say, sir, in both wings of the castle. Very convenient, sir, you see, for all parties concerned."

"I see," said I, impressed. And then repeated it, a little more impressed after reflection. "I see. You are a very resourceful fellow, Britton. I am inclined to bounce all of the Schmicks. They have known about this from the start and have lied like thieves. By Jove, she must have an extraordinary power over them,—or claim,—or something equally potent. Now I think of it, she mentioned a grandfather. That would go to prove she's related in some way to some one, wouldn't it?"

"I should consider it to be more than likely, sir," said Britton with a perfectly straight face. He must have been sorely tried in the face of my inane maunderings. "Pardon me, sir, but wouldn't it be a tip-top idea to have it out with the Schmicks tonight? Being, sir, as you anticipate a rather wakeful night, I only make so bold as to suggest it in the hopes you may 'ave some light on the subject before you close your eyes. In other words, sir, as you won't be altogether in the dark when morning comes. See wot I mean?"

"Excellent idea, Britton. We'll have them up in my study."

He went off to summon my double-faced servitors, while I wended my way to the study. There I found Mr. Poopendyke, sound asleep in a great armchair, both his mouth and his nose open and my first novel also open in his lap.

Conrad and Gretel appeared with Britton after an unbecomable lapse of time, partially dressed and grumbling.

"Where are your sons?" I demanded, at once suspicious.

Conrad shook his sparsely covered head and mumbled something about each being his brother's keeper, all of which was Greek to me until Britton explained that they were not to be found in their customary quarters—that is to say, in bed. Of course it was quite clear to me that my excellent giants were off somewhere, serving the interests of the bothersome lady in the east wing.

"Conrad," said I, fixing the ancient with a stern, compelling gaze, "this has gone quite far enough."

"Yes, mein herr!"

"Do you serve me, or do you serve the lady in the east wing?"

"I do," said he, with a great deal more wit than I thought he possessed. For a moment I was speechless, but not for the reason you may suspect. I was trying to fix my question and his response quite clearly in my memory so that I might employ them later in the course of a conversation between characters in my forthcoming novel.

"I have been talking with the lady this evening," said I.

"Yes, mein herr; I know," said he.

"Oh, you do, eh? Well, will you be good enough to tell me what the devil is the meaning of all this two-faced, underhanded conduct on your part?"

He lowered his head, closed his thin lips and fumbled with the hem of his smock in a significantly sullen manner. It was evident that he meant to defy me. His sharp little eyes sent a warning look at Gretel, who instantly ceased her mutterings and gave over asking God to bear witness to something or other. She was always dragging in the Deity.

"Now, see here, Conrad, I want the truth from you. Who is this woman, and why are you so infernally set upon shielding her? What crime has she committed? Tell me at once, or, by the Lord Harry, out you go tomorrow—all of you."

"I am a very old man," he whined, twisting his gnarled fingers, a suggestion of tears in his voice. "My wife is old, mein herr. You must not be cruel. We have been here for sixty years. The old baron—"

"Enough!" I cried resolutely. "Out with it, man. I mean all that I say."

He was still for a long time, looking first at the floor and then at me; furtive, appealing, uncertain little glances from which he hoped to derive comfort by catching me with a twinkle in my eye. I have a stupid, weak way of letting a twinkle appear there even when I am trying to be harsh and domineering. Britton has noticed it frequently, I am sure, and I think he rather depends upon it. But now I realized, if never before, that to betray the slightest sign of pentness would be to forever forfeit my standing as master in my own house. Conrad saw no twinkle. He began to weaken.

"Tomorrow, mein herr, tomorrow," he mumbled, in a final plea. I shook my head. "She will explain everything tomorrow," he went on eagerly. "I am sworn to reveal nothing, mein herr. My wife, too, and my sons. We may not speak until she gives the word. Alas! we shall be turned out to die in our—"

"We have been faithful servants to the Rothhoefens for sixty years," sobbed his wife.

"And still are, I suspect," I cried angrily.

"Ach, mein herr, mein herr!" protested Conrad, greatly perturbed.

"Where are the keys, you old rascal!" I demanded so sternly that even Poopendyke was startled.

Conrad almost resorted to the expediency of grovelling. "Forgive! forgive!" he groaned. "I have done only what was best."

"Produce the keys, sir!"

"But not tonight, not tonight," he pleaded. "She will be very angry. She will not like it, mein herr. Ach, Gott! She will drive us out, she will shame us all! Ach, and she who is so gentle and so unhappy and so—so kind to all of us! I—I cannot—I cannot! No!"

Mr. Poopendyke's common sense came in very handily at this critical juncture. He counselled me to let the matter rest until the next morning, when, it was reasonable to expect, the lady herself would explain everything. Further appeal to Schmick was like butting one's head against a stone wall, he said. Moreover, Conrad's loyalty to the lady was most commendable.

Conrad and Gretel beamed on Poopendyke. They thanked him so profoundly, that I couldn't help feeling a bit sorry for myself, a tyrant without a backbone.

"Jah, jah!" Conrad cried gladly. "Tomorrow she will explain. Time

enough, Herr Poopendyke. Time enough, eh?"

"Well," said I, somewhat feebly, "where do I come in?"

They caught the note of surrender in my voice and pounced upon their opportunity. Before they had finished with me, it was quite thoroughly established that I was not to come in at all until my neighbor was ready to admit me. They convinced me that I was a meek, futile suppliant and not the master of a feudal stronghold. Somehow I was made to feel that if I didn't behave myself I stood in considerable danger of being turned off the place.

However, we forced something out of Schmick before his stalwart sons came tramping up the stairs to rescue him. The old man gave us a touch of inside history concerning Schloss Rothhoefen and its erstwhile powerful barons, not to minimize in the least sense the peculiar prowess of the present Amazon who held forth tonight in the east wing and who, I had some reason to suspect, was one of the family despite the unmistakable flavor of Fifth Avenue and Newport.

About the middle of the nineteenth century the last of the real barons—the powerful, land owning despotic barons, I mean—came to the end of his four-score years and ten, and was laid away with great pomp and glee by the people of the town across the river. He was the last of the Rothhoefens, for he left no male heir. His two daughters had married Austrian noblemen, and neither of them produced a male descendant. The estate, already in a state of financial as well as physical disintegration, fell into the hands of women, and went from bad to worse so rapidly that long before the last quarter of the century was fairly begun the castle and the reduced holdings slipped away from the Rothhoefens altogether and into the control of the father of the Count from whom I purchased the property. The Count's father, it appears, was a distiller of great wealth in his day, and a man of action. Unfortunately he died before he had the chance to carry out his projects in connection with the rehabilitation of Schloss Rothhoefen, even then a deserted, ramshackle resort for paying tourists and a Mecca for antique and picture dealers.

The new Count—my immediate predecessor—was not long in dissipating the great fortune left by his father, the worthy distiller. He ran through with the bulk of his patrimony by the time he was twenty-five and was pretty much run down at the heel when he married in the hope of recouping his lost fortune.

The Schmicks did not like him. They did not approve of him as lord and master, nor was it possible for them to resign themselves to the fate that had put this young scapegrace into the shoes, so to speak, of the grim old barons Rothhoefen, who whatever else they may have been in a high-handed sort of way were men to the core. This pretender, this creature without brains or blood, this sponging reprobate, was not to their liking, if I am to quote Conrad, who became quite forceful in his harangue against the recent order of things.

He, his wife and sons, he assured me, were full of rejoicing when they learned that the castle had passed from Count Hohendahl's hands into mine. I, at least, would pay them their wages, and I might, in a pinch, be depended upon to pension them when they got too old to be of any use about the castle.

At any rate, it seems, I was a distinct improvement over the Count, who had been their master for a dozen very lean and unprofitable years. Things might be expected to look up a bit, with me at the head of the house. Was it not possible for a new and mighty race to rise and take the place of the glorious Rothhoefens? A long line of Baron Schmarts? With me as the prospective root of a thriving family tree! At least, that is what Conrad said, and I may be pardoned for quoting him.

I am truly sorry the old rascal put it into my head.

But the gist of the whole matter was this: There are no more Rothhoefens, and soon, God willing, there would be

no more Hohendahls. Long live the Schmarts! Conrad invariably pronounced my name with the extra consonants and an umlaut.

All attempts on my part to connect the lady in the east wing with the history of the extinct Rothhoefens were futile. He would not commit himself.

"Well," said I, yawning in helpless collusion with the sleepy Gretel, "we'll let it go over till morning. Call me at seven, Britton."

Conrad made haste to assure me that the lady would not receive me before eleven o'clock. He begged me to sleep till nine, and to have pleasant dreams.

I went to bed but not to sleep. It was very clear to me that my neighbor was a disturber in every sense of the word. She wouldn't let me sleep. For two hours I tried to get rid of her, but she filtered into my brain and prodded my thoughts into the most violent activity. She wouldn't stay put.

My principal thoughts had to do with her identity. Somehow I got it into my head that she was one of the female Rothhoefens, pitiable nonentities if Conrad's estimate is to be accepted. A descendant of one of those girl-bearing daughters of the last baron! It sounded very agreeable to my fancy's ear, and I cuddled the hope that my surmise was not altogether preposterous.

My original contention that she was a poor relation of old Schmick and somewhat dependent upon him for charity—to say the least—had been set aside for more reliable convictions. Instead of being dependent upon the Schmicks, she seemed to be in an exalted position that gave her a great deal more power over them than even I possessed—they served her, not me. From time to time there occurred to me the thought that my own position in the household was rather an ignoble one, and that I was a very weak and incompetent successor to baronial privileges, to say nothing of rights. A real baron would have had her out of there before you could mention half of Jack Robinson, and there wouldn't have been any sleep lost over distracting puzzles. I deplored my lack of bad manners.

(To Be Continued.)

Predicament of a Suffragist.

A well-known university professor who has taken much interest in the woman's suffrage movement was persuaded to carry a banner in a parade that was held in New York some months ago.

His wife observed him marching with a dejected air and carrying his banner so that it hung limply on its standard, and later she reproved him for not making a better appearance.

"My dear," meekly replied the professor, "did you see what was on the banner? It read, 'Any man can vote. Why can't I?'"

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