

HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

By
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McCutcheon

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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 25 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. Later Smart finds a woman who is in possession of a wing of the castle that is barred to him. She grants a brief interview, but refuses to leave. The servants appear to be in league with her, and Smart is in a quandary.

It was quite reasonable to assume that she was young, but the odds were rather against her being beautiful. Pretty women usually adjure such precautions as veils. Still, this was speculation, and my reasoning is not always sound, for which I sometimes thank heaven. She had a baby. At least, I suppose it was here. If not, whose? This set me off on a new and apparently endless round of speculation, obviously silly and sentimental.

Now I have humbly tried to like babies. My adolescent friends and acquaintances have done their best to educate me along this particular line, with the result that I suppose I despise more babies than any man in the world. My friends, it would appear, are invariably married to each other and they all have babies for me to go into false ecstasies over. No doubt babies are very nice when they don't squawk or pull your nose or jab you in the eye, but through some strange and prevailing misfortune I have never encountered one when it was asleep. If they are asleep, the parents compel me to walk on tip-toe and speak in whispers at long range; the instant they awake and begin to yawn, I am ushered into the presence, or vice versa, and the whole world grows very small and congested and is carried about in swaddling clothes.

There is but one way for a bachelor to overcome his horror of babies, and he shouldn't wait too long.

I went to sleep about four o'clock, still oppressed by the dread of meeting a new baby.

My contact with the one hundred and sixty-nine sight-seers was brief but exceedingly convincing. They invaded the castle before I was out of bed, having—as I afterwards heard—the breweries, an art gallery and the zoological gardens to visit before noon and therefore were required to make an early start. The cathedral, which is always open to visitors and never has any one sleeping in it, was reserved for the afternoon.

I was aroused from my belated sleep by the sound of mighty cataraacts and the tread of countless elephants. Too late I realized that the tourists were upon me! Too late I remembered that the door to my room had been left unlocked! The hundred and sixty-nine were huddled outside my door, drinking in the monotonous drivel of the guide, who had a shrill, penetrating voice, and not the faintest notion of a conscience.

I listened in dismay for a moment, and then, actuated by something more than mere fury, leaped out of bed and prepared for a dash across the room to lock the door. On the third stride I whirled and made a flying leap into the bed, scuttling beneath the covers with the speed and accuracy of a crawfish. Just in time, too, for the heavy door swung slowly open a second later, and the shrill, explanatory voice was projected loudly into my lofty bed chamber.

"Come a little closer, please," said the morose man with the cap. "This room was occupied for centuries by the masters of Schloss Rothhoefen. It is a bed chamber. See the great baronial bed. It has not been slept in for more

than two hundred years. The later barons refused to sleep in it because one of their ancestors had been assassinated between its sheets at the tender age of six. He was stabbed by a step-uncle who played him false. This room is haunted. Observe the curtains of the bed. They are of the rarest silk and have been there for three hundred years, coming from Damascus in the year 1695. Now we will pass on to the room occupied by all of the great baronesses up to the nineteenth—"

A resolute beholder spoke up: "Can't we step inside?"

"If you choose, madam. But we must waste no time."

"I do so want to see where the old barons slept."

"Please do not handle the bedspreads and curtains. They will fall to pieces—"

I heard no more, for the vanguard had pushed him aside and was swooping down upon me. A sharp-nosed lady led the way. She was within three feet of the bed and was stretching out her hand to touch the proscribed fabrics when I sat bolt upright and yelled:

"Get out!"

Afterwards I was told that the guide was the first to reach the bottom of the stairs and that he narrowly escaped death in the avalanche of horrified humanity that piled after him, pursued by the puissant ghost of a six-year-old ancestor.

CHAPTER V.

I Meet the Foe and Fall.

THE post that morning, besides containing a telegram from Vienna apprising me of the immediate embarkation of four irreproachable angels in the guise of servants, brought a letter from my friends the Hazzards, inquiring when my castle would be in shape to receive and discharge house parties without subjecting them to an intermediate season of peril from drafts, leaky roofs, damp sheets and vampires.

They implored me to snatch them and one or two friends from the unbearable heat of the city, if only for a few days, appending the sad information that they were swiftly being reduced to grease spots. Dear Elsie added a postscript of unusual brevity and clarity in which she spelt grease with an "o" instead of an "a," but managed to consign me to purgatory if I permitted her to become a spot no larger than the ink blot she naively deposited beside her signature, for all the world like the seal on a death warrant.

I sat down and looked about me in gloomy despair. No words can describe the scene, unless we devote a whole page to repeating the word "dismal." Devastation always appears to be more complete of a morning I have observed in my years of experience. A plasterer's scaffolding that looks fairly nobby at sunset is a grim, unsightly skeleton at breakfast-time. A couple of joiners' horses, a matrix or two, a pile of shavings and some sawed-off blocks scattered over the floor produce a matutinal conception of chaos that hangs over one like a pall until his aesthetic sense is beaten into subjection by the hammers of a million demons in the guise of carpenters. Morning in the midst of repairs is an awful thing! I looked, despaired and then dictated a letter to the Hazzards, urging them to come at once with all their sweltering friends!

I needed some one to make me forget.

At 11 o'clock, Poopendyke brought me a note from the chataleine of the east wing. It had been dropped into the courtyard from one of the upper windows. The reading of it transformed me into a stern, relentless demon. She very calmly announced that she had a headache and couldn't think of being disturbed that day and probably not the next.

My mind was made up in an instant. I would not be put off by a headache—which was doubtless assumed for the occasion—and I would be master of my castle or know the reason why, etc.

In the courtyard I found a score or more of idle artisans, banished by the on-sweeping tourists and completely

forgotten by me in the excitement of the hour. Commanding them to fetch their files, saws, broad-axes and augers, I led the way to the mighty doors that barred my entrance to the other side. Utterly ignoring the supplications of Conrad Schmick and the ominous frowns of his two sons, we set about filing off the padlocks, and chiselling through the wooden panels. I stood over my toiling minions, and I venture to say that they never worked harder or faster in their lives. By twelve o'clock we had the great doors open and swept on to the next obstruction.

At two o'clock the last door in the east ante-chamber gave way before our resolute advance and I stood victorious and dusty in the little recess at the top of the last stairway. Beyond the twentieth century portieres of a thirteenth century doorway lay the goal we sought. I hesitated briefly before drawing them apart and taking the final plunge. As a matter of fact, I was beginning to feel ashamed of myself. Suppose that she really had a headache! What an uncouth, pusillanimous brute I—

Just then, even as my hand fell upon the curtains, they were snatched aside and I found myself staring into the vivid, uptilted face of the lady who had defied me and would continue to do so if my suddenly active perceptions counted for anything.

I saw nothing but the dark, indignant, imperious eyes. They fairly withered me.

In some haste, attended by the most disheartening nervousness, I tried to find my cap to remove it in the presence of royalty. Unfortunately I was obliged to release the somewhat cumbersome crowbar I had been carrying about with me, and it dropped with a sullen thwack upon my toes. In moments of gravity I am always doing something like that. The pain was terrific, but I clutched at the forlorn hope that she might at least smile over my agony.

"I beg your pardon," I began, and then discovered that I was not wearing a cap. It was most disconcerting. "So you would come," she said, very coldly and very levelly. I have a distinct recollection of shrinking. If you have ever tried to stand flatly upon a foot whose toes are cramped by an excruciating pain you may understand something of the added discomfort that afflicted me.

"It—it was necessary, madam," I replied as best I could. "You defied me. I think you should have appreciated my position—my motives—er—my—"

She silenced me—luckily, heaven knows—with a curt exclamation.

"Your position! It is intensely Napoleonic," said she with fine irony. Her gaze swept my horde of panting, wide-eyed house-breakers. "What a noble victory!"

It was quite time for me to assert myself. Bowing very stiffly, I remarked:

"I regret exceedingly to have been forced to devastate my own property in such a trifling enterprise, madam. The physical loss is apparent—you can see that for yourself—but of course you have no means of estimating the rental destruction that has been going on for days and days. You have been hacking away at my poor, distracted brain so persistently that it really had to give way. In a measure, this should account for my present lapse of sanity. Weak-mindedness is not a crime, but an affliction."

She did not smile.

"Well, now that you are here, Mr. Smart, may I be so bold as to inquire what you are going to do about it?"

I reflected. "I think, if you don't mind, I'll come in and sit down. That was a deuce of a rap I got across the toes. I am sure to be a great deal more lenient and agreeable if I'm asked to come in and see you. Incidentally, I thought I'd step up to inquire how your headache is getting on. Better, I hope!"

She turned her face away. I suspected a smile.

"If you choose to bang your old castle to pieces, in order to satisfy a masculine curiosity, Mr. Smart, I have

nothing more to say," she said, facing me again—still ominously, to my despair. Confound it all, she was such a slim, helpless little thing—and all alone against the wall, three very sinister could have kicked myself, but even that would have been an aimless enterprise in view of the fact that Poopendyke or any of the others could have done it more accurately than I and perhaps with greater respect. "Will you be good enough to send your—your army away, or do you prefer to have it on hand in case I should take it into my head to attack you?"

"Take 'em away, Mr. Poopendyke," I commanded hurriedly. I didn't mind Poopendyke hearing what she said, but it would be just like one of those beggars to understand English—and also to misunderstand it. "And take this beastly crowbar with you, too. It has served its purpose nobly."

Poopendyke looked his disappointment, and I was compelled to repeat the order. As they crowded down the short, narrow stairway, I remarked old Conrad and his two sons standing over against the wall, three very sinister figures. They remained motionless.

"I see, madam, that you do not dismiss your army," I said, blandly sarcastic.

"Oh, you dear old Conrad!" she cried, catching sight of the hitherto submerged Schmicks. The three of them bobbed and scraped and grinned from ear to ear. There could be no mistaking the intensity of their joy. "Don't look so sad, Conrad. I know you are blameless. You poor old dear!"

I have never seen any one who looked less sad than Conrad Schmick. Or could it be possible that he was crying instead of laughing? In either case I could not afford to have him doing it with such brazen discourtesy to me, so I rather peremptorily ordered him below.

"I will attend to you presently—all of you," said I. They did not move. "Do you hear me?" I snapped angrily. They looked stolidly at the slim young lady.

She smiled, rather proudly, I thought. "You may go, Conrad. I shall not need you. Max, will you fetch up another scuttle of coal?"

They took their orders from her! It even seemed to me that Max moved swiftly, although it was doubtless a hallucination on my part, brought about by nervous excitement.

"By Jove!" I said, looking after my trusty men-servants as they descended. "I like this! Are they my servants or yours?"

"Oh, I suppose they are yours, Mr. Smart," she said carelessly. "Will you come in now, and make yourself quite at home?"

"Perhaps I'd better wait for a day or two," said I, wavering. "Your headache, you know, I can wait just as well as—"

"Oh, no. Since you've gone to all the trouble I suppose you ought to have something for your pains."

"Pains?" I murmured, and I declare to heaven I limped as I followed her through the door into a tiny hall.

"You are a most unreasonable man," she said, throwing open a small door at the end of the hall. "I am terribly disappointed in you. You looked to be so nice and sensible and amiable."

"Oh, I'm not such a nincompoop as you might suspect, madam," said I, testily, far from complimented. I dislike being called nice, and sometimes I think it a mistake to be sensible. A sensible person never gets anything out of life because he has to avoid so much of it.

"And now, Mr. Smart, will you be kind enough to explain this incomprehensible proceeding on your part?" she said, facing me sternly.

(To Be Continued.)

Chile will raise \$10,219,650 this year for improvements on state railways and \$22,921,215 for betterments will be raised in the next five years.

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