

HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

A Fool and His Money--By George Barr McCutcheon

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS INSTALLMENTS.

In the opening installments of "A Fool and His Money," Geo. Barr McCutcheon's charming novel, 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, Smart takes a trip on the River Danube. He discovers an ancient castle, which he purchases from an Austrian Count. With his secretary, Poopendyke, he takes possession. It 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. Later he meets her and is captivated by her wit and beauty. He finds that she is divorced from a worthless and scheming Austrian Count, who was awarded the custody of the lady's child. The Count demands \$1,000,000 from his rich American father-in-law, when he would give it up. The mother abducts the child and seizes the castle as a hiding place. Smart fears trouble with the authorities, but decides to assist the fair divorcee, although she warns him of the danger. A number of visitors makes it difficult

to keep secret the presence of the Countess in the castle. One guest, familiar with the castle, almost comes upon Smart and the Countess unawares. The woman escapes—out slams a door behind her. The visitor suspects Smart of an intrigue with the wife of his valet. Finally the party leaves and Smart is relieved. The Count turns up again and asks for a loan of money, but is refused. He leaves after Smart uses rather plain language. The Countess tells Smart she married blindly, and he believes her. Unknown to himself he has fallen in love with her. She tells him she intends to marry again, but does not say whom. The Count and a confederate plan to swindle Smart, but the latter knocks the Count down and orders the men out of the castle. Mrs. Titus, mother of the Countess, arrives with two sons, posing as Smart's mother. Old friends drop in unexpectedly. It is learned that a Baron has challenged the Count to a duel. The Baron is killed and the Count flees until the affair has blown over. In disguise the Countess leaves the castle to fly to safety on her father's yacht. Smart kisses her and thinks she hates him for it. The Countess gets away safely. The Count makes Smart an amazingly liberal offer for the castle, which the latter considers favorably.

A PILE of rubbish lay heaped in one corner of the room, swept up and left there by the big Schmicks to await the Spring house-cleaning season. I presume, Tarnowsky at first eyed the heap curiously, then rather intently. Suddenly he strode across the room and gingerly rooted among the odds and ends with the toe of his highly polished boot.

To my horror a dilapidated doll detached itself and rolled out upon the floor—a well-remembered treasure of Rosemary's and so unique in appearance that I doubt if there was another in the world like it. Indeed, I have a distinct recollection of being told that the child's father had painted in the extraordinary features and had himself decorated the original flaxen locks with singular stripes of red and white and blue, a sardonic tribute to the home land of her mother.

I turned away as he stooped and picked up the soiled, discarded effigy. When next I looked at him, out of the corner of my eye, he was holding the doll at arm's length and staring at it with fixed gaze. I knew that he recognized it. There could be no doubt in his mind as to the identity of that tell-tale object. My heart was thumping fiercely.

An instant later he rejoined me, but not a word did he utter concerning the strange discovery he had made. His face was set and pallid, and his eyes were misty. Involuntarily I looked to see if he had the doll in his hand, and in that glance observed the bulging surface in his coat pocket.

In silence we stood there awaiting the reappearance of Saks, who had gone into one of the adjoining rooms. I confess that my hand trembled as I lighted a fresh cigarette. He was staring moodily at the floor, his hands clasped behind his back. Something smacking of real intelligence ordered me to hold my tongue. I smoked placidly, yet waited for the outburst. It did not come. It never came. He kept his thoughts, his emotions to himself, and for that single display of restraint on his part I shall always remember him as a true descendant of the nobility.

We trapped down the long flights of stairs side by side, followed by the superfluous Mr. Saks, who did all of the talking. He was, I think, discoursing on the extraordinary ability of ancient builders, but I am not absolutely certain. I am confident Tarnowsky did not hear a word of the fellow said.

In my study we found Poopendyke and the two strangers.

"Have you made out the papers?" demanded the Count harshly. An ugly gleam had come to his eyes, but he did not direct it toward me. Indeed, he seemed to avoid looking at me at all.

"Yes, Count Tarnowsky," said the lawyer. "They are ready for the signatures."

"Perhaps Mr. Smart may have reconsidered his offer to sell," said Tarnowsky. "Let him see the contracts."

"I have not reconsidered," I said quietly.

"You may sign here, Mr. Smart," said the notary, as he gave me the document, a simple contract. I found "Jasper Titus will offer more than I can afford to pay," said the Count. "Please do not feel that I am taking an unfair advantage of you. I am absolutely certain that he wants to buy this place for his granddaughter, a descendant of barons."

The significance of this remark was obvious, and it was the nearest he ever came to uttering the conviction that had been formed in that illuminating five minutes upstairs. If he suspected—and I think he did—he preferred not to ask the questions that must have been searing his curious brain. It was a truly wonderful demonstration of self-restraint. I would have given much to have been able to read his innermost thoughts, to watch the perplexed movements of his mind.

"Schloss Rothhoefen is yours, Count Tarnowsky," said I. "It is for you to say whether his whim shall be gratified."

His lips twitched. I saw his hand touch the bulging coat-pocket with a swift, passing movement.

"Will you be good enough to sign, Mr. Smart?" he said coldly. He glanced at his watch. "My time is valuable. When can you give possession?"

"The day the deed is transferred," I said. "That will be in less than three days. I have satisfied myself that the title is clear. There need be no delay."

We signed the contract after I had requested Poopendyke to read it aloud to me. It called for the payment of fifty thousand kronen sterling, at the time of signing. His lawyer handed me a package of crisp banknotes and asked me to count them. I did so deliberately, the purchaser looking on with a sardonic smile.

"Correct," said I, laying the package on the table. He bowed very deeply.

"Are you satisfied, Mr. Smart, that there are no counterfeits among them?" he inquired with polite irony. Then to his lawyer: "Take the gentleman's receipt for the amount in the presence of witnesses. This is a business transaction, not a game of chance." It was the insult perfect.

As he prepared to take his departure, he assumed an insinuating air of apology, and remarked to me:

"I owe you an apology, Mr. Smart.

There was a time when I did you an injustice. I suspected you of keeping your mistress here. Pray forgive my error."

Five days later I was snugly ensconced in the ducal suite at the Bristol, overlooking the Kärntnerstrasse, bereft of my baronial possessions but not at all sorry. My romance had been short-lived. It is one thing to write novels about mediaeval castles and quite another thing to try to write a novel in one of them. I trust I may never again be guilty of such arrant stupidity as to think that an American-born citizen can become a feudal baron by virtue of his dollars and cents, any more than a real dyed-in-the-wool Countess or Duchess because some one needs the money more than she does. It would be quite as impossible, contrari-wise, to transform a noble Duke into a plain American citizen, so there you are, even up.

My plans were made. After a fortnight in Vienna, I expected to go west to London for the Autumn, and then back to New York. Strange to relate, I was homesick. Never before had my thoughts turned so restlessly, so wistfully to the haunts of my boyhood days. I began to long for the lights of Broadway (which I had scornfully despised in other days), and the gay peacockery of Fifth avenue at four in the afternoon. It seemed to me that nowhere in all the world was life so joyous and blithe and worth while as in "old New York"; nowhere were the theaters so attractive, nowhere such restaurants. Even, in retrospect, the subway looked alluring, and as for the Fifth-avenue stages they were too beautiful for words. Ah, what a builder of unreal things a spell of homesickness may become if one gives it half a chance!

As for Schloss Rothhoefen, I had it on excellent authority (no less a person than Conrad Schmick himself) that barely had I shaken the dust of the place from myself before the new master put into execution a most extraordinary and incomprehensible plan of reconstruction. In the first place, he gave all the servants two weeks' notice, and then began to raze the castle from the bottom upward instead of the other way round, as a sensible person might have been expected to do. He was knocking out the walls in the cellars and digging up the stone floors with splendid disregard for that ominous thing known as a cataclysm. The grave question in the minds of the servants was whether the usual and somewhat mandatory two weeks' notice wouldn't prove a trifle too long after all. In fact, Hawkes, with an inspiration worthy of an office boy, managed to produce a sick grandmother and got away from the place at the end of one week, although having been paid in full for two.

The day on which I left for Paris still saw Tarnowsky at work with his masons, heroically battering down the walls of the grim old stronghold, and I chuckled to myself. It was quite evident that he hadn't found the hiding place up to that time.

After several days in Paris, I took myself off to London. I was expecting letters at Claridge's, where I always take rooms, not because I think it is the best hotel in London but because I am, to some extent a creature of habit. My mother took me to Claridge's when I was a boy and I saw a wonderful personage at the door whom I was full personage at the Kings. Ever since then I have been going to Claridge's and while my first king is dead there is one in his place who bids fair to live long, albeit no one shouts encouragement to him. He wears the most gorgeous buttons I've ever seen, and I doubt if King Solomon himself could have been more regal. Certainly not Nebuchadnezzar. He works from seven in the morning until seven at night, and he has an imperial scorn for anything smaller than half a sovereign.

There were many letters waiting there for me, but not one from the Countess. Alas! I had encouraged the hope that she might write to me; it was the least she could do in return for all that I had done for her, notwithstanding my wretched behavior on the last day of our association. While I had undoubtedly offended in the most flagrant manner, still my act was not unpardonable. There was tribute, not outrage in my behavior.

Poopendyke fidgeted a good deal with the scanty results of my literary labors, rattling the typed pages in a most insinuating way. He oiled his machine with accusative frequency, but I failed to respond. I was in no mood for writing. He said to me one day:

"I don't see why you keep a secretary, Mr. Smart. I don't begin to earn my salt."

"Salt, Mr. Poopendyke," said I, "is the cheapest thing I know of. Now if you had said pepper I might pause to reflect. But I am absolutely, inexorably opposed to rating anything on a salt basis. If you—"

"You know what I mean," he said stiffly. "I am of no use to you."

"Ah," said I triumphantly, "but you forget! Who is it that draws the salary checks for yourself and Britton, and who keeps the accounts straight? Who, I repeat? Why, you, Mr. Poopendyke. You draw the checks. Isn't that something?"

"If—I didn't know you so well, I wouldn't hesitate to call you a blooming fool, Mr. Smart," said he, but he grinned as he said it.

"But he who hesitates is lost," said

I. "This is your chance, don't let it slip." He looked at me so steadily for a moment that I was in some fear he would not let it slip.

Before I had been in London a week it became perfectly clear to me that I could not stretch my stay out to anything like a period of two months. Indeed, I began to think about booking my passage home inside of two weeks. I was restless, dissatisfied, homesick. On the ninth day I sent Poopendyke to the booking office of the steamship company with instructions to secure passage for the next sailing of the Mauretania, and then lived in a state of positive dread for fear the confounded American tourists might have gobbled up all of the cabins. They are always going home it seems to me, and they are always trying to get on a single unfortunate ship. In all my experience abroad, I've never known a time when Americans were not tumbling over each other trying to get back to New York in time to catch a certain train for home, wherever that may be. But Poopendyke managed it somehow. He must have resorted to bribery.

I awoke one morning to find a long and—I was about to say interesting—letter from the Countess! It was a very commonplace communication I found on the third or fourth reading. The sum and substance of its contents was the information that she was going to Virginia Hot Springs with the family for a month or two and that Lord Amberdale was to join them there. It appeared that her father, being greatly overworked, was in need of a rest, and as the golf links at Hot Springs are especially designed to make it easy for rich men, his doctor had ordered him to that delightful resort. She hoped the rest would put him on his feet again. There was a page or so of drivel about Amberdale and what he expected to do at the New York Horse Show, a few lines concerning Rosemary; and a brief, almost curt intimation that a glimpse or two of me would not be altogether displeasing to her if I happened to be coming that way.

It may be regarded as a strange coincidence that I instructed Britton that very evening to see that my golf clubs were cleaned up and put into good shape for a little practice on a course near London, where I had been put up by an English author, and who was forever ding-donging at me to come out and let him "put it all over me." I went out and bought a new brassie to replace the one destroyed by the experimenting Rocksworth youth, and before I got through with it had a new putter, a niblick and a spoon, neither of which I needed for the excellent reason that I already possessed a half dozen of each.

Keved up to a high pitch of enthusiasm, I played golf for ten days, and found my friend to be a fine sportsman. Like all Englishmen, he took a beating gracefully, but gave me to understand that he had been having a good deal of trouble with rheumatism or neuritis in his right elbow. On the last day we played he succeeded in bringing me in two down and I've never seen neuritis dispersed so quickly as it was in his case. I remember distinctly that he complained bitterly of the pain in his elbow when we started out, and that he was as fit as a fiddle at the eighteenth hole. He even went so far as to implore me to stay over till the next sailing of the Mauretania.

But I took to the high seas. Mr. Poopendyke cabled to the Homestead at Hot Springs for suitable accommodations. I cannot remember when I had been so forehanded as all that, and I wonder what my secretary thought of me. My habit is to procrastinate.

I almost forgot to mention a trifling bit of news that came to me the day before sailing. Elsie Hazzard wrote in great perturbation and at almost unfeeling length to tell me that Count Tarnowsky had unearthed the supposedly mythical Rothhoefen treasure chests and was reputed to have found gold and precious jewels worth at least a million dollars. The accumulated products of a century's thievery! The hoard of all the robber barons! Tarnowsky's!

Strange to say I did not writhe nor snarl with disappointment and rage. I took the news with a sang froid that almost killed poor Poopendyke. He never quite got over it.

Nor was I especially disturbed or irritated by the telegram of condolence I received on board ship from Tarnowsky himself. He could not resist the temptation to gloat. I shall not repeat the message for the simple reason that I do not wish to dignify it by putting it into permanent form.

We were two days out when I succeeded in setting my mind at rest in respect to Althe, Countess Tarnowsky. I had not thought of it before, but I remembered all of a sudden that I held divided scruples against marrying a divorced woman. Of course, that simplified matters. When one has preconceived notions about such matters they afford excellent material to fall back upon, even though he may have disregarded them after a fashion while unscientifically thinking of some one else. As I say, the recollection of this well-defined though somewhat remorseless principle of mine had the effect of putting my mind at rest in regard to the Countess. Feeling as strongly as I did about marriage with divorcees, she became an absolutely undesirable person so far as matrimony was concerned. I experienced a rather doubt-

ful feeling of relief. It was not so hard to say to myself that Lord Amberdale was welcome to her, but it was very, very difficult to refrain from adding the unamiable words: "damn him."

This rigid, puritanical principle of mine, however, did not declare against the unrighteousness of falling in love with a divorcee.

CHAPTER XX.

I Change Garden Spots.

If I have, by any chance, announced earlier in this narrative that the Valley of the Donau is the garden spot of the world, I must now ask you to excuse the chubbiness of spirit that prompted the declaration. The Warm Springs Valley of Virginia is infinitely more attractive to me, and I make haste to rectify any erroneous impression I may have given, while under the spell of something my natural modesty forbids me to describe.

If you happen not to know the Warm Springs Valley, permit me to say that you are missing a great deal. It is a garden spot and—but why discourse upon a subject that is so aptly handled by the gentlemen who supply railway folders with descriptive material and who will tell you in so many words that God's noblest work was done in the green hills and vales of fair Virginia? Any railway folder will acquaint you with all this and save me a great deal of time and trouble, besides giving you a sensible and adequate idea of how to get there and where to stop when you reach your journey's end, together with the price of Pullman tickets and the nature of the ailments you are supposed to have if you take the waters. It is only necessary for me to say that it is a garden spot and that you don't have to change cars if you take the right train out of New York City, a condition which does not obtain if you happen to approach from the opposite direction.

I arrived there early one bright November morning, three days after landing in New York. You will be rendered unhappy, I fear, by the announcement that I left Mr. Poopendyke behind. He preferred to visit an aunt at New Rochelle and I felt that he deserved a vacation. Britton, of course, accompanied me. He is indispensable, and so far as I know, hasn't the faintest notion of what a vacation means unless he considers employment with me in some such light. At any rate he has never mentioned a relation in need of a visit from him.

Before leaving New York I had a rather unpleasant encounter with my publishers. It was in the nature of a luncheon at which I was led to believe that they still expected me to supply them with the manuscript of a novel at a very early date. They seemed considerably put out when I blandly informed them that I had got no farther along than the second chapter. "We have been counting on this book of yours for January publication," said they.

I tried to explain that the muse had abandoned me in a most heartless fashion.

"But the public demands a story from you," said they. "What have you been doing all Summer?"

"Romancing," said I.

I don't know just how it came about, but the suggestion was made that I put into narrative form the lively history of my sojourn on the banks of the Danube, trusting implicitly to the imagination yet leaving nothing to it.

"But it's all such blithering rot," said I.

"So much the better," said they triumphantly—even eagerly.

I do not suppose that you, as publishers, can appreciate the fact that an author may have a soul above skittles," said I indignantly. "I cannot, I will not write a line about myself, gentlemen. Not that I consider the subject sacred but—"

"Wait!" cried the junior member, his face aglow. "We appreciate the delicacy of—er—your feelings, Mr. Smart, but I have an idea—a splendid idea. It solves the whole question. Your secretary is a most competent, capable young man and a genius after a fashion. I propose that he write the story. We'll pay him a lump sum for the work, put your name on the cover, and there you are. All you will have to do is to edit his material. How's that?"

And so it came to pass that I took myself off that evening for Hot Springs, secure in the thought that Poopendyke would attend to my literary estate far more capably than I could do it myself, and that my labors later on would be pleasantly devoted to the lazy task of editing, revising and deleting a tale already told.

If you are lucky enough to obtain rooms in the Homestead, looking out over the golf course, with the wonderful November colorings in the hills and gaps beyond; over the casino, the tennis courts and the lower levels of the fashionable playground, you may well say to yourself that all the world is bright and sweet and full of hope. From my windows I could see far down the historic valley in the direction of Warm Springs, a hazy blue panorama wrapped in the air of an Indian Summer and redolent with the incense of Autumn. Britton reminded me that it was a grand morning for golf, and I was at once reminded that Britton is an excellent chap, whose opinions are always worth considering.

(To Be Continued.)