

HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

By
Geo. Barr
McCutcheon.

Copyright, 1913,
By Geo. Barr
McCutcheon.

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. 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. Later he is captivated by the wit and beauty of the mysterious lady and no longer urges her departure. 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 a million dollars from his rich American father-in-law, when he would give it up. The mother abducts the child and selects 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.

"WHILE I am not overjoyed at the prospect of being dragged into it, Countess, I certainly refuse to back out at this stage of the game. Moreover, you may rest assured that I shall not turn you out."

"It occurred to me last night that the safest thing for you to do, Mr. Smart, is to—get out yourself." I stared. She went on hurriedly: "Can't you go away for a month's visit or—"

"Well, upon my soul!" I gasped. "Would you turn me out of my own house? This beats anything I've—"

"I was only thinking of your peace of mind and your—your safety," she cried unhappily. "Truly, truly I was."

"Well, I prefer to stay here and do what little I can to shield you and Rosemary," said I sullenly.

"I'll not say anything horrid again, Mr. Smart," she said quite meekly. (I take this occasion to repeat that I've never seen any one in all my life so pretty as she!) Her moist red lip trembled slightly, like a censured child's.

At that instant there came a rapping on the door. I started apprehensively.

"It is only Max with the coal," she explained, with obvious relief. "We keep a fire going in the grate all day long. You've no idea how cold it is up here even on the hottest days. Come in!"

Max came near to dropping the scuttle when he saw me. He stood as one petrified.

"Don't mind Mr. Smart, Max," said she serenely. "He won't bite your head off."

The poor clumsy fellow spilled quantities of coal over the hearth when he attempted to replenish the fire at her command, and moved with greater celerity in making his escape from the room than I had ever known him to exercise before. Somehow I began to regain a lost feeling of confidence in myself. The confounded Schmicks, big and little, were afraid of me, after all.

"By the way," she said, after we had lighted our cigarettes, "I am nearly out of these." I like the way she held the match for me, and then flicked it snappily into the center of a pile of cushions six feet from the fireplace.

I made a mental note of the shortage and then admiringly said that I didn't see how any man, even a count, could help adoring a woman who held a cigarette to her lips as she did.

"Oh," she said coolly, "his friends were willing worshippers, all of them. There wasn't a man among them who failed to make violent love to me, and with the Count's permission at that. You must not look so shocked. I managed to keep them at a safe distance. My unreasonable attitude toward them used to annoy my husband intensely."

"Good Lord!"

"Pooh! He didn't care what be-

came of me. There was one particular man whom he favored the most. A dreadful man! We quarrelled bitterly when I declared that either he or I would have to leave the house—forever. I don't mind confessing to you that the man I speak of is your friend, the gentle Count Hohendahl, some time ogre of this castle."

I shuddered. A feeling of utter loathing for all these unprincipled scoundrels came over me, and I mildly took the name of the Lord in vain.

With an abrupt change of nature, she arose from her chair and began to pace the floor, distractedly beating her clinched hands against her bosom. "Twice I heard her murmur: 'Oh, God!'"

This startling exposition of feeling gave me a most uncanny shock. It came out of a clear sky, so to say, at a moment when I was beginning to regard her as cold-blooded, callous, and utterly without the emotions supposed to exist in the breast of every high-minded woman. And now I was witness to the pain she suffered, now I heard her cry out against the thing that had hurt her so pitilessly. I turned my head away, vastly moved. Presently she moved over to the window. A covert glance revealed her standing there, looking not down at the Danube that seemed so far away but up at the blue sky that seemed so near.

I sat very still and repressed, trying to remember the harsh, unkind things I had said to her, and berating myself fiercely for all of them. What a stupid, vain-glorious ass I was not to have divined something of the inward fight she was making to conquer the emotions that filled her heart unto the bursting point.

The sound of dry, suppressed sobs came to my ears. It was too much for me. I stealthily quit my position by the mantel-piece and tip-toed toward the door, bent on leaving her alone. Halfway there I hesitated, stopped and then deliberately returned to the fireplace, where I noisily shuffled a fresh supply of coals into the grate. It would be heartless, even unmannerly, to leave her without letting her know that I was heartily ashamed of myself and completely in sympathy with her. Wisely, however, I resolved to let her have her cry out. Some one a great deal more far-seeing than I let the world into a most important secret when he advised man to take that course when in doubt.

For a long while I waited for her to regain control of herself, rather dreading the apology she would feel called upon to make for her abrupt reversion to the first principles of her sex. The sobs ceased entirely. I experienced the sharp joy of relaxation. Her dainty lace handkerchief found employment. First she would dab it cautiously in one eye, then the other, after which she would scrutinize its crumpled surface with most extraordinary interest. At least a dozen times she repeated this puzzling operation. What in the world was she looking for? To this day, that strange, sly pecking on her part remains a mystery to me.

She turned swiftly upon me and beckoned with her little forefinger. Greatly concerned, I sprang toward her. Was she preparing to swoon? What in heaven's name was I to do if she took it into her pretty head to do such a thing as that? Involuntarily I shot a quick look at her blouse. To my horror it was buttoned down the back. It would be a bachelor's luck to— But she was smiling radiantly. Saved!

"Look!" she cried, pointing upward through the window. "Isn't she lovely?"

I stopped short in my tracks and stared at her in blank amazement. What a stupefying creature she was!

She beckoned again, impatiently. I obeyed with alacrity. Obtaining a rather clear view of her eyes, I was considerably surprised to find no trace of departed tears. Her cheek was as smooth and creamy white as it had been before the deluge. Her eyelids were dry and orderly and her nose had not been blown once to my recollection. Truly, it was a marvelous recovery. I still wondered.

The cause of her excitement was

visible at a glance. A trim nurse-maid stood in the small gallery which circled the top of the turret, just above and to the right of us. She held in her arms the pink-hooded, pink-coated Rosemary, made snug against the chill winds of her lofty parade ground. Her yellow curls peeped out from beneath the lace of the hood, and her round little cheeks were the color of the peach's bloom.

"Now, isn't she lovely?" cried my eager companion. "Even a crusty bachelor can see that she is adorable."

"I am not a crusty bachelor," I protested indignantly, "and what's more, I am positive I should like to kiss those red little cheeks, which is saying a great deal for me. I've never voluntarily kissed a baby in my life."

"I do not approve of the baby-kissing custom," she said severely. "It is extremely unhealthy and—middle-class. Still," seeing my expression change, "I sha'n't mind your kissing her once."

"Thanks," said I humbly.

It was plain to be seen that she did not intend to refer to the recent outburst. Superb exposition of tact! Catching the nurse's eye, she signalled for her to bring the child down to us. Rosemary took to me at once. A most embarrassing thing happened. On seeing me she held out her chubby arms and shouted "da-da!" at the top of her infantile lungs. That had never happened to me before.

I flushed and the Countess shrieked with laughter. It wouldn't have been so bad if the nurse had known her place. If there is one thing in this world that I hate with fervor, it is an ill-mannered, poorly trained servant. A grinning nurse-maid is the worst of all. I may be super-sensitive and crotchety about such things, but I can see no excuse for keeping a servant—especially a nurse-maid—who laughs at everything that's said by her superiors, even though the quip may be no more sidesplitting than a two syllabled "da-da."

"Ha, ha!" I laughed bravely. "She—she evidently thinks I look like the Count. He is very handsome, you say."

"Oh, that isn't it," cried the Countess, taking Rosemary in her arms and directing me to a spot on her rosy cheek. "Kiss right there, Mr. Smart. There! Wasn't it a nice kiss, honey-bunch? If you are a very, very nice little girl the kind gentleman will kiss you on the other cheek some day. She calls every man she meets da-da," explained the radiant young mother.

"She's awfully European in her habits, you see. You need not feel flattered. She calls Conrad and Rudolph and Max da-da, and this morning—the back window she applied the same handsome compliment to your Mr. Poopendyke."

"Oh," said I, rather more crestfallen than relieved.

"Would you like to hold her, Mr. Smart? She's such a darling to hold."

"No—no, thank you," I cried, backing off.

"Oh, you will come to it, never fear," she said gaily, as she restored Rosemary to the nurse's arms. "Won't he, Blake?"

"He will, my lady," said Blake with conviction. I noticed this time that Blake's smile wasn't half bad.

At that instant Jinko, the chow, pushed the door open with his black nose and strolled imposingly into the room. He proceeded to treat me in the most cavalier fashion by bristling and growling.

The Countess opened her eyes very wide.

"Dear me," she sighed, "you must be very like the Count, after all. Jinko never growls at any one but him."

At dinner that evening I asked Poopendyke point blank if he could call to mind a marriage in New York society that might fit the principals in this puzzling case.

He hemmed and hawed and appeared to be greatly confused.

"Really, sir, I—I—really, I—"

"You make it a point to read all of the society news," I explained; "and you are a great hand for remembering names and faces. Think hard."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Smart, I do remember this particular marriage very clearly," said he, looking down at his plate.

"You do?" I shouted eagerly. The

new footman stared. "Splendid! Tell me, who is she—or was she?"

My secretary looked me steadily in the eye.

"I'm sorry, sir, but—but I can't do it. I promised her this morning I wouldn't let it be dragged out of me with red hot tongs."

CHAPTER VII.

I Receive Visitors.

She was indeed attended by faithful slaves.

The east wing of the castle was as still as a mouse on the day my house party arrived. Grim old doors took on new padlocks, keyholes were carefully stopped up; creaking floors were calked; windows were picketed by uncompromising articles of furniture deployed to keep my ruthless refugee from adventuring too close to the danger zone; and adamantine instructions were served out to all of my vassals. Everything appeared to be in tip-top shape for the experiment in stealth.

And yet I trembled. My secret seemed to be safely planted, but what would the harvest be? I knew I should watch those upper windows with hypnotic zeal, and listen with straining ears for the inevitable squall of a child or the bark of a dog. My brain ran riot with incipient subterfuges, excuses, apologies and lies with which my position was to be sustained.

There would not be a minute during the week to come when I would be perfectly free to call my soul my own, and as for nerves! well, with good luck they might endure the strain. Popping up in bed out of a sound sleep at the slightest disturbance, with ears wide open and nerves tingling, was to be a nightly occupation at uncertain intervals; that was plain to be seen. All day long I would be shivering with anxiety and praying for night to come so that I might lie awake and pray for the sun to rise, and in this way pass the time as quickly as possible. There would be difficulty in getting my visitors to bed early, another thing to test my power at conniving. They were bridge players, of course, and as such would be up till all hours of the morning overdoing themselves in the effort to read each other's thoughts.

I thanked the Lord that my electric lighting system would not be installed until after they had departed. Ordinarily the Lord isn't thanked when an electric light company fails to perform its work on schedule time, but in this case delay was courted.

We were all somewhat surprised and not a little disorganized by the appearance of four unexpected servants in the train of my party. We hadn't counted on anything quite so elaborate. There were two lady's maids, not on friendly terms with each other; a French valet who had the air of one used to being served on a tray outside the servants' quarters; and a German attendant with hands constructed especially for the purpose of kneading and gouging the innermost muscles of his master, who it appears had to be kneaded and gouged three times a day by a masseur in order to stave off paralysis, locomotor ataxia or something equally unwelcome to a high liver.

We had ample room for all this physical increase, but no beds. I transferred the problem to Poopendyke. How he solved it I do not know, but from the woe-begone expression on his face the morning after the first night, and the fact that Britton was unnecessarily rough in shaving me, I gathered that the two of them had slept on a pile of rugs in the lower hall.

Elsie Hazard presented me to her friends and, with lordly generosity, I presented the castle to them. Her husband, Dr. George, thanked me for saving all their lives and then, feeling a draft, turned up his coat collar and informed me that we'd all die if I didn't have the cracks stopped up. He seemed unnecessarily testy about it.

(To Be Continued.)

Cornell University recently dedicated a forestry building in connection with the state college of agriculture,