

# A FOOL AND HIS MONEY

Drawing by Arthur I. Keller

BY GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

## CHAPTER XIX. I Burn a Few Bridges

ACCOMPANIED by Hazzard and Smith, I went over the castle from top to bottom, in quest of the reason for Tarnowsky's prompt acceptance of my demand. We had no doubt that he had a good and sufficient reason for wanting the place, and but one thing suggested itself to our imagination,—his absolute certainty that treasure was hidden somewhere about the venerable pile; treasure of considerable magnitude, you may be sure, or he would not have displayed such alacrity in accepting my terms. While I was eager to get rid of the castle at any price, I did not relish the thought of being laughed at for a fool by Maris Tarnowsky after he had laid his greedy hands upon treasure that had been mine without my knowledge.

We spent two unprofitable days in going over the place, and in the end sank down tired, defeated, and without the slightest evidence in our possession that so much as a halfcrown lay hidden there as treasure trove. I gave in, and announced that if Tarnowsky could find anything worth having he was entitled to it so far as I was concerned, and I wouldn't begrudge him a farthing's worth.

He telegraphed that he would arrive on the morning of the third day, accompanied by his lawyer, a notary, and an architect. My four guests departed in haste by the late night train, after extracting a promise from me to join them in Vienna when I was no longer the master of Schloss Rothhoefen.

TARNOWSKY was as bland and smiling as a May morning as he came jauntily down the great hall to where I awaited him. "I am here incognito, my dear Smart," he said, extending his gloved hand, which I took for performance. "A stupid, unchivalric Empire has designs upon me,—perfunctorily perhaps; but it's just as well not to stir up the monkeys, as you Americans would put it."

"Our late friend the Baron was not totally without friends, I take it," said I dryly.

He made a grimace. "Nor enemies," he declared. "Brave men usually have more enemies than friends, and he was a brave man. Because he was a brave man, I have no feeling of regret over the outcome of our—er—meeting. It is no honor to kill a coward, Mr. Smart."

He introduced his three companions. I was surprised to see that the lawyer was not the fawning Schymansky, and later on inquired for him.

Tarnowsky laughed. "Poor old Schymansky! He is in prison. He was my second, poor chap. It did not occur to him to run away after the—er—duel. They had to make an example of someone. His trial comes up next week. I am afraid he may be dealt with rather harshly. But let us come to the matter in hand, Mr. Smart. I dare say your time is valuable. You have no objection to my going over the place with Mr. Saks, I am sure. He is the architect who is to rebuild the castle for me. My attorney and Mr. Pooley the notary will, with your assistance, draw up the proper contracts preliminary to the formal transfer, and I will sign them with you upon my return."

"Would it not be better to discuss the question of payments before we go any further, Count Tarnowsky?"

"You will be paid in cash, Mr. Smart, the instant the deed is transferred," said he coldly.

I followed him to the top of the stairs that descended to the basement of the castle. It was rather significant that he elected to explore the lower regions first of all. "I shall accompany you," said I deliberately.

A faint scowl came into his face. He eyed me fixedly for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and said that his only desire was to avoid putting me to any unnecessary trouble. If I cared to come, he would be more than grateful.

"It isn't necessary to visit the cellars, Saks," he said to the architect. "Ample time for that sort of rummaging. I particularly want your opinion on the condition of the interesting walls on this floor and above. My scheme of improvements, Mr. Smart, contemplates the enlargement of these halls by throwing them into one."

"A very simple process," said I, "if the whole structure doesn't topple down upon your heads while you're about it."

"I shall contrive to save my scalp, Mr. Smart; no matter what happens. It is very precious to me."

We went over the castle rather hurriedly, I thought; but he explained that Saks merely wanted a general idea of the structure. He would return another day to make a careful inspection.

"I dare say you are surprised that I should be willing to pay double your original price for Schloss Rothhoefen," he ventured, pausing in the corridor to light a cigarette. We were on our way to the top of the east wing.

"Oh, no," I said calmly. "I am aware that treasure is buried here. As a matter of fact, I've tried to unearth it myself; but without success. I wish you better luck."

"Thanks," said he facetiously after the first swift glance of inquiry. "It is doubtless a fairy tale, handed down by tradition. I take no stock in it. My principal object in acquiring Rothhoefen is to satisfy a certain vanity that begets me. I have it on excellent authority that my ex-father-in-law—the man Titus, you know—talks of buying the property and performing the

stupendous, characteristic American feat of removing it stone and timber, just as it is, to his estate north of New York City. No one but a vulgar, purse-proud American would think of doing such a thing. I want to buy this place for no other reason than to tell him that he hasn't enough money in his possession to purchase it from me. D'you see? Vanity, you may call it, as I do; but it pleases me to coddle it."

By this time we were in the rooms once occupied by the Countess. He glanced about the apartments carelessly.

"Deserted, I observe," he remarked with a queer smile. My heart almost stood still. "Eh? What do you mean?"

"If I am not mistaken, these are the rooms once occupied by your valet's wife. Am I right?"

I steadied myself. "She has gone away," I said. "Couldn't stand the climate."

"I see," said he; but he was still smiling. "How does your valet stand it?"

"Nicely," said I, with a conscious blush.

"I mean the separation, of course."

"Certainly. He is used to it."

"Isn't it rather odd that he should still think she is here, in the castle?"

"Does he?" I murmured.

"I inquired for her when I encountered him downstairs. He said she was quite well this morning, except for a headache."

"She is subject to headaches, I believe," said I, with the utmost nonchalance.

He lifted his right eyebrow lightly; but said no more on the subject.

A pile of rubbish lay heaped in one corner of the room. 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 odd 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, 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 a fixed gaze. I knew that he recognized it. There could be no doubt in his mind as to the identity of that telltale 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 of 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 transcendentalist of the nobility.

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.

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

"The day the deed is transferred."

"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 two thousand dollars 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 pun-hunter 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 air of apology, and said 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 paramour here. Pray forgive my error."

FIVE days later I was snugly ensconced in the ducal suite at the Bristol, overlooking the Kartnerringstrasse; bereft of my baronial possessions, but not at all sorry. My romance had been short lived. It is one thing to write novels about medieval 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 an American-born girl can hope to be a real, dyed-in-the-wool Countess or Duchess because someone needs the money more than she does. It would be quite as impossible, contrariwise, to transform a noble Duke into a plain American citizen.

My plans were made. After a fortnight in Vienna I expected to go to London for the autumn, and then back to New York. I was homesick.

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 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 a few days in Paris I took myself off to London. I was expecting letters at Claridge's, where I always take rooms. There were many letters waiting there for me; but not one from Countess Aline. I had encouraged the hope that she might write to me. It was the least she could do in return for all 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 accusatory frequency; but I failed to respond. I was in no mood for writing.

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 tourists might have gobbled up all the cabins.

I awoke one morning to find a long 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 rest, and as the golf links at Hot Springs were specially 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.

AT last I took to the high seas. Poopendyke called to the Homestead at Hot Springs for suitable accommodations.

I almost forgot to mention a trifling bit of news that came to me the day before sailing. Elsy Hazzard wrote in great perturbation and at almost unending 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 or snarl with disappointment and rage. I took the news with a sangfroid that almost killed poor Poopendyke. Nor was I specially disturbed or irritated by the telegram of condolence I received on board ship from Tarnowsky himself. He could not resist the temptation to do so.

## CHAPTER XX. I Change Garden Spots

IF I have, by any chance, announced earlier in this narrative that the valley of the Donau really is a garden spot of the world, I must now ask you to excuse the ebullience of spirit that prompted the declaration. The