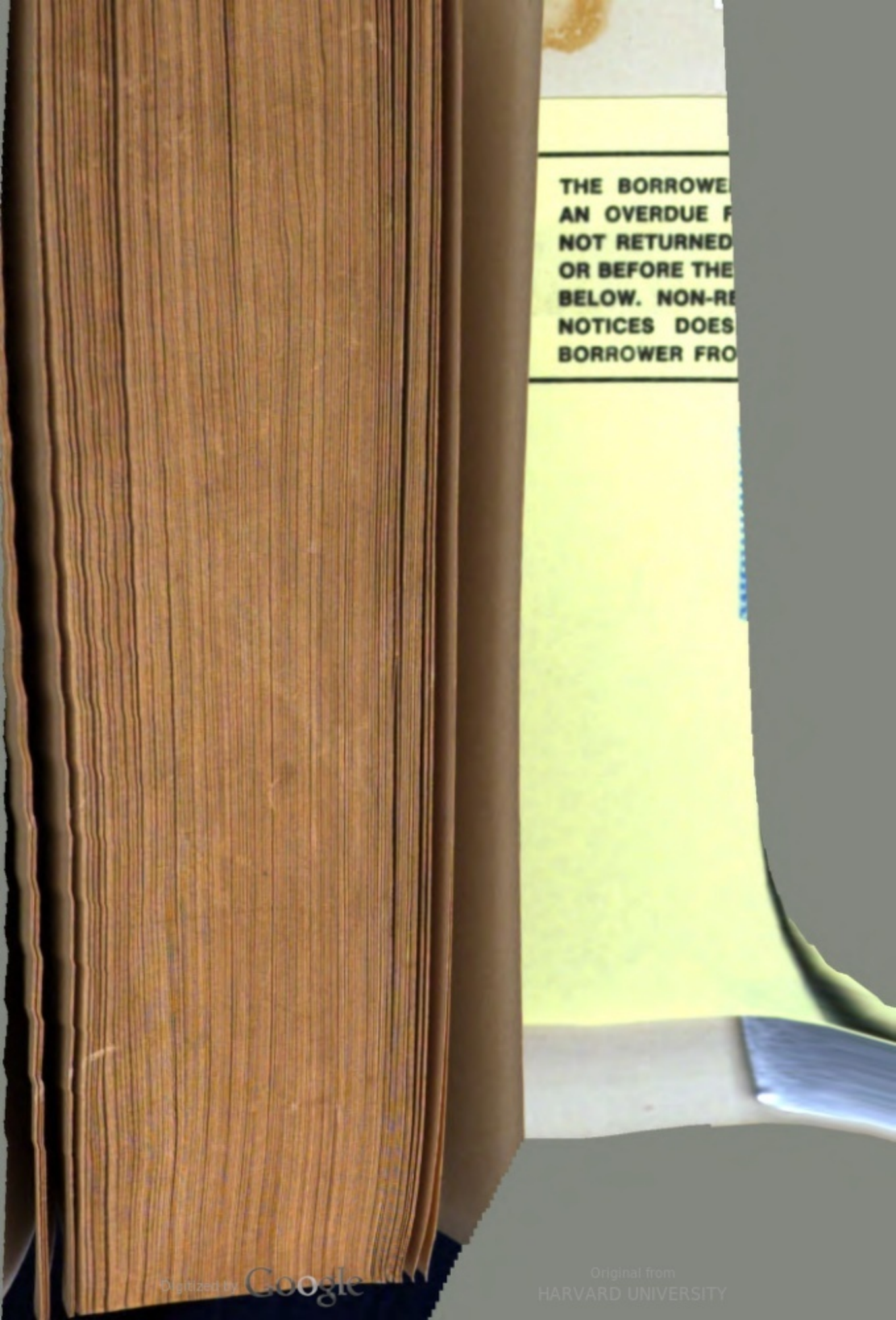
AND BLACKIE DAW

GEORGE RANDOLPH
CHESTER

Digitized by Google
Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY



Digitized by Google
Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Al 1944.8.75.10

SHORT STORY COLLECTION

EDWARD PRESCOTT

Harvard College Library
THE BEQUEST OF
EDWARD PRESCOTT
CLASS OF 1870

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

WALLINGFORD AND BLACKIE DAW

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

WALLINGFORD AND BLACKIE DAW

By

GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER

Author of

YOUNG WALLINGFORD, FIVE THOUSAND AN HOUR, THE JINGO WALLINGFORD IN HIS PRIME, ETC.

INDIANAPOLIS
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

COPYRIGHT 1913
THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
BEQUEST OF
WINWARD PRESCOTT
JANUARY 27, 1933

PRESS OF
BRAUNWORTH & CO.
BOOKBINDERS AND PRINTERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

Digitized by Google
Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	TIPPING IT OFF	1
II	THE COME-BACK	19
III	BLACKIE TAKES CHARGE	32
IV	STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL	46
V	A FESTIVE SCENE	67
VI	SOME CLASS	84
VII	PIPING HOT	97
VIII	MONEY MAD	116
IX	DOWN WITH GRAFT	138
X	TALKING BUSINESS	153
XI	TOO GOOD TO KEEP	168
XII	A STOLEN MARCH	185
XIII	STANDING TREAT	204
XIV	AVOID THE RUSH	222
XV	AGAINST THE RULES	243
XVI	GET-AWAY DAY	259
XVII	UP AGAINST IT	273
XVIII	THAT'S THE TALK	286
XIX	PLAYING THE GAME	306
XX	PINK AND PROSPEROUS	319
XXI	A NOISE LIKE MONEY	341
XXII	GETTING IT STRAIGHT	359
XXIII	AN AMERICAN JOKE	376
XXIV	CASH, PLEASE	388

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

WALLINGFORD AND BLACKIE DAW

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

WALLINGFORD AND BLACKIE DAW

CHAPTER I

TIPPING IT OFF

BIG Tim Measen, jaws and all, came out of the ivy-clad Griswald Art Terra-Cotta Studios, with one-half of his mustache neatly curled and the other half chewed to a kinky tassel.

"What's the matter, Tim?" hailed Blackie Daw, who was coming up the flower-bordered path with Wallingford.

"I want to borry a bomb," declared Big Tim, with a vengeful backward glance at the "studios."

"I get you," laughed Blackie. "You've been cut down on the Griswald campaign contribution."

"Cut down!" snorted Big Tim. "Cut out!" and his face grew purple.

"I told you the day of graft and corruption was over in my home suburb," triumphed Blackie. "Jim, this is my friend, Tim Measen, the proprietor of the Tarryville town council. Tim, shake hands with J. Rufus Wallingford, a business associate of mine."

"Glad to meet you," husked Tim, giving Walling-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

WALLINGFORD AND BLACKIE DAW

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ford's hand a crushing grip. "Have you been in business long with Mr. Daw?"

"Don't get me wrong, Tim," hastily corrected Blackie. "Jim isn't a sucker. He's been my regular side-kick for years."

"Oh!" remarked Big Tim, and shook hands again. "I certainly am glad to know you, Mr. Wallingford. I was just going to tip it off to you that you'd better get wise if you was doing business with Blackie," and he laughed uproariously at the possibility of his warning a sucker!

"Tim used to run a squeeze spindle next to my shell game at the county fairs," explained Blackie. "Now he's my political enemy. Wallingford's going to buy a house out here, Tim, to help me elect my reform ticket this fall."

"Stay out of it," warned Tim. "Let me slip you my word that there's nothing in politics any more. Why, I've had this million-dollar Griswald factory valued on the tax list at fifty thousand ever since I've been the politics of Tarryville, and now Harry Griswald won't come across with his regular ten thousand support for the party."

"The reform spirit is growing," exulted Blackie. "The time has come, Tim, when nothing but square methods will be tolerated in public office."

"Go to it!" grinned Big Tim admiringly. "You

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

put that con across like a real straight hair, but you're too late by five years. You can't kid anybody with reform splush nowadays. I know, for I've tried it myself."

"But I'm on the level with it," earnestly protested Blackie.

"Go on and deliver your milk," laughed Big Tim. "I'll give it to you for one thing, though. You always was the best spreader on the lot. What are you going to hand the Griswalds?"

"Jim's going to try to buy Harry Griswald's residence property, just between the factory and my house over there."

"He'd better buy it quick, then," snarled Big Tim. "If handsome Harry keeps it, it's going on the tax list at about ten billion dollars instead of thirty thousand," and he started to slouch away, as round-shouldered as a gorilla. "I say," he called, turning. "It's no use your going in now. They were just starting a board of directors' scrap when I got my turn-down—the three Griswald brothers and the two sisters. That's why I wanted a bomb."

"Thanks," chuckled Wallingford. "We'll stay out till they're through, for fear you might find one," and stepping from the path, he walked across the beautifully kept lawn to the hedge beyond which stretched the Harry Griswald estate. It was a hand-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

some big place, running back from the pike to the river, with winding drives, and big trees, and a stately stone house.

"I feel like it's a hop dream when I think of owning a park like that," smiled Wallingford.

"Piker," reproached Blackie.

"I'll put up enough money for it to make a flurry on Wall Street," indignantly repudiated Wallingford; "and I'll let them bite every dollar, to make sure it's good; but I'm suspicious of my luck. From all I hear, this Griswald won't sell. Why doesn't he live in it?"

"His wife got nerves as soon as she married money, and has only strength enough to dress five times a day, and carry twelve trunks to a different health-resort every month in the year," grinned Blackie. "She's a confirmed invalid."

"Then why won't he sell?" puzzled Wallingford.

"Hush! It's the ancestral estate," whispered Blackie. "Harry is the first aristocrat the family ever had, and he broke himself buying an old homestead to make good."

"No heirs?" guessed Wallingford.

"In Tarryville?" scorned Blackie.

"Then he'd sell, with proper pressure," decided Wallingford. "Say, Blackie, if I could buy this property, I'd cut off that whole corner of the river-front with thick shrubbery. I don't like its face."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"It does look as if it had been disowned by the factory," agreed Blackie as they turned from the despised curve toward the adjoining unattractive private wharf, where great yellow barges unloaded the clay for the Griswald terra-cottas, and carried the finished product away.

Just beyond the Griswald wharf was a dingy little boat-landing, with a narrow alley running back to the pike, and with a ramshackle club-house, before which was clustered an imposing fleet of up-to-the-minute private launches.

"T. B. C.," read Wallingford from the idly hanging pennant. "What's that—Tarryville Boat Club?"

"The same," sighed Blackie shamefacedly. "There's enough money kept in captivity by the owners of those boats to build a navy, but they can't get wharfage enough on this river to dock a peanut-hull."

"There's not much chance to goat in, then," regretted Wallingford.

"Maybe you can win it for us," returned Blackie hopefully. "They tell me they have no accommodations, but Violet Bonnie says it's because she doesn't wear a lorgnette."

Wallingford studied the landscape in profound thought: the residence property, the terra-cotta factory's wharf and the boat-landing; and presently his big round head bobbed with slow determination. "I

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

think I'll have to make Harry Griswald part with his old homestead," he decided. "Wanting things too long hurts my liver."

"My own impression is that Harry is a damn fool," rasped a hard voice in the board-room.

Blackie, in the anteroom, grinned with infantile delight. "That's Curtis Griswald," he half whispered to Wallingford. "He's the oldest brother, and he keeps a bulldog."

"I second the motion," came a languid voice from out the board-room.

"Welles Griswald," explained Blackie. "Youngest brother, and leads an Italian greyhound around on a gilt chain. Say, Jim, if Fannie moves out here will she use a lorgnette?"

"Shut up," growled Wallingford, listening intently.

"I demand to be heard," orated a pompous voice.

"Harry," said Blackie. "Keeps black-and-tans; they bark and run."

"You have your way about being heard," snapped a metallic feminine voice. "We're always hearing you."

"Vivian," checked off Blackie. "She lives with two parrots and an Angora."

"You are always so harsh with Harry," drawled the sweet voice of a lady who one instinctively knew

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

must be fat. "He has a perfect right to have a voice in the business, and I, for one, think all his ideas are most clever."

"Grace Griswald, now de Pitzi," added up Blackie. "Keeps a pale-whiskered, imported husband. Say, Jim, could you find room for a kitchen and a chef on a forty-foot launch?"

"You are enthusiastic about Harry's crazy ideas because he is willing to make an ornamental place for your husband in the factory," charged Curtis Griswald.

"He knows he ought to," retorted Grace. "Paul's lifelong study of ceramics should not be wasted."

"It always has been," tittered Welles.

"Again you insult me," piped a small voice which could have belonged to none other than the pale-whiskered husband.

"If you didn't insist on coming here you wouldn't know it," gruffly charged Curtis.

"That's one thing I agree with, anyhow," snapped Vivian, who sounded thin. "No one but a stockholder should be admitted to these meetings."

"That's enough snarling at Paul," protested Grace with a gradually rising voice. "Of course, though, one who has never been able to obtain a husband could scarcely be expected to know the courtesy due to one."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"If I lowered myself enough to buy one, I would at least have confidence enough in him to put my stock in his name," retorted Vivian.

Brother Curtis pounded energetically with his gavel. "These things are not for business discussion," he remarked. "Since there is nothing more of importance before the board, we may as well adjourn."

There was a chair-pushing sound of Harry Griswald rising violently to his feet.

"We'll not adjourn until I have presented a report on my plans for extension!"

"Move we table the report," offered Welles.

"Second the motion," snapped Vivian.

"You've heard the motion," briskly announced Curtis. "Now, Harry, don't make a silly speech. You and Grace will vote no, Vivian and Welles will vote yes. That leaves the deciding vote of the tie-up to me, and I also vote yes! That settles it! The motion to table your volunteer report is carried, by a poll of three to two."

"I don't see where you get the right to say how I'm going to vote," shrilled Vivian.

"Do you want to change it?" demanded Curtis.

"No!" staccatoed Vivian; "but I do claim the privilege of speaking for myself."

"I should think you'd be tired of it," interpolated Grace.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I'm tired of this continuous bickering," announced Vivian. "It is disgraceful that this family can not come together without quarreling. I'm compelled to attend these meetings to protect my interests, but if I could sell my stock at a reasonable figure, I'd never be seen near one of you."

"For how much will you sell your stock?" inquired the pale-whiskered one.

"Don't be a fool," Grace admonished her husband. "You haven't the money to buy it."

"I'll sell for two hundred thousand dollars," offered Vivian.

"Any of us would do that," sneered Welles.

"I'd like to buy it," declared Harry. "With the power to extend the business, I could make it double its value in a year. I'll.give you a hundred thousand cash, Vivian, and my note for the balance."

"There'd be something crooked about it," retorted Vivian. "I'd even suspect your cash."

The gavel fell impatiently. "Harry's more than dubious methods are not under discussion, and this meeting is adjourned!" roared the chairman, whereupon an immediate babble arose, with six tireless voices in the contest for supremacy.

"Lovely party," commented Blackie. "Say, Jim, do you suppose they could make a pianola small enough to put on a forty-foot launch?"

Wallingford paid no attention to him, nor was

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

he paying any attention to the babble in the board-room. His round pink face had not the trace of a line on it, nor was there a wrinkle in his brow, but he was perfectly oblivious of the fact that Blackie, insistent now to know if a wash-room, dressing-room and kitchen could not be combined on a forty-foot launch, was prodding his elbow. Presently he arose and looked out of the window toward the Griswald wharf.

"Confound it, Jim, I wish you'd listen to me!" insisted Blackie at his elbow again. "Where would you put the cellarette on my launch, or would you have one in each end?"

"Make it a combination knapsack and life-preserver," advised Wallingford, turning to him with a cheerful smile. "I've figured out how to vote for you this fall."

"I knew you'd do it," returned Blackie, in some surprise that Wallingford had spent so much time over the problem. "You said, down at the wharf, that you intended to make Harry Griswald sell you his place."

"I know how, now," chuckled Wallingford. "I'm going to induce that Napoleon of finance to extend the business."

"I think I'd better get a poultice for Harry," thoughtfully proposed Blackie.

"He won't be stung," denied Wallingford.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Harry Griswald was a man of large ideas; one could tell that from his very walk, which was majestic and a trifle wide and swaying, as befitted a man of some portliness; his brow wore a habitual frown, not at all of displeasure, but of thought; and he greeted Wallingford with the seriousness due to so large a caller, and one supporting so heavy a diamond in his cravat. He might be a buyer of art terra-cotta!

"Any one introduced by my very good neighbor, Mr. Daw, is sure of a hearty welcome to our studios," Mr. Griswald observed, shaking hands most condescendingly, and leading the way into his own private office.

"He'd like to become a neighbor of yours, too," Blackie informed Mr. Griswald. "He wants to buy your residence property."

Mr. Griswald turned most severe. "It is not for sale," he replied. "It is to be entailed."

"I'm sorry," regretted Wallingford. "However, I'm not surprised. I wouldn't sell it. You have a beautiful plant here, Mr. Griswald," and he cast his eye on a magnificent water-color perspective hanging over Griswald's desk, which looked like the bird's-eye view of a world's fair.

"The nucleus of one," admitted Mr. Griswald with modest pride. "It will be a magnificent plant if ever my plans of extension are carried out," and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

he waved his hand gracefully over the water-color, in which the future Griswald galleries squeezed the horizon rudely.

Wallingford nodded his head in emphatic approval. "No business can stand still," he sagely observed. "It must either go forward or backward."

"Precisely what I tell my brothers," declared Griswald, growing choleric as he remembered his wrongs.

"You are a partnership, I believe," prevaricated Wallingford, by way of drawing fire.

"No, a corporation," corrected Griswald. "A million dollars, divided equally among five."

"I see," mused Wallingford. "That is a most unfortunate condition for business progress. The largest enterprises are the result of an aggressive one-man power. I suppose you get along, however, like brothers," and with a glare he dared Blackie to snort.

"Well, yes," admitted Griswald with a wince. "Of course my brother Curtis, being the oldest, assumes a certain amount of authority."

Wallingford cast a savage glance at Blackie. That irresponsible person was grinning shamelessly.

"Authority, to be worth anything, must be absolute," Wallingford declared with the solemn wisdom of a school-teacher. "Of course you know how Peter Wilkinson got his," and he chuckled.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Mr. Griswald shamefacedly confessed that he did not. In fact, he had never heard of Peter Wilkinson, but naturally he did not confess to that depth of ignorance.

"It's a good laugh," Wallingford informed him, and crossed his legs so comfortably that Mr. Griswald offered him a cigar and gave Blackie a match for his cigarette. Evidently this was a gentleman of wide experience, and one often learned something from these informal chats. "At the start," continued Wallingford, lighting his cigar, "he was a minority stockholder in a business which had stopped growing; but now he owns it all, and is so prosperous that the mint is jealous."

"A minority stockholder?" queried Mr. Griswald, beginning to feel a vague admiration for the Napoleon of finance whose case was so nearly like his own.

"A one-fifth interest was all he owned," insisted Wallingford.

Mr. Griswald reflected that this was an exact parallel to his own case, and became more eagerly attentive.

"He was a strong resourceful man," went on Wallingford.

Mr. Griswald compressed his jaws. He, too, was a strong resourceful man. He wore curly tufts of burnsides to prove it.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"He was a man of knowledge, of education and of refinement," stated Wallingford.

Mr. Griswald smoothed his mustache with a hand upon which glowed a daintily set sapphire.

"He was a man of ideas."

Mr. Griswald frowned at the bird's-eye view of the terra-cotta plant that should be built—if he were running the business.

"In fact, he was a commercial genius."

Mr. Griswald strove to look modest. "A commercial genius," he sadly remarked, "usually has unbelievable ignorance and prejudice opposed to him," and he glanced bitterly out at his brother Curtis, who was passing the window.

"Peter Wilkinson made that handicap look like a squeezed soap-bubble," bragged Wallingford with the true pleasure of a creator. "I knew him like a lead dollar. Wilkinson Green Paint Company, you know; you've heard of them; every pair of green shutters in the United States carries a coat of their mixture. That's their specialty. Green shutter-paint. Nothing else."

"By George!" commented Griswald. "I didn't know there was a monopoly of green shutter-paint. How did your friend go about it, with his minority of stock?"

"Well, he was one of these strong, aggressive, never-say-die fighters, to begin with," replied Wall-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ingford, and Mr. Griswald, squaring his shoulders and his lower lip, looked savagely out toward his brother Curtis's larger and better lighted private office. "Nobody would carry out his ideas, so he got bull-mad, one day, and made up his mind to umpire his own game or go broke. There was one stockholder who would vote with him, and between them they held forty per cent. of the shares. Peter knew where another fifteen per cent. could be bought, so he sold his house and lot, his automobile, his motor-boat and the baby buggy, came into the next stockholders' meeting with a fifty-five per cent. control, tossed out the two men who had pooh-poohed his ideas, and now when he wants to figure out how much he's worth, he sets down a figure nine, and writes ciphers after it until his arm aches!"

Mr. Griswald drew a long, long breath. "Bully!" he declared with much show of vigor. "That was the way to do it!"

"It was a fighter's way," agreed Wallingford warmly. "Think of it! The day he got his Dutch up, he was almost a middle-aged man, but full of fire." Mr. Griswald blinked his eyes and grew deadly stern. "To-day, he is in the prime of life and couldn't even go bankrupt if he invented something or got into a lawsuit. Why, not long ago he bought the immense ancestral estates of Lord Twim-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

bley, and the king was his guest at a recent shooting party!"

The chest of Mr. Griswald expanded. He was one of those who had been within a mile or so of the coronation, and he felt that, somehow, this gave him allegiance to the British crown. "Stunning!" he ejaculated.

Wallingford arose with the apologetic air of one who has already outstayed the limits of a purposeless call, but he paused to admire the pretty perspective over the desk. "That's a magnificent ideal," he politely commented. "Do you figure on achieving it in the near future?"

Mr. Griswald, who was a keen, strong, aggressive, middle-aged man of brilliant ideas and fighting fire, stood up and dwelt heroically on his pet watercolor. "Yes," he suddenly declaimed with vast determination.

"I hope you do," smiled Wallingford, shaking hands with him. "It will beautify Tarryville so much that I am sorry I can not live near enough to watch your studios grow."

"Wait a minute," hesitated Mr. Griswald, and Wallingford allowed him ample time for great thought.

"You spoke, a while ago, of buying my property. How much do you offer?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"A hundred thousand dollars," stated Wallingford.

Mr. Griswald inwardly gasped. It almost seemed an omen that Wallingford had named the exact amount he needed to make up enough to buy his sister Vivian's stock; that is, if she had not changed her mind. Moreover, the offer was quite liberal.

"I'll do it!" he enthusiastically decided, banging his fist upon his desk like a hero.

Wallingford whipped out his check-book. "It's a bet," he agreed. "I'll give you a check right now, on a bill of sale, if you like, and we'll put up to our lawyers the job of cheating us the rest of the way."

Mr. Griswald's eyes suddenly contracted. "I'd rather think about it overnight," he responded contemplatively, waving the enticing check-book from him.

"If I could only slip you the money, you'd stick," laughed Wallingford, putting away his check-book with regret, nevertheless. "Now, let's have a clear understanding about this. I'm offering you a hundred thousand for Griswald County over there, from the hedge to Blackie Daw's, and from the gasoline pike to the tug-boat speedway."

Again Mr. Griswald silently considered. "For my residence property," he finally corroborated.

As they passed out of the building, Blackie sol-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

emnly plucked a geranium from an enormous pot at the side of the door and pinned it on Wallingford's coat. "It's a medal," he explained.

"For what?" grinned Wallingford. "For jollying Brother Harry into selling the family estate, if he can buy Vinegar Vivian's stock to-night?"

"No," corrected Blackie; "for quick digging. Where did you keep all those facts about that paint monopoly? I never heard of it."

"Neither did I, till just as we came in," chuckled Wallingford. "Look there," and he pointed to a workman who was spreading a coat of vivid green paint on the "studio" shutters.

Blackie walked over and looked at the paint-can. "You came close enough for that sucker never to find out the difference, anyhow," he commented. "He'll probably swallow that shutter-paint gag without pinning back its ears."

"What's the matter with the parable?" demanded Wallingford. "I think it was a pippin."

"Nothing much the matter with it," laughed Blackie; "except that you need a lorgnette. You missed the key-board. It isn't the Wilkinson Green Paint Company, but the Williamsburg Cream Paint Company. They grind out twelve cans a day in a leaky old barn just over the bridge; and they manufacture eighty-four shades to order!"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II

THE COME-BACK

WALLINGFORD, happy in the possession of a fair suburban home of many shaded acres, installed his automobile in the garage and littered the place, from pike to river, with several varieties of the five known kinds of building materials: brick, stone, iron, wood and cement. There was a pergola to be built, a spring-house, some bridges, a kiosk and numberless other stamps of his individuality, and accompanied by Blackie, he even went over to see the new president, manager and mainspring of the wholly reorganized Griswald Company about supplanting the hedge, on their mutual property line, with an ancient, ivy-clad stone wall.

"I don't understand what hedge you mean," protested Harry Griswald, looking uncomfortably out the big bow-window that had once shrined Brother Curtis. "There is no hedge on the dividing line between my former residence property and the studio grounds."

"Oh, I see," returned Wallingford carelessly. "The hedge is entirely on your side. In that case

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I suppose you won't mind my building a wall at the edge of the line."

"I scarcely think you would like a wall so near to the house," advised Griswald, who was so uneasy that Wallingford looked at him sharply.

"Just where is my property line?" he wanted to know, catching the infection of uneasiness.

"I'll show you," offered Griswald with alacrity. "It is marked by corner-stones," and he led the way out to the pike and along the front of Wallingford's new purchase. Half-way he stopped. "This is the limit of my residence property," he stated, removing with his foot the leaves and moss from an X-marked surveyor's stone. "It runs straight back from here, at a right angle to the river."

Wallingford turned in amazement to Blackie. That gentleman was grinning for pure joy.

"Looks like you patted the wrong end of your hornet," he consoled J. Rufus.

"It's hard to believe," protested the veteran "trimmer," and then he demanded of Griswald: "Do you mean to say that this was not a part of your residence property?"

"It was not technically known as such," replied Griswald, recovering his complacency, now that the worst was over.

"Did it never belong to you?"

"Well, yes," admitted Griswald, now curling his

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

mustache to conceal a smirk of satisfaction. "In fact, it does yet. You see, this part upon which the house stands was the original residence property, which I purchased from the Sammis estate. The remainder I bought from my brothers, three years ago. We—we still speak of it as a part of the studio grounds."

Blackie snickered outright, and Wallingford gulped audibly.

"Get that poultice," he groaned to Blackie. "But look here, Griswald, I distinctly remember that when I first talked this over with you, I specified that the price I offered was for your entire property; from that hedge to Mr. Daw's and from the pike to the river!"

"And I distinctly remember that I corrected you by saying my residence property," returned Griswald coldly. "You will find the estate you have purchased accurately described in your deed."

Wallingford looked sadly on that beautiful stretch of woodland. There was the spring over which he had intended to build his pretty little stone drinking-house; there ran the tiny brook which he had planned to put to such picturesque use; there was the knoll upon which he had decided to erect his kiosk; and across yonder was to have run his pergola!

"Skinned by an amateur!" he reflected with hu-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

miliation. "Oh, *very* well, Griswald! How much do you want for it?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars," replied Mr. Griswald happily.

"Fine!" declared Wallingford. "I may as well get it good while I'm at it. I'll meet you at my lawyer's to-morrow morning. I want to see the new deed fixed myself."

"Cheer up, Jim, the worst is always yet to come," advised Blackie hilariously when Griswald had gone. "The bitten worm will turn at last, and the darkest dawn is just before the hour."

"I hope you choke," growled Wallingford savagely. "I don't like to be stung when I'm off duty."

"But see what a good lesson it is to you!" soothed Blackie. "In order to handle a sucker with grace and ease, you ought to know how one feels. How does he?"

"Go on and giggle, you laughing jackass!" snarled Wallingford.

"Do you know that I'm being sheared of a hundred and twenty-five thousand cold iron plunks in order to vote for you?"

"I know it, and I'm proud of it," snickered Blackie. "It's the record price."

Wallingford glared after the retreating form of the gifted amateur. "And to think that peanut-brained four-flusher got it up all in his own head!"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

he exploded with a scorn that was entirely for himself. "I wish Measen had found his bomb!"

"Go to it!" laughed Blackie. "It's a good thing to have a grouch all the way out. You'll have to calm yourself before you can frame up a proper come-back for neighbor Harry, and I think I'll go over to the house and play the saxophone for Violet Bonnie till you are once more willing to be Little Sunshine. Say, Jim, can you think of any way to put a shower-bath on a forty-foot launch?"

Wallingford turned to him kindly but firmly. "When you play your saxophone, won't you please render my favorite airs, very softly, in the far corner of your cellar?" he requested. "I want to stay here, and think."

Half an hour later Blackie, glancing out the window of the Dutch library, saw Wallingford on the river bank, walking frowningly up and down, up and down, up and down.

"I'll give him ten more minutes," he grinningly observed.

"I'll go out and start them making that champagne-cup," sympathetically replied Violet Bonnie. "To tell the truth, though, I expected him in before this. I never knew Jim to take so long to dig up a scheme."

"That's because this one has to be a peach," chuckled Blackie. "Jim's professional pride is hurt."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"This ain't much like the old fair-ground days, when we guzzled our suds straight from the can, ate our scoffin' at a stand-up grease-joint and flopped in the wall of a platform show," observed Big Tim Measen, as Violet Bonnie poured him another sample of the contents of the cellarette in the Dutch library.

"It isn't even like the days when I used to carry Blackie's maybe mining stock as a side line to my Florida swamp-land operations," asserted Chinchilla Williams, who, though fastidiously neat, derived his nickname from his general hairiness. "When we were having our meal-tickets punched at Java Charley's, I never expected to be mayor of Tarryville, nor to see you with a so-help-me house like this."

"It's because I quit phony work," stated Blackie with virtuous pride. "There's no money in a con game. I never would have had a hut of this kind if I hadn't gone into legitimate business graft with Jim Wallingford."

"He seems to be some clever party, all right," agreed Big Tim; "but just the same, you'd still be rolling your own cigarettes, out of chopped alfalfa at five a pack, if you hadn't been lucky enough to catch friend wife here, on her sleep-walking day, and marry her before she woke up," and he lifted his glass gallantly to Violet Bonnie.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"That's a cautious and stingy statement," echoed Chinchilla Williams. "How an outcast like Blackie ever picked such a peach is a point past me."

"Quit your kidding," chided Violet Bonnie, highly delighted. "A little more of the rye, Mr. Williams?"

"No, I think I'll switch and take a headache, if you have a bottle of hop essence loafing around near the ice some place. Now, Blackie, what can we put over for you?"

"Well, Fringes," explained Blackie, "I'm going to hand you some political dope so good that this ought to be your birthday. On the level, I'd like to hold it over for my reform campaign this fall, but Jim Wallingford can't wait. Don't you think it would be a good play for you to give the masses in Tarryville a public boat-landing?"

"No," replied Chinchilla from force of habit, it being considered the loss of about five points in the game to agree to anything offhand.

"They got one," objected Big Tim; "down at the foot of Ticonderoga Street."

"A fish-market ferry-landing!" scorned Blackie. "What I mean is to get a good place, and doll it all up for red-carpeted skiffs and launches with scalloped awnings."

"It sounds delicate, but where's the rake-off?" objected Tim.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Public boat-house and fishing-pier," promptly returned Blackie. "If you had a cute little stretch of river bank, with a Cupid fountain in the center, and a border of geraniums, and eight iron benches, the town council could rent one end for the boat-house, and the other to the Tarryville Boat Club, if they'd build a fishing-pier to shut off the pikers that pay their debts from the spenders that live on their mortgages. The club would put up a pile of verandas that would be a credit to the community."

But Tim looked at him in earnest speculation. "Where do you and Jim Wallingford come in on this?" he naturally wanted to know.

"We'll get to join the boat-club," returned Blackie immediately and with wide-eyed innocence. "Violet Bonnie has a dressmaker that makes a specialty of exclusive yachting outfits."

"And the minute we do horn into that club," supplemented Violet Bonnie with a flush of anger, "I'm going to get me a one-eyed lorgnette made, and hand the marble stare right back at some of these enameled-faced dog-cuddlers out here!"

"Hand 'em a hunk of glassay for my wife," begged Chinchilla Williams. "She was peeved enough before I got to be mayor, but after that, they tossed her the frappéd gaze so hard that every time she came in from her afternoon drive she had chills."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I suppose they'll pull the same effect on me when Blackie is mayor," guessed Violet Bonnie philosophically; "but I can dangle some few medals as a freezer myself."

"It's a shriek to me that Blackie's going to lead a reform ticket around by the hand," laughed the mayor.

"He's on the level with it," insisted Violet Bonnie with a trace of indignation. "When Blackie gets through wiping up, politics in this town will be so clean you could eat off it."

"It's been tried, and it doesn't work," declared the mayor with a grin. "However, that's neither here nor there. If Blackie gets too strong in his campaign, I'll have to pull his record on him."

"What difference does that make on a reform ticket?" demanded Blackie.

"They know yours, don't they?" interjected Violet Bonnie.

"Anyhow," went on Blackie, "I think we ought to agree to leave personalities out of the fight, since there's so much to be denied on both sides, and stick to the campaign issues. I'm against graft, bribery and corruption, and that's my platform."

"What's this public-boat-landing scheme?" inquired Big Tim who had been thinking it over very carefully. "Where's the land you want to unload on the town council?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"If that's what I was after, I'd come to you, square and honest, and figure how we could split it up," returned Blackie, a trifle hurt. "There's nothing of the kind doing. I wouldn't sell you my land, and Wallingford wouldn't part with any of his."

"Then where do we get it? Show five cards and shake your sleeve."

"You'll have to condemn it," explained Blackie blandly, and blew a thin blue stream of smoke at the bust of Browning; "condemn it and buy it in at its tax valuation."

"I get you now," smiled Big Tim, much relieved. "I didn't know you hated anybody in the burg."

"I don't," grinned Blackie. "This is a mere public-spirited enterprise, as I tell you."

"Tie a bunch of firecrackers to that and start it down an alley," advised Big Tim. "Let's get down to cases. Who's to be stung?"

"Well, there's only one possible location," explained Blackie. "That's the strip of river-front just above the Boat Club landing."

Big Tim and Chinchilla Williams looked at each other speculatively while they figured it out, and then they grinned in unison.

"Why, that's the Griswald wharf!" said the mayor.

"You have the nerve of a taxi-driver," commented

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Big Tim admiringly. "Why, I don't believe we could do that, legally."

"You can do it, though," reproved Blackie; "do it, and make it stick. Can't you?"

"Yes, I guess so," acknowledged the politics of Tarryville; then he chuckled. "Handsome Harry would be so sore he'd holler from the touch of his own clothes."

"He'd probably take a turn at crooked politics this fall, and run us outside the town limits," guessed Mr. Williams. "He's the kind of a Johnny that wears his handkerchief in his cuff, but that doesn't keep him from playing at petit larceny. He got hold of enough stock the other day to toss his two brothers out of the shop and take in his dago brother-in-law, and now he'll keep right on blowing himself up until he touches a pin; but in the meantime he'll make a loud noise in public affairs."

"I'm for him," laughed Blackie. "He stung Wallingford, and that's going some. I never let a good laugh interfere with business, though."

"I should say not," agreed Big Tim. "Why, do you know what that curly-whiskered Lucy had the nerve to tell me yesterday, when I went to see him again about the party contribution? Chinchilla and I need that ten thousand for personal use, and don't you forget it, and I even put it up to Harry in that light. He was crooked enough to tell me that

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the tax values for this year were already fixed, and that I'd be out of the game this fall anyhow! Can you beat it?"

"I knew I had him going!" exulted Blackie. "I've been converting him to the reform government, and he's dead against bribery, graft and curruption. They all are. You're licked now, Tim."

"I wonder if you have a chance," mused Big Tim, whose vision was remarkably clear. "I might be better off if I did let you win, and me step out for about two years. Then I could come back strong."

"I'm for it," announced the mayor. "One reform administration makes it a cinch for the regulars next time."

"Then we'd better clean up all we can," decided Big Tim. "Blackie, what's there in it for us if we put this boat-landing across for you?"

"The applause of the multitude," boasted Blackie. "Every voter in Tarryville, but one, will be for you."

"What's there in it for us?" demanded Big Tim, helping himself to the rye.

"The cutest little political play that was ever put over," insisted Blackie. "Why, Tim, I feel like a sucker for putting you wise to it. It's the only thing I know of that might pound a cork into my campaign against graft, corruption and bribery!"

"What's in it for us?" insisted Big Tim.

"Twenty-five thousand bones," stated Blackie.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE COME-BACK

"Say, Tim, how can I arrange sleeping-quarters for four people and a cook and an engineer on a forty-foot launch?"

A month later Harry Griswald, after a series of painful struggles with J. Rufus Wallingford, who had just returned from a business trip, paid that merciless gentleman one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars for the part of the river-front that Wallingford did not want.

"It's an outrage all through!" protested the broken-hearted Griswald as he exchanged his check for a deed. "My business can't exist without that wharf, and you know it, but that doesn't explain all your rapacity. I can understand why you were bound to have one hundred and twenty-five thousand, because that leaves you in possession of my entire personal estate without it having cost you a cent! But I can't understand why you insisted on a fifty-thousand-dollar profit."

"It's easy enough to understand if you will only figure a moment," explained Wallingford pleasantly. "Twenty-five thousand of what you call profit is for improvements," he waved his hand toward the growing pergola, "and the other twenty-five thousand—" here his smile became positively radiant as he waved his hand at the passing Big Tim Measen —"well, that was for expenses!"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER III

BLACKIE TAKES CHARGE

"THAT," observed Blackie Daw with careful analysis, "was the distinct and unmistakable sound of a wallop."

"It's Jesse James in trouble again," agreed Wallingford with a trace of a frown, as he arose from his comfortable chair in the headquarters of the Tarryville reform party. "That bandit will get the place pinched yet. This is the fourth political fight he's had in the three days since we've hired him, but it's the first one he's pulled off in the office itself."

"Squints is full of the reform spirit," admired Blackie. "I am strong for his sturdy Americanism. Hear that, would you! They've gone to the mat!"

Throwing open the door, they were delighted to discover a highly active bundle of two boys on the floor, a fact that they discovered by counting the legs, in occasional seconds of repose. Presently the bundle came to rest, with one boy sitting on top and breathlessly requesting the other to "holler 'nough!" The victor wore a very much soiled blue

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

uniform, highly scuffed and muddied boots and a shock of tousled sandy hair; and except for his brilliantly blue eyes, his countenance was mostly composed of dirt scrambled with orange freckles.

"Why, hello, Toad!" greeted Blackie, extending a friendly hand, while Wallingford, surveying the mêlée with chuckling surprise, reached his hand automatically into his pocket. He always had an impulse to give Toad Jessop money.

"I can't let go to shake hands till this kid hollers 'nough," regretted Toad, who was thorough in all his undertakings. "Holler 'nough?"

"No!" aspirated the boy on the floor with a mighty lurch, and the tussle began again.

It became necessary, in the interests of humanity, to "split out" the contestants, for the office boy, who was variously known to Blackie as Jesse James, and Squints, and Legs, and any other name that came handy, had earnestly assured them, on the day of his hiring, that he had never been licked in his life and never intended to be; and they believed him.

"Now, what's it all about?" demanded Wallingford, holding Toad, while Blackie performed a like service for Squints.

"Does that kid belong here?" inquired Squints, feeling of his lip and looking critically at his finger.

"Of course he does," replied Blackie. "He's the adopted son of Mr. Wallingford and myself."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Then I resign," promptly decided Squints. "I dare him outside."

Toad made a lunge, but Wallingford had grabbed him in time.

"The resignation is not accepted," declared Wallingford firmly. "Now, Toad, tell us what the rumpus was about."

"Well, I come to the door and said I wanted to see Mr. Wallingford," explained Toad. "He asked me what for. I told him it was none of his business. He told me, 'Get out, you hobo!' Then I pasted him."

"Naturally," agreed Blackie. "I have two tickets for a musical-comedy matinée this afternoon. I think it's the funniest show in town. Would you boys like to go?"

Toad and Squints looked at each other a moment, and then grinned sheepishly.

"I can't leave my job," protested Squints. "There's a kid tryin' to stick a Regular Ticket poster on the door."

"I'll tie my new bulldog to the knob, and he'll be there when we come back," offered Wallingford. "Just now, Jesse James, I think you'd better run down to the corner and get three or four sandwiches and some apples and bananas for Toad. He's hungry."

"I'm starved," Toad replied to this safe guess.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"All I had for breakfast was some coffee and sinkers and a hamburger steak and some German fried and some bread and butter at a railroad hash-house; and it took my last two bits."

Wallingford looked Toad over critically, from head to foot, and was prepared for the worst as he led the way into the office.

"You've run away from school," he sternly charged, seating Toad in the big swivel chair and making ready to do his duty in the way of stern conversation. "If you had been fired, Major Skillen would have written me to that effect and instructed me to send money for your return ticket."

"Major Skillen ain't there any more," explained Toad, singularly at ease and apparently conscience-free. "The rheumatism got him away last year, and he sold out to Old Polecat."

"Major Poole," severely corrected Wallingford. "I remember now."

"Polecat," firmly insisted Toad. "He was a barber, and he wears smelly stuff all the time. He licks the boys for nothing at all; if you tear your clothes, or break a window, or play hooky, or fight, or anything. He feeds us on nothing but beans, and not enough of *them*. He's cut out baseball, and football, and hockey, and shinny, and marbles, because it spoils our clothes. We got to have our hair cut every Saturday, and be manicured twice a week.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

he announced, passing the letter to Blackie with a gesture of anger. "We'll take the next train, and investigate Major Poole. I think he needs it."

"We'll bring you back his scalp, Toad," promised Blackie, patting his adopted half-son affectionately on the shoulder.

"I'm goin' along," insisted Toad indignantly, "I want to see it done."

Major Poole, sitting in a somber dark office, and in a stiff oak chair, and at a heavy oak desk, all sizes and sizes too big for him, proved to be a skinny little man, with scanty snow-white hair parted in the middle and plastered to his skull, with his snow-white mustache and goatee brilliantined to needle points, and with a carefully cold-creamed professional smile, which weakened when he saw Toad's stern backers.

"Well," said Wallingford, when the formalities of introduction had been disposed of; "now that I have you both together I want to get at the bottom of things; and I may as well tell you, to begin with, that the boy doesn't lie."

"No," granted the major in a squeaky little voice. "Young Jessop is very truthful; I must admit that; but he is not amenable to discipline."

"Not to an overdose of it," agreed Wallingford.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I wouldn't want him to be. To my mind, there's too much discipline in your school, anyhow."

"I was a soldier in the Civil War, sir," explained Major Poole proudly, squaring his shoulders; "and I got my practise in discipline in the finest army in the world."

"I've looked you up, and you were a sutler," dryly corrected Wallingford. "You got your practise disciplining mules."

"There's not much difference," defended the major with a laugh.

"Not when you beat them," retorted Blackie, bristling. "I can lick any man who finds it necessary to give frequent lickings to boys. If we had known you had that habit, we would have taken this boy home long ago."

"I think that has been happening," surmised Wallingford. "I notice that you do not seem to have so large an attendance as Major Skillen had when I was here a year ago."

"No," admitted the major sadly. "The business is falling off, and if the city builds its school I'm a goner. I wish I had never got into it."

"You don't belong in it," charged Toad, who had been glaring defiance all this while. "You only took this school so you could lick boys, and a lot of them squealed at home and was took out. Now

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

We got to shine our shoes three times a day, and put on a fresh collar for dinner. Smell me!"

Both Wallingford and Blackie smelled the sleeve he indignantly held up to them. There was no question but that Toad's very clothes were redolent of the unmistakable perfume of a barber shop.

"This," declared Blackie, aghast at the indignity, "is an outrage. I suppose you even have dancing lessons."

"Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday," complained Toad; then his face reddened and tears sprang to his eyes. "Half of us have to play girl!"

Wallingford nearly choked. "Did you play girl?" he asked with a superhuman accomplishment of gravity.

"Once," gulped Toad. "I licked the boy that was dancin' with me, before we got outside. I been in bad ever since."

Wallingford nodded sympathetically. "How did you come to leave so suddenly that you couldn't write for money?" he asked.

"Old Polecat locked me up," stated Toad, immediately straightening up with snapping eyes. "I joined the sixth-grade town football team on Saturdays, and wanted to let my hair grow. I ducked the hair-cutting three weeks, and Old Polecat licked me. I told him I was goana run away from school. He licked me again, and asked me if I was still

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

goana run away. I told him yes, and that when I got home I was goana have you go up there and put him out o' business."

"Then he licked you again," grinned Blackie. "Did it hurt?"

"Naw, not much," scorned Toad. " I got a few welts on my legs yet; but I didn't cry."

Wallingford, looking into his eyes, glanced hastily out of the window, from motives of delicacy. "How did you get away?" he inquired.

"Old Polecat threw me in my room, and bumped my head on the wash-stand, and nailed my windows shut; but before he had the door locked, I busted the window with my water-pitcher and jumped out, and hit 'er up through the woods to the railroad, and hid till night, and hopped a fast freight, and come home. Are you goin' back with me?"

Wallingford looked at him in deep perplexity and finally turned to Blackie. "I'll be jiggered if I know what we ought to do," he puzzled.

"Make good!" blurted Blackie, who was fully as indignant as Toad. "It's my opinion that Old Polecat is too good a barber to waste in a military school."

The postman came in with a letter for Wallingford. He opened it and read Major Poole's account of Toad Jessop's crimes.

"We'll go right over to the house and wash up,"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

he announced, passing the letter to Blackie with a gesture of anger. "We'll take the next train, and investigate Major Poole. I think he needs it."

"We'll bring you back his scalp, Toad," promised Blackie, patting his adopted half-son affectionately on the shoulder.

"I'm goin' along," insisted Toad indignantly, "I want to see it done."

Major Poole, sitting in a somber dark office, and in a stiff oak chair, and at a heavy oak desk, all sizes and sizes too big for him, proved to be a skinny little man, with scanty snow-white hair parted in the middle and plastered to his skull, with his snow-white mustache and goatee brilliantined to needle points, and with a carefully cold-creamed professional smile, which weakened when he saw Toad's stern backers.

"Well," said Wallingford, when the formalities of introduction had been disposed of; "now that I have you both together I want to get at the bottom of things; and I may as well tell you, to begin with, that the boy doesn't lie."

"No," granted the major in a squeaky little voice. "Young Jessop is very truthful; I must admit that; but he is not amenable to discipline."

"Not to an overdose of it," agreed Wallingford.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I wouldn't want him to be. To my mind, there's too much discipline in your school, anyhow."

"I was a soldier in the Civil War, sir," explained Major Poole proudly, squaring his shoulders; "and I got my practise in discipline in the finest army in the world."

"I've looked you up, and you were a sutler," dryly corrected Wallingford. "You got your practise disciplining mules."

"There's not much difference," defended the major with a laugh.

"Not when you beat them," retorted Blackie, bristling. "I can lick any man who finds it necessary to give frequent lickings to boys. If we had known you had that habit, we would have taken this boy home long ago."

"I think that has been happening," surmised Wallingford. "I notice that you do not seem to have so large an attendance as Major Skillen had when I was here a year ago."

"No," admitted the major sadly. "The business is falling off, and if the city builds its school I'm a goner. I wish I had never got into it."

"You don't belong in it," charged Toad, who had been glaring defiance all this while. "You only took this school so you could lick boys, and a lot of them squealed at home and was took out. Now

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

you lick fifty boys as much as you used to a hundred; an' it makes too much for each boy. You're goana be put out of business."

"I wish I could, gentlemen," half groaned the major, appealing to his two older accusers. "My old comrade Skillen seemed to make a living out of this school, but I can't do it. I don't seem to understand boys very well."

"He's a old bachelor," explained Toad vindictively.

"That may be the reason," assented the major wearily. "You probably will not believe that I am not cruel, but the boys keep me continually aggravated with their disorder and untidiness."

"Of course they do," interposed Blackie. "They need dirt. They need to roll around in the grass, and get covered with mud, and tear their clothes on barbed wire. This boy never wore but one suspender up to the time we got him. I don't know just what else we'll do, Major Poole, but I do know that I wouldn't punish Toad by keeping him in this school a minute longer, under your management."

"Toad was quite right," said Wallingford, rising. "You are not fitted to have charge of boys, and we can't leave this one here. What's the matter, Toad?"

"I don't want to go," protested that youngster, visibly distressed. "I like my gang, and the teachers are all right. I don't like to study, but I suppose

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I got to have arithmetic and history and geography when I grow up. I might as well get 'em here as any place, and I got a gang together that can lick twice its weight in town boys."

"I don't see how we can take your gang along," laughed Wallingford.

"Don't do it," urged Toad. "Put Old Polecat out of the business, and let us stay here. I promised the gang that's what you'd do."

Wallingford sat down again. "How much will you take for your school?" he inquired.

"Well, you carry my mortgage, and square off my debts, and give me five thousand dollars, and I'll step right out," offered the major hopefully.

"How much do you owe?" asked Wallingford.

Silently the major produced his books and a bundle of bills. "Here's every cent," he stated.

Wallingford, with a practised eye, ran over the books and the bills, and, satisfied, produced his check-book. "Here's your five thousand," said he. "We'll go right down-town and look after the deed and the mortgage. You will, of course, Major, keep charge of the school until I have found some one else to take your place,"

"Not for me!" jubilated Major Poole, who had already thrown off his military coat and replaced it by a Grand Army serge with brass buttons, which, with a wide-brimmed Grand Army hat, he had taken

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

from a cupboard. He now slipped the check into his pocket. "I'll have a new barber shop rented and chairs ordered before night, and in a week I'll be wearing a white coat and saying, 'Next!'"

"Peace be with you," wished Blackie, trying on the trim military cap which he picked up from the desk. "Let him go, Jim. I'll run the school for a few days. Toad—"

Toad, who had been watching him with shining eyes up to this very second, was not there now. He had vanished, and a frantic cheering, which shook the windows in a moment more, told that he had vanished into the dining-hall.

"Didn't you say something about the city being about to build a school?" asked Wallingford in the president's office of the Boomville Bank, where they had gone to arrange about the mortgage.

"Yes, but I don't think you need worry about that," replied Major Poole with a smile. "Do you think so, Jameson?"

Mr. Jameson also smiled, and shook his head. "I scarcely think so," he agreed. "The city's project for building a military school is our local incubus. We're pledged to build one, since General Smithson died three years ago. He left the city a magnificent plot of ground for the purpose, and the city accepted the gift, with all the attached conditions. If the school isn't built on it in twenty-five years the prop-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

erty reverts to the heirs; but the city has many better things it could do with two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars."

"I'm glad to hear that," replied Wallingford; "for I have a school on my hands of which I shall want to dispose, and the city's project might interfere."

"We had hoped that you might remain with us and take charge of the school," suggested Mr. Jameson politely.

"No, thank you," repudiated Wallingford. "I leave educational matters entirely to my friend Mr. Daw, who is now in charge of the school, and he is too busy to serve for other than a purely philanthropic reason. I suppose General Smithson was a very wealthy man," he added, always eager for information about heirs, they being a highly profitable division of humanity.

"Not extremely so, but rather well-to-do," replied the banker. "His two daughters keep their affairs very much to themselves, but I know that they have lost a great deal of money in local investments since the general's death."

"Oh, well, the reversion of the property in twenty-two years will be a handy thing for the third generation," observed Wallingford carelessly.

"I don't think there'll be any third generation," surmised Jameson. "The two Misses Smithson are

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

quite elderly. Frankly, as an earnest member of the Boomville Chamber of Commerce, I wish they had their land."

"I see," chuckled Wallingford. "It not being public property until the city makes good, it is not exempt from taxation."

"Not only that," agreed Jameson, "but the tract is so tied up that it's worthless. The B. G. & T. Railroad, which is coming through in the spring, would establish its shops here if it could find a suitable location, and the Smithson Military Academy tract is the only one that would fill the bill."

"Why doesn't the city release its option so the tract can be bought up for the railroad company?" Wallingford inquired.

"It can't let go," Jameson informed him with a worried brow. "The land is available for military academy purposes only, and when it accepted the gift, the city pledged itself to the building of a military school on the grounds. It now has a twenty-five-thousand-dollar fund, which has been tied up and can not be touched for any other purpose."

Wallingford laughed. "You talk as if you needed the money," he taunted.

"We do," acknowledged the banker with a wry smile. "Boomville seems, at last, on the point of deserving its name. We now have two railroads and a third one coming, a traction line and a num-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ber of factories which cost us money to get here. We want the shops of this new railroad, and then the Chamber of Commerce figures that it can sit still and collect the profits a while."

"It will cost you a lot of money to get the railroad shops," guessed Wallingford, intensely interested.

"Not very much," responded the banker. "We have to give them a right of way through the city, which can be engineered for twenty-five thousand dollars. The railroad company only asks that we find a good location for its shops. I imagine that it would pay as high as a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the land; but there's no use talking about it. The company won't have any location we've offered it."

"That's why you wish the Smithson heirs had their property," summed up Wallingford.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," urged the fidgety Major Poole; "but I have to go. I'm afraid somebody might grab that vacant store-room I have my eye on. I want to hire a sign-painter to put, 'You're next!' on the windows in big gold letters."

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER IV

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

WALLINGFORD, having been to the recorder's office and the probate court and two or three other county offices, went out to call on the Misses Smithson, and threw those worthy ladies into a state of profound consternation. In the first place, he came out in the Spangle Hotel's dark green limousine, and he bore with him a gigantic bouquet of roses.

"It is presumption, I know, for a stranger to offer you these flowers," said J. Rufus glibly; "but my excuse must be that my father was a warm admirer of General Smithson, and you must consider these roses merely as a tribute to the family of that gallant soldier."

Miss Harriet Smithson bowed graciously. She was a self-possessed spinster, with lines both of care and of gentleness on her waxen-white face, and she wore upon the heavy black silk dress, which was brown at the seams, a soft fichu of yellow old lace, which had been mended, and remended and mended again with infinite labor.

"We can have nothing but gratitude for so pretty a remembrance," she returned, and Wallingford

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

wished, quite uncomfortably, somehow, that her voice had not been quite so weak. It seemed to lack food.

Miss Martha Smithson had not yet spoken. She had her own waxen-white face buried in the extravagant mass of pink roses, and when she looked up, a faintly delicate touch of their beautiful color was in her cheeks. She was a trifle younger than Harriet.

"Your father was a soldier, too, I am sure," she remarked, her gaze straying reverently to the big oil painting of firm old General Smithson over the mantelpiece.

Wallingford wished that he could wipe his neck. He had never felt more uncomfortable in his life. Everything in this room, except the ladies, had been old, and massive, and rich when he was a nameless kid, and, somehow, the very furniture, worn as it was, made him ashamed of himself, a feeling he resented.

"Under General Smithson," he promptly lied.

Miss Harriet and Miss Martha hesitated.

"I am sure you will have some tea," offered Miss Martha, after a slight pause and an infinitesimal glance at her sister.

"I scarcely think so," hastily refused Wallingford, with an intuition of the truth about food. "It is so soon after luncheon."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Oh, you must have some of our famous tea," urged Miss Harriett, ringing an old-fashioned bell-cord at the side of the portières. "It is supplied to us by an old friend of father's in China, and he sends us so much more than we can use that we are constantly compelled to give it away to our friends."

"We can't help bragging about it," laughed Miss Martha, who had once been extremely pretty, and who was still very nice and restful to look upon. "It is so nearly priceless."

Wallingford felt suddenly angry. Confound it, why couldn't they bring themselves to sell it! That's why their fool friend sent them such an over-supply. And why didn't they sell this big place? An old negro came to the door, his curly hair as white as silver wires, and his long-tailed blue coat hanging about him as loosely as if it had been on a broomstick.

"Some tea, Absalom," ordered Miss Harriet gently; "some tea and—and some cakes."

"Yessum," said old Absalom, looking at her steadily; then he glanced at Wallingford; then he looked back at his mistress. "Yessum," he repeated, and went away.

J. Rufus could feel those cakes choking him in advance; yet he knew that he had to eat them. This proud poverty had to be handled delicately; and he had fat hands!

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"My call is not a purely social one," he stated, "but I intend to enjoy your tea, nevertheless. I came partly on business."

Miss Harriet's lips deadened in a faint bluish pallor. Business could only mean something unexpected to pay.

"Then we might get that over before the tea comes," she observed with a lightness that was the absolute pinnacle of bravery.

"I think that we can," guessed Wallingford pleasantly. "I'd like to get a second option on the land that your father presented to the city."

The bluish tint left Miss Harriet's lips, and Miss Martha, completing a suspended breath that had been cut in half, buried her face in the roses again.

"A second option?" faltered Miss Harriet. "I don't quite understand. That property was set aside for the building of a military academy. It was our father's dearest wish."

"I know," returned Wallingford. "The city, however, may not build this academy, and I want to get from you the privilege of purchasing the land, in the case the city finds a way to relinquish its option."

"Oh, we couldn't sell you any such absurd thing as that," refused Miss Harriet, a certain momentary flicker dying out of her eyes. "We'd be cheating you."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

That idea hit Wallingford in his funny spot, but he could not have laughed, even if he had been alone. "Please don't worry about me," he begged. "I'm turning gray-haired, and I never have been accused of cheating myself."

"Let me understand," puzzled Miss Harriet, looking at Miss Martha for aid in her perplexity. "You want us to say that, if the city does not live up to the conditions of my father's gift and the property reverts to us, we will sell it to you?"

"That's it exactly," agreed Wallingford.

Miss Harriet pursed up her lips. She was a business woman now! "I suppose you would wish us to put that in writing," she cautiously suggested.

"Of course," corroborated Wallingford.

"Then, I should think," went on Miss Harriet triumphantly, "that the price you would pay should be mentioned."

"The price," Wallingford hesitated, changing his mind again, "would be a hundred thousand dollars."

Miss Harriet and Miss Martha looked at each other with gasping astonishment. A hundred thousand dollars!

"Of course," went on Wallingford, "I should pay you for the option itself. For that option I am willing to pay you, cash, immediately, five thousand dollars."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Miss Harriet swallowed. "Let me understand," she said, becoming again the keen and shrewd business woman. "You mean that you would pay us something in advance for the privilege of having the first opportunity to buy this property, at a hundred thousand dollars, in case the city, before its twenty-two more years are up, does not build its military school?"

Miss Martha gazed at her sister admiringly.

"You have a death grip on the idea," commended Wallingford, sincerely pleased with her clarity.

For a moment there was absolute silence, while the two sisters fought back their swimming senses. The color was high in Miss Martha's transparent cheeks, and her eyes were glistening. She suddenly arose.

"You will pardon me a moment, I am sure," she said with beautiful repression. "It seems to me that Absalom is very long about the tea," and bowing gracefully to Wallingford, she turned her back and hurried from the room. Twice her shoulders started to heave, but she held them firm.

Her sister Harriet gazed after her with much concern. "I do not suppose it would seem rude, since this part of your call is so purely a business matter, if I were to follow my sister and consult with her alone," she suggested.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Certainly not," Wallingford smilingly assured her, glad to be rid of them for a moment; for emotional business was uncomfortable.

They came back just ahead of Absalom and the tea, and if their eyes were a trifle suspicious as to color, Wallingford hoped that he betrayed no sign of noticing it.

"We have decided to accept your offer," announced Miss Harriet, with an almost imperceptible touch of Miss Martha's hand as they sat down.

"Very well," returned Wallingford. "Shall we go to your lawyer's or to mine to draw up the agreement?"

"To none of them, if you please," stated Miss Harriet icily. "We had a lawyer, and he lost us a great deal of money; so if you would just as lief draw up a clean and clear agreement that any one can understand, and will be satisfied with having some honest friends of ours witness it, we shall be much better pleased."

"So shall I," chuckled Wallingford, and they led him into the library, where, at a huge and much carved old mahogany secretary, full of odd little compartments and secret drawers, Wallingford drew up an agreement so simple and straightforward that both Miss Harriet and Miss Martha were delighted with it. They signed it immediately and thereupon Wallingford, who was always prepared

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

for such emergencies as this, paid them the five thousand dollars in cash, making an energetic bet with himself that they would die of want if they had to wait three days for his check to be put through for collection.

It was a happy party which drank the famous Chinese tea after that important ceremony, and Wallingford, in the big high-ceilinged drawing-room, sat, with the fragile little china platter in one big hand and the fragile little china cup in the other, feeling as much out of place as Toad when he had to play girl; but glad, some way, that he was there, nevertheless. The ladies were particularly animated, and chattered with a gaiety they had not exhibited for years. There was a pretty flush in their cheeks and a sparkle in their eyes. Youth had touched them for a moment again with his magic wand, which makes the blood run fast.

When Wallingford had quite finished with the famous tea, and had eaten every last crumb of his cakes, Miss Harriet, who had been waiting with splendidly concealed impatience, arose and passed the tray for his tea-things.

"It will only take us a moment or two to put on our wraps," she suggested. "We shall go at once with you to the witnesses of whom we spoke, and have our agreement signed, so that you will be protected in case anything happens to us. You have

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

made us very rich now, you know, and we are likely to fall victims to mad dissipation."

"We may have a week in the city for the opera, maybe, may we not, Harriet?" ventured Miss Martha hopefully.

"You may have anything you want, I think," promised Wallingford, "for really, I believe that I shall have the pleasure of realizing your father's school for you, and of paying you that hundred thousand dollars besides."

"Our trip to Europe!" gasped Martha. "Paris, and gowns, and the blue ocean! Really, do you believe it can be true, Mr. Wallingford?"

"The most likely thing in the world," he assured them, smiling at her enthusiasm. "By the way, you'll understand that this transaction of ours is absolutely confidential."

"Certainly," hesitated Miss Harriet. "If you wish it, you must have an excellent reason, I know."

He almost blushed. "I have," he replied.

Wallingford, who had quite deliberately kept out of the way until he had a plan of action formed, rolled up to the Skillen Military Academy in the hired limousine, and found the first class in marbles digging holes in the dirt with their knees; two football elevens, grimed from head to foot, taking their initial practise on the campus; a wrestling match in

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

progress in the middle of the lawn; a batter for the impromptu senior prep nine driving a ball through a dormitory window, and a board of grievances, Toad Jessop presiding, sitting in grave judgment on an argument between Slimmy Browne and Duckwaddle Morley, as to whose father was the more popular man, Duckwaddle winning, by a bloody nose, just as Wallingford came up.

In the office, Wallingford found Blackie standing gracefully at his desk, surrounded by a group of grinning instructors, and propounding his theory of elementary education.

"In addition," he was announcing, "every boy's hair is his own. On and after this date, beans will be served only twice a week, and sandwiches, pie, doughnuts and apples shall be constantly standing on the sideboard in the main hall, with nobody watching. In case of a fight, the boy who is the most out of breath shall be allowed to explain first. A batting average shall take equal rank with a score in geography. A pupil in arithmetic shall have a proper grade for the answer, no matter how he gets it. I have decided that a certain amount of instruction will not hurt the boys, and it's up to you gentlemen to administer the same with as little pain as possible."

He paused, bowed to J. Rufus and sat down.

"Gentlemen, the first board of education meeting

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

is dismissed, with a recommendation that the balance of the time until Saturday night be made a continuous field meet, to make up for lost time. There will be no further classes until Monday."

The instructors, one and all, with the exception of the professor of grammar, who was an enemy to mankind by the very nature of his calling, approved of that suggestion, and being lusty young fellows themselves and working on small salaries, spread out, like a fan, as they left the door, to explain a few football tricks and the finer points of baseball practise.

"Well, Blackie, where are the reporters?" asked Wallingford, energetically pulling off his overcoat, for he had much work to do.

"Locked up in a little room down the hall with a tableful of sandwiches, an empty leather-topped desk and a pair of dice, and they don't know that the time is passing," replied Blackie. "You will find the place by the smoke rolling through the keyhole."

Wallingford looked at his watch. "There is no rush about them, then. This is the quiet hour, when the morning-paper men have plenty of time and the evening papers are off the press, and I can take a little rest. Toad's got us into a desperate gamble, Blackie. I'm in our expenses, and forty-five thousand on this place, and five thousand for an option

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

on another piece of land, and I'm not sure that I see daylight yet. All I want is to come out whole."

Toad Jessup came bounding in with a piece of note-paper folded into a triangle, on which was scribbled the name of Principal Daw. "This dropped out of the history class-room just now," he said.

Blackie opened and read the note. "It's all off, Jim," he announced. "You'll have to make up your mind right away what to tell these boys. The losers want out."

"Send them some money," suggested Wallingford. "I have to smoke about an inch more of this cigar and think."

Fifteen minutes later he went back to the door of the history class-room, and knocked, listening interestedly to the educational address within while he waited. The monologue, in the voice of that eminent pedagogue, Horace G. Daw, was as follows:

"Oh, you feeby dice! Huh! Come on, nice little feeby! Huh! A three and a two, now, for your friend Horace! Huh! A three and a two or a four and a one; I'm easy to please! Huh! There she rolls, boys! Get a piece of paper and add 'em up! Fade it, gentlemen! It's all there for the covering, and all velvet! Who takes this six bits that's left over? You're the grand little sport, Fatty, and I hope I break you. All ready now, and watch 'em

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

closely. Huh! A natural! The gentlemen who are broke again will kindly edge back from the desk, and let the live members split up this assortment of currency for my sixth consecutive pass."

The door was opened by a youth of the exact shape and dimensions of a bean-pole, who was surmounted by a felt mushroom hat, pale eyes and a brave smile.

"Mr. Wallingford," he guessed. "Step right in, if you have anything."

"The city editor has just called up," observed Wallingford softly, as he stepped inside the smoke-dimmed room.

"What city editor?" demanded six breathlessly interested voices.

"I couldn't catch the name of the paper," chuckled Wallingford, and led them back into the principal's office, where the air was clearer and the light better, and gave them a splendid story. His father, Hiram Wallingford, had been a lifelong friend and admirer of that brave and gallant soldier, the late General Smithson. His father had, just previous to his recent demise, learned of the general's desire to have a military academy named in his honor, and, to carry out the wishes of both brave warriors, Wallingford had now purchased the old Skillen Military Academy, intended to endow it with a twenty-five-thousand-dollar dormitory, rename it the General

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Smithson Memorial Military Academy, and present it to the city of Boomville, as the tribute of one dead soldier to another. This, the dearest wish of his heart, accomplished—

Wallingford pressed a handkerchief to his eyes. The reporters, deterred by professional delicacy, refrained from asking him any more questions about the lately deceased Hiram Wallingford as soon as they were convinced that this big strong man was too much overcome by his intense emotions to answer them. Some of them even withdrew and left him alone with his grief, and awaited outside the door, for fear he should go out the back way. They were still there when, an hour later, Wallingford went out to his limousine, but he choked up again the moment he saw them, and did not unchoke until he was safely on the train and headed for the offices of the B. G. & T. Railroad. He might make a better bargain than he had hoped.

Boomville rang with the philanthropy of J. Rufus Wallingford and his magnificent gift to the city; but the Chamber of Commerce, which also embraced all the Progressive party members of the city council, held a hasty and a worried meeting. The consensus of opinion therein expressed was that J. Rufus Wallingford, undoubtedly generous and emotional as he was in his philanthropy, had

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

brought into town with him a huge bundle of festering gall; for he had saddled the city, already groaning with a burden of obligation and taxation by means of one General Smithson Military Academy, with another one, which might turn out a costly institution to keep up.

President Jameson, of the Boomville Bank, allowed them to exhaust their storm of just indignation before he arose to pour oil on the troubled waters. "I am in receipt of a letter from our friend Wallingford, which will explain itself, I think," he observed, holding in his hands the document in question. "The envelope was addressed to me, but the contents was addressed to the Chamber of Commerce and to the City Council of Boomville, and it runs as follows:

"'Gentlemen: In urging your acceptance of my gift of the General Smithson Memorial Military Academy to the city of Boomville, I desire to call your attention to the following facts. First, my only desire in carrying out the wishes of my father, Hiram Wallingford, was that your city should have a Smithson Academy at once, and I could not afford to donate the two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars necessary to build and endow such an academy according to the terms and conditions of General Smithson's bequest. However, should the city, at any time, comply with those conditions, and build the new academy on the Gen-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

eral Smithson property, I have no objection to your transferring the name to the new school, and to your selling the old property for any purpose you see fit.

" 'Secondly, in case the city does not care to build the new academy, it can permit the General Smithson tract to revert immediately to the heirs, and can invest the Smithson Academy fund, which can not be used for other purposes, in the tract of woods now adjoining the old Skillen Academy, thus making that school preserve fully as valuable for the purpose, if not more so, as the Smithson property. How this is possible will be seen by an examination of General Smithson's will, his deed of gift and the pledge of acceptance which the city signed through its mayor and council. These documents in conjunction, by their peculiar wording, only require that the city possess, control and operate an institution to be known as the General Smithson Memorial Military Academy, *and do not stipulate, specifically, that such an academy must be located on the General Smithson ground;* although they do state, specifically, that the city can not utilize the property for any other purpose.'

"Gentlemen, I have looked over the bequest, the deed and the pledge. Mr. Wallingford was shrewder than ourselves."

A thoughtful silence followed the reading of this important communication, and then the pretty light of day began to dawn.

"Why, this man Wallingford is a public bene-

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

factor!" stated old Peter Packington, whose specialty was real estate first mortgages. "He has shown us how to let go of the quarter-of-a-million-dollar Smithson Academy load."

"Better than that," supplemented L. G. Wheeler, whose specialty was suburban subdivisions, and who was consequently a factory-boomer. "He has shown us how to let the property revert to the heirs so it will be available for the B. G. & T. shops."

"That is a matter for the city council," immediately urged Samuel Hicks, who made bricks and hoped to sell a few millions of them to the new railroad. "There is a meeting to-night, Cushman."

William Cushman, who was the proprietor of branch grocery stores wherever there were workmen's cottages, nodded his head emphatically.

"We'll put it right through," he promised, and the other members of the city council then present, they representing the majority, cheered him for the statement.

"Move we adjourn!" shouted Peter Packington, suddenly remembering an important engagement.

Peter Packington, who had his automobile right outside the door, was the very first member of the Chamber of Commerce to call on the Misses Smithson.

"I've come to bring you some splendid news," he told the two flushed and happy ladies, who were al-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ready beginning to pack for Europe and Paris and gowns.

"We're becoming used to such pleasant surprises," returned Miss Harriet, repressing a certain trace of iciness. "We could stand more, I am sure, however."

"I think I can arrange, to-night, to have the property your father left the city revert to you," he beamingly suggested. "In that case, I should like the first opportunity to purchase the tract."

"We have so many friends working to that end, it seems," she replied, wishing that she could be sweeter. "Mr. Wheeler and Mr. Cushman have both telephoned a like message. How much do *you* offer?"

Mr. Packington considered carefully and immediately raised his bid. "Eighty-five thousand," he offered with a wince. He had figured on obtaining the land for possibly fifty; but, if both Wheeler and Cushman had been after it, an offer of that size would be useless.

"I thank you," said Miss Harriet, rising and smiling sadly at her sister Martha, who had an increasing pink glow in her cheeks.

"Am I to understand that that price is satisfactory?" asked Packington, trying to read Miss Harriet's inscrutable countenance.

"No," replied Miss Harriet, leading the way to

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

the door. "We shall make no announcement concerning the property until we know that it is ours."

Mr. Packington cleared his throat. "I might be able to raise that bid a trifle," he suggested hopefully.

"We do not care to discuss it at the present moment," she coolly informed him.

Last of all came Mr. Jameson, of the Boomville Bank; but this was at nine o'clock that night. Both Miss Harriet and Miss Martha were sorry to see him, for, while they had not counted him at any time as their particular friend, their particulr friends of the old régime having mostly died or become very poor, they had always looked upon him as trustworthy.

"I've come to bring you some good news," he began, beaming upon them.

Miss Martha had been biting her lips. "How much do you offer us?" she inquired, altogether too sweetly.

"Offer you! Why, great Scott, girls, I wouldn't buy that property from you at any price, because it would be absurd in me to buy it unless I expected to make a profit, and I don't want it from General Smithson's daughters. I came out expressly to warn you not to sell it to any one. The new railroad company will give you at least a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for it."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Miss Martha was almost cryingly apologetic, but Miss Harriet helped her make him understand that he had started the way all of them had.

"I don't blame you a minute," he said, laughing away Martha's poignant distress. "I am very glad to learn, too, that you did not sell to any of them."

"We could not," Miss Harriet explained. "I believe there's no reason for further secrecy now, is there, Martha?"

"I think not," agreed Martha; "especially with an old friend like Mr. Jameson; besides Mr. Wallingford said that he only asked for discretion until everything was settled."

"Wallingford!" repeated Jameson. "Did you sell to him?"

Their beaming faces told him that they had. "For how much?"

Miss Harriet and Miss Martha looked at each other smilingly.

"For a hundred thousand dollars. We telegraphed him as soon as we heard the news this afternoon, and have had an answer from him. He is coming to-morrow to bring us the money and to get a deed for the property."

"A hundred thousand!" protested Jameson. "Why, he will sell it to the railroad company for half as much again! You should never do business with strangers!"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

That admonition was too much for the gentle Miss Harriet. "I am angry," she said. "All this day, people we have known for years have been trying to buy our property for less than the stranger offered us. Moreover, had it not been for Mr. Wallingford, nothing would have been done about either that property or our father's military academy for twenty-two years to come, by which time both my sister and myself would have been dead, I hope. If Mr. Wallingford, after buying the school property, makes a profit of twenty-five thousand dollars for himself, as I understand from his telegram that he has, both my sister Martha and I, who have discussed the matter thoroughly, only wish that it was more! Besides," and she waved her hand in the general direction of the huge bouquet of pink roses, now widely blown and withering in their third day; "besides, Mr. Wallingford's father was a friend of General Smithson!"

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER V

A FESTIVE SCENE

"IS everything all right, sir?" asked the square-faced waiter as he carefully turned the points of the pie away from his two diners, and placed their after-dinner coffee-cups on the wrong sides of them.

J. Rufus Wallingford had endured in the silence of helpless despair until now; but this inquiry was adding insult to injury. "Taking it all in a lump," he observed with forced calmness, "considering it in bulk and in detail, food, price and service, I am compelled to admit that the salt is good. I don't remember ever tasting better salt."

The waiter thoughtfully wiped his thumb. "It's the truth about the salt," he admitted. "Would you like a little more of it, sir?" and he grinned with keen satisfaction. "I'm going right down to the kitchen and tell that dago chef what you said. It's as good as a twenty per cent. tip to me to explain a message like that to a wop."

Wallingford frowned at the waiter's luxuriant presumption, for the dinner had put him in a bad humor. "You have a lot of unfettered conversa-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

tion," he chided. "You should be more careful. My friend here is the famous Vittoreo Matteo. You've probably heard of him. Chef to King Emmanuel of Italy, you know."

The American waiter tried to throw some respect into the glance he cast on the black-haired and black-mustached Blackie Daw, but the attempt was a distinct failure. "I'll rub that in on Umberto," he decided.

"Bring me the check," ordered Wallingford wearily, and as the man strode away he made a wry face into his demi-tasse. "Let's jump this town," he suggested.

Blackie Daw, impelled by the everlasting spirit of perversity, held his cup daintily and sipped at its thick contents as if it were nectar. "Your liver must be awful bad, Jim," he compassionately stated. "Myself, I'm the president of the Boosters' Club for this pleasant little burg. I never saw such a fine collection of factory chimneys; and you know what that means."

"I'll tell you about it," offered Wallingford, still glumly. "It means that this is the original home of the little Willie Weisenheimers. It means that this town is full of earnest hard-working millionaires who drink champagne in their overalls, but whom you couldn't separate from a dollar unless you picked them off it, piece by piece."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

junction?" asked Wallingford as he
desk for his key.
ning night of the grand opera season; three
nts and a matinée," explained the clerk; "Car-
men, Il Trovatore, Faust, and Tannhäuser. I don't
think you can get a seat for to-night; it's Carmen."
"We can walk over to the Grand Opera House
and watch the rich folks go in, anyhow," resignedly
decided Blackie. "You have shiny dressers here."
"New York hasn't anything on us," confidently
maintained the clerk, who was a native son. "We
have the money and the duds, and the good-looker
to wear them. Why, last winter at the opening
the opera season, Billy Dudley, of the Morning D
fender, counted three hundred and twenty-sev

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

tion," he chided. "You should be more careful. My friend here is the famous Vittoreo Matteo. You've probably heard of him. Chef to King Emmanuel of Italy, you know."

The American waiter tried to throw some respect into the glance he cast on the black-haired and black-mustached Blackie Daw, but the attempt was a distinct failure. "I'll rub that in on Umberto," he decided.

"Bring me the check," ordered Wallingford wearily, and as the man strode away he made a wry face into his demi-tasse. "Let's jump this town," he suggested.

Blackie Daw, impelled by the everlasting spirit of perversity, held his cup daintily and sipped at its thick contents as if it were nectar. "Your liver must be awful bad, Jim," he compassionately stated. "Myself, I'm the president of the Boosters' Club for this pleasant little burg. I never saw such a fine collection of factory chimneys; and you know what that means."

"I'll tell you about it," offered Wallingford, still glumly. "It means that this is the original home of the little Willie Weisenheimers. It means that this town is full of earnest hard-working millionaires who drink champagne in their overalls, but whom you couldn't separate from a dollar unless you picked them off it, piece by piece."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

A FESTIVE SCENE

"I hate to encourage you in it, Jim, but what you need is a drink," commiserated Blackie. "Where's that waiter?"

The person in question was just then entertaining a well-fed-looking little man at another table, but presently he came with the check, and let them go.

They had taken dinner rather earlier than the usual hour, and as they walked out through the lobby the parlors began to be filled with the local society leaders, large jelly-like ladies attired in low-necked gowns and plenty of spangles, and accompanied by gentlemen in expansive shirt-fronts and high hats.

"What's the function?" asked Wallingford as he went to the desk for his key.

"Opening night of the grand opera season; three nights and a matinée," explained the clerk; "*Carmen, Il Trovatore, Faust,* and *Tannhäuser.* I don't think you can get a seat for to-night; it's *Carmen.*"

"We can walk over to the Grand Opera House and watch the rich folks go in, anyhow," resignedly decided Blackie. "You have shiny dressers here."

"New York hasn't anything on us," confidently maintained the clerk, who was a native son. "We have the money and the duds, and the good-lookers to wear them. Why, last winter at the opening of the opera season, Billy Dudley, of the *Morning Defender,* counted three hundred and twenty-seven

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

dress suits and eleven tuxedos, and eight of the tuxedos were worn by strangers."

"I get it," approved Wallingford. "A pair of white gloves went with every dress suit."

He paused, with Blackie, at the cigar-stand, where the well-fed-looking little man whom they had noticed in the dining-room stepped up to them, and tipping his hat, remarked to Blackie:

"I beg pardon, sir, but I am given to understand that you are a quite distinguished chef."

Wallingford gazed at him in perplexity. He was plump bodied and plump faced, had a sprinkling of iron-gray in his black hair and wore his neat clothing with the ease and grace of a polished man of the world. In his correct and mellow speech there was a slight foreign trace, but no man could have placed his nationality.

Blackie Daw, though with some misgivings as he estimated the stranger, took up the burdensome rôle of Vittoreo Matteo with alacrity. "*Si, signore,*" he answered, with an appealing glance at Wallingford, shrugging his shoulders and turning his palms upward at the height of his neck.

"Nix, Blackie!" suddenly laughed Wallingford. "Tear up your ticket. This is Henri Dufois, late chef of any big hotel which was lucky enough to get him. He speaks Russian and Chinese as well as he does any of the common or high school languages.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Mr. Dufois, permit me to introduce my friend Mr. Daw."

Mr. Dufois acknowledged the introduction to Blackie with easy courtesy, but kept his eyes turned questioningly on Wallingford. "I can not quite place monsieur, though I remember his face very well," he admitted. "The acquaintance has been professional, perhaps."

Wallingford chuckled, and his big pink face wreathed into lines of jovial reminiscence. "Henri," he solemnly directed, "I want you to put into my turtle-soup some of that eighteen-seventy-six Amontillado, and write my name on the bottle; then—"

"Mr. Wallingford!" interrupted Henri with every indication of delight, and shook the proffered hand of J. Rufus most heartily. "It is a pleasure to meet you after so long a time, and it would be almost as great a pleasure to prepare some of the little delicacies of which you are so keen a judge. Monsieur, your friend, I take it, then, is not a chef?" and he waited a trifle anxiously for the answer, though he turned on Blackie a friendly countenance.

"Not exactly," laughed Blackie. "I have been regarded as a good camp cook, but I have never been applauded for anything more difficult than ham-and or steak and onions."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"We're just going in for a liqueur to kill the taste of our dinner," offered Wallingford, noting Henri's trace of relief. "Won't you join us?"

"We truly need it," accepted Henri with a wry face. "I have been here two days. If I stay longer I must buy an electric chafing-dish."

"Invite us to your room when you do," urged Wallingford. "What brings you to this dyspepsia factory, anyhow?" And he led the way to the bar-room.

"Business," replied Henri. "I am hunting a location for another good restaurant. I have a Café Henri in each of three excellent cities, but my fourth venture was a failure, and I am naturally cautious."

"This should be a good town," judged Wallingford, noting three silk-hatted men for whom the bartender was nonchalantly pouring champagne highballs. "They seem to have money here, and to be willing to spend it."

"They have no palates," objected Henri sadly.

"You'd be doing them a favor to give them a chance at something better," suggested Wallingford.

"At the possible loss of a hundred thousand dollars," retorted Henri with a smile, "I'm afraid of them. I wish I could move one of my places here for a trial."

"That sounds like good business," chuckled Wall-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ingford. "What you really want is for somebody to invest a hundred thousand in such a place, fit it up and run it according to your ideas and turn it over to you for about eighty thousand, if you like it."

"Well, yes," agreed Henri with a shrewd twinkle.

"Hello, Blackie! How is Violet Bonnie?" inquired a thick man who had been stunted lengthwise.

"Hello, Pop," hailed Blackie. "Violet Bonnie is so healthy she's mislaid her make-up box. Are you running this show?"

"Don't you see my gray hair?" demanded Pop, who could have measured his height with the outstretch of his low-cut white waistcoat, and from whom care had long since fled discouraged. "Coming in?"

"Couldn't get tickets," explained Blackie; "so Jim and I came over to see the procession of dress-suit lollops. Meet my friend Wallingford, Pop. Mr. Hickey, Mr. Wallingford."

"I know Pop," laughed Wallingford, shaking hands with him. "He was one of the loudest knockers when we put on *Lama's Goat;* and it was after he laid down his hammer that I went out and cleaned up a hundred thousand on my belief in the success of the piece."

"I've tumbled," acknowledged Mr. Hickey with

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

pride. "So many people won out coppering my bets that now I'm doing it myself. I took out this company just because I knew it would be a frost."

"It looks like an artistic box-office troupe," admired Wallingford, watching the money flow past.

"Pretty good company?"

"Medium-weights," replied Hickey indifferently. "I couldn't afford the fat singers, but it isn't the singing that pulls these gooks; it's art. I make spike-tails and open-face bosoms compulsory in the first twelve rows. Say, where do you eat?"

"Star Hotel," confessed Wallingford gloomily.

"I thought so," groaned Hickey. "The last time my business made me halt in this tank town, I found a quiet little German place with sawdust on the floor where a man could buy real food, but there're cobwebs in the windows to-day. Excuse me a minute, and we'll edge in. I got a pair of sure-enough Spanish dancers, and I've split their hot specialty into the second act. It's the best part of the opera."

He waddled hastily into the box-office, and Wallingford and Blackie stood interestedly watching the solemn parade. These people took the duties of wealth quite seriously. The women wore their rich capes and the men their stiff gloves with a brave determination to be at aristocratic ease, no matter how painful. They exchanged gay banter and laughed lightly and moved with careless grace, and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

occasionally apologized for it, and did all the other things which persons of wealth and breeding do.

"It is, indeed, a gay and festive scene," observed Blackie, admiring it, nevertheless. "I will hand them one thing, Jim. They built this theater regardless."

"I never saw a finer one," agreed Wallingford seriously, as his eye roved from the magnificent marble lobby to the glimpses of carmine and gold revealed through the open doors.

Hickey came back to them as the overture began, and led them past the doorkeeper. Blackie, catching the sound of the music, immediately surged into the auditorium, where he found a dark corner and promptly proceeded to forget the world; but Wallingford's commercial mind was caught by the costly foyer, and he hung behind with Hickey to examine it in detail.

"Somebody must have believed in the future of the drama in this town," he commented.

"If they believe in anything here they certainly do back it off the boards," returned Hickey. "Let me show you up-stairs."

He led Wallingford back into the lobby, where, to the right and to the left just outside the entrance to the foyer, wound beautiful marble staircases. He stopped at the box-office a moment and came back with a key.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I was so paralyzed when I saw this new shack that I want to see somebody else struck stiff," he remarked as he led the way up-stairs.

He opened an electric switch-box at the head of the stairway and flooded the place with light. Even Wallingford, used as he was to luxurious interiors, was amazed by the richness and beauty of the extravagantly decorated suite of rooms, all of them ablaze from the light of crystal chandeliers, leading up to an immense recital hall in white and gold, the panels between its pilasters embellished with fresco paintings, in soft pastel colors of more than usual breadth and strength.

"For high-brow stuff," explained Hickey with a grin. "They had a few lectures and recitals and readings for the fourteen-story intellects here, but the real brainy people of this town haven't any money, and the other kind would rather sleep at home; so they cut out the classics, and the last thing they held in here was a barn dance. Shame, too, ain't it?"

"If old Cap Churchill could see this, he'd have a freak orchestra in that balcony and a gross of celluloid palms on that waxed floor in twenty-four hours," observed Wallingford thoughtfully.

"Wouldn't it make a swell restaurant!" agreed Hickey enthusiastically. "Right over there is a tiled kitchen, with all the aseptic improvements for

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

modern Red-Cross cooking, and a suite of private dining-rooms that might have been designed by David Belasco himself. Let's get out of here. I get cross when anything makes me hungry."

Hickey and Wallingford and Blackie, gathering up Henri Dufois in the lobby of the Star Hotel, strolled back to the dining-room just ahead of the dress-suit brigade, and as soon as the square-faced waiter saw them he made a break for their table.

"Umberto says to leave it to him," he announced.

Blackie smiled and nodded his head energetically, but pointed to his neck, and Wallingford took compassion on him.

"Signore Matteo has a sore throat and can not talk, but he will be happy to have Umberto go as far as he likes."

Blackie heaved a sigh of relief when the waiter was gone. "You've run me up against a continuous performance of lightning-change acts, but this one is the rottenest turn of all because it doesn't get us a hand," he complained. "Umberto Primo will cook us raviolas, macaroni and three kinds of spaghetti, and stumble up here to get my fine Italian thanks. If I hadn't been smart enough to invent a sore throat I'd be up against it."

"If it's a new laugh, hand it to me," requested Hickey.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"This is Vittoreo Matteo, the world-famous chef, from the kitchens of King Emmanuel, of Rome," chuckled Wallingford. "How he came to be it was through my hunting some way to send word to the chief poisoner down-stairs how rotten his chefing was."

"That explains it, then," laughed Henri. "Your waiter told me about it at dinner."

A swarthy little man with a bristling black beard came toward them, buttoning the vest of his tuxedo, and obedient to a gesture from the square-faced waiter who followed him, went straight to Blackie and held out both hands, which Blackie grasped with equal effusiveness. Good-natured Henri took upon himself the stream of Milanese that poured from Umberto, and the two gabbled energetically for some moments, during which both of them glanced occasionally at the alert and beaming Blackie, Umberto with deep respect and Henri with a sly twinkle. Finally Umberto, bowing profusely, withdrew, and Henri turned to Blackie with a laugh.

"You'll have to keep your sore throat," he declared. "Umberto not only wants to show you some prize cooking, but he invites you to his kitchen."

"Nothing doing," declared Blackie. "He wants to learn some of my secrets."

"I don't doubt it," agreed Henri; "also he wishes

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

to talk Italian politics with you. Every man in Italy is a socialist; but there are six different kinds, all enemies."

Two capable-looking men, who would have been better dressed in sack suits, paused at their table to congratulate Hickey.

"It was a highly successful opening," the taller man informed him. "I don't know much about such matters myself, but my wife, who is musical, says that this is the best company that has ever been to Ironburgh."

"It was exquisitely rendered," acclaimed the shorter man, who wore the perpetual frown of one who takes trifles so seriously that there is no room in his life for tragedy. "It is a great relief to find a Carmen who can dance."

"It's what I call a musical treat," corroborated Hickey. "Won't you join us in a cocktail?"

The men eying the experienced-looking group with a certain degree of willingness, Hickey immediately introduced them to J. Rufus Wallingford, promoter and capitalist, to Vittoreo Matteo, the world-famous Italian chef, late from the kitchens of the king at Rome, and to Henri Dufois, secretary and assistant to the great Vittoreo.

"Won't you take supper with us?" begged Wallingford. "Umberto is preparing a special menu in honor of his distinguished fellow professional."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"We'd be delighted," refused the taller man; "but Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Carter will be along in a few moments. We hurried ahead, while they were removing their wraps, to obtain a table; and I see that Charlie has already turned the chairs at our favorite place."

"We envy you your treat," said Carter, almost pathetically wistful about it. "We have so very little good food in Ironburgh. I wish some of you famous artists would go into business here."

"It is barely possible that Signore Matteo may do so," stated Wallingford with a speculative glance at Blackie. "If he can get the proper backing and can be assured of sufficient exclusive patronage, he could, I think, be induced to locate in your very lively city."

"What does he want?" asked Mr. Thomas, who had a sharp crease in each cheek from jaw-snapping bluntness.

"Mainly, to conduct a café which would be patronized only by the socially elect," replied Wallingford. "Do you suppose that the recital hall in the Grand Opera House could be obtained for such a purpose?"

Both Mr. Thomas and Mr. Carter considered that suggestion in the light of a distinct revelation.

"It would be ideal," commended tall Mr. Thomas, and he looked upon Blackie with increased respect,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

as did, also, Mr. Carter. It was quite evident that Ironburgh reserved all its admiration for thoroughbreds.

"A place conducted on that scale would become the fashionable rendezvous of Ironburgh from the moment it was opened," asserted Mr. Carter.

"You're talking to the right people," stated Hickey. "Mr. Thomas and Mr. Carter were charter members of the Grand Opera House Company, and are on its board of directors."

"Gentlemen, I am pleased to meet you," suddenly interpolated Blackie, awakening to his duties, and he shook hands impulsively with both of them. "I will only consent to manage a café in your very beautiful city if I can have that hall of recital, and if everything shall be, what you call, very swell."

"You don't need to worry about that," Mr. Thomas assured him with a smile. "Ironburgh, in proportion to its population, has a larger contingent of socially inclined wealthy people than any other city in the United States. We have needed just such a café as you desire to operate, and we would support one of exclusiveness and class."

"Without a doubt," corroborated Mr. Carter.

"Everything must be very swell," insisted Blackie, shaking his head. "I should not care to entertain guests, after six o'clock, who were not in evening dress."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Certainly not," scorned Mr. Thomas.

"That is exactly what we wish," asserted Mr. Carter, half indignant that any other possibility should be discussed, or even mentioned.

"You spoke about backing," remembered Mr. Thomas, addressing Wallingford. "How much is needed?"

"A hundred thousand dollars," stated Wallingford calmly. "Signore Matteo is not a wealthy man, but he would buy five thousand dollars' worth of the stock, and I would expect five thousand dollars' worth for promotion. Signore Matteo's only condition is that he be given a three-year contract of absolute management, on a reasonable percentage basis."

"True," corroborated Blackie. "If I do only a small business I wish only a small pay; if I do a large business I wish to make a fortune. I shall make a large business."

The cocktails having arrived, and two large ladies, bulging from amid a particularly aggravating riot of spangles, having passed their table with correct smiles, Mr. Thomas and Mr. Carter grasped their glasses and adeptly tossed off their drinks.

"I'm for it," avowed Mr. Thomas as he arose to his full length. "Bring your subscription list to me to-morrow at eleven thirty, and I'll introduce you at luncheon to the balance of your stockholders."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

A FESTIVE SCENE

Monsieur Henri Dufois bent upon Wallingford perplexed and anxious brows. "I do not understand," he puzzled as their guests moved away.

"Neither do I, but it's all right," reassured Blackie.

"You go up to their suite with the boys and you'll get it," laughed Hickey. " I know Blackie of old, and he never even carried a spear in a flivver."

"Cheer up, Henri," chuckled Wallingford. "About the first of next week I'll want you to slip into New York and help me pick out dishes and silverware and such junk for my new Café Haut. Let's see; I'll have them monogrammed C. H."

"C. H.?" repeated Monsieur Dufois. "Why, that is the monogram I use on all the Café Henri supplies. Except that I would not care to have you use the same pattern, which is my own design, I could get them for you very quickly from my own supply-houses."

"Let's talk it over after supper, up-stairs," chuckled Wallingford.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER VI

SOME CLASS

THE new Café Haut opened in a conflagration of glory, the occasion being a return engagement, for one night only, of the Hickey Grand Opera Company, and every table having been engaged two weeks beforehand, at a four-quart premium, the stockholders of the latest addition to Ironburgh's social éclat stepped high and beamed and were filled with gay glad repartee. The femi-

nine colors of this particular season running to strong and masterful Richard Strauss effects, into the soft and dignified tinting of Recital Hall was poured a mad riot of purple and red, of green and orange, and of yellow and lavender, the whole sprinkled liberally with evening wraps in frank, brave kimono and Navajo-blanket effects.

On every table there was a ticket with a name, and there were soft-tinted lights, and real flowers, and up in the ornately carved balcony was a sixteen-piece orchestra, led by an acrobatic conductor with no sense of shame. In every direction five-languaged waiters were suavely advising their guests with one breath, and softly cursing buss-boys with the next; and the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Café Haut, firmly established as the most exclusive and recherché palace of epicurianism east or west of anywhere, was so successfully launched that the directors were half intoxicated with animal spirits before they had touched a drop of alcohol.

It was, indeed, a notable gathering! But who was the most notable person and the most noted in all that hall of glittering light? Who was the most conspicuous, the most sought after, the center of all eyes and the pivot of all thought? Blackie Daw!

Grand, gloomy and peculiar, the pseudo Vittoreo Matteo, in the uncomfortable rôle of a chef too far advanced to cook, infested the floor of the Café Haut in a state of torment, which began in aggravation and ended in downright savagery; and with each man who loftily called him Victor and demanded a service, his hatred of the human race increased.

To add to his discomfiture, Blackie discovered among the diners an unexpected guest. He had just been called to the table of Charlie Secretary, who was living at a five-thousand gait on a three-thousand salary, but had cheerful hopes of making his income catch up to his expenditures.

"Waiter!" had been the sharp call of Charlie, as Blackie, finally convinced that time stretched into eternity, passed his table on the way to change Mrs. Smelting Works' order for the fourth time.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Waiter!" repeated Blackie to the nearest foreign servitor.

"No, you," insisted Charlie, not unkindly by any means, but still with a trace of sternness. "Look here, Captain, can't I induce you to hurry up our order a little bit?"

There were three young ladies with Charlie, and one of them, the one with the brightest eyes and the most flawless shoulders and the most perfectly arranged complexion, glanced up at him roguishly. In a soft and mellow voice she issued a few limpid remarks, in musical words, each of which ended with a vowel.

Blackie caught his breath, but stood the shock nobly, beaming upon her with gallant adoration until she had quite finished; then he replied. A shade of distress crossed her face when he began, and it deepened as he continued. When he had finished, she said faintly, "Thank you," and Charlie, glowing with pride over her accomplishment, pulled a five-dollar bill from his waistcoat pocket and handed it nonchalantly over his shoulder to Blackie. There was some class to the girls he could win, and it took a man of class to win a girl of such class!

Blackie, his eyes distended at the sight of that green paper as if some one had offered to pull his nose, was about to make hasty tracks away from

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

that table when a hand touched his elbow, and a voice, which he instantly recognized, addressed him as, "Signore Matteo!"

Turning, Blackie beheld, with a sinking heart, the dark visage of Umberto, flawlessly dressed except for his beard, and once more a stream of limpid Italian assailed his ears. Distinctly confused, Blackie pointed hastily to his throat and hurried back into the kitchen for comfort; but Henri, in a white coat and a huge white apron that came up to his neck, was busy among the stew-pans, measuring and weighing with chemical exactness.

"What troubles monsieur?" he asked perfunctorily, though he frowned slightly as he noted the distinguished chef's lassitude.

"Money," replied Blackie disgustedly. "I've been dodging it all night. It seems to injure the sport to have people willing for me to take it away from them."

Henri shook his head in perplexity. "That is an excellent crowd out there," he judged. "It should be worth a hundred dollars to you to-night, in tips alone."

"It's a shame to waste it," acknowledged Blackie. "I wish you'd go out and get it, and let me stay here and boil eggs."

"Impossible," returned Henri quickly, brought to

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

a realization of how busy he was. "I am, with my own hands, preparing the dinner for Mr. Wallingford and his friends. You should be on the floor."

Blackie's head straightened with a jerk. That last remark of Henri's had been peremptory, and, indeed, for a fleeting second Henri had almost forgotten that he was not talking to a paid under officer of his army. Blackie hastily reviewed his highly miscellaneous lifetime, and could not remember a minute, since his school-days, when anybody but a subway guard had had a right to tell him to step lively. He felt his neck beginning to swell and moved out of the hot kitchen.

The hall of dazzling light was still ablaze with gaiety, and he tried to walk straight through it without a turn of his head to the right or to the left, but, try as he would, he could not escape the now angry face of Umberto, who, as he passed, shook a dark forefinger at him and hissed:

"Royalist!"

That was a slight relief, but, as he passed the length of the dining-room, there was still the table of jovial-faced Jim Wallingford to pass. That unprincipled scoundrel, dining with Hickey and the directors and their wives, now added a probable bitten ear to his list of future casualties, by snapping his fingers sharply as Blackie came abreast. The signal could not be ignored.

"Vittoreo!" called Wallingford, in the tone of

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

friendly loftiness he would use to a favorite trusted butler.

Blackie's impulse was to stride straight on, but there sat the pleased directors of the Café Haut watching the well-known and justly famous Vittoreo Matteo, and Blackie never yet had "thrown the game." Wallingford knew that and counted on it, dog-gone him!

"Yes, sir," said Blackie, wheeling, and searching anxiously but hopelessly under the bottom hem of his waistcoat for a pin, he approached and leaned over the back of Wallingford's chair.

"Vittoreo," directed J. Rufus, in the suave tones of a kind master, "I think there is a little too much draft in here from those top windows. I wish you would see to it."

"Yes, sir," strangled Blackie, catching the eye of the fiendishly grinning Hickey at the other end of the table. He felt under the right lapel of his coat. No pin!

"And, Vittoreo."

"Yes, sir."

"I wish you would get me a foot-stool."

"Y-yes, sir." Blackie felt under the other lapel.

"Vittoreo," called Hickey, motioning to him.

Blackie, adding Hickey to his list of future massacres, but determined, now, since he was in it, to bear all and beg for more with a submissive "Yes, sir," hurried over to Hickey.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I wish you'd have your drink-mixer put up a bottle of those cocktails for me," he gently requested, and at the same moment Blackie felt something slipped into the hand which hung below the edge of the table.

In the first shock, he thought it was money, and his face reddened, but before he had decided how he could meet this particular atrocity, his sense of touch advised him that Hickey had slipped him a precious pin, and his fingers closed over it.

"Thank you, sir," he said gratefully, and looking up, met the eye of Wallingford, who was chuckling, and whose huge round face was pink with the joy of the occasion.

Blackie returned immediately to his station behind Wallingford's chair, and with his hand resting lightly in the middle of Wallingford's broad back, leaned over obsequiously.

"Is there anything else I can do for monsieur?" he softly inquired.

"No, I think not, Vittoreo," returned J. Rufus grandly, and felt in his waistcoat pocket.

Blackie leaned still lower. "Don't wince, you fat slob!" he hissed in Wallingford's ear. "You feel this pin against your coat? Well, I'm going to jab it in to the hilt and leave it there!"

Wallingford paled and shrank. "Don't," he begged in low agonized tones.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"If you wince or holler, you're a nigger!" again hissed Blackie, as full of vindictiveness as a coiled rattlesnake. "Now, one, two, three, bing!" and the bony piano-pounding fingers, which could crack hickory-nuts, performed their violent duty well, without the aid of any movement or twitch of his body farther back than the wrist.

Wallingford half lifted himself from his chair, and two big tears dripped from his lower eyelids and splashed down over his cheeks.

"Is there nothing else I can do for monsieur?" asked Blackie anxiously.

Wallingford shook his head and reached back for the pin.

Blackie, his rage only whetted by this taste of revenge, cast a triumphant glance at Hickey and strode out into the anteroom for a whiff of fresh air. There the fates were again kind to him. They sent him Umberto, who, his dark countenance crimsoned with fury, wagged a stubby forefinger under Blackie's nose.

"Royalist!" he hissed. "You know I am a Garibaldian, and you despise me! You say you have a sore throat! Maybe you will talk English, at least, to me, when I tell you that there are five hundred Garibaldians in this town, and no accursed Royalist stays here more than one day! Royalist!" and once more he shook his finger under Blackie's nose.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The eyes of Blackie glistened with joy. "Um-m-m-berto, you are a gift from heaven," he observed, ineffably soothed. "I have been waiting for you. Come outside with me." And clutching Umberto by the convenient whiskers, he dragged him out into the hall, missed his footing, and they bumped comfortably down the marble steps together.

The great Vittoreo Matteo sat placidly through the called meeting of the Café Haut Company and listened without the quiver of an eyelash to the appalling financial report of the secretary.

"In concluding this report," read the palely concerned Mr. Carter, "I beg to call the attention of the board to the remarkable fact that, while the luncheon and afternoon trade is quite up to expectations, the dinner and supper trade has dwindled to next to nothing." The secretary lowered his paper. "Now, I've made some private inquiries about this, and have compared notes with several members of this board, and have discovered a curious thing. Men won't go regularly where they are compelled to wear dress suits, but they will wear dress suits in places where they are not compelled to do so. Men who swear that we have the best food this side of New York put on their dress suits and go to the Star Hotel for dinner, and drop in again after the theater. I have

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

asked a lot of them why, and they tell me that this place is too stiff."

President Thomas nodded his head. "Matteo, I guess we'll have to call off the dress-suit rule."

"Call it off?" inquired Blackie, still placid. "You mean to have no more dress suits at dinner?"

"No, I don't mean that," replied Thomas. "I mean that we must lessen the requirements; reduce the necessary fussing up, say, to a clean collar."

"I'm for that!" announced the president of the Bessemer Refinery, who could remember exactly where he got his start, and was proud of it. "I don't see any sense in refusing a twenty-dollar bill because the man who wants to spend it happens to have on a pink necktie with an emerald in it."

Thomas looked at him with a grin. "Why, you're the fussiest dresser in the crowd," he charged. "Seven minutes after six, every evening, finds you cursing your pearl studs."

"What of it?" defended the Bessemer man. "Just because I like to feel clean is no sign I'm a snob!""

A gleam of satisfaction rested upon the face of eleven good men and true. The sentiment was popular.

"The ayes seem to have it, Matteo," laughed Thomas. "The dress-suit rule must go."

"Never," stated Signore Matteo, quite placidly.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"But, Matteo," Thomas pleaded, "you don't get this. On the opening night of this café we served dinner to two hundred and fifteen dress suits and two hundred and eighty-seven evening gowns, and everybody went home stuttering with happiness and champagne. The next night, which was Saturday, you had a hundred and four diners. The next night twenty-one, and now the average is about seven. People like the place and your food, and they love to pay the price, but they will not be ordered to wear a broad shirt-front. The dress suit must go."

"Never," insisted Vittoreo Matteo, still placidly. "You ask me to run a fine place, with everything very swell. I do so. It is the only kind of a place I will run. If the people do not come—" he shrugged his shoulders and spread his palms.

"Mr. President!" rasped the gentleman who had increased the Malleable Company from a brick stable to a twelve-acre plant. "I propose that we stop this fool discussion. I move that, from and after this date, the dress-suit rule be discontinued, that the newspapers be notified at once of our decision, and that we use our advertising space to state that fact. 'Come as you are,' would be a good slogan."

"Second the motion with much enthusiasm!" interjected the heavy-jowled gentleman who had added twenty-four stacks to the smelting works.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

President Thomas drew a long sad breath, "I regret to be compelled to announce that the motion is out of order," he stated with a sorrowing glance in the direction of Blackie. "Signore Matteo has, in his possession, a contract, signed by the officers of this board, and at the direction of the board, which gives him absolute management of the Café Haut for the next three years."

A silence like a funeral pall descended upon that assemblage of earnest business men.

"Move we adjourn," snapped the Bessemer man.

After the adjournment, the directors flocked around Blackie in their private and individual capacities, begged him, coaxed him and swore at him, but all to no purpose. That obstinate Italian, pro tem., was not to be budged an inch, although they did finally exasperate him to the point of offering to buy their stock. They thought he was foolish, until he named the price he would pay. Thirty-five dollars a share!

Thomas was the first man to recover his breath. "The fundamental principle of my business is to stop a leak," he stated with a sigh.

Two days later, Blackie went to Monsieur Henri Dufois with a large thick bundle of stock certificates.

"Here it is," said he. "One hundred per cent. of the stock of the Café Haut Company. Give me that

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

check for seventy thousand and change the sign to the Café Henri."

"I don't think I ought to pay you quite so much," smiled Henri. "Monogrammed china and silverware have not much value."

"I have only an hour and a half to pack and catch my train," laughed Blackie, handing him a fountain pen. "I suppose you'll allow a dress suit in your dining-room once in a while."

"If the wearer can pay cash," assented Henri.

"You were a long time in closing up," grumbled J. Rufus as Blackie stepped off the train in Poplar Center. "I have a lumber game here that has almost gone stale waiting for you to help with the finishing 'touch'."

"Three weeks is short work to close up a thirty-three-thousand-dollar profit," defended Blackie.

"Thirty-three thousand!" repeated Wallingford. "Why, there was over twenty thousand left in the treasury alone, and you were in sole possession of the company for at least an hour before you sold out to Dufois. Do you mean to tell me that you only took the profit on the manipulation of the stock, and didn't snag out that twenty thousand?"

"Certainly not!" indignantly asserted Blackie. "Do you suppose I'm a crook?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER VII

PIPING HOT

THE man who hailed J. Rufus Wallingford as an old friend was small and stooped and wizened, but his wrinkle-framed old eyes had a spark in them.

Wallingford shook the proffered hand with a cordiality that was purely habitual, and examined the stranger with cautious perplexity as he sat opposite in one of the leather chairs of the smoking compartment. "You have the advantage of me," he confessed reservedly, wondering whether his enforced traveling companion had known him as a benefactor, or otherwise.

The man laughed; a little crackling laugh which ended in a cough. "I fool all the boys," he boasted. "I'm so ready for the morgue that undertakers follow me home to get my address," and he laughed again, as if that were the best joke in the world. "I'm Dollar Bill."

Wallingford, both shocked and startled, scrutinized him again, incredulously. Why, Dollar Bill, whose specialty had been sawdust money, had been a roly-poly little chap, who should have stayed the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

same age until he failed to hear "ten." "You don't pass with me," puzzled Wallingford. "The Dollar Bill I knew would still be crisp."

The other put his hand on his chest and laughed again. "I make 'em all think I'm a counterfeit," he stated. "Do you remember the night the gook from Carson City passed me this souvenir?" and he exhibited a wrist across which was a ragged seam.

Wallingford looked into the still zestful eyes and shook his head sadly. "It's Dollar Bill all right, I guess," he acknowledged, hurt by the discovery. "What tore you?"

"I was bogus, and the government put a stamp on me," replied the frayed one. "They laid me away for a ten-stretch, Jim, and they took out of me everything I ever had. In place of it they gave me the 'cunny'."

Wallingford, who was physically sensitive to a high degree, hastened to change that unpleasant subject. "Happy news," he commented. "I suppose you've dropped the merry little green-goods game to which you were such an ornament."

"Cold," coughed Dollar Bill. "I've quit graft forever."

"What are you doing?" asked Wallingford sympathetically.

"Manufacturing antique furniture," was the cheerful reply, in which there was a note of pride.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I learned my trade in the government's big boarding-house on the island, and if I do say it myself, there isn't a man in the business can bore as fine a set of worm-holes as I can, or break a chair leg so natural. Why, I've even had my own antiques brought to me to be restored."

"No wonder you pin bouquets on Bill," approved J. Rufus. "I suppose there's a good profit in it."

"There would be if I didn't have to go to Texas every winter, to save the piece of a lung I have left. Looks as if I'd be late this season. My best new plant died, confound him; and I had just salted his shack."

"It's a game I'm not hep to," confessed Wallingford. "How do you lay the pipes to sell genuine antiques?"

"Well, I've worked up my own bunk. I watch the papers, and when I see that Mr. Pozollop has picked up a prize Pembroke high-boy in Liberty Center, I hit out for that new Yukon on the first rattler, because I know that the junk bugs will swarm there like mosquitoes around a rain-barrel. I locate a brass-necked old farmer, or a thin-nosed spinster, or even a thousand-year-old nigger mammy living in a shack with all the weatherboards loose, and slip them in a few choice antiques."

"I laugh as follows," observed Wallingford with profound approbation. "I should think these high-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

boy high-brows would have some way to tell the real goods from the phony, though."

"I meet all tests," scorned Dollar Bill. "I know 'em as soon as they do. My best gag, however, is to write, in the bottom of the secret drawer: 'From John to Prudence. With a heart full of love, July 4, 1776.' That always fetches 'em."

"I suppose that the latest storm center of acute antiquarianism is out this way," judged Wallingford.

"Piping hot. I got in ahead of Isaac Abrahams and Maple-Knot and Company, who are my chief competitors in the business. They planted a pie-crust table, here and there, and a few Hoppendale dressers; and old Henry Crane screwed antique door-knockers all over Lafayette; but I got old Jonathan Bunker, in near-by Poplarville. His was the only rheumatic mansion in the county, and he was such a grouch that none of the neighbors had been in his house for twenty years; so nobody knew what he had."

"You fitted him up right, then?"

"From cellar to attic," boasted Dollar Bill, glowing with pride. "Every room in his house is filled with priceless antiques, with a secret drawer in everything but the glassware, and not an unbroken piece in the collection. I had the plant all ready for opening to the public, and had suction sweepers

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

working, reversed, for a week, to get a good coating of dust, and had turned two dozen spiders loose in each room to put on the finishing touches, when old Jonathan, who went through every battle of the Civil War without a scratch, run a splinter in his thumb and died of lockjaw. Now, every stick of furniture I had is in that house. I haven't a scrap of paper to show for it, and the Oklahoma heir will probably throw me off the place when I put in my bill."

"It's a long way to Texas," commiserated Wallingford. "Why don't you write yourself a note from old Jonathan acknowledging his debt? He'll never dispute it."

"I don't know his handwriting," complained Bill.

"Poplarville!" yelled the brakeman, as the engine whistled for down brakes.

The antique furniture maker arose wearily. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"Lafayette. They tell me it's a live little county seat with plenty of loose money."

"Ten miles farther on," commented the other. "Any particular business there?"

"No, just prospecting."

"I wish you'd get off and help me collect for my antiques," and the ex-green-goods man eyed wistfully the large proportions and impressive appearance of his old friend Wallingford.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I don't mind if I do," observed J. Rufus carelessly, and he went back to his chair for his hand-luggage.

Lafayette Bunker, who was a gaunt and clumsy man of queerly knotted muscles, stood at the gate of the old Bunker farm and acknowledged his identity with gloomy reluctance. "Yes, I'm old Jonathan Bunker's nephew," he stated. "Want to talk about buying the farm?"

"No," denied Dollar Bill, with a hopeless intuition. "I came to see you about some antique furniture."

"I don't want to buy none," immediately repudiated Lafayette. "I declare I don't know where old Jonathan got all the worthless trash the house is cluttered up with. When I was here, five years ago, he had two chairs and a kitchen table and a canvas cot."

"He got it from me," explained the worm-hole expert; "and here's the bill for it. I'm William J. Shuvit."

Lafayette Bunker, who had not yet removed his foot from the lower bar of the gate, eyed the document in question with careless indifference, but did not take it in his hands.

"That ain't no proof that Jonathan owed it to you," he uninterestedly argued. "Course I don't

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

say he didn't, but if he did, you'll have to collect it the next time you see him," and he laughed silently, like a man too stingy to share even a joke.

"Very well; I'll have to replevin the furniture," announced Mr. Shuvit, concealing his anger as much as possible.

"You can do whatever you blame please," granted young Mr. Bunker. "The furniture's mine, and I'm goin' to sell it if I can find anybody fool enough to buy it," and he strolled away in the direction of the disintegrating old house, pausing to pull a dead and decayed weed from the side of the walk.

"The worst of it is I don't dare replevin it," confessed Dollar Bill to Wallingford. "The papers would get hold of it, and that would ruin my business. I ought to have made several thousand dollars on this deal, but, in the shape the thing is, I'd have been glad to settle for fifteen hundred, and take the next train for Texas. Why, confound it, Jim, I haven't any furniture left to sell. I used it all in stocking up this place."

"You might buy it in at a very cheap figure," suggested Wallingford. "I say," he called after the retreating heir to the Bunker estate.

Lafayette half turned and bent upon them impatient brows. "Hunh?" he grunted.

"What will you take for that furniture?"

The heir from Oklahoma came back immediately.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"What'll you give?"

"A hundred dollars."

"Well, this morning I might have sold it to you for that, but I've just seen this man's bill, and it says the furniture's worth fifteen hundred; so that's the price. I ain't lookin' for any profit. I'm just a plain farmer."

"I know; I've bought apples from them," chuckled Wallingford. "Let's see that furniture."

"Come right in," invited Mr. Bunker.

Dollar Bill Shuvit walked reverently into the parlor of the old Bunker homestead, and surveyed his own creations with the worshipful pride of a born genius. "Look at that Scrambleton suite," he glowed. "Did you ever see more beautifully threadbare upholstering? Look at the mended leg on that Stuart table! You can see that the bottom of the leg is newer wood, and was glued on by a dub, say twenty or twenty-five years ago!"

Wallingford looked about him with the appreciation of an artist. The dust of ages lay thickly on everything, and the spiders, undisturbed for years in the dim light of those shuttered rooms, had spun their webs where they would, even across the pendulum of the long-since-stilled grandfather's clock which glared in at them from the hall.

"That's a sure-enough old-timer," observed Wallingford, viewing the last-named article admiringly.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Isn't it!" agreed Dollar Bill with enthusiasm, as Mr. Bunker strode back to the kitchen to suppress a boiling teapot. "I buy my works from a maker who can scratch a hundred-year-old repair date better than any other man in the business. There's a secret drawer up in here."

"You're strong for secret drawers," remarked Wallingford, glancing into the library, where stood an exquisitely inlaid mahogany desk that had been painted black, with the paint cleverly worn off on one corner to show the treasure underneath.

"They're the life of the business," corroborated Mr. Shuvit with professional enthusiasm.

He led J. Rufus into the dining-room, and upstairs into the bedrooms, and even into the attic, extolling the virtues of rare high-boys and low-boys and other modern triumphs of antiquity, and since Wallingford was interested, displayed secret drawers and sliding panels and false bottoms and hollow bedposts without number.

"Well, how's the furniture?" asked Mr. Bunker, rejoining them in the front bedroom, where Wallingford himself had begun to covet a heavy old four-poster that bore the marks of two full centuries of dignified wear.

"It's too old-fashioned to be worth much," decried Wallingford. "I might give you the hundred dollars I first offered you for it."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"It's worth more than that for lumber," insisted Mr. Bunker. "I've heard, too, that old-fashioned furniture sometimes fetches fancy prices."

"When it's in such rotten repair as this!" retorted Wallingford indignantly, pointing to the carefully sagged bed-rail and to the tottering high-boy, one corner of which had been propped up with an artistically scratched and marred and battered walnut jewel box.

"Well, it is kind o' shiftless-looking," admitted Mr. Bunker, scratching his head. "I'm willing to knock two hundred and fifty dollars for repairs off o' what this gentleman says the goods is worth."

"Twelve hundred and fifty dollars," figured Wallingford. "I might buy the farm for that, if you'd throw in the house and furniture."

"Make it five thousand and I'll go you," offered Bunker.

"This isn't oil land," derided Wallingford. "How many acres are there to this place?"

"Twenty."

"And it won't grow mullein stalks!" scorned Wallingford. "Look out of the window at those stone-covered hillsides. Have you the nerve to want two hundred and fifty dollars an acre for this collection of pebbles that has too much earth in it to even make a good gravel-bank?"

"Seventy-five an acre," amended Bunker. "The

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

house is worth two thousand and the furniture fifteen hundred. What did you say your name was, mister?"

"J. Rufus Wallingford," answered that gentleman, feeling that he had better play safe on that item.

"I thought I heard this other man call you that," went on Mr. Bunker. "Well, Mr. Wallingford, I'm just a plain farmer, and bein' I'm anxious to get back to my farm with some ready cash, I'm willing to make a leetle sacrifice to you. I'll call the farm fifteen hundred and the house fifteen hundred and the furniture a thousand. That's four thousand dollars; but I want spot cash. There's a barn out there, too, you know."

"I'll think it over, but I know I won't pay you that price," said Wallingford.

"You'd better think quick, for there's other people wants this place," prevaricated Mr. Bunker. "Suppose'n' you just walk out to the barn and back, and give me your answer."

"You'll be perfectly satisfied if you get your fifteen hundred?" inquired Wallingford, out at the barn.

"Satisfied!" echoed Dollar Bill. "I'd be plumb slothful."

"All right; I think I'll give it to you," suddenly decided J. Rufus.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

He went back toward the house, and Mr. Bunker came down the kitchen steps to meet him.

"There's a good grazing meadow down yonder where the spring run goes through," he urged.

"You couldn't graze a sick dog on it. I'll give you three thousand five hundred for the farm and everything in it or on it, if you can assure me of a clear quitclaim deed, and will leave Poplarville to-morrow, and stay away."

"Cash?" demanded Lafayette Bunker with quivering eagerness.

"Money," Wallingford assured him; "plain, simple, United States greenbacks, pronounced genuine at any bank."

"Come right over to Lafayette to the courthouse," invited Mr. Bunker. "We can drive it in an hour and a half in your hired rig out there."

"Sieve" Bascom, so nicknamed because his face was so minutely and so evenly pockmarked, and because he could not hold liquor, plunged his spade slowly into the turf of the old Bunker front yard and paused to rest. An infinitesimal patch of fresh brown earth marked the net result of his last half-hour of labor, but, even so, he glared at it vindictively.

"This country's all for the rich," he growled. "A

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

man that's born poor stays poor, an' the only chance that he's got is to slave from morning to night."

Jim-Jams Jones, working with an equally reluctant spade on the opposite side of the path, paused in the very act of lifting a few clods to agree. The tip of Mr. Jones' bulbous nose was an angry copper-red, and there was no sobriety to the windward side of him.

"Sometime they'll be a revolution, an' the down-trod laborin' classes'll git their rights," he thickly prophesied. "For two cents, I'd refuse to drudge another stroke for this here rich Wallingford."

Sieve pried at his spade-handle to loosen the turf. "Trouble is, we need his money, an' there's a law ag'inst takin' it away from him, as we'd ort to do," he opined.

"Didn't even say how much he'd pay," grumbled Jim-Jams, turning his own spadeful. "Supposin' he shouldn't come back!" and he dropped his spade in a sudden panic.

"We'd lay a lien ag'inst the property," pronounced Sieve confidently, turning over another spadeful and proceeding to break it. "This government protects the laborin' man. I reckon—"

The glint of something yellow caught his eye. He stooped over slowly to examine it, then, with an involuntary gasp and a furtive glance at Jim-Jams

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Jones, picked it up and nonchalantly slipped it into his pocket.

"Wha'd you find?" asked Jim-Jams, but without the useless exertion of coming over to see.

"Nail," replied Sieve with studied carelessness. "Say, Jim-Jams, supposin' you go back 'round to the well and draw up that pint of bug-juice we brought along."

Jim-Jams started back along the path with an alacrity that would have been deemed impossible in him by one who had watched him spade. When he returned, Sieve had dug up an area equal to his entire previous work of the morning; and the earth was powdered; also there was a feverish glitter in Sieve's eyes.

"Looky here, Jim-Jams," said Sieve, "this job ain't big enough for two, an' if you don't like to work at it, I don't mind finishin' it myself."

Jim-Jams regarded him darkly, and cast his eye reflectively at his own work. Suddenly he leaned forward, with puzzled brows.

"You spaded up some o' mine," he charged. "Lemme see that nail!"

Sieve reached his hand in his pocket with ready compliance, then drew it out reluctantly. "It ain't there," he said. "I guess I must 'a' dropped it out."

"Lemme see that nail!" demanded Jim-Jams, advancing.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"It ain't there, I tell you," insisted Sieve, backing away. "It wasn't much of a nail, nohow; all bent an' rusted up."

"Lemme see that nail!" reiterated Jim-Jams, breasting close up to Sieve, with his left forearm close up under that gentleman's chin and his right fist drawn threateningly back for a short-arm jab in the wind.

To his intense surprise, Sieve, who could notoriously be bluffed even by a notorious bluffer, suddenly grappled with him, and they rolled over and over on the weed-tufted gravel walk. They doubled and twisted and writhed, but suddenly the sight of something yellow on the walk, something that had rolled from Sieve's pocket, caused Jim-Jams to let go his hold and pounce. It was Sieve's "nail," and though he pounced also, Jim-Jams got it and arose to his feet, clutching it firmly in his hand. It was a five-dollar gold piece of an old date, tarnished and crusted with earth, but beautiful!

"Turn your pockets inside out!" ordered the outraged and indignant Jim-Jams.

"I ain't got another one, partner," stated Sieve with cheerful alacrity. "I wouldn't fool you. I only intended to surprise you."

"Turn your pockets inside out," ordered Jim-Jams with the cold insistence of an honest man who is dealing with a known thief.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Sieve did so pleasantly, and proved himself an honest man. "Here's what," he brightly suggested. "You take your side an' me mine, an' see who gets the most."

"Not by a damn sight!" repudiated Mr. J. J. Jones emphatically. "We'll take your side first. You'll spade an' I'll watch."

Mr. Sieve Bascom demurred vigorously to this arrangement, but the inherent force of character of Mr. Jones won the day; and never was there a patch of ground so thoroughly spaded as the forward portion of the right-hand section of the front yard of the old Bunker home. The work, under the active and intelligent supervision of Mr. Jones, was, in fact, so thoroughly done that it was extremely slow. It was almost sub-soil spading, but by nightfall it had yielded thirty-two dollars, a rich pay-streak of old silver coins having been struck just before sunset. Mr. Jones, still fresh and keen upon the scent, was for continuing the work by lantern-light, but Mr. Bascom, whose muscles were throbbing from the unwonted exercise, argued forcefully and successfully that they might overlook something in the dark; so, feeling well paid for their efforts, and united by a strong mutual purpose, they trudged into Poplarville in great friendliness and dropped in to Mike's for a supper appetizer.

They were very lordly as they entered the place,

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

where they had so long been furtively meek, and Mr. Jones paid for that drink with a nicely washed gold coin, which Mike scrutinized almost hard enough to make it blush before he tossed it into the drawer and made change. Meanwhile, the two hard-working laboring men chuckled, and gazed at each other with secret understanding as they drank their drinks.

"Let's have some more o' the same," suggested Mr. Jones. "Two more o' that two-for-a-quarter stuff, Mike. It's on Sieve this time."

"I ain't seen the paper yet," observed Mike as he set forth the bottle; "but I suppose I'll hear about the hold-up before the night's over."

Sieve laid a five-dollar gold piece on the bar. "We'll be right here if anybody wants to pinch us," he promised. "Let's have Piggy Moore bring in a steak from next door, Jim-Jams."

"I was thinkin' we'd go down to Reagan's an' have a swell feed," debated Jones; "but I guess we'd be more comfortable here. Tell him a big sirloin an' some German fried, an' some hot coffee an' pie," and with the easy grace of a man of means, he leaned an elbow on the bar and crossed one foot over the other, while he drank his second drink, with his little finger sticking straight out from the glass.

Mike, who had been going out for a little stroll, put on his apron before he counted out the change for the second gold piece.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Mr. Bascom and Mr. Jones walked over to the little card-table, where, after they had placed their order for the feast, they demanded that liquor be brought to them; good liquor.

Pinky Slump walked in, and Jim-Jams Jones broke the eternal record of Mike's place by inviting him to have a drink, nonchalantly displaying a handful of silver when he paid for it, and Pinky decided to remain. Rhubarb Jennings made his usual appearance for the evening session and joined the pleased committee on irrigation.

At eleven o'clock, Jim-Jams Jones, forgetting that they were not alone, had a sudden remembrance of how Sieve had tried to "do" him.

"Rusty nail, wasn't it!" he charged thickly. "Tried to lie to your old partner, didn't you!"

"Aw, cut it, Jim-Jams!" protested Sieve. "You got yours, an' let's be friends. We got to get more in the mornin'."

"Rusty nail!" scorned Jones, leaning forward and glaring through his reddened eyes. "Tha's what you tried to put me off with. Rusty nail! An' you tried to put me off o' the job, an' let you spade up the whole Bunker front yard yourself. Is that equality and brotherhood?"

Pinky Slump exchanged a startled glance with Mike. Rhubarb Jennings loafed over closer to the table. There were a dozen thirsty regulars at the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

bar, the entire leisure element of the growing little town, and they were all busy drinking, at the expense of the two lucky ones.

"Aw, cut it, Jim-Jams!" pleaded Sieve.

"James!" corrected the other, smacking his fist inaccurately on the edge of the table. "James J. Jones, an' that goes. Rusty nails, eh? Look here, Sieve, this is what I'm goin' to do with you. You're goin' to stay home to-morrow, an' I'm goin' to spade up the rest o' that Bunker front yard myself. Tha's because you tried to do me."

Pinky Slump walked quietly out of the rear door. Rhubarb Jennings regarded his going thoughtfully, and followed. There seemed a strange thrill of intensity in the room. Mike took off his apron and handed it to his bartender.

Fifteen minutes afterward, Sieve Bascom and James J. Jones were left in uninterrupted conversation, with only a nervous bartender to wait on them. The bartender turned them out, sodden in walking sleep, half an hour before closing time, and sallied forth to borrow a spade and a lantern. There was none to be had!

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER VIII

MONEY MAD

POPLARVILLE suddenly burst from obscurity and elbowed its way into a definite location on the map. J. Rufus Wallingford, waiting for just that transformation, grabbed all the papers from the news-stand and caught the first train, driven by the stern necessity of protecting his property. At the station, he wired Blackie Daw to close up his deal in Ironburgh and come on, then he climbed into the train and surrounded himself with entertaining information. A miser story always finds its way to the front page, and the New York correspondent in Poplarville had a gorgeously creative mind, which was attuned to the safe and conservative harmony of only one thousand per cent. exaggeration.

The grounds of the recently defunct Jonathan Bunker had proved to be a veritable gold mine, and the citizens of Poplarville had gone money mad. Fabulous deposits of yellow coin had been unearthed at every spadeful, and untold wealth had suddenly come upon families that had been poor for generations. A thousand dollars had been unearthed from the roots of an old rosebush; another thousand had

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

been concealed beneath the flooring of the well platform; a fortune had been discovered in the corner of the long-unused dog-kennel; in the rotted front gate-post had been found the price of a farm, and Wallingford, as he devoured these and smaller glowing details, admired the mental resources of a writer who could turn an exact two hundred dollars' worth of gold and silver coin into such an inexhaustible Golconda. The best was yet to come, however; for, after having detailed these few simple facts, the budding genius, with a loud plunk, fell back on his imagination, and though hemmed in by the absence of display type, narrated, in a free-running, ball-bearing lie, how the worthy citizens had staked out claims in the front yard, the back garden, the stony hillsides and the meadow, and how, this morning, they were feverishly buying and selling shares in these claims on Flagpole Square.

Pausing to give the tension spring on his typewriter another twist, the gleeful gurgling correspondent had manufactured a gaudy life history for the secretive old Jonathan, and incidentally mentioned that the historic old mansion, provided on the spot with a romance of the Revolutionary War, one of the Civil War and with a ghost, was a repository of priceless antique furniture, dating from the landing of Columbus, the whole now being owned by one J. Rufus Wallingford, a world-famous connoisseur

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and antiquarian. On the arrival of Mr. Wallingford wholesale arrests were expected.

Edified, instructed and improved by this intellectual treat, Wallingford stepped from the train at Poplarville and ran straight into an eager young chap with straw-colored hair and gold-rimmed glasses.

"This is Mr. Wallingford, I believe," said the young chap before the porter had set down that eminent connoisseur and antiquarian's grips.

Wallingford clutched him warmly by the hand and viewed him with frank admiration. "You're the young man who writes for the New York papers," he correctly guessed. "What's your name?"

"Paul Pollet."

"That cinches it," chuckled Wallingford. "You're hired."

Paul Pollet had produced a note-book to make a few jottings, but now he slammed it back into his pocket. "Home, hotel or sheriff's?" he briskly inquired, bundling Wallingford into a rickety old cab.

"Sheriff?" repeated Wallingford in perplexity. "Oh, yes. I suppose you have it all planted for me to arrest the town."

A shade of disappointment dawned on the other's face. "I have a posse of twenty deputies sworn in and waiting the word. It would make a great follow story!"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Wallingford considered carefully a moment. "Drive to the sheriff's," he said.

Paul Pollett's brow cleared instantly. "Will you excuse me a minute?"

"All right," granted Wallingford. "Where are you going?"

"Into the telegraph office to file my description of the wholesale arrests and the rioting which followed. I had planned to have the state militia here by to-morrow," and jerking a bulky manuscript from his pocket, he darted for the depot.

"Wait a minute!" called Wallingford; and then as Paul came back, "Is there anything in your story about the antique furniture?"

"Not a line."

"Get a mention of it in some place where they can't lift it out."

"It's in," promised Paul, and whizzed. He was gone five minutes, and came running back with purple copying ink on his ear, but happy. He immediately bounced into the cab. "Now, Mr. Wallingford, what am I hired for?"

"Secretary and prospectus writer."

"I'll have old Henry stop at the office of the *Evening Reformer*," returned Paul happily. "I have to resign. I suppose there's no use talking salary. You'll pay me more than I'm getting now, and expenses. How soon may I write a prospectus?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Right away," promised Wallingford. "I want a flossy descriptive catalogue of that antique furniture."

For a moment young Mr. Pollet looked blank. "I'm afraid I don't know much about antique furniture," he confessed.

Wallingford turned on him reproachful eyes. "Do you need facts for a good story?" he demanded.

"They only gum it up," announced Paul with conviction. "I thought I ought to get your instructions, though. I'll make you a catalogue that any antiquarian could read to his family. I think I'll run on ahead to the *Reformer* office," and he leaped out of the cab with a friendly word of encouragement to the horse.

He was standing in front of the sheriff's office when old Prince stopped there with a sigh, and he made everything easy for Wallingford.

"Just sit still, but have your fountain pen ready," he suggested. "I'll bring out the warrants for you to sign. It's the custom here. They're all ready. There's fifty-eight of them, so far."

The posse, each man with a glittering tin badge on his breast, marched out in solemn array, while Paul was still in the office, and lined up against the wall, happy in their stern ferocity, and grateful to the stranger who had made it possible for them to arrest their neighbors.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"This is posse number two," explained Paul as he bustled out with the papers, followed by the sheriff, who was a pursy short man with a protruding mustache and puffy red cheeks. "Posse number one is out guarding your property, and if we can only sneak in the back way, I think we'll see evidence enough to have posse number two arrest posse number one. I have the blank warrants right in my pocket. I think it'll make a great story, don't you?"

Wallingford, his big shoulders heaving so that he could hardly write, paused a moment to enjoy his new secretary. "Blackie Daw is being cheated," he chuckled, and went on with his writing.

The sheriff, who wore the widest brimmed felt hat that could be found, and ostentatiously displayed a huge bulge beneath his coat in each hip pocket, took every warrant as it was signed and examined it with a portentous frown, and when he had twenty, distributed them to the deputies, one to each man, and came back for more. When Henry and old Prince and the antiquarian and his secretary drove away, those deputies were issuing forth in double file, with the globular little sheriff at their head; and there was not another male human being to be seen on the streets of Poplarville.

Half a mile from Jonathan Bunker's former house, Wallingford and young Pollet, after despair-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ing instructions to old Henry, left the cab and made a détour through the hills. When they came in sight of the house, young Pollet took one look at the industrious panorama, filled with earnest spaders, and whipped out his bundle of blank warrants.

"Just sign these!" he joyfully urged. "I'll send them back by old Henry when he brings up the luggage."

The collectors of antique furniture came and went into rhapsodies over the artistic handiwork of Dollar Bill Shuvit, and read the incomparably erudite catalogue, but they all went away with their hands to their brows, for the price J. Rufus Wallingford had set upon the collection was staggeringly prohibitive, and he would not sell individual pieces. The first two days, of course, brought forth the regular dealers in antique furniture, but these gentlemen did not even inquire the price; they merely inspected the furniture with delighted approval and passed their hands over it lovingly and said "Billy Shuvit" and went away; but the genuine collectors, those who were well up on the literature of antiques, and could tell a Chippendale in the dark, lingered long, and went away broken-hearted, while Paul Pollet went about with a pained puzzled feeling.

On the evening of the fourth day, however, he came to Wallingford with a relieved countenance.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"There have been two or three people here with enough money to cart away the whole works, but you haven't seemed anxious to sell," he observed, as Wallingford, with his coat off and his sleeves rolled up, prepared to broil a steak over the coals of the kitchen stove.

"No," agreed Wallingford with a speculatively amused glance at young Pollet, who was setting the table for two.

"That means that you haven't found the right kind of a buyer," went on Pollet with relentless logic, propping their two folded cots with a stick of stove-wood so he could move the table away from the wall.

"No," admitted Wallingford, slamming the steak down close to the coals for a sizzling moment and then twirling it swiftly on the other side. "Get your plates out of the oven, Paul," and twirling the steak back to the original side, he reached out with his deft right hand, turned some sizzling German-frying potatoes with a fork, and replaced the tin lid on the skillet.

Young Pollet set the hot plates on the table with a slam, and distributed them. "Gee, what a story!" he exclaimed. "Say, Wallingford, how do you work the rest of it?"

"Open the beer," chuckled Wallingford, watching his steak with painstaking judgment.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Young Pollet, still laboring with his inexorable logic, took in the beer from the cool window-sill and opened it, as Wallingford slid the deliciously browned steak on to the hot platter, and with the haste of a man stamping out the fuse of the powder-magazine in the third act, returned for the potatoes.

"You could have unloaded, at a fair price, to an honest man this morning, and you let a rich old spinster go yesterday, who was pathetically eager to be stung."

Wallingford seized a carving-knife and laid open some juicy red slices. "Where's the salt?" he demanded.

Paul shoved it from behind the platter of fresh-cut bread, and poured the beer. "I guess if you'd sell to an honest man you'd be in bad," he opined.

Wallingford sat himself down with a sigh of comfort and took up his knife and fork. "You are a young man of remarkable penetration, Paul," he complimented his secretary. "A great many otherwise bright men go to jail for selling their goods to the wrong people. There's a law against that. If you don't eat a steak like this while it's blistering hot it's no good until it's ice cold."

That night, when Wallingford thought he was asleep, Paul raised up on his elbow.

"I'll be jiggered if I see how you work it," he remarked. "This miser stunt has me going. I

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

know you planted that money, but I don't see why. Nobody believes there's a cent left in the ground."

"That was advertising," laughed Wallingford, and went to sleep.

In the morning, J. Rufus walked into town for exercise, and when he came back he brought Blackie Daw behind deaf old Henry and dumb old Prince.

Blackie and Paul Pollet accepted an introduction with grave courtesy, and then, after a long hard look at each other, they mutually grinned.

"Welcome to our family," said Blackie cordially. "Jim has been telling me about the reckless imagination you've brought into the firm, and as soon as Toad Jessop takes your measure, we'll sign them papers. Come on and educate me in antique furniture. I'm to be the sales person."

They went into the dim old rooms, and became better known to each other amid the hoary antiquities deposited there by William J. Shuvit, and by nightfall they were so well acquainted that Paul stopped whatever he was doing every time Blackie started to say anything.

That day had been unproductive, though the place had been overrun with collectors who were willing to bankrupt themselves on a Hoppendale high-boy or a Tingletower table, but staggered faintly away on the ultimatum of all or none.

About nine o'clock the next morning, however,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Paul bustled back to Wallingford, who was having fun with the preparation of a frog-leg pie, and took down his overcoat.

"If you don't need me, I think I'll run into town to my boarding-house and pack up," he suggested.

"All right," agreed Wallingford, opening the oven door to test the heat. "What's your hurry?"

"Your buyer's here," explained Paul briskly. "Just judging him from the outside, I should say he was worth a few hundred thousand dollars that are hungry for company, and are not particular about their associates."

Washing his hands and slipping on his coat, Wallingford strolled into the front room in a gravely preoccupied fashion, and found there, in furtive inspection of the surroundings, a one-eyed man whose broad mouth and heavily wrinkled cheeks suggested that he would feel more natural with a knife between his teeth.

"I know but very little about such things," Blackie was saying as Wallingford entered, "and, in fact, Mr. Wallingford is equally ignorant of old furniture. He only knows that this is a very valuable collection and bought it on speculation. Mr. Wallingford, this is Mr. Day, who has come to look at the Bunker collection."

"It is a very fine collection," Wallingford gravely assured him. "My business agent will give you

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

every opportunity to examine it, and I feel sure that, if you are a judge of such things, you will be ready to talk business when you are through."

"Well, I don't know," speculated Mr. Day, his one keen eye roving to the grandfather's clock and to the what-not and to the ceiling. "I hear that this old Jonathan Bunker was a queer case."

"He was rather an eccentric character, I believe," agreed Wallingford.

"Heard he was a miser," went on Mr. Day, his greedy eye straying in to the heavy black desk and to the bookcase and to the padded chairs.

"I think that report was greatly exaggerated," returned Wallingford with a smile. "The town went crazy over finding a few odd coins scattered about the grounds, and I discovered a few gold pieces in the cellar, but, come to sift it down, I don't believe there was more than three hundred dollars hidden all told. I've made some inquiries, and I can't find where Bunker could have obtained any money to hide."

Mr. Day's anxious eye returned from a roving voyage into the visible portion of the dining-room. "I suppose not," he acquiesced. "Your man tells me you ain't a regular furniture-dealer."

"Hardly," laughed Wallingford. "This is my first offense. I don't know any more about furniture than a cat does about building a nest in a tree.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I only bought this place to oblige a friend. Mr. Daw, I'm afraid I shall have to leave Mr. Day entirely in your hands. I have some business in town."

After Wallingford had gone, Blackie also excused himself, on the plea of writing a letter, and begged Mr. Day to conduct his own tour of inspection for a while. He went up-stairs to write his letter, and, instead, looked down into the library through a hole which had been conveniently bored in the elaborate plaster centerpiece of the hanging-lamp.

Mr. Day's first action, on being left alone, was to walk through all the rooms down-stairs, to make sure that they were vacant, then he returned hastily to the library and pulled out the drawers of the old desk, one by one, feeling into the vacant drawer-spaces with his eye upturned in a painfully hopeful squint. At last he gave a grunt of satisfaction as he drew forth a small inner drawer from the base of the desk, behind the longer ones, and Blackie, whose tread was as light as a cat's, arrived in the door of the library just as Mr. Day was about to replace the receptacle.

"What have you found there?" demanded the stern Blackie, advancing swiftly into the room and taking it from him. "A secret drawer, by George!"

"Yes," acknowledged Mr. Day, looking him

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

squarely in the eye with his one orb, and betraying no embarrassment whatsoever. "That's the sign of this being a genuine Diskerton desk."

"How interesting," commented Blackie. "Maybe there are some more such things," and he proceeded to haul out the drawers and stack them on the desk.

"It ain't no use," urged Mr. Day hastily, and obviously ill-pleased with the proceeding. "I never heard tell of their putting more than one secret drawer in a piece of furniture."

"They might," insisted Blackie, highly interested, and he kept vigorously at his work, prowling into the interior of the empty desk, and thumping its panels, and investigating it thoroughly. "Why, here's another one, up underneath the top! The regular one slid right under it," and he drew forth a flat narrow drawer, filled with tarnished half-dollars.

He set it on the corner of the desk, and the two men looked thoughtfully at it, and then at each other.

"I reckon Mr. Wallingford would raise his price if he knew this," speculated Mr. Day with a short little laugh.

"Yes, I reckon he would," acknowledged Blackie, echoing the laugh; "if he knew it."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Mr. Day's available eye gazed on Blackie with kind regard. "I suppose you're kind of attached to your boss," he guessed.

"I'm attached to anybody who hands me money," declared Blackie.

"What he don't know won't hurt him," mused Mr. Day, his now dilated eye rolling greedily in the direction of the bookcase.

Blackie went into the kitchen and returned with a stout flour-bag, into which he dumped the half-dollars. "Let's slam these drawers back and look somewhere else," he suggested. "How much did you get out of that other drawer?"

Mr. Day glared at him a moment and from his pocket produced ten silver dollars and a small handful of pennies. "It ain't much," he declared, omitting to mention the four five-dollar gold pieces which he had slipped into his waistcoat pocket; "but every little bit helps."

They had a mad merry search for secret drawers, and the bag grew steadily heavier. The deposits seemed to be richer, too, as they proceeded, and Mr. Day's greed was whetted to a ravenous point with each successive find.

"Book-learning pays," he triumphed, as they wrenched its long-hidden secret from a chiffonier and rescued some faded greenbacks of an early vintage. "I don't know much about old furniture my-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

self, but once I found fifty dollars in an old bed-post, and I've been reading up on secret drawers ever since. Now, take that bedstead. I'll bet at least one of them posts is hollow, if not all four."

He tried the caps of each one, and the third one unscrewed. He reached his long fingers into the cavity, and at first his upturned eye took on a look of abused disappointment, then it brightened and its lid screwed nearly shut as he drew forth a small glittering object, and held it in the palm of his hand.

"A diamond!" gasped Blackie. "Why, that one's worth eight hundred or a thousand dollars! This rock I'm wearing cost me six hundred."

Mr. Day replaced the cap and screwed it tight. Blackie held out his hand for the diamond. Mr. Day slipped it into his waistcoat pocket and led Blackie immediately away from that bed-post, in which there were nine other diamonds, equally large, and some priceless rubies and sapphires and emeralds.

"We'd oughtn't to put this in the bag," he decided. "It might cut through. Let's see if there's anything in this old secretary."

Blackie watched Mr. Day calmly until he found the cunningly hidden compartment, and then he walked to the window and pulled the crumpled newspaper from its broken pane, as a signal, after which he busied himself with a clumsy old wash-stand in the opposite corner.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Meanwhile, Mr. Day was excitedly feasting upon an acid-yellowed old parchment, which read as follows:

"To the heir of Zachariah Bunker, who finds this writing. The treasure of the unholy Dalton Band, which I can not with safety put to any present public use, is hid in the place which is told hereinafter. With my dying breath, I charge whoever finds this to exhume that treasure, which consists of some forty pounds, avoirdupois, of melted gold, some fifty pounds, more or less, of melted silver, and many jewels, including above a hundred diamonds, the value of which I am unable to judge, not having any degree of expertness in such matters; but, whatever its value, I charge my descendants to turn this treasure into lawful money and devote it to the chapel and the founding of a fund for the support of such an institution. The treasure is buried as follows: Thirty rods to the southeast of the spring is a black boulder with a rough cross hacked on its side. Measuring from this cross—"

"What did you find?" asked Blackie, suddenly turning.

"Nothing of any consequence," declared Day, attempting to shove the parchment into his pocket, but Blackie was too quick for him, and opened the mouth of the bag peremptorily.

With great reluctance Mr. Day dropped the parchment into the bag, just as a heavy foot resounded in the hall below.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I'll hide it in here," whispered Blackie, and hastily stuffing the bag into a closet, he locked the door and slipped the key into his pocket.

"Well, Mr. Day," said Wallingford, entering the room, "how do you like the furniture?"

"It's pretty fair," acknowledged Mr. Day with a fleeting but intense glance at the third bed-post and a speculative one at the fourth. There were two other beds on that floor, and a vast virgin field in the attic. "I've seen better furniture, but this might catch me, if you made the price right. I'd be willing to give you a pretty fair figure for that bed, say."

"I'll not break the collection," declared Wallingford firmly. "I shall have one sale, and be done with it. As a matter of fact, I would rather sell the entire estate just as it stands, and give you the key."

"I'll even dicker with you on that," offered Mr. Day, suppressing his eagerness. "How much do you want for the place?"

"Thirty-five thousand dollars," said Wallingford calmly.

Mr. Day's one eye almost glazed. "I'm talkin' sense," he protested.

"So am I," insisted Wallingford. "There are over forty pieces of furniture here, and some of them are worth over a thousand dollars apiece. Be-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

sides the furniture and the house and the farm, there's the chance that you might find some more money. That's worth something."

"Not much I reckon," scorned Mr. Day. "You said yourself you didn't know where old Jonathan'd get it."

"That's true," admitted Wallingford. "I don't think it's much of an inducement, but the chance is there, just the same. What I'm really charging you for is the antique furniture, which I bought from the heir of old Jonathan Bunker, and I'm told that it's worth the money."

"Let's go out and look at the farm," suggested Mr. Day, and he led the way by a roundabout path to the spring.

There, about thirty rods to the southeast, was a big black boulder, upon the side of which was rudely scratched a cross!

Paul Pollet was waiting on the platform of the station when Wallingford and Blackie and Mr. Day came down to take the train. He sat on an upended suit case, with a typewriter on one side of him, a hand-bag on the other, a trunk behind him, and a lunch-basket on his lap, prepared to remain right there until sent for. He grinned cheerfully when the trio approached, and his first question, when Blackie dropped behind while Wallingford and Day went in to buy the tickets, was:

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"How much did you get?"

"The first price," grinned Blackie. "Why?"

"I'm trying to get a line on how much salary to hang you up for," explained Paul. "Have you got your money?"

"Not yet, but soon," replied Blackie. "We're going to the city on this train, and rush to the bank before it closes and get ours, and rush back through here on the return train. Mr. Day, however, will get off at this stop. He wishes to be alone in his new house."

"To hunt the rest of the 'salt'?" laughed Paul.

Blackie looked at him in sorrow. "How foolish," he commented, and Wallingford and the old furniture collector returning just then, Blackie took the latter gentleman to one side. "I'll drop off with you on our way back," he offered, "and help you search the rest of that furniture."

"I don't need any help," refused Mr. Day hastily. "It's my furniture now, you know."

"Yes, but we were to go halvers on what we found," insisted Blackie.

"We only got a little over eight hundred dollars up to the time I bought the place."

"And that diamond," Blackie reminded him. "There were others in there. I remember I heard them clink when you dropped the one you showed me. And then there was that paper. What was in

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

it? I'm going back and see. I've a right to know."

"There wasn't anything in it," sturdily maintained Mr. Day, showing the honesty of his soul in his good left eye, which was wide open and fearless and frank, though slightly shifting. "Tell you what I'll do, Mr. Daw. There ain't no use to waste your time by having you stop off there, and make Mr. Wallingford suspicious of you. I'll just buy out your half-interest, counting the cash at eight hundred and the diamond at seven hundred, that makes fifteen; and your half's seven-fifty. I'll give it to you."

"You'll draw enough extra at the bank to slip me fifteen hundred, or I'll get off and look," firmly threatened Blackie.

When they had passed through Poplarville on the return trip, Blackie produced fifteen hundred dollars in crisp crackling bills, and passed the bundle to Wallingford.

"That's the prop. cash you used to salt the mine," he stated. "I could have had more of it, but I didn't want a profit. We lose the cost of those three ounces of diamonds and other precious gems. You're an extravagant cuss, Jim, for buying such good ones. Cheaper ones would have done just as well."

"I like things done right," chuckled Wallingford. "They cost us thirty-three dollars, but we can afford to lose it."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Extravagance in the small details of running expense has been the ruination of many a good business," chided Blackie sedately.

Little Paul Pollet wiped his glasses reflectively and strove to look as serious as Blackie.

"Only one thing worries me," observed Wallingford presently, with a frown. "That ancient parchment. It's documentary evidence, and it makes me feel like somebody was waiting around the corner with a brick when I leave explosive writing behind me."

Blackie, with an impressive flourish, drew forth the documentary evidence in question, and laid it in Wallingford's hand. "There is them papers," he said with a low choking sob. "The old homestead is saved. My appearance may be against me, because I wear a black mustache and a cigarette, but I am not bad at heart; eh, Polly?"

Little Paul, henceforth Polly and Crackers and such like friendly epithets, leaned back in his seat to rest. "Gosh, what a story!" he ejaculated. "If I could only dig out the details; gosh, what a story!"

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER IX

DOWN WITH GRAFT

"YOU lose your bet, Jim," announced Blackie Daw, looking up from the Tarryville *Banner* and reaching mechanically for his glass of lemonade.

"I have no unsettled bets," protested Wallingford, opening the door of the cellarette between Blackie's red set of Mark Twain and his green set of *The World's History*, to find something with which to temper the plainness of his drink. "Moreover, I don't feel any hunch in my system for a bet."

"You're going to make one right now," insisted Blackie, carefully replacing a life-size picture of Horace G. Daw in the center library window. "You'll bet me that you know what a Sizzlebite is, and I'll win. You may as well pay me."

Wallingford poured a fair-sized portion of amber liquid into his lemonade, and carefully tasted it. "Where did you find Sizzlebite, and how do you spell it, and has it a tail, or do you get it in a bucket?"

"It's a political term," replied Blackie gloomily. "That's why it annoys me to be ignorant."

"Don't worry about it," Wallingford comforted

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

him. "In less than two weeks we'll have you elected mayor of Tarryville on the straight reform ticket, without the aid of a scandal, a purchased vote, or a Sizzlebite. Does it seem to be anything like a gerrymander?"

"No; it's a rake-off," explained Blackie, looking at his watch, and buttoning the Prince Albert which he now wore every evening. "It's part of the repaving of the main road which bisects this county from stem to stern, passing through Mount Hopeso, Fevermarsh, Tarryville, Whistlawn and Catty Manor, the expense thereof being borne pro rata by the municipalities above mentioned."

"Bravo!" applauded Wallingford. "Hurrah for Daw and reform! But what about Sizzlebite?"

"It's the code word of the specifications that the county commissioners have just promulgated," went on Blackie, testing his voice two or three times on that last word. "We ought to hear that band by this time. Pro-mulgated; pro-mulgated. There are several other ingredients which look fairly familiar in these specifications, but Sizzlebite is a ringer. There's to be two pounds of it in every square yard, and I thirst for information."

"You'll find the answer ready made," suggested Wallingford. "All you have to do is to call up the county commissioners and find out whose brother-in-law controls the stuff."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Graft and corruption!" indignantly declaimed Blackie. "That ought to be a pretty good thing, Jim. There must be twenty miles of that road, and it's an average of thirty feet wide. How many square yards would that be?"

Wallingford, his professional instincts aroused, drew a pad of paper toward himself and figured it up. "Three hundred and fifty-two thousand square yards," he announced with a chuckle. "Why, Blackie, a ten-cent-a-pound profit on Sizzlestuff would amount to over seventy thousand dollars."

"I guess they all have brothers-in-law," surmised Blackie.

"Seventy thousand," mused Wallingford almost hungrily.

"And the people pay," solemnly intoned Blackie. "I suppose the contractors get another rake-off; else, why contract?"

"And the sub-contractors another one, and the village officials another, and the suburban defenders of the public rights, like the Tarryville *Banner*, another," commented Wallingford. "That paving will be contracted for at about a dollar and a half a yard, and its actual cost, outside of the Sizzlegraft, won't be over nineteen cents."

"The business should be systematized," declared Blackie. "There's too many middlemen's profits."

Wallingford was lost in deep thought. He

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

smoked one of Blackie's cigarettes and drank some more of Blackie's lemonade, while Blackie carried out to the card-pedestal just inside the front door a pile of neat hand-bills bearing the portrait of Horace G. Daw and the slogan, "Down with Graft!"

"Say, Blackie, you know who the county commissioners are, don't you?" inquired Wallingford when the reform candidate returned.

"As a progressive citizen, alive to the needs and abuses of a growing and prosperous municipality," sonorously began Blackie, with his hand in the bosom of his Prince Albert.

"Who are they?" interrupted Wallingford.

"Tommy Harvester," stated Blackie curtly. "As a patriotic voter, bent on promulgating—"

"You don't say so," broke in Wallingford with a pleased expression. "I didn't know Tommy lived out this way, or I'd have guessed that he was director of the works." He grabbed Blackie's desk telephone with one hand and leafed through the telephone book with the other, while Blackie, standing thin and straight in front of a pier-glass let into the bookshelves opposite the cellarette, made graceful oratorial gestures, and practised on words containing nice round "o" sounds.

"Mount Hopeso eight-o-seven," directed Wallingford, making figures with his disengaged hand while he waited.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Hello," presently shouted a voice that sounded like that of a red-faced man with a yellow mustache. "Who is this calling?"

"J. Rufus Wallingford."

"J. Ru— oh, hello, Jim!" greeted Tommy cordially. "Where are you; jail?"

"Blackie Daw's. He's running for mayor of Tarryville," explained Wallingford. "You know Blackie."

"He's a credit to politics. I hope he wins!" responded Tommy warmly. "What can I do for you, Jim?"

"Pass me a little info. Who controls Sizzlebite?"

"Harry Gootch. He's a brother-in-law of Sam Ross."

"County commissioner?"

"Ross is," replied Tommy. "Gootch is just a plain slob. Why do you want to know?"

"I like the name of the stuff," chuckled Wallingford. "Who's to be the head contractor for this new county road?"

"Whoever can buy enough Sizzlebite," returned Tommy promptly. "We're playing no favorites. The county commission can't let any contracts, you know."

"I guessed that from the necessity for Sizzlebite," laughed Wallingford. "Where can I find Mr. Gootch?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Don't fuss with him," advised Tommy. "I can tell you anything you want to know. Sizzlebite's twenty cents a pound, and there's seven hundred thousand pounds of it to be sold."

"Twenty cents a pound!" repeated Wallingford. "What is the stuff?"

"Well, I ain't sure yet of anything but the selling price," hesitated Tommy.

"Slack coal's a good ingredient," suggested Wallingford. "It has a rich solid color. However, that's up to you. Don't do business with anybody till you see me, Tommy."

Violet Bonnie came bounding into the room, with her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling. "The parade's coming!" she announced, and to corroborate that statement the blare of a band broke out somewhere in the foreground.

"Is the American flag hauled up?" inquired Blackie, with the care of a good general.

"It goes up as they turn in at the gate," responded Violet. "I left Fannie watching it."

"Is the barrel of cider on the front porch?"

"I'll bet you," she assured him. "With six dozen new tin cups and a case of stogies. Your picture's in every window, and the toy electric lights around them are all lit up. The moving-picture show's ready to spring at any minute, and Polly Pollet is just fizzing with his lecture."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Very well, then; lead me to it," consented Blackie resignedly, assuming his most dignified pose. "I am in the hands of my friends. If my fellow citizens insist on my appearing before them, I shall address them, even though I am taken by surprise. Say, Jim, I want you to count the house out there, and if there's less than two hundred and fifty in that parade, I'll dock Billy Cushman a dollar a head."

Mayor Williams sat in his unpalatial office in the Tarryville city hall, with his knees under his desk and his chair against the wall. Big Tim Measen, with his hair polished smoothly over his knobs, sat across from him with his knees under the same desk and his chair against the opposite partition. Thus working at the responsible business of city government, there was room for but one more person, a limitation which had its advantages, since the business of government is best transacted—and safest—with the fewest possible number in conference.

"Looks like we can count up," suggested Big Tim. "We got ours."

"The new boulevard slips us," reminded Mayor Williams, more popularly known as Chinchilla, because of his untamable beard; "I hate to lose that."

"It's for Blackie," decided Big Tim sadly. "It

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

is a snide trick of the county commissioners to show us a nice ripe peach like that just as we get on our train."

"Do we travel, though?" questioned Chinchilla. "Blackie can't make that reform guff stick. We've made his record as an all-round con. man so well known in this town that the life insurance and railroad men out here are jealous of him."

"They think he's on the level with this reform stuff," denied Big Tim. "He could sell phony diamonds to a professional tout. He wins, hands down. Jim Wallingford's speeches, and Paul Pollet's circus newspaper stunts, and that office kid's scraps with our bill-stickers, and Violet Bonnie's house-to-house canvass and Blackie's crazy whoop-'em-up methods have made this sleepy old suburb know it had a campaign for the first time since the Civil War. Men are going to stay in the village to vote who haven't cast a ballot since they were twenty-one. They laugh their heads off every time election is mentioned, and they'll laugh when they go to the polls. Blackie could get elected if he had 'Graft and Corruption' on his banners in place of 'Reform.'"

"Well, we've done the best we could," the mayor consoled himself, glancing at the much-penciled sheet of paper in front of him. "We've contracted all the city improvements for the next ten years,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and if the cheap-skate contractors don't turn crooked and skin us out of our bit we ought to have a pretty fair income. It's as good as having money out at interest."

"They'll skin us all right," decided Big Tim gloomily; "that is, unless we can get back in the next campaign." He pulled the sheet of paper toward him and inspected the figures with the sedate half-mournful interest of a man who is retiring from business with a comfortable ledger balance that might have been more.

"I'm afraid we've overplayed ourselves," worried the mayor. "The town will never grow fast enough to put in all that sewerage we've contracted."

"That's all right," Big Tim comforted him. "They can put in two lines on some streets. It's been done. We've cleaned up pretty well for a small town."

"I hate to leave Blackie anything, though," fretted the mayor. "He doesn't need it. He's an expert and an inventor. He'll pull off new stunts in graft in the next two years that could be used as a political text-book. Hello, Jim Wallingford. Come in and make yourself comfortable."

"You lollops'll have to move out then," Wallingford laughed, squeezing into a chair at the desk.

"Not for a couple of years," refused Chinchilla, bound not to give up the ship in public.

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I couldn't get a bet out of you at fifty to one," scorned Wallingford. "I didn't come in to hold a bluffing match with you fellows, though. I didn't even come in as Jim Wallingford. I came as the President of the Sizzlebite Paving Construction Company."

"Have a cigar," offered Big Tim hastily. "Chinchilla, reach down for that bottle and glass for the gentleman. Mr. Wallingford, have this chair. It's more comfortable."

"You seem to be expecting me," guessed Wallingford with a grin.

"Far from thus," corrected Big Tim. "We didn't expect to be so lucky."

"You seem to recognize that Sizzlebite password," observed Wallingford, lighting his own cigar in preference to the one Big Tim had offered him.

"At a glance," acknowledged the mayor. "We lamped the Sizzlebite plum from afar, but figured that to be laid over for Blackie, if he wins."

"Nothing doing with Blackie," Wallingford advised them. "He's heading the reform ticket."

"Nobody's worrying about Blackie," laughed Big Tim. "He gets his coming and going. How about this Sizzlebite thing? Have we time enough to get in?"

"How soon can you hold a council meeting?" inquired Wallingford.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"In fifteen minutes," promised the mayor, reaching for his telephone.

"There's no need to pant," objected Wallingford, stopping him. "To-morrow will do. I don't suppose there's much use talking business, except to mention the terms."

"Anything you name will be all right," offered Big Tim. "The boys know this is their last chance."

"Do you intend to build the road yourself?" asked the mayor.

"Me!" chuckled Wallingford. "I never built anything but a plan of action in my life. All I intend to do is to get the contracts, and I just dropped in to see if you fellows are ready."

"Where's your conract?" demanded the mayor, producing his fountain pen.

"I haven't any printed, nor the copy written," smiled Wallingford. "I haven't even settled on the price, but I think it'll be a dollar and a half a square yard. Twenty-five cents of that will go to the officials, I'll take twenty-five myself, and hand the game over to a regular paving contractor at a dollar a yard."

"He can make a swell profit at that price," figured Big Tim.

"About fifteen cents," estimated Wallingford. "He has to pay out forty for Sizzlebite, and split up ten among the suburban newspapers along the route.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

That leaves thirty-five cents to be spent on making the road."

"It can be done," judged Chinchilla. "Although, if the road were to be made according to the specifications published in the *Banner* last night, it would cost a dollar and a half."

"It would if it had to carry forty cents of this county-commissioner graft stuff," corroborated Big Tim. "However, public-work specifications belong in the Sunday supplement."

"They class with poetry," agreed Wallingford, rising. "I'll get a form contract ready to-night, boys, and mail you a copy in a day or so. Lay your pipe-lines right away to have it all signed up."

"It'll come back to you on the next mail," promised Big Tim. "The boys'll be tickled stiff to skin Blackie out of this. Why are you dishing him?"

"Blackie has nothing to do with it," Wallingford assured them. "He's on the reform ticket."

"You're practising your next speech," charged Chinchilla half enviously.

"Maybe," admitted J. Rufus, laughing; "but I speak from the heart." And walking out into the six-foot rotunda, he surprised a thin-legged boy in the very act of pasting an atrocious caricature of Chinchilla Williams on the floor of the city hall.

The boy, affectionately known to Blackie as

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Legs" and "Jesse James" and any other ignominious name that came handy, returned stealthily when he saw Wallingford. "Was you in the mayor's office?" he wanted to know.

"Right-o, Spider," answered Wallingford, smiling down at him and handing him the customary quarter. "I have just come from an interview with His Honor."

"Go back in and talk loud a minute, won't you?" begged the boy. "I've been tryin' for three days to sneak this poster on his door," and he held up a gorgeously printed cartoon of Horace G. Daw, embellished with the legend, "Vote for Honest Horace!"

"I am sorry to see this tendency in you, Spraddles," gravely reproved Wallingford. "It smacks of underhanded methods. Nevertheless, I shall go back."

He looked over his shoulder as he reentered the office, but the Boy Terror was nowhere to be seen. He was hiding, in an ecstasy of mysteriousness, behind the tall pedestal that supported the thirty-dollar statue—nobody knew why—of Nathan Hale.

"Gentlemen," said Wallingford with solemn pomposity as he reentered the room, "I neglected to explain to you the tremendous advantage of Sizzlebite as an ingredient, in the proportion of two

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

pounds to the square yard of boulevard paving, and I have returned to remedy that neglect, so that you may present the advantages of this material at the next meeting of your cautious and conservative council. Sizzlebite, gentlemen," and here, becoming aware of a crackling and rustling and swabbing sound behind him, he raised his voice, "is a rare mineral, mined in the solitudes of the Sudan Desert, which serves to give a proto-plastic ho-mogeneity to roadways intended for the use of that modern ve-hicle, the pneumatic tired au-to-mobile. It is brought to America at vast expense, in specially chartered steamers, and is fused in specially constructed crucibles of solid clay." A mysterious rap on the glass of the door that was hidden by his broad bulk apprised him, with three knocks, a pause, a knock, a pause, and a knock, that the deadly deed was done. "After which interesting process, gentlemen, the dividends are declared."

"Bravo!" laughed Chinchilla Williams. "Blackie Daw, in his palmiest days, never made a better speech to a bunch of ginks in front of a three-shell board."

"Blackie Daw," asserted Wallingford with deep feeling, "is a changed man. He is against graft."

The laughter upon this was long and loud, and Wallingford had a grin on his own face as he once

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

more stepped into the rotunda. On the door of the office of Chinchilla Williams were not one but three tightly glued posters extolling the honesty of Horace G. Daw, and decrying the contemptible villainy of wicked Williams.

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER X

TALKING BUSINESS

THE mayor of Fevermarsh proved to be a yellow-complexioned man with mournful eyes, who received the impressive J. Rufus Wallingford with a cordiality only one degree removed from personal enmity.

"The Sizzlebite Paving Construction Company?" he commented. "I never heard of the concern," and his eye roved with positive hatred over the vast curving area of Wallingford's chest.

"Possibly not," admitted Wallingford suavely, studying his man in perplexity. There were lines in his face, and particularly about his eyes, which made the experienced promoter guess him to be "approachable", and yet, why that distinctly hostile attitude? "The wide use of automobiles has developed many new fields of industry, and has changed many others. Sizzlebite paving has very properly come to be the only recognized road material for automobile highways, and conscientious county commissioners, those who wish to handle the funds of the people with true economy, are insisting on its use everywhere."

"I suppose so," granted Mayor Jaunder, his re-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

sentful eyes resting on Wallingford's big, round, pink face. "They've forced it on Fevermarsh, anyhow, and so, I presume, it is merely a matter of finding where we can make the best terms."

"The best terms you can get will be from the Sizzlebite Paving Construction Company," Wallingford placidly informed him. "We positively control the material, and the price is the same to one and to all."

"I see," admitted the mayor with a dour scowl at Wallingford's plump and bediamonded hand. "You have a monopoly, and we have nothing to say about it. The price is so much, and we pay it. Fortunately, the present town council does not need to burden itself with the opprobrium of having saddled the township with this heavy expense, which, no matter how unjustly, will be charged against this administration."

"We should infinitely prefer to do business with the present council," returned Wallingford hastily, setting the man right in his misapprehension. "The Sizzlebite Company is by no means anxious to take advantage of its apparently superior position, and it is not disposed to be ungenerous; in fact, quite the contrary."

The mayor seemed more interested, although no more friendly. "What is the price of Sizzlebite paving?" he wanted to know.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"That depends on the amount of cooperation we receive from the authorities in carrying out the specifications," replied Wallingford. "Who is the proper person to see in regard to the necessary business arrangements?"

"The town council," advised the mayor; "although I could carry them your offer."

"I think we're coming at it," decided Wallingford, hitching up his chair and wondering at the sudden flare of dislike that he encountered. It was so positive that he was once more in doubt.

"Then why don't you come to the point?" demanded Mr. Jaunder, producing a little bottle of pills from his waistcoat pocket and taking two of them. "You spoke something about the price depending on what degree of cooperation the authorities gave you in helping you carry out your specifications."

"Well, yes," hesitated Wallingford, deciding that he had made a mistake.

"I suppose that the generosity of which you spoke will be in inverse ratio to the amount of help we give you in seeing that we get what we pay for."

"Well, yes," again admitted Wallingford, feeling decidedly uncomfortable, as he became more and more aware of Mr. Jaunder's intense loathing for him.

"In that case, I may as well tell you that the authorities of this incorporated municipality are far

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

too busy with other matters to pay any attention to the work. Now, what's your offer?"

"A dollar and a half a square yard."

"Net?"

"Gross."

"What's the rebate?"

"Twenty-five cents a square yard, which you may turn back into the town treasury or put into any other fund you see fit."

Mr. Jaunder regarded Wallingford's neck with deep malignity for two minutes. "For our entire and complete cooperation in regard to the carrying out of your specifications, you'll have to make the rebate thirty," he declared.

"I don't see where the actual contractor's going to get by with it at that price," worried Wallingford. "There's only thirty-five cents a yard figured now to go into the construction, and at thirty cents I'm afraid some sections of your road wouldn't be over an inch thick."

"It will have the proper amount of Sizzlebite in it, won't it?" demanded the mayor.

"Two pounds to the square yard."

"That's what makes the road right for auto use, isn't it?"

"Well, certainly," granted Wallingford, still worried.

"Then it's up to the county commissioners," de-

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY