

Keeping Up With Wattville

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"You have a plan," said Stukey, yielding to the persuasive smile that began to beam on him.

"Plan is a feeble word," said Wattville impressively. He took out a little stick of pomade, waxed the stiletto mustache and signaled to the grinning bar-keeper to give them a twist and a turn. "Stukey, had I not been cursed with wealth and manly attractions, I certainly could have been famous. Listen to my inspiration. Tom, keep the change and send your son to college."

He led Stukey to Fifth avenue and said mysteriously:

"You remember Harrigan and Laquer?"

"I certainly do."

"Charming personalities. We lunch with them at half past one."

"You are going back for revenge," said Stukey, with an intuitive defensive stiffening of the arm, which Wattville held affectionately.

"Revenge is the beginning of my little tale," said Wattville, raising his hat with a perpendicular motion to conceal the fates. "Stukey, I say revenge, but I have a higher motive. You know my opinions on the subject of the idle rich. I don't say I am a socialist, but I will admit there are times when my spirit inclines that way. And those times are when I walk up Fifth avenue, as we do now, and behold the Club windows banked with indolent spectators passing their time in idle, enervating and childish gambling such as Nigger Up and Nigger Down."

"I see," said Stukey with a smile.

"No, Stukey, you misjudge me," said Wattville, grieved. "I don't deny that the suggestion was purely personal, but I assure you my motives are patriotic and altruistic. I put it to you, is not any scheme that will take from these centers of hoarded capital and place more funds within the grasp of the man in the street a measure of national significance?"

WHETHER it was Wattville's theory of Limitation and Concentration, or a certain befuddling effect of his flow of words, Stukey began to feel again a certain hypnotic haze stealing over his senses.

"Quite right," he said quickly, in order not to say "quite wrong."

"You have seized the idea," said Wattville, briskly. "On this day we will make such a killing, Stukey, that the rate of interest will drop and the shortage of gold entirely disappear."

"But how?"

"You have a legal trend—you come right to the crucial idea. Well, my boy, you and I will represent the masses against the classes; we will avenge the crime of 1896; we will play the entire Bar and Bottle Club at its own game, and then we will sell the furniture at auction."

"They skinned us last time," said Stukey unsteadily.

"Brannigan," said Wattville suddenly with a gesture of command. "To the Dixie Marching Club. Hit it up. I know all the cops."

"What the deuce is he up to now?" said Stukey to himself, observing Wattville with his hands rolling about the seat in convulsions of laughter.

"Stukey, forgive me," he said suddenly, controlling himself. "I've had these attacks for the last forty-eight hours. I really ought to see a doctor. Whom, here we are!"

They came to an abrupt stop before a four-story brick building in the San Juan Hill district. Over the front a glaring white sign read:

THE DIXIE SOCIAL PARLORS

At the noise of their coming, the windows were suddenly populated with curious faces of dusky hue.

"The secret is out," said Wattville triumphantly. "Stukey, at exactly 3:05 P. M., while Messrs. Wattville and Stukey are seated in the front windows of the Bar and Bottle Club, the Dixie Grenadiers headed by the Peter Jackson Band, will come marching past, three hundred strong, and they will

march and march around the block so long as there is a dime left in the club till, or a watch and chain that is not piled in our laps."

Stukey, overcome with emotion, flung his arms about Wattville and asked for forgiveness for all his past suspicions.

THE DELIGHT of possessing such a secret naturally had seriously interfered with the first theories on Limitation and Concentration.

"I say, see here," said Wattville, when Stukey had roared aloud for the twentieth time to the amusement of the serious crowd, "hold up, boy! This won't do. Can't you control yourself?"

"I can't."

"You'll give the game dead away. Try coughing."

Stukey obeyed.

"That's better."

"I say, though, Wattville, ought we to keep the club house? Is it moral?"

"Stukey, that is a second proposition. We will deliberate on that when we have taken possession. Now, you understand the plan."

"I do."

"Repeat it."

"We give them their choice of up or down. If we have the ups, I keep on my hat. If we have the downs, I take it off."

"You can remember it by hat up, hat down."

"Absolutely."

"At 2:30 a large portion of the colored population of New York will congregate in Madison avenue. Mr. Eugen Lyptus Jackson, or whatever his name, will come discreetly by the window, get your signal and return to lead the procession."

Stukey clung to a lamppost in a paroxysm of coughing.

"That's better," said Wattville.

"Still, keep your mind off it as much as you can."

"I'll try."

"Think of the blowing up of the Maine or the blight on cotton in the South—no, not cotton, better make it wheat."

"I'll try," said Stukey weakly. "I say, how are we going to get our hats?"

"That's the wily part of it," said Wattville; "after lunch, we insist on leaving; we take our hats and canes as though we hadn't a thought of staying and then we relent—reluctantly."

"And we only promise to stay twenty minutes or half an hour."

"Perfect; come on now, we must make a grand entrance," said Wattville and he added seriously: "I hear the most lugubrious reports from the West."

"About what?" said Stukey, surprised.

"About the blight on the wheat."

THE LUNCHEON was preceded by a little amicable passage at dice, at which their hosts gracefully admitted defeat. Nothing could be more charming than their solicitude for the cough that occasionally racked the body of Stukey. Harrigan recommended a special brandy; Laquer prescribed what he called a Tower of Babel, into which seemed concentrated every known liquid, on the theory that none with healing properties should be overlooked. Stukey, whose nature was warm and impulsive, felt his soul incline to his hosts. He began to have misgivings, to feel an increasing pity and a doubt of the ethics involved. Again, suspicions awoke in him of the Wattville who was rattling away in such glib spirits—what if, after all, he, Stukey, was but the tool for a deliberate swindle.

"There's only one thing to do," he said to himself with exaggerated respect. "Stukey, old boy, you must be astute. That's the word. When the game's over—tell the truth—laugh. Laugh a lot and return the money. That's it; that's the only thing to do," he added ponderously, "the noble thing!"

"Well, boys, shall we wander down stairs?" said the unsuspecting voice of Harrigan.



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