

EASY MONEY STORIES.

When the tale of the successful crook came (or came back) into the literary field a few years ago, and Raffles and his brilliant brothers began to vie with Sherlock Holmes and his in the favor of the public, the Up-to-Date Magazine, of which I was a subeditor, was one of the first to realize his importance.

We were lucky in securing Montgomery Tuckahoe Purse—"M. T. Purse" his friends called him—as a regular contributor.

His famous hero, Easy Money Patterson, soon became the big feature of our every edition.

Month after month the Up-to-Date ran his adventures, and then, without the least warning Monty Purse disappeared and the stories ceased in the middle of a series.

We jumped into the breach with a new line of features; but we missed him.

We all missed him. Monty was one of the best fellows I've ever met. He was really modest, to begin with.

Then he was as nearly as possible the opposite of his hero; the soul of honor, generous to a fault, as trusting, unsuspecting, and ingenuous as an O. Henry rube, irresponsible as a child—and always broke.

He simply couldn't keep money; didn't seem to know its value. Many's the time he came to me to make a touch of a few dollars to tide him over the month, though he might have got his check from us the week before on the strength of his next story, which he would write in a day or so—"just as soon as I nail the idea, old man."

And he never failed to pay up as punctiliously as though his life depended on it.

The boys all liked him in consequence, and there was no mockery in the "M. T. Purse." It was himself.

He was alone in the world, so we did what we could to keep an eye on him. But he never got into any real trouble.

And, to cap it all, he had genius. "Why don't you write something for the big monthlies?" I've asked him. "You can surely get away with it."

"Because I'm not sure of my ground," he'd insist. "They want stories about Europe and society, or the West, or the East, or the North, or the South, or the Fiji Islands. I don't know those places and people. In the face of Kipling's dictum that 'Accuracy is the touchstone of all art,' I wouldn't dare write about 'em. It's easy enough to make up plots for those Patterson stories."

But Monty disappeared! It dawned on me one day that he hadn't been around for a couple of weeks to be tided over. Nobody else had seen him, I found, and when the third week went by without a sign of him, I started to investigate at a hint from the editor in chief. His next tale was long overdue.

At his lodging house in West Fourteenth street the landlady told me, with genuine regret, that he had left suddenly nearly a month before, without a word as to where he was going. And there the hunt ended.

Without hiring private detectives, we could do nothing until he chose to send us word.

A day or two later he did, but it didn't help much. I got a picture postcard from him, dated at Cairo, Egypt. "Having the time of my life," it said. "Sorry I couldn't get around to say good-by. Will write." But he never wrote. I was considerably surprised and inclined to be angry with him. "Where had he got the funds to travel?"

Six months went by. For four of them we ran the Patterson stories, as usual; then the supply gave out. The chronicles of the brilliant master-rogue were not in the magazine for August.

Hardly had the September number reached the news-stand when a storm of protest began.

Readers all over the country wrote indignant, facetious, or aggrieved letters, wanting to know why we had failed twice in succession to print the "Easy-Money" stories.

"Looks as though we were going to lose some subscribers," said the editor in chief, and with that to think about I went out to lunch.

In Fifth avenue, not a block from the office, I ran square into the vanished author.

"Monty Purse!" I cried. "Where under heaven have you been?"

"Why, blessed if it isn't Sponable!" he exclaimed heartily, squeezing my hand in strong, brown fingers. "Gee, I'm glad to see you! Isn't this old hamlet a joy and delight of the heart and a comforter of afflictions? Come and have a drink. I've forgotten what a cocktail tastes like."

As we turned through the crowd I sized him up. It was a new Monty, no longer our beloved "M. T. Purse."

Gone was his careless dress; gone the worry that used to shadow his face. That face was now tanned a rich brown and was lighted by an expression that belongs by divine right only to persons of wealth.

"Where have you been?" I repeated as we found seats in a cafe. He turned to a waiter.

"Bring me," he said with decision, "a Manhattan. Make it two."

"Hold on—" I began.

"Two," repeated Monty firmly. "What's yours, old man?" And when the man was gone: "Why, I've been studying Europe and society, and

the West and East, and various other things.

"And left us in the lurch just four stories to the good, and now—see what our readers think about it." I showed him one of the letters.

Monty Purse returned it with rather a guilty look.

"Had no idea I was so important," he defended himself. "I suppose I really shouldn't have done it; but, Lord, man, it was a temptation!"

"But what on earth did you do?"

"I told you—went abroad. Took in Europe and Asia and sections of Africa. I'd be there yet if I hadn't got so homesick for a certain insignificant village on the Hudson. And I've learned a heap, Sponable. I'll be able to write now. Want something different?"

"Indeed we do. But where did you ever get the money to travel on?" I demanded bluntly. "Somebody leave you a fortune?"

"Why, no; from my stories. I found a new market; that's all."

"For whom are you writing now?" I inquired rather coldly.

"Haven't the faintest idea," said Monty Purse.

I stared at him in amazement. "Well, for— Look here, you seem to be sober. Suppose you tell me all about it."

"Well," he began thoughtfully, "toward the end of last January I was up in my room working on a Patterson story and feeling bad. Sponable, if there's one form of unmitigated Hades it's being in debt. I was.

"It was getting late and I was about ready to turn in, when the landlady came up with a visitor.

"He was a queer-looking guy. Under height, fat, bald, and—well, somehow, I—he sort of made me feel nervous.

"He introduced himself as Joseph Macon and came to the point right away. He had followed the Patterson stories from the start, he explained, and wanted to corner my output.

"I was in the 'yes, who is it?' frame of mind toward a proposal just then. And his cigars were irrefragable.

"What is your proposition?" I asked.

"I'll take all you write," he came back. "I ain't goin' to tie you down, Mr. Poise, but I c'n use at least one a week, see?"

"And the price?" I asked.

"One thousand plunks per each," he said, watching me anxiously, I thought.

"I nearly had heart failure when he produced a roll like a tent-bag, and counted out eleven one-hundred-dollar bills on the table.

"There you are, Mr. Poise," he grinned. "Does them look like business?"

"Well," sighed Monty, flicking away his cigarette stub, "that was the beginning. Wasn't it the whitest dealing you ever heard of? I never knew my stuff was so popular.

"Next day I moved to a hotel, squared with everybody I owed, and a couple of weeks later, after piling up half a dozen stories, I sailed for Europe.

"I guess that covers the situation," he ended and sat smiling introspectively.

"Shall we move?" he suggested at length. "I'd like to see what old B'y looks like again. Have they got up any more electric signs?"

I felt his eyes on my face as we left, but could not meet them, and he was obviously troubled.

"Have you seen anything that looks like my stuff in any magazine?" he asked.

I shook my head.

"That's funny. Suppose I ought to be satisfied, but one does like to see one's stuff in print."

"Well," I said rather grimly, "I think I can oblige you. Come over this way."

We crossed to Broadway and went into a newspaper office. He was silent now and rather troubled.

I asked to see the files and ran through them while he watched uneasily. At last I pointed to an item.

"Clever Crooks Get Five Thousand Dollars From Farmer," he read aloud. "McMaken Gang Busy Again—Works Ingenious Scheme on Steuben County Farmer." He finished it with slowly paling face.

"Good heavens, Sponable, what does it mean?" he whispered; but I was still busy with the files. I showed him another item.

"But I don't understand!" he cried, almost in a wall. "Those are two of my last stories! D'you mean Macon's a reporter, syndicating my stuff as fake news?"

"Worse than that," I told him gently. "You've been aiding and abetting a number of felons, Monty. Your man is undoubtedly the head of an infernally capable gang of confidence men. You have been supplying him with his schemes for the past six months!"

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Late hours give a drawn look to the face, an unmistakable sign of loss of sleep. You will meet plenty of people who declare that they need but little sleep, but you will find nobody who has not been benefited by a change in early retiring hours. Even when sleep does not come readily, the relaxed position of the body and the darkness are restful to brain and body. Men and women of ancient times used to spend a deal of time in reclining, for couches, not chairs, were the chief furnishings of homes. We of the present generation sit in straight chairs until the strain shows in the face, the lines that should not be found in any but faces of the aged.—Evening Wisconsin.

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CASTORIA.

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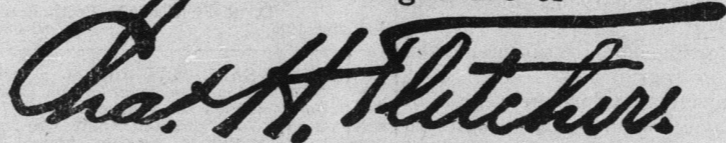
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