EDWIN LEFEVRE

THE PLUNDERERS


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A Novel

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I

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He handed a slip to the clerk, which the clerk read, counting the words from sheer force of habit:

Wanted-A Man With St. Vitus's Dance and an Introspective Turn of Mind. High Wages to Right Party. Apply Saturday Morning, Room 888, St. Iago Building.

“Four-sixty-four,” said the clerk.

The man raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

“Four dollars and sixty-four cents,” repeated Carroll.

The man took out a wallet and tried to pull out a bank-note, but could not because of his gloved hands. He took off the right glove, fished out one five-dollar bill and gave it to the clerk, who handed him back thirty-six cents. As the man took the change the clerk distinctly noticed that he had a big ivory-colored scar which ran from the knuckles to the wrist and disappeared under the cuff. He remembered it by reason of the freak ad and the man's voice.

The advertisement appeared in the *Herald* on the next day. Being Christmas, the one day of nonreading in America, few people saw it. Nevertheless, at nine on Saturday morning, ten men with spasmodically twitching necks or limbs waited for the advertiser to open the door of Room 888, on which they saw in gilt letters:

ACME VIBRATOR COMPANY

W. W. LOVELL, MANAGER

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The elevator man was heard to tell an inquirer, “Here's Lovell!” And presently the voiceless man, dressed as usual in black, with black gloves, stepped from the elevator, nodded to the waiting men in the hall, and opened the door of 888. At first they thought he was a mute, but realized later that he was merely saving his bronchial tubes, just as asking men to come Saturday forenoon—pay-day and pay-hours—would save effort by bringing only men without employment.

Lovell and the afflicted entered. The outer office had half a dozen chairs, and a table, on which were some medical magazines. Lovell scrutinized the ten applicants keenly, and finally beckoned to a tall, well-built chap with a blond mustache, whose unfortunate ailment was not so extreme as the others, to follow him into the inner office. The man did so. There were a desk, three chairs, a table, and a dozen polished-oak boxes that looked as though they might contain vibrators. Lovell closed the door, sat down at the desk, motioned to the blond man to approach, and whispered:

“What's your name?”

“Lewis J. Wright.”

“Age?”

“Thirty-six.”

“Working?”

“Not steadily.”

“Profession?”

“Cabinet-maker.”

“Family?”

“No.”

“Do you object to traveling?”

“No; like it.”

“We pay sixty dollars a week, all traveling and living expenses. Will you go to London, England?”

“To do what?”

“Nothing!”

“What?”

“Nothing!” again whispered the manager, very earnestly. He seemed anxious to convince Mr. Wright of his good intentions. “Nothing at all! Sixty a week and expenses!”

“I don't understand,” said Mr. Lewis J. Wright, with an uneasy smile. His excitement aggravated the malady and his neck jerked and twitched almost constantly.

“I want a man with St. Vitus's dance.”

“That's me,” said L. J. Wright, and proved it.

“And with an introspective turn of mind. Understand?”

“Not quite,” confessed the cabinet-maker.

“A man who likes to think about himself.”

“I guess I can fill the bill all right,” asserted L. J. Wright, confidently. Sixty a week, all expenses, and a trip to London began to look very attractive.

“Then you're engaged.” The manager nodded.

“I don't know yet what I'm to do,” ventured Wright.

“Nothing, I tell you.”

“Well, I'll do it, then!” And L. J. Wright smiled tentatively; but the manager of the Acme Vibrator Company looked at him seriously—almost reprovingly—and whispered so hoarsely that Wright felt like going after cough-lozenges for him:

“Listen, Wright. You will go to London with a letter to Dr. Cephas W. Atterbury, 23, Abbey Road, St. John's Wood, N. W. Every day you will sit down in a comfortable chair in the doctor's anteroom, where the patients wait, from nine to eleven a.m. and five to seven p.m. You will think of your St. Vitus's dance. For doing this you will get sixty dollars a week from us and your hotel bill will be paid by the doctor. You may not have to sail for a month, but your salary begins on Monday. Come here every Saturday and get twenty-five dollars on account. When you sail you will get all that's owing to you besides four weeks' salary in advance, and a round-trip ticket, first-class.”

“But if I get stranded in London—”

“How can you, with three or four hundred dollars in your pocket, a return-trip ticket, and no need to spend except for clothes, which are very cheap there? Come next Saturday, but leave your name and address in case we need you. Can we depend on you?” He looked searchingly into the grayish-blue eyes of Lewis J. Wright, and seemed comforted when Lewis J. Wright answered:

“Yes. I'll go on a minute's notice.” He wrote his name and address on a slip, gave it to the manager, and went out. Lovell followed him to the outer office and, beckoning to the afflicted nine to draw near, whispered:

“I've hired a man, but I shall need more soon. Write your names and addresses and leave them here. Don't come unless I send for you,” and he distributed printed blanks on which each applicant wrote out his name, address, and answers to the questions:

1—Do you object to traveling alone?

2—Do you object to sitting in comfortable chairs?

3—Do you object to people making remarks about you?

4—Do you object to minding your own business or earning your wages?

One of the applicants spoke:

“Mr. Lovell, I'd like to know—”

Lovell, however, cut him short with a hoarse but peremptory “Don't talk! Can't answer!” pointed to his throat, and disappeared in the inner office, the door of which he closed.

Whereupon the disappointed applicants, expressing their feelings in a series of heartrending jerks, twitches, tremors, and grimaces, trooped out into the hall. There they cross-examined Wright and arrived at the conclusion that they were to be used as living advertisements for the Acme Vibrator. Doctors were employed to boom it and the company supplied dummies or “property” patients.

II

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To the same clerk in the *Herald* office, a fortnight later, came the same man in black, and whispered something. The clerk recognized him, leaned over, and asked, pleasantly:

“What is it this time?” He had a good memory. He afterward remembered thinking that the hoarseness was chronic.

“How much for one inch in Help Wanted, Male?”

“Pica caps?”

The man nodded eagerly, half a dozen times.

“Two dollars and thirty-two cents.”

The stranger, in trying to take the exact amount from his pocket, dropped a dime on the floor and had much difficulty in picking it up by reason of his black gloves. This naturally made the clerk remember about the scar, which the man evidently desired to conceal. Carroll, the clerk, alert-minded and imaginative—as are all American Celts—caught a glimpse of the scar between the end of the glove and the beginning of the cuff.

On the next day, the unemployed males of New York read this in the *Herald*:

Wanted—A Brave Man. Wages One Hundred Dollars a Day. No Questions Answered. Apply Room 888, St. Iago Building.

There are many brave men in New York. When W. W. Lovell stepped from the elevator at the eighth floor he had almost to force his way through a crowd of men of all kinds—brutes and dreamers; sturdy animals, and boys with romance in their eyes; fierce-visaged, roughly dressed men, and fashionably attired chaps, with high-bred, impassive faces; young men seeking adventure and old men seeking bread. Lovell was darting keen glances at the men. He let his gaze linger on a man neither short nor tall, of about forty, who suggested determination rather than reckless courage. He was shabby with the shabbiness of a man who not only has worn the clothes a long time, but has slept in them. Lovell approached him and whispered:

“Come about *Herald* ad?”

“Yes.” Others drew near and listened.

“Are you really brave?” He looked anxiously into the man's face. The man, at the question and at the grins of his fellow-applicants, turned a brick-red.

“Try me!” he answered, defiantly.

“Before all these men?” There was a challenge in the hoarse whisper.

“If you want to,” answered the man, with quick anger. He clenched his fists and braced his body, as for a shock.

“Come in!” and W. W. Lovell opened the door of 888.

“I'm braver than that guy!” interjected a youth, extremely broad-shouldered and thick-necked.

Mr. Lovell looked at him coldly, steadily, inquisitively, as though he would read the man's soul. He stared fully a minute and a half before the thick-set youngster dropped his gaze, whereupon Mr. Lovell pushed in the man he had picked out, followed him, and slammed the door in the faces of the others. They tried the door-knob in vain. It was a spring lock.

Mr. Lovell sat down at his desk, motioned to the man to draw near, and said, sternly:

“No questions answered!”

“I'll ask none.”

Lovell gazed at him intently. He nodded to himself with satisfaction, and proceeded, in a painful whisper:

“Your name is W. W. Lowry.”

The man hesitated. Lovell frowned and, leaning forward, said:

“One hundred dollars a day!”

“My name,” said the man, determinedly, “is now W. W. Lowry.”

“Do you know anything about travelers' checks used by the American Express Company?”

“Yes.”

“Ever used any yourself?”

“No.”

“Ever in Paris?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“When I was—er—years ago.”

“How many years?”

“Ten; no—eleven!” The man's face twitched. Remembrance was evidently not pleasant.

“I'll pay you one thousand dollars for eight days' work in Paris.”

“I'll take it.”

“Listen carefully.”

“Go ahead.” The man looked alert.

“You will get a first-class ticket from New York to Paris and return, and hotel coupons for ten days in the Hotel Beraud, in Paris. You will leave, in all probability, on February first, arrive on the eighth. On the ninth you will go to the American Express office and cash some of your checks. They will serve to identify you. Do it again on February tenth. At exactly eleven minutes past eleven on the eleventh you will whisper to the mail clerk: 'It is eleven-eleven, to-day the eleventh. Give me the eleven letters for W. W. Lowry.' If you do not receive eleven letters, don't take any, but return the next day at precisely the same hour, and say exactly the same words. What was it I said you should say to the correspondence clerk?”

“It is eleven-eleven, to-day the eleventh. Give me the eleven letters for W. W. Lowry,” repeated the man.

“Right! When you get the eleven letters you will bring them unopened to me—here. Now go to Mrs. Brady's boarding-house, 299 East Seventy-third Street; tell her you are Mr. Lowry. Your room and board are paid for. Make it a point to be at the house every day at eleven in the morning until after luncheon and at six p.m. You must not go out evenings under any circumstances. I'll allow you eleven dollars a week for tobacco and will bring you some clothes. Come back Wednesday at eleven-thirty. Here's this week's eleven dollars. That will be all.”

“That's all right, my friend; but—” began the man.

Lovell frowned and interrupted sharply:

“No questions answered.”

“I wasn't going to ask; I was going to remark that you would have to show me that one thousand dollars for the week's work.”

“Next Wednesday I'll take you to the American Express Company. I'll give you one thousand dollars and you will buy the checks yourself and sign them. I'll keep them until sailing-day and I'll give them to you on the steamer. Forging,” he went on with a sneer, “is signing another man's name with intent to defraud. You will sign your own name—your own signature—on travelers' checks that you yourself have paid for. See? A thousand dollars for asking for eleven letters and bringing them to me, unopened, is good graft, friend. If you make good I'll keep you busy.”

“You are on!” said W. W. Lowry.

“No drinking. Above all things, no talking! I may be crazy, my friend; but what would you be if you gave up a job worth a thousand dollars a week and all expenses paid? Remember our motto: No questions answered!”

“Damned good rule!” agreed W. W. Lowry, with conviction.

“Look out for reporters and for men who say they are reporters!” warned W. W. Lovell. “When you go out, close the door quickly behind you and hang this sign on the door-knob. I don't want to see anybody.”

W. W. Lowry obeyed. The sign said:

POSITION FILLED

III

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A particularly beautiful limousine stopped before the door of Welch, Boon & Shaw, the renowned jewelers, on Fifth Avenue. There alighted from it, on this cold but bright January day, a tall, well-built man, erect, square-shouldered, head held high. He wore a fur-lined overcoat with a beautiful mink collar, and a mink cap. He was one of those blond-mustached, ruddy-complexioned, daily-cold-plunge British officers you sometimes see in Ottawa. He walked quickly into the shop and spoke to the first clerk he saw.

“Where's the proprietor?”

“Who?”

“The proprietor of the shop!” He spoke with a pronounced English accent. His eyes were gray and cold.

They looked a trifle close together, but that may have been from the frown—said frown impressing even a casual observer as a chronic affair. His appearance, even without the frown, was aristocratic.

“Do you wish,” said the clerk, politely, “to see Mr. Boon or Mr. Shaw?”

“I wish to see the man who owns this shop; the—ah—boss, I think you call it here.”

“Well, Mr. Boon—” began the clerk, about to explain.

“I don't care if it's Mr. Loon or Mr. Coon. Be quick, please!” he said, peremptorily.

The clerk, now resenting the stranger's words, tone, manner, attitude, nationality, and ancestry, turned to a floor-walker person and called:

“Mr. Smith, this—ahem—gentleman wishes to see one of the firm.”

Mr. Smith came forward, smiling suavely.

“You wish to see one of the firm, sir?” He bowed in advance.

“Yes. That's the third time I've said what I wish. I have no time to lose and not much patience, either!” He twitched his neck and twisted his head as though his collar were too tight. It was a habit, and it became more pronounced with his annoyance. All the clerks noticed it.

Mr. Smith bit his lip and said, very politely: “Yes, sir. It happens that none of them is in at present. If you will tell me what you wish to see them about I may suggest—”

The fur-coated man turned on his heel, his face dark red with annoyance, and started to leave the shop.

“Good-by, old Jerk-Neck!” muttered the offended clerk.

Mr. Boon entered at that very moment.

“Here's Mr. Boon, our senior partner,” said Mr. Smith, with an irritation in his voice that he could not conceal, and that now gave Mr. Boon his cue.

“You wish to see me?” Mr. Boon asked it very coldly, ready to say no.

“You have an annoying set of clerks here,” said the fur-coated stranger. “I wished to see one of the firm and—”

“You see him now,” interrupted Mr. Boon, letting the words drop out with an effect of broken icicles. “I am Mr. Boon.”

“My good man, I came after some pearl necklaces and a few rings, and trinkets. Do make haste! I am Colonel Lowther.”

“Indeed! Well, what if you are Colonel Lowther?”

In Mr. Boon's eyes was a look that made all the clerks in the store busy themselves with their own affairs. Explosions scatter dangerous fragments that may injure lookers-on. The fur-coated Englishman stared at the sizzling jeweler in amazement.

“Damme!” he sputtered. “Do you mean to say—Oh—I see! Yes! I am the secretary of the Duke of Connaught. The jewels are for his Royal Highness.”

The change was instantaneous and magical. They all understood now, and forgave. There wasn't a clerk in the store who did not stare with unchecked interest at the fur-coated member of the royal party, concerning which the newspapers were printing columns and columns.

The man opened his coat, took a card from a Russia-leather case, which he gave to Mr. Boon.

“Colonel the Honorable H. C. Lowther, K.C.B.,” it read, “Private Secretary to H. R. H. the Duke of Connaught.”

“Colonel Lowther,” said Mr. Boon, in a voice from which all the icicles had melted and turned into warm honey, “I regret exceedingly that you have had to wait. Had I known you were here, or if you had only mentioned who you were —”

“Exactly so. Yes! And now I'll have a few words with you in private, Boon.”

The colonel could not know that Mr. Boon was not a misterless Bond Street tradesman, but a millionaire expert in gems and human vanity. So Boon forgave the omission of “Mr.” and magnanimously said, “This way, Colonel Lowther, please!”

In the office Mr. Boon opened a box of his good cigars—and they were very good, indeed—and held it toward the colonel, who took one with his gloved hands, lit it at the flame of the match which Mr. Boon himself held for him, and puffed away, with never a “Thank you.”

Again Mr. Boon was magnanimous.

Colonel Lowther wiggled his neck as if his collar were uncomfortably tight, and then shot his head forward with a motion that made the chin go up six inches—a nervous affliction that Mr. Boon politely ignored by looking exaggeratedly attentive.

“His Royal Highness wishes to leave some remembrances to gentlemen he has met, you know—chairmen of committees and presidents of clubs, and others who have been very nice to him. At home he would have given them snuff-boxes or cigarette-cases, with his arms on them; but

there won't be time to engrave them, so he will give scarf-pins.” He paused, puffed at his cigar, and cleared his neck of the constricting collar.

“I understand,” Mr. Boon assured him, deferentially.

“And the duchess will give rings and—ah—lorgnette-chains—trinkets—ah—you know. Everybody in New York has been so kind to the party. 'Pon my honor, Boon, I really think Americans are keener for royalty than the British. I do! What?”

“Blood,” observed Mr. Boon, with the impressive sententiousness of a man inventing a proverb, “is thicker than water!”

“Eh? What? Oh! I see! Yes! Quite so!”

“Our people,” pursued the encouraged Mr. Boon, “have always thought a great deal of the English—er—British royal family.”

“Oh, indeed! Now, Boon, I didn't think you showed great affection for George III! What?”

Mr. Boon blushed to think of Bunker Hill. His daughter was a D. A. R., too! He hastened to change the subject.

“You mentioned,” he said, as though he were reading aloud from one of the sacred books, “some pearl necklaces. At least, I think you did.” He put on the tradesman's listening look in advance. It is the look that courtiers assume when they listen to his Majesty excitedly telling how once, on a hunting-trip, he almost dressed himself.

“Oh yes! The pearls are for the Princess Patricia. A necklace to cost not over ten thousand. You see, the duke is not one of your Pittsburg millionaires. He's not what you'd call rich, in America!” He smiled, democratically, as a man

always does when he is pleased with his own wit. Mr. Boon smiled uncertainly.

“You can't, of course,” he said, regretfully, “do much with ten thousand dollars.”

“Not dollars—pounds! Perhaps we may go up to fifteen thousand; but his Highness would prefer to keep at about ten thousand pounds. That's fifty thousand dollars.”

“I am sure we can please his Highness,” said Mr. Boon, with impressive confidence. There fleeted across his mind the vision of the tremendous value of the advertisement which the royal patronage would give him. The papers were full of the doings of the distinguished visitors. He himself on his way to the office had been guilty of the pardonable curiosity which the lower classes call rubber-necking; and he had even discussed—in common with 89,999,999 fellow-Americans—the personal pulchritude of the royal ladies. Usually democracy is enabled to apologize to itself for its undemocratic interest in feminine royalty by saying, “She isn't at all goodlooking.” That excuse, however, did not serve in this instance. The Princess Patricia was the most popular girl in New York—with the classes because she was the princess, and with the masses because she was so pretty! And to think of selling pearls to her!

He closed his eyes and ecstatically read what the papers would print about the sale! He heard himself saying to Mrs. Carmpick, of Pittsburg: “This necklace is handsomer than the one we sold to Princess Patricia!” He heard the rattle in the throats of Johnson & Pierce, of J. Storrs' Sons, of the sixteen partners of Goffony's, dying from apoplexy

superinduced by envy, or from starvation following the loss of all the swell customers!

“Ah, you realize, of course, Boon, that his Royal Highness's patronage is worth many thousands to your firm. What?”

The colonel's eyes, Mr. Boon thought, were cold and greedy, as befitted a common grafter. Mr. Boon resented this, having himself been caught red-handed getting something for nothing. If he had to pay a commission—“We appreciate the honor, of course, Colonel Lowther,” he said, deferentially—and non-committally.

“Quite so! You ought to, considering how the newspapers will mention your shop.”

“I may suggest, Colonel Lowther, that our firm's reputation—”

“I know its reputation. That's why I am here”—the colonel's voice seemed colder than a Canadian cold spell—“but it is no better than your competitors'—Goffony, Johnson & Pierce, or J. Storrs' Sons. I figured that the duke's patronage should be worth thousands to Welch, Boon & Shaw; so you must make me a special price.”

“We have but one—”

“I've heard all that, Boon,” the colonel interrupted, angrily. “If you are going to talk like a bally ass I'll waste no more time here. Bring in the pearls. I can't take over a half-hour to this.”

Mr. Boon's hard sense and knowledge of advertising values triumphed over his injured dignity. He excused himself, and presently returned with a tray full of pearl necklaces.

“I say, Boon, on second thought, you must not reduce your prices. It's a bad principle.”

“Yes, it is,” agreed Boon, cordially.

“Therefore, my good fellow, name me one price—the lowest possible after considering how much the duke's patronage is worth to your house. The very lowest! Put it in plain figures on new price-tags. The duke is accustomed to the prices across the pond, you know; so don't frighten him. Now that one?”

He picked up at once the most beautiful necklace—and also the most valuable, though by no means the most showy. Mr. Boon's respect jumped. He looked at the colonel, whose neck and head were twitching and twisting violently.

“This one—” he began. The colonel interrupted him:

“Now, Boon, think carefully—the very lowest price,” he said, sternly. “If you name a really reasonable figure I'll pledge you my word to recommend its purchase and not visit the other shops. Take your time!”

Thus placed on the rack, Mr. Boon figured and cut and restored and reduced again until he was angry at the torturer and at the opportunity for a glorious advertisement. Finally he said, vindictively:

“This I'll sell for sixty-five thousand dollars!” Immediately he regretted it. Perhaps he was overestimating the advertising value of the Princess Patricia's beautiful neck to exhibit his pearls on. The price was exactly thirty-five thousand dollars less than he had expected to get for it during the next steel boom.

“Oh, come now, I say,” remonstrated Colonel Lowther, impatiently. “That's thirteen thousand pounds. It's too much,

you know.”

“Colonel Lowther,” said Boon, pale but determined, “I am losing considerable money on this, which I am charging to advertising account and may never get back. If the price is not satisfactory, I'm sorry; and I can only suggest that you'd better go to the other firms you've mentioned. They are all,” he finished quietly, “very good firms.”

Colonel Lowther, who had not taken his keen eyes off the jeweler's face during the speech, appeared impressed by Mr. Boon's earnestness. His neck jerked spasmodically half a dozen times before he said:

“I believe you. I'll take it. But first mark it—in pounds; thirteen thousand pounds.” And he looked on, eagle-eyed, while Mr. Boon himself wrote out a new price-tag. Evidently he would take no chances with sleight-of-hand substitutions. “Put it here,” he said, “beside me.”

It made Mr. Boon say, half angry, half amused: “We won't change it for an imitation string. We are really a reputable firm, Colonel Lowther.”

“Oh! Ah! Really, I—ah!” stammered the colonel, “I wasn't thinking of such a thing!” He looked so absurdly guilty, however, that Mr. Boon forgave him. “I think you'd better show me others—ah!—cheaper, you know, in case the duke should not wish to go above ten thousand pounds. Say, that one—and this!—and this!”

He had selected the three next best; but Boon figured very closely and in all instances named a price below cost: fifty-seven thousand five hundred dollars, fifty thousand dollars, and forty-five thousand dollars.

“Put them here also with the first one,” said Colonel Lowther..

“Don't you wish us to put them in boxes?” asked Mr. Boon.

“Ah—ah!—I say, bring the boxes in and I'll put them in. We'll do it more quickly,” he finished, lamely.

There flashed across Mr. Boon's mind the possibility of crookedness. Colonel Lowther did not trust them—perhaps because he hoped to avert suspicions by that same attitude of distrust! Mr. Boon determined to watch closely. He asked a clerk to bring some cases for the necklaces.

“You fix them, Boon,” said Colonel Lowther, who was watching the jeweler's hands as children watch the hands of a prestidigitator.

It actually eased Boon's mind to be taken for a crook. He arranged the necklaces, each in its own Russia-leather case, and then gratefully helped Colonel Lowther to select two dozen scarf-pins, amounting in value to eighteen thousand dollars, a score of rings worth in all a little over twenty-five thousand dollars, and a few lorgnette-chains and other trinkets. Once all these were duly price-tagged, packed, and placed beside the necklaces, Colonel Lowther, after a series of mild cervical convulsions, said, calmly:

“Now, Boon, you and I must settle a personal matter. You know, of course, the royal party never pays cash.”

“Then,” said the impetuous Mr. Boon, “the deal is off!”

“Silly ass! The royal family of England always pays. You know very well that the jewels bought by King George for gifts for his coronation guests have not been paid for yet. It's all a matter of red tape. The money is as safe as the

Bank of England! Any banker here would be glad to guarantee the account—only that would never do, of course. Now you know I can't take any commission. I've made you give me the lowest prices for the duke, haven't I? What?”

“Yes, you have; and therefore I can't—”

“If I were a bally Russian I'd have made you name a price twice the usual figure and I'd have taken the difference as a commission. It's what you Americans call graft, I believe. What?”

“Of course,” said Boon, coldly, disgusted with the venal aristocracy, “we'd never have done such a—”

“Tut, tut! It's done everywhere; but not to me!” Colonel Lowther said, so sternly that Mr. Boon considered himself accused of unnamed crimes. He resented this, but, being unable to fix the exact accusation, contented himself with remarking, diplomatically:

“Of course not! But at the same time—”

“Yes, yes,” rudely broke in the colonel, with a silencing wave of his gloved hand. “Now I can myself pay you in cash for whatever the duke buys—say, up to twenty thousand or twenty-five thousand pounds. For advancing this money, which will not be paid to me for months, I ask you to allow me a half-year's interest. That,” finished Colonel Lowther, impressively, “is banking. What?”

“At what rate?”

“Oh, eight or ten per cent.”

“Impossible!”

“Then, Mr. Welch, Boon, or whatever your name is, I wish you a very good morning!”

“But we'll allow you interest at the rate of six per cent, a year.”

“But I myself have to pay five for the use—ah!—that is—er—” floundered the Englishman. Mr. Boon perceived instantly that the colonel borrowed the money from Canadian bankers at five per cent, and got ten per cent. It was not a bad scheme for high-class aristocratic graft! Even a jeweler could philosophize about wilful self-delusion, the point of view, custom, and so on. “Make it seven per cent. What?”

Mr. Boon could not help admiring the persistency of the Englishman in coating his graft-pills with the sugar of legitimacy. Doubtless the colonel had really convinced himself this was not graft!

“Very well,” said Mr. Boon, with a smile. “I'll take three and a half per cent, off for cash.”

“But we agreed on seven!” remonstrated the Englishman.

“Well, three and a half per cent, of the whole is the same as six months at seven per cent.”

“Oh!” The colonel began to figure in his mind. His cervical contortions, twitchings, and jerkings were painful to behold. Mr. Boon thought it was a mild form of St. Vitus's dance. It would enable him to recognize the colonel in a crowd of ten thousand.

“Quite so! Yes—three and a half per cent, of the total bill. It will be at least twenty thousand pounds—that's one hundred thousand dollars. Not half bad! What?”

“Do you mean your commission will be one hundred thousand dollars? I'm delighted to hear it!” Mr. Boon was so

pleased that he jested. He would play up the royal patronage to the limit.

“Oh no! I meant the total amount, you know,” corrected the colonel, earnestly. He saw that Boon was smiling, and gradually it dawned on him that the jeweler was an American humorist. “Oh! Ah! Yes! Very funny! Quite so! I wish it were! How many millions would the bill have to be for the cash discount to be twenty thousand pounds? What? Right-O! Well, now bring the pearls and the other things to the motor. I shall show them to his Royal Highness at once. I can let you know in a half-hour which he will keep.” And he rose.

“Ah!—er—Colonel, you know we don't like to—ah!—there's over two hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewels, worth four hundred thousand dollars in any other place in New York; and if anything happened—”

“Nothing will happen,” said the colonel, with assurance.

“And then, it will take a long time to prepare the memorandum of—”

“Why do you need a memorandum?” inquired the colonel, coldly. He looked as if he began to suspect that Mr. Boon distrusted a member of the suite of his Royal Highness, Prince Arthur William Patrick Albert, K.G., K.T., K.P., P.C., G.M.B., G.3. S.I., G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., Duke of Connaught and Stratheam, Earl of Sussex, Prince of Coburg and Gotha, Governor-General of Canada, and potential customer of the world-renowned firm of Welch, Boon & Shaw.

Reading the emotions on the colonel's face and not desiring to offend, but at the same time determined not to

deliver two hundred thousand dollars' worth of goods to a stranger, who might be the duke's secretary, but might not be a reliable man financially, for all that, Mr. Boon groped for an excuse. But Colonel Lowther pursued, frigidly:

“Why should you need a memorandum if you yourself will bring the jewels? Did you think I was a bally clerk to sell your jewels for you? You do the talking—and don't change the prices!”

So profoundly relieved as not to resent the last insult, Mr. Boon smiled pleasantly and said, “I must take a man to carry them.”

“Take a regiment if you wish; but there's room for only three in the motor,” said the Englishman, his neck twitching and twisting and jerking quite violently. Anger seemed to aggravate his nervous malady. Wherefore Mr. Boon hastily gathered up the packages, put them into a jeweler's strong valise, and followed the colonel, accompanied by Terry Donnelly, the store's private policeman, who carried the precious satchel in one hand, and in the other—in his overcoat pocket—an automatic pistol of the latest model.

One of the clerks must have told of the affair, for there was an eager crowd on the sidewalk. They had heard that the Duke of Connaught's secretary was in the store, buying diamonds. By the time it had passed seven mouths it was the duke himself. Mr. Boon heard: “There he comes!” and, “Is the princess with him?” and, “Which is the duke?” And he had pleasant visions of free reading-notices and renewed popularity among the ultra-fashionable. One of the traffic squad was trying to make the crowd move on—in vain.

The colonel good-naturedly forced his way through the mob to the motor, followed by the jeweler and the store policeman, who saw on the door of the limousine the letters “W. R.” And both of them concluded that this stood for the well-known initials of the duke's host.

A short woman, with red hair and a self-assertive bust, stared boldly at the colonel and said, “He don't look like his pictures.”

“Say, are you the duke?” asked a messenger-boy.

However, the colonel merely said “Home!” and entered the motor, followed by Mr. Boon and T. Donnelly. The store footman closed the door as if it were made of priceless cut-glass. The traffic policeman touched his cap and the motor went up the Avenue.

The colonel picked up a newspaper from the seat and turned to Mr. Boon.

“See!” he said, “our pictures. Your reporters are—ah!—very enterprising and clever. But the photographers are worse!” He laughed and went on: “The pictures don't look like me, d'ye think?”

“I recognize the coat and the fur cap,” laughed Mr. Boon.

“Oh, do you?” said the colonel, seriously. He looked at it and said: “But it might be my other fur cap, you know. What?” He looked challengingly at the jeweler.

“It might be,” admitted Mr. Boon, diplomatically confessing his error.

“Quite so!” said the owner of the fur cap, triumphantly.

Mr. Boon, finding himself nearer the house of the duke's host, began to feel more confident of putting through the epoch-making deal. It is not often that a New York jeweler

sells pearls to an uncle of the King of England, to be used by the king's most beautiful cousin! He would have the princess's photograph in his window. It should show the famous necklace!

The motor took its place last in the long string of automobiles and carriages that were creeping toward the door of the house which his Royal Highness was honoring.

“Democracy meekly leaving its card at the house of royalty,” laughed the colonel, pointing to the twoscore vehicles ahead of theirs.

“Americans paying their respects to an Englishman who is honored even in his own country,” said Mr. Boon.

“Oh, now, I say, Boon, that's uncommonly neat, you know. What? But perhaps we'd better get out and walk; otherwise it may be a half-hour before—”

A footman in livery came up to their motor, touched his hat with a respect that entitled him to a bank president's wages, and said to the colonel:

“I beg pardon, sir, but 'is Royal 'ighness 'as gone to Mr. Walton's, sir, at number 899 Fifth Avenue. I was hinstructed to tell you to go there, sir.”

“Tell the chauffeur where to go,” said the colonel, briefly.

“Yes, sir—very good, sir.” The man touched his hat and told the chauffeur.

Their motor pulled out of the line and turned to the west.

“Mr. Walton was at Eton with the duke,” explained the colonel to Mr. Boon.

“J. G. Walton?” asked Mr. Boon.

“Yes.”