

# THE PECULIAR ADVENTURES OF THE LAXWORTHY TRIO

## A Matter of a Thousand Pounds—By E. Phillips Oppenheim

John T. Laxworthy is the chief of a trio of adventurous investigators. In appearance he is unremarkable and undistinguished. He is of somewhat less than medium height, of unathletic, almost frail physique; his head is thrust a little forward, as though he were afflicted with a chronic stoop; he wears steel rimmed spectacles; his hair and mustache are iron gray. "My chief aim," he tells his two associates, W. Forrest Anderson and Sydney Wing, "is to make life tolerable for ourselves, to escape the dull monotony of idleness, and incidentally to embrace any opportunity which may present itself to enrich our exchequer."

MR. LAXWORTHY occasionally played golf. There were other diversions which appealed more strongly to him; and it was simply owing to the persistence of the girl that he happened to be on the golf green at the time when the tragedy at the flower farm was discovered. "This for the hole, I believe," Mr. Laxworthy remarked, whereupon he studied the line of his putt, adjusted his spectacles, took up his stance firmly and holed out from a distance of about seven yards. The American girl made a face at him. "I don't believe you're as nice as I thought you were," she said, rather crossly. "Now, what are all those boys running for, do you suppose?" Through the trees in the adjoining field a sea of violets bent their heads before the soft west wind. About a hundred yards away stood a large bare looking farmhouse and spacious out-buildings. It was toward this that several caddies and one or two of the players were hurrying. "Let's see what the trouble is," the girl exclaimed. They walked along one of the straight furrows between the beds of violets. The farmhouse was built without any enclosing fence in the centre of the field. A little way back, on the left, was a huge barn. Outside this a woman stood weeping and wringing her hands, while a man, surrounded by a curious group of caddies and several players, was talking loudly and excitedly. One of the residents at the hotel, who knew Laxworthy by sight, turned toward him as they hurried up. "You don't happen to be a doctor, do you?" he asked. The peasant stopped forward. In his blue shirt and steepled corduroy trousers he was entirely typical of his class—French, with a dash of the Italian. "If monsieur knows anything of doctoring he may pass inside," he declared. "Otherwise, no one shall enter my barn. I have sent for a doctor. I have sent for the police. What can a man do more?" As for me, I shake. It is a horrible thing which has happened. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with his forearm. There was no doubt about it that he was in mortal terror. "I do know something of doctoring," Laxworthy admitted, answering him in his own tongue. "Who is it?" "The man stared at him. "Monsieur has not heard, then? But last night he came while we were at our evening meal—a tramp, half starved, shaking with fatigue and thirst. He prayed for work, for food, for a sup of wine. "All these I offered. Why not? It is our busy season, and labor is welcome. I let him sleep in the barn. To-morrow, I said, he should work in the vineyard. This morning I forgot that he was there until an hour ago. The lazy rascal! I thought; but I took him a mug of coffee. "I carried it from the house out here to the barn. Giuseppe, I shouted, 'wake up and come to your work. Here is coffee and bread.' Then I threw open the door, and behold! Monsieur may enter!" The man pushed back the clumsy door of the barn. On a bundle of hay, just inside, a man lay dead. He lay on his side, and the long knife which had passed through his heart had come out

behind his shoulder blade. Mr. Laxworthy turned round. "Keep these people away," he called out sharply. "Miss Chambers, you had better go home, please. Don't let any one in here," he added, turning to the farmer. "Don't let anything be moved or disturbed." Laxworthy sank on one knee by the side of the murdered man. For several moments he remained there. The farmer stood a few feet away. "He came to you last night, and you had never seen him before?" Laxworthy asked. "But never! He is a stranger. If I had known that he was one of those who are doomed, do you think that I would have had him here?" "What do you mean by one of those who are doomed?" The man shivered. "The Camorra," he answered. "It is a crime of vengeance, this. There is the cross upon the cheek." Mr. Laxworthy nodded slowly. "What language did the man speak?" "But the same as our own, monsieur. Why not? He came from Marseilles, I think, but he had lived in Tuscany." Mr. Laxworthy rose to his feet. A motor car had drawn up in the road. A sergeant of gendarmes and the doctor came hurrying up. Mr. Laxworthy stood on one side. "They called me," he explained to the doctor "but you see for yourself. I have not interfered with the position of the body, nor touched the man. It is an affair, I fear, for the police." Mr. Laxworthy strolled away over the perfumed field, and found Miss Chambers waiting on the seat by the sixth tee. They abandoned the game. Miss Chambers declared that she could do nothing but think of the dead man's face, of which she had had a hurried glimpse. On their way to the hotel Mr. Laxworthy asked her a question. "You are a young lady," he said, "with some powers of observation. Did anything strike you about the face of that man?" She shivered. "Nothing except that it was the most hideous thing I ever saw in my life," she declared. "I'm afraid I'll dream of it for months." Mr. Laxworthy found the news of the tragedy at the flower farm had already arrived, and people were busy discussing it. Mr. Laxworthy, who seldom went out of his way to speak to any one, paused before the wicker chair of Mr. Freeling Poignton. The latter greeted him cordially. "They tell me you saw this poor fellow who's been murdered?" "It is quite true," Mr. Laxworthy admitted. Mr. Freeling Poignton clenched his fists. "If I had my way," he declared, "I'd make short ending of any Government who let these dirty, murdering societies flourish." "Your humanitarian principles," Mr. Laxworthy said, "are well known. Tell me, would you consider it a gratification to them, or the reverse, that the murderer should be discovered?" "Why, I'm surprised at that question, Mr. Laxworthy. You knew very well that I'm great on the sacredness of human life, and that's why I'm dead set against wars and all manner of armaments. But I'm also strong for justice.



from the chemist's, and tea which I brought out with me from England." "I withdraw my invitation," she sighed. "At the same time, if you could spare me five minutes, I should be very glad." "I will walk with you so far as the small stone terrace there," he said. "There is a seat to the left which is in the sun and out of the wind." Mr. Laxworthy led the way to the seat which he had indicated and arranged his shawl around his neck. "I am quite ready," he declared. "Mr. Laxworthy," she began, "there is a matter which has been worrying me, and upon which I want you to give me your advice. I hope you won't think it a liberty, but I am asking you because you seem to lead so thoroughly self-centred a life, and to be so utterly devoid of interest in what is going on around you, that I feel sure that anything you say will be quite impartial." "It's about what happened at the flower farm," she continued, a little hesitatingly. "You know what that farmer says—that the man came late at night, while they were having their evening meal? Well, it isn't true—that's all there is about it." "Not true," Mr. Laxworthy repeated calmly. "Indeed!" "I will tell you exactly what happened," she continued. "You know Mr. Lenfield, the young gentleman who has been so ill, and who is here with a friend—Mr. Hamar, his name is? Well, yesterday afternoon I went for a short walk with Mr. Lenfield, and we stopped at the farm while he bought me some violets. Every one else was busy, so the farmer and his wife themselves came out to pick them for us, and while we were all there a man got over the fence by the road and came down one of the furrows toward us. "He was quite close before any one took any notice of him. Then the farmer looked up and asked him what he wanted. He answered quite shortly; and then he said something to Mr. Lenfield in English which I didn't hear because I had turned to speak to the woman. When I looked around, Mr. Lenfield had fainted. We got him some water from the house, and he had a brandy flask in his pocket, and he recovered wonderfully quick. "I never thought anything more about the man who had come up, for he seemed to have gone away almost at once. Mr. Lenfield paid for the violets and we walked home together. He is very delicate, of course, and he says that it was just the shock of hearing some one speak whom he had not seen approach which upset him." "You believe," Mr. Laxworthy asked, "that this stranger who came across the field and spoke to Mr. Lenfield was the man whom we saw dead at the flower farm this morning?" "I'm not thinking about that at all," she answered. "I'm sure." "The incident is a singular one," Mr. Laxworthy remarked. "This is what's bothering me," the girl went on. "At luncheon time Mr. Hamar came to me and asked me if I would mind not saying anything about having been with Mr. Lenfield in the afternoon when that man spoke to him. He said that Mr. Lenfield was in such a delicate state of health that if he were called as a witness or had to identify the body he would certainly collapse." "And what reply did you make to Mr. Hamar?" "I am afraid," she confessed, "that feeling sorry as I did for Mr. Lenfield I promised not to mention it. Now I am wondering whether I have done right. Of course Mr. Lenfield may have fainted from some other cause; but it did seem to me as though this stranger addressed him not in the least casually, but as though they were acquaintances. I've been troubled about it ever since. Mr. Laxworthy, and I decided to ask your advice. What do you think I ought to do?" Mr. Laxworthy sat quite still for several minutes. "The man had paid his own debt."

## English Artist Finds American Family Life a Revelation—Children Mentally and Physically Perfect the Result of the Personal Efforts of Parents Here, Says Carton Moorepark—The Triptych Idea in Portraiture

THE informality and charming intimacy of American family life is a revelation to any one accustomed to the tradition that American mothers spend their time buying gowns and playing bridge and that American fathers leave their offices only to eat and sleep," says Carton Moorepark, the English painter who has been visiting this country. "The insufferable American child whom one meets in foreign hotels has added to the idea that he is a neglected little being. "On the contrary I find, after visiting in American homes, that he enjoys more of his parents' society and occupies a larger share of their plans and thoughts than any other child in the world. I do not believe that any other world to do woman in the world gives the same personal, physical care to her little children that the American mother gives. And I doubt whether any other father gives as much time to reading and playing with his children. "The English child under 10 is not intimate with his parents. He never has his meals with them. It is his nurse and not his mother who puts him to bed at night and bathes him in the morning. The scarcity of good servants in this country may account for the constant care that the American mother gives her baby, but the fact remains that she gives up her time to it as the English mother does not dream of doing. "The American mother gives up two years of her life to each child where the English or Continental mother gives but one, and the smaller American families are a natural consequence. Then, too, living conditions in the cities are practically prohibitive of large families. A second child means an extra room and often an extra servant, an outlay of \$300 or \$400 a year. "Of course it is quite different when a man is willing to undergo the physical strain and added expense of commuting. It is in the beautiful country homes thirty or fifty miles from the city that American family life is flowering. There the children are in their own environment, with room to exercise and develop body and soul. "The automobile, that has made so many of these homes possible, is bringing the family together for much of their recreation, and the father is learning that he can play as good a game of tennis as ever. The theatre, refuge of the bored, is out of the question, and so neighbors are thrown upon each other's society for their entertainment, and little communities of friends spring up, with the country club as a nucleus. They play golf there in the summer and bridge in winter and dance all the year round. "Physically and mentally perfect families are beginning to result. The man who can afford a \$3,000 apartment is learning that it pays better to have his own home in the country, and raise chickens and children. He is learning, like the Englishman, to find his pleasure out of doors. But he takes a personal interest and responsibility in the bringing up of his family that the Englishman never does. The walking floor with the baby joke is never heard in England simply because no Englishman would dream of doing such a thing. He loves his child, but he knows far less of the intimate details of its life than the American father knows. "The American child, as far as an outsider can judge, is not spoiled by this intimacy. He is quick and observing, but he is apt also to be well-mannered and well-bred. He is a hundred per cent better behaved than I expected to find him. And the fact that his father, instead of a governess, helps him with his lessons seems to entail no loss of respect, but rather a conviction that 'Daddy knows everything.' Really the difference of American and English ways in their attitude toward their fathers might be quite well shown in those two words, 'dad' and 'governor.' "It's rather strange that this aspect of American family life hasn't been shown by the portrait painters. The usual thing is a collection of portraits one after another. If a family group is attempted at all it is in a room without atmosphere. "That elusive and very admirable thing, American family life, has never been shown at all. The figures are simply sitting for their portraits. They are not doing the things they are accustomed to do, and so they lack any semblance of life and naturalness. "In the accompanying group of the family of Daniel E. Moran, the civil engineer of the Woolworth Building, painted at their country home, Glenoure, near Mendham, N. J., the old triptych idea, in which the religious pictures were made with two folding wings in order that they might be carried in religious processions, has been adapted to the decorative needs of a modern dining room. The three groups, two figures in the centre group and two in each of the side ones, will be set into the oak wainscoting of a country house dining room. The bright green of the summer foliage flecked with sunlight and the white of the children's summer costumes were chosen purposely to lighten the room. So far as I know the triptych idea has never before been used in modern portraiture."



Family of Daniel E. Moran, painted by Carton Moorepark, in which the triptych idea was carried out for first time in modern portraiture.