JOHN RAWN

PROMINENT CITIZEN

By EMERSON HOUGH

AUTHOR of THE MISSISSIPPI BUBBLE; 54-40 OR FIGHT

ILLUSTRATIONS by Ray Walters

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—John Rawn is born in Texas. Early in life he shows signs of masterfulness and inordinate selfishness.

CHAPTER II—He marries Laura Johnson. He is a clerk in a St. Louis railway office when his daughter Grace is born. Years later he hears Grace's lover, a young engineer named Charles Halsey, speak of a scheme to utilize the lost current of electricity. With his usual unscrupulousness he appropriates the idea as his own and induces Halsey to perfect an experimental machine. He forms a company, with himself as president, at a salary of $100,000 a year, and Halsey as superintendent of the works at a salary of $5,000.

CHAPTER III—Rawn takes charge of the office in Chicago. Virginia Delaware, a beautiful, capable and ambitious young woman, is assigned as his stenographer. She assists in picking the furniture and decoration for the princely mansion Rawn has erected. Mrs. Rawn feels out of place in the new surroundings.

CHAPTER IV—Halsey goes to New York with Rawn and Miss Delaware to explain delays in perfecting the new motor to the impatient directors. He gets a message that a deformed daughter has been born to his wife, Grace Rawn. He returns to Chicago.

CHAPTER V—Rawn bargains with Miss Delaware to wear his jewelry and appear in public with him, as a means to help him in a business way.

CHAPTER VI—Rawn is fortunate in market speculations, piles up wealth and attains prominence.

CHAPTER VII—He frets because his wife does not rise with him in a social way. He gives her a million dollars to leave him.

CHAPTER IX—Grace moves to Graystone hall, and Halsey continues to live in the cottage near the works.

CHAPTER X—Halsey's machine proves a success, but he keeps the fact a secret.

CHAPTER XI—Virginia Delaware becomes more and more indispensible to Rawn. He takes her to New York on a business trip. Idle talk prompts him to offer her marriage.

CHAPTER XII—They are married. Through Virginia's tact and ability they make a place for themselves in the social world.

CHAPTER XIII—Halsey threatens to get a divorce because his wife refuses to return to him. He tells Rawn that he has broken up all the machines after proving the success of the invention. Rawn, in a great rage, threatens to kill him.

CHAPTER XIV—Halsey declares he will never build another machine for Rawn and slaps his face. Virginia Rawn intercepts Halsey as he is leaving the house and, with arms about his neck, implores him to reconsider, because his decision will ruin them all.

CHAPTER XV—Halsey tells Virginia that he has abandoned his invention because it would put a great power in the hands of a few to the detriment of the many.

CHAPTER XVI—At Rawn's instigation Virginia agrees to try to bring Halsey to terms, no matter what it costs.

CHAPTER XVII—The directors plan to get the control of the company away from Rawn.

CHAPTER XVIII—Rawn goes to New York to attempt to avert impending disaster. The wolves of finance are closing in on him. Halsey closes the factory and takes up his residence at Graystone hall, where his wife and daughter are seriously ill. He admits to himself that he loves Virginia.

Virginia Rawn smiled, and turned the pages. The next journal had little else but detailed discussion of the Rawn collapse. It also asserted the scheme of the International Power company was the most bold and rapacious fraud of the day. With journalistic vaticination it insouciantly declared that the intention of the company was to establish central distributing points for power stolen from the public's great water powers, and the retail of what the journal in the argot of the day called canned power, in cheap and portable small motors applicable to countless semi-mechanical uses, all with an end of abolishing the need for horse power and for man power alike. The result, it pointed out, would be the throwing out of work of countless thousands of laboring men by the use of electricity stolen from the people themselves. The gigantic combination already was covering the main water powers. The people's present openly had been disregarded, the people's future openly and patently had been put in the gravest of peril. The entire system of government had been laid by the heels. The name of the republic had been made a mockery. Above all, it was asserted, the most intimate intent of the International Power company had been the throttling of the labor unions—against which John Rawn was known to be personally bitterly opposed—the very essence and soul of the conspiracy having been this device whose aim was to wipe out the need of unskilled labor, and to make useless and unpaid the power of human brawn.

Following these assertions—which after all were not in the least bad journalism, however good or bad had been the design of International Power—the same journal exultantly declared that labor need not yet despair, for that the gigantic conspiracy now had fallen in ruins; its leader had abdicated and fled, and his ill-gotten gains had been dissipated in his last desperate attempt to save his holdings in other stocks. In his ultimate fight he had surrendered the control of the International, so long and desperately held in his ownership, and now was ousted from the presidency, other managers being left in charge of the wreck of a desperate marauder's attempt to throttle a republic and to rule a country. And so forth, to many extra pages, all deliciously explicit, and wondrous welcome alike to those who purchase and those who purvey the news.

The chronicle of all this was accompanied in this journal not only with pictures of Graystone hall, but of the abandoned factory of the International Power company; also with portraits of Rawn and his wife and of Charles Halsey, late superintendent of the company; as well as those of Jim Sullivan, the foreman, Ann Sullivan, his wife, and other labor leaders sometimes concerned about the mysterious factory which had housed the desperate secret of International Power. As it chanced, the portraits of Ann Sullivan and Virginia Rawn had been exchanged, so that the beautiful Mrs. Rawn appeared as a hard-featured Irish woman of more than middle age; whereas Mrs. Sullivan, wife of the well-known labor leader, presented a somewhat distinguished figure in her eminently handsome gown and obviously valuable jewels.

Virginia Rawn looked calmly, smilingly, over these and many other varying details of these closing scenes in her career. "Very well," said she, pointing to the likeness accredited to her name, "this is the last time my portrait will appear in print, I suppose. What difference does it make? The older and uglier I am, the better the story! Perhaps for once Mrs. Sullivan, when she sees her picture—young, rich, with plenty of jewels—will think her dreams have come true! Maybe she's dreamed—I know I did; and I know what I am. The names and pictures are right, just as they are. She wins, not I.

"But yes, I suppose this is the end of it all, as you say," she added wearily, almost indifferently. "Of course, we've known it was coming. I suppose there was nothing else could come of it all."

Halsey at first could make no answer except to drop his face in his hands. A half groan escaped him, in spite of his attempt to rival her courage or her indifference, whichever it might be.

"I've done this," he said at last; "I've brought all this on you. It's all my fault, and it's too late now for me to help it. We couldn't straighten out things in the business now, even if I went back to work. It's too late. I've ruined you, Mrs. Rawn."

"Yes, that's plain," she answered quietly. "But isn't this just what you wanted? Haven't you always resented the success of others, deprecated the wish of some men to get money at any cost? Aren't you a Socialist at heart? Didn't you want this—just this?"

"Want it? No! How could I want anything which meant harm for you? If only you had come to me and asked me to go back—asked me to get into line!"

"You'd have done it, wouldn't you, Charley—for me?" She smiled at him, her small, white teeth showing. But back of her smile he felt the pulse of a mind.

"I don't know—how could I have helped it?"

"Then you'd have forgotten all your loyalty to those people over there? You'd have forgotten all about the rights of man of which you told me, and your devotion to the principles of this republic of which you talked—is that true? You'd have forgotten all, everything, for me?"

"Yes, I would!" He looked her fair in the eye, truthfully. "I know that, now—I didn't know it then, but I do now. Yes, I would. Just as I told him—Mr. Rawn."

"You told him, what?"

"Why, that we all have our price. I suppose I had mine."

"So you'd have done that if I had asked you?"

"Then in God's name why did you not ask me? At least, I'd have saved you this!" He smote on the paper with his clenched fist. "Why didn't you ask me to save you this humiliation?"

"I did not, because I knew all along what you'd do if I did ask you."

Silence fell between them now. "Why didn't you?" he once more demanded, half-whispering. "You'd already won. You'd have won me—my principles—my honor."

"Because I did not want to win!" she answered sharply.

"Win what?"

"I was sent to bring you into camp, to get you, Charley. I did not want to—I did not! I was afraid I would!"

"I don't think I quite understand."

His face was white, his voice low and clear, his eye full on hers.

"I was sent out for you, Charley—by my own husband! You know it, we both knew it. I suppose he's been waiting somewhere for me to get word to him that I had done what I was told to do—that I had got you in hand, willing to renounce everything that you held good in your own life. Well, it's too late, now! I'm glad!"

"He sent you out after me—With what restrictions—?"

"None. He didn't care how. He told me he didn't. That's why I've been keeping from you. I was afraid I would save all this."

She nodded her head, including the splendors of the mansion house, its view of the lake, all the gracious, delicate ministries of wealth.

"Good God!" Halsey broke out. "The man who would do that is not worth a woman's second thought."

"Of course not. And the woman who would do that—?"

"Don't ask me about that; I can't think. All I know is that if you had asked me to do anything in the world, I think I'd have said yes."

"For me?"

"Yes, for you. It's the truth. It's all out, at last! There's the whole story now of John Rawn—all of it, in black and white! Here's all my story—to you. You must have known—"

"Yes," she nodded; "of course. That was why, I said, that I've evaded you so long. It was very hard to do, Charley; a hundred times I've been on the point of sending for you. But I didn't."

"I'm glad, too," he said simply, seeing it was to be soul facing soul, between them now. "I've missed you. I've never passed such days in my life as I have here. There's Grace hating me, you ought to hate me—I ought to hate you! Oh, Rawn, man! Where would you have stopped, to get money, to get power? Oh, excellent—to set your wife as a trap for another man! But it worked! It could have been done!" He looked her frankly in the face as he finished. "I love you, Virginia," he said simply. "I suppose I have all along. It's cheap, after all—at this price. But for all this, I never could have told you.

"But one thing I will say,"—the unhappy young man added, after a long time; "it's the one thing I can claim for an excuse. My price was love for you, and good love. It was the whole love of man for woman—I never knew before what that meant! It wasn't for money, but for you. That great, mysterious second current—what you yourself said was the one vast power of all the universe—that belonged to everybody—love—love—I thought that belonged to me, too. I can't see even now where that is wrong. I can't think, I don't know. If it is wrong, then I've been wrong. We're down in the mire together! I dragged you there. And once I dreamed of doing something to lift people up—that was why I mutinied and tore up the motors. And I had my own selfish price. . . . I can never lift up my head again. But I love you!"

She looked at him, her lips parted, her bosom agitated now, her eyes large, her color slowly increasing. "You must not—Stop, we must think! Charley——"

"But why didn't you?" he demanded fiercely. "Why didn't you finish your work as you promised?"

"I never promised. I didn't finish it—because I knew I could. I told you—it was—Charley—yes—it was—love!"

"For me?"

He half started up now, but she raised a hand to restrain him.

"The servants!" she whispered. Indeed, even as she spoke she saw the livery of the butler disappearing at the tall glass doors letting out to the gallery. She did not know that the butler had seen much and heard somewhat; that being a butler he was wise.

"I Was Afraid I'd Save All This."

"But it's got to be—we've got to go through now!" he went on savagely. "Why did you start this, then? Why did you let me know?"

"It was he who started it in me—ambition! No, I always had it. From the day I was born I wanted to climb, to win, to be rich, to have things in my hands. All girls want that, I suppose, till they know how little it is. So I married him—I tried to, and I did. I knew he had money. . . . But then there was more I wanted, after all. I only wanted that something else, too, that any woman wants—what she's got to have, once in her life, rich or poor, because she's a woman—some one who truly loves her for herself as she is, because she is what she is—because she's a woman!

"Oh, I looked all around me here, a long time after I came here, for what I'd missed. I've never been happy here. I didn't have it. I wanted it. At last I saw it. I wanted it. Its price is ruin—for two, you and me. I'm like you. If it's wrong, I don't know where the wrong began! I didn't mind, so far as I was concerned. Let a woman love you, and she'll do anything, no matter how it hurts—herself. But not you—not the man she loves and wants to respect, Charley."

"But—me? I am not good enough for you!"

"Oh, boy! How sweet that sounds to me! Say it over again to me! You make me think I might some day be worth a man's love. It's got away from us now. It's all too late. Everything's too late. When he—Mr. Rawn—comes back, we've got to tell him. I've done what I was set to do—but not the way he thought, not the way any of us thought!"

"Yes, he must know!" Halsey nodded. He held her hand now in his own. They swept on, as upon some vast wave, helpless, clinging to each other, he doing what he could to save her.

"I don't know how to tell him," she wailed. "There was something Pagan in me and I didn't know it. I thought I was in hand, but I wasn't! I started low, and I wanted to climb up—and up—and up! Oh, Charley, look!" She leaned toward him across the table, pleading. "I was just ambitious, just like any American girl—like every woman in the world, I suppose. If I sold out, I didn't know it. I didn't want you to care for me. But you did, you do! I kept away from you, so that you wouldn't, so that we couldn't—so that I'd always feel that you, at least—"

"Where can it end?" he asked quietly.

"I don't care where it ends, that's the worst of it; I don't care! One thing only is to my credit. I've kept my bargain—with him. I've paid the price I agreed to give. There is no scandal about me—yet. And there might have been!"

"Yes."

"But some way, when he sent me out for you, talked to me as he did, treated me like a piece of merchandise as he did—for once I wavered. For once, Charley, it seemed to me that I was released from all obligations to him, that I was where I ought to have a chance for my own hand, to see life as life could be for itself, to have the love that's life for a woman. I wanted to be wooed and won by some one who loved me, just as any woman wants to be, Charley, some time! And I wasn't—I wasn't. . . . It was horrible. . . . . It was horrible. . . . I wanted to give love for love. I wanted what I couldn't get, and saw it was too late to get it fair. and when I saw that you—that even you'd sell out for me—why, where was the good, clean thing left in all the world? I couldn't tell. I didn't know what to do. I don't know now. But you put these papers before me now, and you expect me to shed tears over them. I can't. I don't care. The worst was over for me before now. It came when I knew you'd love me if I'd raise a finger to you. Why didn't you make me love you first—long ago? Then all would have come right. Back there—at first—"

"They'll say that when your husband lost his fortune he lost his wife. Yes—" he nodded. "They'll say that and believe it! That isn't true!"

"No, that isn't true. I was done with him the moment he set this errand for me. No woman can love a man who will do that. But I was done with him—from the first I never loved him, I never did—I only married him! I sold out—what I had to sell, myself, my fitness for a place like this. That was what I called success! I wanted to be some one in the world! Look at me now—"

They sat, two figures in an inexorable drama that swept relentlessly forward; tasting of a part of ambition's ripened fruit; yet hungering with the vast, pitiful, merciless human hunger for that other fruit that hung in a garden once not lost.

"If it costs my soul, I'll stand by you," he said at last; and he reached out a hand to her suddenly.

"No, no!" she cried. "Wait! Wait! I want to think!"

A discreet cough sounded. The butler approached bearing coffee. He wore a half sneer on his face now, the sneer of the unpaid mercenary. He doubted, and had cause to doubt, whether the last month's salary would be forthcoming; for butlers read morning papers. "Ah, er, Mrs. Rawn—" he began.

"What do you want? How dare you speak to me!" she rejoined. "I do not care to be disturbed! You may go!"

He did go; and this was on an errand of his own, an errand which ended in Grace Halsey's chambers. For butlers sometimes take ingenious revenge.

Halsey and Virginia Rawn sat on for a time at the table, the almost untasted breakfast before them. The sun grew warmer. After a time they rose, and they passed from the gallery toward the interior of the house. The tray upon the hall table held a scant morning load for it—one letter and a telegram; the former addressed to Mrs. Charles Halsey, the latter to himself.

"It must be from him," he said. She tossed it to him.

"Home to-night. John Rawn."

(TO BE CONTINUED).

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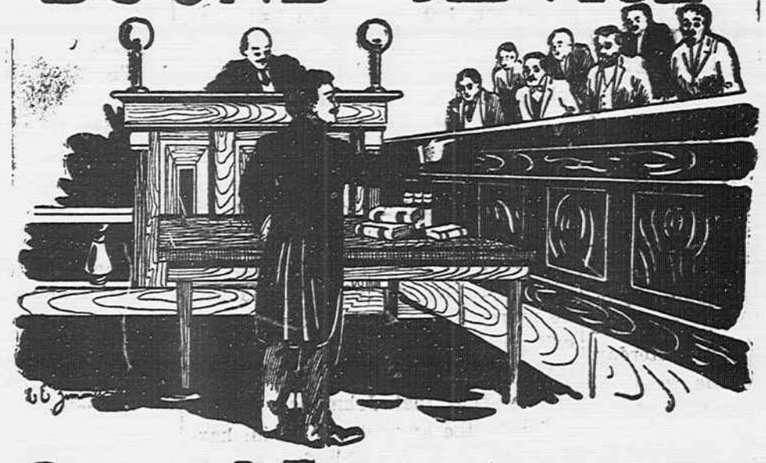

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