

THE LAGGARD

By John Allardyce

"Haow's that garding of yourn, Mr. Rochester?" inquired John Rochester's neighbor, surveying the little strip of spaded ground over the fence. "Wa'al, I swan! Coming up, ain't it!"

"It's mighty slow," said John Rochester, impatiently.

The old man tugged at his goatee reflectively. "I dunno," he said. "Planted it two weeks ago, didn't you? You got to wait and have patience, you know. They say all things come to him who knows haow to wait."

He stalked away over the flats, leaving John Rochester standing moodily in his little garden strip beside the tumbledown colonial house he occupied alone.

The proverb came home to him with bitterness. All things come to him who waits! He remembered Lesbia's despairing cry that morning when he last saw her:

"But you waited too long, John! You should have told me years ago."

John Rochester had inherited a little money from his father, the bulk going to his younger brother, who displayed that business aptitude which he had never possessed. John was nothing but an author. He never aimed at anything but the scribbler's trade, but he had that fatal fire which cannot be quenched, though it can be dampened. For 15 years he had toiled, struggling to win fame and achieve success.

At 30 a little sport of popularity with his stories had enabled him to turn to novels. But here he failed dismally. The critics roasted him unmercifully. They condemned the very qualities which John aimed to put into his book to please the public.

For at 30 he had suddenly grown worldly wise. Lesbia had come into his life and to make enough money to marry her he had thrown his ideals overboard, trying only to write the

sort of tales and books that the public wanted. It was a fatal error, but excusable, John believed, under the circumstances. He awoke to realize that he had sold his soul and he had not been paid for it.

For his first two novels were utter failures and his publishers had refused to accept the third.

Then the Iron entered the man's soul. He sat down and wrote the book that he had always wanted to write. He hardly stirred from his room during those two feverish



He Hardly Stirred From His Room

months. But when the manuscript lay before him he knew that he had at last achieved what he had always hoped to achieve.

He sent it to his publishers and went to see Lesbia. He meant to tell her about his long struggle for her, to ask her if she would share his life, that of a failure. And he always remembered her look, her words, sobbed out despairingly:

"You waited too long! You should have told me years ago. I am engaged to be married."

At once the man's plans fell crum-