

JOHN RAWN

PROMINENT CITIZEN

BY EMERSON HOUGH

AUTHOR OF THE MISSISSIPPI BUBBLE, 54-10 OR FIGHT.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WATERS

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SYNOPSIS.

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

She passed out gently, impersonally. Rawn found himself looking at the door where she had vanished.

It was perhaps an hour later that he re-opened the door himself in answer to a knock. Miss Delaware stood respectfully waiting. "There is a man from Jansen's waiting for you, Mr. Rawn," said she.

"Tell him to come in," said Rawn. There came from a near-by seat a gray-haired, grave and slender man, of sad demeanor, who presently removed from his pocket and spread out upon the glass top of John Rawn's desk such a display of gems as set the whole room quivering with light. Rawn felt his own eyes shine, his own soul leap. There always was something in diamonds which spoke to him.

"Ah-hum!" said he, feigning indifference, "some pretty good ones, eh?" He poked around among them with the end of his penholder, and the gray and grave man quietly opened one paper package after another, and exposed his wares.

John Rawn reached out and pushed the button farthest to the right in the long row on his desk. Miss Delaware came and stood quietly awaiting his command.

Something in the soul of Virginia Delaware leaped! For the first time her eyes shone with brighter fire; for the first time she half-gasped in actual emotion. There was something in diamonds which spoke to her also!

"Pick out two things there," said John Rawn sententiously, pushing himself back from the desk. "I should say this pendant. Take a guess at the rings. What would Mrs. Rawn like; and what would about suit Miss Rawn?"

She bent above the desk, her eyes aflame at the sight of the brilliance that lay before her.

"I should say your choice is excellent, Mr. Rawn," said she at length, gently, controlling herself. "The pendant is beautiful, set with the emeralds. And as for the rings, I'd take this one, I believe, with the two steel-blue stones."

"How much?" said John Rawn, turning to the grave and gray salesman.

"The two pieces would cost you twenty-eight thousand dollars, sir," the latter replied, gravely and impersonally.

"Miss Delaware," said John Rawn, taking from his pocket his personal check book, "oblige me by making out a check for that amount. Bring it in to me directly—and have the boy call my car."

When John Rawn ascended the steps of his mansion house that night, he fairly throbbed with the sense of his own self-approval. There was that in his pocket which, he thought, when worn by the wife of John Rawn at any public place of display, would indicate what grade of life he, John Rawn, had shown himself fit to occupy. He lost no time in summoning his wife, and with small ado put in her extended hand the little mass of trembling, shivering gems. She gazed at them almost stupefied.

"Well, well!" he broke out, "can't you say anything? What about it? They're yours."

"Oh, John!" she began. "John! What do you mean? How could you—how could I—"

For one moment he looked at her, and she shrank back from his gaze. But Rawn's anger turned to self-pity. "My own wife won't wear my diamonds," said he.

She came now and put her arms about his neck, the first time in years; but not in thankfulness. She looked straight into his eyes. "John!" she said, "John!" There was all of woman's anguish in her eyes, in her voice.

CHAPTER IV.

At Headquarters.

Halsey and his wife, John Rawn's daughter, had taken up their residence in the small Chicago suburb in which the central plant had been located. Their cottage was a small one, and it was furnished much like other cottages about, occupied by salaried men, mechanics, persons of no great means. It retained something of the complexion of the old quarters in Kelly Row.

Naturally, Halsey was often taken to the central offices in the city for conferences with the president of the company. He frequently met there

Virginia Delaware, even at times gave dictation to her—a thing he never failed to remember, but never remembered to mention in his own home. As do many men even in this divorceful age, he set aside comparisons, forced himself into loyalty.

On one such occasion he found himself in the position known among salaried workers as being "called upon the carpet" before "the old man." Rawn held a letter in his hand to which he referred as he chided Halsey for the delays in his department of the work.

"Do you suppose I can stand for this sort of thing coming from New York?" he began. "What's the matter out there with you?"

"There's something I don't understand about it, Mr. Rawn. The men are very sullen. The foremen tell me that they never had so much trouble. Of course, they don't understand it themselves, but it's just as though our secret was getting out, and as if the men were afraid of cutting their own throats when they build these machines. Not that they understand what it's all about—it's air tight yet, that's sure."

"You begin to see some of the practical results of your infernal socialistic ideas, don't you, then? You'll come to my notion of life after a while."

"Mr. Rawn, what's the end of that? What's the logical conclusion?"

"Well, I'll tell you! One end and logical conclusion is going to be that I'll get some one to handle that factory if you can't; and he'll handle it the way I tell him!"

"You want my resignation now?"

"I'd very likely take it if it weren't for Grace. Besides, we've started on this thing together; and moreover again, I want you, when I go to New York, to see the directors and explain



"I'm Going."

to them that their impatience is all wrong."

"Is there much dissatisfaction down there?"

"Yes. We've both got to run down east to-morrow night. Go on out now, and reserve four compartments on the limited."

"Four?"

"Yes—we'll want a place to eat and work on the road. I've got to take a stenographer along, of course."

"Then you couldn't use the stenographer on the train—I mean the regular one?"

"I could not, Mr. Halsey," said John Rawn icily. "What business is it of yours?"

"None in the least. I was only thinking about any possible talk. She's a very beautiful girl, and very—stunning. All right, Mr. Rawn, I'll be ready to start to-morrow, and I'll count on getting back here by the last of the week, at least. Good day, sir."

He left the room quietly. He was a handsome, stalwart young man, but in some way his face did not look happy.

"That may all be very well," commented one of the members at the directors' meeting of the International Power Company, held on the day of Rawn's arrival in New York; "that may all be true, but what do we know about the practical application? I've heard of extracting gold from sea water—and the fellow proved it right before your eyes! The world is full of these things, getting rich all at once, but usually when we get to the bottom of it, there's the same old gold brick."

The speaker was rather a slight man, with dark, pointed beard, a man whose name swayed railway fortunes, but whose digestion was not worth mentioning.

"I want all you gentlemen to feel," said John Rawn calmly, "that there's a chance to lay down right here, if your feet are getting cold. Better quit now than later on. I won't work with men who haven't got heart in this thing. If any of you are scared, let me know. I couldn't take over all your stock myself, of course, but if you want to let go, I believe I can

swing another company organization." They looked at him silently, here and there a gray head shaking in negation. Rawn's eye lighted.

"That's the idea!" said he; "we'll sit tight."

He turned to catch the eye of the late objector. "I'm going," said the latter importantly.

"And good riddance!" said John Rawn calmly.

"I'll take care of you for that, one of these days, Mr. Rawn!"

"Why not now?"

"You'll see what I'll do to you in the market!"

"The market be —!" said John Rawn evenly. "There isn't any market. There isn't anything to buy or sell. If there is any stock offered, I'm the market, right here and now. Go on and do what you can."

Halsey rose and placed on the table the little model which he took from the case at his side. In principle, it was the same which had been shown in the original demonstration at St. Louis, long before, although in workmanship it was in this instance a trifle more finished, showing more of shining brass and steel. Halsey looked about hesitatingly.

"Shall we use the fan again?" he inquired of Mr. Rawn.

"Not on your life!" cut in Ackerman. "No more fan bursting goes. You'll put on the little railway, here on the table, as you were showing me the other day."

"You gentlemen all know the general theory of the invention," Halsey went on, again assuming the post of lecturer, which Rawn once more graciously surrendered to him, waving a hand largely in his direction as though in explanation to the others. "It's simply the attuning of a motor to the free electrical current in the air—the wireless idea, of course. You're posted on all this. Now, I've got some little things here which will show some of the applications of our idea. We'll make a little track, for a railway train, and we'll run its motor here with current of our own, simply by our receiver for the free current."

The thing was there to show for itself. As to the breadth of its application, these men needed no advice. They were accustomed to the look ahead, to the weighing of wide possibilities.

"That's the travel of the future, gentlemen," said John Rawn soberly, at length. "They can take or leave it. So can you."

Silence fell on that group of gray, grave men. The thing seemed to them uncanny, although so simple. They looked about, one at the other. A sort of sigh passed about the room. There sat at the table men who represented untold millions of capital. They were looking upon a device which in the belief of all was about to multiply these millions many-fold.

Rawn was the first to break the silence.

"Gentlemen," said he, "of course this is the big part of our company patents, and it is over this that we've met today. You've been doubting my executive ability. I have shown you what the prize is that we're working for—there it is on the table. As to the difficulties of pulling off a thing as big as this, they are bigger in this case than could be expected or figured out in advance. Our superintendent, Mr. Halsey here, tells me that he is having a great deal of trouble in labor matters. The men are discontented, and what is worse, they're curious, all the time. We can't employ just any sort of irresponsible labor, and we can't complete one machine—we've got to bring them all through at once, together—and indeed, got pretty near to finish them all ourselves. We can't take any people in on this secret, of course. It all takes time, and it all takes money. What do you want, gentlemen? I can't do much more than I have done."

"And it's enough!" cried the bearded man, his voice harsh, strident with his emotion. "We've got to have it! Let's stick, let's stick, fellows! They'll never shake us off. There is absolutely no limit to this thing."

"Is that still the way you feel, Jim?" asked Standley from his end of the table.

"Yes, it is; how about it, gentlemen?" answered Ackerman's deep voice.

His eyes turned from one to the other, and found no dissent, although the air of each man was earnest, almost somber.

"Shake hands, then," called out the bearded man with enthusiasm, a man who had swayed millions by the force

of his own convictions before that time.

"Let's all shake hands, then, gentlemen," said John Rawn.

They did so, each man reaching out his hands to his neighbor; Halsey, of course, stepping back as not belonging to that charmed circle.

"Move we 'journ,'" said Ackerman. The president dropped the gavel on the table top.

Rawn finally escaping from the crowd of importunate reporters who waited in the halls, at length broke away to go to his rooms. He met Halsey in the lobby. The latter had in his hand a telegram, which shook somewhat as he extended it.

"Well," said Rawn, turning toward him with a frown, "what is it?"

He read: "Charles S. Halsey, The Palatial, New York: Your child is a girl. The mother is doing well. You would best return at once. There is a slight deformity. You must share this grief with the mother when she knows."

Rawn dropped the message to the floor. Halsey's face looked so desperately old and sad that for one moment Rawn almost forgot his own grief. "You'd better go on home, Charles," he said. "Too bad—to get such news now! But isn't that just like a woman!"

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