

The MOUTHPIECE

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By EDGAR WALLACE and ROBERT CURTIS

READ THIS FIRST.
Charles Stuckey, of a London law firm, reluctantly has agreed to a scheme to defraud the daughter of one of his few respectable clients, Jacqueline Smith, of an inheritance of \$1,000,000 from an American uncle. In keeping with the plan, Col. Alex Lutman—who has a hold over Stuckey—Jim Asson, an ex-convict, and the lawyer are stopping at the same hotel in Cobenzel with Mrs. Smith and her daughter. In dire financial straits, Mrs. Smith has persuaded Jacqueline to marry Asson, unsuspectingly falling in with the plan of the three men to have Asson cultivate the girl, have all of her property assigned to him before their marriage, then splitting up the inheritance. Finding that opposing the plan, as Jim's "trustee", has hurried Jacqueline's decision by revealing a check he cashed for her mother returned marked "insufficient funds". After meeting Jacqueline, Stuckey is more reluctant than ever to go through with the scheme and stalls by telling them all the property deed must be signed in London. Back in London, Charles leaves Lutman in his office while he goes after Jim Asson. Mrs. Smith insists on a conference alone with Charles before signing the deed. Jacqueline signs the deed but later Charles tells Lutman she signed in the wrong place and that he will have to prepare another, perhaps delaying the wedding. Finding that opposing the marriage, Lutman suggests that Charles himself marry her instead of Jim, but he refuses. Stuckey's stenographer, proposes a private chat with Jacqueline. The typist declares Jim Asson is her man and that she will not let Jacqueline marry him, telling her he has just finished a prison sentence. For dead in a whirl, Jacqueline goes home.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY:



"Colonel Lutman assured me that everything would be all right"

CHAPTER 24
JACQUELINE scribbled a note as soon as she reached home. She was going out, it said, and might be home late, and her mother was not to wait up for her. She smiled as she propped the note against a vase on the mantelpiece. That, at any rate, would reduce the odds against her in the coming conflict. She could tackle her mother tonight when she would not have Jim and Colonel Lutman to support her.

Jacqueline spent the afternoon at a movie, had a meal in a small Soho restaurant, and in the evening sat through two rounds of the program in another movie. When she had walked from the theater district to the flat it was almost half-past 11.

Her mother had already gone to bed, and Jacqueline, glad of the respite, decided that she would break the news in the morning, and was tiptoeing across the landing toward her bedroom when she heard her mother's voice.

"Is that you, Jacqueline?"

She opened the door of her mother's room and switched on the light.

"So late, dear," said Mrs. Smith. "I had to come to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I'm much too anxious to sleep. Colonel Lutman assured me that everything would be all right—we had an excellent lunch, Jacqueline. It was such a relief not to have to look at the price of everything before saying I'd have it—but you behaved very strangely at Mr. Stuckey's office this morning, and just for the moment I was afraid you were going to refuse to sign. You did sign the deed, dear, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, mother, I signed it."

A smile spread over her mother's face and her hand found Jacqueline's and drew her down until her lips brushed the girl's cheek.

"You've made me very happy, Jacqueline," she said. "Bless you, dear. It's years since I really slept properly, but I shall tonight."

Jacqueline hesitated, frowning; then she suddenly stooped, kissed her mother, and switched out the light.

It was all very well to talk, she told herself as she went to her bedroom, but it wasn't always easy not to be soft. Poor mother! She should at least have her good night's rest tonight.

Charles had work to do on that afternoon of his talk alone with Jacqueline. There was an important consultation the next day, and a mass of details to be mastered before he could go to bed that night; but when Miss Harrington and Mr. Bells left at 6 o'clock, the work was still untouched, and he was still sitting at his desk, staring at the papers in front of him. He looked, as Miss Harrington had remarked to Mr. Bells, "as if he had something stuck in his gizzard and couldn't cough it up."

At 7 o'clock he gave up, went out, and had a meal in a neighboring restaurant. Then, returning to his office, he settled himself at his desk and made a serious effort to

bring his thoughts to heel and concentrate on the matter in hand. For two hours he struggled on, and then, glancing at his watch and finding that it was 10 o'clock, he leaned back in his chair and stared resentfully at the documents he had been studying. It was no use trying to understand them tonight; he would get up early and have a go at them in the morning.

There was a small room above the offices of Messrs. Stuckey & Stuckey which, though it bore no outward and visible sign of their occupation, was none the less included in the suite. It was approached by a short spiral staircase in the corner of the main office, and had been used, until Charles became sole partner of the firm, as a store room. Charles, however, had found a better use for it. There were numbered amongst Messrs. Stuckey & Stuckey's clients gentlemen whom prudence warned to shun publicity and daylight, and who, consequently, when in need of legal advice, preferred that their consultations with their legal advisers should be held at an hour when they could slip in and out of the office under cover of darkness. Charles had had appointments at 2 o'clock in the morning, and midnight was quite a common hour; and since at that time of night the journey from Rotherhithe to Bloomsbury, where the solicitor occupied a furnished flat, involved a long walk or an expensive taxi ride, he had transformed his erstwhile store room into a very fair apology for a bedroom.

There, on such nights as he was detained at the office, he slept; there, too, from time to time, he accommodated his friend, Captain Allwright, when his ship, the John of Gaunt, was berthed nearby. And others had slept in that room, whose history would make splendid popular fiction of the most thrilling type.

Charles decided that he would sleep there tonight. He climbed the spiral staircase, kicked off his shoes, switched off the light, and flung himself on the bed in the darkness, only to discover that sleep was out of the question. That word "coward" that Jacqueline had flung at him rankled and made him restless. What did she know, or what had she guessed? Something, she had said, had happened in his life to push him down—something tremendous. Was that only feminine intuition? Was it that she had realized, when she saw him, that he wasn't in the least like the man he could be, that here in Rotherhithe, acting as mouthpiece for the riff-raff, he was out of his element, that by rights he should be doing something far better?

He smiled as he thought of the

CROP OUTLOOK FOR STATE VERY GOOD

Continued Cold Weather in March Delays Planting of Crops

Raleigh, April 15.—The cold weather of March delayed farm work and the growth of pasture, thereby lengthening the required feeding period for livestock. Spring work has been delayed over the country as a whole. Considerable fruit has been damaged. Rising prices during the winter have been an incentive to encourage farmers toward a maximum acreage of crops this year. Conditions in the eastern part of North Carolina have been fairly favorable for the preparation of soil and for the planting of early truck crops. Farmers are quite busy preparing for cotton and tobacco planting in fields. Considerable corn is already planted. In the central and western sections of the State, however, farm work is somewhat delayed by the cold and wet soil.

The condition of wheat as of April 1st was reported at 86 percent of a full crop. This is 2 percent better than the ten-year average and 5 percent better than a year ago. For the country as a whole, this year's condition is appreciably below the ten-year average but is 5 percent better than last year. The stocks of winter wheat on farms throughout the nation are appreciably less than the usual at this season of the year.

The condition of rye in North Carolina, reported at 86 percent, is slightly better than the ten-year average and is 8 percent better than last year. The oat crop is also considerably better than last year. For the country as a whole, however, small grains are not up to usual. Pasture conditions are also below the average. Peaches are reported at 55 percent in State which is much less than a year ago and 22 percent below the ten-year average. In the Sandhill Egl or commercial area, however, the crop is only slightly below last year's prospects.

The early commercial potato crop is reported at 83 percent or better. This is equal to the ten-year average. The extremely unfavorable weather a year ago resulted in a condition of only 69 percent which gradually got worse until the last of May. For the Southern States as a whole, the crop

is 77.9 percent, which is the same as the ten-year average and about the same as a year ago. North Carolina suffered from last year's drought more than these other states; that is the early spring drought.

Altogether, the outlook for crops in North Carolina is good. The winter was unusually mild, causing an early start of small grains and fruit crops. On the other hand, the heaviest rain-fall on record occurred in December and January. Late winter cold periods interrupted the growth of crops and caused some damage to early truck and fruit. The continued cold weather during March further delayed farm work and the planting of crops. However, each year has its drawbacks as well as favorable factors. Taken as a whole, we have the prospects for a reasonably average year, provided that later weather conditions are not more favorable.

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CHARLOTTE
IT TOOK EXACTLY ONE MONTH FOR THE NEWS OF THE BATTLE OF LEXINGTON TO REACH HERE

MODEL TOWN
DID YOU KNOW THAT COL. ISAAC WAS ELECTED TO THE VIRGINIA STATE LEGISLATURE IN 1780? NEXT YEAR THE STATE LINE WAS CHANGED, PUTTING HIM IN N.C. SO HE WAS THEN ELECTED TO THE N.C. LEGISLATURE!
THE TOWN OF WASHINGTON IN DAVIDSON CO. ESTABLISHED IN 1845, WAS ONE OF THE FIRST SO CALLED "MODEL TOWNS". IT DIDN'T WORK.

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DID YOU KNOW THAT MRS. JAMES COWAN OF WILMINGTON WAS N.C.'S FIRST WOMAN MAYOR? SHE SUCCEEDED HER HUSBAND ON HIS DEATH IN 1924

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