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THE PROFITEER.

Since the law does not recognise conventional distinctions of class or rank, one does not need to be directly engaged in business to be a "profiteer," and some of those people who have lately sold their homes at the present "boom" prices are wondering whether the Board of Trade is likely to take a critical interest in such transactions. A correspondent of a Wellington newspaper, discussing the profits to be made by speculating in options on dwelling houses, quotes a boasting statement made by one acute gentleman that, having started with a capital of £600, he has been making £80 a week by buying and selling on the rising market. The Prime Minister was asked the other day whether house property comes within the jurisdiction of the Board of Trade, but Mr Massey thinks "that is a question not to be answered off-hand." But the man who has just cleared £500 by the sale of a house on which he had paid, perhaps, £200 six months ago, will argue to his own satisfaction that there is no parallel between his deal and the "outrageous profiteering" at which he protests every time a tradesman's bill is delivered at his doors.

A REAL "SCREAM."

THE HOUSE
THAT HUGGINS BUILT.

Nobody really knew why Huggins started in the building line. He is a bank clerk by profession. The fact is, Mrs Huggins wanted to move—she didn't like the villa they were renting. Hug tried all he knew to persuade her out of it.

Mrs Huggins took no notice; you know what women are. So after Hug had swatted round in the evenings Saturday afternoons, and Sundays, without finding even so much as a smell of an empty house, Podsnap came along with a brilliant idea.

Podsnap is a friend of Bert Huggins. "Why not build your own house, Hug?" he said.

Mrs Huggins jumped at the idea and clapped her hands.

"Bert, you must!" she said. "I should love that. We could have it all to our own plan. In all the wretched houses one rents you have to have the drawing-room just where you find it, and the kitchen is never nice. Now, if we planned our own house—"

Huggins was not really averse to the idea.

"Well, perhaps if I found a suitable plot—"

"Plot, old man? There are plots to burn!" said Podsnap. "If it's only a plot that stops you, that's easy. What's the matter with that bit of ground adjoining your own villa here? It's for sale. I don't suppose Mrs Huggins minds so much where she lives—it's having the kind of house that suits her."

"Mr. Podsnap's right, Bert," said Mrs Hug. "I don't dislike this neighbourhood at all; it's the wretched, poky little house we're living in that I hate. Now, a house of our own planning—"

So Hug bought the plot and looked round for a builder.

"Why not build it yourself, old man?" Podsnap said. "There's no art about building—it's simply putting one brick on top of another. You can buy the stuff first hand, save the middleman's profits, and run it up in your spare time. Living next door gives you an advantage. When you have an hour to spare you can hop into your plot, smack a bit extra on the wash-house wall, and every day you'll see your new house growing and expanding."

Huggins started on his new house with a will. He and Mrs Huggins planned it out together, with the help of Podsnap. There were to be six bedrooms, a dining-room and drawing-room, kitchen, and the usual arrangements. Mrs Huggins was to have a boudoir of her own, and Hug himself was to have a study.

"What about our own ballroom?" said Mrs Huggins.

"And a billiard-room, old man?" said Podsnap.

"Go on!" said Hug. "How many more rooms do you want? I'm not out to be building this house until I've got whiskers down to my feet. My plot is the site for a villa, not an hotel."

"You can smack the extra rooms on top," said Podsnap, "and run a lift up. The air's free; it doesn't matter how high you go."

Hug's private opinion afterwards was that if he had smacked Podsnap on the top things might have gone better.

After about six strenuous weeks of work, Huggins' new villa began to get into shape. Mrs Huggins used to footle round with a little silver-plated trowel she'd got for a wedding present, and imagine that she was building the house herself. Her husband didn't mind, but he wished she had stopped at that.

"Oh," she said one afternoon, "how silly of us, Bert! We've got the drawing-room facing north. We can't have it there, Bert I'm sorry!"

Bert said he was sorry too. Where would she like it? Should he arrange to put it on the roof, or down in the basement next to the coal-cellar? Would she prefer it if he made it portable, so that she could have it in the back bedroom, or take it into the next field, as her wayward fancy dictated?

"Now you're trying to be funny," said Mrs Huggins.

So Hug switched the drawing-room off the north side and had it rebuilt in the rear. The night after they got the walls up, there was a heavy thunderstorm which unsettled the foundations, and when Hug

came down in the morning, you couldn't tell which was the drawing-room and which was the wash-house.

Podsnap came round to look at the ruin. He was unmoved.

"It's just as well in a way, old man," he said.

"I'm glad you think so!" said Huggins heatedly.

"Why, you see," said Podsnap, "I got an afterthought about this house of yours. It occurred to me that if you laid rails underneath, and put the foundation on wheels, with a crank at the side, you could work it round, and get the sun on any room you liked. And it would have the advantage of being a novelty."

"So it would!" grinned Huggins. "Or I could build it in the shape of a ball, and roll it down the hill into the middle of the market-place when the fancy took me. It would be handy for the shops. Or fix some motors to it, and put a couple of planes at the sides, so that we could fly away and spend our week-ends at the seaside. You haven't any other ideas, have you, Poddy?"

Podsnap said if Huggins was going to get ratty about it he would leave him to build the blessed thing himself. Which was all that Huggins asked. He said if Podsnap would only keep away, and not keep coming round with his one-horse notions, he would have the house up and finished within a month.

I was then that Huggins started in, hammer and tongs. He used to get up in the mornings and do a bit before he went to the bank, and a bit more when he got home in the evenings. He kept his scratch building staff at it quite late sometimes, working by candle-light.

"I should like," Mrs Hug said, "a small room built in next to the hall, for the bicycle and things like that."

"Certainly, my dear," said Hug. "It shall be done."

"And I want the corners of the rooms to be made round so that they won't gather up the dust, Bert."

"Exactly, my love," said Bert. "We'll do that."

"And if you can manage it, I should like the cellars above the ground somewhere. They don't get any light when they're underneath and as a rule they're very damp and smelly. Can you do that?"

"Easy," said Hug. "I can swap the cellar arrangements with the attics, and change 'em about, so to speak. Attics are always a bit draughty up top, and the roof won't get so wet in the winter if it's kept underground."

Now and again Hug would go into the woodshed down the garden and work off his dander by punching that bag of sawdust he keeps there. As he says, when you get riled, you've got to hit somebody or something. And better a bag of sawdust than Mrs Hug.

Of course, a few other people had a say in Hug's new house. There was Mrs Huggins' mother. She suggested having a porch at the front door, so that roses could be trained over it.

"I love a porch with roses climbing over it," she said.

In Hug's idea this was a very good reason for not putting a porch within fifty-nine miles of the new house, but Mrs Huggins' mother was a proposition that couldn't quite be ruled out.

Naturally, it cost a good deal. Bricks are not cheap these days, and handy men don't work for nothing. But, as Hug said, you might as well spend your money one way as another.

Hug didn't get the house up in a month as he'd expected. The handy men took too many risks in their enthusiasm. One smashed his thumb with a hammer and had to take a fortnight off to get it into working order again. Another one fell off a ladder on to Hug, and the pair of them were laid up for a month as a result.

When work was resumed, the third man who had been smoking his pipe at full wages in the interval, discovered that the other two were not in the union, and he went on strike.

Little drawbacks like these might discourage some men, but Hug wasn't of that brand. When he starts out to do a thing, he does it. He got that house finished eventually. It was not what you would call beautiful. Some of the

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windows were a bit out of the straight, and the building itself hung over towards the left. However, Hug had a precedent for that. As he said, there's the Leaning Tower of Pisa, that stood up in a lopsided position for a few hundred years, and anyone can build a house that stands up straight.

"Anyway, if it does fall," he said, "it'll come down slap on the dog-kennel next door, which is an advantage. It'll stop that infernal brute from howling all night!"

Hug was so pleased with the job that he had his new house photographed, and sent the picture to the local paper.

They printed it in the next number, and offered a prize to the reader who could tell them what it was meant to be. The medical editor said that Bert Huggins was evidently afflicted with bad dreams, and advised him to see a specialist about it.

"That's just dirty jealousy," said Bert to Mrs Huggins. "It ain't every man who can build his own house. So long as you like it, Amelia, that's all that matters to us."

Mrs Huggins wasn't any too sure.

"There's a much nicer plot I've seen over by the cemetery, Bert," she said. "I suppose you couldn't shift it over there?"

Mr Huggins choked down his gratitude.

"By all means, my love," he said. "It's only a question of taking it to pieces and putting it up again. We'll have it right in the cemetery if you like. Better look over it first, and see if you'd like the drawing-room put anywhere else."

Mrs Hug found a few slight inconveniences when she came to survey the new house in its entirety. In his hurry Hug had forgotten to include any water pipes. He'd missed putting a fireplace in the kitchen, and there was no window in the dining-room.

"All the better," said Hug; "we shan't have a lot of people gaping at us every time we sit down to a meal."

And then, in that inconsiderate way, the women have, Mrs Huggins said she didn't like it, and would sooner stay where she was.

"Besides, Bert," she said, "if we go out of this house somebody else will come into it. We may have nasty neighbours. I say, what a lot of people there are outside! Is anything the matter?"

The matter was only the house that Bert had built. Some of the local paper readers had come round to view it, with the object of winning the prize that the editor had offered.

"Here he is!" grinned a man, when Bert appeared. "That's the chap! What's it meant to be, guv'nor? A menagerie?"

"It's a Chinese pagoda, ain't it, mister." Give us the tip!"

Bert retired indoors and left them to their vulgar curiosity. Then Podsnap came round, and Hug was afraid the convulsions he had would bring on a fit. He hung on to the fence and laughed until the tears came into his eyes. He walked round the house and acted like a maniac. His amusement was so terrific that he had to sit down every few minutes to get over it.

"Hug, old man," he said at last, drying his eyes, "I'm sorry for you. You meant well, but you've made a fearful howler of it. Push it over and I'll show you how to build it properly."

Huggins was just trying to decide whether he should throw Podsnap into

the street or throttle him on the spot, when his wily friend retired behind the front fence and grinned over it.

"Don't be downhearted, Hug," he said. "I know a chap who's come home from the war and has a cheap bomb to sell. You can put it in the cellar and set light to it. The bricks will come in useful to build a rockery in the garden."

Huggins took no notice of this nasty insinuation. He just drew up an imposing advertisement and put it in the newspaper.

"Attractive residence to be let or sold. Delightful situation. Suit newly-married couple.—Apply Huggins, Ivy Villa, Dugboro."

There was a rush of applicants as soon as the advertisement came out. But, somehow or other, they didn't seem anxious to take Hug's new house. The modest ones said it was too big, or too small, or the aspect didn't suit them. Others just looked at it and left.

Once cantankerous person ignored the building altogether, and kept asking Bert where the residence he'd advertised was. When it was pointed out, he took Mrs Huggins aside and tapped his brow.

"I should advise you, madam," he said, "to have your husband put in a safe place somewhere before he gets any worse."

Hug was beginning to look a bit blue about the gills, when a benevolent old gentleman came on the scene. He was bursting with generosity and kindness, and when Hug showed him the new residence he smacked his hands together with pleasure.

"Ah," he said, "that's something like a house!"

"It is something like one," Hug said, not being quite sure now whether he ought to say more. "Come and see the inside."

The old gentleman viewed the inside. Houses were scarce, and he had come down determined to like this one. He approved of Hug's house, as people do approve when they're not going to live in a place themselves. He thought it quite charming.

"I'll let you into a secret," he said, chuckling as he gave Hug a playful dig in the ribs. "My daughter is getting married, and I want to give her this house as a wedding present. It's to be a surprise for the young couple. I think it will, don't you?"

Hug was confident that it would be a great surprise.

"Now, how much would you sell it for?" asked the old gentleman. "My name is Josiah Snoozle, and I'm willing to pay cash down."

Hug thought it seemed almost a shame to take the money, but the old gentleman wanted to buy. It had cost Bert five hundred to build, but he was willing to make a sacrifice and take four hundred.

"And cheap, too," said Snoozle; "they'd say so if they knew."

Bert was sure they would. He took the old gentleman into the parlour and settled all preliminaries. And when Josiah Snoozle went away, Huggins had a cheque for four hundred pounds in his pocket, which was duly honoured three days later.

It is hardly to be wondered at that Bert Huggins could lean over the front fence in the evenings now and smile. He was smiling there one evening when Podsnap came along. Podsnap was smiling too, even more so than Hug.

"Huggy, old boy," he said, "I must tell you I've had the most magnificent