

ALGER

HORATIO JR.

NOTHING TO DO

Horatio Alger
Nothing to Do

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Nothing to Do / A Tilt at Our Best Society:

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Jr. Horatio Alger

Nothing to Do / A Tilt at Our Best Society

NOTHING TO DO

Augustus Fitz-Herbert, as all are aware,
Having crossed the Atlantic, and got a moustache on,
Likewise being son of a known millionaire,
Stands of course on the very top round of the fashion.
Being taught to consider himself, from his birth,
As one of the privileged ones of the earth,
He cherishes deep and befitting disdain
For those who don't live in the Fifth Avenue,
As entirely unworthy the notice or thought
Of the heir of two millions and nothing to do.
He calls them canaille, which I'm credibly told
Is the only French word which he caught when away;
And though, in my case, if I might be so bold,
I should say it scarce paid one for half a year's stay,
The heir of two millions and nothing to do,
Who lives in a palace in Fifth Avenue,
As a matter of course, is no fitting comparison
For the heir of an inkstand and something to do,

Who lodges up stairs, in the house of Miss Harrison.

In this model republic, this land of the free—
So our orators call it, and why should not we?—
'Tis refreshing to know that without pedigree
A man may still climb to the top of the tree;
That questions of family, rank, and high birth,
All bow to the query, How much is he worth?
That John Smith, plebeian, who forty years since
Walked Broadway barefooted, now rides as a prince;
Having managed, though not overburdened with wit,
But rather by chance and a fortunate hit,
To take a high place on Society's rounds;
His claims being based on pence, shillings, and pounds.
I admit there's a certain republican merit
In making the fortune which others inherit;
But why should John Smith so completely ignore
The bridge which has brought him triumphantly o'er,
And turn with disgust from the opposite shore?
And why, when Miranda, whose heart is not proof
Against Cupid's sharp arrows, some day leaves his roof,
And, sundering her family-ties at a jerk,
Returns in the evening—the wife of his clerk!
Thus at Love's trumpet-call bidding Duty defiance,
Should he strive to break up the clandestine alliance?
For, though men have made money, and will do again,
There was never a case known where money made men;
And if Jones be a man in what constitutes manhood,
He's a far better match than young Frederic Stanwood,

Though the one be a clerk, and the other the heir
Of the house next M'Flimsey's, on Madison-square.
If the one is deficient in wealth, we may find
The other quite bankrupt in morals and mind.

Excuse this digression, which yet is germain
To the subject in hand, as will be very plain
When I say that Fitz-Herbert's respected progenitor
Did business years since, as I'm told, in a den eight or
Ten feet each way, where he daily had calls
From all sorts of people with all sorts of things,
From coats and umbrellas to bracelets and rings,
To be left, until claimed, at the Three Golden Balls.
But now, long emerged from his chrysalis state,
Should his former acquaintances call at his gate,
They would doubtless receive speedy notice to leave—
Not the articles brought, but the dwelling instanter,
With their pace perhaps changed to a very quick canter.

So changes the world, and the men that are in it,
That those whom we hail as our equals, one minute,
We pass by the next with a very cold stare,
And gruffly inquire who the d—ickens they are.
From the past to the present—to close our review—
From the pawnbroker's shop to the Fifth Avenue,
To the parlors so full of *objets de vertu*,
And furniture most undeniably new,
Where on tapestry carpets the foot softly falls,
And family portraits look down from the walls,

Of martial old grandsires and stately old dames;
Which, bought cheap at auction, and set in new frames,
And dubbed with high-sounding and fanciful names,
At peace after many of Fortune's mutations,
Look impressively down on their new-found relations.

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