The watching form disappeared from the vantage-point of the doorway. The professional air came back to the figure in the official chair. A half-smile of faint expectancy greeted the negotiators as they again sat facing the notary, and Snatchet continued:

"It may be a bluff, Mr. Notary, but you seem to hold the cards. It's a call to see us, anyway, and we show our hand. It's like this. Valuable plumbago deposits, extensive and rich, have been discovered on this block of land, but unfortunately are confined to Lot number seven, to which we lack clear title. A company is ready to form and capitalize at half a million dollars. Arrangements are pending with the railway to build a branch line, so that transport is cheaply assured. The stuff is rare, valuable, and in large demand. The tonnage in sight is enormous, the deposits can be easily worked, and the profits will be 'way out o' sight. As promoters, Skinner and I are awarded a hundred and fifty thousand dollars of stock, and we expect dividends of at least twenty per cent. We now propose to divide equally with you. Fifty thousand dollars will yield you ten thousand dollars a year—and we give you this for a pen-ful of ink! Besides, there will be much notarial work arising out of the large operations of our company, and other business to which the connection may lead. This should bring you as much more. Twenty thousand a year! Not a bad increase to present income, eh, Mr. Notary? *There's* our 'last word.' What do you say?"

As he finished Snatchet leaned back in his chair to watch the effect of his astounding proposal as its full force was revealed in the moist pallor of brow and twitching lip. Skinner sat in interested expectancy and the rhythmic tick of the office clock alone smote the tense silence with insistent regularity.

The shabby arm-chair became an inquisitorial rack as