

no one higher up than Mr. Davies, the general manager. Mr. Davies knew he did not tell. He always spoke of the "higher up" as "the Board"; from which everyone guessed that Angers and Son was really a syndicate: and guessed wrongly.

There is no reason why the reader should not be taken into the secret, however; the truth was that Mr. Adam Torrance held Angers and Son in the hollow of his hand. Mr. Adam Torrance had been a rich man before he had bought out the Stores from the trustees of the Angers estate; he was now a very rich man, even in a city of rich men, and was daily becoming richer. He was young, too, to be so rich, only twenty-nine—almost a boy! If the Stores had known about him they would have been delighted. It is certainly more pleasant to be owned by a young and fine-looking proprietor, than by a Mr. Davies who is middle-aged and ugly, and a Board which is simply nothing at all. In the old days there was a legend that Angers and Son had sometimes inspected the Stores personally; had known the heads of departments by name and been personally acquainted with the superintendents, but no one really remembered whether these things were so. Certainly Mr. Davies knew everyone and everything and his eyes were everywhere, but Mr. Davies was simply an employee, at the head of other employees; and as for the "Board," it seemed to have neither eyes nor ears nor any real existence. One could not, for instance, see it driving a four-in-hand or speeding a motor-car, and say, "See, there goes the boss!" or point to its palatial residence and remark carelessly, "The old man does things in style, eh?" But these and many similar pleasures the Stores might have had if they had only known about Mr. Adam Torrance.