

CHAPTER III

THE TRAPPING OF A FOOL

A SQUAT wooden office, crushed between two cloud-scraping blocks, stared impertinently upon Main Street, as though proud of the distinction of its architectural insignificance. This building, with the lot upon which it stood, was owned by two country-bred solicitors, who had worked up a considerable practice by a judicious system of advertisement. These joint partners sat for some hours daily at their roll-top desks, inwardly intoxicated by the sense of their position—for they were both little better than illiterate—veneered outwardly by a complete conversance with tough legal arguments. Their clerks performed far more than mere clerical work. Upon their shoulders, in fact, reposed the control of the office, the interviewing of city clients, the unravelling of titles, the valuation of property, with the hundred details of the day's work. Stupefied farmers were invariably introduced into the presence of whichever partner happened to be "disengaged" at the moment of their visit, and, when suitably mystified, were handed over to one of the clerks, with the unvarying formula: "Here, Mr. What's-ye-name, this gentleman wants a loan upon his farm." In four cases out of five the statement was correct; in the fifth case the gentleman in question