# NOTHING TO DO

A Tale of our Best Society

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# NOTHING TO DO.

Frontispiece of gentleman in a chair

Title page of Nothing to do

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To

WILLIAM A. BUTLER, Esq.,
AUTHOR OF
"NOTHING TO WEAR,"
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# 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.
There's Sir Arthur Fitz-Herbert, an old English knight,
  Who won his gold spurs in a hardly-fought field,
Where he rescued the life of the gallant Black Prince
  By receiving a blow meant for him—on his shield;
Of which glorious action, so well worth attention,
Not a single historian makes any mention;
Though by family documents amply attested,
In possession of those who are most interested.
Then there's Lady Fitz-Herbert—a Queen's maid of honor,
Who spent her chief time in attendance upon her;
And when the Queen left on a visit to Calais,
Remained in sole charge of—the plate and the palace.
All which, the Fitz-Herberts may justly lay claim,
Invests with proud honor the family name.

There is something that puzzles me, let me confess—
Why these rare old antiques wear so modern a dress!
Unless, like the comet which now reappears,

For the first time, I think, within hundreds of years,
So fashions in dress run through regular courses,
And strictly obey the mechanical forces.
Let me hereby suggest that some almanac-maker,
In his very next issue but one, undertake a
Brief record of Fashions that may reäppear
In the course of the next or the following year.
With what eager eyes would our wives read, be sure,
About—this—time—expect—a—new—style—of—coiffure,
A black lace Fichu under dark satin loops;
Or, more ominous still, a recurrence of hoops!
Attended, perhaps, by the brief intimation,
Based upon strict and exact calculation,
That the first would enjoy but a limited reign, as
It was looked for next year in far-distant Uranus;
While the last had intended to visit us sooner,
But tarried a while with the ladies of Luna.

Apropos of the portraits—I've heard of a queer
Contretemps which befell the most famous last year;
I mean of Sir Arthur, who saved the Black Prince,—
Excuse my not knowing how many years since.
It seems a young lady—Miss Blanche Delarue—
One day on a visit to Fifth Avenue,
While carelessly chatting and sipping some sherbet,
Was shown the fine portrait of Arthur Fitz-Herbert,
Which, Augustus assured her, as an heirloom
Was more valued than anything else in the room,
And proceeded to speak of the well-deserved fame
Of Sir Arthur Fitz-Herbert, the first of his name,
With a few of those actions of gallant emprise,
Which have made him so great in Posterity's eyes;
Or, at least, that small part which, like Miss Delarue,
Are on visiting terms in the Fifth Avenue.
In the midst of his story conceive his amaze,
When his visitor, after a long, earnest gaze

At the portrait before her, approaching, let fall
On the tapestry carpet plate, sherbet, and all,
Which, scattered with fragments of fine porcelain,
Must have suffered, I fear, an indelible stain.
While standing aghast at a breach of propriety
Which rarely occurs in the best of society,
He was startled still more, as I cannot but own,
When the lady exclaimed, in a deeply-moved tone,
In reply to his feebly-expressed "Never mind it,"
"That's my grandfather's portrait! O, where did you find it?"
Which indeed was the case, being sold at vendue,
Some years since, when the father of Blanche Delarue
Had lost for the time both his wealth and high station,
By indulging too largely in land speculation.
The unlucky portrait, I scarcely need say,
    Was at once taken down, but soon after replaced
By another as stately, though somewhat defaced,—
A clear mark of age, and which, by the way,
On Fitz-Herbert's assurance I'm glad to be able
To say was a knight of the Famous Round Table.

If my memory fails not, 'tis three months to-day
Since Augustus Fitz-Herbert appeared in Broadway,
Having passed the last year in a tour beyond seas,
    Where his travels extended from Russia to Spain,
And towards the North-West from the famed Hebrides
    To the beautiful isles in the fair Grecian main.
He has wandered through climes of which even the names
    Thrill the heart with emotion, or summon a tear,
When we think how completely has time swept away
    The traces of all that we fain would revere.
He has stood, it may be, on the very same spot
    Where Homer recited his deathless heroics,
Or paused at the portico, knowing it not,
    Where Zeno addressed his disciples, the Stoics.
Perchance when he gazed from the brow of the hill

On the once famous harbor—the Attic Piræus,—
Proud trophy of valor reverse could not chill!—
His foot pressed the turf on the breast of Musæus.
He has seen the proud city whose arts and whose arms
In the mouth of tradition for ages have rung;
O, there is not a foot of that soil but has charms,
Where Tully once fulmined, where Virgil once sung.
In the streets of Byzantium he's smoked a chibouk
With the bearded and turbaned devout Mameluke;
Has seen the Cathedral—the glory of Munich—
And deciphered inscriptions, *perhaps*, from the Runic;
Floated dreamily down the thrice beautiful Rhine,
Through lands that are teeming with olives and wine;
Passed a night in the capital city of Berne,
And crossed in a steamer the Lake of Lucerne;
Has strolled through the fortified town of Brussels,
And heard in old Bruges the sweet Minster bells;
Has stopped in the siege-renowned city of Prague,
And supped with Mynheer in his town of the Hague;
At length reaching France, in a steamboat crossed over
The troublesome straits linking Calais with Dover;
Which gained, up to London he travelled post-haste,
With the prominent thought, there was no time to waste.
With the help of post-horses and frequent relays,
He "did" the whole island in eight or ten days,
During which he no doubt made a thorough survey
Of all objects of interest passed on the way.
He next made a very brief visit to Cork
(The city and people he couldn't endure),
And returning took passage at once to New York,
With the comforting thought—he had made the grand tour.

From his journal I venture below to record
A single impression received while abroad:
"June 7th, we reached Athens—a sizable place,
Some three or four miles from the Gulf of Ægina;

It contains a cathedral not equal to Grace
Church in New York, which I think is much finer.
Went up to the top of the famous Acropolis,
Which is visited daily by hundreds of people,
But can't say I think that the view from the top o' this
Is equal to that from our Trinity steeple.
The houses are mostly unsightly and small;
In Minerva and Hermes' street noticed a few
Which will do very well, but are nothing at all
Compared with our mansion in Fifth-Avenue.
The piles of old ruins one sees here and there
I consider a perfect disgrace to the town;
If they had an efficient and competent Mayor,
Like our Mayor Wood, he would soon have them down."

Returned from his tour, he may daily be seen
Promenading Broadway with a calm air of su-
Periority, such as is rightfully worn
By the heir of two millions and nothing to do.
Observe how he shrinks, with a languid disdain,
From a shabby book-keeper with coat worse for wear;
It would scarce be befitting for fine porcelain
To come in close contact with common delf-ware.
He inclines, as I think, in regard to the masses,
In a modified form to the views of Agassiz:
As that Adam the first had another for weedin',
And other such jobs, in the garden of Eden;
While Eve has a housemaid—the wife of the latter,
Of color uncertain—perhaps a mulatto,
Who lives in the kitchen, cooks, washes, and starches,
While Eve in the parlor plays waltzes and marches;
And that those who perforce bear the burdens of life
Date their origin back to this man and his wife,
While from Adam the first are descended the few
Who are blest with long purses and nothing to do.
An exceedingly simple and practical way

Of explaining the present distinction of classes,
Conclusively showing that much finer clay
Is required for the rich than the general masses.

Augustus last week at the Potiphars' party
Met Flora M'Flimsey, of Madison-square,
Who having found out from her friend Miss Astarte
That he—a great catch—it was thought would be there,
Although in a state of extreme destitution
In regard to apparel befitting to wear
With her usual promptness and firm resolution
Represented the case to her hard-hearted père;
Who firmly resisted her touching entreaties.
Until she was forced, in her utter despair,
To remind him she never could hope to be married,
Unless he provided her something to wear.
A state of the case so extremely appalling,
And fraught with such numberless bills of expense
To be run up hereafter, that, trouble forestalling,
He yielded at once, without further defence.
At the same time he said she was perfectly free
To place herself under a husband's protection;
And, hard as the sacrifice doubtless must be,
Provided she made a befitting parti,
That he, as her father, would make no objection.

Her purpose achieved, on the very same day
Miss Flora went out on a tour of inspection
To all of the principal shops in Broadway,
Where at length she succeeded in making election
Of a gossamer fabric of delicate texture,
Whose merit consisted in being so rare,
That one, though attired in it twice or thrice folded,
Might almost be said to have nothing to wear.
At the party which followed (I speak with due diffidence),
Of all that were present not one could compare,

In point of dry goods and surpassing magnificence,
With Flora M'Flimsey, of Madison-square.
She came, saw, and conquered. Her eyes' brilliant lustre—
Or that of her diamonds—effected the coup
Which brought to her feet—not the great Filibuster,
But the heir of two millions and nothing to do.
The marriage, I hear, is deferred for the present—
The bride requires three months at least to prepare.
On the first of November, should weather prove pleasant,
There will be a grand wedding at Madison-square.
The alliance I hold to be every way proper,
Since Flora M'Flimsey, in wedding the heir
Of two millions in prospect (not bating a copper),
May hope to have something, in future, to wear.
While Augustus Fitz-Herbert, Sir Arthur's descendant,
In paying her bills for dry goods and bijoux,
With all the etceteras thereto attendant,
Will find quite as much as he wishes to do.

O, ye who in life are content to be drones,
And stand idly by while your fellows bear stones
To rear the great temple which Adam began,
Whereof the All-Father has given each man
A part in the building—pray look the world through,
And say, if you can, you have nothing to do!
Were man sent here solely to eat, drink, and sleep,
And sow only that which himself hoped to reap,—
If, provided his toil served to gain his subsistence,
He had answered in full the whole end of existence,—
Where then would be poets, philanthropists, sages,
Who have written their names high on History's pages?
They stood not aloof from the battle of Life,
But, placing themselves in the van of the strife,
Marching manfully forward with banner unfurled,
Left their deeds and their names a bequest to the world.
Have you ever (forgive me the bold impropriety)

Reckoned up your outstanding account with society,
Or considered how far, should your life close to-morrow,
You would merit her real and genuine sorrow?
If, in dying, the world be no wiser or better
For your having lived there, then you are her debtor;
And if, as Faith, Reason, and Scripture, all show,
God rewards us in heaven for the good done below,
I pray you take heed, idle worldling, lest you
With that better world should have nothing to do!

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