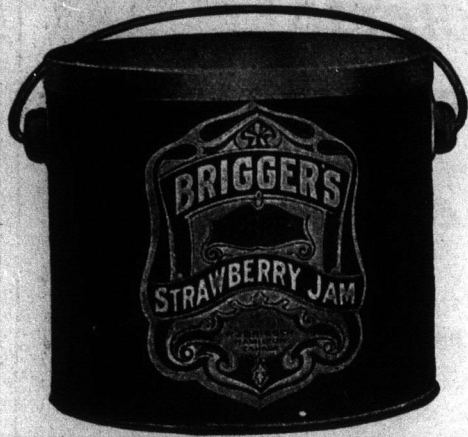


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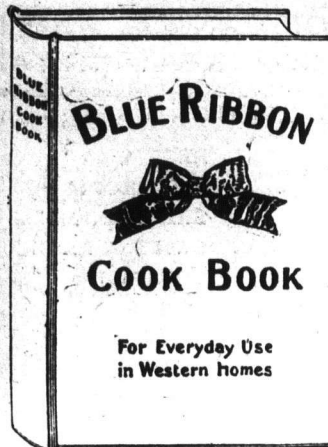
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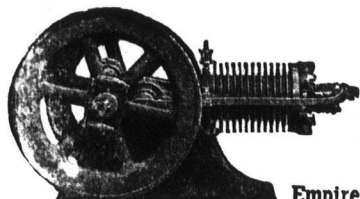
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The Fortune of Graham Hopkins.

By E. J. Rath.



GRAHAM HOPKINS at the mature age of twenty-five, was tired of it. If called upon for a specification of "it", probably he would have floundered. He was not clever at analysis, or words. To be really frank, he was not "clever" at anything. Certainly it was not life of which he was tired, because he was healthy, and optimistic, and had learned that men and places and things are to be found as good, as we desire. Nor was he tired of being a millionaire. It wasn't a dull life and it was inexpensive for being a millionaire, on a millionaire's income, is, by ratio, one of the cheapest occupations in the world.

The "it" of which he was tired consisted of so many things that it was somewhat diffuse and hard to put your finger upon. Principally it was, perhaps, having to do nothing that he really had to do. To partical rise a bit, "it" included seeing his name in the newspapers, society men and women, motors, yachts, dances, operas, town houses, country houses, house parties, horse shows, and—oh, lot of other things. He wanted to do something that was different from all these—only to find that the occupations open to a young millionaire are pitifully limited. That is, plain, ordinary occupations. His matter-of-fact mind did not run to sensations. If he wanted to, of course, he could go out and discover the North Pole, or found a new university, or penetrate Tibet, or do anything else that was peculiar or cost money. But that sort of thing did not appeal to the mind of Graham Hopkins, which was sedate, orderly, and, beyond doubt, commonplace. So conservative was that mind that, for a little while, he feared it was becoming sensational when he realised that he was tired of the things which he had been doing.

Under parental guidance it might have been different, but his mother died when he was a little boy and his father just as he left college. Whatever plans the senior Hopkins may have had he did not live to disclose. All he did was to leave his son an education and many thousands. The thousands were firmly imbedded in a steel plant, about which young Hopkins had no need to worry. True, he had a sister; but she was married to a wealthy man situated in the same commonplace way as himself, so she did not count.

J. Graham Hopkins rarely did anything hastily, so he thought about this matter of being tired for a long time. Then he went to see his lawyers.

"I am going away," said he. "For a year, at least; perhaps longer. Where? Oh! I don't know definitely! all over the world perhaps; I've just come in to tell you to look after things while I'm away. Money? Why, I'll send for it when I need some. You needn't worry if you don't hear from me much. I'll be all right. Investments? Do whatever you think best about that. Let it stay where it is, if you like. Well, good-bye."

And thereat J. Graham Hopkins walked out of the offices of his lawyers with an uneasy, pleasurable feeling, as though he were playing truant.

"What's your name?" asked the manager briskly.

"James G. Hopkins."

"Any references?"

"No, sir. I didn't think about that."

"It's customary. Have you had any experience?"

"No."

"We advertised for somebody with experience. It's usually too much trouble breaking in a green man. Are you industrious?"

"I think so."

"Gamble?"

"No, sir."

"Married?"

"No, sir."

"Living with your people?"

"No; I'm at a boarding-house."

The manager devoted five seconds to a scrutiny of James G. Hopkins and three seconds to thought.

"Come around to-morrow morning," he said, "and I'll let you know whether I can give you a job. I'll be frank and tell you that if anybody who can show some experience comes along in the meantime you won't get it."

Hopkins picked up his hat and walked out, mildly excited. The uncertainty of his immediate future was not displeasing. To-morrow he would either be hired or looking for a place somewhere else. It was his nearest approach to a game of chance. He hummed a tune as he strolled through the city.

It was a new experience in his life when he tumbled out of an iron bedstead in an attic room at half-past six o'clock in the morning and began to dress. It was equally novel to breakfast at seven-thirty in a dining-room half filled with other young men who were apparently clerks, and young women who might have been typists, and other persons of various ages who were, likely enough, all sorts of things. An early ride to the city in an electric car was an absolute innovation. Surely, adventure was coming upon him fast.

"We'll try you," said the manager. "But you'll have to prove your worth, understand."

"You'll get twenty-five shillings a week."

Hopkins nodded, being a little too excited to speak.

It was six o'clock that evening when he started off home to the boarding-house, reviewing in his mind the things he had been doing all day. He was amazed at his own capability. He had sorted papers, rearranged books, carried samples, answered the manager's bell, stamped letters, posted them, opened other letters, handed messages to telegraph boys, studied letter files, peeped into the labyrinth of a card index, found out whom people wanted to see—in fact, it was hard to think of anything he had not done.

All the week he did these things, over and over again and gradually he began to understand why he did some of them. On Saturday night there was twenty-five shillings in his pocket. He handed fifteen to his landlady who smiled and said something gracious about young men who were prompt payers.

James G. Hopkins was a business man, and he liked it. He had earned twenty-five shillings working at a job that he got on his own. He felt absurdly proud. He found that the world of working people was curious and interesting. He discovered that the manufacturing of endless varieties of hardware and selling them to people who needed them, or thought they did, was not so prosaic as it sounded. At any rate, so long as this thing amused him he was going to keep at it. If he got tired of it, it was easy enough to go back to being a millionaire.

Let it be said clearly that Hopkins was putting into practice no scheme for the betterment of mankind. He had not gone into business for the purpose of reforming it. Neither did he intend to write a book about it. He was not a student of sociology. He was just plain James G. Hopkins, doing what suited him and minding his own business.

Some weeks passed before he realized that the matter of being a millionaire was being crowded away back into some little-frequented part of his brain. At first, outside of business hours, he could not help thinking about it, but that was largely because the new life was strange to him. It afforded him some amusement to think of what his sister might say, if she knew, or his lawyers, or his friends. But as the new environment became more familiar to him, he thought