

you will find prices higher still. There is very little wheat in Minnesota this year, and what there was in Dakota was cut down by hail. Millers in St. Paul and Minneapolis are anxious already, and there is talk of a big corner in Chicago. Nobody is offering again, while you know what land lies fallow in Manitoba, and the activity of their brokers shows the fears of Winnipeg millers with contracts on hand. I can convince you from the papers and market reports I see before you."

Barrington could not controvert the unpleasant truth he was still endeavouring to shut his eyes to. "The demand from the East may slacken," he said.

Witham shook his head. "Russia can give them nothing. There was a failure in the Indian monsoon, and South American crops were small. Now, I am going to take a further liberty. How much are you short?"

Barrington was never sure why he told him, but he was hard pressed then, and there was a quiet forcefulness about the younger man that had its effect on him. "That," he said, holding out a document, "is the one contract I have not covered."

Witham glanced at it. "The quantity is small. Still, money is very scarce, and bank interest almost extortionate just now."

Barrington flushed a trifle, and there was anger in his face. He knew the fact that his loss on this sale should cause him anxiety was significant, and that Witham had surmised the condition of his finances tolerably correctly.

"Have you not gone quite far enough?" he said.

Witham nodded. "I fancy I need ask no more, sir. You can scarcely buy the wheat, and the banks will advance nothing further on what you have to offer at Silverdale. It would be perilous to put yourself in the hands of a mortgage-broker."

BARRINGTON stood up grim and straight. There were not many men at Silverdale who would meet his gaze.

"Your content is a little too apparent, but I can still resent an impertinence," he said. "Are my affairs your business?"

"Sit down, sir," said Witham. "I fancy they are, and had it not been necessary, I would not have ventured so far. You have done much for Silverdale, and it had cost you a good deal, while it seems to me that every man here has a duty to the head of the settlement. I am, however, not going to urge that point, but have, as you know, a propensity for taking risks. I can't help it. It was probably born in me. Now, I will take that contract up for you."

Barrington gazed at him in bewildered astonishment. "But you would lose on it heavily. How could you overcome a difficulty that is too great for me?"

"Well," said Witham with a little smile, "it seems I have some ability in dealing with these affairs."

Barrington did not answer for a while, and when he spoke it was slowly. "You have a wonderful capacity for making any one believe in you."

"That is not the point," said Witham. "If you will let me have the contract, or, and it comes to the same thing, buy the wheat it calls for, and if advisable sell as much again, exactly as I tell you, at my risk and expense, I shall get what I want out of it. My affairs are a trifle complicated, and it would take some little time to make you understand how this would suit me. In the meanwhile you can give me a mere I O U for the difference between what you sold at, and the price to-day, to be paid without interest and whenever it suits you. It isn't very formal, but you will have to trust me."

Barrington moved twice up and down the room before he turned to the younger man. "Lance," he said, "when you first came here, any deal of this kind between us would have been out of the question. Now, it is only your due to tell you that I have been wrong from the beginning, and you have a good deal to forgive."

"I think we need not go into that," said Witham, with a little smile. "This is a business deal, and if it hadn't suited me I would not have made it."

He went out in another few minutes with a little strip of paper, and just before he left the Grange placed it in Maud Barrington's hand.

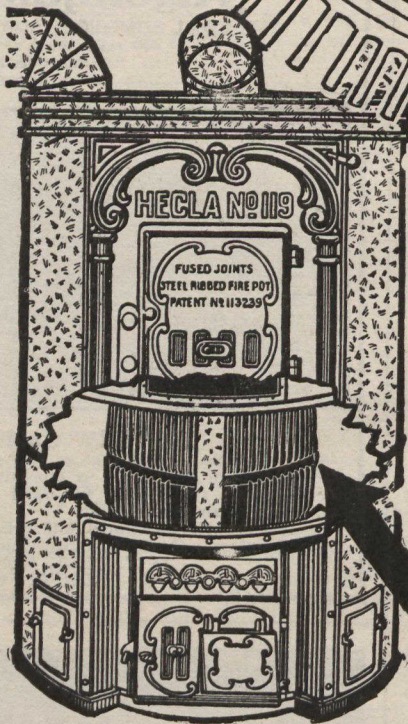
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