

# THE IMPERATOR



BY  
**HAROLD  
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## CHAPTER XXV.—(Continued.)

It was about this time when, as the whitened horses floundered through the lee of a bluff where there was shelter from the wind, the men in the sleigh found opportunity for speech.

"Now," said Dane quietly, "I know that we have lost you, for a while at least. Will you ever come back, Witham?"

Witham nodded, "Yes," he said. "When time has done its work and Colonel Barrington asks me, if I can buy land enough to give me a standing at Silverdale."

"That," said Dane, "will need a good many dollars, and you insisted on flinging those you had away. How are you going to make them?"

"I don't know," said Witham simply. "Still, by some means it will be done."

It was next day when he walked into Graham's office at Winnipeg, and laughed when the broker who shook hands, passed the cigar box across to him.

"We had better understand each other first," he said. "You have heard what has happened to me, and will not find me a profitable customer to-day."

"These cigars are the best in the city, or I wouldn't ask you to take one," said Graham dryly. "You understand me, anyway. Wait until I tell my clerk that if anybody comes round I'm busy."

A bell rang, a little window opened and shut again, and Witham smiled over his cigar.

"I want to make thirty thousand dollars as soon as I can, and it seems to me there are going to be opportunities in this business. Do you know anybody who would take me as clerk or salesman?"

Graham did not appear astonished. "You'll scarcely make them that way if I find you a berth at fifty a month," he said.

"No," said Witham. "Still, I wouldn't purpose keeping it for more than six months or so. By that time I should know a little about the business."

"Got any dollars now?"

"One thousand," said Witham quietly. Graham nodded. "Smoke that cigar out, and don't worry me. I've got some thinking to do."

Witham took up a journal, and laid it down again twenty minutes later. "Well," he said, "you think it's too big a thing?"

"No," said Graham. "It depends upon the man, and it might be done. Knowing the business goes a good way, and so does having dollars in hand, but there's something that's born in one man in a thousand that goes a long way further still. I can't tell you what it is, but I know it when I see it."

"Then," said Witham, "you have seen this thing in me?"

GRAHAM nodded. "Yes, sir, but you don't want to get proud. You had nothing to do with the getting of it. It was given you. Now, we're going to have a year that will not be forgotten by those who handle wheat and flour, and the men with the long heads will roll the dollars in. Well, I've no use for another clerk, and my salesman's good enough for me, but if we can agree on the items I'll take you for a partner."

The offer was made and accepted quietly, and when a rough draft of the arrangement had been agreed upon, Graham nodded as he lighted another cigar.

"You may as well take hold at once, and there's work ready now," he said.

"You've heard of the old St. Louis mills back on the edge of the bush country. Never did any good. Folks who had them were short of dollars, and didn't know how they should be run. Well, I and two other men have bought them for a song, and while the place is tumbling in, the plant seems good. Now, I can get hold of orders for flour when I want them, and everybody with dollars to spare will plank them right into any concern handling food-stuffs this year. You go down to-morrow with an engineer, and, when you've got the mills running and orders coming in, we'll sell out to a company if we don't want them."

Witham sat silent a space, turning over a big bundle of plans and estimates. Then he said, "You'll have to lay out a pile of dollars."

Graham laughed. "That's going to be your affair. When you want them the dollars will be ready, and there's only one condition. Every dollar we put down has got to bring another in."

"But," said Witham, "I don't know anything about milling."

"THEN," said Graham dryly, "you'll have to learn. A good many men have got quite rich in this country running things they didn't know much about when they took hold of them."

"There's one more point," said Witham. "I must make those thirty thousand dollars soon, or they'll be no great use to me, and when I have them I may want to leave you."

"That's all right," said Graham. "By the time you've done it, you'll have made sixty for me. We'll go out and have some lunch to clinch the deal if you're ready."

It might have appeared unusual in England, but it was much less so in a country where the specialization of professions is still almost unknown, and the man who can adapt himself attains ascendancy, and on the morrow Witham arrived at a big wooden building beside a pine-shrouded river. It appeared falling to pieces, and the engineer looked disdainfully at some of the machinery, but, somewhat against his wishes, he sat up with his companion most of the night in a little log hotel, and orders that occasioned one of Graham's associates consternation were mailed to the city next morning. Then machines came out by the carload, and men with tools in droves. Some of them murmured mutinously when they found they were expected to do as much as their leader who was not a tradesman, but these were forthwith sent back again, and the rest were willing to stay and earn the premium he promised them for rapid work.

Before the frost grew arctic, the building stood firm and the hammers rang inside it night and day until when the ice had bound the dam and lead the fires were lighted and the trials under steam again. It cost more than water, but buyers with orders from the East were clamouring for flour just then. For a fortnight Witham snatched his food in mouthfuls, and scarcely closed his eyes, when Graham found him pale and almost haggard when he came down with several men from the cities in response to a telegram. For an hour they moved up and down, watching whirling belt and humming roller, and then, whitened with the dust, stood very intent and quiet while one of them dipped up a little flour from the delivery hopper. His opinions on, and dealings in that product were famous in the land. He said nothing for several minutes, and then, brushing the white dust from his

hands, turned with a little smile to Graham.

"We'll have some baked, but I don't know that there's much use for it. This will grade a very good first," he said. "You can book me the thousand two eighties for a beginning now."

Witham's fingers trembled, but there was a twinkle in Graham's eyes as he brought his hand down on his shoulder.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I was figuring right on this when I brought the champagne along. It was all I could do, but Imperial Tokay wouldn't be good enough to rinse this dust down with, when every speck of it that's on you means dollars by the handful rolling in."

It was a very contented and slightly hilarious party that went back to the city, but Witham sat down before a shaded lamp with a wet rag round his head when they left him, and bent over a sheaf of drawings until his eyes grew dim. Then he once more took up a little strip of paper that Graham had given him, and leaned forward with his arms upon the table. The mill was very silent at last, for of all who toiled in it that day one weary man alone sat awake, staring, with aching eyes, in front of him. There was, however, a little smile in them, for rosy visions floated before them. If the promise that strip of paper held out was redeemed, they might be materialized, for those who had toiled and wasted their substance that the eastern peoples might be fed would that year, at least, not go without their reward. Then he stretched out his arms wearily above his head.

"It almost seems that what I have hoped for may be mine," he said. "Still, there is a good deal to be done first, and not two hours left before I begin it to-morrow."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### Reinstatement.

A YEAR of tireless effort and some anxiety had passed since Witham had seen the first load of flour sent to the east, when he and Graham sat talking in their Winnipeg office. The products of the St. Louis mills were already in growing demand, and Graham appeared quietly contented as he turned over the letters before him. When he laid down the last one, however, he glanced at his companion somewhat anxiously.

"We have got to fix up something soon," he said. "I have booked all the St. Louis can turn out for six months ahead, and the syndicate is ready to take the business over, though I don't know quite whether it would be wise to let them. It seems to me that milling is going to pay tolerably well for another year, and if I knew what you were wanting, it would suit me better."

"I told you I wanted thirty thousand dollars," said Witham quietly.

"You've got them," said Graham. "When the next balance comes out you'll have a good many more. The question is, what you're going to do with them now they're yours?"

Witham took out a letter from Dane and passed it across to Graham. "I'm sorry to tell you the Colonel is getting no better," it ran. "The specialist we brought in seems to think he will never be quite himself again, and now he has let the reins go, things are falling to pieces at Silverdale. Somebody left Atterley a pile of money, and he is going back to the old country, Carshalton is going, too; and, as they can't sell out to anyone we don't approve of, the

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