

THE GOLDEN FLOOD

By EDWIN LEFEVRE



Resume: Mr. Richard Dawson, president of the Metropolitan Bank, New York, is visited on a Thursday, by Mr. George Kitchell Grinnell, who wishes to deposit \$100,000, and presents an Assay Office check on the Sub-Treasury. One week from then he deposits \$151,000, a fortnight later \$250,000, and three weeks later \$500,000. He makes no revelation of his business, and on his desiring to make a deposit of \$1,000,000, the pompous president becomes excited. A deposit of \$2,500,000 follows, then \$5,000,000, and the following Thursday, \$10,000,000. Mr. Dawson employs Costello, a detective, who reports that Mr. Grinnell lives quietly, but has a load of bullion bars taken to the Assay Office every Monday. The flood continues until Mr. Grinnell has nearly thirty millions in the bank. The president in desperation seeks again to discover the source of the fortune. He is baffled once more, and Mr. Grinnell increases his deposits to \$35,000,000, and informs Mr. Dawson that Miss Grinnell, his sister, shares the secret of his wealth. The president then warns the plutocrat, Mellen, of the gold calamity. They tell Grinnell of the harm of too rapid increase in gold supply.

"I REALISE that. You agreed with me that an increase of one hundred millions a year, in addition to the normal output of the mines now in operation, was not excessive. Since I saw you I have carefully studied the matter"—Grinnell's voice and manner showed profound conviction—"and I have come to the conclusion that the world could not only stand two hundred and fifty millions more than it is now getting, but be all the better for it. That is only a billion more in four years. Four years is a long time." He looked pensive—as if he were thinking how very long that would be.

Mr. Mellen started. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but Grinnell went on quickly: "Tell me, Mr. Dawson, is it not true that the expansion in business all over during the past few years, while it has been followed by a great expansion in bank credits, has not been followed by a proportionate increase in the supply of actual cash? That being the case, why couldn't it be possible to add two hundred and fifty millions a year without disturbing business, by distributing one hundred millions among banks in Germany, France and England, and scattering one hundred and fifty millions among banks in various sections of the United States?"

"Do you propose to do this?" Mr. Dawson was looking at the young man with an intentness which he could not help tingeing with anxiety.

"That isn't the question," said Grinnell, a trifle impatiently, as if unwilling to lose the thread of his argument. "Do you deny that such a thing could be done?"

"Yes, I do! It would mean wild inflation; it would lead to a world panic!" said Mellen, not altogether composedly.

"Do you think so, Mr. Dawson?" Grinnell persistently ignored Mr. Mellen.

"I think," replied the president, nervously, "that \$250,000,000 in gold a year more than the world is now getting would be too much. Without definite knowledge of the source and limit of the new supply, sentiment would become so alarmed that it would mean a disastrous panic, probably the worst in the history of humanity, since there would be the keenest apprehension over the possibility of gold being demonetised. An inexhaustible supply of gold could lead to nothing else; and then—God help us all!" The president was so impressed by his own words that his face grew livid. Mr. Mellen was breathing quickly.

"Who said anything about an inexhaustible supply of gold?" said Grinnell angrily. "I, of all people, do not wish gold to be demonetised. What would my gold be worth if that happened?"

"Precisely; that's why we wish you to confide in us," said Dawson, with a very friendly smile.

"But I still believe," said Grinnell doggedly, "that

two hundred and fifty millions a year would not do harm. I have made up my mind on that point, and I will not change it. Mr. Dawson, you have asked me several questions. Now, let me ask you one: Do you, or do you not, wish me to make any additional deposits in this bank?"

"Certainly I wish you to if you do."

"Very well." The young man took from his pocket-book a package of slips. He read one after another—the bank president could see that they were Assay Office checks—and finally selected one. He said, "Here is a check for eleven millions two hundred thousand," and returned the others—there were at least eight—to his pocket-book. "I shall deposit this."

Mellen walked over to the desk and took the slip from Mr. Dawson's hand with a calm authoritativeness, as though the bank president were his clerk, which, indeed, was what Wall Street thought, though erroneously. Then he turned to Grinnell.

"What assurance will you give that you will do nothing to ruin us? If the world knew your secret it would mean ruin for all, absolute ruin!" The sound of that word, uttered by himself, seemed to shake Mellen's composure. He glared at the young man.

"Mr. Mellen," said Grinnell, very quietly, "you are an older man than I. I shall try not to forget it."

"I must know! At once! Do you hear me?" said Mr. Mellen loudly. It was not exactly anger which burned in his eyes, but a sort of overgrown retulance at being baffled. There was an obstacle; it might be insurmountable. The uncertainty was in itself a check. An invincible pugilist had been knocked down for the first time in his career as champion.

"William!" said Mr. Dawson, approaching his friend, "you are excited." Then to the young man, apologetically: "He has been under a severe strain for some time past."

The richest man in the world grew composed as by magic. For the first time that day he became his normal self. He had crushed all opposition to his Syndicate twenty years before by the exercise of stupendous will-power. For a decade he had not been called upon to weigh his words or his actions. Through disuse the qualities that had made him the richest man in the world had atrophied. But now he was again the William Mellen his competitors had feared.

"Mr. Grinnell," he said, with a politeness that was not excessive, "I apologize. I beg that you will forgive the nerves of a man who, as you say, is much older than you, and has many more troubles."

"Have you thought of any investment yet, Mr. Grinnell?" interposed Mr. Dawson. It was to change the conversation. At the same time the answer would be interesting, possibly valuable. Mr. Mellen sat down and listened attentively.

"No, I have decided to wait until my deposits at the various banks are larger."

"How much do you propose to deposit with us?"

"Oh," said Grinnell, with a smile full of an ingratiatory humour, "if you are still frightened I'll only deposit a million a week. I suppose I ought to start a bank of my own." Mr. Dawson and Mellen exchanged quick glances, unperceived by the young man, since the young man continued to smile, almost boyishly.

"Yes; you must not dream that you can produce two hundred and fifty millions a year," said Mr. Mellen, ignoring the last bomb, about the bank. "That would not do at all."

"I think it would. Even at that rate it would take a man some time to catch up with your fortune, Mr. Mellen."

"It isn't a question of my fortune, Mr. Grinnell," Mellen said in a kindly voice, "but of the fortunes of all the world; yours as well."