

HEPPEL DEGRASSE'S GRANDSON

"**T**HERE!" cried Jasper, slapping the kinks out of his newspaper, and passing it over to Blount and Everard. "The aristocracy counts, even in this country. Read that!"

Blount held the paper while Everard, crossing the room, perused the item over Blount's shoulder.

"Captain Noel Degrasse—that's the rubber millionaire crowd—'decorated by the King.' Blount read, 'Another Canadian wins Distinguished Conduct Medal for services on the west front.' 'Well,' Blount looked across toward Jasper, 'What about it?'"

"I was merely remarking," sighed Jasper, reaching for his paper once more, "that blood will tell—even in this country, where we pretend there's no aristocracy. The war has shown that the so-called upper classes even in Canada, are earning their right to leadership by conspicuous sacrifices at the front."

"Bah!" retorted Blount, "there is no such thing as an aristocracy in this country. A few old blue-noses here and there have tried to keep up the traditions of the old world, and all they have become is snobs—shabby old snobs that are being crowded out even from the State dinners at Government House."

"Wrong," returned Jasper. "You shouldn't let your passion for democracy blind you to the truth. The truth is, that the few aristocrats we have in this benighted country have shown their title deeds. Their young men have proven what was in 'em. They are as worthy to lead to-day as they were in the old days of chivalry. Noel Degrasse is merely another one of upper class Canadians to win the D. C. M. He has helped redeem Rosedale from the charge of being merely rich and childless—oh, no!" As the others smiled, "I don't mean what you mean. He was an aristocrat in Peace, and he's proved himself an aristocrat in war."

Everard looked across at Jasper.

"What makes you think Degrasse was an aristocrat?" he said.

"Well, isn't he?"

"Probably a gutter snipe," chuckled Blount.

"That'd be a good one on you, Jasper."

"No," continued Everard, "Degrasse is no gutter snipe. But neither is he the kind of aristocrat Jasper thinks he is."

"Isn't he one of the old Degrasse tribe that came up here with the U. E. Loyalists before eighteen hundred?" queried Jasper.

"No," said Everard steadily. "He isn't. Though Noel Degrasse's mother probably has half a million a year income, and all the outward—and perhaps inward signs of the things you admire so much, Jasper—the truth is, that it would take a very skilful man to trace the Degrasse family back much more than two generations. Noel Degrasse's grandfather came to Toronto a nobody from nowhere—"

"One on you, Jasper," snorted Blount.

"Wait—wait a bit," said Everard, "and yet I agree with Jasper that Noel Degrasse is an aristocrat."

"How the devil?" demanded Blount.

"Brains," said Everard, enigmatically. "Brains are the things that count. I'll tell you the story of the Degrasses if you like."

This is what he told.

II.

"**O**LD Heppel Degrasse was a peddler in the backwoods of Ontario. That is the first that is known of him. Though his name had a French turn, he himself resembled in manners and speech a Pennsylvania Dutchman. He replenished his pack at intervals in Toronto, then set out westerly and northerly through the scattered farming settlements, trading his goods for products of the farm—such as he could carry most conveniently. He would sell some thrifty farm wife a bolt of grey flannel with which to make grey petticoats for her flock of children. She would give, in payment, her accumulated house-money in the form of dried sheep-skins. Sheep-skins in those days were the best sort of currency in the small-ware and dry-goods trade. They were light and flat. Here and there, sitting in the shadows beside the fire-place you will encounter grandmothers who recall those days and will picture for you—in the intervals of the young people's

Everard's Story of Business Fortune in Canada, and a D. C. M. that Followed

By BRITTON B. COOKE

talk about Red Cross teas and the latest aeroplane lieutenant home on leave—how the peddler's wagon would roll up the lane all a-flutter with the edges of his stacked-up sheep-skins, while the hearts of his patrons were a-flutter with the anticipation of pretty things to be solemnly chosen out of his cargo.

"Such was the first trade of the grandfather of Noel Degrasse, D. C. M. But, as a matter of fact, the old fellow did not make much money at the peddling business. It is said he was robbed once by highwaymen on the road from Toronto to Orangeville. Another time, returning from a long trip, he tried to ford the Credit near Streetsville, but was caught in the current and lost all his load of sheep-skins. The real foundation of the Degrasse fortune was laid in the later ventures of old Heppel Degrasse. He quit the peddling trade, and with what capital he had went to Windsor, opposite Detroit, where he discovered for himself a profitable way of manipulating his capital.

"You see, in those days Canadian money, arriving in Detroit, or American money arriving in Canada was at a great discount. Anyone crossing from the boundary did well to take with him, if he could, the currency of the country he was entering. Otherwise the shop-keepers and money-changers would be almost certain to gouge the traveller heavily. Old Degrasse conceived the idea of underselling the money changers. He established himself first of all on the Detroit side of the river where, when he met Americans evidently bent on crossing to Canada—and not too well informed on the exchange situation—he offered to change their money for them at an advantageous rate. He was plausible and persuasive, and in time he had changed half of his small Canadian fortune into American money, and with little or no loss to himself. He now hired a clerk and opened one office on the American side and another on the Canadian side—just where the international traffic was bound to pass. By exchanging and re-exchanging the currencies of the two countries he was able in five years to build up a big fortune, as fortunes went in those days."

"But where," demanded Jasper, breaking in, "did the rubber business commence?"

"That was the next step," said Everard.

III.

"**O**LD Heppel had married when in Windsor—I believe it was a half-Spanish half-Irish woman, whose husband had been drowned in a ferry-boat collision in the Detroit River. By this woman he had one son—the father of Noel Degrasse, D. C. M. By the time this son was twenty or thereabouts, the old Degrasse had made his original fortune still greater by shrewd money-lending in Toronto and elsewhere. He had set himself up—with-out offices, of course—as a sort of private banker.

"One of his borrowers was Tertius Cochrane—ever heard of him? Well, old Tertius was one of the nobles—one of the 'blooded aristocracy'—but not the aristocracy of brains—not by a long way. Old Tertius had inherited from somebody a recipe for the making of rubber—everything he had he 'inherited'—and he had established a factory in Toronto. Of course, as you know, nearly all the early rubber manufacturers worked by these secret 'recipes.' They resembled the average house-wife's prescription for making a cake. They were inexact and unreliable. They were not so much formulae as mystic rites. Old Tertius alone behind a locked and sealed door. He would enter the making-rooms with great dignity, and leave all his help standing in awe outside while he, with the precious recipe in hand, went in and made an incantation, or threw some sort of magic powder into the mess of rubber—or scratched the sides of the vat and whistled—something equally intelligent.

"At all events, he could never be absolutely certain whether a batch was going to be a success or a

failure—and thereby he got into the debt of old Degrasse. Finally he had to show the recipe to Degrasse and make the old man his partner. The old man advanced more money, and they went on with the silly recipe. Sometimes it worked and sometimes

the batch would be a dead loss. On those occasions old Tertius Cochrane would blame it on the east wind, or the moon, or the raw material—anything that was handy.

"Grandfather Heppel Degrasse became fascinated by the rubber problem in time. Instead of giving it up in disgust he grew more and more determined to find out what was wrong with Tertius' methods. He was getting old by this time, so he sent his boy—that's Noel Degrasse's father—down to Peru to learn something about the gathering of the raw material and to 'pick craft'—that is, to learn what he might from other folk in the rubber business. After the boy had been in Peru a year he sent him to Harvard to take a post-graduate course in chemistry, and then he 'bought' him a job in one of the leading steel manufacturing concerns in the United States. He tried to get the boy into a rubber company, but couldn't.

"In five years' time—during which the Toronto rubber concern had been losing money hand-over-fist—Noel Degrasse's father came back and was given the management of the Tertius Cochrane factory. Cochrane had sold out and set himself up as a sort of Patron of Canada on Well's Hill. Young Degrasse was in full charge.

"The first thing he did was to instal an experimental laboratory in the old factory. Even his father was alarmed at this sign of new-fangled faddishness. But old Heppel Degrasse said nothing. He was worried over his losses in rubber, and he was determined that if the boy was able to make good he would at least have every chance to prove it. And the boy—Noel Degrasse's father, DID prove it.

"He analyzed and cross-analyzed that old rubber recipe. He found the why and the wherefore for every step in it. Some of the things that the recipe required he found to be absolutely worthless, and therefore unnecessary. Other things commanded by the recipe were in wrong proportion, as one might expect from the empirical methods of those days. Finally, Degrasse II. had so improved the methods of his father's factory that there were no longer any bad batches, and the quality of the Degrasse rubber was beginning to be known throughout the trade.

"The rest of the story doesn't matter much. The point is that young Degrasse had brains, and was able to retrieve the old peddler's money. He did not stop with putting the laboratory into his factory and improving the product, but he added also an expert accounting department. He watched his costs and therefore was able to tell exactly—and safely—what his profits were. . . . They were considerable as you know. His son Noel has had the benefit not only of this money, but of intelligent up-bringing. With the money-problem of life solved, the second generation of Degrasses was able to put the same skill into training its children as into making the rubber business go."

IV.

BLOUNT, who had listened intently throughout the telling, sighed with satisfaction.

"Well," he said, "You've only proven that the Degrasses were not—in the first place or in the second place, either—aristocrats. The D. C. M. that young Noel Degrasse has just won, comes as the logical result of having old Nobody Heppel for a grandfather. Another victory for Democracy, I say!"

Jasper was beginning to sulk—because, of course, it did look as though he had lost his case—when Everard spoke again.

"Not on your life, Blount," he said. "If Jasper will just alter his definition of aristocracy I will stand on his side and prove you wrong."

"You mean—" said Jasper, "if I will grant that aristocracy means brains?"

"Yes—and money," said Everard. "The Degrasses of this generation have had the leisure—thanks to money—to study and to think and to form proper

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