


"I Want You to Have My New Portable Granary"



"I have a money-saving invention—handy granaries to allow field threshing over your farm. Move them about each year. You save long hauls at harvest time. In spring you scatter small straw stacks—no burning of straw."

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"Write me for my booklet. It shows how profitable my Granary is even on a single quarter-section farm. Use it for 1912. The Book Tells of Big Money for You."

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and I could not reach a higher place. Other men held the better-paid positions, and although most of them were far below me in general equipment, education, and so on, they had learned through almost lifelong experience to fill their particular niche and to fill it well. I began to suspect that there might be only the difference of a phrase between "learning the business" in a factory and "getting a job" in the mill.

As soon as I grasped the full humor and beauty of my promotions, I discharged myself. After a short hunt I secured a better position in one of the largest factories of its kind in the country. Here I jumped from the top of the manual-labor ladder to the bottom of the boss ladder. The change from overalls to ordinary garments, from a heavy monkey-wrench to a roll-top desk, seemed too good to be true. The release from them acted as a spur. My enthusiasm, however, was tempered this time, for I had learned some jolting facts since I started in the business, and did not expect too much. The girls this time did not admire my pink cheeks.

Two Years in a Mill are not good for Pink Cheeks.

From this time I rose reasonably fast up to the time that I left the business. The agent of the mill seemed to like me and every inducement was offered me to grind ahead. Grind I did. Many, many days in succession and many weeks in the rush season I reached my desk before seven in the morning and did not leave until late at night except for a bite to eat. Of course I got some results. One of them was a bothersome heart, another a chronic gloom. I finally attained a salary of twenty-eight dollars a week, and a place where there were but two heads between me and the superintendency. The man immediately over me was a "pin-headed," anaemic German with all the obstinacy of his race and little of its brains. What brains he did have were concentrated upon his business. Not a great time went by before we clashed. Our ways of looking at almost everything were

too radically different. Again and again some petty tyranny would show his attitude. I could only rage inwardly. I learned from bitter lessons how much the daily welfare of an employee may depend upon the man higher up.

The social side of town life—the theatre, dinners, dances, everything of which I had dreamed before I left home—had faded from my sight. When after a long day I came home at night to my boarding house I had no inclination for such things. Instead I would sit in my room and smoke pipe after pipe until bedtime. The worst of it came, however, after my last promotion under the German I have mentioned. My general health was at a low ebb by this time, and I found that under the constant irritations from my boss I could not leave my work behind me at night. The little incidents that made up the day would keep running through my mind until I fell asleep. I had started in the mill business as a means to an end. The means had now become the end. The game had got me.

The Fear of the Whistle.

Then came a summer vacation, and I went home to spend it. During the time that I was there the difference between my own position and that of my brother seeped into and soaked through me. Big, rugged, the picture of health, he went about his business at a normal speed, and often during my stay he stopped work a bit early to play a little tennis. Before I went back to town, my father urged me to come back to the farm. This time I listened very attentively. But my mind was not quite made up. Before I had been in town a week, however, I had decided I could not get the contrast between my brother and myself out of my mind. Here was I, a run-down understrapper; there was he, the great unbosomed.

Mr. Sammis, the agent, telephoned to my office one day and told me that I was to be transferred to an assistant superintendency in another city at a good salary. The next day I walked into the private office and resigned. I told him my reasons, and added: "This is a good position you offer me. I haven't a doubt that you think me foolish to leave you." Sammis looked me over firmly for a moment. I awaited and dreaded the caustic answer. I liked Sammis. Then a big hand was pushed at me and a big voice rumbled quietly enough: "You would be a fool to stay. Look at me. I'm fifty. I have the constitution of an ox, and I haven't been really well for ten years. I've been lucky; I get ten thousand a year. I've been bossed by everybody all my life, and I don't know a damned thing outside this office. Goodbye and good luck."

And so I came to the farm again—thinner, wiser and eight years older than when I left it. In one respect, however, I was a gainer by my years in the city. The experience in the factories and the knowledge of business ways and organizations remain with me, together with a dearly bought conception of the value of a dollar.

I sometimes visit, on farm business, the town where I started my boomerang career, and sometimes I see and talk for a few minutes with some of the boys I worked with. They have climbed a little since then, but there is a nervous desire to drift, as they talk, a few feet nearer the mill gate, that show the ingrown fear of the whistle—the symbol of their bondage. Moreover, they do not talk to me as they did when we worked together. They are friendly and frank as of old, but running through their talk is a subtle deference, an unconscious homage from the man who is still an employee to the man who has ceased to be one. And to me, who has been in the same boat, the actions and talk of these old young men of the mill show sharply the great difference between farming and other business in these days of great corporations, and the greatest blessing that farming can offer a young man—the chance to be lord of his own business and master of himself.

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