

NO MAN IS AS GREAT AS HIS WORK

Copyright, 1911, by the



POMPOUS, iron-jawed railroad president swung round in his swivel chair and scowled at an inquisitive reporter.

"You can take it from me, young man," he said, "that neither Wall Street nor the Standard Oil Company or any other power on earth had anything to do with the building of this railroad. I built it with my own brains. They got me the money; they got me the men. It is a good railroad; one of the best in the world, and it is going to last for many years as a monument to me. But bear in mind that I made the railroad; the railroad didn't make me."

The reporter duly set this speech down, and somewhere in some newspaper it may be found, essentially as we have set it forth here.

It isn't true, it isn't just, it isn't even common sense, but there can be no doubt that when the railroad president uttered it he believed it, every word. He fancied then, as he fancies now, that he was greater than his work, and that the railroad practically sprang from his brain, as we are told that lesser deities sprang from the brain of Jove, who was the head of the family of deities worshipped by the thoughtful but credulous people of early times.

Now this man, able as he was, merely put together that railroad. Centuries before he was ever heard of men dug iron ore from the earth, and thus provided the means by which his track and locomotives and car wheels could be built.

While the buffaloes were still kicking up dust clouds along his present right of way Stephenson was tinkering at his teakettle of a locomotive engine, thus beginning ONE BRANCH of the railroad business, of ALL OF WHOSE BRANCHES this man calls himself the master.

Then other men improved the locomotive, and devised methods of engineering, and harnessed the lightning to the electric telegraph, and taught steam how to work in a steam shovel, and educated the public into ways of buying railroad stocks and bonds, and experimented with different kinds of rolling stock, until from the abundance of the work that they had produced it was possible to choose and arrange the materials for a railroad.

And meanwhile the tough, sinewy pioneers who had crossed the plains with ox teams, fighting their way against Indians and wild animals and famine and blizzards, developed a new country and planted the wheat fields that made the railroad worth while.

So the great railroad builder, instead of being greater than his work, was merely a very small part of it.

He took up the work of hundreds, even thousands, of other men, and, following the example of many other railroad builders, combined it all into a tolerably efficient railroad.

Relatively he was about as much the originator of the great system that he brought together as the fourteenth coral insect in a reef composed of fourteen hundred billion coral insects is the originator of the reef.

The world requires men like this man—men with imagination and nerve, who can see its needs, and who have the courage to supply them, no matter whether their motives are purely philanthropic—which is not often—or wholly selfish. But the world cannot afford to let such men get conceited or to fancy that compared to their own important personalities the work that they are doing is a mere incident.

Several times in history big, able men have become possessed with the idea that they were greater than all other earthly beings. The last of these was Napoleon, and he lived to understand, if not to admit, his mistake.

America has been more fortunate in its great men. Washington knew that compared to the cause he served his own personality counted for but little. There was never a time that he would not have stepped aside to let an abler man take charge of the Colonial army, had an abler man been possible to find.

Lincoln counted his country first and himself last. He had no vanity that his contemporaries were able to discover; he had no am-

bition other than to see the country once more united and at peace. Great men were both of these, yet neither of them for a minute fancied that he was as great as the task that he had been set to do.

The engineer who has built a great bridge earns and gets the gratitude and admiration of his fellow men. Yet he has merely applied principles discovered and developed years before by other men, gathering together and putting into use materials whose properties have been known for centuries.

He is not a creator, but a developer, and if he is a really able man he will be the first to admit his dependence on others. He has taken up the work that had been left uncompleted and carried it a little further, just as future engineers will take up and develop the work first done successfully by the Wrights in building and sailing flying machines.

In the medical profession, which has perhaps gone further of late than any other calling, no one man dominates.

Each of the great scientists who have devoted their lives to it works at his own specialty, acquainting himself with everything of importance that has been done before, and trying to improve upon it as much as he can.

No medical scientist begins to be as great as the great work he is doing for the future of mankind. Year after year the colleges turn out swarms of graduates; year after year the ablest men apply themselves to the advancement of their profession.

The good that they have done already is incalculable; the good that they will do in the future cannot be imagined by the mind of to-day.

And if you could go into the laboratories where quiet, patient men toil hour on hour on some complex problem, if you could watch them at their work and hear them in their conversations with their fellow scientists, you would understand that they perhaps more than any other men understand how small and unimportant they are in comparison with the noble work that they are doing.

The building of a battleship requires far more than the labor of the thousands of engineers and workmen who are employed on it.

Long before the designer can lay down the lines of the vessel in the molding loft he must have stored away in his brain a marvellous amount of knowledge concerning all that has been done in shipbuilding up to the present time.

He must know exactly the strength of the materials that are to be employed for frames, plates and armor, their weight and their ability to resist the destroying elements soon to be arrayed against them.

For all this knowledge he is absolutely dependent upon men who have built ships before him, beginning with the first savages who ever constructed vessels that would float on water, and continuing through all the ages of civilization.

After the designer has done his work the builders must take it up—thousands of them, scattered throughout the country—working in every place where the materials for shipbuilding are to be gathered together.

Each of those men, whether he is a superintendent of construction or an ordinary riveter, uses knowledge that he has gained from others, knowledge that has come down through the generations, each succeeding generation adding a little to it.

The battleship is not the work of one man. It is not even wholly modern, for its general form was decided upon almost with the first coracle which was paddled through the waves, and the materials from which it is built have been known in some form or other further back than history has been written.

If you try to learn who was the discoverer or the inventor of the automobile, undoubtedly the most useful of all recent developments, you will find that your quest will be hopeless.

Many minds began to inquire into the pos-

sibilities of applying the explosive force of petroleum to motive power at about the same time.

Numbers of men worked independently on gas engines, and numbers of others took up the engines that they had developed and set about making use of them in motor carriages.

The fact that the automobile was so quickly developed—that from a clumsy experiment it became a thing of tremendous usefulness in a very few years—is due to the fact that so many men were at work upon it, each profiting by the experiments of the others, and all working to the same end.

Here was a work that was not only greater than any one man, but was greater than all the men who took it up.

And the development of the automobile, as most of the men engaged in its manufacture will tell you, is but little more than fairly begun.

The gasoline engine, which enabled engineers to get great power with very little weight, space and fuel, has made flying possible.

And the only bar to flying as a practical commercial accomplishment is the present lack of a perfect motor.

But the new art is greater than those engaged in it, however daring or brilliant they may be.

And in a few years there will be worked

out in the workshop as well as in the air plans that will revolutionize a portion of the carrying trade of the world and make barriers set up by rivers, seas and mountains wholly ineffectual to prevent the passage of travelling man.

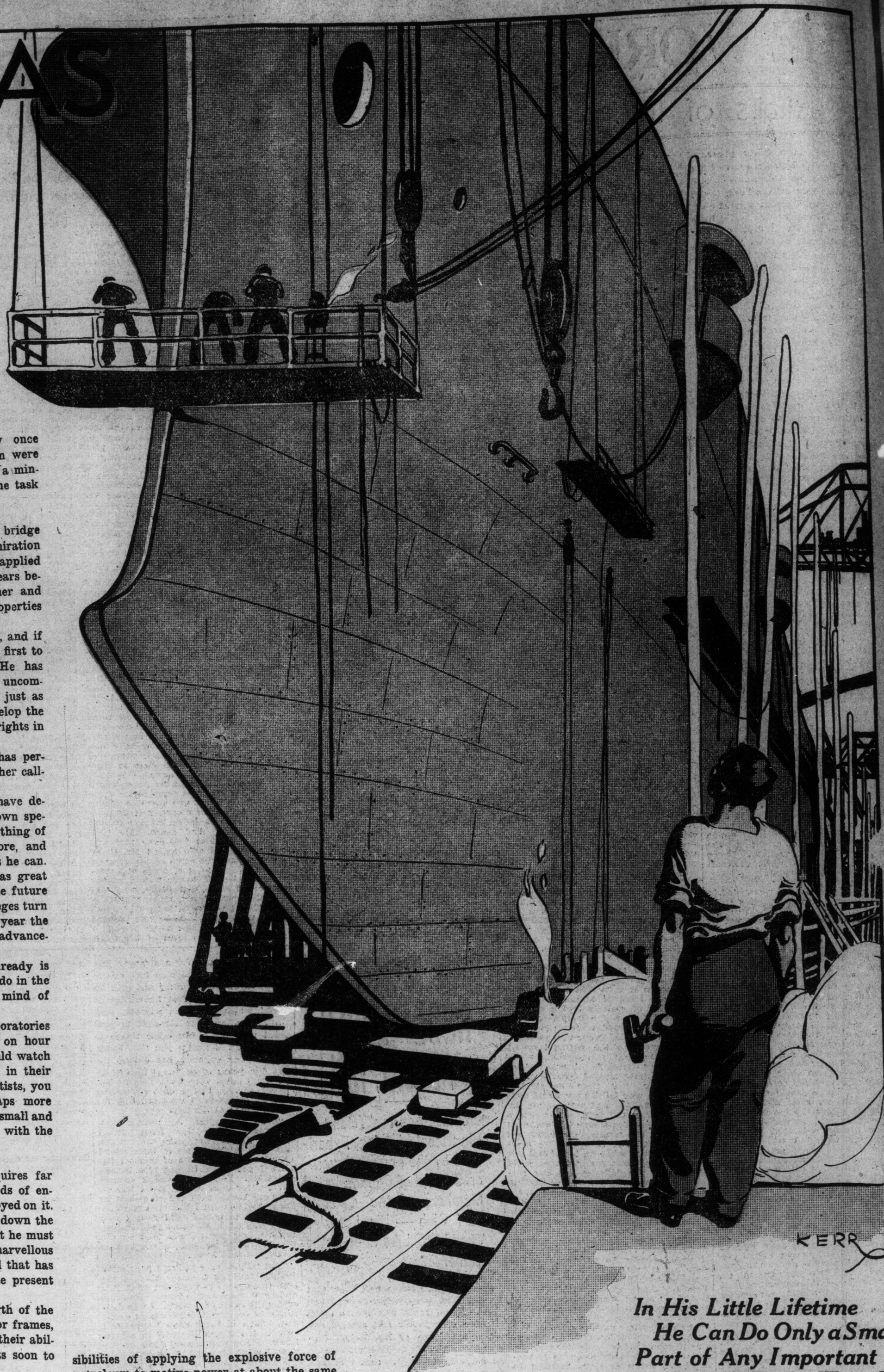
The world that most of us know is a great work shop, in which each must find the job he is best fitted to do, and do it as well as he may.

Education is but studying what other men have done in the world in order that we may waste no time in discovering what has already been discovered or in following paths that have been found to lead in no useful direction.

There is no work so unimportant that it is to be despised, so long as it is wholesome; there is no field of human endeavor that has been so fully cultivated that it will give no further return for labor.

The man who realizes that instead of being greater than his task he is infinitely small in comparison with it has a chance to do his best, and in doing his best he is reasonably sure to be successful.

Whether he gathers together a great fortune or not does not matter a great deal.



*In His Little Lifetime
He Can Do Only a Small
Part of Any Important
Human Task, Then He
Must Pass On and
Leave Its Completion
to Those Who Are
to Come After Him.*

Some men were not meant for fortunes, and are spoiled by them.

But whether or not he can justify his existence by being of use to those that are here and those who are to come matters a great deal.

Let him take hold of any work that comes to hand, if he finds that he can do it, and after learning all that there is to know about what has been done upon it go courageously to work to do a little more if he can.

He will soon find that as he progresses the importance of his task becomes constantly greater in his eyes, and that as the years have passed by he has come to prefer it to anything else in the world.

Whether it is medicine, law, engineering or selling groceries, if he feels that it is a great and useful work he will find in it pleasure and satisfaction, and unconsciously he will become one of the world's really valuable workers.