

# Jimmie's Infant Industry

By CHARLES JOHNSON POST

In Everybody's Magazine

"Wuthless—o' course he's wuthless if he won't work! Now, Ma, there's no use in talking—I don't intend to be the fool father of a rich man's son—at least not any more." With a dexterous movement the old man flapped his morning paper open and with one blow of his palm smote it flat with the financial page uppermost. "More coffee," he ordered over his shoulder curtly.

A butler, silent, scornful, automatic, moved through noiseless grooves; and from the other end of the breakfast table Ma kept on, heedless of the old man's dictum of finality.

"Why, Pa, I don't see how you can set so—you've got money enough for all of us. Let the boy enjoy himself."

The old man grunted from out of his coffee cup, with his eyes still glued to the market reports before him. "Let him learn to make money like I did, so's he can take care of it when I'm gone—that'll be enjoyment enough."

The ample form with its placid curves rippled in a spiritless indignation at the other end of the table. "It ain't fair, Pa," she urged peevishly. "Here he is just getting on with real nice people and invited all around—house parties and such, and clubs and all that—and now you're going to make him come down to your stuffy old office every day!"

This was a gross libel on the old man's headquarters; a whole floor had been remodeled by a fancy architect in an ascending scale of opulence that culminated in an inner sanctuary with fluted columns, padded floors, and silk rugs—A place where everything had been carved, woven, painted, or designed to special order. It looked expensive, and thereby satisfied the old man's only esthetic sensibility.

Dispassionately he grunted as he pushed the empty cup away. "Jim's going to learn to work," he announced flatly. "Tell him to come down to the office at five this afternoon. If he don't come, his allowance is cut in half. Not before five o'clock, though. I'm busy." He shoved his chair back from the table and jammed the paper in his pocket. "Don't forget to tell him about his allowance—he'll come."

"His allowance—oh, Pa!" The silk and lace morning gown fluttered in an agony of agitation. "Why, he hasn't enough as it is, and I was just going to ask you—wait a minute—wait a minute, Pa—" But with a final snort of his shoulder the old man had disappeared, and from the distance came a further series of puffings and gruntings that marked his struggles with his overcoat. Helplessly the fluttering laces and silk settled back.

The thumb of Destiny had been turned down, and the doom of a regular and vulgar daily toil was about to descend on the son of the house.

Down-town, late that afternoon, the old man sat alone in his carved and hispadded sanctuary. Thirty stories below, the haze of the evening was already settling, softening the roof-tops of the distance and leaving in delicate contrast the purple canons of the intersecting streets. Before him, on a littered desk with the area of a billiard-table, four clocks bearing enameled

signs—London, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco—marked the hours with a mechanism as silent as the passage of time itself.

As the New York clock indicated a quarter of five he had dismissed brusquely the last conferee and then apparently lost himself in staring idly over the mellowing lights of the great city. The smooth-shaven, heavy jowls and the lean lips were as immobile as ever, yet at intervals the old man's eyes travelled across to the little clock that was slowly counting out the minutes of the New York day. And one of the heavy-knuckled hands covered with the loose, parchment skin of old age abstractedly fondled an unlighted cigar that would ordinarily have been half consumed by this time.

A muffled buzzer sang at the side of the desk, and a second later a faded little secretary appeared. "Your son is outside, Mr. Gorem."

"Send him in," ordered the old man curtly. He swung around at the desk, lighted the cigar briskly, and began shuffling among the scattered papers. "Prompt—maybe he's got the goods. He ought to lave—from me, anyhow. Or maybe he wants the allowance," he added grimly to himself. "On time, hey?" He looked up as his son entered the room. "Ma told you what I wanted you for!"

The younger man nodded as he lighted a cigarette. "Said we needed the money—I'm getting a big boy now—time to go to work, put my shoulder to the wheel, and all that sort of thing," he answered flippantly.

The old man snorted. "Well, made up your mind what business you want to go into, hey?" he asked.

"Well, Dad, I've come down to talk it over. But you know I've no taste for business—what need, anyway? You've got more money than you or the rest of us can use. Of course," he went on seriously, "if we were like most families and you needed me, why, you know, Dad, I'd pull along in the yoke with you like all possessed. But as it is, I don't feel that I'm a shirk."

"You won't be a shirk, Jimmie—you've got my blood in ye—and it's

time to begin. I've got some pride o' family, and I made my own pile myself—I've got the pride of wanting to see my son do what I've done, and with a better chance at the start than I had—peddlin' tinware. In the next place, there ain't room in this country for a man that won't work, whether he's one of these rich hoboes or just an ordinary poor one; and then, for another reason, I don't intend to be one of these fool fathers of rich men's sons, spending the dollars they don't know the value of."

"But you've made enough, more than enough, Dad—you can't use what you're making now," argued Jimmie.

"That's not the point," retorted the old man harshly. "A man's what-d'ye-call-it, hey?—destiny, that's it, destiny—is work—and work is anything from peddling bananas or tinware, like I did, to bossin' from the top o' the heap, like I'm doing now. My money's going to give you a better chance to choose than I had—now then, what ye going to have, hey?"

It was a crisis for Jimmie, but Jimmie did not know it; for, like most crises, it looked very commonplace. A score of times Jimmie had escaped with audacious ease; this was merely another time, probably.

"From any one else, Dad, that would sound like an invitation to have a drink. But if I've got to choose right off, it's only fair to begin at the bottom and peddle bananas as you suggest," said Jimmie gaily.

The old man leaned forward grimly. "All right, selling bananas it is; I'll take you at your own word. And," he added bluntly, "if you go back on it now—well—"

"The banana business!"

Jimmie recognized, a trifle late, that he had really passed a crisis. In the momentary whirl and adjustment of ideas, an impossible picture arose in his mind of a young man and a two-wheeled cart piled high with sprawling yellow fruit. "Oh, I say, Dad, that's only a joke!" he exclaimed.

"Joke nothing! Or if it is, it's your joke, ain't it? You make a wish, just like a story-book, and here I am like

the fairy godmother that makes it come true—like that!" He cracked his big knuckles in illustration.

But the harshness died out of his voice as he went on: "Why, Jimmie, son, I don't care what it is you're in; but I'll put you at the top o' the heap. You needn't worry about pushing a cart through the streets—I did that, or pretty much that, when I started. But you'll start right—big business, modern ideas, and all that sort of thing. Bananas! By gad, I'll show the world what the banana business ought to be!"

He punched a button under the rim of the big desk, and the faded little secretary popped into the sanctuary. "Fix up a room for Jim outside somewhere. Put a desk in here for him till it's ready." The faded secretary slid noiselessly out.

"Jim, you'll come down town with me mornings after this. Your business at first will be to sit tight—mostly to stop, look, and listen, as the railroad signs say. You can go up home now and tell Ma that your salary will be what she thinks your allowance should be—now that you won't have time to spend it."

Jimmie accepted the state of affairs with an easy adaptability, though still a trifle dazed at the swiftness with which events had crystallized. "All right, Dad! Hooray for the banana business if you say so—this automatic choice is a great load off my mind. Want me to go home by way of the docks and pick up a few bargains in left-over bunches?"

"You don't know enough," retorted the old man curtly. "I don't reckon you know enough about business to start anywhere but at the top." His face hardened in abstraction for an instant.

"If anybody cares enough to know, you might say that you're the secretary to the Consolidated Tropical Fruit Products Development company."

Jimmie whistled. "Swell name that, Dad! When I can reel out an offhand inspiration like that, I'll be qualified to sit among the big guns, too. After this I'll never be able to look a banana in the eye without taking off my hat to it."

The old man's harsh features softened again, and he walked across and laid his heavy-knuckled hand on the younger man's shoulder. "Why, Jimmie, son, there's no greater world to conquer than that of modern business. You've got brains—ain't I your father?—and with me back of you we'll found one o' these financial what-d'ye-call-ems—destinies, no, dynasties—that's it, dynasties. I'll show you. Tell Simmons I want to see him," he concluded abruptly as they reached the door together.

Before the old man had returned to his desk, Simmons, the drab little office secretary, was again at his elbow. "Mr. Jim said you wished to see me, sir?"

"Yes; everybody gone? Well, call up Griscom and tell him to meet me at the club this evening; important. Get Foote on the wire—tell him to be there, too."

Griscom was chief of the old man's staff of permanent counsel, and Foote

Continued on Page 19

## THEIR LOYALTY A JOKE



"The Canadian Manufacturers' Association, in convention assembled at Ottawa, greeted with laughter the appeal of the Western Grain Growers that the British Preference should be increased to fifty per cent. with free trade with Britain to come in ten years."—Press Report.