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We judge ourselves by what we feel capable of doing; but the world judges us by what we have already done.

Longfellow.



JOHN J. MAIN.

In the literature of engineering, the mechanism of the steam engine appeals more to the imagination than do the simpler constructive details of the apparatus in which steam is generated—the boiler. Hence, in the historic account of the evolution of the steam engine from Savery, Newcomen's and Watt's inventions in the nineteenth century, to Parson's turbine in the nineteenth, descriptions of the media in which steam is raised, occupy a very minor place. And yet, the art and skill involved in the design and construction of a waggon, Cornish, Lancashire or tubular type of boiler is by no means to be despised. Many of the deplorable accidents to power plants in days gone by, were directly traceable to the rule-of-thumb methods followed in the laying out of the plates for, and primitive means employed in the construction of, the boilers. In recent years, however, a marked change had come over the scene: boiler making has been reduced to the exactitude and precision of a science. In Canada, this progress has been largely due to the genius and initiative of the engineer whose portrait appears above.

John James Main was born on the Island of Alderney, Great Britain, in 1852. He comes of good artisan stock; for his father was a contracting blacksmith of repute. In 1856 he came with his parents to Canada, settling in Hamilton, Ont. After six weeks, migrated to Montreal, stayed until 1859, when they turned westward, locating in Toronto. His primary education was received in the "Old Country," and Angus, Montreal, P.Q., also Aurora, Ont.: the finishing touches being given at the Barrie Grammar School. At 13, was apprenticed to the machinist trade at Newmarket, under Sam Sykes—an artisan of the old school. He had to get up at 4 o'clock, raise steam, and have shop ready for men at 7. Then breakfast, work, dinner, work until 6 p.m. After 8 months ran away to Toronto. His father sent him back with message for Sykes: "If story told was true, cancel indentures; if not, good thrashing and set to work again." The complaints were true, hence, freedom granted.

Then apprenticed for 5 years in Northern Railway shops—now Grand Trunk Railway. In 1872, joined his father in contract for making crossings, switches and points for two narrow gauge railways—now Midland and Owen Sound branches of the C.P.R. Upon completion of this contract, engaged in boiler making with Dickey, Neil & Co., Beverley

Street. Then went to the United States, and worked in Titusville, Oil City, and Erie, Pa. Returned in 1877, to take charge of engine and boiler works of Inglis & Hunter. Superintended this plant until 1880, when he returned to Erie, Pa. But urgent pleas of Mr. Inglis for his return prevailed, and in September, 1881, they bought out the Canada Car Manufacturing Co.'s plant, Toronto, and commenced engine and boiler making—himself upon the percentage basis. In 1895, left John Inglis & Son, and began business for himself, in connection with Polson Iron Works. In 1896, James R. Annet, Joseph Wright, and himself, got control of the Canadian patent rights of the famous "Heine" boiler. He became manager of the Canada Heine Safety Boiler Co., and superintendent of the Polson Boiler Works. This boiler business prospered wonderfully. In August, 1906, Mr. Main bought out his partner, Mr. Joseph Wright, and straightway sold out to the Polson Iron Works—becoming third member, and a director of that firm, also Manager of the whole works. It is only fair to say, that when Mr. Main went with the Polson Co. in 1895, the affairs of the Company were at a low ebb. The present successful and prosperous condition of the Company's business is largely owing to his energetic and resourceful co-operation.

Space alone prevents us telling in detail the eventful story of his deeply interesting business career; his struggles to get a technical education; his winning of a Mechanic's Institute three years' scholarship; how he walked three miles three nights a week to evening classes; how the old boiler makers kept the secrets of their laying-out formula up their sleeves, necessitating his wandering into factory after factory, even to workshops in the "States," in order to make himself master of the boiler maker's craft. All this would make a romantic story, as profitable reading as Smiles' "Lives of the Engineers." Although 55, Mr. Main is a fine example of physical vigor and vitality; one of the secrets being his almost life-long abstinence from alcoholic drinks and tobacco, and his love of the open air—for he is an enthusiastic motorist. Like Gladstone, he is the happy possessor of the power of compelling sleep at will. As a mechanic, there is probably no man better known in industrial Canada. His pupils are holding responsible positions in almost every workshop in the country.

He is President, Vice-President or Director of 17 different Companies, and has the good-will and respect of every business man and every engineer in the Dominion.