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Wed. Oct. 11/22

Sir Henry Thornton

Old-timers in Logansport, Indiana, say the New York Times, have been gathering around the town grocery these last few days swapping yarns about "Little Hen Thornton," who used to live there. Today he is Sir Henry Worth Thornton, and the boldest of the cracker box prophets have been heard to say that they always knew he would grow up to be something like that. He had been a Knight for several years, and Logansport has put out its chest with proper pride. The thing that started old residents harking back again to his barefoot period was the announcement the other day that their "little Hen," now General Manager of England's Great Eastern Railway, had developed with associates a ball-bearing device which might conceivably revolutionize railroad operation. One despatch said that a coach equipped with these bearings was "so easily moved that its brakes must be kept on lest the wind start it off." Another message set forth that it required seven men to move a coach without the bearings, but one man could easily move the same coach with these bearings installed. A new steel of such hardness that it is expected to withstand this usage has made the device possible, which would mean a great saving in fuel and prospectively bring about almost any speed.

Has Done Notable Things. Sir Henry Thornton is a conspicuous figure in the little group of Americans who have won to the biggest sort of success in England. He has done so many notable things since going there in 1914 that he is looked upon as one of the outstanding personalities in English affairs. Previous to becoming general manager of the Great Eastern, he was superintendent of the Long Island Railroad, and known as a rising man in the railroad field. His achievements of the last eight years have more than borne out that estimate, at the same time verifying the opinion of the grocery store philosophers in his old home town. Probably no man ever took up such a job as his under greater difficulties. The first of his difficulties arose when Lord Claud Hamilton, chairman of the Great Eastern in 1914, said that no man capable of running the road could be found in England, and made known the selection of Thornton. Immediately one section of the press, a large share of the public, and most of the railroad world rose in criticism. "Great Britain has not in many years had such a shock to her pride," commented the Sunday Observer. The things printed were mild compared to the spoken word. It was said that Thornton had made a name for himself by driving his men to the limit, that he was an efficiency expert of the worst sort, and woe to those who fell under his jurisdiction.

And He Did Not In face of all this, Thornton gave up his

broken stream to the Channel ports, a large part of the whole over the Great Eastern. Thornton had tackled more than he knew.

His Work In the War An Executive Committee of railroad managers was formed to handle the war traffic, and England took over the roads. Thornton was not on the committee, which might have prompted many men to resentment. Failure to include him was explained in various ways. The Great Eastern went on much as before, with its operating head doing his best to speed men and munitions to France. And presently he was included in the control committee. A little later he became a Lieutenant-Colonel and was more intimately concerned in the operation of all the roads. Next he was made a Colonel, and it seemed in the nature of things that his promotion to Brigadier-General should come about. By that time the English public had grown pretty well accustomed to the name of Thornton. It was associated with a number of matters that could not be overlooked. Then he was appointed Director of the Channel Transports. In fact, titles were coming his way, and before long he had more to do with war transportation than almost anybody else. Verily, Thornton had made good and the men "who knew him when" back in Logansport, would have been proud could they have seen how he handled his new work and wore his new honors. It seemed logical, once more, that these honors should be extended by a grant from King George, making him a K.B.E., which is Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire, and something that only a few men ever get. He also got the Legion of Honor and other marks of merit.

Wanted To Be a Bishop Thornton—if it is permitted to speak that way of a K.B.E.—might be called a typical product of the American railway school. It was in this field that he made his first venture and where he soon found himself. He had attended St. Paul's School, at Concord, N.H., and made something of a name on the football field. Afterward Thornton was one of the heavies in the line-up at the University of Pennsylvania. Following graduation, the future head of the Great Eastern went to work for the Pennsylvania as a draftsman. That was in 1896, and he spent the next few years ploughing his way through a hard routine of engineering duties. In 1901 he reached his first real executive job as Superintendent of the Cleveland, Akron and Columbus Railroad, and his climb upward has been steady ever since.

It is easy enough to say that a man has succeeded, but much more interesting to inquire into the reasons of his success. In Logansport they say that "little Hen" wanted to be a bishop—just why nobody knows. How he came to be a railroad man has not been recorded, but it is certain that he soon showed signs of having executive calibre. All of those who knew him in the early days attest to his humanity, his love of fair play, and unswerving willingness to help the other fellow.

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MEIGHEN PAPERS, Series 3 (M.G. 26, I, Volume 135)