

By
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The Young Man and His Problem

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NEW YEAR ACCOUNTING

In a business magazine just to hand, a teacher of commercial subjects paraphrases the usual terms of bookkeeping by offering the following resolutions:

Resolved, that by January 1st, 1921, I will be prepared to keep accurate accounts of

My money—in order that none of it slip away to no purpose.

My time—in order that I invest none of it unprofitably.

My property—in order that I may utilize it with full effect.

My debts—in order that I may pay them promptly.

My engagements—in order that I may be relied upon.

My business activity—in order that I may both give and receive full value.

To round out the series, one might be inclined to add—

My mind—in order that I may develop mentally as well as materially.

My body—in order that my physical life may meet the demands imposed upon it.

My ambitions—in order that I may realize the true nature of my opportunities.

QUALITY VERSUS QUANTITY

In the general readjustment that confronts us, the complaint is heard sometimes that quality is losing ground and that good workmanship is not so much in evidence as it used to be. If this is the case, the condition is one that time will improve. Good work, in the long run, must command the market. An anecdote related to a condition in Switzerland many years ago, bears upon this.

"As a rule," it says, "Swiss workmen are competent in their several trades, and take an interest in their work; for, thanks to their superior education, they fully appreciate the pecuniary advantages to their masters, and indirectly to themselves, of adhering strictly to this course. A striking instance of the policy of acting otherwise has lately happened at St. Imier, in the Bernese Jura, and produced a deep impression. In this district, for some years past, a great falling-off in the quality of the watches manufactured has taken place, owing to the inhabitants finding it much more profitable to increase the production at the cost of the workmanship than to abide by the old rules of the trade.

They prospered beyond all expectation for a considerable time, but finally their watches got such a bad name that they became unsaleable, and the result is a general bankruptcy of nearly all the watch-makers of this particular district."

INITIATIVE

How much initiative should an employee display? Recently, a writer undertook to answer this question by relating a couple of anecdotes in illustration.

An attitude in some businesses is "What is that to you? Stick to your own department." The awakened enthusiasm, warming with zeal for the welfare of the business, is instantly chilled below zero, and valuable energy and eagerness are diverted from what might otherwise be prolific activity. Now and then, in my experience, I have found a snub rouse the man instead of crushing him, but that is the exception rather than the rule.

"Keep to your own work," replied a short-sighted employer to a clever and ambitious assistant, who threw out a hint about an improvement in the policy of the house. "Keep to your own work"; and then, with amazing lack of tact and appreciation, he added: "If you don't, you will get too big for your clothes, and then your clothes won't fit you, and you'll have to go."

"Go I will, this day month," was the instant response. But he did not go, for the head of the house promptly realized his own stupidity, and put things right by the adoption of the hint, coupled with a substantial increase of salary. In the converse case, there was a sinister factor operating to the detriment of a great undertaking; ultimately, its nature was discovered, and the root eradicated. One man had known of the evil, though his knowledge was not of the guilty species. He was asked why he said nothing.

"It was not in my department; I thought it was nothing to do with me."

"I suppose if the next room had been on fire, you would have thought it was nothing to do with you," retorted the indignant head of the business, his indignation thoroughly justified; and the subordinate's prospects of promotion were seriously interfered with.

POETRY AND THE ENGLISH

It is remarkable that the English people, one of the most practical of all peoples—so that they have been called "a nation of shopkeepers"—have found poetry a favorite means of expression. Under the crust of the military and the mercantile the fire of imagination has ever been burning. Perhaps it is that very imaginative power that has made them see the whole world at once as a field for their achievement, so that they have been unable to rest until their ships have traversed every sea, their soldiers and explorers crossed and their traders entered every land.—Fernald.

WEATHER AND EFFICIENCY

What effect does the weather have upon you in terms of efficiency? An instrument company reports that a study of efficiency in comparison with weather statistics brings out the following facts:

That more clerical errors are made during the summer months than during winter, with a marked increase for excessively hot weather.

That excessive humidities increase the tendency to error and a slight humidity generally means a higher percentage of accuracy.

Errors decrease slightly as the wind increases and are excessive for cloudy, wet days.

THE ART OF LISTENING

One reads, in the course of a few years, many articles on the Art of Reading, the Art of Writing, the Art of Painting, the Art of Speaking, but I do not remember for a moment a definite statement on the Art of Listening, and the duties and responsibilities of the listener.

These are days of meetings, clubs, societies and movements of various kinds, and in the development of these things, we find that the groups that are interested in them may be divided, each of them, into those who do the talking and those who do, or should do, the listening. Criticism of speakers is common enough, and can hardly be made more pointed than in the words of George Eliot, who wrote "Blessed is the man who, having nothing to say, abstains from giving wordy evidence of the fact." But what about criticism of the listener? Is it not a fact that his disappointment at the outcome of the meetings he attends is usually his own fault. He complains, for instance, that the proceedings were dry, that the speaker had not an attractive personality, that he did not stick to the point, that the title of the lecture was misleading, that he could not hear well. Sometimes, no doubt, these complaints are justified, but not always.

In the first place, there are many meetings at which one should not expect entertainment to be the leading feature, but rather instruction, and the man who complains that he was not entertained, had probably no business at the meeting at all. Then, too, it is a mistake to pin too much on the attractiveness or personality of the speaker. The message is more important than the mannerisms of the speaker, and it is just here that we need to cultivate more of the art of sympathetic listening instead of critical looking.

With regard to misleading titles of lectures and addresses, there is certainly some ground for complaint here. Those who are given the opportunity of speaking to men and women in the group should see that the privilege is not abused, and that the title of their talk indicates as nearly as possible the substance of it. But even here, the listener is frequently at fault; he does not correctly interpret the title of the address, and so goes to the meeting with wrongly conceived ideas, upon which he bases his subsequent criticisms.

With regard to being unable to hear at meetings, nine-tenths of this could be overcome by more careful "ear training." We have become so accustomed to noise and shouting that we are unable to grasp the tones and meanings of the quiet speaker. Interruptions among the audience will, of course, drown out the best of speakers, but on many occasions our lack of hearing is due to a certain auditory laziness.

On one occasion I had a class of students in a school auditorium and during the course of the proceedings, some students in the centre of the hall complained that they were unable to hear. I stopped the speakers and asked for absolute silence, during which I dropped a pin to the floor. The impact was heard by every student, and I have had no more complaints since then.

Before you criticize the nature of another meeting, be sure that your own position in the matter is perfectly clear.

FARMERS AND PUBLIC LIFE

One should rejoice in all legitimate movements among farmers for co-operation to improve marketing and secure the best return for all they produce. One cannot doubt that the chief co-operative enterprises of the grain growers have been of great advantage to Western Canada even if one questions the wisdom and practicability of some of their political teaching. All that makes rural life more attractive and farming more profitable is of direct social and national advantage for, when all is said, it is only by greater returns from agriculture and by fuller recognition of the social dignity of the calling, that the population upon the land will be materially increased.

There have been too few farmers in the legislatures, in the house of commons, in the senate, in honorable places upon public commissions. I cannot think that a successful banker, or railway builder, or manufacturer, or educator, holds a more honorable position in the community than a successful farmer or stock breeder. From generation to generation, the supply of educators, bankers, capitalists, and even the social leaders of the cities, is renewed and maintained by recruits from the country. The farms are the nurseries of scholars and statesmen, of the leaders in finance and industry.—Sir John Willison.

THE PERSISTENCE OF LINCOLN

From a contemporary, "Canadian Finance," we quote some interesting references to the career of Abraham Lincoln.

When Abraham Lincoln was a young man, he ran for the legislature in Illinois and was badly beaten.

He next failed in business, and spent seventeen years of his life paying the debts of a worthless partner.

He was engaged to a beautiful young woman and she died.

Later, he married a woman who was a constant burden to him.

He then tried to secure a government appointment and failed.

He became a candidate for the United States senate and was badly defeated.

In 1856, he became a candidate for the vice-presidency and was again defeated.

He was subsequently elected president of the United States.

It is a long lane that has no turning.

CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR

In the eternal cycle of time, we have almost completed another of our finite calendar years, and in Canada it has been a year for which we have much to be thankful. Notwithstanding apparently adverse conditions, we have progressed steadily in the task of reconstruction, and in our own country at least, we have been able to avert many of the unpleasant prophecies of the pessimist.

As always, there is much still to be done in this great new country of ours and in proportion as we keep an even mind in the midst of our activities, so shall we accomplish our tasks with a minimum of friction.

To our readers I extend the greetings of a happy Christmastide and the hope that in 1921 they experience to the full the opportunities that ought to be theirs in this land of great heritage.

WORK AND MOTIVES

In explaining property and the need of private property, it is said that men will not undertake severe work unless they are fairly sure of being paid for their work or of making a profit out of their industry. This means that men will not work without a motive. If we desire to find the cause of work, we must discover the force or motive that sets it in operation. As Nature's forces are the power that makes machinery effective, so motive in industry is the force that lies behind work.

The most important fact in explaining industry is the fact that men have many and varied wants. To satisfy wants is the purpose of work and the explanation of industry. This statement may be proved by assuming the contrary. If the wants of men could be supplied without work, there would be no farming, no manufacturing, no buying or selling, no paying or receiving of wages, no anything as we now know in the world of industry.

We have here a cause, a means, and a result. The cause is human wants; the means is human work; and the result is human satisfaction.—H. C. Adams.