

4 LEADING AMERICAN INVENTORS

of enterprise, and not for a moment its master. From the best engineering practice of their day the Stevenses chose this device, or that method, with a judgment cooled and steadied by the responsibilities of large investments. Where original inventions were demanded, these they created, all to rear units for trade and commerce wholly new, units so daring that men of narrow outlook and restricted means would never have called them into being.

Goodyear, Howe, and Mergenthaler, beset by chronic poverty, in building their models were obliged to limit themselves to dimes when they should have laid out dollars. Not so with the Stevens family: their work from the outset drew upon every source of aid and comfort. Before they touched a drawing-board with a pencil, they could fully learn the state of the art in which they meant to take new strides: they could confer with their peers in engineering circles both at home and abroad. Mechanics of the highest skill stood ready to carry their plans into effect with despatch. When their experiments turned out well, as they usually did, there was no weary waiting in the ante-rooms of capital that their ventures might be adopted. The Stevenses were themselves men of wealth, so that when they launched a steamboat, its freight and passengers were ready to go on board. If they built a locomotive, they could also build a railroad to give it profitable traffic. Poverty as a sharpener of wits has had much and frequent praise. Let us sing a new song, this time unto wealth! The race is not always to the impeded, and much sound fruit mellows in the sunshine, and nowhere else. The Stevenses were leaders whom other men were glad to follow, well aware that their path was free from obstacles, so that, in a following, more was to be won and more to be shared than under chieftains of less faculty and fortune. As America grows richer, we are likely to see more of this leadership on the part of wealthy and cultured men who, alive to their responsibilities, repay