

A LITTLE FLYER IN BOXES

Mr. Pitcher Finds a Partner

by PETER B. KYNE

Illustrations by
ROBERT W. AMICK

SYNOPSIS—Reuben K. Pitcher, having embarked in the lumber commission business for himself, and having cleaned-up a few thousand dollars on his first deal, boldly contracts with Henry Peets, Manager of the Washington Box Factory, to sell its entire spruce box output. He pays \$2500 down, agreeing to pay a corresponding sum within thirty days. Then he begins to question his ability to put the deal through—and sees ruin suddenly staring him in the face.

REBUBEN K. PITCHER bade Mr. Peets a touching farewell and returned to his hotel, where the first person to accost him was one Billy Allen, Purchasing Agent for the Amalgamated Canneries Company, of California. Pitcher had an inspiration.

"Hello, Billy," he said, "come up to buy boxes?"

"Yep," replied Allen. "Looks as if the apricot crop will swamp us this year.

"Pretty hard to place orders right now. Most of the box mills are pretty well loaded up with futures."

"Well that doesn't worry Billy Allen," the purchasing agent replied, blandly. "I know where I can lay my hands on a hundred and fifty thousand ready-made boxes and only waiting for our brand on one end."

"You mean the orders made up for the Golden West people before they failed?"

Allen smiled. "I suppose you want me to tell you my business, eh, Rube?"

"I hate secretive people," Pitcher retorted. "See you around the hotel later, I suppose," and he went up to his room.

To him here an hour later came Henry Peets, with an egg-sucking expression of countenance.

"Say, Pitcher," he began lamely, "about that canery stock I just sold you. I've just received a pretty fair offer on it. How'd you like to tear up that contract I gave you and take a thousand clean profit for your afternoon's work?"

Rube Pitcher only grinned. "Mr. Peets, business is business. This is a game of the survival of the fittest, and I was never accused of puling sentimentality when playing it. When I bought your shook this afternoon I took the most desperate chance I shall ever take. So did you. Well, the cat's hopped my way and I'm going to gamble on the market. I'm sorry for you, but it can't be helped. You might convey my compliments to Billy Allen and tell him I'll sell him those boxes sixty days from now. I'll take five thousand for my bargain then."

HENRY PEETS sighed and retired. Presently he returned. "Say," he spat furiously, "if I ever get on my props I want you to handle my output for me." And he ducked out again.

The following morning Rube Pitcher took passage on a lumber schooner for San Francisco to save expense. He knew the skipper, and had declared himself eligible for a pass.

Upon his arrival in San Francisco he briskly fell to work in his chosen field of endeavor, although his very first move was to arrange for the transportation of his box shook from Gray's Harbor to San Francisco on a steam schooner due on the Harbor in about forty days. This matter attended to, and having received a written promise from the vessel owners to freight his beautiful kiln-dried box shook below decks, where no seas could possibly come aboard and ruin it, he started blithely on a selling trip into the southern part of the state and was gone two weeks. When he returned to his office he found a letter from



"Promise me you won't talk to anybody else first," pleaded Billy Allen.
"It's a bargain," declared Pitcher.

Billy Allen awaiting him. He replied to it in characteristic fashion:

My Dear Mr. Allen:—

There are a great many more apricots in this fair state of ours than you seem to think. I have just been traveling around a little and I guess I won't sell my boxes for a few weeks yet.

Very truly yours,

REUBEN K. PITCHER.

Billy Allen made no reply to this letter. He was afraid to, for there are certain statutes in force designed to insure the purity of the United States mails. Instead he conceived a passionate desire to spend an hour a day in Rube Pitcher's office in a vain endeavor to point out to that young man the error of his way. To all of which Reuben K. Pitcher smiled and pointed to his office calendar, upon which the fifteenth of September was marked with a large red cross.

"That," said Mr. Pitcher, "is the date my boxes are due in San Francisco. Call on me September fifteenth and I'll talk business with you."

"Promise me you won't talk to anybody else first," pleaded Billy Allen.

"I will—provided you promise me you'll take the entire lot off my hands at the same price I am offered by your competitors for lots of ten thousand."

"Show me their written offer, and I'll meet it."

"It's a bargain," declared Pitcher. "Now leave me alone until September fifteenth, because I want to give due thanks to a very merciful Providence for the grandest crop of apricots in ten years."

SLOWLY the month dragged along. Since the day of his return from his northern trip, Rube Pitcher had not seen Queenie once. He had called her up the night of his arrival in San Francisco, only to learn that she was spending the week-end out of town, and before her return on Monday, he had taken an early train out on his two weeks' tour of the state. Upon the completion of this trip, when

he again called her on the 'phone, she had left for a month's vacation in the Sierras. They had, however, corresponded, although their letters, in view of the status of their rather nebulous love-making to date, were more or less perfunctory and fairly free from endearing terms. Until his soul should be released from its burden of boxes, it had occurred to Rube that it might be just as well to permit his love affair to drift along in a state of uncertainty rather than clinch the matter with a definite proposal of marriage by mail. So he contented himself with sending Queenie flowers and books and fruit, and writing twice a week—letters that evinced a warm affection and admiration, but nothing more. Mostly he wrote about his business and his hopes and aspirations for the future. He did not have much time to devote to this correspondence, for he was hustling hard for orders with which to load up his mill and give it something to work on when the saws should be turned over for the first time.

THE vessel which was to freight his box shook south was delayed in loading by a longshoremen's strike, and it was not until the sixteenth that she was reported loading. She sailed on the nineteenth, and on the twenty-second her owners called Pitcher up. A wireless from the vessel had informed them that she would be due in San Francisco early next morning. She would proceed first to Oakland Long Wharf to discharge her deckload of shingles; then return across the bay to discharge Pitcher's box shook on a San Francisco wharf, and Pitcher was requested to call up the Chief Wharfinger's office and make arrangements for a berth for the vessel. When he did so, the vessel was assigned to the bulkhead between Howard Street Pier No. 1 and Howard No. 2; whereat Pitcher fumed, for, by reason of the boxes being discharged on an open dock, he would have to engage a watchman to guard them until they had been drayed to the cars and shipped down into the Santa Clara valley. Despite the clear weather all along (Continued on Page 10)