

WILLIAM L. YETTER PRESIDENT OMAHA COMMERCIAL CLUB

How a St. Joe Boy Has Risen by Dint of Careful Attention to Business to Become One of the Leaders Among Missouri River Jobbers and as Man of Affairs in Omaha

BUSINESS is the word that describes William L. Yetter, the young man who has been elected president of the Commercial club of Omaha, an organization representing the varied interests of the throbbing western city, the great market town and queen of the agricultural world, set away in a kingdom of corn.

But the chill of the word is mollified by Mr. Yetter's radiance. He does not bear a superficial, physical, nor even a physiognomical, resemblance to the cold man of business. He radiates a lot of good things, physical well-being, good humor, good nature, and good business principles. Some people think he is popular simply because he has tact which enables a perfect blend of good fellowship with proper business dignity. But that is not all. He is a success in his business, and though he has been in Omaha less than ten years, he has succeeded in getting the goods which he sells known in almost every town and city in the west where there is a jug trade on Standard oil. Placed anywhere Mr. Yetter has shown that he is always in harmony enough to be agreeable without surrendering his own ideas. He takes a little of the suavity of society into business and carries back a little of the good poise of an alert business man when he returns to society. He is a sort of storehouse of general healthfulness of view, but business above all other things. William L. Yetter is a regular connoisseur of business characters, and has gathered around him information about them which has guided his personal business to success.

"They don't put enough into business or life outside of hustling," is the way he puts it. And he was never found out selling his goods because he can put something in besides the hustling which will yield better dividends.

Mr. Yetter was born in Missouri and schooled in Missouri. He has had the Missouri spirit almost all his life. His years are forty and he has enjoyed them all. They have been busy, but he has got some fun out of what others would make only a grim, solemn, dry, pompous business.

It was in St. Joseph, Buchanan county, that Mr. Yetter started the struggle with a lot of other bully western boys. His father was a merchant of modest means, and William L. had to hustle. St. Joseph was doing the same thing in those good old days. The merchants had the goods and they had the trade. Everything east of the Rocky mountains pinned a rose on old St. Joe some twenty-five years ago. Kansas City and Omaha had some trade territory, but the real trade in the west went to St. Joseph or Chicago. The Denver merchants who attempted to enter the wholesale field fell down, and Pike's Peak gold was not mined fast enough to overcome the competitor which was given Denver by "little old St. Joe," as they had the city in the red, red west.

In the Newspaper Business

In such an atmosphere Mr. Yetter started, and, strange to say, he sold papers about the first thing he did after he reached an age when most boys start in business for themselves. It was in the good old days of the "St. Joe Gazette" before Missouri thought of child labor laws or the city government thought of wasting money on probation officers. The circulation managers had not opened up schools for boxing, when "Willie," or "Bill," Yetter became one of "de kids what works at night." That he has made a success of the wall paper business after selling newspapers and "loafin' round the boiler shop newspaper offices," is still a wonder to Mr. Yetter. But all things handed him could not be bad, and he frankly admits the newspaper office experience was far from being time wasted. He denies, in his mild way that he ever took advantage of the passengers coming across from Atchison by hopplin' trains and telling them that it was "de last chance ter git yer Gaz-zet." The "Murrikin" and "Noose" were not sold in those days and Mr. Yetter escaped having yellow journalism charged to his boyhood days.

Another close escape which Mr. Yetter had is still referred to with mingled delight and regret by the man who came so near going into the newspaper business that he has chosen the wall paper business as a life profession. No less a person than Eugene Field "helped 'em whoop up local" on the St. Joe Gazette, when Yetter was carrying papers and later when he was in the mailing department. Not a blush now comes to his face when he recalls the service he did Field by mailing thousands of copies of his poems to the readers of the old Gazette. Like "Pap," Abel of the old Pacific house in St. Joseph, Mr. Yetter knew the pedigrees of all the human race, or at least that proportion of it contained in the city directories of the eighties.

"Yes, I remember Eugene Field well," says Mr. Yetter. "He was dodging around the mailing room and business office a good bit. He said he got something like \$30 a week for doing everything from turning the press to editing the yards and yards of telegraph and he acted like he had about that much to do. Of course we did not know then the genius of Field. He was the homespun, humorous sort of a fellow which numerous writers have since described, and put a lot of bustle and brains into the make-up of the St. Joe Gazette."

Days of Boyhood Busy

While Field was around to Milton Tootle's opera house when a minstrel show was due to get a bit of dramatic news, Yetter, the boy of 14 was on the "make" to go into the show and investigate some of the early-day dramatic art, which has never slipped his mind. And while Field the reporter-editor-manager was tackling farmers for the "noble bits of news," Yetter was selling the papers to them, and where Field got the pecks of apples and peaches, Yetter does not deny that he got his pockets full. It was far more profitable selling Gazettes to Colonel Waller Young, Colonel James N. Burns and Frank M. Posegate than hopplin' the cars with a basket full of water-lilies as some of the boys did to separate the travelers from their negotiable tin when they left for back east after "lookin' over the town." And Yetter stuck to the newspaper business and his school books. As for "Lover's Lane," which runs from Grand avenue and Seventeenth street to the northwest limits of St. Joseph, it was never a real lover's lane to Mr. Yetter, but the old barefooted, hungry lean 'ornery boys of the city had some great times in the old narrow road where the maples make a canopy and it's shady time all the time.

These scenes made their impression on Mr. Yetter and while he escaped becoming one of the "poets in their misery, dead" he did become a composer and a painter of landscapes. Of German descent Mr. Yetter went to work in the mechanical department of the St. Joseph Volksblatt, a big German paper and set type for a year. But it was not a trade to his liking. He saw no business future which could possibly result from setting type, and he had already begun to admire the men around him who were a business success in the community. Another trade was more attractive after he finished school, and he learned to hang wall paper and paint. The painting which Mr. Yetter did was no common painting either, for he became a first-class decorator and then finished off by acquiring no little skill as a painter of landscapes. If Mr. Yetter was not a connoisseur of business ideas he would doubtless have been an art collector and had his office and home lined with pictures of the masters' and his own making, but as it is he has a collection of photographs of business men. They have artistic frames and their quality and style tells that they are the work of the artists in photography. But it is the men which Mr. Yetter admires, not the photographs nor the artist's work. He might be said also to be a connoisseur of character.

Ideal of the Young Man

John Wanamaker was a much-talked-of man in Mr. Yetter's young manhood days. Wanamaker became one of his ideals. The financial trickster had no place in the admiration of Mr. Yetter. It was the man who built up a great business and made millions without splurging but maintained a respectable elegant status consistent with simplicity which interested Mr. Yetter. Marshal Field, not the wealthiest man of his time, but the biggest tax-payer, was an-



WILL L. YETTER.

other who interested Mr. Yetter, and when an opportunity to join his father in business and move to Hastings, Neb., which city presented a good opportunity, came he put his practical experience with his father's modest capital and the Yetter retail paint and wall paper store was opened for business in 1886.

The Yetters were successful. William L. Yetter grew into the business. He was popular in Hastings. For once he identified himself with republican politics and was elected city treasurer by a majority which made his opponent explain that Yetter was such a good fellow that he just stood still and let him win. But it did not happen to be the exact truth. Mr. Yetter won because he was recognized as a business man. Finally Mr. Yetter took the business as his own and conducted it with success through the hard times of 1893 to 1896 and by 1899 he had reached the top and saw nothing more in the business world of Hastings for him to conquer, at least

in his line. He joined his brother in Denver in a manufacturing enterprise, but it was not suited to his tastes.

It was then he saw the rising star of Omaha and hitched his wagon to it. When he entered the business here he occupied a small store on lower Farnam street, which looks just the size of a base ball pitcher's box as compared to the present seven-story building 66x132 which his wholesale wall paper house now occupies on Howard street.

When Mr. Yetter identified himself with the business interests of Omaha, his first step was to join the Commercial club. That was not quite ten years ago, and he soon made himself felt. He was needed in the club. He succeeded to a high place and was appointed a member of the executive committee and placed at the head of the committee on trade extension. While he headed this committee trips were taken by the wholesalers and jobbers of Omaha to Kan-

sas and South Dakota and numerous jaunts out over the trade territory in Nebraska. For three years Mr. Yetter served at the head of the committee. He has succeeded without buying a brass band. He doesn't even work the press. What he has done for the Commercial club he has done simply in the course of his duty. Doing things for the club through the Commercial club was an old thing before Mr. Yetter got into the harness and he knows it. The work he does he has been doing just as he would co-operate with his salesmen and assist them in opening a new strip of territory. And it has been done with the same regularity with which he opens the safe of his office.

Works With Ak-Sar-Ben

It is the same with his work in the interest of Ak-Sar-Ben. He is serving his third year on the Board of Governors, and has been chairman of the ritual committee, that little branch body which is responsible for much of the fun at court. Tortures untold have been devised which have impressed candidates with the greatness of the realm of King Ak-Sar-Ben and the influence which Samson, the Lord High Chamberlain, has with the powers that be. As a member of the parade committee Mr. Yetter assisted in handling one of the best series of parades ever seen at the carnival the last year.

As to his membership in the Field club, it doesn't amount to much. Chasing a putty ball over the links, from "T" to green, over bunkers and through hollows, does not appeal to Mr. Yetter. Recreation never appealed to him very strongly, anyway. He never played a game of base ball in his life, and even as a boy he was always on the "make" and had little use for the "godless, ribald vanities which modern youth pursue," not that Mr. Yetter objects to others taking all the outside recreation which they desire, but he never had the time to hear him tell about it. By living such a life Mr. Yetter is enabled to do a lot of work under a full head of steam, and he has made some money by it. He does not carry any outward signs of money and does not want to. He is just as good a fellow as he was when he "helped 'em whoop up the circulation on the St. Joe Gazette," and in the Missouri city there are hundreds who were his friends when he had something like \$10 a week. They are his friends still. To find out how popular Mr. Yetter is at the Commercial club, start to "knock" him in any mixed crowd and see how many and prompt the responses to the effect that he is just what he seems and no four-flusher either as to ability or energy or general sentiment.

System His Great Hobby

Mr. Yetter is a "crank" on system in his business house. All his clerks say so, but they like him because of his poise. He is not too soft as to his heart or too hard as to his head. The young men interest him. He has started a number in his business, and wants to start more as fast as he can find those who will meet a few of his ideas as to "signs" of a future. All his business life in Omaha he has devoted his time to the management and to the buying, leaving the selling for those who have hustle without the love for business routine and care. He co-operates with his salesmen in a larger way than most of those who are selling to a large trade, and the result is that he has built up a good business in about half the time. He unconsciously gives the impression to his employes that there is something to cultivate in business besides greed for money and though he loves the "rigor of the game," like Ella's old friend, he "plays it with a clean hand."

As president of the Commercial club Mr. Yetter succeeds such men as Herman Kountze, late president of the First National bank; the late A. L. Gibbon; J. H. Dumont; J. E. Baum; C. S. Hayward; Euclid Martin; C. H. Pickens, the late J. Frank Carpenter; A. C. Smith; R. S. Wilcox; W. S. Wright; F. W. Judson and C. M. Wilhelm.

Mr. Yetter was married in Hastings in 1888. His home is at 103 North Thirty-first avenue, and his family consists of his wife and one son. None of the friends of his boyhood days are about him in Omaha. One of his old chums who has always crowded the chairs closer together when Yetter came around, is Charles Berry assistant general freight agent of the Chicago Great Western railroad company.

Even so looks William L. Yetter, the new president of the Commercial club and even so he is and has been. He has done a lot of big things since he has been in Omaha and has not personally made so much money out of them either. He doesn't want to be disgracefully wealthy, but just to continue to be the good mixer that he is. When his business is business, and when he is off on a trade excursion it is to make friends. Then he just jollies along, saying "What do we care?" and is just good fellow enough, just plous enough, just dignified enough and high enough to be able to look over everyone in the crowd, but very well liked in any circle or set. That's more than something.

Life Work of General Grenville M. Dodge Reviewed

A NOTABLE review of great achievements in military and civil life was the address of John N. Baldwin on the career of General Grenville M. Dodge, delivered at the thirty-sixth annual reunion of the Army of the Tennessee at Council Bluffs November 9, 1906. It was reread at last year's reunion of the society at Vicksburg, Miss., and is now printed in booklet form.

The address follows: In this time of great national eminence, with happiness pregnant in 20,000,000 American homes, with our astral emblem honored and respected throughout the world, with the seat of peace of both hemispheres by the Potomac, with a nation distinguished for its commerce, its wealth, its Christianity and its enlightenment, it is meet that we should pause in our onward flight to acknowledge with full hearts our love, our reverence, our boundless gratitude and obligation to and for our preserver and benefactor—the union soldier.

We have with us one of the chief actors in what history truly represents as the greatest tragedy ever played in the theater of war. He saw the curtain rise on Fort Sumpter and fall on Appomattox. He shared with his comrades in arms the fortunes and misfortunes of military life, and like them he received his plaudits and his wounds.

I have the honor to speak of our distinguished fellow townsman, our neighbor, our friend, Grenville M. Dodge.

If our honored friend experiences some embarrassment as he listens to the recital of his deeds and achievements, he must remember the pleasure it affords those who offer their tribute and their expressions of esteem, and also remember that if the struggles and triumphs of the strong and successful are never to be recounted, the inspiration of worthy action might be lost and many tender chords remain untouched.

"Let us, then, be what we are and speak what we think, and in all things keep ourselves loyal to the truth and the sacred professions of friendship."

I believe that it will be both profitable and pleasurable for us to stop a moment during these tempestuous, tumultuous, business expanding, wealth getting and property developing times, and seriously contemplate the rugged and lasting qual-

ities of such a man as General Dodge, and also with fitting ceremony and circumstance, in the presence of the highest in the community, give to him his true meed and merit.

The Army of the Tennessee is conspicuous in American history. Around it is woven the story of the civil war. It participated in more than forty engagements, among them being a number of the great battles of that war. It not only participated, it was in the thick of the conflict, and was often the medium through which defeat was turned into victory. More than once the fate of the union depended upon its prowess and soldierly valor. It was so at Shiloh, Vicksburg, Corinth, Atlanta, and in fact nearly all the great battlefields of the war. As General Grant, speaking of Vicksburg, says in his personal memoirs, "It looks now as if Providence directed the course of the campaign, while the Army of the Tennessee executed the decree."

The name of General Dodge will forever be associated with the Army of the Tennessee, its great soldier in time of war and its great citizen in time of peace. He was one of the best and honored commanders, a fit companion of Sherman, McPherson and Logan. In the personal memoirs of Grant, Sherman and Sheridan are found the highest testimonials of these great soldiers to the valor, courage, skill and bravery of General Dodge. Commendation from such a source is a priceless legacy.

I desire to speak of the achievements and triumphs of General Dodge in the ranks of private citizenship. While he has illuminated the pages of American history with his deeds of valor, he has also made his impress as a private citizen in the sphere of industry.

It is not the rule that men ascend to eminence by leaps and bounds. It is by steady tread that we move up the rough and rugged path to success. This is an age of concrete thought and those of whatever vocation who rise above mediocrity and reach eminence and distinction are they who subject their lives to the crucible of hard intellectual and physical endeavor.

We often and wisely repeat the truism that man is the architect of his own fortune. Individuality is the despot, destiny the subject. I do not subscribe to the doctrine that all men

are created equal or that at the threshold of life's contest all are equally armed, but among those who are thus favored some fall, while others succeed, thus establishing the fact that success is a reward and not a legacy.

A man rising to eminence acquires that estate at tremendous cost. Many they are who crave it but few they are who are willing to strive for it in the only way it can be obtained, that is, by hard and constant endeavor. And is it not true that those who stand on the pedestal of fame are, as a rule, those who have crossed life's chasms on the bridge of sacrifice?

General Dodge's position today in the business and transportation world represents an investment of years of hard labor, and useful life. Without heredity of birth, without moneyed or influential friends, but with labor, diligence, integrity and faith in himself, he has risen steadily and marked a path across the railroad world. Studious, thoughtful and indefatigable, he has had much to encounter and much to conquer. He never despised an opponent and therefore never became careless, and he never feared one and therefore never became unnerved. He always had faith. He may have thought sometimes in the struggle that right would be defeated, but he never believed for a moment that wrong would triumph. Fidelity was his sovereign, loyalty his guide, and devotion his ruler. He bivouacked at his post of duty and absolutely only sought relief and solace in increased opportunity.

He is the very incarnation of resoluteness and determination. It is because he saw events and their causes, strove to obviate consequences, studied to ascertain contingencies, and because of caution and foresight, that he became distinguished in this realm of action, reaching a point where he had no superiors.

The Pacific railways were the great constructive forces in the development of the country west of the Missouri river, and of these the Union Pacific was the pioneer and the first to lead the march of civilization into the wilderness. It was not conceived for private ends nor born of the spirit of commercialism, but was created to preserve a republic and projected by the impulse of improvement. It is the only railroad in the

United States that was constructed under federal munitions and protected by federal troops, and of which it was said by the supreme court of the United States that the people of this country would have sanctioned the action of congress in its creation if it had departed from the traditional policy of the country regarding works of internal improvement and charged the government itself with the direct execution of the enterprise.

Its construction began on the 2d day of December, 1863, on the west bank of the Missouri river, in the city of Omaha. May 10, 1869, on Promontory Point, Utah, with simple but impressive ceremonies, the last spike was driven fastening the connecting rail between the Central and Union Pacific railways, completing an iron highway between the two oceans and consummating one of the greatest achievements of this age.

President Lincoln, fully appreciating the genius and indomitable will of General Dodge, immediately after the war called him to the task of construction of the Union Pacific railroad. He turned his face, recently bathed in the smoke of musketry, toward the "wilderness," the "Rookeries," and the "Great American Desert," and he surveyed and supervised the construction of that road, then a "military necessity," now one of the great systems of railways which move the commerce of the world. He had no maps or charts to afford him information of the topography of the country. The territory traversed was designated in text books as a wilderness dedicated by nature to be the eternal habitations of the savage and the buffalo.

Limited by law to a maximum gradient of 116 feet to the mile, not compensated for curvature, he held it down to ninety feet to the mile. Pressed for time, congress impatient, the people demanding an early completion, he had to contend with hostile Indians, inadequate funds, lack of transportation facilities, high priced labor, and numerous other obstacles, but in spite of all he pushed his line across the continent, consummating a feat in railway engineering unequalled in the history of American railway construction.

To emphasize this great achievement, I speak authoritatively, officially, and with full knowledge

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