



Whether Common or Not

By WILL M. MAUPIN.

A Stray Thought or Two

Every now and then I run across a man who seeks to excuse his employment of little children in his factory by saying:

"I started out to work when I was 11 years old."

That man is usually about 50 or 55 years old, and he seems to think that because he had to begin work when he was a boy that boys ought to begin earning a livelihood by the time they are 10 or 12.

I ran up against such a man in a big city the other day. He employs several hundred people in a big, stuffy, ily-ventilated factory. Practically every employe is of foreign birth, and 75 per cent of them unable to speak the English language. With a school officer I visited this factory and several child workers were taken out and forced to go to school. The employer was mad about it. He asked:

"How are we going to get help?"

"Pay good wages and employ adults," I suggested.

"I began working for a living when I was 11 years old," he said. Then I waxed somewhat wroth and remarked:

"Perhaps you did, sir; but you didn't begin working in a crowded factory, surrounded by ignorance, crowded in a poorly lighted room, with foul air to breathe. And you were not forced to bend over a machine performing the same automatic task for ten hours a day for a mere pittance—a task that benumbed your brain and did not train your fingers; a purely automatic task which, if followed for a hundred years, would not make you a skilled workman nor teach you even the rudiments of a trade. You at least had good air to breathe. You were taught a trade that promised a livelihood, and had a future of some promise for you—not a future as empty as a broken cistern. You were taught to work because it was good for you—not forced to work because some one wanted to coin your boyish brain and muscle into gold for himself, until the little frame was exhausted and then thrown aside like a squeezed orange. If you'll give these little children the same chance, the same surroundings, the same thoughtful consideration, that you had when you were a child worker, perhaps your paltry excuse will receive some consideration from men and women who think more of protecting little children from exploitation than they do piling up dollars."

I might have said more, but the employer did not give me a chance. He left.

A few weeks ago the mechanics in a big western shop went out on strike in order to enforce a demand for better working conditions. Among others secured to take up the work was a 14-year old boy, who was promised a steady job at good wages, with chances of promotion. The lad had been backward in school, being still in the fifth grade. For his work in the shop he was paid 6 cents an hour.

The attention of a state official was called to the case, and when he protested against this violation of the state's child labor law he was told that the boy's mother was a widow, and that she depended upon the boy's wages for her support. The official hesitated, not being willing to compel the boy's discharge until he had investigated the facts. He met one of the strikers and told him

what he had heard. The striker said:

"Meet me here in thirty minutes."

The official waited and promptly on time the striker appeared, followed by the executive committee of his union.

"Mr. Official," said the striker, "you compel those employers to obey the child labor law, and leave the boy and his mother to us. If he will go to school, bringing us a report from his teacher each day, we'll pay his mother as much as he would earn in the shops. And when school is out we'll either get him a job in the open air, and away from the foul air and heat and smoke of that place or pay him to stay at home and work in the garden for his mother."

Just as soon as the official could reach a phone he ordered the boy discharged under penalty of instant prosecution. The boy is going to school, and every evening he carries home to his mother an envelope containing 60 cents, paid by men out on strike to secure a fair day's pay for a fair day's work performed under fair conditions.

A few weeks ago I spent a night at the home of a Nebraska farmer. He homesteaded in 1878, and still lives on the original homestead, to which he has since added many broad acres. The farm house was by no means a pretentious mansion, but everything about it, inside and out, spoke eloquently of comfort. To achieve all this the farmer and his splendid wife had endured many hardships and privations—grasshoppers, drouths, hard times, and even Indian scares.

When we sat down to supper there were eight of us—the farmer and his wife, four stalwart sons, the youngest 15 and the oldest 24; a daughter of 18 and myself.

We talked about the problem of keeping the boys on the farm, and the farmer said to me:

"I've never had any trouble about that," and the four boys smiled.

"How did you do it?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "I couldn't explain why or how, but I know my boys have never shown any disposition to leave the farm for the city."

"How about it boys?" I asked.

"O, we're well satisfied here," said the oldest son, and the other boys nodded assent.

I thought afterwards that I had penetrated the secret. I saw in the family sitting room row after row of good books. I saw half a dozen farm and dairy journals. I discovered that two of the boys had taken the course at the State Agricultural College, and that another one was to enter the same school next fall. Each son had an interest in the farm, and every year was given his proportionate share of the farm profits, and the family kept books like an up-to-date manufacturing establishment. The daughter was a graduate of a high school and was preparing to enter the State University. She prepared the supper while her mother walked with her husband and the visitor about the farm premises. Before time for retiring the daughter played the piano and the whole family sang. A little gossip was exchanged over the telephone with a neighbor or two, and shortly after 9 o'clock—about four hours earlier than I am accustomed to retiring, the father reached up and laid his hand upon a well-worn Bible. From it he read a few verses, and then,

while we all knelt, he poured forth a prayer of thanksgiving and a petition for blessings upon the household and the guest within the gates. Then off to bed, and somehow or other, confirmed victim of insomnia that I am, I dropped off to sleep without loss of time, and next morning was up and stirring around about the hour I usually manage to get to sleep.

Perhaps the problem of keeping the boys on the farm isn't such a difficult one, after all.

This same farmer owns a fine pasture bordering upon a small river. Three or four years ago he and the boys scraped out a nice pond near the stream, excavating until the bottom of the pond was lower than the bed of the river. The pond immediately filled up by seepage and was stocked with fish—channel cat, croppies, bass, pickerel and bullheads. Pretty soon that farm will be harvesting a profitable crop of fish, to say nothing of the pleasure it will afford the members.

"Some of these days I'm going to own a farm, and the first thing I'll do after I get title to it will be to build a fish pond. While my rich friends are touring Europe I'll be sitting on the bank of that pond having the time of my life."

Mary Again

Mary had a little lamb

With which she went a-straying,
Until her papa said to her,

"That mutton isn't paying."

So down to Washington he went

Chuck full of deep dejection,
And told the fellows there in charge
He had to have protection.

"How you and Mary love that lamb!"

Exclaimed each tariff fixer,
"Just watch us help you guard that
lamb,
And do it double quick, sir."

The tariff on that young lamb's wool

To Mary did endear her;
And Mary and her dad just grinned
Each time that they would shear
her.

Tariff Tradition

"What's that story about Jason
and the golden fleece?"

"O, something about schedule K
in the tariff bill, I guess."

Brain Leaks

It's a muddy road that has no
bottom.

It is better to lift up than to be
dragged down.

The thing we do best is the thing
we love best to do.

What we most want is not always
what we most need.

The tongue of scandal is helpless
before ears that are deaf.

Character is what a man has; rep-
utation is merely what people think
he is.

The man quick to make excuses
soon gets into the habit of making
nothing else.

Some men are like gunpowder—
they put forth one exertion and are
never heard of after.

When Opportunity knocks the
sound is usually drowned by the
noise of the knocker on the inside.

The man who is forever boasting
of being self-made merely advertises
the fact that he has finished his top
story.

Men who take their business
troubles home with them usually
take their good nature to the office
and leave it there.

Late frosts have not been confined
to horticultural and agricultural dis-
tricts. There have been some se-
vere political frosts in certain east-
ern republican congressional dis-
tricts.



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