

The Unfortunate Experience of a Successful Salesman.

A TRUE STORY.

I HAD been working all winter and spring in the western part of New York State, alternately at wood-chopping and at making cradles and bedsteads, with a brief interval during which I ran a wheelbarrow express from the village hotel down to the steamboat-landing a mile and a half away, when I made my first and only flight into business as a drummer. I still think that it was a success in a way, even if it did n't work out exactly right. But that was not my fault. I like a concern, anyhow, that can stand up alone in times of prosperity: this couldn't. It was an infant industry: that was the mischief.

It was this way. A lot of my fellow-workers in the factory had hit upon the idea of setting up in business for themselves on the coöperative plan. They had no capital, but they hired a shop with water-power; wood was cheap, and the oil-country close at hand, with boom towns springing up all over it like mushrooms. They wanted beds and tables and chairs down there, and had money to pay for them. All that was needed was some one who could talk to go and sell them the things; then enough could be made to establish the business before the credit of the concern gave out. They picked me for that job, and I, nothing loath, dropped ax and wheelbarrow, and started out.

An album full of photographs of furniture and a price-list made up my equipment. I was to do the rest. I remember, as though it was yesterday, the first storekeeper I struck. It was in Titusville. He was a cross old man, and would n't so much as look at my pictures; but when I poked the book under his nose and it fell open right at the extension-tables, he had to in spite of himself. I told him the price before he could get his eye off the picture, and he took another look. He turned over the leaves, while my heart beat high with anticipation, and by and by he came back to the extension-tables. If they were any good he would n't mind a dozen or so; but he had to bind me down to an iron-clad contract as to price and quality, since he had never seen me before, and did n't know our tables. I signed that contract,—I would cheerfully have signed anything just then,—and many more like it in the three weeks that followed. It was singular how suspicious they were of extension-tables, in spite of the fact that they hankered after nothing else, in that free-handed country. But then I early made up my mind that that was the way of trade.

There were others in Titusville who wanted extension-tables, and I let them have them gladly. I must have sent home an order for a hundred that night before I took the late train for Oil City so as to be up and doing with the birds. There it was the same thing, and so in Pithole Centre, in Franklin, and all the way down the Allegheny River. There was evidently a famine in extension-tables. They wanted nothing else. It seemed as if no one slept or sat down in that country, but just ate. But I made up my mind that they probably all kept boarders, oil running high in those days, and lots of people streaming in from everywhere. Before that day was at an end I had determined to let all the rest of it go, and to throw myself on the tables entirely. If tables they wanted, tables they should have, if it took the last stick

of wood in Chautauqua County with Cattaraugus thrown in. A thunder-storm raged while I canvassed Oil City, and the lightning struck a tank. The oil ran down the hill, and set one end of the town on fire. But while it was burning I sold extension-tables in the other end, reasoning that they would need so many more of them when they came to rebuild. There must have been something contagious about my enthusiasm, judging from the way those tables went.

That night I went to bed happy after sending home a big order for extension-tables, all under iron-clad contract, and telling them to hurry them up. I slept the sleep of the just. I don't know what kind of a time my employers had when they got that order next morning, but I can guess. It seems that they telegraphed to my customers, and received only copies of the iron-clad contract, with assurances that it was all right—they had seen my papers. They wired for me, but no telegraph was swift enough to keep up with my progress through that oil-country. My blood once up, I swept through the region like a storm-wind, scattering extension-tables right and left, until finally I sold a dealer in Allegheny City a full thousand dollars' worth in one bill. When that order came home they gave it up. They did n't wire any more, because it was no use. Not until I brought up in Rochester on the Ohio River near the State line, my last cent gone, and sent back for fresh supplies, were they able to locate me. Every morning the mail had mapped out my trail to them, but where I might be by that time, out on the front, there was no telling.

They sent me ten dollars, and wrote me just to come back, and sell no more tables. But I was not to be balked in that way. I laid out a route which the ten dollars would cover, into Ohio a little way, and planted a few score extension-tables in every town I came to. They were just as greedy for them there as in Pennsylvania. Finally I pinched myself of a dinner or two, and wound up with a run to the city of Erie on the lake, and filled that place with tables too. Then I went home, feeling like a conqueror.

My chief met me at the depot; he wore a look of exhaustion. There was a crowd at the factory just across the canal, and a flag hung out of the window. I felt that it was not a wholly undeserved honor. I had done the best I could, and a reception a little out of the usual would not be unnatural. I asked him what he thought of it, and he said that it was great.

Lots of times since have I tried to recall what were my feelings when I found out that it was the sheriff's flag that hung out of the window. I suppose that I must have been stunned. The concern had «busted.» Too much extension-table had wrecked it. Instead of four hundred and fifty dollars of commission, I got seventy-five cents, which was just half of what the boss had in his pocket. He divided squarely. And that ended my career as a drummer, along with the firm's.

What was the matter? Why, the price-list. It seems that by some mistake the selling price of extension-tables had been put lower than the cost of working up the wood. Perhaps that also explained my sudden popularity with the trade—perhaps; I cannot say that I like to think of it that way.

Jacob A. Riis.

Uncle Ezra on 'Change.

I 'd be'n readin' 'bout some fellers thet were dealin' in
New York
In a brand o' wheat called «futures» an' a «fancy»
breed o' pork;
An' they bought it on the «margins» of a place they
called «the pit.»
So one day I traveled down there jes to take a look
at it;
An' I said to Sary Ellen thet perhaps, fer all I knew,
I 'd bring home some wheat to «seed» with, an' a
«fancy» pig er two.
Well, I hunted an' ast questions, an' I had the blamed-
est chase,
An' I shore was disapp'inted when at last I found the
place;
Fer they wa'n't no hogs a-runnin' in that lane they call
«the street,»
An' you can't make bread ner flapjacks from that
«future» brand o' wheat.

Why, they hain't no wheat about it, ner no pork, ez I
c'd see—
Jes a lot o' dudes thet acted more like lunnytics to me;
Fer they 'd hol' their breath a minute, sorter waitin' an
excuse;
Then they 'd swing their arms an' holler like all bedlam
hed broke loose.
An' I stood right there an' watched 'em fer about an
hour er so,
An' I never saw no «margins» where that «future»
wheat c'd grow;
An' they wa'n't no sort o' pastur's fer that «fancy»
pork to «range,»
An' I did n't see no cattle herdin' round the Stock Ex-
change.
Ef you went there fer pervisions you 'd come short o'
winter's meat,
An' you 'd get no bread ner flapjacks from that «future»
brand o' wheat.

So I went away disgusted,—them manœuvres made me
chafe,—
An' the balance of the day I watched some fellers move
a safe;
An' I bought a bag o' peanuts as I stood a-watchin' it,
An' the peddler give me by mistake a quarter countyfeit.
An' I tuk the train that evenin', an' I went back home,
an' then
I announced to Sary Ellen thet I 'd not go there again.
An' I told her 'bout «the street,» an' 'bout them doin's
in «the pit,»
But I think I failed to mention 'bout that silver county-
feit.
An' she wondered how them city folks c'd get enough
to eat
F'om that «fancy» breed o' pork an' that there «future»
brand o' wheat.

Albert Bigelow Paine.

An Irish Host.

THE door lies open and the gate swings wide;
All are made welcome—even sun and rain.
Well knows the host, and knows with conscious pride,
That all who leave his door will come again—
The refuge of the homeless and the lost;
And no one hungers there, unless it be the host.

S. R. Elliott.

The Advertising Girl.

SHE was a most enchanting girl,
Rosy and plump, yet full of grace;
Her hair was perfectly in curl,
A winsome smile was on her face.
«You are so mirthful and so gay,
So free from care, fair maid,» said I,
«Life must be one long holiday
Through which you wander happily.»

«Oh, no, indeed, kind sir,» she said;
«I 've had no holiday for years;
I am the advertising maid
Who in the magazines appears.
Life is a whirl of crowded days;
Yet I am gay, and happy too,
Because I find along its ways
So many pleasant things to do.

«From morning unto night I take
My fill of change and luxury.
There are a dozen firms that make
My gowns—the latest styles, you see!
The daintiest of gloves and shoes
Are stitched for me with special care;
I 've all the kodaks I can use,
And all the furs that I can wear.

«Innumerable soaps and scents,
Candies and dentifrices, too,
I use with perfect confidence,
And recommend the same to you;
In each new style of underwear,
Braces, and waists my form is clad;
I have pianos and to spare,
And twenty tonics make me glad.

«And when these varied interests pall,
Still wider joys to them succeed—
Those swiftest, sweetest hours of all
When on my bicycles I speed.
I have at least a score of wheels,
And through each magazine I whirl.
Ah! brighter bliss no monarch feels
Than crowns the advertising girl!»

Priscilla Leonard.

Aphorisms.

WHEN a man claims that he understands women, you may be tolerably sure that he has had experience with one woman whom he found he did n't understand.

EXPERIENCE is not always a good teacher. The man who has once taken a sham for a reality is apt ever afterward to take all realities for shams.

AN unhappy woman turns for distraction to «things»; but with a man the memory of love can be effaced only by a new love. Hence devotion, intense and sincere as far as it goes, to a fascinating woman is often only his surprised tribute, though genuine in its way, to her ability in helping him to forget another woman who, at all hazards, must not be remembered.

DEMAND does not always regulate supply: a lover may ask for letters at the post-office for a year without getting any.

Alice W. Rollins.