

After a Man Is Fifty

A MOVEMENT DEALING WITH A SERIOUS INDUSTRIAL PROBLEM, THAT OF THE GRAY-HAIRED MAN WHO CANNOT GET A JOB

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IF you were seventy-five years of age, a veteran of the Civil War, and lame from a wound received at Antietam or Gettysburg; if you had been in business, but unsuccessfully, because of too broad a faith in the honesty of your brother man; if you were bereft of family, relatives, and friends; if you were out of a job, lean of body, and shabby in raiment, wouldn't you feel as if the wrath of God had centered itself upon you? Wouldn't you be frantic for want of food and impelled to curse the ugly scheme of life which brought you to such a pitiful, desperate state?

We hear you say yes, and you say it in a whisper. The very thought of such a dire strait is appalling. But the picture is not overdrawn. Thousands of worthy men and women have come to such a plight.

For years industry has been worshipping with increasing fervor at the shrine of youth. The propaganda of "pep" has been sweeping and insidious—a continuous and unlifting barrage of exploitation calculated to throw an abiding fear of gray hairs into the administrators of business. Boyish faces have smiled at us from magazine pages above legends that proclaim them to be the chief executives of great corporations. Inevitably this has boomed the stock of youth and depressed the stock of age all along the line—from presidents and managers down to the humblest wage-earner.

As a consequence, scant attention has generally been paid to the old man in industry.

Early in the year 1917 I became interested in finding positions for gray-haired

men who, because the passing of time had placed its imprint upon their countenances, had made their step less springy, and mayhap dimmed their vision, found it almost impossible to secure advantageous employment. Far too many such men were roaming the streets, vainly approaching the employer, and listening to the oft-repeated:

"You don't suit."

A bureau was opened in Chicago for the purpose of finding positions for worthy, needy men past forty-five years of age. Twenty-six hundred applications from unemployed men were registered the first month. The distress of mind, the anguish of heart, the tales of destitution and desperation, the vast loss of valuable time, the all-too-evident presence of a grave fault within our civic entity, were appalling.

I knew I had to sell a bulging warehouse of worth, loyalty, and hard-earned experience. I began immediately to interest the employer along new channels, for I realized that I must do some pioneer work to establish a market for the elderly man. With the aid of some kindly publicity, of personal talks with large employers, and of circular letters to small merchants—who are the most numerous class of wage-payers—I built up an appreciation for the man beyond the prime of life.

WORK FOR THIRTY THOUSAND MEN

In twenty-three months I have placed in good positions, at more than living wages, thirty thousand men who possess that paramount ambition—a keen desire to hold the

EDITORIAL NOTE—A brief notice of Mr. Gannon's work in behalf of elderly men appeared in the "Odd Measure" department of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE for April last (pages 562, 563). The movement has attained such scope and importance that our readers will be interested in this fuller description of its purposes and operations written by Mr. Gannon himself.

position. More than ninety-seven per cent of these men have made good; more than fifteen million dollars in salaries has been paid to them, and thousands of employers gladly acknowledge value received.

The gratitude of the recipients of our service has been ample and intense. Not one cent was ever charged either applicant or employer. The *per capita* placement cost for the entire effort, covering all expenses, was eighty-nine cents. The funds were contributed by corporations, public-spirited citizens, and, during the past eight months, by the Federal government through the United States Employment Service.

The average age of applicants placed was fifty-seven years. The number of dependents for food, clothing, and shelter—wives, mothers, and children—was more than fifty-seven thousand.

The youngest gray-haired man I put to work looked sixty, but he was only forty-two. The dear old dean of our placements was ninety-four years of age, but he possessed a spirit of alertness, ambition, and self-respect rarely found among men of half his years.

More than thirty-six thousand applicants have passed our way, and all have received a courtesy which made for new ambition and greater determination. The daily grind gave birth to an absolutely new phase of psychology. The "why" for such a course of unused mental and physical power quickly wrote a standard catechism for the direction of the bureau in its procedure.

Generally speaking, when a man has reached fifty, he should have established himself financially and socially. Some of the reasons why our registrants have reached the late forties without a competence are marital troubles, making for an unhappy home life; inability to keep abreast of the times; lack of vocational guidance; extravagance; and the scourge of a timid heart.

Greatest evil of all is the last-named. Parents unwittingly break a son's spirit, and he carries through life a curse he cannot cast off. Teachers often chide the learning mind, and the shadow grows, clouding the future. An employer's misjudgment of an employee's mentality has stifled ambition which, if given scope, would have enriched them both.

Many an applicant has come to me riding the ass of ego and jangling the discordant bells of pomposity. They claim a place

in the ten-thousand-dollar class, yet when shorn of their tinsel we find they cannot fill out an application-blank intelligently. On the other hand, hundreds of men unable to read or write have proved to be stout-hearted and long-headed.

Thirty-five men whom I placed at moderate salaries a few months ago come back now, at short intervals, to hire some of the old boys. We have striven to establish a sort of common ground for the employer who knows of us and the less fortunate who only want a chance.

One applicant, placed at twenty dollars a week, quickly rose to six thousand a year. Another who possessed fine qualities and knew how to use them, but who had become discouraged by repeated turndowns, was absolutely pushed into an eighteen-dollar job. To-day, after nine months' endeavor to overcome his false pride, he is earning seventy-five hundred dollars a year. Thus do we uncover the latent possibilities of the oldish man whose only fault is lack of the opportune smile when trying to get what he deserves.

We have never offered a married man a job paying less than fifteen dollars a week. We always endeavor to secure the highest rate for the applicant with wife and children to support.

No man should live more than forty minutes' travel from his work. It is just as important that an applicant should be pleased with his work, and satisfied that he can live upon the salary offered, before sending him out, as it is that the employer should get a man who is carefully selected according to the information furnished us.

It is but natural that some of the men should not fit the positions to which they are sent, and that a small percentage of them should prove incapable or unworthy; but if a man was worthy, and did not fit the first position offered, we sent him to another until he was fitted. We made a study of each man to learn about him and to decide for what he seemed best fitted.

A SOCIAL-RESEARCH LABORATORY

To all practical purposes we have been running a big research laboratory to determine the industrial value and the special characteristics of the worker of forty-five or over; and also to find out something definite about the assets and liabilities of the middle-aged or oldish man as an employee. But the main point was to help these men

to hold their own, rather than to conduct a cold-blooded economic experiment.

Sympathy, not social curiosity, was the motive that started and has maintained this movement; but the economic value of its experiences is none the less because its central purpose has been sympathetic instead of scientific.

Naturally, we have learned a good deal about employers as well as employees. At the outset we found employers generally obsessed with the idea that a tag reading "dead timber" ought to be hung on every applicant and employee over forty-five. Possibly that statement is a little too sweeping, but not much. The employment men were certainly fed up on the favorite efficiency doctrine of the infusion of young blood. Two elements, however, forced them to give middle-aged men an inning—the great war demand for labor, and the selective service which drained the country of its youthful fiber.

The use of the older man, bringing experience paid for by some one else, has proved to be God's own fresh air for that stuffy closet in which is kept the "labor turnover" skeleton. The war was surely a cleansing fire. It made junk of old ideas, for the old men have "come back" to stay back; they have proved that "age is a good purchase."

We endeavor to make the applicant understand that an employer does not care who his relatives were or what he did for a living yesterday. The employer wants to be assured that the applicant can perform the set task of to-morrow.

Those beyond the prime of life—and the "when" of such a period is ever a mooted question—generally bring into their daily activity the weight of experience gained through years of trials and successes. They are loyal to a degree that cannot be measured by money. They are not speedy, but steady, which is preferable. They stabilize, particularly when placed with the younger element.

They constitute a "safety first" factor of importance. They are permanent, not migratory. They lessen labor turnover. They minimize wastage. They talk less, produce more, and generally are worthy of respect and appreciation.

My gratifying endeavor in Chicago for men past forty-five years of age influenced my appointment by the Department of Labor to nationalize the Handicap Bureau

of the United States Employment Service. My function will be to continue helping the thousands who were the builders of yesterday, but jobless to-day and hopeless of the to-morrow—some only gray-haired, some physically crippled, and others with no commercial experience. Such will receive an attention which will not classify, segregate, or humiliate.

A few men beyond forty-five must be classed as "impossible"—temperamentally, personally, mentally, and physically—but the fact must not be overlooked that about thirty-five per cent of the employers are themselves impossible. They, too, are unfortunately endowed with temperaments and personalities which eventually, if not immediately, constitute conditions of employment distasteful to employees. To this cause is due a very large percentage of the unrest and dissension commonly laid at the door of labor.

A great deal of unrest and dissension can be eradicated through the employment of supervision, which embraces not alone discipline, but a sympathetic brotherhood as well. The street-sweeper, even as you and I, has his ambitions, his air-castles, his sympathies, his personal idiosyncrasies, meriting respect and acceptance.

MANY FOREMEN NEED EDUCATING

Administrators of big industries have not, as a rule, fully awakened to the fact that one of the vital problems of the present moment is that of educating superintendents and foremen to the right attitude toward the gray-haired worker, and of removing those who will not react rightly to that instruction.

It is a military axiom that an army is made or broken by its officers. You can say the same thing of industry. If its "non-coms"—its foremen and subforemen—are not of the right stuff, or if they fail to get the right view-point and attitude, there is going to be trouble and failure in production.

The foreman is the sergeant who must take the men over the top; and he must be on the job, and be right, or the drive will utterly fail. Because their support is so vital, every intelligent manufacturer is going to subject his foremen to a sharp scrutiny these days, to see that their attitude toward the elderly man is intelligent and friendly.

And it must also be sympathetic toward

the other new element—woman. The presence of a large proportion of mature men in shops and factories is bound to make the general introduction of women into industry easier in every way. To put it in a homely way, any cooccupational shop largely manned by men of middle age is going to suffer less loss of production through fooling and jollyng than the shop having the usual proportion of young men. It will soon become commonplace to see daughters working in plants beside their fathers—and perhaps their mothers, too. This slant of the new situation must be taken into consideration.

The habit of following our placements in a persistent and systematic way has added materially to the value of the work. When dissatisfaction has arisen, I have made it a rule to get both sides of each case. Some of the results of this practise have been illuminating.

One employer of rough labor for shifting freight and stock decided to try older men on his night force. Several good men were sent in response to this call. A little later they reported that labor under the night superintendent was impossible for any self-respecting man who had reached the age of gray hairs. It was evident that the superintendent had no notion of encouraging the employment of "old guys" in his department. An investigation followed, and the facts were placed before the employment manager, who promptly responded:

"I guess it's about time to get a new superintendent—one who can read the handwriting on the wall and recognize that the riot of young blood is over, and that we're coming to the time when we'll be glad to get the old boys to work, and to give them decent treatment, too. Suppose you send me a superintendent to take the place of this one who can't see a man over thirty."

After a carefully selected man had been placed in the position of superintendent, it was noted that elderly men sent to work under him did not return for reassignment. All of them remained and reported entire satisfaction. Finally, the employment manager declared:

"My night force never gave me so little trouble, or did its work so well, as under this new man. I'm solid on the old boys; and if some of our other superintendents and foremen don't show symptoms of recognizing that we're up against new conditions,

you're going to be called on to furnish more well-seasoned supervisory talent. I have about reached the conclusion that young men are not well qualified to supervise men of mature years. At any rate, I am certain that experience is fully as big an asset as 'pep.'"

Judgment in handling men and materials is the great thing in keeping up a steady and satisfactory volume of output. Of course, a young man may have a natural endowment of judgment; but generally it takes experience to develop that quality, and experience only comes with years. If my prediction is not too hopeful, a considerable number of old boys who have waited a long time for recognition and promotion will, under the new order of things, find themselves eventually in positions of authority.

In a certain Chicago business house you will encounter a dignified, white-haired man of fine presence who keeps a set of books in a hand of copperplate exactness which is fast becoming extinct. In June of last year this old bookkeeper looked his seventy-two years, for he was then in need of money and employment. To-day there is something about his bearing that takes a heavy discount from his birthday figures. His employer explains it on the theory that there are remarkable powers of reinvigoration in a raise of salary—especially in the case of a man who has exceeded the allotted threescore and ten years.

One particular placement was that of a lady sixty-seven years of age, who was in dire straits for want of employment. As she was burdened with the care of an orphan grandchild of seven, her case seemed almost hopeless. Because of her age, she was quite feeble and unable to do any sort of manual labor. To get an outside position meant that the child would be left to his own resources through the day, which would have been to his disadvantage.

By means of a chain system—telling each of four friends to tell four more, and so on—the old lady was placed as companion to another lady eighty-four years of age.

By thus making both ends meet for budding youth and golden age, the heart-strings of human nature are once more attuned. None are too old. We have placed applicants beyond ninety years of age, and none are so helpless that some niche cannot be found into which they will happily fit.

They lied who swore age rots our fiber, and shrinks the measure of a man.

Some Famous Utopias

PHILOSOPHERS' DREAMS OF IDEAL COMMONWEALTHS, AND THEIR ATTEMPTED APPLICATION IN A LONG SERIES OF HISTORIC EXPERIMENTS

By Richard Le Gallienne

AT a moment when representatives of the leading nations of our troubled planet are earnestly in counsel as to the best way of remolding this sorry scheme of things, it is interesting and suggestive to recall some of those earlier schemes and experiments by means of which idealists and reformers of the past sought to grapple with the riddle of the painful earth. And, indeed, of such seminal importance were some of those old schemes and experiments that one may indulge the fancy of the World of Shades being almost as much exercised as our living selves as to the outcome of the present august deliberations "to keep the world safe for democracy." At the shoulders of the visible representatives at the Peace Congress, one can imagine such invisible presences as those of Plato and Sir Thomas More, Bacon and Campanella, Rousseau, Morelly, and Fourier—not forgetting a deputation from Brook Farm—bending over in eager attention to the deliberations of a conclave, the mere summoning of which shows that the political theorists of the past did not dream and labor wholly in vain.

Plato would find at least one matter for rejoicing in that more than one of the leading spirits taking part in that conclave are philosophers; for, in his "Republic," the great Athenian laid down that, "if the constitution of a state is to be carried to perfection," one of its conditions will be that "its kings must be those who have shown the greatest ability in philosophy and the greatest aptitude for war. . . . The highest political power must, by some means or other, be vested in philosophers." And for the encouragement of these and the others at work upon the "League of Nations," could we conceive his making himself heard, Plato might recall his answer to those who

criticised the impracticality of his own schemes.

"The possibility of realizing such a commonwealth in actual practise," he argued of his own imaginary republic, "is quite a secondary consideration, which does not in the least affect the soundness of the method or the truth of the results. . . . All that can fairly be demanded is to show how the imperfect politics at present existing may be brought most nearly into harmony with the perfect state" which he proceeded to describe.

PLATO'S DREAM OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Plato's "Republic" was the earliest attempt at putting on paper a pattern commonwealth. The scheme was an exceedingly arbitrary one, and, like most subsequent utopias, it began by not merely leaving out, but discountenancing the individualism of human nature. Yet the sterner and most inhuman of its conditions had already been successfully embodied in the military state of Sparta, and its communism—not merely of land and goods, but also of women and children—was to be tried out in a great many subsequent social experiments.

The state—or rather the city, for Plato was thinking in terms of a small community—was to be the unit, the individual man or woman merely a contributory fraction of that unit, and Christ's counsel to "love thy neighbor as thyself" was to be put in daily practise by the citizens of Plato's republic. "That city, then," he says, "is best conducted in which the largest proportion of citizens apply the words 'mine' and 'not mine' similarly to the same objects; or, in other words, that city which comes nearest to the condition of an individual man. Then will not our citizens