

Why Live in the City?

BY WILL ROSE

Author of "The Small-Town Newspaper Divorces Its Party," etc.

For satisfaction in living, a former advertising and promotion man compares his present position as newspaper editor, bank director, and citizen of Cambridge Springs, Pa. (population 2,000), to his experience with big corporations in the cities.

Nobody loves a growler. But occasionally a growl is part of the Great Melody. Even the villain sings and sometimes satisfies. With this promise, may I tell the world how a cog-wheel in a corporation can be transformed into a small-town business man with income and leisure?

We were a small group standing in the quadrangle of the university following Senior Singing on the steps of Goldwin Smith Hall. My wife was meeting a chum of her girlhood, and I was renewing an acquaintance with this chum's husband, my classmate in 1911, whose report included the information pertinent to the purposes of this accurate article, that he had gone to work for a giant corporation in Philadelphia when we left the university fifteen years before, and was still there and, presumably, at work. Meanwhile his eyes were inventorying us, a perfectly human thing to do. Then he remarked: "So you are a country editor, Bill, a small-town man. Yet your family doesn't look it."

Ah ha! I thought, here is another of these young Americans who flirts with the idea of leaving the city treadmill flat, who hesitates because he has no reliable information concerning modern small towns, and the type of man who thrives therein. He is beginning to suspect that the United States Steel Corporation was created by one man when it was created,

largely because the world had arrived at the one stage in its development when such a corporation could be formed, and that the man who made it had something besides residence in a big city. He has discovered that every big-city business has more bright men, young and old, in it than the few who stand at its head and get quoted in *The Wall Street Guesser* and *The American Hero Magazine*. And he has noted an inconsistency in the two quotations. In *The Wall Street Guesser* our dominant business man explains that the dividend was passed because of conditions over which he has no control; but *The American Hero Magazine* prints his portrait over his slogan, which is: "Hard work and long hours will get you to the top, providing you have an invalid mother and thirteen worthless brothers to help you along."

After my aforesaid classmate tested the fabric of my soul, very much as the old-time merchant frankly rubbed the coat of his friend between thumb and forefinger, I determined to tell my story publicly in the hope that it will never again be asked for privately, and that it may help the millions of city goofs who are bewildered by the complexities of existence and opportunities à la American.

I was formerly the goofiest of these goofs, one of the legion in the city treadmill. Mine was one of the nickels that

paid dividends on a billion dollars' worth of jammed cars and subways, except on those days when my small-town uncle came to the city and treated me to a ride in his taxicab. One day we passed the greatest public library in America. "Some time I am going in there," I said. "I was in last night," he commented. "I was interested in the Nobel Prize winner." We passed the Metropolitan, and I suggested that I had read that some of the new artists were great. "I heard Galli-Curci when I was in town last month," he said. "I am no critic, but I know what I like, and except for the sentiment of the thing, she sounds as good as some of the old-timers. By the way," he continued, as we paused in the traffic in front of a Forty-second Street theatre, "if you haven't seen the Follies, I'd like to take you and the girl tonight." We hadn't. But I did not see much of the show because I was thinking too fast and too hard.

My uncle always stopped at one of the large hotels because he knew the manager. He did not love this manager more than he did us, but he liked his beds better than the davenport which we could provide for him in our combination living and dining room. Thus, we occasionally ate at and enjoyed the big New York hotel. Before we left him one night, I had one of my rare flashes of human intelligence, and remarked that a man's measure is determined by the capacity of his brain in analyzing and meeting conditions.

"What the hell did you think it was?" he queried.

"A pauper can analyze," I said. "But capital is needed to meet conditions."

"Borrow it," he suggested. "There are just two classes of business men in America. One is the fellow who can see a business that doesn't exist; the other is the

fellow whom he shows how to build it. The first fellow borrows money at 6 per cent, uses it and makes it earn more. He gets the difference. That's all there is to it, except that New York City lends money easily only in million-dollar lots, and the small town lends only thousands or hundreds."

Then I said: "That's a good theory. But how does a man put it into practice?"

"My advice to any man," he continued, "is to start. He must find out what type of man he is. Some never start because they think the step is irrevocable, and they hate to make a mistake of their entire lives. They do not know that such a thing is impossible. The test is brief; the demands of business administration attend to that. Bradstreet's reports several hundred business failures every week. If you are not the type to run your own business, to be your own boss, if you cannot make a success of directing others rather than doing all the work yourself, that fact will be impressed on you reasonably soon, and you will be forced back into the other class where you belong.

"Meanwhile, if the prospect is not attractive on that basis, you are one of the other class, anyway, and would better remain in the big organization, which is a haven if you are sound. But whether you ever get to the top will depend absolutely on luck, on developments growing out of conditions over which you have no control."

I have applied my uncle's summary countless times to a business experience touching Chicago, New York City, Erie, Washington, D. C., and Cambridge Springs, Pa. (2,000 inhabitants), and have been astounded by the number of instances, under widely varying conditions, in which it has proven itself

sound. Not all of these instances can be set down here. Let's sketch some of the major ones. I am including my own foolishness as well as that of others.

It is my unpleasant duty to refer, at this point, to the frank estimate of the man as I find it in the annual of my university class. You have read these things. One does not write his own, must be handled by his friends, with charity presumably. This is what they printed about me: "Bill has a great desire to succeed and speculates upon what makes success. He is self-reliant with a touch of sympathy for his fellow man. He has an appreciation of responsibility which is accentuated by his good fellowship and vivacity when he is free from responsibility." At the time I did not like this estimate; especially did I resent the mere "touch of sympathy for his fellow man." Perhaps my friends could have used the word "impatience" more accurately. Yet subsequent perspective developed by experience shows me that the brief paragraph was close to truth in describing the undergraduate who expected the business world to place him quickly in the dominant position which, in his opinion, he so richly deserved.

My view-point included only the centres of biggest business. Big men did things in a big way, and so during the spring vacation of my graduation year, I took a swing around the circle, to Chicago, to New York, and back again, following up five different openings which I had developed by earlier correspondence. One of these was a junior clerkship in a large advertising agency in Chicago, at fifty dollars per month, and another was a sales position in a text-book publishing house in New York, which had held out an offer of exactly three times that amount.

The agency looked good; I liked it

and admired the executives in the various departments, but I felt I must investigate the larger salary in New York. Then came the first violent awakening to the difference between practice and theory. The college had not taught me to be sharp. I had been led to believe that reactions in the business world are as definite as those in chemistry. I was an unsophisticated purist. So I talked like one, directly to the point and frankly. The consequence was that the manager of the text-book house refused to remember his attractive bid, and merely matched the offer of the advertising agency. My refusal, however, was at least one definite reaction in the science of business.

Immediately after graduation, I became a junior clerk in the order department of the intensely interesting advertising agency in Chicago. This department included about a dozen units, each unit handling all the details between a definite number of large advertising accounts and the magazines and newspapers of the nation. In each department were a supervisor, one senior clerk and two junior clerks. Accurate reporting obliges me to say that my interest and application in this work quickly marked me for advancement. My brother junior clerk was a high-school graduate whose I. Q., had intellectual boundaries been rated at that time, could not have been of the highest. My senior clerk was the type who whistled "O, You Beautiful Doll" in the office almost as soon as Nat D. Ayer composed it. My supervisor was a clever drunkard, supposedly reformed. Soon, the department manager had a telephone placed on my desk, and authorized me to call the stenographic department for dictation. Then the senior clerk was fired, but I did not get his desk because the office

felt it belonged to a junior clerk in another unit who had done good work and was my senior in service. That was all right; it was just. Admittedly, however, this senior clerk was not the type to make a successful supervisor. And so when my supervisor preferred a spree to the office one afternoon, and paid the price, I applied for his job. I was held back again. "You can handle the work," explained the department manager, "but you are not seasoned. I am too much interested in you to wreck you with too rapid advancement." Perhaps that was not as good as it sounded, but what could a fellow do? I did the obvious thing and went back to my desk to double my effort.

The so-called "plan" department was the objective of every inside man. In plain English, this was the sales department, the members of which brought in the appropriations of advertisers to be planned and handled by the agency. A million-dollar account meant an income of five to ten thousand dollars. Some of the plan men, by developing connections over a period of years, and with this most modern agency behind them, were bringing in from five to ten millions of appropriations annually. It happened that a cough-drop manufacturer near my home town had built up a slow distribution over a considerable area, but had never employed national advertising. Accordingly I developed an invitation to an interview with the management, and applied for permission to make the trip. But such an idea seemed preposterous to my superiors. Whereas I would have given the interview intense concentration and sympathetic treatment, a busy plan man was loaded up with the assignment and pressed out of his way to make a superficial call. The net result was not thrilling. My idea had

been proved to be a dud. My prospects suffered. Yet, two years later this cough-drop company came into the field with its first appropriation, which rapidly grew into big figures, much to the delight of another agency.

In spite of the human error in big business, I think I might have continued my personal campaign of pressure toward advancement against obstacles over which I had no control, except for a development the significance of which I could not overlook. The department manager, whom I loved like a big brother in spite of his rather oversolicitous interest in me, became prematurely warped over Florida land sales, and left. He had been an executive of about three-thousand-six-hundred-dollar size in those times (1911). He secured his successor, however, a younger man, for one thousand eight hundred dollars. He told me, confidentially, that this man had been in the advertising business in Chicago for seven years.

With a number of seasoned men in the department, myself not included as such, of course, the new manager was brought in from the outside. So does familiarity breed contempt in the big organization, as a rule. After seven years' experience this young man was made the head of sixty to seventy people, and could be interested for one thousand eight hundred dollars per year. Meanwhile, I had promised to return to and marry a trusting girl within two years from graduation, so trusting that, in addition, she preferred a solitaire earned by the sweat of my brow to one purchased by my willing father. Such are the odds assumed by a few rare girls. I was still earning fifty dollars per month. And so, four months after joining the agency, I jumped to New York City as salesman in the advertising department

of a magazine at one thousand dollars per year.

Big business would have the employee assume all responsibility and cost in developing raw material into an organization. My contention is that the only responsibility of the beginner is to prove his potential size and consistency, both of which are understood to include personal habits and code. The claim of the dominant executive when on parade, that he owes his success entirely to hard work and a doglike fidelity, is a lazy gesture. It is propaganda.

I never have regretted leaving the Chicago agency. Here, for instance, is the case of a brother clerk who advised me not to leave. He had also been a brother graduate, the son of a rich man, and had met my department manager through my friendship. When asked whether he was interested primarily in income or opportunity, he had answered "opportunity," à la text-book. Whereupon he had been started at thirty-five dollars per month. Several years later in distant fields, I received a letter from him. "I am leaving the agency," he wrote. "The Big Boss was shocked when I told him, and offered to put me into the Plan department immediately if I would stay. But I told him that his well-advertised initiative was belated in my case. I have two high-sounding titles, but my pay check is less than my chauffeur's."

My switch to the New York magazine, however, was an error in personal judgment, due directly to deficiency in experience. I had not realized that there is much small business in big fields, and that the man who intends to campaign for the big place in the big city would better wipe all small organizations off his list, unless he can be an owner. This magazine was a beautiful product, and

much glory must go to the men who made it and fought for it during the few years of its existence. But it was a class publication, the second in a field wherein nearly all national advertisers could afford only one publication. Meanwhile, it was obliged to reproduce rare rugs and glorious gardens in expensive three-color work, and its competitor was solidly entrenched by many years of priority of place, and exceptionally well managed by a corporation strong financially. It was no place for a poor man, although the rewards of some of our well-won battles were delicious. But I recognized that I could not solve my personal problems there, and when opportunity presented itself, after about a year, I became the advertising manager of the second newspaper in the evening field in Erie, at a salary of thirty dollars per week.

Without realizing it, I was soon being captivated by the larger income and the fuller life of small business in smaller cities. Not yet, however, had I abandoned the dream of dominant place held by the college graduate of less than two years previous. It was this, rather than the fact that a watch-dog type of general manager was trying to do the work of a builder and promoter on the Erie newspaper, which led me to accept the position of promotion manager at forty dollars per week on a newspaper in Washington, D. C., when it was offered to me about two years later.

Here again, however, was the watch-dog manager praying for the results of promotion work and unwilling to run the risks of securing them. "Promotion" on a newspaper is a technical term. The promotion manager concerns himself almost exclusively with national advertising. His job is to make intelligent and thorough surveys of his field, and to plan campaigns aimed at securing dis-

tribution and sales through retail co-operation. I broke promptly with this newspaper when I was refused permission to spend a single dollar in advertising and travelling, and jumped over to the second newspaper in the evening field in Washington, where an intelligent advertising manager controlled his department and co-operated with me to make a big success of the venture.

This newspaper was, at that time, operated by a large corporation interested in many fields and holding out, it seemed, unlimited opportunities to aggressive young men. At last, I thought, I had struck my stride. I was only twenty-five years old and already beyond the two-thousand-five-hundred-dollar class, a very definite plane difficult to break through before the war. With the volume of national advertising greatly increased and swinging fine, I was given the authority of assistant advertising manager and the more difficult assignments. One of these was the task of reviving the automobile department, where success was immediate and I had the first thrill of seeing my writing published under a by-line. Then the Chicago manager of this great corporation was pushed up, and I heard rumors of decisions in the New York office to put me in his place. All of which is reported to emphasize the possibilities of the average bright young man under that rare business character, the intelligent and impersonal superior.

One morning, however, the general manager interviewed me with the news that the circulation manager had gone to the hospital, tricked by fate. Would I take the position? Still seeking that broad experience in all departments necessary to the dominant executive, I accepted. Hearing of the change, the advertising manager with whom I had en-

joyed such fine success, sought me out. "Don't do it," he said. "The G. M. is a dumb-bell. This is the third big newspaper the central office has given him. One was sold out from under him because he couldn't bring it through. Another was closed up a complete loss. Things are better here because I haven't listened to him, and he might as well not be around. You don't operate with brute force enough to combat his meddling. He's a prize simp, and he'll trip you just by trying to help you."

But the paper was strictly a street-sale proposition with circulation dependent entirely on the morale and efficiency of the sixty-three people in the department. The previous circulation manager had been a product trained up from the streets of Chicago, ferocious and domineering, constantly harassed by newsboy strikes. I was already planning department meetings, intelligent bonuses, and newsboy welfare. That afternoon I may have faced a crisis in my big-town career, but if so, and if I decided wrongly, I accept all responsibility. The general manager told me that a late mail had brought correspondence from the central office, asking his opinion of my appointment to the Chicago management. He would gladly recommend me without reservation, he said, if I so desired. I told him that I appreciated his confidence, and that I would leave the matter in his hands. I never heard anything more about it. But on the basis of conditions that afternoon, I do not think I decided unwisely.

Next day the general manager left town on a two weeks' vacation. Possibly it is significant that he did not question me about my circulation plans, nor leave any suggestions; a man cannot question nor suggest if he is not enough of an executive to possess ideas by experience or

observation. It is also significant that my only correspondence with him during his absence concerned the wrong spelling of his hotel on our mailing lists, and his suggestion that I must check up the accuracy of the department; that, and sending him several extra copies of an edition in which his latest poem had been published by an indulgent editor. Meanwhile, we were sending some immediate and interesting results of our new methods to the central office. Overnight we had made a daily gain of 7 per cent, and were holding it. This was summer in a semisouthern city. Nobody had been murdered, no babies stolen for a week. The city was out of town or sleeping off the heat.

Then the general manager returned. First he read the praise from the central office, and then he totalled up the few dollars I had paid in bonuses, and added to it a raise from nine to twelve dollars per week for the department clerk and stenographer, a hard-working girl who knew every detail and had not been increased since she came to work, three years before. A sensible executive would have been content with the figure and taken an extra hour for lunch. But he meddled and then went for a ride on one of the circulation trucks with the city circulator, another Chicago product, already jealous, who was sojourning with us until the police permitted him to return to his old home town. We parted company. The circulation slumped. A short time later the paper was sold and our meddling manager was shifted to a soft berth in the corporation, where he doesn't cost more than his salary so long as he contents himself with trade-paper interviews on how to run a newspaper.

As for me, I was invited to the inner sanctum of the great and wealthy head of the corporation in New York City

where we visited for an hour, and I listened to an exposition of the danger of breaking bright young men with too rapid advancement. I was too disgusted to care about telling him the truth. When we parted he suggested that I be of good cheer and await word from him. That was ten years ago, and he has since passed to his reward. Meanwhile, however, spiritualism is winning serious recognition. I may have misunderstood him.

Meanwhile also, although patience is a virtue, a young man's first duty is to himself and his own rather than to big corporations. That, I believe, is good scripture even though it is not generally recognized in big business. Nor does the world accept alibis in lieu of debts, spiritual and material. It was more than ever up to me to make good.

Now it was that for the first time since leaving cloistral halls, the academic side of my mind was given a hearing. I could not resign myself to sweeping the sidewalk of small business in a small town as such, but suppose a small-town business could be made a laboratory experiment? If a man began with a peanut-stand, could he build it into a business? Would a country newspaper yield to the same principles of organization and management that are profitably employed in big business? All things are comparative. After all, a broad and wholesome life, with time for the enjoyment of the arts and humanities should be the goal of every man. Wherein is he a hero who grinds himself to pieces with an excess of business, though he leave forty millions? There is no law compelling a college graduate to work out his salvation in the big city, except the law of vanity. I discarded the desire to impress others; I chucked the false gods of the school-boy.

My record being unconvincing, my father indorsed my note for three thousand five hundred dollars much in the spirit, I think, of an honest man who does not welch at accepting full responsibility for the liabilities he has created; and we travelled to a distant small town to purchase a run-down country newspaper. He was true blue, however, recognized the problem as being spiritual rather than material, and talked about reassuring features of the location such as the size of the bank resources, the rapidly developing dairying community, and the probable demand for a good newspaper if one were offered there. He disclosed his fears only once, when he treated to after-dinner cigars at a hotel en route, and I selected one to enjoy. "College life—fraternity house—things like that have developed your tastes along expensive lines," he said quietly. "Your cigars alone will cost you a hundred dollars a year, even if you don't give any away." I saw that he did not grasp my plan and passed up discussion. I battled down the moment's panic. I was out to prove that thrift, based on shabbiness and a careless toilet, are no more necessary in the small town than in the city, nor more business-wise; and I believed that a courageous spirit could be master of the undeniable psychic effect of association.

And so I started in. For the first time in my business experience I was the dominant executive and administrator, the source of all planning and the court of last resort. Now I created conditions. Now I could discard all diplomacy in handling my superiors, a problem which consumes at least half of the energy of the cog in the corporation. For I had no superiors other than public psychology and the law of demand and supply.

Selling, or the lack of it, is the one

glaring deficient in small-town business management. The merchant dusts stock and unpacks boxes; if there is any time left over, he hastily scribbles an advertisement. Too often, the banker works long hours figuring interest on deposits already in hand, instead of those cached in stout old stockings and unused chimneys, or mailed to the larger banks in cities. My paper had been conducted from the back shop in such spare moments as the printer-owner could steal from his paper and ink. I hired another printer, put my best hours into selling, did the books and reporting at night. Meanwhile I bought a typesetting machine, then another, going into more debt for both.

There were problems, but they were anticipated and conquered by a well-defined policy. One instance was a strike by the merchants against a justified increase in rates. But they needed me as much as I need them, and quickly taught themselves a lasting lesson. None of the problems were as dissipating to my moral fibre, nor as serious as those I had encountered in Big Business. Where there is a fight and victory there is fun.

When the book-work and office detail became sufficiently heavy to cut down my selling time, I added a combination office woman and stenographer to the organization. When reporting interfered with my real work, I took on a news-writer. When the demands of management increased, I hired a salesman; and finally I engaged a manager so that I could give my attention to buying out my competition and consolidating the two businesses.

The result was logical. With the complete organization insuring the constant momentum of the business, net profits were the best in the history of the venture.

Then came a development I had not anticipated. I was invited into banking, manufacturing, and other business and civic projects, where I give and receive counsel and enjoy profit and loss. Others have tried to buy my business, but I cannot afford to sell, because the amount offered, if hired out to Big Business, will not earn more than a quarter of what it is making in my own hands—an eloquent commentary; having demonstrated my executive and administrative ability as I might never have had an opportunity to do in the large centre, Big Busi-

ness has called to me several times, but never with work the characteristics of which I can enjoy. Even so, I might be tempted were it not that I believe I have solved not merely existence, but life. For here I am free and there I might be in chains. Did you see "You and I" on the New York stage a year or two ago? Then you understand. Here I am permitted to live without paying undue attention to the number of lights we burn, or the cost of education for the children while indulging the craving for art in every man's soul.



When He Came In

BY KATHARINE DAY LITTLE

WHEN he came in, that night, his face spelled peace;
 Not happy, but with hints of happiness
 That played across the deeper tragedy;
 For they, the father, mother of his friend—
 That other boy, who yesterday raced by
 So casual and so laughing-eyed—"Why they,
 They want me to come out on Sunday, just
 The same"—he faltered, but his voice went proud
 Again—"They'd like to have me come, the same
 As if"—We knew how much it meant, we knew,
 I thought we all must know, when hushed we sat,
 A moment speechless—fingers marked a place
 In evening books, a needle stabbed the air
 Instead of cloth. And then there came a voice
 Alas, quite kind, and cruel as a knife:
 One voice that should have known, that should have known—
 "I don't believe they want you. I should think
 They couldn't, now"—indifferently fell
 The words that put the sober light right out
 In young, brown eyes, so proud to be of help,
 That wounded in the quivering boy's soul
 Something that had assuaged the earlier wound
 Made by his playmate's going. Stiffly, he stood
 A moment motionless. A murmur hung
 Behind him, as the heavy steps trudged up
 Dark stairs—"They said they'd like to have me come."