

## CHAPTER XIX

### HOW TO STUDY INDUSTRY

Having for the last time presented diplomas to a graduating class of Wausau High School and having delivered at Green Bay his last commencement address, the last of many which Grandfather delivered in the latter years of his school principalship, Grandfather arrived on the following Monday morning in Boston to "study industry" for The Curtis Publishing Company.

A suitable office had been provided. Thinking in terms of the school business, Grandfather expected that someone would hand him a course of study and some directions. Instead, Mr. Latshaw beamingly said that everyone expected much from the study of industry. So Grandfather sat down in the empty office. Empty? Oh, it had, to be sure, plenty of furniture, but was entirely devoid of ideas.

What could be more lonesome than an information bureau with no information in it? How could one study industry anyway? Where was the handle on the jug? Where could one get hold of a study of industry? There were a million things one might do, but there was no use in trying to do a million things - that would lead only to confusion. Where was the clear cut path which would take one safely through the woods into green pastures beyond?

Mr. Latshaw offered half time of one stenographer. Grandfather requested him to keep the stenographer; he had found nothing for himself to do and did not want to be bothered trying to find something for a stenographer to do. The chief accomplishment of the week was to put the words "commercial" and "research" together and to coin a phrase "Commercial

Research" to name the work which was proposed. It was not realized at the time that with that name a new industry or profession had come into being.

When Grandfather asked for samples of all the material which Curtis representatives had to work with, he was furnished nothing except one letter which a year or so before a representative had written to a prospect, urging him, more by flowery language than by facts, to use advertising. There was no organized information for the use of the advertising department of The Curtis Publishing Company, and aside from Mr. Latshaw's belief, no feeling that organized information was needful.

The same situation held with other publishers and with advertising agencies. It was to be a pioneer attempt to find information which could be used by advertising men. Mr. Latshaw's vision was keen and far-sighted. The material he desired was not in books. Some might be in the various bureaus in Washington, but most of it was in the thoughts of merchants and manufacturers.

"The job," Mr. Latshaw said, "is not a desk job. The thing I have been most afraid of was getting a man who would read reports and shuffle cards. I selected you because I believed you could go out on the road, talk with people and find out that which has not been put into books - namely, the underlying trends of thought which make our opportunities."

At the end of three weeks a conviction was reached that "industry" was too big a topic. Perhaps, however, one could study "an industry." A list of important industries arranged alphabetically was submitted to Mr. Hazen. He did not go beyond the first - Agricultural Implements - good enough. The Curtis Publishing Company has just purchased The Country Gentleman and had no information on agricultural implements. Therefore, let's study agricultural implements.

"Where shall I begin," asked Grandfather, still expecting someone to furnish a course of study. "Where you think best," said Mr. Hazen. "I suppose," said Grandfather, "they are manufactured chiefly in and about Chicago." "That might be a good place to begin," agreed Mr. Hazen. "I suppose," continued Grandfather, still groping for directions, "they are sold out along the jobbing frontier - Minneapolis, Omaha, Kansas City." "Yes, you will need to go there," again agreed Mr. Hazen, "and when you get there, if you find you need to go further, go further." "When do you wish me to make a report?" "Whenever you are ready."

"But," said Grandfather, making a last attempt to get the job defined, "how much money do you wish me to spend on Agricultural Implements?" "You do not understand us," said Mr. Hazen with a decisiveness which indicated that no further questions were desired, "it is your job to study Agricultural Implements; get busy."

That night Grandfather realized for the first time that he had a real job, that if anything were done, he had to do it, that Mr. Hazen was to be taken literally in what he had said at Hartford - "It is a magnificent opportunity; take it and make the best of it." From that moment on, for the next twenty years, there was never a day when the Commercial Research Division did not have a great plenty to do.

In the field was a "magnificent opportunity." The huge mercantile operation of the United States employed hundreds of thousands of people, was directed by some of the keenest minds in America, was intensely busy and was energetically thinking new thoughts; yet about all this industry as yet little of value had been written.

The Government had compiled almost countless volumes on manufacture and mining and lumbering and agriculture, but on wholesaling and retailing - not a single volume. A census of distribution? No merchant had ever asked

for one. There was something inherently secretive about merchandising. The manufacturer, of necessity, left tangible records in the form of his finished product and the machines with which he created the product. He could not be secretive, if he would, for secret formula and mysterious machines are soon public property.

But while the merchant handles concrete merchandise, in his methods he deals largely in intangibles that leave no concrete evidence of just what produced success. The merchant has been disinclined to put in writing the most vital part of his thinking and when he has written an article for Printers' Ink, has frequently avoided stating that which one might wish especially to know.

So, in the field of merchandising was a great untapped well of valuable information - "a magnificent opportunity." The problem was to "make the most of it."