

CHAPTER XXVI

WORKING FOR THE CURTIS PUBLISHING COMPANY

Grandfather feels that he was indeed fortunate in having been able to spend so much of his life working for The Curtis Publishing Company. It is beyond him to express the inspiration and satisfaction he found in working for and with the strong and alert men whom Mr. Curtis gathered about himself. Furthermore, the numerous contacts with forceful men outside the organization were inspiring.

Besides, he always had a feeling that second only to the churches and the public schools, The Curtis Publishing Company was the greatest force for right thinking there was in the United States, and that in working for The Saturday Evening Post, the Ladies' Home Journal and The Country Gentleman, he was devoting his life to the better side of things as truly as when he was in school work.

It is quite beyond the possibilities of this book to describe to you the strong personalities who have dominated The Curtis Publishing Company. Mr. Bok, in "The Man from Maine" and "The Americanization of Edward Bok", has left a remarkable picture of Mr. Curtis and of himself and some day you must read both of these books for yourself.

To members of a family which seems doomed to be short of stature, the career of Mr. Curtis should be inspiring. Mr. Curtis was short of stature and as a boy was handicapped in the rough-and-ready struggle of newsboys. But what he lacked in physical prowess he more than made up in intelligence and moral courage.

Perhaps I can best illustrate the point by what a lumberman once said to me. Many of the lumbermen of Northern Wisconsin were large

physically. One of these one day, in speaking of one of short stature, said: "I am afraid of that man. He was so small he had to depend on his wits and in the end he became smarter than any of us."

Grandfather does not belittle the business advantage of strong physique. He has seen many instances where commanding physical appearance has been an important factor in men's successes. On the other hand, men with commanding appearance have so much conceded to them that some of them become intellectually lazy and lose out to some man of small stature who has trained his wits to overcome handicaps.

Mr. Curtis at no time had the advantage of secret process or patent or control of raw materials that in any way accounted for his success. He started out publishing a very small magazine edited by his wife. With no exceptional advantage except unusual personal qualities, he made the greatest success which any man ever attained in publishing. Mr. Curtis earned all he got - he was in no sense a child of fortune.

A publishing business is three distinct businesses all merged in one. In the first place, it is a manufacturing business - the production and sale of a concrete article - a magazine, with all the problems of buying, financing, manufacturing and selling which the manufacturer of shoes or automobiles or any other product has.

In the second place, it is an editorial business - the business of creating ideas and ideals and winning for them acceptance - in other words, the business of shaping the thought of one's generation and leading the human race in its struggle forward.

In the third place, it is an advertising business - the business of allowing others to use the pages of your publication to promote the sale of their products. The publication, so to speak, introduces a salesman to

its friends and allows the salesman to use the introduction to move his wares.

Now publishers have usually understood only one of the three functions. Some have been editors, some manufacturers, some advertising men. Mr. Curtis, to a greater extent than anyone who entered the field, understood all three.

Although he wrote little himself, he had a keen editorial instinct. He studied his publications carefully in detail. It was this personal instinct for editorship that enabled him to recognize the ability of Mr. Lorimer and Mr. Bok. It was not chance that sent him the two greatest editors of modern times - it was an unerring ability to pick out from those who passed in review two unknown young men who, when given the opportunity, proved to be the geniuses Mr. Curtis believed them to be.

After Mr. Curtis became less active in directing the Curtis publications, he continued to watch very carefully the editorial content of his Public Ledger. One day he sat down for a few minutes at a luncheon which Mr. Boyd was giving to an advertiser and at which Grandfather was present. The advertiser began to joke Mr. Curtis about not having anything to do. "Oh," said Mr. Curtis, "I have plenty to do. I read and comment for my editor on every page of the Public Ledger." This statement was received by all as a joke. Mr. Curtis said, "That is no joke. Here are my notes on yesterday's paper", and pulling from his pocket a handful of yellow slips of paper, he proceeded to read. "This subject deserved first page space and was well handled. This subject should be relegated to second page," etc. Having read for some time he looked at his watch - "I am overdue with my editor now and will ask to be excused."

In the second place, Mr. Curtis was a manufacturer. He understood

the art of printing - had a fine sense both of good results and of the practical problems of producing them and that fundamental instinct for business that enabled him to master the problems of finance and of selling.

In the third place, Mr. Curtis had an understanding of advertising and a faith in it that was far in advance of most men who were leaders in the advertising profession. Mr. Curtis did not like to make speeches and avoided all efforts which were planned to lionize him. In the years of his active management of The Curtis Publishing Company, he rarely accepted an invitation to speak. "I know how poor my speeches are," he once said to Grandfather, "and no one can make me think they are good."

As a matter of fact, his speeches were unique for brevity, humor and point. On one occasion, having been elaborately introduced to make a speech on "Does Advertising Pay?" he said: "I don't know how to make a speech on 'Does Advertising Pay'. All I know about the subject is that when I had no money I borrowed \$350,000 and invested it all in advertising. There is a building down the way that cost several millions and it is paid for and there is money in the bank. I think it paid." How in a lengthy address could one say more?

Almost any problem of his business Mr. Curtis believed could be solved by advertising. This supreme faith in advertising was one which led him to consider every piece of advertising copy which bore the signature of The Curtis Publishing Company as a matter of great importance, and as he relinquished various details of his business, the one he held longest was to give a personal okeh to advertisements of the company. His associates might spend a million for presses, but if they planned to put out an advertisement he wished to see the copy. He would readily approve advertising expenditures but only excellent copy could get by.

It was not his custom to express words of praise. He expressed his confidence in other ways. One of his tributes to Grandfather was his willingness to listen to Grandfather's speeches. Frequently he went to some inconvenience to attend some meeting where Grandfather was scheduled to speak.

To give one illustration: One day in Chicago Grandfather chanced to meet Mr. Curtis. In response to Mr. Curtis' inquiry, Grandfather said he was giving a talk to a group of grocery wholesalers who had been brought together by an advertiser. "Would it be all right for me to come?" asked Mr. Curtis. Grandfather assured him that it would be quite all right if he thought he would be interested. "I have a luncheon engagement," Mr. Curtis said, "but if I can shorten it up so as to get there by two o'clock, I'll come."

That Mr. Curtis would come seemed so improbable that Grandfather did not mention the circumstance to the advertiser, but just as Grandfather started to speak, in walked Mr. Curtis. Grandfather stopped to introduce Mr. Curtis and then went on just as if Mr. Curtis had not been present. The advertiser then asked Mr. Curtis to talk and, to Grandfather's surprise, Mr. Curtis readily complied and made the longest and one of the best talks Grandfather ever heard him make. He talked to the men about the importance of advertising, what it had meant to himself and what it would mean to them to tie their efforts in with advertised products.

Neither the advertiser nor the wholesalers had any comprehension of what a unique thing it was for Mr. Curtis to come to such a meeting. They all probably thought he was accustomed to do this. No one acted as though it was anything out of the ordinary, and the informality and matter of factness with which everyone took his presence put Mr. Curtis thoroughly

at ease, and he entered into the spirit of the meeting heartily.

One other quality which Mr. Curtis had to an extraordinary degree should be mentioned, for it was a large factor in his success - the ability to reach a decision on a basic principle and have it positively settled in his own mind for all time to come. He seemed not to be troubled with those contrary thoughts which pursue most men after a far-reaching decision. When he had decided a matter he allowed no one to register a contrary thought. The matter was settled.

For example, he decided not to take patent medicine advertising - apparently he never thereafter felt any allurements for that classification. It was no part of his business. He bought The Saturday Evening Post against the judgment of his friends, and it is said that at a meeting where the treasurer reported that The Saturday Evening Post had caused a loss of \$1,000,000 Mr. Curtis quietly remarked that he was relieved to know that the amount was no greater and that before another \$1,000,000 was spent, he thought The Saturday Evening Post would have turned the corner. Whether or not this be literally true, it is at least true of the spirit of the man.

On one occasion, when a certain move with reference to The Country Gentleman was under discussion, the comptroller reported that the move would entail a loss of half a million dollars, Grandfather heard Mr. Curtis quietly say, "I will ask the other directors to stand the loss with me," and headed off all discussion.

But Grandfather must not write longer of Mr. Curtis - you must read Mr. Bok's wonderful book - "The Man from Maine."

Grandfather could write a whole book about the wonderful men who helped Mr. Curtis build the greatest publishing business in the world, but he must restrict himself to just a paragraph each on a few of those who

were bearing the burdens when Grandfather joined the company in 1911.

Mr. Bok was the active head of the Ladies' Home Journal. He had a gracious personality, was always interesting and could always be counted upon to stand firmly on the ethical side of any problem. As one came to know Mr. Bok, it seemed clear that he had been an important factor in molding the high ideals upon which the business was founded. He had a keen sense of beauty and made a large contribution on the aesthetic side. He created the pattern after which all leading women's magazines have been made and among the many noble monuments he has left, the finest is the concept of a magazine which should be an intimate and powerful influence in building American home life.

Mr. Lorimer had already achieved a success with The Saturday Evening Post that was the admiration and the envy of the publishing world. It was universally conceded that The Saturday Evening Post was the greatest of all advertising media - unique and beyond the reach of competition. Little could one realize in that day to what greater heights Mr. Lorimer would carry The Saturday Evening Post.

Do not imagine Mr. Lorimer reading endless manuscript to select the best. To be sure, he did plenty of that very thing. It was said that he read the equivalent of a full-sized book every evening. But that was only an incident in his editorship. He planned every copy of The Saturday Evening Post even as a builder plans a house. He thought in terms of an individual issue of The Saturday Evening Post, he determined the ideas to be promoted, suggested a fiction theme to one writer, a leading article to another, a subject for a cartoon to a third and a subject for an editorial to a fourth. And then from time to time he wrote an editorial himself and when he did, what an editorial it was! Those who read thoughtfully soon

were able to tell in the first paragraph whether it was Mr. Lorimer's own handiwork. He had a dynamic personality - and an instant and sound answer for every question put to him. It seemed that his office door was always open - he was very approachable - but one must have something important to say and one must not stay long.

He devoted his life to The Saturday Evening Post. He refused invitations to speak, although his father had been one of the country's greatest preachers and Mr. Lorimer himself could have been a powerful speaker. But what better or greater task could one have than that of editing the publication which more than any other was to shape the thought of his generation?

Mr. Lorimer also had a keen instinct for practical business and when Mr. Curtis retired from personal management, Mr. Lorimer as First Vice President and Chairman of the Executive Committee became the active head of The Curtis Publishing Company.

Mr. P. S. Collins had from an early day had charge of the sale of the publications. A man of unusual shrewdness and resourcefulness, he evolved many original methods, among them the plan of having boys sell the publications each week and each month in their own particular residential district. Maybe some day you will wish to be a Curtis salesman and if so, you will find it a lot of fun and will learn a lot about salesmanship. Mr. Collins' ability in obtaining abundant circulation of an excellent quality was one of the prime factors in the success of the company.

Mr. J. B. Williams had charge of the manufacturing department and there was no part of The Curtis Publishing Company's accomplishment that seemed more marvelous than the manufacturing. A contract to print 100,000 copies of a booklet the size of The Saturday Evening Post would be a big

contract which it might take weeks to fill. But the Advertising Department and the Circulation Department would blandly agree to have 100,000 additional circulation and would wish not only a 100,000 copy contract to be done sometime, but 100,000 to be done every week, just leaving it to Mr. Williams; and shortly thereafter might similarly wish another 100,000 on him; and the best of all was that Mr. Williams always made good and with a smile. He always had a smile and a cheery word, was a true friend and dependable. His ability to improve constantly the quality of printing and at the same time print more and more copies until he printed daily enough magazines to make a pile taller than any mountain in America was another of the prime factors in the success of the company.

Another man whose contribution was less conspicuous than those mentioned but was very real, was Mr. Ludington, the treasurer. Genial, gentlemanly, thoughtful of all about him, he combined charming personal qualities with exceptionally keen business judgment.

Of Mr. Hazen, Grandfather has spoken elsewhere. Holding all somewhat aloof, he preferred to carry the burdens of his office alone. None of his associates felt on intimate terms with him, but all in the Advertising Department had admiration and affection for him, for he took a personal and fatherly interest in all who worked for him.

When ill health caused Mr. Hazen to retire, Mr. Boyd succeeded him. You all know Mr. Boyd and Grandfather will not attempt to describe him to you. You all know his dynamic personality and what a lively place the Advertising Department was likely to be under his direction. Mr. Boyd's unusual business intuition and his firm belief, contrary to the thought of his times, that concentration of advertising appropriations into large space units in Curtis Publications would give maximum results, was one of

major factors in the rapid growth of The Curtis Publishing Company and also did much for the development of the whole advertising industry.

Two others who later became leading factors should also be mentioned. Mr. Fuller began studying the inside problems of The Curtis Publishing Company about the time when Grandfather began to study outside marketing problems. Mr. Fuller did this so successfully that he rose to be Comptroller and then Secretary of the company and one of the Executive Committee. His study produced many economies and greatly improved the efficiency both of the mechanical and of the office operations of the company.

Mr. Healy had not yet entered The Curtis Publishing Company. He came from the University of Illinois to work on The Country Gentleman, became the first manager of the new Detroit office, later manager of the New York office and, when Mr. Boyd retired, became Advertising Manager.

A man of strong physique, exceptional sales ability and a stalwart faith in men he had tested, he did a marvelous work for The Curtis Publishing Company during the trying days of the great depression. He bore a heavy load of responsibility and of work, but amidst all the disturbing conditions he maintained poise and an unfailing good nature. His own sales ability held many critical situations and the confidence he inspired carried the company through the dark days of 1930 and 1931.

Was it not wonderful for Grandfather to spend so much of his life working with these national leaders, each outstanding in his line? The opportunity to work with these men and to enjoy their friendship Grandfather accounts one of the greatest bits of good fortune which ever came to him.

CHAPTER XXVII

LIFE ON THE ROAD

"Do you not get tired of traveling?" many times Grandfather was asked. To which he was wont to reply: "I would not dare to, for then I should feel sorry for myself. Do you ask yourself whether you like to shave every morning? You better not ask yourself the question. Suppose the answer should be 'No'? Then what a fix you would be in."

As a matter of fact, Grandfather is convinced that he did not dislike to travel because he always spent his vacations traveling. Grandfather was well fitted physically and temperamentally for a life on the road. Grandfather was short of stature (5 feet, 4 inches) and hence fitted comfortably into a Pullman berth, into short beds and into short bathtubs and small taxicabs. He was endowed with a strong constitution that stood the wear and tear of jolty rides on train and by auto and of irregular meals and of broken hours of sleep.

When food was poor, he ate sparingly and made up when a good restaurant was found. He ate a light breakfast of fruit, toast and hot water and sometimes bacon. At any time it happened to be convenient, he ate a light lunch--usually fruit, a bowl of half milk and half cream with crackers and lettuce or celery. For dinner it made little difference whether at 5 or 8:30, he ate a hearty meal, usually lamb or fowl or fish with vegetables, also fruit in some form and always hot water.

Grandfather did not drink coffee, tea or stimulants of any kind and did not use tobacco in any form. It seemed to him the part of good judgment not to acquire a habit which he saw some men struggling hard to overcome.

Temperamentally he was fitted for a life on the road. He did not feel sorry for himself when meals were poor, rooms unpleasant and vehicles uncomfortable. To these things he paid little attention. He did not mind being alone. He could always amuse himself by a walk in the park, a visit to an art gallery, an hour or so in a library. He could spend an evening pleasantly doing a bit of work or just writing in a lighter vein just for fun. "The Parlins" resulted from Grandfather's - perhaps you would say - weird way of amusing himself.

Grandfather could sleep any time under almost any conditions. The evening before this chapter was written, for example, Grandfather took a taxi from the suburbs through the early evening traffic of Cleveland to a down-town hotel for dinner. Since Grandfather was to make a speech, he decided to take a little nap and the next he knew the taxi driver was shaking him and telling him that he had arrived. The ability to sleep in a taxi between speeches was a life saver on many occasions.

When Grandfather was in school work, he traveled some years as much as 25,000 miles, taking a party to Europe, meeting lecture engagements, attending teachers conventions, looking up new teachers and traveling with athletic and declamation contestors. During the past twenty-one years with The Curtis Publishing Company, he traveled an average of about 1,000 miles per week or 50,000 miles per year, or a total of approximately 1,000,000 miles for the twenty-one years.

Had it not been that his physical and temperamental equipment especially fitted Grandfather for travel, he is confident that he could not have traveled so many miles and showed up smiling at sixty quite happy to continue his life on the road.

Meanwhile Grandmother had to bear the brunt of running the home,

and much credit is due her. She was always courageous and never wept over Grandfather's trips. "It is lucky," said Charles, "that mother is not like Mrs. Youker (the wife of one of Grandfather's assistants). We would not get her dried off from one time to the next."

Grandfather never encouraged any fuss about his coming and going. "Where is your father?" asked a neighbor of Grace. "I don't know," Grace, according to the neighbor, replied, "I guess he went to Chicago, perhaps it was Detroit. No, I think I heard him say something about Boston. Oh, I don't know - he went somewhere."

Grandfather, however, gave serious thought to the problem of his family and worked out a plan somewhat unique but which proved satisfactory. Responsibility for correct conduct was placed on each individual. "I cannot police you," Grandfather said to Charles and George. "You will have to police yourselves." "Parlin, I can't understand it," said a neighbor, "you let your boys use your automobile and allow them spending money and seem to pay little attention to where they go and they take care of themselves. I watch my boy very carefully, always sit up to let him in at night and I am frank to tell you that I am having a hard time with him." "I guess that is the trouble," said Grandfather. "You do not give him a chance to take care of himself."

It did not seem practical to have an elaborate home. Grandfather held himself ready for emergency calls and seldom issued or accepted social invitations. He and Grandmother had had a sufficiency of social life in Wausau and Grandfather felt he had fully executed his civic duties by his years of school life. So Grandfather never felt a sense of deprivation from lack of social life.

Meanwhile Grandmother worked out her own career and led a very

active and a very useful life. For many years she had charge of the Scientific Temperance Instruction work in all the Philadelphia schools. She received no pay for this work, but applied herself as zealously to the task as if she had received a good salary. She traveled all over the city, visiting all kinds of schools, conducting essay contests, presenting prizes and talking to the children. She established many pleasant acquaintanceships with teachers and supervisors and, at one time, probably knew more about Philadelphia schools than anyone except the regular school supervisors.

She was also for many years head of the Woman's Auxiliary of the First M. E. Church of Germantown. This church, famous in Methodism for its leadership and its philanthropies, in the personnel of its membership, was unusual. Its members ranged from a group of multi-millionaires down to people who would starve were it not for church assistance.

Grandmother was especially fitted to be head of the woman's organization of such a church, for having grown up in a smaller city where the school principal was the social equal of all - both rich and poor - she had developed none of the class consciousness which most city people have. She was accepted socially by the wealthiest families of the church and felt perfectly at ease at their functions. On the other hand, she could hold the hand of an old lady, dying in poverty, and do something to make her last days more comfortable.

Because of this rare range of social qualities Grandmother seemed indispensable as the head of the Woman's Auxiliary. When after years of service she thought it best to retire, she had to resort to the device of having a constitution adopted which provided that no one could hold an office for more than three years. She had to remain for another three years but ultimately was retired through constitutional limitations. At last she surrendered the title of president, but remained an active worker.

Grandmother also took an active interest in the Woman's Club of Germantown - an outstanding organization. On one occasion, being scheduled for a book review, she reviewed Volume I of "The Parlins". Was not that funny? Would you not have liked to have heard her? Grandfather surely would. Oh, yes! Grandfather knows it was a nervy thing for himself and Grandmother to write a big fat book all about themselves and he knows it was nervy for Grandmother to review her very own book written about her very own self. The very thought of that room full of women - they had to bring in extra chairs to accommodate the crowd - listening with sober faces while Grandmother reviewed a huge volume written by herself about herself caused Grandfather to laugh so long and so hard when he heard it that he almost had hysterics.

But in the advertising business we learn that nerve is one of the factors which makes the world go around and no good advertising man or his wife is ashamed to demonstrate that he or she has a full share of this precious article.

Besides, don't you see, Grandmother told the Club how the book was written for her grandchildren and then don't you see the ladies must almost have wept with joy at the thought of Grandmother's devotion to you? Had the ladies only have known you, they would have known that Grandfather and Grandmother just could not have done otherwise than write a book for you.

The home was simple and automatic - automatic gas heater, electric range, automatic hot water heater, electric refrigeration, a maid, almost automatic, who came every morning to look at the house and stay if needed.

After the children were gone, Grandmother and Grandfather could at any moment write a note on the blackboard to the maid, lock the door and be off for a week or a month or more with nothing left behind to worry about.

Hence, with less "things" to tie them down, the family could get the compensation of a traveling man's home - namely, travel - all the children had a trip abroad, all had a trip to the Pacific Coast. Before she was twenty-one, Grace had made three trips to Europe, two to the West Indies, one to Yellowstone Park, Pacific Coast, Alaska and Hawaii.

In such a life of travel and of individualism, how could a consciousness of family solidarity be maintained? Well, first of all, when Grandfather was home, he made it a point to be really home - i.e. to be home in spirit as well as just there in corporeal form, and he had a hunch that the family appreciated him better when he was there on week-ends than they would if he had been home to every meal but with his thoughts wandering elsewhere and grouchy every time someone interrupted his musings.

To maintain family spirit, Grandfather did two things. First of all, when Grandfather was home at a week-end, each member of the family in turn was encouraged to give an account of the week's experience and accomplishment. Grandfather always made it a point to be interested in whatever each child was doing and to furnish encouragement and, if need be, some money to help out on every worth-while project.

On the other hand, Grandfather aimed not to be "indulgent" and not to spoil his children with too much money. In the first place, he did not have money to use thoughtlessly and in the second place he believed a child should learn to understand the effort and sacrifice which money represented.

In the second place, Grandfather concluded that a child's recollection of his home life largely centered around red-letter days - hence Grandfather decided to make more than usual efforts to make birthdays and holidays memorable occasions. At Christmas more than usual effort and money were used to make the day one to be remembered - Volume I of "The Parlins"

was planned and executed as a Christmas surprise, the entire work being done so secretly that no member of the family suspected what Grandmother and Grandfather had prepared and put into the mysterious box which was sent to Ruth's nearly a month before Christmas.

Grandfather and Grandmother feel that they have been blessed with a fine family of children and grandchildren and one of their greatest joys has been that the family have grown together in spirit as the years have gone by. To us it seemed that the family orchestra concert epitomized a family endeavor toward ideals and solidarity. Many thought it remarkable that all could play. One thought it more remarkable that four children and three in-laws would all be willing to play in the same orchestra.

As Grandfather received congratulations on that concert and the fine family spirit it evinced, he had no regret that he had spent his life on the road and had left his family largely on their own responsibility. They had measured up to the responsibilities placed upon them. They had done a grand job of bringing up themselves.