

CHAPTER XVI - JIMMY THROWS A BLUFF.

That afternoon Mr. Harold Bince had entered his superior's office with an afternoon paper in his hand.

"What's the idea of this ad, Mr. Compton?" he asked. "Why do we need an efficiency expert? I wish you had let me know what you intended doing."

"I knew that if I told you, Harold, you would object," said the older man, "and I thought I would have a talk with several applicants before saying anything about it to any one. Of course, whoever we get will work with you, but I would rather not have it generally known about the plant. There seems to be a leak somewhere and evidently we are too close to the work to see it ourselves. It will require an outsider to discover it."

"I am very much opposed to the idea," said Bince. "These fellows usually do nothing more than disrupt an organization. We have a force that has been here, many of them, for years. There is as little lost motion in this plant as in any in the country, and if we start in saddling these men with a lot of red tape which will necessitate their filling out innumerable forms for every job, about half their time will be spent in bookkeeping, which can just as well be done here in the office as it is now. I hope that you will reconsider your intention and let us work out our own solution in a practical manner, which we can do better in the light of our own experience than can an outsider who knows nothing of our peculiar problems."

"We will not permit the organization to be disrupted," replied Mr. Compton. "It may do a lot of good to get a new angle on our problems and at least it will do no harm."

"I can't agree with you," replied Bince. "I think it will do a lot of harm."

Compton looked at his watch. "It is getting late, Harold," he said, "and this is pay-day. I should think Everett could help you with the pay-roll." Everett was the cashier.

"I prefer to do it myself," replied Bince. "Everett has about all he can do, and anyway, I don't like to trust it to any one else." And realizing that Compton did not care to discuss the matter of the efficiency expert further Bince returned to his own office.

The following afternoon the office boy entered Mr. Compton's office. "A gentleman to see you, sir," he announced. "He said to tell you that he came in reply to your advertisement."

"Show him in," instructed Compton, and a moment later Jimmy entered--a rehabilitated Jimmy. Upon his excellent figure the ready-made suit had all the appearance of faultlessly tailored garments. Compton looked up at his visitor, and with the glance he swiftly appraised Jimmy--a glance that assured him that here might be just the man he wanted, for intelligence, aggressiveness and efficiency were evidently the outstanding characteristics of the young man before him. After Jimmy had presented himself the other motioned him to a chair.

"I am looking," said Mr. Compton, "for an experienced man who can come in here and find out just what is wrong with us. We have an old-established business which has been making money for years. We are taking all the work that we can possibly handle at the highest prices we have ever received, and yet our profits are not at all commensurate with the volume of business. It has occurred to me that an experienced man from the outside would be able to more quickly put his finger on the leaks and stop them. Now tell me just what your experience has been and we will see if we can come to some understanding."

From his pocket Jimmy drew a half-dozen envelopes, and taking the contents from them one by one laid them on the desk before Mr. Compton. On the letter-heads of half a dozen large out-of-town manufacturers in various lines were brief but eulogistic comments upon the work done in their plants by Mr. James Torrance, Jr. As he was reading them Mr. Compton glanced up by chance to see that the face of the applicant was slightly flushed, which he thought undoubtedly due to the fact that the other knew he was reading the words of praise contained in the letters, whereas the truth of the matter was that Jimmy's color was heightened by a feeling of guilt.

"These are very good," said Mr. Compton, looking up from the letters. "I don't know that I need go any further. A great deal depends on a man's personality in a position of this sort, and from your appearance I should imagine that you're all right along that line and you seem to have had the right kind of experience. Now, what arrangement can we make?"

Jimmy had given the matter of pay considerable thought, but the trouble was that he did not know what an efficiency expert might be expected to demand. He recalled vaguely that the one his father had employed got something like ten dollars a day, or one hundred a day, Jimmy couldn't remember which, and so he was afraid that he might ask too much and lose the opportunity, or too little and reveal that he had no knowledge of the value of such services.

"I would rather leave that to you," he said. "What do you think the work would be worth to you?"

"Do you expect to continue in this line of work?" asked Mr. Compton. "When this job is finished you would want to go somewhere else, I suppose?"

Jimmy saw an opening and leaped for it. "Oh, no!" he replied. "On the contrary, I wouldn't mind working into a permanent position, and if you think there might be

a possibility of that I would consider a reasonable salary arrangement rather than the usual contract rate for expert service."

"It is very possible," said Mr. Compton, "that if you are the right man there would be a permanent place in the organization for you. With that idea in mind I should say that two hundred and fifty dollars a month might be a mutually fair arrangement to begin with."

Two hundred and fifty dollars a month! Jimmy tried to look bored, but not too bored.

"Of course," he said, "with the idea that it may become a permanent, well-paying position I think I might be inclined to consider it--in fact, I am very favorably inclined toward it," he added hastily as he thought he noted a sudden waning of interest in Compton's expression. "But be sure yourself that I am the man you want. For instance, my methods--you should know something of them first."

In Jimmy's pocket was a small book he had purchased at a second-hand bookshop the evening before, upon the cover of which appeared the title "How to Get More Out of Your Factory." He had not had sufficient time to study it thoroughly, but had succeeded in memorizing several principal headings on the contents page.

"At first," he explained, "I won't seem to be accomplishing much, as I always lay the foundation of my future work by studying my men. Some men have that within them which spurs them on; while some need artificial initiative--outside encouragement," he quoted glibly from "How to Get More Out of Your Factory." "Some men extend themselves under stern discipline; some respond only to a gentle rein. I study men--the men over me, under me, around me. I study them and learn how to get from each the most that is in him. At the same time I shall be looking for leaks and investigating timekeeping methods, wage-paying systems and planning on efficiency producers. Later I shall start reducing costs by

studying machines, handling material economically and producing power at lowest cost; keeping the product moving, making environment count on the balance-sheet and protecting against accident and fire." This was as far as Jimmy had memorized, and so he stopped.

"I think," said Mr. Compton, "that you have the right idea. Some of your points are not entirely clear to me, as there are many modern methods that I have not, I am sorry to say, investigated sufficiently."

Jimmy did not think it necessary to explain that they were not clear to him either.

"And now," said Compton, "if you are satisfied with the salary, when can you start?"

Jimmy rose with a brisk and businesslike manner. "I am free now," he said, "with the exception of a little personal business which I can doubtless finish up tomorrow--suppose I come Thursday?"

"Good," exclaimed Compton, "but before you go I want you to meet our assistant general manager, Mr. Bince." And he led Jimmy toward Bince's office.

"This is Mr. Torrance, Harold," said Mr. Compton as they entered. "Mr. Bince, Mr. Torrance. Mr. Torrance is going to help us systematize the plant. He will report directly to me and I know you will do everything in your power to help him. You can go to Mr. Bince for anything in the way of information you require, and Harold, when Mr. Torrance comes Thursday I wish you would introduce him to Everett and the various department heads and explain that they are to give him full cooperation. And now, as I have an appointment, I shall have to ask you to excuse me. I will see you Thursday. If there are any questions you want to ask, Mr. Bince will be glad to give you any information you wish or care for."

Jimmy had felt from the moment that he was introduced to Bince that the latter was antagonistic and now that the two were alone together he was not long left in doubt as to the correctness of his surmise. As soon as the door had closed behind Mr. Compton Bince wheeled toward Jimmy.

"I don't mind telling you, Mr. Torrance," he said, "that I consider the services of an expert absolutely unnecessary, but if Mr. Compton wishes to experiment I will interfere in no way and I shall help you all I can, but I sincerely hope that you, on your part, will refrain from interfering with my activities. As a matter of fact, you won't have to leave this office to get all the information you need, and if you will come to me I can make it easy for you to investigate the entire workings of the plant and save you a great deal of unnecessary personal labor. I suppose that you have had a great deal of experience along this line?"

Jimmy nodded affirmatively.

"Just how do you purpose proceeding?"

"Oh, well," said Jimmy, "each one of us really has a system of his own. At first I won't seem to be accomplishing much, as I always lay the foundation of my future work by studying my men. Some men have that within them which spurs them on; while some need artificial initiative--outside encouragement." He hoped that the door to Compton's office was securely closed.

"Some men extend themselves under stern discipline; some respond only to a gentle rein. I study men--the men over me, under me, around me. I study them and learn how to get from each the most that is in him. At the same time I shall be looking for leaks and investigating time-keeping methods"--he was looking straight at Bince and he could not help but note the slight narrowing of the other's lids-- "wage-paying systems and planning on efficiency producers."

Here he hesitated a moment as though weighing his words, though as a matter of fact he had merely forgotten the title of the next chapter, but presently he went on again:

"Later I shall start reducing costs by studying machines, handling material economically and producing power at lowest costs: keeping the product moving, making environment count on the balance-sheet and protecting against accident and fire."

"Is that all?" asked Mr. Bince.

"Oh, no, indeed!" said Jimmy. "That's just a very brief outline of the way I shall start."

"Ah!" said Mr. Bince. "And just how, may I ask, do you make environment count on the balance-sheet? I do not quite understand."

Jimmy was mentally gasping and going down for the third time. He had wondered when he read that chapter title just what it might mean.

"Oh," he said, "you will understand that thoroughly when we reach that point. It is one of the steps in my method. Other things lead up to it. It is really rather difficult to explain until we have a concrete example, something that you can really visualize, you know. But I assure you that it will be perfectly plain to you when we arrive at that point."

"And now," he said, rising, "I must be going. I have a great deal to attend to this afternoon and to-morrow, as I wish to get some personal matters out of the way before I start in here Thursday."

"All right," said Mr. Bince, "I suppose we shall see you Thursday, but just bear in mind, please, that you and I can work better together than at cross-purposes."