

THE ROVER

By George Randolph Chester

CHURNING UP BUSINESS

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DON'T believe you like the churn business very well, Tommy, speculated Helen Rand, as a powdered-looking superintendent went

able. They're trimmed from the edges of the staves, and the lumber can't be cut any more economically, because we must have the grain running straight.

"I suggested that," and Tommy wrinkled his brow. "The superintendent and the manager laughed at the idea. They claim we'd scatter our force in making a market for another product. They've run this plant for years and years, and they know all about it, I don't."

"They were in financial difficulties when they got you, weren't they?"

"Yes, but there was a time when they made a good profit. They've been cramped for capital here lately."

"Why?" asked Ames.

"I don't know," mused Tommy. "The big cramp came right after they enlarged the plant. I guess they overplayed themselves; then they ran into heavy competition."

"I understand it now," nodded Ames. "They did all their big manufacturing in this room. When they enlarged the plant they didn't rearrange the machinery."

As they turned away, the superintendent, a wrinkled-faced old man, with a white mustache, came up to them and Tommy introduced him.

"Mr. Ames is studying our methods of production," Tommy explained.

"Are you familiar with the churn business?" inquired the superintendent, with ill-concealed resentment.

"I never saw a churn factory before," confessed Ames with a laugh.

"Oh," said the superintendent with a smug amusement.

When Tommy and Ames returned from their inspection of the plant they found the superintendent in the office with the manager, a large, red-faced man, who was addicted to shirt sleeves and who chewed cigars. The superintendent was leaning on the corner of the manager's desk and both turned with displeasure as Tommy came in. The superintendent nodded and returned to the factory. Tommy introduced his caller, and explained his present mission in life.

"Yes," acknowledged the manager, giving Ames a thorough stang up. "Brinley has just been telling me that you were giving Tommy some expert advice. What do you think of our plant, Mr. Ames?"

"Frankly, it's pretty bad," he began. "You should shut down your shop for about a month and rearrange all your effective machinery."

The manager leaned back in his chair and looked at Ames through heavy-lidded eyes.

"Do you like the color of the new rug Tommy put down?" he insolently inquired.

Ames rose.

"I came here to talk business," he stated.

"Who invited you?"

"I did," unexpectedly declared Tommy. "There's something wrong with this factory, Lasset, and I'm going to find out why the Reverse Gear people can undersell us."

"Mr. Ames is as ignorant of a churn factory as you are," retorted Lasset. "You look after the finances, Tommy, and we'll tend to the factory."

Tommy studied the manager unsmilingly.

"I've made an unfortunate impression on you, Lasset," he presently observed. "You think I'm a saphead, because you got my money into this concern; but I want you to always remember that I came along with the money; and, by jinks, I'm going to see that I get my money's worth. Come on, Ames, we'll take a spin. I want you to talk to me."

CHAPTER III.

Tommy found Brinley out in the shop giving specific orders to the foreman of the stove department about the handling of his material.

"It's awkward to do it," the foreman was protesting when Tommy came up.

"It saved two haulings," Brinley insisted. "You take them now from here into the other building, finish and shape the ends, bring them back to have the edges grooved, and take them over to the other building again for assembling. By grooving the edges before you take them out of here we'll save two haulings."

"That's what I've always said," declared the foreman.

"You do as I tell you," ordered Brinley, and a very much disgruntled foreman walked away to injure the perfect workmanship in which he had taken so much pride.

"You're putting into effect one of Mr. Ames' suggestions," charged Tommy.

"It's something I've had in mind a long time," denied the superintendent.

"Then why didn't you do it?" Tommy immediately wanted to know.

"Mr. Spencer, I am supposed to answer leading questions like that to only one man in this concern," he stated. "I can't work for two bosses, and I won't."

"Some day you'll try not working for any," prophesied Tommy.

He returned to the office full of anger.

"Lasset, I found Brinley putting into execution one of Mr. Ames' suggestions, only doing it clumsily," he observed.

"Suppose he is," growled Lasset. "I think it proves Ames' point," persisted Tommy.

"We don't need another ornamental man," remarked Lasset.

Tommy kept his temper pretty well, considering.

"We need a new manager," he declared. "You represented to me that if you were unhampered by debt, you could put us on a dividend-paying basis."

"The price of lumber's gone up since you came into the business," Lasset informed him.

"I'm going to take it," laughed Tommy. "I'd like to have you come over to the Commercial club with me."

"With pleasure," accepted Ames, and Tommy, with a trace of pride in the distinguished appearance of his guest, walked into the well-appointed business club which he had so recently joined.

He introduced Ames to three or four of the members, and they strolled through the billiard parlor on their way to the dining room.

"Hello, John Ames!" greeted Dick Templeton, walking up to the visitor and shaking hands cordially.

"You've deprived me of a pleasure, both of you," complained Tommy. "I had hoped to introduce you."

"Couldn't think of it, Tommy," declared Dick. "I was a great deal out of luck, and keep him out," he ordered.

"Mr. Ames is a stockholder," returned Tommy, coming around in front of Lasset's desk where he could talk directly at his face. "I gave him a share of stock."

"That's your lookout," snapped Lasset. "The fact that he's a stockholder, however, doesn't give him the right to come in here and disturb the men. Half of them have knocked off work and are standing around, with their tools in their hands, talking. How do you expect Brinley to preserve discipline?"

"I don't," answered Tommy. "I'm going to fire Grinley at the same time I get rid of our clumsy old machinery."

"You're going to fire him?" snorted Lasset.

"That's what I said," insisted Tommy, laying his fist gently but firmly on the manager's desk. "Now, look here, Lasset, I'm going to talk to you like a Dutch uncle. Will you, or will you not, employ Ames to remodel this factory?"

"Certainly not!" shouted Lasset.

"Then I will!" declared Tommy. "You got me into this concern under the impression that I couldn't be any trouble, because I didn't know anything. In that far you were right; but you didn't take into consideration the fact that maybe I could learn. I'm coming into the next stockholders' meeting prepared to fire you and Brinley, and then I'm going to run this factory myself. I've discovered that I like the churn business better than billiards."

"You walk like a sunbeam!" observed John Ames, as he guided Helen daintily out of the pocket made by

Ames' hand.

"I hope to remain some little time," replied Ames with a quiet smile at Tommy.

"Fine business!" exclaimed Dick. "Tommy, we must take him out to Mrs. Rushmore's little informal dance, and give the girls a treat."

CHAPTER V.

Within ten minutes after John Ames landed at Mrs. Rushmore's that night, the entire feminine contingent of the most exclusive set in town realized that this would be a lively social season. All the mammas with marriageable daughters threw out nervous tentacles in every direction, frantically anxious to absorb information.

He danced first with Helen Rand, and that lively young lady sparkled and snapped and glowed under the consciousness that the eyes of every girl on the floor was unceasingly upon them. Tommy Spencer danced with that fluffy little Rostand girl, and surprised Helen by flirting outrageously. Helen flashed at him a glance of amusement as she passed him in the walk, but Tommy seemed even more amused than she.

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"That's what you told me last week, didn't you, Billy?" asked Tommy.

"Lasset said the firm had made a quart of a million churns with the tools ground on these wheels," remarked Billy with contempt.

Brinley came through the shop to the grinding room, looked in at the door with a scowl at Ames and Tommy, and went away. Presently a boy came back. Ames was in the engine room listening, with a frown, to an annoying little click in the governor.

"Mr. Lasset wants to see you right away," announced the boy to Tommy.

"Go as far as you like, Ames," invited Tommy. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

Tommy went into the office, and found Lasset in a snarling frame of mind.

"You have to get your friend out of here, and keep him out," he ordered.

"Mr. Ames is a stockholder," returned Tommy, coming around in front of Lasset's desk where he could talk directly at his face. "I gave him a share of stock."

"That's your lookout," snapped Lasset. "The fact that he's a stockholder, however, doesn't give him the right to come in here and disturb the men. Half of them have knocked off work and are standing around, with their tools in their hands, talking. How do you expect Brinley to preserve discipline?"

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"Is that so?" laughed Ames. "Give me a thousand, Tommy. Coming back to that series of costume dances, old man, I do wish you'd wake up and join us. Helen says you must. What's the matter that you never get around to Helen's any more? She thinks you're treating her shabbily; and by George, you are."

"I've been so busy," lamely defended Tommy. He mused heavily a moment. "If Helen says I must, I suppose I must," he finally admitted.

"When do you begin?"

"The first Friday in next month," said Ames. "I am to see Helen this evening. I'll tell her. She'll be delighted."

Tommy winced internally, but outwardly he smiled most pleasantly.

"I guess I'll be there."

That evening he repeated his promise. He saw Helen and Ames flashing by in the new touring car which was a part of the extravagant Ames' advances. At first Ames had been the delight of all the girls, but, with the passing of time, he had become more and more devoted to Helen. The two were almost inseparable.

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