

ED SIMPSON, WATER BOY

R. R. Clark, in The Uplift.

Passing through the village of Glen Alpine a few days ago, it was noticed that the side of the railroad cut hard by the passenger station was covered with grass, flowers and shrubbery. The improvement, I was told, was due to the fact that Glen Alpine is the native place of E. R. Simpson, general manager of Southern railway lines east; and that a better station might be built at Glen Alpine as a compliment to the distinguished railroad man who began his career at Glen Alpine as a water boy for a section force.

For the especial benefit of the boys in the training school and any other boys who may read The Uplift, I am talking today not about E. R. Simpson, general manager of the Southern railway, but about Ed Simpson, water boy. Up and down the old Western North Carolina railroad, where he spent his first years in the railroad service and showed his fitness for higher things, the present general manager of the Southern is yet "Ed Simpson." That is a term of affection and admiration, especially among the older people, who watched him climb upward with interest and admiration.

Ed Simpson was born at Glen Alpine, October 20, 1869. His education was limited to the common schools, and these schools were limited as to term and curriculum at that period. At the age of 14 years he began work as water boy for a section force, of which his father was foreman, at the wage of 40 cents a day. As a water boy he attracted attention. He didn't have to be urged to get the water and he didn't seek the shade when he had done the work for which he was paid. He was interested in the section work, he picked up spikes and made himself useful to the force. Presently when he was old enough and strong enough to swing a pick and shovel, he went to work as a section hand. The qualities he displayed as water boy remained with him. He made such a good section hand that presently he was made a section foreman. His capacity to manage men and accomplish work soon placed him in charge of a work train, in command of wrecking crews. His success as the superintendent of wrecking forces was such that by and by he was made superintendent of the Asheville division of the Southern. He was division superintendent on three different divisions until 1914, when he was made general superintendent. Recently he was moved a step higher to general manager.

That is an inspiring story of a climb from the bottom of the ladder to near the top; and its greatest inspiration is in the fact that Ed Simpson's success is due to industry and native ability. It is not a case of good fortune, or simply luck. He had no influential connection or friends, so far as known, to push him up. But he had that in him of which men are made and he won success on merit. Less than 38 years after he began work as water boy for a section force he is the general manager of a great railway system.

I want the boys to notice first that Ed Simpson wasn't afraid of work nor ashamed of work in any humble capacity. He was not only willing to carry water for a section gang but he was not content simply to carry a few buckets of water as he could get by on. When he had supplied the water he didn't stop and wait until they called for more water. He made himself useful. When he was big enough to do a man's work he didn't leave home to look for a better job—for easier and more dignified employment in the towns. He didn't feel above the work of a section hand. He took the job at hand, the rudiments of which he had learned while toting water for the section force and with such intelligence and industry did he apply himself to the job that when a section foreman was wanted he got the job. When made section foreman he didn't feel that he had reached the top. He wasn't content to rest on his oars and let things drift. Having shown himself a first-class section hand he demonstrated his capacity to direct work. There are many privates in the rank but few capable commanders; many good workers who haven't the capacity to direct work intelligently, to command men so as to secure the best results and to maintain the respect and good will of those under them. That talent is not common. Ed Simpson was not only a worker himself; he could work others, and work with them if need be. That type is not the sort that is puffed up by promotion, not the sort that becomes tyrants when given a little authority. Ed Simpson went on up. When he was general superintendent of the Southern along came the big flood of 1916, that washed away many miles of Southern railway track and put many lines out of commission. General Superintendent Simpson took the line from Winston-Salem to Wilkesboro as his job. He walked and rode horseback or muleback over the right of way of the badly wrecked road from Winston-Salem to North Wilkesboro, got the lay of the land, saw the size of the job, assembled a force and went to it. He could have stayed in Greensboro or Winston-Salem, probably, and issued orders to subordinates. But that wasn't Ed Simpson's way because he was not trained that way. He could say come on to workmen, and take a hand himself, if necessary, as well as he could say go on. And that sort of general, whether on the battlefield, or in private industry, gets the best and the quickest results. It is human nature to follow, with a loyalty that never quails, the man who can lead the way, who can do things himself. My recollection is that the line taken over by General Superintendent Simpson was the first of the wrecked lines put in commission.

I have no personal acquaintance with Mr. Simpson. I met him once, 20 years ago or more, when he had just been promoted to superintendent of the Asheville division. A Statesville shipper complained to me that the Southern was negligent in furnishing him cars. I passed the criticism along in The Landmark, of which I was editor. A little later a modest young man appeared in my office and quietly and courteously explained that there was a mistake about the cars. He had just taken over the superintendent's job, he said, and he didn't want to get a call down on account of a misunderstanding. There was nothing about him so often found even in clerks in the railroad ticket offices. The new division superintendent quietly explained to me how it was and it gave me real pleasure to set him straight. I have never seen Mr. Simpson since nor communicated with him, and wouldn't know him if I were to meet him in the road. But a man who makes good as he has, has my unbounded admiration and respect.

Not only is it evident that Mr. Simpson's success didn't give him the "big head" and make him feel above his old associates, his old friends and neighbors at Glen Alpine or ashamed to call Glen Alpine home, but I am satisfied in my own mind that he didn't work solely with promotion in view. The fellow who works solely for the purpose of climbing will soon

give himself away. It is the sort who go on and do their best, no matter how humble nor insignificant the job, because they believe it is their duty to give the best that is in them, who make the success Simpson has made. Promotion comes to that kind because there are so few of them without the asking because they command it. They don't watch the clock, afraid of doing a minute's work overtime; they are not afraid they may do a hand's turn that some other could do. They not only work, but they are loyal to the business, and to the interest of their employers because they feel that they are employed for that.

Today there are hundreds of chances for boys to one for the boys of Ed Simpson's water boy days. A liberal education is easily obtained now; then educational opportunities except for the bare rudiments, were far removed from the poor boy. Now there are jobs in plenty at good wages for the fellow who is willing to work as Ed Simpson worked; all the time there are openings for earnest, willing workers. In Ed Simpson's boy days jobs were scarce, and yet many poor boys, taking the opportunities at hand, made good. The Simpson success was more notable than rare. His example was conspicuous. Some of his boyhood associates, many of them probably, have made a success in life, with little or no better opportunities than he had, but their success is not so spectacular. I am saying this not to detract from Mr. Simpson, but to show present day boys that his was not such a rare case; and to show the boys of this day that if they do not succeed it will be because they don't try, because they haven't got the root of the matter in them. They can't all go from water boy to general manager

of railroads, but they can all attain some degree of success if they are willing to begin at the foot of the ladder and climb by their own exertions. They can't begin at the top, or even half way up, as so many of them want to do. They can't command full wages on a job until they can show that they can make good. Too many of them consider the amount of the pay first, the quantity and quality of the work last. In short, they want a big salary for doing as little work as possible and doing that indifferently. Many of them have been getting by with that the past few years, while workers were scarce; and many of this type are now looking for jobs and will continue to look for them. The Ed Simpson will get the jobs as soon as they show they are of the Simpson type.

In conclusion I am making my manner to Mr. E. R. Simpson, general manager of Southern Railway lines east; and I am standing uncovered before

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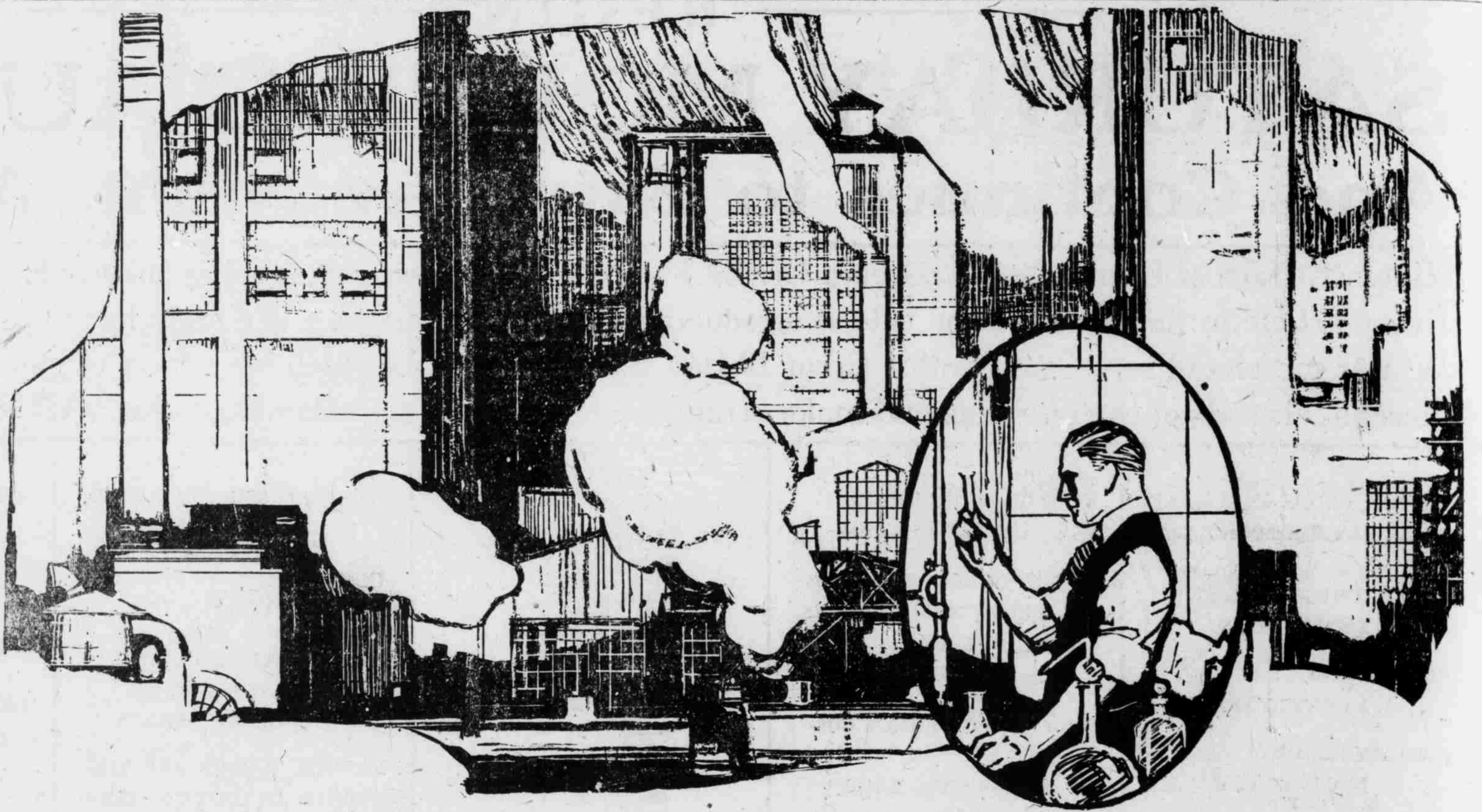
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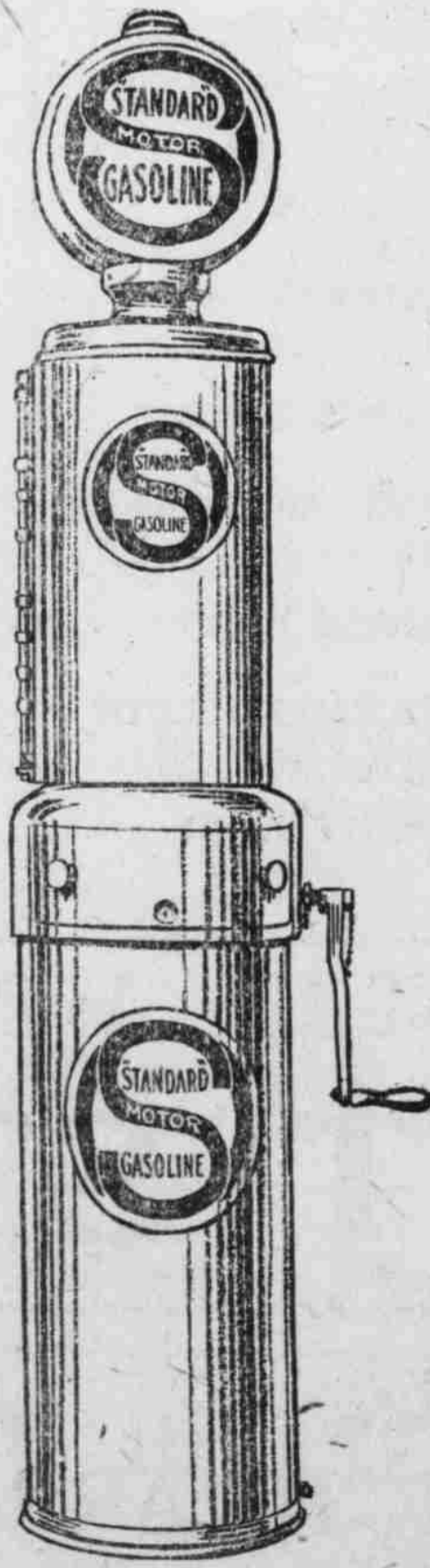
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