

# HUNTING A JOB WHEN A MAN IS OVER FORTY FIVE

## Some Are Pathetic Figures but Others Turn Apparent Adversity to Good Account.

THERE is no more pathetic figure than the man of 45 hunting a position, and finding door after door closed to him for no other reason than that in the modern commercial and industrial world the demand is for young men and not for those who have begun to show the gray at the temples. A large employer of men in one of our biggest corporations plainly stated his side of the case to the writer in these words: "A man who has failed to make good at 45 is not wanted to-day; he never will make good. We can't afford to bother with him. The fact that he's hunting a job shows he's a failure."

This somewhat unsympathetic and sweeping conclusion fails to take into account two facts of general significance. Fully one-half of those seeking a new job at 45 or over were not dropped or discharged for incompetency, but as a result of the shifting conditions of business and industrial life.

The consolidation or reorganization of every company or firm plays havoc with the old employes, and many, if not discharged outright, are demoted to some minor position. Failures, retirement from business, hard times, and changes in the method of work are all responsible for turning adrift thousands of old employes who have worked faithfully and well in their positions.

The unsettling of business through any one of a dozen causes throws upon the market a considerable number of middle-aged-old clerks and employes.

The other fact worthy of notice is that our new organization method of con-

ducting large business affairs limits a man's chances of success to a minor sphere. He is merely a unit, a cog, in the great system for which he works, and his success should be measured by his ability to perform that duty efficiently.

To expect all of these units to rise above the positions for which they have been trained and drilled is to expect the impossible.

Therefore a successful clerk may be turned adrift at 45, and no matter how well and faithfully he performed his work he will be counted a failure when he seeks another job, although up to that time he was a success in his limited field.

Society must soon take cognizance of this most pathetic figure, and our industrial and business world must likewise stop to consider him. We cannot go on indefinitely casting upon charity as wrecks those who still have fifteen to twenty years of usefulness.

The waste of good material is too enormous for economical exploitation of labor. There must be some remedy other than pensioning which will give the man of 45 a fair chance to work out his final destiny.

During the panic of recent date the laboring man had a hard time of it through lack of steady work, but he is employed again and is rapidly making up for the losses sustained from involuntary idleness. But the man of forty-five and over suffered a more permanent loss, and he is not likely to recover from it. Of the thousands of clerks and office employes who lost their positions through the panic, how many have recovered them or found any job anything like as remunerative?

The manager of one large corporation office, employing upward of 500 clerks and assistants, gleefully remarked recently: "One good thing the panic did for us, it gave us an opportunity to get rid of all our old men. No dead wood here. Every man is under thirty-five."

From his point of view this result was probably a good one, but what of the old employes who were never taken back? Have they found new jobs? Or if they succeeded in getting new positions, how much less do they receive for their services?

Here are some of these pathetic figures, and what they are doing: James Smith was forty-six when the panic forced him out of his position as clerk in a wholesale chemical manufacturing company. He had \$1,000 saved up—a rather unusual amount for a \$30-a-week clerk with a family to support—and this was all spent during the months he was hunting a new position.

He was not disappointed at first, for business was dull, and many others were out of employment. He kept saying: "Wait until business picks up. Then I'll get a job."

When most of the savings were gone, the business revival came, and the man grew hopeful. Others were getting positions. Then why not James Smith?

For the first time he found himself up against the conditions which shattered

his last hope. "Too old. I'm sorry, but we want younger men."

This refrain was repeated with slight variations wherever he applied. He grew desperate, lost hope, and aged five years within a twelvemonth.

Finally, in sheer desperation he accepted a minor position at \$10 a week, sorting and folding circulars. This did not last long, but about as long as James Smith's health lasted.

Under the strain he broke down nervously, and had to quit. His wife and daughter took in washing and ironing to keep him from starving, and his fifteen year old boy secured a job at \$8 a week to help along.

The family supported him until he could help with the washing. Now he has become almost as expert at the wash tub as he formerly was with the pen.

Harry Jones was forty-seven when he met with a similar fate, except that Harry had not saved a thousand dollars, and had little more than \$200 in the savings bank. He was in a bad way.

Concluding that business would not recover for some time he had the wisdom to hunt for jobs outside of his specialty. Except for a few odd jobs which brought him in a dollar occasionally he found nothing to do that he was capable of doing.

The long wait, and the fear of never getting back his former job, weakened his mind for a time, and he was sent away by relatives to the country. When he returned in full health again his former position was not open to him. A younger man had it. Harry is now working for the janitor of the building in which he formerly "clerked it" with high hopes for a happy future.

Five others, who were interviewed, reported having lost their positions during the panic and were unable to get anything to do in their line because of their age. They were too old, and no one cared to employ them.

Their only hope was to accept some minor position or "clerk it" at about half their former salary in some office where old men were taken on account of the reduced pay.

In this connection it is worth while making mention of two important experimental instances. One was that of an office manager who paid about half the usual salaries for good clerks. He could not get at his wages competent young men, and he had employed men of 45 and over.

To the query as to whether he was satisfied he replied: "Yes, I suppose so. They're a cheap lot, but they do the work. It's all they're worth." It was clearly impossible to get a fair-minded answer from him.

The other instance was that of a man

of business who was also something of a philanthropist. He was keenly alive to the importance of any great sociological question.

The business panic had forced him temporarily to shut down, and practically all of his office force had been laid off pending business recovery. He was later in reopening than most business offices, and when he finally started in to reorganize his work most of his old employes had drifted away or secured other positions.

Then the idea of trying an experiment came to him. He advertised for competent office clerks 45 and over.

He was literally swamped with applicants, and he had his pick of a large number. He chose upward of thirty men who came with good recommendations, and put them on full salaries which he had formerly paid to younger men.

With the exception of two who appeared a little doubtful at first, the new men all stayed with him. As to the results of this experiment, the philanthropic business man had this to say:

"I never had a better office force in my life, and from the first things went smoothly. There was no breaking in of green men; no carelessness; no idleness; no unskillfulness."

"They were all tried veterans, and they knew exactly what was expected of them and they did it efficiently. They saved me an endless amount of annoyance and irritation so common in breaking in new, untried men."

"Twenty years of training counted for something. I got more out of these veterans than I could possibly have secured from younger and greener men."

"Now my plan is to employ only clerks who are 45 or more. I could fill my office with this class at a considerable saving in the present state of the market, but I believe a man is worthy of his hire whether he is 25 or 45."

This is the nearest approach to a solution of the problem that has yet been tried, and without the element of philanthropy it is quite evident that a similar experiment would pay in a great number of instances. Instead of offering less wages for competence and training, it would seem as if a premium should be paid for the services of a man of 45 who is in good health and understands his work thoroughly. Of course, there are many at this age and beyond who are not competent or who are so broken in health that their services are of questionable value; but they do not affect the general ethics of the situation.

The personal equation must always enter largely into the solution of every problem, and the man who has always been held down as an insignificant unit in a great corporation may suddenly show

great expansive qualities under adversity.

and work out his destiny in the most unexpected manner.

The panic of two years ago was not thus without its qualifying good. Even to some clerks of 45 it brought compensations. These few instances serve to brighten the picture and demonstrate once more that environments have much to do with the success or failure of individuals.

William Brown had been a clerk in a bank for twenty-five years and lost his position when the financial juggling of a few Presidents involved a number of banks in ruin. With less than \$800 in the bank, a family of four to support, and approaching 48 years of age, the prospects were not very bright for Mr. Brown.

But he went home and thought instead of wasting his time trying to find a new position when all sorts of institutions were turning away applicants and discharging old men. He waited a month, two months, three months, and then he decided he would do something.

He was familiar with the bond market, and as stocks and bonds were very low, they seemed to him to offer good bargains to investors if they could be so convinced. He went to a big bond house and stated his case. He wanted to sell bonds to investors—not on a salary, for he knew he couldn't get such a job, but strictly on commission. Any bond house was glad to employ him under such conditions.

So William Brown tried his hand as a bond salesman. He had never sold anything before, but he had ideas about how such things should be done, and he had secretly envied the bond salesman whom he had met.

Unknown to himself he was a natural born salesman, but business habits and an early marriage had prevented him from making a change. He had never dared to give up his salaried position.

Now it was to make good or starve—sell bonds or go to the poorhouse. And he sold bonds; he induced timid out-of-town investors to put their hoarded money into bond bargains; he explained, argued, and persuaded.

At first success came slowly, and then more rapidly. While other bond salesmen were staying at home bemoaning the hard times, and not considering it worth while to attempt to drum up trade in such a depressed market, William Brown pegged away, and by degrees made enough on commissions to keep the wolf from the door.

When business began to resume its normal condition again, he was on the high road to success. The bond house appreciated his services, and the junior member argued this way: "A man who can sell bonds in hard times must be worth a good deal when times are good." So

our erstwhile thirty-five-dollar-a-week bank clerk was offered a five-thousand-dollar-a-year salary and commissions.

The solution of the problem which confronts the jobless man of 45 must be worked out individually in a great many cases which we never hear of, and there are successes and failures known only to themselves or to their near friends and relatives. We cannot believe that all of these young-old derelicts are permanently stranded or that they are working out the rest of their existence in some minor capacity where overwork and underpay eats the heart out of life. There are some like William Brown, who have found a solution to their difficulty, but in different ways.

Charles Williams was typical of this class, and his case may offer some hope to others. Discharged through no fault of his own, and unable to secure a decent position again on account of his gray hairs, he decided to move away from the city, and with his few hundreds in the bank he rented a ten-acre farm for \$120 a year.

His chief reason for this move was to save rent money, and incidentally to raise something for the little ones to eat. He didn't know much about gardening or farming, but he read books and consulted neighbors.

His wife and children raised chickens and fresh vegetables; he bought a cow and pig, and later a horse, but this latter necessitated his mortgaging his life insurance policy. Between them they raised nearly enough to supply their table with food, and sold enough off the small place to buy dry groceries and an occasional luxury in the way of a coat or hat.

It was a pretty hard pull the first year, and the small capital ahead dwindled gradually; but the second year they stopped the leak, and lived without running into debt. The third year they came out a little ahead.

The boys were old enough to do odd jobs for the neighbors, and this helped. They took a few boarders in Summer, and later rented out a wooded part of the farm to camping parties.

In Winter they all worked at something. They tried mushrooms in the cellar, and the boys started a squab factory, as they called it.

To-day Charles Williams is cultivating a farm of fifty acres. He works hard, but he makes a decent living, and lays aside something each year.

He is over fifty now, but he doesn't look it. He is a strapping fellow, and enjoys life. If you ask him he will tell you that he is glad he was ostracized at forty-five, for now he is doing the work which nature intended that he should do. Until he became a farmer he was a misfit, according to his version of his life's story.

An investigation of several other disqualified men of forty-five who did not go down under the crushing burden of defeat demonstrated equally well, but in varying degrees, that the individual is often competent to deal with the perplexities of such an emergency.

One man is the owner of a successful retail drygoods store. He had been a clerk in a large-importing and exporting

house until he lost his position and was unable to secure another "on account of my gray hairs." With his little savings bank fund he started into storekeeping himself, and he applied rigid rules of living which enabled him to pull through successfully. He is now happier than when he was merely a cog in a big machine.

Another is a successful traveling salesman for a big hardware house for which he formerly worked as a clerk. He got out on the road because he was too old to get back his former job, but not too old to sell goods on commission. Now he sells for the house on commission plus a salary twice what he received as a clerk.

Still another took to hotel keeping. He started as a boarding house keeper at a Summer resort, and made enough the first year to keep him through the Winter. Then he added another house to his management, and conducted the two successfully. Now he has a hotel which accommodates 500 guests.

It would be easier for society if each individual would work out the solution of this new problem himself, but in lieu of it there must eventually be some concerted action to see what can be done for the jobless man of forty-five and over. Meanwhile, is our industrial and commercial world losing or gaining by any such application of hard-and-fast rules about the age of clerks and employes? The answer to this would certainly prove of interest and value to a great many people, especially to the increasing army of involuntarily ostracized men of forty-five and over.

### Paging the Deaf

THE time I experience most inconvenience from deafness is when they are paging some one at a hotel," said the man who doesn't hear well. "I spend more than half my time in hotels. Whenever I see a boy tearing through the lobbies and smoking room paging some one I nearly have heart failure until I find out who he wants. He might want me. Among all the guests there is only 1 chance in 500 that he does; still, he might, and I would never know it unless he came and shouted it into my ear. Naturally, no well-bred bellboy will do that, so the initiative of finding out whether I am paged or not devolves upon me. I stand up and block the way."

"Boy," I say, "do you want Benson—J. R. Benson? Speak loud, please, because I am deaf."

"He does speak loud. He makes a megaphone of his hands and shouts, 'No, I want Brownson,' and passes on."

"Pretty soon another boy appears, and we repeat the performance. The whole lobby becomes interested. They imagine that I am expecting an important message. I am expecting no message at all, but the possibility that I might get one and miss it because I couldn't hear the boy paging me causes me to make a fool of myself several times every evening."

### Rude Americans

AMERICANS are rude, extremely so," said the Englishman just four days over. "They don't want to be told anything; think they know it all. Yesterday three men who sat in double seats with me in an elevated train were arguing over a matter that none of them seemed to have definite information on. It happened to be something that I had read a long article about the night before, so I spoke up and told them what I knew. Now, in my country we would thank a man who did that, but these American didn't thank me. They laughed in my face, that is what they did."

"That is strange," said his American friend. "Americans are usually very grateful for every bit of information offered them. What did you tell them, anyhow?"

"Well, they were fussing about which city had the finest diamond in the country. One said Philadelphia had, another Chicago, the other stuck out for Pittsburg. I said, 'Pardon me, gentlemen, you are all mistaken. Utica has the finest diamond in the United States. I read about it last night. It weighs I forget how many karats and was brought from London by a Mrs. Patterson about a year ago.'"

"And then they laughed. Very rude Americans are, I think."