

'Ah, indeed!' said Mr. Ray, glancing at the paper that was offered him. 'Yes, that is his autograph fast enough. Perham was my room-mate at college, and a right good fellow. I haven't seen him since we were graduated. Sit down, won't you, and tell me about him.'

'That is first-rate,' he declared, after listening to a glowing account of his friend. 'I am delighted to hear from the old fellow. And now about your case. To tell the truth, I hadn't thought of any more office help. But—perhaps I might work you in to help on the books and to act as general utility man about the office. It will be small pay at first, but if you are adapted to the business it will lead to something better.'

There was no difficulty about coming to terms, and Mullins at once made his start in the insurance business.

One evening some time later Mr. Ray said to his wife: 'I've got to get rid of my new clerk. I'm sorry about it, for he is a thoroughly good fellow—but stupid, stupid! I was getting along very well before, but I have certainly been overworked since Mullins came. It's queer, too. He took the commercial course at Pine Grove Seminary, under Charlie Perham, you know. And Perham gave him a first-class recommendation. I hope he isn't a fair sample of Perham's graduates.'

So the next day Mr. Ray, in as tactful a manner as possible, explained to the young man that under the prevailing business conditions he should not need extra clerical assistance after that week. Mullins accepted his dismissal in good part, and just before leaving on Saturday he asked, quite as a matter of course, 'Would you be willing to write me a recommendation, Mr. Ray?'

'A recommendation? Why—ah—certainly! By the way, will you let me look at the one that Mr. Perham gave you?'

As Mr. Ray read the letter through, with considerable care this time, a light broke in upon his mind. Then, in a spirit of emulation, he turned to the typewriter, his stenographer having gone, and produced the following:

'I am pleased to say that Mr. David Mullins, who has been in my employ, is an eminently worthy young man whose desire is to do well whatever he undertakes. I do not doubt that his services will be as satisfactory to any future employer as they have been to me.'

'Henry Ray.'

Mullins was much pleased with this, the more especially as he had secretly feared that he had not been entirely successful in the insurance business. He thanked his late employer heartily, and on Monday morning started on his search for another place.

His travels presently brought him to an office which bore the sign, 'William Evans, Coal and Wood.' The proprietor was in, and although his demeanor was far from gracious, he did listen to what his visitor had to say.

'I have just turned off one fellow who was of no earthly use,' he declared, in a rasping tone that seemed to match a hard look in his eyes. 'It is next to impossible to get any decent help nowadays. Recommendations? Oh, of course! They all have them.' He accepted rather gingerly those that Mullins now offered, and glanced them over.

'Hum—irreproachable character—substantial business education—services satisfactory. Oh, they read well enough, of course! Well, I want a man at one of my yards to do the weighing and keep a lookout for things generally. I may as well try you as any one if you want the chance. You may start in at once, and I will give you a dollar a day until Saturday night. If you suit, I'll pay more after that. If you don't suit, you leave. What do you say, yes or no?'

Mullins said yes, although the work was not quite what he had originally in mind.

He was really much better adapted to this place than to his former one, and he easily learned its duties. Being of a practical turn of mind, he soon saw the need of improvements about the yard. For one thing, he became convinced that the scales were not accurate. Some of these matters he took the liberty to bring to the attention of his employer.

When Saturday night came he was well satisfied with his success in his new business, and he went to the office fully expecting a permanent engagement with a handsome increase in salary. The proprietor had gone home, but the bookkeeper handed Mullins an envelope, which contained a five-dollar bill and this note:

'Dear Sir,—I find upon trial that you do not suit me, and I shall have no further use for your services. Enclosed please find five dollars, payment in full for five days' work. Yours, etc.,

'William Evans.'

This was a cruel blow to poor Mullins, and he turned away in deep dejection, from which he had by no means recovered, when, on Monday morning, he again started on his rounds.

It was indeed with very little hope that in the course of the forenoon he entered the office of 'John Arkwright, Contractor.' But there was something in Mr. Arkwright's shrewd, kindly face that encouraged Mullins, and he was able to make his application with less than his usual awkwardness.

'Good recommendations, you say?' repeated Mr. Arkwright, as he swung round in his revolving chair and peered at his visitor through steel-bowed spectacles.

He read with some care those that were now put into his hands, and as he did so the pleasant smile that lighted up his rugged features gave Mullins considerable encouragement.

'This your last place?' asked the contractor, with his thumb on Mr. Ray's signature.

'No, sir. I was with Mr. Evans, the coal merchant for a short time.'

'That so? Did he give you a letter when you left?'

Mullins flushed painfully. 'Yes, sir,' he faltered, 'but I guess you couldn't call it a recommendation.'

'Oh, well, I'll be the judge of that. I'd like to look at it, if you don't mind.'

'Well,' said Mr. Arkwright at last, 'I rather like your appearance, and I think that there may be something in you. I don't need a bookkeeper or a clerk, but I could use a young fellow who wasn't afraid to work, and whose knowledge wasn't confined to what he learned at school. I reckon most of yours is outside of that,' he chuckled. 'If you say so, I will give you a chance. It will be only day-laborer's pay, and not much different from day-laborer's work at first; but if you can learn to go ahead with a job and to handle men you may find it worth your while by and by.'

Some ten years may be supposed to have elapsed. Mr. Perham was still at Pine Grove Seminary, although he had often felt a desire for a wider field of usefulness, with a correspondingly better salary. He was therefore agreeably surprised one day to receive a telegram, asking him to meet the trustees of a flourishing school in another State, as a candidate for the position of principal, and he readily accepted the invitation.

After his interview he was taken by one of the trustees in his carriage to the railway station.

'I believe that I haven't told you how we happened to look you up,' said the trustee, as they drove along. 'The fact is, I became interested in you through one of your old pupils, who is now a partner of mine.'

Mr. Perham could not have told why, but instantly there flashed before his mind's eye a scene in the bursar's office at the seminary, and he seemed to hear the words, 'I hope I may have a chance to do as much for you some time.'

'What is his name?' he asked. And he was not entirely surprised to hear the trustee answer 'Mullins.'

'He was called out of the city to-day,' added the trustee, 'or he would have been on hand to meet you.'

'He must have changed considerably since I saw him,' remarked Mr. Perham, in default of anything else to say.

'Well, he isn't so green as he was, but he is the same simple-hearted fellow, after all. For instance, he is still proud of the testimonial that you gave him when he left school.'

Mr. Perham had to blush before the quizzical glance that came to him through steel-bowed spectacles.

'It was the best that I could do at the time, Mr. Arkwright,' he said.

'Probably it was. I presume he didn't shine at school. But I reckon that I could give him a better recommendation if occasion required. For one thing, I could say that I thought well enough of him to take him into my business—contracting, you know. He can get more work out of a crew of men and keep them better natured than anyone else I know. To this day he is always quoting things that you said, and I must say that they have generally struck me as good, sound sense. That is how I came to think of you at this time. So, Mr. Perham, if you are elected—and I think you will be, though of course I am only one of the trustees—if you are elected, it will be largely on the strength of Mullins' recommendation.'—Youth's Companion.