

quently, Davis had the respect of his fellow-workers as well as of his employers, and if there was one idea farther from their minds than all others, it was the one that Davis ever would turn out to be a loser. They began to cultivate his friendship, wisely figuring ahead unto the day when Davis should be a power in the office.

Then—something slipped. For a few weeks Davis the reliable was Davis the incompetent. He made error after error, delayed shipment after shipment, and at the end of the week, when he began to get into form again, he had the work of his desk mixed up in a way that would have been a shame to the rawest beginner. When he came back to his own, however, he was the same old Davis, the reliable one, and within two weeks he had things whipped back into shape again, and the work of rating went on with the old machine-like regularity and accuracy.

'What was the matter?' asked the head of the department when things were going right. 'Were you sick?'

'I wasn't right, somehow,' said Davis. 'I couldn't handle myself the way I ought to. All right now, though.'

'Oh, of course.' The head wanted Davis to see that he was well satisfied with him. 'I didn't ask because I wanted to find fault. I know how a man has those spells sometimes; no matter how hard he tries or what he does, things simply will persist in going wrong. It's one of the most inexplicable things in the world. I suppose it's all due to a man's physical and mental condition. It's easy enough to see how at times a man for some reason or other would be below his normal average of keenness and ability. Glad to see that you're all right again.'

Now, that easy-going, good-natured head helped Davis on his career downhill, though, of course, he never knew it. But his complacency and sympathy made it easier.

'He never suspected a thing,' said Davis to himself. 'He'll never get on.'

So that night he went out and had a good time with a bunch of good fellows that he had fallen in with, which same bunch and their good times had been responsible for his inefficiency of the week previous.

'Bobbie,' said his wife next morning, 'don't you think that you've been going out just a little bit too much lately?'

'No, I don't,' said Davis. 'Do you?'

'I don't know just what to think,' said Mrs. Davis. 'But if it was anybody but you I'm sure I would say yes. But you're so careful, I know you wouldn't do anything that would hurt you.'

'Of course I wouldn't,' grunted Davis, who had a headache. 'Forget it.'

That day he had another bad day at the office. But he was in shape next day, and by working like a Trojan—a Trojan of pencil and paper—he managed to straighten his errors out before they were discovered by the people up ahead.

Of course you know what it was that started Davis on his journey downhill. Just booze, that's all. But it took him some time to reach the bottom, and the different stages of his descent are all interesting.

It was a year after he had started to have his good times that the head of the department was fully convinced that it was booze and booze only that was taking the steel out of his crack chief clerk. It took him this long to be convinced, because he wanted to keep Davis if it was possible, and he hated the stuff that was spoiling him like sin itself. When he was forced to admit the truth he had to let Davis go.

'You will give me a reference?'

The head said: 'I am sorry, but I can not do so.'

So Davis was cast upon the world with a record of four years' employment with a firm from which he could not get a recommendation behind him. While it is strictly true that a fulsome recommendation is a little worse than none, it is also true that when a man works four years for a firm and can not use its name as a reference he is heavily handicapped.

'Where did you get your experience?' asked the people where Davis applied for a position in the tariff department.

'At Going and Co.,' replied Davis.

'Who were you under there?'

Davis told them.

'Can we write Mr. Blank regarding you?'

Then Davis had to up and confess that he had left Going and Co. because of a quarrel with this same Mr. Blank, and consequently it would be preposterous to imagine that he would be favorable to Mr. Davis.

'All right. Call in again in about four days.'

In the meantime the firm receiving the application communicated with Mr. Blank regarding Davis, and when the latter called

he was informed that the vacancy had been filled. They promised to let him know if anything turned up. Then they tore up his application.

While these rebuffs were being met with, Davis kept on drinking a little. Having only a little money, he couldn't drink a lot. He was out of work for a month. Then he took a clerk's position at 15 dollars a week. At Going and Co.'s he had made 40 dollars. Likewise, the Davis household shifted its lares and penates from a 30-dollar apartment to an 18-dollar flat. The first big step downhill had been taken; Davis had dropped from the ranks of the comers to a place in the mob.

When you look at it carefully this is a bigger drop than would appear on the surface. Here was a man who through his own ability had won his way to a position where the big things were immediately before him. There could be no question that he 'had it in him' to go on and win the big prizes. He had ability far beyond a chief clerk's requirements, and he was developing with every day. Then suddenly the slip, and here he was down among the men who had only such ability as is required to perform the most mechanical and insignificant of duties allotted to man.

He began to think of this phase of his condition, and then he began to drink a little more. He was what is known as 'quite a souse' now. On pay night he would come home wobbly on his feet and fuddled about the head, and with a good share of his 15 dollars gone to the bourne whence no money ever returns. And then came the near-panic of last fall, and Davis, being a new man, was dropped from his new position.

That broke Davis's nerve. He felt the fates were against him. He accepted the first job he came across, that of packing orders in the crockery department of a big store. He's there now. He gets ten dollars a week. He and his wife live in two furnished rooms on the north side just across the river, and sometimes when she feels strong Mrs. Davis works as a saleswoman in the store in which Davis is a packer. Davis never expects to be anything but a packer as long as he lives. What's the use of trying, he argues, when everything is against you? So he shoves the excelsior between the sides of the box and the lamp and tries to forget what a chance he once had.

Moral: The downfall route is so easy that it's no wonder so many take it.—Chicago Tribune.

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