

A Little Flyer in Boxes

(Continued from Page 7)



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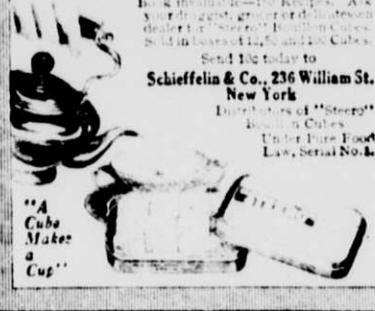
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though one stiff loss would wipe me out just now."

The mill president considered this point from all angles, and finally, for reasons best known to himself, he decided to take a chance on Reuben K. Pitcher. And with the business which had taken him north successfully consummated, that gentleman next decided to cast about him for the selling agency of a spruce box factory, a side line of sound, well-made spruce box shook promising to add materially to his income.

Quite early in his stay at Hoquiam, Pitcher had observed a modest little factory on the bay shore at the eastern end of the town. He had observed also a tremendous pile of box wood at the end of the elevator that carried the waste from the saws, and the thought had occurred to him: "Here is a man with a well equipped little plant, but he isn't making any money. I'll call on him, and if he needs a selling agent, I'll put him wise to a few things."

UPON completing his business with the Wishkah Company, therefore, Reuben K. called at the office of the Washington Box Factory and sent in his card to the manager, who presently came in from the factory. He was a sad man, who chewed tobacco, and the rim of his hat was heavily laden with fine sawdust, which fact did not escape the eagle eye of Rube Pitcher—for he saw at once that the manager had been running spruce boards through a planer—infallible evidence that his cash reserve was low, and that he was endeavoring to eliminate expense by doing himself the work of a hired man. He shook hands and said his name was Henry Peets; that he owned the factory which was fully insured, and hoped, by all the gods, pagan and otherwise, it might catch fire and burn to the foundation timbers.

Finding Reuben K. Pitcher a sympathetic listener, he proceeded to dilate on the general misery of the box business and his own stupidity for ever embarking in such a fool game.

"What you need, Mr. Peets," said Pitcher, "is a live selling representative in San Francisco; somebody that knows the trade and can supply you with orders enough to keep the factory running the year around; somebody that can get you the top market price for your stock and arrange tonnage to freight it to market. And while it's a great blow to my natural modesty to make such a crack, I think I'm the angel that's been sent to save you," and he explained his qualifications for the job.

Henry Peets grinned painfully. "I don't doubt your ability, Mr. Pitcher, but if I'm to have an angel, the angel must have cash—ka-sh—cash! I could buy a nice lot of No. 1 and No. 2 box spruce at twelve dollars right now if I had the money, and you know the market is easy at thirteen dollars. Better than that, I could grade a lot of No. 2 and No. 3 shop common out of the box stock and get into the sash and door end of it in a small way—but I have n't any money to buy the stock and work it up, so what's the use of living?"

"But won't the saw-mills up here trust you?"

"Trust me! They'll take the little plant away from me if I don't glad den them with some real money within sixty days." Henry Peets appeared on the point of crying; indeed, some hint of his desperation may be gleaned from the fact that he was glad to pour his troubles into the ear of a stranger.

"What's put you out of business?" Pitcher inquired mildly.

"A whale of an order for cannery stock. I cut the price to get the order, because I simply had to have the business; had to keep the old mill going to save my credit. I stood to make a decent profit on the order,

and I stayed off my creditors on the strength of it. A hundred and fifty thousand boxes for the Golden West Canning Company—"

Reuben K. Pitcher grasped Henry Peets by the arm:

"Did you brand 'em?" he demanded huskily.

"No. What kind of a box man do you think I am? I've been stuck before with orders after I'd branded the ends, and I held off on this until I had the entire order out. They kept delaying sending me the brand—"

"And when you had the order out they blew up with a loud hurrah, eh?" Pitcher grinned. He had refused to figure on this very order for the Arago Mill & Lumber Company because of an inside tip that the Golden West people were shaky financially.

"I'm stuck with the goods," mourned poor Henry Peets. "Simply can't sell them at a distance, and I'm tied up so I can't get away to work them off myself. I've put the lot up to a dozen commission salesmen, but I can't seem to get an order started."

PITCHER nodded, for he understood readily why this should be. The canners ordered their boxes one year in advance, and until the present crop should have been disposed of, there could be no market for Henry Peets' cannery stock. Nevertheless, he knew what Peets did not know, to wit: that the California apricot crop that year was likely to prove a bumper, in which event the canners would in all probability be short of sufficient boxes to market their product. The apricot crop would commence to be harvested in about three weeks, and should the prognostications of a bumper crop prove true, he realized that there would be rush orders to the factories for more boxes. And here was Mr. Henry Peets in the most desperate plight imaginable, ready to sacrifice his cannery stock at a ridiculous price for a little ready cash. Here also was Mr. Reuben K. Pitcher—with five thousand ready cash which he could conveniently spare for sixty days! The Wishkah Logging & Lumbering Company would not commence operations for thirty days, and it would be fully sixty days longer before he would be called upon to use his meager capital in expanding the business of his lumber agency. Why not, then, sound out the market on cannery stock and take a little flyer in boxes?

The more Reuben K. thought it over, the more alluring did the prospect become. With the certainty of an underestimate of their box needs on the part of the California fruit canners, Pitcher foresaw a sharp rise in prices and a consequent extra profit. Most of the box factories, having, as they supposed, disposed of the cannery business for that season, would be busy on apple and orange business; some of them, in fact, were already working on orders for the Alaska and Columbia River salmon canneries—why, if things turned out right, he might make a profit of five cents a box on these boxes—one hundred and fifty thousand of them—wh-e-w-w! The box men would be certain to take prompt advantage of the dilemma of the canners, and Pitcher fairly glowed as he thought of one hundred and fifty thousand boxes in a bare market with all hands scrambling for them!

He turned to Henry Peets. "Let me see that stock," he said.

PEETS took him over to his warehouse and showed him the boxes—sides, tops, bottoms and one end all neatly wire-wrapped and piled. The other end had been stacked loose, ready to be run through the branding machine. Pitcher unwrapped more than a dozen bundles of each and measured them carefully. He found that they conformed exactly to



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