

The Genius Who Inspired Gasless Sunday

A. C. Bedford, Standard Oil Executive, Had Faith That Voluntary Appeal Would Be Best

ALFRED C. BEDFORD, chairman of the National Petroleum War Service Committee—and chairman of the board of directors of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey—is the man of genius who first proposed that the people east of the Mississippi be requested, not required, to give up the use of their automobiles during a series of motorless Sundays.

This is the fifth Sunday. The notable record of the last four is guarantee in full of as perfect a performance to-day. And less because each of the four Sundays spelled a saving of from 8,000,000 to 9,000,000 gallons of gasoline for the fighters than because some one had gauged absolutely the heart and spirit of the American people, public curiosity has been insistent concerning him, and from every corner of the country has sought to discover his identity.

Curiosity Finally Satisfied.

Inquiries came to THE SUN by the thousands, but THE SUN, which had made diligent inquiry and tapped all its known sources of information, was as deeply in the dark as any one else. And on its editorial page last Wednesday it acknowledged as well its impotence as its own eager interest:

We confess to a patriotic curiosity to know the name of the person in the service of the United States Government who first conceived the idea of making the call for the motorless Sundays east of the Mississippi a request and not a command.

Such great conceptions are usually the product of individual intelligence. The initiative is not from plural effort. It goes back to some one man's wit, common sense, foresight and faith in the soundness of public opinion. It is rarely the result of a formal conference. Its promulgation may follow a conference on the subject, but somebody, some individual, has proposed the plan originally to the conference which adopts it as the expression of combined wisdom and joint authority.

This man—for we insist that it was some one man, a man of genius—perceived that better results could be obtained by making the sacrifice and the service a purely voluntary matter, to be enforced only by an equally voluntary consensus of unofficial public opinion. He foresaw that the Government had only to ask and that the entire population concerned would loyally and joyfully cooperate. He knew with the faith that was in him that the spontaneous sentiment supporting the restriction would manifest itself with a potency which all the marshals and deputy marshals at the command of the Department of Justice could not exert. And he was right!

This man of genius, whoever he may be, is a profound psychologist, a clairvoyant seer, a practical administrator. He has served his country well, because he has done much more than to accomplish without friction, without reaction, the requisite saving of gasoline in the eastern part of the continent. He has evoked perhaps the most impressive and instructive demonstration of the American spirit that has been witnessed since the war began.

THE SUN would like to know the name of this man of genius.

"The Sun" Held the Secret.

And yet all the while it was making inquiries and receiving them THE SUN had the secret in its possession. It lay buried in the office files of August 31, where Mr. Bedford predicting a hearty response to the appeal that no unnecessary gasoline be burned on the following day—the first of the gasoline Sundays—gave utterance to the following expression of his faith and firm conviction:

"To-morrow is going to witness in America a marvellous demonstration of patriotic united purpose to do anything possible to hasten the victory over Germany.

"The record of the day will demonstrate that the users of gasoline, which is now so sorely needed for motor transport, for airplanes, for ambulances, for tanks and all the other uses of war which are so helpless without it, will hail this as an opportunity to prove, by sacrifice of a pleasure, their eagerness to beck up our boys who are doing, daring and dying abroad."

Logic dictated that any one with so vital a faith in the inherent decency of



ALFRED COTTON BEDFORD.

Americans must have been himself the one to propose originally that that decency could be relied on absolutely. To Mr. Bedford in due course was conveyed the intimation that no man could deny himself in print. He did not deny it, but he evaded it.

Mr. Bedford's Subtle Hand.

On the authority, however, of another member of the petroleum war service committee we have the following story and explanation:

"He has the neatest way of making himself felt in a meeting of any person I have ever encountered. He is little and light—only physically of course—and when he is leading in any gathering or deliberation he never suggests for a minute that he is running the job. I have noticed that if all is going well and sensibly he frequently takes no part at all.

"As early as last May it became apparent that all the wasted gasoline of the country would have to be saved and that a lot that was not really being wasted would have to be saved also. We had a food administration already, then, and a fuel administration. The Government had taken over the railroads and the express companies and was preparing to take over the telephone and telegraph lines. It looked as though the oil industry would be the next to come under the thumb of Uncle Sam and all the oil men were worried.

"Bedford had had the idea that by harmony and cooperation among the oil people Government control would be made unnecessary and had been working hard on this line, travelling all over the country, conferring with this group and that and trying to make it clear to all hands that the oil industry stood on the threshold of a great opportunity; the opportunity to demonstrate to the country that its patriotism and organization were so perfect that it could be trusted fully to conduct itself and do it better than the Government could do it.

Just a Quiet Suggestion.

"All the independents and big competitors of the Standard Oil fell into line with him, and by last August the organization which is now known as the petroleum war service committee was an established and harmonious affair, and had been considering the proposal about cutting down the use of gasoline for more than two months. We were all at a meeting one day discussing it:

"We had been all over the history of coal conservation, and had about decided that the Government would have to direct a series of gasless days, the same as it had ordered the fuelless days last winter. Suddenly Mr. Bedford, who hadn't

been saying anything for quite a while, spoke up.

"I don't think that is a good plan."

"What isn't a good plan?"

"To issue an order that nobody shall use gasoline unnecessarily. I thought when the heatless days were ordered that the public would have responded better if it had been requested to make the sacrifice voluntarily. This is merely a suggestion. But I believe the heart of the United States is in this war."

"That was all. He didn't ask for a vote or for any one else's opinion. As a matter of fact the meeting, which had then been in session for three successive days, adjourned soon afterward and was resumed the next morning. The next morning everybody—they had all absorbed Bedford's idea and had been sleeping over it—thought the same way he did, and the suggestion was passed on to Mark Requa, oil administrator, and through him to the President, with the result that everybody knows.

Author of Idea Modest.

"And why hasn't Mr. Bedford come forward and owned up that he was the man who trusted the public and wanted them to conserve their gasoline voluntarily? Well, I imagine he hasn't spent much time thinking over his suggestion as a suggestion since the day he made it and didn't know anybody cared much who made it first."

Dr. Harry Garfield, Federal Fuel Administrator, appointed Mark L. Requa oil director for the Fuel Administration last January. Mr. Requa was a prominent mining engineer and believed thoroughly in the principles of Government control and operation of the oil fields and oil industry during the war. He believed so even as late as last July, when he made a speech at Tulsa, Oklahoma, at a meeting of refiners and producers. Mr. Bedford also made a speech at the same meeting on the same day. Mr. Requa said among other things:

"I realize that it is not possible for the producers of oil or the refiners of oil in Oklahoma to be fully acquainted with the many problems confronting official Washington. The magnitude of the struggle in which we are engaged is, I think, but faintly comprehended even by many of those who occupy official positions.

Beyond German Vision.

"The most profound students of military tactics in Europe failed at the outset of this war to visualize in any degree the gigantic proportions that the conflict has assumed, and it is recorded that after the battle of the Marne the German General Staff, realizing how utterly they had misjudged the course of events or the im-

Saving of Gasoline Only One Phase of His Efficient Mobilization of Oil Industry for the War

nensity of the undertaking, deliberately set to work to construct an entirely new theory for the conduct of future warfare. And if those men could not pre-visualize the task, how can you men of Oklahoma, far removed from the strife, gain any real comprehension of the titanic struggle in which this nation is involved?

"You will be hopelessly at sea if you do not realize all of this; if you do not approach this problem from an entirely new point of view; if you do not see that the greatest triumph of democracy is the ability of a free people to surrender temporarily their individual initiative and subject themselves to rigid discipline en masse, to the end that they may achieve victory, following which they may again return to their accustomed method of individualism which has been the glory and the backbone and the upbuilding force of this nation."

Bedford's Appeal to Patriotism.

And Bedford when his turn came, among other things, said these things:

"The oil industry is a highly technical business. It is, as you all realize, very sensitive. For its successful prosecution a delicate balance is required.

"It is realized that the best results can be obtained by having the oil industry regulate itself because the practical oil men know best its problems and their solutions. The oil men of the country, on the other hand, have justly prided themselves on their ability to regulate the industry, and up to the present they have proved themselves right in their contention.

"In helping to work out this problem and in the consideration that you may give it, may I ask that you do it in the spirit which has enrolled this industry as a part of the great industrial army at home, and which shall merit the confidence referred to by President Wilson, who in all his utterances has voiced a deep and sincere faith in the business and industrial leaders of the nation. He has done so in a manner that has keyed their patriotism to the highest pitch, and has stirred them to exert all their physical, mental and moral qualities in support of the cause of liberty and honor."

Triumph of Patriotism.

There are those who have known him long who consider that Mr. Bedford's speech at Tulsa was a triumph of tact, and accounts in great part for the fact that the oil industry is still conducted by the men who made it and not by a Federal administrator.

But those who have known him longer and better believe that the phrases at Tulsa sprang not from tact but from patriotism; and that Mr. Requa, himself a sturdy patriot, let the oil men carry on by themselves because he became convinced of their patriotism and the sincerity of their spokesman.

Perhaps he remembered Mr. Bedford's utterance the day he became president of Standard Oil in 1916.

"I believe that an attitude of free and open speech is beneficial to both corporations and the public they serve. So far as may be possible I'm going to have an open house here."

Perhaps he remembered that last April the 10,000 workers at the Bayonne and other New Jersey plants were organized into a republic of labor, that seventy of their leaders dined with Mr. Bedford, and that their wages within the two preceding years had been raised 94 per cent.

At all events, he knew that serving on the National Petroleum War Service Committee with Mr. Bedford there were men of all the companies who had once been the Standard's bitterest opponents; that these forces were working together harmoniously, and that the committee was producing results.

But did he foresee that when the time came for the American people to cut their Sunday pleasure for the country's sake Mr. Bedford would be the one to propose that they be asked to make the sacrifice voluntarily on the score—as only a man of genius could see it—that they would respond all the more heartily on that account?