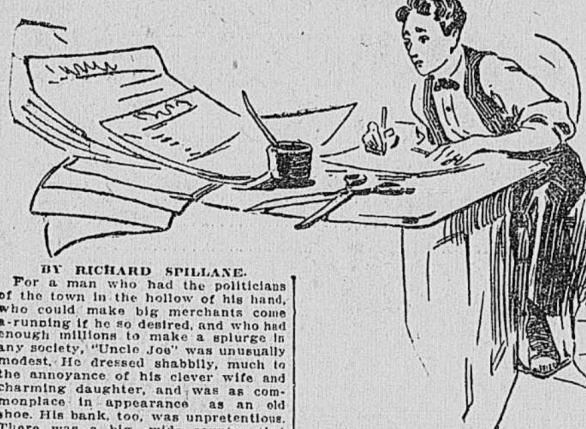


REAL ROMANCES OF THE BUSINESS WORLD

AN AFFAIR WITH A BANKER



BY RICHARD SPILLANE.

For a man who had the politicians of the town in the hollow of his hand, who could make big merchants come a-running if he so desired, and who had enough millions to make a splurge in any society, "Uncle Joe" was unusually modest. He dressed shabbily, much to the annoyance of his clever wife and charming daughter, and was as commonplace in appearance as an old shoe. His bank, too, was unpretentious. There was a big, wide counter that extended around two sides of the enclosed space. The other two sides did not need counters, for they were against the walls. Above the counter was a wire screen, with openings here and there. One of the openings was where the counter was rounded, turning from the front to the side of the room. At this bend in the counter "Uncle Joe" sat all day looking out on the busy street or chatting with little more than business with him. He never handled money, never raised his voice above the ordinary conversational tone, and never seemed to pay much attention to things, but his sharp little eyes took in everything, or nearly everything.

From where he sat he could see every one worth seeing in the business life of that town, for the bank was right in the heart of the city, at the junction of the two principal streets. And somehow he heard everything, or nearly everything, worth knowing. What he heard he seldom repeated. He had come into that seaport town with a small merchant he had become an importer. From an importer he had branched out to be a banker. Shrewdly and quietly he had made progress. Rarely did he make an error, and he was doing the most profitable banking business of the city that some of the old fogies realized that he was a power in the community. He was so mild, so soft-voiced, so unobtrusive that it was hard for them to understand how he had made such headway.

Uncle Joe never told them the secret. Day after day he sat at the counter, and the city passed in review before him. Merchant and politician stopped now and then to gossip. The banker was a most attentive listener so long as the subject interested him. When it did not he had a habit of looking into vacancy in a preoccupied sort of way that made a caller feel it was a proper time to depart. The Mayor was a regular caller. The Mayor patronized Uncle Joe. The city funds were deposited in the bank, and the Mayor felt that Uncle Joe should feel appreciative. The Mayor did not know it, but he never would have been elected had it not been for Uncle Joe. In some mysterious way the banker had obtained a hold on most of the foremost men of each of the political parties, and unostentatiously, and usually without their realization of his influence, he had them do just what he wanted.

It was the same in regard to various big business concerns. There was not an establishment in town that Uncle Joe did not have an accurate line on. On one of the rare occasions when he

spoke openly and unreservedly about himself he had declared he could read the character of any man into whose eyes he looked. This was his one vanity. He had been known to get rid of the account of the greatest mercantile house in the State because of the ascendancy of one man in the management. The account apparently was a most valuable one, and another bank was delighted to get it, but eighteen months later, when the house failed, the other bank would have been in serious trouble had not Uncle Joe gone to its assistance.

Harvey Kirby was one of the few men in the town who really knew Uncle Joe. Kirby was young, impetuous and poor. He worked on the afternoon newspaper. He had mixed in local politics enough to become curious regarding the man who pulled the wires. It took him quite a while to find out. When Kirby got curious he usually did not rest until his curiosity was satisfied. He became curious, too, about the way the Wharf Company was managed. It was the general belief that the city owned one-third of the Wharf Company stock, having received the shares for the dock and riparian rights it gave to the company, but he discovered that by an artful trick the company had given one-quarter and not one-third. There had been 75,000 shares outstanding when the deal was made. An extra issue of 25,000 shares had been made to the city for the rights it surrendered. No one outside the inner circle of the Wharf Company knew the real facts until Kirby dug them up.

Kirby wrote vigorously, and sometimes put more of a sting in his paragraphs than he intended. He was a welcome visitor to Uncle Joe's house and had been suspected of being an ardent admirer of Uncle Joe's daughter, Janice, until he came out in the Spade with a broadside in which he lambasted Uncle Joe without mercy. The Spade was a weekly review, in which Kirby had a half interest. Another man paid the bills, and Kirby did the writing, and incidentally paid his respects in vigorous English to those persons he could not treat as he wished in the columns of the more conservative Star. It was not pleasant for Uncle Joe to have Kirby show by the minutes of the meeting of the Wharf Company that it was Uncle Joe who played the trick by which the city was eched out of its just share of the Wharf Company holdings. It was not pleasant, either, to have it brought out that the principal politicians were Uncle Joe's puppets.

Uncle Joe did not show back temper, but when Kirby, as was his daily custom, called at the bank the next day to learn what was going on, Uncle Joe, in his mildest and blandest tone, re-

marked that thereafter he would be more than pleased if Kirby did not visit his house.

"Very well," said Kirby.

That was all they said about it, but Kirby was savage in what he wrote about the Wharf Company in the next issue of the Spade. He was savage, too, in what he said about the opposition the Atlantic and Mississippi Railroad was encountering in seeking an entrance to the city. A syndicate of millionaires had grabbed all the land on the water front not owned by the Wharf Company and would not sell except at an exorbitant figure. Kirby likened them to highwaymen, and without mentioning names, portrayed them so accurately that no one could mistake who he meant. Uncle Joe was prominent in the picture.

Week after week Kirby ripped into Uncle Joe and the other rich men of the town. There was no question about his being right in nearly everything he said. The city suffered from lack of enterprise. It had plenty of millionaires, but they were perfectly satisfied with things as they were and desired no change. They considered they had made the city and they resented criticism. Kirby and various other young men insisted that wealth had a duty. They said the town might be delighted to the rich who had made their fortunes there and now were willing to sit back and look on, but it was not so pleasant for those who had only modest homes and whose prosperity depended on the growth and expansion of the city, its industries and its commerce. They declared it was little short of a crime to keep out a railroad just because a few rich men insisted on the railroad paying tribute to them first. Once Kirby had become so angry that he wrote something to the effect that the town needed nothing so much as some first-class funerals.

All this time Uncle Joe and Kirby chatted once or twice a day like the best of friends. Uncle Joe had a fine nose for news, and no one gave more good, readable stuff to the young newspaper man than the mild old banker. Occasionally Uncle Joe would search Kirby's face with those keen eyes, but every time he did so Kirby returned the scrutiny with interest.

"Kirby," said Uncle Joe one afternoon, "you're a foolish youth if you only knew it. You write a lot telling men how to manage their affairs, and you try to tell the city how it should manage its business, but do you ever give heed to your own affairs? Don't think I am impertinent, but would you mind telling me how much money you are making and how much you have saved up?"

Kirby laughed. "Why, Uncle Joe," he answered, "I only get \$25 from the Star. I don't get a penny for what I

write in the Spade. That's a labor of love. The \$25 a week just keeps my mother and myself."

"Kirby," said the old banker, "if you know so much about how other people could make money, why don't you make money for yourself?"

"If I had any capital I'd make it fast enough," was the reply.

"You have capital; credit is capital," Uncle Joe declared.

"O, I have!" exclaimed Kirby, with a touch of sarcasm. "Maybe I have it with you."

"You have," said the banker. "You are young, and so far as I know, honest. You were born here. You and your mother own the home you live in. You have no particularly bad habits. You work regularly. Any young man of good reputation can have reasonable credit from a bank if he has a good proposition."

"Does reasonable credit mean \$5,000, \$10,000 or \$15,000?" asked Kirby.

"That depends," said the banker. "What would you buy if you had the money?"

"Uncle Joe," said Kirby, "if there is any solid, safe investment in this town, let's Wharf Company stock. It pays 1-2 per cent. a month—6 per cent. a year. You've got a lot of it, I know. It wasn't good you wouldn't have it. I've been lambasting you people a long time, and I'm going to lambaste you a while lot more, but that does not affect the security. It is ridiculous the price the stock is selling at. Why, it's dirt cheap. Am I right?"

"Yes," said Uncle Joe.

Kirby did not ask any more questions, but hastened to a broker named Pendleton.

"How much Wharf stock have you for sale?" he asked.

"Eighty-eight and one-half."

"I'll buy it," said Kirby.

Pendleton, who knew Kirby had nothing, inquired whom it was for.

"Get the certificate, and come with me to Uncle Joe's," Kirby replied.

"I'm sorry," Kirby announced to Uncle Joe a minute later, "that I could buy only fifty shares. If I could have picked up 500 I would have done so."

Then he drew a check for \$4,425. Uncle Joe said something to the cashier, and a note was prepared for Kirby to sign. The office of the Wharf Company was nearby, and a new certificate being made out to Kirby, this was attached to the note. Kirby was about to sign the note when he happened to observe the rate of interest.

"Say, Uncle Joe," he protested. "This note is made out for 8 per cent. No 8 per cent. goes with me. The stock pays 6 per cent. If you want to do this thing in first-class shape you'll have to reduce the rate."

"Well, what rate would you like to pay?" asked the banker.

"Five is plenty."

"Make it five," said Uncle Joe to the clerk. The clerk smiled. It was the first time Uncle Joe had done such a thing in many a day.

The next issue of the Spade had the usual broadside at the Wharf Company and the millionaires. The day after the paper came out Kirby had to go to the Wharf Company office to collect the monthly dividend on his stock. That \$25 appeared to him to be a mighty good money, and he celebrated by buying for his mother something she had wished for a long time.

For several weeks Kirby continued his campaign in the Spade, and then gradually he began to lose interest in his old line of work. Instead he suggested a new one. The city was being paid only 4 per cent, he pointed out. They were not safer than was the Wharf Company, which paid 6, the shares of which sold below par. There was no better investment. The shares could be purchased in lots of one, five, ten or more. If the shares were well distributed there would be no more juggling with the property. The more citizens owned the stock, the less would be the injustice done by the trick at the time the company made its deal for the city property.

When Kirby came to draw his second dividend he felt an air of proprietorship in the Wharf Company that made him smile at his own conceit. After getting his check he chatted for a few moments with the general manager, and just as he was departing he inquired casually for the receipts of the company for the month. He was delighted when informed they were the best for any month in the history of the company. That afternoon he wrote a glowing article for the Star about the splendid business the Wharf Company was doing. He wrote in the same spirit for the Spade. He was beginning to look upon things with optimistic eyes, and he prophesied that if the Atlantic & Mississippi blockade was raised the town would have a boom that would gladden the hearts of everybody. Nothing kept the road out but the prohibitive price put upon the land held by the syndicate and needed by the company for terminals and wharves, he argued. This was somewhat different from the slashing, stinging style in which he had handled the subject a few months before. Unconsciously he was being weaned from radicalism.

Kirby had collected three or four dividends when one day he walked into the bank and said to the owner: "Uncle Joe, if you have no objection I'll take up that note of mine. I've given orders to Pendleton to sell those fifty shares. Wharf stock sold yesterday at 100 1-2 to 101. I'm willing to let mine go at a bit of a sacrifice, as I need money for a particular purpose; so

ought to toss this \$500 in the gutter, but I won't."

"I've been a fool. I never saw until this minute that you simply used me in this whole affair. Gee, but you're a slick old fellow. And I thought I was smart. Think of it! I've simply made a market for you to sell on."

"Kirby," said the old man, "use that \$500 judiciously and you'll not regret this at all."

"Oh, I'll use it judiciously, never fear," the young man said with emphasis.

"I'll let you know to-morrow about that part of it. I was going to discuss that matter to-day, but to-morrow will do."

Kirby was true to his word. It was not, however, until afternoon that he let Uncle Joe know. It was the most exciting and nerve-racking day Uncle Joe had had in twenty years. Dozens of times he telephoned to the office of the Star. From early in the morning messengers from the bank had been scurrying around on errands for the old man. Then about 3 P. M. he got a telegram, and when he read it he went pale all of a sudden and gasped. Then he pulled himself together and jumped down from the stool and grabbed a telephone.

"It serves me right," he said laughingly to his wife when he got connection with his home. "Here's a telegram I just received." And he read: "I've told Janice about the \$500. The honeymoon will last as long as the \$500 holds out.—Kirby."

The old man leaned over the counter and whispered, "I sold mine yesterday at 100 1-2. There was something in the tone that made the young man flush."

Kirby studied for a moment before replying. Then he looked the banker in the eye. "Uncle Joe," he said, "I

I've told Pendleton to sell a point below the market if necessary. Deliver the stock to him if he pays for it."

"All right," said Uncle Joe.

Later in the day Kirby heard the stock had been sold at 99 1-2. He went to Uncle Joe, got his note, destroyed it and got the profit that was coming to him. He was \$500 to the good, exclusive of the dividends he had collected.

"Uncle Joe," he said, when he had straightened out his affairs, "you've been mighty kind to me, and I want you to know how I appreciate it. Don't think I'm presumptuous in what I'm going to suggest. I know you've got a deal of Wharf Company stock. It has had a sharp advance. It is not going higher for a long time. It is likely to decline. Par is tempting to those who have held for years. You folks are not going to be able to keep the Atlantic and Mississippi out of this town much longer. When the announcement is made that the road is to come it will make Wharf stock slump. I'm as sure as that I am standing here that the A. & M. will increase the Wharf Company's receipts vastly and make the stock much more valuable, and lots of people won't see it that way until the fact is demonstrated. If I were you, Uncle Joe, I'd sell my Wharf stock now. You can pick it up a bit lower if you want it."

Uncle Joe looked at Kirby quizzically. "I haven't any Wharf stock," he said.

"You haven't?" exclaimed Kirby. "Why I saw you on the books for 2,100 shares."

The old man leaned over the counter and whispered, "I sold mine yesterday at 100 1-2. There was something in the tone that made the young man flush."

Kirby studied for a moment before replying. Then he looked the banker in the eye. "Uncle Joe," he said, "I

Richmond Tuesday, to see Bernhardt in "Camille."

The men of the Wednesday Night Canner Club entertained in a delightful manner the women of the club Thursday night at the Wilson Hotel. Covers were laid for twelve, and a delicious dinner was served.

The Bible study class was well attended at the home of Mrs. MacLean E. Leath, on Friday evening.

Farrar V. Shelton, the son of Mr. and Mrs. T. P. Shelton, is at home from Randolph-Macon College.

Dr. O. Hausch has sold his new home to Joseph Wilson, of this town.

Mrs. W. J. Strickler was elected "February leader" of the Woman's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church at its meeting Monday. Mrs. Strickler, assisted by Miss Martha Hughes, served delicious refreshments.

Mrs. Southall Farrar and family, of Amelia, have been visiting Mrs. T. P. Shelton, of this place.

Miss Grigsby, one of the teachers of the High School, has as her guest this week her sister, from Washington, D. C.

The Rev. G. C. Campbell has returned from a trip to Washington, D. C.

The amateur play to be given for the benefit of the Episcopal Church, has been postponed until after Easter.

Samuel Turner left last week for a visit to his parents in Amherst county.

Mrs. J. P. Agnew will leave Monday for the annual celebration at Hollins Institute.

R. K. Herberston, of Victoria, spent Sunday in town.

The Misses Harding have returned from a visit of several months in Florida.

Mrs. P. S. Tatum, who has been very sick, is much better.

Miss Ollie Wells, of Texarkana, Tex., has been visiting Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Ferguson.

Gladstone Social News

[Special to The Times-Dispatch.] Gladstone, Va., February 18.—O. H. Johnson has returned from a short stay at his home in Brems.

Mrs. K. H. Smith was called to Blackstone this week owing to the illness of her daughter.

Miss Emma Taylor is visiting friends in Lynchburg.

W. C. Vermillera has returned from Richmond.

Miss Nettie Ransome has returned to Elk Hill, after spending some time with her sister, Mrs. J. I. Orrock.

Mrs. F. P. Akers is at home again after spending some time in Richmond, and attending the Gaines-Ligon wedding.

P. E. Kerby, of Richmond, is here for a short stay.

L. E. Goelsby, of Buckingham, is spending some time at the home of W. P. Jordan.

Do Your Eyes or Nerves Trouble You

or have you other chronic ailments? Call on DR. FORTNEY, Neurologist, 611 E. Broad Street, for free consultation. Wonderful cures through neurological methods.

Burkeville Social News

[Special to The Times-Dispatch.] Burkeville, Va., February 18.—Meston Shelton, MacLean Leath, F. V. Fowlkes and Miss Fowlkes, were in

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One-Third More Value

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Superior in Quality. Economical in Price. Healthful and Nourishing. Goes much further, costs much less than hog lard.

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Limited one to a customer.

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Perfect food preservers. Economical in the use of ice.

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