

"Next!"

By

EDWARD HUNGERFORD

AS a leveler of caste and a bulwark of social democracy the Shop of the Striped Pole is to be at once compared with the voting booth and the jury box,—where each man is the peer of every other man and sharing equally the Republic's privileges of life, liberty, freedom, etc. You may be the chief man in your town,—and let us hope that you are,—but when you step within the door of the Shop of the Striped Pole the head barber looks up for a single moment from his chair, smiles his impartial smile of greeting to all good customers, and merely says:

"There are only five ahead of you, Mr. Blinks."

With three chairs working and two of them engaged upon somewhat complicated performances, you look dubiously at the prospect. It is Saturday,—a short day even in your town, which has not acquired all the metropolitan vices as yet. There is to be a meeting of the directors out at your factory, and you also must make the bank before the noon whistle blows. After that Jinks is going to take you out to lunch and a couple of rounds at the Country Club, and you do not know when you will be back. After that—an oasis of barbering until Monday noon, and you pass the plate tomorrow morning in church.

You recount these things quickly in your mind. There is another shop at the new hotel, but it is sure to be more crowded; another down near the carriage works, but it has foreign barbers; then you have come to this shop for eighteen years now, and—

You sink meekly into a seat and pick up a comic paper, three weeks old and badly thumbed. At another time you might enjoy it; but now you are thinking of the time you are going to waste until the two mechanics from the paper mill, old Dr. Hedges, the Jinks' chauffeur, and a weasel-faced stranger in town, shall have had their opportunity and your time is come. You fuss and fume—inwardly. At heart you are an aristocrat. You drop the comic weekly and pick up a religious one—and find ironic joy in so doing. Finally in your ears this:

"All ready, Mr. Blinks."

It is your favorite barber,—the favorite barber of all the wise men of the town. He tucks you in as a mother might tuck in her child, and runs his fat finger over your jowls as a butcher might inspect a fresh carcass in from the storehouse. But you like it—you honestly do! The splash of the lather on your cheek has a feeling of enchantment; while in your ears there runs the music of the choice gossip of the town. In the chair the time goes quickly. There is gay banter as well as a democracy in the place, and before you know it you are sitting upright again, and the barber is softly asking:

"Isn't it about time we tackled the hair once again?"

What a Barber Earns

THAT is one of his perquisites, and in a profession that goes back into dim centuries and proudly announces itself as the mother profession of modern surgery, perquisites count for something. In the modern barber shop in the modern city they count for something definite. The journeyman barber may be paid only \$10 or \$12 a week,—rarely more than that, except perhaps on the Pacific Coast, where all labor commands higher prices,—but in almost every case he receives a commission of from twenty to thirty-three per cent. on his weekly earnings over, say, \$25. Then there are special commissions paid sometimes on the sale of hair tonic and other condiments.

After which there remain the tips, always a problematical figure, and dependent largely upon the skill and cordiality of the barber. So it will be seen in an

IN this number Edward Hungerford begins a series of articles giving inside figures and inside facts of some typical American businesses. Each article is written from first-hand investigation; each one gives a remarkable picture of the conditions that surround each business, of the factors that make for success or failure in it, of the risks, opportunities, earnings, and drawbacks that a man encounters in each calling. Mr. Hungerford's next article will deal with "The American Hotel."

instant that the barber, like the waiter and the sleeping-car porter, draws his real income not from his employer, but from his patrons. And this is not a tradition that goes back through centuries of barbering. It came in with the tipping habit, one of the European nuisances that we have imported.

For even such established institutions as barber shops do progress. It was a long time ago that the ancient profession of the cupper and the leecher was married to the able profession of the shoe shiner. And more recently others have come,—the chiropodist and the manicure (who is an institution of herself, and therefore deserves her own story).

Some big modern shops, particularly those situated in or near the large railroad terminals, have complete bath and dressing rooms, and valet service in addition. But the once familiar swinging sign of the tin bathtub, which always used to hang adjacent to the Striped Pole, has disappeared. The private bathtub has become one of the Great American Institutions.

Barber Shop 20 Years from Now

WILL the barber shop itself disappear as well? There are some worldly wise folk who aver that they already see signs of its forthcoming disintegration. They will call your attention to the number of your friends who today shave themselves—perhaps you yourself have that cleanly and efficient habit. And the roll seems to be growing constantly.

"Barber shops, yes," they will tell you; "but not to shave in. The barber shop of the future will be a hair-cutting establishment simply and entirely."

And, as if in support of this theory, they can show you right in the heart of the city of New York two or three shops in which a man could no more hope for a shave than in a cigar store or a tango palace. And there is a smart old shop foreman down in the Wall Street district whose name is almost as well known as any of the big brokers there, who can tell you of the changing taste of his patrons.

"Those fellows uptown who will only cut hair are really French beard cutters," he says; "but they get away with it pretty well, just as my old boss used to get away with it with his name and 'Hair Cutter' underneath it stuck up in the biggest gilt letters on the door. The big bugs would wait for him to tackle their hair, and get a worse job of it than they would have had at any other chair in the shop. Still, that's all in the day's work."

"I can see the difference in the business these days myself, though. Twelve or

fifteen years ago, and I'd have eighteen or twenty shaves and perhaps half a dozen jobs of hair-cutting, shampooing, and the like. Now I won't shave more than five or six men in the passing of a single day. But the shop keeps just as many chairs, and every chair is just as busy as then, because more men come to it, and because every man wants more work these days: not only hair-cutting, but shampooing, singeing, facial massage,—all those things that used to be looked on as dudified, but now have become a part of every business man's routine."

Side Lines the Salvation

IT is the development of special side lines, then, that has saved the barber shop, just at the very time that the safety razor threatened its very existence. But before the crisis arose there were shops that did not hesitate at specialties, nor at applying them by brute force. There is a tradition that in one of the historic hotels in downtown New York a countryman once paid \$12.45 after a single session in its barber shop, and was fortunate in escaping with his life.

By singular coincidence it was probably the barber himself who was the beginning of the popular craze for the safety razor. Not by his own methods or lack of cleanliness so much, as by his own autocratic position, did he give strength to his new opponent. He had forgotten one thing. He had forgotten that to a man whose beard grows fast and black an open shop each day of the week is a necessity, just as an open drugstore each day of the week is a necessity. Drugstores and railroads and newspapers and telephone exchanges manage to operate seven days a week by giving their employees Sundays scattered through the week.

But the barber would not see it that way. He sought to work each of his men seven days a week, and long hours in addition. They rebelled. And in one State after another the men, working through their well organized unions, secured the passage of laws closing the barber shops all day Sunday.

These laws still hold. And getting a shave on Sunday in many towns deserves to be reckoned among the great American adventures. It is quite out of the question, unless you are willing to pay a barber privately and have him come to your house on Sabbath morning, or else have a friend who is running a hotel. In this last case you will probably be examined more minutely than a German suspect going into the English lines, and, having passed this examination successfully, will be conducted through a small door be-

yond the bellboys' bench, through devious and winding back halls and alleys, to be eventually let into an unused storeroom where a nervous barber hovers over an improvised chair, and between uncertain strokes dreams of the police and a jail sentence.

You Can't Shave in Cincinnati

SUCH cities as New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and New Orleans proclaim their metropolitanism by permitting their barber shops to run openly and legally on Sunday. Boston has the advantage of a Massachusetts statute permitting hotel guests to be shaved in their own rooms. And in a good many other cities the hotels have made such a statute for their own convenience. The State laws are almost always forbidding on this point. Theaters may run, films do likewise, soda fountains gurgle, but if a man wishes to be shaved in a barber shop on Sunday he is immediately classed among the felons.

There is variation, of course, in the way these State laws are observed. In Cleveland a man may be shaved easily in a shop on Sunday. In Cincinnati the thing is absolutely taboo. In Kansas City you may be publicly scraped; but in St. Louis, in the same State, one must go unshaved or else cross the bridge to East St. Louis—which is nearly as bad. In Atlanta you are shaved on Sunday by an aged and badly scared negro, who charges you five times the regular tariff for trembling on the verge of a jail settlement; but in Savannah—well, Savannah is not in the same State as Atlanta.

The immediate result of these strict laws in regard to opening barber shops on Sunday was to boom the safety-razor trade. A man had more necessity of being clean-shaved on Sunday than on almost any other day. And having solved the problem by shaving himself, it followed as only a matter of natural course that he would shave himself each day of the week. So the barbers found themselves shaving six men a day instead of sixteen, and the business for its very existence has fallen back upon the development of its specialties. Men cannot cut their own hair. The barber thanks Heaven for that.

Other businesses, indispensable and highly profitable, are being gathered into the chain-store systems across the country. The barber shops, apparently being neither indispensable nor highly profitable, have so far escaped this process of economic evolution.

Gives Bargain Shaves

A SMART barber who runs a shop in a city in the middle part of the country has worked out an ingenious plan for the development of his own business. His shop is situated on a side street, nearer the residence section of the town than the business. His rent is low; but his location not such as to draw much transient business. Yet he runs eighteen chairs, and keeps them filled almost all day long. This man has worked out an ingenious scheme. If you wish to become a regular patron of his shop, he will sell you on the first day of each month a card, which entitles you to a daily shave, two hair-cuts, and two shampoos. This card costs you three dollars, and is a great saving—if you can reach his shop regularly. Even if you do this, and use the card down to its last punch-mark, the boss smiles on you pleasantly. He is not losing. He is bringing to his shop the life-blood of any business,—steady income.

A successful shop or store, a retail business of any sort, is rarely built up on what an engineer would call a "peak-load." The smart boss barber in Ohio has already learned that. And if a really large syndicate of barber shops should ever come into being, you may count upon him as leading it.