The Immigrant Lad Who Became A King of Industry

by Archer Wallace

In November, 1837—the year in which Queen Victoria ascended the throne—Andrew Carnegie was born in Dunfermline, Scotland. His father was a weaver, and before the invention of the steam loom, made a comfortable, if modest, living. Andrew's mother early impressed upon him that economy was a virtue, a lesson which he never forgot in later days. On one occasion Mrs. Carnegie asked her children to repeat a proverb from the Bible. When it came to Andrew's turn, he stood up and said, "Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves". While Andrew was mistaken in thinking this was in the Bible, it shows how deeply it had been fixed in his mind.

One day Andrew's father came home very dejected. "Andy," he said, "I have no more work." Up till that time all weaving had been done on hand looms, and the introduction of the steam looms threw hundreds of men out of work. Andrew never forgot how bitter and harsh his father's words sounded. "No more work!" That meant no more money, and poverty stared them in the face.

Andrew's father could not obtain work in the town. Hundreds of others, like himself, were thrown out of work. It was no use moving to another town for conditions were the same everywhere. After some anxious days of planning together, the family decided that the only thing to do was to follow the example of some relations and move to the United States.

The Carnegies sold their hand looms and household belongings, and got ready for their long voyage. There were only two children, Andrew and his younger brother, Tom. Those were the days of sailing vessels, and crossing the Atlantic meant a rough voyage of many weary weeks and, after that, long and tiresome railway journeys. Andrew was only eleven at this time.

The family reached Pittsburgh safely and Mr. Carnegie obtained work at a cotton factory. Soon after this Andrew got a position as a bobbin boy, at *one dollar and twenty cents a week*. He was delighted to be actually earning money. At the end of the first week, when his wages were put into his hand, he felt as happy as a king. One dollar and twenty cents, earned by his own efforts; how proud he felt!

The work was hard and the hours of labour very long. He worked from early morning till late at night, with only an interval of forty minutes for dinner. After a time he got another situation which was, if anything, even harder. This work was to fire the boiler and run the steam-engine which drove the machinery of a small factory. The work was so hard that it soon began to tell upon his health. Night and day he was haunted by the possibility of a calamity, and in his sleep he would often put out his hand to test the water-gauge.

Those were dark days for the young Scotch boy, but he determined not to bring his troubles into the home. He was blessed with a keen spirit of determination to succeed and, no matter how hard he found his work, he never complained. There was poverty in the home, but it was honest poverty and he was not ashamed of it. He often had to deny himself pleasures which other boys could afford, and had to wear his clothes long after they had become shabby; but nobody ever heard him grumble or complain.

When he became fourteen Andrew got a position as a telegraph boy at *three dollars a week*.

There was not a prouder boy in Pittsburgh. Besides the advance in wages, the work was healthier. He was so overjoyed with his position that soon he began to fear lest he should lose it. He was not acquainted with the business section of the city where he had to deliver most of his messages, but he overcame this by using his excellent memory. He committed to memory the exact location of all the business houses in the principal streets, so that when a telegram was handed to him, he knew at once where it had to be delivered.

His regular habits and attention to his work soon attracted the attention of those over him and at the age of sixteen he was promoted to the position of telegraph operator, at a salary of three hundred dollars a year. This advance came at the right time, for Andrew's father had just died and the burden of carrying on the home fell upon Andrew's shoulders. Soon after this he accepted a position with the Pittsburgh Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad, at an increase of ten dollars a month.

At this time something happened which did much to change his whole life. Through the interest of his superintendent it became possible for him to purchase ten shares in The Adams Express Company for five hundred dollars. Andrew's business instinct led him to see that it was a splendid opportunity, and his mother was just as anxious as he was to make the venture. After a consultation they decided to mortgage their little home and buy the shares. This little transaction was destined to be the forerunner of many successful business deals.

One day, while he was travelling on the railway, a man showed him the model of a sleeping-car. Such things were at that time unknown, but Andrew saw instantly that the invention was a good one, and made arrangements for the inventor to meet the superintendent of the railroad. The outcome was that a company was formed to build sleeping-cars, and Andrew Carnegie was one of the number. Soon after this he was made superintendent of the Pittsburgh division of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Not long after he was promoted to this position the company began to make experiments with an iron bridge. Up to this time all bridges had been built of wood. The experiments with iron proved successful. There had been so much delay on the railways by the bridges being broken or burned that the cast-iron bridges were welcomed. Mr. Carnegie, with his keen business instinct, saw at once that iron bridges must displace the wooden ones. He formed a syndicate known as The Keystone Bridge Works, and his first undertaking was to build a bridge with a span of three hundred feet over the Ohio River. Thus began the work of iron and steel constructions which Mr. Carnegie followed up until he became known throughout the world as the "Steel King."

Before many years had passed Mr. Carnegie not only owned his own immense iron and steel works, but also a fleet of steamers which were used to transport the iron ore across the Great Lakes. He built his own railroad to convey the ore from the lake ports to Pittsburgh, a distance of 425 miles.

In 1900 The Carnegie Steel Company was organized with a capital of one hundred million dollars. The enormous concern gave employment to 45,000 people. One of the plants alone covers an area of seventy-five acres. It is no exaggeration to say that it is by far the greatest manufacturing concern of its kind in the world. When Mr. Carnegie decided to retire he sold out his interest in the steel works for two hundred and fifty million dollars. It was said at that time that he could give away thirty-five thousand dollars a day and never touch his capital. For many years he gave large sums of money for public libraries and other enterprises which seemed to him to be deserving of assistance.

Having worked his own way in the world, from a very humble beginning to a position of great power and influence, Mr. Carnegie never had much patience with lazy people. He would never tolerate

around him what are known as "dead heads". "Concentration," he said, "is my motto. First, honesty, then industry, then concentration." He expected every one in his employ to be anxious to do their best.

Throughout his life he was a man of good habits, and a non-smoker, and attributed his vigor of mind and body to the fact that he avoided anything which would undermine his health. The careful religious training which he received in his humble home in Scotland had a lasting influence for good upon his life. Clean living, honesty, and devotion to his work, no matter how hard it was, made Andrew Carnegie one of the foremost business men of his generation.

Source:

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