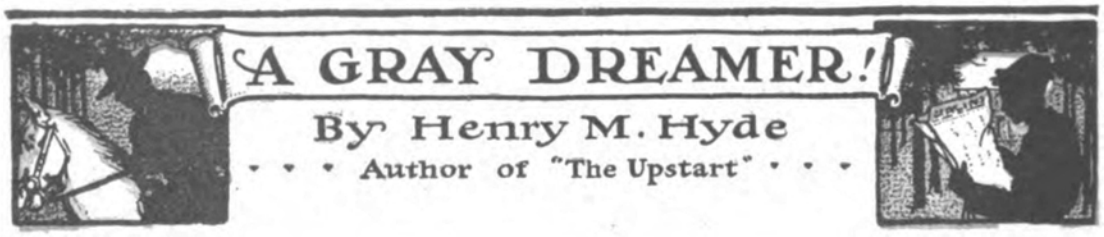


THE greatest masters of business are all idealists. They dream wonderful dreams and they see compelling visions. They are prophets and seers and poets. They are "possessed of spirits." And by the degree to which they subordinate every other human desire and passion to the supreme work of making their dreams come true is their greatness measured.

Shakespeare stole plots and lifted incidents and episodes, with no thought of apology to the smaller men whose paste he turned into diamonds and whose brass he transformed into massy gold. And to the whole world he is justified of his works. So the master poet, whose lines are measured by the rhythmic clicking of car-wheels over steel rails, tramples on the rights of little people, with no feeling of personal enmity, no consciousness, indeed, of wrong doing, but simply in obedience to the irresistible creative will which *must* realize its vision.

But business is a battle, as well as a ballad. Its raw materials are not inert words, summoned obediently from the pages of a dictionary, but sentient creatures, with passions and wills of their own, which are harder, therefore, to handle and arrange each in its own proper niche. And there is always another man with a domed forehead and a square jaw, obsessed by another vision, the realization of which would mean that the first must remain always a mere castle in the air. So to the high pleasure of creation is added the vast joy of a fight with a worthy foe. Which is a sufficient answer to the insistent questioning of smaller people why the great man of affairs sticks to his task long after he has achieved every ambition which their uninspired imaginations can conceive. It is not the love of money; it is not the feeling of power; it is not the fascination of the game; it is the compelling necessity of making his dreams come true, backed by the conviction that he alone is equal to the necessary struggle.

The general offices of the Great Northern railroad company at St. Paul are not housed in an impressive building. It is an old-fashioned elevator which carries one up to the office of the president. The furniture and fittings of the offices are remarkable only for their plainness and the look of hard use about them. A big desk, generous in both width and depth, stands in a small room opening from the outer office and before it sits an old man, with a tremendous head and torso and short, thick limbs. The big, bald dome of his head is thatched at the back and more scantily at the sides with a thick, rough crop of iron gray hair, worn much longer than the prevailing fashion. His nose is large and prominent and his lower lip plainly projects even through the short, rough gray beard.

He talks courteously, yet with the poorly-concealed impatience of one who grudges each minute. Now and then, to emphasize a point he stops and smiles, slowly. But the smile is of the lips, alone. The dark eyes, far back under thick, bushy brows, have no part in it. They are eternally sombre and reflective, fixed on the vision which for fifty years has possessed and controlled the tremendous will which sees through them. That dream would have been realized long ago, but for the fact that it has constantly expanded and grown greater by what it fed upon.

It was just half a century ago this year that James Jerome Hill left his father's backwoods farm in Canada and came straight across country to the head of navigation on the Mississippi. Already, in his life time, he has become almost a traditional figure and a whole collection of myths have grown up around him. Men tell that a casual traveler, riding his horse through the wilds of Can-

ada, stopped at the farm of the elder Hill and there dropped, as he rode away, a month-old newspaper. That paper boasted the untouched, virgin glories of the great Northwest and it set on fire the mind of the eighteen-year old boy, who picked it up. So strong was the call which the new empire made upon the boy, so compelling was the vision which it opened before him, that within the week he had borrowed the money to pay his fare and had started, driven by demons, to take possession of his kingdom.

One passes over the seventeen years during which the boy of eighteen was growing to be a man of thirty-five years. They were years spent from the first in learning at first hand the limitless resources of the land and in helping to make things move back and forth across its surface. Following the course of the Red River of the North, the little carts of the fur traders crept down to the central market in St. Paul. Each of them was drawn by a single ox and their two wheels were as high as a man's head. Where they had broken the surface of the soil Hill saw that the wild prairie grass grew twice as high as elsewhere. That proved to him the marvelous fertility of the country—waiting only cultivation—and the vision grew brighter. In the cold northern winter he tied on snowshoes and went out with Indian guides to explore the country. On dog sledges he rode far out into the wilderness, over the great flat table lands and up into the mountains. Thus he learned that the Indian trails had already found out passes and cuts through which it would be possible to build a railroad. And the vision took wings.

In '73, what by being the first to bring coal to St. Paul and the first to bring furs from Winnipeg on the wonderful Red River of the North, which runs between Minnesota and what are now the two Dakotas, he had accumulated a capital of $100,000. Beyond that he was now fully possessed of his vision and felt himself ready to set about its realization. He borrowed $400,000 from the bank of Montreal, which made the loan grudgingly, and bought for half a million the St. Paul & Pacific, a bankrupt railroad, which started at St. Paul and stretched away West for a few miles to nowhere

in particular. It was part of his vision that this country west of St. Paul should be quickly filled with prosperous farms. But where were the men to come from who should till the land? They must be

able to stand the cold winters and strong and industrious to do the hard work. The eye of the dreamer, guided by the brain of the man who was born for the grand strategy of business, looked round the spinning globe and fixed itself upon the Scandinavian peninsula. Forthwith trainloads of sturdy Swedes and Norwegians crossed the Atlantic and settled along the line of "Jim" Hill's little road, which the wise men had laughed at him for buying.

"This is a hard wheat belt," Hill told the settlers. "Plant wheat."

They followed his advice and prospered. But lean years came. Occasionally the wheat crop was well nigh a failure. Then there was nothing to fill his freight cars and that stood in the way of making his dreams come true.

"It was years ago," Mr. Hill told me, "that I made up my mind something must be done to keep the people along our lines from being forced to depend on a single crop. So I bought 900 Polled Angus and Short Horn bulls and as many thousand blooded swine and distributed them among the farmers. That got them interested in stock raising and, as a result, the Great Northern handles more cattle and hogs than any other line running into St. Paul."

But how the wise men laughed at the time that "Jim" Hill was giving away his "black bulls!"

Six years later even his vast patience could restrain itself no longer. He had seen the huge forests which cover millions of acres about Puget Sound. To him that meant the irresistible widening of his vision—lumber—a tremendous freight traffic to the eastward.

"I shall build the Great Northern through to the Pacific coast at Puget Sound," he announced publicly. That, of course, was the supreme folly which roused the loudest—and last risibilities of the wise in their own conceit. To the South lay the Northern Pacific, a lusty "infant industry," thick swaddled in huge grants of land from the national government; to the North the Canadian Pacific was being rushed through to the coast, backed also by large subsidies. How was this dreamer to build a great line between them, through a country most men believed to be half-sterile and altogether bleak and forbidding, alone, unaided by financial support from Washington? But the Hill jaw was set and the deep-set Hill eyes were lit with superb self-confidence. In 1893 the Master of the Great Northern looked out, like Balboa, upon the Pacific. It was the year of the great panic. He had realized his dream just in time to be overwhelmed by the tidal wave of bankruptcy which swept the country. The Northern Pacific fell back gasping into the arms of a receiver. Most of the other transcontinental lines went down in the storm. But the Hill road had been buttressed with the fine strategy of a great business general. From the first he had planned so that, in case of necessity, his lines might almost live upon the local traffic of the country through which they marched. And, more important still, he, alone among the rivals, had found, in the giant trees of Puget Sound, a dependable nail on which to hang the steel chain which stretched across the continent.

But, at first, the lumber of Puget Sound did not move eastward. The Hill freight cars, going West with supplies and manufactured products, came back empty across the mountains. It costs nearly as much to move an empty freight car as one which is loaded. And a procession of "empties" from the Pacific meant quick ruin. A committee of lumbermen were called to consult with the president of the Great Northern at St. Paul. The rate on lumber from Puget Sound was sixty cents a hundred pounds.

"The rate is too high," they told Hill. "We cannot pay it and make a living profit."

"Well," he asked, "what rate shall I make you?"

"If you could cut it down to fifty cents?" they pleaded.

The lower lip projected in its slow smile and the dark eyes shone with the light of far-seeing vision.

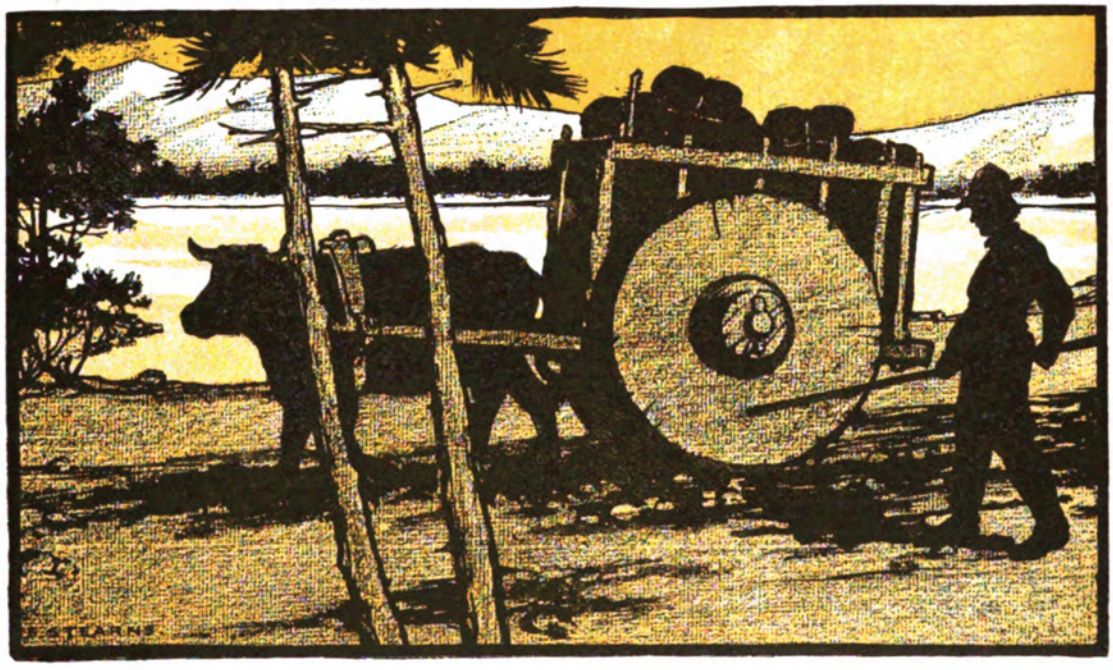
"I will make the rate forty cents," he said. "Go home and start the saw-mills."

In a twinkling the Hill problem was reversed. Such a flood of lumber was loaded at Puget Sound that hundreds of freight cars for its carriage eastward, had to be pulled empty across the Rockies. The Pacific coast was a land of vast natural resources and, as it became

more thickly settled, its people manufactured for themselves more and more of the products which Hill had at first brought them from eastern factories. This cut down the West bound freight, at the same time that the lumber trade with the East was increasing in a geometrical ratio.

But the mind of the great business strategist had long ago foreseen the emergency and laid plans to meet it. He was well used to thinking in terms of continents, for, when money had been needed by millions for the building of "Hill's Folly," he had simply packed a country satchel, taken steamer and borrowed the required sums from conservative old Dutch and German bankers on bits of paper signed with the single name of James J. Hill. Also he had seen, in a vision, that the Norsemen were the fittest settlers for his new empire and that dream had long ago proved its truth. So now his imagination had crossed the Pacific and pictured the swarming yellow millions on the far shores of that ocean buying the goods which Great Northern steamers should bring them from the distant Western terminus of the railroad on Puget Sound. Already Hill agents were at work in all the ports of China and Japan, copying off the bills of lading of coastwise junks and studying the needs and notions of the people. They came back and reported that the yellow people were desperately poor and had small need of Western luxuries or even what most men call the necessities of life.

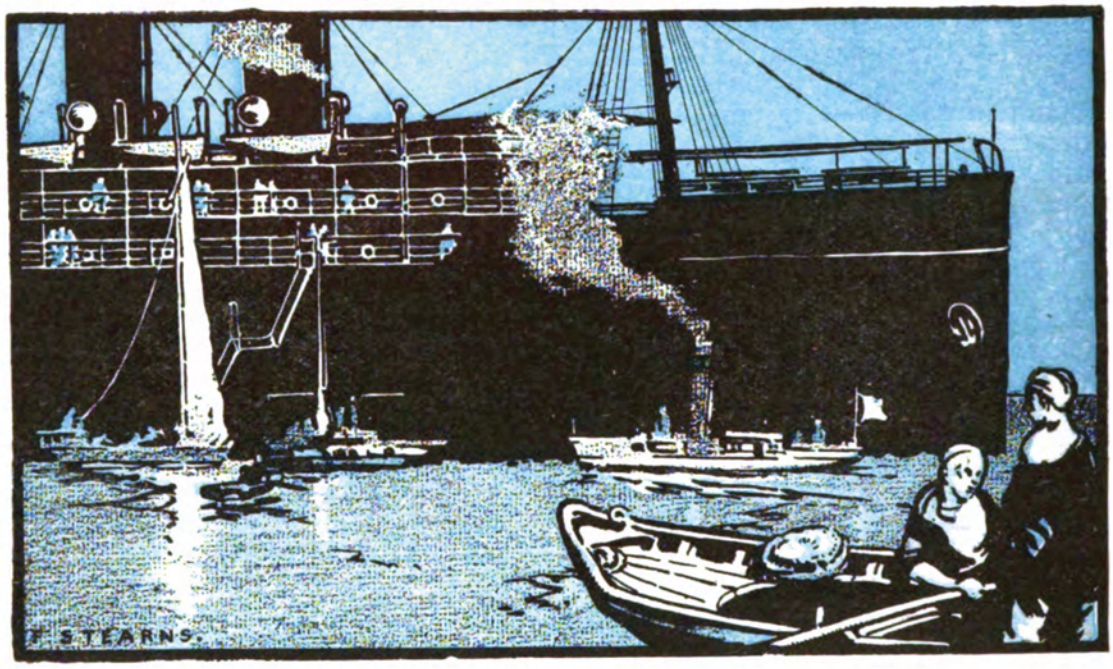
"Yes," said the Master, "but all men must eat, and wear something to cover their nakedness. We must send them our cotton and our flour. That shall furnish the Western traffic to balance the lumber coming East."



By this time men laughed no longer. They simply wondered. But one still had his objection and he was fresh from the field. "The Japanese are satisfied with the short staple cotton from India," he put in.

"Ours is better," Hill answered and, presently, when a party of Japanese capitalists visited this country, he caught them on the wing and made this proposal: "I will send you a cargo of our long staple cotton. Use it to mix with the stuff you are now using. If it is not satisfactory I will pay the bill." So, in the face of Oriental prejudice, the trial was made. And, since then, the shipments of raw cotton from the southern states to Asia have approximated two hundred millions of pounds in a single year, of which the Great Northern carries more than seventy-five per cent over the mountains.

But long before the dream of clothing



the yellow coolies had come so far true, the man was so sure of his vision that he had put on the stocks for service on the Pacific the two greatest freight carrying steamships in the world, twin sisters so enormous that their joint tonnage equals that of whole fleets of modern freighters.

He sent also a score of men to knock at the doors of New England cotton mills, drumming up trade with the far East, and filling empty West bound Great Northern freight cars. In a few years the shipments of rough cotton cloths, fit for the clothing of the Chinese, who bought, rather than manufactured, their wearing apparel, was multiplied by six, and Hill got most of them. The Great Northern road was carrying also the hard wheat flour of the Northwest, by the million barrels to the great cargo ships on Puget Sound. And the lumber came streaming back, inexhaustible. The Hill freight cars were full both ways.

Now, one might well conclude, the farthest limit of the man's vision had been reached. His great, new, silent empire, wrapped in drifts of snow, had been quickened into marvelous life. Across it swept the splendid trains of his railroad, the only line across the continent which has always stood on its own bottom, never passed a dividend or lost a cent for its stockholders. The dream of '56 was vastly more than realized.

Already the exports from the new cities on Puget Sound had passed those which went out through the portals of the Golden Gate. And now from the East came the menacing fulminations of other great dreamers—though, born of Wall street frenzies, theirs were chiefly visions of piratical exploitation. The gray old Emperor of the Northwest was injuring their interests, which centered at San Francisco—meaning to them that the tremendous success of the Great Northern was inevitably and unintentionally bearing their stocks and making profitable coups in the stock market difficult. So these men set about teaching the frontiersman a bitter lesson in the New York art of high finance.

Hill needed no warning. He had dealt too much with other and more literal Indians to mistake the signs of coming treachery and trouble. Perhaps he smiled his slow smile as he sat at the old desk and the deep-set eyes lit with the joy of battle. At any rate he took out of the inexhaustible pocket-book he has seemed always able to command the vast sum of two hundred million dollars and bought, out of hand, before the staring, incredulous eyes of New York's craftiest, the great Burlington railroad system, with its nearly 9,000 miles of through trackage. He must, at whatever cost, make his just-realized vision a permanent reality.

Possession of the Burlington gave Hill his own markets in the greatest lumber-consuming states of the Union; it gave him a base on the Great Lakes at Chicago and terminals at St. Louis, Kansas City, Denver and the Black Hills. At Chicago he might load, on his own cars, goods brought from the East by train or lake boats; at St. Louis he made direct connections with roads which tapped the great Southern cotton belt and made that part of his export business secure; the other branches put him in close touch with the great packing houses, the smelting furnaces and steel mills, the factories and farms of the whole middle West.

The sullen masters of the New York stock market roused from their trance to find that, at a single tremendous stroke, "Jim" Hill had not only won his own battle, but had, at the same potent instant, dealt them a blow from which they have not yet recovered. And Eastern respect for the business strategy of the crude Northwest, as exemplified by the grizzled old pioneer, became, directly, both deep and somewhat fearful.

How Hill has borne himself in the relentless struggle which has raged since then, sometimes beneath the surface and sometimes in the public eye, men who read current newspapers have seen and pondered. It becomes apparent that the hitherto irresistible forces of Wall street manipulation have met, in head-on collision, a more than immovable body. After each shock one sees still standing, unshaken and impregnable, the embodied reality of "Jim" Hill's early dream—his loaded freight trains moving swiftly East and West across the continent on unbroken lines—his great Empire growing ever richer and more imperial.

Only the other day, to celebrate his sixty-eighth birthday, Mr. Hill, by closing a contract with the Steel Trust for the mining of iron ore along the southern shore of Lake Superior, gave to the stockholders of the Great Northern a present of four hundred millions of dollars, which vast sum will go to enrich the children and grand-children of the men who, in the days when the wise were still laughing, proved their confidence in "Hill's Folly."

But though to him, more than to any other, is due the prodigious development of their country, one may hear among sincere and prominent citizens of the great Northwest much savage criticism of the man and of his methods. Hill is denounced as a relentless and domineering tyrant. To a large extent the charge may be admitted. But his critics fail to realize that the man could not have been other than he is and do his work. They fail to realize the compelling power of a vision which seizes the soul of a strong man and drives him over all obstacles to its realization.