

Men of Faith

GEOFFREY S. CHILDS²

As president of the Farmers & Manufacturers Beet Sugar Association, in whose area you are meeting, I first of all want to extend to the Society a very warm welcome and the hope that your deliberations will be thoroughly successful. Looking over this program I don't see how these meetings can be anything but successful, unless perhaps it leads to some sort of mental indigestion. But that can be overcome by a certain amount of frivolity which I assume goes along with all sugar gatherings. The two have to be kept in balance some way and that is your problem. In any event, we do hope that you will enjoy yourselves here in every way. We are delighted to have you meet in our area.

My subject is "Men of Faith."

I am going to open by reading to you an excerpt from that great book of Fred Taylor's, "The Saga of Sugar," which I believe every sugar man should reread from time to time just to realize what it means to be a sugar man:

"It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the contributions of some of the individual pioneers to the sugar factory project. One Phillip De LaMare, who captained the wagon trek of the machinery across the Great Plains, was a young man of only 29 years and reared in the luxuries of civilization. It is doubtful if there is another episode in the industrial development of America which for sheer courage, stamina and physical endurance surpasses the story of De LaMare and his party.

"Says De LaMare—

"I saw a task before me that seemed almost beyond the power of man to accomplish. One thousand miles of uninhabited country lay before me, and beyond rose great chains of almost unexplored mountains.

"On July 4, 1852, the long trek began. Only four or five miles were covered the first day and with the trip hardly begun, those miles brought forth the greatest of all of their calamities and disappointments. Some of the wagons carried from 5,000 to 9,000 pounds, requiring four to eight oxen each to pull them, and they had been especially constructed to withstand the heavy loads. Now it developed that they were very badly made with faulty green timber. Axle-trees broke on many; others gave evidence that they could not stand the trip. It was tragedy.

"Now out of funds, yet with characteristic courage and determination, De LaMare set forth to obtain more wagons. By dint of great persuasion and at the cost of considerable time, he managed to obtain on credit some 40 Santa Fe wagons—this time the best of prairie schooners.

"Out into the great uninhabited plains they traveled. Each day they drew further and further away from civilization. Days and weeks and months passed and still they pushed on."

Well, then the story goes into more and more trouble and finally it says that:

"In early November of 1852, more than four months after leaving Fort Leavenworth, these weary travelers reached Salt Lake City. Only by their great ingenuity and overcoming almost insurmountable obstacles; only by their great resourcefulness and stamina and only thru the great leadership of De LaMare did these men bring their expedition thru to success."

¹ Address delivered to the general meeting of the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists, Detroit, Mich., Feb., 1950.

² President, Michigan Sugar Company.

Ladies and gentlemen, that story is really the story of the sugar industry itself. This industry is characterized by men who *work* and *love* their work; and as one who has been privileged to spend 16 years in the sugar beet industry (which is but a day), I want to pay tribute to all sugar men, high and low, who are worthy of the name. I know of no group of men who seem to better typify that something which to my mind is the greatest thing there is, and that is men who really *work* and who *love* their work and who, therefore, make possible all the things that we have.

When we talk in generalities like this, we pose to each individual one of us the question as to how we are fitting into that splendid picture of the men and the industry we admire so deeply. So I want to talk to you for awhile about the job that confronts us. My thought is to treat the subject first from the standpoint of management (which happens to be my particular part in the situation in this area); and, secondly, from the standpoint of your and my responsibilities as individuals.

First of all, I think one of management's great responsibilities is to be constructive. Management must see to it that the industry is sound and profitable because, if this industry is not well managed, then all the work that we as individuals do will go for nothing. Without any desire to point a finger, I would say that there are times when management has not been too constructive and I think this fact should be recognized as a truth.

It is a responsibility of management to encourage real cooperation. One of the stumbling blocks of this industry has been the fact that there is a tendency for great loyalties to divisions of the business. You have the men in agriculture devoted to agriculture and all problems concerned therewith but who display no great interest in processing, selling or accounting. In other words, there is a feeling that their side of the work is the all in all. Of course, without the raw product, there isn't any processing. But the fact remains that, unless the agricultural division works with the processing side of the business, there is conflict and there is a lack of the real harmony which leads to good results. Now, this matter of cooperation cannot be brought about by just talking about it or thinking it is a good thing. It is management's responsibility to see that the agricultural division of the business, the processing division, the selling division and the accounting and financial division of the business are guided and inspired to work in real harmony.

I think another great responsibility of management is to provide and build new leaders. This industry has suffered from the gap between top management and the men qualified to take their places. There is no sound constructive management where there are not being developed capable, trained, ambitious, conscientious younger men to take responsibility and to prepare for real leadership. And so I say to you that, in every division of this business, there should not only be capable men who are now in charge of every phase of it but directly under them thoroughly competent men (and I would say college-trained men), ready to step in as the necessity arises.

This industry has in the past been built by men, in many cases, who "just grew up" with the business. That was all right for that era. But that isn't enough for this era. This era calls for constructive men, college-trained men, and so I say again that one of the great responsibilities of management is to see that those men are provided.

Another great responsibility of management is to encourage research. We can take satisfaction in the realization that that necessity has at last come to be recognized. I think the American Society of Sugar Beet Technologists is doing yeoman work in the field of research. Then there is the Beet Sugar Development Foundation, as a clearing house of research, in the western area. These groups are supplemented by research activities on the part of associations and companies in the industry. One of the great goals of this effort is to increase the yield of sugar per acre. Dr. Robbins was telling me about a chart out in the hall, which shows what has happened in California, where beginning in 1925 the average yield per acre has risen steadily until now it is around 19 tons per acre. Of course, in California they do everything in a big way. We may not be able to equal that figure but we can approach it. Seriously, we do know that there is available knowledge today that if put into effect will increase the average yield in any territory. A further contribution to research work is the Sugar Research Foundation, which is engaged in fundamental research dedicated, among other things, to the discovery of new uses for sugar and its by-products.

There is a tremendous field, in my opinion, for the discovery of non-edible uses of sugar that would tend to offset the danger of producing too much sugar with the resulting demoralization of prices both in this country and in the world as a whole. I also feel that there are important new uses for our by-products that will affect their value favorably.

Of course, research must also be concerned with the opportunity for reducing costs by the discovery of better methods of processing.

Well, the good thing about all this is that there are in effect, as I have said, research groups now struggling intelligently with all of these problems and beginning to show some results.

Let me add that I think it is also the duty of management to think in terms of what can be done to increase the goodwill of this industry. We have suffered, for reasons that we don't need to go into here, from a lack of goodwill. Part of that lack of goodwill has been definitely encouraged by various and sundry forces, but certainly this industry would profit if we could find an intelligent means of increasing the public goodwill towards the industry.

Now, may I digress for one moment to say this: You have all heard that we should find uses for our factories in non-operating seasons. Well, maybe we should. There are some attempts being made here and there. I am not too sure that this is a good idea or a sound one. In other words, outside of the sugar equipment, all we really have in these beet factories is a power house. You can't convert a sugar house into some other basic use and not put in entirely new equipment if you are going to do a competing job. We have a power house that could be used and you might have a

situation where you could use your field force in connection with some agricultural development, but I just want to make one little observation. There have been some noble experiments in trying to use sugar plants for other purposes that have turned out rather disastrously. Why? Because there is a genius that goes with each business. Why don't we make candy? Why don't we become bakers? Why don't we make everything our product is used for? Because that isn't our genius. The great danger of getting caught up in this idea of trying to fill this so-called seasonal gap with some other business activity is the danger of neglecting your basic activity. That statement is open to challenge and I may be all wrong. But I mention it as perhaps a little comfort to some sugar people who are hearing from time to time how we only operate three or four months of the year. Are any of us sitting around idle the other months of the year? I don't think so. This is the busiest industry during the rest of the year that you can imagine.

Now, so much in general for the responsibilities of management. I am only trying to key up thinking. Let me say a word about our responsibility as individuals.

I have a thought about the typical sugar man which probably doesn't apply to anybody in this room. Let me tell you what a typical sugar man may be. Well, for one thing, he may be a man who tends to work much harder physically than he does mentally. None of you, of course, fall in that class! But I have seen such men.

A typical sugar man may be a man who is periodically over-optimistic or unduly pessimistic. That wouldn't apply to you! But I have seen him.

A typical sugar man may be a man who is skeptical of anything new. Not you! But I have seen him.

A typical sugar man may be a man who periodically convinces himself that the industry is on the verge of extinction. Not you! But you have heard about him.

And, finally, the typical sugar man may be the man who believes in rugged individualism regardless of the price paid for it. Not you, of course! But I know you have heard of such a man. Rugged individualism has been one of the great curses of this industry. This idea that we are going to have our own way regardless, and I mean competitively, has cost this industry a fortune again and again. Not only that, but it has held back its progress. Rugged individualism doesn't fit this kind of a world, in my opinion. What we need is men who sense the need for cooperation and who work together to accomplish results.

And so I would say to you who might possibly sense that some place in that list of the failings of the so-called typical sugar man there was one that fitted you (and I will admit to several of them), we need to be on our guard. One of the things that we must do individually is to avoid falling into routine thinking—just doing our work from day to day and not really thinking about it.

And let me point out to you one little practical suggestion about how to guard against routine thinking. It may not be of any value to you at all but the principle is still there. I maintain, just as a business keeps books,

or otherwise it wouldn't know where it was going, so the individual may very profitably think about keeping books on what he is doing. It isn't a bad idea to get some idea at the end of a day of what you have done. From that daily outline of what you have accomplished you can do something else that is really invaluable, and that is to keep a business diary of your own. The thing that amazes me is the fact that so many men work hard, but when asked point blank what they have done, they just can't remember. Well, that isn't serious; if somebody asked you what you ate three weeks ago, you can't remember. But it is a very important thing for you to know for your own guidance whether or not you have done anything worthwhile, for example, after a month has gone by. Well, if you keep a business diary then you can see for yourself whether or not you are really doing any worthwhile thinking and whether or not you are producing anything worthwhile.

It is a wonderful thing to work very hard, very earnestly, very sincerely, but if nobody knows anything about it, you are under a severe handicap. In other words, we need to learn the value of salesmanship in our efforts. We need to learn that if we do something, if we know something, if we discover something, somebody should know about it so that it can be put to greater use. All of us can profit by becoming salesmen of our ideas and efforts in an intelligent, sensible way.

It is our responsibility as individuals to increase our knowledge constantly. There are a great many men who know a lot but who overlook the fact that there is an absolute necessity for adding constantly to that store of knowledge. Your membership in this association is one of the means provided for increasing your knowledge.

Let me say a word along a little broader line. I think our industry is tremendously important in this country today. It is tremendously important to this country today for the basic reasons that I have been trying to develop here—the fact that it is made up of men who put work first. We are not an industry which is asking for more and more for less and less. We are an industry made up of men, as I said in the beginning, who *love* their work and who *work*, and there is a tremendous need for that in this country today. There is too much of a spirit developing in this country that somebody owes us a living; there is too much of a spirit developing that we should be getting more and more, as I said before, for less and less. You know, one of the grand things about this industry is the fact it is so rugged. You can't make a living in this industry easily, and that is perhaps one of its blessings. This industry is tremendously important to this country because we are keeping alive the pioneer spirit in a large group of people and we are also maintaining the dignity of man. Man is not dignified when he is led to think that he doesn't really have to work.

Well, I have digressed a bit because I want you to get the thought of what I mean by "Men of Faith." I don't mean it in any purely inspirational sense. I mean it from the standpoint that once in awhile it is a good thing for us to take a little look at our work and all its difficulties and struggles and then look back realizing that it has been a pretty good show from the standpoint of its basic accomplishments by individuals, by companies and by

the industry. When you put it all together, it represents what I like to feel and know is a great contribution to the welfare of this country at a rather difficult time.

Let me close by quoting again from that great book, "The Saga of Sugar":

"Where there is no vision, the people perish. This is an obvious truth.

Except for the imagination and faith of the leaders of the past, the world would still be an undeveloped wilderness. The progress of mankind has ever waited on the vision and courage of the few—the few who seem at times to abandon prudence in the interest of common good. The names of such go thundering down the ages while conservative men sink into nameless graves. And so it was with this great sugar saga—a few tipped the balances against the forces of nature, and the opinions of many. They unconsciously projected themselves into grateful remembrance.

"Many present leaders of the industry still are young; they are aggressive; they have faith in those for whom they work. Most important of all, they believe with all their hearts in the future of the beet sugar industry. Owing to recent technological advances in seed and field mechanization and other phases, they look forward to a time when the industry, stabilized and competitive, will obtain a more eminent position in the national economy. Through this optimism, the faith of our fathers marches on."

I testify to you here now my absolute faith in the future of this industry because of its background; because it has awakened to the realization of the need for research; because it now has organizations like this functioning and because I have a hope that where you have men who really *work* and who *love* their work, somehow such an industry will receive protection thru all the difficulties that confront it.