

**THE SIGN OF "B"**

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The Sign of "B" by George H. Eisenhart

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**GEORGE H. EISENHART**

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BY

**GEORGE H. EISENHART**

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# THE SIGN OF "B"

## CHAPTER I.

THOMAS WILKS entered the Bush Trust Co. as a bookkeeper at the age of twenty, at thirty he was Secretary and Treasurer of the same institution with a salary of eighteen hundred a year. He lived in a modern house and enjoyed the modest luxuries of life. A clever wife presided over his home, and a boy and two girls blest their union. The family life was nearly ideal and the future was unclouded. Only at intervals, when he gathered his children about him, did a shadow arise on his horizon—he questioned if his income would be sufficient to educate his children as the times demanded. The question came up frequently, but he did not allow it to disturb him, as he had ten years in which to settle it, and in the meantime many changes might take place.

Carl Shurs was the proprietor of the best cafe in Middleburg, and had his account with the Bush Trust Co. He was a shrewd business man, but the business was not to his liking for many reasons, chief among them was, his bank account did not accumulate fast enough to suit him. That he was dissatisfied no one

would have suspected, as he was always genial and looked after his business to the smallest detail. He had other dreams and was constantly looking about how he might put his dream in the concrete.

Shurs had gone over his dream a thousand times, and he was sure his plan could be worked out to advantage if he only had the capital. "Yes," he said after musing a long time, "I will see him," and with that he went to the Bush Trust Co. and sought the private office of the Secretary. He was in and always glad to talk to customers.

After the usual small talk was disposed of, Shurs invited Wilks to take luncheon with him at the Cafe.

Wilks and his host had a table in a secluded corner of the room. The meal had not progressed very far when Wilks took a sip of his beer.

"What do you think of that beer?" Shurs asked casually.

"I am not a connoisseur, but it tastes good to me."

"That is because you do not know the taste of good beer. I seldom drink it, I do not consider it fit to drink."

"You sell it," with a questioning look.

"Yes, because I cannot get any better. American beer is inferior to the German product."

"You are partial to the Fatherland, and I do not blame you. You should import the real article and educate us."

"That is not necessary."

"I suppose not." Wilks did not care to enter into a discussion of the merits or demerits of beer.

"We should manufacture it. Then we could enjoy a good drink of the beverage once in a while."

The guest did not reply, and the host was nettled just a little that his companion did not show more interest in the subject that was so dear to him.

"Has it ever occurred to you, Mr. Wilks, that this city, with a population of forty thousand, imports all the beer from the large city? All the money is sent out and very little stays home. If we had a brewery of our own, the money would stay here and increase business. A brewery will give employment to a number of men, and the county will be benefited by the revenue from the license, and by the taxes from the improvement of property. Besides, a number of men who are not afraid to risk a little money would increase their bank accounts; and incidentally would be a force in the community. Money means power; the more you have, the greater your power.

The idea was a new one, and Wilks was always looking for new business. He was all attention.

"I had not thought of a brewery as an asset of the county," Wilks said after a moment. "In fact, the question of beer, or any kind of drink, does not enter into my business, hence I have not given it any consideration."

"I have given the subject considerable attention for the last three years. Indeed, I thought this city



lacked a brewery, and it aided me to settle here. I at once entertained the idea of starting a brewery."

"And what has prevented you?"

"Lack of capital."

"There is no trouble to get money for a sound business."

"True, but you must also select your associates with care in a business of this kind. Business integrity is just as necessary in the brewery business as in the Trust Company."

"I see you have a plan in mind, unfold it, so we can discuss it more intelligently."

"Just this. I have been casting about for a partner. One with a good business training and who is thoroughly acquainted with local conditions. I have selected you as the man best fitted for such a partnership."

"I appreciate the confidence you place in me, but the business does not especially attract me."

"From what angle?"

"It is not the most refined business in the first place, and there is a sentiment against it."

"I agree with you, but people do not know what this business means to the country. Perhaps you do not know that the breweries and distilleries pay annually into the treasury of the United States a matter of three hundred million dollars; and that the Municipal and State governments collect another two hundred million. Tell me, how would the United

States' government, the Municipal and State governments be carried on if it were not for this service! Besides, the farmers have ready sale for their products. The railroads harvest a large business and employment is offered to thousands who conduct the business of brewing and distilling. I tell you, man, the public, or part of it, does not understand that we virtually support the government. Take this revenue away and what would happen! You can guess. What I am telling you is true not only of this government, but of every government in the civilized world. I consider these vast business interests are benevolent institutions."

"I had not entered this field of inquiry, but it does bring a large amount of revenue to the various governments."

"And what is more," Shurs continued with enthusiasm, "it is just as clean a business as conducting an iron furnace, or steel mill. The law gives any man the privilege to brew beer or distill spirits, and no one can interfere as long as you abide by the law."

"All you have said is very interesting, but is a trifle beside the mark. You were about to unfold to me your plan of starting a brewery in the community. I am interested in your project."

"It is very simple. I can raise a certain amount, so can you. We organize a company. You are president and look after the financial end; I will manage getting out the product."

"How much capital will it require?"

"We must have a hundred thousand dollars. We can start on that, and after we make good it will be no trouble to get all the money we need. And what is more," said Shurs, tapping the table, "we will make good. We shall place on the market a beer superior to anything now used in this state."

"Yes," with a drawl.

Shurs scrutinized his guest. "I do not want you to think I am a vapor. I am a partial brewer, and, furthermore, I have a secret to brew beer not known in this or any other country. Oh, I know you think I am fabricating, but I am not. As a boy in the Fatherland I was apprenticed to an old man who had a one-man brewery. He made a beer superior to any beer in Germany. He was an eccentric old man, and refused fabulous sums for his secret. After I had been with him for eight years he revealed the secret. He made me take an oath I would not reveal it to any one in Germany. He had reasons for this peculiar act, but he would not tell me what they were. Two years later he died. I have kept my oath, and now I am ready to make use of my secret process."

"In what respect is your beer superior to ours?"

"The beer I brew has a much better flavor and contains only one-half of one per cent. of alcohol. The beer in this country is tasteless and contains three per cent. alcohol. Part of the secret lies in the ageing, which does not receive the proper attention in most breweries."