

HENRY FORD'S OWN STORY

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Henry Ford's own story by Rose Wilder Lane

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ROSE WILDER LANE

**HENRY FORD'S
OWN STORY**



E. Paul Thompson

HENRY FORD

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FOREWORD

BY ROSE WILDER LANE

FIFTY-TWO years ago * a few farmers' families near Greenfield, Michigan, heard that there was another baby at the Fords'—a boy. Mother and son were doing well. They were going to name the boy Henry.

Twenty-six years later a little neighborhood on the edge of Detroit was amused to hear that the man Ford who had just built the little white house on the corner had a notion that he could invent something. He was always puttering away in the old shed back of the house. Sometimes he worked all night there. The neighbors saw the light burning through the cracks.

Twelve years ago half a dozen men in Detroit were actually driving the Ford automobile about the streets. Ford had started a small factory, with a dozen mechanics, and was buying material. It was freely predicted that the venture would never come to much.

Last year — January, 1914 — America was startled by an announcement from the Ford factory that ten million dollars would be divided

* July 30, 1863.

among the eighteen thousand employees as their share of the company's profits. Henry Ford was a multimillionaire, and America regarded him with awe.

Mankind must have its hero. The demand for him is more insistent than hunger, more inexorable than cold or fear. Before a race builds houses or prepares food with its hands, it creates in its mind that demigod, that superman, standing on a higher plane than the rest of humanity, more admirable, more powerful than the others. We must have him as a symbol of something greater than ourselves, to keep alive in us that faith in life which is threatened by our own experience of living.

He is at once our greatest solace and our worst enemy. We cling to him as a child clings to a guiding hand, unable to walk without it, and never able to walk alone until it is let go. Every advance of democracy destroys our old hero, and hastily we build up another. When science has exorcised Jove, and real estate promoters have subdivided the Olympian heights, we desert the old altars to kneel before thrones. When our kings have been cast down from their high places by our inconsistent struggles for liberty, we cannot leave those high places empty. We found a government on the bold declaration, "All men are born free and equal," but we do not believe it. Out of the material at hand we must create again our great ones.

So, with the growth of Big Business during the last quarter of a century, we have built up the modern myth of the Big Business Man.

Our imaginations are intrigued by the spectacle of his rise from our ranks. Yesterday he was a farmer's son, an office boy, a peddler of Armenian laces. To-day he is a demigod. Is our country threatened with financial ruin? At a midnight conference of his dependents, hastily called, he speaks one word. We are saved. Does a foreign nation, fighting for its life, ask our help? He endorses the loan.

We contemplate him with awe. In one lifetime he has made himself a world power; in twenty years he has made a hundred million dollars, we say. He is a Big Business Man.

Our tendency was immediately to put Henry Ford in that class. He does not belong to it. He is not a Big Business Man; he is a big man in business.

It is not strange, with this belief of millions of persons that the men who have been at the head of our great business development are greater than ordinary men, that most of them believe it themselves and act on that assumption. Henry Ford does not. His greatness lies in that.

With millions piling upon millions in our hands, most of us would lose our viewpoint. He has kept his—a plain mechanic's outlook on life and human relations. He sees men all as parts

of a great machine, in which every waste motion, every broken or inefficient part means a loss to the whole.

"Money doesn't do me any good," he says. "I can't spend it on myself. Money has no value, anyway. It is merely a transmitter, like electricity. I try to keep it moving as fast as I can, for the best interests of everybody concerned. A man can't afford to look out for himself at the expense of any one else, because anything that hurts the other man is bound to hurt you in the end, the same way."

The story of Henry Ford is the story of his coming to that conclusion, and of his building up an annual business of one hundred and fifty million dollars based upon it.

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