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FIRST CHEAP WATCH

The Story of the Famous Old Long Winding Waterbury.

SCHEME OF AN OLD COBBLER

How the Connecticut Shoemaker's Idea Was Taken Up and Worked Out—A Timepiece That Came to Be Known All Over the World.

In a small country town in Connecticut lived a cobbler. He was a poor man and a peculiar one. The boys called him a "gene," and some thought him crazy. But he kept on in the even tenor of his way, living his own life and thinking his own thoughts. One of these thoughts was that he could make a watch that would have only three wheels.

A watchmaker out of a job heard of the cobbler and called at his little shop. This was the beginning of the famous Waterbury watch, which was the first cheap watch to be manufactured. It is now a thing of the past. But its cheap price and its remarkably long "wind" (it was a stem winder) were known around the world.

The Waterbury was named for the town where it was made. It had more than the three wheels that the cobbler had planned, but the little old shoemaker's idea was the original germ from which was evolved the successful cheap watch.

Having got the idea, the purchaser of the cobbler's rights found that the first difficulty in his path was lack of money. He looked about for a man with money enough, nerve enough and imagination enough to lead him to render the financial aid without which no first step could be taken. He was found, because it was a Yankee with an indomitable will that was looking for him.

"How much money will it take and how long a time do you want before you can begin to make your watches in sufficient quantities to make the thing a success," he inquired.

"I will be frank with you," replied the inventor. "It will require $25,000, and I shall need eight months for preparation."

"Go ahead," said the daring capitalist.

He went ahead. He met unexpected difficulties and had spent $250,000 and used up twenty-eight months before he turned out a single watch. But the capitalist never faltered. Then the factory, for which every piece of machinery had to be invented and specially made, turned out its first thousand watches.

Not one of them would go! Among other things, it was found that the sheets of brass out of which were stamped the wheels of the watch had a grain somewhat like wood. The wheels cut out round would not stay round.

This difficulty being remedied, a second thousand watches were made. A large number of these went, but the percentage of "stoppers" (watches that refused to go) was still too large.

New study, new experiments, however, finally perfected the cheap little timekeepers to the point of perfection that only about 10 per cent were stoppers. The good watches were tested in six positions—lying on the face, on the back and in four positions on the edge. The maker of each part stamped his mark on the part he made, so that if fault was found in that part he must make it right.

Then came the question of selling the watches, and over $800,000 was spent in the years of its vogue in advertising the Waterbury watch. Some of the methods used were interesting.

A negro minstrel troupe were paid to open their show by saying, "We have come from Waterbury, the land of eternal spring," referring to the long time required to wind the Waterbury watch.

One day the owner of one of these timepieces was winding it on the train. Across the aisle a traveler noted that his neighbor was winding his watch. It caused no thought until a second look and then a third showed the winding still under way. Then the astonished man spoke. "Excuse me, sir, but are you winding a watch?"

"Yes," said the winding owner, "and I'm tired of it. You wind awhile, will you?" This led to explanations and resulted in the ordering by the stranger, who had never before seen a Waterbury, of 50,000 watches for the use of his business house in its China trade.

The great business went on, and large sums of money were made in it. All over the world people were buying these watches, so cheap were they. All over the world people laughed at the "long wind." The old backer of the enterprise had died, and one of his successors felt indignant because his son in traveling in some remote part of Hungary was asked if the Waterbury he came from was the place where the watch with a long wind was made.

"And," said the man, "I don't want the product of my factory laughed about all over the earth." But his ambition led him to try to make a good watch. The new field he soon found was by this time occupied by most successful competitors, and after getting into hopeless indebtedness the old Waterbury Watch company died in the house of those who should have been its friends.—John F. Simmons in New York Tribune.

Had Him.

Cynical Man—Nature must have been dreaming when she made woman. New Woman—She must have had a Welsh rabbit nightmare when she made man.—Bohemian Magazine.

About half the time

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