



# EFFICIENCY INCORPORATED

By Bertton Braley



## The Bright Young Collegian Gets Some Pointers from the Telephone Operator.

WHEN the City Gas company, after due and proper consideration, and with much filing of papers and filling of blanks, granted to Jimmy Thornton a "position" in the office, he was put inside the rail and outside the superintendent's offices on the sixteenth floor, given a list of the staff, and told to be information man and Cerberus as well.

Now, Jimmy had never even paid a gas bill in his life, and his information about the commercial and technical end of the gas business consisted of knowing that if you didn't pay your bill the gas was shut off, and if you blew out the gas you died.

But he made up his mind as soon as his parchment degree was packed away in the bottom of a trunk somewhere that he was done with frivolous things and that life henceforth was to be a stern struggle, at least for a few years, for success. Body and brain were to be used exclusively for progress in his career, not for diversions or divagations. And he intended to take this first position as seriously as though it paid a hundred a week instead of ten.

Therefore he pored diligently and devotedly over the list of officers and offices, impressing them firmly on his mind by re-reading and verbal repetition. It was while his lips were moving in this manner softly over the names, and his eyes were staring into space in that peculiarly vacant way eyes do when the mind is busy memorizing, that he looked vaguely and then more interestedly into the bright brown eyes of an exceedingly pretty girl at the telephone switchboard.

Jimmy immediately shifted his eyes a trifle and concentrated on his memorizing. Or thought he was concentrating, until he realized that he was gravely whispering to himself, "Irving Brown, superintendent, room 1622—darn pretty brown eyes; Irving Brown, superintendent, room 1622—stunning red hair; Irving Brown, superintendent, room 1622, beautiful teeth; Irving Brown, superintendent, room 1622, some pretty girl, some pretty girl, some pretty girl!" And, therefore, the next time his eyes strayed in Miss Harriet Welton's direction he grinned at her. She gave him a smile in return.

"That's right, son," she said, "industry, efficiency, application—they all start that way."

"Just as I thought," responded Jimmy, "the first words that issue from those pearly lips, ruby lips I mean, are those of wisdom and sapience. Who always start that way?"

"The ambitious and intelligent young men who get this desk out here," the young woman informed him. "You see, they can't keep a good boy for \$10 a week, so they give the job to college men."

Thornton winced—ducked, in fact—as if she had thrown something at him.

"And what becomes of the college men?" he asked. "Have there been many of them?"

"Hundreds," responded Miss Welton. "Brown fires 'em as soon as they think they want a raise. He has one of these pigeon-hole minds," Miss Welton continued, "and he's pigeonholed this information desk as a \$10 a week proposition. He ought to see that this information desk is one of the most important places in the building, and put a man here who knows all about the departments, and the employes, and the business in general, but \$10 a week is the price of the desk, as he looks at it, and he gets \$10 a week service out of it."

"Ah," said Jimmy, "but I intend to give him more than \$10 a week service. I shall be the affable, diplomatic, and refined little prodigy who knows all about everything, and who guards the gate with all the tact and wisdom of the president's secretary."

"Yes, no doubt, and indubitably as well,"

the girl agreed, "and as soon as you begin to show signs of reasonable intelligence Brown will worry for fear he has to raise you and there'll be a new little face at the table."

"But—but he told me he was strong for efficiency, and that's not efficiency," said Jimmy.

"Don't make me laugh," warned Miss Welton, "my lips are chapped. You stick around that desk for a while and you'll find out what kind of efficiency there is in Brown's department. City Gas company, Mr. Brown? Just a moment, please." Miss Welton was busy with her switchboard again and Jimmy, his enthusiasm just a little cooled, went back to his list.

For a month Jimmy sat at the desk inside the rail, a buffer between the public—frequently irate—and the staff of the City Gas corporation. When he wasn't practicing diplomacy with those outside the rail he was absorbing information regarding the great company's operations, personnel, and methods. He worked hard, in spite of the gay raillery of Miss Welton, which he always answered in kind.

Then one day Jimmy came in, hung up his hat, seated himself at the desk, and said: "Harriet—I'm tired of that 'Miss Welton' stuff—Harriet, you of the bright brown eyes and the gorgeous sunset hair, I am about to impart to you my conclusion that the way this company is run is the bunk. Talk about governmental inefficiency; it's a grain in the bucket compared to this. For a month I've done nothing but stall off people who want to get in and murder Brown—and I feel as though I was failing in my public duty that I don't let 'em do it."

"Man here yesterday who has been trying to get a gas stove put into the place for a month; we promised it in two days. We've sent twenty-two men to his house to interview him about it, and the net result so far is ten feet of pipe which is cut wrong. I told him we were fearfully busy and that the superintendent was in China or somewhere, and he suggested that if we had twenty-two men to send on one job, a half hour at a time, he thought we ought to have one man to send for two hours and put in the stove."

"I wonder, if I went to Mr. Brown and told him what I had observed out here, and sort of gave him the outside point of view, if perhaps, he might not—"

"Brother," said Miss Welton, "I like you a lot, much better than most of the other 'rah rah' boys who started in here; your fair haired beauty is attractive to me and your manners are engaging. I don't want to lose your enlightening conversation and companionship immediately. Which is why I say to you—don't. The old man says he welcomes suggestions—but he doesn't. He cherishes the idea that he is the whole brains of the establishment and he doesn't want any too much display of them below him. He's always hollering about incompetence around him, but he likes it, because it makes him think, by comparison, he's a real executive."

"All right, then," said Jimmy, "maybe we can figure out some way to sell him advice. I'm only a little college lad alone in a wide, wide, and wicked world, but I can see that there's need of a change in an organization which takes five days and three men's time to fix a leaky gas jet."

Miss Welton was thoughtful for a moment, then she chuckled.

"Figure away," she said; "if you can dope out some system to make the old putty-head take your advice and pay for it, go ahead."

Now it's not to be assumed that Jimmy and Harriet confined their conversation to shop talk. Nor to office hours. When Jimmy first asked her to go out with him she answered: "Every single one of the gay young Lotharios that have had that desk

has tried out\* the same stuff on me, and I turned 'em all down. It's bad for discipline, bad for work, and it makes the office talk. I made it a rule when I took this job never to go out with young men from the office except in a party."

"Well, we'll make it a party, then," suggested Jimmy, "name the rest of them."

Miss Welton dimpled.

"I can't think of anybody just now that I'd want along. I—I guess I'll break my rule," said Miss Welton. "I'll meet you at the Astor."

That evening marked a new point in their companionship, a point where they began telling their past lives and their hopes and dreams, and more or less intimate likes and dislikes. So that after another month in the office of the City Gas company their intimacy had grown until it seemed the most natural thing in the world for Jimmy to confide nearly everything to her. And on the particular day which is significant, Jimmy came out of the superintendent's office with a woe-begone face.

"Fired?" questioned Miss Welton.

"No, but here I've been working my head off going over all the blanks and vouchers and things, listening to endless complaints, buzzing around in the shop and the show rooms when I could sneak away, all to see what I could evolve in the line of efficiency dope for the boss—figuring on selling it to him some way, or making it so strong he'd have to take it and give me a raise—well, I've been doing all that, and then today he calls me in and says that the 'Efficiency Company of America,' whatever that is, has made arrangements to survey the business, in fact, to run it for a month, on their promise to save \$5,000 for the company or forfeit an equal amount. And they're sending their man tomorrow, and I'm to take him around and introduce him to all the department heads and show him where the offices and shops are, and generally be useful. And, of course, he'll get the money I ought to have made."

Miss Welton sympathized condolingly.

Then came the epochal night when Jimmy went home to his boarding house to find on his table a thin envelope from the Efficiency Company of America, and to discover within that envelope a check for \$500, "in payment for counsel given and services rendered."

What Jimmy wanted to do immediately was to call up Harriet Welton and tell her about it. But Harriet had gone to the theater that night with her mother, she said.

He didn't sleep much that night and was up long before the alarm clock's summons. He appeared at the office at 8:30 and it seemed to him it was four hours before Miss Welton showed up, though she actually was ten minutes early. Because of that fact and a certain benignity of fate, there was no one else in the outer office but these two as Jimmy told her his story.

"And what will you do with the five hundred?" she asked, when she could get in a word.

"Half of it's yours," he said. "It belongs to you for first putting me wise to that old simp of a superintendent, and for helping me to see what needed changing around the place, also for suggesting that I sell my advice to him. I didn't know I was selling it, but I was. That Efficiency man—"

Miss Welton laughed.

"Isn't an Efficiency man at all," she said. "He's a cousin of mine in the real estate business who volunteered to pose as the efficiency engineer in this scheme."

"Scheme?" echoed Jimmy. "Then it wasn't, it isn't—say, what did happen, anyhow?"

Harriet smiled.

"Here's the story, young man just out of college," she said. "My father's one of the largest stockholders in the City Gas company, and he is the greatest bug on efficiency you ever saw."

Jimmy stared, swallowed, and started to speak, but Harriet put her hand over his mouth.

"I have the floor," she said. "Well, father had a lot of gas work done once, on a teze-ment of his, and after he'd stood the bungling and blundering of the City Gas company for about a month he went to the superintendent and told him what he thought of that sort of work. Also he told him that a

kid just out of college with nothing but a little intelligence and common sense could run that job better than the superintendent—and when that little pompous gentleman smiled fatuously, father stalked out of the office saying that he'd show him.

"Father and I are great pals, and when he told me about it I suggested that he get the president of the company to give me a job as a phone girl or something like that—the superintendent didn't know me from Eve, of course—and then I'd see how the land lay and keep an eye out for the college boy I thought might do the job. The others wouldn't do at all. In the first place they were too fresh with me—not that you weren't fresh, but I liked you. In the second place, they didn't show any particular interest in the job. So I knew you were the lad—and you may remember that I started you to thinking about what might be done to straighten out and simplify their system and save money."

"And all this mystery about where you lived and all that was why?" asked Jimmy.

"Two reasons," Miss Welton said. "First, I wanted to be liked for myself alone," she said this with a mock languishing air, "and I feared that if you met me out in the palatial pile where we live amid surroundings of imperial magnificence you would value me for my wealth, possessions, and social position; second, because I really was afraid that you'd remember, when you met my father, that his name was on the stockholders' list of the City Gas, and perhaps suspect me of being here for just some such purpose as this scheme. I've known people to get wise on less evidence than that."

"Still," said Jimmy, "I don't see why you minded my knowing there was a scheme. Why didn't you tell me I was in on this? Then I—"

"Because," Miss Harriet explained, "because," and she spoke very rapidly, "I didn't know whether you would really put it over or not, and if your ideas failed I didn't want you to feel the unhappiness of failure. I—I liked you too much." She blushed and Jimmy moved closer to her, but she shook her head vigorously.

"I don't see," said Jimmy, "exactly the reason for the Efficiency Company of America, where did it come in?"

"Father and I formed that company," said Miss Welton, "and had the stationery printed, with his name down as a director. And then he fixed it so that the superintendent would hear a lot about the company through friends at the club, and then he had a letter sent to the superintendent which practically told him that the Efficiency company would improve his department, save him money, save the company money, smooth the relations between the company and the public—and if it didn't save \$5,000 in a month would agree to forfeit that amount. The charge for the service, if successful, was to be \$1,000. And since Mr. Brown likes advice he has to pay for, he fell for the proposition. Father had the money posted through a dummy—and the rest you know. Stop and think, Jimmy, is there a single change in the method of doing things at the City company that you didn't think of—except perhaps a thing or two I suggested?"

"No," agreed Jimmy.

"Well, then, that's your five hundred. And the other five hundred I took. And I just want to see that fat old superintendent's face this morning when you go up and tell him—as you are going to do—that you are the Efficiency Company of America."

Jimmy grinned widely at the prospect. Then very suddenly he took her in his arms and kissed her. She gasped a little, but didn't resist.

"That we are the Efficiency Company of America," you mean," he said.