

# THIS WELFARE WORK SHOWS GOOD PROFIT

Every Man in the Commonwealth Steel Works Made to Feel Himself a Partner.

## BOYS FITTED TO THEIR JOBS

"Hungry Hollow" Changed to "Lincoln Place" to Suit the Aspirations of Its Residents.

When Clarence H. Howard, President of the Commonwealth Steel Company of St. Louis, conceived the idea of inaugurating welfare work among the employes at the steel plant ten years ago he laid the foundation for what has since grown to be one of the most successful co-operative schemes in this country. The Good Fellowship Club of the Commonwealth Steel Company, with its more than 1,000 earnest members, its splendid new clubhouse, and its indomitable spirit of "get together," has shown that employer and employe need only to be fully informed of each other's problems to insure avoidance of disputes.

When the present management came into control of the steel company about the first thing President Howard did was to inquire about the young men in the plant. He wished to know whether they liked the work and whether they were in the right places in the shops to work out their ambitions. The young men were at first a bit bashful in the presence of "the big boss," but as soon as they found that he was talking with them and not at them the young fellows became quite confidential. As a result of his information Mr. Howard formed the Good Fellowship Club, and at once started a night school to complete the education of employes who had been forced to go to work young.

Volunteer instructors from the drafting rooms gave lessons in drawing and mathematics. Later the attendance grew and the company hired experts to teach. It was found, however, that the young men, after a hard day's work, were fatigued and could not get the full benefit of the courses. Finally a day school was established, and every young man in the plant not yet twenty-two years old was put into the school one morning or one afternoon each week, during which time he was paid as though he were working for the company and not for himself. There are now about 120 men getting advantage of the school and the results are said to have been beyond expectations.

There is a bit of real Americanism in the fact that the only requirement to enroll for the courses is the ability to read and write the English language. In addition to the technical branch of the school a complete course in commerce is given for the clerical force. Employes are graduated after a course of four years.

About 35 per cent. of the Commonwealth employes are foreigners and the problem of how to get into intimate touch with them was difficult, as the men were suspicious of the company's intentions. In an attempt to solve the question Miss Edna Haas, an expert in welfare work, was employed. Miss Haas went to board with a family in the foreign settlement known as "Hungry Hollow," a corruption of Hungry Hollow. She organized educational meetings and taught the people that the true American spirit was co-operation and not antagonism. A short time ago a committee of foreigners went to officials of the steel company and said that "Hungry Hollow" didn't seem to fit their neighborhood any longer; they thought that "Lincoln Place" was more in keeping with their new ideals. Lately a school for foreigners has been established with all academic subjects in the course. Special stress, however, is laid upon instruction in methods for safety while at work.

One thing that has pleased the men is the method of employ and discharge in operation at the plant. When a man makes application for employment he is rigidly examined as to his ability. This is done to protect the men already at work and to provide that they shall not have to bear the burden of working with men not as skillful as themselves. If the applicant proves his fitness he is examined by a physician, and if his health is good he is hired. This medical examination works against the introduction of diseases to other workmen. No man is ever "fired." If complaint is made about him the charges are laid before a committee and the continued employment or discharge of the man rests solely upon the committee's decision.

In order to bring to the men realization that their own prosperity depends upon the manner of service they give, a prize system has been put into effect. Under the system the entire administrative force of a shop receives a percentage of their monthly salaries, if the shop record in efficiency, safety, and production justifies it. This has aroused a joint interest, and the workers have come to feel that they are, in fact, partners in their employer's success.

The question of safety received attention in 1912 when the Commonwealth

Company installed a well-equipped laboratory, with a surgeon in constant attendance, at the plant. To impress the importance of care, lectures on safety are given frequently. The company's desire to have the worker united with the officials in all matters of mutual interest is further evidenced in the safety work. Boxes have been put in all over the plant, and employes drop suggestions into them. For the best suggestions a monthly prize of \$10 is awarded. The work has met with remarkable success, and last year there were only three minor accidents due to negligence.

The Board of Governors of the Fellowship Club—all workmen—some time ago came to the conclusion that the plant needed a restaurant. They referred the matter to the company, and the Fellowship Restaurant was the result. In the restaurant, which, with its sunshine and openness, gives grateful change to the men who have been in the turmoil of the shops, plain home cooking and inexpensiveness are the rule. The average cost of a meal, according to statistics compiled by the company, is 17 cents. All sorts of vegetables are supplied in generous portions at 3 cents a serving. Another reason why the Commonwealth men are not worrying about the high cost of living is that any meat with all the trimmings can be had in the restaurant for 12 cents a portion.

Since its establishment the restaurant has served 1,200 meals a day. Quick service is given, and even when the noon hour rush is at its greatest the men are seated and served in exactly six minutes. Music, occasionally by the employes' band, goes with all the meals.

Separate from, but adjoining the restaurant, is a lunchroom, where the same type of equipment as is in the main dining room has been installed. Here the man who prefers to carry his own lunch is provided for, and on gas plates he may heat beverages.

In connection with the work of the welfare the Good Fellowship Club issues "every little while" a periodical called The Commonwealther, which chronicles all the happenings of the plant. There aren't any prosy, better-than-thou editorials in The Commonwealther. But there are stories about the baseball club, the glee club, and intimate personal notes that show how deeply and earnestly the workers have entered into the latest phase of the relations between labor and capital.

While President Wilson was on his trip through the West he inspected the Commonwealth plant and was impressed by the spirit of the men. Later he wrote a letter to President Howard in which he expressed his appreciation. Down in an obscure corner of the latest issue of The Commonwealther there appeared a brief notice to the effect that all employes except officials would get a 10 per cent. increase on the next pay day. Evidently the "make-up man" of the little sheet thought the notice was of such common occurrence that the best it deserved was an inch below the many inches of a story about the changes of the baseball team.

President Howard is now in New York in connection with the tenth annual meeting of the American Iron and Steel Institute, which will close today at the Waldorf-Astoria. He did not care to talk about the welfare work at his plant yesterday, but expressed himself as well pleased with the results.