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Tub Factory

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Tub Factory

By Ken McGuiness

*. . . Clang of Machine
Clashing With Wood
and Worker.*

THE long stretch before dinner was starting. The motors were humming as they gathered speed after the mid-morning shut down for a lunch. The hum changed to a roar as the machinery reached full speed, and the roar to a hellish screech as the turner jerked back a lever, pressing the flying belt of sandpaper against a slowly turning tub. Leaning against the table which I fondly called my desk, but which was really only the rough wooden bench on which the tubs were finished, I wearily pulled on my worn leather gloves.

I watched the other three members of the crew as they went about their tasks. First came the "setting-up man." I could see his back through the fine haze of dust that filled the low-ceilinged room. He was putting staves in an iron ring. After filling the ring it took him only a moment to find the proper fit. He pulled the ring containing the "set up" tub out of the three upright prongs which held it, and tapped the staves firmly together by stamping the tub on a round slab of iron. The dead metallic sound of wood striking iron could barely be heard above the sandpaper's screech.

THE turner picked up the tub behind him, swung it across in front of himself, and slammed it tight on the spindle. The head of the spindle banged against the burr which held it on.

A high ringing noise was heard as the turner knocked the ring off with a steel dumb-bell. He pulled a lever and the tub rolled over against the sand belt. There was a momentary lull as the tub that had been against the belt dropped away and the new one took its place. The new tub was soon screeching its protest as the sandpaper scratched down the rough spots on its surface. In the meantime the turner had slipped a wire hoop on the freshly sanded pail, and the click of the little steel wheel which drove it tight sounded like a roller coaster going around a sharp curve. Steel crashed against steel, and the burr went spinning off the shaft from one blow of the heavy dumb-bell. The turner pulled the tub off the spindle and set it on the slide leading to the "lathe boss."

I pulled myself on to my desk as the half-finished tub moved slowly down the wooden slide. The boss picked it up, flexed it in and out to see if it was tight, and prepared to put it into the "chuck." Grasping it carefully in his left hand, he slipped it into the hollow, spinning cylinder, quickly shoving it in tight with a steel bar. The high-pitched rasp of steel on the rough edge of the tub vibrated above the roar of the rest of the machinery. The long lathe slid into the hollow of the tub where its steel knives tore and cut into the wood. They dug a shallow groove in which the bottom was placed. Little square chips flew out, covering the hands and shoulders of the boss, and bouncing off his face. More screeching of sandpaper against wood when he pulled the spinning tub from the "chuck" with two pads of sandpaper.

A S HE tossed the tub on to my slide I walked over to it. Picking up the tub I put it in the press. Crack! The bottom was in the groove. Clink! The iron ring dropped around it. Creak! The staves were drawn together, and I slipped a bottom rim over the edge. Clink! The tub was out of the press and skidding across my desk toward the spinning driver plate. Crack! Clink! Creak! Clink! Another one slid against it. When the bench was filled I walked over and stood in front of the spinning plate. Neatly dropping a tub on the plate I drove the hoops down. More roller coaster-like noises. Slapping the side of the tub with a gloved hand I could feel the heat from friction with

the tub before it finally rocked off the plate. A deft flip of the wrist and it dropped into the growing stack, careened crazily for a moment, and then settled into the tub beneath.

SAME thing over and over. Never varying. Never ending. Yellow dust in your eyes, your hair, covering your whole body. Dusty smell of dry spruce hurting your nose, soaking into your clothes, smothering every other odor. Sweat streaming down your face, soaking your clothes, making dust against bare skin burn. Screech! sandbelt scratching against wood. Rip, steel knives tearing wood. Thank God! only a couple hours more.

Vignette

By Helen Clark

THE night looked in at my window; blue-black and starless it was, with a delicate tracery of leafless branches outlined like engraving on the sky.

Snow, dull-white and packed, blanketed the ground. The snow below and the soft sky above made the earth a silent, silent place.

In the distance the light of a train moved across the window, one tiny gleam of light in a limitless field of blue-black and white. The train moved on, leaving the night, blue-black and starless, still silent.
