

**Ambitious To Rise In Life And
Never By Luck: Russell Sage**

21-22

Orison Swett Marden

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III.

AMBITIOUS TO RISE IN LIFE — NEVER BY LUCK.

RUSSELL SAGE UPON OPPORTUNITY, INTEGRITY, PHYSICAL VIGOR.

Because this article has been extracted from a parent book, it may have non-pertinent text at the beginning or end of it.

FEW great fortunes have been acquired by one man, or within the limits of a single lifetime. The vast wealth of the Vanderbilts, the Astors, and many others has accumulated through several generations. It is seldom, indeed, that a fortune like that of Russell Sage is amassed by one man. For years the newspapers of the country have been filled with stories of his eccentricities.

When I called at the great banker's office I found it very hard to obtain an audience with Mr. Sage, even though I had an introduction to him. He has so often been the victim of cranks, and has so many callers at his office, that he has been obliged to deny himself to all alike. I found him seated at an old flat-topped desk, looking over the stock reports of the day, and I was surprised at the extreme simplicity of all his surroundings. The furnishings of the room looked as if they might have seen service before the Civil War, and, upon later inquiry, I learned that most of the chairs and the desk itself have been in use by Mr. Sage for more than twenty-five years. He has become so attached to them that he



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cannot discard them for more modern inventions. Mr. Sage is smooth-faced, and his hair is thin and gray. His clothes are fashioned in the style of thirty years ago, but of good material and well kept. His shoulders are bent with care and age, but his face has a good color, and a happy smile that betokens health and a peaceful mind.

"I have come to ask you to tell me the story of your life," I said, "for I am sure it must be of great interest."

Mr. Sage smiled. "I don't know about its being of interest. It is very simple and commonplace to me. You know I began as a grocery clerk, in a country town. That is a very humble beginning, I'm sure. I received a dollar a week for working from early morning until late at night, but I was well satisfied with my lot, because I knew that it was bound to lead to better things. So I worked my very best, and saved my wages, which were slowly increased as I went along, and finally I had enough money to start a little store for myself. When I was twenty-one years old I had a store of my own, and I made a success of it."

"But how did you happen to come to New York?" I asked.

"Oh, I was ambitious," laughed Mr. Sage. "Like most boys, I thought there was no other place like a city for success, and I finally sold my country store when I was still very young, and came to New York. I started in as office boy, at very low wages, and from that day on I worked myself up and up, until I finally became a financier on my own account. It took a long time, though. It was not all accomplished in a day; though when I came to New York I expected to be rich in two or three years. I was very much like other boys, you see. They all expect to get rich in a day."

"But some of them never get rich," I said.

"Well, it's their own fault if they do not succeed," said the financier. "Surely, every one has as good a chance as I had. I don't think there could be a poorer opportunity for a boy to rise. The trouble is that most of them are not very anxious to rise. If they find themselves wealthy some morning they are glad, of course; but they are not willing to work, and make themselves rich."

"Some say that it is all luck," I ventured to suggest.

"Oh, pshaw!" said Mr. Sage, with great disgust. "There's no such thing as luck. I'm sure there was none of it about my career. I know just how I earned every penny, and the reason for it, and I never got anything I did n't work for. I never knew any one to obtain lasting wealth without lots of hard work."

"Do you think there are as good opportunities for getting rich to-day as there were thirty years ago, or when you made your start, Mr. Sage?"

"Undoubtedly. I think there are even greater opportunities, for new industries are being established all the time, and there are broader fields to work in. But then, the old fields of business are not overworked, by any means. I always say that there is room for good men anywhere and at any time. I don't think there can ever be too many of them. It is true that there are many applicants for every place in New York, but if I were unable to get a place in an Eastern city I should go West, for there are great opportunities there for every one."

"People say, though, that the West is not what it is supposed to be," I remarked.

"Yes, there are always pessimists," said Mr. Sage. "The people who say the West has no opportunities are the same persons who used to call it foolish for any young man to come to New York. When I decided to

come here, I was told on every side that I would regret my action; but I never have. Some people never see opportunities in anything, and they never get along. I did not see any very great opportunity ahead of me when I came to New York, but I knew that if I had a chance I could make one. I knew that there are always openings for energetic, hard-working fellows, and I was right."

"Of course, you believe that strict honesty is essential to success, Mr. Sage? I've heard many people say that honesty does n't pay, especially in Wall street."

"That is a foolish question," said the financier. "It is absurd to imagine that it pays to be dishonest, whatever your business or profession. Do you suppose if I had been dishonest in any dealings when I started out, that I would be worth anything to-day?"

"What do you think of the chances for country boys in a great city like New York to-day, Mr. Sage?"

"I think they are as great as ever. Employers are on the lookout for bright young men, and I believe that they would prefer that they come from the country, provided there is no danger of their becoming dissipated. I think that is the only thing men have against country fellows, and there are many things in their favor. I think an earnest, ambitious, hard-working boy from the country has a splendid chance of becoming somebody. There are much greater opportunities for him to exercise his good qualities, and the reward of his enterprise is much larger. The same energetic labor that would make a man worth twenty-five thousand dollars in a small town would be very likely to make him worth a hundred thousand or so in a great city, and all on account of the wider field."

"What, Mr. Sage, are the essentials of success?"

"The essentials to success, in my opinion, are just

three: honesty, industry, and economy.] Any young man, amid existing opportunities, has a chance of becoming a millionaire."

"To what do you owe your wonderful vitality?" I asked. Mr. Sage smiled, before answering me.

"I never smoke, I never drink any liquors, I retire early, and get up early, and take care of myself in every possible way," he said. "Do n't you think I ought to be healthy? I have always taken care of myself, and I think I've proved that hard work is not bad for one's health. In fact, I think that work is the best thing I know of for improving a man's constitution, for it makes a good appetite, and encourages digestion. It is not work that ruins so many men. It's the wine they drink, and the late hours they keep, and their general dissipation. I expect to be at my desk for many years to come, and just because I've taken good care of myself."

"You ask me why I don't stop work. I'll do it if you will answer me one question: 'What else can I do that will do as much good and keep me as well?' Well, you can't answer it; nobody can."