Reminiscences of Waldorf-Astoria’s Proprietor, Who Rose from the Kitchen to be the Most Famous Hotel Man in the World

By A. S. Crockett.

LOQUENT tribute to the late George Boldt has been paid by high and low. Stress has been laid upon him not only as a great hotel keeper and business man, but as a citizen. It may be permissible here to record that he enjoyed his friendship over a dozen years, and association, for over a dozen years, even while working with him in a confidential capacity, to tell of the man that his intimate friends and associates knew.

Picture an office, small, but well furnished, open like a library, filled with a bookcase and a desk.

This is the story of how Boldt made his fortune.

He was a plain man, without much education, but with a mind that was always on the move. He was always thinking of new ways to make money, and he was always successful.

When dancing became popular Mr. Boldt tried to do his part. He did not at first realize the force of the craze. He yielded gracefully and introduced dancing in the Grill Room when he found that older patrons of the hotel wanted a place near at hand where their sons and daughters could enjoy dancing amid proper surroundings.

He had no regular hours for work. He worked when in the “jungle” for hours in the morning. He was always tremendously interested in his morning mail. Then, if anything interrupted, he would dictate rapidly for an hour or two.

When the Mayor’s Committee wished to give the dinner to President Wilson at the recent illumination of the Statue of Liberty it was found that the Grill Room of the Waldorf-Astoria had been rented by a charitable organization that for many years had held its banquet on the same date. The women in charge did not wish to cancel their lease. Once persuaded to them. They had rented boxes and collected the money for them.

The situation was put up to Mr. Boldt. Some of the women were asked to talk over the matter. Mr. Boldt led them to the Grill Room and the Oak Room, and in my presence offered them the two big rooms free if they would care to give up the ballroom, which they had at the usual high rental fee.

"Of course I would not think of urging you to give up the Grill Room. It is a matter I leave entirely in your hands," said Mr. Boldt, after displaying the advantages the other location might have in attracting patrons. Suddenly he turned to me and grabbed at my arm, and I felt his whole weight. It was the first indication I had that Mr. Boldt was not up to his usual form. He excused himself and said he was too tired to move.

The women apparently had not realized that he was hardly able to stand. They were turning over the proposition. In a short time they ascertained that they would get hold of the other members of their committee as soon as possible and they thought that, under the circumstances, they would be willing to make the exchange. He knew how to make such an exchange attractive.

It is not violating confidence new to men that there is more than one young man in the United States who, struggling for the means of obtaining a college education, saw the way open through Mr. Boldt. Often he has proffered such funds directly. But more frequently he has preferred to render his aid indirectly, supplying a third person with funds to lend a deserving young man, with the proviso that the recipient of the loan might not know where it originated. Many he has assisted to obtain a musical education.

Mr. Boldt was devoted to his family, and some of his happiest hours were those when he had his three granddaughters in his library and there was a party on. It might be illustrative of the human side of Mr. Boldt, too, how, on seeing Mr. "Buster Brown." Buster was a water sport that had been much liked by the late Mrs. Boldt, and when she died he attached himself to her husband. The man and the dog were inseparable when they were in the Thousand Islands or when the two were in New York, and Buster always slept on the foot of Mr. Boldt's bed.

He lived to the ripe age of 68, did Buster, and when that had gone he would come in my morning car and talk about "over the river," where, during the winter months, he would often walk eight or ten miles the journey of the gamblers who were either turning in lustful into women's affairs. Mr. Boldt wanted an island here or a canal there. Then they would be turned loose to New York. Buster would be incomprehensible until his return.

There never was a man for the past. He lived in the present and dreamed of the future. The story of his having started his career in New York as a waiter I have heard. It has been repeated so vividly that it should make the little hotel I have to tell of more.

Several months ago I first saw the waiter story in a magazine. I brought it to Mr. Boldt's attention. He laughed. "No, no; what's the use?" was the incident was apparently dozed.

Then a more recent article appeared, containing the same story. It was on a Saturday, three weeks ago. I did not see Mr. Boldt. Let me tell how Mr. Boldt was so often a subject of wonder. Just before a recent concert there was a rehearsal in the Grand Ballroom and Mr. Boldt was present to criticisms. At a point in the rendition of "The Waldorf Singer," Mr. Boldt suddenly frowned and shook his head. Then the orchestra was over his command, director, Joseph Knecht.

"You should not have passed at such-and-such a point," he said.

And Mr. Knecht exclaimed that the pause had resulted unintentionally.

Mr. Boldt played the piano, and would often improvises melodies for his grandchildren. Infrequently some of the members of his staff have heard him sing, and they testify that he had really a good lyric tenor voice.

His favorite diversion was solitaire, in which he knew many varieties. He used to play silently, without the sight of the cards, while he resolved important problems in his business career. An intense fondness for the England language.

He was open to suggestions about books. Most of the books that he read at night, was in the nature of study. Before his last illness he was on the point of finishing up the English language.

The extent of his vocabulary and his sense of discrimination in the use of English words have frequently made one imagine that he was familiar with a dictionary.

It is said that during many years only one man called Mr. Boldt by his first name—Mr. George Hamilton, the well-known physician and a lifelong friend. To him Mr. Boldt sometimes felt the use of telling his troubles and plans with a friend, as the physician who was always more of his confident. At times he used to talk with employees and get their viewpoint. He used to say that sometimes he learned something from his employees. But no one could misread the effect of crystallizing his views.

Mr. Boldt was the first to use flowers as a means of decoration. Each season he spent a fortune putting roses on tables and window sills and between the windows throughout the house.

He had no superintendents, as far as I know. It was reported that Friday was a lucky day with him, and never missed it. If a Friday fell "out," he had conducted a philosophic discussion. Mr. Boldt's demand caused him to cancel an engagement to which he was looking forward, but no additional comment was made. After "I have learned not to give a disappoint-