

## **Does Sowing and Reaping Always Work?**

A principle of the universe is sowing and reaping. It operates in every area of life. Farmers sow seed to reap a harvest. Students sow time studying to reap knowledge. Companies sow capital into R&D to reap products to sell. Parents sow truth and righteousness into children to reap mature functioning adults. Churches sow Biblical truth to reap growing healthy congregations. Government seeks to sow well conceived laws administered with justice to reap prosperous societies. Despite this ubiquitous reality, from time to time situations occur where sowing and reaping doesn't appear to work. Or does it? Henry Parsons Crowell experienced such a situation.

In 1882, Henry, age 27, bought a failing oat mill from his uncle. Over the past decade, Henry had fought TB, the disease that took his own father's life and nearly took Henry's. In those days, the only treatment protocol for TB was to send afflicted people to live outdoors in moderate climates. While convalescing in his home in Cleveland, he spent hours reading and meditating on scripture. Through this fellowship with God, Henry became convinced that God was going to heal him in 7 years. Following the doctor's prescription, Henry spent 7 years living out west in a moderate climate and was healed. Prior to his father's death in 1864, his father wisely set up an education trust with \$27,000 of assets for Henry. As a teenager, Henry was diagnosed with the same fatal disease that killed his father. As a result, Henry was not able to attend eastern schools as his father had hoped, so the trust money was used to enable Henry to live out west in the moderate climate prescribed by the doctor. During his time out west, Henry, bored of exploring, turned to business activities. The process of buying, operating, and selling, several successful ventures revealed to him his knack for business, just like his father.

At the age of 9, Henry accepted Christ as his savior. The event that triggered his decision was his father's death. As Henry sought solace and perspective on this tragedy, he found it in Christ. A few years later, Henry was touched by the redoubtable evangelist D. L. Moody. In a meeting in Cleveland, the only time that Henry ever personally saw D. L. Moody, he heard these words, "The world has yet to see what God can do with and for

and through and in a man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him.”<sup>1</sup> These words gripped Henry. After a long time of meditation and pondering, Henry committed to being that man whose life would be fully consecrated to the Lord.

So in 1882, Henry, without a formal education, but healed by God and armed with spiritual perspective and a heart to be in business, took over the Quaker Mill with the conviction that God led him to the business<sup>2</sup>. It was his belief that his involvement in the business was important and part of a greater stewardship with which he was entrusted.

The early years of the business were difficult. Competition was fierce in the highly fragmented business of providing oat meal for human consumption. Though Henry recognized the nutritional quality and low cost of the food, the buying public didn't. Oats were viewed largely as animal food. To grow the nascent business, Henry knew that he needed more muscle to change the consumer perspective than what his company could provide. Observing the success that other industries experienced with joint ventures, Henry approached a number of his competitors with the proposition of forming an Association of millers. In 1885, twenty small millers in the Cleveland area joined together under Henry's leadership to form the Oatmeal Millers Association of Ohio. Henry wrote the Association charter which focused on high ethical standards and delivering quality products at competitive prices. Noticeably absent from the Association was the largest miller in the area, Ferdinand Schumacher, a pugnacious German who was a generation older than Henry. Schumacher was extended an opportunity to join the Association, but ungraciously declined. Henry's youth and progressive ways did not sit well with the stubborn German who believed that the old ways were just fine. On the other hand, Henry was progressive, always seeking to find new solutions to business problems. For example, oatmeal was typically sold to consumers in large barrels, which were subject to insects and vermin. Henry proposed to package oatmeal in convenient vermin-proof boxes with bright colored labels. He also aggressively advertised seeking to help consumers see the value of oatmeal, and in particular the oatmeal produced by the Association members. Schumacher saw no reason to either adopt Henry's proposed packaging practice or his advertising strategy. He viewed such progressive ideas as a

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<sup>1</sup> *Cereal Tycoon* by Joe Musser, Moody Press, 1997, pg 38.

<sup>2</sup> IBID, pg 94.

wasteful use of resources. Nevertheless, the Association went forward without Schumacher adopting a common trade name, pricing and marketing that would enable the millers to more effectively compete.

In March of the following year, Schumacher's Jumbo Mill in Akron burned. Henry, the ever gracious man, called on Schumacher to convey his condolences. In the course of their conversation, Henry discovered that Schumacher did not have insurance to cover the loss. Perceiving that Schumacher needed help, Henry extended another invitation to join the Association. This time Schumacher saw an opportunity. If he could gain control of the Association, he could rebuild his empire quickly. Negotiations began. At the same time, Schumacher quietly acquired Akron Milling Company which had little business but leading edge production technology. Since the Association was an alliance of manufacturers, control was, to some degree, proportional to production capacity. With Schumacher's acquisition, he suddenly had more production capacity than most of the other millers combined, which enabled him to immediately gain an equal standing with Henry in managing the Association.

A year later, some of the millers dropped out of the Association. The seven largest millers reorganized the Association under the name Consolidated Oatmeal Company. Henry was President, his close friend Robert Stuart was VP, and Schumacher was treasurer. Schumacher's contempt for Henry and his marketing practices continued. In 1888, the Association moved to Chicago. Then in 1891, with Henry's encouragement, the members of the Association merged their assets into a new company called the American Cereal Company. Schumacher bargained hard to receive value for both his tangible and intangible assets and ended up with 50% of the stock. Henry received 12% and his friend Robert Stuart received 12%. Now with voting control, Schumacher voted himself president. Henry was made VP and general manager, and Stuart became secretary-treasurer. The only reason that Henry and Robert were made officers is because of their reputation and standing with the other shareholders. Everyone knew that the company would not exist without Henry and Robert.

Robert Stuart served as treasurer and financial officer for the company. All went well for several years. The company made money in a very depressed economy, but Schumacher was determined to find a way to get rid of Henry and Robert. Finally an

opportunity came. In 1897, the company experienced its first quarterly loss. The board of directors was stunned. Schumacher saw his opportunity. He sold the board on firing Stuart. Henry was crushed. He lost his close friend and business partner. Now secretly Schumacher began to plot the ouster of Henry. Soon thereafter, Schumacher gained the support from the board to fire Henry. As a result, Jim Andrews, Henry's production genius and close friend quit, as well. Now the three men who built the Association and then the company were gone leaving Schumacher to do as he wished, and he did loading the company payroll with family and personal cronies. Schumacher also shaped the board of directors to suit his purposes including adding a banker by the name of Will Christy. It was Schumacher's intention to elevate his standing with bankers by adding Christy.

Losing control of the company that he built and felt called to was devastating to Henry. What was he to do? Many people would have sought revenge. After all, what happened to Henry was an injustice, a travesty. Surely many options were recommended to Henry. He could start a public relations campaign against Schumacher. Or Henry could buy another company and seek to destroy American Cereal or he could sue Schumacher or Henry could just quit. He chose none of these; instead he sought God in prayer. The question was what was God's will? Henry reflected on many things. God gave him a father with the foresight to setup a trust which provided the needed funds for Henry's healing. God also gave him his father's business acumen, placed him in the oatmeal business, and enabled him to build both the Association and American Cereal with great success. Now seemingly outside of his destiny, what was Henry to do? With Robert, who was now part of another company, Henry searched for a legal and ethical way to unseat Schumacher, but without success. The only thing they knew to do was to buy any available stock, which they did. But the best case scenario was that they would buy all the outstanding shares, except for Schumacher's, which would give them 50% of the company and a standoff with Schumacher. They couldn't see the advantage of doing this, but felt they were suppose to buy as much stock as they could anyway.

During this same time, unbeknownst to Henry and Schumacher, Will Christy became very aware of Schumacher's ineptness. He realized the company's success was due to Henry's marketing prowess, Jim Andrews' production proficiency, and Robert

Stuart's financial acumen. Christy knew that some how, he had to get the triumvirate back managing the company.

Secretly, Christy began to meet with investors. The investors were convinced that Christy was right and began to buy stock in the company. Now with Henry, Robert, and Christy's investors buying stock, the price went from \$40 to \$90 a share. Not knowing Christy's perspective, Schumacher believed that Christy's investors would be loyal to him; hence, he viewed the run up in the stock price as an opportunity to sell and payoff some lingering debt from his prior business venture. The sale reduced Schumacher's holdings to around 40%, but he was not concerned about losing control.

The next shareholder meeting was a rude awakening for Schumacher. Christy's agenda came forth. Schumacher was removed from office and Henry and Robert were reinstated. Schumacher was crushed and decided to retire. But the company was back in the hands of the men that built it and had the vision to carry it into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The lesson to learn from the experience is that, in the end, trusting and obeying God brings blessing even though during the process doesn't look like it. Proverbs 29:16 (NIV) says, "When the wicked thrive, so does sin, but the righteous will see their downfall." The righteous did see the downfall of wicked. Schumacher's contempt and disdain for Henry and his friends was repaid not by Henry but by the Lord. Henry had graciously extended a hand of mercy to Schumacher when he was devastated by the fire. Schumacher did not respond in kind, but sought to attack Henry at every opportunity. Henry responded by sowing the good seed of prayer and dependence upon God to fight the battles. He always believed that God led him to the Quaker Mill business. It was his conviction that his involvement was important and part of a greater stewardship with which he was entrusted. Despite this belief, there were surely days when Henry wondered if God forgot him, but the faithful good God of the universe never did. Only God could have orchestrated the events so that Schumacher's own friend, Will Christy, would see the reality of Schumacher's inability to lead the company. Furthermore, Christy saw that the Henry, Robert, and Jim were the men that could and would lead the company to success. Henry could never have orchestrated these events. It required the intervention of the creator of the universe, who fought the battle for Henry, to restore him

to his place. Henry's only role in this process was to sow seeds of faith in God through prayer and righteous living. It is God's role to provide the harvest in His time and way.

Sowing and reaping is a universal principle. It always works, even when it doesn't look like its working. Just as there is a time lag between when a farmer sows seed and when the germinated seed breaks through the ground, so it is with much of life. Henry planted much good seed, and, in the end, reaped a wonderful harvest. But he never failed to tend to his crop, even when he didn't know what was going to happen. He faithfully prayed and trusted God to make provision for him and fight his battle. Never was he vindictive; nor did he use manipulation and deception to cast a bad light on Schumacher. Rather, he chose to seek God for guidance and direction. He did every righteous thing he knew to do and was an example of Proverbs 21:31 (NIV), which says, "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD." Henry Parsons Crowell, the founder of the Quaker Oats Company, prepared the horse well by sowing the good seed of righteousness and waited to reap God's victory.

Gerald R. Chester, Ph.D.

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