

# How to Become a Millionaire

By **BOGGER ARMSTRONG**

The traditional or Horatio Alger type of success story is in the museum now, with "Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model" and Elsie Dinsmore—good only for a burlesque. The death-of-a-rich-uncle method has obvious practical drawbacks. The Single-Tax formula, "Buy a piece of land and sit on it," certainly worked in the past, but could not be depended on for quick results; the big profits have usually gone to the grandchildren. Moreover, census experts predict a stationary population; if they are right, a powerful cause of increasing land values will vanish. The Marxist explanation, which makes riches the fruit of capitalist exploitation, really explains nothing; it does not tell us how to become capitalists in the first place. What I want to know is how I, starting from scratch, can make millions, and that within a reasonably short time; I have as much philo-progenitiveness as the next man, but I like to have a good time too.

There are, of course, books on the subject. Some of these will impart 10,000 money-making schemes to the reader; you can consult them at the library, and much good may they do you. Others are case histories—studies of how people have made fortunes in the past. These are a little more practical, because we assume that what has been done once can always be done again. Meyer's "The Great American Fortunes" belongs in this class; so does "The Astors" by Harvey O'Connor. Ida Tarbell's study of the Rockefeller fortune might be included. And there is a new book, "Men of Wealth" by John T. Flynn, who writes for Collier's and the Scripps-Howard newspapers. (Simon & Schuster, publishers; price \$3.75, and worth it.) Mr. Flynn has already written a biography of Rockefeller; in his new book he traces the origin of a round dozen assorted fortunes, and comments briefly on a good many more. On the basis of the evidence he provides, we may begin to formulate rules for getting rich.

In the first place, if you want to make millions, you must have certain personal qualifications. No easy-going man ever did it. If you aren't brimming with energy, resign yourself to the simple life. You must be greedy for money, or greedy for power, and your greed must be a driving passion which translates itself continuously into dynamic action.

You must be shrewd, especially in sizing up people. You don't need much intelligence, in the sense that a research scientist needs it; brains can be bought. But you do need the quick wit of the fencer, so as to spot advantages and seize them quickly. You need a certain kind of courage—the courage to back your own judgments with all you've got, come hell and high water.

And you must be able, upon occasion, to revise your judgments suddenly, and switch horses in the middle of a raging torrent, if necessary.

You would do well to go easy on the scruples. It is just possible for a scrupulous man to get rich, but the man who will make a million, with scruples, could make fifty million without them. Worse: if you pamper your conscience too much, you may make your fortune only to lose it. There are several standard procedures, any one of which will get results. You can, if you like, lead a moral double life, in which Mr. Hyde makes the money and Dr. Jekyll spends it. It is possible, with a little practice, to make this division as easily and expertly as an amoeba. Or you can sell yourself to yourself—rationalize your actions until they look like benefactions. Remember that the torturers of the Spanish Inquisition had, in theory, no other object than to save the souls of their clients. Finally, you can shift the burden of your scruples to other shoulders; you can buy legislators who will legalize your crimes, preachers who will sanctify your sins, and biographers who will whitewash your career and present you with immortality and a halo.

Given these qualities, then, you have several alternative roads to riches.

(1) You can gamble. This has the advantage that anybody can do it. Hit the numbers with a borrowed penny, continue with a successful three-horse parlay, and you can start playing the stock market. This method has never worked yet, but it might some time.

(2) You can become a landowner and live off your tenants. We have already noticed the drawbacks of this method. It is most useful, not as a primary money-making device, but as an auxiliary scheme, in conjunction with Methods 3 and 4.

(3) You can climb aboard a boat that is going places fast before anybody else wakes up. In order to make this work, you need a little luck and a lot of *carpe diem, fugit hora*. It can be done; Owen did it; so did Vanderbilt; so did Ford. But the chances are that you will do little more than get a good start by this method; in order to consolidate your gains, make them stick, and increase your accumulation, you will do well to consider No. 2 and especially No. 4.

(4) This is the best system. It is what Oppenheimer calls "the political means." You need a little luck at the beginning. Find somebody with a lot of power and not much energy or common sense. In practice, you need only look for someone with a lot of power. Scratch his back expertly and he will scratch yours. Let him tap your ability and he will let you use his power. In time, you will be thinking for him, and, of course, for yourself

too. You can think for him first if you want to, but you'll get rich faster the other way.

Let's turn to Flynn's book and see how his specimens worked these four systems. Flynn starts with Jacob Fugger, who lived when Columbus was discovering America. He used Method 4, although Flynn is a little confused on the subject. Flynn says on Page 10 that "the foundation of the Fugger fortune, of course, was merchandising," and this is true in the literal sense—Fugger started as a merchant. He didn't start cold; the business was built up by his father. On Page 34 we find that Fugger "obtained from the debt-ridden royal spendthrift those invaluable copper and silver monopolies that became the chief source of his great fortune." The angel was the Emperor Maximilian.

John Law, the Scotsman who engineered the great Mississippi Bubble scheme, was the original Ponzi. His system contained elements of 1 and 3, but mostly 4. He sold his idea for easy money to the bankrupt French Government which succeeded Louis the Fourteenth, called the Grand Monarch by most, but not by Flynn. Mark Twain called him Louis the Putrid. Law's gigantic stock-flotation scheme brought him temporary power,



but in a way Law is out of place in this list; his riches were mostly paper, and he died broke.

The Rothschilds, who come third on Flynn's list, used Method 4, with the additional advantage of finding noble nitwits on both sides of a conflict, and playing them against each other, to the advantage of the five Rothschild brothers. Anselm Rothschild, in Frankfort, was the friend of Napoleon's deputy Dalberg. Nathan Rothschild in London was in the service of the British crown. They couldn't lose. But Flynn admits his inability really to account for the rise of the Rothschilds in twenty years from nobodies to the greatest financial power in the world. The Rothschilds predicated their every act on the axiom that every man has his price. According to Flynn, they were never proved mistaken. When they had made their money they bought space in an encyclopedia for an imaginary biography; indeed, they subsidized such a quantity of fiction about themselves, and veiled the details of their activities so closely, that their full story will probably remain a mystery. One thing we do know: they attached themselves to all the rulers of Europe, and used the power of each to further their own designs.

Robert Owen and Cornelius Vanderbilt both started

with Method 3—Owen by seizing the opportunities of the new factory system before others were fully aware of them, Vanderbilt by doing the same thing in steamboat transportation. But Owen had scruples. He tried to reform the system which had made him rich without understanding what made it tick. He died broke, like Law. Vanderbilt, on the other hand, switched to Method 4 as soon as he had a good start. He made a modest fortune out of steamboating, without any special legal protection in the United States and only a little in Nicaragua. In order to engineer his vast railroad deals, he had to buy the New York Legislature and make a deal with Boss Tweed. Vanderbilt was one of the most profane, foul-mouthed, violent barbarians of the American pirate kings, but, according to legend, his last words were, "I'll never let go my trust in Jesus."

The Mitsui fortune of Japan was not made "without well-arranged, carefully nurtured, and well-oiled contacts with the proper government authorities." Cecil Rhodes the Empire Builder, Basil Zaharoff the munitions salesman, Mark Hanna the politician, Rockefeller and Morgan—none of these varied the formula much. Rockefeller and Morgan both were able to spot loopholes in the law and twist it in their favor. In the last analysis, their fortunes rested on a political foundation.

Mr. Flynn takes the position that landownership, which was formerly the sole source of great wealth, has become unimportant nowadays, and that most of our present day fortunes came from "industrial" or "commercial" or "financial" sources. It depends on your definition of landownership. Men of today have found substitutes for deeds and red ribbon and sealing wax; but the reality underneath is the same. Fugger did not need legal title to his copper mines; privileged access, protected by the government, was enough. The Rothschilds were not a landed family; but they contrived to secure a slice of the taxing power of many nations. The New York Legislature imposed upon every citizen of the State the condition that he divvy up with Commodore Vanderbilt; what more could Vanderbilt have done if he had been fee simple owner of the land of New York?

Exploitation takes many forms. Once it consisted of the ownership of men, and we called it slavery. It still consists in large measure of the ownership of land, and we call it landlordism. But it has often taken the form of the ownership of state-granted privileges; for this we may, if we like, invent a new name. It is still landownership, because its essence is control over the territory in which people live and work and trade. It is still man-ownership, because its essential result is the complete or partial enslavement of the population. "No man working with his hands," writes Mr. Flynn, "upon materials of his own possession and creation, with tools of his own fabrication, can produce enough to make himself wealthy." With that sentiment, on the basis of his own evidence, there can be no disagreement.