

MARVIN HUGHITT—BUILDER

The Story of the Country Lad Who Climbed from the Obscurity of a Wayside Telegraph Office to the Highest Pinnacle of Railway Success—and of the Man, Who, After Fifty Years of Continuous Service in the Building of One of the World's Greatest Railway Systems, Is Still Planning and Working for Greater Achievement

By WILLIAM FLEMING FRENCH

ACCOMPLISHMENT, real accomplishment," said Theodore Roosevelt, "is more than the mere doing of things. It is the performance of duty in a way that will act as an inspiration to others, the lighting of the way for those who are to follow. It is the leaving of 'foot-prints in the sands of time.'"

Marvin Hughitt has written a record of his achievement—written it in steel across the heart of a nation. He has molded and built two hundred small railroads into one great system, and in doing it has written an indelible lesson in the hearts of the thousands who have toiled with him. The personal story of his half century of service is the pride of the Chicago and North Western Railway, and will long be used as a primer for those new in the great game of railroading.

For Marvin Hughitt is a leader—a doer, and the record of his achievements has for many years been an inspiration to those around him. The story of so remarkable a success as his will ever be a stimulant to the ambitions of others.

Like so many of the other big men of America this veteran railroader was not endowed with a silver spoon at birth. He has learned his lessons in the hard school of experience, by climbing every rung of the railroad ladder.

Born on a small farm in Genoa township, Cayuga County, New York, he shared the lot of the average country boy, and at fifteen was given the choice of settling into farm work in earnest or striking out for himself.

Choosing the latter he cast his lot with Professor Morse and his fascinating telegraph instrument. Hence the pilgrimage to Auburn, high in hopes and low in funds, to master the intricacies of the elusive clicker.

There was no royal road to telegraphy those days. Anything learned was learned without help, by individual digging and experimenting. But young

Hughitt persisted and in November, 1852, he was appointed telegraph operator for the New York, Albany and Buffalo Telegraph Company at Albany, New York.

Naturally a telegraph operator in those days was more or less the center of attraction and it is not surprising that the bright young country lad with the desire to please should catch the eye of no less a person than Judge John D. Caton of Illinois.

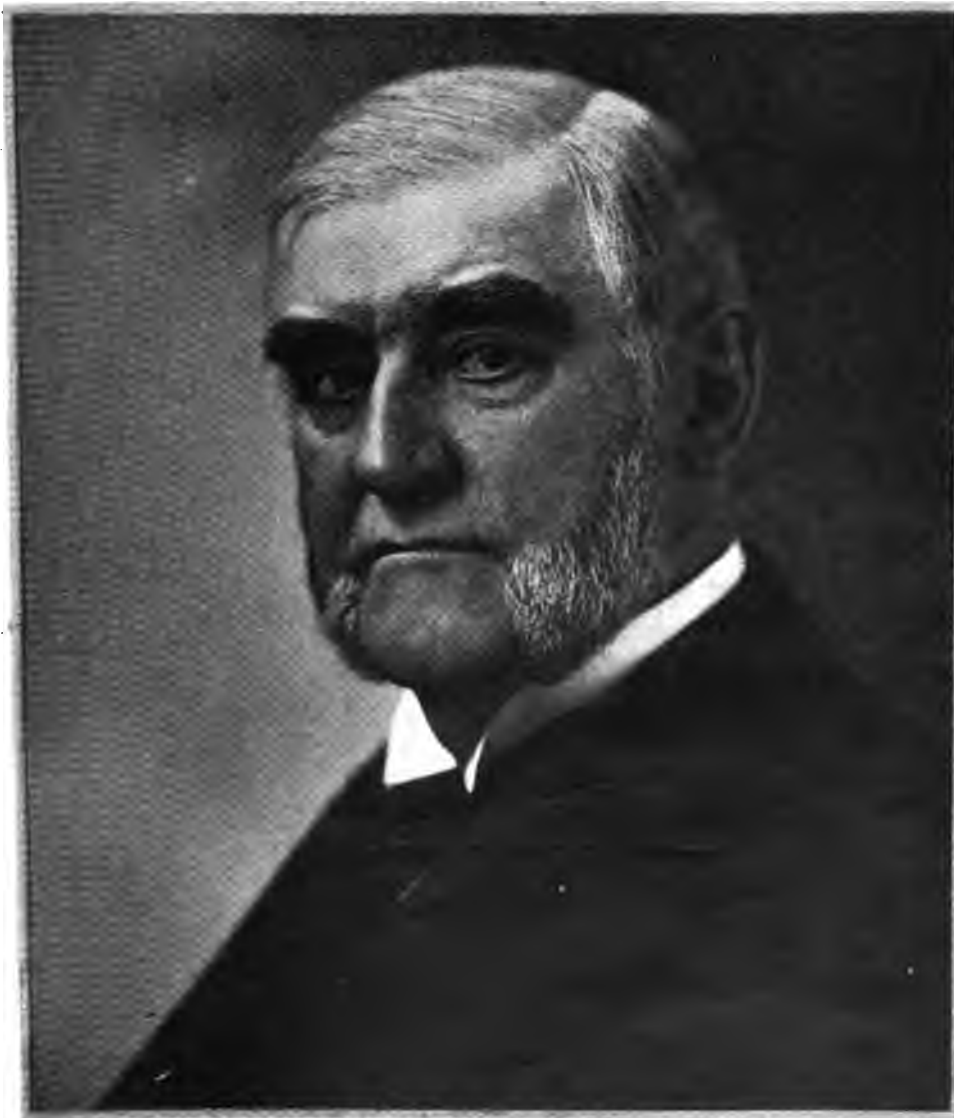
The manner in which young Hughitt handled a transaction involving the dispatching of some telegrams for Judge Caton pleased the famous jurist so much that when he got control of the Illinois and Missouri Telegraph Company and decided to open a Chicago office he promptly enlisted the services of the boy in Albany.

Thus it was that in 1854 Marvin Hughitt, then a boy of seventeen, became the first telegrapher in the West. Soon he was made superintendent of the Illinois and Missouri Telegraph Company—which company, by the way, long preceded the present Western Union.

The young man's ability to meet the ever-changing conditions and situations that arose in a pioneer telegraph office won the attention of the operating heads of the St. Louis, Alton and Chicago Railroad (now the Chicago and Alton) and he was offered the position of superintendent of telegraph, which embraced the position of train dispatcher.

Now in his own element, the railroad, young Hughitt's progress was more rapid. The Illinois Central bid for his services, making him trainmaster of the Southern Division of that road, with headquarters at Centralia, Illinois.

Here, in 1862, at the height of the Civil War, Marvin Hughitt, now twenty-five, first won national recognition. We consider a man of twenty-five little better than a boy now, but during his twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth years this young



MARVIN HUGHITT

At Eighty-five, Mr. Hughitt Is Still the Directing Genius of the Chicago & North Western, Which During Fifty Years of Service He Has Developed into One of the World's Greatest Railway Systems

telegrapher made history, and in doing it became intimately acquainted with the greatest figures in American history—Abraham Lincoln, General Grant, William H. Seward, Lincoln's secretary of state, and Secretary of War Stanton.

The fortunes of war were not favoring the armies of the North and Lincoln ordered the Illinois Central Railroad requisitioned for government service.

Troops and supplies must be rushed southward without a second's delay. Already troops were being mobilized at St. Louis. They must be moved to Cairo.

The government's needs were imperative—they must be given the right of way over all else. The railroad officials understood that. But they understood something else, too—that to abandon their own service, to tie their own trains

up indefinitely would be almost suicidal. How could they keep their own trains moving and at the same time meet the needs of the government?

"Young Hughitt" was the only answer. He was an expert train dispatcher and at the same time in charge of transportation on that division. He could oversee the work.

But when they called on Hughitt he did not quite agree with them. All his life he had had a firm-rooted conviction that the way to get a thing done was to be on the job. So he figured he would be on the job this time. Also he did not want to share the responsibility with anyone else.

So he sat down at the train dispatcher's table and started the trains rolling. For thirty-six hours he kept them rolling—traveling at a rate faster than the government dared hope for, so much faster, in fact, that when he had finished a continuous shift of thirty-six hours, moving all troops from St. Louis to Cairo, the War Department changed its plans and asked him if he could keep them moving—on to Virginia, Kentucky, the end of the railroad.

He could, and he did—adding another thirty-six hours to the stretch he had just put in at the dispatcher's table. But the end of those seventy-two hours saw a remarkable achievement: the troop and supply trains all safely delivered and the regular schedule of the Illinois Central maintained as well. Not a train was abandoned, and young Hughitt kept them on time, too.

And so he kept on the job—a habit he has never overcome, as he is as much on the job today as he was fifty years ago. All his remarkable railroad career, in fact, is crowded with instances of his staying on the job, or personally handling the big problems of his system.

Service such as Hughitt had performed in Centralia could result in but one thing—promotion. As soon as the War Department indicated that his services dispatching troop trains were no longer necessary, he was called to Chicago, to the head offices of the Illinois Central as general superintendent.

But always a pioneer, the West again called to the constructive, building genius of this man and he left the Illinois Cen-

tral in 1870 to become assistant general manager of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway.

The Pullman Palace Car Company was then pioneering and, by reason of the development that lay before it, attracted Hughitt. In 1871 he was made general superintendent of this company.

But railroading itself, not telegraphy or car building, was his forte. That alone fascinated him.

At this time the Chicago and North Western Railroad was opening virgin territory, and having its problems doing it. Here was the sort of task to appeal to the pioneering instinct of the young railroader, and in 1872 he cast his fortunes with the new road, the first road to open the great territory of the West.

General superintendent at thirty-five and general manager before he was forty! The record of his official achievement from then on is listed as follows:

1876, General manager Chicago and North Western Railroad.

1877, Director Chicago and North Western Railroad.

1880, Vice president and general manager Chicago and North Western Railroad.

1882, President Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway.

1884, President Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railway.

1884, President Sioux City and Pacific Railway.

1887, President Chicago and North Western Railroad.

1890, Director Union Pacific Railroad.

1891, President Milwaukee, Lake Shore and Western Railway.

1904, Director Southern Pacific Co.

1907, Chairman of executive committee Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway.

1909, Director Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway.

1909, Director New York Central and Hudson River Railroad.

1909, Director Michigan Central Railroad.

1910, Director New York, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad.

1910, Chairman Chicago and North Western Railroad.

Today he is chairman of the board of



MARVIN HUGHITT'S PRIDE

The Chicago & North Western Passenger Terminal at Chicago, Built by Mr. Hughitt in 1911 at a Cost of \$23,000,000, One of the Finest Structures of Its Kind

one road, president of four others and director of seven roads.

So Mr. Hughitt is truly the pioneer railroad executive of the country, of the whole world, in fact, giving sixty-five years of his life to railroad service. During this time he has learned every phase of railroading, combining the qualities of operative ability, financial experience and administrative and executive genius into the great science of building. Understand, Marvin Hughitt is a builder—never a promoter, never a gambler.

The development of this man, like the development of his road, has been gradual and steady. Steadily, indomitably, both have plodded onward, never rushing forward with some fortunate coup and dropping back into difficulties with the ebb of fortune. Little by little the man won greatness and little by little his road grew in size and power.

From a rambling stretch of a little over eight hundred miles of road in 1852 to one of the world's greatest systems, with over ten thousand miles of road—that is the progress of the North Western under the Hughitt regime, and not one rod of it was built by gambling coups or by sensational promotion. Steadily onward day by day and mile by mile—that is the Hughitt slogan.

Blending more than two hundred roads into one system would seem to hold promise of thrilling stories of financial juggling—but it does not.

One of this remarkable pioneer's financial associates says: "Marvin Hughitt never plunges, never gambles. Everything must be slow and steady, must be certain and sure. He has ever been the restraining hand, and many of the younger of us have irked and fretted under his rule. But he is adamant. To oppose him is like trying to fight back the tide, or stay the hand of time.

"Many the time I wished my lot had been cast with a Harriman, a Gould or even a Lawson—but how well I have outgrown that feeling. Marvin Hughitt may have been a barrier before we hares of finance, but let me tell you he makes a wonderful harbor in times of stress.

"Sometimes we used to refer to him as 'Old Inevitable'—so sure, so certain was his progress. And today I like to think of him as the same staunch bulwark of strength, the same indomitable figure that moves ever forward—never hurrying, never hesitating—calmly setting the pace for a great system and its thousands of employes. And always I see him on the job, eternally watching details and guarding those about him from the sudden disasters that sweep railroads from prosperity to bankruptcy."

To describe this remarkable man more clearly than does this thumb-nail sketch of a now famous financier would prove a near impossible task.

Today at eighty-five he is a striking

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Marvin Hughitt—Builder

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figure of success: man-sized, straight of figure, powerful of shoulder and firm of face. Of stern stuff is Marvin Hughitt, the kind of a man who survives the grind of pioneering. Every gesture, every pose marks him as the man in power, the director of vast resources.

It does not require the fine eye of the character analyst to see in Marvin Hughitt's face the lines of determination, deeply etched by years of unremitting battle; the square jaw of the fighter and the clear eye of an easy conscience.

The man is the personification of his work—or is the work the expression of the man? Know one and you know the other. Far-sighted has Marvin Hughitt always been—yet conservative. No need to tell you he is not a gambler—you just know it. No need to tell you of an iron will—you sense it.

The man's personal appearance by itself sets him apart from the average business man. He is the "type" the movie loves to depict as the stern, iron-willed, scrupulously honest character who knows no compromise with wrong. And in many respects he is just that, except that he is most considerate of his subordinates and far from intolerant. But most assuredly he is of the old school—and those who serve him admire him for it.

Legal right does not mean moral right to Marvin Hughitt, and he has never permitted anyone associated with him to take advantage because the law allows. That is not the way modern business operates, but it is the way Marvin Hughitt has run his railroad, and he hasn't done such a bad job, either.

An example of this may be found in the expression of the claim agent who said: "Only once in all the years I was associated with the North Western was I criticized on a claim settlement—then because Mr. Hughitt did not think I had paid enough."

This is not an isolated case of Mr. Hughitt's insistence upon absolute justice, irrespective of what the law says. The records of the condemnation proceedings, whereby those property owners who attempted to hold up the great terminal improvement being made by the North Western system in Chicago were

compelled to sell their land, hold some interesting testimony as to Marvin Hughitt's idea of square dealing.

First of all Mr. Hughitt had the condemnation proceedings postponed in order to permit certain property owners to arrange their affairs so as to result in least inconvenience to them. Then, after the jury had set the amounts to be paid Mr. Hughitt had a private investigation conducted and concluded that the jury had not been liberal enough with the property owners. In almost every instance he ordered the amount the property owners claimed paid instead of that set by the court, adding more than a hundred thousand dollars to the cost of the land to the railroad, but winning the respect of the entire community, the good will of everyone and even greater loyalty from his own employes.

In the case of Eli Felsenthal, for instance, who had property at 67 Canal Street, the jury awarded \$62,000 and Mr. Hughitt ordered an additional fifteen thousand paid. Henry Brown was allowed \$79,000 for property at Madison and Canal Streets that the jury valued at \$64,000. Mr. Hughitt ordered an additional \$40,000 paid to the Pennoyer Teaming Company for property the jury valued at \$145,000.

A score more of such illustrations might be cited—to point out how this pioneer railroader carries his conscience to work with him every day. He does not keep it in the closet for exclusive Sunday display.

Mr. Hughitt will pay what he thinks a thing is worth, will give full value, but not a cent more. The generally accepted "good business" practice of paying graft "to keep things moving" never did appeal to this conservative individual, for "graft" is "graft" to him, no matter how attractive its form or guise.

And this fact accounts for the building miracle that has remained a mystery to Chicagoans for years. How did Mr. Hughitt complete the most important improvement in the history of Chicago without paying graft, having strikes, getting mixed in politics or other municipal tangles?

"The reason he didn't, I guess," con-

fided a local politician, "is because he was just too big. He wouldn't play the game with the boys. He wanted to build a big terminal and he didn't want any fooling. If you've ever met Hughitt you'll know that he doesn't take kindly to horse-play. And you can't bluff him, either—take that from me! I've a friend who tried it. Well, he's satisfied! I don't know if the old gentleman is a poker-player or not, but his middle name is show-down. Believe me, it is! I know, and I know I know."

It is true that Marvin Hughitt is regarded with respect not untinged by fear. That fear, those closest to him claim, is unfounded—but it is there. There is no denying it. For this pioneer is a formidable figure, and not above being frank at times. When a man of eighty-five can dominate the way Marvin Hughitt dominates today you can wager there is enough iron in his make-up to justify a little timidity at least.

No one ever dreams of questioning the absolute sincerity and inherent kindness of the man, and there is real reason for the apparently blind loyalty that the men award him. He has earned it; he demands it and he gets it.

Even so informal a thing as a written sketch of Marvin Hughitt could not be drawn without a few bold, hard strokes. For Hughitt is a man's man of the two-fisted, hard hitting type. He is blunt, but never discourteous, thrifty with his words and frankly set on having things done his way, but he is sure to make certain his way is right before taking his stand.

A pioneer necessarily must be progressive, and the chairman of the North Western has given ample proof that he is able to keep step in the march for better, bigger things. In fact, he likes to set the pace. His was the first road in the West to elevate its tracks, the first road in the country to install an adequate system of safety devices, the first in the West to double track and the first of the thirty-six roads entering Chicago to grasp the possibilities of the Windy City and to build to meet its requirements. And behind every one of these movements looms the figure of Hughitt, personally directing the work.

There was a time when "chairman of

the board" meant the genteel way out. But this veteran has blasted that theory sky high. He is holding the reins, or driving the car, today as surely as he was fifteen years ago. If you suggest to any employe of standing on the entire system that anyone but Mr. Hughitt is running the road you are waving a red flag. They seem to resent the idea.

We said Mr. Hughitt was thrifty with his words, and that, no doubt, accounts for the fact that his story has not been written before, that and the fact that he does not court publicity.

And how thrifty is "the chairman" with his words? Well, when the government took over the roads four years ago railroad officials all over the country blossomed out with statements, interviews and attacks of oratory. It was not at all uncommon for a railroad president to prepare a sheaf of script on what he wanted to see the government do and how he would give his good right arm to help the cause.

Of course, the reporters flocked to Mr. Hughitt. At last he would talk, would drop all barriers and give them some real stuff. This was the chance to get the story from the greatest of all railroaders, the man who "out-Hilled" James Hill, up to that time the greatest builder—actual hard-pan railroad builder—the country ever knew.

There was much delay, but his statement finally was given out. It read: "We will cooperate."

That is Marvin Hughitt.

Outside of a reply he made to a published complaint of an employe, the following "secret of success" is probably the longest statement of his on record:

"The great secret of success—the mark of real genius—is the ability to understand men, to read and mold human nature. I would rather hire one man who knew men than two who knew railroading. One can learn to run a railroad but he cannot learn to be the master of men. That is a gift of nature."

Mr. Hughitt is as chary of giving advice as he is thrifty of words, but the young man that comes into contact with him soon learns that in this big man's opinion the most essential quality one can possess is the habit of staying on the job until the job is finished.