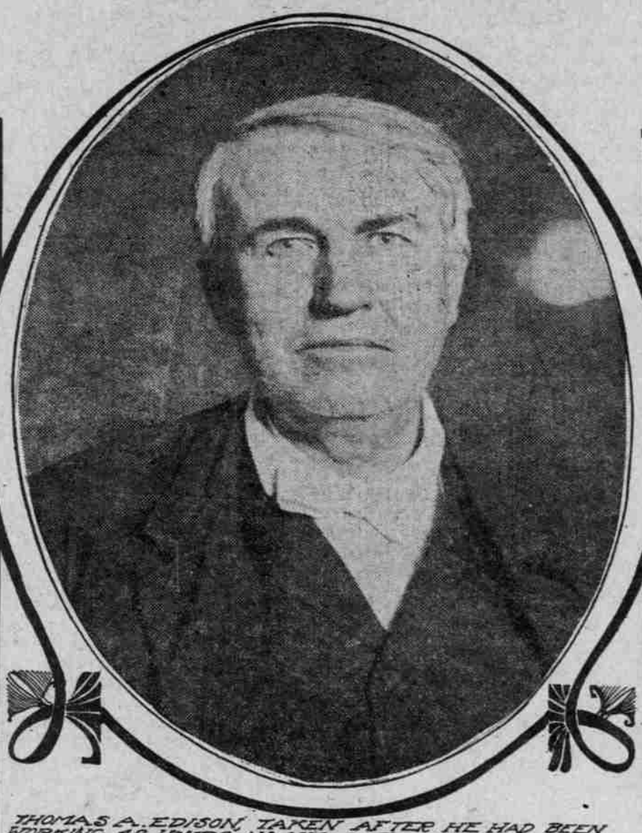
THESE MEN MADE MOST OF THEIR HIGHEST OPPORTUNITIES

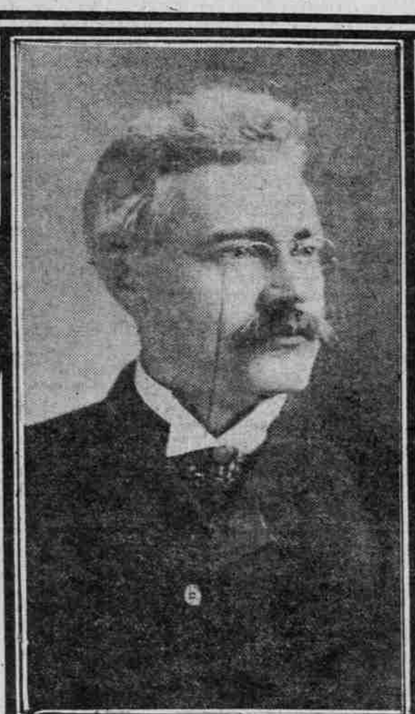
Frank A. Vanderlip's Brilliant Governmental Transaction That Recently Made Him President of the Country's Largest Bank. How Walter G. Oakman, Financial Associate of W. G. McAdoo, Became a Power In the Metropolis

The True and Hitherto Untold Story of How George W. Perkins Became Associated With J. P. Morgan. How Edison Seized the Opportunity to Invent the Incandescent Light, Which Gave Him His First Working Capital of $3,000,000

W.G. OAKMAN, ONE OF THE McADOO TUNNELS FINANCIERS



THOMAS A. EDISON, TAKEN AFTER HE HAD BEEN WORKING 48 HOURS IN HIS LABORATORY



FRANK A. VANDERLIP WHEN HE FIRST WENT TO WASHINGTON, AND NOW

GEORGE BRUCE CORTELYOU IN 1898 WHEN HE WAS PRES. McKINLEY'S PRIVATE SECRETARY

GEORGE W. PERKINS SUPERINTENDING PREPARATORY WORK FOR HIS NEW HOME

THOMAS L. JAMES, NEW YORK BANK PRESIDENT

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, when President, was fond of quoting from a poem written by John J. Ingalls, who was for many years a Senator from Kansas. Colonel Roosevelt was so impressed by the thought that was in this ode that he had a copy of the poem framed and hung in a conspicuous place on one of the walls of the room he used as a study or library. The poem taught the lesson that to every one there comes at some time in his life at least one opportunity, and that success or failure follows either the accepting or the ignoring of this opportunity.

Recently some interesting and even unusual illustrations of the truth that is in that thought have been furnished by men whose names are recognized by the public throughout the United States, as well as by some others not so well known, but who have achieved a high degree of success by recognizing and grasping opportunity when it came.

Perkins Morgan's Right Hand.

When Pierpont Morgan invited George W. Perkins to become a member of the banking house of J. P. Morgan & Co. there was wonder expressed by many able financiers that Mr. Morgan should have discovered in an officer of an insurance company the qualities which he deems essential for a partnership in his banking house. Mr. Perkins had gained an almost unique reputation as a successful solicitor for life insurance policies, and especially for the writing of some for very large amounts. For that reason he was brought into executive relations with one of the largest of American life insurance companies, his principal responsibility being the oversight and direction of the agencies. For that service he received a salary of $75,000 a year, and that would be thought a career sufficient for the ambition of almost any young man.

One day Mr. Morgan and Mr. Perkins were together in the directors' room of this insurance company, and the conversation turned by chance from insurance matters to a proposition then under consideration by the Government for the marketing of a loan of $200,000,000. Mr. Perkins ventured to say to the great financier, who had placed many loans aggregating hundreds of millions upon the market, that it seemed to him that the Government might so place this great loan as to give every one an equal chance to obtain some share of it, and that, too, without involving the cost of so much as one cent for commissions, bonuses or any gratuities. Mr. Perkins went on to say that he had given much thought to the method usually followed by the Government in placing its loans, and that it seemed to him that a plan could be devised by which every section of the United States could have opportunity to subscribe to a reasonably proportionate amount of a Government loan.

Mr. Morgan at once became interested. Here was a young man, known chiefly for his success as a canvasser for insurance policies, who actually had been contemplating high finance, and who seemed to have evolved a new plan by which one of the greatest of the fiscal operations of the Government could be carried out satisfactorily.

Mr. Morgan asked Mr. Perkins to explain his plan in detail. Thereupon the young life insurance officer, with the enthusiasm which is characteristic of him, and with earnestness of speech and manner, took a large sheet of paper and upon it sketched a series of circles, the center being the smallest, the next one of greater diameter, and so on.

Having done this, Mr. Perkins said that the interior circle represented a zone of which New York City, Boston and Philadelphia were the centers. In that zone were established the greater number of banking institutions and lived the greater number of individuals who were accustomed to invest in Government bonds. The next zone, Mr. Perkins said, represented the section which included much of the Middle West and of the Central South. The zone beyond that represented that part of the country which lies between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. And the outermost zone sketched by Mr. Perkins represented the Pacific Slope.

Having made this explanation Mr. Perkins went on to show the relative proportion by sections of the United States of investments in Government securities. It was evident that he had mastered these statistics. He explained to Mr. Morgan that the Secretary of the Treasury might parcel out the proposed bond issue, accurately adjusting the different parts to the capacity of each of these zone districts to absorb the bonds. Much the greater part would be absorbed by the district of which New York is the center. A considerable part by the zone which represented the Middle West. A smaller part by the remoter zone, and the smallest of all by that which represented the Pacific Coast. Thus parcelled out, each district or section of the United States would have a fair opportunity to participate in this loan. That would remove the objections entailed by the placing of other loans and involving charges of favoritism. That would give every person or institution in the United States who desired to make this investment a fair opportunity to do it.

Mr. Morgan listened with the keenest interest, and was impressed especially by the clearness with which Mr. Perkins made his explanation, and his grasp of one of the most difficult of financial propositions. There were many details which had been considered by Mr. Perkins involving the machinery, so to call it, by which a loan could be marketed in this way directly from the Treasury Department. Mr. Morgan put many questions to the young insurance officer, discovering in the answers that Mr. Perkins had not only that intuitive and constructive quality of mind which is essential for high success in financing, but also a vast fund of information.

In part as a result of this conversation, which was begun partly to pass away some leisure moments, Mr. Morgan made Mr. Perkins the unexpected proposition that he become a partner in the banking house of J. P. Morgan & Co., having special responsibility over the working out of certain financing propositions. That involved the yielding of a salaried position that paid $75,000 a year. But it placed Mr. Perkins shoulder to shoulder with the greater financiers of the United States.

Frank A. Vanderlip's Opportunity.

A few weeks ago Frank A. Vanderlip was chosen president of the National City Bank of New York City, succeeding James Stillman, who in 16 years gained the reputation of being the ablest constructive banking intellect New York ever had known. Mr. Vanderlip is now president of this great bank, chiefly because he discovered and accepted a fine opportunity.

He was serving as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury when Lyman J. Gage was Secretary. Congress had authorized the placing of what is known as the Spanish War loan—$200,000,000 in all. This money was to be used to pay the expenses of the war with Spain. The Secretary of the Treasury was authorized to place the loan upon the market. It was presumed that this marketing would be done through the customary aid of fiscal agents, who might therefor receive a commission or who might take bonds from the Government at a bid price, expecting to market them with the public at a higher figure.

In this situation Mr. Vanderlip saw his opportunity. He spent many hours in perfecting a plan by which these bonds could be marketed directly from the Treasury to the public without any other cost than that of clerical assistance, so that if there were profit in them the investors would gain that advantage.

When Mr. Vanderlip first proposed his plan there was a recollection that John Sherman, when Secretary of the Treasury, had attempted to float a loan directly from the Treasury to the public, and had been unsuccessful. The speculative capitalists captured this loan. Mr. Vanderlip, however, had thoroughly learned the history of that unsuccessful attempt. His plan involved the offering to the public of an opportunity to send bids directly to the Treasury Department for so much of these bonds as each person thus disposed to invest felt justified in taking.

Mr. Vanderlip was told to go ahead and see what he could do. He organized a large corps of clerks and began the preparation of invitations to the public, setting forth the fact that every bid would be considered by the Treasury Department, reasonable allotments would be made, and that the public might be assured that the bonds would be delivered to successful bidders without the intervention of any middleman or fiscal agency. It was a vast undertaking. It required days and nights of exhaustive preparatory work. It entailed an enormous amount of clerical examination in noting, classifying and assorting the bids. The stationery charge was of itself, in the aggregate, a small fortune, but it and the extra clerk hire represented the only cost to the Government.

The bids came upon the appointed day in almost cyclonic swiftness and magnitude. The mere manual labor was appalling. It required some weeks to schedule and decide upon these bids. But after this work was done there went from the Treasury Department to cities, towns and villages all over the United States notification that bids had been accepted and the Treasury Department was ready to receive the money and to deliver the bonds. Every dollar of that issue of $200,000,000 went directly from the Treasury Department into investors' hands without any cost in the way of commissions, and whatever appreciation in the market value of these bonds followed, the investors had the entire advantage of it.

That consummately brilliant transaction fastened upon Mr. Vanderlip the attention of the foremost men in the world of banking and of finance. They recognized in it not merely executive ability of a high order, but a power of constructive originality that is unusual. Because of the grasping of this opportunity Mr. Vanderlip was invited to become vice-president of the City Bank and, with the resignation of Mr. Stillman, was chosen president. Yet it is sometimes said that the post of Assistant Secretary of the Treasury involves no more than perfunctory or high-grade clerical work. Like every other position, it contains the possibilities of opportunity.

The Case of George Bruce Cortelyou.

Within three weeks after his retirement from the office of Secretary of the Treasury George B. Cortelyou was chosen president of one of the greatest of the public utilities corporations of the United States. Nine years earlier Mr. Cortelyou was a secretary in the office of President McKinley. His various promotions were due not only to the accepting of opportunities, but to the creating of them.

His highest opportunity came at the time of the currency panic of 1907. He had been Secretary of the Treasury when that cyclonic panic began, a little over a year. He was unknown as a financier. His powers had not been tested, and there was some doubt as to the expediency of naming him for so important a post as Secretary of the Treasury, especially as he was the youngest man, excepting Alexander Hamilton, ever nominated for that office.

The currency panic, if it was to be checked and overcome, involved not merely the co-operation of the United States Treasury Department, but also the working out in almost a day's time of a comprehensive and adequate plan by which the needed assistance could be given. Here was Mr. Cortelyou's opportunity. He had to keep his eyes upon the entire country, and yet fixing the greater part of his thought upon New York City, where the panic centered. He had the machinery of the Treasury Department in perfectly systemized organization within 24 hours. He allotted to the various parts of the country such proportion of Government funds for deposit in the banks as was fair, necessarily allotting the greater portion to New York City. In half a day's time he perfected the plan by which the securities that the Government was to receive to protect these deposits might be conveniently obtained.

In that way he placed hundreds of millions of Government funds that were adequately secured by high-grade bonds upon deposit in the National banks all over the country. This involved accute financial judgment and a very high degree of executive efficiency, and there was amazement and admiration in New York because of the skill and promptness with which this young Secretary of the Treasury met this responsibility and accepted the opportunity.

That achievement caused Mr. Cortelyou's name to be held in reserve for the presidency of the corporation in New York City which furnishes light, heat and power, electric and gas. It is a giant corporation, one of the world's greatest "industrials." To manage it involves a very high order of executive ability, much skill and a great deal of tact, for the community itself is the customer. Moreover, to serve a corporation of this kind satisfactorily justifies the payment of a very large salary, and the public is sure to number this executive officer among the greater financial and constructive forces. Mr. Cortelyou thus becomes president of the Consolidated Gas Company with a salary said to be $50,000 a year, and with the opportunity of taking rank among the great executive and administrative intellects of this kind, and he has secured this, one of the highest prizes of business life, chiefly because he accepted and proved equal to an opportunity that arose at the time of the currency panic of 1907.

Edison's First Great Opportunity.

Until Edison perfected the electric light which is identified by his name he had gained no great fortune, although in the receipt of a handsome income for his various inventions. The electric light now commonly used is the result of Edison's recognition of an opportunity that came in a wholly unexpected manner.

In the city of Ansonia, Conn., was a large manufactory whose product was machinery and certain of the cruder forms of electrical apparatus. Edison was at that time living at Menlo Park, N. J., and had just perfected his phonograph, which is an entirely original invention. One day he received a letter from his friend, Professor Barker, of the University of Pennsylvania, inviting him to go with the professor to Ansonia to witness the operation of a large apparatus, or machine, which had just been finished by the manufacturers in that town.

"It was a very hot day when Edison and Professod Barker started on their journey. Edison, for the greater comfort of travel, wore an old-fashioned linen duster, and the heat of the day caused traces of his suspenders to be conspicuously marketd upon the back of his coat.

But he paid no heed to the heat when he reached the manufactory and saw the great apparatus in operation. He was completely absorbed in his inspection and study. A new idea had been inspired by this machine, although it was one not in line with the purpose for which the machine had been constructed. All that hot Sunday he stood absorbed before this apparatus, and when night came he said that it had given him the hint of the means by which there could be such divisibility of the electric current as would make incandescent lighting possible.

He returned to his home, and abandoned or postponed all his other experiments and contemplated inventions so that he might devote himself entirely to this problem. He was occupied for many months, and incurred a cost of many thousand dollars in the attempt to discover a filament which could be made incandescent by the passing of the electric current. He had discovered the way by which the current could be divided so as to make it available for lighting. But the little filament perplexed him. He even sent agents to Africa and South America to secure specimens of bamboo or rattan, thinking that its fiber might furnish the filament. But he at last discovered that carbonized paper would serve the purpose, and the Edison light was thus perfected. Ten years later Edison said to the writer that this invention yielded him his first capital, about $3,000,000 in all; that it had created commercial capital aggregating some $300,000,000, and had given employment, directly or indirectly, to about 1,000,000 persons. He knew his greatest opportunity and seized it when he stood before the apparatus in the manufactory at Ansonia.

How W. G. Oakman Became a Force.

Among the great intellects associated with W. G. McAdoo in the construction of the celebrated McAdoo tunnels under the Hudson River, all of which are to be in operation by July 1, is Walter G. Oakman. His brilliant successes have been due to his recognition of opportunity and his acceptance of it.

Mr. Oakman began his business life in a humble capacity with one of the railroads of New York State. While still obscure and in the possession of no more wealth than his salary, he was married to the daughter of the great Senator from New York State, Roscoe Conkling. But not to any family influence did he owe his successes. There came a time when some small and yet important executive emergency was met successfully by him, so that he was promoted. But his great opportunity came at the time of the attempted reorganization of what was called the Richmond Terminal Company.

This was a very difficult proposition. It had proved too difficult for some who had handled with success other great reorganizations. There were bonds and underlying bonds, cobwebbed together, so that it seemed almost impossible to unravel the web. Mr. Oakman took hold of it and mastered the problem. This brought him into association as an equal with some of the foremost of the financiers of the United States, having been in the past four or five years, especially associated with the rapid-transit systems of New York and the construction of the Hudson River tunnels.

It has been said of Mr. Oakman by those who have known his career that he has never permitted an opportunity to pass and never accepted one without gaining success in it.

Thomas L. James' Opportunity.

Thomas L. James, who was Postmaster-General in President Garfield's Cabinet and is now president of one of the larger National banks of New York City, when a young man seized an opportunity, although to many of his friends his action appeared to be a grievous blunder.

He was the editor of a little weekly newspaper in the town of Hamilton, New York State, in which Colgate University is situated. As his newspaper had warmly supported the election of Abraham Lincoln, his friends and the Representative from that district determined that Mr. James should be appointed postmaster of Hamilton. There came to him an intimation from the Representative that if he would accept the appointment he would be named for that place. At that time there came to him also an opportunity to accept a subordinate place in the New York Custom-House.

To be postmaster of Hamilton was to be the conspicuous citizen of the town. It was a high honor for so young a man, and the salary was a comfortable one. On the other hand, to accept a subordinate clerkship in the Custom-House at New York seemed to be burying one's self in a great organization, with remote chances for any promotion. Besides that, there was sure to be isolation in the great city where he knew no one, and the salary for the service was less relatively than he would have received as Postmaster at Hamilton. But Mr. James thought he saw opportunity for a career in the New York Custom-House offer, and he accepted it.

A few years later, by reason of his effective service in the Custom-House, he was named, and without his knowledge, Postmaster of New York City by President Grant. He had realized upon the opportunity he grasped. His service as Postmaster of New York fixed upon him National attention, he having instituted in that office the first civil service system. President Garfield called him to the Cabinet as Postmaster-General, and, after he retired from that office he became president of one of the great financial institutions of the city.

John R. Hegeman Saw Opportunity.

Thirty years ago there was in New York City a life insurance corporation which was struggling for existence and seemed doomed to bankruptcy. At that time a young clerk in a broker's office, John R. Hageman, was convinced that he saw an opportunity in this corporation.

He outlined his idea to a man of some capital, so that the stock of this life insurance corporation was purchased by this capitalist with intent to name young Hageman secretary of the corporation and give him an opportunity to make good his confident prediction that the company might be quickened so as to become abundantly prosperous. The young secretary worked a plan for a new form of insurance, at least new to the United States. Today this corporation is the largest incorporated life insurance company in the world. It has assets of hundreds of millions, and it occupies a gigantic building and a tower which is one of the wonders of New York, all these reflecting the accuracy of judgment with which the young Hegeman thirty years before saw an opportunity in what every one else regarded as an impending bankruptcy.

In addition to his other triumphs, Mr. Hegeman today receives probably the largest salary paid to the president of any corporation incorporated under the laws of the State of New York, namely, $100,000 a year. To all the friends of his young manhood it seemed as if young Hegeman's opportunity for a career was with the firm of brokers with whom he was employed as clerk.

To know opportunity when it presents itself and to seize it—this the careers of successful men show is the certain way to gain success.

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