Procter and Gamble, in Person

THIS COMMENTARY is offered as substitute for a requested history of The Procter and Gamble Company in 750 words. Quite recently Rinehart has published the biggest and perhaps the best history of the company, entitled "It Floats." The author is Alfred Lief, who also wrote one of the histories sponsored by the company itself. The new book has a text of 322 pages and nearly 100,000 words. It is lack of brevity that accounts for much of its excellence. For the first time adequate attention is given to the detailed activities of the founders of the company.

I cannot compete with Mr. Lief as a historian but hope that a few words about the first of the Procters and of the Gambles will be appropriate.

William Procter came from England to Cincinnati in 1832, when he was 31 years old. In apprenticeship he had learned the business of retailing groceries and fabrics and the art of candle-making and later found employment in a woolens shop. His employers backed him in his next move, which was to establish his own shop in London. There misfortune, attributed to both burglary and fire, overtook him. With a debt still to be paid across the sea, he and his wife came to the United States.

They were headed down the Ohio for Louisville when misfortune struck again. Mrs. Procter contracted cholera, which caused them to leave their boat in Cincinnati. She died very soon, and he remained to make candles in a rented storeroom, working alone and calling from house to house to sell his product.

By 1832 James Gamble, aged 29 years, had already established himself in a small way as one of the many soap manufacturers in Cincinnati. He had come to the city from northern Ireland in 1819 and had worked for a while in his father's greenhouse. In 1821 he was apprenticed to a soap-maker and was engaged in making soap for the rest of his life.

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FOR the next five years both men made steady but slow progress, thanks to long hours of hard work. They became quite well acquainted for Procter sold some of Gamble's soap and they married sisters. In 1837 they joined forces, each being able to furnish half of the partnership's capital, $7,192.24. To the partners and their father-in-law this seemed quite a step forward, but the world took little notice and there was no basis for predicting the great success which lay ahead.

Hard work continued for both partners, with a sharp division of duties. Gamble took charge of manufacturing. He was likely to be on the job well ahead of the regular 6:30 a.m. starting-time and studied the chemistry of soap making in his spare time. Procter, strong on merchandising, took care of sales and finances. The partners conferred chiefly at night. They worked harmoniously, both being intensely interested in product quality, and resolved, contrary to a current trend in the trade, to furnish full weight on all orders. After about 10 years assets increased ten-fold. Annual sales reached a million dollars after about 20 years, a good business for two men in those days and a solid foundation for the still greater, future growth of a large organization.

Among the many fine qualities which contributed to the ultimate success of James Gamble and William Procter, their ability to work together deserves special mention. The progress which each made singly was commendable, but the really impressive progress came after they joined in partnership.

Individual achievement is at the present time overshadowed by the group achievement which has been found essential to technological progress. Many people worry about this situation, and the worrying is doubtlessly wholesome within reasonable limits. For a better understanding of what they are worrying about, the worriers should take a close look at some of the simple examples of small group projects and learn that group achievement is an addition to, not a subtraction from, individual achievement. Of course, I recommend particularly the case of the original two-man team of Procter and Gamble.

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