

The Story of My Life by "Billie Button"

CHAPTER X. A Business that grows fast—and an Industry that amounts to something

“WHAT becomes of the waste shell?” Oh, that is crushed, bagged up and shipped away to be used in making such useful products as chicken feed and fertilizers.

Every week twenty-five to thirty thousand gross of us Pearl-Buttons have the finishing touches put on our education. From the factory we go all over the country, from Maine to California, to Wholesale Dry Goods and Notion Houses, and to manufacturers of Shirts, Night Robes, Dresses, Wrappers, Waists, Aprons, Sweaters and other garments.

The remarkable growth of the business of the Wisconsin Pearl Button Company during the past seven years shows that “quality counts” in buttons as in everything else. For the year ending July 1st, 1907, the output of the factory was 237,400 gross, while the year ending July 1st, 1913, saw this swelled to the neat, round total of 1,580,220 gross, while for the present business year a production of 1,800,000 gross is planned. What a string of pearl buttons that would make. “Consistent delivery with right prices,” says Mr. MacWillie, “accounts for this splendid increase.”



We Pearl-Buttons, of the Fresh-Water branch of the family, have worked a revolution in the button business. New as our family is (the Fresh-Water Pearl-Button was practically unknown twenty-five years ago), it has made itself a power in the world's industrial life. In the past twenty years we have saved the users of pearl buttons over two hundred millions of dollars, for our aristocratic relatives, the Ocean Pearl-Buttons, cost from twenty-five cents a dozen up and weren't a bit better for practical use in life than we are. No longer must people pay high prices or content themselves with poor, easily breakable makeshifts of agate or bone. Fresh-Water Pearl-Buttons can now be used on even the least expensive garments. Thirty-seven billion, five hundred million of us went forth from the button factories of America last year. What do you think of that?

Our commercial importance is recognized by the big National Association of Pearl Button Manufacturers, including in its membership over twenty factories in seventeen different states. This organization exercises a watchful, if selfish, care over our clam-progenitors, for there's danger that our family history would be cut short if existing clam-beds were relentlessly ravaged without anything being done to renew the supply. So the Association has interested the United States Fisheries Bureau in the protection and artificial propagation of fresh-water mussels, and a great deal of practical work is being done by fisheries experts and scientists to keep up the supply.

