

## THE SAGA OF THE ROARING ROAD

when a young man, operating a small repair and sales shop. Then he conceived the idea of establishing a jobbing business to reach the market he saw existed but which, up to that time, had been beyond the vision of most of the manufacturers. He had looked ahead and seen that the logical way to succeed in the bicycle business was to handle the product in large quantities. Logically enough it was this idea that later brought about his entrance into the automobile business, first as a creator of markets and later as a supplier of the demand thus created—a manufacturer.

He founded the Elmira Arms Co., of Elmira, N. Y., and almost from the start the new venture proved a success. It was at this time that Mr. Willlys was first attracted to the automobile business. No sooner had he become familiar with the cantankerous "horseless carriage" of those early days than he became convinced that what he had learned of the bicycle industry applied to automobiles as well. And it was right there that he took the step that proved to be the turning point of his life; the move that took him from the ranks of ordinary salesmen and made of him a veritable captain of industry.

He organized the American Motor Car Sales Co., with headquarters in Indianapolis, for the purpose of wholesaling Overland and Marion automobiles. He contracted with those two companies for their entire output. In an incredibly short time he had made contracts with dealers for 500 Overland cars and had put up the money deposited by those dealers with the Overland company as a part guarantee for their delivery. And then, though he had labored under the impression that the concern was as stable as the government, Mr. Willlys found the Overland company was in

## THE SAGA OF THE ROARING ROAD

serious financial straits. A visit to the plant in 1907 effectually, and none too gently, dispelled any illusions he had had of the standing of the firm, for he found the Overland in a hole that threatened to engulf not only itself, but the American Motor Car Sales Co. as well.

The danger of seeing his all go down in the wreck only aroused the young easterner to a real display of his fighting ability. His inspection of the plant ended on a Saturday and he called a conference with the officials of the Overland company for the next afternoon in an Indianapolis hotel. At the conference he formally demanded to know why the firm had failed to deliver the cars on which he had made deposits. The demand was only a formality, however, for he knew as well as did its officials what was the matter with the manufacturing firm.

"Our company will go into the hands of a receiver tomorrow," was the plant manager's formal reply to Mr. Willlys' formal demand. "We were able to only partially meet our payroll for the week. It looks like the end."

"How much cash do you need to tide you over until tomorrow?" asked Mr. Willlys.

"Four hundred and fifty dollars," was the reply, and there wasn't even a suggestion of hope in the tone.

Though the day was Sunday, in the middle of the 1907 panic period when Indianapolis banks were paying in script and cash was as scarce as the proverbial chicken's molars, John Willlys was not dismayed. With the aid of the hotel clerk, who turned the money till upside down and the office strongbox and the pockets of all his friends and acquaintances inside out, he raised \$500 on his personal check before evening. The Over-