

R1853/1

Great Moments in American Faith

"I have won the greatest victory, over my own nature," said this industrialist, politician and reformer, who was known to all as

Golden Rule Jones

by Thomas Fleming, New York, New York

Big, sandy-haired Samuel Milton Jones was worried.

This self-educated son of Welsh immigrants, who had made a fortune in the Ohio oil fields, lived in Toledo, where he hoped to manufacture steel rods and other devices to make oil drilling more efficient. But in 1893, shortly before Jones opened his factory, economic catastrophe struck America. Stocks plunged, banks failed, businesses collapsed, millions of people were thrown out of work. It was the worst depression in the nation's history.

Sam Jones's business plans were not affected by the massive downturn. But Sam Jones's soul was profoundly altered. Contemplating the tramps camped on the outskirts of town, the desperate men who begged him for a job, the upsurge of petty crime and the angry demands for law and order from the pulpit and city hall, Jones began to ask himself if there were something fundamentally wrong with America.

The big Welshman had been brought up on the Bible by his parents. Was it the failure to practice the teachings of Jesus that had created these terrible problems? Of all the teachings of the man from Nazareth, the one that had made the deepest impression on Sam Jones was the Golden Rule.

Jones decided to see if the Golden Rule

could be practiced in business. When he opened his factory, workmen discovered a sign on the wall: "The Rule that Governs This Factory: 'Therefore Whatsoever Ye Would That Men Should Do Unto You, Do Ye Even So Unto Them.'"

Sam Jones's place was different from others. There were no foremen or time clocks. Everything was done on the honor system. For very little money the workers could buy stock in the company, unheard of at the time. To give his employees a sense of community, Jones sponsored picnics and outings to nearby lakes. And each Christmas, every worker received a bonus, along with a letter from Jones.

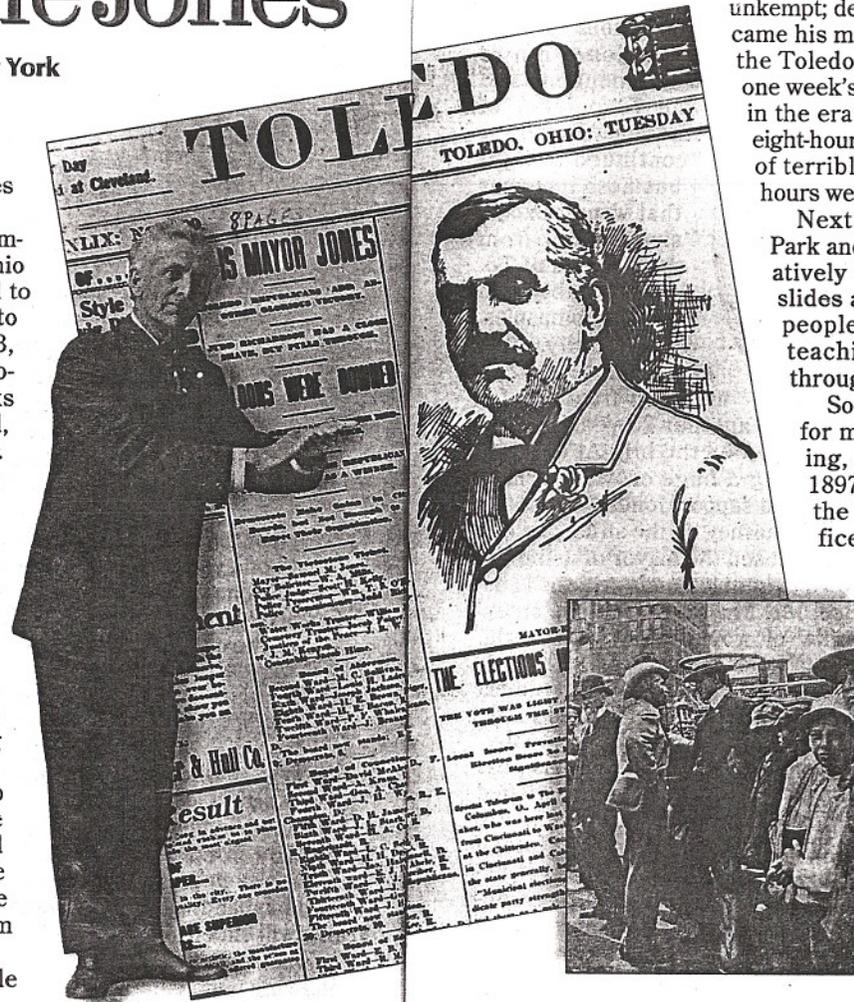
Frequently, he hired men who were unshaven and unkempt; derelicts, other people called them. Some became his most productive workers. Jones astonished the Toledo business world by giving his employees one week's vacation *with pay*. Even more astonishing in the era of the twelve-hour day, he instituted the eight-hour day, so more men could have jobs in a time of terrible want—and because he believed eight hours were the most a man could work productively.

Next to the factory Jones built Golden Rule Park and Playground, where workers enjoyed relatively fresh air and their children capered on slides and swings. In nearby Golden Rule Hall people heard speakers from across America, teaching them how to improve their lives through education and spiritual rebirth.

Soon many people were urging Jones to run for mayor of Toledo. After much soul searching, he became the Republican candidate in 1897. He won, and promptly began to apply the teachings of Jesus to politics. On his office wall he carved on a three-by-one-foot board: "Judge Not, Lest Ye Be Judged."

The new mayor banned the police habit of dragging poor people off the street and throwing them in jail on mere suspicion of wrongdoing. With the help of a crusading young lawyer named Brand Whitlock, the mayor began hearing these cases himself. Mayor Jones also disliked police smacking people around with their

Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones during a political speech on August 24, 1903 (left); the Toledo B'ade announces Jones's election as mayor (center); Mayor Jones talks with Councilman-at-Large Ben Greenwald at a fire-equipment demonstration.



clubs. He replaced the clubs with light sticks that could not inflict serious injuries.

Next he established civil-service examinations for policemen and other municipal employees, ending the demoralizing habit of wholesale firings whenever a new administration took over city hall. He put all city workers on eight-hour days and set a minimum wage. He introduced kindergarten into the city's schools. He turned over his salary to his clerk, who was told to distribute it to those who needed help. When that stipend vanished—as it often did within a week—the mayor dug into his personal fortune.

One winter evening, as Brand Whitlock and Jones left city hall, a tramp asked the mayor for enough money to rent a room for the night. Jones reached in his pocket and discovered he had only a five-dollar bill. He gave it to the man and told him, "Go get it changed and bring the coins back."

Jones chatted about municipal problems while Whitlock wondered if the mayor would ever see his money again. To the lawyer's astonishment, the man returned with the money. The mayor put the coins in his pocket.

"Ain't you goin' to count it?" the tramp asked.

"Did you count it?" Jones asked.

"Yes, sir, I counted it."

"Well then, there's no need for me to count it. Did you take what you needed?"

The tramp shook his head. The

mayor gave him a half dollar and strolled home with Whitlock.

"There was no possible ostentation in this," Whitlock later wrote, recalling the incident. "He was doing such things every hour of the day."

When Jones ran for reelection some people in Toledo opposed him. The politicians of both parties disliked him for taking out of

their corrupt hands the power to appoint city employees. Jones ran as an independent and won 70 percent of the vote. The mayor continued to fight business interests that wrung excessive profits from the citizens of Toledo, notably the streetcar companies.

When the city council attempted to renew their franchise for another 25 years, Jones vetoed the bill. At a public hearing a huge crowd stormed city hall to support Jones.

The attorney for the streetcar company accused the mayor of using the crowd to intimidate his critics. "I suppose, Mr. Mayor, that this is an example of government under the Golden Rule?" he sneered.

"No, it is an example of government under the rule of gold," replied Jones, referring to the streetcar monopoly.

Despite all his civic and business reforms Jones remained unsatisfied with his own spiritual progress. He constantly tried to live the Golden Rule no matter how difficult it became. Once, he went to see an opponent with a written statement of his position on a controversial issue.



Samuel Milton Jones

NBRI
NELI

The man snatched the paper out of Jones's hand and tore it up.

In his day Jones had held his own in the rough-and-tumble world of the oil fields. His big, hardened hands had thrown their share of punches. But Mayor Jones walked away without striking a blow or saying a word.

He went to the office of Whitlock, who had become his protégé. Struggling against rage, Jones told Whitlock what had happened. Then a smile broke over his face.

"Well, I've won the greatest victory of my life," he said. "A victory over myself, over my own nature. I have done what it has always been hardest for me to do."

"What?" asked Whitlock.

"It has always seemed to me that the most remarkable thing that was ever said of Jesus was that when he was reviled, he reviled not again. It is the hardest thing in the world to do."

Golden Rule Jones, as he was now known around the country, won two more mayoral elections. Whitlock wrote about his last campaign. He and Jones traveled around the city in a buggy drawn by an old white horse. On the platform Jones's only arguments came from the New Testament and the Declaration of Independence. At the close he led everyone in a song he had written to the tune

of a Welsh hymn from his boyhood.

Jones died of pneumonia in 1904, not long after his fourth election victory. Only then did people discover that during his seven years as mayor, Sam Jones gave more than seven hundred thousand dollars to the poor—two thirds of his original fortune. That is the equivalent today of nearly thirteen million dollars.

Brand Whitlock was one of the eulogists at his funeral. "I know not how many thousands were there," Whitlock later wrote. "Down to the corner, and into the side streets, they were packed, and they stood in long lines all the way out to the cemetery. In that crowd there were all sorts and they all stood there with the tears streaming down their faces."

Weeping with them, Whitlock remembered the times when Sam Jones came to him and reported that the Golden Rule seemed not to be working in a certain situation. But his commitment to it remained undimmed. He said there was nothing wrong with the rule, he just didn't know how to work it very well yet.

Then he would quote his favorite poet, Walt Whitman:

"The love is to the lover and comes back most to him,
The gift is to the giver and comes back most to him—it cannot fail."

GUIDEPOSTS ONLINE

Visit Guideposts on the World Wide Web to:

- Read selected stories from the current issues of *Guideposts*, *Angels on Earth*, *Guideposts for Kids* and *Positive Living*
- Send prayer requests to our Monday morning Prayer Fellowship
- View the current day's reading from our popular devotional book *Daily Guideposts, 1997*
- Read excerpts from some of Guideposts' best-selling books
- Subscribe to our publications or order books

The Guideposts Internet address is: <http://www.guideposts.org>

