

AN HONEST PRINTER.

HONESTY in business appears to be looked upon by many as an uncertain quantity. Because some honest men fail while some dishonest ones thrive, we are prone to accept the theory that "honesty does not count." This state of things is not new. In all ages the same thought has found lodgment in the human mind. Shakespeare in his day said:

"To be honest, as this world goes, is to be a man picked out of ten thousand."

With this kind of sophistry thousands of men have tried to silence the dictates of conscience when committing a dishonest act. They have tried to persuade themselves that there is no such thing as honesty in business. They credit other people with being dishonest and then think that they are justified in adopting the same methods. When a man wants an excuse for doing wrong he will not be long in finding it.

However, the subject of this article is more limited in its application, and instead of dealing with the whole human family it is only intended to apply to printers. At the same time the application of the word "honest" is here intended to be a little broader than the idea of wilfully stealing from others. It is intended to cover the dishonesty of carelessness, and dishonesty towards self.

The meaning of the word "honesty" as defined in dictionaries is not confined to the act of stealing, but embraces all that which is meant by such words as the following: Integrity, probity, uprightness, trustiness, faithfulness, honor, justice, equity and veracity. It also covers what we understand by "plain dealing." A "tricky" man, who watches his opportunity for taking advantage of the ignorance or weakness of others, is not honest.

Many a printer who starts out with the intention of honestly meeting all his engagements and of doing everything which is upright and straightforward degenerates in the course of a few years so far as to commit many irregularities which he knows to be wrong and which he never intended to commit. He finds himself trying to excuse these lapses on the ground that he is only doing as his competitors do, and saying that to do otherwise would be to fall behind in the race. In most cases this state of things comes through ignorance.

It must not be supposed for a moment that a printing business cannot be conducted both honestly and profitably, for the most successful business is that which is carried on by straightforward men in a straightforward manner. Therefore there is no necessity for dishonest dealing, and those who indulge in it must do so because they are naturally dishonest or ignorant of the technicalities of their business, or by lack of business methods find themselves unable to cope with their more competent competitors and endeavor to make up for their deficiencies by dishonest methods.

Now ignorance is no excuse for dishonesty. The man who starts a business which he does not understand is courting failure, and in most cases deserves to fail. A compositor or pressman who starts out for himself without knowledge of business management or of buying stock or of making prices, or of the thousand and one other things which his competitors know, is placing himself in a position where he will almost inevitably fall into dishonest methods. At first he may shrink from doing that which he knows to be dishonorable, and thinks that he would rather have no business at all than get it dishonestly, but he

discovers that business is not so easily obtained as he had thought, and that the prices which he can get for his work do not allow sufficient margin for profit, and then his good resolutions are apt to give way to scheming and strategy. The temptations which are peculiar to a printer under such circumstances are the following:

Using the knowledge he may have acquired of his former employer's business in such a way as to make customers transfer their orders to him.

Giving customers a lower grade or weight of stock than was agreed upon; or short count; or using a poorer quality of ink, or in some other way cheapening the work.

Bribing those who give out the printing of a firm or company by paying them commissions on the amount of work obtained.

Bribing the employees of other printers to reveal trade secrets or to say what prices are charged for work.

Taking orders at less than cost in order to handle the money as long as his credit holds out, knowing that failure must come.

These are not imaginary or fanciful suppositions, but the simple enumeration of dishonest practices which are indulged in by printers; and they do not cover the whole field of such abuses.

An honest printer will not resort to any such nefarious practices, no matter how much he may be tempted, and the best way to avoid such temptations is to learn how to conduct business so as to obtain a fair share of work honestly and to execute it so as to make it pay. There is no short road to riches in this business any more than in others, and while knowledge and industry generally lead to success, ignorance and carelessness lead to failure.

Printers to be honest must learn to understand their business. No man can know what he ought to charge for work in order to make profits and be in a position to pay his debts unless he first learns what that work costs him. It is not enough that he should know how much some one else charges, because perhaps the printer whose prices he is copying may be on the road to ruin. He must learn to calculate for himself. Labor and material are the two chief items of cost, and with these he should be thoroughly familiar.

In calculating materials he must not forget to add the cost of handling. Stock which he buys for 6 cents a pound may cost him 7 cents by the time he gets it into his pressroom. Should it come from a distance he must not forget his freight charges. The stock used for making ready must be borne in mind, as well as the quantity of ink, bronze and other materials used. As a rule the ink may be only a small item, but there are times when it amounts to a good deal.

Labor means more than the time taken for composition or presswork. Distribution, making up, waiting for forms, and many other things which take time have to be added to composition and presswork. It is calculated that at least 100 per cent. has to be added to the wages paid for actual composition in order to cover the cost. And presswork can only be properly calculated by taking into account not only the labor employed, but the cost of placing and keeping the presses there at all times ready for use, whether they may be constantly in use or not. The quantity of work which a pressman can do in a given time depends upon the size and quality of the press he has to use;