

THE DISCRETION OF TRAVELLERS.

A travelling salesman needs to be a very self-sufficient man in these times. He often is called upon to act before other men would have time to think, and to use his own judgment where others would be advised. The work he is in clearly calls for special talents, and the wide-awake jobber who needs a man for the road knows just what parts the appointee to the position should have. A man may have excellent abilities, may be active and strictly upright, but may not possess all the requirements for success on the road. He must have, in addition to a suitable business training, a degree of self reliance that is not called for in the house salesman. It is his capacity for doing business without the guidance of a principal or head of a department that is his strong distinguishing point. Unlike the house salesman he can not, when confronted with a problem, repair to a superior for instruction; he has to be his own mentor. He is hemmed in by what the retailer wants him to do, what he would do himself in the given circumstances and what he feels that his house would do. The step he usually takes may be called the average result of these influences, and gets as close as possible to the satisfying of all of them. It requires judgment, self-restraint, diplomacy, to get the traveller successfully through some of the situations he is placed in.

It makes his task much harder when prices are irregular to know when he is being "bluffed," and to know when the alleged lower prices of rivals are genuine ones. When to resist and when to yield are hard questions very often. Just now, for example, there is endless perplexity for the traveller in the rumors and the facts of cutting. It is hard for him to know when he is leading or following in a cutting campaign. Yet the brunt of determining has to fall upon the traveller alone. He must have the promptness and decision to decline or close an order that is offered on some debatable ground. There is a heavy responsibility upon him, quite as heavy as upon one of the principals of his house. Selling goods, realizing a profit and following a conservative course in prices are very hard things to reconcile; the traveller is called upon probably more than anyone else to reconcile them. This training cannot but serve him in good stead, and that is the main reason why so many men who were formerly travellers are among the chiefs of commerce to-day.

22 LBS. FOR \$1.

Anyone whose range of observation extends over the past fifteen years must be struck with the wonderful expansion in that time of the purchasing power of a dollar in the commodity of sugar. It is not longer ago than that that retailers could sell white sugar at 11¢ per lb., and 10 lbs. for a dollar was a cut price. If not within that time, at least not much longer ago, the regular rate was 11 lbs. for a dollar. To-day there are

retailers to be found, and there is no lantern necessary for the search, who sell 22 lbs. of granulated sugar for a dollar. In the meantime wages have gone up.

There have been economic reasons, bearing on the production of sugar, for this decline in prices. The extension of the area of cultivation of beet root is one of these; another is the evolution of the machinery used in manufacture. Tariff changes have also played a part in the reduction. The effect of these changes upon the demand became in turn a factor, as increased consumption glided from an effect into a cause of cheapness. But the mainstay of low prices, that which has been their steady support since the sugar trade amounted to anything, has been the anxiety of dealers to sell sugar. The removal of retailers' profit ranks high as one of the causes of cheap sugar. Wholesalers now add their mite to the general good, and to-day a dollar is convertible into 22 lbs. of the very best granulated sugar made on this continent. What need have we for any such state of society as Bellamy looks backward to, where the mere cost of production and transportation is to determine the price, and profit is exorcised from the body politic and commercial? The refiners of course do make a little money yet out of the production of sugar, but if two or three more of them could be brought into the business they might be persuaded to give up their profits for the good of the public.

So much does the tendency run towards selling at an absolute loss, that the question What is sugar sold for? becomes pertinent. Are there any people still selling it who are under the delusion that it is intended to make money on it? If there are, it is well that they should amend their ideas on this matter. There appears to be a higher, more purely philanthropic object than this in the business, and it evidently is, to bring cheap sugar to the masses. This idea of making money on sugar is altogether too sordid, and so the consumer gets 22 lbs. of granulated for a dollar.

There was some hope, when the duty was removed from sugar, that the trader would endeavor to keep upon his prices a little deposit of profit, which he would not permit the rough collision of competition to shake off. But it was not so. The prodigal retailer would give all up to his customers. When the wholesale traders sorrowfully dispensed with their margin, the retailers let go of it too, and now the consumer could not get sugar laid down direct from the refinery—if the refiner would sell to him on the same terms as to a wholesaler—at any lower price than he can buy from the majority of retailers. It seemed natural to expect, when it became possible for the retailer to sell at 5¢ per lb. and make a little, that he would not go below that price. Everybody felt that the danger point was cleared when the retailer could buy at 4½¢. But it seems that 5¢ is not a stopping point for people who wish first and foremost to make sales. The retail sugar trade appears to be past redemption.

LEAP FROG ON THE ROAD.

The "advised" visit is rarely on time. The calendar and the map of a given route may be gone over in joint conference between the head of the house and the traveller who is to cover that route, places and dates may be matched, and notice sent to each trader in that particular circuit, of the day when the traveller is to call. But he doesn't call on that date, at least hardly ever. The reason is, that he departs from the course staked out for him and goes chasing after other travellers whose whereabouts he hears of. That is what deranges the plans of which the advice cards are tokens. A, representing one house is in a certain town to-day and learns that B, the representative of a rival house is to be in another place the day after to-morrow. Two or three towns intervene between where A now is and the place where B is to be, and A is booked for every one of those towns before he is to go to the more distant place. That however, does not dissuade him from leaping over the intermediate towns and making his way to the place where B is heading for, and getting to that place to-morrow, or one day ahead of B. If he can leave the trade of that town in the condition of a squeezed orange for B, he feels that he has amply recompensed his house for the extra expense necessitated by retracing his steps to take in the omitted towns. But there is no saying when he will take in the omitted towns. He is like a luminary without a fixed orbit, and prides himself upon his unexpectedness. His aim is to checkmate his rival, not to carry out the plans of his house. A general does not plume himself more upon the fulness of his intelligence as the enemy's movements than does the traveller upon his thorough knowledge of what his rival's plans are. All this requires sharp observation, alertness and promptness, but there is equal room for the application of the same qualities to the business of selling goods. There is such a thing as becoming so deeply absorbed in the game of forestalling competitors as to neglect the real objects of travelling. As some men are cleverer at checkers than others, so some travellers are cleverer at effecting combinations and bringing several points into line where a series of jumps can be made, each one over a rival. But it is not always the man who gets ahead of his opponents that sends in the largest sheaf of orders. The best travellers on the road are men who keep the even tenor of their way as "advised."

The trouble with this leap-frog business is that it disappoints the retailer. Traders frequently complain to wholesalers that, relying upon the "advice" of the traveller's visit, they allowed the travellers of other houses to go through without giving them in order. In this way opportunities to make an advantageous purchase probably were let go by, because the notice of the traveller's visit was depended on. In some instances the six weeks, or whatever other set time the traveller is to be on the road, slip away before he has had time to catch all the places he has missed. In one case, a retail merchant reports that he had not been called upon for a year by the traveller of a house he dealt quite extensively with.