

# STATIONERY

## ARE YOU A STATIONER?

BY G. E. R.

**I**N these days of rapid transit and endless invention, affecting all branches of trade, the old saying about the "survival of the fittest" becomes more and more of a truism. Right here let me ask, how many stationers make any serious effort to see to it that they are among the class likely to survive the realistic never-ceasing battle otherwise known as daily business. Its conditions to-day and the methods of conducting it every thinking person will admit, are very different to what they were even a dozen years ago, and yet there are scores of merchants whose trade, to put it mildly, has not increased appreciably during the past few years and yet to whom if you were to even gently suggest that they were not keeping pace with the times in their business methods you would be offering an affront. Still a great many of these dealers conduct, or to be more correct, try to conduct, successfully a business which perhaps once flourished when the dealer sat behind the counter and waited for his customers to come in, and no doubt a great many of these well meaning merchants sigh for a return of what they are pleased to call "The good old days," which alas are no more, and which are apparently forever to remain ancient history.

To be charitable, let us suppose that these ambitious, though not very progressive stationers, have never for a moment thought that it was just possible that these very customers of theirs who once found time to come to their stores to procure their wants, may now be kept too busy to spare the time to do so, and can appreciate the convenience of having a pleasant mannered salesman call on them periodically. Especially is this true if he makes it a point to come ready to show samples of the latest and best of everything in his line. This is generally the case with the more up-to-date young men employed in this capacity, representing a dealer in one of the larger cities, whose sources of supply are the very same wholesale houses which the dealers in the smaller towns have access to. The prices are of course the same, but undoubtedly the advantage is on the side of the merchant in the small town, for freight rates are fairly reasonable and it certainly costs less to sell goods right at home than it does to send a high-salaried traveller a long distance to dispose of them.

Now of course "Every crow thinks it's young the blackest" and no doubt every merchant, no matter what kind of business he be engaged in, thinks his particular branch of the trade is most seriously affected, by the keen competition of the present day, but in one particular at least, the stationery business is unique. Take, for instance, the dry goods business. Do any of the large retail dealers in the cities send a traveller out through the towns calling from store to store or from house to house to solicit orders? The answer is, of course, "No." Is anything of this kind done in the grocery business? Not at all. In the hardware business? No. In the boot and shoe business? No, again, is the answer. But when you

come to the book and stationery business, it is very different, for in the cities nearly every large retailer sends out a traveller sometimes thousands of miles, who goes into towns and sells goods at often higher prices than are asked by the local dealers, and in this way takes the business right from under the very noses of men who have no one but themselves and nothing but their own behind-the-times, back-number ways of doing business to blame, for the falling off in their trade. Yet, as above mentioned the original cost to both merchants is the same, and it should and does cost less for the small dealer to sell the goods.

If you should get into conversation with a traveller for any of the wholesale houses and ask him if any of the merchants of his territory are complaining, he will invariably tell you something like this: "When up in Thrivingtown the other day I was showing Mr. Slow some of our newest goods but was unable to sell him anything excepting some old standbys that he could not very well do without. When I suggested that he ought to be able to dispose of quite a number of a certain line to some of the large manufacturers (of which there were several, in his town, he blandly remarked that Push & Co., of our city sent a man there every couple of months and sold them all they wanted of that kind of thing." And would you believe it this self-same would-be merchant prince had no more intention of doing anything towards advancing his business interests, further than staying in his store, keeping his clerks there and waiting till the next favorable opportunity was offered him of singing the same old blue-ruin tale of woe.

Again you will even sometimes be asked if you think it pays these people to send out travellers to solicit orders in this way. When asked a question of this kind one often wonders if people think that merchants spend the enormous amount of money they do for salaries and travelling expenses purely for the love of it, or do they for a moment suppose that it may be because the conditions of trade render it necessary and also that it pays. The degree to which it is profitable depends on the reputation of the house, the price and value offered, and the ability of the traveller.

Then again you will sometimes be told that the department stores have killed the trade of the small stationer, and while there may be quite a bit of truth in this, so far as fancy goods and fancy stationery is affected, yet so far as the commercial branch of the trade is concerned this argument does not hold good. Every business man knows that, quality considered, one will nine times out of ten, and often the tenth time too, pay just as much for goods in department stores as anywhere else, but just as much as necessity was and always will be the mother of invention, just so much will the desire in human nature for convenience even prove the stronghold of the department stores and according to the extent to which the regular dealer makes it convenient and agreeable for people to trade with him, is his business bound to show a corresponding improvement.

A mistake, which many merchants make is to buy too heavily in one or two lines of goods, thereby locking up too much of their capital without being able to show much variety, whereas if they were to keep more closely in touch with good up-to-date wholesalers, watch carefully for the latest things which are promptly advertised and commented on in the live trade papers, then buy within reason,