

**The Business of Threshing.**—Many men assume that they are fitted to be threshermen because they like to run a traction engine or tend a separator. Right here is where they are pretty liable to make a mistake. There is just as much sense in thinking you have a call to thresh merely because you love to see the wheels "go round" as there is to think you have a call to preach because you love yellow-legged chicken. These things may be valuable qualifications in either profession but they are not necessarily winners.

Love for one's profession is a mighty fine thing, but my experience indicates that it grows cold or waxes hot pretty much in proportion to what it brings us in good hard American dollars. The thresherman who cannot pay his notes when they come due is not generally a very amiable, enthusiastic sort of fellow, even if he can do circus stunts with his engine.

It is not my purpose to belittle the mechanical end of the business, because that is mighty important, but the financial end is after all the most important consideration. No man has any right, in justice to himself to buy a threshing outfit until he has carefully considered the business end of the proposition and decided upon his own business capacity. Threshing at best is a hazardous business. The investment is heavy, the profits never very large, and the risks enormous. Under favorable conditions and in the hands of right men, the business can be made to pay. Many men do make it pay, but, on the other hand there are many failures. In fact there are too many failures.

The responsibility for these failures lies, in most cases, with the men who engage in the business. They do not analyze conditions carefully enough. They do not consider the facts that every business man must consider before engaging in a new enterprise. Apparently a great many bank on their luck when the facts are against them. It has been well said that "facts are stubborn things." You may ignore them to-day and apparently escape from them, but they will rise up and smite you tomorrow, when escape is impossible. Right here I wish to quote from Mr. John D Rockefeller's "Reminiscences of Men and Events." He says: "Good old-fashioned common sense has always been a mighty rare commodity. When a man's affairs are not going very well, he hates to study the books and face the truth. From the first, the men who managed the Standard Oil Company kept their books intelligently as well as correctly. We



## Practical Talks to Threshermen

Conducted by PROFESSOR P. S. ROSE

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knew how much we made and where we gained or lost. At least, we tried not to deceive ourselves.

"My ideas of business are no doubt old-fashioned, but the fundamental principles do not change from generation to generation, and sometimes I think that our quick-witted American business men, whose spirit and energy are so splendid, do not always sufficiently study the real underlying foundations of business management. I have spoken of the necessity of being frank and honest with one's self about one's own affairs. Many people assume that they can get away from the truth by avoiding thinking about it but natural law is inevitable, and the sooner it is recognized the better."

That is good straight talk from a man who knows and it applies just as surely to the business of threshing as to any other business. To analyze conditions tabulate the facts and face the truth even if it hurts; that is what makes for business success but it requires an uncommon stock of common sense and some bravery to do it.

There is a certain amount of preliminary study necessary before a man thinks seriously of engaging in the threshing business, and it is my purpose to discuss somewhat in detail the various factors that enter into the final solution of the problem.

I have already pointed out that the man must first study himself carefully, impartially, and honestly. He must take the facts as they actually are. This is probably the hardest task a man can do because personal vanity always rises up to blind our eyes to the truth. This question of personal fitness, however, must be settled and no one can do it but the individual who has the problem to solve. In arriving at the answer I should consider first my business ability; second, my energy and aggressiveness; third, my standing in the community; and fourth, my experience or technical knowledge. I have put technical knowledge, because it is always possible to hire some one to make up this deficiency, but the other three qualities can neither be hired nor bought. It is true one can sometimes find a partner to make up a deficiency in one of the three first essentials, but even this is apt to prove a source of trouble.

Business ability is not easy to define. It includes many things, among which may be mentioned handling men, keeping accounts laying out the season's run, making contracts, collecting and keeping the rig in the best of order and everyone good natured. Handling men, and I mean by this the customers as well as the crew, is mainly a matter of leadership. It is something that can be learned partially, but it is more a matter of natural aptitude. Some men are born leaders and others are not. There always have been "hewers of wood and drawers of water," and always will be. If you find out you are one of this class and are bound to thresh anyway, get a job hauling water or pitching bundles. It will prove more satisfactory in the end. It is best to face this matter squarely and don't argue because John Doe or Ole Olson has a rig that you must have one too. There is no logic in that.

We will leave the matter of cost, keeping, etc., for subsequent discussion and take up the second consideration, that of energy and aggressiveness. This is something an honest man can settle in short order. No one knows better than himself if he is a hustler and can stand the strain of long hours of hard work. This is essential to success in threshing more than in most businesses because the season is short and only hustlers can win. And another thing, a man must be of the temperament to fight hard when luck is against him. For if he gets discouraged and "lies down" when difficulties arise, as they surely will, he can't win.

The third point is also easily disposed of. A man generally knows whether his prospective customers are friendly towards him or not. If they are, it is a mighty big business asset. If they are not, it is a serious handicap, because no matter how well he does his work they will get some one else if it is just as convenient. It pays to have customers that will wait until you can get to them and if need be let your competitor pull by. This is a pretty serious test of friendship sometimes but when a man can command that sort of loyalty it means success. It is what is called in business generally good-will. When a firm sells out it sells its good will, when the doctor sells his practice,

he sells his good-will. In his case it is all there is to sell and yet often commands a pretty big price. Good-will, or one's standing in the community, is after all a pretty valuable asset and the man who thinks of going into business can not afford to overlook or nap to protect it, once it is gained, or to overlook the extent to which his competitor has acquired the good-will of the public.

The matter of technical skill or experience must not be lost sight of. In fact, it has been the purpose of these lessons to advise our readers along these lines. It is important and no business of a mechanical nature can hope to succeed unless there are competent men to operate and care for the machinery. It is desirable that the owner of the outfit have this skill. It saves money and delays and adds to the success of the business provided the other end, the business end, is handled as it should be. In any event, the owner or manager should know whether the men he hires are competent to do the work well. This amount of technical knowledge is imperative. Beyond that, men of special training can always be hired for a sufficient consideration. And right here I want to say emphatically, that a cheap, incompetent man is the dearest man you can employ to care for expensive machinery. The good business owner will see to it that he secures really competent help, even if he does have to pay pretty high wages.

### Keep Children Away

A very peculiar and exceptionally exciting affair occurred down near Nevada, the other day, says the Garrison, Ia., Independent. A threshing machine was being operated on the Thomas Tow placet. The machine had been stopped for a short time and when it was started up again, the man who was feeding the separator heard a number of hair raising yells emanating from the bowels of the machine. The yells were repeated frantically and the machine was stopped, that an investigation might be made. Then it was that the cause was disclosed. A 7-year-old member of the Tow family had crawled into the machine during the time that it was stopped, bent up on a tour of investigation. He had crawled into the rear end of the machine and was upon the shaked when it began its operation. He crawled out a much wiser and well shaken youngster but none the worse for his rather exciting experience.

The better you behave the better you will get along.