

ASSOCIATIONS AND GUILDS.

Mr. Charles S. Smith, the President of the New York Chamber of Commerce, who, responded to "The Commerce of New York," at a dinner recently, said:—

"Gentlemen, we may, without a charge of egotism, magnify the mercantile profession. Commerce is, with the exception of agriculture, the oldest of all professions; it is older than any patent of nobility, older than written history. It began almost as early as anything human began. The late Professor Hitchcock said that 'commerce, through all the ages, had led to the historic march of civilization since mediæval times.' The merchant has been the founder and the patron of the university and library, the hospital, the museum, and the schools of medicine and art. The ancient and historic trade guilds in the remote past gave a powerful impulse to commercial and industrial organization, to which your toast refers. A rapid glance at their history will not be without interest in a company of merchants.

"An English historical writer describes these ancient guilds as voluntary associations of those living near together, for a common purpose, paying contributions, helping one another in sickness and poverty, and united for the pursuit of a special object. All writers agree that a marked feature, in all times and countries, was their custom of 'feasting together periodically.' They chose their own masters and officers, and made rules for self-government. They were democratic in their organizations. In some cases they provided their members with retiring pensions and paid their travelling expenses. There is an historical record of these associations among the Greeks in the second and third centuries before Christ, in which we find rules that a member who did not pay his fine was excluded unless excused by poverty and sickness, and that women were admitted as members and attended the meetings. As early as the fourteenth century in England the trade and merchant guilds attracted great attention on account of their wealth and influence. Wyckliffe complained of some of their abuses, and in 1389 returns were made of their doings in Chancery; what was known as guild law was often adopted as the law of the town.

"Now, in closing, gentlemen, may I refer for one moment to the obligation New York is under to the merchants for the liberal endowment which is constantly increasing her hospitals, libraries, museums, colleges of medicine, schools of art, and her hundreds of charities. The Astors, Vanderbilts, Marquands, Carnegies and many others are showing that they know how to execute the trust of great wealth. Let me quote the words of Addison concerning merchants, which certainly must be conceded to be of high authority: "There are no more useful members of a commonwealth than merchants; they knit mankind together in a

mutual intercourse of good works; they distribute the gifts of nature, find work for the poor, add wealth to the rich, and magnificence to the great."

WASTE IN COMPETITION.

Mr. Erastus Wiman, in speaking at the annual dinner of the New York Wholesale Grocers' Association last week on the waste in competition, said:

"The change in popular sentiment regarding this question of competition and combination has been very remarkable. Perhaps nowhere is it beginning to be better understood than among the working people. The Knights of Labor, in their journal, for instance, are constantly preaching that the railway and coal companies, and labor employers that compete most severely, pay the least wages; for, at the last analysis, the cost of production is largely the cost of labor, and if by competition labor is reduced, the working man is the sufferer. So in the distribution of merchandise. In country places, if one store, on the corner, is sufficient for the distribution of the articles of necessity, the cost of the second store might just as well be avoided. True, if there was only one store higher profit might be exacted, but the profit would not likely amount to so much as the expenses of the second store. For instance, in a country town, where one baker is doing a sufficient business to sustain his family, and educate them, and is realizing a reasonable profit, he should be let alone. A second baker coming along to do an unnecessary work simply increases the cost of bread in the town. It increases to the extent of the living and education of the second baker's family; the cost of his horse and wagon, his employees, his rent, and his living expenses. The delivery of the bread in that little town by two wagons, two men, and all the wear and tear, blacksmithing, horse feed and other expenses costs more than the flour from which the bread is made. Thus the farmer on the Minnesota plains, the miller in Minneapolis, the transportation agency from the West to the East, the cooperage, and even the baking are in the combined amount less for each loaf of bread than the cost of delivery in the small town where one baker would suffice, and where two bakers are competing. It is sometimes difficult to see how money can be made, so numerous are the charges on the articles which we consume, and the greater the competition the greater the charge.

"These suggestions will doubtless be regarded as very absurd, but they are thoughts which naturally come to one looking out at the tendency in business circles. The field of opportunity in business seems greatly to be narrowing. For instance, hardly any one would like to establish his son in the oil business, in competition with the Standard Oil Company. The chances of success for the young man under these circumstances

would not be very good. Neither would a new starch factory have attractions for a beginner in view of the strong organization in this particular line. As to sugar, no one would be foolish enough to put a large amount of money into a refinery to buck against existing combinations in that line. Soon the salt trade may assume a shape so combined that competition in it will be difficult. In school books, in envelopes, in telegraphs, in harvesters, in sewer pipes, in almost every walk of life, combination seems to be the order of the day. Certainly a better service and a lower price should flow from these movements. Certainly the Standard Oil Company gives better oil, a much safer article, more fully distributed for a greater variety of uses, at much less money than if there were fifty competitors whose charges were added to the cost of production and distribution. For instance, the pipe lines which run from the point of production in the oil regions to the point of manufacture and the point of distribution, perform a wonderful work which competition could never have achieved. The investment of \$40,000,000 in piping underneath the ground, by which gravity, night and day, does its perfect work in the transportation of oil from the centre to the sea, could never have been accomplished except by such a strong combination and such a prosperous concern as the Standard Oil Company. So in the telegraph business. The Western Union Company to-day performs a service for the public in the transmission of messages affording instantaneous communication more perfect, more reliable and infinitely better than if there were fifty companies in the field, and each State had half a dozen telegraph systems of its own. There is hardly any department of life in which a combination, under judicious, honest and politic administration, would not be more beneficial than all the competition in the world.

"These thoughts will no doubt be regarded as pure heresy, and yet one cannot take a careful observation of the times, and measure results that have been achieved by competition on the one hand and combination on the other, but he must feel that the outcry against consolidation is unreasonable, and that the waste of competition which begets loss, failure and increased cost to consumers is an exploded advantage, a wasteful indulgence, and, in the long run, a disappointment to all concerned."

ALASKA SALMON.

Of the forty odd canneries in Alaska not over thirty, it is stated, will be worked this year. The fleet of vessels, usually numbering over fifty, will also be less in number. The canning industry last year gave employment to nearly 3,000 men, including seamen, clerks, fishers and canners, but a prominent local canner estimates that less than 1,000 will be worked this year. The San Francisco Chronicle says that "it is estimated by the knowing ones that the pack in Alaska during the coming season will be much less than the past year, and that the difference will cut quite a figure in local competition with foreign markets."—Winnipeg Commercial