

THE RETAILER AND Wood-Worker

A WORD TO THE RETAILER.

In this country there are two classes of retail dealers, the one conducting a strictly retail yard, and the other having in connection with his retail business a wood-working factory, by means of which he supplies dressed stock, sash, doors, etc., to his customers. This fact has suggested the change which has been made in the heading of this department, and while in the future the same attention will be paid to the wood-worker as in the past, it is hoped to present, also, articles of interest to the dealer conducting exclusively a retail trade.

Many millions of feet of lumber are consumed annually in building operations in Canada, a large portion of which passes through the hands of retail dealers, to whom manufacturers and wholesalers look for much of their Canadian trade. A close affinity, therefore, should exist between the manufacturer, the wholesaler and the retail dealer, and each should strive to promote the interests of the trade in general, by according to each branch its rights. To make this department beneficial in advancing the interests of the retail dealer is one of the objects desired, and to attain this the assistance of every dealer throughout the country is solicited. Contributions on any subject of interest to the trade, whether local or general, and discussion on the methods of executing work in the planing mill, are invited. This is the Retailer's Department, and we trust the retailer will assist us to make it of the greatest possible service.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT.

WHILE the lack of organization in the lumber trade of the Dominion is strikingly manifest by comparison with other countries, it is creditable to the retail trade that the only association which can fairly be said to be in active operation is the Western Retail Lumbermen's Association of Manitoba. Nearly every retail dealer of the Northwest has his name enrolled on the membership list, which also includes the manufacturers as honorary members, thus assisting in a better carrying out of the objects sought. Since the inception of the association dealers have been enabled to maintain fair prices. While cutting has been avoided, the consumers have not been called upon to pay exorbitant figures. There is certainly much to be said for and against the perpetuation of combines. There always has been, and perhaps always will be, strong opposition to their existence, but any arrangement that will secure to the manufacturer a reasonable return for money invested, and prevent him from sinking into bankruptcy, bringing loss to the community in which he resides, must, we think, be looked upon as serving a desirable purpose.

This the Western Retail Lumbermen's Association are striving to do, and what can be done in one section of country can be done in another. It might not be perfectly feasible for the retail dealers of Eastern Canada to organize on their own account, but they might become a branch of a manufacturers' association if such existed, and work in harmony therewith. In the United States there are a number of retail associations, which have proven to be of great assistance in maintaining the trade on a profitable basis.

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THE lot of the retail dealer in many parts of Canada has not been a happy one during the late period of depression. In British Columbia his condition has been improved by mining operations, and in the Northwest the advance in the price of wheat has had the effect of creating considerable trade, but in Ontario and Quebec less favorable conditions have prevailed. Upon the building trade largely depends the business of the retail lumber dealer, and unfortunately, the two largest cities, Toronto and Montreal, have just passed through a period of severe depression. Dropping into the office of a retail dealer in Toronto, the writer inquired how the past year's business had compared with 1895, and was told by the proprietor that he had adopted the policy of selling for cash only, and this, of course, had restricted his trade, but until the books were balanced for the year he could not say just how he would stand. He said, however, that the past few years had been a period of enduring expectation, and they were just hanging on awaiting the return of better times. The wisdom of conducting a cash business is not to be doubted, although it is sometimes very difficult to do. Bad debts are the bane of many an otherwise promising business, and liberal credit opens the door to the unscrupulous contractor to evade payment for his goods. The refusal of credit to builders would have a tendency to weed out the weak contractors, and thus place the retail lumber trade on a stronger footing.

CONDITIONS NECESSARY TO SUCCESS.

FOR a long time the planing mill business has been one of very close competition, for which state of things mill owners have only themselves to thank. A great percentage of them are troubled to-day to know how to make ends meet on the last day of 1896.

The proprietor or manager who always comes in an hour or two late, sits down, puts his highly-polished boots up on the desk, there to remain until he has posted himself fully on horse racing and base ball matters, and smoked his cigar, leaving his correspondence and business—that should receive his first attention—till the cigar

and sporting news are fully digested, is nearly always in trouble, as well as those who wait daily in their offices for the clouds to roll by, never making an effort to look up a job, and only getting what falls on their plates without any efforts on their part. If work is to be had you must hustle around and get it. If you don't get a car load get half a car load; hustle around and get your share of what is to be had.

The owner or manager should be at his place of business the first one in the morning and arrange business for the day. See that your foremen have everything properly arranged for the day's work, making necessary suggestions and having a good understanding about the work. Nothing pays better than this "entente cordiale." It makes things work smoothly—like riding along in a nicely-oiled carriage instead of one that squeaks and squeals all the day through. The proprietor should not only be there first, but should remain till the last and see what has been done and what left undone; often what has been left undone is of more importance than that which has been done.

Because you are proprietor or manager is just the reason why you should be right around among the men and machines, especially in close times like the present. It is necessary at all times to keep an eye on the material that comes into the mill. See what it is and how it is handled. It is wrong in principle to go along from year to year in an old beaten way that you have always been used to. You must from time to time look into new ways of doing things and see if there is not a better, cheaper and quicker way to do work.

It is not always machines that need improving. There is often as much saved in handling stock as the percentage of profit you hope to make on it. One concern may underbid another and make a good margin of profit just from a better and easier way of handling the stock. This stock handling is a stumbling block in the way of many an otherwise enterprising business concern.

You go to a mill and see men passing up one board at a time through a scuttle, that thing being repeated every day. It doesn't need a demonstration to show they are liable to have hard times there. They are slow coaches. Get some kind of a lift over that hatch, if it is only a simple hatch over a drum; hitch steam to it and instead of putting up one board send up a thousand feet. I see every day men carrying one board at a time from scows on to a wharf, and if the stuff is heavy, two, three and sometimes four men to a plank or stick of timber. Away up the wharf they go with it about as they would go to a funeral. Not that the men don't work hard enough. We all know it's hard enough to carry this stock up the wharf, and it's slow enough too. There needs to be some enterprise and some go-ahead; instead of one piece at a time going ashore, a steam crane should put a thousand feet ashore and a traveling crane or car carry it up the dock. Does any one wonder that this concern is in the hands of a receiver?

Numbers of owners and managers think it is beneath their dignity to get out and dig into their work, preferring to entrust it to some kind of a foreman. Business is business, and if you