

THE MERCHANT'S IDEAL.

"An ideal, far in advance of practicability though it may be, is always needful for right guidance." These are the words of one of England's philosophers, and there is no valid reason why even a philosopher's wisdom may not be turned to account by the practical man of business. Unless a business man sets a goal, he will not know how nor where to direct his course. The merchant should have his ideal in business as much as a poet, a painter, or a philosopher in their respective vocations.

To take a walk down the business street of any town is to find that different merchants have different ideals. Some show extreme care of outward appearances. A prominent, attractive sign, a neatly painted front, a well-dressed window, a well-arranged out-door display—these are the signs by which the passer-by may judge of the merchant's ideal. A dingy front and a poor, weather-worn display will not attract customers nor increase a merchant's reputation. It may save trouble and expense, but a dollar saved in this way is not a dollar earned. Then, when the interior of a store shows careful planning and artistic execution, it may be certain that the merchant or his head clerk has an ideal, and that a high one.

Every merchant should aim to have his store the best of its kind in the town. His capital may be smaller than that of his competitor, but he must use it to the greatest possible advantage, making up for this disadvantage by extra careful management. His store may not be the largest, but the largest knife will not always do the most cutting. The way in which space is utilized in a store overcomes difficulties as to lack of space. The situation may not be the most convenient for his business but he must make up for this by increased attractiveness. His clerks should be the best procurable. Do not keep a poor clerk from a mere desire to avoid the trouble of filling his place. A merchant must also have his ideal as to how his customers should be treated, how their orders should be executed, how their wishes should be gratified, and how their custom should be retained. He should know how a good business should be managed, financially and otherwise, and to find out this he must profit by the experience of others, which he should be always seeking to discover, and by his own experience. The wide awake merchant must be always learning from contact with others who have had the experience he is trying to gain.

To accomplish all this, he should set a high ideal before him and daily try to attain that high standard. The higher the standard, the greater the attempts to attain it. He must be enthusiastic in his business, and his whole energy must bend towards the making this business a successful one.

Mediocrity is to be shunned. Aim high and gain the height, or at least come so near it that you may have the satisfaction of looking down the rugged road and of feeling that you have traversed a goodly distance.

THE VICTIMS OF THE PATRONS.

Mr. R. J. McLoughlin, Wallaceburg, Ont., writes a letter which we print on another page, with every expectation that it will do good wherever it is read. There has been a great deal of clamor about the campaign the Patrons are carrying on against independent traders. The formation of every new lodge is hailed with an uproar of rejoicing that swells from one side of the province to the other; the local press starts the cry, and the metropolitan papers re-echo it, until the public begin to think that the Patrons are carrying everything before them. From the assailed trade, on the other hand, there is only now and then an audible murmur, and this silence tends to confirm on-lookers in the opinion the fuss of the Patrons is calculated to scatter abroad, that the latter are having it all their own way. The trade ought to be, if not equally vociferous, at all events equally prominent in the struggle, and then no credit would be given to the Patrons for their superior aggressiveness. Such facts as Mr. McLoughlin brings before the attention of his fellow-traders are never mentioned by the Patrons. If they are not made conspicuous by the trade, they will never leak out to forewarn and encourage men who have yet to face the temptation or the coercion of Patron agents. To check this movement it is the duty of all who know anything of the association to put it at the service of their fellow-merchants. Our columns are open.

The movement is not to be dreaded for its permanency—for that is a property that is not inherent in it and that cannot be accidental to it—but for its disastrous effects upon trade while it exists. Its track will be marked by more sepulchres of ruined businesses before those are through with it who have foolishly embraced it. A Patron store is the tomb, not the nursery, of business, and the sad epitaph on the three stores whose former owners have been obliged to give up the struggle in Wallaceburg will be the death sentence of the Patrons throughout this country in a very short time. But one short year sufficed to hurry into hopeless insolvency two men whose reputed business sagacity led to their appointment to the chief offices in a local business men's association. This ought to be instructive and admonitory reading for some weak-kneed traders, who are wavering towards the side of the Patrons. Mr. McLoughlin's clearly worded, well-written letter ought to be pondered by every one in the trade.

SOUND ADVICE.

In the American Cultivator of the 19th inst. the following sterling advice to farmers appears:

"The advice not to get trusted, and to buy only what you have money to pay for immediately, is for most of the year much easier to give than to act upon. A large proportion of American farmers begin and work through life with too little capital. They buy too much land in the first place, and to make this land productive are obliged to borrow money to stock and work it. Even then they usually borrow less than profitable management of the land requires. The result is a multitude of petty debts that harass worse than large debts, are more often the subject of disagreements, and prevent farmers from one year's end to another from knowing exactly how they stand financially. No good business man will allow himself to remain long in such financial condition as this. He will pay off the numerous small debts, even if he has to borrow the money in a lump to do so. At this season of the year, and through the winter, money is more plentiful with farmers than at other times. It ought to be possible for most of them to hold in reserve money sufficient to pay cash for all they need to buy. They will probably buy rather less paying cash than if they received credit. What they buy for cash will be at a large reduction, more than enough in most cases to leave a good profit after deducting legal interest on borrowed money."

If to the foregoing had been added the injunction to practice rigid economy until the burden of debt has disappeared, the paragraphs would have deserved a place in every farmer's scrap-book or a frame upon his living-room wall. As it is, it merits the highest praise, and the lesson it teaches might be learned by many merchants to their great pecuniary advantage, not to mention the freedom from the mental strain and the annoyances produced by a number of petty debts.

Too many of the farmers' organs seldom refer to the farmers' indebtedness except when in need for a text for articles denouncing the "middleman" and the "bloated" mortgage holder. How much wiser is the policy of the Cultivator, which offers valuable suggestions instead of indulging in diatribes against perfectly innocent people, and advocating the formation of Alliance exchanges and other schemes for the extermination of the middleman. With the exception of wage-earners who are paid at intervals of a fortnight or more, and of farmers who seem to be, as a rule, destitute of cash except immediately after harvest, the people who actually need credit from retail merchants are not numerous, and if with the passage and enforcement of a weekly payment law, and the acquirement of businesslike and thrifty habits by the farmers, the necessity for granting credit to those two classes could be obviated, a general system of strictly cash dealing could be established, to the betterment of every branch of trade, and an improvement of the purchasing power or the condition of consumers, owing to the lower prices at which cash sales can be made.—*Merchants' Review.*