

SIGNING NOTES IN BLANK.

THE practice was formerly very common, and it is not altogether done away with yet, of persons signing or endorsing notes in blank, leaving the holder to fill them up at his convenience. It is well known that persons have by this means become liable for sums far beyond anything they ever dreamed of, and have involved themselves, their families, and their relatives in embarrassments, which have burdened and harassed them for years. Not a few men have gone down to the grave with sorrow, from this cause—their poverty (brought on solely by such obligations) weighing down their spirits until the burden crushed them.

A man who gives another a note, signed or endorsed in blank, places himself and all he has entirely in the power of the person holding his signature. For, let it not be forgotten, that it is easy to get on another person's paper, but to get off is another matter. Let any man who is in that position try the experiment. There are cases in which a man may rest perfectly comfortable under an obligation of which the extent is known, but to lie under the load of an obligation of which the extent is unknown, which may be of trifling amount, or may any day involve him in hopeless ruin, is what no man will submit to who values his good name, his property, or the welfare of his family. The existence of one who has put himself in that position, is more like that of the ruler who dined every day with a naked sword suspended over his head than any thing we know of.

If any such read this, we give him the same counsel which Solomon gave to the sureties and endorsers of his day. It will be found very plainly set forth in the Book of Proverbs, viz., not to give sleep to his eye, nor slumber to his eyelids until he is free.

The cases we are now referring to, are those in which blank endorsements are trusted with friends or relatives, in which case there is, of course, an implicit reliance on the honour of the person to whom the signature is committed. In the intercourse and business of life there has to be a good deal of reliance on the good word, and honour of our friends and connections, and it is creditable to society that it should be so very rarely abused. But there are legitimate bounds to all confidence, and we do seriously think that the line is passed when a person places gratuitously in the power of another his whole fortune, to be imperilled at his discretion.

It may be pleaded that to refuse to sign in blank would often involve trouble and embarrassment. This is not a sufficient ground on which to rest such a custom, for every difficulty—say when renewals are required—would be obviated by making arrangements in time.

There are cases, however, of a still more reprehensible character than those mentioned, we mean when customers of wholesale houses sign or accept blank paper, leaving the merchant to fill up the amount as it may suit him. This practice used to be very common with the 'supply houses,' and many a man has found to his cost that he has by means of it, become involved in obligations vastly beyond his power to meet. So long as the wholesale house kept up, all went well, for they took care to provide for the paper; but on the first breath of trouble, protest after protest would be sent to the alarmed storekeeper, who then saw for the first time what astonishing folly he had been guilty of, and was left to get out of his difficulties as well as he could.

If any storekeeper finds it a condition of being 'supported,' that he is to furnish the 'house' with his name to be used whenever wanted, at their discretion, it would be far better for him to shut up at once. He is only deceiving himself and the public by trading in his own name, for he is no more master of his own destiny than if he were a clerk in the employ of his patrons.

We say he deceives the public, as well as himself, and especially the banker who may have his paper offered for discount. Such paper is presumably for value and possibly it may be. But possibly it may be used for an utterly far in excess of its value, in which case it is something like a fraud on the part of the offerer, he having an unsuspecting accomplice in the signer. Ordinary accommodation paper or loan paper the banker knows how to deal with. It is subject to its own rules, and can be accepted or rejected according to its character. But this paper is deceptive and dangerous, because it looks like, and is intended to pass for paper which represents a bona fide sale of goods. The banker knows by experience that paper representing such transactions is subject to certain

laws of average as to certainty of payment; but when the paper represents nothing but the folly of the maker and the need of the offerer—still bearing the appearance of a genuine mercantile document—he is as much put out as if it were a forgery. Not only, then, out of regard to his own interest, but from simple honesty and good faith, a man ought never to sign his name to a bill, purporting to represent a mercantile transaction, unless the bill be complete, and for an amount that he really owes.

The last remark covers a class of transactions which are not so dangerous as signing bills in blank, but are dangerous enough to form a subject of caution. A customer of a wholesale house will sometimes be asked to give paper for more than the amount of his account. No man that values his commercial position will do this. No matter how good he thinks the house is, the very fact of their asking him to become responsible for an amount beyond what he owes ought to put him on his guard. The answer to such a request should invariably be no; when a man promises to pay \$1000 and only owes \$500, he is a party to a deception which every honest man ought to keep clear of.

THE MERCANTILE PROFESSION.

A commercial career has become one of the liberal professions, and has taken on itself alike the dignities and the duties of its station. . . . There are few more magnificent patrons of art than the men of commerce, few warmer friends of literature, few whose private houses show greater traces of refined and elegant tastes. The old school of merchants is fast fading out of sight, to the infinite grief, perhaps, of the survivors, but to the certain benefit of the world at large. The men whose vision was bounded by the out-look from their counting houses; the men of one idea, that, namely, of amassing money they knew not how to spend; the men whose pride it was to have sacrificed everything to money-getting, and to have found themselves at fifty with solid fortunes, but with shattered constitutions, are fast giving place to a school of refined and cultivated gentlemen, no less keen in the pursuit of wealth; but regarding it as a means rather than an end—a means of happiness to themselves and of good to their neighbours.—*Fraser's Circular*.

The above is a picture of the British merchants of the present day, and will be recognized as faithful by those merchants of Montreal, and other cities of Canada, who cross the Atlantic yearly and are brought into contact with them. Since the beginning of the century, the business of merchant has been gradually rising in the scale of English society, and now it is regarded almost in the light of a profession. Nor is this to be wondered at. The successful mercantile man—at least in Great Britain—requires to be a very different person from what was necessary even fifty years ago. Now-a-days he must go through a long course of study, he must have enjoyed a liberal education, he must understand the laws of political economy, he must be industrious and shrewd, he must have the manners of a gentleman—in a word, he must have had a thorough commercial training before he can hope to succeed. In point of intelligence—of mercantile honour—and of respectability, the mercantile classes of Great Britain are unsurpassed in the world, and are therefore a good model for our Canadian merchants to strive to imitate.

The business men of young countries, taken as a whole, do not compare favourably with those of older commercial countries. Canada is no exception to this rule, although we have little hesitation in asserting that business intelligence and morality are quite as high here as among our Republican neighbours. But we have yet much before us in this respect, and every agency calculated to advance the character, respectability and influence of our commercial men, deserves encouragement. Great progress has been made of late years in this respect. An ignorant man, without business or any other kind of education, cannot now rush into storekeeping because he happens to have a few dollars in his pocket. With the competition which now exists, such a person is almost sure to fail. Only men of good business acquirements—men of respectability and of means—can now succeed in the business centres, and the more intelligence and experience they have the more certain are they to make money.

Competition is one of the main means by which the character of our merchants is raised, and the Commercial Colleges established throughout the country may be specified as another. These institutions are established upon a correct theory, namely, that if a

young man is to be successful in the world of commerce, he must be educated specially for it. In some of these colleges, the instruction probably lacks in thoroughness, but they nevertheless do a useful work. Not many years ago, if a Canadian lad could read and write, and had gone as far as "bills of parcels" in arithmetic, he was deemed quite qualified to take a place behind the counter. This day has happily passed away, unless it be at the outskirts of civilization. Some knowledge of business is now considered a requisite in any one applying for such a position; and the best interests of the mercantile community, as indeed of all classes, will be promoted by raising instead of lowering the standard.

One mode by which mercantile respectability may be promoted in Canada rests in the hands of the importers, and that is, by using proper discrimination in giving credits. How often is it, even at the present day, that if a man comes to buy a stock in Montreal, if he can pay a small part in cash, he gets what he wants without any enquiry whatever into his personal character, or his fitness to do business. Very likely his ignorance of business, or his vicious habits, render his success utterly impossible, and after a few years he fails, involving his creditors to a large amount; on the other hand, does it not often happen that young men of spirit and enterprise—whose thorough acquaintance with business and excellent character render success almost certain—are denied stocks, because they have but little ready money to pay down? In giving credits, business knowledge and personal character should be the first considerations; and if our wholesale dealers always made them so, there would be fewer scandals in commercial life than we have to report.

If the standing of our business men approached nearer that drawn by *Fraser's Circular*, in the extract given above, we would hear less in Canada of failures, of assignments, and of mysterious disappearances. The standard of business intelligence and honour would be higher. This would at once render mercantile business safer—safer both to the wholesale dealer, and to the retailer himself. Compared with other countries, similarly situated, we have no reason to complain of Canada in this respect; but so long as there is room for improvement, we should not be content to remain inactive. The proud position occupied by the merchants of Britain should be our aim, and we should not rest content with anything short of that.

Iron Moulder's Strike in Albany and Troy.

A meeting of Iron Founders from all sections of the United States and Canada was lately held at Albany, to take concerted action respecting the Iron Moulders' International Union, a trade organization which aimed practically at depriving the Founders of the right to control their own shops. The following resolutions were adopted, with a preamble setting forth some of the more offensive rules and regulations of the Moulders' Union:

"Resolved, That it is expedient and necessary to the protection of the interests of the Iron Founders of this country to organize themselves into a National Association for the protection of their general interests, the promotion of a friendly feeling and mutual confidence among the members, and especially for the purpose of resisting any and all action of the Moulders' Union, which shall in any manner interfere with our right to control our workshops and to manage our own business.

"Resolved, That we will proceed to introduce into our Shops all the Apprentices or helpers we deem advisable, and that we will not allow any Union Committees in our Shops, and that we will, in every way possible, free our shops from all dictation or interference on the part of our employees."

This action on the part of the manufacturers was considered by the Union a sufficient cause for striking work, and in Troy alone, nearly a thousand men abandoned the shops. It is proposed by the workmen to establish a co-operative foundry upon a large scale, and in this way become quite independent of their late employers. The determination on the part of the capitalists not to give in, is becoming stronger and stronger, and the ramifications of their association are every day growing wider, and embracing not merely the manufacturers, but also iron miners and dealers in iron manufactures. In view of these facts, the differences between masters and men are not likely to be soon settled, and heavy loss must accrue to both parties to the dispute.

—A Company, styled The Bowmanville General Furniture Manufacturing Company, have advertised in the *Canada Gazette* their intention to apply for an Act of Incorporation under 27th and 28th Vic.