

DISCOUNTS AND UNDERSELLING.

After long and careful thought we do not understand how men are to be helped out of difficulties into which they have deliberately thrown themselves, and for reasons that still exist, and will continue to exist for a longer period than we can define, except by an entire alteration of conduct. The competition of business men has been widely lauded as the producer of all kinds of trade excellence, economy, and civility, but, of course, there are drawbacks on the other side, especially when the contest has been keen, the capital unequally distributed, and recklessness has entered the arena. Underselling of all kinds is a product of Competition and it is only reasonable, therefore, to argue, that if the product is of such a growing character that it has at length run away with all the profits, say, of the Stationers and Booksellers, that Combination should be resorted to as the antidote. Traders in antagonism bring out each other's pluck, endurance, energy, skill, ingenuity, etc., the consumers getting side benefits in the shape of lower prices and greater civility; but traders in antagonism know no mercy, and so they kill each other, the weak going to the wall, and the stronger living only as before, all the resultant profits being given away to the almighty public.

Combination alone, faithful and true, will hold the fort safely.

We have heard very much lately about the evils of the Discount System as respects Books and Magazines (and Stationery might well be included), and all kinds of remedies are proposed, many of which seem to us unsuitable. If retailers choose to give away all or nearly all their profits to purchasers of their goods, whatever these goods may be, we cannot understand what it has to do with the men who sell to the retailers, nor why they should be asked or presume to act as judges or umpires by charging higher prices to reduce the profits of retailers, and compel them to keep up their prices to the public (i. e., filching from Peter and Paul may be the gainer.) Nor do we know by what right the wholesale house or manufacturer, having once sold his goods, is deemed to have a voice in deciding what profit shall be placed on them by the retailer; nor that it should be asked that the large purchaser be charged exactly on the same scale as the smaller purchaser. These are each in contravention of sound principles; is, in fact, doing evil that good may come, which it probably never will in such a connection.

A correspondent in a contemporary journal is convinced "that if the publishers and wholesale trade will simply charge the retail trade one certain price per copy for all books, whether purchased singly or in large numbers, and allow no odd books," discount practices would soon cease, "the wholesale

trade at the same time entering into a bond not to supply any but the retail trade at less than the published price, allowing five per cent. for cash." Another correspondent asks for extra discount to firms out of England. And we are also favored with the statement that we ought to ignore published prices altogether, and charge what we like—just about what we have been doing, and getting so rich on it! In the North the opinion is said to be unanimous and emphatic that net prices will not and cannot become general, except in the case of a certain class of books—so that Edinburgh is evidently not a haven of rest yet for booksellers.

What we say is, that as retailers have brought this discount evil on themselves by unrestricted competition, they must get rid of it by as perfect a combination as possible. Even if you adopt the plan suggested by a contemporary, and unite for the purpose of supporting a large distributing agency, so as to get your goods cheaper, you will have to fight the wholesale houses before long, and the members must certainly bind each other successfully not to go beneath the 3d. in the shilling. Why not act as our workman? Form a society, or hold a Booksellers' Conference, or utilize the present London Booksellers Society (a short notice of the outing and dinner connected with which, on June 11, will be found elsewhere), or the Retail News-agents' and Booksellers' Union (the Secretary of which, Mr. E. G. Scopes will be pleased to give full particulars as to what the Society is doing in the way of remedying trade grievances), and thus influence and work the trade from some large and important central spot, taking in the smaller towns and neighbourhoods. Scour the country for members, and then at your regular meetings you will be able to discuss what discounts will really enable you to live, without frightening purchasers by the bugbear of net prices. The discounts might possibly be lessened a little without making it worth the trouble of book buyers to order from Leaden of the large discount houses. With a little from the purchaser, perhaps some favor shown by the publisher, and the removal of the insets in magazines (which have reached a point at which the trade may justly remonstrate), retailers may yet be able to live, especially if they will try to ascertain what their working expenses really are,—say 12 to 18 per cent., as the case may be.

Men are always on the strike in these days for less hours of work or mere wages. Booksellers and Stationers cannot strike, but they can combine, and get more profits if they choose, and especially as they would then only take from the public just a little of what they ought never to have given them. Of course, as among trade unionists, there will be plenty of non-members, but you must put up with this, and seek to bring them within the fold at every possible opportunity, working upon their love of fair profits. All book-buyers

do not live in London, or even in the great towns, and it surely will not pay them too take too much trouble over saving say 1d. in the shilling.

It is far better, in our opinion, to lessen the present discount slightly, by act of combination, than to keep it as it is, and then to seek to purchase on better terms by a large distributing agency, and by the assistance of the publishers in any of several ways; because these will still be left open for future calls when, perhaps, all has been done as above referred to, and still the balance is on the wrong side because of new and yet unknown difficulties. If you cannot keep the public in ignorance of published prices, we do not quite believe that the discount system is to be prevented by reducing the booksellers' profits. Suppose it should do so in the large towns: how is the very small purchaser to sell at even published prices, as he cannot take advantage of the premiums offered to the large buyer:—5d. for a 6d. magazine will not show him the way.—The Stationer, Printer, and Fancy Trades' Register.

A HUSTLER.

The Michigan Maccabee gives a lengthy sketch of David Swinton, formerly a clerk with Walpole, bookseller, of Kingston. He is now a wholesaler in East Saginaw, Mich. The journal says: "In February, 1883, he removed to Saginaw, and with George A. Reynolds, of Detroit, established the well-known wholesale and retail book and stationery firm. At the time, the trade journals referred to this firm as the "youngest" wholesale firm in the country. Mr. Swinton was 24 and his partner 23 years of age. The business was a success from the start. In October 1883, Mr. Swinton was married to Belle Florence Wilson, eldest daughter of ex-mayor Stewart Wilson, Jr., Picton, Ont., and since then four children, all fine girls, have been born to bless their home.

"David Swinton is usually identified with all meritorious, new and public enterprises, and he was one of seven who incorporated the People's building and loan association. He served for three years as vice-president of this, the largest loan Association in the state. In politics, he is a staunch republican, and, although often invited to do so, has never yet been a candidate for office, yet, while shrinking from public elective positions, he is always on hand to do his share of the work and help his friend along. He believes in life insurance, and has often said that he is "worth more dead than alive," financially; he believes in beneficiary insurance societies and in fraternal orders.

A reputation for truthfulness is indispensable to permanent and satisfying success.

Every line of goods embodies a history and a lesson worth years of study to understand.

The trader who pays his way must sell at a profit, and cannot afford to cut below others in the same line.