

MANAGER AND CUSTOMER.

Banking is an exacting business. It is based upon certain principles, and its conduct requires to be conformed to those principles. Laxity is dangerous, but perfect compliance with rule and precept is not always possible. Bank manager and bank customer are both human; the manager is trained in system and method; the customer often despises both. How is the one to get the other to comply with regulations he does not understand, and cannot see the need for? The manager must use self-control; it will be well if he possesses tact—and some managers do not. He should be able, if he cannot get his customer to comprehend bank regulations or the reason for them, to “jolly him along” in such a way as to effect the purpose of the moment.

Some very curious things occur where the party of the one part is a gentlemanly but unyielding piece of mechanism of a bank, and the party of the other part an unbusiness-like farmer or mechanic, who hates red-tape, and has a distrust of the superfine clerkly air. It may be that one thing which has helped the success of private bankers in Canada in getting business has been their happy way of keeping red-tape out of sight and making the farmer or the drover or the artisan feel at home in the banking-room. Formality or routine is abhorrent to some men, who do not wish to be made to feel, as one man phrased it, “like as if I was in church, b’gosh! an’ I didn’t ast him fur anythin’ but a hunderd in small bills. Dog on the feller; he might a ben civil.”

It is well for a bank manager or accountant in case of complaint by customers not to be too certain that his records or his memory are always right and the customer wrong. In such a case he might well recall Davy Crockett’s maxim: “Be sure you’re right, and *then* go ahead.” I remember hearing of an instance where a country manager lost an account by being too sure that his customer was wrong. A draft on his client, Mr. S—, was presented one day at the bank and refused payment because there were not funds enough at the credit of S—. Down comes Mr. S—, two days afterward, to ask why this draft had not been honored. “Because there were not sufficient funds,” said the manager.

“But there are funds enough.”

“No, not by twenty dollars.”

“I tell you, yes.”

“I tell you, no.”

“You are mistaken.”

“It is you who are mistaken.”

“Do you mean to tell me,” said the now angry customer, “that you deny your own bookkeeper’s word?”

“Nonsense; my books tell me that your account is short twenty dollars.”

“But your pass-book *shows* me that there is enough at my credit to pay this draft, and more; look at it.”

And the too-confident banker found that the pass-book, showing S— to have sufficient funds, was right, and his ledger wrong. He apologized for the mistake, but it was too late; the customer was mad through and through at being subjected to the indignity of having his draft dishonored, and took away his account.

In country places, people who have to do business with banks are often impatient of delay and do not understand or care for routine. A drover went into a bank branch one day at the lunch hour and found the clerk with his mouth full. “Say, look-a-here, about them there bills I was to hev—I’m in a hurry, and you was to hev them ready two hours ago.” The clerk mumbled something and pointed to the accountant’s desk. Away goes the drover, only to find the accountant absent, and back he comes to the clerk, still munching away at his lunch.

“Well, you folks don’t seem to care whether I catch my train and pay for my cattle or not. All right. I reckon I can find a bank that will keep their promise and give me what I want. And then you’ll hear from me, you d—d graven image of a dude.”

And he flounced out at the door to almost run into the

returning and regretful accountant, whose forgetfulness or delay had nearly cost him a customer.

“Obey orders, if you break owners,” may be a good enough motto for captains of sailing vessels. But it hardly implies that owners’ orders must in all cases be literally obeyed without those owners being told of exceptional circumstances which might justify a departure from general orders. Head offices of banks frame rules for the general government of their branches, but it is understood that long-established managers in places remote from head office have discretionary power to go beyond the strict bounds prescribed by ordinary rule. Young and comparatively experienced managers in small places, however, cannot so safely be given such discretionary power.

An instance is related of a manager in a good-sized Canadian town, who, while a good office man, was not of a sort to deal tactfully with customers. He was grumpy in manner; and besides was hampered by being held tightly to the ordered limits by warnings from head office and from his inspector. One of his customers was a flour and feed merchant of moderate means and good repute, who also dealt in coal and cement. This merchant had a note coming due on the bank for several hundred dollars, and was \$140 short. It also chanced that the bank manager owed him \$60 for goods. On the morning when his note was due, the customer went to the bank and said:

“Mr. Blank, I am a little short to-day, and will ask you to let me overdraw to protect my note.” The manager’s reply was a refusal. “Why,” pleaded the customer, “it is a small matter; I am only \$140 short and you know you owe me \$60; if you pay me that, I will give my note at 30 days for \$80.” The manager was obdurate, and said, in his snappiest way: “I will not allow overdrafts; it is your place to provide for your note.” “Well, I did not expect to be turned down so sharp, when I have been dealing with this bank for ten years.” All that the banker would say was: “You go and raise \$140 to cover your note. If you don’t, I’ll protest it.” Turning to leave the bank the merchant called back over his shoulder:

“All right; I’ll raise the \$140, and I’ll put your bill in a lawyer’s hands for collection, and you can go to Podunk, you and your bank, I’m done with you.”

Now this manager was right, in a sense, for he was obeying orders. He was not right, in another sense, for it is part of a banker’s business to assist a decent customer and to keep him—there are ways and means by which a man may do this and still hold the bank protected. We are not told whether the manager lost this customer, but the probabilities are that he did, and all for want of tact and a little “give and take.”

CITY AND DISTRICT SAVINGS BANK, MONTREAL.

This excellent savings institution held its fifty-eighth annual meeting last week, having been founded in 1847. The amount of funds it handles has risen to large proportions, for the totals of assets and liabilities reach \$18,427,906. Of the assets, there is \$1,660,510 in cash; Canadian Government stock, \$2,037,012; provincial bonds, Montreal bonds and other municipal bonds and debentures, \$5,271,431; call and short loans secured by collaterals, \$6,399,518. It owns head office building and seven branch buildings, valued at \$450,000. The remainder is in sundry securities. The amount of deposits is \$16,643,365, and that due shareholders (\$2,000,000 subscribed), is \$600,000 in paid capital and \$800,000 in reserve.

Very remarkable is the number of accounts open for depositors. Ten years ago they were only 48,145, but to-day there are 74,487, some five thousand having been added during the calendar year 1904. And the average sum due each depositor is \$222.44, where in 1895 it was only some \$177. We take the following from the report: “The net profits for the year were \$148,378.12, and the balance brought forward from last year’s profit and loss account, \$77,708.37, making a total of \$226,086.49. From this amount have been paid two dividends and bonus, and \$100,000 has been carried to reserve fund, making the latter \$800,000, leaving a bal-