BANKING AS A PROFESSION.

Opportunities for the Young Man Who is Ambitious and Enterprising.

[The following article was written fifty-eight years ago and first appeared in the Bankers' Magazine. The excellent ideas it contains, and which time has not impaired, are from the pen of George P. Bissell.]

It is generally true in mercantile life and in the learned professions, and **always** true in banking, that in order to insure success, a young man must have some end in view towards which all his exertions shall tend. Every young man should have some well-defined plan of life marked out before him, and all his energies should be directed to the realization of it.

Many have some general object in view, such as getting rich, or getting beyond hard work at some time of their life, while but few have a specific, noble mark, towards which they are aiming. This is the reason why there are so many second-rate young men to be found in every profession, and why so many men of riper years are neither one thing nor another—strung up and dangling between something and nothing—breathing in the unsatisfying east wind of a glorious mediocrity, and hoping that an undefined something may turn up one of these days, which shall relieve them and place them in an undefined blissful somewhere. According as a young man aims, so will his arrow fly. According to the energy with which he strives, and the talents which he brings to bear, so will he rise. But what are the objects to be aimed at by a young banker? For what end should he strive, and what is there ahead to reward his toil? What are the advantages of the Banker's profession? The advantages enjoyed by persons in his profession, for the attainment of everything desirable in life, are very great, and the inducements held out by the profession to ambitious, enterprising young men, are enough to satisfy any reasonable person. A high eminence and a name are as sure of attainment as in any other business.

What He Can and Need Not Do.

It should be the object of every young man who enters the profession, to become thoroughly acquainted with every part of it. He should strive to become familiar with it all, from the great general principles down to the minutest detail. While in a subordinate situation, he should not be satisfied with merely doing the work which is laid upon him, but while in this situation, he should be fitting himself for the next place above him. His aim should be to rise as rapidly as is consistent with a healthy growth, till he has placed himself at the head of an institution; and then his ambition should be, to be first in his profession, to reach an eminence and carry his bank with him. To aim merely at a cashiership or to be president is a low aim; but to be known as the best cashier or president in the country, is an aim well worthy of any man, and is the only one which should satisfy a young man entering this profession. A young man can rise as rapidly and as surely in this, as in any other profession; he can also rise as **slowly** and as surely, and he can remain as immutably stationary, as in any other calling under heaven. There are plenty of stopping places adapted to all phases of mediocrity, and these stopping places are very tenacious of their prey. A man once fixed in any of them, is there for life.

No one should enter the business unless he is determined to reach the top of the ladder. If a man is not somewhat ambitious, and unless he can see through a pretty long transaction, he generally becomes a fixture. Any one can tell, in the course of his first year, whether he is adapted to the business, and whether he will succeed. If a young man begin to feel the trap-door of a second-rate station, or a subordinate clerkship, pressing him down as he is trying to ascend the ladder, let him make a desperate effort to raise it; and if he cannot succeed, let him at once betake himself to some other ladder, under some other opening.

Sudden Wealth or Poverty Unknown.

Let no one enter this profession with the expectation of becoming suddenly, or even speedily, rich, for this expectation will be disappointed; neither let any entering the profession be afraid of ever becoming poor. Labor is generally liberally rewarded, and talent is generally appreciated. There are some, it is true, in banks, who receive but small pay, and who delve for years in subordinate situations, but such are generally men not largely endowed with talent, whose aim is nowhere, and who consequently are paid about as much as they are worth. A man of talents and energy is always sure of good pay; sufficient for all the expenses attendant upon a genteel style of living, besides a handsome margin for moderate investment for the satisfaction of that great maelstrom account generally known as "sundries." He is always sure of a competence. "A competence is all we can enjoy, Oh be content where Heaven can give no more."

It is impossible to name exactly the amount of salary which a young man may expect to receive. It depends a little upon the locality and size of the bank, and a great deal upon what the young man himself is. A moderate young man in a moderately-sized bank generally has a salary very nicely fitted to him, while an energetic, talented young man, in a good institution, can be the recipient of almost any sum that he has the face to ask for. In some banks the office of president is a mere sinecure; in such banks the president receives no salary, but takes it out in honor. Let a young man fix in his mind the salary that he thinks he ought to be worth, and then work for it, and he will generally receive it. A banker, from the nature of his position in the financial world, has often opportunities thrown in his way for making money besides his salary, but this should not be counted upon by a young man, for it is very uncertain. If a young banker is working for a name, a reputation, and,—which follows as a matter of course,—for a high salary, his best course is to keep himself free from anything like speculating, shaving or dabbling in stocks. He should engage in no other business but his bank, and he should keep himself as far as possible from any course in which there is the least possibility of becoming in any way involved or embarrassed.

All Work and No Play.

There is less anxiety of mind in this profession than in most others. It is true that the banker has a great many cares, and his mind has about as much as it can well do, but there is none of that terrible anxiety of mind which waits upon the merchant who has his warehouse full of goods, prices falling, and money scarce. The merchant at times is elated by prosperity, and again he is weighed down by anxiety, and either extreme, or the transition from one to the other is very wearing; but the banker has at **all** times enough to think of. He is never troubled with the alternations of excitement and depression; his mind is constantly active, not overtasked, and consequently its action is always healthy. During business hours he works hard, but at night he can throw off all care, and devote himself, if he choose, to literary pursuits, and to self-improvement.

There are times in great commercial distress when confidence is destroyed, that banks are crowded and pressed very hard; but with ordinary management they can be carried safely through. No bank ever failed where there was good management and no speculation. All that is required is caution and prudence; but the most incessant exercise of caution and prudence will not amount to that anxiety which produces sleepless nights.

Brain Room for Ideas.

A banker can have a great deal of time to devote to mental culture, and to the acquisition of useful information. He generally has his evenings to himself free from care, and much can be done by the improvement of such hours. His business is of such a nature that this is not incompatible with being first in his profession. There are some, however, who work night and day, and make slaves of themselves, but such are generally men who care but little for mental improvement, and whose whole aim seems to be to remain in a bank, and yet realize a treadmill. Let them work. They have the satisfaction of knowing that they are not always the best bankers. The best in any profession are those who have room enough in their brains for more than one idea, and who take time for something besides dollars and cents. A banker can, if he will employ himself, so cultivate his mind that he will shine as brightly in social life, and appear as well, even in literary circles, as men of liberal education.

These are some of the advantages of the banker's profession, and these are some of the inducements which are held out to those who wish to enter it.

Some Things He Must Possess.

A young man in order to succeed should maintain a straightforward course, both in his own affairs, and in the affairs of the bank; he should be possessed of a clear head, a mind not easily carried away by tempting offers for speculation, a disposition to receive very fair stories with considerable allowance; he should have urbanity combined with firmness and decision, and above all, he should have a deep-seated, stubborn passion for **good security.**

These are the traits which are absolutely necessary to insure success in banking. Without them, no young man should enter a bank. Without them, a young man should rather take himself to some one of the other professions, where even a fool can sometimes make a happy hit. In banking there are no happy hits to be made; the life is one long, dead pull upon talent, energy, and perseverance.