

The Commercial

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MERCHANTS AND CLERKS.

Trade and other journals frequently contain articles upon the subject of the duty of clerks to their employers; but very little is said upon the duty of the merchant to his clerks. The one question is quite as important as the other. Indeed, the first requisite is that the merchant should act in a proper manner towards his assistants, for where good treatment is not extended to the employees, the latter cannot be expected to have their employer's interest always at heart. The merchant is the head of the business, and should be the first to set a good example in encouraging right relationship between himself and his assistants. Besides, he is often more dependent upon his clerks than the latter are upon him. It is therefore in his interest to treat fairly those who are in his service, that he may reasonable expect the same treatment in return. "Do as you would be done by" is a good motto to follow in this matter.

To start out with we will give another quotation. "The laborer is worthy of his hire." Perhaps you have heard something like that before? "A fair day's pay for a fair day's work, and your motto be live and let live." How many merchants act upon these principles, and willingly pay fair wages to those in their service? The first requisite to obtain and keep a faithful clerk is to pay him fair wages in return for his services. Begin by engaging an employee at reasonable wages, and follow this up by proper treatment, and you have discharged your duty toward him. If under these circumstances he does not faithfully devote his time to your interest, he is not the person to have in your employ. Better get rid of him.

The *Minneapolis Trade Bulletin* tells of a clerk in a western wholesale house who has been sent to jail for stealing. The man occupied a responsible position in the establishment, and one which compelled him to dress well, yet his salary was only \$7 a week. Upon this small allowance he was obliged to support a family and keep up a respectable appearance in society. This practically impossible task led the man into the habit of appropriating goods belonging to the house. The firm is a wealthy one, and its head is president of the Young Men's Christian Association, and a man said to be a millionaire. Now this man seemed to be ignorant of some very necessary Christian principles, and while occupying an exalted position himself, was endeavoring to increase his wealth by grinding down his employees to a sum less than they could live honestly upon. The excuse for paying such small wages is, that the men are there of their own free will, and they can go elsewhere if they choose. This is a very poor excuse, and does not relieve the employer of his duty to pay fair wages, or of his share in the responsibility of encouraging dishonesty. Besides, men working for such wages are not so employed of their own free will. They have got to make a living for themselves and family,

and are sometimes forced to take anything that is offered them. It is all very well to talk about free will, but a man with a family cannot always wait for an opportunity to obtain work at fair wages. He is obliged to do something, and these starvation salaries look very much like taking advantage of the unfortunate circumstances in which some may be placed, and a rather dishonorable advantage at that.

A few dollars per week added to these very low salaries would never be felt by many merchants, but it would be a great help to the employee. Aside from this aspect of the matter, the clerk must know that he is being taken advantage of, and under these circumstances he cannot have his employer's interest thoroughly at heart. At best he cannot but be dissatisfied with his position and will long for a change. The services of such a clerk cannot, therefore, be as valuable as a fairly paid and properly treated employee. In positions of trust such as most clerks occupy, it would seem to be really worldly wisdom on the part of the merchant to pay fair wages and be surrounded by contented clerks, who will be ever ready to further his interests, rather than to have employees whose only aim is to get in their time while hoping for something better to turn up. Then, if the clerk has not a very keen sense of right and wrong, he will say to himself, "I am worth a great deal more than I am getting here, and, therefore, I am justified in helping myself to the goods of my employer." The wrong on the part of the merchant will not of course justify dishonesty in the clerk; but when the latter knows that he is not being fairly dealt with and is not receiving the just reward of his labor, he will sometimes inwardly excuse himself in dishonesty. Thus many young men are encouraged to make criminals of themselves. A case came up at the Winnipeg police court recently, where a clerk in a responsible position was charged with appropriating goods belonging to his employer. In the evidence it came out that the young man's salary was \$5 per week, when it should have been twelve, or at least double the amount. How can employers expect anything else under such circumstances.

Treat your assistants honorably and fairly, and like human beings with passions like yourself. Give your orders in a kindly and gentlemanly manner, that they may appear like a request rather than an order. If you have any reproof to offer, do not do it before customers or other employees. Nothing is more irritating to a clerk than to be reproofed before others; and it is often very disagreeable to customers as well. The writer has at present a case in mind where a Winnipeg lady transferred her patronage from a leading city dry goods store, because the proprietor had in a moment of temper reproofed a young lady clerk in her presence. The whole question may be summed up in a few words: Treat your clerks in a manner that they may learn to respect, rather than mistrust and hate you, and you will find that in the end it will pay you. Customers will prefer a store where the clerks are cheerful and attentive, and where there is an appearance of harmony. If the clerks are not satisfied with their treatment, these conditions cannot exist, and they will not be able to make it as pleasant for customers. Besides, where the clerk has not the

interest of his employer at heart, he is not at all likely to make a valuable or attractive salesman.

HUDSON'S BAY RAILWAY.

Now that the winter season has set in, rumors concerning railway construction next season will be in order. Already applications for charters for new roads are being announced, and by the time Parliament and the Legislature are called, the usual crop of applications for railway charters will be ready. Among other railway schemes, the Hudson's Bay railway is attracting its full share of attention. Undoubtedly there will be one or more bills before Parliament this winter concerning this road. Application will no doubt again be made by the promoters of the road, for further aid to their scheme, and it is quite probable that this undertaking will take some new form or appear in some new phase before the winter is over. It has been rumored that the Dominion Government will do something handsome for the road next session of Parliament, but any statements of this nature cannot be considered as very reliable at the present time.

Though the Hudson's Bay railway question has been in a dormant state for some time, Manitobans are just as much in earnest as ever in their desire for the construction of the road, and their faith in its practicability and in its ultimate construction is also undiminished. In this connection it may be said that the scheme to build a road through Ontario to Hudson's Bay cannot be regarded as a rival to the Manitoba and Hudson's Bay road, as a good many here seem to suppose. The prospects for a direct road from Manitoba to Hudson's Bay would not be injured by the carrying out of the Ontario and Hudson's Bay or James Bay scheme, which is now being considered. Indeed, a road to James Bay through Ontario would only help to establish the practicability of the Manitoba enterprise. Every argument in favor of the Ontario road can be made to apply to the Manitoba road, while there are important considerations in favor of the Manitoba scheme, which do not apply with the same force to the proposed Ontario road. For instance, the local traffic, the development of the country along the road and the trade of the Bay itself would be arguments in favor of either road; but the one great feature of the Manitoba and Hudson's Bay railway, as a short route to Great Britain and Europe, cannot be applied with any force to the proposed Ontario road, for the reason that the Atlantic seaboard furnishes a more readily available route for the country east of Manitoba. In the one case the road would furnish a short and greatly needed outlet for the exports of the country, in addition to the development of local trade. In the other the development of the local trade of the country and the Bay would be the only advantages of the road. These latter interests alone, we believe, are sufficiently important to warrant the construction of the proposed road. Let the promoters of the Ontario road therefore carry out their scheme if they can, for it should assist rather than injure the prospects of the Manitoba and Hudson's Bay road.