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THE COMMERCIAL TRAVELER AS A FACTOR IN
BUSINESS.

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THERE are a few silver-haired men yet in the retail ranks who meet on their rounds of duty, who relate with zest early experiences while making biennial purchases at Montreal, Toronto or Hamilton, as the case may be. They also retain a vivid remembrance of the change brought about with the introduction of the system of buying from sample at their own door. In those days competition was less keen, calls less frequent, and travelers received a warm welcome, largely growing out of the length and importance of the merchants' wants list.

BYGONE CONDITIONS.

Personal excellence and aptitude for the road, while always of value, was not then so much a necessity. A quarter of a century ago, in Ontario at least, travelers generally had what they termed "a good time," barring the discomforts incidental to pioneer rural life. They did not require to "move fast," and if orders were few the volume of business in the aggregate was large. Merchants were in the habit of filling up twice a year, leaving little for the sorting time. Four trips a year answered the demands of the trade, while now eight to twelve is a common experience, and in some lines calls are repeated every three weeks.

THE MAN IN DEMAND.

The startling progress of these later times has increased the demand for high-class men, and no department of life's activities is making a louder call for the best than this commercial avenue of labor, yet many ordinary men, if faithful and industrious, hold their positions well, not because the results are entirely satisfactory to their employers, but by virtue of the fact that better men are difficult to find, and wholesale firms are averse to making changes.

A striking success is seldom attained without complete conditions, or, in other words, a high-grade house and representatives. A good traveler can largely overcome indifferent house management, but an otherwise smartly managed wholesale establishment will fail with weak travelers.

When the system of supply accounts was in vogue, customers belonged to the house, and special ability on the part of the traveler was of small moment. Fortunately, in Canadian experience that practice is almost a relic of the past. In the business race a burdensome handicap will bring to grief the laden

victim, and men doing business as a supply account are always short on cash and long on cost of purchases. Independent buyers crowd them to the wall, which disaster, in turn, affects the wholesaler.

DIFFICULTIES TO CONTEST WITH.

Some years ago the writer remembers with what glee a traveler started out for a wide-awake firm, having just severed a connection of many years' standing with a house carrying weak accounts. But one trip was sufficient. His new employers would not fill orders taken from those he had been selling, and he neither possessed the nerve nor the training which enabled the interesting of independent buyers. Another experience is on record where for six years a traveler held solid every customer once made (except the undesirable purposely dropped) during which time sales were large and losses few. The latter case illustrates what may be accomplished under complete conditions, and the former shows how easily a strong house may make a mistake in selecting a traveler.

Many merchants trade for years with a firm without having met the principals, and in such cases the responsibilities of the traveler are increased. If the head of a jobbing house is capable of leaving a good impression he should meet his customers at least once in two years; it would prevent the dictation of an unwise letter, and save the traveler that difficult task of patching a rift in what has been to him a judiciously woven commercial web.

THE TRAVELER'S POSITION.

Impropriety, if not imposition, is sometimes practised between the wholesaler and retailer, and both in degree are guilty, neither is the traveler free from wrong doing, striking both ways. His position naturally elects him arbiter as between two clients. True, the employers often expect their brief wisely argued against the customers' particular interest. They say, "We pay the fee." But the traveler must be faithful to justice if he would keep up sales, and customers are part of his capital, in fact the basis of his salary.

It is results which tell rather than special methods. A man cannot long draw more than his earnings warrant, and if his pay is less than justice demands, that is his own fault. No doubt a well-defined method must be the daily practice if permanent success is the goal aimed at. Some travelers are granted larger latitude than others, but the wholesaler allowing his representatives almost unlimited powers is apt to regret it. In the heat of the battle on the road, where their pockets are not directly