

Machinery in the Shoe Trade.

In an ideal state of society anything which tends to increase the productive power of mechanics will certainly elevate the race, by lessening the hours of drudgery and giving opportunity for the development of scholars, poets and scientific men.

The benefits from the use of machinery as society is at present constituted are somewhat doubtful. This is especially true in the shoe business, because in no other has the ingenuity of man been more wonderfully displayed. A single large family settled in the wilderness without necessary agricultural implements, would be greatly benefitted by the introduction of plows, harrows, rakes and the like, because they would be enabled to produce the necessities of life in much less time than formerly, and could employ the leisure time in the improvement of their minds.

It is evident that the march of labor-saving machinery cannot be stayed, nor would it be wise to attempt it. It is equally evident to thinking minds that a change in the labor situation to counteract the tendency of machinery to throw men out of employment, must be made if our country is to remain contented and happy.

In the early days of New England, and particularly Massachusetts, made a specialty of shoemaking. In my own native town in central Massachusetts, scarcely a man, woman or child in the township, but what had something to do toward the making of shoes. Gradually the business from being done piecemeal in hundreds of little shops was collected into large manufactories and machinery largely increased the product while diminishing the number of workmen. The machines for cutting sole leather, the improved pegging and stitching machines threw hundreds out of employment, but since then other and more wonderful inventions have appeared. The lasting machines, trimming machines, heeling machines, crimping machines, treeing machines, and many others have increased the product to a great extent while decreasing the employees correspondingly. It is generally admitted that enough shoes can be made to supply all demands if the factories are run but eight months per year on the average, such is the power of labor-saving machinery.

Now what advantage has the shoemaker gained by all this? He is told that shoes can be bought so much cheaper, that he gets them with much less trouble and in better grades than formerly, that those who remain to run the machines get much better pay than formerly, and that those who are shut out from work get employment elsewhere greatly to their advantage. The idle shoemakers are reminded by the first argument of the Irishman who on coming to America complained of the cost of certain articles, saying that they could be bought in the Old Country for a shilling. When asked why he did not remain in Ireland, he said, "Bedad, I couldn't get the shilling." So the shoemakers thrown out of work say they can't get the shilling. The machinery in many cases requires simply the watchful eye of a child so that many heads of families are thrown out of employment by children who should be at school.

What becomes of the men thrown out of employment? If they seek to enter any other industry they are met by the same labor-saving machinery the large surplus of unemployed labor enables manufacturers to be tyrannical with impunity and reduce wages.

The remedies which thoughtful shoemakers and other workers would apply to the diseased state of affairs are:

First, the prohibition of child labor by an increase in the school age, and the passage of the most stringent laws against the employment of children under school age, also by the enactment of apprentice laws.

Second, by a reduction in the hours of labor from ten per day to eight. This, if adopted generally, would require an addition of twenty-five per cent, to the present working force and employ all those now idle. Each worker would have money in his pocket and the increased demand for commodities would without doubt make the eight hour day worth as much in wages as the former ten hour day.

Third, the placing of some restriction upon the enormous influx of thousands who are ready to sell their labor at almost any price. This is dangerous and should receive the attention of all true patriots.

The cry of anarchists, demagogues and agitators raised against those who discuss the labor question will not prevent an impending crisis. These are problems which must be solved and true lovers of liberty who desire to prevent disorder and crime should consider candidly the situation and work earnestly for those things which will tend to preserve our peace and prosperity.—*Frederick Mason, in Shoe and Leather Worker.*

Cash vs. Credit.

There is a sort of traditional belief among people who are not themselves directly connected with the shoe trade that shoes sell for cash. Of course it is known very well in the trade that such is not the fact, though it must be admitted that the beginning of the departure from the cash system was made by the manufacturers for their own convenience rather than that of customers. But while dating bills ahead has become a necessary feature of the business, it has not stopped at that. Not only are bills dated ahead for such a length of time as will suit the convenience of the manufacturer, thereby enabling him to get his goods out of the way, reduce expenses of storage, insurance, etc., but this concession in his favor paves the way for customers to ask favors and they get them in the shape of extensions on bills, at 30, 60, 90 days and over. So then the shoe trade is no longer conducted on a cash basis. Indeed it seems impossible now to get the business down to a cash basis; but the next best thing that can be done is to keep collections closely made and not permit them to run behind.

Now at the beginning of the year is a good time for merchants and manufacturers to stiffen up their backbones and make new resolutions on the matter of collections. There are some exceptions, but the general rule is, that the more lenient one is with a customer owing a bill, the poorer customer he becomes. While conversely the more promptly collections are

made, the better customer and better friend one becomes. In the first place when bills are promptly collected the customer gets all the benefit there is to be had of discounts, etc., and pays no interest. If he wants more goods, he thinks, well, I have settled up with so and so, I can buy another bill of them to fill up broken assortments. But the other hand, if so and so have let their bill run and charges interest, it makes the customer feel as if he were paying too much for his goods, and if he needs more goods before the bill is paid, he is almost certain to order them of some house to which he has paid up his bills in full. In fact when a bill runs on a long time it is almost certain to create more bad feelings in the end than if the collections were pushed, and the bill promptly paid. The moral of this is obvious and is taught by every business man's experience. Keep your collections well up. Don't wait for a "better time." Have a rule and stick to it, that when bills are due they must be paid, and, barring reasonable exceptions, insist upon the enforcement of the rule. But of course, do it in a proper manner. Strictness in collections may give offence, but it will not if done promptly. Get up the name of being prompt collectors and customers will pay your bills in preference to those of other houses anyhow. Remember that it is dilatory collections more than all other things combined that bring about losses finally.—*Leather Gazette.*

BRADSTREET'S, of January 14th, gives Mayor Hewitt, of New York City, credit for an idea in connection with local taxation, which has the merit of boldness to recommend it. Although the idea is intended only for New York, Mayor Hewitt's might be worthy of consideration in other cities. We quote the article in full: "Mayor Hewitt, of New York, has made his annual message the vehicle for the expression of some sound and suggestive views upon taxation, which he has set forth in such a way as to make them likely to attract attention. He says that the city of New York would be a large gainer by the abolition of taxes on personal property. The abolition of these taxes would make necessary the levy of an additional rate upon real estate, but the increase would, he says, be rather nominal than substantial, and would be compensated for by the advance in the value of real estate, which would follow inevitably. Mr. Hewitt states a fact thoroughly well known when he says that personal property taxes are notoriously impossible of collection in New York city, and that their incidence in practice is highly unjust. Those who ought to pay most largely evade payment, while the estates of widows and orphans and wards in chancery pay the full amount. Again, he suggests that if the personal property taxes were repealed it would not be difficult to devise a system of taxation upon corporations enjoying public franchises which would not be onerous to them. In referring to this point, however, Mayor Hewitt is careful to point out that any proposition to impose taxes upon what people or corporations owe, instead of what they own, is absolutely unsound. This latter proposition is one which legislators interested in the success of the state and city would do well to lay to heart."