Title: A Man of Samples. Something about the men he met "On the Road"

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Release date: July 1, 2004 [EBook #6132]
Most recently updated: January 28, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Text file produced by Ben Byer, Juliet Sutherland, Charles Franks and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team

HTML file produced by David Widger

A MAN OF SAMPLES

SOMETHING ABOUT THE MEN HE MET "ON THE ROAD"

By Wm. H. Maher

Author of "On The Road To Riches"

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CHAPTER I.

“When do you start, Tom?”

“At midnight.”

“Well, good-by; sock it to 'em; send us in some fat orders.”

“I'll do it, or die; good-by.”

And then I sat down to think it all over. Our traveling man was off on a wedding tour, and I had agreed to take his place for this one trip. As the hour drew near for me to start, my courage proportionately sank, until I now heartily wished that I had never consented to go. What if I failed? I had been stock clerk and house salesman for three years; I had been successful; my position was a good one, and one that would grow better; there was nothing to be made by success on the road, as I had no intention of continuing there, and failure might be the means of making my place in the house less secure. What an infernal fool I was! If there had been any way under heaven for me to get out of it I would have hailed the opening with delight. I would have blessed any accident that would have been the means of sending me to bed for a week or two, and I would have taken the small-pox thankfully. But there was no release. Like an ass, as I was, I had agreed to take Mallon's trip, and I must go ahead if it made or unmade me.

I ate my supper with a heavy heart, bade my landlady and her daughters a solemn good-by, then went to the theater to forget my sorrows. At midnight I was checking my sample-trunk for Albany, and persuading the baggagemaster that 218 pounds were exactly 120. I succeeded; but it took three ten-cent cigars to do it.

The reason I call the town Albany is because that is not its name, and I may as well say here that as I write about actual incidents I don't propose to “lay myself liable” by giving the name of any town or any dealer. If I call him Smith it will naturally follow that he was not Smith.

If Albany had been a hundred or more miles away I would have taken a berth in the sleeper, but we were due there at 2 o'clock, so I dozed and nodded and swore to myself during the two hours' ride. I wanted to get there, but I dreaded it, too. Stories I had heard traveling men tell about poor beds, mean men, dirty food, and unprincipled competitors all came back to me in a distorted fashion, and if I didn't have a nightmare I must have experienced a slight touch of delirium tremens.

“How much of a town is Albany?” I asked the conductor.

“No town at all; just a crossing.”

“No hotel there?”

“Oh, yes; they call it a hotel.”

This was exactly what I expected. Probably no one would be up and I could walk around the town for the next four hours. What an idiot I was! By thunder, I would break my leg or my arm the first thing I did and get out of this foolish—

“Albany!”

What, so soon! Those were the two shortest hours I had ever known.

No lights anywhere; no one about; nothing but—

“Hotel, sir?”

Good; here was a ray of comfort. “Hotel? Well, I should say so. Where is your light?”

“Here it is.” And a lantern came around a corner as the train dashed off on its way.

“Don't mind your trunk; that will be taken care of and I'll get it in the morning. Here, Dan, lead the way.”

We walked a square or two and went into a neat appearing office. Bed? Yes, I might as well get a few hours' sleep. And I was given a very comfortable room. I lay in bed trying to recall our customer's name, and preparing my speech of introduction when—. Some one was rapping at the door. What's up? Breakfast! What, breakfast already? Why, I hadn't thought I was asleep at all.

As I looked over the register, after breakfast, dreading to start out, I asked the clerk;

“Been any gun men here lately?”

“None since last week. Layton was here from Pittsburg on the 22d.”

“Did he sell anything?”

“I think he did sell Cutter a small bill”

“How many stores are there here?”

“Three that sell guns. Are you in the gun business!”

“Yes. I am from Pittsburg.”

I hung back as long as I dared; found out all about the trains; picked up facts and fancies about the merchants; got my cards and price-book handy; stuck four revolvers (samples) in my pockets; pulled my hat down solidly on my head, and started out. And every step I took I, figuratively, kicked myself for being there, and for being a blasted fool generally. “JOHN O. JORDAN, GUNS AND REVOLVERS.”

This was the legend that attracted my attention, and toward it I took my way. I stopped at the window long enough to take a hasty inventory of its contents, and from it I sized up my man. There were some goods there that came from our store; this cheered me, I took courage, walked in, and handed Mr. Jordan my card.

“We have done some business with you,” I said, in my blandest tones, “and Mr. Mallon always spoke pleasantly of you [this was a random shot]; he has taken a wife unto himself, and I am making his trip.”

“Why the devil don't you send me the goods I ordered last time from him? Where are those British bull-dogs? Did he sell them too low, or is my credit poor?”

Phew! There it was. I must first close up an old sore before I could do anything else. I might have known it would be just so, but I was such a pig-headed fool I hadn't thought of this.

“Tell me all about it, Mr. Jordan;” and he told it, with fire in his eye. But he felt better for having told it. I knew nothing of it till now, but I took out my book and said:

“Mr. Jordan, the goods will come now. You may depend upon it. How many bull-dogs do you want?”

“I don't want any. I got some of Layton. The house can't fool me again.”

I sat down on the counter and gave him fourteen reasons for his order not having been filled (I hope some of them were true), and then I pulled out a “Pet” revolver and asked him if seventy-five cents was not mighty low for that.

He admitted that it was, but he had bought of Layton five cents lower. Then I explained wherein Layton's was ten cents poorer than mine (I hadn't seen his), and why he ought to give mine the preference. What had he paid for 32-caliber?

“One twenty-five.”

I drew out mine at $1.20, and I convinced him that mine was a better pistol than his, although he said he had already more than he ought to have and he would not buy more. Then I placed an automatic ejector under his eyes, threw out the shells, cocked it and snapped it, and explained how, though it cost us $6.70, I was going to sell him some at $6.

“No, you ain't,” said he, “I've got two on hand and can't give them away.”

By this time it struck me I was making but little headway and was wasting my breath in praising goods he already had, so I concluded the best plan to go on was to see what he had, and govern myself accordingly. He seemed to have everything, confound him! There was nothing he had not bought in the thirty days, and I began to think I could use my time better somewhere else, when a man came in to buy a gun, and I stepped aside to watch the subsequent proceedings.

The story told by that retailer about those guns would have made a dog howl, if it were not for the fact that he believed every word of it. The farmer wanted a good muzzle loader, but wanted it choke-bored! The retailer brought down seven different guns, all of them choke-bored! and expatiated upon their cheapness and good qualities. Some reference was made to me, as being a gun man, and I was drawn into the conversation. I explained the merits of guns to that farmer in a way that pleased him mightily. I could see that, but he finally said he didn't intend to buy a gun that day, but would some time in the fall, and he passed calmly out.

I looked at Mr. Jordan, and he looked at me. “Are you mad?” I asked.

“No; I'm used to it.”

“Then try a cigar.”

As we smoked and discussed mean customers, I put in some good licks for my house, and by and by heard Jordan say:

“I lied to you about those bull-dogs; I didn't buy any of Layton; you may send me six.”

CHAPTER II.

When Mr. Jordan gave me the order for six “bull-dog” revolvers, I felt that I had made a conquest; I went carefully through my list, adding something here and there, until I had made a very pretty bill with him. So, although he met me as if he wanted to punch me in the head, we parted on the best of terms. Where should I go next? A sign farther down the street said “Hardware,” so I started down that way.

A man who carries a mixed stock is easier to sell goods to than is the man who makes a specialty of one line. In the house we always had a closer price for the dealer who made guns a specialty than for the hardware man who kept a few guns and revolvers as a small branch of his stock.

“John Topoff” was the name over the door, so I went in, carefully noticing the stock, the way it was arranged, and the amount, in order to get some idea of the kind of man the owner was.

“Is Mr. Topoff in?” I asked a young man who was blacking stoves and who I was sure was not the man I wanted.

“Naw,” he said, as he brushed away.

“Will he be in soon?”

“Naw, he's dead. There's Mr. Tucker, he's the boss.”

The young man spoke as if answering the questions about Mr. Topoff had become a burden to him, and if that honest hardware man had been dead long I didn't blame the boy for getting tired of him.

Mr. Tucker had been studiously keeping his back toward me, as if I was to expect no encouragement from him, but he turned when I spoke his name and I introduced myself.

“Don't need anything in your line,” said he, as if he wished I would accept that as a final verdict and get out.

What would you have done, respected reader, if you had been in my place? I would gladly have said “good-day,” and gone at once if it were not for the fact that my present business was to get orders, and the only way to secure them was to work for them. So I ignored Mr. Tucker's ill-timed remark and proceeded to be sociable.

I explained as pleasantly as I could why it was our house was sending out a new man. I got him interested enough to ask a question or two, which was a point gained, and finally I came round to his stock, but I carefully ignored guns and talked of nails; something I knew nothing about.

Don't you know you can pay no one a higher compliment than to place him in the position of a teacher to you? I picked that idea up somewhere, and I put it in practice by asking Mr. Tucker for information as to hardware and hardware houses. He was soon talking warmly and as if he was enjoying himself, and I was wondering when would be a good time to get guns started, when a little boy came to the door and shouted: “Pa! ma wants you to come home a minute, just as soon as you can!”

He started off without a word, and I proceeded to get acquainted with the young man who said “Naw!”

Of all creatures on the face of the earth the average clerk is the easiest to pump. The fact that a man is from a wholesale house seems to be sufficient guarantee that he may safely be told anything regarding prices, and where goods came from. The moment Tucker went out the door Bob stopped his work, and for fifteen minutes he kept his tongue wagging about the cost of goods and all he knew about them. He was so incautious that I soon learned his cost mark, and then did not need to ask cost afterward.

How did I do it? Bless you! Every traveling man does it in spite of himself. For instance, I pick up a box and notice it is marked L.X.K., and I ask the clerk, while I look at the revolver, What did this cost?

He turns the box up to see the mark, and answers, $2.25.

This may be the truth, or may not. If it is, “L” is 2 and “K” is 5, and “X” means “repeat.” So by and by I find a box marked B.L.K., and I ask the cost of that. He answers, $1.25. I am now sure that B is 1, L is 2 and K is 5, and I can easily guess that A and C are 3 and 4. By finding boxes with other letters on, and learning from the boy what the mark is, I soon have “Black horse” as the cost mark in that store. I make a note of this in my trip book so that I can use it when I am here again, or when our other man is here.

My way now is tolerably smooth. If he really needs goods the merchant will be willing to order at prices paid before; if he thinks he does not need anything I may tempt him by quoting prices a little under what he paid. In either case I am in good shape to make a fight for an order; thanks to the clerk's loose tongue and lack of sense.

A customer comes in and wants a file. I listen to the conversation, trying to get hold of any hint that may be useful to me by and by. Another man wants a box of cartridges. My ears are wide open now.

“Have you the 'U.S.'?”

“U.S.—U.S. What do you mean?” asks the clerk.

“I want the kind with U.S. on the end.”

“What good is that?”

“Good to go. I like that kind. Have you got them?”

“I don't know; yes; no, they ain't either! They're U.M.C.”

“Don't want 'em!”

Now I was temporarily selling the U.S. cartridge, so I made a note of what the man said, to be used on Tucker, but I took up the conversation and convinced the customer that the U.M.C. make of cartridges was good; he finally bought a box and went off apparently satisfied.

Just then Tucker came in.

I made some laughing allusion to pig-headed customers, and the clerk at once opened up on the “fool” who thought one cartridge was better than another. When the young man was back at his stove I started out to sell Tucker a bill. He was backward about buying; didn't know our house; always bought of Simmons; did not like to have so many bills; always got favors from Simmons, and despised our city on general principles.

I agreed with him on every point, but (Oh! these “buts”) I also wanted an order. I took out my bull-dog revolver that was selling at $2.85; he had none like it in stock; it was the leading pistol, retailing readily at $4 to $5, according to locality. “I want to send you a few of these at a special net price,” said I; “the regular price is $3; I will sell you at $2.85.” I said this as if I was making him a present of a gold watch. “I wouldn't have the d—n things as a gift,” said he.

CHAPTER III.

When a man has been on the road a year or two he is never disappointed because a dealer refuses to buy something he was sure he was going to sell him. He is prepared for “No” on all occasions rather than for “Yes.” But a man is terribly disappointed on his first trip every time he starts out to sell a particular article and does not meet with success. I was sure Tucker would give me an order for some bull-dog revolvers, but in answer to my low price he had said he wouldn't take them as a gift!

I would have been very glad to go straight home and let Tucker get along without bull-dogs, but my silly head had brought me into this business and I must keep on. Probably he saw I was a good deal disappointed, for he added, in a rather kindly tone, “Every pistol of that kind I have ever sold came back on my hands for repairs, and I swore I'd never buy another.”

“You are making a mistake,” said I. “When the double action first came out they did get out of order easily, and manufacturers were obliged to take back broken ones and replace them at great expense to themselves. In self-defense they were obliged to make them better, and they are just as reliable as any other to-day.”

“Well, I don't want any.”

“All right, we will pass it. But I wondered what one of your competitors meant when he said he had the pistol trade; now I understand.”

“Does he sell these?”

“Yes, he had some from us not long ago, and gave me an order for more to-day.”

“What's the best you can do on them?”

How many times a day does every traveling man see men act as Tucker did? Here was a line of goods he was cocksure he did not want, but the moment he heard that his competitor had a trade on them he began to feel that he must have some. Seven-eighths of the goods sold are sold in this way. Very few men do business on their own judgment. Their competitors make their prices, select their styles, and force them to carry certain stock. The drummer's best card is always: This is selling like fire; Smith took a gross, Brown half a gross, Jones three dozen, and you will miss it if you do not try a few. Such dealers always have the larger part of their capital locked up in goods they bought because others had bought the same goods.

I repeated my price to Tucker, and he told me to send him a few. “By the way,” said he, “what are your terms?”

“Sixty days.”

“Does your house draw the day a bill falls due?”

“No; the house is slow about drawing upon customers, and they always give ten days' notice before making draft.”

“Well, I don't like to be drawn on. The house that draws on me can't sell me again. I can't draw on my trade, and I'm devilish glad to get my money in six months, but you fellows in the city expect a man to come to the exact minute. I don't want any drawing on me.”

It was an excellent place to have delivered a lecture on the beauties of prompt payments. I could have told Brother Tucker that if he did not see his way clear to pay his bill when due he should not buy it, and if his customers did not pay promptly he should dun them harder or keep his goods. But the traveling man is not sent out to inculcate business morals, and he is too anxious to sell a bill to run any risks by disagreeing with a buyer. I did what all others would have done in my place. I assured Mr. Tucker I would be as easy with him regarding payments as any house in the world would dare be, and that point safely out of the way, I sold him several items quite smoothly. We came to guns.

“What is Parker's worth?”

“Twenty-five per cent, off factory list.”

“What! Why, here's a quotation from Cincinnati of 25 and 10!”

“Let me see it, please. I have not heard of any such figures.”

“Bob, where is that list of Reachum's?”

“I don't know.”

“D—n it, you had it.”

“Then it must be in the drawer.”

Tucker emptied the drawer, looked through a pile of papers, but could not find the circular he was looking for He was annoyed by it, and I was sorry.

“Well, let it go,” said he, “but that was the price.”

“There must be a mistake somewhere,” said I, “for the goods cost that at the factory in largest lots.”

“There was no mistake,” he said sharply; “I know what I am talking about. The discount offered was 25 and 10.”

I hastened to assure him that I had not meant that he was mistaken, but that Reachum must have made a mistake.

“That's no concern of mine,” said he, “and I rather think that Reachum is a man who knows his business as well as any of you. If you are higher than he is on guns you probably are on other goods. I guess you had better cancel that order.”

Here was a pretty how-do-you-do! How was I to get out of this box? I confess I was in great doubts as to what to do or say. I dared not sell Parker's guns at any such price, yet the man would cancel the order and probably always have a grudge against the house unless I sold him now. I could not believe that Reachum had made this price, and yet there was no telling what that house might or might not do.

“How many Parker guns do you want?” I asked.

“I don't want any. I only asked because it is a leading thing, and if a house is not low on that I conclude it is high on other goods.”

“I was going to say,” I said, “that I would meet the price.” I wasn't going to say anything of the kind, but as he didn't want any I was safe in saying it now.

“Then you may send me two. I think I know a place where I can sell two.”

Just so! I was in for it again, and in for it bad. Sometimes it pays to be smart, and sometimes it does not. This was one of the latter times. As a matter of fact I had no business to quote a discount greater than 20 per cent, but I had said 25 so as to make a good impression on him, and at 25 and 10 I was sure to catch Hail Columbia from the house.

Just then Bob, who had come over when appealed to about the list, said:

“There's that list you wanted,” and drew one out of a pile of papers on the desk. Tucker opened it with an air of satisfaction, but I could see his face grow black.

“D—n it, this isn't it.”

“Yes, it is; it's the one that came in yesterday, and there's the figures on it you made for Utley,” persisted Bob.

I did not wait on ceremony, but looked over Tucker's shoulders, and to my astonishment and delight, there was, in plain figures, discount on Parker guns, 15 and 10 per cent.

“How in thunder did I make such a mistake!” said Tucker, with a somewhat downfallen air.

“We all do it,” said I, anxious to help him out the best way I could. “Fifteen and 10 is low enough, but if they were offering 50 and 10 I would meet them.”

Don't you think, good reader, that this was a proper thing to say? It seemed so to me, and cost nothing, so I said it. I added, “You see, Mr. Tucker, my price of 25 per cent, straight was a better one than Reachum's. Shall I send the guns at 25?”

“Why, you just now said you'd sell at 25 and 10!”

“I said that because you said you were offered at 25 and 10, but as that was a mistake I take back my figures.”

“Well, let the Parker guns go.”

I was quite glad to do so. But it made it up-hill work for a few minutes, until Tucker had got over his chagrin about the guns. But we managed to get in smooth water again, and when we were through I had taken a fair order from him, and much of it was for little odds and ends that paid us a good profit. I bade him good-day with a feeling of gratitude, and assured him of my hearty thankfulness.

After dinner I tackled a general dealer. The hotel clerk told me the Pittsburg man, who was there a week before, had sold Cutter a bill, so I had no hopes of doing much with him, but I had two hours yet, and might as well improve them.

“Martin Cutter” was over the door, and I got an idea in my head that he was a long, thin individual, with black hair and whiskers. But he wasn't. He was of medium size, well built, and had an air of shrewdness and of business about him. He was waiting on trade, so I sat down and watched him and took notes of the stock. When he was through with his customer he came forward and met me pleasantly, spoke well of our house, but said he was just getting in a bill of revolvers and cartridges, and needed nothing in our line.

There was something about him that made me like him at once, and I had the feeling that I was making a pleasant impression upon him. We chatted about Pittsburg, about gun houses, about the cutting going on in prices, and the general dullness in all business. I think that when I went out of the store I had more respect for him as a man and as a merchant than I had for the two who had bought of me. Had he needed any goods, I would have given him my lowest prices at the first word. As I was walking back to the hotel I suddenly remembered that he was just the man to buy a certain pocket-knife that we had lately taken hold of, and I went back to speak about it to him.

“Are you sending goods here to any one?” he asked.

“Yes, two bills.”

“Then send me a dozen.”

I thanked him, and went off feeling better. The chances are always decidedly in your favor of selling a man whom you have sold before. The dealer who lets you leave town without an order this trip will let you go twice as readily the next time. I like to get him down in my order book even though it is for some very trifling

thing, because of the influence it will have on the future.

I went to the hotel, copied off my orders, and mailed them, feeling that I had done extra well, and then sauntered leisurely to the depot. On the train a man behind me heard me ask the conductor about Rossmore.

He leaned over and asked, “Are you selling goods?”

“Yes.”

“Then we'll go to Rossmore together. What line are you in?”

“Guns and revolvers.”

“The devil you are! So am I.”

CHAPTER IV.

I didn't fancy going to a town with a competitor. I have now been on the road a good many years, and I do not fancy it to-day. If I can get in there one train ahead of him I will strain every nerve to do it, but rather than go in on the same train I would hang back and let him have the first “go” at the town and take my chances for what he leaves.

When two men selling the same goods are in a town together the dealers usually take advantage of it. They tell the first man that they may want this or that, “if they can buy it right,” and, after getting his price, say he can come in later. He knows very well that this means his competitor is to be consulted also, and he must have a very stiff backbone indeed if he does not cut his own prices at once.

So when my neighbor on the train told me he also was going to Rossmore and was selling guns and revolvers, I felt my courage ooze out of my fingers. He handed me a card, with a good-natured smile, and I read:

SHIVERHIM & GAILY,
Philadelphia.

I don't like to hand out a card as an introduction of myself to other traveling men, so I told him my name and that of my house, and we considered ourselves acquainted.

“Is this your first trip?”

Now, why in thunder should he have asked that? Did I look different from other traveling men? I felt as if he showed very bad taste in asking such a question and I made a note to never do it unless I wanted to be mean. But I told Blissam (that was his name) that it was my first trip.

“Then you'll find Rossmore a tough place to tackle.”

I said we had three customers there.

“So have we; so has every dealer that ever went there. They buy a handful of goods of everybody, and they buy most goll-darned cheap. They'll lie to you until your head swims. First, there's Fisher; keeps an eating room on the main floor and gun store upstairs. I'll go in and quote him Remington guns at $36, when you call he'll ask your price; if you say $36, he'll tell you that you're high, and he'll break you down in spite of yourself.”

“But when a fellow gets to the bottom he's got to stop,” said I.

“Oh, there's no bottom to guns. It's the meanest business in the world, and it used to be the best. In '70-'73 I could make big profits as easy as a duck swims, but now it's all glory. I sold Simmons a bill of $600 last week, and made exactly eighteen dollars.

“Oh, well,” said I, “you can't expect to make much on Simmons, but there are lots of places where you do make a good profit now.”

“No, sir; it can't be done. Say, are you going to cut prices much at Rossmore?”

“Not at all, if I can help it. I'm out on the road to make money, and not to show big sales. But I'm afraid your house will overshadow mine.”

“Oh, that's all nonsense; people don't go a cent on houses any more; prices are what tell. I'll introduce you.”

Not much. No competitor of mine ever introduced me or ever shall. I prefer to introduce myself in my own time and way.

We reached Rossmore about 7 o'clock in the evening. Blissam took it for granted that I was going to the Everett House, but my hotels had been fixed for me by our old traveling man, and he had instructed me to go to the Forest; a cheaper house, but in all other respects equal to the other. I was rather glad, too, that we were not going to the same house. Be ever so sociable with a competitor, still the fact remains that he is a competitor, and his success means your failure. Under such circumstances a man must be less interested in his business than I was to permit him to feel very desirous of his competitor's company.

After registering at the hotel it occurred to me that it would be a good idea to catch any of the dealers that I could that evening and break the ice. It might be worth something to make a good impression before Blissam got around. After getting my bearings well established, I started to call on Billwock.

Billwock was pretty generally known in the gun trade; first for being mighty slow pay, and second for the fact that they had a baby at his shop regularly every year or oftener, and the store was used as nursery and play-ground. Traveling men had to see the last baby and count all the old ones, and according as they praised them did old Billwock buy liberally or not.

The head of the house had said to me, “Don't push goods on Billwock; he owes us enough already. If you squeeze a good payment out of him you can sell him a small bill.”

This kind of talk is all good enough, so far as it goes; but the poor devil on the road often finds he can't get a cent, neither can he sell any goods. The men at home think all he need do is to say, “Here I am; what is it you want?” and then copy the order as fast as he can write. But the men who order that way are the kind who never intend to pay for what they order.

I thought the matter of Billwock's account all over by the time I found his store. It was dimly lighted, but I saw a man and woman at the rear, and went in. A mussy and dirty looking man came forward to meet me, but when he had walked a little way he evidently concluded that I was a drummer, and that I might walk the rest of the way to him.

“Is this Mr. Billwock?” I asked.

“Yes.”

I told him who I was, but he seemed little interested. I started to ask about his business, but some one sang out my name and said, “Don't go talking business out there; come back and see the baby.”

Blissam, by thunder!

I went back and found him beside Mrs. Billwock, with a young one on his knee, and as much at home as if he was the uncle of all concerned. I made up my mind that Blissam couldn't be any more sociable than I could, and I set out to do my prettiest.

About 9 o'clock we both went out together, and, perhaps naturally, drifted to the smoking room of his hotel. He was an old hand on the road, and full of stories of his own and others' experience. I tried to be a good listener.

“There are some mighty queer men in the trade,” said he, as he puffed his cigar. “I took an order from a man in Indiana, not long ago, for felt wads, Nos. 8 and 9, and for some cardboard. When I went to copy my orders I remembered that the man had given no size for the cardboard wanted, but I was pretty sure he wanted 12's, and wrote that size. As it happened the house was out of No. 9 felt and let it go, as he only wanted one-third of a dozen. What did the fellow do but send back the card-board wads, saying he had ordered 9's, and giving us Hail Columbia for sending 12's instead, as well as a long epistle about knowing his own business, and not wanting our help in running it. The card-board wads were worth about 33 cents, and the express charges on them back were 25 cents. I tell you the world is full of smart Alecks.”

“I presume I have seen more about returned goods than you have,” I said, “as I have been in the store so long, and see every package that comes in. I do get my back up over some of the stupid things the average retailer will do. It never seems to enter his head to drop the house a card and await their instructions about the goods that are unsatisfactory, but he fancies he is showing how smart he is by whacking them back at once, and always by express, no matter how heavy the goods are. A neighbor of mine, a hardware man, told me an instance of the smart Aleck a few days ago. The house was handling a new tubular lantern and selling it under the market price of regular goods. The traveling man sent in three orders from a Michigan town, each of them for one-half dozen lanterns. The stock clerk had a single half dozen of the new lantern and found a half-dozen case of the genuine. He filled two orders and put the other half-dozen on the back-order book. The genuine was billed at the cut price and nothing said on the bill. In a day or two back that case came by express, and an indignant letter from the customer for palming off on him the old tubular, when the agent had sold the new. The clerk erased the mark and sent the case back to the other man in the town whose order was not filled. You can see how much time, trouble and expense would have been saved had the smart Aleck dropped a card to the house saying he did not want the lanterns and held them subject to orders.

“Yes,” said Blissam, “but I have seen goods go back when I thought it was the proper thing to do. You know one of the latest schemes is to sell goods in cases, and throw in the show-case. It started with needle and thread men and has gone into a good many other things. A concern from somewhere in Ohio had a man in Illinois selling shears in this way. In one town he sold the dry-goods man a case, at 45 per cent, off retail prices, and gave him the exclusive sale of the town, and then sold a hardware man across the street at 50 per cent, discount, and gave him the exclusive sale. When each party opened up his stock and made a display they soon discovered how the land lay, and, furthermore, the way in which the dry-goods man swore when he saw the other's bill at so much less than his, would have made your hair stand up. He boxed up these goods and sent them back by express, and I thought he did right.”

I went down to my hotel and sat a while in the smoking-room. There were several traveling men there, and they seemed to be very much interested in some “she,” but I was never a good hand at making acquaintances, and I made no effort here, but went to my room and soon fell asleep, to dream all night about selling goods at 100 per cent profit. The next morning I was out bright and early to see Jewell & Son. The clerk said neither of the firm was in, so I made myself as pleasant to him as I could, and posted myself as to the goods the house was handling, and the prices they were paying. By and by the elder Jewell appeared, and as I introduced myself he said:

“Gun men are plenty to-day; my son has just gone to the hotel with a Mr. Blissam to look at his goods.”

CHAPTER V.

When I found that Blissam was ahead of me, notwithstanding my being out so early, I felt as if I should be glad to get away from him as soon as I could. He was altogether too numerous for me. He had told me he

wasn't going to cut prices, and I was very sure I did not want to do it, but I made up my mind I was going to get my share of the trade, cut or no cut.

I began with talk to Mr. Jewell about a single-barrel breech-loader our house was controlling, and quoted it at $7.20, sixty days.

“Is that the F. & W. gun?” he asked.

“Yes, sir.”

“Why, Blissam quotes that at $7.”

The deuce he did! Yet he was the boy that didn't intend to cut.

“Was his price net?”

“No, two off, ten days.”

“Well, that brings them $6.86. We make 5 off in case lots, bringing them down to $6.84, and there is 2 off that, ten days.”

This was so mighty close to what the goods were costing us that I felt like crying as I made the figures; but my back was up, and I didn't propose to let Blissam walk over me, even if he was from Philadelphia.

Mr. Jewell was a very pleasant man to meet. He had no hobbies, no crotchets. He was as pleasant with me as if I was buying instead of trying to sell to him. This is a pretty good test of a man. One that meets a strange traveling man pleasantly and gives him a patient hearing is bound to be pleasant and kind-hearted clear through.

I gave him quotations on revolvers and cartridges, and tried to get him to say he would not order of Blissam till I saw him again; but he would not promise, for the reason, he said, that his son might even then be buying at Blissam's room. Still, he said, it was the son's custom to do no more than make a memorandum at the hotel and give the order after consulting him.

I then started off to see Billwock, and squeeze some money out of him. His wife and seven children (or more) were there, but no Billwock. Where was he?

He was down getting a boat ready to go fishing with Mr. Blissam that afternoon, she said.

Confound Blissam!

Had Mr. Billwock left any word for me?

“Nein; not ein wort.”

I found where he was and started for him. He wasn't at all pleased to see me; in fact he didn't seem to care whether I had gone from Rossmore or not.

“Going fishing?” I asked. “Yes; I dakes a leetle fish.”

“Don't you need some goods?”

“No; I dinks not.”

“How about money? Haven't you got some for me?”

“Not a tollar now. You see I pay Plissam last night ery tollar I haf.”

“Why didn't you divide?”

“It was not wort' w'ile.”

“But I must have some money; your account is long past due and we need it.”

“W'at you do? I got no money, I told you.”

“You must get some. I don't care how you get it or what you do, but I must have $50 to-day.”

“Well; if I get it I gif it you.”

“But you are not going to get it while you are off fishing. I don't want to be too stiff, but I want you to understand that I mean just what I say. Our house drew on you and you let the draft come back, and I have orders now to attend to it.”

“What you do, s'pose I not get it?”

“I shall tell you when the time comes.”

He saw I meant business, so tied up his boat and started toward the store, muttering to himself and looking daggers at me. When he reached the store he talked in German with his wife awhile, and finally said to me:

“You come in pimepy and I see what I can do.”

Satisfied there would be some money coming I then called on the hardware house of Whipper & Co. I had often heard of Whipper. He was known to the trade as the biggest liar east of the Mississippi; but a real good liar is usually an affable fellow to meet, and Whipper called me “My dear boy” before we were together five minutes.

I sympathize with business men in their affliction from traveling men. We go into their stores early or late, as suits ourselves; we expect their immediate attention, and we want to sell them or have a good reason for not doing it. I often walk back to a man's desk and find him intently at work over something; I would gladly back out if I could, and risk the coming in later at a more opportune time. But he has seen me, probably cusses to himself, hopes I am selling something he doesn't keep, so he can cut me off at once, and then takes my card or listens to my name.

I don't want to come right out and say “Do you need anything in my line?” for if he answers “No” I ought to turn about and leave him, so I casually remark that it is a good day, or a stormy day, and he says “Yes,” as if he had heard that before. I take a roundabout way of getting to my business, and all the time he would be very glad if I was in Halifax. I may interest him in my goods before I get through, but if he could have had his way he would have omitted the interview until a better time for him.

But there are men on the road who drum a man if they reach the town at midnight, and as he sticks his head out of his bedroom window, inform him they are giving an extra 2 1/2 on “J. I. C.” curry-combs and ask him how he wants his shipped. Henley can do this. The boys on the road know that he carries a Waterbury

watch in each pocket, and expects to sell 1,000 bills in 1,000 minutes.

I appreciate such a man as Whipper. Whatever it was he was doing he always dropped it, and met a salesman as if he was honestly pleased. I think that ought to offset a great many sins. I hope it will.

I told him my little story and he looked as if he believed every word I said. Then he asked, in a very confidential tone "What is your best price on American bull-dogs?"

"Two dollars and eighty-five cents."

"Phew! You are far out of the way, my dear boy, far out of the way. Did you see this last card of Reachum's? No? How could you? You are on the road. We now get two postals a day from Reachum, and I expect to see them coming oftener by and by. Tom, where's Reachum's last card?"

"I don't know; I toss them in the waste basket when I come across them."

"Don't do it again; I want to make a collection of them in an album. So $2.85 is the best you can do?"

Now, $2.85 was as well as any one could do, and we only had a margin of 10 per cent. to figure on. But I determined to cut a little, just for fun, and see what the upshot would be. So I said, "$2.85 is bottom everywhere, but I am going to make you a special price of $2.82 1/2."

"Tom," said he turning to the desk, "What was that Shiverhim & Gaily man's price for bull-dogs?"

"Two dollars and eighty cents."

I swore to myself that I would punch Blissam's head when I next met him in a good place. There was no getting even with him, let alone getting ahead of him. I dared not go below $2.80, sell or no sell, so I began to talk brand.

"Two dollars and eighty cents is all the Lovell bull-dog ought to sell for," I said: "in fact $2.75 is Reachum's price on them, but we are selling F.& W. goods, and can easily get 5 to 10 cents more for them."

"Will you sell me some of Lovell's at $2.75?"

"I would if I had them, but we don't carry them. I'll make you the F. & W. at $2.80, and I shall catch thunder for doing that. But I want to sell you."

"To be sure; to be sure!"

He said this as a man might humor a child, and as if he fully understood all that was in my mind.

"Tom, do we need any bull-dogs?"

"No, sir; got 50 on the way from Reachum at $2.70."

CHAPTER VI.

I probably looked as disappointed as I felt, for Whipper's voice took on a very sympathetic tone. "You could not touch $2.70?" he asked.

"No, sir."

I felt like adding, "I can't touch anything; I'm going home."

"What is your price on cartridges?"

"Combination price; same as every one else."

"Is this your first trip?"

"Yes, and my last. I'm not cut out for the road. I don't suppose I could sell you anything even if you wanted it; I'm not a success."

"Pooh; pooh! I've been on the road myself; it is not always fair sailing, and it is not always foul. Keep a stiff upper lip."

Yes, keep a stiff upper lip, when goods were being sold at cost all around you! I was not built that way. Just then the book-keeper, Tom, handed a memo to Whipper and he turned to me. "Have you Quickenbush rifles?"

"Yes; blued and plated. Regular price, $5. I'll make you special price if you want any."

"What will you do?"

They cost us $4.50 at the factory; I quoted $4.75.

"Great Caesar! You are high!"

"Yes? Well, it is the best I can do."

"Make it $4.50 and we will take twelve."

"No, sir; it can't be done. But I am afraid there is no use in my trying to sell you. If you can get them at $4.50 you can buy as low as we can."

"Well, send me a dozen."

I entered the order. Was there anything else?

"What is the best you will do on bull-dogs?"

"$2.80 is bottom; but you say you have ordered them?"

"Oh, that is one of Tom's lies; you may send us 50."

We went through the list, and the old man gave me a very nice order; then followed me to the door with his arm in mine, and sent me off as if he was bidding good-by to a son. I forgave him all his lies, and feel kindly

toward him to this day.

I ran into a hardware store with my samples of cutlery, hoping to do something in a line where Blissam could not meet me, but the first man I saw was Blissam, leaning over the show-case, as if entirely at home, and in full possession of the stock. He introduced me to Mr. Thompson as if we had been traveling companions for life, but added to me, “Thompson does not do much in our line, except caps and cartridges, and I've just fixed him up.”

I felt like taking him by the nape of the neck and dropping him down the sewer, but I turned to Mr. Thompson and talked cutlery. I told him I had a line of No. 1 goods at low prices, every blade warranted, and put up in extra nice style for retailers.

“Whose make?” he asked.

“Northington's; but made especially for our house, and with our brand. We are making a specialty of a few patterns, and intend to make it an object to the retailer to handle them and stick to them.”

“You can't touch me on those goods,” said Thompson; “I've handled them and had trouble with them. I am now handling nothing but the New York. I don't know that they're better than any other, but Tom Bradley dropped in here one day, and I had to give him an order, and I've not been able to leave him ever since.”

“Does he come often?”

“No, about once in two years or so, but he's business from the ground up. I like him and like his goods, and I don't want to change.”

I took out my samples more for the purpose of posting myself than with hopes of selling him, and where my patterns were like those in his stock he passed mine over without a word, but I saw that two patterns of mine pleased him. They were even-enders, 3 1/2 in. brass lined, and cost us $3.85. We had been getting, in half dozen lots, $4.80, but I felt that I was in a dangerous place, and I quoted $4.25.

He went back to his stock and returned with a sample the exact counterpart of mine, and said, smiling, “This is Bradley's; he's a tough fellow to beat; I paid $3.65 for it.”

I lost all interest in pocket knives then and there and got out of the store right speedily. I was feeling savage, and made straight for Billwock's. He had made a raise of $40 for me, saying, with several German-American oaths, that was all he could do, and when I talked of selling him something he looked as if he would throw me out of the window.

I called twice at Jewell's before I caught father and son there together, and then I had a difficult task before me. The father was inclined to give me the preference, the son favored Blissam, but they had not yet ordered, and were needing some goods, and I felt as if I could never forgive myself if I were to fail then and there.

They tackled me first on Flobert rifles; I quoted them at exactly 10 per cent, above cost to import, but they declared I was too high. I felt sure Blissam's house bought no lower than we did, and that he could not sell on less margin than that, so I stood up to the price. Then we took up bull-dogs; I named $2.80, and they shook their heads at that; so they did at price of Champion guns, till I began to feel that my case was hopeless.

“I am afraid we can't give you an order to-day,” said the son.

“I have quoted you my best prices,” I said, “and am disappointed.”

They talked together a few moments and finally said, “You may send us a case of Champion guns,” and this was followed by other items. I could see that they were dividing the order between Blissam and me, and I felt grateful for even this, and tried to make this evident. I succeeded in getting several items that paid a good profit, and I went to my hotel feeling that I had done pretty well.

At the desk I was handed a note from Whipper, saying: If you cannot make the Quickenbush rifles $4.60 please omit them.

There was but $3 profit in the item, and I would have omitted them but for a desire that Blissam should not get ahead of me; so I started for the store to learn something about it. On the way I met Blissam, and I put it right at him. “Are you quoting Quickenbush rifles at $4.60?”

“Not by a drum sight! Who says so?”

I handed him Whipper's note.

“Are you going there?” he asked.

I said I was.

“I'll go with you.” This suited me. We saw no look of surprise on Whipper's face. I went straight to the point. “I can't sell the rifles at $4.60, Mr. Whipper, unless I know some one else has quoted that price; if they have, I'll meet it.”

“Just scratch them off,” said he, as calm as a day in June.

“But has any one given you such a figure?”

“Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies. If I can get them at $4.60 I will take them.”

I could get nothing more out of him and we started back. On the way we met Tom, Whipper's book-keeper. I asked him what it meant. “Oh,” said he, laughing, “I guess the old man thinks he can get them at $4.60, but we have so many on hand, perhaps it's only his way of canceling the item.” And that was all I ever got from them about it.

CHAPTER VII.

I parted with Blissam at the hotel, he going to the South and I West, and about 7 o'clock that evening I reached B—. I had often heard our traveling man speak of the hotel here, and the popularity it had among salesmen, so I was prepared to find the smoking room tolerably well filled when I went in there after supper. There were half a dozen or more in one group, who seemed to be on the best of terms, and I listened to their talk. I found that they were discussing the mistakes of the shipping and stock clerks, and of course that touched me upon a tender spot, and I was all attention.

"Some of our boys used to make the most absurd mistakes," said one talker; "but the old man was about as bad as any of them. I remember getting most mighty scared once. I had been entry clerk and shipper and jack-of-all-trades in the house. One night's mail brought us back a letter we had mailed, with the notation of the postmaster, 'No such man here.' Taylor, the boss, took the mail, calling out to the book-keeper, 'Fague, I guess we've got a mistake on you this time.' Fague looked at it, saying, 'I don't believe I've made a mistake, but if I have I must stand it.' The envelope was torn open and the address on the bill was the same as that on the outside, John Smith, New Castle, Ind. Then I was sent to the order book, but the order there was New Castle, Ind. Taylor was getting mad. I was told to find the original order, which I did, and discovered that it was from John Smith, New Carlisle, Ind. Says Taylor, 'There's altogether too many mistakes here. Now these goods are lying at New Castle, and will have to be ordered back; the chances are Smith will refuse to receive them, and we will lose at least $75. The man that made that mistake ought to be known; if we owe him anything he can have it in the morning, and then let him be discharged. What do you say, Dewey?' 'It's a bad mistake,' said Dewey, the partner, 'and we are making a good many, but it's pritty hard to discharge a man. Let us see who made it, and show him how much loss it causes us, and give him a pritty good scolding.' 'No,' said Taylor, 'he ought to be discharged; d—n him, he ain't fit to be around a store; if we owe him anything pay him up, and let him go; it will be a lesson to the rest. 'Billy,' turning to me, 'bring the book here so we can see who made that mistake.' Now I was mighty afraid that I had done it. I had been doing that work, more or less of the time, and I trembled as if I had the ague. And in looking at it before, I had paid no attention to the writing. I went back to the desk for the book, and brought it to Taylor. Dewey came over to look at it as Taylor opened the book and found the place. 'H—l,' said Taylor, 'I did it myself!' Jerusalem! but I felt good! 'Well,' said Dewey, 'if we owe you anything you'd better take it.' I was just about dying to holler. The next day all the boys knew it, and Taylor was mighty quiet for several weeks after that."

"I came near losing a customer once," said another man, "by a little carelessness. I went into his store in a great hurry; sold him a bill, and collected pay for a previous one. I neglected to enter the collection on my book and also to report to the house. They shipped the goods ordered, but supposing that I had not collected amount due from him, inclosed a statement of account with a 'please remit' at the bottom. No bull ever flew at a red rag quicker than he flew at that statement, and he wrote a saucy letter, saying he had paid me, and he didn't like being dunned for a paid bill, etc., etc. You all know just how a small man will act under those conditions. They forwarded his letter to me and I acknowledged my carelessness; I wrote him taking all the blame on my shoulders, and explaining how the mistake happened. But his Irish was up, and in a few weeks he went into the store, still talking 'bigitty,' proposing to settle up and quit. The book-keeper took his money, handing him back his change and a receipt. He counted the change and pushed it back, saying, 'That ain't right.' The boss stood near, taking all the tongue-lashing, but feeling as if his cup would run over if the book-keeper had now been guilty of making a mistake. He took the change, ran it over hastily, and saw that it was correct. This was nuts. 'It seems,' said he, 'you occasionally make mistakes, Mr. B., so you ought to make allowance for others. It is a devilish smart man who never makes a mistake, and a devilish mean one who will not make allowances for the mistakes made by another.' 'Oh, I'm mean, am I,' said B.; 'well, I pay my bills.' 'So do other people; you're not the only man who pays.' But B. went off on his high horse. The next time I went there I could'nt touch him with a ten-foot pole, but the trip after he came around all right."

"I wish I had no collecting to do," said a man near me; "I can sell goods, but collecting is the deuce-and-all. I envy the New Yorkers who don't have any collecting to do. Their business is to sell, and the house collects."

"But when we do have to look after an account." said a man whom I had set down as a New Yorker from the first, "it is always a tough one. Not long ago our house told me to stop at a town to see one Berry & Co., who had let two drafts come back, and then had written an impudent letter. They had given us an order for about $700 worth of goods, but they are quoted light, and the old man concluded he'd send on a part of it, and when that was paid send another part, and so on. They refused to pay because they did not get all the goods ordered, and when asked for a report of their condition refused to give one, saying parties could find out about them from Dun or Bradstreet. I presented the account and was told they wouldn't pay until they had to. I reasoned with them, but the fellow was a big-head, and the more I talked the worse he acted. I finally told him I was sent there to get the money or put the account in the hands of an attorney, and went out saying I would be back again at a given hour and I hoped they would be ready to settle up. I went to the other dealers there whom I knew and they all said the fellow hadn't a leg to stand on in court. I went back in the afternoon, and after getting another tongue lashing, he gave me a check, but told me I had lied, as he handed it to me. I haven't wanted to punch any one in years as I did him, but I gave him my opinion of him in a few words, and he won't soon forget it, either. Now, you Western men don't have that kind of trouble in your collecting."

"No," said a grocer, "our men never say they will not pay; it's the other way; they say they will and then don't. Seems to me I could get along with a man who said he wouldn't but could be made to. I could do something there; but the fellow who solemnly assures you he will send in a large remittance next week, and then doesn't, is a hard one to manage."

"Do you want to know who, in my opinion, is the smallest man on earth?" asked a Chicago traveler.

Of course they all looked assent.

"Well," said he, "Ed. Smythe told about him the other day, and I know the man. Ed. had his samples open at the Moody House and called on the man. Yes, he would go look at them; he wanted a few German goods. He went there, looked the cards all over (Ed. has three trunks), made a sheet full of memo's, and said he would write out an order. Ed. called around about 6 o'clock in the evening. There are two chairs in the office; the hog sat in one and had his feet in the other; he was reading a newspaper and kept on reading; Ed. stood around patiently, as any man can afford to be patient if he is going to get an order. In the course of half an

hour a friend came in and wanted to know of the hog if he wasn't ready to go somewhere. He jumped up, pushed his books in the safe, talked to his friend, and ignored Ed. After a while Ed. said: 'Have you made out your order, Mr. B.?' 'No, sir; I'm not going to give you an order. I don't intend to buy any more from your house,' and he walked into Ed. in a way that he evidently thought would impress his friend that he was a wonderful cuss. Ed. is a good-natured fellow, and business is business; he didn't open on him then, but he got even before long. I tell you the smallest man in the world; the meanest dog in the kennel; the dirtiest whelp I know, is the fellow who thinks it's brave to abuse a drummer when he has him in his own store."

This received a universal amen.

"Let me read you a sketch from the *American Grocer* on 'Smart Alecks,'" said a man, drawing a copy of that paper out of his pocket. "It's called, 'Solomon Smart visits the City.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

Solomon Smart, of New Portage, O., dealer in general merchandise and country produce, had been in business three years, but had never, until the present occasion, visited the city where the larger share of his purchases came from.

Going to the city was something to which he had long looked forward. He had dreamt of it when he was a clerk; he had eagerly questioned the traveling men about it, and his old employer always told marvelous tales when he returned from his annual trip.

When the old man died, and Solomon, assisted by his father-in-law, was enabled to buy the stock, he began to arrange for a business trip to the city, but somehow every plan he made was interfered with and came to naught. It was a source of great grief to him that he could not carry out his plans.

"If I could only get to Toledo," he often said to his wife, "I could save at least 10 per cent on prices, and I could pick up job lots of things at big discounts. All the jobbing houses have odds and ends that they are willing to sell at anything they can get, in order to get rid of the stuff. I hate to buy of drummers. It costs piles of money to keep them on the road, and the men that buy of them have to pay it."

Solomon, as may be supposed, was not popular with traveling men. His contempt for them was expressed openly, and his opinion of their being a curse to retailers was usually the first thing he told them, after be had looked at their cards. Some of them argued the matter with him. Some of the more independent members of the profession told him he was a blank fool. But those who called regularly let him say his say and then squeezed an order from him, keeping their opinion of him for use outside his store.

His peculiar opinion of traveling salesmen was not his only peculiarity. Most of "the boys" on the road mentioned him as "Smarty Smart," because of certain tendencies he had of making reductions in prices, of marking off charges for cartage or boxing, or of returning goods because he had changed his mind after buying them.

Solomon didn't intend to be mean; he fancied he was only standing up for his rights, and if he occasionally took a little more than his conscience told him was his "rights," he soothed that by saying to himself that the house wanted to sell him so mighty bad they would stand it.

Let a man be constituted as Solomon was and his "smartness" grows on him. He has an idea that every house he buys from is trying to get unfair advantage of him, and that he must present a bold front or he will be imposed upon. He always magnifies his importance as a buyer, and fancies that every order he sends in is met with a hand-organ and treated to champagne.

So when he finally saw his way clear to making the long-wished-for visit, some of his pleasantest anticipations were the welcomes he expected from the heads of the wholesale houses, and the invitations he would receive to dine and wine with them. But he did not propose that they should pull the wool over his eyes. He would show them that he was no "greeny," and that he knew what was what.

He carried two large empty valises with him to bring home as much of his purchases as possible as baggage, and when he reached the city hotel late in the evening the clerk sized him up as easily and as accurately as if he had known him for ages, and sent him to one of the poorest rooms in the house most unceremoniously.

The next morning, bright and early, Mr. Smart started out to do business. His first call was on a hardware man with whom he had done considerable business, and from whom he was sure of a warm welcome. He was met by a pleasant young man whose manner seemed to ask, What is your business? He asked for Mr. Braun. Mr. Braun was not down yet but would be in a short time. Would he wait? No; Solomon didn't propose to wait. He was there on business and must attend to his business. Perhaps the young man could wait on him? No, indeed; Solomon didn't come to town to be waited on by clerks. Perhaps he would call again, but he said it with a doubtful tone as if he was not sure that he would patronize a house where the proprietor didn't get around earlier in the morning. Then again he was somewhat indignant that the clerk should not have known him, and when he was asked to leave his name he went off saying it was no matter.

Then he called at Sikkor's, wondering if anyone would be in there. Was Mr. Sikkor in? No; did he want to see him personally? Personally! He wanted to see him on business, of course. He would not be at the store that morning, but Mr. Birden was at the desk, yonder, if he would do. Well, it was good to find one proprietor in; and he moved over to Birden's desk, where that gentleman was busy opening the morning's mail. He looked up at the approach of Smart, said "Good morning," and waited for Solomon to tell his business.

“This is Mr. Birden?”

“Yes, sir,” pleasantly.

Solomon had rather expected him to say, “This is Mr. Smart?” and to hold out his arms, so he was somewhat disconcerted.

“I buy goods of your house occasionally.”

“Yes? Whereabouts is your place?”

“North Portage.”

“North Portage, eh? What is the name, please?”

“Smart.”

“Yes.” Solomon could see that he might as well have said Smith, so far as Birden's seeming to recall it was concerned, and he began to get angry.

“How is trade, Mr. Smart?”

“Rather dull just at present.”

“Sorry to hear that; hope it will improve. You have a memorandum for some of our goods, Mr. Smart? Let me call one of the men to wait on you. Church, look here.”

And before Solomon had time to open his mouth he was introduced to Church, who shook hands with him, linked his arm through his, and had him half way to the sample room. They were getting on well till Church asked: “Let me see, Mr. Smart, where is your place?”

“North Portage,” said Solomon in his crispest manner. No one seemed to know him, or to remember him five seconds.

“Oh, yes; North Portage. Waite goes there. Waite's a good fellow; you like him, don't you?”

“I'd like to have him stay at home. I never want to see a drummer.”

“Is that so?” and Church looked at him in mild surprise. “Well, what shall we start on first?”

Solomon wasn't prepared to start on anything. It wasn't at all the way he had expected to get started. He didn't like being pushed from one proprietor to another, and then to a mere clerk, and to have that man take it for granted that he was going to buy without any coaxing or figuring. He was disappointed. He expected to have bought a bill here, but there were other stores of the same kind in Toledo, and he believed he'd punish these fellows for their indifference by going somewhere else. Good idea! He would act on it.

He told Church that he guessed he wouldn't leave an order just then; maybe he would come in again. Church coaxed him a little then, but it was too late. Solomon was bound to go, and off he started for a notion house.

The proprietor was in the office, shook hands with him, asked about trade and crops and finally proposed to show him some goods. This was more to Solomon's taste, and he bought readily, but he was disgusted to see that prices were no lower than the traveling man had sold at. He mentioned this to Shaw. “Lower? Of course not. We can't ask you one price in Toledo and another in North Portage. My man carries my stock into your store, lets you see the goods, quotes you prices and posts you.”

“But his expenses are big; it costs you nothing to sell me now.”

“His expenses come out of my pocket; not out of yours. I would be mighty glad if traveling men were done away with; but it would be a saving to me, not to you.”

This rather staggered Solomon, for it upset one of his hobbies. As he was finishing, and about to say “good-by” to Mr. Shaw, he saw the book-keeper whisper into that gentleman's ear and turn away.

“By the by, Mr. Smart, my book-keeper tells me he has had some correspondence with you over deductions made in remittances. These little things are very annoying, and while the amount in dollars and cents is nothing, still business ought to be done in a business way.”

Smart began to feel very hot.

“The book-keeper tells me that your last bill ran nearly two months over time, and that you not only refused to pay interest, but did not pay express on your remittance. Now, Mr. Smart, this is not right. Our place of business is Toledo, not North Portage; our bills are due here, not there; and if we allow them to run sixty days after due we are loaning you money, and ought to be paid for the use of it.”

“I don't get interest from my customers,” said Solomon.

“That's your business and theirs. You do not sell them on a jobber's profit. We deal with you as a business man, and in a business way. I think I know just how you feel,” said Shaw, pleasantly; “when I began business I felt the same way. I squeezed every cent that I could from the men I bought from; but I discovered that it was poor policy. I saved a few cents and lost the good will of the house, which was worth dollars. I speak of all this in a kindly way, and to avoid future misunderstandings. Don't you think of any thing else? No? Well, good-by, I am glad you called and hope to do more with you in the future.” And before Solomon knew it he was bowed out.

But he was boiling with rage. He was particularly angry with himself. He had stood there and taken the lecture as if he was a boy. It was in his mind to cancel the order just given to Shaw, but that gentleman had dismissed him so politely and smoothly that he hadn't had time to do it. It had never seemed possible to him that he would have listened to such a lecture as that without giving back as good as he got, and then sending the man and his goods to—-, a place where there is no insurance against fire.

In no very happy frame of mind his next call was on his dry-goods house. Mr. Luce met him, when he introduced himself, decidedly coldly. Solomon began to think that he would go to some other house with his order rather than leave it here. But before he made a move to go out Mr. Luce asked, “Is there anything I can do for you?”

“I don't know as there is.”

“Our Mr. Goodnow did not stop at your place the other day because of your habit of returning goods. While

we would be glad to do business with you, we cannot allow anyone the privilege of ordering goods and then returning them at our expense, if he happens to change his mind. I do not try to make Eastern houses shoulder my mistakes, if I make any in ordering goods, and I don't see why I should bear your burdens."

"Why don't you send what I order? I didn't order the blue print I returned the other day."

"Mr. Goodnow is very positive that you did order it. It is always possible that the small sample he carries with him appears differently to a man than the goods do when seen in the whole piece. And a man might occasionally be expected to make a mistake, as you did the other day when you wrote us to send you three gross of corsets, when you intended, you said afterward, to order but three dozen. But in the last three bills bought of Goodnow you have sent back goods, and it is not possible that he made such mistakes. Then you deduct from bills, though made out at prices agreed upon."

"The last cambrics were billed half a cent too high," said Solomon.

"Then you shouldn't have ordered them. The time to make prices is when you are buying. We have a price for every article in our stock; if you ask it we will give it to you, and then you are at liberty to order or not, as you think best; but if you send us an order for cambrics and say nothing about the price you have no right to express them back to us because our price happens to be different from what you expected. You could have learned our price before ordering, and not having done so, you ought to be man enough to stand to your own action."

"You claim to sell as low as any one, don't you?"

"We do, and are ready to quote our prices so they can be compared with others when called upon to do so. But we all cut occasionally for reasons of our own, and I prefer to make prices when selling goods, not after they are delivered. Some time ago you returned by express a few trinkets. You knew that Mr. Goodnow would be at your place in a short time, and you might easily have waited until seeing him before returning the goods, but you evidently thought you were punishing us and showing your grit by rushing them back by express. I assure you it does not add to your reputation as a business man. I thought I would mention these points to you because they are important in our relations, and unless the men you buy from feel pleasantly towards you there is every reason to suppose that you will be the loser."

"I guess I can buy all the goods I want," said Solomon; "I've not been troubled that way yet." And he walked off, with a surly "Good day."

He had never bought but one bill of the other dry goods house, and did not like their traveling man; but now he would have bought of Old Nick rather than buy of Luce. He went over to Keeler's and again introduced himself (the task was getting as disagreeable as it was monotonous), saying he wanted to buy some goods. The gentleman made an excuse to go to the desk for a moment, and Solomon knew it was to consult the reference book as to his standing; having found that satisfactory he proceeded to show him through the stock. The goods were not nearly so much to his taste as was Luce's stock, but he bought lightly, and considered that he was punishing Luce.

After dinner he called again at the hardware store, and this time found Mr. Braun there. He was greeted cordially when he gave his name, but imagine his feelings when, after a few remarks, Braun said: "What's the matter with you people down at North Portage about axes? We wrote you that four of the last six you returned were in no way covered by warrants; some were broken in solid steel, some were ground thin and had to bend, and one had never even been out of your store. We can't ask any factory to take back such goods from us, it wouldn't be right; and we do not make enough profit on a dozen axes to stand such a loss."

"If you give a warrant you ought to stand up to it."

"We do stand up to it, every time; and we do a good deal more than that. But you do not stand up to it. You take back goods not covered by a warrant and expect us to stand the loss."

"Well, if my customers bring them back I must take them or lose their trade."

"That's your business, not mine. I don't care what you take back or do not take, but I object to your taking them back and then shifting all the burden over to us. We have charged your account with the cost of making these axes good."

"Well, that's the last time you'll ever have a chance to do that."

"We can't help that; right is right. It's a small affair, but the thing has to stop some time, and it had better be stopped now."

Solomon pulled out his wallet, "How much is my balance here?"

Braun turned him over to the book-keeper, who took his money and gave him a receipt. As he walked out he did not hear the remark of Braun to the clerk: "He's one of those smart Alecks that have to be sat down on occasionally, but I guess I gave him a lesson."

He bought his hardware of another house; he bought his groceries of a new firm; he didn't buy any boots and shoes at all, because the clerk did not take hold of him just right, and he reached home the next morning a tired, soured and disgusted man. He told his wife that he had been a fool to spend money when he might have stayed at home and bought of traveling men. "I tell you," said he, "a man's a mighty sight more independent when buying in his own store. The drummers are red hot for orders, and you can squeeze them down. Then you've got your stock to look at, and see costs, etc., and the men feel you're doing them a favor to give them an order; but, by George, they think they're doing you a favor to sell you in their own stores. I'm done going to town."

I saw Mr. Smart a few weeks ago, and he gave me his report of his trip: "I learned something," he added; "I believe I can make more money by having the wholesale houses my friends than I can by making them mad at me, and now we get along first rate. I guess Luce is one of the best friends I've got, but I was all-fired mad at him that time, I tell you. And what made me the hottest was that I felt the old man was right."

CHAPTER IX.

A good hotel is a blessing, but the best hotel is still a hotel, and can be nothing more. One feels all right until the bellboy has fixed the key in the door and gone. Then you begin to realize that you are alone. There's but little difference, I imagine, in the feelings of a prisoner going into his cell at the close of day and those of a man in his lonely bed room in a hotel. There may be noises and voices, even songs and laughing, on either side of you, but these only serve to show you how lonesome you are.

I dislike to go to my room until I am forced to do so by the hour. I want to be among people and to see them about me. I go to my room under protest; I turn the key, fix the bolt, look at the window, open my valise, and wish I was at home. I think of fires, of sudden sickness, of to-morrow's trade, of to-day's orders, and of all the pros and cons of business. Through the night I hear scurrying feet in the hall, the late arrivals, the early risers, the bell-boy's raps on the doors, and finally the chambermaid's clatter, and her occasional turn on the knob, as a broad invitation to get up and out of the way that she may do her work.

I started out in the morning at B——, determined to do all in my power to make a good showing for myself. There is but one gun-store, but all the hardware dealers handled something in my line. It is a sleepy town. Time was when it had a large trade in the surrounding States, but of late it sells near home. A town of its size might and ought to support two or three good gun stores. I called on Bell & Co., gave the man who looked most like the buyer my card, and proceeded to say a word or two about something else than business.

“We have had some goods from your house,” said Mr. Bell, “but we never get our orders filled. There's always something left out. I don't like it. When I order an article I want it.”

Our house had always made a specialty of filling orders complete, and I was surprised at what I had just heard. I remarked this, and that I was the stock-clerk, and that I feared he was visiting on our heads the sins of others.

“No, I am not,” said he. “In the last bill we sent you there were two items left out;” and he found the bill and showed me our own memorandum regarding the items. To be sure they were goods we never kept in stock and never intended to. I explained this, but he took the ground that, in the first place, a house should keep everything in its line, and if they happened to be out of anything should buy it.

I did not attempt to contradict him, for it's a mighty poor time for that when you are hunting for an order, but I tried to change the conversation into some other channel.

“How is your stock of guns?”

“Full. What do you ask for the Lafoucheaux, twist barrels?”

“Ten fifty.”

“Oh, you're way out of reach.”

It's a pretty good plan not to disagree with a man at any time, but it's especially a wise course about this time.

“I can buy them,” said he, “at $9.”

“Yes? That beats me; $10.50 is best I can do. Who quotes at $9?”

“Why, Reachum does. So does Tryon's man. Do you know him?”

“I do not.”

“He's a lightning fellow; well posted; good natured; sharp as a needle, and a mighty sight better than his house. If he was in business for himself I'd buy all my goods of him.”

Yes, that was interesting; but I had other fish to fry.

“Do you need any Lafoucheaux guns?”

“Yes, if I can buy them right.”

“I will meet any price given you by Reachum, Simmons, or Hibbard Spencer.” I didn't want to; I wanted to get better prices than they were quoting to their mail trade, but I proposed to make myself solid with him at once.

“Well,” said he, “I'm waiting for Clayton. I rather promised him an order the last time he was here, and he's to be here in a day or two.”

If there's one thing in the wide world that would make a man work for an order that is the kind of speech to do it. I had no grudge against Clayton, but I was bound to get that order or know why I couldn't. I remarked that Clayton was a first-rate fellow.

“Yes, he is; he's quiet and modest, and knows his business; if he only let up on his whistle he'd be perfect.”

“I didn't know he was a whistler.”

“He is; he's always whistling under his breath as if he was trying to catch the extra 2 1/2 on cartridges.”

“Are you handling the U. M. Co. cartridges?”

“Yes; got them of Simmons. He offered to discount Reachum and I gave him the chance. What are you doing on cartridges?”

“60 and 10.”

This was cost, but I saw he had a good stock.

“What are you doing on Champion guns?”

“25 and 10.”

“And Zulus?”

“$2.40.” This was bottom on both these articles, and I would get my hair pulled if I sold at these prices, but I was in for it, and proposed to keep on. The partner came up to me and asked about revolvers, and very soon we were chatting about our line in detail.

If men really want goods, it is often difficult to get them to order. They have thought, like Bell, of waiting for a particular man, or they fancy there may be advantage in delay, or they have no figures but yours and are not sure you are quoting bottom prices. There is a disinclination in all men to buy even in good times, and in these days there is almost a determination in every dealer's heart that he will not order anything at any price, or under any circumstances. Of course, when a call comes for something he has not got he realizes that he has gone too far.

I spread out my samples, talked my prettiest, sang the special praises of my goods, and finally heard the welcome words: “You may send us,” etc. When one gets that far, it is his own fault if he does not go on. Several times in our work we were interrupted, so that the forenoon was pretty well spent when I was through. It was the hour when many men go to lunch, and I fancied Mr. Bell to be a man who occasionally might enjoy a glass of beer, so I suggested that we go out. He assented, and led the way to the nearest place.

What is there in the act of eating or drinking together that draws men nearer? It surely does do this, but I don't know why. In his store we were in the position of proprietor and drummer, at the beer table we were two sociable men.

“I do not often drink,” said he, “and there are times when I feel provoked at being asked out. Some drummers throw out the invitation as if it was part of their samples, others as if they saw I was cross, and proposed to spend five cents in beer to make me good natured. I occasionally enjoy a glass of beer, and when I don't feel like drinking it all Chicago couldn't make me drink.”

I remarked that I was pretty much in the same way.

“I've known a good many traveling men who went to the dogs from too much treating,” said he. “When I began business in '65 one of the best salesmen out of New York sold me my first stock. He was paid $5,000 a year, and was worth it. He went on a drunk here, but braced up in a day or two and went off all right. The last I heard of him he was dying in a hospital in Cincinnati of delirium tremens.”

“You must have known a good many men in your time?”

“Yes, sir; and knew a good many to go up, and a good many to go down. I was in the hardware trade then, and bought of Billy Smythe and John Milligan. Look at those boys now! Both of them in splendid positions. Poor Hank Woodbury, who sold me thousands of dollars from Sargents', went insane and died. I remember a man dropping in one day who looked a good deal more like a school teacher than a salesman. His name was Bartlett and he was selling chisels. He didn't know much about the goods, or about hardware, but he had a frank, open way of confessing his ignorance and his prices were all right. Do you know him?”

“Yes.”

“All the wholesalers know Bartlett; he's getting shiny on the head, but he can talk Miller's cutlery sweeter than the angels can sing. They tell me he's grown rich and lives like a lord; owns an island in Long Island Sound, and a yacht and other good things, but he's the pleasantest man who comes here.”

I like to hear about traveling men who have prospered; they ought to get on in the world if any class of men can get on. There may be houses that are prosperous in spite of their salesmen, but such houses are very few. And the man who can make money for others ought to be able to do that for himself, but this does not always follow. I have met some traveling men who were once superior salesmen and then steadily ran down. Perhaps whisky is back of it, or, perhaps, circumstances are against them, but every business man will have known just such cases. Mr. Bell and I discussed this until it was time to part, and then he said, “Come in again, I may see something else.” I felt that I had won his good will.

CHAPTER X.

I left Mr. Bell, and went a square farther down the street to a hardware store, where our house had occasionally done some business. I was very familiar with the firm's name, and had heard a great many stories of Mr. Harris, the buyer. There was an air of push and prosperity in the store, and when I inquired for the buyer I was shown into the office. There were two men at the desks, and a man lying on a lounge; the latter proved to be the man I wanted.

“I don't feel like doing any business just now,” said he, “come in after dinner.”

This was pleasanter than to be told not to come in at all, so I made another call on the street, but did no business. As I took my place at the dinner table a man opposite me (we two were alone) nodded, and asked if I was selling hardware, saying he had seen me come out of Mr. Bell's. I told him my business, and he gave me his card: Tibbals, of Meriden, Conn. I've seen many handsomer men than Tibbals, but I have not often met one who was better company. He had been on the road, so he said, for twenty years, selling plated ware, and I expect “Rogers Bro., 1847,” was tattooed all over him.

“Have you sold Harris?” he asked.

“No, he told me to come in after dinner.”

“What a lazy fellow he is! That man is the laziest one on my route. I took his order this morning while he lay on a lounge. I asked him if he was sick, and he said he was not, but he was tired. Great Scott! just think of a man getting tired doing nothing.”

I saw Tibbals liked to talk, so I led him on to more details about Harris.

“Some folks are lucky,” said he. “When I came out here in '65 Harris was a traveling man, but the next January he was given an interest. The house was old, rich, well known and well liked. They carried everything in stock from a bar of iron to a knitting-needle. Harris took the books and gradually got to be the buyer. He used to have some ambition, but for the ten years last past he takes the world as easy as if he was a fat old dog.”

“Do they still make money?”

“No, I guess not. They don't buy as they used to, and they are always grumbling. But other men have made lots of money here in these twenty years and didn't have one-tenth the start Harris had.”

“Does he drink?”

“Of course he does. Great Scott! when did you ever see a lazy cuss that didn't drink? I've often gone over to the billiard-room and taken his order there. I believe, by thunder, he would leave a customer any time if a crony came for him to go off on a good time.”

I do like to hear an old traveling man. If he has the inclination he can give one lots of points. Tibbals went on:

“I ran across a man in Seebarger's the other day that I used to know in Toledo and Cleveland. He was stock man twenty years ago and ten years ago, and is to-day. He's a first-rate man; solid, reliable, competent; he seems to be content, and he used to seem content. But how, in the name of H. C. Wilcox, can a man be so satisfied with himself? I don't understand it. I should want to be going up or down; I wouldn't be a setting hen all my life.”

“You have seen many houses go up and down,” I said.

“Well, I have. I remember a Detroit concern that in '65 had a nice, small trade, but each year seemed to be doing better, until I used to think they were about the sharpest set on my route. Business was always good, and the goose was away up. One of the partners built the nicest house in the city, and lived like a baron. But, by hokey, he's on the road selling goods to-day, and another man lives in his nice house.”

“What brings them down?”

“Big head, almost altogether. They get the big head; they fancy they are all Claflins or Stewarts, and they suddenly drop through a hole. It's almighty hard to be successful and not take to worshiping yourself. And the younger men fall into the trap easier than the old ones do or did. Take such a man as Wm. Bingham, of Cleveland; I don't see any change in him in twenty years. Yet the house has grown to be a very large and very successful one. Did you ever know Tennis?”

“No, I did not.”

“In '65, Tennis & Son seemed to be the booming firm in hardware there. They were rich and had a big trade. The old man died, the boys ran through the business so fast that you couldn't catch it with a gun. Oh, I've seen a good many fellows go under in twenty years.”

“And you think it's always their own fault?”

“Not always. I've seen some mighty good fellows go down. I remember a Toledo concern—good workers, good habits, living economically, but '76 pinched them to the wall. I tell you it's hard to see such men fail. It's like death to them. They fight against it until it's no use fighting longer, and it's pitiful to meet them.”

“How is plated ware?” I asked, to be sociable.

“Like all other ware, mighty hard to sell. There's several Rogers, all genuine, but I'm the head one. Our goods are the best known and the best, but if another 'Rogers' offers 2 1/2 per cent, better, off goes my customer. Do you have folks so confounded close?”

I assured him, laughingly, that I had.

“Well,” said he, “it's funny. I'm not so all-fired close when I buy a suit of clothes; I don't leave a man if he won't throw in a pair of suspenders; but dealers will go back on their best friend for a tooth-pick. I'd like to sell a line of goods like Chris Morgan's, where the price isn't mentioned.”

After dinner I called on Harris and found him scolding the boys in the store-room. I saw he was irritable, and would have gone out if I could, but he saw me and I had to advance.

“D—n those Eastern fellows,” said he, vindictively, “I'd like to wring their necks.”

I had to appear interested and ask why.

“Because they're such infernal fools. Here's a case of 150 pounds just in by express with $3.37 charges; could have come by Merchants Dispatch for 69 cents. But the fool clerks they have down there have the most insane idea about express, and every little while will shove something like this in on us.”

“Can't you charge it back?”

“D—-d if I don't!”

He went into the office and ordered the book-keeper to charge up the difference. I could sympathize with him. As stock clerk I had seen many a box come in from the East by express that we were in no hurry for, and that was never ordered to be so sent. The parties doing most of this are not in New York stores, but at the factories. In the small towns where most factories are, express and freight bills are paid once a month in a lump, and the clerks and shippers do not see the cost of each shipment. This makes them careless as to such charges, and to receive or send a big box by express is a matter that does not need a second thought. But in the cities, where each package is paid for when delivered, the clerks soon learn how express charges count up, and they do not ship so carelessly.

Perhaps I said something of this to Harris, but he finally turned to me sharply and said, “What are you selling?”

I handed him my card again.

“Oh, yes; well, we don't need any.”

Goodness! How disappointed I was! I guess I looked it, for he added, “Unless you've got some d—d low prices.”

I assured him I had, and made up my mind to give him only our ordinary figures; I had heard our senior say once that the man who talked this way was never a very close buyer.

Just at this moment a very pert young man came in at the office door, walked up to Harris, handed out his card in a way that pushed me to one side, and said:

“Mr. Harris, we've got the best butcher knife there is in the market.”

“Better than Wilson's?”

“Yes, sir; better than anybody's.”

“How does your price compare with Wilson's?”

“We are about the same.”

“Then I don't want it. Wilson's are good enough for me.”

“But I can show you ours is better.”

“I don't want any better, unless it's at less price. Wilson's sell themselves.”

The young man looked crestfallen and soon went his way; I took up my story, but instead of asking about this, that or the other article I handed him my price-list and asked him to look it through. He stretched himself on his lounge, and taking the book was about to open it, but stopped to ask, “Have you got a cigar about you?”

CHAPTER XI.

When I had given Mr. Harris a cigar and he had lit it, and when he had once more resumed his horizontal position on the lounge, I proceeded to take his order. He was an easy man to sell. The stock was low on some of my goods, and he had a favorable impression of my house, so he ordered easily, saying but little about prices until we came to cartridges.

“Whose cartridges are you selling?” he asked sharply.

“We handle both the U. M. C. and Winchester.”

“No Phoenix?”

“We don't keep them in stock, but I can get them for you if you prefer them.”

“I won't sell any other.”

I was curious to know why.

“Just because I like Hulburt; he's one of the nicest men there is in New York, and I'm going to handle his cartridges every time.”

“But,” said I, and very cautiously, “don't you find some trade that will insist on having the other brands?”

“Yes, and they can go somewhere else and get them. I wouldn't buy a U. M. C. cartridge if there never was any other. Reachum uses their goods to cut prices with, and, d—n 'em! they can sell him, but they can't sell me.”

I finished the bill, then chatted awhile with him about trade.

“There's no money in business,” said he; “times were when you could make a profit, but nowadays it is a struggle to see who can sell the lowest. There's a revolver that I bought of Tryiton for 53 cents, and our men say he has advertised it all over for 55 cents. How the devil am I to pay freight and sell for 2 cents profit? There is no such idiocy in any business today as in the gun trade. A jobber has to fight against every other jobber and the manufacturers too. The U. M. C. folks are said to back up Reachum, and Simmons is supposed to have Winchester behind him, and away they go, seeing who can cut the most and be the biggest fool.”

“But is it not so in other lines?”

“No; the prices are not advertised to any such extent as with guns and ammunition.”

“Then you think the factories could stop it if they chose?”

“Oh, the factories be d—d! Seven-eighths of the factories are managed by school-masters. They get up their little schedule of prices just as they draw off their 'rules and regulations' for their help, and expect the dealers of the country to dance to their tunes.”

I thanked him for his kindness and went on my way very well content. But when I sat down to copy off the order I was put in quite a quandary. Traveling men meet such men as Harris frequently. He gave the order because he was friendly to the house, but he had not asked for prices on anything. What was I to do? I had several prices, for my figures were elastic, to offer trade, according as the buyer was a close one or not, and just where to put Harris I did not know. I proposed to ask him all I dared and not get into trouble, but to decide on what this limit was gave me some study.

The other trade in the city I attended to carefully, and was well satisfied with my work. In the evening I started for C. As I went into the car there were three men at one end talking rather loud and sociably, and I went as near to them as I dared. One of them had lately been out to Denver and that section, and was describing to his audience the wonderful perpendicular railroads of Colorado, I soon found that all three were connected with boots and shoes, but handling different grades or styles, so they did not conflict. Of course they were from Boston, and equally of course they were rather priggish. The talker was not more than 22 or

23 years old, but the immense experience he had passed through was more than wonderful, and the old chestnuts he got off as having happened to himself were beyond Eli Perkins' power of adaptation.

“I had a customer in Peoria,” I heard him say, “who picked up a goat shoe and said 'he supposed dat was apout tree sefenty-fife.' I told him it was $5.25. 'O, tear, tear,' said he, 'can't you make him four tollar? Shake dells me: Fader, ton't you puy ofer four tollar. You should see my Shake; he is only dwendy-dwo, but he got a young head on old shoulters.' I told him that, seeing it was he, I would make the price $5, and he ordered twenty-four pairs.”

He told this as if it was the most comical story ever heard, and he laughed both long and loud over it, as did his two friends.

“When are you going home?” one asked him.

“Next week; been out over two months; had a big trip, but I don't expect to do any more traveling.”

“No! Why not?”

“I'm going to be married.”

“No! Who to? Are you telling the truth?”

“Yes, I am; honest; going to marry the boss's daughter. She and I used to go to school together, and I honestly believe she made the advances to me, rather than I to her. Oh, yes; I'm all fixed; going to stay in the office and help the boss.”

I wondered what kind of a girl the “boss's” daughter could be, to marry such an ass as this, and I would have been glad to see the photograph of her that he passed to his friends, but I made up my mind that the “boss” was getting a rare prize in a son-in-law.

Sitting in the smoking room of the hotel that evening I heard some men mention names that were familiar to me, and I discovered the talker to be a groceryman.

“If our goods are close,” said he, “the sales are large and folks have to buy. I heard H. K. Thurber say that the best year's business that he ever did was on a net profit of 1-3/4 percent.”

“Phew! How much did he sell?”

“Eighteen or twenty millions.”

“I've been in Thurber's store,” said another, “and I tell you they have things down fine. I think H. K. Thurber had the best head on him of any man I ever saw. He was quick as lightning; his judgment was good; he had no soft spot for any one, and he didn't tell his plans to any one. But Frank, his brother, seems to be just as successful, and yet is very different.”

“He's the politician, isn't he?”

“Yes; he was a Greenbacker, and anti-monopoly, and lots of other things. Some of these days he'll be Mayor of New York, or go to Congress, and he'll be heard from. His public life is profitable now, for it helps to advertise Thurber's business.”

“Well,” said another, “You've got to get up mighty early to get ahead of Hoyt in Chicago. They don't sell as many dollars, perhaps, as Thurber, but they have sand, and they don't put it in their sugar, either.”

“I like groceries. A dealer has to buy them, whether times are good or bad. Folks must eat.”

“And take medicine?”

“Yes, and take medicine. And, by the way, do you know that the grocers are giving druggists a lively time on medicines? They are. Thurber has a drug department, and advertises them at 'a grocer's profit.' Lots of others have gone in, and the day will soon be here when a man can buy his sugar and quinine in the same place.”

“What will druggists do?”

“What have they been doing the last ten years? Sell teas and coffees, cigars and tobaccos, and fancy goods. Look at a drug store in holidays, and it is full of plush cases, placques, bronzes, and goods that were supposed to belong to jewelers. The bars are dropping down in every line.”

“Business is done in queer ways,” said a man who was sitting near me. “Tobacco men give away guns in order to sell their tobacco; coffee is sold by giving plated ware, baking powder by glassware, boots and shoes by giving dolls and sleds, ready-made clothing by a prize of a Waterbury watch, and soap by giving jewelry. Nowadays a dealer don't ask you about the quality of your goods, but about the scheme you've got to sell them. It's a demoralizing way of doing business, and ruining trade.”

“That's so! That's so!” was echoed from all sides.

CHAPTER XII.

Stepping into a hardware store early the next morning, after introducing myself I was handed a letter sent to me in the care of the firm. I was very glad to receive it, and accepted the pleasantly given invitation to sit down and read it.

No man should greet a letter with more welcome than a traveling salesman. It is a tie that connects him with home, he who is so wholly disconnected. He is always wondering what his house may think of this sale, or that price, or this failure to sell, and be he never so sure that he has done well, still the assurance from home that they recognize his success makes him happier.

Houses differ much in their manner of writing to their traveling men. A friend of mine who lately made a change told me his principal reason for leaving the old house was the letters they wrote him. “I never cut a price in the world, unless I had to do it to meet a competitor; but if I did it, no matter for what cause, I was sure to be reminded that I had not been sent out to 'cut,' but to make money. Yet when I came home and explained why I did it, I was told I had done the right thing. But they nagged me the next trip just the same, and I grew tired of it.”

I did not find any such letter as that. It was a hearty commendation of my work and braced me up for the future. “We miss you in the stock,” the letter read; “but we can put up with all that while you do so well on the road.”

I spoke of this to a traveling man. “Well,” said he, “I scarcely ever hear from my house from one end of the trip to the other. Our goods don't vary in price very much, and I'm not much of a hand at writing letters. I send in my orders when I've any to send, and when I've none I save postage. But I know men who have a printed form, and they have to fill one out and send home every night, orders or no orders. That's too much like being a sleeping-car conductor for me.”

After reading my letter I turned to Mr. Shively with determination to sell him a good bill. But I saw he had a customer, and kept out of the way, but not too far to hear the conversation.

“That,” said Shively, “is a better gun than the ordinary Lafoucheaux—a good deal better. I know you can buy of Reachum and Shiverhim & Gaily for $7.65, but there is all of $2 difference in the goods, and the man who should appreciate this the quickest is the retailer.”

“But I can't get a cent more for this gun than for the others; buyers will not discriminate.”

“You give them no opportunity. You take it for granted that they will go to the lowest-priced places, so you insist upon buying the lowest-priced goods, but I tell you, Mr. Thompson, you are making a mistake. A certain proportion of every community runs after the lowest prices; a large majority seek good value for their money, and a small percentage, who are fools, buy only high-priced goods. Then again, a share only of the trade will come to you or me. Our competitors, no matter how mean they may be, will have their own friends, and, try as we may, we can only draw a certain share of the trade.”

“That's so.”

“Of course it is so. And the dealer who looks these things squarely in the face and acts accordingly is the one who succeeds. I remember when I was younger I expected to do all the business in my line here. There was a run on Parker's gun. The list price was $50; they cost us $37.50. Every one was asking the list, but making a small cut if necessary. I had a fair trade in them, but I concluded I would do more, so I advertised the price $45. This did not accomplish what I expected, so I came down to $42.50, and finally to $40. I sold a few more guns than I otherwise would have done, but I did not make one dollar more of gross profit. In order to attract a few extra buyers I had been cutting down prices to men who would have bought of me, whether or no, and I stopped it.”

“I remember my first Parker gun,” said Thompson; “I called a man into my store to look at it, one who talked as if he knew all that was worth knowing about guns. He opened it, looked through it, sighted it, etc., then asked the price. I quoted $50. 'That settles it,' says he, 'I wouldn't have it; a good gun can't be bought for any such money,' and he dropped it as if it was a hot brick. The next time I showed it I asked $75, and I sold it at $65.”

“Yes,” said Shively, “the fools still live; I'm one of 'em. I suppose I do things just as bad as that every day, but I don't do it knowingly. Here's this craze over Smith & Wesson's revolvers. A man, for some good reason of his own, wants a revolver in the house. He hopes he shall never have to shoot with it, but for fear he may need one he buys it. The chances are ninety-nine in one hundred that he has never been a marksman, or if he was he is so much out of practice that he could not hit a door off hand, and with his nerves steady. I show him a good revolver at $2.50, or a double action bull-dog at $3. But he asks, 'Have you Smith & Wesson's?' Of course I have; single action $9.35; double-action, $10.35. I explain that the cheap one is as safe to the shooter as this is; that the chances are not one in a hundred that a man can jump out of bed excitedly and hit a burglar off-hand; that no burglar, hearing a shot, waits to be informed whose make of revolver is used, and that practically the cheaper pistol is the most sensible for him to buy. But he has a foolish idea that he is going to be a much more formidable fellow with a Smith & Wesson under his head, and he takes that. And because of just such idiotic men Smith & Wesson can ask a big price for their goods.”

I was much interested in that talk, and sorry when the two men separated. But I was there to sell Shively some goods, and I went at it right heartily.

“I am rather tired of the gun business,” said he, “and would drop that branch quite willingly. It is being managed on the basis of brag rather than that of brains. Any fool can sell a revolver at 92 cents that cost him 90, or a gun for $7.50 that cost him $7. No brains are required to do that. The poorest salesman I have on the road sells the most goods and makes me the least money. The gun business has got into the hands of men who have just brains enough to run a ten-cent counter store.”

“Is it not about as bad in other lines?” I asked.

“No, not quite. There is much more detail to other lines. The gun business is compact and the line small. Consumers pick up names of makers quicker, and post themselves easier. A man buys a pistol or gun but once or twice in his life, and he gives the matter considerable study and shops around a good deal. Fifteen years ago Kittridge of Cincinnati used to be the champion cutter, but either he is out of business or has changed his tactics; now St. Louis and Chicago have gone into the postal card business and struck the 'Me Big Injun!' attitude. Here is a card one of my men sent in from a little town to-day. Shot quoted 80 bags $1.16! The man can't buy 80 bags in 80 months, and the house sending the card to him knows it, but it gives him a basis to work on us, and hurts us without helping anyone.”

“Yet you buy of these card men?”

“No, I don't, d—n them; I'd shut up shop sooner. There is no reason in the world for wholesale gun stores;

the business ought to be handled by the wholesale hardware trade, and ought to be done in a legitimate way on a legitimate profit. But some idiotic manufacturer, either being hard up for money, or envious of a competitor, goes to one of these gun houses and offers a special cut price, and within twenty-four hours every little cross-roads dealer is advised of the cut."

"I heard a man swearing just about the same way about screws," I said.

"Screws? Oh, yes; that's so. Screws have been about as mean. One factory used the hardware trade of the country to club a competitor, and thousands of dollars of values were wiped out in the operation. I had, say $1,000 worth of screws, bought at 75 percent off. Russell & Erwin wanted to hurt the American, so down went screws to 80. That didn't settle the business, and next they went to 90 off. What was worth $1,000 at 75 off was worth but $400 now. And this cut was advertised everywhere, so that retailers insisted on getting it. The orders as sent in were not filled, and retailers' orders on us were much larger than before. By and by we had no stock, and then, without any reason other than their own sweet will, prices went up again. It was a most outrageous piece of business from beginning to end."

"I am glad all the bad work is not done in guns," said I, "but how is your stock? I think bull-dogs are going to advance."

"I suppose they are; look at this letter."

He handed me a letter from a New York house which read:

New York,——, 188—.

Messrs. Rhodes & Shively—*Gentlemen:* I have entered your order for 100 "Blank" Bull-Dogs at $2.85, prices guaranteed. Please send on specifications. A combination is about to be formed among the manufacturers, and prices will advance to $3.25. Yours respectfully,

F.B. Combaway.

This was news to me, so I opened the letter I had just received from home and read to him:

"We have just got in a large lot of 'Blank' bull-dogs and you may cut prices to $2.65."

"Well," said he, "what the devil does this man mean by sending me such a letter?"

"He undoubtedly believed there was going to be an advance and booked you for 100 revolvers."

"What is your price on cartridges?"

"Fifty-nine per cent."

"There is another smart combination. The cartridge association puts my competitor in the A class and gives him 50 and 10 off, but we, who have to sell in the same town and to the same men, can only get 50. It's the most childish and sickly combination that I ever saw. Manufacturers seem to sit up nights to see what infernal fools they can make of themselves. Now I tell you there are only two classes of dealers—wholesalers and retailers. If a man is a wholesaler he should have wholesaler's prices, and if he isn't he shouldn't. But your smart Aleck manufacturers want to rate them, as Bradstreet does, and give 12 1/2 off to the A class, 10 off to B, 7 1/2 to C, 5 to D, and list to E."

"But a man who buys 1,000 dozen axes ought to buy for less than he who buys but 100 dozen?"

"Not a bit of it. If both men sell at wholesale they ought to be on one level, otherwise the smaller buyer can not hope to succeed. And I tell you it is much more to the interest of manufacturers that there should be six small houses in a town than one extra large house. Your large buyer is autocratic; he can break the market, and often does it to his own hurt, as well as to the damage of every one else. The average buyer is content to buy as low as his competitor, or if he gets a little inside price, keeps it to himself, lest his competitor shall know it."

"You seem to have figured it out pretty thoroughly."

"I have, and I know what I'm talking about. But of all the silly things manufacturers do, they never get quite so absurd as when they undertake to advertise."

"Please explain."

CHAPTER XIII.

"I can explain what I mean by showing you this letter," said Mr. Shively. "Here is a line of goods I proposed to handle, and wrote the manufacturer for prices. He has advertised them largely, but has not worked up a very large sale as yet, though he has succeeded in making them pretty well known. He writes me he will discount 35 and 5 per cent., and adds: 'Please do not quote or sell at better than 30 and 5.' What does he take me for? The list is $12; 35 and 5 off brings the net price to $7.41, and if I sold at 30 and 5 off, I get $7.98, or 6 per cent. on the investment, and I pay freight out of that! But this manufacturer thinks I am liable to cut under $7.98, so kindly cautions me against doing it. He must have a mighty queer idea of a merchant's profits."

"What would you do if you were in the manufacturer's place, to begin with?" I asked.

"First decide on a fair retail price. Every article must first be judged on this basis. It is not 'What will the jobber pay for this?' that decides the cost of goods, but 'What will this retail at?' Having decided this, then settle on a discount from this price that will pay the retailer a fair profit, and in quoting prices to the retail trade stick pretty close to this. Then the jobber should have a margin of 15 per cent. at least, and yet be able to sell retailers at my price."

“But suppose the goods will not allow all this.”

“They must allow it if they are to be handled by the trade in a regular way, and they will always allow it if proportioned aright; but what I complain of is that so many manufacturers are unable to comprehend the jobber's position. Here is a sheep-shear that is advertised to consumers at $1.25 per pair; the maker says the lowest he can sell at and make a small margin is $8 per dozen. There is a good margin between $8, factory price, and $15, consumer's price, but how is it divided? A retailer is quoted the goods at $8.65 and the jobber at $8. Don't you see that common sense would say $10 to the retailer and $8 to the jobber? If the jobber wants to sell at less than $10 let him do so (he is sure to do it), but the manufacturer should not.”

“Some houses ignore the jobbers altogether; what would you do with them?”

“They are all right; I have no fault to find with them; I can meet all of such competition, and without worrying. No factory can handle my trade so cheaply as I can. A great deal of my trade no factory can reach. Salesmen get higher salaries from the factories than we pay. They only get the trade they drum; there is very little of mail orders from the small trade sent East; what they need they want quickly. Both Russell & Erwin and Sargent & Co. have drummed the retail trade for years, but they have done jobbers no harm, and of late are very anxious to get the jobbing trade. I don't fear the drummers from the factories, but I do dread the low quotations they scatter around, because I must meet their figures.”

Mr. Shively seemed pleased at having a good listener, and had talked as if enjoying himself. While I was very much interested in his views, still it is probable I should have acted just the same even if I had cared nothing about what he said. No higher compliment is paid to a man than to place him over you as your teacher. I left him after getting a fair order from him, and passed into a large retail store.

That undefined line between the large retailer and the small jobber is a delicate one on which to tread. It is rarely that a retailer will buy of his home jobbers. Every jobber will sell more or less at retail; will tread on the toes of his retail neighbor, and the latter has a special desire to buy as low as the jobber does. Much of his stock is bought at such prices; on a large part he is assured by the salesman that he is getting as good prices as the largest jobber in the land. If one is not direct from headquarters it is doubtful ground to walk on, but it has to be taken care of.

I handed my card to the man whose face seemed to me to show authority and ownership, and I was not mistaken.

“Guns!” said he, “we don't handle guns.”

“But you do revolvers and cartridges.” I had seen them in the show-case.

“Yes, but we don't sell them. The jobbing houses are retailing at wholesale prices, and we poor retailers stand no chance.”

“You must retail at wholesale prices, too. You can buy about as close as they do, and you can do retail business as cheaply as they can.”

“Yes, but don't you see, no matter what our prices are they are retail prices, and for the same reason their's are wholesale; the idiotic public loves to be fooled, and will fool itself if no one else takes the job. What are cartridges worth?”

“Two dollars and ten cents per 1,000 for 22s.”

“Why, I can buy here in town for that!”

“I presume you can; we make no money on cartridges; neither do the jobbers here or anywhere else.”

“Well, if you can't beat the houses here, how do you expect to sell goods?”

“Oh, cartridges are but one item in a very long list, and, profit or no profit, people must have them.”

I always expect a retailer to tell me that I must beat his home jobber, or he will not buy of me. But I know that this is not often true. He will not buy of the home jobbers at the same price, for he feels that he is building up his competitor. I have seen a great many jobbers who had spent time and money trying to get control of all the trade in their own city, but I never saw one who did not finally give up in disgust. It is not human nature to be willing to help build up a man who is in any way your competitor, and often you would rather pay a trifle more elsewhere than buy of him. This may not be “business,” but it is human nature, and there are many places where the latter is by far the stronger.

I undid my sample roll and showed my revolver samples to Mr. R. Almost every revolver reminded him of something, and I listened to his stories with the interest of a man who wanted an order.

“There is no trade in the world so mean as this,” said he. “People come in here for a revolver, and I am almost sure they mean mischief with it. What am I to do? My refusal to sell one will not prevent their getting it, yet I hate to sell to them. Of course a large majority of those I sell are sold to people whom I know, and I know they buy them for proper use. But a woman will slip in here and slyly ask for a revolver, and I am wondering if she is going to commit murder or suicide. Many a time a man looks so woe begone as he buys a pistol that I make some excuse to keep him from loading it here for fear he will blow out his brains right in the store.”

“Did anything like that ever happen with you?”

“No, not with me, but it has happened. I read of a man going into a gun store, buying a revolver, asking the clerk to load it (doing it all calmly), and then placing it at his temple and falling down dead. I believe I would go crazy if such a thing were to happen in my store, and I always worry more or less for fear it may. It's a mean business at the best; I wish there were no revolvers made. What do you get for this?”

“Two eighty-five.”

“Well, send us six.”

I sold him a fair bill, and then spent the afternoon trying to sell two other large retailers, but without success. One of the men was snappish, the other good-natured but full of goods. I did want, very badly, to get a little order out of them, but when I went to supper I had nothing from them. After supper I went down to the cross-grained man's store determined to get so well acquainted with him that I could meet him again under different auspices.

He looked at me as if he expected to be pestered in some new spot, but I put him at rest by saying I had a little time to lounge and thought I could do it there. At this he dropped some of his frowns and began to be sociable. We talked until I was sure it was long after his shutting-up time, so I bade him good night, saying I was going off in the night.

“Don't you ever drink a glass of beer or wine?” he asked.

“Try me!”

“All right; let us lock up and go down the street a block.”

CHAPTER XIV.

I think a merchant who does not want to buy usually feels uneasy to have a traveling man about the store. He keeps up all the barriers that he can, so that he shall not be led farther than he intends to go. If he becomes very friendly it may be all the harder for him to say “no” by and by, so he keeps up an uncomfortable stiffness and is glad to see the salesman go. I have seen this, or thought I saw it, often and often in my own case. I could not get the dealer to be friendly with me while I was in his store, but perhaps I met him in the hotel and found him cordial and sociable.

The retail dealer who had invited me to take a glass of beer with him had been rather stiff in his own store, but the moment he turned the key in the lock he seemed to throw away his coldness and became very talkative. We sat down at a table and our beer was brought.

I doubt if any traveling man ever became a drunkard, because of the drinking necessary to be done among his customers. A little of it appears to be really necessary. But this little would lead no one to excess. The men who drink to excess are those who patronize bars with other traveling men, and who drink alone. The temptation is great. Every hotel has its bar; all introductions and intimacies have to be sealed with a drink, and the man who does not feel bright, or fancies he does not, has a row of bright bottles beckoning to him to “brace up” with a glass of their contents.

I do not wonder that the pulpits and all thoughtful people cry out against the drinking of liquor. Every traveling man's experience, the tales he could tell of the financial and moral ruin of men from drinking, and men who are usually the most intelligent and who ought to be the most influential, are all in the line of the injunction to taste not the accursed stuff. I say this after years of experience; I felt it on my first trip, but I was so anxious to ingratiate myself into the good graces of every man I wanted to sell to that I drank with customers when asked, and when it seemed wise invited them to indulge with me.

Do you say that the foolishness of this was that I must continue it each trip and do more each time? No, you are not correct. I had less occasion for it the next and each succeeding trip. I was able to meet the men on a different footing after the first trip, and I had but little use for liquor as an engine to help business.

A man must needs, too, be very cautious in inviting men to indulge. If it is done in any way so that it appears to be to help make sales it will do more harm than good. A certain class of traveling men will invite a merchant to go out and get a drink as if they were offering him a new paper collar, or to pay for his having his boots blacked. Their manner seems to say, “I must buy you a drink and then I'm going to stick you on an order.” They disgust where they expected to please.

Yet, as I have said before, men seem to come close together over a glass of beer. My friend had positively refused to buy a dollar's worth from me, and I had put him down as rather a surly fellow, but as we sat there over our beer he chatted about himself, his business, and his partner, as if we were old friends.

“I have been seventeen years in trade,” said he, “and we have been tolerably successful. I began with $1,500, and I suppose I am worth $35,000, but I work fourteen hours a day, and I have to carry all the responsibility on my shoulders. My partner waits on customers when he is in the store, but when he wants to go out driving or to go anywhere else, he goes. I never let him do anything but he makes a bull. He contracted for advertising the other day, $300 worth, in a paper that will never do us three cents' worth of good. We have the meanest kind of competition here; every wholesale house retails, too, and retails a good many goods at wholesale prices. They buy in larger quantities than we do, and of course can buy cheaper, and they look upon their retail profit as so much clear gain. I am tired of the business, and if I could sell out I would get into the jobbing trade.”

There it was. The man who wants to sell out is one of the most numerous men that exist. But it was my business then, and it has always been my business since, to listen sympathetically to all such tales, and to promise to have an eye out for any possible purchaser.

“We don't do much in your line,” he continued, “because men don't come to a stove store to buy revolvers, but if I don't sell out I'm going to do some wholesaling, and see if I can't eventually work up into wholesale exclusively.”

This was a much more promising opening for me, and I led his fancy over a bed of roses to the not distant day when he might put up that fraudulent sign—“No goods at retail.” And I was reminded of a very cheap pistol that we had that I would sell him at 52 cents, which he could job to any country dealer at 75 cents. I don't know if it was the beer or my eloquence, but I sold him fifty then and there, and added some other goods to the sale, so that my evening was not wholly wasted.

I saw him not long ago. He is still retailing at the old stand and still grumbling about his partner, but we have been the best of friends since our first evening together.

As I ate my breakfast the next morning I overheard two men at my table talk about trade, and I quietly listened.

“It only takes a little thing to help out a line of goods or to kill them,” said one. “Nimick & Brittan got out that burglar-proof attachment on their locks and just kept themselves going by it.”

“Is Brittan on the road now?”

“Guess not. The Big Three, Brittan, Rashgo, and Bond, work some kind of a syndicate, though, and make a good thing out of it. I met Brittan twenty years ago or so. He was a hard worker, good-natured, understood human nature and was a success. He represented several concerns, and used to make ten or twelve thousand clear a year. Finally he got into the lock factory.”

“Most traveling men are crazy to get into something.”

“Yes; that's so. We think if we had a shebang of our own we'd just make things fly; but we miss it oftener than we hit it when we do get the factory.”

“You're right. The man on the road with a good trade and a good salary has a pretty good thing of it.”

“Well, some men expect to strike it rich by silver stock. Do you know Al Bevins?”

“The sleigh-bell man? Yes, I know him well.”

“Has he told you about the silver stock?”

“No.”

“He has been investing in Deming's—”

“Oh, d—n Deming! He's a nuisance with his silver stock.”

“Yes, but he gets the boys in all the same. Henley has bought a lot in Providence on the strength of his investment, and Deacon Hall, of Wallingford, will buy out Wallace when his dividends come in. Bevins says it's better than sleigh-bells, and Al knows how to run a factory.”

“Still, some of the men at the factories are born idiots. You can't teach them anything. If the managers were compelled to make one trip a year they'd find out a good deal. Here's my ax trade. I've been cussed from one end of the trip to the other. My orders for October shipment were billed about January 1. And it's the same way year after year. I swear, I often wonder that I get any orders at all! They damn me in February, and yet they give me new orders in May. But it is sickening to hear the same story over and over, year after year.”

“What excuse do they offer at home?”

“Oh, it's never two years alike. One year the streams dry up; then the foreman is discharged; then they booked too many orders.”

“A little thing happened that riled me when I was last home. A customer ordered a certain spoon, using a special number of his own, on the 18th of May. I was in the shop late in June, and the shipping clerk asked me what spoon that was! Here he had held the order six weeks before he took steps to find out what the man wanted. I gave him a piece of my mind.”

“Talking of spoons, do you ever run across Kendrick, of Mix & Co.? I traveled with him a few years ago.”

“He sticks close to the factory. There is an instance where the traveling man took the management of the factory to good purpose. I don't believe there is a better-managed business anywhere. Kendrick has become a deacon in the church, with a weather eye out for fast horses.”

“Talking of spoons reminds me of Father Parmelee, of Wallingford. Do you know him?”

“Who, Sam? Yes, indeed.”

“We were in Detroit together, and the way Parmelee talked William Rogers was enough to drive a man crazy. He's just chock full of William Rogers, and I'll bet he'll want Rogers on his plated grave-stone.”

“Parmelee is one of the kindest-hearted men on the road. I never heard him say a bitter word against any one; I never knew him to bore any one; I never heard a merchant speak other than kindly of him. He travels for a big house, but they probably do not know how much of their business in the West is due to Parmelee's push and tact. He has been a long time traveling, and I always like to meet him.”

When the two men went away I ruminated over what they had said, and I laid up several points for my own use. I was especially glad to hear them praise other traveling men. It's a mighty good sign of any man to find him generous in his praise of others. I thought this all over as I started down the street to find Shull & Cox and try to sell them 100 bull-dogs. I caught their sign and marched boldly in, wishing there was a law on the books that would compel every dealer to give a salesman an order whether he needed goods or not.

A young clerk was at work near the door, so I asked if the buyer was in.

“That's him over there with that drummer.”

“Is it Mr. Shull or Mr. Cox?”

“That's Shull; Cox won't be here for an hour yet; he don't get up till the school bell rings.”

I saw the young man was talkative, so I prodded for more information. “Who is that drummer?”

“I don't know his name; he's selling revolvers from More & Less, of New York.”

This was fun for me, and I wished I was out of the way, and out of the town. I concluded that the best thing I could do would be to interview some one else immediately, and I started off at once.

CHAPTER XV.

I think a man often does better work when he is spurred on by anxiety. I had seen More & Less's man in the store across the street, so I determined I would do my best at Bingham's and not get whipped out of the town. Mr. Bingham met me as if he wished I was somewhere else, but I was too eager to sell to care very much about his manner. I told him my story as well as I could, and insisted that if he needed anything in my line I could do him good.

"I don't need anything," said he, "but what is all this talk of the M. H. & Co. revolver?"

"It is coming into prominence," I said, "and Jim Merwin gave it a big boom in Cleveland the other day. McIntosh took him before the Police Board, and they say Merwin outdid Buffalo Bill. McIntosh says the Chief of Police took a Smith & Wesson, and Merwin a M. H. & Co., and each tried to shoot the other with empty shells, Jim grabbed the Chief, emptied his revolver of the shells and rammed the pistol in his ear until the Chief yelled for mercy. Merwin gave such a war dance that they had to call out the fire department to cool him down. He secured the city's order for an outfit for the police, and M. H. & Co. stock has gone up since then."

"Do you sell them?"

"Yes, at factory prices."

"Pho! All you men talk factory prices."

"I mean factory prices."

"Well," said he, "I'm going to buy of Simmons after this; he beats the factories. His New England man—"

"His what?"

"His New England man. Didn't you know he had opened a Boston office and now drums New England?"

"I hadn't heard of that."

"Oh, yes. St. Louis is going to run the country on hardware hereafter and on guns. Simmons' New England man says they do a big business there; dealers buy bills of $8.87 down. Their New York office isn't open yet, but it's coming; they want Sam Haines as manager, or J. B. Sargent. They do things up big down there."

"How many M. & H. revolvers can I send you?"

"Don't want any now; just asked out of curiosity."

This was discouraging, but I opened my price-book at A, and called his attention to every item in it, but to everything received the same answer, "Got it." I began to get desperate.

"Look here," said Bingham, "you seem to be excited, young man. I like to see a man work, but if a fellow don't want anything, he don't, and that's the end of it. I never bought a dollar from your house, and your prices are no better than others."

But I wanted an order. Whether he needed goods or not was no concern of mine; I wanted an order and I was determined to get one if such a thing were possible. Finally I struck Flobert rifles. "Look here," I said, "I have a special price on Flobert's target rifles—$2.10 by the case—but I will give you a cut even on that; I will make them $2, and now I want you to give me an order."

"Two dollars," he said, as if turning it over in his mind; "$2, eh? I've a mind to go and see Madley with you."

"Who is Madley?"

"He's a clothing man, and chain lightning about offering gifts to purchasers. He has run cows, watches, pianos, and lager beer; maybe he'd take hold of rifles."

"Very well," said I, "let's us go see him. What price shall I quote him?"

"You needn't do any quoting; I'll make prices and you expatiate on the goods."

We started down the street to Madley's, and I was introduced to the gentleman, a fussy, garrulous little man with an extremely red face. Bingham opened the ball, and I never listened to more talented drumming than he did that morning.

"Chris," said he, "this young man is offering target rifles at a cut price that knocks anything ever known. The boys have been buying them very freely of late, and they are popular. I fancied they might hit you as a gift with a boy's suit. If you can handle them I don't want any profit, but am getting other goods from him, and you can ship with my goods."

"What are they worth?"

"Well, you have as much of an idea of the worth of a rifle as any one else has; suppose you were going to buy one for your boy, what would you expect to pay?"

"I don't know anything about them."

"Oh, you've got some idea and I want to get it, for you will not be very different from the average man in your estimate of cost."

"Oh, d—-n it, say $10; but I can't handle any such goods."

"We don't ask you to at $10. But that is about the average idea regarding price. Now, Chris, this man's price is $3.12."

It struck me this was getting mighty close to "cost!"

"Eh, $3.12! How the devil can they make it at that?"

"Oh, they make it. How they do it is none of our concern. It would make you a very popular gift and the boys would go wild over it."

Madley turned to me. "Is that your bottom price?"

"I gave Mr. Bingham my very best figures."

"How many have you got?"

"Any amount you want."

He called two of his young men, and after a conference with them came up to Bingham and said: "Bingham, I can't afford to let you make a profit on these rifles. You wouldn't come up here if you were not making

something. The idea is a good one, and you may send your boy up and get the best suit of clothes I've got, but I'm going to figure on rifles before I order."

"All right, Chris, go in." He turned on his heel to go out, and I followed. When we were on the sidewalk he said: "I don't give it up yet, but I can play bluff as well as he can."

"You asked too much advance, I am afraid."

"Oh, I know him. I'll go for him by and by."

And he did. I called in the afternoon and took his order for 100 rifles, and he showed me a written order for them from Madley at $2.62. To these he added several other items, making a very nice bill. I have always noticed that, however much a man did not want any goods, the moment you get him started there is but little difficulty in then getting his order for some of the very things he told you he was not needing.

During this time I had no fear of the other salesman. My prices were down so low I cared for no one, but I concluded I would go back to Mr. Shull's, and see if anything was left for me there. He happened to be at work at the shelves, which is a place I like to find a man at, and I explained that I was in early in the day but saw he was engaged.

"Yes," said he, "I had a gun man here all forenoon. He sold me all I needed in your line. He says bull-dogs are going up."

"I had not heard of it."

"What are you selling at?"

What should I say? If he had bought I didn't care to quote a special price, and I did not want to name a high price, for that might give him a bad impression of the house in the future.

It is a difficult place in which a salesman finds himself, this quoting prices to a man who has just bought. The temptation is always to name a very low rate, perhaps even to go below your lowest selling price, for the purpose of making the man feel that you would have been a better man to buy from, but this is a two-edged sword, and I have not cared to handle it. I concluded it would pay here to be frank.

"It is possible there is some advance of which I don't know," I said, "but my price has been $2.75 to $2.85, according to quantity."

"That's what I bought at."

I opened up on rifles, found him entirely out, and showed him my order from Bingham for 100.

"What in Sam Hill is he going to do with 100?"

I did not enlighten him. I said: "Oh, every lad buys a target rifle nowadays."

"What price do you get?"

"Two dollars and ten cents by the case."

"Case? How many's a case?"

"Thirty-six."

"I don't want any case. If you want to send me a dozen at that you may."

I wanted to, and got his order for another item or two, and left him, feeling I had done pretty well.

This showing one merchant the order you have taken from his neighbor is one of the easiest things in the world to do, but it is not always a trump card. Still, it has a powerful influence in a majority of cases. The best buyer who lives has times of doubting if his judgment is infallible, and he is glad to brace it up by comparing with the judgment of others. This he is able to do through having salesmen tell of the orders given by other buyers, and be he never so smart, he very often falls into their traps.

If you are a buyer you are, possibly, looking at a Russell knife, listening to Booth's eloquent description of the way they are hand forged, elegantly ground, and how Oakman inspects every blade and then wraps it up carefully in Ella Wheeler Wilcox's last poem. The pattern you have in your hand pleases you, but you wonder how others will look at it. The question is not, "Do I like it?" but, "Will it sell?" You are inclined to think it will, but just then your eye falls on scores of patterns on your shelves that you thought would go like hot cakes, but they have disappointed you. Perhaps, after all, your best way is to wait; but just then Booth opens his little book and shows you where Bartlett ordered 100 gross; Buhl, 50 gross; Ducharme, 25 gross, and Blossom, 10 gross (but he puts his thumb over this last hastily), and you tell him to send you a few. As I said before, I believe the best buyer is more or less influenced by being told what others are doing, and with the smaller trade it is constantly used to sway their decision.

Is it right?

I do not know. I am not writing of the ethics of business. I know that traveling men use the order taken from one buyer to influence another, and that it often has great influence, although I think the buyer is not wise who acts upon such information. Even when he is told the strict truth regarding the orders given by others, he ought to know his own stock and trade so well that he could depend upon his own judgment. But most of us like to lean on some one else, and when we are hesitating and learn that our competitors have decided thus and so, it is easy to fall into line and buy as they did.

CHAPTER XVI.

Sitting at the breakfast table of the hotel next morning a gentleman opposite looked up pleasantly and

asked:

“Are you selling goods, sir?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What line?”

“Guns and sporting goods.”

“Yes? I'm a little in that line myself.” And he handed me his card.

HOPSBY, COCKLEY & CO.,
20 Warren Street,
New York City.

“My name is Cockley,” he added.

I had heard of him often, and was very glad to meet him, though I would have been still happier if he were not selling the Norwich revolvers. I always had a feeling that I stood a poor show when I was in direct competition with other salesmen in my line, and I never felt quite comfortable with them.

“How is trade?” I asked.

“Well, rather dull on the road; but they write me it is booming at home. We have a large South American trade that the elder Mr. Hopsby, being a fluent Spanish scholar, and author of that well-known work, 'Spanish As She Is Walked,' looks after, while young Mr. Hopsby looks after his father and me, and it keeps him busy.”

“You have a good many lines beside pistols?” I asked.

“Oh, yes; pistols are a side issue. I sold Deming 1,237 Waterbury watches, and Blossom a car-load of can-openers. I sell Pribyl here a ton of nail-pullers at a time. Did you ever see the Waterbury watch?”

“I have not seen it lately.”

“Then take these two; no, put them both in your pockets; I always give a man two, so he can check off one by the other. A Waterbury watch is one of the greatest blessings in the world. Babies can drop them; boys can throw them at each other, and women can use them as stocking-darners. Mr. Hopsby drops one into the contribution box every Sunday, and expects, in the course of a few years, to provide every young African with a time piece.”

I didn't get it quite clear in my mind whether Cockley was guying me or not, but he looked as if he were simply trying to be sociable.

“Have you been long on the road?” he asked.

“No; this is my first trip.”

“That so? You look quite at home. I remember my first trip; it was in New England, and I was selling sewing-machine needles. Mr. Hopsby took me around a corner before I started and, presenting me with a nail-puller, told me he was afraid he was doing wrong to send me out, I was so young; but that I was to remember that the only way to prosperity was in getting orders. It hadn't struck me in just that light before, but the more I thought it over the more I believed he was right. The first man I tackled was a pious-looking deacon, and I began to whistle 'The Ninety and Nine' as I went toward him, so that he might understand that I was a Bible class scholar. I worked over that brother for two mortal hours, and finally got mad. 'If you only played billiards,' said I, 'I'd lick you like thunder.' 'You can't do it,' said he, and in less than ten minutes we were at the table across the street. I was just more than walloping him, when suddenly I remembered the tearful injunctions of Mr. Hopsby. I let him beat me three games, and then sold him $60 worth of needles.”

“You have been on the road a long time?”

“Twenty-two years come Valentine's day.”

I looked incredulous.

“Oh, I began young. Chris. Morgan, George Bartlett, Sam Parmelee, Charley Healey, and I started on the same day. We now leave New York Saturday night, give Cleveland, Monday; Toledo and Detroit, Tuesday; Fort Wayne and Indianapolis, Wednesday; Chicago, Thursday; St. Louis, Friday; Cincinnati, Saturday; and are in New York for business the next Monday morning.”

“That is fast traveling.”

“Yes, but we have the trade educated up to it. We tell them 'no bouquets,' 'no parties,' but just orders. We telegraphed ahead to Toledo, the other day, so that while the train waited twenty minutes for dinner I sold three bills.”

The was all said so honestly and so pleasantly that I had to believe he was sincere, but at the same time I knew it wasn't strictly correct, and I felt more and more uncomfortable.

“How do you like this hotel?”

“Pretty well; I'm not very particular.”

“You will be when you have been ten or fifteen years on the road. Hotels are a large part of your life. I left word at the Julian House, in Dubuque, to be called at six o'clock, the other night, and about four I heard some one pounding away, so I asked what was up. The musical voice of the watchmen came back: 'It's now 4 o'clock, and I'm going off watch, so yees has two hours yet to sleep before 6 o'clock.' Now that struck me as a family arrangement, and I'm going to have it extended to other houses.”

“There's something about hotels I don't like,” I said.

“What's that? The whisky? It is poor here, but you will find it better farther West.”

“No,” I said, “I'm not much interested in the whisky. What I dislike about hotels is the loneliness.”

“Yes, that's so. For that reason I like to travel with a party. I get Brother Little, he sells Pillsbury flour, and is a first-rate player on the harmonica, and Al Bevins (the talented sleigh-bell artist), who plays on a $2 music box, while I play on a double police whistle equal to any man in America. We take possession of the parlor and invite the landlord's family in, and, I tell you, we make it home-like! How would you like to try a little concert here to-night?”

I begged off most emphatically, and said I must go for business. “Hold on, we'll go together. Do you know any one here?”

I confessed that I did not.

“Neither do I; so we can be of great help to each other. I'll introduce you, and then you can introduce me.”

I felt as if I stood a good chance of getting into some kind of a scrape before I got away from him; but off we started. We were going down the street when Cockley struck an attitude and pointed to a sign over the way:

“I told you I knew no one; I was joking. There's a friend's. Let's go over and see Bewell. He'll be glad to see us and give us the whole town. He was in New York this spring, and we had a good time together studying up art. After he had once seen the game piece in Stewart's it was impossible to keep him away from it. I never saw men so devoted to aesthetics as he and Joe Gildersleeve were. He said the best way to see the picture was through a glass of rum and molasses, and he looked at it in that light about thirteen times a day.”

I followed him in with some fear of a joke being played on me, but his manner changed at the door, and we met Bewell as if we were all deacons. He gave Cockley a very warm reception, as if thoroughly glad to see him. I concluded I was in the way, so with a promise to call later, I betook myself to another house. I did not meet Cockley again for many months.

I thought him over when I had time, and was not surprised that I had always heard him spoken of as being a very successful salesman. The half-hour that we were together had made me like him, and the way that he went into Bewell's store showed me that he knew when to be dignified as well as when to be jolly. I especially liked the way in which he spoke of his partners; in my way of thinking this is one of the signs of a broad man. The small, petty-minded fellows are sure to have a complaint to make of their house or buyers or partners. In following Cockley's steps since I have always heard him pleasantly spoken of by merchants and travelers.

I found the store, to which I took my way, a large wholesale hardware house. I observed as I entered that one man was very angry about something, while he talked to another whom I took to be his traveling man. I did not care to bother him until he was through, so nodded a good morning and took a chair. I soon found the man was angry over allowances the traveler had made in the previous week, and I was much interested and strongly in sympathy with him.

“What did Labar say about the goods he returned?” he asked, as his eye caught that name in the list in his hand.

“He claimed that he ordered dish-pans and that we sent rinsing-pans, and that the brushes were moth eaten.”

“What did you tell him?”

“I said as little as I could.”

“I wish you had told him that he was a contemptible cur. A man who will lie over $4.80 worth of goods, after keeping them in his hands ninety days, and seeing you twice meantime without saying a word, is a mighty small man. He knew from the price what the pans would be, but he never thought of any such excuse until after we drew on him for his long overdue bill. Of course our kicking does no good, because other houses will sell him until they have similar experiences with him, and it will take a good while to go around. If I was as mean as some of these whelps I'd shoot myself. Did Simpson pay up?”

“He paid the balance of the bill, but would not pay interest; said that we were the only house that charged interest, and he should never buy of us again.”

“The miserable little liar! I don't suppose a house is in existence that lets a bill run five months after due and does not add interest. When are you going out?”

“On the next train.”

“Well, try and collect the balance due from Stone, but don't sell him another dollar; there are decent men enough in the trade, let the mean ones go. If he does not pay, get the name of a reliable justice and we will send a sworn account to him. But don't sell him again.”

“They're good as wheat.”

“I know they are good in the sense of being responsible; mean men usually are; but it is not a question of their responsibility; they are tricky and untruthful, and their idea of being smart is to lie over goods and prices and compel a deduction. Give them the go-by. Well, good-by; don't worry over trade; do your best and we will be satisfied.”

As his man started off he turned to me with, “Well, young man, you look as if you wanted to sell me something.”

CHAPTER XVII.

When a merchant says to the traveler, “Young man, you want to sell me something?” it is a notice to come at once to the point and state your business. It is not the way we like to proceed. We prefer to pass the compliments of the day, talk about business, and approach gradually the special branch of trade to which we are devoted. But Mr. Clark's “Well, young man,” was like a whip, and I had to at once open out with my little story.

“We don't want anything in that line,” said he, with decision. “We are full of guns and ammunition. It's a beastly business. I wish I was out of it. Here is a card quoting Pieper's 'Diana' gun at $32; mine cost me $38;

now, how the d—-l does this concern sell at $32?”

The “Diana” gun was well known to the trade as one having all the modern improvements; the rubber butt-piece had Diana's head on it and hence the name; but Pieper sent over one lot of about two hundred guns of the common quality, and this “Diana” butt-piece was on them; they were sold by Pieper's agent to a gun house as common guns, at about $28, but this house promptly sent out its daily postal card quoting the “Diana gun” at $32. This was the story as told to our house, and I explained it to Mr. Clark.

“That may be just as you say,” said he, “but a business that is full of that kind of tricks is a good one to get out of.”

Just then a clerk came in and handed him a slip of paper, which I recognized as a special report from the mercantile agency. He excused himself while he read it. “This beats the Turks,” said he to me. “I never knew a time when it was so difficult to get reports of the standing of retail dealers that you could tie to. My man sends in an order from J. C. K., Burlington, and he says: 'This man has a nice stock of goods and his neighbors say he is worth $5,000, and is good for anything he buys.' Dun does not quote him at all, so I asked for special report, and here it is:

> *J. C. K., Burlington, has been in business here since 1880; came from Kokomo, where he failed and paid 40 cents on the dollar; is married, age about 42, habits good. Claims to have stock of $2,200, and to owe not to exceed $600. Is doing fair business, but his personal expenses are rather high, and it is said he is close run for ready means. Thought safe for small amounts, but bill should not be allowed to lapse.*

“Now this and my salesman's report don't tally very closely. Here is another case. My man sells John Johnes, of Dubuque, and writes: 'He has a grocery well stocked; says stock is worth $3,000, and no debts. His neighbors say he is sound as wheat.' But when Dun's report comes in it says:

> *Is a married man. Been in business alone and with partners for several years; means limited and estimated worth $500 to $800. Is regarded as an honest man, and it is believed he will do for a limited line.*

“Now I don't like an honest man who is worth $500 to $800, according to Dun, but who tells my man he is worth $3,000.”

“You can usually depend on Dun, can't you?”

“Yes, I think they sin on the right side; they are apt to make a man out as bad as they can. Here is one of their reports, as an instance:

> *F. Keef, saloon and grocery. He appears to be doing a good business; is in debt, but to what extent are not able to say. Had some claims against him here, but think he will pay. Has some energy and push in business. Has no real estate so far as known, and not considered sound financially.*

“You would not care to sell a man on such a report, would you? Yet that man is one of the best paying men on our books.”

“Do not your salesmen call on the banks?”

“Yes, I suppose they do, but let me tell you that banks are the biggest liars in existence. They often say a man is good when they know exactly to the contrary. My man sent in an order from L. Loeby, of LaGro, Kentucky; he wrote, 'Loeby is a sharp buyer, and said to be good. I called at the bank and they said he was A No. 1, and good for anything he buys.' Well, I got a report from Dun, and here it is:

> *L. Loeby, LaGro; age 35; married; been in business two years; fairly temperate and fairly attentive to business; character and business capacity moderate; it is said doubtful as to honesty; means in business, about $1,000; no real estate; on the $1,000 above listed as his means in business the bank here holds a chattel mortgage of $600; he has a large family, and of late he has not been paying his bills as they fall due.*

“You can see why the bank quotes him A No. 1. The more goods he gets the better is the value of their chattel mortgage. I have stopped putting much faith in what banks say about men.”

“Are not the mercantile agencies almost always sure to find something against a man or a firm?”

“No, sir; they have to give facts as near as they can get at them, and if there is nothing against a man they can not give anything against him. Take this report:

> *Darby & Chase, groceries and commission, Delphi. E. J. Darby and W. H. Chase compose the firm; seem to be men of good character and business capacity. They are thought to be worth $10,000 to $15,000.*

“That report probably gives the best general opinion in that community regarding that firm. Their character and business capacity are good, and they are prospering, evidently. But the mercantile agencies omit to tell us some very important points about men. A man may be financially all right, and yet be an undesirable customer, or one who ought to be handled with great care. Every report ought to tell whether the man is a smart Aleck or not; if he is mean about returning goods; if he makes unfair claims; if he is a chronic reporter of shortages; if he allows bills to run long past due and then refuses to pay interest, or exchange on drafts; all these points ought to be covered.”

“Are you much bothered by such men?”

“Every wholesale house is; no matter what line it is in, or who it is, the wholesale dealer has more or less of just such men to deal with. I know a retailer who invariably reports a shortage; he lies, of course, but he is fool enough to think he is making money because he beats every house out of a dollar or two every time he pays a bill. Here is a man whose bill was due November 30; I draw on him by express (his town has no bank)

February 23, and add 25 cents to the draft to cover the cost of getting the money to me. I make no claim for interest although I have as good a legal claim for it as for the principal, but he refuses to pay my draft, and in a few days sends me his check on a country bank for the face of the bill. It cost me 25 cents to collect his check, and I paid 25 cents to the express company on the returned draft, so I get 50 cents less than my bill and lose the use of my money nearly three months after it was due me."

"Why didn't you draw through the nearest bank the day the bill was due?"

"I didn't want to be so sharp with him; I felt kindly toward him, and supposed a little leniency would be appreciated, so I only sent a statement asking for remittance. And this is the way he repays me!"

"Probably you gave him a piece of your mind."

"What good does it do? The drummer from my competitor will call on him, and if the dealer starts to run me down he will help him at it. We put up with things of this kind until the average retailer fancies he is real smart, and the meaner he is the smarter he will be considered."

"But isn't it your experience that shippers do make mistakes, and occasional overcharges are made?"

"Certainly it is; not very frequently, but occasionally such things happen to us. But I don't write the factories as if they were pickpockets, and as if these errors were intentional. In thirty years' experience I never knew a house refuse to correct an error, and while I want all my discounts and extras to which I am entitled, I don't want one cent more than that. If I do not pay bills when due I expect to be drawn on, and have to pay the cost of the draft. If interest is demanded I pay it, and if it is not demanded I feel grateful to the house for letting me off."

"I think gunsmiths a mighty touchy set of men to deal with."

"They're no better and no worse than any one else. My neighbor told me last night that he had just received notice from an Iowa customer that he would not take a bill of dry goods, just sent him, out of the depot because they were charged one-half cent too much. He claimed the bill was one-half cent a yard on everything higher than the price agreed upon between himself and the salesman. The house is one of the most reputable in the State; the salesman is one of fifteen years' experience, and the prices are the same as he made to others in that town and all along the route. He says the retailer kept no copy of the order and goes entirely by guess. He does not write to ask the house if there is a mistake or not, but shows his smartness by announcing that he shall refuse to receive the goods."

"What will they do with him?"

"Keen said the man owed them $700 on a past due note that they were carrying at his request; he said they would compel him to pay it up clean at once, and never go near him again. I hope it will bother him right bad to raise the money."

I apologized for having taken up so much of his time, but said I would be sorry to go away and not have a small order to show for it. I called his attention to Flobert rifles, interested him in them, and finally secured his order for a case. As we were finishing our talk a happy-looking pair came in the door, and I took up the morning paper while Mr. Clark went forward and greeted one of them, a Mr. Healey, very cordially, as if he were a very old friend, and then Healey, his eyes twinkling, said:

"Mr. Clark, let me introduce my friend, Mr. Fuller. He is known far and near as 'And Forged Fuller, and he is also the owner and patentee of that celebrated washing compound, Fuller's Earth."

Clark laughed heartily as he shook hands with Fuller, who said:

"I may say that my trade mark is 'Paragon;' heverybody hasks for it—"

"Yes," broke in Healey, "and nobody buys it!"

"I may say," said Fuller, placidly, "that Mr. Healey is wrong; I frequently sell a few. It's my trade mark, and known, I may say, in England as well as here."

"Yes," said Healey, "Fuller lives on both continents, and brings the steel over in his grip. We have our examples at the hotel and shall be glad to have you come up there. Fuller don't care whether he sells or not; he is rich and traveling only to keep down his flesh."

Mr. Clark made an engagement with them and they went away. As they passed out he said: "There goes one of the most genial-hearted men on the road. I have known Charley Healey for about twenty years. He came out here representing Hilger & Son, and built up a good trade for that firm. Hilger could not have done it in a thousand years. Then that firm and Wiebusch consolidated, and Healey looked after their Western business. I never met a buyer who was not his friend, and I imagine most of them are, like myself, heavily in his debt for courtesies extended to us, not by way of business, but as if he were under obligations to us. I say to you that a good many houses never suspect the debt they are under to their traveling men, but look upon themselves as the great magnet that draws trade, when nine out of ten dealers care nothing whatever about the principals and buy entirely out of regard for the salesman."

I had heard many men speak in the same terms of Healey before, and I hoped I should meet him at dinner.

As I bade good-by to Mr. Clark and thanked him for the order given me, he said: "Somehow you do not seem like a stranger."

I thanked him for that compliment most sincerely.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Sunday to the commercial traveler, if to no others, is preeminently a day of rest. If there are stores open during week days he feels that he ought to be at work, and if he gives himself an extra half-hour at noon or evening his conscience pricks him. But upon the Sabbath there is nothing to be done by way of business, unless in getting from one town to another, and it is his rest day.

I slept so late (I admit that I am always lazy whenever I dare be) that I fancied I would have the dining-room to myself, but I had plenty of company. The hotel where I was had an excellent reputation on the road and was a favorite place at which to pass Sunday. I was fortunate enough to meet here a hardware man from my own city whom I knew well, and who had traveled long enough to know almost everybody.

“How is trade?” was, of course, his first question.

I had no bragging to do over my trade, for, it must be confessed, I was not sure that I had sold even half what I ought to have done. So I said, “My trade is only so-so.”

“Well,” said he, “I guess that is about as much as any of us can say. Times are tight. Goods are so infernal cheap and cost so little that if you sell a man four or five pages it don't amount to anything in dollars and cents. I was just telling White here—by the way, let me introduce my friend, Mr. White; sells notions for Haff & Walbridge, New York. I was just telling White that I took a big order from a house yesterday, one covering six pages of note paper, and each item calling for fair quantities, and it amounted to $92. A few years ago it would have footed up $400.”

“It is so in every line,” said White, “everything is down, but we have new lines every season, and keep up trade by having novelties.”

“What a chain-lightning genius Haff is!” exclaimed my frend. “I remember when he traveled for Howard & Sanger; good-natured, voluble, energetic, and uneasy as a lump of mercury. Suddenly he blossomed out as an inventor, and he's kept on inventing ever since. I've been surprised that the man who is father of so many children has not invented a better nursing-bottle or colic exterminator. What's your last novelty?”

“Base balls.”

“Ye gods! Base balls! Well, you've got a mighty good man to fight against.”

“Who's that?”

“Taylor, of Bridgeport. I don't know when I've seen a man of more push than he. I believe he patented or invented the ball that Warner makes, and they placed him in charge of the ball department. He just has balls on the brain; tosses them in his sleep; takes them to church and plays catch with the tenor, and keeps two balls in the air while he drinks a cup of tea. That kind of a man is bound to succeed.”

“Is the base ball trade a large one?”

“Yes, it amounts to a good deal of money. Every notion dealer in the country carries more or less of them in stock. The ball that sells for a nickel is bought by the barrelful; such a ball is sold to the jobbers at 28 or 30 cents per dozen, and to the retailer at 35 to 40 cents. Balls that retail at 10 to 25 cents are the best sellers, but a few good balls go in every bill.”

“How high do they run?”

“The best sewed balls retail at $1.75 each, but the ordinary 'league' ball retails at $1.50. Such a ball is sold to jobbers at $7 to $9 per dozen, except Spaulding's; he keeps his pretty stiff because he gets them into the hands of the National League, and a certain class, because of that, will buy them and no other.”

“Is there any choice in the different makes?”

“Very little. Certain dealers get balls made with their name on and advertise them as being superior to anything made, and very often the manufacturer cannot sell his own brand in the territory where these are. You know people love to be fooled.”

As we went away from the table, we met a gentleman whom my friend introduced as Mr. Hart, of Bradly & Smith, brush manufacturers, New York. Hart evidently was an old timer on the road, and knew the brush business like a book.

“Trade is fair,” said he, “but New York has to compete with brush factories in every city now, whereas, twenty years ago, we had it our own way. That was the time when my firm ran the Methodist Church and laid out Asbury Park, N.J. It was easier to make $50,000 a year then than it is to make $5,000 now.”

I was struck with a point he made against a buyer for a large jobbing house. Some one had said that they bought in good quantities, as compared with one of their competitors. “Yes, they buy in larger quantities,” said he, “but give me the other men. I sell them both, but here is an incident which tells the kind of big buyers your friends are. A year ago I had a new leather-back horse brush that I was selling at $9 a dozen. I showed it to B.'s buyer and it took his eye at once. 'What is the best you will do if I take a quantity?' he asked. 'I would like to sell that at $9, and if I could do it I'd push them.' I knew there was a good profit to us at $9, even where we sold in small lots, so I figured that in quantities we could sell at $7.50. How many do you suppose he ordered?”

“Well,” said my friend, “knowing that it's mighty hard work to sell a $9 brush nowadays, I should say six dozen would be a good order.”

“Yes, so it would; I expected he would order six or eight dozen, but he ordered twenty dozen.”

“The deuce he did! Did he sell them?”

“I was there yesterday and he had sixteen dozen and a half on hand. I don't call that very shrewd buying.”

Sitting in the smoking room was a tall, slim, Yankee-looking sort of a man, who smoked in a nervous way, and when he talked seemed to speak with great earnestness. He was introduced as Mr. Rockwell, a cutlery manufacturer of Meriden, Conn. Somehow these Meriden men are all alike. They are great pushers in business, wire-pullers in politics, and in season and out of season stand by each other. If Wilcox and Curtiss and the Rockwell family were only guaranteed fifty years more of life they would own the State of Connecticut. Rockwell was discoursing upon pocket cutlery, and as it was a subject about which I knew nothing, I took a back seat.

“American manufacturers,” said he, “not only have to fight against poor foreign goods, but what is worse, they have to fight against them under American names and labels. Thirty years ago if a man got up a fancy brand he put 'Sheffield' on it; now this is changed; everything has to have at least an American name. The result is that American goods are damaged by foreign trash, which, having an American brand, is supposed to be American-made. A farmer buys a knife branded 'Missouri Cutlery Shops,' thinking he is getting an honest, home made article. The probabilities are that it was made in Germany, and is of the poorest quality. It does not give satisfaction; so he damns American goods and goes back to his old IXL. And when he gets a poor IXL knife, as he very frequently does, he swears it is bogus.”

“That's so,” said one of his friends. “I often hear men sighing for the old knife of their daddies.”

“Why, here is a sample of the man in this letter. Let me read a few lines. After mentioning our advertisement, he says:

> *Now I have been hunting a good knife for twenty years, but too much “protective tariff” having shut out competition, we now only get such “pot-metal” cutlery as monopolists choose to give us; nice handles with hoop-iron or cast blades, not as good for $2 as the old “Barlow” knife boys could buy for a “bit” forty-five years ago. If yours are good I will be glad to get them, but if they are a cheat, I will call on you with a shot-gun, on my way to Canada, where I will then have to look for a good knife.*

“That man,” continued Rockwell, “believes what he says, probably, but a man of 45 who knows so little ought to be shut up in an idiot asylum. If we could have a law here as they do in England, permitting no goods to be labeled or branded as American-made unless they were made here, such a man would hang his head with shame at his injustice to home manufacturers.”

I liked to hear Rockwell talk; he had a way of giving a sentence in a crisp, sharp way, and then half shutting his eyes for a moment, as if he was waiting to see what the other fellow would say and be ready with an answer.

My friend spoke of him with great enthusiasm, saying his house had done business with him for many years, and looked upon Rockwell as one of the most growing men in the trade. In talking with him afterward about pocket cutlery, he said to me: “No cutlery factory in this country is paying a penny to its stockholders; we are looked upon by the free-traders as coining money, but our men are averaging twice the wages of the English, and three times those paid by Germany, and the labor is about eighty-five percent, of the cost of the pocket knife. The leading American makers turn out good goods, far above the average English or German; but the consumer is not able to tell whether he is using an American or foreign-made knife, because of the habit of branding everything with American names, and we have to bear the curse.”

“Why is it that Meriden people hang together so?” I asked.

“Do we?” he asked, laughing. “Perhaps it is because they're all such good fellows. The rich men there, and there are a good many of them, have always been ready to help any enterprise that came to the town and could make a fair showing. You will find the same men stockholders in a great many different companies; their salesmen help each other, and they are closely united socially. They work together and love their city.”

I don't know any better eulogy to deliver upon a body of business men.

Later in the day, a rather warm conversation near us drew us toward five or six men who seemed to be growing excited. A traveling salesman appeared to be giving a manufacturer some good advice.

“You men,” said he, “seem to think you do a very smart thing when you go to these big buyers and give them an extra 10 per cent., but you don't seem to be capable of learning that in doing this you are cutting your own throats. Only a few months ago I was talking to Simmons. 'I don't like these low prices,' said he, 'nor to have everything down so close to cost; we can't get extra discounts as we can when prices are higher; the most we can get now under ordinary circumstances is 2-1/2 to 5 per cent.' 'How much do you think you ought to get?' I asked him. 'Ten per cent., at least,' said he.”

“But he doesn't get it,” said the manufacturer.

“Oh yes, he does, on a good deal of his stock. He must get it on your goods or he would not be quoting them at the price we pay you for them. We paid you $3.60 for the last lot we bought, and I saw a quotation from him on your goods at $3.62. He is no fool; he does not sell goods at cost. When I saw his quotation my price was $3.60 and will be $3.60 until we clean your goods from our shelves, and it will be a good while before any more of the same brand ever go back there again.”

“But that is all nonsense,” said the other, “he buys the goods at exactly the same price your house does.”

“Then it is time we quit them. If we have no protection on your goods we want to drop them.”

“That's pretty tough,” said the other, half disposed to be angry. “I have no control over your prices; I sell your house as I sell him; I advertise the goods so that the jobber could make a profit if he would, but if he won't I cannot compel him to do it. The jobber has no idea of anything but to beat his competitor in buying and then beat him in cutting the price. Nothing counts in business but a 'cut.' I don't know where we are going to.”

“Well,” said my friend, “suppose we go to dinner.”

CHAPTER XIX.

A number of traveling men around a Sunday dinner-table, when they feel sure it is going to be a good dinner, is about as entertaining a company as any business man would care to be in. Jokes are necessarily plenty; stories fly about freely, but the man must be very thick-headed who does not pick up bits of information that he is the better for knowing.

At our table were represented knit goods, groceries, cutlery, hardware, crockery, and guns. When the the jokes had flowed about, and firms were being discussed, I heard the dry-goods man say: “Yes, sir, if I wanted to point out two of the longest-headed men who foresaw the coming change in doing business I would mention Butler Bros., of Chicago and New York. I used to sell them notions when they were in Boston, and they were nice men to do business with. It's harder to sell them to-day, for the buyer has grown hardened and cuts to the quick.” “They were the 5-cent counter men, were they not?”

“Yes, 5, 10, and 25 cent counter goods was their hobby, and it beat the great horn spoon to see how the thing spread. Every little cross-roads store had its 5 and 10 cent counters, and manufacturers and jobbers cut in prices to cater to it. Of course it could attract attention only by offering bargains. If a dealer put on his 25-cent counter only such goods as he had been selling at 25 cents, no one would have patronized it. The point in his mind was to attract attention by the bargains he could show. He could make a fair profit on the whole lay-out, but perhaps one-third of the stock was sold very close. Under ordinary circumstances a dealer paying 20 cents for an article would sell it at 30 to 40, but now it went on the 25-cent counter.”

“But it hurt regular trade.”

“Yes, it did to this extent, that it led men to dabble in things not in their own line. The dealer was apt to do the most cutting in such goods as were not in his regular line. He was inclined to be stiff on his own goods, but say he was a dry-goods dealer, it did not hurt him to cut on tin dippers, wash-basins, wooden-ware, etc. So when the hardware men followed with their cheap counters they were most inclined to cut on notions, and in fact the cheap-counter business has very much to do in the mixing up of trades and the demoralization of prices.”

“Don't you think it was the basis of department stores?”

“Yes, I do. Men saw that their small line of crockery, or tinware, or stationery sold well, and they increased the assortment, and finally led up to the 'department' idea.”

“How is this 5-cent counter business managed? I mean, how are the sales made?”

“Largely in assortments; for instance, if you pick up advertisements of the houses making a specialty of such goods, you will find that they offer assortments for a certain amount of money. They give the goods in detail; the dozen price of each article, the quantity sent in the assortment, the cost to the dealer, and the total retail price. Of course if the dealer is just starting out in such goods the entire assortment is what he wants, but if he is in it already the list enables him to buy just those things he needs. You'd be surprised to see the profit there is in these things, even in the present hard times. For instance, I saw an assortment of 5-cent goods consisting of 167 dozen articles which would retail, as you can figure, for $100.20; cost to the dealer, $60; profit, $40.20, or 67 per cent, on the investment.”

“Let's go into the 5-cent business,” said the cutlery man

“Better start a knife-stand on the street. Do you make goods for street-men?”

“No; they handle the cheapest Dutch trash.”

“Where do they get it?”

“In New York and Philadelphia. Seven or eight years ago some street fakir got hold of a showy two-blade penknife at about $2 a dozen. He took his stand on the street and they went off readily at 25 cents. The business seemed to spread all over the country like wild-fire, and especially during the fair season. Jobbers in the inland cities were cleaned out of stock they looked upon as dead and worthless. Of course, as soon as this demand was felt houses began to prepare to supply it. At first the fakirs were willing to pay $2 per dozen, but when new stocks came out cuts were made and the prices steadily went down.”

“What do they pay now?”

“These 25-cent tables do not cost, on an average, $1.50 per dozen knives. They get out a very handsome-looking two-blade knife, in bone or ebony handle, for $1.32 per dozen; a good-looking jack-knife for $1.40 to $1.75; pearl handle penknives for $1.75 to $2.”

“Are they worth a cent?”

“Not to cut with. They sell by the eye entirely; handles and blades are well finished, and they seem to be worth a good deal more than the price asked for them.”

“We had quite a run with some of these men on revolvers,” said the hardware man. “We had a wood handle 32-caliber that cost 85 cents—a good pistol. A seedy-looking fellow bought two or three hundred from us. His plan was to go into a shop, saloon, or store, and in a confidential way tell the boss or clerk that he was dead broke and would sell his $5 revolver for $2.50. At that time the average gunsmith was asking $3.50 to $5 for a common revolver, and he sold enough every day to make him good wages.”

“Thank goodness!” said the grocer, “we don't have these snide affairs in our line.”

“No, people have to give your goods away. It's samples of soap, samples of tobacco, samples of tea, samples of baking-powder, etc., etc., from morning till night. It's a mighty mean line that has to be given away.”

“This giving away,” said the crockery man, “has made a big hole in our business. Some one suddenly discovered that crockery would be a taking thing to help work off poor goods. Of course, the home jobber benefited by it for a very short time, and then the New York importers stepped in and took the cream. Baking-powder men, coffee-grinders, tea houses, and others sent out crockery, and people, got so much of it for nothing they had no excuse for buying any.”

“I doubt if it really hurts us much in the long run,” said the Meriden man. “Here was a baking-powder concern in Ohio that offered a set, consisting of fifty-one pieces, of silver-plated ware with every case of their own goods. If you had read their advertisement you would have been sure that Rogers never turned out any better goods than these they were giving away. But the fifty-one pieces cost them just $7.50! They used a

good many thousand sets. The table caster was worth about 70 cents. You can imagine the quality! Now, I hold that in the long run cheap stuff will help good goods. People who have it will get disgusted with it, and will replace it with reliable ware, while if they had never had the trash they would not have had their own consent to buy the better goods."

"Perhaps the most wonderful thing about business today," was said, "is the amount of information given in circulars, price lists and advertisements. I can remember twenty years back where a price list simply gave you the briefest statement of the article, sometimes the size, but oftener not, and the price. Nowadays an ordinary list is a mine of information. I remember having reached the conclusion that one of the things particularly needed was a circular for the consumer about the way to strop and take care of a razor. I could not find a syllable on the subject in any English or American price list. I wrote to four manufacturers for points, but received the briefest of replies and no practical help. I sat down to write the circular. Did you gentlemen ever try your hand at such a job?"

No one had.

"Then I just want you to try it once, and you will believe what I tell you, that it will be about as tough a job as you ever undertook. I had been selling razors for ten or twelve years; I had talked with barbers, as you all have; I had heard customers talk; I had heard shrewd remarks and silly remarks; I had heard manufacturers occasionally drop a hint, and now I was to sit down and evolve out of my memory and experience a circular on the subject that would be of benefit to every one handling a razor."

"How did you make out?"

"Well, perhaps the best answer to that is the fact that our firm sends out the circular to-day just as I wrote it eight years ago. But I started to speak of the large amount of information you find in circulars and advertising nowadays. Advertising is much more of a science than it was. Pick up a decent trade paper and the ordinary advertisement is full of shrewd points for those handling the goods, that cannot help being of immense value to retailers. And I can call your attention to this: these advertisements, these shrewd ones, are always written by men who have been traveling salesmen. Such men know the points that ought to be brought out."

"Yes," said the dry-goods man, "how is this, cut from the advertisement of a list of five-cent counter goods. Don't you believe the man who wrote this knew the soft side of a retailer?" And he read:

HOW TO DO IT.

Bundle up some of the unseasonable goods that are taking up valuable counter space, and put them away on the shelves. By this economy of space, and with the possible addition of a temporary counter, you have gained room enough to admit of the introduction of a "5c, 10c or 25c counter." The next thing to do is to send to some reliable jobber for a bill of staple household sellers, with which you can mix hundreds of articles from your own stock; then send out a little circular ("dodger") to the over-anxious inhabitants, telling them of a few of the articles to be found on your "Cheap Counter," and they will respond as readily as though you had sent them free tickets to the circus. It matters not that they have not seen one of these counters before, there will be the same rush—the same scramble for first choice—the same telling of friends about bargains bought; and instead of sitting around waiting for the advent of spring, you will have pocketed a nice profit from your cheap counter, besides having worked off any amount of odds and ends that might have been in your store five years, and would have remained five years longer had not this modern wonder made an exit for them.

"That sounds mighty like Ed. Butler," said the dry-goods man.

CHAPTER XX.

Occasionally a traveling salesman meets at the hotel or on the train the head of some large house, who is making a trip for special reasons of his own. Such a man is always sure to be affable with every one, but he is especially conciliatory to the salesmen he meets on his route. Perhaps this is due to the fact that he is a stranger and these old travelers can help him, if they are so inclined, or it may be for the purpose of leading them to be talkative with him, and in that talk he can gather points that will be of value to him. Whatever the cause may be, there is no question as to the fact. But the talkativeness is not always on one side. I have met wholesale merchants on the road who would talk freely and tell me more about themselves and their business in one evening, while we sat in a country hotel, than they would have done in five years of ordinary intercourse in the city.

The man who sits in the house all the year falls into several errors. One is in thinking that people are anxious to buy of him, and that his traveling men ought to find it very easy to get an order in almost every store. Another error is in believing that the orders come solely because of the firm's popularity, rather than of any merit in the salesman. I suppose there are goods so well advertised that, in a large measure, they sell themselves; but, outside of patent medicines, I can not now recall one such item.

We were talking of this, half a dozen of us, while in the smoking-room Sunday evening, and one of us said: "The best man to work for, if you do your level best, is a man who has been on the road himself. Such a man always knows where and when allowances must be made for dull trade, and for cutting of prices. The man

who always makes the most trouble, and who was fore-ordained to be a dashed fool, is the book-keeper. The balancing of his little gods of books is of more account, in his eyes, than is the sale of a bill of goods. And having the ear of the firm he usually gets permission to do any piece of dashed foolishness that he suggests. But next to him is the merchant, who never steps out of his own door to try to sell a bill, or the manufacturer who runs his little shop in a one-horse way and never goes out to see what others are doing, or learn what consumers are saying about his goods. I once traveled for such an old block-head, and, as I started off on a trip, I advised him to discontinue making a certain article, telling him it was out of date and could only be worked off on greenhorns in business. I guess I was as much interested in getting them off as if they were my own, and I lost no chance of working in a few wherever I could. The same amount of work on salable goods would have paid big money. Well, when I got home, may I never breathe, if that old ass hadn't taken my sales as evidence of the big demand for the goods and was piling up the store-house with the same stock!"

"Yes," said another, "but the man who sits in his office usually makes the biggest mistake in supposing that he is a great deal smarter than the men he sells. Because he is a peg higher in trade, as jobber, importer, or manufacturer, he imagines he is also greater in ability, and he has no hesitancy in advising these poor devils about their business. I was selling scythes several years ago, and worked for just such a man as I have been describing. He was a good mechanic, but pig-headed; goods must be made and finished a certain way, because that was the way they had been made for thirty years. The result was we were losing our trade. I knew he was blaming me for the trade falling off, so I persuaded him to make a flying trip with me to Buffalo, Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit and Chicago. The dealers at Buffalo were rather old fogy, and we got our order there from our regular customer, but when we struck Cleveland I saw the old man open his eyes. It was one of Blossom's off-days, so he didn't waste much time on us, but said he didn't want any of our goods. Deming hadn't got into silver mining, so we couldn't get an order from him by buying a share of stock, but Van was about half-full, and he opened up on us. Then Toledo piled it on. There were four jobbing houses there in our line, but not one would buy. I knew one buyer pretty well. After we had been the rounds we came back to his place, and I asked him to tell us frankly how we could get some of his trade. He gave in detail the ideas that were current among retailers and consumers regarding shape and finish of scythes, putting it down in a clear-headed way, so that a baby could have understood him, but showing the shrewdness of a man who was studying all the points in connection with his trade. It did the business. We went up to Detroit, and had a long talk with Charlie Fletcher, and the old man bought a lot of samples and went home. On my next trip, you can bet, I had salable goods."

"You can study a man as he is only when you see him in his own store," said a third. "When a country merchant comes into Chicago, and walks into your store, he is very desirous that you shall be pleasantly impressed by him; so he puts on his best manners. You are on your native heath, you are surrounded by your clerks, and you are considerable of a man in a city of big men, while he realizes he is a very small toad in a little country puddle. But just put the shoe on the other foot, and go into his store. Now, he is on his own ground; you are asking favors of him in the shape of orders, and all the petty smartness comes out, if there is any in him. It is an opportunity that permits a mean man to be his meanest, and draws out of a generous, kindly soul all the milk of human kindness there is in his heart."

"Well," said a dry-goods man, "there are a good many kinds of men in the world, but the man who makes me fighting mad is in Pittsburg. He's most infernally polite, but he never wants anything. As I go back to his desk he is either reading or writing. I say: 'Good morning, Mr. Blane,' and hand him my card. He scarcely looks at it, but in the most solemn and dignified way says: 'We do not need anything in your line to-day.' Then I open up on my leading items: 'I have a very nice line of novelties in so-and-so.' He looks off from his paper to say: 'We are full of so-and-so to-day,' then goes to reading again. 'I have some desirable patterns in new goods in silks.' He looks up to say, 'We have enough silks for the present.' 'I can give you special prices on hairpins.' He looks up again to say: 'Our stock of hairpins is full.' And then I bow myself out. I asked the boss one day if he ever sold the firm when he was on the road. He said he did once. Blane was out of town and he sold his partner. Still, I call on him every time I go to Pittsburg."

"Pittsburg? Oh, that's where Joe Horne hangs out."

"Who's Joe Horne?"

"Why, Joe is the man whose orders are as well known in the west as Willimantie thread. Every New York drummer stops at Pittsburg, and every dry-goods man sells Joe Horne, or says he does, so that now, west of the Mississippi, the first greeting given a drummer is, 'Show us Joe Horne's order.' Joe must be a very good fellow to give his orders so impartially."

"Did you know Luce?" one dry-goods man asked the other.

"Luce, of Toledo? I should say I did."

"He was a tough man to tackle unless he felt just right. They tell of a put-up job on a drummer who used to call on him. He couldn't manage ever to get an order out of Luce. One day he said to a friend, who always sold Luce, 'How is it that you succeed and I fail? I sell the best trade in the country and to a good many men that you don't sell; now, why is it I can't catch on to Luce?' The other asked, 'Do you ever talk politics to him?' 'No.' 'Well, that's his soft side. He's a regular old moss-back, Vallandigham Democrat. If you want to succeed, go in on that line.' His friend thanked him, and the next time he went to Toledo he felt better. Luce wanted no goods, as usual. Then Mr. Traveling Man opened on politics. He remarked that all over the State there was a good show for burying the d—d Republicans that election. Luce glared at him in speechless wonder. Then Mr. Drummer launched out on the infernal meanness of the Republican leaders, but by this time Luce was ready for him, and the way that poor devil was talked to would make you sorry. When he next saw his friend there came pretty near being a fight, but the friend thought it too good a joke to keep and told Luce. No one enjoyed a joke better than Mr. Luce, and, by thunder, the next time the man called on him he gave him a good order, and they were the best of friends afterwards."

"I often wonder if any one ever fools a man equal to the way he fools himself. I always laugh over a customer of mine in Cincinnati who always insists he must have 'a leetle adwantage.' The boys on the road like Old Pap and laugh over his 'leetle adwantage.' He says: 'I must haf a leetle adwantage ofer New York and

Philadelphy. They ton't pay no freight. They get their goods at their door; I must haf a leetle adwantage to cover the freight.' The old man has this so firmly fixed in his head that we have to humor him by giving him 'a leetle adwantage.'"

"Some men think that in giving an order all they need to do is to state their own terms and time, and every one will dance to their tune. A concern in the Northwest that failed (and they ought to), used to write their orders on a blank that was headed:

All prices guaranteed. Privilege of increasing,
decreasing, or countermanding
No charge for boxing or drayage.

"How was that for smartness?"

"You say they failed?"

"They did."

"They ought to have got rich!"

"Yes, they are a fair type of the average buyer; it's cut here, screw down there, pare over yonder. No matter what your price may be, it's always, 'What are you going to do for me?' as if he must have a special cut. I showed Hibbard & Spencer's buyer a new tool the other day, and gave him my price. `What's the best you can do?' I told him that was the best I could do. 'But what is your price to Hibbard & Spencer?' As though every salesman must have laid away in a snug corner, a special price for that important firm! `I have given you my price; it is the best I can do with anyone.' They are not willing anyone shall make a cent but themselves; they want the whole apple, and are not willing to give the manufacturer the core."

CHAPTER XXI

When I reached T. I had a very disagreeable duty before me, namely, to fix a misunderstanding with a customer. The house had written me: "Atkinsen & Co. bought a bill last October from Ned on 60 days' time; goods went exactly as ordered. When the bill became due we sent a statement, with a mem. that if not heard from in ten days we would draw. In reply they sent us a letter saying the goods were sold them under arrangement by which they are to be paid for when sold, and that we had better hold our draft, etc. We wrote that we did not do that kind of business; that our terms were plainly stated on the invoice, and that upon receipt of that, if not correct, they should have notified us at once. To this they sent a 'Smart Aleck' letter, and when we drew on them allowed our draft to be returned. Settle the matter up; take back the goods, if no better way suggests itself, but close it up. And close up our deal with them; they are the kind of men we do not want to do business with."

To be ordered to get money out of a slow customer is bad enough, but to have to settle an account with a mean one is a thousand times worse. The slow customer is usually ready to dun himself, and full of apologies for his slowness, but the "Smart Aleck" who wants to be small has a hundred arguments ready at hand to prove that he is a very superior person who proposes to stand on his rights. Every traveling man has such customers as this "on his list," and is occasionally called upon to tackle them.

I had made up my mind that I would find Atkinson rather tall and slim, but he wasn't; he was a pleasant-looking man, and I handed out my card as if I had called around to sell him a big bill. His face lost some of the smile when he saw the firm's name, but I began to talk of trade and the weather, and kept it up until I had forced him into an appearance of being sociable. Eventually I led the talk around to his stock and was fully prepared for his decisive "We do not need any." I mentioned guns, rifles, cartridges, caps—everything—but he was full. I was determined that he should introduce the subject of the account, and this he did when I made a move as if to go.

"Did your house tell you about our account?"

"They told me to stick to all the money I could get," I said, pleasantly.

"Have you a statement of our account with you?"

"I think I have." And I appeared to be searching for it, though, of course, I knew the exact page and line it was on. "Here it is: $43.30."

He went to his ledger, found it correct, I suppose, and then from his cash drawer counted out the amount and asked for a receipt. I gave him one, thanked him for the money, and then remarked that I was sorry there had been any misunderstanding about the terms.

"I like to see a house live up to its agreement," he said, in a surly tone.

"Don't we?"

"No, sir; these goods were to be paid for when sold."

"But the invoice is plainly marked sixty days; why didn't you report such an agreement when you received the invoice?"

"I don't care for the invoice. Don't I get any amount of invoices where all of the discount does not show? When I pay them I deduct the extra, and that is the end of it."

I concluded a little plain talk would neither do us or him any harm; he was probably in a state of mind that would prevent him buying of us very soon again. I said: "I am satisfied that you have been long enough in business to know that staple goods, such as you had from us, are never sold on any such terms as you state

you bought these at. I made inquiries about you of your neighbors, and every one said they had misunderstandings with you, and are not on good terms with you, and if I could see your correspondence I am pretty sure I would find we are not the only house out of town that you have had just such disputes with. I simply say to you, and for your own good, Mr. Atkinson, that you are making a mistake. My orders from my house were not to sell you, and while I know you can get along without us, you can't afford to keep driving houses away from you without hurting yourself. I'm obliged to you for paying me; that is all I came in here for."

He told me that I and my house could go to the devil, and in that pleasant frame of mind we parted. I suppose I cut down the bridge between him and us, but I venture to say other houses had the benefit of my frankness.

I spoke of this to an old traveling man whom I met at the hotel. "Yes," said he, "there's too much coddling among us all. We smooth over this, and give in on that, and the result is we make it all the easier for the fellow to be small the next time. I'm selling axes, and, of course, I have to warrant them. Do you warrant guns?"

"Not to speak of."

"Then you ought to thank your stars. Warranting is the most infernal device ever brought out to make men mean and dishonest. I put it down to the dealer, when I sell him, in the plainest way I know how, that we warrant an ax only against being soft or breaking from a plain flaw. When I come around in the spring he pulls from under the counter two or three or more rusty axes that he hands to me, with the remark that 'here are some poor ones.' I pick up an ax and find some idiot ground it as thin as a razor, and the edge broke out so that it looks like a saw, I ask him what is the matter with it.'Too hard; brittle as glass.' 'But I didn't warrant against being too hard.' 'But you expect your axes to stand, don't you?' 'This would stand if ground properly.' 'Oh, yes; you fellows always have some loop-hole to get out of your warrant.' This rather staggers me, so I pick up the next one. 'What is the matter with this?' 'Soft.' As I hold the edge to the light I can see a slight bend in the bit. The man who used it had it stick, and in his efforts to loosen it, he had given it such a terrible wrench that the edge had bent a trifle. To a man knowing anything of the proper temper of an ax the fact of that slight bend is in its favor, and the work of grinding it out would have been much less than it was to remove the helve. But I pass that, as there is no use to argue that a slight twist does not show soft temper, and I pick up the third one. It has a corner broken off; the break is still bright, but I am calmly told there was a bad flaw there. I start to explain why I know, from the shape of the break that there was no flaw, but he twits me again with wanting to go back on my warrant, and I stop right there. Now, this is the history of nine out of ten transactions. The retailer takes back everything a customer brings back for fear of losing that customer's trade. The jobber takes back from the retailer, knowing it is unjust, but he is afraid that any hesitancy on his part will damage his trade. And the poor devil of a manufacturer takes it off the jobber's hands and cannot help himself. There is a deuced lot of cowardice in business nowadays. It goes back through the dealers till it reaches the consumer, and it encourages him to make any kind of claim he sees fit to cover his negligence, ignorance, or maliciousness."

Sitting in the cars that evening, I overheard a traveling man say: "I find it a little bit harder each week to leave home. I have a little girl of three, and I see so little of her it makes me discontented. Her mother knows just what time I ought to come up the street, and she and the baby are watching for me at that hour every Saturday evening. When they see me the little one comes running to meet me. Her excitement and her running just take her breath away, so that when she gets to me she cannot speak a word. But she can squeeze me and kiss me. How I do hang on to her all the time I'm at home! I go to bed two nights in the week like a man should. I wake up to find those little arms around me! And on Monday morning I have to pull myself away. I tell you it's almighty hard."

His voice had a tremor in it, as if a very little encouragement would bring tears.

"Yes," said the other, "it is hard. I've been there. I had a girl six years old that was to me all yours is to you, and all she ever can be. I started off one Monday morning leaving her as happy as a lark. On Wednesday I was telegraphed to come in, and when I got home Thursday morning she didn't know me. Just as long as she could speak she kept asking for me. I never start out on a Monday morning but that I think of her, and I never walk toward the house Saturday night that I do not miss her. I don't know, but it seems to me that a traveling man has no business to have a wife and family."

"I never knew you had lost a child," said the other; "if I should lose my baby I believe I would go insane."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't; you would do just as every one else does; you'd go on and suffer. But the men that can be with their families seven days in the week ought to thank their God every hour of the day."

"I travel a good deal by team," said a third, "and am frequently driving as late as 10 or 11 o'clock at night. As I go along the road and see the light shining out of the windows, and see family groups in their homes, gathered around the lamp, I tell you, boys, I get homesick. It's the time of day I want to be at home with my family. I envy every man I see in such a home, and I contrast his condition, surrounded with his wife and children, and a long night of rest before him, with my work. I finish up my day at a late hour at night, then perhaps have to get up at an unearthly hour in the morning to catch a train. There's mighty little poetry in this kind of a life."

"But, after all," said the first speaker, "our wives suffer the most. They have the responsibility of the home and children on their shoulders all the time, and they worry more or less over us. My wife never sees a boy coming to the door with a circular but she thinks he has a dispatch saying I am either maimed or killed in a railroad accident. Then if the children are sick she has to shoulder the burden alone, and it is all the greater because she always tortures herself by believing that she must be in some way to blame. I tell you our wives have the hardest part to bear."

"That's so," came from several.

CHAPTER XXII.

In a traveling man's experience no two days are exactly alike, and yet there is a monotony in the story of a trip because the history of one day is so much like the history of everyday. We sell to different men in different towns but the arguments on both sides are very much the same with all men. It is but rarely that a merchant admits that he needs anything in our line until after a certain amount of preliminary coaxing, and he never admits that prices are low enough.

Some buyers meet one pleasantly, and are perhaps all the more disappointing. Their manner seems to promise success, but the result is failure. Other men start in rather snappish, as if the salesman was a nuisance, but gradually grow sociable, and if they give him an order he is forever their friend. He can not take “no” for an answer, because his experience tells him that the majority of buyers start out with a “no,” and end by buying a bill. He must be persistent, because he has heard numberless times, “I will look at your samples if it is any comfort to you, but I won't buy,” and in nine cases out of ten he has taken the man's order after all.

The longer he is out on the road the easier his work grows, but it is not always true that his orders continue to grow larger. Friendship with buyers work two ways: the salesman may be able to press them to buy in a stronger manner than a stranger would dare do, and on the other hand the buyer can the easier put the salesman off. When he says: “You know well that if there was a thing in your line that we wanted you would get the order, but there is none,” the salesman has to take it gracefully and hope for better luck next time. But a stranger, in the same line, calling there the next day, and mentioning each item in his list, may secure an order, and at no better price than the buyer's acquaintance would have given.

For these reasons I have not given details of my trip so far as they concerned my own sales. It is enough to say that I was doing fairly well, not only in selling goods, but in making “valuable acquaintances.” My house wrote me very pleasant letters, praising the character as well as the amount of my orders, and I looked to my going in with such anticipations of pleasure that the last six days of the trip seemed to have more hours than any arithmetic table of time ever put into them. Partly to kill time, and partly to make myself more “solid” with buyers, I spent nearly every evening with some of my customers, and listened to many bits of experiences that were worth more than money to me.

One merchant said to me in his talk: “I have bought a great many goods of Wiebusch, and feel as much at home in his store as I do in any place outside of my own. And, while I do it because of dollars and cents, still there is something back of these that always turns the scales in his favor when his prices are no lower than his competitors. Twenty years ago I was clerk for a hardware house in the West, and about as ordinary a one as could be. One summer I made a trip East to visit some friends, and concluded to give myself a treat by taking a day or two in New York. I knew no one in the city personally; I knew the names of the houses my employers bought from, and for some reason that of F. Weibusch seemed most familiar. I put up at the Hoffman House. I laugh every time I think of it.”

“Did you feel overpowered?”

“That's exactly the word. I was awfully overpowered. I had been used to dropping into the little country hotels where the landlord and clerk were at your service, and where you had to black your own boots, and carry your baggage around. When I dropped into the Hoffman with my grip in hand, and wrote my name in the register, and saw the overwhelming indifference in the eyes of the lordly clerk, I assure you I felt as small a potato as ever grew in a hill. I never felt quite so small and mean in all my life.”

“How did you get around?”

“I got to the hotel about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. I sat down in the office and tried to get my spirits up to the pitch of my surroundings, but it was a dismal failure. I felt that I was 'country' from crown to heel, and I was terribly uncomfortable. I happened to think of some familiar names, and among others of Mr. Wiebusch. The directory gave me his address, a porter posted me on street-cars and the way to Beekman street, and in due time I presented myself at the door. I felt timid about going in. I was only a clerk; I had no business on hand; I would simply be taking up some of their time in the store, and with no profit to them. But I went up stairs, and after telling a clerk who I was and whom I was connected with, was by him introduced to Mr. Wiebusch.”

“And your reception was a pleasant one?”

“You may judge so when I assure you that I remember it vividly and kindly to this day, and shall always do so. He could not have been more cordial to the head of the largest house he dealt with. 'Cordial,' mind you; not simply polite or pleasant. I was made to feel that I had paid him a compliment by calling upon him; that everything about the place was at my disposal; and that I could do him a still greater favor by permitting him to do something more for me. Now that was real kindness of heart; it was genuine courtesy, and I went back to my hotel not caring a continental d—m whether the clerk saw me or not.”

“Did you make other calls?”

“Yes; the next day I called on a dozen houses, more or less, and was pleasantly met everywhere; I remember that; but I don't recall the name of a single one of them! You can see by this, from the distinctness with which I recall everything connected with my visit to Mr. Wiebusch, what a relief to me his kindness was.”

“Do you still go to the Hoffman?”

“Not a bit of it. When next I went to New York I was partner in the house and the Cosmopolitan or French's were plenty good enough for me then.”

“Are there many men on the road now that were traveling then?”

“Not a great many. Sam Disston was here to-day; he's one of the old stand-bys, and he doesn't look a day older now. These red whiskered men have the advantage of such fellows as you and I. I've grown gray in spots, but here's Sam still as red as when he first came out snapping a Disston saw. I'd like to have Sam to myself some Sunday afternoon and get him to tell the ups and downs of his goods. Henry used to talk saw and shout saw and swear saw, but he always sold them. I hung on to Spear & Jackson about as long as anyone did in this section, but I had to finally give in, and I was an ass for not taking hold of the Disston saw sooner.”

“It's a high-priced saw, isn't it?”

“The Disston factory makes all kinds of saws. Look at this saw—pretty neat, isn't it? Full size, 26-inch blade; good handle; what do you suppose it is worth?”

“I know nothing of saws; I couldn't guess.”

“Yes, you can guess. You know whether it looks worth 5 cents or $5.”

“Well, say $1.50.”

“That's close. You are a good guesser on saws. I buy that of Disston for $3 per dozen.”

“What! A Disston saw?”

“I didn't say a Disston saw. It is made by Disston, but their name is not on it, nor is it any such quality as they would brand with their name. But they have a tremendous trade in goods on which their name never appears. I guess they are the largest saw manufacturers in the world.”

“Disston must have an easy job.”

“Don't you fool yourself. Sam has just as hard a job as you have. In the first place much is expected from him; then his goods being standard, are sold close by all jobbers, and they are inclined to push other makes, which can be bought cheaper. And on cheap goods it is entirely a matter of price, so he has to meet all the competition of every saw-maker in the country. I don't believe he has any easier job than you, or any other traveling man has.”

After selling a couple of cases of cartridges to a wholesale grocer one evening, he was led to tell of his early days, and I learned that no one trade contained all the shrewd men. Said he, “I once felt that our house was a very important one, and about as large as the State of Michigan. But one July I went down to New York, and sauntered into Thurber's, on West Broadway. I didn't expect to buy anything, but I thought Thurber would feel complimented by such a man as myself calling upon him. Their lower room looked rather busy, but not any more so than I expected, but when I got up stairs and found myself facing from fifty to seventy-five clerks I began to think Thurber's was a bigger business than mine. A boy led me to H. K. Thurber's private office, but there were several men ahead of me and I waited my turn. The longer I waited the smaller I kept growing. Mr. Thurber's face was one that you could study. One moment it lit up with a smile or happy thought, the next his mouth closed with a snap as if it was the combination lock of a safe-door. At his table was a chair for `the next,' and I felt as if `next' was going to be called out whenever I saw a man getting ready to arise. It was a pleasure to watch Thurber. The new-comer took his place in the vacated chair, told who he was, what was his business, and Thurber had a 'yes' or a 'no' ready before the man was through. 'We don't want it' came out sharp and decisive. 'But if I could—.' 'We don't want it;' and this time the mouth closed tighter, and the man saw there was no 'buts,' and bowed himself out. Then to the next, and if his luck was better the bell was touched, and the boy who answered told: 'Show this gentleman to Mr. Whyland.' Here a letter was placed before him by a clerk, and after a glance at it an answer was dictated to the stenographer, who sat in a corner nearby. Long before it was my turn to bother him I felt so cheap that I would have sneaked off, but I was afraid some of the boys would take me by the collar and drag me back. Mr. Thurber met me pleasantly, and said a few words about our business that told me he knew something about us, and professed to be very much pleased at my call. Then he sent for Mr. Whyland and insisted upon my allowing him to show me about the store. Whyland had but lately returned from his European trip, and was just aching all over to sell goods. You know how that is, don't you? Take any good salesman who has been out of the harness for awhile and when he gets back again to work there's more enjoyment in selling a bill of goods than in drinking a bottle of champagne. I swore to myself that I wouldn't buy a cent's worth, but before I got away from Whyland I was down for $13,000 worth of goods.”

“Whew! It was a dear visit.”

“Not at all. I needed the goods and bought them low, so that it was all right. But Whyland turned me over to Frank Thurber. Frank is the politician of the concern; the greenback, anti-monopoly, mugwump man! He beamed on me as if he was Venus rising out of the sea; patted me on the back; said I would own all of Michigan in a few years, and he was coming out to get some points from us wide-awake Westerners; then filled my pockets with his anti-monopoly speeches and papers, led me to the top of the stairs, gave me his benediction, and I left. It was an experience. No opera that I ever listened to, no ball that I ever attended, contained so much genuine pleasure for me as I got out of that visit. But I went away satisfied that our house had still room to grow before it would be the biggest in the trade. It does a man good to see what a small concern he is occasionally.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

“I can tell you one thing,” said a hardware man to me, “there is a good deal of forcing down of prices done

by traveling men that is entirely uncalled for. Here comes a man to me selling auger-bits. I am full, and I tell him so. He enlarges on the superior quality of his goods. I admit them to be good, but my stock is too full for me to think of adding to it. He thinks it possible there will be an advance, as at 70 and 5 per cent. off the list there is a positive loss to the maker. I have no fears of an immediate advance, and say so. Then he says: 'Mr. X., I am very anxious to get a small order from you; trade is not very brisk with me, and, as an inducement, I will give you an extra 5 per cent.' Knowing this to be lower than others are quoting, and feeling well satisfied that the goods are liable to advance rather than decline, when they change, I make out an order for him. But how is he going to justify that cut to his factory? It was absolutely uncalled for. It was not done to meet competition, but to beat competition, and was simply a bait to lead me to order when otherwise I would not have ordered."

"But," said another man, "go back of that a little. At 70 per cent. discount the maker is barely getting back 100 cents for what actually costs him one dollar. He is trimming as close as he can in everything to keep him from loss; wages are cut down, economy in material practiced, and every detail scrimped to the last possible limit Then this order comes in from the salesman at a still lower figure. No further scrimping can be done in material—that has a limit that cannot be passed—where, then, can any saving be made? Only in the wages. The workmen are shown the prices that the goods are now sold at, and told that there is but one thing for the factory to do: to meet this 'competition,' or close up. And, of course, the meaning of this is another reduction in the already well-reduced wages. I declare, a man must have a good deal of gall to be drawing a salary of from $1,800 to $3,500 per year and ask a workman to take 10 per cent. off his wages of $1 per day."

"Yes, and you will notice," said the first speaker, "that all this was done that the traveling man might have an order to send in, and not because of any requirements of competition or of demand and supply. When I read of workingmen striking I think of these things and wonder what they would do if they could see what we merchants see of unnecessary cutting in prices. Manufacturers and jobbers send men out to present the merits of their goods, but their sole idea of a 'smart' man is one whose sales are large. If they have a dozen men on the road, the man who sells the most goods is the champion man. He sells big bills and is expected to cut prices. But one of the men who makes less show may be much the most profitable for them."

"You would keep account of profits rather than of sales?"

"Certainly I would, and pay salaries on that basis. Then the salesman would have strong inducements to get good prices. As it is now all he need ask himself is: 'Will the old man stand the cut?' and if he does it is as much a feather in his cap to make the sale as if it was at better prices. Take the matter of steel squares. One of my men writes in that a Cleveland jobber is selling them to the smallest trade at 75 and 10 per cent. off. I investigate and find that they can be bought at 80 off. But the several manufacturers shake their heads and say this price is a positive loss, etc., etc. Then what the d—l do they sell at that price for? Neither dealers nor consumers were complaining of the old prices, and all the extra stock that is sold by the cut goes on to the dealers' shelves. The decline is made to a few jobbers, and they at once start out their men to give it to the retailers, and to use it as a bait, and when other jobbers learn it they combine to squeeze the price down so that all can get it. This is a sample of generalship that the square makers ought to be ashamed of."

"Yes, but the carriage-bolt men of the country have been playing just that same kind of a fool game for several years. Who is benefited? No one, unless it is the big wagon concerns, or the big machine men. I am told that men in bolt factories at present prices do not make $1 a day. Why should they work for starvation wages so that the concerns using bolts can save 40 per cent on their purchase? It's a cursed outrage! The older manufacturers can stand it, because they just coined money a few years ago, but now they must squeeze their poor devils of workmen down in order that they can sell goods at nothing. If the Knights of Labor were devoting themselves to righting wrongs of this kind, the whole country would back them up."

"I often feel sorry for some of the concerns," said the other, "when I have met the 'managers.' I came back from New York three years ago and told my partner if Lawson & Goodrow could make money as their New York office was run, that no one else need worry about his business. Here was an old concern, with every facility for making goods cheap, with a reputation for quality second to none in the country, with experienced workmen, and a good hold on the trade, yet they failed a year or two ago, and made so bad a failure I supposed they were swamped forever."

"But they are going on."

"Yes; I'm glad to see it, and understand that new brains have taken hold of it. But think of putting in as manager of such a business a young man just out of college! He was a very pleasant gentleman; I remember him with a warm sense of his courtesy, but he did not know the A, B, C of business. Fancy such a man competing with Oakman or Charley Landers!"

"You've got to get up early to get ahead of Landers.'

"Yes, Landers is a man of resources and thoroughly understands human nature. I rode down on the New Haven boat with him one night, and I spent two very pleasant hours on deck talking with him. He makes a good impression on you, both as to his shrewdness and his breadth. You get the idea that he is not small in his methods, and that he has an active mind. I imagine that when he took hold of the management of his concern, after Jim Frary had stepped down and out, he had about as unpromising a job on his bands as a man could have. Frary was a terrible cuss to pile up goods, I'm told, and the stock was in horrible shape. But Landers rode through the storm, and his business has seen some mighty prosperous years."

"Did you know Rubel?"

"Of Chicago? Yes, indeed. Poor fellow, I received a card a day or two ago announcing his death. He ought to have been good for twenty years yet. I bought some of his patent goods sixteen or eighteen years ago, and sold more or less of his brand ever since. His plant in Chicago shows what was in him. I hated, like thunder, to sell his goods when they were branded 'Chicago,' but when he changed that to 'American' I bought as freely of him as from others. He was jovial, sociable, and wide awake. I wish he might have lived to enjoy his well-earned success."

"What has become of Jim Frary?"

"I have lost sight of him. If any man ever had a good chance to make a strike I think Frary is the man. With

Weibusch back of him, furnishing money and brains, with a combination in prices on a profitable basis, and with the boom in business, that concern ought to have made piles of money. But it is not generally supposed that they did. Frary has become temporarily eclipsed, and General Trunk manages it as if it was an orchestra. I don't know if he gets much music out, but he probably enjoys bossing things; that's worth a great deal to him." [Footnote: As is known to the trade, within a very few weeks after the above article was written the Frary Cutlery Co. failed, and have since been sold out under the hammer. And prices of table cutlery are once more "booming."]

"Don't you like Trunk?"

"Like him? Of course I do. You would if you were to meet him. He's one of the most unassuming and gentle-mannered men you ever met. If he only had a little confidence in himself he would be the Napoleon of the table cutlery trade, but he is inclined to listen to everybody's advice and not assert himself."

"I had a deal with Frary once that amused me. I had been handling a small, one-bladed knife that we paid about 40 cents per dozen for. We made quite a leader of it, but were told, in answer to our last order sent, that the stock was out. We tried to get it two or three times afterward, but without success. The next time I saw one of the men I asked him why the dickens we couldn't get that knife again. 'We have given it up,' I was told; our cost book showed the cost to be 36 cents per dozen, so we supposed we were getting our money back, but somebody had the curiosity to foot up the items not long ago, and found an error in adding of 20 cents; the knife had really cost 56 cents! Fancy a concern doing business in that way!"

"There are any numbers of just such concerns. Every little while you see changes made in prices to correct errors. There's a deal of guessing done around factories, and also a good deal of figuring on what a competitor does. One man learns of a competitor making a certain price, and says, 'If he can sell at that, I can,' and that becomes his price, without his even knowing that he is making money or losing at these figures."

"I think a good many dealers sell goods by guess, as well as the manufacturers. This is especially true of retailers. A level-headed man, named Root, has got up a series of cost cards that will be of help to the hardware trade, but other lines need them just as much."

"But all the cards in the world will not keep the blank fools from selling goods at cost. Here is an item in an Eastern paper about two Connecticut concerns who sold 'crazy cloth' (whatever that is) under each other's price, till at last one fool offered it at 1 cent a yard, and then the other came down to ten yards for 5 cents. That was in Sargent's town; probably they had been listening to his free trade slush."

CHAPTER XXIV.

I fell in with a jolly crowd of commercial men, some salesmen and some heads of houses, at the Tremont, and I have rarely enjoyed an evening more. Of course there were any number of stories told, many jokes cracked, and a deal of chaffing of each other. But if I could have written down all the points made about business they would have been eagerly read by my present audience. One man was cursing the book-keeper, as is usual, when a merchant said:

"There are always two sides to every question, and there is a good deal to be said from the book-keeper's stand-point. Other things being equal, a man who has had office experience makes the best man on the road. Very much of the trouble caused by the book-keeper's letters might be avoided if the traveling man knew enough, or had a little forethought. You say things to your customers ten times worse than the book-keeper ever writes, but a letter looks much more severe than the words you said sounded to the ear. One salesman when collecting will take pains to get certain bills balanced. If the customer offers to pay $50 on account and there is a bill of $53.36 due, or two bills of that sum, he suggests that it would be a good thing to make the payment that amount and wipe these out. Such a man helps the office at home. Another man takes the $50, and does not care a cent if anything is balanced or not. It may be necessary to have a scapegoat in every concern, but the traveler who runs down his office for doing its duty is not smart, and is sowing seed that will grow up to bother him in the near future."

"Yes," said another merchant, "and there's a sight more book-keeping than there is any need of. Every little item has to be charged, bill sent, statement sent, and then receipted for when paid. If a jobber wants an ax of a special size, just one, and has to order it from the factory, although he knows the exact cost, it never enters his head to send in cash with the order. He must have as much red-tape over it as if the order was a thousand dozen axes. So the retailer; if a customer wants a gross of screws sent on at once by express, the charge of 22 cents has to go through all the departments. There's too much of it. It's expensive in time, and foolish."

"Don't talk of paying in advance," said a salesman, "we're mighty glad to get the money after it's due."

"Yes, I know; there's too much work there, too. Although the buyer knows the exact time that his bill is due, he is getting so of late that he will pay nothing until a statement is sent, and not then till it pleases him. Your small man, not in the amount of business, but small-minded, dearly loves to hold back until you have sent him notice of draft made on him; he at once sends on a remittance then and his little soul takes comfort in telling, when the draft on him is presented, 'I do not owe them anything; their bill is paid.' Or else he waits till the draft is presented and dishonors it because it is drawn 'with exchange.' But there ought to be a keener sense of the honor to be won in paying bills promptly. If Dun and Bradstreet were to put in a third rating to show whether dealers paid promptly or not, and whether mean in little things or not, it would be of vast help."

"How would you have it?"

“Why, as it now is, we are told that John Smith is worth $2,000 to $5,000, and his credit good. I would add another column, and show prompt pay, slow pay, unpleasant in collecting, etc. You now trust a man on the basis of his capital and credit, but if you knew he was a smart Aleck you would not care to sell him no matter how much he was worth.”

“Well, boys,” said a New York man, “I don't have anything to do with the collecting, and I'm mighty glad of it. It's bad enough to sell goods without having to squeeze the pay out too. But I had a case the other day that surprised me a little. Last October I sold a bill to a concern in Canton, Ohio, on 60 days. When I started out this spring the book-keeper told me the bill was still unpaid. He said he sent statement in January, then drew through the Canton bank in February, but draft was returned unpaid. I told him the concern was good, and I didn't understand it. I was in Canton in April and intended to speak to the concern about our bill; but when I went into the store one of them met me very cordially, said our goods had gone well and he wanted some more. I took it for granted they had paid up, or they would not be so ready with another order, so sold them a bill and said nothing about the old one. But here is a letter from my house asking if anything was done about the October bill, and telling me it has not yet been remitted to them. Blest if I understand it! The longer I travel the more I get puzzled.”

“Well, quit cutlery and go selling coffee.”

“Coffee?”

“Yes, coffee. There are three things that must be selling well in these days: soap, tobacco, and coffee. Just look at the advertising pages of the papers and magazines. You see nothing but these three things and patent medicines. But then you expect patent medicines, so they don't count. Soap! Great Caesar! It's in everything. 'Queen Soap, 'Sulphur Soap, 'Ivory Soap', 'Pears' Soap,' and all the other soaps. The advertising is by all odds the largest expense, and the poor devil of a retailer is expected to sell at about 5 per cent. margin. Then see the whole country painted red on tobacco. And now we're catching it on coffee. If Arbuckle isn't a nephew of Barnum's he ought to be, for he knows how to advertise. I long ago gave up eating bread made from baking powder, because each manufacturer proved the other fellow's goods were poisonous, and I don't know but I must give up coffee since the advertisements expose how easy it is to doctor it. But at present I'm sort of holding on to Arbuckle's, and when my confidence in that goes then I'm done for.”

“You are right,” said a grocer. “Arbuckle has made an immense business in coffee, and made it by his brains. It's encouraging to see a concern get out of the rut and show folks that the end of everything hasn't been reached yet.”

“Seems to me,” said a manufacturer, “that you grocers have done more to demoralize business, by your gift enterprises, than any other class has done. Is the thing holding its own?”

“No, there is a decided feeling growing against it. The large wholesale grocers of New York, Austin, Nichols & Co., say, in a recently published letter:

“'We do not believe in “gift schemes” of any sort, and are not in the “give away” business. When the time arrives (if it ever does) when we are unable to sell good goods on their respective merits we will quietly retire from business.'”

“And a Ypsilanti, Mich., grocer writes: 'One fellow carries a shotgun around with him, another a saw, but they principally run to clocks. Of course you don't have to pay anything for these fine articles, provided you buy the goods which call for them (in your mind). The retailers, too, now are striving their very best to see which can give the most with a pound of baking powder. That is, a great many retailers are. They do not seem to care anything about the quality, if they can only give the largest prize. Quality is not considered at all. They buy the thing for the great prize offered. When the retail merchants of this country shut down on this despicable way of doing business and sell goods on their merits, without a prize package attached, just so soon will a blow have been struck at the root of the whole matter.' These pretty fairly represent the growing sentiment among large and small traders of brains. They see that the moment an article ceases to be sold on its merit, just that moment a dealer is losing his hold on trade. I met a man from Ohio on the cars a day or two ago. He had been sent out to Iowa by his house to sell coffee and spices on the prize-package basis. He said he was almost turned out of doors by the Iowa merchants as soon as he had told his story. The dealers there said they wanted no goods that had to be worked off in that way, and had no confidence in goods that could not sell themselves. Now that was a healthy sign.”

“When I see it,” said another grocer, “I at once assume that the concern is sending out cheap goods, or that it has been losing trade and catches at this straw to save itself. When an old and reliable house like Lorillard goes into the give-a-prize-away-with-every-package business, it only goes to show to what an extent this matter is carried on. The Lorillards are now introducing a tobacco called 'Splendid.' They say it is a 'splendid' thing, makes one feel 'splendid,' etc. If it is, why not sell it on its merits; advertise it in a legitimate way; make the price an inducement, and if it is a splendid article the public will soon find it out. Lately they have been offering a pack of cards with every 10-cent piece, besides giving a first-class cutter to the retailer with a single box, and a combination truck and ladder with five boxes.”

“It is really one sign of the hard times. When business recovers itself, and that time is not so far distant, consumers will not be attracted by the cheap gifts. Every day they are being educated to understand that they pay for all their 'gifts,' and pay well, too.”

“In times like these you can't blame men for jumping at everything. Every buyer wants 'a leetle adwantage,' and, like a Chicago man that the boys tell of, tells you your price is 'stereotyped' unless you cut down below every one else. So dealers try low prices and try gifts, but by and by they will have to sell on a rising market, and things will change.”

“You think prices will go up?”

“They must go up, and it is right that they should. There is no reason why the girl at work at a loom should starve just that your wife should save a cent or two a yard on her gingham dress. Wages must go up, and goods advance too.”

“But if wages advance and the cost of living advances too, where is the girl to be benefited?”

“Don't fool yourself on that stuff; that is the stale argument of some of the smart young men who write for posterity. Rent is probably as high to-day as it was when wages were twice as high. The prices of flour, pork, and beef are regulated by the crop, not by the buyers' wages. If I were hammering at an anvil I would take my increased wages and pay increased prices if I had to, and feel pretty sure I was going to be benefited. There are some theories, like this one and free-trade, that sound very plausible, but do not stand any chance when actual tests are made in every day life. The cry of all merchants to-day should be, 'Pay decent wages to your help and add it to your goods.' And any factory that held out ought to be boycotted. I know it's a mean word, but it is a good one for use with mean men.”

CHAPTER XXV.

The last day on the road must always seem a long day. One figures out just what train he will take, the hour he will arrive at the end of the journey, and the minute he will be with his family or in the store. I had reached my last day and was putting in my “best licks” so as to have a good batch of orders to carry in with me, to make my welcome all the greater. But as luck would have it no day of my trip had been so uncertain and tantalizing.

I spread out my revolvers before four concerns and enlarged upon their remarkable qualities and low prices. “Bulldogs” had stiffened in price at the factories to $2.25, less 10 per cent., and our stock was large and bought at low prices. I used this as a bait wherever I could, but every other man had been throwing out offers of the same kind, and mine were not so greedily taken as I would like to have had them.

“No use of your offering baits,” said one party “there's no life in the gun business any more. Here's Lafoucheaux guns at $7, Flobert rifles at $2, Smith & Wesson revolvers at $8, and the deuce knows where it will stop. Things must be mighty dubious when S. & W. have to cut their prices. Here's Reachum's last billet doux on rifles, quoting them at about 5 per cent, above cost, and yet you expect me to give you an order. No, it's no use; I must wait till somebody wants to buy something that I have.”

“Do you say that about all your lines?”

“Well, it's mighty near it in everything. Here's an order from my man on the Central for a quarter dozen steel squares at 75 and 10 off; cost me that a month ago. Here's strap hinges at 65 and 5 off; I paid that for them. There's a milk-strainer, sold at $1.25 per dozen, cost me $1.20; carpet tacks sold at $1.50 gross, cost me $1.44. All these things in one bill. I tell you I am getting rich fast.”

“I am going in to-night,” I said, “and would be glad to carry in a little order for you. I'll get it out myself and see that nice goods are sent you.”

“No, I don't want anything.”

I heard almost a similar complaint from the next one I saw, but I managed to secure two orders for my day's work, and then I was done. I never paid a hotel bill so gladly or bought a railroad ticket with happier feelings. There was a pleasure in getting my baggage checked home, and no car ever seemed to me quite so comfortable and inviting as the one I rode home in.

When I walked into the store it was difficult to believe that I had been out of it more than twenty-four hours. The bill of goods on the floor looked exactly like the one I saw there the day I started away. The porter and drayman seemed to be talking about the same accident or “wake” that they were engaged in when I last saw them together, and the white head of the “old man” was bent over his books as if it had never moved. I couldn't help saying to myself, “How glad they ought to be that they have only to do the work that comes to them, instead of feeling the responsibility of creating new business.”

They met me as if I had been off on a lark, and ought to feel grateful to them for doing my work while I was away. I wondered if I was ever ass enough to meet our old travelers in any such way. I guess I was.

“Well, old boy, had a good time?”

This from stock clerk, from salesman, from the packer, and from the book-keeper.

Good time! Great Caesar!

Good time! With a constant dread about you that you are going to fail! Pushing yourself boldly into men's offices a dozen times a day, yet always nervously dreading the reception they may give you. Catching late trains and early trains; missing meals or sitting down to tables where things are so uninviting you cannot eat. And all the time, day and night, wondering if your employers are satisfied with your sales and if they recognize the necessity of your cutting prices. A good time! If there is any business in the world that is so little of a “good time” I would like to know what it is. The firm met me very pleasantly. They joked me a little about my new beard and the extra fat they declared they saw on me, and then the welcomings were over.

I took my place at my old desk with a firm resolution to let other men do the traveling; I would stick to the store.

“Come home to supper with me,” said the head of the house; “I'd like to talk over your trip with you, and we can do it better at home this evening.”

This was an honor I had not had before. The other boys looked at me with envy.

“How have things gone? Has business been good?” I asked my old assistant in the stock.

“Things have gone so-so; trade has been only middling. But you did first rate, old fellow. I heard the old man say you were a success.”

“Did he say that?”

“Yes, and lots more. You made a strike.”

This was pleasant news.

After our tea that evening the head of the house began to question me about my trip, and I saw that a detailed story of it was what he wanted. So I began with the first town that I had stopped at, and gave him a history of the trip. He seemed to enjoy it, and to pick up a good many items from it.

“Yes,” he said, “business is becoming less profitable every year. The idiots who are going to get rich by selling flour at 25 cents a barrel less than cost, simply by doing a h—l of a business, are multiplying. Reachum can probably sell goods close and make money, as he has no traveling men; his principal expense is his postal cards. Simmons & Hibbard can sell our goods low because it is only one department of a large business with them, and its proportion of expenses is not great. We will be compelled to do either less or more; either do a smaller business in guns and ammunition and at less expense, or to put in other goods and drum a larger variety of trade. We have pretty much decided to do the latter. What do you think of it?”

I laughingly suggested that in Cleveland and Indianapolis some of the houses were adding a silver mine to their stock, and that we ought to have one too.

“And then compel the traveling-men to buy or not give them orders? That would be a good scheme. But I had not thought of that. Our plan is to lay in a line of goods that will work in well with general trade and sell all the year round.”

I said I thought it was a capital idea.

“Will you give up the stock and go on the road regularly?”

What? Go on the road regularly? Not a bit of it. Keep on, month after month, year after year, hammering after orders? No, oh, no!

“Then you don't like it?”

No, I did not. There was altogether too much anxiety about it for me. There were men so constituted that they did not feel worried whether they got an order or not. They were the proper men to travel. But I was nervous and anxious, and worried when I had no order for fear I was not going to get one; and then worried after I had one, fearing I would not get any more. No, I was not made of the right kind of stuff for a traveling man.

“If I did not see that you are so thoroughly in earnest I would say you are sarcastic. You evidently believe what you say, but you do not seem to understand that the very reason why you will make a successful salesman is this nervous dread of failure. When you meet a man who doesn't care a copper cent whether trade is good or not you have met a second-rate man. Trade can only be secured by persistent and hard work. A man of your disposition will be pulling wires and ingratiating himself into the good will of his customers, while your contented man is playing billiards or making acquaintance of a sport of the town. Taking into consideration the times and the condition of business, your trip has been a remarkably successful one, but the second one will be a better one for the house, and a pleasanter one for you. You will then call on acquaintances, not on strangers, and you will find your task easier and your trade better. Think it over. You will be more valuable to us on the road and it will pay you better.”

But I swore I would not consider it. Afterwards I fancied I might think of it. Then I did consider it, and yes, here I am. I represent the firm of Blank & Blank, Guns and Ammunition. If you are in need of anything in my line I would be glad to figure with you, for I am

A MAN OF SAMPLES.

HIS LAST TRIP.

[ILLUSTRATION]

Morgan had been on the road for one house about 20 years. This is a long period of travel. In less time than that most men work up or work down. No man can continue on a dead level as a salesman during that time, even if his habits are good. If he has ability he is sure, with rare exception, to work himself off the road. If he is mediocre no one house can afford to carry him for twenty years. Morgan was the rare exception just mentioned. He was an excellent salesman, and his ability and success but served to weld him the closer to his work. The house had made him a partner long since, but the business he controlled was so large and so profitable, that they all knew, and he best, that to withdraw him and experiment with a new man would be but playing with fire over a magazine of powder. So he went on his way year after year, making no plans for the future that would change his work or his life.

But his family, consisting of his wife and their one daughter, Mary, a romping girl of twelve, was not of his disposition, These two could not see husband and father start off without a protest. The wife had always on her heart a burden of anxiety about him; of dangers on railroads, of his possible robbery and murder; of the discomforts of hotels, and the fear of his falling sick among strangers. She was naturally a timid woman, and the responsibility of the house weighed upon her. The whole burden of Mary's growth in body and mind, her training, her companions, and her pleasures were matters the mother would gladly have shared with the father, but she was generally compelled to decide them alone.

The father's continued absence was a constant pain and grievance to Mary. There was never a week but

that she felt deprived of some special outing because he was not at home to go with her. Saturday night and Sunday, if he was where he could run home, were so many solid hours of happiness to them all, but to Mary they were full of perfect bliss.

Morgan was known to all his friends as a man who never worried. If a train was late he sat down and waited; if a customer failed he always signed a compromise; if he didn't get the best room in the hotel, he took what he could get; and he lost no sleep in picturing how his competitors might get ahead of him. He always left home with the assurance that everything would go on all right until he returned, and when he went away he thought of the two he loved as being happy and well.

But as he started on this trip, he could not shake off a slight feeling of anxiety that had possessed him all the night, and had grown since he awoke. Their talk the previous day had been about the entrance Of diphtheria into the neighborhood, and of the fatal case but two blocks away from their door. Mary had complained of a slightly sore throat, but on Monday morning declared it was entirely well again, kissing him good-by with more spirit than usual, as if trying to convince him of the truth of her words, and send him away assured and happy.

When he was seated in the cars the shadows came over his spirits again and began to torture him with doubts and possibilities. It might be, he thought, that her sprightliness of the morning was due to fever, rather than to health. He wished he had looked into her throat, and he regretted that he had not cautioned his wife about her. He nursed these fears until he felt himself becoming wild with apprehension, and then he resolutely put the thoughts aside, declared he was foolish and would have no more of it, and devoted himself to a companion and to his papers.

Men cannot always govern their minds. These are kingdoms that frequently rebel against all government. Several times during the day Morgan caught himself going back to his morning thoughts and he resolutely changed the current. But at night, try as he would, he could not conquer them. Even his dreams took up the forebodings of the day, exaggerated and intensified them, and tortured him. Next morning found him out of sorts, nervous, and miserable. He had a long drive to take in the country, but he shrank from it as if he saw danger in his track. All his intuitions seemed to be crying to him to go home, but what he thought was his common sense kept insisting that he should go on with his business, and not cross the bridge of trouble until he came to it.

The day was one of the loveliest October days he had ever seen. His drive was through twenty miles of the best corn land of Illinois. The black road was as dry as a board, and as level as only a prairie can be. The first effect of the beautiful day and pure air was invigorating. He enjoyed the drive through the street into the country road. Then the broad fields, the pleasant farm houses, the herds of horses and cattle, the long Osage hedges, the perpetual but always surprised rabbit at the road side, all these attracted and entertained him, and his ride was successful in driving away his blues. His customer seemed especially glad to see him; took him to his house to dinner; talked with him of important personal matters, and gave him a large order for goods. He turned back to the railroad feeling as happy as he had ever done; took out his order-book and figured up the amount of the bill and the profit, as was his custom, and then began to sing.

Suddenly there came across him a wave of anxious worry, and all his thoughts flew back to the daughter's sore throat, and the funeral he saw last Sunday. He could not drive these away. They clung to him; they whispered to him; they unfolded themselves like a panorama, and on the canvas he saw Mary sick, then worse, and then dead! It was the longest twenty-mile ride that he had ever taken, and his old friend, the landlord, concluded from his face that Morgan had met with bad luck in sales that day.

He had a night run to Decatur and determined that he would telegraph to the house, and quiet these nervous apprehensions that were so cruel, though probably so absurd. It would cost but little, he reasoned, and though foolish, it was wiser than to continue to be torn by doubts. So before going to bed he gave the operator a half rate message, for morning delivery, as follows:

To Manning, Morgan & Co., Chicago, Ill.: Is my wife or daughter sick? Answer, care Gilsey.

C. MORGAN.

He felt easier having done this, and passed a better night than the previous one, although there was in all his sleeping and waking thoughts an under current of solicitude over impending danger to Mary.

With an attempt not to be anxious, yet terribly apprehensive at heart, he tore open the telegram that reached him about 9 o'clock:

To C. Morgan, care Gilsey & Co., Decatur: Come home first train.

MANNING.

Good God, what was this! Were his forebodings indeed true? If so he was all the more totally unprepared for the truth. His constant comfort had been that his fears had not the slightest foundation to rest upon, and the more they crowded upon him the surer he had been that they were flimsier than dreams. But here staring him in the face were those four ominous words:

“Come home first train.”

Why had they not given him the whole story? He started for the telegraph office to send for further particulars, but stopped. Suppose Mary was dead! Did he want to learn it here, so far from his wife? No; he would wait. Such a story would unfold soon enough. There were several hours before a train went his way; the discipline of twenty years asserted itself, and he attended to his business.

The ride home was one that can be understood in its depths only by those who have been similarly circumstanced. The train seemed to creep. The minutes were like hours. The stops seemed to be interminable, and every mile nearer home seemed to be proportionately longer than the previous one. He reached the city at dark. The store was closed. He had expected to find Manning there, but he suddenly remembered that he had not telegraphed to him the time of his arrival. As he neared his home the first glance showed him there was a change. The lower part of the house was in darkness, and only a dim light shone in the front chamber, which was but rarely occupied.

“They have laid her there,” he said to himself, and all his soul cried within him in anguish. His poor wife!

How she must have suffered, to have gone through all this alone! What a brute he was to go away Monday, when he ought to have known, and did know, that something dreadful was upon them! He reached the door; it was fastened; he would go to the other side and enter quietly. But some one heard his step, and, opening the door, called him back.

"Is it Mr. Morgan?" The voice was that of a neighbor.

"Yes." He passed in, expecting to see or hear his wife. The friend closed the door and turned to him.

"Have you heard—," she began.

"I have heard nothing; is Mary—," he broke down. The door beside him opened.

"Oh, papa!"

Give him air! What mystery was this?

"Mary, is it you? Are you alive? Why, I thought—I feared—Oh, darling, is it you?"

Yes, it was Mary. Oh, thank God! Thank God!

"Tell me again, dear, are you well?"

"Oh, yes, papa, but poor mamma!"

"Mamma! What of her? Is she sick? What is it? Tell me quick!" And again he was pushed from the heaven of happiness to the bottomless pit of doubt. "Is mamma sick? where is she?"

"Oh, papa, the doctor says she is going to—"

"Hush," said the neighbor. "Step inside, sir; the doctor is with her now; he will soon be down. Prepare yourself, Mr. Morgan; your wife is very low. The servant's carelessness caused an explosion in the kitchen, setting herself on fire; your wife ran to her assistance and saved her life, but, I fear, at the expense of her own."

"I must see her."

"No, sir, not now; be guided by me for a moment. The doctor will soon be down."

He took Mary in his arms and they wept together. Oh, if his wife, his darling wife! were to be taken from him! It was the cruelest blow God ever struck! And she saving another's life, too! He cursed and raved, but it was in his own heart; and Mary, crying on his breast, only knew what comfort it was to have her papa once more with her.

The physician came down with manner so grave that it told its own story. "There is scarcely a chance," he said; "you can go to her; she will not know you."

"When did this happen?"

"Monday evening."

"Have you consulted others? Can nothing more be done?"

"Nothing except to help her to die easy."

* * * * * * *

But she did not die. She knew her husband. He begged of her to live, as only a man can plead whose soul is bound up in a woman's life, and whether love, or whether medicine, or whether care saved her, I do not know. But she lived. But Morgan informed Manning that his traveling days were over; that a new man must be engaged for that route. They found him, after diligent search, and much to the surprise of everyone connected with the house, he sold more goods for the firm than Morgan had ever done. The one who rejoices most at this is Morgan, who says he has made his last trip.

"LET US KICK."

[The following sketch by M. Quad in the Detroit Free Press, will be new to some of our readers, and will, we think, be appreciated by them all.]

I really and truly believe that the day will come when the kicker will be classed where he belongs and be entitled to the reverence due him. I look upon him as a philosopher and a philanthropist. He stands forth one man out of ten thousand. He is actuated by the most unselfish motives. He is the real reformer.

I am not a kicker. I am simply taking the preparatory lessons to enable me to blossom out. The other day when I bought a ticket to go east they told me at the ticket office:

"While the train does not leave until about eleven, the sleeper is open at nine, and you can go right to bed and wake up at Niagara Falls next morning."

I entered the sleeper at half-past nine and went to bed. That is, it is called going to bed. You are boxed up, boxed in, surrounded and smothered and charged two dollars for the misery. A sleeping-car is a mockery, a fraud and a deception. The avarice of the companies results in misery for the passengers. Four other persons had gone to bed, and at ten o'clock we were all asleep. At that hour two men entered with a great clatter. They were talking loudly, and they sat down and continued. I waited fifteen minutes for one of the other sleepers to kick. No one uttered a protest Then I rose up and asked:

"Do you men know that this is a sleeping-car?"

"We do," they answered.

“And do you propose to continue this disturbance?”

“We propose to talk as long and as loud as we please!”

I called the conductor and inquired:

“I have paid for a berth in which to sleep. I can't sleep for this disturbance. Will you stop it?”

“Really, I can't,” he answered.

“Are there no rules?”

“Yes, but people in a sleeping-car must expect to be disturbed.”

“Oh, they must. Very well—see me later.”

Four others came in with just as much racket, and they kept their chattering going until eleven o'clock. At half-past eleven the lights were turned down and everybody was ready for sleep. I had been patiently waiting for this. Lying on my back, arms locked over my head and my palate down, I brought a snore which went thundering over that car in a way to open every eye. After two more a man called out.

“Thunder and blazes, but we've got a whale aboard!”

After three more they began to yell at me from every berth. I put in two extra ones, and the porter came down and shook my arm and said:

“Heah—you—stop dat!”

“Colored man!” I said, as I looked up at him, “if you come here and do that again I may fire upon you!”

As soon as he had gone I went back to business. When a man sets out to snore for revenge you'd be surprised to know what a success he can make of it. In five minutes they were calling for the conductor. He came down and parted the curtains and said:

“Hey—you—wake up! You are disturbing the car.

“Conductor, haven't I paid for this berth?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Is there any rule which prohibits snoring?”

“No, but—”

“Then you keep away from me! I have a revolver, and I might take you for a robber!”

Then I returned to the main question. I snored in every key of the scale. I snored for blood. I had every person in the car swearing mad and ready to fight, and they sent for the passenger conductor. He refused to interfere. Several chaps volunteered to “pull me out o' that,” but when they came close enough to see the muzzle of a revolver they fell back. At two o'clock in the morning they held a convention, and as the result one of them asked:

“Stranger, can we buy you off?”

“No, sir.”

“Is there any way on earth to stop that bazoo of yours?”

“The four of you who came in last were grossly selfish. You had no care for the rights of others. The four who were here before I came were disturbed but hadn't the grit to kick. Now, then, promise me on your solemn words that if you ever enter a sleeping-car again you will respect; the situation, and I will let you off.”

Every soul in that car made the promise, and half an hour later we were all asleep.

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