

THE MAKING OF A MERCHANT

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The making of a merchant by Harlow N. Higinbotham

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HARLOW N. HIGINBOTHAM

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HARLOW N. HIGINBOTHAM



SECOND EDITION



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1906

PREFACE

COMMENT of any practical value on the subject of the mistakes most frequent among boys and young men entering on a business life is certain to meet with one criticism which may be epitomized in the single word "commonplace!" And why? Because these faults are so common that they are impressed on the attention of every large employer of labor, particularly in commercial lines, and he is compelled to reiterate them with emphasis and tiresome persistency. If they were less common, less universally recognized and uniformly disapproved by employers, their enumeration would not appeal to their victim as commonplace, stereotyped and uninteresting.

Occasionally, however, a boy or young man of sufficient character and receptivity is found who is willing and eager to profit by advice from those of long experience, even though it may be given in painfully familiar terms and may sound sage, tedious and "preachy." It is for the aspiring young men who are animated by this spirit of tractability that these suggestions and comments are made by

one whose views are the result of thirty-eight years of experience in unbroken connection with an enterprise that has had many changes in the personnel of proprietorship and now has more than seven thousand employees.

In the course of that service he has filled various positions from the very humblest to that of part proprietor and manager. With the exception of his earliest years, all this period of labor has brought him into direct personal contact with the young employees, and the responsibilities of his position have compelled a daily and unremitting watchfulness of their conduct with the view to determining faults and mistakes which most beset the young adventurer into the mazes of commercial activity.

H. N. H.

Chicago, 1906.

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CHAPTER I

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

AS a majority of business positions today are filled by men who entered the harness as boys, the manner in which a boy looks at his first employment is of fundamental importance. Generally he does not take himself or his duties with sufficient seriousness. He is inclined to think that he is "only a boy," and that his work is of boyish inconsequence. Nothing could be further from the real facts than such an impression. To realize this it is only necessary to go into the office of any large establishment—the business heart of a commercial enterprise—and observe the swarms of boys that flit between the desks of the older workers.

Who is always at the elbow of the executive head of an establishment of this kind? A boy! He comes into closer and more continuous contact with the proprietor, the general manager, or the

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department head than any adult. Because he is "only a boy" he is party to private conversations and transactions from which even the "confidential man" might be barred. This means responsibility and opportunity, and his conduct is, therefore, of greater personal interest and moment to a business executive than he is generally inclined to think.

Boys fail to satisfy the demands made upon them more from the lack of promptness and punctuality than by any other reason. Thousands of dismissals, rebuffs, discouragements and failures at the beginning of a career could have been avoided by these small workers had they made a cardinal point of being always on hand in their proper places during every moment when subject to duty. It is not enough that they should be generally at their stations. The time is sure to come, no matter how sparingly they allow themselves the indulgence of straying only a little from the rigid requirements of office rules, when they will be suddenly wanted—and will be found wanting!

Many fall into the habit of being a few rods, or perhaps only a few feet, from the spot where they are expected to be. This means that the busy employer must leave his desk or resort to