

IN HONOR OF ROBERT W. NELSON'S SIXTIETH BIRTHDAY.



ON September 20, the managers of the American Type Founders Company resident in Jersey City and New York city, with invited guests, including the representative of THE INLAND PRINTER, assembled to do honor to Robert Wickham Nelson, the president and general manager of the company, upon his sixtieth birthday. The function was a surprise to Mr. Nelson. A number of short speeches were made by Mr. Nelson's associates and visitors, all marked by admiration for the guest of honor. The keynote of the celebration was the evidence of thorough loyalty



ROBERT W. NELSON,
President and General Manager of the American
Type Founders Company.

of the managers of the type company to their chief and the interests of the company, and, as each speaker narrated some characteristic incident of his relations with Mr. Nelson, it was discernible that the loyalty of the subordinates was simply the reflection of the loyalty of their chief to them. The sincerity and spontaneity of the honors awarded to Mr. Nelson were to the invited guests simply a confirmation of what each of them has observed in his contact with the large staff of managers at the general offices in Jersey City and the managers of the branches throughout the country.

Believing that our readers should know the man who is the dominating personality in the organization which is the most extensive in its dealings with the printers, the editor has prevailed upon one who is in close touch with Mr. Nelson to write an appreciation of his character and abilities. From personal knowledge and long-continued dealings with the subject of the following study, the editor gives it his most hearty endorsement.

A STUDY OF A CAPTAIN OF INDUSTRY.

It was with reluctance that I consented to undertake to write this appreciation of Robert W. Nelson, for the reason that (unavoidably) many eulogistic notices appear in printing-trade periodicals which have a strong flavor of advertisement. Such a notice would be utterly distasteful to Mr. Nelson, and to attempt it would be regarded as somewhat disrespectful.

Mr. Nelson first came into contact with types when he bought out a small country newspaper in Braidwood, Illi-

nois, in 1877. He was then twenty-six years of age. His first occupation was that of clerk in a druggist's store. At twenty he started a coal business. From that venture until this time, every business Mr. Nelson has established is a success. The coal business still flourishes in the hands of a relative and that little paper in Braidwood developed into the *Joliet Daily News*, still vigorous under the ownership of James H. Ferris, one of Mr. Nelson's partners in founding the paper. Utilizing his experience in Joliet, Mr. Nelson, with two others, established the American Press Association, the combined capital of the trio amounting to \$1,500. The American Press Association is to-day a great factor in American newspaperdom, and strong as the rock of Gibraltar. It was placed on that rock mainly by the exertions of Robert W. Nelson. Much of the profits he derived from the American Press Association were invested in the Thorne typesetting machine, a little while before the linotype machine was introduced. The unexpected introduction of the latter machine discounted all expectations of making the Thorne machine the tremendous success it would have been if separately-cast types had continued to be used in the newspapers. Notwithstanding this discouragement, the machine, being the best typesetting machine ever invented, is the last survivor of a long line of abandoned machines, and the company now making it has ample vitality and a not inconsiderable field. Mr. Nelson's judgment in buying the Thorne machine was fundamentally right, judged by conditions then existing, and his methods of manufacturing and merchandizing were sound, and account for the survival of the machine, although Mr. Nelson has not actively managed its affairs since 1894. He established a printing plant in New York city in 1890 to teach Thorne-machine operators, and, notwithstanding that the first use of the plant has been abandoned, the business of printing was so soundly established that it is to-day one of the larger successful plants in that city.

Thus all the work of his first twenty-three years still remains as evidence of his good judgment in establishing himself in new lines, and his ability to build his enterprises on foundations well and truly laid, and, therefore, permanent.

It was with this record of success to his credit that, in 1894, Mr. Nelson was reluctantly persuaded to assume the management of the American Type Founders Company, when it was on the verge of failure, and rent with internal factional disputes. When first approached he did not own any stock in the company; but when, after investigation, he convinced himself that good management would save the company and make it successful, he immediately invested in it the greater part of his fortune, being of that temperament which prohibited him from recommending to others any proposals which he would not himself venture on. In this he exhibited the courage and the squareness of conduct which are vital elements in his character. Within a year the inharmonious elements within the company had merged into one loyal following of the one man whom all factions came quickly to trust in implicitly; for Mr. Nelson, full of courage and undeviating in his principles, is yet a harmonizer of men, for men trust him instinctively, so open and frank and fair and reasonable are all his methods. He is the sort of party man who is admired by the opposite party, and thus soon obliterates party lines in the desire of all to achieve the common good.

Well, the American Type Founders Company is now thoroughly organized, covering the whole country and reaching out into foreign countries, and the printers have formed their judgment of it and the services it renders to them.

When Mr. Nelson assumed the management the competition with the company relied mainly on misstatements, buncombe appeals and personal abuse. These eccentricities were utterly disregarded, and Mr. Nelson's whole attention was given to the task of improving the methods of business and manufacture. Mr. Nelson is friendly to all legitimate competition and competitors. He has never in any degree antagonized any concern or person. He maps out his course, and moves forward on it, without shifting his course to pursue or punish any competitors. In the type business, since he came into it, some of his competitors have had a monopoly of aggressive tactics, and of most of these competitors it is written: They were. If the moths sing their wings, can the candle be blamed?

Mr. Nelson's breadth of view was disclosed by his action when Baltimore and (later) San Francisco went down in ruins. The branches of his company in both cities were totally destroyed. The instant the extent of San Fran-

I wish the printers to realize that Mr. Nelson is one of the great men of the United States. His friends know that the type business is a small matter to him; he would be equally successful and popular at the head of the largest of our industries. He would make an ideal cabinet minister, or ambassador, and there is no office in the gift of the people which he could not amply fill. This is because he has executive ability of the highest order—the capacity to organize and to direct. As an executive, Mr. Nelson never seems to be a part of his organization, but rather to stand over it and control it, as an engineer controls his engine. The organization is his, and he is greater than it at all times. He relies upon his managers, yet he knows the condition of affairs in the territory of each better than any one of them. He avoids contact with details, but has at his command day by day every detail of every branch of his organization. Everything moves with clocklike regularity, yet no part of the process of business is allowed to become



Assembled in honor of R. W. Nelson, president of the American Type Founders Company, on his sixtieth birthday.

cisco's loss was made known, he telegraphed the company's branches in Los Angeles, Portland and Seattle to ship all available machinery, types and material to San Francisco, and to send all clerks and salesmen. Trainloads of printing machinery and materials were shipped from the East, containing the entire stocks of several of the largest factories. A big circus tent was put up while the ruins were still aglow, and by Mr. Nelson's directions every printer in the city who had stood well on the books prior to the disaster was accepted as in good credit. By this action many printers were reestablished in business who otherwise would not have been able to resume. Precisely the same policy was carried out earlier in Baltimore. It might be said this was a magnificent act of business. It did, indeed, prove profitable; but contrast it with the action of the competing house next in importance, which telegraphed its salesmen not to go to San Francisco, fearing it might acquire a number of bad debts. Mr. Nelson was really actuated by precisely the same spirit which possessed the leading business men of San Francisco, and without which the rehabilitation of that city would have been impossible. It was a time to think of character and to bank on previous credits rather than to exact the usual guarantees for credit. It was commercial statesmanship of a high order.

stereotyped. The same principles of administration will spell success everywhere and in all enterprises, whether of business or statesmanship. They are elementary to the characters of all great executives, and they are extremely rare.

To be a manager under Mr. Nelson is accounted a privilege. Each manager is treated with the deference due to the chief representative of his company in his special territory or department. The "big stick" is never used, and cogent reasoning and positive demonstration supply its place. There is a peculiar impersonality in Mr. Nelson's method of deciding between conflicting views and in administering corrective methods which make the decision or correction palatable to the parties affected, because their legitimate *amour propre* is never offended. The managers are proud to be part of the organization, and the loyalty and good will thus engendered are among the great assets of the company. Harmony prevails where Mr. Nelson presides, for with the greatest firmness he is constantly amiable, judicial and sympathetic.

It is a favorite theory of this writer's that the characteristics of the really great are alike in all times and under all conditions. In the course of reading, since the editor requested this article, I happened upon a descrip-

tion of a man who lived in the first century of the Christian era. As it describes the character of Robert Wickham Nelson far more clearly than I am able to do, I have no hesitation in using it. "In him I observed mildness of temper and unchangeable resolution in the things which he had determined after due deliberation; and no vain-glory in those things which men call honors; and a love of labor and perseverance; and a readiness to listen to those who had anything to propose for the common good; and undeviating firmness in giving to every man according to his deserts; and a knowledge derived from experience of the occasions for vigorous action or for lenity. I observed, too, his habit of careful inquiry in all matters of deliberation, and his persistency, and that he never stopped his investigations through being satisfied with appearances which first present themselves; and that his disposition was to keep his friends, and not to be soon tired of them, nor yet to be extravagant in his affection; and to foresee things a long way off, and to provide for the least or the greatest without display; and to be ever watchful over the things which were necessary for administration, and to be a good manager of the expenditure; nor did he court men by trying to please them or by flattering those he had dealings with, but showed sobriety in all things and firmness, and never any mean thought or action; none of his merits were greater than his truthfulness; not even by indirection did he ever depart from truth-telling; and any exaggerations used by others in writing his proclamations [advertisements] he consistently repressed; no one ever had cause to doubt his word; every one who knew him acknowledged him to be a man, good and above flattery, able to manage his own and other men's affairs. He was also easy in conversation, and made himself agreeable without affectation. He was also most ready to give credit without envy to those who possessed any particular ability, and gave them his help, that each might enjoy reputation according to his deserts. There was in him nothing harsh, nor implacable, nor violent, nor, as one may say, anything carried to the sweating point, but he examined all things severally, as if he had abundance of time, and without confusion, in an orderly way, vigorously and consistently." Thus wrote the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus of his father and emperor, Antoninus Pius. As there were "great men before Agammonon," there have been many since, and in presenting this vivid picture of some of the qualities of greatness in Robert Wickham Nelson, which have made him loved as well as admired, no apology need be offered, for kings among men are no less uncommon in this land of democracy than in any other land.

JUST DON'T.

Do you feel you'd like to quit? Don't!
Get to feeling you don't fit? Don't!
Do you want to yell "all in"?
'Cause your wind's a little thin
And you think you'll never win?
Don't!

There's a kick you want to make? Don't!
There's a head you want to break? Don't!
Do you feel you want to whine
Like a genuine canine
And send blue streaks down the line?
Well, Don't!

When you see a chance to duck, Don't!
When you want to chuck your luck, Don't!
Keep right on without a stop
And you'll surely show up on top,
If, just when you want to flop,
You Don't!

— C. L. Armstrong, in *The Fra.*

AN APPRECIATION FROM AUSTRALIA.

In the August number of *THE INLAND PRINTER*, we made editorial mention of a request from Australia for the privilege of adapting a number of the I. T. U. Course lessons in typography, and of our pleasure at being given an opportunity to aid this far-off government in its technical-education work. Thanking us for a favorable response, the I. T. U. Commission on Supplemental Trade Education is in receipt of two letters — one from J. W. Turner, superintendent of technical instruction, for the Department of Public Instruction, New South Wales, and the other from J. W. Barker, teacher in charge of the composing classes. While these letters are highly appreciated by *THE INLAND PRINTER* for their kind references to the work being accomplished by our magazine, we are more deeply affected by the tribute paid to the printers of this country and to the other progressive American workers for a higher standard of technical instruction. And in justice to these, we print below the letters:

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, August 25, 1911.

GENTLEMEN.—I desire to express my sincere and heartfelt appreciation of your intermediation with The Inland Printer Company and of their disinterestedness in permitting me the high privilege to adopt portions of the excellent lessons of the I. T. U. Course to be used for the betterment of the rising printers in this State.

The answer given to my request is far beyond my most sanguine hope, even though the action is so much in accord with the high principles expounded in the pages of *THE INLAND PRINTER* — "That printers should lead the world in trade education." It is certainly a highly satisfactory example of the precept, "Practice what you preach."

In asking you to accept my thanks and to tender them to The Inland Printer Company, I should also be gratified if you will express to the staff of the journal my admiration of the high standard that is reached in the articles coming under the editorial and departmental headings. I am a keen admirer of the exceptional and exhaustive way in which subjects are treated — results making it far and away the best journal in the interests of printing.

I am gratefully taking note of your kind offer "to help out," contained in the letter to myself, as well as the request in your communication to the secretary of the N. S. W. Typographical Association that you be kept informed as to the progress of the Course here — I am honored both with your kind offer and request and shall have pleasure in availing myself of the dual opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) J. W. BARKER.
Teacher-in-charge, Composing Classes.

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, August 26, 1911.

GENTLEMEN.—It affords me the fullest satisfaction to endorse the remarks contained in the accompanying letter from the teacher-in-charge of the composing classes at this college, regarding your disinterestedness in granting the request made by him with my cognizance.

For some years I have been a very great admirer of the trade-educational methods of America, and your action strengthens my impression of the courtesy shown me when, as a member of an educational commission, I visited your great country.

My ideals in regard to all sections of technical education are on an exalted plane, and in that connection much is looked for from printing.

Such help as you so generously have given aids very considerably in the achievement of the ideal, and my appreciation of your action is very real.

My felicitations to you, gentlemen, in the great good work you are so successfully engaged in, with which my personal well wishes are bracketed.

I have the honor to be, sir,

Your obedient servant,

(Signed) J. W. TURNER.
Superintendent of Technical Education.

JUMBO GEMS.

Weather damp and cold, and Ralph, our fifteen-year-old lad, has been down with the croup, kids all sick, the little dog has the sniffles, some of the neighbors' cats have had fits, one of our hogs broke down in the hip, most of the Gamble children are down with colds, and, to take the neighborhood as a whole, we are somewhat under the weather.—
Country correspondent in the Fowler (Kan.) Gazette.