

The Uses of The Business Historical Society

ONE of the most frequently asked questions of the officers of The Business Society is: "What practical use is this great mass of material which you are gathering?"

The best answer is perhaps found in a recent occurrence, when the librarian of the Society received a note from a Boston man, asking if a certain book, urgently needed, could be supplied. It stated that researches had shown the book to be so rare that it was contained in three libraries only — two in Washington and one in Wisconsin, none of which, on account of its rarity, was willing to circulate it. The book was a fundamental study of track construction called Report upon the Plan of Construction of Several of the Principal Railroads in the Northern and Middle States, and upon a Railway Structure for a New Track on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, by Jonathan Knight, 1838.

This booklet was found in a pamphlet collection of the Business Historical Society now in the Harvard Business Library and was delivered to the Boston business man within half an hour after his request. His gratitude was such that in a short time he returned the book to the library, preserved in a handsome new binding.

Two of our Many Recent Accessions

Two scarce business items have recently been added to our collection. The first is a bound blank-book in which a prominent cotton merchant kept his personal statistics, commencing in March, 1783. This man did tremendous research under difficult conditions: he has listed the quantity of cotton wool imported into Great Britain from 1771 to 1789 and balanced the total for manufacture, thus making it possible to judge probable prices from supplies and from the activity of the mills; there are also estimates of crops for various years from all parts of the world; the prices are carefully listed; the wages of employees are stated; and the costs of manufacture are clearly set forth. A very careful inside history of the East India Company has been penned in this book by the merchant, and the data are probably not to be duplicated in their original form in any published account.