

MERCANTILE EVOLUTION.

THE mercantile machinery of to-day is manifold. First the manufacturer is connected by his agent with the wholesaler, the wholesaler is connected with the retailer by the traveller. This is a complicated and expensive manner of distribution and at present it is threatened. The retailer sees this enormous addition of expense and profit and seeks a method of escape. The result is that he seeks to buy directly from the manufacturer. To do so he must sell large quantities, and to do this he must combine with others in order to crush out small dealers by means of close prices. The day of the small dealer is fast passing into the darkness of a night of forgetfulness. Concentration is the watchword of to-day. To speak practically of the dry goods trade, will make the meaning clear. In Toronto to-day there are two large bazaar stores where you can purchase anything from a bicycle to a tooth brush, from a set of furniture to a frying pan. They sell large quantities because they sell at a small margin of profit. They sell on a small margin, because the concentration of a large number of businesses under one roof means less administrative expenditure, less expense in a hundred different directions, besides the great saving—the wholesaler's profit. What is the result? Hundreds of small stores in Toronto are vacant. A gentleman of undoubted veracity claimed a few days ago that walking down Yonge street from Bloor to the Esplanade or a distance of about two miles, he counted nearly three hundred empty stores. It is much the same on the other streets. Outside of Toronto the merchants are suffering within a radius of one hundred and fifty miles, the suffering varying inversely as the distance. A net work of railways provides for speedy transportation of customers, with the continually recurring excursion rates. A ride to the city is a pleasant outing, the fare is recouped by a saving in prices, and the buyer has had a greater variety to choose from. The small dealer in the towns and cities is doomed.

These are hard facts and facts to which we would willingly shut our eyes if we could; but we cannot. From the course of events in England and the United States, we catch the drift of the same movement. It is a mercantile evolution. There is an endless change going on. The methods of trade change and these changes we call advances. And the man who believes that the present state of mercantile arrangements will continue for ever and ever is clearly very ignorant regarding history and very short sighted as regards the trend of the affairs of to-day. In the United States we have seen the growth of great departmental stores. They are seen also in Montreal and Toronto, and their career has been successful beyond expectations.

Competition may be doomed and it may not, but the competition of the future will be

among greater units, because the small units will be absent. The smaller wholesale houses are also being crushed out. Great attention has been drawn to this fact in England by the amalgamation of the great wholesale houses of Lawson & Co. and Leaf & Co. The Draper's Record says: "With combined energy, consolidated connection, lessened administrative expenditure, and other economies, it would be irrational to conceive otherwise than that good will result, and we hope that the favourable expectations of those who have carried through one of the most important and significant events of our time, will be realised to the full." And this "combined energy and lessened administrative expenditure" is what is helping the great retail store.

In this great evolution which has already begun, and about the certainty of which there can be no doubt, there will be a lessening of the number of travellers. Now the travellers could be lessened by two-thirds and still all the goods necessary for the consumers would be sold. The dealers will miss their pleasant faces and cherry remarks, but they are too expensive for this era of great competition. Too many travellers add too much to the price of goods, and this is a thing which the buying world of to-day will not tolerate.

An abortive protest against the present distributive system has been made in Ontario very recently by the Patrons of Industry, and if they accomplish nothing else, they will at least educate people to a certain extent with regard to this expensive system which is in full bloom at present.

We do not set ourselves up as prophets, but we claim that what we have said is a just deduction from the mercantile tendencies of the day, and no wholesaler, no traveller, and no retailer should fail to study the signs of the times and profit by them. The changes may not be what we would desire, but they must be studied simply because they will be the inevitable result of a mercantile evolution.

RETURNING GOODS.

A FEW days ago the dry goods section of the Board of Trade had a reunion and discussed several matters of interest to the trade. Their discussion concerning the manner of passing goods through the Custom house has borne fruit, as may be seen in the report in another column.

But the most important topic from the retailer's point of view was that of returning goods. The result has been that a circular letter has been put out to all merchants concerning setting forth the grievances under which the wholesalers suppose themselves to be labouring. This circular shows that heavy parcels are returned at the wholesaler's charge, though the order has been filled strictly according to the letter of the law. Yet a merchant finds that they are

goods he would sooner be without and he sends them back, and that at the wholesaler's cost. This is indeed wrong. No retailer if his order is filled properly has any right to return goods at the expense of the man who has not made a mistake. Again, the complainants show that returned goods are badly packed and if the goods escape damages, the boxes or wrappers are torn and the labels destroyed, stock number gone and much trouble, if not serious loss, is caused. This must certainly be dishonouring to the wholesale merchants.

The wholesalers maintain that if they have made a mistake they are quite willingly to pay the cost of that mistake, and this is mere justice, not generosity. Still a justice which leaves nothing to be desired. But they maintain that they cannot afford the serious losses occasioned by the indiscriminate return of goods which have been shipped according to order.

We apprehend that the difficulty will lay partly where there is an order and part of it implies a discretionary power regarding shade, variety or quality on the part of the person who fills the order.

Still there is a necessity of a change from the present state of affairs, and the mutual exchange of opinions will do much to remove the mote and the beam from the eyes of both. Arrangements should be made which will be made satisfactory to both parties, and these arrangements should be well known and morally binding on all.

SPRING DRESS GOODS.

THE different wholesale houses are getting ready for the spring trade and samples are abundant.

In prints some very new lines are being shown. The most striking things will be fancy shades in grounds, with less distinct patterns. These will form a real novelty as the patterns form a pleasing contrast to either stiff stripes or formal distinct floral designs. Indigo grounds will probably have as great a demand as last season; and some very pretty patterns are shown in navy grounds with white spots and figures, and with old gold spots and florals. Black grounds with colored patterns are shown in very great variety. Cream grounds will again be in high favor and some really excellent patterns are shown as well as an enormous variety. Mr. Sanderson the buyer of prints for John Macdonald & Co. states that they will carry seventy-one full ranges in English prints. Among the specialties of this house are a special pongee cloth for ladies blouses, and navy and red drill lettees.

In French stuffs the novelty for next spring will be the Velours Rousse which is now the thing in Paris. It is an all wool cloth with a cotton cord, thus enabling it to be dyed in any shade. Bengalines or poplins will be a leading line in different designs.