

DO NOT XEROX

THE CANADIAN GROCER

& GENERAL STOREKEEPER

PUBLISHED WEEKLY
\$2.00 PER YEAR

Published in the interest of Grocers, Cannery, Produce and Provision Dealers and General Storekeepers.

Vol. VI.

TORONTO, MARCH 11, 1892.

No. 11

J. B. McLEAN, President. HUGH C. McLEAN, Sec.-Treas.
THE J. B. McLEAN PUBLISHING COMPANY,
FINE MAGAZINE PRINTERS
AND
TRADE JOURNAL PUBLISHERS.
HEAD OFFICE: 6 Wellington West, Toronto.
MONTREAL OFFICE: 115 St. Francois Xavier St. A. J. Ritchie, Manager.
NEW YORK OFFICE: Room 105, Times Building, Roy V. Somerville, Manager.

SPECIAL TO OUR READERS.

As the design of THE CANADIAN GROCER is to benefit mutually all interested in the business, we would request all parties ordering goods or making purchases of any description from houses advertising with us to mention in their letter that such advertisement was noticed in THE CANADIAN GROCER.

Traders who sell fresh fish, oysters and other lines that have to be preserved in ice, ought to make a certainty and a specialty of having pure ice. In cities whose ice supply is apt to be from polluted waters, this is especially important. In Toronto the agitation against frozen sewage has been kept up so long and has been so earnestly carried on by the advocates of better sanitary conditions, that nearly everybody is more or less alive to the danger that lurks in a lump of bay ice. That general knowledge cannot but check business. There are people, and many of them, who forego their liking for oysters merely because they are mistrustful of the source of the ice. It is the same way with fresh fish. Just now when Lent is on it is material that this drawback to trade should be removed. It would pay retail grocers to make a specialty of keeping pure ice and and advertise it freely in their shop-fronts and elsewhere. An idea recommended by a physician writing in one of the morning papers is that retailers who keep goods for which ice is necessary, should obtain Lake Simcoe ice and get from the medical health officer a certificate of its source and its purity. Those who have the enterprise to

do this thing may depend upon making it pay, for there is a wide constituency of consumers who are looking around for some grocery store where they can be assured that pure ice is used on oysters, fresh fish, etc. More could be made out of ice as a special advertisement than anything else just now. Retailers should make a point of getting their summer supply from untainted sources, and having its purity properly certified. Butter and similar perishable commodities would sell at better prices in the hot weather if the ice had the right brand on it.

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A. E. P., whose letter appears in another column, writes very sensibly upon the question of calling for orders. He upholds the custom both in practice and in theory. In his view it is not a necessary evil, but is a normal condition of trade in cities. He does not consider that more bad debts are likely to be contracted at the consumers' houses than at the grocer's store, rightly holding that the grocer is more likely to select his customers when he goes for them than when they come to him, and that debts are more easily collected when calls are made than when they are not. An especially good point is made in favor of calling for orders in the claim that it tends to keep trade from concentrating upon one or two streets, and causing exorbitant demands for rent from the owners of stores on those streets. There undoubtedly is that tendency, to which the delivery wagon, the telephone and the street car very greatly minister. There has to be something to offset this tendency, and the custom of calling for orders appears to do it. But the question is one that will bear scrutiny and it is intended that it shall be very fully canvassed in our columns. Let others speak.

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It is undoubtedly an arbitrary thing for any assemblage of men to constitute them-

selves an authority in prices, and to assume the power of prescribing the margin of other men's liberty as salesmen. The only legitimate authority there is is the resultant of supply and demand. Any attempt to supersede that requires widespread and genuine unanimity among those who control the supply or the demand. Such an unanimity it is hard to effect. It is seldom attempted on the part of the demand because it is seldom necessary; it rarely succeeds on the part of any controlling agency in the supply, and for the same reason. The eagerness of sellers to do business usually makes the one sort of combine unnecessary and the other impossible. It is a noteworthy fact that prices are lower since combines became the popularly condemned thing they are. In the grocery trade particularly it is true that neither the supply nor the demand holds the balance of power over prices. The centre of gravity lies in that body of traders who are determined above all things to sell goods. It is these who are the arbiters of prices, and it is largely to them the public owes it that everything is so cheap to-day. It is also to them that trade is to credit a great part of the disaster that overtakes it every year. Their influence is on the whole a baneful one. The public, however, will never cry out against cheap goods, no matter what the consequences may be. It is not the right or the wrong of an influence in prices that the people consider. The question with them is, What side is it on? If it is for cheap goods it is desirable; if it is for higher prices it is wrong. That is the sort of morality that too commonly exclaims against combines. Like a good many other things, combines have to be looked at individually, and each is right or wrong of itself, not on account of its nature as a combine. The desire to do a stirring trade appears to be supplanting the money-making instinct, which, however it may be declaimed against, must be deemed one of the most steady influences in trade. So long as that instinct could be preserved without recourse to combines, trade flourished and failures were few.