



THE DECAY OF PATRON STORES.

WALLACEBURG, Ont., Dec. 22, 1891.

Editor of THE CANADIAN GROCER :

SIR,—From perusal of Mr. Weismiller's letter in a recent issue of THE GROCER, I am led to give you, for the benefit of the trade generally, a short history of that very ephemeral organization known to fame as "The Patrons of Industry." As I will give nothing but facts, I must perforce detail only what has come under my own observation here. About one year ago the pestiferous thing first made its appearance in the townships adjacent and tributary to our town. This section was, I believe, one of the earliest visited by the "organizers," who hailed from Michigan, only a few miles distant from us. You will probably remember that I wrote a short letter to THE GROCER at that time under the nom de plume of "Merchant," counselling united and determined opposition to "the Patrons" on the part of all merchants. In that letter I also stated that the only two merchants in our town who could be found to take up the Patrons were the President and Vice-President of a so-called Business Men's Association which had been organized here a short time previous.

Only one little year since these events occurred, and what do we find now? The aforesaid president and vice-president both failed and out of business, as well as a third foolish merchant who listened to the voice of the charmer and marred a hitherto unsullied business record by pandering to the selfishness of the Patrons of Industry. With these three victims lying hors de combat, and fortunately no others being available to take their places, the Patrons have come to an abrupt and inglorious ending here. Almost daily we are informed of lodges that have been broken up and scattered. In fact it has been a complete rout of horse, foot and artillery.

Now why could not this have been accomplished one year ago? Why could not the "Patrons" have received their death blow then, instead of having been permitted to gratify their inordinate selfishness for a twelve-month to the utter ruin of three of our business men? Simply because there was not unanimity in opposing them. Had all the merchants refused to sell them goods at 12½ per cent. advance on invoice price (which any sensible man knows is selling at a loss), I have no doubt the three insolvent ones referred to would be still in business, and every one else engaged in trade in our town much better off to-day.

In recounting the somewhat short-lived career of Patron-ism here, believe me, Mr. Editor, I am actuated only by motives of

true devotion to the best interests of Canadian merchants, in whose ranks I have stood for a good many years, and to whose welfare I, long since, became sincerely attached, during a very pleasant part of my life spent amongst them on the road as "A Knight of the Grip." I remain, very sincerely, etc.,

R. J. MCLOUGHLIN.

MY LATE PARTNER.

The selection of my late partner was the result of mature deliberation on my part, and all the resources at my command were called into play to thoroughly investigate his character. All I could learn of him, together with surface indications, led me to believe that he was honest and honorable. I accepted his statement that he desired to engage in the retail business. After several years' experience in this line I had accumulated sufficient capital to start half a store, hence my need of a partner. A mutual friend suggested our names to each other, and the matter of joining forces was taken under advisement. My proposed partner was head bookkeeper in a wholesale house, which was loth to give him up. After taking the precautions referred to, it took but a short time to arrange the preliminaries and to decide upon a location. He was not an entire stranger to me, as we had had a bowing acquaintance for some time, and I had also met him in a social way. He was one of those exceedingly genial fellows in whose presence one feels good natured and perfectly at ease; one that readily makes friends. To correct any false impression as to the lack of respect I entertain for those who have departed this life, or that it is my desire to knowingly cast any reflections on such, I wish to emphatically state that my late partner is not dead, but that he is appropriately spoken of as late because of his habitual lack of punctuality. Being desirous of keeping expenses at as low a figure as possible we decided not to employ clerks, but to do the work entirely ourselves. The division of labor naturally adjusted itself, he keeping the books and I doing the buying. We were, of course, both to interest ourselves in selling goods, sweeping the store, cleaning lamps, washing windows, and all such necessary duties as fall to the lot of those who are entirely independent of help. We were fortunate in creating a favorable impression in our new home, and our business proved all that could be expected for beginners. I did not fail to recognize the good qualities of my partner upon closer acquaintance, as they stood out the more clearly against the background of his defects. I may have been somewhat critical, but as his shortcomings affected me directly and personally, I could not be otherwise. He found it convenient to get to business in the morning after I had swept, put out the show goods and cleaned up generally. He was tardy in getting back from dinner and supper; and many times a day he would run out just for a minute, and

return in an hour. I expostulated with him after I became convinced that his actions were premeditated, when he laughingly promised to reform. I felt considerable hesitation in taking him to task, as we had an equal monied interest in the business, and should have been equally interested in other respects. He proved to be an excellent salesman, social and obliging, but he never developed any aptitude for putting away goods. In fact, I could always tell what goods he had shown during my absence at the counters. When asked to assist in straightening up, he would betake himself to the books, or to brushing goods, seeming to find much amusement and pleasure in the latter. I should not have been surprised to have found the polish all wiped off the blades of the pocket knives, so industriously did he employ himself in this direction. I always found him ready to lead the procession when any show was to be made, myself coming in for the work; in fact, I found in the course of time that he had numberless pleasant little ways of making himself disagreeable. Another point which was a constant source of solicitude on my part was the persistent manner in which he gave credit indiscriminately. His genial disposition, upon which I had counted so much, seemed to totally incapacitate him for refusing a request to "just charge this," even when he knew that the party was utterly unworthy of credit. When spoken to about the matter, he acknowledged that this policy would end in numerous bad accounts, but excused himself on the ground that he found it so hard to say no. He proved to be a better servant than master, for though considered an excellent bookkeeper in the position he had held, his posting was never up to date and we were obliged to look over the books whenever a customer called to pay his account. It is said one must travel with a person to know them, but I found that business association answered the same purpose. The climax was reached, during his protracted absence from the store on account of sickness, when it became necessary for me to bring the books up to date. The condition in which I found them, and the manner in which they had been kept, caused me to believe that his design was to keep me in ignorance of the condition of our business. I was strengthened in this belief, because after he had figured up the inventory a short time before, he was unable to find that any money had been made on the year's business. I felt almost confident at the time, from the amount of business we had been doing, that such was not the case; now I was certain of it. Upon his recovery and return to the store I accused him of deception, and rather than have any further disclosures made he agreed to withdraw from the firm, upon terms dictated by myself. I hardly need add that this ended my experience with partners; but I often wonder if other people who are apparently serene find their partners more congenial than mine proved to be.—Exchange.