

A CHAT WITH AN OLD COUNTRY DRY GOODS CLERK.



THE other evening we dropped in to have half an hour's chat and smoke with an old neighbour, Tom Pryne. Tom was for many years a draper's assistant in the old country or, what we call in Canada, a dry goods clerk.

"Thirty years ago," said Tom "after serving five years' apprenticeship in the north of England: went up to London to work for Merino, Melton & Matchit, one of the largest retail houses in London.

At that time I was a pushing, ambitious young fellow, and was soon promoted to the dress goods department.

"The salaries paid were not very high but we had a chance to make twenty to thirty shillings a week in premiums or 'spiffs' as we called them in those days.

"It required a wonderful amount of tact, ingenuity, and judgment of human nature to make premiums. There was nothing for the salesman for selling new seasonable goods, where we used to 'get in our fine work' was selling old job goods—remnants or manufacturers' stocks that came to hand. Sometimes we would get three or four hundred pieces of job stuff into the department, then we made money.

"We used to get a halfpenny per yard premium on all job lines under a shilling and a penny for goods above that price.

"At first I could not make any money for myself, although the old hands were making lots of it. All the customers that I got seemed to want only new goods, similar to those displayed in the large show windows which by the way covered about two hundred feet frontage.

"Like all other hands I was too anxious to sell job goods so as to make premiums. I had after all to go to the window dresser and request him to hand me the piece of goods the customer asked for when she first came to the counter.

"It took me a long time to learn. The old gentleman on my left was a London salesman of twenty years' experience. His plan was, to simply find out what was required and go at once to the window dresser and he would lay it before the customer in such a way, that the prettiest goods looked about as attractive as an old wash rag, then in his polite manner ask how many yards he should cut without attempting to show any other piece. The goods looked so different from what they did in the window that the customer didn't think she would like it; in fact the old gentleman didn't intend that she should like it.

"Now was the time the aged artist displayed his ability. He would quietly and artistically blend half a dozen pieces, taking great care that one shade should not destroy another. He displayed the 'job lines' to such advantage—the penny premium of course had something to do with it—that in his hands the old stuff looked far better and more attractive than the dress she had chosen from the sidewalk which now lay crumpled up and rejected by both customer and salesman. Nine times out of twelve he made his 'penny a yard,' leaving new goods as he quietly remarked for 'us young fools to sell and practice with.'

"After the customer was gone he would take the rejected dress back to the window dresser to replace—as a professional window dresser only can—with the smiling remark: "You can put back the decoy, the lady didn't admire it."

"My old teacher used to remark, 'any fool from the country can sell new fresh goods but it requires an artist to sell old dress goods and make spiffs', which I found to be true before I left the department."

TOM SWALWELL.

RETAILERS AS IMPORTERS.

The N. Y. Millinery Trade Review says: THE CANADIAN DRY GOODS REVIEW in a lengthy article gives a variety of reasons why retailers should not import goods direct from Europe. They can be summed up nearly as follows: They must disburse 40 to 50 per cent. cash down. They cannot buy as favorably as wholesale dealers, who get better terms when buying larger quantities. They invariably overstock themselves or select goods that are not wanted by their limited and local trade.

The above is true, with few exceptions, of retail houses here that embark in the importing of millinery. All importers in a measure are compelled to buy blindly; in other words, they have to take the risk of their purchases not being desirable in this market. But large dealers have the trade of the whole country for an outlet. A retailer, unless an exceptionally large dealer, sees his money and expenses of an European trip in the small stock he has imported. His salvation lies in having novelties not to be found elsewhere, or so scarce and desirable as to command an exceptionally high price, to enable him to realize a paying profit. In the majority of instances his competitors, who have bought similar or the same goods from a home importer, can undersell him and make money at their prices, while he is getting cost or selling at a loss.

A MONTREALER'S OPINION.

A retailer in Montreal writes: Just a line to express an opinion on the two articles headed "Retailers as Importers." The first article which evidently was intended to advertise against retailers importing was, I consider, exceedingly weak and not in accordance with facts. The latter article, which appeared in April's issue, is in accordance with facts, therefore reasonable and good. The former seems to have been written by a wholesaler who makes the mistake of presuming to tell retailers how to conduct business. The latter by a retailer who writes what he knows. The former a poor advertisement, the latter an honest statement of facts and free from self-interest.

FOUR MONTHS' FAILURES.

We are indebted to Mr. T. C. Irving, superintendent of Bradstreet's, for the following list of failures throughout the Dominion in the dry goods and allied trades during the months of January, February, March and April:—

	ONTARIO.	Assets.	Liabilities.
	No. Failures.		
Dry goods.....	30	\$302,775	\$859,657
Millinery.....	10	11,290	31,540
Clothing.....	4	13,379	43,785
Tailors.....	4	20,734	66,620
Gents' furnishings.....	4	15,300	29,300
Hats, caps and furs.....	1	700	1,600
Totals.....	63	\$363,878	\$1,032,502
	QUEBEC.		
Dry goods.....	31	\$335,900	\$1,008,385
Millinery.....	6	6,050	13,295
Clothing.....	7	86,450	231,500
Tailors.....	8	15,900	31,769
Hats, caps and furs.....	1	700	1,600
Totals.....	53	\$445,000	\$1,286,549
	MANITOBA.		
Dry goods.....	1	\$14,000	\$30,000
Clothing.....	1	9,000	40,000
Tailors.....	2	10,410	31,870
Totals.....	4	\$33,410	\$101,870
	NEW BRUNSWICK.		
Dry goods.....	3	\$32,900	\$49,300
	NEWFOUNDLAND.		
Dry goods.....	1	\$24,000	\$35,000
	SUMMARY.		
Dry goods.....	66	\$700,575	\$1,982,342
Millinery.....	16	17,340	44,835
Clothing.....	12	108,829	315,285
Tailors.....	24	47,044	150,259
Gents' furnishings.....	4	15,300	29,300
Hats, caps and furs.....	2	1,100	3,200
Totals.....	124	\$899,188	\$2,505,221

This would give something less than 36 cents on the dollar, which is not a favorable showing.