

MISTAKES IN BUYING.



CANADIAN wholesalers and jobbers have made some mistakes this year in regard to their buying. In fact, the class who are pursuing mistaken policies may be extended to include all importers and all who buy direct from manufacturers, either domestic or foreign. This class is one to whom any mistake, however slight, is exceedingly costly, and to whom a great deal of mercantile wisdom is usually attributed.

In Toronto and Montreal are a class of mercantile firms whom we generally designate "wholesalers." These men import large quantities of dry goods, and sell them to the great body of retailers throughout the country. They do not confine themselves to importing, but also handle domestic goods such as hosiery, underwear, cottons, etc. But it is their importing to which they look for greatest success and profit. This year some of these firms imported much less than usual, in view of the fact that trade was likely to be restricted in volume. This decision in regard to a lessening of their buying must have been reached by them last fall, as their buyers were then placing orders for goods which retailers secured this spring. The houses with this excellent foresight could be numbered on the fingers of one's right hand. The great majority of the houses pursued another policy.

This other policy was to import as largely as usual and restrict their purchases from Canadian manufacturers. The consequence is that one-half of the wholesale houses in these two cities are overloaded with imported goods, and their stock of domestics is almost nil. They are either selling these imported goods at cost, or less, or carrying them over until another season. If the latter course is pursued, they may be found unsuitable for the then reigning styles; if the former, they are doing themselves and their confederates in business a decided and a lasting hurt.

We are not denouncing the importing of foreign goods; but we are pointing out the evil results of weak importers trying to carry too high a head in foreign markets while at home they are pulling in all semblance of their fighting horns. Not only is such a policy detrimental to the houses themselves, but it is detrimental to both Canadian and foreign manufacturers. To Canadian manufacturers because they lose orders at a time when they need them most; to foreign manufacturers, because their risks are decidedly increased.

Canadian manufacturers are suffering just now from a dearth of orders. They are not to be pitied from a certain point of view, as they have long been the voluntary slaves of a class which has little regard for them, and as they are as a class lacking in energy and independent action. Still, in their helplessness, one cannot fail to find a little compassion to bestow upon them.

This lack of orders is due in part to the mistakes in buying on the part of importers, as indicated above. It is due also to the fact that retailers who levy from manufacturers are not fully aware of what is required of them, and both retailers and wholesalers lack in the consideration to which domestic manufacturers are entitled. The agent for a manufacturer goes into a wholesale house and asks for the privilege of showing his samples. The reply is "Our Mr. Smith is just going to Europe, and we will lay it over until he comes back." That is

right. The foreign manufacturer has a right to his orders two or three months, yes, six months ahead of the domestic manufacturer. Mr. Smith returns a few months afterwards and drops a few lines for the agent to call. He wants some goods, and if he can have them inside of six weeks, he will place a good order. The orders already taken preclude the possibility, and then there is a rushing hither and thither in a vain attempt to get suitable goods. Then unsuitable goods are bought -- but then they are only Canadian, so it doesn't matter.

It is much the same with the retailer. He is not in his element unless he is buying from a manufacturer. Moreover he cannot lay aside his pickaninny ways and cannot get up courage enough to order ahead. He waits until the last moment and then sends in a "rush" order, "Ship quickest way," and expects the manufacturer to put on a double staff and work all night for him. The manufacturer doesn't, however, and the retailer loses some profitable trade.

To give domestic manufacturers a fair chance dealers must order ahead. It has to be done with foreign manufacturers, and should also be done with the domestic mills. The prejudice which belittles the importance of the latter class must be wiped away, and in its place must come a desire to give them every possible opportunity for that development which can come only from the co-operation of the two classes -- the manufacturer and the middleman.

The manufacturer only makes to order. He prepares a large range of samples, but manufactures only the quantity of each sample that his customer orders. It is to the retailer and the wholesaler that he looks to gauge the public demand for each class of goods. The manufacturer prepares designs in huge variety; the jobber must pick out those which will suit the public, and estimate the quantity of each required. If these are not the offices of each, then the business is out of joint somewhere. Assuming, however, that these are the necessary duties of each, it can easily be seen that manufacturers are deserving of more consideration than they have hitherto received.

MISREPRESENTATION.

Nothing is more valuable to a retailer than his reputation. With a good reputation, he is rich; without it, he is poor indeed. To misrepresent the goods he sells is to play a game at which he will be eventually beaten. The punishment is inevitable, for vice, like virtue, brings its own reward.

The most common, and perhaps the easiest, form of misrepresentation is to show a cheap imitation in place of the genuine article. This, besides being hurtful to the morals of the person doing it, and besides being exceedingly risky with particular customers, is exceedingly unfair to the manufacturer who has established a reputation.

The Dominion Suspender Co., of Niagara Falls, write us that there are a number of merchants throughout the country who are said to be passing imitations of the Hercules suspenders on their customers. Some of them even hang these imitations on the D.S.Co.'s show racks. We cannot believe that there are men in the regular trade mean enough to do business in this way. Our opinion of them is contrary to all such assumptions. We sincerely hope that the information is based on one or two cases, and that dry goods men, as a rule, are above such things.