

THE DRY GOODS REVIEW

THAT ARTICLE ON JOBBERS.



HOWEVER plainly some thoughts may be expressed, they are liable to be misinterpreted. This is the weakness of written thought as compared with spoken thought, the latter being accompanied by certain tones of the voice, gesticulations and explanations which aid in making clear the meaning of the words spoken. Newspaper rivalry often leads writers to put

wrong constructions on other writers' words, so as to score a point of greater or less magnitude.

Last month in an article on "The Signs of the Times," we pointed out that jobbing might be less important in Canada in the future than it had been in the past, owing to the fact that an increasing number of manufacturers, domestic and foreign, were selling direct to the retail trade, and an increasing number of retailers were importing and were buying domestic staples direct. The Monetary Times, a financial journal which sometimes discusses trade questions, interpreted this to mean that in our opinion jobbing was a thing of the past. It says:

"It might never have occurred to us that Canada was destined to revolutionize dry goods trade methods as practised the world over, had not a contemporary raised the question: 'Is wholesaling a necessity or even a possibility of the future?' The dismal picture which the writer of the article in question drew of the wholesale merchant's future lot plainly indicated that, in his opinion, at least, wholesale jobbing must inevitably give way to a new order of things. But the wholesale dry goods merchant is not to be so easily dethroned from the prominent position he has so long maintained."

We deny that we averred that jobbing must give way to a new order of things, but we did give a wholesaler's opinion to that effect. Such a ludicrous blunder is unworthy of the journal referred to.

No one in the trade will deny that more retailers are importing now than ten years before, and it would be safe to say that the volume of goods now imported by retailers is ten times what it was twenty years ago. The figures of the Customs ports show this.

Again, no one will deny that more domestic manufacturers are selling direct to the retail trade than formerly. This is due, in a measure, to excess of production over consumption, and hence a dissatisfaction on the part of some manufacturers, who find that their goods are moving more slowly than they wish.

This means, if it means anything, that the jobber has increased competition, and, as was remarked in last issue, whether this will cause any marked change in the importance of the jobbing trade, "the future will disclose."

The Monetary Times argues that because jobbing as a profession has been in existence for a number of centuries, it will always be in existence. This is poor reasoning, even if the conclusion arrived at is true. The Feudal System was once a predominant feature of Europe's social structure, but it has passed away and hardly a vestige of it remains. The Craft and Merchant Guilds of the middle ages once predominated all trade, but these too have passed away. Other characteristic features of past social systems have disappeared, displaced by new methods and new systems. What has been, may not always be. Evolution in these matters but shows the progress of civilization and of the human intellect.

Our object in pointing out the possibility of a gradual change was simply to make men watchful. The wise captain in a time of calm always prepares for a storm. The wisest business man is he who can look farthest ahead and anticipate possible contingencies. Because changes are very gradual and their ultimate consummation remote is no reason why they should not be studied and prepared for in advance.

Many United States and British jobbing houses have a retail store in connection. This is a feature which is now being introduced into Canada. Take Toronto for example. The jobber now sells only \$1,000 worth of goods to the city retailers where he formerly sold \$10,000. These city retailers have grown fewer in number but larger in size, and can afford to import direct. The Toronto jobber can only regain this trade by opening a retail store and waging a competition with these large city retailers by selling direct to the city consumer. Already this thing is contemplated and its adoption is only a matter of time.

But should such a plan be adopted by the jobbers, they may still retain their original occupation of wholesaling, because there will always be many stores which do not require goods in sufficient quantity to enable them to import with profit. The wants of these numerous small stores will always necessitate a certain number of jobbing houses to remain in existence. The number and importance of these jobbing houses will depend on the greater or less progress of the centralization which is so prominent a feature of the retailing of the present day.

Nevertheless, we see no reason to recede from our former position, that the retailers who are buying direct from the manufacturers, both domestic and foreign, have materially multiplied during the past few years and promise to still further increase in numbers in the future.

A DISCUSSION ON TAXATION.

W. W. TURNBULL, the head of one of St. John's largest grocery firms, has come before the citizens with a scheme by which he proposes to revolutionize taxation. He read a paper outlining his scheme before nearly all the prominent merchants of the city in the Board of Trade rooms.

Mr. Turnbull's idea is to impose all taxation upon net income, whether from real estate, from the labor of a man, or from any other source, and to relieve from taxation all real estate not earning any income. Jas. F. Robertson, of Manchester, Robertson & Gibson, dry goods, could not see that the scheme was feasible, and could not agree with Mr. Turnbull that a business house which had made no profit in a year should be relieved. He could not see why they should go before the mayor and council and say, "We have done no business this year, don't charge us any taxes." The idea, Mr. Robertson thought, was preposterous, when it had to be considered that every one would learn that the firm was financially cramped and would be wary of them while they were trying to keep a stiff upper lip in a time of depression. Mayor Robertson, who is also a grocer, Mr. S. Schofield, agent of the Turners' line of steamers, Mr. T. S. Simms, brush manufacturer, and others opposed the idea as set forth by Mr. Turnbull, and which Geo. C. Schofield, manager of the Bank of New Brunswick, favored. A vote of thanks was tendered Mr. Turnbull for his paper, but the meeting took no action on it. The scheme is not one that commends itself generally to St. John citizens.