

RETAILERS' PROFITS.

The *British Columbia Commercial Journal* has latterly been in receipt of a number of communications on the subject what is described as the extreme advance on cost which it is said is the almost variable demand of the retail trader, and except in the matter of dry goods which the competition is so keen and change in styles so frequent that clearing out sales "at most ridiculously less, indeed, than living—prices are the rule and not the exception. Drug-staples and druggists' sundries are described as cases in which the profits cannot be described as short of exorbitant, hence the army of drug stores all of which seem to be doing well, closings up among them being few and far between.

Then if one looks at the family or rather the prescription trade, a bottle of distilled water containing perhaps a drachm of the most inexpensive tincture cannot be had for less than fifty cents, leaving a profit of at least forty cents—some say to be divided between the druggist and the medical man, who, it is notorious, is accustomed to carry with him prescription papers bearing the head lines of some favored drug store, followed invariably by the symbolical "R," and occasionally by the direction "Sig." Now, is not the Dr. accustomed to be paid by his patient? Why should he then accept, if he does not actually demand, an *honorarium* from the dispenser in addition to the professional fee of his patient? As for the druggist, he makes it his general rule to charge fifty cents for a twenty-five cent patent medicine, and for other packages he cinches his customers in about the same proportion. This is in addition to the profit he makes over and above the profit derived by selling the article at the price for which it retails nearer the place of production.

But it is the grocer of whom the consumer most frequently complains. Taking quality into consideration, tea, though much nearer its place of growth, is more costly than say at Toronto or Montreal. Sugar, at the present, is about as cheap as it is to be had anywhere else; but that is due to the competition of Hawaiian and other descriptions that have been placed upon the market, but not infrequently a soft white sugar is palmed off upon the consumer at the same price as the harder and much more economic article that sells at the same price. Coffee is from 25 to 50 per cent. dearer than in either of the places we have named. Canned and preserved goods are almost infinitely higher. Dried fruits are not to be had except at exorbitant rates, despite the proximity of the California orchards and gardens. Butter and cheese are away up, and, as for quality, what is offered is frequently below the standard. Other staples may be similarly spoken of, while, as for fancy lines—spices, condiments, biscuits, etc.—many people are forced to satisfy their appetites much in the same way as the hungry boy did, who, after looking through the windows of an Old Country cook shop, is reported to have gone away with the exclamation "Thank God for a good dinner!"

It is claimed that there are two reasons why in addition to much higher rents consumers are compelled to pay such a large

advance on cost. How much this amounts to can readily be seen by any one who has the opportunity of seeing the wholesale price lists. In the first place, it is said the distance that goods require to be brought involves augmented charges for freight. Supposing that it is \$1 per hundred weight extra that is only one cent per pound, and not the additional sum that is expected by the retail storekeeper who, according to some wholesalers, has only to bear a share of the difference, the competition in the distributing houses being such as to compel them not subsequently to assume the entire burden.

No doubt one reason of the excessive profits of which we speak is the undue amount of credit extended to some customers, whose neglect to pay is the cause of an additional imposition on customers generally. The retailer in consequence of the default of those who buy from him is forced to pay for the additional time during which his paper runs. If he placed this on the shoulders of those who neglect to pay in the shape of interest charges, there would not be so much to complain of, but, as it is, every one is the sufferer on account of these inordinate profits.

While speaking of the complaints of the wholesalers of these undue profits, it must be said that among them there are, it is announced, those who, when they have a retail customer requiring an extended line of credit make him pay in the first place extra prices for what he buys, duplicating and possibly triplicating their ordinary profits because they know that the retail dealer is helpless in their hands. One thing is certain, said a well-known and highly respected merchant, the other day, prices to consumers must be brought down to rock bottom figures. People cannot afford to pay more. Wages are getting lower, and there are many who cannot, even at the reduction, get sufficient work to do. The days when cost was no object are over, and if those who are now in business do not take a move in the right direction there are those who will enter the field and acquire the trade which they have recklessly driven away.

A ROYAL HIGHNESS' COSTUME.

It appears to be not generally known that the unhappy Lobengula has, in his fight, his royal sister, Nina, with him. She is decidedly plump, tremendously embonpoint, and her skin is of a coppery hue. She wears no dress, the only covering about her waist being a number of gilded chains, some encircling her, some pendant. Round her arms are massive brazen bracelets. A blue and white Free Mason's apron appears in front and looks strangely anomalous there, though really not unbecoming. From her waist also there hang down behind a number of brilliant-colored woolen neck wraps, red being the predominant color. Under the apron is a sort of short, black skirt, covering the thighs, made of wrought ox-hide. Her legs and feet are invariably bare, but she wears round her ankles the circlets of bells worn by the women to make a noise when they dance. Her headdress is decidedly pretty—a small bouquet of artificial flowers in front and amongst the hair, standing in all directions, feathers

of bee-eaters' tails. A small circular ornament, fashioned out of red clay, is fastened on the back of her head. She has always been a great favorite with European settlers.

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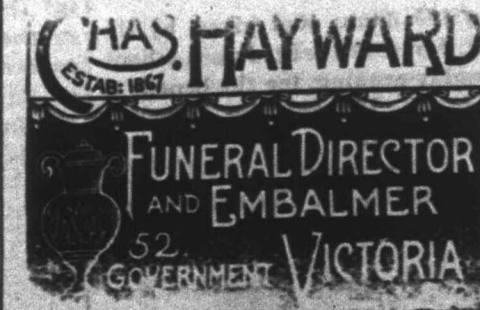


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