

XEROX

# THE CANADIAN GROCER

& GENERAL STOREKEEPER

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SPECIAL TO OUR READERS.

As the design of THE CANADIAN GROCER is to benefit mutually all interested in the business, we would request all parties ordering goods or making purchases of any description from houses advertising with us to mention in their letter that such advertisement was noticed in THE CANADIAN GROCER.

Among the legal decisions upon appealed cases, given on another page, is that of Green vs. Minnes, which was originally tried last summer at Kingston before Justice Rose. That case was an action for damages from the defendants, Minnes & Burns, merchants, and E. S. Andrews, a collecting agent, for posting the name of the plaintiff's wife as a debtor, and offering for sale an account against her of \$59. Judge Rose gave a written opinion and a verdict in the case, holding that there was no libel in the publishing in this manner of an account which every other means of collecting had failed to collect. But the verdict of the judges who tried the appeal, it will be noticed, set aside the ruling of Judge Rose and awarded \$50 damages to the defendant. It is important to observe, however, that the principle set up by Judge Rose was not combated by his learned brethren of the Queen's Bench. What they reversed was his verdict in the special circumstances of this case, not the written opinion he gave upon the matter of publishing accounts for sale. The points on which the success of the appeal was based were: that the advertising of the account was to blackmail defendant, that the debt was incurred not by Mrs. Green nor Mr. Green, but by a former husband of

Mrs. Green; that the amount advertised was not the actual amount. This decision shows that when blackmail or coercion to pay are the objects of advertising an account, such advertising is libel. The difficulty of proving that such advertising is for neither purpose and has neither effect, must be sufficiently great in all circumstances to make such a mode of recourse to get payment a rather dangerous one.

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A convention of the Ontario Patrons of Industry met here on Wednesday of last week and continued in session several days. Only such of the proceedings as it was deemed expedient to give to the daily newspaper press have yet transpired, but no doubt a considerable part of the business transacted related to questions which have no important bearing upon the retail trade of the country. It appears that the reduction last July in the duty upon salt has not allayed the agricultural discontent arising from the conditions of the trade in that article of merchandise. The Patrons aim to be independent of the combination among the manufacturers, and proposals appear to be entertained for the establishment of salt works to be controlled by the Patrons. That association cannot embark upon such an undertaking as the development of a well and the opening of a refinery. It is simply a benevolent society in the eye of the law. To go into any such business as the manufacture of salt it must be incorporated under a different act from that which constitutes it a provincial entity in Ontario. Consequently it is probable that a number of Patrons will seek incorporation for the purpose of forming a joint stock salt company, which will be run for the benefit of the association, but in the name of the company incorporated. No dividends are to be made; cheap salt is the sole object aimed at. Some \$15,000 is believed to be the capital necessary for the enterprise, and this it is proposed to raise by

stock sold in \$1 shares. If the combination at any time lowers its price below that at which the Patron works can produce salt, the latter are to be closed down during such time. The works may be set going or they may not be; they have been proposed at all events. A resolution was passed that in the opinion of the Patrons the Government should enact a law making it a penal offence on the part of any citizen or firm to unduly raise the price of necessaries. The number of members is said to be 30,000, and the number of branch associations 1,500. A Dominion charter is being applied for.

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It is in keeping with other ideas of the Patrons that they would introduce law as a factor in prices. This would indeed be an arbitrarily governed country if a trader could not be left to his own freedom in the matter of what price he should ask for his goods. Legislation that had that bent had to be swept away after Adam Smith's views began to take hold in trade. The only laws that remain for the prevention of undue advantage on the side of the seller are the local-market laws that provide for the inspection of weight and quality in certain lines. Supply and demand will determine prices without the intervention of law. If law should be imported into the matter at all, it ought to be to sustain rather than to depress prices. The tendency of prices is downward in nearly all lines, and the effects of this are what the farmers themselves are suffering from. If they had to pay more for the things they buy they would be able to get more for their grain and other produce. Competition is one great agency that acts on the side of cheapness. No act of parliament would make the majority of lines any cheaper than they already are. The idea that combination unduly advances prices is perhaps more of a bugbear than it ought to be. Combines are learning that the advantages of union are in the reduction of expenses, and not in the advance of prices. The history of combines in the United States shows that the attempt to realize very high prices always brought new competitors into the field, who could perceive in the margin between a fair price and an immoderate one, a sufficient guarantee of protection to cope with the union upon.