

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.

The extinction of the free retailer would be a disaster, not merely to the people who make their living by trade, but to the whole community. As has been shown in former articles, it would remove a powerful pressure from prices and would banish voluntary enterprise from trade. Where capital and business individuality are hedged about by restrictions, neither will be easily induced to enter. How much of the material progress of the towns and cities of this or any country has been due to the fact that every trader was the master of his own business? In the first place, would the fine buildings in which so many of our retailers carry on business, have existed if customers had always been secured by such contracts as the Patrons ask merchants to sign? They certainly would not. Those fine buildings were put up, stocked, appointed and managed, to bid for the custom that was free in the country round. If the traders who keep store in them had always got customers by the Patrons' way, there would be no need for attractive shops and all the conveniences and refinements of modern trade. Competition would have been weeded, and a prosaic, plodding, eighteenth century style of doing business amid a disarray of boxes, barrels, etc., would be in

vogue to-day. The present sprightly conditions of business are the evolution of competition that gave the consumer a choice of supply.

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But our towns and cities would lack more than their fine stores, elaborate mercantile service and low prices. The greatest promoters of the growth of towns and cities have always been the merchant class. If a factory was proposed to be started, a railroad projected, any public works contemplated, the most urgent supporters of these were the merchants. A factory would employ hands, diffuse money, import wage-earners, increase the population, and in this way benefit the merchants who wanted more people to sell goods to. A railroad would increase the traffic, cause the opening up of whatever resources lay about the town—as mines, lumber regions, water-power, agriculture,—develop industry, and probably make a market for a big surrounding district. It would thus help the merchants. But these same advantages would bring other traders, mechanics, etc., to minister to the increased wants of a larger population, and thus multiply the competition in favor of buyers. Schools, churches, all the enlightening influences have been brought rapidly into existence in all parts of the country, and one of the strongest levers for the obtaining of them has been the activity, mercantile interests. Every improvement to any town has been to the advantage of the country tributary to that town. Reduce the number of the merchants, organize all the customers, tie each surviving merchant to a specified list of customers, and he will have no object in doing anything to increase the population or the wealth of his town. His spirited part in the work of keeping up the condition of roads, abolishing tolls and market fees, etc., would be a thing of the past. The very reduction in the number of the merchants would tell immensely on the public spirit of a town or city.

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Thus would the decline of the free merchant affect disastrously the whole com-

munity. It would remove a powerful curb from prices and a powerful incentive from municipal prosperity. Towns would wane and local markets would crumble away. The sleepy few left in trade by the will of the Patrons would be incapable of handing on the light that the swift-moving men of our times would leave burning. And the workers of this ruin would reap their full share of the general mischief. They would pay more for their goods, because wholesalers could force prices upwards against the feeble resistance of the subdued remnant who would be in trade on the Patrons' conditions, and the higher the wholesalers' prices would be the wider would be the retailers' margin. There would be fewer to bid for the farmers' produce, so that butter and eggs would go at lower prices than if there were many and keen competitors for the farmers' trade. The Patrons are the victims of a huge mistake, the effects of which they will feel most when their idea triumphs most.

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The traders, therefore, who so far have withstood the temptations, threats and debilitating rivalry that the Patrons bring to bear upon them are deserving of credit for their steady adherence to a principle that at the outset must cost them loss. Many of these steadfast men are now under a boycott, of which the object is to coerce them into unconditional surrender to their former customers, now organized into a Patron lodge. There is no doubt it takes a stiff determination to stand out against arguments that appear to be backed up by the withdrawal of the means of livelihood, and all honor is due to those who have the spine in their will to do it. The merchant of course is not always like the big manufacturer, who can let his works lie idle and starve men on strike into unwilling submission. Too commonly he is like the man who lives by his wages, and the loss of the former's custom is like the loss of the latter's situation. It seems, however, that the acceptance of the Patrons' conditions is about as speedy a way of going to the dogs as a trader can adopt. The record of failures so far goes to show this.