

The Commercial

WINNIPEG, APRIL 1, 1888.

THE GROCERS' ASSOCIATION.

The retail grocers of Winnipeg formed an association some time ago, for the purpose of affording mutual aid and protection in carrying on their business. After a season, however, the society was allowed to become disorganized. A successful effort has now been put forth to reorganize the association, and it has now been resuscitated and placed in a healthy condition. This early move to reorganize the association would indicate that the society as formerly existing must have proved beneficial to the members. Had it been otherwise an effort to reorganize would not likely have been made. The new association appears also to be heartily supported by the city grocers, a large number having attended the meeting called to resuscitate the association, and all were in favor of keeping up the institution.

Undoubtedly the association can be made to serve a very useful purpose, but its usefulness will depend largely upon the conduct of its members. The first thing that is needed is the co-operation of all or nearly all the grocers of the city. It is not enough to join the association and stop there; but to give hearty assistance in carrying out the objects and furthering the plans of action which may be adopted. Honesty in carrying out any agreement which may be resolved upon, is also necessary on the part of all the members. If a certain course of action is resolved upon, all the members should honestly endeavor to carry it out to the letter, regardless of any individual advantages which might be gained by slyly evading the agreement. Jealousies and suspicions one of another should be dismissed. There is always likely to be jealousies among men in the same lines of trade in small towns, but in Winnipeg business should be sufficiently developed and of sufficient magnitude to overcome these little personal jealousies.

One difficulty in keeping associations of this nature together, arises from the fact that very often a small minority will disagree with the majority, on a certain policy or line of action. The minority, who are overruled, "kick" against the conclusions arrived at, and very often lead to the rupture of the association. A

deadly rupture may not at once occur, but the association is weakened by the internal strife, and disintegration has begun. The policy which should be followed in such associations is therefore to oppose a proposition, if such is the wish of a minority of the members, until the proposition is adopted by the majority. But once adopted by a majority, the minority should be prepared to not only acquiesce in the proposal, but to assist in carrying it into full effect, just the same as if they had been in favor of the policy. If this line of action is followed, and each member honestly endeavors to carry out the aims and objects of the association, it will certainly prove a valuable auxiliary to the retail grocery trade of the city.

The retail grocery trade is the most important line of business in this city, and this is true of almost any city. The grocer is the best known and the most frequently sought for among business men. Days and weeks may sometimes pass without the necessity arising for a visit to the dry goods store, the hardware store or the druggist (the less frequent to the latter the better as a general rule), but the grocer is in request every day by almost every household. Credit also enters largely as a matter of necessity, into the grocery trade, and this is one point upon which a well conducted association can be of great value. If the cash is not at hand, the purchase of dry goods and many other commodities can be delayed for a season, but in the matter of groceries the case is different. When they are wanted, they are, as a rule, like revolvers—wanted badly and immediately. It will not do to wait till the end of the month for the wages wherewith to buy a bag of flour, when the children have nothing to eat. The groceries must be had at once, whether or not the cash is in hand, and hence credit is an important feature of the retail grocery trade. The most important business, the grocery trade is at the same time the most largely represented. In this business competition is the keenest and profits are the smallest—so much so that the profits are frequently represented by loss, even when an apparently fair trade is being done. The magnitude of the business, the keen competition and the extent of credit in this particular branch, render an association of retail grocers more necessary than in any other line of trade. It is therefore to be hoped that the city grocers will all take a hand in the association, and pull together to make it a success.

The meeting together of a number of men interested in a similar business, in order to talk over their trade affairs, should alone be a matter of interest and mutual benefit to those concerned. A great deal can be learned from the exchange of ideas alone. The opinions of different persons expressed upon a subject, will induce a train of thought and lead to the development of new ideas. The social intercourse brought about by the meetings of the association, should also prove advantageous to the grocers. But unless some active, aggressive line of policy is adopted, the mere meeting together for social and trade discussion will hardly keep the association together. If the members take hold and work together, however, they will, in such an important trade, find plenty to do of a practical nature. Indeed, several questions of importance to the grocers of the city have already been considered to some extent. One of these is what is termed the peddling nuisance. The city is infested with peddlers, who continually go from house to house disposing of commodities mostly belonging to the grocery trade. These peddlers pay no taxes, rent, fuel etc., while the grocer is at a heavy expense under these various heads. The grocers complain that while they pay a heavy tax to the city and to the landlord, the peddler gets off free. They therefore ask that the peddlers be taxed to a proportionate amount with themselves, and that peddling without a license be prevented. Farmers come into the city and peddle their produce from house to house, and then endeavor to sell any balance they may have left, to the grocer. This the grocers consider as hardly fair to them, when they are paying heavy taxes, rent, etc., and doing so much to build up the city.

The credit system is also one which the grocers can consider carefully to advantage. Of course it will be difficult to make any cast-iron rules, but in some respects benefit can be had from co-operation. There are many instances of professional dead-beats, who obtain all the goods from a dealer which they can on credit, and then transfer their undesirable patronage to another unfortunate. Such parties should be made known to the association so that their credit could be cut short. A dead beat should not be allowed to work his little game more than once.

The regulation of prices even on the most staple articles is a difficult question, and it is doubtful if anything can be