

DEPARTMENTAL STORE COMPETITION.

OWING to the agitation in Toronto to raise the assessment on the Eaton Co's. stock the whole question of big departmental stores has come up again for discussion. The Retail Merchants' Association, members of which conducted the inquiry and gave evidence, is now asking to be recompensed for the expenses. It was a purely municipal work they did and there seems no reason why the account should not be paid. The point is raised that the civic officials have no legal power to pay it. The municipal authorities all over Canada appear to have a good deal of power to do foolish things, but seldom assert their right to do wise things.

But the general discussion on big departmental stores is once more raising questions which we have often referred to in these columns. One is that the local merchants can often copy their best methods to his own advantage. The Oshawa Vindicator, for example, directs attention to one strange case of local apathy when it says: "There are 30 business men within the four blocks of the town who never say a word to the public from one year's end to the other, either through a newspaper or by hand bills. Can those men expect to keep trade in town?" This is one of the particulars in which the local merchant can afford to copy the policy of the big stores with their fresh, up-to-date advertising.

Another point of equal importance is that of giving credits. A correspondent of a Toronto paper says: "Make the store debts as the hotel liquor debts—uncollectable in the Division Court under \$100. You cannot get any Government to do that, but the departmental stores are doing it without consulting any Government. How many good, honest merchants have "gone to the wall" through being not only too generous with other persons' goods, but with their own hard-earned money, only to keep up and encourage a class of persons who should not exist in any country that wants to be progressive and prosperous?" No doubt the cash system is a considerable factor in drawing trade away from stores that give credit.

We believe that the local merchant is entitled to his local trade, and that he is, as a Manitoba contemporary says, "the man who cannot be dispensed with. He is a man who takes great risks in the pursuit of his business. He comes unbonused, invests his capital, and puts in a stock of goods entirely at his own risk. He is obliged to stock his store before the goods are needed, and in doing so he has to anticipate the wants of the community. Hundreds of people never think of this, and have no idea of the amount of caution and fine judgment that are required in doing it."

MORE SMALL PORTS OF ENTRY.

The Dominion Government still continues a policy which has been in vogue in this country for many years of creating outposts of Customs at various points throughout the Dominion. As we have already pointed out on more than one occasion, this is not the right policy. It encourages different classification of values all over the country, so that no importer is sure of what rate his competitor is paying for the same goods.

It may be said that the local merchant is inconvenienced by

these outposts, but, as a matter of fact, the equalization of Customs rates is of more importance than anything else. This is especially true where the tariff, as ours does, consists largely of ad valorem duties rendering necessary a very accurate knowledge of the qualities of goods before the correct sum can be collected.

Unless some very strong opinions are brought to bear upon it, it looks as if our succeeding Government would go on creating small ports of entry until the number of such small Customs houses exceeds all reasonable necessity.

AMERICAN METHODS IN LONDON.

THERE have been rumors for some time that a big departmental store would be opened in London, England, on the American plan, and the name of the capitalists who were engaged in the enterprise were said to be The Siegel Copper Co. It seems that there is some truth in the statement.

In the opinion of that firm, whose large stores in Chicago and New York are conducted on the most up-to-date methods, the biggest city in the world needs just such an institution as one of these. The Americans consider that the big stores of London are inadequate to the immense area served, and they assert that the English store has never yet grappled with the mercantile policy of large volume and small profits.

We would be inclined to think the very reverse, but this charge is actually made by one of the managers for The Siegel-Cooper Co., and he ought to know what he is talking about. He says further that the largest London store only does an annual business of about \$15,000,000, which, if so, is not a very large sum considering the immense field that London presents to such enterprise.

One of the chief requisites to the success of a new departmental store in London would be a proper situation, one which would be central enough to draw the trade from the principal avenues of traffic, and at the same time be not too far from the West End. It is said that the cash system is not worked out as perfectly as it should be in the existing London stores, and that the American institution would strictly enforce cash as they do in America.

THE KID GLOVE TRADE.

The country dealer should be careful not to lose the profits to be made in keeping his stock of kid gloves well assorted.

There is often trade lost in this way by the local merchant not caring to carry anything like a complete stock, either in colors or sizes of ladies' kid gloves. In this way the big city stores do a large trade by mail.

The wearers of kid gloves complain with considerable truth that the local store cannot furnish them with the kind they want. By this means the local buyer gets into the habit of ordering things by mail, besides kid gloves, and thus the local merchant loses his trade.

It would be well for town and country dealers to consider this matter very carefully, and decide whether it would not be worth while to announce his intention of being thoroughly up-to-date in kid glove stocks.