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WHOLESALE AND THE LAW RE COMBINATION.

The views of wholesale men, on that subject which affects them so closely, the law against all forms and manners of combination were clearly expressed by a deputation which waited upon Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Hon. Mr. Fitzpatrick at Ottawa last week. The chief speakers were Messrs. Hugh Blain, of Toronto and H. M. Kittson, of Hamilton, for the grocers; D. W. Bole, M.P., of Winnipeg, for the druggists; and E. M. Trowern, of Toronto, for the Canadian Retailers' Association. The memorial presented to the Government set forth that the grocery trade, in its retail as in its wholesale branches, is one of the great staple businesses of the country, the capital invested in it being very large, and the goods dealt in forming for the most part an economic necessity to the consumer, and some of them yielding an extremely small profit, e.g., sugar and tobacco. The wholesale and retail branches are closely interdependent. Perhaps severe and even undue competition has borne more heavily upon the grocery business than on any other, for the self-evident reason that the goods handled by them are mainly staples and necessities, the value of which was easily ascertainable by the public. To aggravate this competition, it is alleged that departmental stores have exploited the grocery business by advertising and selling at cost and less than cost prices in order to promote the sale of other lines upon which they could make more profit. To meet these conditions and the competition of trade pirates who live by failure and who sell goods without reference to the fact that they should be paid for, it has been found necessary in self-preservation for the trade to make selling arrangements among themselves, to endeavor, where possible, to have uniform selling prices with regard to proprietary articles. It has been found necessary to systematize the selling of goods with certain restrictions as to price. It has been found necessary also to make an effort to induce manu-

facturers to grant a differential in price between the price at which they sell to the wholesale merchant and to the retail merchant.

In other words, the wholesalers have found it expedient to take collective action. Suffering from wasteful competition, they have come to an agreement in the effort to remedy the evil. But this is where apparently they fall foul of the law. Section 520 of the Criminal Code says that everyone who conspires, combines, agrees, or arranges with any other person to unduly prevent, limit, or lessen the manufacture or production, or enhance the price of any article, is guilty of an indictable offence, and liable to a penalty of \$4,000, or to two years' imprisonment.

Under the circumstances, the wholesale grocers, who, it may be said, as a body of business men have not their superiors in integrity and law-abiding instincts in the Dominion, feel that they are badly treated. Other business men, railway companies, telegraph companies, insurance companies, fix their rates by collective action; and they ask, why should not they? Physicians and lawyers are not interfered with; why, they question, should merchants and manufacturers be?

Much of the trouble seems to hinge upon the word "unduly" in the clause of the Act respecting combinations. Formerly it read "unlawfully," and one suggestion made by the deputation was that the latter should be reinstated, the word "unduly" being too liable to be taken advantage of by over-zealous exponents of the law. They also ask that the law in general be made clearer, so that there would not be the constant uncertainty such as prevails now, as to what is legal and what open to objection.

WINNIPEG AS A MANUFACTURING CITY.

Whatever else the enterprising city of Winnipeg may be, it has not yet reached the title of a great manufacturing centre. And this is what is beginning seriously to concern its people. To sit at the gateway