

NOTES ON THE PATRON MOVEMENT

The following notes on the Patron movement have been sent in by a very fair-minded and clear-headed business man, whose facile pen is not a stranger to the pages of THE GROCER. He is one of the last to approve of making terms with the movement, but he does not believe in giving factitious strength to it by too flattering an opposition. We should be glad to have some of our readers signify how far they agree with him. He says:

It is just possible that the merchant, whose business suffers through the operations of the Patrons of Industry have not adopted the proper remedies to cure the evil. It is useless to try to obstruct the current of a popular agitation in the hands of skilful agitators. Strong opposition to the movement only acts as a dam to hold back the current for a short time, to give it head and strength to break down the barrier, whereas if the dam were not built, the current would soon run its course and abate without any more damage being done than a temporary inconvenience to those concerned.

Opposition is not only the life of trade, but it is the life of any doctrine, no matter how erroneous, that tickles the fancy of a number of the inhabitants of any country, just as persecution is the life of a sect. Opposition to any cause frequently invests that cause with the crown of martyrdom, whether it deserves it or not.

Stump orations by merchants at Patrons of Industry gatherings are of no avail in stopping the movement, but on the contrary, have a tendency in the opposite direction. The farmers, as a class, know very little about the percentage of profit required to make a business pay, and it is useless trying to educate them in the matter. Experience is the only teacher, and if left alone to work the thing out in their own way, they will in time get the same kind of experience as they got some years ago in their management of the Grange.

It is unwise for country merchants to attempt to boycott wholesale houses by withdrawing their patronage from those who sell to merchants who supply the Patrons. If the Patrons started stores of their own it would be reasonable to ask the wholesale houses to refuse to supply such stores, but it is unreasonable to ask wholesale houses to stop supplying substantial merchants who have dealt with them for years, simply because these merchants manage their business in their own way. The custom of supplying goods at an advance on cost price is not confined to the retail trade. It is not very many years since the bulk of the dry goods trade was done at an advance on the starting cost price. Cooked invoices, changes in the tariff, and the large amount of Canadian manufactures put into the market stopped this system for a time. It has however to some extent been revived of late, and staple dry goods of

Canadian manufacture are now offered by some houses at an advance on cost price, so low as to be below the actual cost of the expense of doing business.

Patron stores will not last long. Those of small capital will be refused credit by the wholesale houses, who know that they can't make it pay, and those of considerable capital will very soon give up supplying the Patrons, when, after stock-taking, they find they have lost money by so doing.

The Patrons can only be strong when they have money in their pockets. Last year there was a large crop, which gave the farmers the handling of considerable money, a great deal of which, no doubt, went to Patron stores. What were the other merchants doing in the meantime? Were they collecting the amounts which had been standing in their books for one, two, three, or more years? A few were wise enough to do so, but it is to be feared the majority were spending more time in discussing the Patron question than in vigorous attempts to collect their accounts.

It is impossible for an individual to fight against a combine, and merchants don't appear to be able to form combines of their own. They are about the only class of people who can't.

The Patrons are a combine which the merchants can't fight as a combine. Therefore it is useless to try, but every merchant ought to be able in the interests of his own business to fight an individual farmer. Therefore let him make up his accounts, demand a speedy settlement, take the farmer into his office and talk business to him in the same way as the wholesale merchant talks to his debtor who does not pay up, and if every other means fails try the strong arm of the law on him. If the merchant can't get his money out of the Patron for fresh goods, he will have more time to attend to the collection of his book debts, and if he puts his whole energy into this he will probably reap more benefit to his business than will make up for the loss of sales during the short time the Patrons will be in existence.

If he is afraid of losing custom by taking energetic steps to collect the accounts, and quietly beholds the Patrons passing his door to leave his money, not their own, at the Patron store, he is simply strengthening the Patrons and putting a rod in their hands to whip himself with.

EXCESS BAGGAGE.

The maximum weight of baggage that a traveller's ticket entitles him to carry is 300 pounds. The railway companies should raise this limit to at least 500 pounds. This concession is due to the extensive patronage which their roads receive from the commercial travellers. The railway expenses of every house that maintains a staff of travellers figure very largely in the costs of doing business, and this is supposed to go to the benefit of the railroads. Further, though the roads impose

a tax on all baggage above 300 lbs. in weight, they derive but little revenue from excess weight. Excess has to be paid for usually by the traveller, but the remuneration is small in comparison with what the road tariff provides, and seldom reaches the coffers of the company, because it very generally takes the form of a bribe. It is a means, therefore, not of swelling the receipts of the road, but of corrupting the servants of the road. It is also a cover under which now and then a traveller can run in expenses that are not strictly regular, if he be disposed to do so. A set of samples weighing 900 pounds are often carried free of charge so far as the roads are concerned, though they may net the baggage master five or ten dollars. The Boards of Trade should take this matter in hand and endeavor to obtain from the railroads a more liberal allowance for commercial baggage.

HALTON COUNTY AND THE RAILROAD.

A largely attended meeting of the Hamilton Board of Trade was held last week to protest against the action of the G. T. R. in boycotting Halton county by causing two trains per day to run through without stopping. President George E. Bristol occupied the chair, and vigorous speeches were made by A. E. Dalley, A. Turner, A. T. Wood, M. Leggat, John A. Barr and others. It was pointed out that the action of the Grand Trunk was really a blow at Hamilton's business interests by diverting the Halton trade to Toronto and away from Hamilton. On motion of W. Leggat, seconded by A. E. Dalley, a lengthy resolution was unanimously passed condemning the action of the Grand Trunk and endorsing the action of the Council of the Board appointing a committee to proceed to Montreal next week to interview Mr. Seargeant in company with the Civic Railway Committee. At a meeting of the finance committee of Hamilton's council the other day it was decided to act with the Board of Trade and send a deputation to interview General Manager Seargeant, of the Grand Trunk railway, at Montreal, as soon as possible to try and induce him to rescind the action of that railway in cutting off from the people of Halton county all communication by rail by running trains through the county without a stop. The railway people have been sued for \$6,000 by Halton county and are retaliating by refusing to stop trains at any stations in Halton. The Halton people have got legal advice that the action of the railway authorities is illegal and that they can compel the latter to stop their trains. The county council of Halton consulted its solicitors, Bain, Laidlaw & Co., of Toronto, as to the legality of the action, and the lawyers have advised that the company's course is clearly illegal. The result will be that another action against the Grand Trunk will be instituted without delay unless the obnoxious order is revoked, and Halton County has so much good fortune already with its law that it is encouraged to go ahead. Hamilton merchants whose trade is suffering from the railway's policy will wish the county success in its appeal to the courts in this case, even if they do not entirely sympathize with the action which is at the root of the difficulty.