

THE ANT VS. THE OCTOPUS.



SEVERAL times during the past twelve months THE DRY GOODS REVIEW has pointed out that the small retailer was being crushed out by the departmental store, and that the latter was a product of the mercantile evolution which is now going on. Naturally enough the small city retailer declined to acknowledge that his death was but a matter of time, and the ideas were received by a large number with a certain amount of disdain. But during the past month much additional light has been thrown on the subject by the various commercial papers and others interested in the matter, and the opinions expressed by this journal have been amply verified. It has been pointed out that about twenty five per cent. of the stores in Toronto's 27 miles of shop frontage are vacant, and with no prospect of tenants. The effect of this is more severely felt in the dry goods trade than in any other. The grocers have not felt the effect because the large stores cannot handle groceries to much advantage, yet even here the process of centralization is going on although much more slowly. The retailers of boots and shoes have felt the change much more, but the custom derived from repairing tends to continue the stores run by practical shoemakers. The vendors of meat, green grocers, and fruit dealers have been unmolested. The booksellers have felt the effects of the centralization very much and this, combined with the fact that Toronto now supplies free text-books to the pupils in the public schools, has crushed out the small bookseller almost entirely, while the larger ones are suffering from decreased trade. The small fancy goods dealer will soon be a thing of the past. The small millinery stores are fast lessening in numbers; and though there are circumstances peculiar to millinery which is made up of custom trade, that tends to keep these stores in existence, yet they are doomed to lessen still more both in number and importance. The men's furnishers and the hatters are suffering, as are the dealers in retail fur goods. This latter class have suffered more in Montreal than in Toronto; but in both places the larger stores are drawing to themselves nearly the whole of the trade and the small city hatter and furrier will soon be a matter of history in point of importance. In the case of the small general dry goods dealer, the change is most apparent. Figures to support this have been quoted in previous issues.

The men formerly engaged in these mercantile operations have drifted into other employments, but it is the real estate men who are suffering most at present. The empty stores with a flat above in which its occupants formerly lived are not readily turnable into residences, nor are their locations suitable even if they could be made into dwelling houses. The consequence is that the market value is shrinking, much to the discomfort of the owners. Rents have dropped very considerably in the case of stores still occupied by small dealers, and thus the shrinking is generally felt. There seems no way out of the difficulty, as no remedy can be proposed or carried into effect. It is a case where the owners of such property must suffer in their helplessness. Twenty-five years from now there will not be as many stores in Toronto as there are to-day, even if the city be double the size, and much the same can be said of other Canadian cities. Centralization must necessarily go on, because the larger stores can supply goods at less prices, and people will go where they are forced to pay the least. The introduction of a

faster and cheaper street car service has combined to help this centralization. There will always be a good trade in the centre of each city, and then smaller centres may be established at a distance, say, of two miles from the central business portion. But between these centres the smaller stores will ultimately go out of existence, or, if they remain in existence, their owners will do small business in specialties or in lines in which their personal skill is a material factor. With an electric street car service, a distance of two miles to a shopping centre is not a thing which presents sufficient difficulty, discomfort, loss of time or cost, to deter any shopper from undertaking the journey.

In the larger towns and smaller cities the small dealer is at a disadvantage, but not to the same extent as in the larger cities; but even here the tendency to combine more than one business under the same roof is appreciable.

The question then naturally presents itself: Is the tendency to centralization one which is desirable? Theoretical economy would answer that it is, because it cheapens the goods which the consumer requires, and consequently enables him to purchase more or better goods. But this looks only to the ultimate result. It is in the process of change that the blighting influence of this centralization is felt. Those who lose by the change must continue to lose while the change is being accomplished, and all trade necessarily suffers in sympathy. Still no matter what the suffering, the change seems unavoidable, but if the inevitableness of this be pointed out and acted upon intelligently much suffering can be avoided. The matter is one that should be thoroughly ventilated and studied with regard to all its probable and possible effects.

APRIL IMPORTS.

THE following figures show some imports for the month ending April 30th:

	1893.	1892.
Cotton, manufactures of.....	\$404,706	\$341,930
Fancy goods.....	130,619	138,808
Hats, Caps and Bonnets.....	115,137	129,065
Silks, manufactures of.....	192,124	191,124
Woollen manufactures.....	705,595	619,197

In these classes of goods every class shows an increase over April of last year except fancy goods. A peculiar thing is the fact that silk imports for the month increased exactly \$1,000.

The total imports into Canada for the month, including both dutiable and free goods, amounted to \$9,389,800. In April of last year the amount was \$7,975,200. This shows a healthy increase, and other parts of Canadian trade show a corresponding prosperity. Just here the following quotations will be opportune:

"Canada has risen very much in the estimation of British and continental manufacturers during the past few months. Hitherto Australia has been petted and made much of by the European manufacturers. They got all the favors, while Canadians were looked upon as the poor relation. The manufacturers looked upon Canada as a God-forsaken country where bears and Indians predominate. However, Canadian buyers worked cautiously, seldom or ever overbought and paid their debts in full. They said nothing but bided their time, knowing what the result would be. The recent total financial collapse of the whole Australian colonies has come upon the Europeans like a thunderbolt, and they are now running after Canadian buyers who go over there. In the past Canadians had to look for manufacturers; now they quietly sit at the hotels and the manufacturers