

ARE THE RETAILERS LOSING THEIR HOLD?

The Trade Passing Into Other Hands—Profits Are Being Reduced—Toronto a Great Distributing Centre—Some Letters—Remedies Suggested and Asked For.

A GREAT question is agitating the minds of thinking booksellers, news-dealers, and fancy goods dealers as to the future of the retail trade. There are signs that their business is decaying, and that other hands are doing the work and getting the profit that once was theirs. With a view of waking up the part of the trade that are *calmly sleeping on the brink of oblivion*, we discuss this question in some of its bearings and quote some opinions.

THE NEWS BUSINESS.

As we have pointed out in previous issues, the news business, so far as Canadian papers and periodicals are concerned, is fast passing into the hands of a class of bright newsboys, who are making good money out of it. They are usually energetic little fellows with bright faces and winning ways, and they can sell two copies of Grip to one sold by the dealer—yes, sometimes ten. They hustle with the Chicago Blade, the Detroit Free Press, the Buffalo Express, the Saturday Globe, the Toronto Saturday Night, the Sunday World, the Montreal Sunday papers, etc., and they are doing the newsdealers up.

MECHANICS' INSTITUTE LIBRARIES.

There was a time when mechanics' institute libraries were bought through the booksellers, but very few orders come that way now. The change occurred in this way. A town would have a slow bookseller, who was not fit to be trusted to execute an order with despatch, and consequently a member of the board of directors would place the order with some city firm. The city firm tasted fresh blood, and longed for more. So it has gone on and on, until the libraries are mostly supplied from the cities. The bookseller who doesn't look alive finds this trade in some other man's hands. It is not a case of larger discounts, but simply a case where energy and business tact are put on trial, and where the best man wins.

What is the remedy? The remedy depends on the town and the bookseller. Every bookseller can sell his town library all its books if he is smart enough. If he isn't smart enough to think out a scheme, he had better get out of business. One dealer in Western Ontario—Brantford—supplies his library with the books as they are issued. He never allows anything to drift out of his way. A live man always has success and always deserves it.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LIBRARIES.

Much the same can be said concerning Sunday school libraries. Once the retailers had all the trade. Then a wholesale house began to give 20 per cent. discount to Sun-

day schools, then others joined in and it came down to 25, and then 30, and now it is 33½ per cent. Then somebody started to send out double the quantity to every school, and this is a terrible feature.

Certainly this is not the booksellers' fault entirely. It is the fault, to a certain extent, of the wholesalers. One began and the others followed. And now things are cut so fine, that not a jobber in general literature for Sunday schools will admit that there is any money in it, and more than one man has failed.

During the past few months many letters have arrived at this office complaining of certain and various actions of the wholesale houses. In every case we have tried to investigate these cases and show the wholesale houses how they were injuring the trade. All these letters have not been published, but they have been in substance laid before the wholesalers, and the effect cannot fail to be beneficial.

This month we have received a letter from a prominent bookseller complaining of a circular sent out by the Methodist Book and Publishing House, and especially of two clauses in it. These were to the effect that Sunday schools need not send money with their orders as they would be trusted, and that double the quantity of books needed would be sent and could be returned at the senders' expense. Here is the letter we received:

EDITOR BOOKS AND NOTIONS:

SIR,—Can you in your wisdom inform us how it is possible for the retail booksellers of this Dominion to establish a healthy and profitable state of business when prominent wholesalers scatter such documents abroad? Is it fair to the trade to have a firm like this trying to draw the trade from the local dealers? Is it a healthy state of affairs to induce customers to come to you by offering terms like sections 6 and 7?

How long are the retailers going to submit to the dual position of this firm, loading up the dealer on one hand and unfairly coaxing their customers not to buy from them on the other hand? What can be done? Do you consider it a fair deal?

Yours truly,

Several complaints have reached us of the actions of the Copp, Clark Co. in much the same way. A recent complaint was regarding a very low quotation on Blackie & Co.'s books.

Here is a card from a man in a small store with a small stock:

SABBATH SCHOOL LIBRARIES.

Publications of Presbyterian Board of Publication, Philadelphia; Religious Tract Society, London, England; Nelson & Son, Edinburgh, Scotland; Blackie & Son, Edinburgh, Scotland, etc., etc.

If you wish to replenish your Sabbath school library I will be glad to send you a quantity of books from which an excellent choice can be made. You may order twice the quantity required, and after making selection return those not needed at my expense. The discount to schools on the Presbyterian Board's books is 25 per cent., and on Religious Tract Society's, Nelson's, Blackie's, etc., 33½. In ordering kindly say whether you wish all of one publisher's books or an assortment from each.

N. T. WILSON,

12 King St. W., Toronto, Ont.

We show all the cases to show that wholesale houses are all the same, offer practically the same discounts, and take orders direct whenever they can get them. They proceed on the rule that "If we don't, someone else will," and play the old excuse: "Well, the other fellow did it, and we had to."

SCHOOL MAPS AND SUPPLIES.

School maps and supplies from another line which dealers sometimes supply, but which can be bought direct at a discount. Very few dealers have been able to hold this business. It has drifted into the hands of those who make a specialty of supplying boards of trustees direct. At least three firms in Toronto specialize on this.

We have been referring only to small schools in towns, villages and country sections. In the cities it is different. Here the boards mostly buy not only school supplies but scholar's supplies direct from the jobber. This means a wiping out of a large amount of retail trade. In Toronto two score of small stores handling these goods have gone out of business, and the jobbers now wrangle for the contracts at fractional advances on cost.

THE REMEDIES.

What are the remedies? The most natural remedy and the most prevalent remedy is "combination." If the retailers could and would combine they could educate the trade to resist invasions of their rights and to make such improvements in business methods as would render invasions of their unnecessary.

But we are much afraid that such a combination, no matter how desirable, is practically impossible owing to the lack of esprit an corps, the prevalence of selfish feelings, and the extra exertions required. If an association of retailers were formed and properly conducted, it would do much for both wholesaler and retailer, making business more satisfactory to both. We believe that what ever helps the retailers and gives him increased trade, is helpful to the wholesaler. We believe that the wholesalers recognize