

## EPILOGUE

DESPITE COMPETITION from the department stores, the chain stores and the super-markets the corner grocery continues in business. Lately it has been encouraged by the decision of some of the big stores to go out of groceries and meats. Despite refrigeration, the wastage continues to exist for fruits, vegetables and meats are more perishable, let us say, than boots and watches and they take up a great deal more room. In addition, the super-markets competition has shaved profits from the grocery departments in the big general stores.

The corner store continues to give the special service that it always gave. It provided credit. It is open when its big rivals are closed. It is a neighbourhood centre for gossip. It is the only place where at the last minute one can buy a pound of butter or a loaf of bread. It was meant for emergencies, and experience has shown that a great percentage of the events in the ordinary householder's life is made up of emergencies. In the matter of standard brands and packaged goods it can sell what the big stores sell, and at about the same price. If the increase amounts to a couple of cents a pound the ordinary buyer will think that the extra convenience to him is worth it. In the course of the years a relationship of respect and even friendship can be established by the corner store. The interdependence of store and customer is much plainer than it is between the big store and the customer. It is plain that one cannot survive without the other so it is in the interests of each that both should prosper.

Not long ago there was a survey made in the United States which showed that the enterprising small butcher or grocer had no reason to fear the competition of the chain store. He was at many obvious disadvantages but in the matter of human relationship he had something that the employee of a chain store, however competent and courteous lacked and could never acquire.

The corner grocer is never likely to get rich a fact that is likely further to endear him to the customer. Now and then he may go broke; but as often as not he will get further credit and as a result of a former unhappy experience will conduct his affairs more wisely in the future. The life is not too strenuous. The grocer, if he has the right kind of wife and a couple of half-grown children, can have another job while the family looks after the store. Thus there is a double income. No more has he to wrestle with barrels of sugar or molasses or bags of potatoes for the quantity of things he sells at one time is likely to be minute.

Nor is it beyond the bounds of possibility that some time or other by dint of business sense and energy he can leave the little store and become the head of a chain of stores. This has happened in Toronto. The son of a corner bakery is now one of the most important businessmen in the British Empire. A man who took over Radcliffe's store and failed became the head of one of the biggest grocery chains in Canada. Even when worst comes to the worst and the defeated corner grocer has to give up and go back to work he will have accumulated a rich experience to flavour his subsequent

reminiscences. Good luck to him, say I. Of all those mentioned in this chronicle only four survive -Sir Thomas White, Miss Margery-Hutchison, a cousin, my brother Thomas Cauldwell McAree and myself. Of those who at one time or other drew sustenance, spiritual or material, from the Cabbagetown store none ever got into any serious trouble. None of them was ever an inmate of any institution, mental or reformatory. One became a millionaire. Without exception they were warm hearted hardworking, decent people, none of whom ever looked to the government or any organized charity for any help in time of trouble. They helped themselves and they helped each other. As I said earlier they were the kind of people who helped build Toronto from a time when the population was fewer than 100,000 until now when citizens, many of whom have been born since these pioneers returned to dust, are now thinking gloatingly of a city area numbering more than a million. They would, I think, have adapted themselves to a metropolitan city as they adapted themselves from little farms in Ireland or Canada to the growing city where they established themselves, and, in the circle touched by their lives, their principles and simple religious beliefs. But like the writer they would have found Toronto a less pleasant place in which to live. They would have been dismayed to think that even in a motor car it might take them the best part of an hour to visit a friend on the other side of the town. They would have missed their back-fence conversations in the days when their neighbours were their friends and not simply people who happened to live nearby.

But Aunt Polly, I think would have enjoyed television. She had an extraordinary capacity for adapting herself to any new experience or any new situation. She would feel in her ancient wisdom that after all there were no new things to the human heart, and if those she loved liked the new fangled ways then she too would love them for their sake.