

the Dominion. It was brought in principally by our enterprising millers, who ground it into flour, and shipped it again to the English and American markets. It is to be presumed they made a profit by the transaction, and the country must have been benefitted by its manufacture in our midst, and by the employment given during its transportation from the West, both to our Railway and Navigation lines. So far from regarding with jealousy Canadian purchases of American produce, we consider such transactions a profitable branch of our annual trade, and deserving of encouragement.

COMMERCIAL TRAVELLERS—THEIR USES AND FAULTS.

What is a commercial traveller? "A mercantile or commercial agent, who travels to obtain orders for goods, or selling goods on commission," says a good authority. But if it were required to define what a Commercial Traveller, properly, ought to be, in view of the enlargement of their functions among us at the present day, or the extent of the responsibility thrown upon them, the definition would be neither so brief nor so simple. We will attempt to describe what, in the opinion of sound and experienced merchants, a Canadian commercial traveller, of to-day ought to be, to fulfill properly the duties assigned him. He should have, first, a good business training, in things great and small pertaining to business generally; a technical knowledge of the particular branch in which he is employed; he should be a judge of goods, and aware of the process of making such manufactured articles as he sells. He should be a judge of character and of sufficient shrewdness not to be outwitted by the close, keen buyers, or the cunning "dead-beats" he is pretty sure to encounter. He ought to possess a knowledge of the country, or at least the part he travels, its requirements, its products and its capacities; to have judgment enough to perceive an overstock, to scent a failure afar off, or on the contrary, to see the opportunity for the extension of trade in a new district safely, or for selling a round parcel to a safe man. Above all, the true commercial traveller should be a man of good morals, good habits and good manners, the standard for which is, we presume, sufficiently established to need no elaboration from us.

There are estimated to be 1,500 commercial travellers in the Dominion, possibly more, now that St. John and Halifax warehousemen find it necessary to resort to them, to prevent their trade drifting into the hands of Montreal or Quebec men, and considering that there are no small number of sellers for

British houses going in and out amongst us. How many of these are worthy of the name? how many possess the experience or the judgment, the business knowledge, technical or general, to fit them for the post? One in ten? Well, let us be charitable, and take the estimate of a liberal, conservative wholesaler, who said, "twenty per cent. of them may do;" the obvious meaning is that the other eighty per cent. won't do—won't do any good. Selling goods by travellers is overdone, done to death, from Windsor, Ont., to Sydney, C.B., and a great cause of the ills that flow from it is, as well the pressure by competing merchants to sell, as the poor unthinking material they get to do the selling. If competent people were always employed to take orders, people who paid some heed to the requirements of the village or town, or their customer, and who were both willing and able to give some advice to him, concerning the quantity or assortment he should buy, we would hear less of the overbuying and consequent excessive competition in the country retail trade. Many a wholesaler who knows better, if he but took time to think the matter over, will send out in a dull time, or pending an overstock, his junior salesman with a set of samples, "to see what he can do," in the way of selling goods, give him *carte blanche* almost as to whom he shall call on, and send the goods upon his crude and hastily formed opinion, as to the desirability of such sales as he makes. But worse than this, a false economy is practiced in hiring cheap men for this important business. We have heard of cases—we hope they are exceptions—in which school-teachers *minus* business training; youthful tyros whose only apprenticeship had been served in a commercial college; and broken-down country traders, who through indolence or ignorance had made a mess of their own affairs, have been furnished with sets of samples and appointed to the position of virtual dispensers of credit because they offered to work cheap. "It is an easy matter to sell goods," many tell you; "and any one can do it"; granted, too easy altogether, but to sell goods discriminatingly in proper quantity to good men only, involves some knowledge and ability on the part of the seller. Besides, Commercial Travelers now-a-days often have other functions assigned to them than the mere selling of goods; they are required sometimes to take stock in a customer's premises; analyze his books, and report upon them; to advise with an embarrassed debtor about his affairs; or they may be telegraphed to retrace their steps a hundred miles or two, to represent their principals at a meeting of creditors. The more need, therefore, that they should be men of sense and experience; not greenhands, not reckless men, who think

only of their commission; not drunkards, who spend their evenings indulging in liquor for the sake of sociability, so-called, and must have more liquor in the mornings to stimulate their overtaken digestives. It may be said that proper men are scarce, and that therefore, inferior hands must be taken. To this we reply that there are good men enough for the wants of the country, to be obtained for a respectable salary; the trade of Canada by no means needs so many travellers, and the surplus are but working harm. When a merchant wants a book-keeper, he does not take one for the post hap-hazard, because he is cheap and wants work. He enquires carefully into his training, his habits and reliability, feeling that grave responsibilities rest upon him, and that the success of the business may be greatly affected by his competency or otherwise. It ought to be quite as much the case with travellers, whose discretionary power is even greater than that of a book-keeper, while he is removed, the most of his time from the oversight of his employer, who has his book-keeper day by day under his eye.

Commercial travellers in Britain are, as a rule, men of middle age, well versed in business, sound of judgment, and many of them are cultivated gentlemen besides. It is probably true that the same standard is not needed here, the conditions of trade being different: as it is true that Old Country rules will not apply here, circumstances being materially altered. Nor must we look to the "drummers" of the United States for a pattern, if pattern there must be, with their continual "push trade, drive ahead, overreach the other fellow and make a sale; if the concern bursts to-day, we'll help him up to-morrow; it's a free country."

But among the best business minds of this country, there is no question that selling by commercial travellers is overdone, and that these forced sales bring about more insolvency than anything else. Many conservative merchants long set their faces against employing travelling salesmen, contending that it would bring about abuses and overtrading, until compelled to it by their trade being diverted to houses who did; and there are numbers who deplore the injudicious lengths to which the system has been carried, and the unbusiness-like, not to say discreditable, means sometimes employed in it. For this and other reasons, there is a strong feeling that the abandonment of the whole system would be a wise step. One prominent house in Ontario has ventured on this course, and does not seem to suffer any loss of business in consequence.

Strictly well-qualified commercial travellers may be a valuable adjunct to legitimate trade. They will always be in good demand,