

Soliciting Business.

A grain dealer and merchant in southern Manitoba writes The Commercial complaining of the custom which has developed in the trade of sending men out among the farmers to solicit business. Our correspondent modestly asks that his name be withheld. The letter is as follows:

"For the last few years the grain men have allowed their buyers to go into the country and solicit business. Last year this was done at Whitewater. One of the dealers, however, would not do this, neither would he go off his platform to wrangle and dispute about prices, but took what came to him, in some cases paying more than was offered in the country the day before by the canvassers.

Now this foolish custom is a great expense to all concerned as each dealer had to have an extra man for street and country work.

Last April a dealer started in his store taking orders for binder cord. He did not see a man outside of his office. Within a week an outside firm employed a farmer to canvass the whole district. As soon as the dealer knew this he reduced the price of twine to a point that no outside merchant could touch without actual loss, and to-day is delivering cord at such a small profit that it is certainly a loss for the outside men to compete with. The dealer has no canvassing to pay for nor livery or horse hire, no extra work in delivering, no extra expense in collecting, is always on the ground and sees his customers every week, while the outside man had a man and team canvassing, and will require a man for days or weeks to deliver the goods. The same thing again, when he has to send a collector to get his money. The dealer cannot see why it should be necessary to send a man into the country to sell implements and cord any more than sugar, cotton, pork or potatoes."

So far as the implement trade is concerned, the custom of soliciting business among the farmers has become so thoroughly established that it could hardly result in much good to condemn the practice. At the same time, we believe it would be better for the farmers to refuse to place orders in this way. When they want an article they would probably be able to do better by going after it, and inspecting the various articles shown. If they have the money, they will certainly be able to buy to better advantage. They often buy articles which they really do not need, through the custom of soliciting, and to this extent at least the practice is an injury. The Commercial has always condemned the custom of buying from peddlers. In nine cases out of ten the farmer gets an inferior article in this way, at a higher price than he could buy for from a regular dealer.

As for the grain trade, there can be no excuse for the unbusinesslike custom of going into the country to solicit business. The farmer will have to pay for the increased cost of doing business in this way, as indeed he will have to do in the other lines of trade.

Business men cannot pay the extra expense of soliciting without charging something for it.

Porto Rico.

The island of Porto Rico is 3,668 square miles in extent. It is 95 miles long and 35 miles broad, and has a population, according to the latest figures, made in 1887, of 813,937, of which more than 300,000 are negroes. There are 137 miles of railway and about 150 miles of wagon road. All other travelling and transportation must be done by mules and riding horses. There are 470 miles of telegraph lines and telephone systems in the principal cities. In 1895 the total value of the imports was \$16,155,056 and of exports \$14,629,494. In 1887 the United States sent imports to the island to the value of \$2,181,024, and received exports valued at \$1,988,888. In 1896 the exports to Spain were \$5,423,760, and there was received from Spain \$7,328,880. There is a large tobacco crop now growing which promises well.

The principal city is San Juan, situated upon a small island connected with the main land by a bridge. At the other end of it are the high cliffs which support El Morro Castle. The harbor entrance is one of great difficulty except under the most favorable considerations, but a broad and beautiful bay is concealed beyond it. The smaller island is two and a quarter miles long and averages a quarter of a mile in width. The city is a complete walled town, with portcullis, moat, gat s and battlements. Although over 250 years old it is still in good condition.

Inside the walls the city is laid out in regular squares, six parallel streets running in the direction of the length of the island and seven at right angles. The houses are closely and compactly built of brick, usually of two stories, stuccoed on the outside and painted in a variety of colors. The upper floors are occupied by the more respectable people, while the ground floors, almost without exception, are given up to negroes and the poorer class, who crowd upon one another in the most appalling manner. The population within the walls is estimated at 20,000, and most of it lives on the ground floor, where everything reeks with filth and conditions are most unsanitary. The entire population depends upon rain water caught upon the flat roofs of the buildings and conducted to the cistern, which occupies the greater part of the inner courtyard, while vaults occupy whatever remaining space there may be in the patios.

Epidemics are frequent, and the town is alive with vermin, fleas, cockroaches, mosquitoes and dogs. The streets are wider than in the older part of Havana, and will admit of two carriages abreast. They are swept once a day by hand, and are kept clean. The soil under the city furnishes a good natural drainage. The trade wind blows strong and fresh, and through the harbor runs a stream of sea water at a speed of not less than three miles an hour. With these conditions, no contagious diseases if properly taken care of could exist.

There are several small suburbs without the walled city, and the total population was estimated at 30,000 in 1896. There is little manufacturing, and that of small importance. The Standard Oil Company has a small refinery and there is an electric light plant. The climate is warm, and

except for three months agreeable. There are sudden changes and much lung trouble, especially among the natives.

Ponce is the second city of importance. It is situated on the south coast about two miles from the seaboard and has a population of about 15,000. It is the residence of the military commander and the seat of an official chamber of commerce. There is a Catholic church and the only Protestant church in the Spanish West Indies. The inhabitants are principally occupied in mercantile pursuits. Its seaport is Playa, a town of 5,000 inhabitants, where vessels of twenty-five feet draft can be accommodated in the harbor. This is said to be the healthiest spot on the island.

Mayaguez, the third city, is situated in the west part, facing Mona Channel. There are three manufacturing of chocolate for local consumption. Sugar, coffee, oranges, pineapples, and coconuts are exported largely—all except coffee, principally to the United States. Of sugar the muscovado goes to the United States and the centrifugal to Spain. Mayaguez is the second port for coffee, the average annual export being 170,000 hundredweights. About 50,000 bags of flour are imported into this port every year from the United States. The population is nearly 20,000, the majority white. The climate is excellent, the temperature never exceeding 90 degrees F.

Aguadilla, in the northwest portion of the island, has 5,000 inhabitants. In the town are three establishments for preparing coffee for exportation. The climate is hot, but healthy.

Arecibo, with 7,000 inhabitants, is situated on the north coast. The harbor is poor, being nothing more than an open roadstead. Goods are conveyed on the river to and from the town in flat-bottomed boats, with the aid of long poles. At the bar of the river everything is again transferred into lighters and thence to vessels.

Fajardo has a population of 8,779. The town is about one and one-quarter miles from the bay. The only important industry of the district is the manufacture of muscovado sugar. Shooks, hickory hoops, pine boards, and provisions come from the United States in considerable quantities. Sugar and molasses are exported, and occasionally tortoise shell. The climate is temperate and healthy.

Naguabo is a town of 2,000 inhabitants. The capital of the department, Humacao, is nine miles distant, and has 4,000 inhabitants—the district comprising more than 15,000.

Arroyo is a seaport of 1,200 inhabitants. The annual exports to the United States average 7,000 to 10,000 hogsheads of sugar, 2,000 to 5,000 casks of molasses, and 50 to 150 casks and barrels of bay rum.

The Cocksbutt Plow Company, of Brantford, Ont., have had a very busy season this year. The demand for their goods having been so great that it has necessitated an enlargement of their factory, as with the present accommodation they have not been able to turn out the goods fast enough. An addition 145 feet long and five stories high is being built to the factory. Mr. Mott, manager at Winnipeg for the company, says that with this large increase in the capacity of the factory, he hopes to meet the requirements of the western trade more promptly than they have been able to do this season, on account of the great demand for their goods.