

This subject has been under consideration at this office for months back, and to reach undeniable facts a reliable representative of The Commercial spent most of the month of April and a portion of May in visiting the different towns and villages of Manitoba, interviewing country merchants in a general way as to causes for complaint, and eliciting opinions of such merchants on the freight rates they had to pay on inbound freight. The following is his report in full, and it is well worthy of a perusal, especially by those who are a little too ready to complain without cause:—

Following is the result of some inquiries which I made, while travelling through Manitoba recently, with a view to finding out retail prices and the conditions affecting them for such lines of dry goods, groceries, clothing, boots and shoes, hardware, etc., as the farmers buy most of. The period covered by these inquiries was April 5th to May 3rd.

In all I visited 10 different places—the market towns of the most important and thickly settled district, so that the prices and facts given may be taken as applicable to all Manitoba. I found prices at all these points to be practically the same, the only substantial differences being in places where local jealousies among the merchants were resulting in outs.

While making these inquiries I also obtained the opinions of the merchants in the matter of inbound freights, with a view to determining whether there existed in the province any real dissatisfaction or not, and found that with few exceptions they consider them reasonable and satisfactory. Several of those whom I talked with went into the matter fully, and explained that the only grievances the country had were on the outbound rates for grain and the local rates from Winnipeg. Several mentioned the fact that the Company has the long haul from North Bay to Rat Portage over a part of the road from which scarcely any business arises, to take into account when fixing the through all rail rate, and naturally this has to be operated at the expense of other parts. Those merchants who complained of the inbound rates were as I learned on closer enquiry from men who buy principally in Winnipeg in all lines and who consequently pay the proportionately higher local rates. In the few cases where I found dissatisfaction with the through rates, I endeavored to ascertain the ground, and usually, in fact always, it turned out to be politics rather than business.

Some individual opinions may be helpful in this connection. Following are some, as they appear in my note book, but without the merchants' names:—

A Carman hardware merchant thinks the rates on inbound goods in his line as low as can be expected.

A Carman general merchant thinks the rates on goods in his line from Montreal or Toronto are not too high. He estimates that of the retail price of goods 5 per cent. represents freight and from ten to 15 per cent. the increase due to the credit system.

Another Carman general merchant believes the freight rates to be too high in every way.

A Deloraine grocer expressed the opinion that the country is being very fairly dealt with in the matter of inbound rates. (This man appeared to be better posted on the subject than any I had met up to that time; he had the whole business down fine and his opinion is especially valuable as he confines himself to groceries, the line of goods above all others about which complaints are made.)

A Deloraine general merchant expressed himself as being satisfied with the Montreal and Toronto rates, but he condemned the local rates from Winnipeg.

A general merchant of Manitou pronounced the eastern rates satisfactory, but complained of the local rates.

The leading merchants of Killarney spoke favorably of the through rates but unfavorably of the local.

A long established and well known general merchant of Morden thinks that the country has no reason to complain of the rates charged on merchandise coming in. He said that all the reduction the C. P. R. could make would not lower the cost of the farmers' supplies to him, as the difference would only amount to the smallest fraction of a cent on such goods as he buys most of. The merchant would reap any benefit there might be.

Portage la Prairie merchants did not seem to feel that there is any ground for kicking in this matter.

A Carberry furniture dealer pronounced the rates on his goods away too high. In some cases the freight amounts to more than the original cost of the article. He recognized, however, that this was the case because furniture as a rule is very light in comparison with its bulk and accordingly has to pay special rates.

In towns west of Brandon I found only a very few dissatisfied merchants.

One result of my inquiries which will help greatly the understanding of this subject is the estimate of the merchants as to the percentage of the selling price of goods, which is cost of carriage. Most merchants calculate that taking a stock of general goods all round about five per cent of the retail price would cover this. Taking the different lines of goods the general opinion seemed to be that on dry goods from 3 to 4 per cent. of the selling price is freight, on clothing 5 per cent., boots and shoes 7½ per cent., and on groceries 5. It must be borne in mind when considering this matter of prices in the light of percentages that the cheap goods are generally the heaviest, and therefore pay the most for freight.

I found the retail prices for all lines such as I enquired about to be substantially the same at all points. The difference in the freight charges between one point and another is so very trifling when considered from a retail point of view that it makes no difference at all to the consumer, although it probably amounts to considerable on the merchants' receipts of goods for a year. The difference between the credit and cash prices for goods amounts to about 10 per cent. Most merchants have a regular credit price marked on the goods, and on this they give a discount of 10 per cent. for cash on everything except groceries and boots and shoes, on these they give 5 per cent off. The following may be taken as the prevailing prices for the articles mentioned throughout the province:—

#### GROCERIES.

Granulated sugar .....	16 to 19 lbs for \$1.00.
Light brown sugar .....	18 to 20 lbs for \$1.00.
Japan teas .....	25, 30, 35 and 40
per lb.	
Black teas .....	Same.
Salt, per bbl .....	\$2 to 2.75.
" in 3 lb bags .....	3 and 4 for 25c.
Syrup in 1 gal. pails ...	70 to 90c (2 qualities).
" 2 .....	\$1.25 to 1.50
Syrup in bulk .....	5, 6, 7, and 8c.
Canned vegetables .....	12½ cents per 2 lb tin.
" fruit .....	20 to 25c
" salmon .....	20c, Horseshoe brand.
" .....	12½ to 15c other brands
Dried currants .....	10 to 12½c per lb.
Raisins .....	10 to 12½c per pound.
Prunes .....	10 to 14 lbs. for \$1.00
Dried apples .....	10 cents per pound.
Matches .....	15 cents per box.
Coal oil (Canadian) ....	25 to 30 cents per gal.
" " (United States) ..	35 cents sunlight.
" " " .....	40 cents Eocene.
Lard .....	15 cents per pound.
Cheese .....	15 cents per pound.

#### DRY GOODS.

Flannelettes .....	8 to 15c per yard.
Prints .....	8 to 15c " "
Shirtings .....	10 to 15c " "
Grey Flannel .....	20 to 40c " "
Factory Cotton .....	5 to 12½c " "

#### CLOTHING.

Mens' suits ..	\$8.00 to \$15.00 Canadian tweeds.
Underclothing 1 25 to	1.75 per suit (coarse kinds.)
Outside shirts ..	.50 to 1.75 in flannelettes and cottonades.
Socks .....	6 to 8 pairs for \$1.00 (woolen.)
Overalls .....	\$1.00 to \$1.25.

#### BOOTS AND SHOES.

Red leather, ha. vest shoe ...	\$1.00 to \$1.50
Black, split, boots .....	1.25 to 1.50
Black boot, in grains and kips ..	1.50 to 2.50
Long boots .....	2.25 to 5.50

#### HAIRDWARE.

Cut nails .....	5c per lb., \$4 per cwt., 8d
Wire nails .....	6c " \$5 " "
Hoes .....	40 to 50 cents
Rakes .....	40 to 50 cents
Hay forks .....	50 to 60 cents
Stable forks .....	75 cents to \$1.00

A few instances of how the freight charges appear in relation to these selling prices may be helpful here.

At a town on the southwestern branch of the C. P. R. I bought a yard of flannelette piece goods, such as a farmer's wife would buy to make a dress for herself or for a child. It is of a kind that could be put to numerous uses. The regular credit price for this was 12½ cents, but for cash it can be bought for 10 cents. According to the merchant's calculation, ¼ of a cent per yard would cover the freight on this goods from Montreal. Taking that amount as correct, it will be seen that the freight on enough of this goods to make a dress for a woman would not amount to more than 2 or 2½ cents, or less than it costs to send a letter the same distance. At a point on the Souris line I purchased a yard of print such as would be used to make a dress. This also cost 10 cents, and the same calculation for freight will hold good. At a point on the Pembina Mountain branch I secured a sample of grey flannel which sells at 30 cents a yard cash or 35 cents on credit. This is of a quality suitable for women and children's wear or for men's shirts. The merchant told me that between ¼ and ½ a cent per yard would lay this down from Montreal.

At Oak Lake, on the main line, I examined some men's suits, such as a farmer would buy for general use. One was shown me which sells for \$10.00, the exact weight of which was 6½ lbs. The merchant said that these came in cases of fifty suits, the cases weighing when empty 100 lbs. This would give two pounds of case freight to each suit. The suit I examined would thus have to pay for 8½ lbs. in all. The rate charged on clothing to Oak Lake from Montreal or Toronto, "Lake and Rail" route is \$1.96 per 100 lbs., or roughly 2 cents per lb. This suit or 8½ lbs. would therefore cost to lay down at Oak Lake 17 cents, a trifling amount in comparison with the selling price. Other suits which I had weighed at different points ranged from 3½ to 5½ lbs, according to quality.

At the same place I examined a pair of boots such as a farmer would wear in all kinds of weather in the summer. These weighed 3 lbs exactly. They also, according to the merchant's calculation, would have to pay 2 lbs of case freight, making 5 lbs in all. The rate on these would be the same as the clothing, 2 cents per lb; 10 cents would therefore be the freight on this particular pair. The merchant's cash price for them was \$1.60. Of course, finer lines of boots and shoes would cost very much less than these.

It is not so easy to figure out the freight on groceries, for the reason that, as I have already said, most of the grocery stocks are bought in Winnipeg, and consequently pay two kinds of rates before they reach the consumer, the carload lot rate from Montreal to Winnipeg, and the less than carload lot local rate from there. Making as close a calculation as I can, however, I find that the rate on a dollar's worth of granulated sugar to furthest points in Manitoba

(Continued on page 910.)