

SWARMING PEDLERS FURNISH A PUZZLE HARD TO SOLVE

Street Venders Who Make Market Places of City's Highways, Often to the Prejudice of Health and Traffic, Are Harassed Rather than Regulated at Present—They Belong to a Thousand Categories and Comparatively Few of Them Bother About Getting Licenses.

By W. M. HOUGHTON.

POR OLD FATHER KNICKERBOCKER is forever discovering that one sort of congestion begets another. Now that he has too many people and too high rents and too much street traffic, he finds that these very things have bred a great surplus of street vendors whose peripatetic trading defies regulation, obstructs traffic and endangers the public health. It is just one thing after another in the life of our justly celebrated municipal parent.

It is inevitable, of course, that the streets of the richest and most crowded city in the world should become market places. The purchasing power represented by the restless multitudes which throng them offers too great a bait to the trading instinct so dominant in New York's population. But even more compelling are the exorbitant rents which storekeepers must stuff into their prices. The horse and wagon, the pushcart, the street stand or the basket pay little or no rent. The street vender can undersell the storekeeper, therefore, and hence he fills a decided economic want which will keep him in the street just as long as the housewife counts her pennies.

THEY HAVE LITTLE VALUE FROM THE TRAFFIC STANDPOINT.

Now, there is no doubt in the world that the streets of New York offer a much more picturesque appearance because of the presence of these highway traders scattered by thousands throughout her length and breadth. But pedlers do not help the progress of the fire apparatus plunging to the conflagration, or speed up the congested vehicular traffic, or, for that matter, add to the rest of the night worker, whose dreams of a summer morning are troubled with the blare of the scissors-grinder's bugle, the nasal wail of the ca-a-sh clo's collector, the hurdy-gurdy's metallic ragtime or the hoarse sing-song of the man who sell vegetables or fruit or flowers from a driverless wagon. From the blind man selling pencils and shoestrings up through bootblack, newsboy, street faker, pushcart pedler to and including the fruit stand man armed with his feather duster, it is a tribe which seems always under foot because to be so constitutes its stock in trade.

Then as a menace to health (perhaps the night-workers' broken slumber should be mentioned in this connection) the pedlers of foodstuffs and of clothes occupy a shelf by themselves. Grocery and butcher shops, delicatessen emporiums, ice cream parlors, all the countless dispensaries of food which have roofs over them and pay rent can be and are inspected from time to time by Health Department agents. Sweathouses and clothing stores must submit to a certain amount of supervision in this respect. But nobody knows where the pushcart pedler keeps over night the eggs or the fish or the vegetables he has been unable to dispose of, or where he purchased or where he stores the garments he offers daily for the minute inspection of would-be customers. His ability to move his store about at will also precludes any systematic inspection of his wares as they are offered for sale on his cart. In fact, the city has to-day no effective check either on the numbers or character of its pushcart pedlers, on whom hundreds of thousands of its poorer tenement dwellers depend largely for their supplies.

It is the pushcart pedler who presents by far the greatest problem. The Bureau of Licenses has divided the pedlers to whom it issues licenses into three classes—horse and wagon, pushcart and basket. To all three classes it has issued a total of 6,417 licenses, but Morris D. Waldman, head of the United Hebrew Charities, estimates

the street, provided each one changed its location at twenty-minute intervals. But this law was never enforced and the entire report of the commission was pigeonholed.

Then, in the summer of 1912, a special committee of the Board of Aldermen, headed by Alderman Brush, used its microscopes on this troublesome specimen of the human species, and in December of the same year Mayor Gaynor ap-

pointed a commission to perform the same task. The Mayor wrote one of his pithy letters to this commission, which consisted of R. A. C. Smith, chairman; Louis E. Miller, Morris D. Waldman, Michael Furst and William A. Cokerley, saying:

"The number of pushcarts in some localities seriously interrupts traffic on the streets. The litter of them also keeps the streets dirty. Their business also interferes with the business of neighboring shopkeepers, who pay rents. In many cases, however, these pushcart proprietors are paying large rent to abutting land owners for permission to have their pushcarts stand there.

"I see no reason why this should be so. Should it be permitted to continue? Are there too many pushcarts? Should they continue in the streets or should the city take them off the streets and provide markets or sheltered places for them to stand in? It is for you to open up the whole subject."

Well, both the aldermanic committee and the

ment that a human being of either sex might wear spread about on the sidewalk for lack of a stand. Particularly well preserved garments, some of the most intimate nature, are effectively displayed on a line hung against the fence.

If you exercised a little patience in bargaining, you could buy from her a pair of shoes for five cents, a coat for a quarter or a bit of silk for two cents. And it would all be pure profit to the expansive proprietress, for, as she explains, the clothes are given to her in winter by the people for whom she washes. She saves them up for the summer time, and while her patrons are away at the seashore supports herself until their return by selling their cast-off clothing.

IT EXPLAINS THE HIGH DEATH RATE OF THE QUARTER.

Picture to yourself the dirt of the street on which these garments rest and try to imagine the dirtiest corner of a dirty room to which she trundles them off for safekeeping at night and you may begin to realize why the foreign born population is noted for its high death rate. And it may make you wonder why the diseases they contract don't spread with more frequency into those parts of the city inhabited by what we are pleased to term the average New Yorker.

The scene shifts to one of the side streets just above 110th st., running west to Fifth av. It is a hot summer's night. The pushcart proprietors have pushed their carts homeward, but the street cleaners have not yet arrived. One approaches

through a strict sense of duty a mixed heap of fish heads, watermelon rinds, decayed peaches and other debris lying at the curb, the aftermath of a brisk trade. And swarming over the street in shrill play are smutty-faced, half naked children, while their parents sit on the doorsteps or lean from the tenement windows. As far west as Madison av. the gutter of that street impregnates the evening with its fetid odor of accumulated

refuse, and these men, women and children breathe it.

At the height of the trading hours in this street it is a common thing to see crates of fruit balanced on the top of overflowing garbage cans or to see piles of clothing spilling over on to the refuse. It is here, too, that eggs are bought by the smell. A woman approaches a small stand, one of the many abutting from a small shop or a tenement house entrance. On this stand are several boxes of eggs advertised at different prices. The careful housewife picks up one of the most expensive, say "ten for 15 cents," being attracted by the primitive eulogy of their freshness emerging in print from their midst. She finds a crack in the shell and then she sniffs at it appraisingly.

SOLID ROW UPON ROW OF PUSHCARTS LINED UP.

This street, like so many on the lower East Side, is a typical pushcart street. The roadway is narrowed to a little lane in the middle between solid rows of pushcarts lining either curb. The sidewalks are only wide enough for two persons to walk abreast because of the innumerable flimsy wooden stands which nestle against the tenement houses and shops and protrude forward as far as their proprietors dare. Some of the stands are old baby carriages and others simply boxes perched on convenient garbage cans. It is said that the proprietors of these stands pay rent to the storekeepers or tenement house proprietors in the front of whose buildings they carry on

their business. In front of one store on the lower East Side as many as ten stands were counted. And some of these streets are fire streets.

It is the presence of the pushcart men, which induces the erection of these stands. The pushcart pedlers make a given street their market place, and consequently attract to that street a much larger than normal crowd of shoppers. Immediately the stands spring up to get their share of customers in the crowd. Let the pushcart men make their rendezvous elsewhere and the stands would most of them vanish, too.

When Theodore Bingham was Police Commissioner he settled the problem for a large part of Harlem beautifully by corralling all the pushcart pedlers in the region under the New York Central viaduct, in Park av. There, unmolested and in comparative contentment, they plied their trades for two years, much to the satisfaction of every one concerned. But shortly after Commissioner Cropsey took office complaints began pouring in to the effect that in permitting these men to remain under the viaduct the Commissioner was breaking the law, which provided that they should be allowed to use the city streets only if they kept moving constantly. Mr. Cropsey found it necessary, therefore, to abolish this eminently satisfactory open air market and scatter the pushcarts once more.

But out of this successful experiment of General Bingham's has arisen the recommendations of both the aldermanic committee and the com-



AN OPEN-AIR MARKET ON THE EAST SIDE.



AT HER PLACE OF BUSINESS.

that Manhattan has between 5,500 and 6,000 pushcart pedlers alone, and Mr. Waldman knows as much about the pushcart situation as any one in the city. This means that considerably less than half the pushcart pedlers in the city have licenses 2,907, to be exact.

Mayor McClellan had the pushcart pedler investigated in 1906 by a commission. This commission recommended allowing four pushcarts to a block in those congested streets in which they naturally abound, these four to stand twenty feet from the corner in each case. In the less crowded streets it was proposed to let them stand all along

Gaynor administration made extended visits to the pushcart sections, to the lower East Side, to Greenwich Village and to Harlem, to see, to hear and to smell, and they saw and heard and smell what any normal citizen in the possession of his faculties could see and hear and smell to-day, two years later, in those very regions.

Let us take up first the Italian "market," which begins at First av. and 110th st. and spreads northward. The sidewalk there is bordered with a dirt pathway, and on this dirt pathway are spread all manner of second hand clothes and piles of dirty cotton wadding, taken from old com-

OLD AGE IS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

By W. B. BLAKE.

"**L**O! I am this day fourscore and five years old. And yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me; as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in." So spoke Caleb, the son of Jephunneh—and Dr. Holmes quoted his words in his "last paper on old age," written when he was himself four score years of age, and named as nonagenarians who retained their faculties Lord Lyndhurst, Sidney Bartlett and Josiah Quincy. I am not perfectly sure who Bartlett and Lyndhurst were, but we all of us remember that Quincy was president of Harvard College and Mayor of Boston, and some of us remember his marble effigy that stands in Sander's Theatre, Cambridge, dominating its academic stage. If Holmes were living to-day he might name among his vigorous old men Gladstone, Walt Whitman and himself—to say nothing of John Burroughs and William de Morgan, both of whom survive. Metchnikoff holds that old age is a specific disease that can be put off to one hundred and fifty years, and tells us that it is "repulsive at present because it is devoid of its true meaning; is full of egotism and narrowness." According to him, "the physiological old age of the future will be something very different. Perhaps it will be more like the hale antiquity of Caleb, son of Jephunneh.

The rarity of old folks is one of the things that strikes visitors to New York, and "I suppose there is no place in the country where people have such a dread of growing old as here," writes "Alcide" to a New York newspaper. I wonder. Old age has certainly been dreaded by the poets and prose writers, from the time of the Greek antiquaries down to Pierre Loti. Sainte-Beuve scored Chateaubriand for dreading the engulfing wave of years and for feeling ennuï even in his mother's womb; but this sentiment was no invention of Rene's—any more than it was Guy de Maupassant's. Morbidity about growing old is very far from being a woman's complaint, in spite of all the jokesmiths have said; perhaps it is in most cases only a reflex from unwise living. The Goncourts tell in their journal of a white-haired patron of the Cafe Riche, in Paris. The waiter recited his list of dishes, then uttered the hackneyed formula: "Monsieur desire ——" "I wish," faltered the

old man; "I wish—that I wished something!" For youth is desire. . . . Perhaps the old man hadn't wanted the best things in his youth. Most of us don't.

Not long ago Dr. Eliot, of Harvard, passed his eightieth birthday. According to my Boston newspaper he celebrated the day as he celebrates all other fair ones—by bicycling. I remember that when I was an undergraduate at Harvard—President Eliot was only seventy then—I used to meet him returning from his matutinal bicycle ride at the moment when I was making my desperate dash to Memorial Hall in the hope of reaching the door of the college commons before it closed for the morning between me—and breakfast. That was at 9 o'clock. It always gave me a slight shock of shame to think that this distinguished elder of mine had breakfasted so long before me, and had already done his daily stint of exercises, and was returning now to take up the serious work of the day at a time when my own eyes were still heavy with sleep. But then, I thought to myself, I am still young. There is plenty of time left for acquiring good habits. I might have known better! One grows worse instead of improving in this matter of rising. My only comfort now is to recall old Sam Johnson's resolutions. Almost every year he repeated them. But lying abed was his weakness to the very last. And he didn't live to Dr. Eliot's age, either.

It is curious how those who grow old ascribe their long life to some crochets of theirs which they share, as a matter of fact, with men who are booked for shorter lives, that may or may not prove merrier. We all know the ancient tectotaler who ascribes his preservation to his abstinence. Most of us know his contemporary who has drunk whiskey every day from his twentieth year and thinks his steady use of distilled spirits is what has kept him safe and sane. It is the same way with tobacco and red flannel underwear, taking exercise and wearing B V D's. But if a man thinks it helps him somehow to flood his insides with sour milk or plunge himself into ice water, and he survives this rough treatment, why disillusionize him? He may as well live a short life and a merry one after his own perverted fancy, and he harms no one else unless there are women and children dependent on him for sustenance. Dr. Eliot has the right of it, however, when he names as the habits most conducive to long life and activity "moderation in eating, a full allowance of sleep and no regular

use of any stimulant whatever." Harvard's ex-president used to drink wine in moderation; nowadays, at a time of life when many men have taken up drinking "for medicinal purposes," he has put the taboo upon alcohol, along with tea and coffee.

It is doubtful if any beverage but water was ever of much consequence to him; he has never needed them. The word temperance is written in his clear eye and steady hand and erect carriage. If Dr. Eliot had never made Harvard a great university, and in large measure directed the educational progress of America along the lines of development it followed for two generations in school and college, he would all the same be a master man by reason of his qualities of mind and body. But his character and his health have been built on one rock. There is no cure-all for moral or mental or physical diseases; no one valid prescription for growing old gracefully and well. One is likely to succeed in the job all the better for realizing these facts—and trying to be tolerant of others.

But if there is no cure-all there is at least wisdom of life. I have been reading the "Colloquies" of Erasmus, where some one observes that he would grow old "with the tiresomeness of living so long in the same place," though it were Rome itself. Here is the answer!

The changing of Place has indeed something of Pleasure in it; but then, as for long Travels, 'tho' perhaps they may add to a Man's Experience, yet they are liable to a great many Dangers. I seem to myself to travel over the whole World in a Map, and can see more in Histories than if I had rambled through Sea and Land for Twenty Years together, as Ulysses did. I had a little Country-House about two Miles out of Town, and there, sometimes, if a Citizen, I became a Country-Man, and having recreated myself there, I return again to the city, a new Comer, and salute and am welcomed as if I had returned from the new-found Islands.

To which the interrogator: "Don't you ever assist Nature with a little Physick?"

Answer: I never was let Blood, or took Pills nor Potions in my-life yet. If I feel any Disorder coming upon me, I drive it away with spare diet or the Country Air.

Here is the modern view. Not drugs, but moderation; not purgings, but fresh air. It is not the things we want to do that hurt us, generally speaking, but the things we force ourselves to do. We can't literally go "back to nature"—at least we can try to remember her address.

mission appointed by Mayor Gaynor to study the question. Both reported in the spring of last year and both favored the setting apart of areas like that under the Park av. viaduct, where the pushcart trade could be segregated, the space under the Manhattan and Williamsburg bridges, for example; the Essex Market Court building, etc. Unfortunately for the inclusion of the space under the Central tracks in Park av. in the scheme, the Corporation Counsel gave it as his opinion that it would be illegal to permit any permanent occupation of this thoroughfare.

Mayor Gaynor died before he had an opportunity to pass upon the legislation based upon these reports. Mr. McAneny, then President of the Borough of Manhattan, promised to take the matter up after the campaign, but he then became President of the Board of Aldermen and it passed out of his jurisdiction. Borough President Marks has included the pushcart problem in the broader one of markets in general and is at present busy trying to hit upon a solution which will harmonize with one of the whole market situation. Mr. Waldman is one of his advisers.

In the meantime, however, pedlers of all descriptions continue to increase in number, despite the restrictions which the Bureau of Licenses places about the granting of a license. If they find it impossible to procure licenses they launch forth without them, paying "protection" money in a good many instances to those ever-present scamps who profess to have political influence and who pocket the money. Mr. Waldman thinks under the present system it would be well to abolish licenses altogether and let the street vendors increase at will, since the existence of licenses seems to lend itself so readily to this particular form of petty graft. He exonerates the police, who as a rule, he thinks, are too mainly a lot to stoop to "shaking down" pushcart pedlers.

FOUND WEIRD CONDITIONS IN REGARD TO LICENSES.

Mr. Waldman, as president of the United Hebrew Charities, has had occasion often to recommend needy pensioners, incapacitated for ordinary labor, for pushcart licenses. Under the Gaynor regime he ran up against the bureau's policy, adopted in 1906, of issuing no new licenses, on the ground that it must discourage the increase of such pedlers for obvious reasons. Mr. Waldman, therefore, embarked on a private investigation of the holders of licenses and in a short time unearthed at least a hundred cases in which the licensee was dead, or was no longer using his license, or was renting out a string of pushcarts on the strength of his one license, or in some way or other had disposed of or greatly abused the privilege it conferred. He had these licenses transferred to his own worthy protégés.

Under the Mitchell administration there is inclined to be greater liberality in the matter of issuing licenses, but still the number of street vendors grows faster than the number of licenses. As proof positive of this, regard for a moment the total number of licenses issued in Manhattan to basket pedlers—814! Under this category come all the street fakers, it must be remembered, as well as the immigrant women who sell big German pretzels, the Armenian women who sell lace, the boys who sell flowers and even the blind men who sell pencils and shoestrings, every one, in fact, whose street wares may be, whether they are or not, included in a basket. Sometimes there seem to be almost as many street fakers as this alone on Nassau and Ann sts. in the noon hour or on a Saturday afternoon.

The street fakers' point of view with regard to licenses may be aptly illustrated by the remarks of one of their number, who explained recently that if one had no license and business was poor he could easily become arrested and be sent over to Blackwell's Island for a much needed rest and a steady diet.

And in all of Manhattan there are only eighty-six organ grinders licensed! Here is one of our most familiar types of street vender. The term "organ grinder" includes, of course the more ad-



HIS CRUTCHES HELP TO MAKE TRADE BRISK.

vanced hurdy-gurdy grinder as well as the exaggeratedly pathetic old woman who teases forth the "Miserere" from a little box on one stick while she rolls her eyes to heaven and holds out her free hand. The number of licenses for organ grinders is limited by law in Manhattan to five hundred, but in view of the small number actually issued it is safe to say your average senescent finds it safe enough to set forth upon his conquests without paying his \$1 fee.

But the basket pedler and the organ grinder haven't yet become problems like the pushcart man, and largely because they do not fill anything like as large an economic void. The pushcart has solved the high cost of living problem to a large degree for the tenement dweller. Despite their irresponsibility, it is true that the fruit and vegetables which these pedlers sell so much more cheaply than the stores are as a rule fresh, since they usually dispose of all they buy from the wholesaler each day, having no facilities for their storage over night. They sell, too, the greatest conceivable variety of household commodities, purchased cheaply at auction sales and from surplus stocks and sold way below the standard prices.

In other words, though they need regulation, they should not be harassed.