

## COUNTRY CANVASSING

### Practical Results Obtained in a Rural Section of Pennsylvania.\*

"Does canvassing pay?" Yes, and no. It depends upon how the canvass is organized and conducted, the genius of the individual engaged in the work, the environment, and, above all, the persistency employed. Canvassing is not an exact science, no more than is medicine. It is powerful, and a necessary attendant of the county newspaper business. Canvassing can be compared aptly to advertising, which pays only when an advertiser "keep everlastingly at it," in a good medium.

To canvass three or six months every five or eight years does not pay, as you will admit when I read the actual practical results obtained in an agricultural section, after three separate attempts, made nineteen years apart, five years thereafter, and again three years after that effort. The three canvasses were made by good men, the first two by a professional solicitor, the last by a vigorous young man, who, however, was far from a first-class subscriber-getter. It cost me nearly \$1,000 to learn these facts, which I am now giving you so easily. They prove beyond dispute that canvassing pays only when you have a man on the road the year 'round, and always the same man. He is the Ego. His must be a personality of a quality to win confidence and business. He must be a human walking sign of your newspaper; so much so that the patrons will recognize him afar off, and the good housewife will welcome him to dinner, when he should be able to tell a good story, with wit enough to make the children laugh; or he must play on the organ, and on Sunday sing in the rural choir. There are few men combining all these qualifications.

Can you afford to employ such a man? If you have 3,000 circulation you can. If you have 1,500 circulation the best way would be to work him three months every year, but be sure he is the same individual. In such a case it is exceedingly difficult to find a man who will work three months only during the year. Otherwise, be your own canvasser.

Here is the beacon light for all country newspapers. Every editor can own his own home, ride out in the townships one day a week, eat dinner with the farmer, go to his barn and compliment him on his horses, cows and pigs. He will give him his subscription and get that of his neighbor. I have never tried this myself, but I believe it is practical with a circulation of 1,500.

I will herewith recite you my appearance in four dramatic acts upon the canvassing stage. They prove just what I have said: first, canvassing does not pay unless carried on continually; second, it must be by the same person for a number of years; third, the editor himself is a "walking sign," and the successful canvasser.

After my agent's tour in sixty-six districts of my county, I had the curtain rung down amid the tremendous applause of my own judgment, and resolved that the hills of old Bradford should not see an Argus canvasser, unless he was a fixture of the establishment, for some years.

In 1870 my father concluded we must canvass or go to the journalistic heaven, as we were in debt \$2,500. He started out in May, 1870, and by September had collected \$1,500 in cash, but much of it was subscriptions for five and even ten years in advance, paid by leading democrats to "keep the paper." This proves the editor the best canvasser.

Nineteen years after his canvass I had a canvasser from June 15, 1889, to March 15, 1890, say thirty weeks. He charged me \$14 per week, and was always sure to collect his own salary first from my gilt-edge patrons. His record

was: New subscriptions for nine months' canvass, \$645; amount paid him for wages, at \$14, \$420; amount paid in for subscriptions and collections, \$450, costing about 65 cents for each subscriber. Considering that many names he sent in were for three and six months, I believe they cost me \$1 per head, and I lost at least \$300 on that canvass.

He wrote me on March 15, 1890: "Dear Parsons.—Au revoir. Many thanks for your very pleasant treatment of your Bohemian missionary. I have sent you 645 new subscribers, which approaches by degrees the 1,000. Probably better than you expected, and will leave you, without doubt, 600 or more permanent." The nine months' canvass had paid him.

Nine years have passed, and while there were some results, they never extinguished the \$450.

Again, from May 4, 1895, to October 12, 1895, twenty weeks, I employed the same man, with the following result: number of new subscribers reported, 184; received cash from new subscribers, \$30.05; number of renewals, 89; money collected from renewals, \$22.20; total amount of money received by him, \$250.25; wages paid him, at \$14 per week, \$249.68. After allowing, say, 15 per cent for collecting, we found that 184 new subscribers had cost us \$217.20, or within a very small fraction of \$1.18 each. Twenty discontinued within six months after the canvass was over.

Again had the canvasser developed his capacity of simply collecting his salary from my subscribers, and sending me a lot of new names on which I must take the chances.

Last scene of all upon this mimic stage in newspaper canvassing was by a bicycle rider and professional collector. He was to receive 50 per cent to pull out the old roots, and I gave him about a fourth of my list, those I thought hard to collect, and much in arrears. Occasionally I unconsciously put in a gilt-edge patron. He played to a large audience, from May 19, 1898, to October 1, 1898—five months. We secured new subscribers, 10; amount collected from old subscribers, \$385.96; commission, 50 per cent, to collector, \$184.60. He skipped after the canvass to Binghamton, N. Y., owing us \$10.

Does canvassing pay? Well, I never yet could bring my judgment to believe that I "got even" with that \$900 invested in my three canvassers, and the \$1,500 collected by my father himself when he was young always appeared to be the only successful effort ever made by us.

The metropolitan newspaper with an unlimited field proudly scorns to beg for readers; but the country publisher, confined within the limits of a single county, is shackled to that humiliation, and must make the best of it.

#### The Government's Daily Newspaper.

The Portland (Me.) Transcript says that a valuable but little-known daily newspaper is published in Washington by the Bureau of Foreign Commerce, and is entitled "Advance Sheets of the Consular Reports." It has reached its five hundredth number. In its pages are found many interesting glimpses of life in foreign lands, and the range of its matter is wide, as the following list of articles in a single issue shows: "American Fruit in Norway," "Sugar in Spain," "Heating and Cooking Stoves in Uruguay," "Coffee in Jamaica," "Conversion of Mexican Debt," and "Direct Steamship Connection with Syria." These papers are extracts from consular reports. They are of prime interest to business men, but nearly every issue contains some paragraphs which are curious, amusing or novel. This is true of many other government publications, but this daily is exceptionally favored.

#### Avoided Politics and Succeeded.

In reply to questions as to how he had made a success, his methods for securing subscriptions, advertising, etc., George G. Strock, for sixteen years

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editor and publisher of the Albany (Mo.) Ledger, says he has always endeavored to give the business his entire attention, keeping his machinery up-to-date, and aiming "to make the Ledger first of all a county newspaper."

In closing his communication, Mr. Strock says, apropos of success:—

"The experienced country editor may or may not say I have discovered the secret, when I tell him that, in all those sixteen years, I have studiously avoided the intimacy of the professional politicians; have not held any office, elective or appointive, or even hinted to any politician that he could make me accept any kind of pie at his disposal as a reward for the paper's good-will toward him. By such a course I have escaped political entanglements with factions, and as nearly as it is possible for one to do so, have allowed the politicians to do their own dirty work. I can name many otherwise good editors who have dabbled in politics and office-hunting, and failed in their profession."

#### Touching Adieu to Its Old Dress.

The Nashua (N. H.) Press appeared in a new dress of type recently, and bade adieu to the old type in these words:—

"The old type has told tales of joy and sadness; it has recorded a success-

ful war for the deliverance of a people from the oppression of a merciless foe; it has discussed questions of public moment in the light of the hour in which they were incepted; it has defended itself, but never with hatred, envy or malice; it has endeavored to be faithful to good morals, the interest of church and state, and all things that make for the good of the people; it has praised men and women more than it has censured them; it has said nothing it wishes to recall. The new type cannot foresee its mission or foretell what of happiness or sadness it will relate to the households of Nashua. In this particular 'it is better as it is.' The only thing it can say is that its purpose is to be as faithful in the future to everything that makes for the happiness and prosperity of this community as the old type was in the past. It can promise no more."

The Shelbyville (Ill.) Union is evidently disposed to sustain Newspaperdom against ruinous competition judging from the following: "It is rumored that Attorney John M. Harlow, the poet-lawyer, is about to start up a democratic weekly paper. That's good. There is plenty of room here for about eight or ten more good newspapers."

"And the man who would attempt to remove the Simplex Type Setter from the JOURNAL office, were we unable to get another, would be shot on the spot, instanter."

THE JOURNAL,

(Issue of October 2, 1899.)

MATTOON, ILL.

For full particulars regarding the Simplex One-Man Type Setter, and a list of the offices using it, address

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\*From a paper entitled "Does Canvassing Pay?" read before the Northeastern Pennsylvania Press Association at Laceyville, October 28th, by E. A. Parsons, of the Towanda Argus.