

Smart Aliaks.

Solomon Smart, of New Portage, O., dealer in general merchandise and country produce, had been in business three years, but had never, until the present occasion, visited the city where the large share of his purchases came from.

Going to the city was something to which he had long looked forward. He had dreamt of it when he was a clerk; he had eagerly questioned the travelling men about it, and his old employer always told marvellous tales when he returned from his annual trip.

When the old man died, and Solomon, assisted by his father-in-law, was enabled to buy the stock, he began to arrange for a business trip to the city, but somehow every plan he made was interfered with and came to naught. It was a source of great grief to him that he could not carry out his plans.

"If I could only get to Toledo," he often said to his wife, "I could save at least ten per cent. on prices, and I could pick up lots of things at big discounts. All the jobbing houses have odds and ends that they are willing to sell at anything they can get, in order to get rid of the stuff. I hate to buy of drummers. It costs piles of money to keep them on the road, and the men that buy of them have to pay it."

Solomon, as may be supposed, was not popular with travelling men. His contempt for them was expressed openly, and his opinion of their being a curse to retailers was usually the first thing he told them, after he had looked at their cards. "Some of them argued the matter with him. Some of the more independent members of the profession told him he was a blank fool. But those who called regularly let him say his say and then squeezed an order from him, keeping their opinion of him for use outside the store.

His peculiar opinion of travelling salesmen was not his only peculiarity. Most of "the boys" on the road mentioned him as "Smarty Smart," because of certain tendencies he had of making reductions in prices, or of marking off charges for cartage or boxing, or of returning goods because he had changed his mind after buying them. Solomon didn't intend to be mean; he fancied he was only standing up for his rights, and if he occasionally took a little more than his conscience told him was his "rights," he soothed that by saying to himself that the house wanted to sell him so mighty bad they would stand it.

Let a man be constituted as Solomon was and his "smartness" grows on him. He had an idea that every house he buys from is trying to get unfair advantage of him, and that he must present a bold front or he will be imposed upon. He always magnifies his importance as a buyer, and fancies that every order he sends in is met with a hand-organ and treated to champagne.

So when he finally saw his way clear to make the long-wished-for visit, some of his pleasantest anticipations were the welcomes he expected from the heads of the wholesale houses, and the invitations he would receive to dine and wine with them. But he did not propose that they should pull the wool over his eyes. He would show them that he was no "greeny," and that he knew what was what.

He carried two large empty valises with him to bring home as much of his purchases as possible as baggage, and when he reached the city hotel late in the evening the clerk sized him up as easily and as accurately as if he had known him for ages, and sent him to one of the poorest rooms in the house most unceremoniously.

The next morning, bright and early, Mr. Smart started out to do business. His first call was on a hardware man with whom he had done considerable business, and from whom he was sure of a warm welcome. He was met by a pleasant young man whose manner seemed to ask, "What is your business?" He asked for Mr. Braun. Mr. Braun was not down yet but he would be in a short time. Would he wait? No; Solomon didn't propose to wait. He was there on business and must attend to his business. Perhaps the young man could wait on him? No, indeed; Solomon didn't come to town to be waited on by clerks. Perhaps he would call again, but he said it with a doubtful tone as if he was not sure that he would patronize a house where the proprietor didn't get around earlier in the morning. Then again he was somewhat indignant that the

clerk should not have known him, and when he was asked to leave his name he went off saying it was no matter.

Then he called at Sikkor's, wondering if anyone would be in there. Was Mr. Sikkor in? No; did he want to see him personally? Personally! he wanted to see him on business, of course. He would not be at the store that morning, but Mr. Birden was at the desk, yonder, if he would do. Well, it was good to find one proprietor in; and he moved over to Birden's desk, where that gentleman was busy opening the morning's mail. He looked up at the approach of Mr. Smart, said, "Good morning," and waited for Solomon to tell his business.

"This is Mr. Birden?"

"Yes, sir," pleasantly.

Solomon had rather expected him to say, "This is Mr. Smart?" and to hold out his arms, so he was somewhat disconcerted.

"I buy goods of your house occasionally."

"Yes? Whereabouts is your place?"

"North Portage."

"North Portage, eh? What is the name, please?"

"Smart."

"Yes," Solomon could see that he might as well have said Smith, so far as Birden's seeming to recall it was concerned, and he began to get angry.

"How is trade, Mr. Smart?"

"Rather dull just at present."

"Sorry to hear that; hope it will improve. You have a memorandum for some of our goods, Mr. Smart? Let me call one of the men to wait on you. Church, look here."

And before Solomon had time to open his mouth he was introduced to Church, who shook hands with him, linked his arm through his, and had him half way to the sample room. They were getting on well till Church asked, "Let me see, Mr. Smart, where is your place?"

"North Portage," said Solomon in his crispest manner. No one seemed to know him, or to remember him five seconds.

"Oh, yes, North Portage. Waite goes there. Waite's a good fellow, you like him, don't you?"

"I'd like to have him stay at home. I never want to see a drummer."

"Is that so?" and Church looked at him in mild surprise. "Well, what shall we start on first?"

Solomon wasn't prepared to start on anything. It wasn't at all the way he had expected to get started. He didn't like being pushed from one proprietor to another, and then to a mere clerk, and to have that man take it for granted that he was going to buy without any coaxing or flouting. He was disappointed. He expected to have bought a bill here, but there were other stores of the same kind in Toledo, and he believed he'd punish these fellows for their indifference by going somewhere else. Good idea! He would act on it.

He told Church that he guessed he wouldn't leave an order just then, maybe he would come in again. Church coaxed him a little then, but it was too late, Solomon was bound to go, and off he started for a notion house.

The proprietor was in the office, shook hands with him, asked him about trade and crops and finally proposed to show him some goods. This was more to Solomon's taste, and he bought readily, but he was disgusted to see that prices were no lower than the travelling man had sold at. He mentioned this to Shaw. "Lower? Of course not. We can't ask you one price in Toledo and another in North Portage. My man carries my stock into your store, lets you see the goods, quotes you prices and posts you."

"But his expenses are big, it costs you nothing to sell me now."

"His expenses come out of my pocket; not out of yours. I would be mighty glad if travelling men were done away with, but it would be a saving to me; not to you."

This rather staggered Solomon, for it upset one of his hobbies. As he was finishing and about to say "good-by" to Mr. Shaw, he saw the book-keeper whispering into that gentleman's ear and turn away.

"By the by, Mr. Smart, my book-keeper tells me he has had some correspondence with you over deductions made in remittances. These little things are very annoying, and while the amount in dollars and cents is nothing, still business ought to be done in a business way."

Smart began to feel very hot.

"The book-keeper tells me that your last bill ran nearly two months over time, and that you not only refused

to pay interest, but did not pay express on your remittance. Now, Mr. Smart, this is not right. Our place of business is Toledo, not North Portage, our bills are due here, not there, and if we allow them to run sixty days after due we are loaning you money, and ought to be paid for the use of it."

"I don't get interest from my customers," said Solomon.

"That's your business and theirs. You do not sell them on a jobber's profit. We deal with you as a business man and in a business way. I think I know just how you feel," said Shaw, pleasantly; "when I began business I felt the same way. I squeezed every cent that I could from the men I bought from; but I discovered that it was poor policy. I saved a few cents and lost the good will of the house, which was worth dollars. I speak of all this in a kindly way, and to avoid future misunderstandings. Don't you think of anything else? No? Well, good-by, I am glad you called and hope to do more with you in the future." And before Solomon knew it he was bowed out.

But he was boiling with rage. He was particularly angry with himself. He had stood there and taken the lecture as if he were a boy. It was in his mind to cancel the order just given to Shaw, but that gentleman had dismissed him so politely and smoothly that he hadn't time to do it. It had never seemed possible to him that he would have listened to such a lecture as that without giving back as good as he got, and then sending the man and his goods to—, a place where there is no insurance against fire.

In no very happy frame of mind his next call was on his dry-goods house. Mr. Luce met him, when he introduced himself, decidedly coldly. Solomon began to think that he would go to some other house with his order rather than leave it here. But before he made a move to go out Mr. Luce asked, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I don't know as there is."

"Our Mr. Goodnow did not stop at your place the other day because of your habit of returning goods. While we would be glad to do business with you, we cannot allow anyone the privilege of ordering goods and then returning them at our expense if he happens to change his mind. I do not try to make eastern houses shoulder my mistakes, if I make any in ordering goods, and I don't see why I should bear your burdens."

"Why don't you send what I order? I didn't order the blue print I returned the other day."

"Mr. Goodnow is very positive that you did order it. It is always possible that the small sample he carries with him appears differently to a man than the goods do when seen in the whole piece. And a man might occasionally be expected to make a mistake, as you did the other day when you wrote us to send you three gross of corsets, when you intended, you said afterward, to order but three dozen. But in the last three bills bought of Goodnow you have sent back goods, and it is not possible that he made such mistakes. Then you deduct from bills, though made out at prices agreed upon."

"The last cambrics were billed half a cent too high, said Solomon."

Then you shouldn't have ordered them. The time to make prices is when you are buying. We have a price for every article in our stock, if you ask it we will give it to you, and then you are at liberty to order or not, as you think best, but if you send us an order for cambrics and say nothing about the price you have no right to express them back to us because our price happens to be different from what you expected. You could have learned our price before ordering, and not having done so, you ought to be man enough to stand to your own action."

"You claim to sell as low as any one, don't you?"

"We do, and are ready to quote our prices so they can be compared with others when called upon to do so. But we all cut occasionally for reasons of our own, and I prefer to make prices when selling goods, not after they are delivered. Some time ago you returned by express a few trinkets. You knew that Mr. Goodnow would be at your place in a short time, and you might easily have waited until seeing him before returning the goods, but you evidently thought you were punishing us and showing your grit by rushing them back by express. I as-

sure you it does not add to your reputation as a business man. I thought I would mention these points to you because they are important in our relations, and unless the men you buy from feel pleasantly towards you there is every reason to suppose that you will be the loser."

"I guess I can buy all the goods I want," said Solomon; "I have not been troubled that way yet." And he walked off, with a surly "Good day."

He had never bought but one bill of the other dry goods house, and did not like their travelling man, but now he would have bought of Old Nick rather than buy of Luce. He went to Keeler's and again introduced himself (the task was getting as disagreeable as it was monotonous), saying he wanted to buy some goods. The gentleman made an excuse to go to the desk for a moment, and Solomon knew it was to consult the reference book as to his standing; having found that satisfactory he proceeded to show him through the stock. The goods were not nearly so much to his taste as was Luce's stock, but he bought lightly, and considered that he was punishing Luce.

After dinner he called again at the hardware store, and this time found Mr. Braun there. He was greeted cordially when he gave his name, but imagine his feelings when, after a few remarks, Braun said: "What's the matter with you people down at North Portage about axes? We wrote you that four of the last six you returned were in no way covered by warrants; some were broken in solid steel, some were ground thin and had to bend, and one had never even been out of your store. We can't ask any factory to take back such goods from us, it wouldn't be right; and we do not make enough profit on a dozen axes to stand such a loss."

"If you give a warrant you ought to stand up to it."

"We do stand up to it, every time; and we do a good deal more than that. But you do not stand up to it. You take back goods not covered by a warrant and expect us to stand the loss."

"Well, if my customers bring them back I must take them or lose their trade."

"That's your business, not mine. I don't care what you take back or do not take, but I object to your taking them back and shifting all the burden over to us. We have charged your account with the cost of making these axes good."

"Well, that's the last time you'll ever have a chance to do that."

"We can't help that; right is right. It's a small affair, but the thing has to stop some time, and it had better be stopped now."

Solomon pulled out his wallet, "How much is my balance here?"

Braun turned him over to the book-keeper, who took his money and gave him a receipt. As he walked out he did not hear the remark of Braun to the clerk: "He's one of those smart Aliaks that have to be sat down on occasionally, but I guess I gave him a lesson."

He bought his hardware of another house, he bought his groceries of a new firm, he didn't buy any boots and shoes at all, because the clerk did not take hold of him just right, and he reached home the next morning a tired, soured and disgusted man. He told his wife that he had been a fool to spend money when he might have stayed at home and bought of travelling men. "I tell you," said he, "a man's a mighty slight more independent when buying in his own store. The drummers are red hot for orders, and you can squeeze them down. Then you have got your stock to look at, and see costs, etc., and the men feel you're doing them a favor to give them an order; but, by George, they think they are doing you a favor to sell you in their own stores. I'm done going to town."

I saw Mr. Smart a few weeks ago, and he gave me his report of his trip. "I learned something," he added; "I believe I can make more money by having the wholesale houses my friends than I can by making them mad at me, and now we got along first rate. I guess Luce is one of the best friends I've got, but I was all-fired mad at him that time, I tell you. And what made me the hottest was that I felt the old man was right."

London shipping firms engaged in the Canadian trade have agreed to an advance of 10 per cent. in freight rates because of the advance in coal and other steamship stores.