

THE ART OF SELLING BOOKS.

From The Publishers' Weekly

THE art of gauging a customer's purchasing capacity is a difficult one, and one that is not always readily mastered. It requires delicate judgment to "size up" a customer. Many times a customer who in reality desires to buy is at first diffident, and may mislead the salesman. The best plan is to endeavor to discover the customer's taste. Unless the salesman can get at this he is likely to waste much valuable time, for it is certainly an absurdity to show a rare edition of Rabelais to a customer who reads only the last novel by "The Duchess" and the like, and vice versa.

"Do you take any interest in biography, history, etc.? Here are several new books by so and so."

This is a leading question, and the expression of opinion that will follow will probably convince the salesman that the customer does not.

"Is there anything special that you would like to see? What class of works interests you most?"

This is another leader, and, spoken casually, as the salesman glances over the counter, will perhaps elicit the reply that works of natural history, or the sciences, are the particular hobby. The road is now clear. Having shown the recent works on the subject, the salesman may ask,

"Have you a copy of Wood's 'Natural History'?"

"No, I have not."

"We have a set of the best edition. If you will step this way I shall be pleased to show it to you."

The salesman puts before his customer the set, and enlarging on it he quotes the price. He also mentions Jardine's "Naturalist's Library," Cuvier's "Animal Kingdom," and others in the same line. Now the chances are that he has struck the right channel, that salesman and customer will come en rapport with each other, and the at first distant customer will become more intimate, and tell what books he has and what he would like to have. It now depends on the salesman's knowledge and ability, having got his customer thus far, to make the sale. He should search through the catalogues for his customer, prepare a list for him—in short, do all he can to assist him, and he may be rewarded as he deserves. If, after all, the customer does not buy, the salesman should be just as serene and happy as when he began. The customer will feel especially pleased if the salesman remarks that when he is ready to purchase he will be glad to wait upon him.

The customer of the opposite style—he of the effusive and demonstrative character, who will look at everything shown him,

praise them highly and seem delighted, but who never says, "I will take it"—is a pitfall to the unwary salesman. This customer wastes much of the unsuspecting salesman's time, and fills him so full of hope and expectation of making a large sale, that when he sees the customer go out with the stale excuse, "I will call again," his disappointment will no doubt be great. Such a customer should be treated with every caution. We have seen piles of books four feet high about such a customer, which the hard-working salesman had brought together from every corner of the store, urged on by the warm-hearted encouragement of his customer.

The salesman should "feel his way." It is singular how he can become an adept in this respect if he trains himself to a close observation of those with whom he comes in contact. We mean this to apply to the general public, not to regular customers whom he constantly meets, and whose peculiarities and tastes he will soon learn and remember. The appearance of the customer may often offer a clue—the professional people generally express their calling by special characteristics, the bibliophile, the novel-reader, the lover of solid reading, can likewise be discovered.

The salesman should be very careful how he meets customers who enter his store. It is a mistake to pounce upon them the moment they enter the door, as though the salesman were delighted at the approach of a victim. Let them get well into the store, and give them time to find out where they are. Having got thus far they should be approached unconcernedly yet pleasantly. No indecent haste should be shown to wait upon them. On this point the salesman should be extremely cautious. Few things contribute more to the loss of a sale than the over-anxious and importunate salesman. He betrays himself the moment he begins, and the customer, as soon as he becomes aware of the salesman's intention, is put on his guard, and is quite likely roused to resent the salesman's importunities. On the other hand, if the salesman, quiet in manner and undemonstrative, yet warm enough to show interest in gratifying the customer's wishes, so impresses himself upon his customer, he at once gains his good-will, and he will be pleased to note the reciprocal feeling of the customer as he unbosoms himself to him and expresses his wants. The moment his desires are discovered, the salesman should show some interest in the customer's inquiries and begin with becoming zeal the pleasant task of getting what is wanted. It is surprising how well such methods work. It softens the crusty customer at once, and endears the salesman to the genially-dispos-

ed; they will attentively listen to what he has to say and take pleasure in looking over such books as he may deem they ought to purchase. He should not forget to watch for the proper time to stop and should try to avoid being told to do so. He should not press further when such is the case. Stop.

When he has a good customer who is buying liberally, the salesman should remain calm, outwardly indifferent, however anxious he may be within. This is the test of the true salesman. He should keep the customer warmed up, but not ply him too fast. He must keep in mind what he will show him, before he is through examining what he is looking at. The customer must be led on as if accidentally—as though it were by no studied effort on the salesman's part. The salesman should be quiet in his movements. Nothing is so painful as the rushing salesman, who flies from one end of the store to the other, pulls everything from the shelves, and piles the books about the customer in endless confusion. Such a course is apt to alarm and confuse the customer, who is led to imagine that he is buying up the whole store. The books purchased by the customer should never be piled up where he can see them, as it is a constant warning to him, and he is apt to stop. They should be left where they are shown, or, better still, should be put back, if taken from the shelf or table before the salesman. A memorandum of the purchases should be made as the salesman goes along. He should be careful to show no anxiety here. On the contrary he should treat the whole affair as a matter of daily occurrence. Let him take his customer easily along, who will partake of the same spirit, and perhaps not realize how much he has bought. The salesman should never call upon others to assist him, and should not have the whole staff of the store engaged in bringing all the stock to him. It is better to take the customer to the books, as the salesman can more readily engage his attention by general conversation as they journey about. Besides, it is bad practice to show book after book with out some adequate break, as it is apt to weary the customer if he is fed with good things too fast. He must be held on to, not hurried out. It is good to proceed slowly always, and by easy stages. Many a large purchaser has been stopped in his delightful career by the hasty and over-anxious salesman.

Over-selling a customer is as bad as not

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