

BOOKS AND NOTIONS

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HOW TO SELL PAPER BOOKS.



OW best to sell books is a huge problem, and many men have many ideas. This article will be confined to the writer's own ideas, and to paper books only. To make the plans more clearly defined, they will be laid down for a dealer in a town of 5,000 inhabitants.

To do a paper book trade in Canada, the dealer must first know what to buy. The new books are the best.

The knowledge of these can be gained only from publishers' circulars and trade papers. The circular is never certain to be sent you, the trade paper is—if your subscription is paid. This journal, alone, will not suffice, although it will help. A good United States journal is necessary. Any person desiring the names of some of the best journals of this kind, they will be given them, on receipt of a post card, with the request.

Then, when the trade paper is a certainty, the dealer must read reviews of the newest books, and decide whether the name of the author, the style of the book, and the price, combine in the suitability necessary for his trade. If the reviews and author's name denote a suitable book, he can order from two to five copies, according to his judgment, and the price. Care must be taken not to load up with books that will not sell. The

best way is to have only two copies for the first shipment, unless the book is by a well-known author, and in a popular strain.

Then, when the book is received, it must be examined, with the aid of a good review. Take, for instance, R. H. Savage's latest book, "For Life and Love." The dealer must know what other books he has written. They are: *My Official Wife*, *The Little Lady of Lagunitas*, *Prince Shamyl's Wooing*, *The Masked Venus*, *Delilah of Harlem*, and *The Passing Show*. The dealer of ten years' standing will know them all well. The mere ability to mention an author's other books often sells a new book. The reader who appreciated "My Official Wife" will be an easy customer for "Life and Love," when informed that it is by the same author. But this will not always suffice. Take, for example, "Dodo," which has created quite a sensation in England during the past seven months, and in Canada and the United States during the last six weeks. Here was a new author. Benson was an unknown quantity, and his name was impotent. But to return to "For Life and Love." After knowing the name and author, the next thing is, What is the book about? The Review, and a hasty glance, gives the information. A young engineer is sent by his uncle and guardian to Texas, to look after some property there, and to lay out a new railroad. This was in 1874, when the South had not lost its Confederate sympathies, and when the negro problem was just becoming a menace. The author leads the reader from New York to Washington for a short sojourn, to pick up the first of "the tangled threads of the web of life, stained in wine and blood, brodered in fools' gold, twisted by the hands of the Fates, with fair women's jewelled fingers playing in the meshes, stretching from Texan camp to Cabinet on the Potomac, from Mexican strongholds to Texan ranchos, and from Havana and Liverpool to New York. After a most interesting gaze on Washington intrigue, the reader follows the heroes and heroines down through the Southern States, and through a tragic storm, where "the romance of four centuries of piracy, slave-trading, and smuggling, the dark mysteries of a hundred maritime atrocities, linger around the grassy keys, the winding inlets, and coral reefs of the Gulf of Mexico, whereon Spain, France, England, Mexico, and the United States warred for the final dominion of vast Texas." The reader follows on across the Texan plains to the fortified home of a Texan king, with his countless herds, and army of cowboys. The young engineer has fallen in love with the stern and crafty rancher's daughter, but treachery and vengeance make it a long battle for life and love.

With such knowledge gained in a very few minutes the book is ready to be sold. And the dealer exclaims, "All that trouble

to prepare to sell a 50-cent book, on which the profit is a paltry 10 or 15 cents!" It may be a crazy idea, but it may be worth a trial. It will sell one copy of the work here and another there, and the tale will have to be told five times to sell the first five books, then the dealer can wait. Those five books when read will sell other five, and so on. Moreover, it teaches each customer that you are a bookseller, not a mere cash register to note the price of the book and hand over the proper change. If books do not need to be talked up, why, all the country needs is a half-dollar-in-the-slot machine, and the passer-by can get any book desired. But books and chewing-gum are two different classes of merchandise. A blind fool can sell chewing-gum, it takes a man to sell a book. The bookseller who is a bookseller must be a veritable encyclopedia of information, and no abridged edition in one volume either. Go into a dry-goods store, and listen. Does the customer rely on the merchant's judgment? Certainly she does. She asks for it, and it is intelligently given, except in the large departmental stores where the clerks with judgment are hard to find—still more those who have any knowledge of the goods they sell.

The dealer who has a customer who comes home from the summer resort and asks for a certain book, and upon receiving the information that the dealer hasn't heard of it, exclaims, "Why, everybody was reading at C—— last month. I read it myself, and I want to send a copy to a friend." Will she put that dealer down in her mind as a man to be relied on, or not? This is the man whose trade is made by other people, and whose trade is his, because there is no person else to get it.

The dealer says he has no time. Lord bless you! You cannot sweep out your own store, dust, clean lamp glasses, run errands, and sell books. Give the minor duties to a clerk, and make the time. It doesn't take much time, and as the dealer gets practice he becomes an adept at gaining knowledge, and a wizard at keeping it. Spend \$5 a year on trade papers and make \$10 by extra sales.

The dealer who knows the books by what is printed on the leaves makes his calling a noble one. He who knows the titles and prices only becomes a mere automaton, and his work is not life—it is merely active existence. The bookseller who loves the books he sells because they are acquaintances will have fewer wrinkles, a happier wife and family, and a longer life—yea, a longer purse.

Another point comes up. When the dealer gets a new book of this kind he must put it where he can reach it as soon as a customer comes in, and he must be always ready to say, "Here is the latest novel by so-and-so." Buying books and putting them on the shelves until people ask for them is