

A FEW WORDS TO AGENTS

It is an established fact, recognized by all classes of civilized society, that honest industry is honorable and "nobbling." Since the days of Cain the "Agriculturist," and his brother the "Shepherd," it has been fully demonstrated that man must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. No sane man has ever denied that somebody must work. But no one will claim that every man should be a tiller of the ground, or a keeper of flocks, although these vocations are highly honorable and indispensable; there are other callings equally desirable, remunerative and essential.

Experience has proved that an honest, industrious and persevering man can, if he will, do honor to a calling generally acknowledged to be very humble, and by the same means he can secure the favor and merit the confidence of those whom he serves. On the contrary, any desirable business may be disgraced by dishonest representatives.

In selecting an occupation, young men are too often inclined to choose what they think will secure the greatest reward for the least effort. Men naturally do not love work. Labor is performed more from necessity than from choice. Hence people are inclined to look for easy situations rather than where their mental or muscular powers are called into exercise to their full capacity, forgetting that it requires just this discipline for the full development of these powers.

When a young man commences the study of Medicine, Law, Science, or Divinity, it is usually with the design to fit himself for a special profession. He hopes and expects to excel. If he thought the chances were against him, and that he would be a mere cipher in his profession, and had any ambition to succeed, he would never enter upon a course of preparation for any profession.

If a young man wishes to become a successful mechanic or merchant, he selects that branch of manufacture or trade which he thinks will best suit his inclination, but not always, perhaps, fully consulting his own qualifications or adaptiveness to that special calling. But whatever may be his choice, it is the part of wisdom for him to at once call in and consult all available auxiliaries to fit himself for the business he intends to pursue, and persevere in this one direction until he has mastered his profession.

The selling of books by subscription offers an attractive, lucrative and permanent business to all who have the simple qualifications for its pursuit.

The Book Agent might be, and ought to be, and very frequently is, the most agreeable and welcome sight that people can see entering their doors. The accomplished book-cavasser is necessarily intelligent in mind, courteous in manner, a benefactor to others, and personally, *very handsomely paid for his labor*. He benefits the public by circulating books in many places where the conveniences of many book stores are very limited; he benefits publishers by actively pushing and selling many more of a publication than the ordinary book-sellers could ever dispose of; and he receives in return, besides the satisfaction of doing good, more profit than any other party concerned in a book, from author and printer to publisher.

The capital required to start in this business is simply enough to purchase the *Canvassing Outfit* for the book selected, which costs, generally, from \$1.00 to \$3.00, and a specimen copy of the book itself, in its cheapest binding, which is sold to him at the agent's prices.

First having ascertained something of the qualifications and reputation for honorable dealing borne by applicants for an agency, the publishers assign to them *exclusive territory of their own choice*, within which each agent has the sole right to sell the publication in hand. The Agent then goes into the chosen field, and (having made himself thoroughly familiar with the prospectus, circulars descriptive of the publication itself), proceeds from house to house, showing the good points of what he has to sell, and taking subscriptions therefor in his canvassing book. When he has taken enough subscriptions, and has received from the publishers his ordered books, he proceeds to deliver them to his subscribers and collect on delivery the *full retail price*, making a handsome margin of *clear profit* on each transaction.

We are aware there is a difference in men—that all are not capable to act as salesmen, yet with a few hours' drill, an inexperienced man, who has the natural qualifications (a good address, gentlemanly appearance, energy and perseverance) may be taught to produce even better results than an old canvasser. And there are many who make \$5,000 per annum, and even more, out of the business. *All depends on the tact, activity and fidelity of the canvasser.*

The entire risk is taken by the publishers, who have immense capital invested in making large quantities of expensive books, paying for composition, advertising rent, general expenses, etc., trusting to Agents to sell their productions; but no Agent ever orders a copy of a book till he has secured his market for it. The business is a *sure one* if pursued with good sense, persistence, and strict adherence to agreements.

A good, paying business may be secured to any man—or, indeed, any woman, for some of the most successful canvassers are women—who can bring a good character, an intelligent mind, an active, energetic will, a physique that can take an open air occupation and a small nest-egg in the way of money enough to buy an outfit. When one territory is exhausted by another is open, and one book is followed by another, so that the business may be *permanent and regular* as well as lucrative. Publishers do not confine themselves to regular professional agents for their canvassers, but like to take fresh candidates who are *determined to succeed*—and that's the great secret, after all.

It is a mistaken idea that the selling of books by subscription is of comparatively recent origin. It was introduced into this country almost contemporaneously with book publishing. Like most other worthy enterprises with which society has been blessed, it originated from a necessity. The Bible was one of the first books sold by subscription, and it has ever since occupied a prominent place among books sold in this way.

In the early days of the history of this country, the demand for books was necessarily limited, and the expense of publishing required a large investment of money. To publish a small edition and wait for the course of sale through the trade, would necessitate a price upon each volume that would place the book beyond the means of persons of limited means. But by soliciting orders in advance, and thus securing immediate returns for money invested, a less amount of capital was required, and the price of books correspondingly reduced.

We are fully aware that the course pursued by certain agents, and we may add that some publishers are equally responsible, has made them unpopular, and, so far as their influence goes, they have made the business they represent unpopular to a certain class of society. But the same may be said of any and every profession or vocation. The pulpit, the bar, the medical profession, and every class of mercantile and mechanical business have furnished candidates for the almshouse, the jail, the penitentiary, and the gallows. Yet no man in his senses would speak disparagingly of these professions or vocations because they have had such unworthy representatives.

Selling books by subscription is just as honorable, if the work be properly conducted, as selling them or any other goods from the counter. The prejudice against the business has arisen principally from the indiscretion, and, in some cases, the dishonesty of the agents. Booksellers who depend upon their sales in the usual way in which other goods are sold, have usually exerted their influence against the canvassing agents. But this prejudice has of late been considerably overcome, as many of the larger publishing houses now have a subscription department connected with their business.

It is a fact which no one will deny, that men, and women, too, will spend money much more freely for the luxuries and amusements of the day, than for the purpose of first-class standard books from book stores. This class of books has to be presented to people at their own homes, and many a family, now intelligent and cultivated, would have been without these means for intellectual improvement, had not some literary colporteur pressed his claims upon their personal attention.

Statistics show that by far the largest part of works sold by the regular trade are works of fiction. Librarians of our circulating libraries tell us that at least three-fourths of the books taken out to read by the masses are of the lightest kind of fiction. We think we are safe in saying that not one-tenth of the books sold by subscription are, in the usual acceptation of the word, "novels." They are for the larger part religious or historical. Others are biographical, scientific, mechanical, agricultural, descriptive, geographical, etc.

We close our remarks in this issue by quoting from a letter written by Rev. John Todd, D.D., who says:—"As a result of this new method of selling books by subscription, my observation leads me to say: *First*—That few of the books thus sold are really worthless, *still fewer* corrupting, while most of them are decidedly good in their influence. In this way a large amount of valuable reading is spread over every