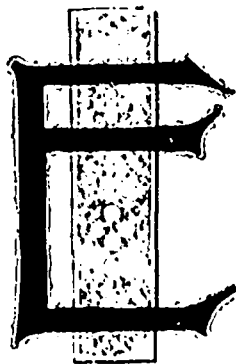


THE NEW METHOD.



VERY merchant should realize that letter orders are playing a great part in the mechanism of the dry goods trade of the present day. Postage is cheap (although it might be cheaper), and people are utilizing this agent to secure their goods on short notice. This tendency to send in letter orders is simply a part of the tendency which is general among the retailers of the day, to make the wholesaler carry the stock.

The retailer won't even order in advance from the traveller but waits until he is actually in need and then orders. He seems to reason, as many a man does when lunch hour arrives he says, "I am not hungry, nor will I eat until I am hungry." But the majority of people eat whether they are hungry or not and often keep this up until their digestive organs make a failure. So with the merchant who buys too much in expectation, he loads, and loads until something falls, and then he wonders why the fall occurred. But the wise merchants will wait as a rule until the demand is almost upon him before he loads too heavily; of course some little variety must be carried at all times, but what is intended to be emphasized here is the tendency to overload in anticipation.

Letter orders until recently were not given much attention by wholesale dry goods men. The idea, that only travellers could sell goods, seem to have absolute possession of their brain, and they forgot or tried to forget the use of printer's ink. But during the past five years a change has been effected in this country. Most of the houses now have a special department for letter orders, and special men to look after them. The cost to the wholesaler of samples and postage is small, because the correspondence can be combined to a great extent, e. g., samples are often sent out in every envelope which contains an invoice. The cost of a traveller is enormous when compared with the cost of letter orders. Last year one house in Toronto sold goods to the value of \$225,000 by means of letter orders, which was almost as much as was sold by any three of their travellers. The difference in the expense of selling this amount of goods in each of the two different ways can be readily seen.

The old way of handing a letter order for attention to the department in which the goods were to be found worked out some ludicrous results. Suppose there were five departments in the house, and a letter order contained the names of goods from each department, and each department was out of the particular line desired, the buyer would receive five letters one from each department telling him of this. This is of course an extreme case. Again, the order was filled by a man in each department, sometimes one clerk, sometimes another, and hence the business was never reduced to a system. But now all this is changed. One man controls all the letter orders, and personally chooses the goods. He becomes acquainted with the different classes of customers, learns their peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, their tastes and their indicated but unexpressed desires. This clerk who manages these letter orders is a man who studies people's characters by their writing and thus learns to know them and their wishes. He is never too busy to fill an order carefully and to send that which will best suit the trade. He understands whether it will be satisfactory to fill an order with

"the nearest thing" or not, because he learns by long experience the man with whom he is dealing. He knows whether the customer is a cantankerous crank, or a buyer on whom he can impose.

Most of this trade is done by means of samples. Circulars are sent out by some firms, and in other cases extensive catalogues, but the drive trade is done by means of samples. These, if bulky, are sent out in separate covers; but very often sent out with the regular correspondence. If a special line comes in, samples are sent out to the live buyers, and these live men who use letters for ordering are often offered snaps which the dealer who buys only from a traveller never sees.

The classes of people who use this means of getting goods are numerous and varied. The man who lives away from a station is liable to be passed by the best travellers, and he is compelled to use letter orders. Dealers in outlying districts, where travellers visit very seldom, find letter orders a necessity of trade. Dealers who do not care to run into the city for the one or two special lines they want on short notice, use the quick travelling mail-car. All dealers use them to a great extent. The wholesalers in Montreal and Toronto receive orders by letter from the remotest districts of The Northwest Territories and British Columbia, as well as from the villages in Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Cape Breton. The letter order department is an invention of this electrical age. Its mechanism and despatch is suited to the exigencies of modern trade, with its quickly moving fashions and freaks. It is a modern method for facilitating the communication between buyers and seller and thus enlarging the economic market. Only those who have tested it thoroughly can fully estimate the advantages it possesses.

On account of the smallness of the expense to the wholesaler, it must, if generally adopted, gradually lower the margin of profit which the wholesaler would need. As expenses decrease, the competition among the wholesalers will naturally tend to reduce their margins, without injury to themselves, but with great benefit to the retailer.

DRESS GOODS FOR FALL.

EXPERTS claim that shots effects and plaids will lead for next fall's trade in dress goods. Whipcords will still be in strong demand. Buyers are holding back a little on Canadian tweed effects, but the better opinion seems to be that a large quantity of these will also be sold in the fall, the trade in these may even surpass the wonderful run in the fall of last year. Blue and black serges will of course be as prevalent as usual.

French woollen fabrics are up. Henriettas, whipcords and Bengalines have been in such strong demand from the French manufacturers that they have increased prices from 8 to 17½ per cent. These goods promise to be in good demand for next season, and dealers here are guarding their stocks of these fabrics. Soft wools have advanced 10 per cent. Reports from the London wool market show an increase in sales of about 10 per cent., owing to the increased demand from the French manufacturers. Dealers who buy any of the these French fabrics at the prices which have obtained since last fall will lose nothing. Those who buy in the fall for immediate consumption will be forced to pay the advance. These days of rising markets give the man who has a financial margin a chance to make a great profit. But the turn of the tide must be watched.