

BOOKS AND NOTIONS

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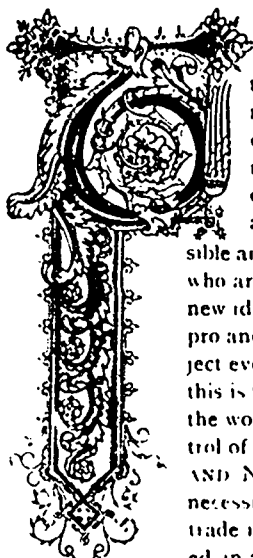
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HERE is a great difference in the business methods adopted by different men, and there is no surer index to a man's capability for the conduct of any business than the carefulness with which he will seek for new ideas and the quickness with which he will decide whether or not the idea which has attracted his attention is practicable, feasible and suitable to his business. There are men who are so light as to be carried away with every new idea before carefully weighing the reasons, pro and con, for its adoption. Others again reject every new plan simply because it is new, and this is the class of men who are generally dead to the world several years before they cease the control of their business. At various times, BOOKS AND NOTIONS, has shown the advisability and necessity of Canadian booksellers extending their trade in various ways and a recent issue contained an article on canvassing for trade.

There are some curiously startling circumstances which have yet to be mentioned. One of these is the fact that some city houses allow much larger discounts to house to house canvassers than they do to retailers. There are of course houses who sell to subscription agents only and allow very large discounts on standard books. But in the case of wholesale houses, which sell to both retailers and canvassers, many of them give a much higher discount, besides other profitable privileges, to their canvassing agents than to their retail customers. Some go even farther than this and handle certain books which they refuse to sell to retailers at all. A Toronto wholesale house which sells hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of books to the retail trade of Canada every year, is handling a life of Spurgeon which it refuses to sell to the trade at all. This is but an example, and these houses justify their action by saying that these books would not sell at all worth mentioning if they were left entirely to the retailer. They cite instances of men selling hundreds of these books in a month or two. The wholesale house which we have referred to, has an agent in a county in Quebec who disposed of three hundred copies of Talmage's "From Manger to Throne," in six weeks, besides doing other business. A certain house in Toronto has an agent in Manitoba who sells about four hundred volumes a month. Another instance which is well known to the trade and which may further illustrate this, is the way J. E. Bryant & Co. have managed the sale of the Concise Imperial Dictionary. All these facts and circumstances point clearly to the fact that to secure large discounts and to secure the handling of all new books, the book

sellers must have some means of enlarging and feeding his trade by house to house canvassing.

The mere fact that there are a number of houses in the cities doing a large and profitable business in supplying their subscription agents only, serves to indicate the huge sale of books throughout Canada, which puts no profit whatever in the pockets of the regular booksellers. The matter is well worthy of the attention of every live bookseller, and he must necessarily conclude that canvassing for trade by means of regular agents will be a profitable, and perhaps a future necessary branch of business. It is not necessary that the agent should carry a wagon load of samples with him, in fact, experienced men say that especially in bookselling one line at a time is sufficient and most profitable. To sell a book requires the talent of persuading the prospective buyer that he wants that particular book worse than any other book in print, and this will not hold for two books. Other reasons why only one line should be handled at a time will readily suggest themselves to any one who thinks on the subject. The salesman makes the sales, just as the hustling business man builds up a huge trade while his competitors sleep. One agent will sell a hundred dollars worth of book, where another and less able man would fail to make a sale.

A city dealer in subscription books, when interrogated as to reasons why he did not sell to retailers, made the following remarks:—"Why, retailers couldn't sell two of those books in a year, because they do not push for trade—they wait for it." Continuing, he remarked that certain classes of books must be pushed or their sales would not be adequate, and he emphasized the point that such books could not safely be left to have their sales regulated by the retail booksellers, and consequently the publisher must and does rely on subscription agents. At present there are five different editions of the Life of Spurgeon upon the Canadian book market, and the aggregate sales of these editions will be among the tens of thousands; yet a liberal estimate would not place the amount sold by regular dealers at more than five per cent. of the whole.

The discounts generally allowed to subscription agents may be illustrated by those allowed by C. R. Parish & Co., Toronto, one of the leading subscription houses in the city. They allow forty per cent. on their regular subscription books to any agent, and when an agent is well established he receives privileges of various kinds which make the total about fifty per cent. On albums and bibles they allow a straight fifty per cent. The Methodist Book room allows from thirty-five to fifty per cent. to their subscription agents, of which they have a large number. Now such discounts as these, when combined with certain special privileges, are greater than allowed to the ordinary retailer. And it is just here where the retailers by sending out or controlling subscription agents and canvassers, can secure to themselves not only works which they would not otherwise be able to secure for sale, but also greater discounts on the works they do sell. As a concrete instance of the latter, the Methodist Book-Room handles a work on which it allows thirty-three and a third per cent. discount to retailers and fifty per cent. to subscription agents. This is justifiable, because if the discounts were not so the book would have a very limited sale. The data here presented will serve to indicate the advantage to be derived by establishing canvassers. The grocer trade and the hardware trade are doing this quite extensively, and there is no unsurmountable reason why the bookseller should not meet the cutting up of the trade at present experienced in the manner described, and in this way preserve the volume of his trade intact, or perhaps materially increase it with beneficial results. It is not in books alone that this can be done profitably, but articles are being continually placed on the market which offer good profits to live merchants. Novelties are numerous, which have only to be shown to be sold. School supplies, such as maps, desks, etc., form another class. In fact, the man who desires to pursue such a plan for business extension, can never lack in articles which will sell readily.