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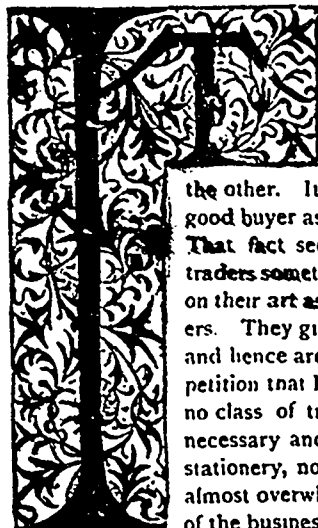
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THIS is the business of a trader to sell goods, but as his stock is rarely bestowed upon him, it is also his business to buy goods. His relation to his trade is not more important on the one side than on the other. It is of as much moment that he be a good buyer as it is that he be a good salesman. That fact seems to slip out of the memory of traders sometimes, and they place more store upon their art as sellers than upon their skill as buyers. They give themselves a one-sided training, and hence are less prepared to meet the stiff competition that has to be stemmed now-a-days. To no class of traders is the study of buying more necessary and valuable than to dealers in books, stationery, notions and kindred lines. In these, almost overwhelming rivalry prevails, on account of the business done in them by bazaar stores, tea stores, etc., at cut prices. The fact that dealers outside the trade can sell at very low prices is itself an indication that stock can be bought cheap. The extent of the business done by big department stores, their use of books, etc., as a leader, their ability to obtain big concessions on account of the largeness of their orders—all these are put forward as explanations of their incomparably low prices. But in addition to all this, there remains the fact that at the sources of supply to these stores the small dealer can also buy cheap. The goods are on the market; why should the bazaar store get them all?

If the retailer did a little more bargain-hunting, he would either be able to modify the effect of competition upon himself or he would become less of a buffer between the force of retail competition and

the wholesaler. At present a good deal of the force of competition spends itself pretty well before it reaches the wholesaler. Better buying is a good conductor, and it is not undesirable that it should be, in order for the jobbers' sympathies to be enlisted in the retailers' behalf. This might lead to the cutting off of supplies in whole or in part to the privateering outsiders. At any rate, good buying will enable the retailer to hold his own more or less successfully against bazaar traders.

When retailers go to the market they should go with the intention of thoroughly beating the bush for bargains. To set out with a premeditated purpose of buying stationery from this house, games from that, and books from another, is not the best way usually. When a man fixes on the preferable spot, after looking over the ground, wherein to place his order for stationery, he may find that there too it will pay him to buy some other class of goods. The unexpected is often the very thing wanted. One thing is certain: no single house can give the best bargains in everything. It can give a good bargain in one line, but compensating prices must be asked for other lines. The retailer by his buying must protect himself from competing dealers the basis of whose business is in other departments of trade. They get cheap prices somewhere, and the retailer must sound the market to find just where.

The pen fakir is alive and in lusty health yet. He plies his calling with as much profit to himself and deception to his customers as ever. The mission of all fakirs is to humbug the public or a part of the public. A glib tongue, plausible argument, unblushing effrontery, are the mental stock-in-trade of the wanderer who sells by his wits. His commercial stock-in-trade may be of the most worthless description, so long as over-credulous people continue to be born. As to the pen fakir, his operations are not confined to districts where bucolic simplicity of character is supposed to prevail. He boldly tackles men who make their living by their pens, men who ought to know whether the representations made are genuine or fraudulent, and he sells to them. In the banks, in insurance offices, in wholesale counting-houses, he contrives to do more business than with the artless householders who never use a pen but to write a letter. He usually has some good thing to offer, a specialty that has been jealously kept out of the hands of the regular trade. There is as much mystery about his wares as in the old days there used to be about the spoil the smuggler was credited with bringing in. Anything that the dealer wished to represent as unobtainable, specially fine or cheap, needed but the whispered word "smuggled" to accelerate its sale in the good old times. The fakir tells strange stories of his pens. One used to offer pens that were made from the metal of old Russian guns, material about whose composition the government of Russia exercised the strictest secrecy, and would let none leave the country, the old barrels having to be made over or put out of danger of exportation. That, of course, was the fakir's story. He also said that the pens were made by some occult process in some far distant region. If he had added that, like Othello's handkerchief—which was woven in a sybil's prophetic fury—they had been made with rod, book and spell and horrid incantation, he would probably have been believed. He got long prices from concerns which used pens by the gross. He was always very solicitous about the worn out pens of this make. "The material was so precious that he would buy back all the old pens, which would be made over by the wizard manufacturer he represented. And grave business men would keep the superannuated nibs for the fakir, who would give the rebate, and in due course throw the used up pens away. But this rebate scheme gave an air of honesty to his professions, which made them go down the more easily. He could sell another lot after giving money back, though he did ask prices which enabled him to recoup customers for their pains-taking care of the old pens. This story is but a specimen of the sort that "go" in the pen-fakir trade. Pens of the widest renown, whose quality is daily attested by thousands, standard goods, are on the market, and yet humbugs can make a living out of unknown stock.