



# THE GIRL BEHIND THE COUNTER.



FINDS NOTHING THAT SUITS HER.



**T**HE WORLD at large needs to be reminded, over and over, that a department store represents more than a crowded mart, where buyers and sellers struggle together in greed for gain; that the men and women who toil within its walls are more than mere puppets and automatons in the moving show of trade. Nowhere can one find a more magnificent theater, furnished with marvelous stage settings, amid which actors move, ready to present the tragedies, romances and comedies of human existence. It is life with all its actualities. The sublime doctrine of the "brotherhood of man and sisterhood of woman" reaches out and covers it, while grim-visaged experience makes or mars the man or woman employed beneath its roof.

We too often forget this, and our forgetfulness may betray us into words and deeds we may not care to remember. Particularly is this true in our dealings with the girl behind the counter—she to whom we allot no such thing as heart, or mind, or anything approaching personality.

We have heard too much, we have accepted too unquestioningly, the recital of the woes of the woman before the counter; we have fairly come to believe that the obliging, intelligent gentlewoman is a rara avis in a store. True, she is apt to be rare when search is confined solely to the aisles and before the counters.

The question has been too largely discussed from but one point of view; with complete disregard for fairness, we have accepted the opinions of My Lady Agrieved, as though blame were a one-sided affair. As if it did not always "take two to make an argument!" The delightful fibs of the salaried have been sweet morsels to us, when he has garnished the glaring faults of the girl clerk. We have patted the funny man's back when he has used his oh-so-keen little hatchet on the betes noires of shopping—the clerks. We have had our fun, but we have forgotten that humor and accuracy are not always twins.

**The Truth Wanted.**  
The great army of salespeople will rise up and call blessed the man or woman who will dare to tell the unvarnished truth about their life. Some of their trials would cost Job his reputation; many of their temptations would make good St. Anthony writhe in his grave clothes. They run the whole gamut of human emotions; see life inside out, wrong side out, and rarely through rose-colored lenses.

The life of the saleswoman cannot be scorned as a narrow existence, when it brings self-knowledge, as well as knowledge of men and women. If you want to know of what stuff you are made, stand behind the counter a few weeks. A young woman who had spent several months in a store, after a most sheltered home life, remarked: "I never would have appreciated my own possibilities for saint or devil, had I escaped shop life."

Admitting that there are rude, unobliging, ignorant clerks, we are not to forget that there are precisely such people among the patrons of the shops. On the other hand, for the many gentlemen who buy goods, there are many equally as well-bred and dignified women to wait upon them. And it is with them and their associates—the girls behind the counter—that this article has to do.

To begin at the beginning, saleswomen are not chosen in a haphazard manner. It is reasonable to suppose that every merchant wants his house to make money; hence his choice of clerks involves many fine points. The days of recommendations are not past, and there is endless red-tape connected with an appointment to a place behind the counter, as crestfallen applicants will tell you. That a girl must have an attractive appearance, from the standpoint of scrupulous neatness, goes without saying; no business man desires to be represented by a slouch. Nor, on the other hand, does a showy, flashy appearance insure favor. The applicant's manner must be pleasing and courteous, tact and dignity should be in evidence. Patience and perseverance are other essential qualities. Aptness to learn, order, promptness, honesty, fill out the long list of qualifications.

Now we will just suppose that the candidate appears to meet the requirements, and that the acute business man, feeling that she is a good investment, hires her. Because shop life, to the minutest detail, is systematized, she finds herself facing a life of regularity and exactness.

A number is given her which, in the mechanical workings of the business, partly absorbs her individuality. She becomes, say, "No. 21." At the bookkeeper's desk she becomes "21," as well as Miss



of her sales. In the morning she is given a new book, while book No. 1 is in the auditor's hands.

The new saleswoman is also given a key, bearing her number. The key fits that modern wonder—that mechanical recording wizard, the "Bundy clock." Rewards are still being offered to the person who can cheat the Bundy. When the girl enters the store in the morning, she rings in her time and hangs the key on its own hook, at the side of the clock, bearing the word "In." Her wraps are put in a locker and she repairs at once to her counter. No loitering in the aisles or at other counters for a morning gossip. The covers which were spread the previous night to protect display goods from dust, must be removed, neatly folded and put away. Then commences the work of putting stock in order, and our green girl must utilize the opportunity to acquaint herself with the goods she is to handle. No easy task, to be sure, and one goes cold with dread when questioned by the managers.

Boxes and shelves must be dusted and woe to her whose housewifely instinct does not provide her with a clean duster and the will to remove the least trace of last night's sweeping.

When the boxes are dusted, empty ones

all, only the right sort are retained in a firm's employ, after a thorough trial—she ignores her interrupted dusting and sells goods with the avidity of one who knows that "sales count up in the office." It can't be helped if the first woman on whom she must wait has passed a sleepless night with a fretful baby, or has her nerves put on edge by the struggle to loosen up the family purse-strings, or is just hopelessly and naturally disagreeable—she must be smiled upon and humored, and be made to feel that the store was built and the business inaugurated for her especial benefit. Goods must be shown with tireless energy, and if the opportunity comes to help the poor, distracted buyer with a timely hint in the right direction, it must be given in a quiet, respectful manner.

It is truly amusing to note how little individuality the woman before the counter seems to think the other one possesses. If, at the supreme moment of despair, the purchaser comes in contact with it, through the generous forbearance of the saleswoman, my lady is resentful, or, at the least, greatly surprised.

As the morning passes, they come crowding in—all types and conditions. Here is Mrs. "Won't I Impress You?" busting up to see if you are carrying a

and be sure they won't shrink! The last ones shrunk out of all remembrance the first trip to the tub.

Then begins the displaying of shirts—gray and white, for the dear creature does not know which color she wants, though, since putting off his baby garments, Freddie has never worn anything but gray. Every grade of wool and cotton, every make, every price, together with the new-fangled "bleeced cotton, quite as warm as wool," is spread out before Mrs. N-S-W-I-W.

The tension increases and the fond mother fairly wrings her hands in despair. Why do little boys distract loving mothers with the choice of shirts? Why wear shirts? Why have little boys at all? This last wicked "why" echoes in the heart of that disheartened shop woman.

Then the miserable would-be purchaser is seized with a happy inspiration. She won't buy the shirts; "Those Freddie has worn thin enough to do until"—until Freddie will need only swimming trunks, or an old garment of his sister's.

What a relief her decision is to madam! Once more life is worth living, and she leaves the counter proud of her foresight and economy.

And the girl—well, being the right sort, she folds and puts away the rejected shirts, meanwhile wondering why that troublesome woman had to trail down town, waste her own time and that of the store, merely to decide that, after all, she did not want to buy shirts for Freddie.

### Not Used to Shopping.

Her trend of thought is broken. Mrs. "Not-Used-to-Shopping" settles, with a perceptible air of apology, on one of those "children's delights," the revolving stool. She has been attracted by some low-neck, sleeveless vest, designed for children. "Have you done in bigger size?" The accent is German. "Oh, yes, indeed! For what age, please?"

Horrors! she is blushing and turning uneasily on the stool. Once more the smiling query, in an encouraging tone, "For what age did you say?" Something between a groan and a gurgle escapes from the lips of the would-be purchaser. The girl wonders if she is demerited. Then it dawns on her—the woman wants the garments for herself.

"Oh, did you want them for yourself?" is asked. "Yaas," returns the much-relieved patron, who had feared she would have to tell her age. Then the proper counter is pointed out or the woman turned over to the gracious flourwalker, and the girl behind the counter has her laugh—the first one, perhaps the only one that day—but it is relaxed.

So time passes until lunch hour arrives. The new girl must now remember that key and the Bundy or a fine will be registered against her, and fines make an ugly hole in one's monthly stipend. Her time is rung "out," and the key put on the proper hook. If she does not go home to lunch or to some of the near-by eating-houses, she finds a cozy luncheon room somewhere about the store where she may eat, chat with a friend or read. In the large Eastern department stores lunch counters, where delicious hot drinks, salads, sandwiches and cold meats are served, obviate difficulties for both customers and clerks. They are a blessing, and one which shops in the Coast cities may be expected presently to adopt.

Lunch disposed of the girl is ready to return to her counter. The forenoon siege did not exhaust the supply of types of buyers, nor does the girl console herself with the thought that her trials ended with the morning trade. With an apology

must be refilled from the reserve stock in the basement. This contingency is provided for by the girl making out a list of the goods sold each day, and turning it over promptly to the manager or other person whose work it is to attend to the bringing up of fresh supplies.

When all this has been done, the new saleswoman is ready to commence selling goods. Chances are that she finds several "I am in a hurry" women lined up at her counter, waiting for her when she arrives there. This hinders the process of dusting and affords a serious test of patience.

It is a wonder that more shopwomen do not suffer from dyspepsia, when one considers their rapid-transit method of disposing of breakfast, in order that the store may be reached by the time the doors open at 8 o'clock. The newspapers and bargain sale allurements must bear part of the blame for this.

When the girl is the right sort, and, after certain line of goods her "friend from New York" has been describing. If it happens, as it usually does, that the house has been selling the good woman that identical thing for years, she is sure—oh, so sure! that "it can't be the same thing," and then she declares that she is going to one of the other stores—to torment some other clerk, no doubt.

The saleswoman hurries to put away the many boxes pulled down to prove that Smartness & Co. carried the goods wanted. She sighs at the loss of time and labor, and wonders if—but here comes Mrs. "Not-Sure-What-I-Want." By dint of questioning that would do credit to a criminal lawyer, the girl maybe learns that something is wanted in shirts "for little Freddie."

Very well, the season is too early for an all-cotton garment, so "Perhaps you want a mixture of wool and cotton?" "Yes; that's it. Part wool and part cotton,

to slang, "there are others." It is wonderful what a variety of cheerful fancies this old world contains.

Even masculinity contributes its share to the great army. Yet, taking it all in all, the shop girl would rather sell goods to a man than to a woman. Men are less self-assertive, much less given to patronizing—knowing doubtless how little they really do know compared with a woman—and they possess a more kindly feeling toward the woman bread-earner. A little of the wholesome free-masonry which pervades man's intercourse with man is evinced in his dealings with the girl behind the counter. Perhaps it is because men are less caustic than women are snobbish, when the truth is out.

The woman who is a full-fledged shopper—who is known as such in every store—deserves a far more ruthless fate than ever befalls her. What part of the econ-