

Women Merchants In Portland Department Stores

How These Women Make Good in Places Held in the Past by Men — Intuition Helps Them Manage People and to Get the Most for the Least Money — Achievements of Some Local Buyers.

It has been only a short time since the spotlight of public appreciation and curiosity has been turned on women merchants—the buyers for department stores. Twenty years ago there were no women buyers; today they are not only an important factor as women in any other line of work—and their epoch has just begun.

At first, men held all the responsible positions in the stores and even most of the less important places as clerks. Occasionally a woman would help a man select goods. That was exceptional, but it was how she got her opportunity. Of late, the women are assisting the men from their places on a big scale. They make up a large majority of the clerks, while many of the large departments are managed and the goods bought by them. They seem to be particularly fitted for the trade. Intuition helps them to manage people and to get the most for the least money. Above all they have a keen insight into what women want. The most striking examples of women buyers are those who have charge of the millinery, hats, shoes, and things for women, such as cloaks and suits, millinery, corsets, and the like. The amount of a buyer's salary is one way of showing her worth by her firm and their salaries range from \$200 to \$1,000 a year, according to the size of the stores and the buyer's particular value.

In Portland there are 18 women buyers. You will find them in most every department: cloaks and suits, corsets, millinery, lace and trims, art-embroideries, pictures, jewelry, neckwear, underwear, infants' wear, books, leather goods, drags. One manages a popular tea room. Most of these women make at least two trips to New York each year, while some go to Paris in order that they may purchase their merchandise from the fashions.

Where Women Win Out.

In each store the members of the firm are led by the grades of the purchasing business. It is the opinion of many that within the next 20 years women will be buyers of all goods bought by women and the hats and millinery of women's wearing apparel.

Two notable illustrations of the adaptability of women to the trade is shown in this city. First, the woman who owned the Bon Marche in Paris, the largest department store in the world, carrying from 100,000 to 150,000 employees. This woman's husband died when he was quite young. She took over the business and made a tremendous success. It is the opinion of many that she formed a corporation and put the business into its hands and thus it stands today. Second, the wife of the late George B. Storey in Chicago. She was formerly an em-

ployee in the glove department of the same store. From the day of her wedding she kept in close touch with her husband's affairs. A few years after the marriage he died, leaving her in full charge of his enormous business. Her success has been marvelous. She has extended the business and doubled the income.

Another case showing women in manufacturing lines is the case of the two women buyers from a big Chicago house. They became tired of working for their firm and determined to buy a business of their own. They went to New York and selected a small undershirt manufacturer by the name of Maloney. In a few years they have become known from coast to coast and manage a business which is a goodly buy undershirts from these women.

Knotty Problems to Meet.

It is hard to appreciate the scope of the woman's buying work, for it is beset by difficulties on every hand. In our great-grandmother's time, if a merchant bought a stock of cloaks and suits for the following spring they must be sold the following spring or not at all. The suits were bought in Spring may have extremely short necks and light skirts. By Summer long coats and pleated skirts may be in vogue. On every hand she must meet the demand of fashion. The problem in her mind is to buy goods that she can sell and get the money out of before the public is calling for something entirely different. On the buyers rest the whole responsibility, for they are given full authority in selecting merchandise. They must take it as seriously as if their own money was at stake.

Miss Lola Bernard, a cloak and suit buyer in one of Portland's large department stores, has the distinction of being one of the first women buyers in the United States. When she first began buying she was a curiosity to the trade and she was pointed out as a "woman buyer." Miss Bernard stood her ground from the first and she proved to be of superior judgment than many of the men buyers.

Changing Old Methods.

It had been the custom to take the suits as they found them. Buyers would select a great many of a certain style or some of each style. There were two classes of buyers—the one who "plunged" on a certain line in the hope that it would please his trade and the one who took a little of each sort, and thereby secured a mediocre assortment with no particular mode to show distinctness of style.

But Miss Bernard and the first



MISS ISABEL GILBRUGH

women buyers did not follow the method of former buyers. "Look here," they said when they were reviewing the samples displayed on models, "that is a very good looking coat, but the skirt will not do at all. Make us another skirt and we will take a certain number of these."

This was very startling to the salesman, but what could they do? Indeed, there is such an air of finality about the statement made by women of this type and they understand their business so thoroughly that one can only acquiesce. They tolerate no arguments.

The correct buyer has a colossal task in these days of slender figures and no hips. She must notice her customers with all the latest devices for reducing the figure, she must persuade them that her corsets can produce the siph-like form now demanded by fashion. That no longer means that a girdle will supply the demands of the stout and thin alike. A corset is a very important garment in a woman's wardrobe and must be selected with the greatest care. The buyer or her assistant must personally conduct all fittings. In each of the large department stores a woman handles the corset question successfully. They are Miss Estelle Kitchen, Miss Ella Hobbs and Miss Nellie Minore.

Miss Hobbs is really buyer for two departments, corsets and underwear, as is Miss Nellie Minore. That each of these women handles two departments is really remarkable, for both departments are large and difficult ones. Underwear is as changeable as suits and cloaks, for skimpy petticoats must be worn with skimpy skirts, while delicate laces and hand embroideries come and go with each new gust of fashion.

Making Good From Start.

When Miss Hobbs began to buy for her store, she was really taken as an experiment, as the members of her firm were rather skeptical about the capacity of women buyers. Her department grew so rapidly that at the end of the first year the firm was amazed. They sent a telegram to the



MISS BERNARD

store in the Middle West where they had secured her services. It read: "If you have another Miss Hobbs, send her at once." A few years after the marriage he died, leaving her in full charge of his enormous business. Her success has been marvelous. She has extended the business and doubled the income.

When I spoke to Miss Hobbs about her marked success, she said, "Oh, you see I am a crank on corsets." Therein lies the secret of a success in my line. What women in Portland does not know Miss Minore or Miss Kitchen or Miss Hobbs? They have overcome the difficulties of multitudes of worried women, and like the fairy godmothers of old, given them their hearts' desire—a trim figure.

The Art of Selling Hats.

In the millinery departments the search for fashion has no limits. It takes a keen merchant, a successful speculator, and withal a particularly shrewd individual to handle hats. Miss Bertha Wagonblast has all these requirements. She has increased the business in her department steadily since going into it. She had been buyer in a wholesale house before taking her present place. Her personality is pleasing, she has an easy manner and a very direct one, a waif who she discussed sailor hats with a salesman. Her conversation was short and to the point. When he was dismissed she turned to me.

In three minutes she had told me what I had come to find out, given me the requested photograph, and if she had added, "That small white hat does not become you, you should be wearing this large black one instead." I feel quite sure I should have had the black at any cost. There is such a nice air of directness about her that smooths all difficulties away.

Art embroidery is a very interesting department and is usually handled by women. Miss Jean Milne has charge of one of these departments. She is a Scotch woman and learned her art in Scotland, she came to Portland about 10 years ago and went to the store where she is now buyer as clerk. Her



MISS DITTMER

strict training in Scotland made it easy for her to work to the head of the department.

Mrs. Anna Dittmer is another buyer of art embroidery. She has a particular ability that finally brought her into her present work. Formerly a bookkeeper, she always possessed a rare talent for designing embroidery patterns at which she spent all her spare time. Some one became interested in her and helped her to secure a place in a needlecraft shop. From there she came to her present position. She is devoted to her work and says she never wishes she could select most of her merchandise at home, yet she must make at least one trip a year to buy imported perfumes and Christmas novelties. Embroideries and laces require thought and decision before being bought or the merchant stands a good chance of having to sell them for less than cost to get rid of them. I found Miss Fannie Hanley going about her task very amiably, although she admitted some of the buyers suffered with "nerves" after a busy season. Miss Huls is a Portland girl.

Miss Rose Cox in the lining department, told me very modestly that her department was small compared to the millinery and some of the others. Nevertheless, her department was very busy and it struck me that a great many people consider it highly important to have linings in their dresses. She had the right kind to draw them there.

Mabel McCleary came to Portland from Peoria last June to take charge of the leather goods for her store. She has not always been a buyer. She began working in stores at the age of 14, and as she is very clever girl she understands her business thoroughly by this time and is a success.

Selecting the Right Books.

The realm of books is ruled by Miss Kate Armsby. "Of course, no department could be more interesting than mine," she told me. When I asked her



MISS WAGONBLAST

whether customers will call for Irish lace or Persian silk.

"Pictures are a more staple article, and Miss Isobel Gilbrugh, a Portland girl, has made them her study. She has been in this department for six years, and has served as buyer for four years, which is looked on as pretty rapid climbing.

Another Portland girl who is now a buyer is Miss Leone Weber, head of a big drug department. She is a graduate of the Oregon Agricultural College Pharmacy department, and has been out of college six years. Unlike most buyers she can select most of her merchandise at home, yet she must make at least one trip a year to buy imported perfumes and Christmas novelties. Embroideries and laces require thought and decision before being bought or the merchant stands a good chance of having to sell them for less than cost to get rid of them. I found Miss Fannie Hanley going about her task very amiably, although she admitted some of the buyers suffered with "nerves" after a busy season. Miss Huls is a Portland girl.

Miss Rose Cox in the lining department, told me very modestly that her department was small compared to the millinery and some of the others. Nevertheless, her department was very busy and it struck me that a great many people consider it highly important to have linings in their dresses. She had the right kind to draw them there.

Mabel McCleary came to Portland from Peoria last June to take charge of the leather goods for her store. She has not always been a buyer. She began working in stores at the age of 14, and as she is very clever girl she understands her business thoroughly by this time and is a success.



MISS MINORE

how she knew what books to select, she said: "Naturally one must read a lot; I must know my authors. But first of all, I must know what my trade demands."

Mrs. J. B. Spencer manages and buys everything for a popular tea-room. She has been prominent in women's clubs and women's affairs ever since she came here. She was a very successful housekeeper, so it is not surprising that she knows what to put on the menu to please and refresh tired shoppers.

When the buyer has completed her quest of fashion and merchandise and has started safely homeward, she has by no means finished her task. It has just begun.

Handling the Selling End.

There are the Spring and Fall openings to think about. They must present her new styles in the proper way to her customers. They must be lured with "sales" to get them into the store. The goods advertised must be actually shown, must be fully as good as boasted. She must have suitable names for all the new shades; there must be "faded" blues, "Helen" pinks, and "coronation" purples. Besides, she must see that she has efficient saleswomen to help her sell these goods.

It is the most efficient of these saleswomen that develop into buyers—for promotion arrives at no one point of the campaign, but comes through hard work, pure merit, shrewdness and tact. The clerk who does not stand and pat her false hair or talk to the next clerk about the one that she had had last night, but the one who helps her customer select goods and is patient and interested in what the customer is elaborately or shabbily dressed, that is the clerk who will be the buyer of tomorrow. She gets the best training in the world as to women's needs. So it is reasonable to expect more and more women buyers each year, as the department store owners predict.

LOUISE BRYANT.

THE CAMP — THE ABSORBING ACCOUNT OF A HARD BARGAIN.

BY F. E. CHASPEL

In fifty-eight years the establishment of J. Hicks, licensed pawnbroker, had suffered many changes, generally for the worse. His neighborhood had degenerated from smart respectability to unadorned squalor. The once dignified reserve of its curbed windows—Hicks had been a banker by proclamation in the beginning—had given place to the cheap advertisements of unrefined saloons, dirt and decay had made their home in every corner of its neglected premises. One thing alone had changed for the better. Hicks himself had been modulated by the great composer, Time, from a particularly vulgar, self-assertive young man of 20 into a veteran of singular gentleness and benignity of aspect, largely due, it must be owned, to a patriarchal beard, the most successful advertising medium the business had ever known. Seen through its highly refracting medium, as through a magnifying glass, the smallest and most unobtrusive interest loomed up as benefactions through its deceptive mist.

In 23 years many things had come into the little shop and gone again. Love and joy and death and bitterness, and pledges innumerable, waiting with the years from the dignity of tradition and wedding rings in the tradition of fat-trousers and the bed blankets. A wife had been given into his care for a season, at some crisis of poverty, and without, but had been redeemed again in due time, and taken out of the stricken hands. A son had come to him in the ways of life's business. A bad loan, this, and one that had cost him dear. Yet, now that he too was gone, the father would have made an even more liberal advance to have him back. And it had somehow gradually come about, through some resultant twist in the old man's mind, that in a general way, he preferred his pledges to his money, that he relinquished them often with manifest regret, and that certain immemorial items of collateral upon his shelves, representing money hopelessly lost to him, had become nevertheless the source of profound satisfaction.

Such was No. 21 as it stood entered upon his books. Commercially regarded, No. 21 was a green silk umbrella with a heavy metal handle of considerable value. It was sentimental, it stood for Hicks' oldest and dearest friend; psychologically, it supplied him, but had been redeemed with something to live for.

Its history was a simple one, but of quite exceptional interest. It had been bought one morning in the early years of his business life by a respectable elderly gentleman, who, after some haggling, accepted for it the sum of four dollars. With this sum and the customary ticket, he went out of Hicks' establishment, and was never again seen there or elsewhere. Nearly a year from the date of this transaction, and just before the expiration of the term of the loan, a young man had turned up, and had inquired with evident anxiety regarding the pledged umbrella. His description was

accurate, and Hicks had no difficulty in identifying the article, and no reason for denying its possession.

"It is most important," said the young man—for family reasons, that this article be redeemed. There is no objection, I presume, to my paying the amount, is there?" Hicks, in a friendly, and taking the property out of your hands.

"None whatever," said Hicks, "provided you had the ticket." "Surely that is unimportant," urged the stranger, "so that you get your money. Suppose I say double the amount, is that all right?" Hicks, in a friendly, and taking the property out of your hands.

"But the thing is worthless—I will pay you ten times the loan to safeguard myself on a certain line in the times! Good God!" he cried excitedly. "I must have it, man; more depends upon it than you know."

But Hicks was a charitable, and the stranger, after having exhausted his stock of argument, entreaty and pecuniary temptation, finally went away. When he had gone, the broker took down the umbrella from its shelf and examined it with a new interest. It was an excellent umbrella, solidly constructed, and of a material so serviceable as to fabric, yet scarcely deserving the valuation the young man had put upon it. Doubtless its value was sentimental merely; and yet—the claimant had been strangely eager. There was some mystery about it. Well, in 20 days it might be solved, for if, as the young man had said, its owner and the ticket were both at the bottom of the sea, the umbrella would become his when the loan matured.

But the matter turned out by no means so simply. Two days before the loan matured, the young man returned, clearly fortified with a better knowledge of the business and of his powers of defeat and resistance, and when the loan for another year, and thus renewed the matter for that period. Hicks accepted the money with an odd sense of defeat and acquiescence, and when his visitor had gone away with his receipt he again took down the umbrella, spread it, and, seating himself cross-legged upon the floor, he gazed deeply upon its mystery, but to no sort of satisfactory result.

"At least," he said to himself as he closed and replaced it, "no wonder that what had now come to be the chief event of his life approached, Hicks felt a heavier home than usual stir within him. His annual visitor had accompanied usually feeble at the time of his last visit, and the chance that he could have survived appeared comfortingly remote. A conviction that at length the mystery of so many years would be somehow revealed to him penetrated the old pawnbroker's mind, and as the critical date approached, he felt an almost youthful eagerness of anticipation. As a rule his visitor had turned up a day or two earlier than

and each annual recurrence of the date found him promptly on hand to protect his mysterious interests.

Between whiles the pawnbroker never saw him or heard from him, but there was scarcely a day that he did not think of him and his pursuit, and scarcely a week that, in an ecstasy of baffled curiosity and greed—for to his inflamed imagination the simple camp had become a treasure untold—he did not take down the article and re-examine it, rap it, sound it, rattle it, feel its fabric inch by inch, and, upon occasion, curse its silent secretiveness in good set terms.

Its metal head was large and heavy, solid, apparently, to all tests that he dared make, and cast on every side at the top into the semblance of a grotesque head, with staring, deep-set eyes. Cut or otherwise invade the substance of the umbrella, and he would find a matter of professional scruple, and finally, noting that his frequent handling was causing signs of wear, he was forced, for the same reason, to deny himself altogether the futile pleasure of touching it, save upon rare and eagerly anticipated occasions. But he hung it on the wall above his desk, and there it stood, day after day, a beacon and a goal, a beckoning hand, a bond of promise. Twice he was sick to death, but they brought the umbrella to his bedside, and straightaway got well. He came back forlornly from his wife's newly made grave and sat down before his tallied, and was presently consoled. He was robbed and stoned him, but he knew a way to be heartened and uplifted. The infinite possibilities of the umbrella, spread themselves above him and shielded him from the storm of circumstances.

Thus time went on, the young man still coming doggedly year after year, every season older and grayer, soon a middle-aged man, by and by an old man, older than his years, shabbier than once and feebler, but still unyielding in patience. He was always safely in time with his payment, but occasionally a little later than usual, because, perhaps, he had to journey or because of some other cause, and he had trouble to get even the near sum needed to protect the pledge. Meanwhile the broker lived in a state of eager anticipation, and was always troling that it was utterly undefined. Each year was to him a crescendo of hope, ending in sharp disappointment.

His life and its attendant pleasures were as the left-hand part of an accountment to the air provided by the disrupted umbrella.

Thus more than half a century went by, and as the 52d anniversary of what had now come to be the chief event of his life approached, Hicks felt a heavier home than usual stir within him. His annual visitor had accompanied usually feeble at the time of his last visit, and the chance that he could have survived appeared comfortingly remote. A conviction that at length the mystery of so many years would be somehow revealed to him penetrated the old pawnbroker's mind, and as the critical date approached, he felt an almost youthful eagerness of anticipation. As a rule his visitor had turned up a day or two earlier than



HICKS WAS POSING A HAMMER TO STRIKE WHEN A SHADDER FELL UPON HIS DESK.

was necessary, but this year he had not appeared on the morning of the final day.

By the terms of the loan the owner's rights expired at noon, and as that hour approached Hicks took down the umbrella with an uneasy hand and determined upon a plan of investigation. He had amply provided himself with tools, and only awaited liberty to use them.

One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight! Nine! Ten! Eleven! Twelve! Hicks had selected a cold chisel from his layout, and was poised a hammer to strike, when a shadow fell upon his desk, and a familiar voice said: "Yes, you've beaten. I haven't the price. I've tried hard, but when one hasn't money to pay for food, even bigger things must go."

Hicks paused in his work and looked at his visitor. He was pale and emaciated, his hair had fallen upon his forehead, and his little life was left him burned in his eyes, with which he eagerly devoured the article the two had so long contended for.

"Let me show you," he said. "There is an easier way." He took the umbrella from Hicks and, inserting an awl in one eye of the carved foot on the umbrella's head, with this leverage easily unscrewed the top, to the pawnbroker's amazement and disgust. The cavity thus discovered contained only a piece of folded paper, yellow with age. Upon this Hicks pounced with a kind of whine of animal greed and satisfaction.

But the stranger's hand fell upon his with an energy of which his feeble body scarcely seemed capable. "Don't touch it!" he cried. "For God's sake don't! It is nothing—noting to you; to me it is so much. No," he urged, as Hicks strove to withdraw his prize. "Not yet, at any rate. Not until you have heard my story." Hicks, who had seen his hand still grasping Hicks' wrist, and went on passionately: "It belonged to her father—this umbrella. He was my employer, and a rich man; and I loved his daughter, and she loved me. But he found it out, and forbade me his house—forbade me to think of her. But I wouldn't give her up, and she wouldn't give me up, and so we used to write one another every day, and send the letters back and forth in this manner, in a piece of folded paper. The old man always carried it, wet or dry, and I used to watch my chance during the day and unscrew the top while he was out of the house, and in my letter, and she did the same at home. It seemed a great joke then to make him our postman. Good God! What a joke it turned out!" Hicks slowly withdrew his hand, leaving the yellow paper between them on the desk. "Business went wrong," continued the stranger, after a pause. "The old man got involved worse and worse, tried the wrong way out of it, and had to skip. He realized on everything he had—sent this, as it turned out—and left between two days, taking her with him. They sailed for South America on the Ginevere—you remember—she was never heard from—never even spoken.

ken. And never a word from her—it was all so sudden—I knew that—but something might have been done—I couldn't understand. I guess I went pretty near out of my mind. My body just went round without me, somehow, for months, doing the old things without my knowing anything about it. When all at once I thought of the old 'umbrella route,' as we used to call it. It was a chance. Perhaps she didn't have any other, but your things had been scattered by sale, but I hunted and hunted. There were a hundred chances that he had taken it with him, but I took the one that he hadn't. By and by I thought of the pawnshops, and went the rounds. I guess yours was about the last, and when I got my eyes on the old thing, it was like coming home. But the ticket struck me, and I couldn't tell my story to such a man as you were then. You've changed a good deal in 53 years."

He paused, and looked longingly at the letter.

"That's what I wanted. I knew it was there. Her last letter to me. The last one she ever wrote. It made me wild at first to think that if I could only get my hands on the thing for a minute, I could have it out. But you won't let me know what it is. What'd you think it was—money?" Hicks nodded.

"Money!" cried the other. "I've wanted money pretty bad, but never the way you wanted it. But you couldn't seem to tell at first, and by and by, when I got to know it was there, wait for me, it didn't seem to matter much, so I couldn't keep it. And I have!" he cried. "And here it is."

"Fifty-eight years," exclaimed Hicks. "You topped old fool! Why didn't you tell me this 53 years ago?" And pushing the letter toward his companion, he turned away.

With a little weak moan of satisfaction the stranger seized the paper and carefully opened it. It may have been five minutes before the old pawnbroker ventured to turn and look at him. He sat just as he had left him, huddled together in his chair, the letter under his hand, his chin on his breast—dead. (Copyright by the Short Story Publishing Company.)