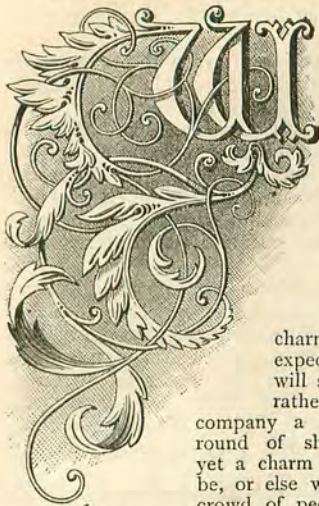


THE ART OF SHOPPING.



WHAT is it in shopping which so attracts the feminine mind?

It must be admitted that the stern sexes are, as a rule, indifferent to the charms of such expeditions, and will suffer much, rather than accompany a lady to a round of shops. And yet a charm there must be, or else why all this crowd of people invariably found at every favourite establishment, many of whom, if they told the strict truth, must own to having come for some trifling purchases which might just as well have been indefinitely postponed, or done without altogether?

Others will go shopping, as they wrongly call it, simply to look in at the windows on the chance of seeing something pretty and cheap, when they rush in and buy it, and go home rejoicing and boasting to all their friends of the bargain they have lighted on.

Let such foolish ones lay to heart this axiom: "Never buy a thing simply because it is cheap."

"Oh, but it is sure to come in some time," they will reply.

Perhaps it may, sooner or later, probably later; and meanwhile it will be laid aside, getting dingy and out of date, and when at last a use comes for it its freshness is gone, and you wish you had never bought it, and could go and get new.

Some members of the shopping world have wonderful notions of economy. They will walk long distances to save a few pence in their purchases, not taking into account the wear of shoe leather or the waste of time, or the mental and bodily fatigue, which surely is of some account if our energies are worth anything.

"Oh, why don't you go to Brown's for that ribbon? I got the very same thing there for 5d. only yesterday," such an one will say to a friend who is paying 6d. for it at Jones's. Now Brown's is nearly a mile away, and this economical lady forgot to mention that by the time she got to the shop she was so exhausted that she had to take a hansom home, so that in the end she lost considerably by the transaction.

Certainly there is no object in paying more than is necessary, even though it is but a farthing a yard; but a great deal of extravagance is practised and called economy by people who have not studied the art of shopping. As a rule it is not economical, but the reverse, to buy cheap imitations instead of the real thing; they are in the end not cheap, but dear. A poor thing, of bad material or badly made, may pass muster for a little time, but very soon its outside gloss of respectability begins to fade, its true self shows through, and everybody can see that it is nothing but a sham. And do we not all in our hearts despise shams? And rightly too, for they are the very essence of vulgarity.

But buy a good thing, and besides lasting ten times as long as the inferior, it will look good and respectable, and unspeakably more

refined, even when worn away to its last threads. So the true wisdom and economy is to have honestly good things, and, if necessary, fewer of them, and not to deck our houses and ourselves in an ostentatious superabundance of "bargains (which are not bargains) picked up so cheaply" here and there and everywhere.

Unless one can afford to fritter away an amazing amount of money, it is well on entering a tempting shop not to think: "Now what shall I buy, what do I want?" but to keep in mind the query: "What can I do without?"

A prudent shopper will keep her eyes from straying amongst the tempting array as she walks up the shop, lest, seeing, the temptation to buy should be too strong for her strength of mind. She will turn a deaf ear to the insinuations of the shopkeeper anent a "special cheap line in gloves," or "a manufacturer's stock of ribbons at less than cost price," conscious that though they may be cheap in one way, they would not be so to her, because she does not want them.

Shoppers may be arranged in three classes; probably we can all fix on one of our acquaintances as typical of each class.

First, then, the desperately economical, not to say stingy, shopper, of whom mention has already been made. Having possibly abundant means, yet nothing gives her so much pleasure as to buy her goods more cheaply than anyone else. Always on the look out for bargains, she moves her patronage from one shop to another, not because the goods are better, but she has the idea that they may be cheaper, or that the vendor may be more readily beaten down in price.

For this dreadful individual, on being shown any article, immediately, and as a matter of course, begins to persuade the shopman to take less than the price. Perhaps in the hope of retaining her custom he does abate a trifle at first, but, finding that there is no end to her bargaining, he becomes impatient and indifferent whether she goes elsewhere or not.

The members of the second class are not so numerous as those of the other two, but still they exist in no small numbers.

A lady of class number two will not and cannot believe that anything is good unless the full or more than the full price is paid for it.

"This is nice tender beef, my dear," she says to her daughter, the housekeeper.

"It is American, mother, eightpence halfpenny a pound."

"Ah, well, I thought it was very flavourless all the time."

Or, after admiring the new carpet in a friend's room, she is told it was bought at a little reduction because the pattern was not fashionable, she will say, sympathisingly, "Well, it won't wear, of course; it is such a mistake to buy underpriced goods when you want wear."

No shops are to be patronised except those "good old-fashioned" ones, which charge a trifle more for everything than anybody else. The addition to the price appears to add a flavour and air to the wares which is quite wanting in those bought at more reasonable shops.

Ah, well, class two, you are foolish, prejudiced, aggravating, but nevertheless to be preferred to your predecessor.

In the third class we find those who understand how to shop. Without being niggardly, they will not pay more than a thing is worth, though it be on sale at the best and most old-fashioned shop in the world. On hearing the price, if she thinks it excessive, she will say so, quietly but straightforwardly, not in the hope of getting it reduced, but to explain her not purchasing it. The truth is much better than a number of foolish groundless reasons which the attendant probably sees through in a moment and despises accordingly.

Again, if she be pleased with an article in quality and price, she will gratify the shopkeepers by saying so equally frankly.

On the other hand, she will never buy cheap rubbish; she carefully examines it and detects the good from the bad, and lets no amount of persuasion or cheapness tell against her own good judgment. She chooses out certain shops and goes to them as much and as continuously as she fairly can. She knows what she wants before going in, or if she does not know exactly she tells the attendant clearly what purpose it is for, and he is always willing to suggest. By this means she avoids the annoying practice of getting the counter covered with unsuitable goods, and finally departing without purchasing at all.

Should she have unavoidably caused extra trouble, or taken up a good deal of time, a polite "I am sorry to have troubled you" will mollify the poor tired server, and do away with the grumbling remarks which would probably be made after her departure.

If she meets an acquaintance in a shop, after greeting her she will finish her purchases before entering into conversation, so as not to keep the attendant waiting, for his time is valuable, though she may have plenty of leisure.

But a word must be said about servers. Are they themselves always perfect? Can they know how much custom they sometimes drive away from their masters' shops by their surliness and unwillingness to oblige? As a rule they are amazingly patient and good-humoured, but still one hears too frequently such a speech as this, "Oh, I never go to Brown's, they have such disagreeable, uncivil people to serve; I prefer to walk a little farther on to Jones's. It is not such a good shop, but they are so polite, and seem so anxious to please."

If they only knew how pleasant it is to be served by a civil, obliging person, and how annoying to have an impatient or unwilling one, they would certainly exert themselves to preserve at least an outward show of patience and good temper, even if they cannot manage to affect the interest in their customers which is such a charm in the attendants at many shops.

The importunate shopkeeper, too, is very annoying, who, when one is in a great hurry, persists in bringing out box after box of "special lines" and displaying them, regardless of your assurances that you do not require anything more.

Also, it is very provoking to be told that a certain article matches your pattern, or is suitable for your purpose, when it is quite evident that it would not do at all. This importunity is often due to the "rules of the house," where the assistants are paid a commission on articles which they contrive to sell. It is never done at the stores, and hence one of the comforts of shopping at these places instead of at shops. Pressing people to buy in that way seldom has the desired effect, and certainly makes them reluctant to go to the shop again.

The one thing to be considered on both sides by sellers and buyers alike is how to do to others as we would be done by.

MARY SELWOOD.

