1927

Do We Need Help in Household Buying?

Frances A. Sims
Iowa State College

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker

Part of the Home Economics Commons

Recommended Citation
Sims, Frances A. (1927) "Do We Need Help in Household Buying?," The Iowa Homemaker: Vol. 7 : No. 6 , Article 9.
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol7/iss6/9

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Homemaker by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
U Pon what basis do you make selection when buying household goods? Is it that it leads you to select this article rather than that one? Is it style or, barring style, is it quality, prices, advertising or good salesmanship? How can one know in this complex marketing system upon what basis to select things, anyway? These and many other questions were discussed at a conference on "The Problems of the Household Buyer," held recently at the University of Chicago, under the auspices of the Home Economics Department.

Speakers on the program represented three sides of the situation. The market was represented by executives from two of the larger Chicago department stores. The government was represented by Miss Ruth O'Brien of the Bureau of Home Economics. Consumers and teachers were present in an unusually large number.

Mr. Schlink, co-author of "Your Money's Worth," a book that is arousing much interest among consumers, spoke of the countless difficulties that beset the buyer in the modern market. The distance of consumer from producer, as regards manufacturing processes and as to what constitutes quality, the enormous amount of advertising, the confusion brought by countless brands, and in all high pressure salesmanship, are all tending to confuse even the most intelligent purchaser. Failing to have adequate information, the consumer either falls back on well-known brands with whose names she has become familiar through advertising, or perhaps decides through price, thinking that the higher the price, the better the quality. More fortunate is she who can depend upon the superior judgment of the experienced and reputable merchant, who endeavors to carry in his stock only dependable merchandise. However, in these days of large stores, the inexperienced and uninformed sales person may sometimes have as little information as the bewildered customer herself.

Were goods always as they are represented in glowing advertisements, the purchaser might then base her selection on these testimonials. But is it possible for all products to have the superior qualities claimed by most of them? So much emphasis has been put upon quality that the customer is often willing to pay a higher price to secure a product that claims distinctiveness. But when the advertisements of all such products claim the same virtues, how then is one to determine which is in reality the best? Unfortunately, there are still examples of misrepresentation in advertising, a fact that has brought into existence in a large number of cities "Better Business Bureaus"—organized of business men of high standards who are striving to eliminate false advertising and misrepresentation from business. If the purchaser could depend upon the advertisements, how much simpler would her problem be?

If the consumer cannot take advertising as an infallible guide in making wise selections, perhaps she may find help in price consideration, thinking that as one article costs twenty-five cents more than another, then perforce, it must be that much better than the other. In free competition, price automatically adjusts itself to a "fair price," but where methods are used to take an article out of competition and set it, in the mind of the consumer, above others of its kind, putting it upon a quality basis, the advantages of price competition are lost. High prices may mean quality but do not always go hand in hand.

An interesting experiment has recently been carried on by Miss Rossamund Cook, professor in education, University of Cincinnati, who reported the results recently. In this experiment, Miss Cook collected samples of sheeting of nine well-known brands, testing them in the laboratories for tensile strength, thread count and weight. These results were then statistically combined to give a quality rating and rank to each piece. The results of her experiment showed quite a correlation between price and quality. The sheeting ranking third in quality was priced twenty and a half times higher than that ranking second in quality. The price of the one was equal to the cost compared with a price of thirty-five cents of the other. The sheeting ranking next lowest in quality was second highest in price, while that ranking lowest in quality took fifth rank in price. This evidence would indicate that price cannot be used as a reliable method of judging the quality of sheetings.

Miss Cook then carried her experiment a step further to test the value of consumers' judgment in selection. These tests are those well-known to every housewife where selection is made on the basis of appearance, feel and comparison. About one hundred and fifty consumers were asked to judge the samples and an average was made. While the consumer was able to judge the poorest in quality, agreeing with the laboratory tests in this case, she varied greatly from the laboratory tests in her judgment of the better grades. The one to which she gave first place stood fifth, while her second choice was next poorest, according to the tests made in the laboratory. The sheeting ranking second in quality in laboratory test was placed very low by the consumers. Similar results were secured when sales people judged the material.

If the consumer finds her own judgment in selection for quality poor and that of the sales person no better and if she can be guided neither by advertisements nor by price, upon what can she base her judgments? A number of interested people will give as an answer, "Standardization." By standardization, we do not mean uniformity in those things that have to do with beauty or individuality. Color, line, style, fine appearance, unusualness have come to hold high place in the minds of the consumer and yet there are many products that the average buyer would like to purchase on a durability or quality basis. Sheetings is one example, towels, table damask, kitchen knives and utensils, electrical equipment and other articles are bought on this basis. May it not be well to formulate some plan whereby the buyer may be aided in the selection of some one of them many articles? Efforts are being made to arouse the interest of manufacturers in this problem. Representatives of a large number of organizations have met with the Division of Standards of the Department of Commerce to call a meeting of manufacturers, merchants, textile experts and consumers to consider a plan to classify sheetings by trade specifications so that the brand name can carry with it definite information which the consumer may use in making her choice. This does not mean, by any means, that other brands would be eliminated. It would merely present a definite quality to the buyer should she desire to purchase it. The government uses no such trial and error method as does the household buyer, nor do industrial companies. All purchases of over fifty dollars made by the government must be bought on specifications set up by the Bureau of Standards. Only goods of known quality, made according to these specifications, will be accepted. By this, an enormous sum of money has been saved. The Bureau of Simplified Practice has cut down the large number of sizes and kinds of certain commodities. Standard ratings have been set up for any purchase for a number of commodities, as, for example, fresh fruits and vegetables, canned goods and meat. These standards are for use when desired. May it not be possible to cut down the number of qualities presented to the consumer, or to present to her articles with definite quality standards? There are, in the files of the government, specifications for all sorts of commodities, but these cannot be published without having some special machinery set up to interpret them for the

(Continued on page 15)
Registrar Reports Increased Enrollment

With 4,074 students now attending classes at Iowa State, the enrollment stands at the highest point in the school's history, according to the registrar. There are now 211 more students in school than were here at this time last year. The faculty directory is also somewhat larger than was the directory for last year, as 114 new names have been added to that list.

According to the census taken at the time of registration, 11 percent of the present students operate motor cars. Every sort of a car, from the family sedan to the "collegiate flivver," amounting to almost nothing at all, is included in the census. A number of the students driving cars depend upon this means of transportation to and from the campus.

The College Savings Bank
AMES, IOWA
Wishes the Students of Iowa State College
A Merry Christmas
We will be glad to welcome you back next quarter.

SOMETHING NEW

In fact, everything shown in our store for Xmas is new.

Diaries
Stationery
Toilet Sets
Desk Sets
Felt Goods
Leather Goods
Stickers-Seals-Cords
Fancy Wrapping Paper

It isn't too late to choose Xmas cards; our stock is yet complete. We are in a position to make your Xmas shopping a pleasure.

STUDENT SUPPLY STORE
Across from Campus, Next to Theater

Wayne Knit Hose for Christmas Gifts

In a diversity of shades, in various weights from the sheerest and most transparent to the heavier qualities, Wayne Knit Hose is known for its tendency to wear exceptionally long.

Specially priced in box (3 pairs) quantities. You may have assorted colors and sizes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular $1.95 chiffon, 3 pairs</td>
<td>$5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light service—isle hem</td>
<td>$4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All silk semi-chiffon, $2.00 quality</td>
<td>$5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$2.50 quality</td>
<td>$6.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Rickenberg Co.
Style Shop Campus town

The Place of the Child

(Continued from page 1)

the best new books on child care and guidance, to attend classes for parents which are being offered by the extension service of some eight of our states' colleges? If this is impossible, to enroll in a correspondence course or to schedule your day so that you may spend time with your child, observing him closely, trying to understand him, talking to him or playing with him? Are you providing companionship for him of his own age? Remember, there is no factor in one’s environment more important than association with one’s equals, both in size and in social and intellectual development.

If you will do these things, I do not think you need to worry as to whether you send your child to the nursery school.

I cannot close this article without paying special tribute to the work of the nursery school at Iowa State College. I have watched its growth since its inception and I have worked closely with those who have been responsible for its direction—Mrs. Lancaster, Miss Swanson and Dr. Vance. The college and the state have a right to be proud of what it is doing and to rejoice that so many of the young women of Iowa are privileged to learn to know little children thru contact with that school. The service it renders to the student is still unique. There are few places that so well serve the homes of today and the homes of tomorrow as does that nursery school. It teaches love and respect for the personality of the child, and the application of the best there is in modern nutrition, psychology, sociology and physical care to the solution of simple problems of the home, so that the college woman may assume homemaking and parenthood with confidence born of intelligent understanding of her problems and how to meet them.

Household Buying

(Continued from page 10)

consumer and some effort must be made upon the part of the consumers to get this help. Does the consumer want assistance and will she use it when she gets it? It has been suggested that the consumer herself does not know what she wants. If this indictment is true, is it not time for us to show that the household buyer does know what she needs and would appreciate help in these matters which concern her so vitally?