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Buying or Being Sold...

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Buying or Being Sold . . .

By Marcia Turner

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IN ALMOST every home there may be found, on shelves and hangers, belongings which are popularly known as "white elephants"—those purchases a woman makes when, as she afterward decides, she was not her best self.

I have one such exhibit in my kitchen that I keep there month after month to remind me not to do it again. It is a sort of wire dipper, with which one may dip from a sauce pan one egg or even one very small potato at a time. At the time I bought it, or rather at the time it was sold to me, I knew perfectly well that we seldom cook eggs in the shell in my family, also that when we do, it is much quicker and more satisfactory to drain off the water.

Undoubtedly there was something wrong, for I recall that when I bought it of a salesman at the door, I was convinced that an egg dipper was something I long had sought and that having acquired it, one more domestic problem in our home was solved. I know now of course what the trouble was, namely that the salesman was a better psychologist than I.

THE art of selling, based on the psychology of salesmanship, is of comparatively new development, but many of us are unhappily aware that it has grown to be remarkably effective. Now if someone would develop a psychology of sales resistance, as an offset, those of us who have not learned to sell, but who have too often been sold, might have a fair chance in the struggle. For a struggle it is. Just for example, did you buy that little pancake spring hat or was it sold to you? Make no mistake, it

looks just as absurd as you suspect it does, or even worse, but you need not blame yourself too much for your part in an unequal contest.

It has been said that Satan never appears twice in the same garb; and so the wary purchaser needs to be prepared for the various forms of what is sometimes termed "high power salesmanship." For example, there is the kind that works by suggestion and the kind that works by aggression. Perhaps some examples will show what I mean. Take the salesman one must occasionally combat, who works by aggression. Here by your own temperament you are likely to stand or fall. If you have a streak of the same quality you are safe; but if you are a bit timid and not quite sure of yourself, then beware, or you are lost.

I STARTED out to find a light coat, tailored, without fur, unbelted and black, if you please. Enter the villain, tall, smartly dressed, iron gray bobbed hair, and bright, intelligent eyes that took me all in, in one sweep. Confidence filled my unsuspecting soul. I was yet to learn the worst. She listened to my request and disappeared.

When she came back she carried an assortment of coats in grays and mixed tweeds. I began to say, "You must have misunderstood"—but she stopped me with uplifted hand, "Now you just leave that to me. Let's try this on and get the style—belt in at the waist a little more—now see—perfect fit—perfect color—see the smart line of this fur—just the thing." I saw and shuddered. Shades of a putty colored stuffed sausage, tied in the middle! I

Your Easter Clothes

shall not try to describe further how I looked or how I felt when I saw how I looked. My protests were wasted.

"You can't wear gray? Why, of course you can wear gray. You see, you came in with your mind made up against gray, but let me tell you, gray is your color. You don't like gray? Why gray is the color this spring. You won't see anything else but gray. Of course this brown coat—you don't want brown? Well, then, I don't see what I could possibly show you"—and so on.

Now, of course I came home with a black coat, without fur and minus a waist line, just as I knew I should. It would have been the same struggle if I had been looking for a gray tweed with fur. The scene in the beginning was laid for a struggle. The resistance of the customer must be ground fine and, with his self confidence, made into mush.

I went home, as I said, with the coat I wanted, but I had an uneasy sense of guilt as one who has slapped the baby; and there was a crimp in my self respect which only time could iron out. And yet it is worth the struggle, the consciousness that you have made the suitable purchase. I realized it with a strong conviction a few weeks ago when I sat waiting for a friend in the rest room of a large department store, and watched other women come and go. Here one and there one, dressed with distinctive taste—the great majority in new spring outfits which fell far short in measuring up to the individual possibilities of the wearers.

Two middle-aged women sat near me in the crowd, chatting animatedly. Presently they greeted with cheers the arrival of a third. They might have been Clara, Lou and Em of radio fame in the flesh, and here was Clara fresh from the millinery section with an orange beret set jauntily above her high drawn knot of hair. Bits of the ensuing conversation reached me—"—and she said these were all the rage—orange is the thing this spring—believe me, I said, I'm not ready for old ladies' hats yet awhile." Lou and Em regarded her with a fascination in which I thought I read dismay. "Cu-u-te" they chorused heroically. But there you are—poor Clara had not bought, she had been sold.

Perhaps Clara's downfall had been accomplished in some such way as mine. Like hundreds of my sisters I thought I knew what I wanted in the way of a spring hat, but like those same hundreds,

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Prints Are Timely

Buying or Being Sold

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I failed to reckon with the trained saleswoman, who accomplishes her purpose by means of the power of suggestion.

When the first model had been carefully perched over my right eye, I saw myself in the mirror with something akin to sorrow. I looked simple minded. Then I heard the saleswoman murmur ecstatically—"sweet—color so lovely for your skin—youthful model—just came in this morning—exclusive"—and so on—you know the formula.

"But everyone will be wearing this style and you don't want to look like last year, do you?" Here I explained apologetically if not originally that unfortunately my face was last year's model. Then she came forth with a lulling argument. Every woman has heard it and many have accepted it: "You have never worn this style probably. It is only that you are not used to it."

Then as a dark prophecy, inserted ever so gently but none the less calculated to pulverize any lingering rock of obstinacy: "Of course (doubtfully) I could sell you a *matron's* hat." At which gloomy threat even great-grandmother herself may be induced to take the little model with the plume curled about one ear, and the cunning veil, assured that she looks just as she did in the daguerreotype, back in 1860.

Now what had the saleswoman done? Simply this, flattered the vanity that seems to be the vulnerable point of us poor humans. First our fatal beauty, then our youthfulness, then the suggestion of competition with our sisters in keeping up to the mode. Mixed in with all this is the soothing effect of much personal interest in us and of apparent deference to our whims.

SPEAKING of the sales appeal to vanity, could anything be more subtly flattering than the methods used by the magazine salesmen who arrive in a steady procession day after day, all bent on earning a scholarship at some university or other? It is a bright morning and your work is well along—or it may be a dark day and you need cheering up.

Here comes a ray of sunshine in the person of a charming young chap with an invigorating grin that of itself hails you as a long lost friend. If you are somebody's mother, your impulse is to give him a handful of cookies. If you are of his own generation you wonder if your hair looks all right. Sales appeal number one! If the neighbor down the road has obligingly given him your name, he immediately calls you by it and that is sales appeal number two.

Next he tells you, with that appealing confidence which he somehow makes you feel is for your ears alone, of his very worthy ambition to go to college, the

fulfillment of which ambition lies in your own kind and generous hands. That is sales appeal number three, directed straight to your bump of altruism. Lastly, in popular phrase, he "kicks you along"—lets you realize what a good sport you actually are. By his very camaraderie, he initiates you into the fraternity of buoyant youth.

Do you fall for it? You do! It is only after a dozen or so replicas of this charming young man have perched on your doorstep or with challenging assurance have draped themselves over your davenport, that you begin to recognize a familiar ring to the conversation and to suspect that this whole show has been staged for a purpose, and further that by its very rubber stamp characteristic, it has been practiced before the mirror for your benefit, and mine.

DO NOT mistake me. The actual kindness of a sales person is genuine more often than not—as genuine, no doubt, as the simple friendliness of those of us who have nothing to sell. It is only that kindness may not legitimately be commercialized, and further, that one needs to be awake to its possible effect upon one's better judgment.

There are ways, of course, in which the questing purchaser of clothes, let us say, may immunize herself to the hypnotic influence of high power salesmanship.

First of all, most of us in our saner moments know the general style and material and color of clothing best suited to our own coloring and individuality. We

know the limits of our purse strings and if we are tempted to stretch the limit we need to consider coldly and dispassionately whether we can or will wear the garment long enough to make up the difference. We know that the purchase needs to fit in with the scheme of the garments already hanging in the closet. Most of us have to keep quite definitely in mind too the adaptability of the garment to the variety of occasions for which it must do service.

And lastly we need definitely to put far from us the lure of extreme modes. For who among your friends stands out as a well dressed woman, even in her house dresses? Not she who, though she be up to the last minute of the mode, looks just like everyone else. No, it is she who knows her own best possibilities and treats them kindly in the face of both aggression and cajolery; who keeps her head and her patience; who buys with discretion, and who, let me repeat, refuses to be sold.

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