

Big Store Always Making Deliveries

(Copyright, 1933, by Anna S. Richardson.)

NEW YORK, April 15.—(Special Correspondence.)—Mrs. Miller, 1047 Broadway—Come on, or we'll never get a table. The lunch room here is always crowded.

They were pushing their way through the crowd around the bargain table, when the clerk called them back.

"Excuse me, but is that in this city?" she asked.

"Why, of course," replied the shopper, irritably.

"And your initials?"

"R. B. Miller—come on, Janet. Did you ever hear of such a fuss over nothing?"

The clerk stamped her sale slip viciously and remarked to nobody in particular, with considerableunction:

"She wouldn't call it nothing if her package failed to turn up on this afternoon's delivery. By tomorrow night she'd be telephoning in that our delivery system was the worst ever, and yet she begrudged the time to give her address accurately. Now, this city is full of Millers, and there's a Broadway in every city and town where we have a free delivery system. Did she suppose I could tell whether her Broadway was in New York, Brooklyn, Newark or Glen Ridge? Some women think we clerks are mind readers—No ma'am, you'll find the galleons on the next sale—I bet the blunder clerk is the hardest worked man in this store."

The blunder clerk, who is to be found in the sub-basement of any big department store, is one of the busiest men in a very busy department.

The modern delivery department, like a certain brand of detectives, never sleeps. To be sure, there are times when its wagons are not seen on the city streets, but that is no sign that all hands are resting. A delivery system is worked on a two-shift plan. For instance, when the local or city delivery is accomplished, the day men are relieved by a new force of wagon men, who are in charge of the big vans by which the suburban delivery is handled.

This force leaves the store any time between 6 and 9 o'clock in the evening, reaching the firm's headquarters in the distant suburbs by midnight or later. At these stations the van drivers receive receipts for their goods and tumble into bed, while a new force of men unpack the vans and distribute and "route" the goods on the smaller wagons sent out from these points.

The next day at noon the van drivers return to the station, take charge of their empty vans, drive back to town and report at the store for another night trip. In the meantime, the suburban delivery force is accomplishing its task; and so, day and night, the work goes on with the regularity and precision of clockwork.

When a cog slips, no matter how small, there is trouble from one end of the system to the other. It is to prevent the slipping of cogs that every important firm gives special attention to its delivery service, and employs some of its shrewdest men to keep this end of the business moving smoothly.

Just as a mail clerk must know the map of his route, while the train takes him spinning across prairies and through mountain gulches, so must the various clerks in a successfully conducted store know the city routes in order to expediate the delivery of goods and to hold the uncertain

trade of fair, but not always careful, patrons.

The increasing aversion to carrying packages, even though they contain no more than a paper of pins and needles or a soft silk tie; the C. O. D. system; the accommodation or special delivery, and the immense number of accounts carried by many firms, tend to make the position of the superintendent of delivery an onerous one. He must have executive power in abnormal development. He must possess the firmness and tact to enforce his plans. He must have the men who are capable of carrying out his instructions—men who will work like machines, yet never become so mechanical as to make mistakes without realizing what they are doing.

One big shop, noted for its expeditious delivery service, devotes the entire sub-basement to this department, and here, during the dull season, two hundred men are given regular employment. The number increases during the sharp rise in spring and fall trade, and in holiday seasons as many extra hands are secured as can work without literally falling over one another. During the two local deliveries at 8:30 a. m., and 3:30 p. m., each day, between fifteen and twenty thousand small parcels are handled, and so thoroughly is the work systematized that of the mistakes made only thirty-five in ten thousand can be traced to the delivery department.

The deftness with which the small parcel delivery is handled is one of the entertaining sights of this teeming department.

These packages are collected from one end of the building to the other in big hampers on wheels, by carriers who wear blue uniforms with silver buttons, so that the inspectors and wrappers may not make the mistake of giving up bundles to unauthorized persons. When a carrier has covered his route in the store he makes for the nearest freight elevator and is shot down to the sub-basement, where he rolls his hamper to the distributing table.

This is an enormous structure of highly polished wood, built on an incline. To the left of the man who is unloading it runs about four or five feet wide on a gentle tilt to the router, who has first sight of the address on the parcel. This side is used for paid packages or good accounts only.

Overhead there is a larger slide built at a more pronounced angle. Here the C. O. D. and unauthorized packages are whirled along to the authorization clerk. This employe not only knows the name of almost every man and woman carrying an account with the firm, but he recognizes them at a glance. If there exists in his mind any doubt regarding a name or an account he turns to a tube nearby and calls up the department of accounts to satisfy himself before passing the package on to the router.

The authorization clerk and the routers occupy square holes at various points in the big system of tables, and they look not unlike the barkers at a country or a midway show. But they are the quietest of men, and scarcely and conversation goes on during the rush hours. The routers glance at the address, paying no attention whatever to the name, mark the number of the route on which it is to be delivered, and shoot it along to the next clerk, who might be termed a distributor. He pays no attention to name or address, only to the number stamped upon the package by the router. Having read that number, he sends the package spinning down another table to the bin which bears the number

corresponding with the route assigned by the router.

These tables, which tilt in one direction or another, have a framework of several inches around the edges to keep the parcels from falling off, while the partitions are of the same height. To the uninitiated, the sight of these hundreds of packages scampering, slipping, sliding toward the various bins seems confusion, but each runway carries its own passengers, so to speak and it is seldom that the wagon man, on emptying his bin and checking off his packages, finds anything misrouted.

The bins look like small stalls, divided in half, on a line with the distribution tables, with an iron netting on the outside. The upper half holds the packages; the lower half, a hamper on wheels to carry goods to the wagons.

When the hour for their removal to wagons arrive, the wagon men receive schedules or records, one marked paid and O. K., the other C. O. D. The bin is opened by the clerks on the inside, the driver checks up his packages with the schedules, and from that moment the responsibility of the package becomes his. The inside clerks have done their part.

Right here many mistakes in address are discovered. In large cities, the districts covered by each wagon are comparatively small, and the driver, having the same route day after day, becomes thoroughly acquainted with it, just as a postman does. It is no unusual thing for a driver to hand back a package with such a remark as: "Mrs. John Henry Brown don't live at 1123, She's two blocks beyond." The package goes straightway to the blunder clerk, who follows its record, and the mistake is frequently corrected without troubling the purchaser.

As a rule, it requires about fifteen minutes for an expert wagon man to check off the contents of his bin and load his wagon. Generally, too, his hours are not hard. He is supposed to report at the stables by 8 a. m. and at the store with his wagon half an hour later. If his last delivery is at 3:30 p. m. he should be ready to leave the stable for home by 6 in the evening. But at the holiday season all rules fall and the delivery men work until they are ready to drop.

Around the outside of the bins runs an aisle, and on the other side of this is a number of dens connected with the parcel delivery. One of these is the wrong address room, where everything mislent must be turned in for investigation. Sometimes this is accomplished by going back to the salespeople, or to the ledgers, in case of a charge account. Here, too, come the C. O. D. packages, which are not claimed when first delivered. A wagon man must make at least three efforts to deliver C. O. D. packages, each time reporting to this "wrong address room," to have his sheet signed and turn in his goods to be held for another delivery.

It requires thirty men in all to run the den devoted to returned or refused C. O. D. packages. Fully 10 per cent of all goods purchased this way are refused on delivery and there is nothing to do except to bring them back to the store. Wagon men say that the majority of these refusals are due not to fickleness of feminine taste, but to a tendency to extravagance. On counting up the day's shopping women find that they have overstepped the allowance, or their husbands object to so large an expenditure and the goods are flatly refused. These refused goods are sorted twice a

day and returned to stock. The wagon clerk, of course, has received a receipt for their return, and the entire record of the goods from wagonmen to salesmen must be kept clear. The cashier for the C. O. D. department has his office in the delivery rooms.

The den devoted to special deliveries is a busy corner. Here come runners from all over the store with packages which cannot await the regular delivery. For example, if a woman is leaving town in haste in the evening and has just missed the morning delivery, her goods will be sent to her special, rather than take the chance of their being late by the regular afternoon delivery. The aisle director presumably satisfies himself that the request for special delivery is warranted, but it is an acknowledged truth in many stores that special delivery is much of a fad with certain fussy shoppers and regular customers, who invent excuses that are terribly and wonderfully put together. The "special" is an accommodation, pure and simple, and a big store records between 50,000 and 60,000 of these accommodations every year. Special delivery is made by boy or by wagons reserved for that purpose.

Then there is a corner devoted to "held packages," which have been ordered for delivery on certain days. They may be C. O. D. bundles, or paid packages. Each bin is labeled with the day of the week on which they go out.

The transfer department looks like a postoffice, with a thousand small racks for holding the sale slips attached to transfer cards. As each slip is received, it is tucked into its little rack, and the package is tossed into a bin which corresponds in number to the rack. When the clerk finds that the entire transfer card has been checked off, packages are gathered up and turned over to the router for distribution.

This method of shopping is infinitely safer and quicker than to have purchases sent indiscriminately and unattached from all over the store. Men, as a rule, will not bother with a transfer card, no matter how large their shopping list, but women like the system and use it very generally.

The mail-order department is run on the same system as the transfer, and the express department is on somewhat similar lines. In the special delivery department are kept the records of the entire delivery system, and one large rack is so arranged that it will hold a year's record sheets, ready for instantaneous investigation.

The express rooms and those devoted to the packing of all large shipments and deliveries, such as china, glass, house furnishings, works of art and furniture, look like busy carpenter shops. The china room is lined with high tables where the inspectors stand. They not only inspect all breakable goods, but stamp them with their numbers, and then pass them on to expert packers, who also stamp the package. In this way responsibility for breakage can be traced.

The average big department store employs 100 regular wagons and a half dozen electric vans. Three hundred and seventy-five horses are in service, and fully that many men are kept at work on wagons and around the stables, which are in charge of a skilled veterinary surgeon.

So important does the average firm regard its delivery system that, to perfect it and keep it working smoothly, it is willing to pay its superintendent a salary which rivals that of a successful buyer or head of department.

Gambling Among the Women of the Larger Cities

THE Brooklyn police have recently taken action toward putting a stop to certain progressive euchre enterprises of women, and the affair has caused a deal of talk in many places besides Brooklyn as to the increase of the gambling mania among the gentler sex. In Chicago it is evident that cards have within the last few years gained a tremendous hold on the affections of all classes of women, especially those in the fashionable and ultra fashionable sets.

It is generally conceded that card playing for prizes or money stakes has almost reached the stage of an epidemic among the women in Chicago, relates the Tribune of that city. Bridge, whist, euchre, and even high five and hearts have their devotees among the women all over the city. The number of women's card clubs in Chicago is hard to estimate. There are big clubs that meet downtown and draw their members from all over the city, and there are clubs confined to those residing in a single block or in a single hotel or apartment house. It used to be that a woman was satisfied if she belonged to one club that held meetings twice a month. But nowadays there are hundreds of women who belong to five card clubs, or even more, and who play every day, and some days play at three different clubs. Women's card clubs used to meet invariably in the afternoon, but now some of the clubs meet in the forenoon, others in the afternoon and others again at night. So that a woman who is devoted to the game can find clubs that will permit of her playing all day if she so desires.

Some of these clubs hold but one session a week, but others hold two or three. The dues vary. Some clubs demand a cash sum

of \$25 or \$30 from new members, others require a certain amount, 50 cents or a dollar, to be paid at each session. The bridge clubs have small dues, as they do not spend the money raised in this manner for prizes. At the bridge clubs, or at most of them, at least, prizes are eliminated for money stakes. There are women probably who play bridge for the love of the game, but even these do not refuse to take their winnings home with them.

At the euchre and whist clubs the prizes are the incentive to the games. The women hold their cards with as much grim earnestness and play as desperately and in as terrible silence as ever man played poker for a ten thousand dollar jack pot.

"See," said a north side woman as she came out of the card room where her whist club had been in session. "Just look what I won. This beautiful parasol with sterling silver handle."

"What," growled her disgusted husband, who had been cooling his heels in the smoking room awaiting her, "is that what you women were playing for? I watched you for awhile and thought you were playing for the Masonic temple and the courthouse thrown in."

Women sternly deny that playing cards for money or prizes is gambling. "I had to pay \$20 all in a lump to join our whist club," said a southside young woman recently, "but I've already won two burnt leather sofa cushions, a cut glass vase and a silver candy dish. I had them priced and all of them together are worth \$22.75. So you see I am ahead, and if I win those candlesticks tomorrow I'll be way ahead."

"So you have the gambling fever?" said a friend.

"The gambling fever," repeated the girl,

opening her eyes wide. "Why, I should say not. Gamble—me; no, indeed. Why playing whist for pretty prizes and gambling are two different things."

"Why different? In what way?"

"Well, one is playing whist for prizes and the other is gambling. That's the difference."

Even the woman who loses \$50 or \$100 at bridge will calmly insist that she is not gambling. She cannot tell clearly why bridge when played for money's sake is not gambling, but it would take six Philadelphia lawyers a week to argue her out of the notion, and even when they triumph they had the woman convinced she would probably conclude with: "Anyhow I'd give a bridge and gambling is gambling. So there now."

Card dealers say that their sales of cards and poker chips are ten or twelve times as heavy as they were ten years ago. The biggest bound in the playing card business, however, has come within the last five years and is mainly due to the sudden interest taken by women in cards when they found they had a chance to win a prize. Women usually found cards silly things. A card game didn't give them much opportunity of indulging in conversation or in gossiping, and it required them to sit still too long. But when it became the thing to play for prizes then immediately the women became interested and card clubs sprang up by the dozen. The more fashionable women have now taken up the bridge mania. The women of moderate means find her passion in euchre or whist. Bridge is a most intricate game, and it requires the services of a teacher for a long time before one becomes expert. Bridge teachers are not in business merely for the sake of

their health, and so learning the game from a teacher costs a good bit of money. Besides that, as people of wealth usually play the games, the stakes are generally pretty stiff, and only people with good cash accounts in the banks are able to play.

The woman of more modest means, however, can go in for the whist and euchre clubs, where she can learn the game from friends and from books and experience, and where the play is not for stakes that might run high against her, but for a prize that will cost her no more nor no less whether she wins or loses.

While the police authorities are commencing to pry into the schemes of promoters who get up bridge or whist games for an alleged charity of some sort, but keeping a dollar for themselves for every penny that finds its way to the charity, there is a wall of protest coming from another source. That is from the husbands of the women who gamble at cards.

"I go home at night for dinner," said one man last week, "the housemaid, the cock out in the kitchen with dinner only half started. Everything about the place showing the lack of care or attention on anybody's part. Reason is that wife's been at her card club all the afternoon. Comes dashing in at 7 o'clock with some thingumbob that she won. Eats a bit of cold meat off the sideboard, gets my name on a check, and then disappears again to spend the evening at a bridge whist club. But it's got to stop. Maybe the police can't stop it, but let me tell you of one patient, long suffering little man that is going to stop one woman from gambling. That's me, and the woman who is not going to play cards any more forever, either for money, marbles or gum, is my wife."