

Devices to Catch Trade

NEW YORK, May 15.—"I saw a vaudeville show for nothing the other day," announced a dialogue artist.

"Where?" queried his friend. "In Blank's department store; it was thrown in with a 5 cent package of pins," was the answer.

First-class vaudeville is only one of an almost endless variety of entertaining and amusing things that the up-to-date retail store employs to supplement its display advertisements in holding old and catching new trade. So fixed and widespread has this feature of big store keeping become within the past few years that hundreds of men and women earn their living entirely by traveling about from department store to department store the length and breadth of the land, directing and giving their specialties therein.

The manager who makes contracts with these people to the amount of \$1,000 or \$1,500 weekly is no longer a rare and daring spirit; and such announcements as "Beginning today, and lasting through the entire week, the public is cordially invited to view our special exhibit of paintings, attend our organ recitals, listen to the band, and ride on the merry-go-round," can be found many times over in the newspapers.

With an eye single to business, the amusements are almost solely planned to catch women. Some of the entertainments appeal to them directly, as demonstrations of everything cookable and wearable under the sun. Others appeal to them through their children, and these according to the managers, are the best sort. Hence, the ever-present solicitude in many a big store for the comfort and pleasure of small boys and little girls.

A certain store in one of the over-grown Atlantic seaboard cities is especially noted for looking out for the children. It has given over the larger part of one of its immense floors of several acres to an enormous playground. Sand heaps, hammocks, swings, foot and hand balls, small ponds for sailing boats, tents, dolls, doll-houses and doll baby carriages are provided in profusion for any child who may be left by its mother in care of one of the nurses in attendance. If the mother wishes it, the nurse will slip a play dress over the child in order to keep its own dress clean and neat while it is in the playground.

The place is overrun with romping children, and there is hardly a child within a radius of several miles of the store that has not played in this "playground."

The children are compelled to behave themselves. If a boy shows a tendency to be quarrelsome he is separated from the rest by a nurse and placed in a portion of the playground reserved for just such youngsters. If here he still remains disagreeable, a nurse takes him to the street, places him on a street car, pays his fare, and starts him homeward. This is in the event that the mother has not left directions where she can be found in the store.

It not infrequently happens that during the summer the playgrounds is used day after day by the same children. To observe the first rule of the playground, a parent takes the child there in the morning, gives it 10 cents for the dainty lunch that the store furnishes for that sum, and leaves it in the care of the nurse until well along in the afternoon. In this way the child is assured of a cool place to play during the hot days at little or no cost, for electric fans furnish a resort-like breeze for the little guests.

Almost as popular with the children as the playground are the Shetland ponies of another store. The small animals number a score or more, and any child who applies may have a free ride around the sixth of a mile tanbark track in an upper floor.

A capacious merry-go-round, with the inevitable organ, is the children's chief delight in still another store "where mamma buys our dresses." When mamma purchases a certain amount of goods each of her offspring is entitled to a free ride, and the larger her purchases the more rides for them.

This store makes a point of having a multiplicity of entertainments. At present besides the merry-go-round, a band of thirty pieces gives morning and afternoon concerts; organ recitals hold the attention while the musicians are resting, and when the organist is not working "coon" singers and cakewalkers, illusion experts and other vaudeville artists are holding forth on the stage in the firm's theater, which is capable of easily seating 500 people.

A concert hall is a fixture in many of the department stores, especially in the middle west and the states to the north of it. Here the lecturer, the special exhibit man and the panorama are found in all their glory.

One of the most popular features for the concert hall is the Passion Play. As a panorama of the Oberammergau interpretation unrolls before the eyes a lecturer explains and describes the play and scenes, and at appropriate times a young man, with a rich voice, sings "The Palms," "The Holy City" and other appropriate sacred songs. The man who conceived the idea has these Passion Play panoramas on the road and he keeps each one busy filling contracts at \$200 a week.

The concert halls of the department stores of the middle west cities are given over extensively to female orchestras. Male musicians are pretty generally tabooed, owing to the almost unanimous belief among managers that a woman violinist will attract three customers to a man's one.

The pipe organ and the orchestration are also not infrequently employed in the concert halls, or are erected in some suitable spot by the store that cannot boast a hall. Each is usually contracted for at prices ranging from \$150 to \$300 a week, and the man who is traveling around the country with its sets it up, arranges the programs and directs the two daily concerts. He doesn't need to know anything about music. If he has an orchestration he simply sets going the crank that starts the music; and he does away with the extra expense of an organist by utilizing an automatic player.

Such a musical instrument can always be counted upon to attract heavily, and sometimes it fills the store to such an extent that business is hampered by the crush. Such was the case recently in Minneapolis, where the crowds became so large and overpowering that the orchestration was stopped and the announcement made that, owing to the jam, the concerts would be discontinued until the store could be partially cleared.

Famous paintings prove almost as strong drawing cards as classical music. Almost a half hundred noted canvases are being exhibited in the stores that do not own their own art collections, and their owners, who paid big prices for them, are making neat profits on their investments. A well known painting of ample dimensions brings in at least \$100 a week.

The chalk-talk man, the sand-picture builder, and the crayon-portrait artist all find the department stores a fertile field of income. The worker in crayon is especially in demand. He will do a rapid-fire portrait of any customer who presents a slip to the effect that she has purchased \$5 worth of goods. He is kept busy the six hours that he usually agrees to work in return for \$50 a week.

The income of the man whose specialty is natural history exhibits is about the same. He displays his cases of butterflies, or bugs, or birds and bird's eyes, or stuffed small animals, in a corner of the store, and morning and afternoon he gives a short talk on the habits of the creatures represented in his collection.

The specialties of the itinerant demonstrators, who get all the way from \$10 to \$75 a week, are as varied and distinct as the demonstrators themselves. Soaps, nostrums, powders, face washes, hair bleaches, corsets, foods, skirt supporters, new cooking utensils, all come within their sphere. But the demonstrator who is always sure of drawing a crowd shows by example how the man of fashion should dress at different periods of the day.

He first makes his appearance from behind a screen at the back of the show window all attired for his morning canter along the fashionable bridgepath. After exhibiting himself for a few minutes, he dives behind the screen, to reappear in a short time in the sack suit prescribed for the morning walk and business.

Correct dress for afternoon and evening functions follow, and then the demonstrator appears for the remainder of the two hours devoted to the demonstration as a workman, with overalls, jumper and spade, and in various picturesque costumes. This man draws a big salary. Another window demonstrator who also makes big money poses as a fashion plate on a revolving pedestal in such a lifeless manner that he keeps the crowd guessing whether he is a living being or a wax imitation. He works four hours a day, and remains on the pedestal fifteen minutes at a time. He doesn't even wink except when his back has revolved to the giggling spectators. Even then he does not dare to wink too frequently for fear of changing his rigid, lifeless expression.

Except to demonstrate clothes, the stores do very little to attract men. One or two, however, have installed smoking rooms, which are chiefly patronized by college youths or young men who make engagements to meet their friends in the store, and spend their time until the hour of the appointment arrives in lolling about the rooms.

Christmas, of course, brings out all sorts of entertainments peculiar to the season. At this time of year a big store thinks nothing of spending \$15,000 to \$20,000 for the entertainment of its patrons.

A certain western store last Christmas put in a miniature electric railway, which ran around the four sides of the store just above the first floor, and was supported by brackets on adjoining posts. The cars consisted of big Mother Goose shoes, and a dozen attendants were kept busy putting on and taking off the small passengers.

Electricity plays a prominent part in store attractions, for a good electrical display always draws well. A column several stories in height and covered with 7,000 electric bulbs is a permanent feature in the arcade of a store in one of the north-western states. It is advertised extensively

and farmers make special trips of many miles to see the wonderful light effects.

Plaster casts of angels, the Madonna and Holy Land scenes, common around Christmas and Easter, are displaced during the rest of the year by statues in gold and silver of well known actresses, which were made for expositions, and, after having served their original purposes, have fallen into the hands of the commercially inclined, who derive good incomes exhibiting them.

GUY T. VISKINSKI.

An Arab Tea Party

A lady traveling in Morocco gives the following account of an Arab tea party: "Our host dispensed sherrub de minat, the wine of the country, made from grapes; the little dome-shaped pewter teapot was there with its fond associations of Morocco, together with the copper tray and circle of diminutive painted glasses; a gorgeous indolent sun poured down beyond the patch of shade; the hum and hover of insects vibrated in the air; and presently musicians were summoned—girls wearing pale green jellabs and silver ornaments, with yellow handkerchiefs twisted around their heads, men in bright colors. Sitting down between us, each was given a glass of sherrub de minat and by-and-by they began to play. Weird and wild music it was, that of the taregea, the gimbi and the tahr, quaint native instruments of the roughest construction and yet, as music, possessing fascination not a little."

America's Greatness

Colonel Abraham Gruber is the master of more Irish jokes, it is said, than any other man in town. In making a speech at a recent public dinner he told this one:

"Mickey Finnigan, who had been an American citizen for about a year and had traveled about this continent considerably, returned home to Hibernia for a visit. This is the way he described his new country to one of his relatives:

"Phwy, Amer-r-ica is so big, begorra, that if you wor to dr-rag England thr-rough the shtates you wouldn't lave a mar-ck in the dir-rt; an' you could lose Oirland in one o' thim gr-rat inland oceans we hov, phwat we call lakes; an' if you had Scotland to get rid of, there are a thousand corners you could hide her in, an' nobody could tell where you had put her except, begorra, for the bad smell o' the whisky." —New York Mail and Express.

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