

One of the most interesting and famous bookshops run by a woman is the Hampshire Bookshop, Northampton, Massachusetts of which Marion E. Dodd is manager.

## Bookselling as a Profession for Women

ONCE a woman came to talk to me about opening a bookshop in Montclair. She said that she had three children to educate and five thousand dollars in the bank. What did I advise her to do? I told her that I could not possibly even guess for her. I did not know how much imagination she had, or will, or culture, or power to work. It takes a great deal of all these to keep a bookshop. But she was insistent, and she was plainly in need of a helping hand from somewhere to keep her from being simply a mother of three children with an uneasy heart. She went away, saying that she would come back in two weeks. Would I think it over and tell her what I thought then?

It gave me three headaches and spoiled a performance of "Il Pagliacci" for me, but when she came back I advised her to do it. Five thousand dollars would not educate three children. It would not educate half a child, or buy their clothes or keep them in overshoes. But if she would get out in the world of affairs, even if she failed, somebody would be watching her, and she would get an experience which would help her to do something else.

Probably five hundred women and a hundred men in the United States are at this moment planning to open bookshops, and thirty or forty thousand more regard them as one of the romantic possibilities of life, like sitting on a stone in the moonlight or finding that there is oil on the farm your grandfather left you, appraised in the last bill for taxes at one thousand dollars.

There is some golden spell about bookselling. If you love books you can check, dust, label, wrap, bill them, and still they give you out some phantom joy. I have loaned books, sometimes ten at a sitting: I

By MADGE JENISON

*As one of the founders of "The Sunwise Turn," a distinctive and delightful bookstore in New York City, Madge Jenison, speaks with authority on this new profession for women*

have bought them, and spent evenings rearranging them after various theories; but to sell anybody one hundred and eighty—pile them up so that all the surrounding chairs and tables are toppling with them, is a kind of fever dream. "The work is the wages" in bookselling more than in most things with which we occupy ourselves, I think.

Women in "making room for their feet" have overrun bookselling. They are at the head of virtually all the book departments of the large department stores in New York. These are the big "merchandising women"—who can buy competently, turn over stock at the required rate, get space from the advertising manager, and handle a large sales force with judgment. The number of women at the national Booksellers' Convention increases markedly each year. One half the attendance at the convention last year was women.

The small, expert shops, where there is something of that experienced professional relation to your material which we associate with a physician or lawyer, are in a

marked degree the enterprises of women.

Eight such shops were opened in New York in one winter—five by women. One was a children's bookshop and one of the two members of the firm was a pediatrician (children's physician) and it aimed to provide as expertly for children's reading as physicians do for their physical development and health. The Sunwise Turn in New York, which was visited during the war by all the high commissions from abroad for material on education and labor, is the project of two women. It is hard to think that women sell books any differently from men but it seems to be true that most of the experimental creative things in bookselling are being done just now by women.

ONE of the romantic subjects of conversation for years in the book trade has been the peddling of books from door to door. We have all talked about a bookshop on wheels winding over the hills and far away. But nobody did it. It remained for Miss Bertha Mahoney of Boston to convince sixteen publishers that a Book Caravan would be a practical advertising project which could be crossed off on their publicity budget even if it did not entirely pay for itself. A special truck was built for Miss Mahoney. It cost fifty-five hundred dollars. The ends let down to give as much space as possible when it stops for business. It carries a thousand books. The plan of its administration is roughly as follows: An itinerary was laid out in advance, and the woman's club, or some interested organization, was asked at each stop to act as hostess and give the Caravan some advance publicity. It drew up in a town square or the court of a hotel, and opened its doors for business. Every night accounts

were cast, and a postal order and the orders for books not in stock returned to Boston. At certain points along the route the stock carried was renewed by packages sent from Miss Mahoney. During the first summer, the Caravan sold eight thousand dollars' worth of books. Miss Mahoney's venture was subsidized by the Women's Educational and Industrial Union of Boston.

A later venture was that of Appleton's. Mr. Hiltman, president of this publishing house, sent out a truck to sell Appleton publications alone. This was a standard truck which cost twelve hundred and fifty dollars, and made no pretensions beyond carrying two tons. Instead of two women at salaries of fifty dollars a week each, it was driven by a single salesman; and instead of making a long tour it ran close to New York and used the home office as a base for restocking. But the fundamental departure it made was that it peddled from door to door instead of selling to those who came to an established stand. The Appleton truck paid from the first week, although it tilled an infinitely more restricted territory than the Book Caravan—the list of a single publisher. But most publishers have a rounded list: fiction, business books, children's books, poetry, biography, travel. At one house, where the driver of the Appleton truck found a sick man he sold thirty novels, not all new by any means, but all new to his buyer.

Any woman whose husband or father would lend her a truck, and who could find a friend to go along for the ride, so that the overhead would not rise too seriously, could try out this experiment. A little ingenuity, and some steps to let down, would make any standard truck a place to stand around and talk of books. And what a chance for headliners the walls of the truck would offer!

"Books are food, air, light, love, hope, common sense, information—Buy"

It is startling to think what the effect on the next generation would be if fine books were carried to the intellectually starved communities of the country. There are states beyond the Mississippi which are almost bookstore-less. The Book Caravan sold forty dollars' worth of books in one hour on one farm in Massachusetts. One woman could do more in a summer by talking about and selling *The Story of*

Mankind; the Lives of Pasteur, Benvenuto Cellini, J. J. Hill, and Elizabeth Blackwell; Evelyn Dewey's *New Schools for Old*; Carpenter's *Love's Coming of Age*; Stanley Hall's *Jesus in the Light of Modern Psychology*, and a dozen or two of the best contemporary novels and volumes of poetry—or anything else she loved, and could present with zeal—than by writing all the checks a fountain pen can sign. She would put in the hands of hundreds of people large models of things about which they think in small, and stories of how people did what they longed to, instead of looking at the horizon and thinking about little poems on resignation.

It has been proved that it is the "quality books," as the publishers call them, that sell from caravans, and that, when people seldom have a chance to buy books, they buy the best. The last United States census shows that nearly one-half of the population of the United States is on farms and probably not in the trading radius of a good bookstore; and such a book truck would bring, especially to youth, the world of the gods.

The Hampshire Bookshop, of Northampton, organized and financed by Smith Alumnae and managed by Miss Marion Dodd, is an experiment in a different

ing now a business of seventy thousand dollars a year.

One of the most magnetic figures in the book trade is Miss Marcella Burns, now Mrs. Hahner, head of the book department of Marshall Field's, in Chicago. Miss Burns conducts at Marshall Field's an annual book fair of national importance, where all the publishers show exhibits. America will have in time a book fair conducted by the book trade itself; but in the meantime Miss Burns is doing it.

The important step in a bookshop is to get it started. A bookshop is so important to a community that it will not be allowed to die if it is once started.

"What did you do?" I asked a woman who had found fifteen thousand dollars capital for her shop in the worst period of the financial depression of 1920.

"What didn't I do?" she answered, and clapped a hand to the forehead that had served her well.

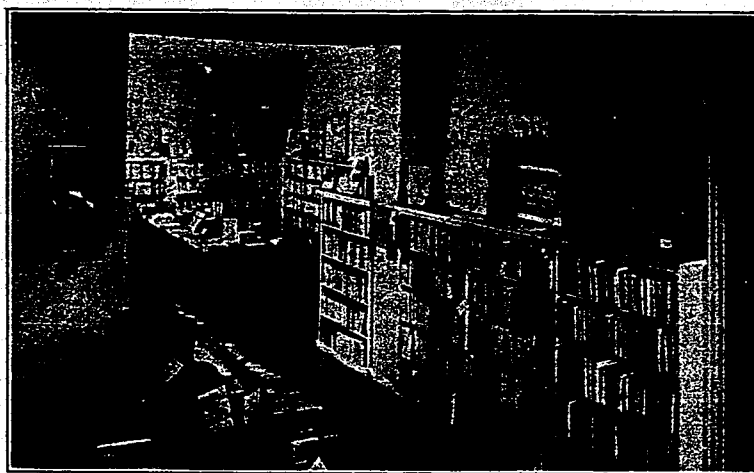
She had written to everyone she heard of, who might help, followed up every idea, every suggestion, devised a plan by which friends of the shop could take each a small hand in helping it; with every turn she made, learned to put her case more and more vividly. One must be able to talk about any idea, to sell it.

To get the shop started, the first great necessity, after the will to do it, is capital. The financing of anything more than a velvet hat frightens very many women; but if women are to realize their business visions they must learn to find the money for what they believe in, take the hazards, and then get the returns, if there are any.

"Desiring isn't everything. The chief thing is to have a straight backbone." Perhaps you can capitalize it yourself. The husband of one woman I know financed hers, an aunt helped another. The

Detroit Arts and Crafts Society partially subsidized its bookshop. In some states the State Federation of Women's Clubs has funds for public-spirited enterprises. The Hampshire Bookshop and the Radical Bookstore in Chicago are both cooperative organizations. They rebate back to all members of the company a percentage of profits.

(Continued on page 26)



Bertha Mahoney, of Caravan fame, is now running this charming bookshop for boys and girls in Boston.

milieu. There is a place in every college community in the country for a shop such as this. Such a shop does not compete with the textbook bookstores. Let these stores keep the textbook trade, and all strength to their elbows. These college-town bookshops are shops with a feeling, and with a look of being lived in. Miss Dodd has proved that such centers are wanted. She has tripled her staff in four years and is do-

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## Read!

### The Editor's note on page 15

It broadcasts a request to clubs for stories of their older members who have pioneered in business and the professions. Please send them in. We will print many of them, in whole or in part. But even if you do not see your story in the INDEPENDENT WOMAN shortly after sending it in, you will be gratified to know that you have made a valuable addition to the archives of the Federation, and that we are building up, here in the magazine office, a well filled editorial file which will be a rich source of material not only for THE INDEPENDENT WOMAN but for all of you to draw upon.

*So please send in your stories!*

## Book Selling as a Profession for Women

(Continued from page 7)

A BOOKSHOP can be begun on a very small capital. Miss Marion Cutter, owner of The Children's Book Shop, in New York, walked along Fifth Avenue thinking how tall the buildings were and how small she was and that she knew nothing about business, and then she went into a little sliver of a room partitioned off from a laundry, which looked to her like a bookshop, and signed a lease for it. She had a capital of \$2,000 made up of a small legacy and the savings of a librarian's salary. At the end of four years she has a capital invested of \$12,000. The Sunwise Turn began with \$2,500. But an adequate capitalization is \$5,000 to \$12,000, and it saves one many a sleepless night to have it. No business is expected to be on an assured basis in less than three years, and a sinking fund for these problematic three years will go partly for rent and partly for publishers' bills, and provide a fund of peace and leisure for constructive effort. The accepted amount of yearly business which a bookshop must do to be on a paying basis is \$20,000. The Sunwise Turn did \$12,192 the first year, \$12,874 the second; \$18,259 the third; \$37,782 the fourth.

Any place will do for a bookshop if one gives it individuality. If you have an idea, you do not have to pay rent. I never see on the main street of any small city one of those old gubernatorial or justice-of-the-supreme-court-looking houses, which always stand somewhat above the car line, without wishing that some daughter of the house would set up a bookshop in the little reception-room which is sure to be at the right hand of the front door. Stables make big studio-like rooms in which it is easier to set up a bookshop than it is not to. In New York the small bookshops are sometimes down a few steps in the old brown-stone houses, sometimes up a few steps, sometimes on the second floor. They can be anywhere that you can put yourself, a few books, a customer—and a chair to fall into when publishers' bills come in.

The safest first buying is the things one likes. One is sure sometime to sell a book one likes. The problem of bookselling is not to sell books but to sell the books one has. Merchandising is not a matter of buying five hundred books and selling them, and then taking the money to buy seven hundred and fifty more, as I thought in the naive days when I first planned a bookshop; it is keeping a set of Jane Austen five years on the shelf, and then selling it at rare book prices because that edition is out of print, or entering more unfortunate items year after year on the stock list until the sight of them makes one's breast give forth a moan.

A GOOD card catalogue of customers is one of the richest assets a bookseller can have, and she should begin from the first to create it. Good card catalogues with information about clients are coming to be recognized in every profession and business as a routine part of equipment. They have sold for as much as ten thousand dollars. The greatest insurance salesman in the world, who sells more than a million dollars' worth

of insurance a year, has in his files notes on his clients and those whom he regards as candidates, which includes their relations to their wives and children, their investments, tastes, clubs, careers, and character sketches to rival Margot Asquith's autobiography.

What you want to know to sell a man a book is not where he lives but whether he wants Ulster to have a separate Parliament, loves the sea, or likes stories best where the young man gets rich and marries the daughter of the owner of the mill, and whether he prefers Airedales or Cocker spaniels. You get this information day by day from people who lean their elbows on the tables opposite you and lay before you their tastes, hates, needs, and sometimes stories out of their lives more poignant and brilliant than anything you have in print. Your window, your technique of selling, your organization, your policy of advertising grow up and change, month by month, within the engrossing movement of human beings in and out of the shop.

Bookselling is the most fascinating thing in the world to do. But with the best management in the world there always remains, especially in the small shop, the difficulty of making it pay—that almost irreducible gap between the overhead of selling books and the profits to be made on them. The big commercial bookstores fill this gap by selling stationery, old and rare books, typewriters, office furniture, even linoleum and automobiles. The small shops which are trying to keep within their walls the feeling of creative, imaginative life sell textiles, pictures, publish, and take orders for printing. One is supported by its English importations.

Sometimes a bookstore is an adjunct to another business. Several gift shops carry a wall of books. Occasionally tea-rooms undertake this, and more could. Any tea-room could add a thousand or two dollars a year to its income with its left hand, by having a shelf of books to let out to solitary diners, and copies of a few of the popular contemporary books for sale. Books bring people.

There is a great untapped possibility for fine bookselling in modern life—the leisure-class woman. Women of family could sell books preeminently well. They have the equipment. It ties up to their traditions. Many of them could do that, and use their powers, who would not do anything else. Every book one sells opens a door into a new life, and a woman's perception could fling open with generous hand the way to a brighter and more spacious world to many a person too busy, or young, or unambitious to find it for himself.

EDITOR'S NOTE:—This article is reprinted by the gracious permission of the author and the "Woman's Home Companion." It appeared in that magazine several years ago, but it is just as pertinent to women's interests now as it was then. Those of our readers who like the easy charm of Miss Jenison's writing will be delighted to know that E. P. Dutton has recently published her book, "The Sunwise Turn", for which, she says, this article was merely a "preliminary canter."