

Autosuggesting the Customer

Autosuggestion and Salesmanship, by Frank Lincoln Scott. New York: American Library Service. \$1.50.

IT was inevitable that someone should arise to hail the Nancy druggist as a pioneer in Salesmanship. What more natural than to take the principle of "selling" oneself good health, via the imagination, and apply it to the task of selling shoes and overcoats and cough-drops?

Mr. Frank Lincoln Scott, himself a salesman, believes that Coué has supplied an altogether new approach to the problems of the jobber. Many a salesman, for example, is troubled by a lack of confidence. "Anticipation of disaster robs some salesmen of so much of their 'go' that they face the hard customer with their best energy frittered away and the remainder is not quite enough to effect the sale."

The man who has something to sell is beset with all sorts of standard "fears." Mr. Scott lists a few of them: Fear of the Big Buyer, Fear of the Little Buyer, Fear of the Hard-Boiled Buyer, Fear of the Evasive Buyer, "Fear of the—well, we might list every type of buyer that exists today and find as reasonable a fear to list beside it." And the answer? "Let your Imagination dwell pleasantly on the experience. Picture an interested expectant listener. See yourself confident, courteous and thorough." Say to yourself, in Coué style, several times at night before going to sleep and in the morning when awakening: "This self-distrust is disappearing little by little and is steadily being replaced by self-confidence which will make it easier every day for me to meet and sell to new customers." As Merton says, in the silences of his own bed-chamber, "O God, make me a good movie actor!"

Get rid of fear, says Mr. Scott; then take what Coué says about Imagination conquering Will, and apply it to your prospective customer. Suggest agreeable mental images. "It is not so far a cry between successful mental therapeutics and scientific salesmanship as you might think." A Boston hat-store apparently owes much of its success to the fact that instead of telling its customers, "Here's a new model which is very stylish," it suggests "Quite a lot of Harvard men are wearing this one." A half dozen such ingenious practices appear in Mr. Scott's account. The least persuasive one, for me, is the case of a salesman of explosives who called on retailers with a new product that could not be set off by accidental concussion. This agent had a custom all his own. "He would take a piece of the new explosive. As he talked with the prospect he would show the sample and say, 'This new product of ours is even more powerful than dynamite. You use it in practically the same way. But—' Here he would lift the sample and throw it with all his might on the floor. . . ." And would the prospect, recovering from the first swift shock of finding himself alive, reach up on the shelves behind him, select a stick of ordinary dynamite and hurl it at the demonstrator, saying, "Well, here's one for you that *does* explode!"? No. The inference is he buys six dozen cases.

I do not know how well Mr. Scott's precepts of Imaginative Salesmanship work in practice. I suppose the number of prospective buyers swayed by information that Harvard is affecting this or that style bonnet is a large and fairly constant factor in the hat world. But of one thing I feel certain. In applying autosuggestion to the business

of selling goods, Mr. Scott has incidentally revealed the credo of the modern salesman with extraordinary skill.

We live in an age when this salesman, through the advertising columns, dominates fully half the space in nine periodicals and newspapers in every ten we read. His patois rules the conversational efforts of a hundred thousand earnest Babbitts at their luncheons. Buyers are "prospects." Arguments are "selling ammunition." A refusal is "an alibi." "Success" is money. Gone is every emphasis on *buying*; how many miles away is the quaint notion of the world beating a path through the woods to the man who made a mouse-trap—if it was the best mouse-trap to be had?

Life is a race in "selling": selling everything—gloves, motor cars, ability, education, socks, skill, saxophones, and "personality." Around all this is wrapped a new and noble terminology. The salesman has become "a scientist"; selling, "a profession." The writer of advertising copy that can "pull" is one of God's ministering angels, putting in the hands of the right people the right products at right prices. All manner of notions evolve from the defence-mechanism of the successful salesman flinching before the fact that he is just a high-class huckster.

How far away from facts is most of this interpretation, showered on little gatherings of salesmen like the gentle rain from heaven, Mr. Scott's book unwittingly suggests. Salesmanship, as it is practised in the grand manner and blessed with all this adulation, is by no means the finely social service of putting into the outstretched hands of people what they want; it is definitely a business of making as many of them as possible believe they want something which they don't. Why else this insistence, so prominent in Mr. Scott's narrative and at every "advertisers' luncheon," upon the necessity of "breaking through the hard shell of the buyer," of "watching for a weakening," of "pushing the enemy's line"?—Enemy! In other words, "the prospect." One of the heroes in Mr. Scott's gallery is the dessert-manufacturer who couldn't sell a pudding because it was uninterestingly white. "A little harmless coloring was added." "Rose Vanilla" was stamped upon the label. Presto! the public ate it up.

Customers are boobs. The right bait will make them bite. And discovering that bait is a large part of the "science" in that modern salesmanship so vaunted to the skies. "An agent for one of the less-known automobiles," narrates Mr. Scott, "successfully uses suggestion by actually playing up the smallness of his company and its output. His car is, of course, well made and fairly priced. In talking with the motorist who is looking over the car for the first time, this dealer commonly enquires where the visitor lives. Often it is possible to say, 'If you buy one of these cars, you'll be the only one on the block who owns one.' . . . This appeals to the desire for exclusiveness (one form of the desire to be great) which is so common in many people. This dealer is always sold out months ahead as a result of his skill in making a suggestion which the prospective customer turns into the autosuggestion: 'Here is my chance to be exclusive.'"

"My chance to be exclusive."—Salesmanship, ferreting for its opening, will snatch at an appeal to snobbery. It will lick boots and scream shrilly and weep with the grief of a crocodile. It will profit from anything that promises a sale. Why shouldn't it?

But why should it be labelled "a profession"?

CHARLES MERZ.

THE PROSECUTION OF THE KUZBAS COLONY COMMITTEE

at the instance of returned colonists is not the criminal case it purports to be. It is a political prosecution inspired by the hysterical prejudice against all efforts to aid the people of Russia. No such case would be brought upon similar charges of disgruntled colonists returning from any other country. They would be referred to the civil courts.

The political character of the case is evident in the fact that an agent of the Department of Justice and two members of the New York City Bomb Squad handled it, among others, although the technical charge brought by the Grand Jury was Grand Larceny! As nearly as we can find out, it is not claimed that any of the nine members of the Committee profited personally or that a dollar was misappropriated. The sole claim seems to be that Kuzbas took the money of colonists on misrepresentations as to conditions in the colony. We deny that claim and are prepared to prove in court our entire good faith.

According to the press, the prosecution has stated that Kuzbas is engaged in "Soviet propaganda." Kuzbas is not a propaganda enterprise in any sense. It is an industrial organization, non-political in character, enlisting American workers, engineers and machinery for the reconstruction of industry in two great centers of coal and steel production in Russia. The Kuzbas industries at Kemerovo, far from being disrupted are making real progress in production.

Over 500 people went to Kemerovo in the last year. The American workers have charge of the coal and chemical production in Kuzbas, and plans are being developed looking toward the control by American workers and engineers of the great steel plant in the Urals.

The Management was reorganized last fall and the American Organization Committee, whose former members are now indicted, has been abolished.

It was replaced by a Managing Board of three, one of whom is now in America.

The prosecution appears to belittle the value of the Kuzbas concessions. In fact they are worth millions of dollars. The steel plant alone represents a pre-war investment of over \$10,000,000 and had 16,000 employees. These properties were taken off the concession market to try out an experiment in American workers' control.

The colonists who quit because of dissatisfaction with conditions have not affected the conduct of the enterprise. Those who are on the job are endeavoring against great obstacles to reconstruct almost paralysed industries.

In connection with this prosecution of the former American Organization Committee undue prominence has been given in the press to the identification of Roger N. Baldwin with the committee, doubtless because of his national reputation as Director of the American Civil Liberties Union. Mr. Baldwin generously and without compensation acted on the committee as organization advisor because of his interest in the experiment. There appears to be evidence that reactionary influence, opposed to many of Mr. Baldwin's activities in behalf of civil liberties, sought to damage that work by connecting him with a criminal prosecution.

Most of the members of former committees are working men with working class connections. Kuzbas is an experiment in workers' control, as well as in the reconstruction of strategic Russian industries by American industrial skill.

In order to make known the facts of the enterprise and the nature of the charges against Kuzbas, we are inviting a committee of distinguished American liberals to examine its operations and to make a public statement.

Fortunately we have funds with which to carry on our legal defense and we do not need to appeal for outside help. We are represented by Arthur Garfield Hays and Thomas J. Blake of New York City. Those who are interested to follow the case in the courts and to familiarize themselves with the work of the organization are asked to fill out and send us the coupon below.

American Representative

MANAGING BOARD OF KUZBAS

KUZBAS, Room 301, 110 West 40th Street, New York City.

Please send me your bulletin in regard to the work of the organization and the developments in the political case against its American representatives.

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Famine: Its Cause and Cure

The Restoration of Agriculture in the Famine Area of Russia: The Interim Report of the State Economic Planning Commission of the Council for Labour and Defence of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul. London: The Labour Publishing Company. 5s.

TO repeat that Bolshevism did not cause the Russian famine seems futile; people are believing as they choose about the matter. Yet the facts are recent and obvious. Famine, this famine, caused the overthrow of the Tsar. The subsequent governments of Miliukoff and Kerensky tried to stop this famine and failed. The Bolshevik government has tried to stop it, but so far with no success. No end to the famine is yet in sight. Russia cannot farm without farm implements, cannot buy farm implements without exporting grain, and cannot export grain without adding to the numbers of those who die for lack of food.

This is the problem above all other problems now before the Russian government. Shall grain be used to feed the starving, or shall they be sacrificed that sometime starvation may end? The Bolshevik rulers have always been frank and have faced facts: they are not ignoring or disguising this famine or the price of ending it.

Famine now is not limited to Russia. In Europe generally, the undernourished are in the majority. Month by month, the death-rate in Vienna is about double the birth-rate. Our time is seeing Vienna crumble as all cities of the past have crumbled. Famine in Europe would be almost universal if some countries were not still in position to buy from the United States, Canada, Argentina and Australia. The outlook in these four remaining sources of food is exemplified in the United States, where a series of good seasons covers the consequences of a loss of 1,700,000 working farmers from 1910 to 1920 with the loss since 1920 apparently accelerating. This loss of farm population in the United States has been attributed to the substitution of machinery for men; but the farm implement business has certainly not been working overtime.

In the Interim Report of the State Economic Planning Commission, the Russian government tries to state the facts about Russian agriculture and to suggest ways by which famine might be ended. The document is not hopeful—"optimistic" as Rotarians would say. Russia has the land and the labor and could produce food, but producing food is not profitable. That is the trouble with producing food for the world over. Other services are now rewarded so much more highly than food production that they are attracting the money and the men. Concessions of Russian land for large scale farming might be had by any reliable capitalist; but capital has abundant chances of that nature in the United States and is not attracted to them. If large scale farming anywhere paid, New York money would be going into it.

Russia has small scale farming still. Dividing the large farms has not added enough to any small peasant farm to make of it anything but a small peasant farm. Everywhere, such farms are associated with poverty. They produce food for the farm family. Above that, what they produce is negligible. The surplus that supports cities does not come from the "little farm well tilled" and the "diversified

agriculture" that city papers advocate. It comes from specialized large scale farming, from which the growth of the profit system has taken all inducement. Complaints by farmers are heard more or less graciously; but farm boys and girls are doing little complaining. They are migrating; they were the farm workers that the American census-takers of 1920 did not find.

The Russian government realizes that large scale farming could end famines in Russia, and the Interim Report give plans for such farming. The plans are as detailed as available resources in experts and equipment permit; the state lacks the most ordinary instruments of surveying, lacks even drawing paper. Nevertheless the report suggests that Russian land would produce a surplus of food under large scale farming. Russia cannot finance farming of that kind. The rest of the world will not, because that kind of farming has ceased to pay. That is why the landed gentry have vanished from the older parts of the world, even from England, and why the newer parts record a continuous and accelerating "city drift."

C. F. ANSLEY.

The Reign of the Evil One

The Reign of the Evil One, by G. F. Ramuz, with an introduction by Ernest Boyd. (The European Library.) New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company. \$2.00.

IN his introduction to the present volume Mr. Ernest Boyd seems quite content to let it pass as a rural fantasia. His characterization is sound as far as it goes, but *The Reign of the Evil One* is unhappily many things more. The opening pages are those of a realistic novel; then satire is introduced, then mysticism, then naïve metaphysics, then fantasy, then absurdity and finally abstract irony.

As a result Ramuz must be admitted to be a writer of versatility, but one whose fondness for experiment in many methods achieves in this instance merely an acute literary muddle. This is unfortunate, for after twenty years, more may reasonably be expected from a novelist than the promise contained in an occasional effective phrase.

The story opens with fine rugged simplicity; a Swiss mountain village is presented with photographic distinctness, while its inhabitants take immediate and convincing form. A stranger is introduced who brings in his sinister vagabond's pack unheard-of troubles. Men mistreat their wives, the honest steal; sickness decimates the hamlet. A hundred minor human dramas end in tragedy. A prophetic villager who warns his fellows against the newcomer is roughly silenced by those he would save. When the populace is finally aroused the stranger protects himself with the blackest of magic and openly establishes a rule of evil. Those who join him exist only for nightly orgies that reach their height when a slut defiles an image of the Christ torn from the walls of the deserted church. Order and becoming calm is restored when a child seeking her missing father crosses herself before the Evil One. There is doubtless some deep significance in all of this; certainly anything can be read into it. The specific moral Ramuz alone may know; for anyone else the book is as unsatisfying, as unconvincing and as inharmonious as the music of a man who plays six instruments at once.

K. F.