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New Way Store: A Book for Clothiers and Their Clerks

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SAM
LAMBERT AND THE NEW WAY STORE: A BOOK FOR
CLOTHIERS AND THEIR CLERKS ***

E-text prepared by Barbara and Bill Tozier

Sam Lambert and the New Way Store

A Book for Clothiers and Their Clerks

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CHAPTER I.

SAM LAMBERT had the best clothing store in Medeena County—a corner store on the main street of Medeena opposite the Court House Square.

Medeena had four clothing stores, not counting The Blue Front, down by the Depot, with its collection of cheap watches in the window, a yellow guitar, two large accordions and a fiddle with a broken E string.

Everybody in the County knew Sam Lambert.

As a merchant and a citizen he was a whole bunch of live wires. A big-boned, free-hearted fellow—lucky enough to just escape being run for sheriff, as some thought he was too good natured, the “gang” was afraid he was not pliant enough, and Sam didn’t want to be away from the store.

Sam took great pride in his clothing business and kept pace with the most advanced ideas in the trade.

He was awake to the marvelous development of the ready-to-wear business. He carried the best and took a positive delight in each season’s new models.

He recalled the old days of “hand-me-downs,” and he had lived to see the two best tailors in Medeena take to bushelling “ready” garments, with less and less of that to be done—principally changing a button or shortening a trouser’s length.

Sam was broad-gauge in everything he did. He sold his goods at the marked price, for cash only—got a decent profit and told you so.

Why shouldn’t he? He had a sense of style. He was keenly alive to the artistry of clothes and his enthusiasm was contagious.

Sam was firmly convinced that a man has to spend money to make money in the clothing business.

He said that a part of the value you deliver to a customer consists in giving him a better opinion of himself: making him feel like a king for a day and that the best is none too good for him.

“A store”, he would tell the boys, “cannot be run on the low gear. You must keep her keyed up. Relax when the store is empty, but when you go to meet a customer put on the tension—take a brace—get spring into your step—learn to bunch your vitality and get it across. But keep your energy inside.

“Don’t bounce and don’t talk too much. Keep yourself in hand. Be quiet but alert.

“Concentrate! For the time being there is but one person in the world and that is the customer, and the most interesting thing in life is the thing he came in to see.

“You can size up your man while you are going forward to meet him. But by all means take him easy. Undue interest might embarrass him. Suppose he only wants a pair of 15c. socks; if he does, there is a test of your ability that you may not realize.

“Many a clerk who can close a Twenty dollar transaction with tact and dispatch never seems able to handle a Ten cent sale so that the customer goes out feeling pleased with himself.

“Nine men out of ten who come into the store are self-conscious. The thing to do is to make your man feel that his requirement is important simply because it is his requirement.

“A good salesman keeps his own personality in the background: he keeps the store and the sale in the background. He puts all the emphasis on service to the customer, and to do this he must mentally put himself in the customer’s place.

“Try to be as interested in the customer’s finding what he wants as if the article was for yourself; but don’t insist on his taking only the thing that appeals to you.

“Quietly dominate the sale, but leave him plenty of room for the exercise of his own taste and ideas.

“Most men, though they may not show it, are slightly on the defensive when they come into a clothing store. That

is why it is so very important that there be no talking or laughing among the clerks.

“You may find it hard to realize the effect of a whisper or a titter on the part of the store’s help when a customer is present. In nearly every case the man becomes sensitive or resentful and thinks he is being ridiculed.

“Try it yourself sometime by going into a strange store in another line of business in a distant city: when you hear a laugh or a remark passed among the clerks, see if you don’t wonder if there isn’t something wrong with your clothes or feel sure that comment is being made on your appearance or behavior.

“There is another form of impatience or self-consciousness on the part of a customer who is more or less acquainted with the store. He hurries past everyone in front, headed for the part of the store where he thinks the goods he wants are kept.

“It is bad policy to step in front of him or otherwise impede his progress. If there is no one to wait on him follow quietly and be on hand when he lands at his destination.

“A clerk often wonders why customers persist in doing this.

“It is because they have an idea of the location of what they want and blindly strike out for it with a certain nervous desire to cover the intermediate ground as quickly as possible.

“Remember that while you feel perfectly at home in the store, few customers do. It is your business to put them at ease and certainly to do nothing to make them uncomfortable.

“When a man comes in for a suit of clothes he usually has some sort of a mental picture of the thing he desires. An idea, clearly defined or hazy, is in his mind as to the general color and effect of the suit he wants.

“It is something he has noticed worn by someone else—looked at in a show window, or seen in an illustration.

“In most cases it will not be the thing he finally buys. It may be a chalk-line stripe or a Shepherd’s Plaid worn by a drummer who boarded the 6.30 Lightning Express. In the glow of the lamps and the bustle and excitement of the Station platform the thing looked possible: but confronted in the store with the very style and pattern he backs away from it, though ‘it looked good on the other man.’

“Find out what he has in mind; meet it as nearly as you can and get it out of the way. Otherwise he will not concentrate on other goods. He will hold to this mental picture and measure everything you show him by it—much to your disadvantage.

“One of the worst possible things is to ask a man about what price suit he wants.

“Keep price in the background. Time enough to feel him out on that subject. No man likes to have you take the measure of his pocket-book.

“You must use your judgment in gauging him as to what to show him.

“The important thing is to get at the picture he has in mind, and the price too, if you can do so without asking him to name the figure.

“Never ask a customer how he liked the last suit you sold him. Let by-gones be by-gones. This is a new deal. Whether he was entirely satisfied is not the point now. Don’t raise dangerous questions.

“There are a dozen reasons why his last purchase may not be remembered with pleasure—reasons that have nothing to do with the value he received or the actual

merit of the clothes.

“If he voluntarily mentions the last suit with praise take it as a natural occurrence and pass it over; you will try to do even better by him this time.

“If he complains of his last purchase don’t argue. Leave the subject as soon as possible and get down to the question in hand.

“Have confidence in your goods, in your prices and in yourself as a salesman.

“There are more sales lost for lack of firmness and decision at the right time than for any other cause.

“Among the clerks in the best and biggest of stores there are ten good openers of a sale to one good closer.

“Be a closer.

“It requires judgment and decision of character, but you can learn to do it.

“When a woman goes into a cloak and suit department, she is not satisfied to buy until she has been made to feel that she has pretty well canvassed the assortment, seen practically everything in the stock at the range and along the line she is seeking.

“She has merchandise imagination and thinks of the possible garments back there in the stock that she might have liked better.

“In this regard a man is somewhat easier to handle.

“It is a fact often demonstrated that clerks can close a sale more quickly where the stock is kept on hangers instead of piled on tables.

“The preliminaries are more quickly covered. Having walked down the line the customer is better satisfied that the whole selection is placed at his disposal.

“There is no secret about it. Nothing held back. No mysterious pile of garments on a table that he cannot see.

“Note the tendency of the customer to investigate a pile of coats—lifting up the corners and looking at the patterns.

“A coat in plain view, taken off the hanger, is more obviously a thoughtful selection of a garment definitely suited for him and he is the more ready to make it his own.

“The important thing in closing a sale is to narrow down the choice as soon as you can to one or two strong possibilities, flanked by a bad one—that is, a style or a pattern that you know the customer doesn’t want.

“When this point is reached it is well to move the customer away from the rest of the stock, say to some distant corner where he can stand on a rug and look in the mirror—

“Where his whole attention can be given to one suit, or at most a choice between two.

“A sale must be opened easily. The customer should never be made to feel that he is being restricted in his selection. But the moment you can form an idea of what he wants you can probably think of just the thing for him.

“If you handle him right he accepts your knowledge of the assortment, instead of demanding a complete canvass of the stock.

“It is then you may know that you have established his confidence.

“In a comparatively short time you can narrow him down to a choice where by a tactful show of firmness you can help him decide.

“In the handling of almost every sale there is a point

beyond which the customer begins to flounder and show indecision.

"The weak salesman leads him on and on with no stopping point—no place to close—and the prospective sale fades to a 'just looking today' excuse.

"This is a universal fault among retail clerks.

"The test of salesmanship is in closing a sale.

"Be a closer!

"Never guy a customer or 'kid him along' for the amusement of a by-stander or a fellow clerk. This is a common practice in some clothing stores. The offender is usually a self-satisfied clerk who has had just enough success as a salesman to make him egotistical.

"He thinks he is a regular dare-devil and that by making sport of his customer he may win a reputation as the village cut-up. His favorite victim is some half-witted fellow—tho' a customer who is partly deaf may do and he is always ready for a yokel or a foreigner.

"There is no doubt," said Sam Lambert, "that the medal for the longest ears and the loudest bray in the clothing business belongs to this Smart Aleck type of clerk known as a 'kidder'.

"To say nothing of the respect he owes the customer, it is astonishing how he can presume to work his cheap little side-play on any human being, when even a dog is sensitive to ridicule and knows when he is being laughed at."

CHAPTER II.

NO one questioned Sam Lambert's power as a business getter, nor the alertness of his store-keeping methods.

He was prodigal of his own energy—never spared himself. He looked after the important things and left details to others.

As with every man who is a constructive force in the world of affairs, Sam's friends and relatives shook their heads—said that he needed a balance-wheel.

This was dinned into his ears so often that he finally came to believe it. So after many Sunday afternoon business discussions, it was arranged that he was to take into the business his wife's cousin, one Lemuel Stucker, who had spent twenty years saving \$9000 as general manager for a flour and feed concern.

Stucker had worked out elaborate sets of figures to prove the needed economies of management.

He was so tireless and sincere, so careful and exact, that it was with a great sense of relief that Sam turned the store over to him.

Here, at last, was a man who could lift from his shoulders the daily burden of management.

Sam's real interest in the change, as those who knew him might have guessed, was a desire for new enterprise. He had long had an eye on a fine opening for a clothing store in the neighboring town of Bridgeville, twenty miles away, and he lost no time in carrying out this project.

During the ensuing year he was so engrossed with the Bridgeville branch that Medeena rarely saw him, and Lemuel Stucker's rather discouraging reports on the state of business were attributed to Lem's conservatism and natural depression of mind.

Lem was Sam's opposite in almost every particular. A

small, sallow man with a black shoe-string necktie and a look of general regret.

He spent most of his time untying knots in pieces of string, picking up bits of wrapping paper and sharpening short lead-pencils, and he was great on buying brooms.

His effect on the store was one of immediate and prevalent blight.

You may wonder why the boys did not complain of conditions to Sam, but Lem was manager—and there is something so virtuous and convincing about a first-class retrencher. His wise saws and thrifty sayings are infectious and he makes everybody so low-spirited that they are ready to catch anything.

No more good window displays—tacks, colored cheesecloth and other accessories cost money, and the sun was bad for the goods.

No more trim on the counters and shelves.

Stop the high-power electric light in front of the store and reduce the lamps inside.

These things did not all occur at once, but so gradually that it was hard to realize just what had happened to the store.

The windows got streaky and the inside of the store looked dingy and cold.

Then the conservative spirit got into the buying. Nothing but black cheviots with a few drab and gray worsteds.

Perhaps it was just as well, for when a customer came into the store and saw Stucker he thought it was raining outside.

Sam Lambert had always prided himself on keeping alive what he called the "buying spirit" in the store.

Nowadays a customer got a sense of caution. The feeling was one of disapproval of all extravagance.

Instead of purchasing a suit, the man wondered where his next month's rent was coming from, bought a pair of cottonade pants and hurried home.

Trade fell off steadily. Affairs went on this way for a twelvemonth and then something happened.

Two of Sam's principal competitors were reported to be remodeling their stores—and what was more, they were going to put in wardrobe systems and carry all their garments on hangers.

This aroused Sam and he made an immediate investigation.

He found that one of the stores had contracted for the old type of wooden wall cabinets where the clothes hung behind panelled doors.

But the other was installing glass wardrobes, where the stock would be on view.

This discovery cut Sam like a knife.

He investigated further, and was delighted to find that his wardrobe competitor, with the temptation to save a few dollars, had ordered a second-rate type of glass wardrobe, with pull-out rods that swing inside the case, without a locking device to prevent them from breaking the glass.

Without saying anything to Stucker he telegraphed the best wardrobe concern in the country to send their representative at once.

CHAPTER III.

AT eleven o'clock the following day a quiet man wearing double-lens spectacles and a pre-occupied air came into the store, asked for Mr. Lambert and was directed to the rear where Stucker was showing Sam the wisdom of leaving the night covers over the black goods during the day to protect the stock from dust.

Sam was so keyed up on the wardrobe question that he heard only about half that Stucker was saying.

When the man with the spectacles arrived Sam guessed his mission without waiting for a word of greeting.

"You," said Sam, "are here to talk wardrobes; let's see what you've got."

"Before I talk wardrobes, or, if you please, the New Way system," began the salesman, "I would prefer to get a fair idea of the amount and kind of stock you carry and how you care for it now."

"Just as I thought," interrupted Stucker. "You're afraid our stock is too big for your wardrobe capacity."

"Well, I don't want to discourage you, but when you count the suits on the table, don't forget to add about 50 dozen pair of knee pants and odd trousers stored in case-goods boxes under the tables."

"Remember too, that when you take the tables out, you must find another place for our last years sweaters, mufflers, caps, gloves and underwear, as well as all our advance stock of shirts, hosiery and ties which we keep under the tables because we have no room for them on our side shelving. You can see it is piled to the ceiling now; and all that on top is active stock."

"That reminds me, Mr. Stucker, of a joke your friend Jones, over at Dennisville, played on Sakes, his partner."

"Before we remodelled their store, they had a lot of money tied up in stock piled under the tables like you have. Most of it was odds and ends—left overs of many seasons that Jones knew even a clearance sale would not clean up."

"He inventoried the lot and shipped 72 dozen pair of knee pants to New York, and wrote the auctioneer to send a check for whatever amount they brought."

"The funny part of it, Sakes never discovered that the stock was gone until about three weeks later, when he noticed a check in the mail and asked Jones what it was for."

"You can do the same thing, Mr. Stucker, with your stock under the tables, and the check you will get will help buy New Way sectional shelving that will give you about three times the capacity your furnishing department has now; so it will not be necessary to climb to the ceiling for your active stock or dig under the tables for your out of season goods."

"Before we discuss detail, Mr. Lambert," continued the salesman, "I have something to say about the practical arrangement of the inside of the store."

"The business of a store is to sell goods. A customer may come in for one item. You want him to buy two or three or a half a dozen. The easier you make it for him, the less he has to cross and recross the store to complete his purchases—the more goods you will sell him."

"What you want—what every merchant wants—and what few have—is a practical, natural selling arrangement of the goods."

"The invention of a practical wardrobe merely made the right plan possible."

"Our business is to suggest the plan and fit the wardrobe arrangement to the needs of a store."

"Every clothing store has its own individuality. Each problem must be worked out on the ground with a full knowledge of the stock and the business, the history of the store, the nature of its trade and the personality of its proprietor."

Sam's interest was excited. This point of view was new to him, but he could see the truth of it and he was impatient to get at the heart of the matter as far as his own store was concerned.

"You're right," he said, "about the personality and individuality of a store; and for that reason don't tell me to put the furnishing goods shelving down the middle of the store. This is a clothing store and not a haberdashery."

"Mr. Lambert," said the salesman, "you have hit the nail squarely on the head. This is a double room, a very different problem from that of a single store. I looked over the place of one of your competitors this morning. He also has a double store with much the same arrangement as yours and I find that he is making a mistake—adopting a plan that is about five years behind the times.

"You see, in the earlier days of the wardrobe, there was no such thing as a center wardrobe. Therefore the clothing had to be hung against the wall in pull-out cabinets. When the clothing went to the side walls the furnishings had to move to the center floor space.

"Such an arrangement is not practical for a double store and the effect is bad. It kills the first impression of a big store. The shelving will look bare if it is not trimmed, and if it is trimmed your big double room looks like two small stores divided by a wall.

"The center shelving will always have stock boxes piled on top and that will throw one side of the store always in shadow. Besides, this arrangement divides the trade and screens half of it from view.

"The stock is cut in two and looks small.

"One salesman can not wait on the furnishing goods trade without neglecting half of it all the time. If you have two clerks, a customer must be taken from one side to the other for his ties or underwear, and there you are again, both on one side at the same time.

"If another customer came along they'd have to stop in the middle of a sale and refer him to a clerk around in the other aisle.

"A furnishing goods department should be continuous. The sale of a shirt will lead to the purchase of a tie or a collar or hosiery. The goods should be in sight so that they automatically suggest themselves.

"You enter this store and the first impression you get is a big clothing store. That is what you want. Clothing dominates the store. Furnishing goods and hats are important and necessary side lines. No one would mistake it for a haberdasher's. You have been known from the beginning as the leading clothier. That's the reputation you want to keep.

"Mr. Lambert, one of the important problems of this store is to house your stock in new fixtures and at the same time widen your aisles.

"You can not see how that is possible. It is really the only problem I have to solve for you, and it is easy."

The little man with the big spectacles had things moving. He was not much of a salesman but he knew all about merchandising in a retail store.

And he certainly was familiar with every store fixture and selling device that had ever been invented, its good and bad points, where it was practical and where it was not.

"Before a merchant puts money into store equipment", said the wardrobe man, "he ought to be sure that he is getting the very latest and most improved models. He owes this to himself as a protection for his investment.

"There is always a temptation to save a few dollars by adopting a poor imitation or some out-of-date device.

"The latest and best is the cheapest in the end, especially when you consider convenience and durability.

"A pretty safe guide is to see what the biggest and best stores everywhere are installing today.

"You will find such merchants as John Wanamaker in his Philadelphia and New York stores equipping his clothing departments solely with New Way Crystal Wardrobes;

"Browning, King & Company in seventeen cities;

"Schuman, Kennedy, Posner, Talbot Company, Jordan-Marsh & Company, Leopold Morse Company, McCullough & Parker in Boston;

"George Muse Company in Atlanta;

"Mullen & Bluett of Los Angeles;

"Becker of San Francisco;

"Burkhardt of Cincinnati;

"Lazarus, and Meyer Israel of New Orleans;

"And more than a thousand others—all the representative stores of their localities.

"These men have selected the New Way Crystal Wardrobes after careful comparison with every other device on the market.

"They have found the New Way Crystal Wardrobe the most sightly and compact—having the largest capacity with the greatest ease of operation.

"They find that they show the goods better; that the clerks can work faster from them; that half a dozen clerks can sell from one wardrobe at the same time; that one boy can keep the stock in good shape where four were inadequate under any other plan.

"They find that the New Way people have basic patents on special features, such as the New Way disappearing doors that divide in the center, and slide into the ends of the wardrobe and do not project into the aisle.

"The New Way revolving rack with the patent locking device, which works loaded or unloaded with equal ease—no friction, no leverage, no noise.

"They find the New Way low center wardrobes give an unobstructed view all over the store and are the only wardrobes made that are entirely practical for grouping in front of a furnishing or hat department.

"Likewise the high double deck wall wardrobes have more than double the capacity of tables."

The wardrobe man illustrated his talk with photographs and backed his arguments with figures.

The upshot of it was that he made a complete ground plan of the Lambert store with a modern selling arrangement and New Way fixtures in their proper places.

But before Stucker would admit the wisdom of the improvement, he argued it from every point of view.

"The farmer trade," he said, "would imagine that they would have to pay higher prices for clothing to make up the cost of new fixtures."

This, mind you, today when the farmer is the most enlightened member of the community—when he is using progressive methods in marketing his own product, to reduce his costs and increase his profits!

Lem acknowledged that the clothiers who are handling the finest merchandise are fitting up their stores with New Way Crystal Wardrobes, and he didn't like to admit that the Lambert Store didn't sell high grade merchandise.

He conceded that fine goods in every other line of trade are treated with the care and respect they deserve, otherwise they would suffer in the handling and cease to be fine merchandise.

Finally, Lem admitted that the discerning public does judge a merchant's stock by the way he treats it, so that the store with New Way Wardrobes as a feature is not only the most progressive store, but in practically every instance the most prosperous in the clothing trade of its locality.

After Sam had given the order his one thought was impatience for the completion of the job.

"I must have that stuff all installed so that I can have my opening a week ahead of the other people.

"Here, Stucker," called Sam to that gloomy soul, who had gone behind a stock of work-shirts, while the order was being signed, "we'll let you dispose of the old fixtures. That's a job that's just about your size.

"I tell you, Stucker, a natural-born retrencher has his virtues. But if you give him rope enough he will retrench you out of business. He never builds anything. If it wasn't for the creative man there would be nothing to retrench.

"The retrencher is all right if you don't pay him too much. He is worth about \$10 a month, because you can find fifty of them in any old man's home that you can hire for less money than that.

"No, Lem, I won't be unfair. You're not as bad as all that. It takes all kinds of people to make a world and there is plenty of room for both of us in this business—there always will be leaks to stop and work to do for an earnest man who has the interest of the store at heart.

"The fault has been in the division of our labor. I'll show you the way we can get the best out of ourselves."

"Sam," said Lem, "I reckon I've been looking at the world through a crack in the fence and I'll have to widen out my view a little. You give me the books and the sales slips to look after. In the meantime I'm going to make the most exact inventory this store ever had and be ready to check in the fresh stock that is to go in these New Way wardrobes.

"My talents are all right if I don't try to cover too much territory."

The two men shook hands.

All was in readiness on the day set. Everybody in Medeena County came to the Grand Opening, and Sam Lambert's New Way Store is doing the business of the town.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SAM
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