



THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS WRONG

War Puts The Shopper On The Spot

SOME one suggested the other day—we forget whether he was a manufacturer or a shopkeeper—that the war has reversed the ancient tradition that the customer is always right. Now, it would almost appear, he is always wrong, and unless business people do something about it while the war is on, it will be very difficult when the war ends to find salesmen and saleswomen who will know how to behave behind a counter.

This is the kind of thing that happens every day:

Eating House

YOU wait your turn in a queue, unless you leave work five minutes early and get in sharp at 12. There is nowhere to hang your coat, and by the time you get your seat the heat of the place has worked through you and made you feel thoroughly uncomfortable. You squeeze into a seat, and the woman opposite allows you a little knee-room.

The proprietor breezes up to take your order. You want a fish salad. You get into conversation with your companion, and in a few moments a plate has been put before you. By the time you see that it's an egg salad, the proprietor is several tables away.

When you finally catch his eye, you remind him that you wanted fish.

"That's right, so you did." He rubs his chin. "That's certainly not fish. It's egg. H'm."

Brief pause. He rubs his chin. Then he suddenly shakes his finger at you: "I tell you what. The fish has sprawned!"

The joke is on you. But you insist. You hold up the plate. Eventually you get what you want. But it is heavy going. You are reminded of the recent disclosure that shark is now being sold for human consumption. But this can't be shark; it's nearly all bones, and very tough. You catch the proprietor's eye again:

"This fish is like concrete; and it's full of bones."

"Oh, you don't worry about that. That's just the reinforcing. Anyhow, there's no extra charge."

Hardware Counter

YOU want a few screws. About an inch and a-half long, and not the thin kind. The man behind the counter looks at you reproachfully. At least you might find out the exact length and gauge, he is thinking. With studied leisureliness he gets out a box, holds out a handful, and they are the right size.

"Yes—those will do."

"How many?" he mumbles at you, and you feel that whether you ask for a few or a lot, he will be disgruntled with you.

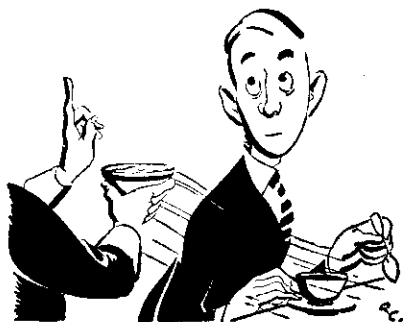
"About as many as you've got there. Make it a dozen." The man throws down his handful on the counter. There are 10. He tosses two more into them.

"Fourpence, please."

You pick the screws up yourself. You put them in your pocket. And why not? You're lucky to get them, aren't you?

Your Daily Bread

THEN take the case of bread. The Health Department keeps hammering at you to eat it brown, and although you prefer it white, you try to be a good citizen. The shop that specialises in brown is a long way off, but



"... A sight from which to avert the eye."

you make the journey. As you enter you see two or three hundred loaves at least, all waiting to be eaten. But do you get one?

You don't. The girl behind the counter will not even speak to you. To protect herself against that necessity she has a crudely-printed cardboard placard stuck up announcing that all these loaves have been sold. If you ask a question she points to that.

But you have come a long way. You came yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that. So you make an issue of it.

To-morrow, then? If you pay for a loaf now will she give it to you to-morrow?

"Perhaps I will and perhaps I won't. It depends on when you come."

She is very young, a little dirty, but distinctly good-looking.

You walk out.

You Must Know the Counter-sign

AS for the cigarette smoker, he submits to anything. He must. Unless he crawls to-day and lies to-morrow, he is reduced to a third or a quarter of his normal supply.

You may, of course, make friends with someone in the trade, buy nowhere else, and walk past the door if you see someone else go in ahead of you. But even then you smoke on sufferance. Your friend in the shop may really be out of supplies. He may be in short supply. He may think that you have had enough this week. He may fail you for a dozen reasons, but you dare not fail him. It is at your peril, if you customarily smoke Capstan, that you produce

a Clarence or a Craven A packet in a moment of absent-mindedness. And if another customer comes in before you have hidden your precious purchase from sight, you know from the black look you get that it will not be policy to call again to-morrow.

You begin, in fact, to wonder whether it is worth smoking at all.

The Same Everywhere

HOWEVER, you are suffering from a world-wide complaint. Here is an extract from an American journal that shows what can happen if all you want to buy is space. We quote from the *American Editor and Publisher*:

The scene: A downtown store, any city, any day now.

Dramatis personae: One advertising man, one merchant.

Adman: You left word for me to call.

Merchant: Yes, where the hell have you been lately?

Adman: None of your lip, bub; what do you want?

Merchant (coaxingly): Ah, don't get sore, I only want a favour.

Adman (suspiciously): I suppose you want to get an ad. in, eh?

Merchant (guilty): W-e-l-l, I would like to run something. Got a special buy that ought to sell like hot cakes.

Adman (consulting little black book): H'mm—say, you HAD an ad. only a month ago. Whadda you wanta do, hog the whole paper?

Merchant (pleading): But, sir, this is something special.

Adman: Well, I won't promise, but...

Merchant: Oh, thanks—here, have a cigar (tenders a Corona-Corona).

Adman (grunts): Harumph—only Corona-Coronas, eh? (He eyes the merchant with loathing).

Merchant: I'm sorry, sir, but...

Adman: Well, let's get down to business... what d'ya want to run?

Merchant (throwing caution to the winds): How about a page?

Adman (turning purple): Don't be ridiculous!

Merchant (giving ground): A half page?

Adman (imperiously): A chiseller, eh? I'll bet you use black market gasoline—probably beat your wife, too.

Merchant (hopefully): A quarter page?

Adman (master of the situation): Come now; let's not be imaginative.

Merchant: How about an eighth?

Adman: You're getting warm, but you're still in left field.

Merchant: Maybe 200 lines?

Adman: Now, look, bub, I'm a busy man—come down to earth.

Merchant: How about a three-line classified?

Adman: I'll speak to Meadows.

Merchant (imploringly): Oh, would you, sir?

Adman (polishing his nails abstractedly): We'll see.

(continued on next page)