

JUMBLE SALE

Written for "The Listener"
by M.B.

"ALL manner of things," said our President. "I'm told the important thing is to have a lot of stuff."

"All manner of things beginning with m," I murmured sleepily, "such as mink coats, and matinee jackets, and mattresses and moccasins."

"But," protested a member, "we don't know anything about running a jumble sale."

"We can learn," said the President firmly. "The Plunket is running one next week. I suggest one of us goes along. What about you, Mrs. Blank?"

"Um-m?" I muttered drowsily.

"Thank you, Mrs. Blank," said the President gratefully. "And now to the next thing on our agenda..."

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FIVE-FORTY-FIVE—and zero hour at six o'clock. I make my embarrassed way to the Helpers' Entrance, past a goodly crowd who call "Back of the queue, please," and "Got your string-bag, dearie?" ironically as I pass. Inside, the helpers, high-strung as racehorses, are gathering for a strengthening cup of tea. Trestle tables, the length of the hall, are heaped high with jumble, Gent's Clothing, Mantle Section, Juveniles, Footwear (Ladies' and Gents'), declining to Books, Chapeaux, and Novelties at the far end of the hall.

The door bolts rattle, hoots of laughter from outside, a voice shrieks, "Yer clock's slow!" The group of helpers' husbands in the centre of the hall grind out their gaspers and stiffen to attention. "Places, ladies!" commands the Organiser, and makes strategic disposition of her slender forces. "Ready, Mr. Robertson!"

The sagging doors clang open, and, with nonchalant haste, the crowd fans out towards the counters. Its main force is directed to Ladies' Mantles, but I, Second Assistant Shoes, stand prepared to take the overflow.

"Ow much?"

My first customer is holding up a stout pair of brogues classic enough for Princess Elizabeth. With an effort I recall my instructions. "Half-a-crown in good repair. Go down if necessary."

"A half a crown."

"Right."

I wrap them. Beside me the Senior Assistant is coping with a Regular Customer who with practised eye has scooped the cream of the bargains, has six pairs along one arm and is stuffing a couple more into a suitcase and getting change for a fiver. And now the overflow from the Mantle Section has

reached our shores, and a dozen pairs of hands are scrabbling frantically in the stock pile.

"Boots size 2 for a boy."

"Two bob for these? The sole's coming off."

"Size Six for meself. No, heel's too high. What do you think that narrow thing will do to me bunion? I'll take these. Fours? Oh well, they might do Janice."

"Size Five are they? You think? Yes, he'll grow into them. What about these for Shirley? Give you sixpence."

"A bob."

"Two bob the lot."

"Right."

I fumble for change.

"Try these on, Gladys. The lady thinks they're thirteens. No, Miss, she doesn't like lace-ups. Have you got an ankle strap? George, you try the lace-ups. They might do your cousin Ken."

Hectic minutes pass. Wagging shoes in all directions.

* * *

IT'S getting towards seven now and there's a lull both sides of the counter. I gaze wistfully at my stock, reflecting on the bitter anonymity lying in wait for the personal possession once it loses the protection of its owner. This pair of first baby shoes would, were we graced with American sensibility, have been sprayed with metal and mounted as book-ends. "Now lie they here and none so poor as do them reverence." (Later I shall sell them to a dealer for a penny.) These sturdy matron's sixes made life easier for a Friday pack-horse, but the pocket into which its owner's corn fitted so snugly will not avail another's callouse. "These D.P.'s of the shoe world," I muse, "would they not be happier consigned to the speedy oblivion the dustbin promises, rather than doomed to drift from jumble to jumble never to be found desirable or useful again?"

A minute to closing time, announces the organiser, and stocks must be cleared, at any sacrifice. There's a slight spurt of renewed interest, I say three-pence and my customers say a penny. But the seasoned campaigners are not interested. They sit comfortably on benches in the centre of the hall, bloated

(continued on next page)



"A GOODLY crowd called out ironically as I passed"



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