

# Behind the Scenes in the Big Stores.

BY ANNE O'HAGAN

THE MODERN DEPARTMENT STORE, THE PRINCIPLES ON WHICH IT CONDUCTS ITS GREAT AND COMPLICATED BUSINESS, ITS MANAGEMENT OF ITS ARMY OF EMPLOYEES, AND ITS METHODS OF ATTRACTING CUSTOMERS.

IN one of those few corners of the earth where primitive conditions still prevail—an island off the coast of Maine—there is a certain windy, salty store. It opens to the pier, where one boat a day touches. It backs upon a rough hillside, down whose wavering path the islanders travel for their provisions. It is weather beaten and gray, and its outlook is across a steely stretch of water to another rough island, and beyond that to the open sea.

Within there is all that the islanders require for their living. There are fish nets and the lanterns that fishermen use, and there are scythes and rakes for the husbandmen; there are tarpaulins, yellow and black, and there are blue overalls. On the shelves are rolls of printed calicoes and bundles of flannel and cloth. Lamps stand side by side with teapots, and arithmetics and geographies lean lovingly against them.

Rubber boots and hams hang amicably from the same rafters. Boxes of china and barrels of potatoes, chairs and canned goods, crowd one another good naturedly on the floor. All the vegetables that the bleak little island produces, together with the dried and preserved products of kindlier climates, are here for sale. Alert young drummers from Portland and Bangor come down with bags of samples to induce orders for all sorts of food stuffs, and the shelves bear witness to their persuasion. In one corner is the inevitable post office.

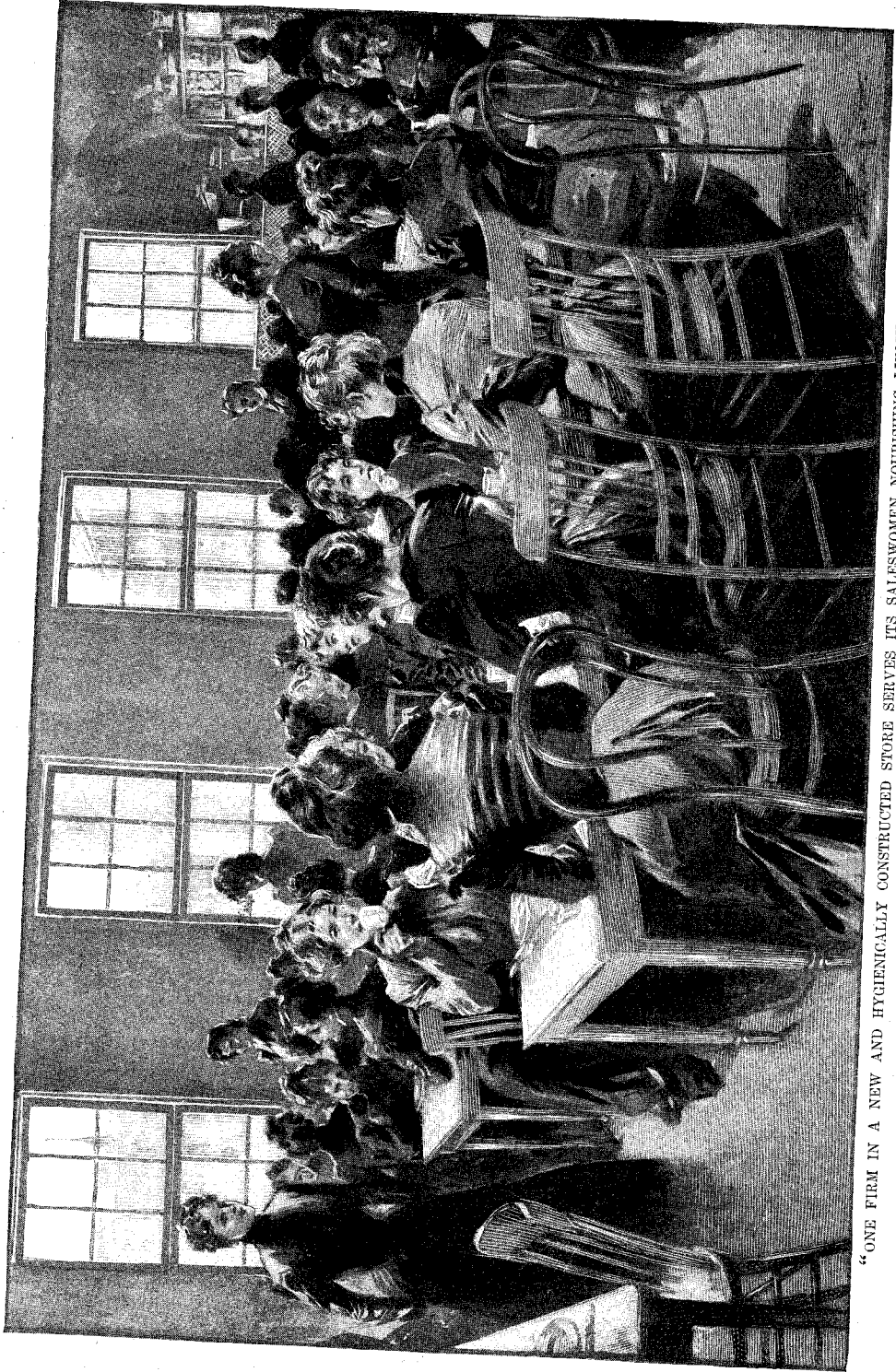
This shop, equipped with every necessity and many a luxury, as the blue flowering vases and the gilt banded bowls testify, requires the services of three persons to run it—the wife and daughter of the proprietor affably dropping down from the living rooms on the second story when business is heavy or domestic life dull. It is an admirable and most essential institution, and it is withal modest, not pluming itself in the least that in the great cities

of the earth, its counterparts, grown almost out of likeness, require two thousand men and women to do with vast striving what the three island folk do easily in it—that is, supply the needs of those to whom they cater.

The department store of the cities does not acknowledge its relationship with the nondescript village emporium. It boasts its ability to sell lamps and boots and clothes and house furnishings all under one roof, and speaks of this as a marvelous development in modern industry. This it is indeed, but the marvel lies not in the novelty of the notion, but in its growth. The Sixth Avenue emporium differs from the general store of Mackerel Cove only in degree.

The dispute as to whether Mr. Macy of New York or Mr. Shoolbred of London is the father of the department store may thus be settled by denying the claims of both gentlemen and awarding the title to the forgotten founder of the first village shop where the farmers bought their flapping hats, their wives their printed muslins, and their daughters an occasional stamp. All that the supporters of Mr. Macy or Mr. Shoolbred can justly demand is that to one of these belongs the honor of first adapting the country shop to city needs—and that, after all, is enough of an achievement for any man to rest upon.

In America there is no rival claimant for Macy's laurels. He established the first department store in this country, and all that his successors have attempted to do is to amplify and improve upon his model. He had been a seafaring man before he went into the business of being general purveyor to the people of New York, and he carried into his new undertaking all the ideas of organization and of order which are wrought into the very nature of the seaman. All the officers of the naval system found their correspondences in the structure of the store, and



"ONE FIRM IN A NEW AND HYGIENICALLY CONSTRUCTED STORE SERVES ITS SALESWOMEN NOURISHING LUNCHEONS AT COST PRICE."



even the cabin boy found himself reproduced in the cash girl.

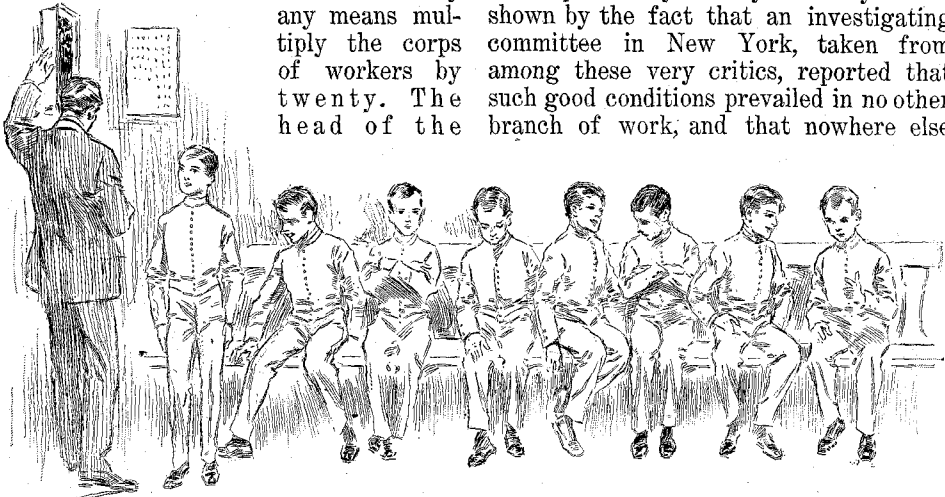
The central idea of the department store, as conceived by Mr. Macy, and as it has grown since his day, was simple—greater profit to the seller by saving in the cost of selling, and a division of that profit with the consumer to encourage more sales and greater consumption. Consolidating under one roof twenty stores—dry goods, shoes, china, and so

on—did not by any means multiply the corps of workers by twenty. The head of the

United States mail delivery, never think of the intricately simple system which provides them with bargains and which gives them their goods.

The other class which is interested in it, its opponents, are equally indifferent to its organism. They sometimes get themselves elected to State Legislatures and succeed in passing laws for its immediate extinction or its gradual ruin.

That they do not always wait to verify their opinions by a study of the system is shown by the fact that an investigating committee in New York, taken from among these very critics, reported that such good conditions prevailed in no other branch of work, and that nowhere else



"IN THE BEST REGULATED SHOPS THE 'CASHES' FOR EACH DÉPARTEMENT ARE ARRANGED, WHEN OFF DUTY, ON A LONG BENCH UNDER THE CHARGE OF A CAPTAIN, WHOSE BUSINESS IT IS TO SEE THAT THEY ANSWER IN ROTATION TO THE CALLS OF THE CLERKS."

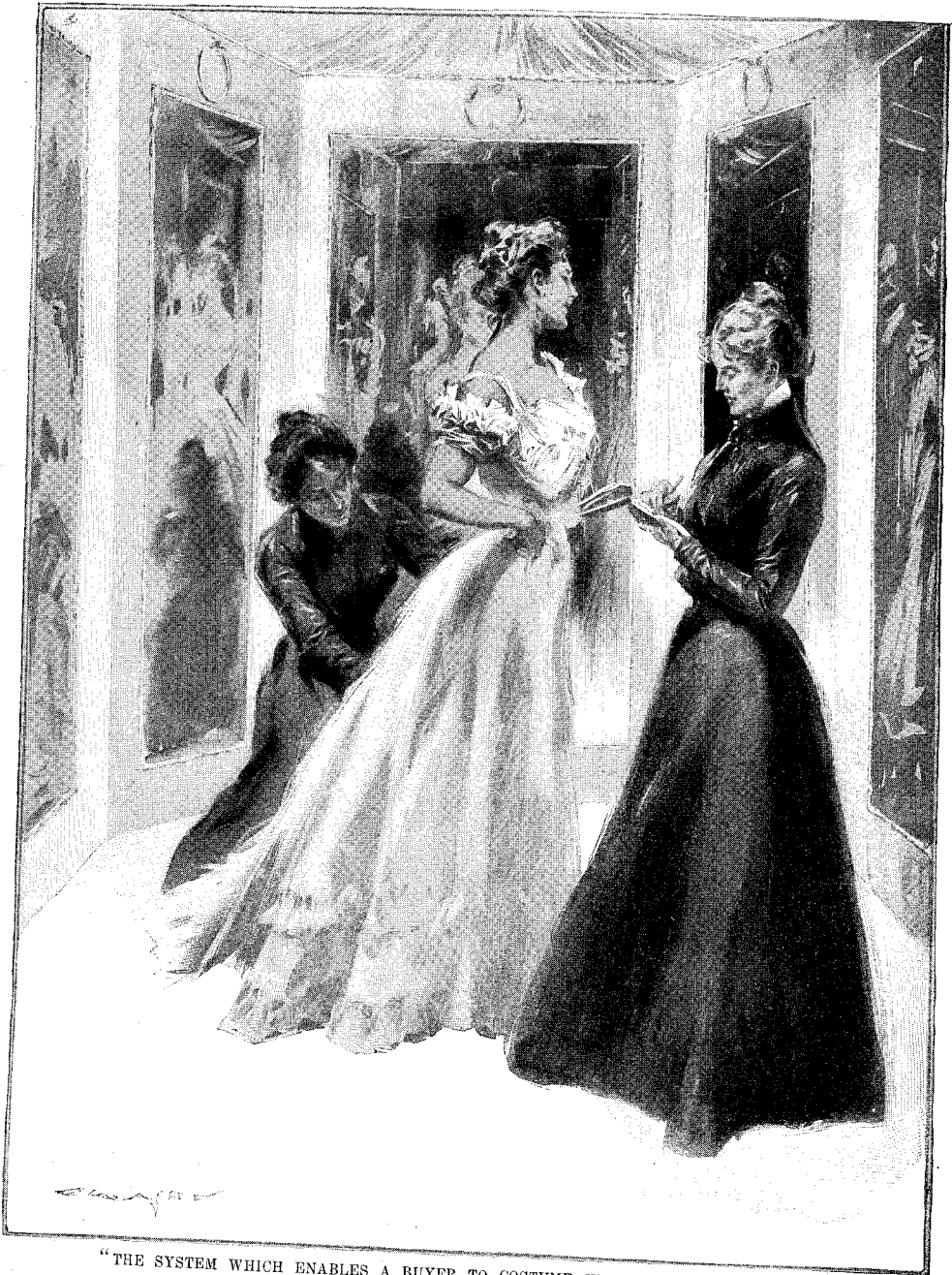
twenty stores was the same man who had been head of the one. He had always required a building; he did not require twenty for his new enterprise. He did not require twenty cashiers in place of one, twenty secretaries, twenty advertising agents, and twenty of each of the officers of whom he had needed one in his one department. Here, then, was an enormous saving in rents, salaries, and the like; and this saving the head of the department store determined to use to attract more trade. Part of the money was to be spent in advertising, and part in lowering prices somewhat to attract further custom.

To its gigantic organization and to its complex system, the two classes who are really most interested in the department store give little thought. The women who throng the shopping regions with eyes alert for bargains, with tongues sharpened for reproof of salespeople, for complaint about a system of delivery that is on the whole as remarkable as the

did the same class of workers receive, on the whole, such liberal compensation.

The system which produces the bargains; which fills the plate glass windows with gorgeous colors and rich fabrics; which enables a buyer to costume herself for a festivity or a funeral, to furnish her home and to mail her letters, to "call up" her family, to be manicured and coifed and shod and hatted; to write her notes, to rest after her labors, and perhaps even to be entertained; to have her picture taken and her bicycle equipped with every device known to the order of the wheel; to uniform her servants and to learn just what a Louis Quinze room really is; the system which does all this is a thing about which the woman for whom chiefly it was planned concerns herself very little.

That there is a vast machinery behind it all, that pure chance does not dictate the forty nine and the ninety eight cent bargains; that there must be a method in



"THE SYSTEM WHICH ENABLES A BUYER TO COSTUME HERSELF FOR A FESTIVITY."

the arrangement which delivers her purchases at her house before she herself arrives from her shopping expedition, she is vaguely conscious; but that the system is a bigger thing than the results of it—that the counters and the show rooms and the forms with gowns upon them are, when compared with the method which produces them, no more than the roses on

a bush in her front yard compared with the process of vegetation—this she does not realize.

The central organization of the department store is the firm—the gentlemen who put up the money and who demand that the profits shall be adequate to their expectations. They are not of the lily of the field type; their sole business is not



to calculate and require interest on their capital. Every important question concerning the business in general is put to them.

The firm's chief aid in dealing with the employees is the superintendent. He is a man of multiple activities. The firm consults him; the heads of the departments consult him; the section managers consult him; the advertising man consults him; the irate customer whose goods were not delivered last night, as the girl at the counter solemnly promised they should be,

not, as a good many shoppers mistily believe them to be, a class living mainly on ocean steamships and in foreign shops; merely touching in New York long enough to unload their purchases. They are heads of departments, and they are held sternly responsible for the financial success of the branch of the business in their charge.

It is their business not only to buy goods, but to advertise them, to see to their attractive display, to arrange for special sales, to examine the samples submitted by drummers from wholesale



"A BIG ROOM WHERE DRUMMERS CROWD WITH SAMPLES TO BE SHOWN TO THE BUYERS."

consults him; the very tardy clerk consults him; the section manager who wishes to know whether Mrs. Soandso's check is to be taken consults him; the request of the woman who wishes to open an account is referred to him; the chief engineer consults him about new engines, and the candidates for saleswomen's positions file their applications with him. He spends his leisure in planning new shelves, new lighting apparatus, and new cases for goods; he organizes the store fire brigades, and he directs special sales. His salary is large; but whether his life is long or not, is a question on which few persons care to commit themselves.

Revolving in the next lower circle of lights are the buyers. The buyers are

houses, to be alert always for opportunities to buy their particular line of goods at reduced prices. A wholesaler's bankruptcy is their joyful opportunity.

Next in position, so far as the public is concerned, and all powerful in the eyes of clerks, cash boys, and cash girls, is the section manager. He is more commonly and less solemnly known as the floor walker. He is, in spite of the comic papers, an important person. He is the mediary between the clerks and the superintendent; he is the first court of appeal for customers; he is the judge in intricate questions concerning returned goods, transfers, credit checks, and special deliveries. He is also a monitor after a fashion, keeping one eye sternly open for

transgressions against the rules on the part of the salespeople. He is the cavalier of customers in distress. In some stores the first duty in the list prescribed and printed for guidance is that he must take immediate charge of sick or disabled shoppers and assist them to the parlor. He makes note of the time the clerks arrive, and fines those whose tardiness is not great enough to come under the awful notice of the superintendent.

Under the section managers come the vast throngs that represent the store to the public—the salesmen and saleswomen, the hurrying cash boys and girls, the cashiers and parcel wrappers. It is these who give the tone and atmosphere to a shop which is distinctive of it. It would be as easy to imagine a Bowery waiter bawling an order through Delmonico's as to picture the indifferent, impertinent saleswomen of certain stores rapping upon the counters of certain others and calling, in the high pitched, rasping voice affected for these occasions, "Cash, cash!" The hall mark of elegance is given to some establishments by their salespeople, while others are forever stamped as shoddy by the same means.

If the clerks can make or mar a department store, however, it is only after they themselves have been made or marred by it. Its traditions, in an indefinite sense, and its regulations and wages, in a very definite one, determine the sort of employee it will have. The almost unfailing courtesy of the people in this shop, the absolute good breeding of those in that, the good nature of a third's, and the insolent indifference of the fourth's, fifth's and sixth's, are not only the all pervasive qualities of their respective establishments, but they are also the products of the establishment's attitude toward its employees.

Many of the big department stores rely upon their goods to sell themselves—with widespread and judicious advertising. Their theory is that an automaton, if properly constructed, ought to be able to sell such bargains as they offer. Their

money goes into all sorts of advertising schemes, and their employees receive only such wages as the substitute for the automaton would require. In such an establishment rudeness, stupidity, and indifference are often to be met, and the customers sigh as heartily for the clerk machine, which would at least be negatively polite, as the firm can possibly do. Nevertheless, these stores are immensely popular with the masses, not because the masses care for incivility, but because they must have cheapness. They cannot afford to pay extra for "atmosphere" when they go forth to buy hardware and shoes.

In stores of the other class, intelligence, cheerfulness, and courtesy are relied upon to do as much selling as is the advertising. Cheerfulness and courtesy are not left to chance, either. The rules concerning the assumption of these virtues are very clear. For instance, at McCreery's, in New York—an excellent example of the carefully managed store of the higher grade—the employees are furnished with a little manual of instructions, and they are required to know in theory and to observe in practice such rules as these:

No conversation between employees should be carried on in the presence of customers.

No reading of papers or books is allowed.

No eating, except in lunch room. Finger nails must not be attended to in the departments.

No alcoholic liquors, tobacco, or chewing gum may be used in business hours.

Indifference to small buyers should be avoided; indeed, this is a common breach of good manners and is in exceedingly bad taste.

To customers no infringement of good manners will be tolerated.

Sales clerks should never intimate that they have no goods so inexpensive as a customer may desire. Such an attitude invariably causes offense and is unpardonably rude.

In almost all the department stores of even slight pretensions the clerks are required to wear black. In summer they are allowed to wear shirt waists, but even then black and white are the prescribed colors.

Clerks usually arrive at eight o'clock and work until six. The first hour of their working day they spend in uncovering and



THE CASH GIRL.





"WORK ROOMS WHERE AT LONG TABLES GIRLS, WOMEN, AND MEN CUT AND SNIP AND SEW AND PRESS ALL DAY."

dusting the stock, which must be in order by nine o'clock. The rest of the day, save for forty five minutes about noon, they spend in practising the rules laid down for them and in selling goods. Their salaries range from six to twenty dollars a week, with comparatively few receiving either the highest or the lowest limit.

In almost all stores there are benefit associations maintained at least partly by the firm for the work people. Into their funds the members pay a small weekly sum proportioned to their wages, a cash boy putting in perhaps five cents and a floor walker fifty. Membership entitles

each member to the services of a doctor during sickness, and to a certain sum each week during absence caused by illness.

The cash girl and the cash boy are perhaps the least imposing figures in the department store procession. Like the clerks, they both give its individual tone to a store and receive from it their own. This place is stamped by the slouching girl who, exchanging remarks with other slouching girls on the way, ambles along in response to a shout for "cash!" That place is stamped by the uniformed boy who appears in response to no more noisy signal than the pressure on a button

behind the counter. On the other hand, the slouching girl and the uniformed boy are both products of the stores to which, respectively, they give tone.

The cash boys and girls receive only two or three dollars a week; they must be over fourteen years of age, and provided with a certificate from the Board of Health to that effect, before they can be hired.

In the best regulated shops the "cashes" for each department are arranged, when off duty, on a long bench under the charge of a captain, whose business it is to see that they answer in rotation to the calls of the clerks, indicated by an electric bell board at the head of the bench.

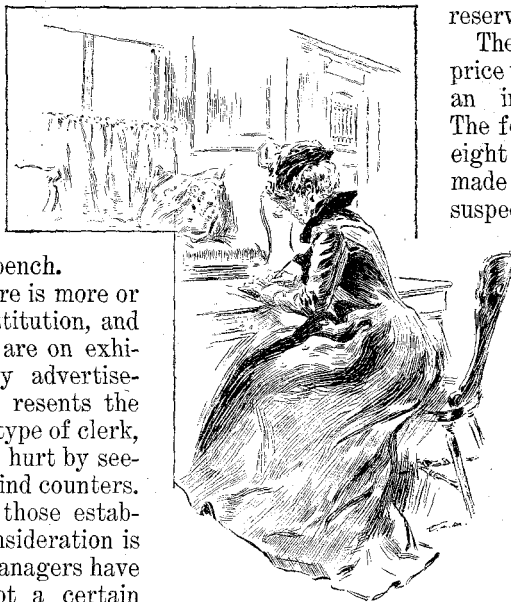
A department store is more or less of a public institution, and the employees who are on exhibition are in a way advertisements. The public resents the worn out, famished type of clerk, and its feelings are hurt by seeing women faint behind counters. Consequently even those establishments where consideration is not natural to the managers have been forced to adopt a certain measure of decency in their treatment of their employees. In those shops where inclination and policy unite to make the work people's lives agreeable, there is really a delightful state of affairs. To take a few instances among the chief New York stores, at Wanamaker's the association of the clerks is encouraged not only to unite for helpfulness during illness, but for recreation and study; and there is a school where the cash boys may continue their somewhat curtailed education in relays. The Siegel Cooper Company sends its employees to the country for summer vacations, as do Bloomingdale, Macy, and other firms. McCreery, in a new and hygienically constructed store, gives them light and airy work rooms, and serves them nourishing luncheons at cost price.

It is not alone the salesrooms or the salespeople, however, which make up the department store. There are stock rooms

high up in the buildings, where in religious dimness made by great shelves reaching to the ceilings, reserved stock is piled—that for each department in its own division—and where men are constantly busy attending to it.

There is the receiving room, too. Here, after goods have been checked at the door where they are actually received into the building, they are sent to be checked again, to be examined by the buyers, to be marked with a price, and to be divided for immediate sale and for reserve stock.

The determination of price is, by the way, rather an interesting process. The forty nine or ninety eight cent bargain has made many a purchaser suspect one of two things—that she was being detained for a penny's change until the quality of her coin could be tested at a government assayer's or elsewhere, or that the firm seriously supposed her deluded into the belief that a hat for eleven dollars and ninety eight cents was quite within her



THE WRITING ROOM FOR CUSTOMERS.

means, though a hat for twelve dollars would be beyond them. As a matter of fact, the customer was not considered in the original making of the odd price. When Mr. Macy established his department store, he made a rule that the percentage of increase in the selling price over the buying price should be an odd number—say nine per cent. The wholesale price of a certain make of hats was a dollar apiece. Sold with the nine per cent increase they were, of course, \$1.09. The oddness of the number was notable; customers were attracted by it; other firms imitated it; but in the beginning it was a mere accident of percentage that started the ninety nine cent and the \$5.47 bargains.

Besides the receiving room, there are the offices of the managers and the buyers. There is a big room where drummers



crowd with samples to be shown to the buyers, and where, in the morning, the busiest scenes are enacted. There are work rooms where "special order" costumes are made; where at long tables girls, women, and men cut and snip and

immense chutes, by freight elevators, or by the careful hands of errand boys, goods are brought to be wrapped, packed, labeled, and put into various drivers' compartments, whence they are taken by the driver for this section or for that.



"THE HALL MARK OF ELEGANCE IS GIVEN TO SOME ESTABLISHMENTS BY THEIR SALESPeOPLE."

sew and press all day, while beautiful fabrics are draped upon unresponsive dummies. There are rooms where alterations are made, rooms where furs are transformed from ugly, shapeless skins into wraps of exquisite texture and cut. There are safes and cashiers caged in as in banks.

There are delivery rooms to which, by

The methods of department store advertising are as various as the traditions and the aims of the stores. This concern indulges in long, intimate chats with possible customers. Its advertisement writer takes three or four columns of a paper to tell what he wishes them to know. Sometimes he becomes involved in a maze of superlatives that can be

taken literally by none but the very raw recruit in the army of shoppers. Another has a small, dignified announcement of wares particularly attractive for any reason—their beauty, their cheapness, or what not. Another merchant paints every sign board from the Battery to the Harlem with hideous reminders of his business. One sends aloft balloons to flaunt the mention of his wares across the noonday sky, and another establishes a baby checking bureau for shopping mothers.

It was advertising of a sort when Altman's horseless delivery wagons first clanged and buzzed their way through the New York streets; it was advertising when Wanamaker decorated the front of his store for the Dewey celebration as though he were the common council and the board of aldermen. It is advertising when Macy fills his windows with a wonderful, costly, unsalable Christmas pageant, and when McCreery, to stimulate the house furnishing branch of his business, makes a season's feature of an Indian room perfect in every detail from the grille copied from an ancient temple to the brass box upon a stand; or of a Marie Antoinette bedroom, pink and beautiful, or an old English hall, dark and rich.

The band that brays in the restaurant connected with this store, the bicycle check system of that, the writing room here and the parlor full of couches and settees there, are all as much designed to attract trade as are the announcements in the papers. They have become such integral parts of the department store system that most of its patrons regard them as matters of course and would be vastly aggrieved if they were, by concerted action, entirely removed. Yet they are not among the salable commodities of the shops, and there is nothing in the price of those commodities which pays for their cost. They are all part of the mechanism of attraction—in other words, of the advertising system.

The special sales are another feature upon which almost all stores rely for prosperity. Buyers are constantly alert for chances to buy up stocks of their own particular goods at less than the market price. These are sold again at intervals during the year at less than the normal retail price. All marking down of goods

below the figure at which they would ordinarily be sold is done only with the consent of the superintendent or of the firm.

There is one special sale for which every department store must provide, and which it must conduct even if it has failed to make suitable provision for it. That is the after holiday "white sale." The "white sale" originated in the Bon Marché in Paris. It was copied in this country, and has now become such a feature of the shopping winter that it would be a bold concern which would dare to ignore it.

In the more advanced positions in the department stores, the honors are fairly well divided between men and women. If there are no women superintendents, there are many women buyers, as efficient and successful as men. The head of the advertising department is occasionally a woman, and a very capable advertiser a clever woman proves herself to be. Window dressers, who are generally promoted from the lower ranks on showing particular artistic aptitude, are sometimes men and sometimes women. Detectives are frequently women, although many retired policemen are also engaged in making the big stores unattractive to professional shoplifters. Women are successful designers both of costumes and of fabric patterns. Much silk that is made in France is woven from the designs of some modest young woman on Broadway or Twenty Third Street, the firm by which she is employed sending the designs over for manufacture. In fact, in almost every branch of the big businesses, except perhaps in the engine rooms, women are employed, and are valuable employees.

It was said in the beginning that this vast and complex mechanism, employing thousands of people, expending gigantic energy and millions of dollars, did with enormous effort what the one store of the remote wildernesses did easily—supplied the wants of its constituency. But the department store of the city does more. It creates appetites and caprices in order that it may wax great in satisfying them. In this aspect it is worthy the serious consideration of the philosopher, as it is already, from its place in the wage earning department of life, a favorite theme of his brother, the social economist.



# OUR COMMERCIAL EXPANSION.

BY FREDERIC EMORY, CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF FOREIGN COMMERCE  
OF THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

THE WONDERFUL CHANGE THAT HAS TAKEN PLACE, WITHIN RECENT YEARS, IN OUR POSITION  
IN THE MARKETS OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE—THE UNITED STATES AS A “WORLD  
POWER” IN COMMERCE AS WELL AS IN WAR AND DIPLOMACY.

THE commercial expansion of the United States during the last few years has been even more remarkable, and scarcely less sudden or less unexpected, than the political expansion which followed the war with Spain. It is a development that presents many interesting features, and the general result appeals most forcibly to the imagination as setting this country before the world as an entirely new factor in the industrial rivalries of nations. It is in this sense that we are really becoming a great “world power,” and the part which we are expected to play in international politics and diplomacy must, if it be realized, be but subsidiary to and complementary of our unlooked for invasion of the markets of the world.

It is more than probable that the political expansion of which we hear so much will be determined in its character and extent by the requirements of our growing trade, and that the manufacturers and exporters of the United States will have the last word to say in the controversy now going on. As economic causes lay at the root of the American Revolution, which produced our present form of government and the institutions which served us for more than a hundred years, so again it may be found that economic considerations have united, not thirteen feeble colonies, but forty five States of a populous and powerful Union, in support of what seems to many to be a doubtful and even dangerous departure from established traditions.

This radical change in our commercial status is due almost wholly to the rapid growth of the export of manufactured goods in recent years. Almost at a bound, we have taken an advanced position among the leading industrial nations in competition for the trade of the world, and have exchanged our traditional

character as one of the largest consumers of foreign manufactures for that of a producer, for export, of many lines of articles which certain countries had long been in the habit of supplying to us. It seems almost incredible that we should be sending cutlery to Sheffield, pig iron to Birmingham, silks to France, watch cases to Switzerland. A few years ago, it would have been considered a vain imagining had any one predicted that we would soon be building locomotives for British railroads, or invading the English and German markets with our boots and shoes. But these are well known facts, and scarcely a day passes without some fresh indication of the growing popularity of American goods in every part of the world where they have been properly introduced, including even the countries which have heretofore been the leading producers of similar articles.

Our position is unique in this, that the nations of the old world, which so long enjoyed the supremacy in export trade, are trammelled by conditions from which we find ourselves to be exempt, and experience has shown that, with abundant supplies of coal and iron at our doors, with improved processes of manufacture, and with skilled labor having a high average of efficiency, we possess advantages which would seem, from constantly growing evidence, to be decisive. With a home market of more than seventy millions of people, who maintain a higher standard of living than is known elsewhere, and are consequently more profitable customers, our manufacturers have a broader and more stable basis for production than have those of any other country. Knowing that they may rely upon large sales at home, they produce commensurately, at cheapened cost. The surplus that remains to be disposed of abroad may be sold at much lower prices