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SARAH B. HARRIS Editor

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OBSERVATIONS

The department store is absorbing the profits which the retailers of a single class of goods formerly received. The small dealers have been clamoring to the legislature for relief for many years. At the present their cry amounts to a howl of despair which merits attention at least.

Since the first department store was organized in 1852 it has lessened the profits of drug stores, book stores, boot, shoe and all small stores. Of late years groceries, meats, carriages and every thing in the way of commodities except lumber, which would take up too much space, have been on sale at the department stores.

At Siegel & Cooper's in Chicago there is a blacksmith shop and a vaudeville theatre in connection with the establishment. "The more you sell the cheaper you can sell it" is true within certain limits. A crowd attracts a crowd. Buyers who have got the dry goods they came to buy, on their way out may pass through the household pet department and buy a monkey, or be lured to the top of the building into the hot house where the flowers will seduce the poorest into forgetfulness of his obligations.

Of course there is not the fine flavor to the books, that characterizes the stock of the book seller who has known publishers and authors so long that his speech, his walk, his dress is distinctly literary and distinguished. The department store book is printed on cheap poor paper, it was made for those who know a bargain when they see it. The covers are red and gold, the

illustrations are frequently numerous but printed from worn out plates of former editions. The clerk who presses the last novel of Marie Corelli upon your notice is without glasses or any other sign of superior literary acumen, so that his advice drives away everybody but the hardened bargain hunter or the Christmas present victim.

But the cheapening of prices compensates for coarser quality, and, of course, in time the heads of departments will acquire the knowledge and authority of specialists. In the meantime druggists who have been in the habit of charging the same price for aqua pura as for any other ingredient of prescriptions, say that they can no longer pay expenses and in some states have united together to get a bill passed prohibiting department stores from selling drugs. But the department store cannot be destroyed by legislation. It is a combination of energies which, like the trusts, is demonstrating to business people the advantages of concentration and contrariwise the evils of competition.

The Bon Marche of Paris pays annual dividends to its hundreds of employes. The employes own the store. The amount of stock each one is allowed to acquire is based upon length and faithfulness of service. The investment pays 40 per cent. No store in this country has such a constitution. The nearest to it is the per cent that is given to the "buyers," whose salaries range from five to twenty thousand dollars a year anyway. The hundreds of clerks do not receive anything more than the overcrowded condition of the labor market establishes. So that except as an example of what combination can accomplish the department store has done nothing to equalize the rewards of labor.

The "Bon Marche" transacts a total business of \$30,000,000, or more than twice that of any American retail establishment. The greatest advance has been made since it has become strictly co operative. Not a franc's worth of its stock is held outside of the people of the store and the leadership of the business is invested in three persons selected from the heads of the departments by the vote of the employes (shareholders) through an election held every three years. The cash paid to stockholders in annual dividends amounts to about five per cent of the total sales, setting aside a suitable sum for contingencies. As the capital stock is but four million dollars an annual dividend of a million and a half represents the great yearly profit of forty per cent. on the capital.

The department store is growing richer and more useful every day while the dealers in a single line are losing ground. Especially is this true of the smaller places, where a crowd in one

store means desertion in the others.

Legislation which would prevent the selling of any and all things under one roof is an infringement of personal liberty not warranted by the constitution. The only measure promising success is retaliatory in character and imitative in methods. Let the grocer, the druggists and all small dealers combine and elect a buyer who can buy in even larger quantities than the department store. The old maxim that "competition is the life of trade" is true only in a most restricted sense. Competition in many cases crushes the life out of men. Co operation invigorates and makes comrades out of enemies.

The Standard Oil company has reduced the price of oil, still the profits are enormous because functions are not allowed to overlap and energy is conserved and used economically. The "Bon Marche" is a refutation of the reiterated statement that co operation has never been and will never be a success. Any way, combination or defeat is the only alternative of the small dealers. Legislation cannot suppress their rivals without first striking a knockout blow to personal liberty.

Le Figaro of December 10th, says that words cannot describe the six hours of continuous ovation to Sarah Bernhardt on her fete day. It is like going to another country to read about it in the Figaro, the first page of which contains, not telegraphic news but jokes, a short story by Jules Lemaitre, gossip about the French academy, the reasons for not decorating Mme. Sarah Bernhardt with the cross of the Legion of Honor, and a full account of the fete in her honor. The Figaro has perhaps the largest circulation of any French paper, at any rate it is the most quoted outside of Paris and it has no more telegraphic news than The Journal or any other country paper. The paper contains six pages. All set with solid reading matter up to the third page where the half of the sixth column is given up to advertisements. Evidently the subscription list pays the expenses of the paper and not the advertising.

But here is the Fete as the reporter wrote it for the columns of a paper that circulates among a people so devoted to literature and art that they subscribe for a daily paper which contains little else.

"At half past twelve Sarah arrived with her son and her daughter in law" (belle-fille). Think of a country so reversed; where a mother-in-law is a belle-mere and all the in laws are designated by the prefix belle or beautiful before the particular relationship that exists, and where the law which created the relation is never referred to. Well, "Sarah arrived in a carriage with two horses before the steps of the Grand Hotel and

descended to shouts of 'Vive Sarah.' The crowd of strangers which were packed under the veranda spontaneously took off their hats on the approach of the great artist. The immense saile du Zodiaque where the banquet was given was already filled with men in black suits and with ladies in evening toilette.

When Mme. Sarah Bernhardt descended from the first floor into the dining room, the five hundred convives rose and clapped their hands madly, *ont battu des mains frenetiquement, sans cesse, encore.* The long train of her admirable white dress was trimmed with English daisies, embroidered with gold, bordered with chinchilla and followed her like a serpent tame and affectionate over the steps of the stairs, and as at each curve she leaned over the rail, resting her arm like a lily on the velvet pillars while with her free hand she waved a reply to the acclamation below, her body, supple and slender, seemed not to touch the earth. She had the air of descending into a glory or aureola.

As the way was long from the staircase to the centre of the table of honor the whole room accompanied her progress with loud applause. She arrived at her presiding place, all pale, but smiling and happy. Then again bravos pealed like thunder and the repast began."

Had a member of the class of Journalism at the state university sent in such a report of a dinner to the ruddy professor of newspapers who consents to teach the students how to write well, in consideration of the column or two of copy they furnish and a hundred dollars besides, had he, I say received this copy he would have marked it with red ink and given it back to be revised and commended by the imaginative writer who had failed to understand a reporter's duty.

At the tables were MM. Sardou, Theuriet, Coquelin, Detaille, Daudet, all the learned and gifted and many of the noble of France. Painters, statesmen, writers, everybody who is eminent, sat about the tables with their eyes fastened on the heroine of the occasion who was happy at last.

Richard Harding Davis' story "Soldiers of Fortune" in the January Century has instead of "Van Bibber" a hero who scarcely knows New York but is familiar with European habits and manners of dining. He is supernaturally good and accomplished and yet near enough to nature's heart to tell a girl the first evening he meets her that he has carried her picture for two years and to ask her as though he were to say "Please pass the bread," to wait for him until he gets back from South America, where he goes on an engineering trip the next day. The young lady