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THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN IDEA

Marvelous Evolution of the Department Store as Exemplified
by a Lincoln Institution, With Something
of the Personnel of W. D. FitzGerald, the Man Behind it All

The men who do things are the men worth having in a community. He who can make two blades of grass grow where but one had before shown itself has been the model citizen since the world began. But even this useful gentleman is being far outclassed in these high pressure days. This is an age of surprises, of tremendous, rapid development, but in no other activity of the world has this been so markedly shown as in mercantile enterprises.

Ten years ago the only department store doing business in America was to be found in the small country town, where it was known as the general store. Today no city worthy of the name but boasts of at least one. Very few of these enterprises burst full-panoplied into being. They are, in almost every instance, a product of development. The idea had its inception in Chicago fifteen years ago, and has rapidly spread. Even conservative New York is now invaded and the largest department store in the world is being built there.

Lincoln now has four of these establishments, all of them the outgrowth of small beginnings. Perhaps none of them, however, so thoroughly represents the marvelous development of the small store with one line of goods into the large one with dozens of departments as does the FitzGerald Dry Goods company, whose head is W. D. FitzGerald, and which occupies an entire building at 1023-27 O street.

Eleven years ago, in 1890, W. D. FitzGerald and J. F. McCourtney, two young men who had had a number of years of experience in administrative capacities, started a dry goods store on South Twelfth street, in what is now known as the Walsh block. They began with a capital of \$3,000 in a room 20x30 feet. A few months later they moved to 1036 O street, where they remained four years. The business was a success from the start and after enlarging the store three times it became necessary to find larger quarters. These were secured in a single storeroom at 1023 O street. Two years later the storeroom next east was taken in and two years ago the entire building was occupied. From a \$3,000 stock in 1890 the store now carries one of \$125,000. In 1895, when the outlook for business in Nebraska was not very encouraging Messrs. FitzGerald and McCourtney started a store at Peoria, Ill., with the latter in charge. The development of that institution has also been phenomenal, and although seven years ago the capital was but \$20,000, the store now does almost as much business as the Lincoln establishment. The combined business of the two for last year was over \$700,000.

"The development of the department store," said Mr. FitzGerald, in discussing the matter with a Courier representative the other day, "has been marvelous, but inevitable. It was not

a product of the enterprise of man, but a concession to the public demand. We live in an age when every convenience and facility for the rapid and easy transaction of business is insisted upon by the customer. If a woman, for instance, desires to purchase a cloak or a suit she will also want to get a hat to match. In the old days she would have had to visit two different establishments. Now she can find both in one. A shopper is usually in quest of more than one article. If she can find them all under one roof she will patronize that establishment. It is convenient, it saves time, worry and annoyance. Especially is this true with out-of-town patrons. They do not come except to purchase a nice bill of goods. We secure their trade by giv-

ing them the opportunity to get what they want and all that they want right here.

more clerks in proportion to the amount of business done than the small one and the wage value of their labor is steadily rising.

"The advantage to the public lies not alone in convenience, but in prices. The big store, with its large capital and immense trade, all under one roof, can undersell the single line store because it buys in greater quantities and therefore more cheaply and its expenses are proportionately less. When we began business in Lincoln it was distinctly a city of comparatively small stores. There were eleven dry goods establishments here. One by one these went out of existence, and the stocks of eight of them were absorbed by us. Much of their trade went with them, and we have been able to develop our

grasp of them in his enlarged career that has brought success to the house.

The management of a business so complex as that of a department store calls for business sagacity of a high order. The man who succeeds is the one who has that intelligence, application and knowledge of the trade and trade conditions that enable him to formulate working plans capable of infinite extension. System is the secret of success in these days of great commercial enterprises. It is impossible for one man to familiarize himself with every petty detail of management or to hope to do so. But if he possesses a discriminative judgment in the selection of his aides, his department managers, and devotes his attention to the general management and superintendence of his business, success is pretty certain to come to him.

Mr. FitzGerald, in his own person, exemplifies the truth of this theory. He is a gentleman of quiet and unassuming manners, but only a brief talk with him is sufficient to impress one with the thoroughness of his business qualifications, the breadth of his business wisdom. This is the day of the impersonal in business affairs. Time once was when every patron of a store knew every attache, from proprietor down to delivery boy. In these days of great establishments this is impossible. It is not the personnel of proprietor or clerk that influences trade, but the quality of goods as compared with the prices asked, the treatment accorded to customers and the facilities offered for convenient trading. To instance: It has always been the policy of the FitzGerald company to make every customer a satisfied one. If by any mischance or fault of the manufacturer the goods, even after having been made up, prove faulty or cause dissatisfaction a cheerful and ready acquiescence in whatever the customer suggests is right is given. That this policy pays has been amply demonstrated in dozens of cases.

It doubtless will be interesting to know that it is not so much quality but style or fashion that governs nowadays. Of course, quality is a desideratum, but not the main one. It is the duty of each department manager to keep himself or herself informed as to what will be worn or what is likely to be popular in the coming season. To keep up to date they make semi-annual visits to the great centres, Chicago, New York and St. Louis. Experience is the sole guide to buying, and if it so happens that the approach of the close of the season finds the store with goods on hand, they are sacrificed, disposed of at any price. It is no longer possible to sell out-of-date goods. The expansion of rural free mail delivery and the widening circulation of newspapers and fashion journals enables every woman in the state to keep abreast with the times, and no last season's stuff could be given to her.

And yet, marvelous as has been the expansion of the department store in the past, it is yet in its infancy. It would be a rash prophet nowadays who would assert positively what the future will bring forth. We only know, however, that the development of the past has brought forward as heads of these institutions men like Mr. FitzGerald, whose public spirit and readiness to aid in community undertakings have done much in the upbuilding of the city.



W. D. FITZGERALD.

ing them the opportunity to get what they want and all that they want right here.

"The department store is gradually but surely driving the single line store out of existence. In twenty-five years nine-tenths of the retail business of the cities will be done by them. This is evolution. It may seem, at first thought, to be a hardship upon the small dealer, but it isn't. The really capable man or woman, the one who, under present conditions, could make a success of a small store, can command, as a department manager, more salary than could be made in an individual enterprise. They are spared the investment, worry and wearisome labor that are inevitable with personal enterprise. They are sent twice a year at the firm's expense to the great markets. The large store, too, employs

business entirely out of our profits. Not a dollar of outside capital is interested and our development has been natural and not forced."

Mr. FitzGerald has been in the dry goods business ever since boyhood. At the age of twelve years he entered the employ of Lord & Taylor in New York city. This was in 1869. He lived in New York until he was twenty-one years of age, and then went south, where he became the buyer for the big retail house of Meankin Bros., of Memphis. From there he went to St. Louis as a buyer for Scruggs, Vandervoort & Barney. In 1890 he came to Lincoln.

All of the thirty-one years of his business career—he is but forty-three years old—have been spent in the retail trade. Being a man of patient pertinacity, he early mastered all of the details of his business and it is his