

Written for this Paper.

DEPARTMENT STORES CONTRASTED.

That the present is an era of mammoth firms and great projects, everybody knows. Trusts and combinations are more than familiar to the public mind, and great inroads are being made continually on old methods of doing business. This modern drift has been denounced, and very harsh things have been said in regard to the purposes and results of these great organizations, all of which have, however, been denied where any notice was taken at all.

The claim is, and has been, that competition had become so intense that profits had melted away, and self-protection was the only excuse for this condition of unity in manufacturing or production. A certain demand being estimated, by pooling it was said that output could follow the market, and that a closed factory, mill, foundry, or productive works of any kind, was a paying investment whether in operation or in suspense.

There is a beautiful theory in this, and it commends itself to many, particularly the small manufacturer who perchance had already felt himself unable to compete with a more elaborate, newer or larger works, its economy in power, expenditure, or location gave or had given any special advantage. But the move made a terrible inroad on that individualism which loves to control its own, and objects for special reasons to any supervision. These reasons may arise from personal pride, from assumed knowledge of markets, whether in the buying of raw material or disposing of the finished product. Location is somewhat of a factor, too. So may be new machinery, or invention, or being an old house or concern with a reputation made in years gone by, and a section of trade or country already fairly claimed as having become a personal or firm market, one in any event to be retained.

But trade aggression is a strange thing. Persistence can capture and dissolve ties of business once deemed secure. We remember hearing an English commercial man say that he called for twenty years on a desired customer, and then secured him as a lasting one, and probably the profit and association was of mutual benefit. Such a thing, though, could hardly occur save in "the land of steady habits," where firms and trade descend from father to son, where a name is continued after all who bore it have passed away, and where the good will of a business is considered worthy of an important pecuniary consideration when transferred from one to another.

In this country of magnificent proportions and ever changing features, these old houses are "few and far between." Trade intimacy is hardly known save in some of the New England states. West of the Alleghenies there is an ever shifting population, though Chicago, St. Louis, Denver and some other business points are taking on some of the more staid features of the farther East; and there are famous names and firms, who in special lines have accumulated fortunes in trade which would have been considered more than princely in the not far distant past.

New York was for many years considered the trade capital of this wonderful country, and it will doubtless retain much of this supremacy. There was an immense population tributary to this great center long before railroads ran beyond Chicago, and the colossal dry goods houses of A. T. Stewart and H. B. Claflin, each doing in their palmy days over one million dollars a week, gave hints of possibilities to which but few brains aspired or even attempted. These houses were not particularly aggressive. We remember A. T. Stewart saying that "all the country west of Chicago was a terra incognita" to him, although it was being invaded by the more speculative spirit of his only formidable rival.

These great and lordly establishments had their corps of buyers in the central cities and manufacturing points of Europe, and these keen, quick-witted, observant men never allowed any trade movement to elude their consideration. They were familiar with the origin and development of the co-operative idea. While the way it expanded and circumscribed many branches was unique and profitable, the principle had life in it, was popular, then sectional. In the first form its progress was like romance, beginning in a small room to distribute to a few personal friends; finally emerging into great warehouses, grand mills, fast steamers and a trade absorbing and creating millions of pounds. In a sectional sense were such as limited themselves to towns or orders, factories and foundry stores, then the "civil service supply" in London and elsewhere, the whole including many failures and some grand successes as a matter of course. But any nonsuccess need excite no special surprise when we consider that in the United States business failures aggregate one hundred thousand per year and "those who know" say that ninety per cent of those engaging in business fail some time or other.

This spirit of massing all supplies in one mammoth institution culminated in the creation of the Bon Marche in Paris. This is a phenomenon even in that proud and splendid city. It is the ne plus ultra of bazars, and the gay denizens from the prince to the proletarian find it a wonderful place of resort, a very lounge, as it were, stocked with the products of the world, and the veritable base of supplies for an ardent and economical people.

This illustration has had the potency of example in this trading land, where it may be somewhat of an exotic-like co-operation. But such department establishments as Wanamaker, Philadelphia, Hilton & Co., and Macy & Co., New York, and Field & Co., Chicago, with many others of lesser magnitude, show that there is a possibility of its acclimation. Yet the very effort is provoking a vast amount of trade hostility. It is looked upon as an encroachment, as an invasion of the idea that given lines of trade should be separate, and rest upon their own foundation.

Of course the western idea and practice has been to keep "everything in every little store," segregation being impossible in a limited population. But it is said that these colossal concerns

are each like the octopus throwing out its tentacles in all directions, and closing hundreds of small stores by the sheer pressure of unlimited means and an unfair competition. Hence complaint after complaint arises; the wholesale trade is appealed to and urged that they decline to sell to these aggressive firms; the retail trade is called upon to combine, to buy in unison and to be ready to defend themselves in every possible way; legislation is urged by others, and municipalities are forewarned that revenues will tell the story of reduced taxation consequent on vacant and unrentable stores.

It is said that these great concerns buy grade goods, off brands, or make their own; that markets are free, but that the avarice of capital buys up at all figures, from persons wanting money, bankrupt and other stock, which the quiet trader sees not, or if he sees, is not in a pecuniary condition to utilize; that these grasping dealers advertise widely, make specialties, create excitement, and even injure the trade they cannot reach or control.

Now it may be that selfishness, personal profit, is at the basis of all business; that men toil, speculate, buy and sell for profit; and that money is the basis of everything at least in modern times. But it is curious that Utah should have furnished the example, the illustration of avoiding this acerbity in trade, and this selfishness of human nature as exhibited in personal deal. In the institution called Z. C. M. I. is an organization founded on a more philanthropic character. It was intended to exorcise this spirit of greed and speculation by a combination which aimed to be general, by creating a mammoth concern for a special purpose and a peculiar people. It said, We have organized the parent house for the importation of goods; it will sell to you in this settlement or the other on a moderate margin; now if you combine among yourselves and do your own distributing all the profits save the expenses attached will inure to yourselves; you need not be overtaxed; you need make no single individual rich; you need only buy what you cannot create, and no dealer, merchant or speculator can take any advantage over you in any way; you shall not be overburdened with stores ruining each other in ungenerous or fatal competition, but have your own store, and when you need another for convenience, simply open it and you have what you want; the great house to which you look for your supplies is always on the watchtower of trade, always in the market, buying heavily, freighting in large lots, and distributing to your necessities if within their reach at all.

Now suppose this was all heartily entered into for mutual benefit and monetary salvation, and there was an institution created outranking the Bon Marche, or Hilton's, Wanamaker's, or any other. Would this belittle Utah? Would her reputation suffer? Would she be any less liberally supplied than now? And if perchance a few called this monopoly and for personal ends depreciated its extension, is this not what is done today in the cases referred to? But this