

CHAPTER XXII

STUDYING DEPARTMENT STORES

The next study was to be Department Stores. Mr. Latshaw had come into The Curtis Publishing Company as manager of a Textile Department to develop advertisers in the textile field. Later he became manager of the Boston office, and Mr. Evans, of the New York office, was made manager of the Textile Department.

The Textile Department was supposed already to have for manufacturers the type of information secured in the Agricultural Implement study and the new study was to be a study of the channels of distribution, especially of department stores as the principal outlet for textiles.

Approximately a year was spent on the study. To get a clear picture of department store operation it seemed necessary to take a census of the volume of business of department stores in the hundred largest cities. Such a thing had never been done. We had no authority to ask anyone what his volume of business in the past years had been. However, the group of department stores in each city was so small that presumably each department store manager had a fairly accurate idea of what every other store in the competitive group did. Probably no one would tell his own volume - perhaps each would tell his estimate of the volume of business of his competitors. The following method produced satisfactory results.

First a visit was made to every department store to prepare a guess at the volume each did. After some experience it was possible to guess somewhere within reason by the looks of the store what volume of business it did. Then a call was made on a manager of a store other than the largest and discussion was started along the line of what constituted

the group of department store competition and what the volume of the group as a whole might be.

The department store manager usually gave an off-hand figure which was too large, to which it was replied that the amount appeared larger than one would think from an inspection of the stores - now the largest appeared to be X store and its volume one might judge would not exceed \$-----, the amount stated being somewhat less than what the store presumably did. The department store manager would probably confirm or raise this amount. Then another store would be discussed in the same manner.

Finally Grandfather would say: "I do not wish to ask you your own volume of business, but assuming you do so much, naming a figure not out of reason but large enough to be pleasing, the total volume of the group would be \$-----, a figure lower than originally given." To which the department store manager would assent. By the time the ground had been covered in similar manner with the manager of each department store, the figures were pretty close to right. When the report was put out in typewritten form in The Curtis Publishing Company's offices, the figures were received by the industry with incredulity.

"How do I know they are right?" asked a manufacturer. "If you will name any store with which you are familiar, we will show you our estimate on the volume of that store and you may judge the accuracy of the whole book by the accuracy of that estimate." "The X store in New Bedford," says the manufacturer. "Our estimate is \$-----. Is it right or is it wrong?" "The figure is in round numbers but is accurate enough for purposes of computation and analysis."

The largest eastern textile wholesaler - the Claflin Syndicate - sent a committee to examine the figures. The Curtis Textile Manager showed

the book with some trepidation, for he had no personal knowledge of whether the figures were anywhere near right. The committee carefully went over the estimates of New York wholesale and retail establishments and nodded approval. "But how in the world did anyone get those figures?" they inquired.

Marshall Field & Company, of Chicago, carefully checked all estimates in the book on the basis of their own contacts, complimented the work highly and offered only a few minor corrections of estimates. Meanwhile the book was more than a book of statistics. The first paragraph read:

"Woman is a shopper. Out of that fact has come the modern department store. Partly by nature, partly by education, woman is a comparer of values. In the management of the household there are two economic functions; the earning of money and the spending of money, the former usually the duty of the husband, the latter often the privilege of the wife. Many women have come to realize that the happiness and economic welfare of the family depend quite as much upon a wise expenditure of the family income as upon a successful gathering of wealth; and hence have come to consider the spending of money not as a privilege but as a serious economic duty worthy of careful thought and effort."

It may be mentioned in passing that this was the first analysis into shopping lines and convenience goods, phrases which were taken up by the trade and became accepted classifications through the advertising and business world.

Meanwhile the book had been produced only by very hard work and in spite of many handicaps. Grandfather was for months almost continuously at work in the field. On one trip through the South and to the Pacific Coast he was gone from home continuously for ten weeks. Sometimes for diversion he gave his Passion Play lecture in a church on Sunday evening,

making arrangements by writing ahead to the leading M. E. Church when he felt sufficiently clear on his schedule and offering to give the lecture gratis.

Meanwhile work was piling up at the office. An excellent stenographer had been assigned to Commercial Research and she had typed the interviews as she received them, but was not able to do anything toward organizing the material. When the time came to produce the report, she resigned to be married. A stenographer was not enough - a student was needed. So a young woman who had helped G. Stanley Hall when he wrote Adolescence was secured. She could study well by herself, but now there were about twenty stenographers, tabulators and typists to direct. She quit because she did not wish to be associated with so colossal a failure as Commercial Research was bound to be.

What was needed was someone who could be both a student and a captain of the office force. Miss Anderson, a woman who had a brilliant record at the University of Michigan, took the place. She proved to be a real captain and is entitled to considerable credit for the accomplishment of Commercial Research in the following years.

At this point Grandfather wishes to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Mr. Smith, who became manager of the Boston office when Mr. Latshaw was transferred to New York as Assistant Advertising Manager. Mr. Smith and his men were very cooperative and entitled to considerable credit for whatever success Commercial Research may have had in its four years in Boston. Grandfather formed a strong friendship for Mr. Smith and today counts him one of his most valued friends.

The report was to be in four volumes - the work was approaching completion when a wire was received from Mr. Boyd, at that time manager of

the Chicago office, to come out on the next train. Next morning in Chicago Mr. Boyd explained that Marshall Field, hearing of the study which The Curtis Publishing Company was making on textiles, had requested a talk to their wholesale underwear salesmen. "When?" "As soon as we can get over there," said Mr. Boyd. It was but a step from the Curtis office to Marshall Field's wholesale store. Fortunately they called on Mr. Boyd for a talk first and that gave about ten minutes for the preparation of a talk.

The Marshall Field salesmen were the best in their line - what could be said to them? Years of practice in extempore speaking saved the day - the talk made a hit - Mr. Boyd was sold. Mr. Boyd now arranged two luncheons for agency men, at which a talk on the Textile Report was to be made. These were the most important meetings which The Curtis Publishing Company had ever held with advertising agents. For Commercial Research it was the supreme test.

Just preceding these meetings was held an ill-fated managers' meeting at Lakewood, which struck down four managers with tonsillitis followed by inflammatory rheumatism (See last chapter of Volume I). Grandfather seemed to be recovering from tonsillitis and took the train for the Chicago meetings, which were to be on Monday and Tuesday. On Sunday morning rheumatism set in. Immediate return home seemed imperative. Mr. Boyd was very pleasant about the matter, but on the train hot water bottles had reduced the inflammation and when the Century reached its first stop (Elkhart) Grandfather got off the train and telephoned Mr. Boyd he had decided to return for the meetings.

Monday Grandfather arose just in time for the meeting and slipped in late to avoid shaking hands, which with inflamed wrists would have been impossible, made the talk without anyone suspecting the situation and was

helped back to bed. Tuesday it was an even greater struggle, but again none of the audience suspected that anything was the matter, and Grandfather was helped on to the next train for Boston. It was a hard trip, but arriving at Newtonville, Grandfather was still able to move sufficiently to be helped into a carriage and out of the carriage into bed, where he remained for the next six weeks. In about two months he was able to do a little work at home, and the final volume of Department Store Lines was complete.

The report was favorably received, the speeches in Chicago had been successful - another milestone had been passed. Commercial Research had not yet arrived, but Mr. Boyd had been convinced that it had possibilities.