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North Dakota Crop Report.

The North Dakota state crop report for the week ended April 26, says that owing to abnormally cold weather, high winds and frequent heavy rain and snow storms, but little advancement has been made in agricultural work since the date of the last report. Throughout the eastern counties heavy rain or snow fell on four days during the week ending yesterday, which have served to make the backward conditions worse in that section of the state.

Nearly all the low lands are completely covered with water, while considerable snow still remains in drifts in the northeastern counties. The excess of precipitation over the normal, was 0.40 of an inch, about 85 per cent. It will take at least ten days of warm, clear weather to put the major portion of the ground in fit condition for seeding. Although the precipitation in the western counties was very slight, but little work was carried on there, owing to the unusual cold and high winds. The temperature for the state averaged, except in the extreme northwestern counties, about 8 degrees below the normal, freezing weather occurring nearly every night.

Department Stores.

The general development of business in a new country, and in fact the world over, has hitherto been from the small grocery to the general store, and these as the population and wealth of a section increased have generally given up one or more varieties of staple goods, and become more or less special stores devoted to groceries, dry goods, hardware, drugs, clothing or the like exclusively.

Within the last decade or two the department store has sprung up and made astonishing and somewhat alarming growth, ending in some cities in a very decided monopoly of retail trade in all its principal branches, and often resulting in a very decided reduction of the number of special stores and a great depreciation of the profits of such competitors as are still able to remain in business and retain a considerable portion of their old trade.

The department store like the trust is almost always a combination of several or many specialists who combine their capital, their experience and business enterprise under one roof, saving in rent, light, fuel, wages and advertising expenses, and gaining the advantage of apparently greater individual capital, relatively smaller amount of stock in any one speciality, a greater opportunity for display and the other ordinary advantages of combination for one common purpose.

It is quite often the case that no one department excels a competing special store in amount or even in the completeness of its stock, and frequently the prices made in general are no cheaper than are usually asked elsewhere, but the arrangement of the store hides any deficiency, and what in any one store of from ten to fifteen special establishments would excite

little or no interest, awakens admiration and surprise when it forms a part of ten or fifteen special stocks assembled and arranged "as parts of one harmonious whole."

The management of such a store moreover pursues a policy in advertising which is not so easy to follow in an ordinary establishment. They advertise bargains generally from one to three in each department, making the relative expense to each of the co-operating parties no larger than it would have cost each to keep up an ordinary "display ad," and enabling the combination to advertise from fifteen to fifty leaders, where each, if alone, could only have advertised from one to three or four. In buying, too, the representative of such a concern has great advantages over others in the same line. "All is fish that comes to his net," and a bankruptcy in furniture, the closing out of a hosiery mill, or an auction sale of cutlery alike attract him and benefit his many-sided combination.

Generally speaking the bargains offered are such in themselves, but pay a good profit and lead the way to large sales of staple goods at ordinary prices. Some of these concerns, however, deal in a very cheap, showy and inferior class of goods, and are by means of their advertised cheapness in other lines enabled to sell second-rate goods at the price of first class commodities.

Hardware is not generally cheap at such stores unless there may be a drive in tacks, or a sacrifice interne tin pieplates, etc. Shoes are often of poor grade and made to sell rather than for wear; and crockery and glass are very frequently only the "seconds," from which all really first-class ware has been carefully removed. Fine display windows, a flood of light, a host of salesmen and clerks, and placards calculated to impress the customer with the idea that "now is the accepted time" and his only chance for a bargain, dispose of a vast amount of ordinary and even inferior goods at full cash prices.

Many of our contemporaries are discussing the department store and are opposing it or apologizing for it as they think fit. The *Trade Journal* does not attack the department store; it has established itself too strongly for us to waste valuable time and space in opposing an institution which legally has every right to exist, whatever may be thought of it from the higher stand of business ethics. It is founded on that combination of private interests for a common end which must always win against individual opposition. Its representatives have realized the value of advertising, while their competitors have failed to give even a reasonable support to the press, and the press could hardly prosper without the department stores and similar combinations.

It is in the power of any six or ten or fifteen specialists who suffer from this new development of business, to give up their separate stores, combine their stock, their advertising, fuel, light and other expenses and "light fire

with fire." It is the only course in our opinion which can meet this method of competition. That many jobbers suffer as a rule from its present state of development we feel certain, for the statistics show an alarming business mortality among dealers of small capital, due largely to the undue monopolization of business by one or two large concerns in a city or town who cut so incessantly and generally that there are no settled prices in any line of staple goods.

What the future may bring to the department store or its present victims, the regular dealers, we cannot say, but unless they increase in number and cut each other into "innocuous desuetude," a few such establishments in a decade or two will do the major part of the retail business of the country.

The subject, however is one which is worthy of consideration, and the columns of the *Trade Journal* are open for any suggestions or arguments regarding it. This development of retail trade must certainly help or injure the jobbing trade at present. Which does it do, and what is to be the ultimate result?—*Trade Journal*.

British Trade.

At the recent annual meeting of the Association of Chambers of Commerce of the United Kingdom, the President said:—

"Passing to the state and prospects of trade, I am sorry to say that what some of my critics called the "pessimism" of my address at Newport, has been only too well, or ill, verified by subsequent events.

Eighteen hundred and ninety-two was a bad business year, almost the world over; and the present one is, so far, scarcely more satisfactory or hopeful. The continued contraction in our home and foreign trades and in both our imports and exports; in railway traffic; in the shipping (both foreign and coasting), and in the bankers' clearances; the increase in the number of insolvencies; and the board of trade reports upon, and the percentages of non-employment in, the skilled labor trades; all these confirm the views I expressed, and only leave the consolation that what has occurred may be a step, though a downward one, towards a better and safer economic condition, and towards clearing an atmosphere clouded by the financial difficulties of South America, and, to a less extent, of Australia.

Specific and comparative trade statistics are scarcely more encouraging. There was no improvement in the iron trade—which can now be more closely observed since the board of trade specify many more countries under the headings of the various classes of iron and steel exports, and subdivide the exports of machinery and mill work—at the end of 1892; nor do the trade returns of the first two months of the present year show any very cheering signs, though there are some few slight indications of betterment.