Women and Industry.

The Spread of Independent Business Activities -

One picks up many confirming facts of this trend towards independent business among women. There are certain traditional occupations which they almost, though not of course, entirely control. The Dressmaker and Millinery shops usually are, in the majority of cases in small towns the country over, are run by women and this, of course, is the tradition. A man in a millinery or dressmaker shop is unheard of in many towns and is looked upon with disfavor, as an undertaking not fitted to him. In one town of ten thousand with which I am familiar the feeling that women's goods ought to be in the hands of women is so strong that a large retail clothing house in the men's and women's garments of all sorts, turned over the Women's Department entirely to a woman. She is a partner in the firm and handles the business quite independently. In this case the undertaking has been a growth and she was with it since the start. In many places the entrance of a man into these traditional trades is set down as unfair competition. These businesses belong to women. There is a little of the same feeling in regard to bake shops, though the town baker is more likely to be a man, assisted by his wife. However, the convention
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that cooking is a woman's business as the hat making and the gown making
effects the business.

In my position as a wandering observer I can recall in various
parts of the country business in one or another branch of the Need busi-
ness, but built up and controlled by women. In a middle West town where

I once spent a couple of days, the chief social center was a drug store

which a few years ago had been started by a woman as an Icecream Parlor

She had been thrown on her own resources by the death of her husband,

had children. Her home made Icecream had always been famous in the

community. It was the natural suggestion that she make it for sale and

she took a tiny little corner in a busy street and she began to sell it.

It grew on her hands. She added other things, home made, and as there

was a demand for drinks, she put in an Icecream Fountain. She added a

pleasant room for winter and a corner in the rear as a garden in the

summer, a thing unheard of in most middle west communities. Probably

it was the soda fountain which suggested drugs. At all events they

began to come, soaps and cosmetics, and always she was the presiding

genius. When I became acquainted with the place, which I hunted through

my whole visit, once I had heard something of its history, this woman
circulated among her guests cheerful presents, slipping in to sit down
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with a party of youngsters getting too boisterous, like a skillful hostess, making strangers at home, keeping her atmosphere. She had a need of social service, the need of the high minded serious woman.

What she would have put on to a home she was putting on to this business, making, as I have said, a fine community center and all of the time she was keeping a competent eye on business. She was clever enough to see too that the real social contribution she was making was an admirable thing for business. I was told that her account was sought by the bankers of the community and that when it had been necessary for her to obtain credit in order to expand these had never been any difficulty about it, that the bankers in the town were the first to suggest that if she wanted to enlarge she had only to call upon them.

One hears frequently the complaint that bankers do not back women in business enterprises as they will men, but bankers will not back men if they doubt their business ability or the soundness of their enterprises. Let a man prove that he has the qualities necessary for developing commercial enterprises and that he is not given to trusting to credit instead of brains and energy and the banker often has to ease him out with suggestions for expansion and my observation is that it is not infrequent with these among women. That there is a tradi-
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The spread of independent business activities among men is unquestionably true. They have not seen women running businesses. There are many of them who have experiences with women who do not manage with care their own household accounts, as why should they? when the general practice is not to give the women an income on which it is understood that she is to run her house and to hold her to exactness in that, but to let her charge, dole out sums. She has no idea of what business practice is; she has no idea of what men call honor in business. These things come from experience. They are not born with one. But let the women have the experience and as a rule she is more careful manager than most men are and so it frequently happens when she takes on her little business that she gradually builds it up until one day it is on such sound a basis that all of the credit devices, the aids to expansion which modern finance supplies will be hers to demand. As a rule my observation is that she goes more slowly when her credit is established than the man does. She is naturally more conservative, less a dreamer. She will not move much faster than she can see an open path. She has more satisfaction in a sure thing than in a possible thing; few women are gamblers in business in the sense that men are.
My middle West Icecream Social Center, while it can be developed in one form or another all over the country, one of the developments which is not infrequent is a small hotel, sometimes not so small, which has come up possibly from a lunch counter, established by a woman. Years ago, talking on the Chautaugua Circuit on some of the more idealistic industrial methods of handling labor, a handsome and obviously prosperous woman came to me after my talk and said "I believe that in certain things you said today is a key essential to my continued success in my business". "And what is your business", I asked. "I am a hotel keeper. I have four hotels in this and neighboring state. They are not City hotels, but in each one of them I am able to accommodate some fifty people. I own the places outright and built them up within the last twenty years, after my husband died, from a boarding house in the home which was left me. From that I have gone on. In many ways I have kept my business up to date. I have a good tabke, if I do say it. My place is immaculate. I have put put in conveniences as the community in which I carried on business has developed. Indeed, I think I have been the forerunner in various improvements in those towns for the sake of my business. You see, I knew that my success depended upon the travelling man and I have tried to make everything comfortable and attractive stopping places that
he would arrange to spend his Sundays with me when he could not get home.

You will find that many of the men that travel in my territory
aim to be with him in one or another of my places over Sundays. But within
the last three or four years I have had great trouble with my help; some-
thing I have never had before and I have charged it to the help, that
they were growing shiftless and were unwilling to work. But this talk of
yours has brought reproach and condemnation to me. I have not been keep-
ing up my end with my labor problem as I have my table; as I have my
physical surroundings. You have been talking about restrooms and recrea-
tion and decent living quarters. Why, you know I never gave that a thought
to any of those things. I have bunked my help in any space that I had
without regard to comfort and I have scolded them because they were not
properly tidy in their crowded quarters. I never had a pleasant place
for them to sit after their work was done. I never gave them
I never gave them first aid, or at least only in a haphazard way. I
never gave a thought to these things. I am going home to reorganize.

It was the last I ever heard of the lady, judging from the
of her I am sure that she did something toward solving her
problem and I treasured her confidence, particularly because I felt
that I was sewing my seed on sterile ground, that people in those
that people in those days were not anxious to listen to good things,
that had been done and might be done in industry but that they were
much more interested in hearing of all the atrocities - and there were
enough of them to be sure, that were practiced by benighted employers.

One story matters seem to them as it did to this woman.

They have not been considering anything about their employees except
how much they could get out of them. They would much rather hear how
brutal the big manufacturer was. That, they felt, did not touch them
in any way and the indignation they felt to them gave them a fine sense
of self-righteous.

The women owning and running a hotel cannot be said to be
common among women. It certainly exists here and there.

This instinctive turning to doing the thing for which
experience and tradition has trained her has produced one of the most
notable successes among independent businesses, and there are often
some original developments that are striking. One thing that
has done to increase the demand for Candy. The Candy Shop cannot be
said to be taking the place of the saloon any more than the soft drink
place does. Candy itself is a more satisfying substitute for alcohol
than the soft drink and here women have made brilliant business successes.
See the Story of Mary Louise and statistics.

But those who travel broadly over the country realize that other women are doing the same kind of thing; beginning locally as Mary Louise did, then spreading to outlying towns. I could count a dozen of these enterprises that I myself have run across in various parts of the country.

Probably after candy making as a business, established and run by women, Tea Rooms have flourished most extensively, but it is interesting to see how the Tea Room is rated largely as a Ladies business.