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Miss Ida M. Tarbell,

American Magazine,

341-5th Ave., New York City.

Dear Madam:-

I have been very much interested in your article in the last issue "Where The Shoe Pinched". For 18 years I published a paper devoted to the interests of the retail shoe trade entitled "Boots and Shoes Weekly", but sold it some years ago and it is now being issued in Boston, Mass. under the name of the Shoe Retailer. I feel therefore as though I know something about the shoe trade.

In a degree you are on the wrong track in attempting to show that the high price of shoes results from the tariff on hides, the excessive cost of linen thread and the royalties paid to the Shoe Machinery Company. To my mind three cents a pair for the use of the entire chain of machines necessary to manufacture shoes does not seem to be exorbitant. Precisely how much the tariff on hides and the increased cost of thread adds to the price of a pair of shoes it might be difficult to figure out, but if we estimate that it is three or four cents (an excessive amount I should say), it would not make any difference in the price to the consumer.

People ^{generally} ~~do not~~, especially women, buy shoes by the price. That is if they have been wearing a five dollar shoe, they cannot be persuaded to try a three dollar shoe; and if they have been paying three dollars, a two dollar shoe does not interest them.

It has been the habit for years to fix the retail price of shoes at what might be called even money, such as, \$2.00, \$3.00, \$4.00 and \$5.00, etc. There is a variation from this rule, in connection with a great many department stores, who charge \$2.98 for a \$3.00 shoe or \$4.98 for a \$5.00 say possibly. Many shoes of course are sold at \$2.50, \$3.50 and \$4.50.

It has been demonstrated more than once, that no successful retail shoe business can be conducted at little, if any less, than a profit of 33 1/3%

For instance, a shoe that costs \$2.25 is retailed at \$3.00. Now if by reason of free hides and a reduced cost of linen thread, this shoe could be furnished by the manufacturer at \$2.20 a pair, the retailer would still charge \$3.00 for it. If on the other hand the cost of this shoe to the retailer should be increased to \$2.80, the

retailer would still have to sell it for \$3.00.

A shoe jobber of 30 years experience in Philadelphia once told me that he could not tell what a shoe was worth without cutting it to pieces to see how it was made and what it was made of, and he did not believe any body else could.

I was once in the shoe factory of the Haywood Mfg. Company at Worcester, Mass. and went through the works with Mr. Frank Haywood, Vice-President, now deceased. He took up two pairs of shoes from a bench in the finishing room and asked me if I could see any difference in them. I was forced to confess that I could not. He said, "The pair of shoes in my right hand we sell regularly at \$4.00. The pair in my left hand is from a lot we have made up for a customer in the South to imitate our \$4.00 shoe. I cannot tell the difference myself sometimes, when they are mixed up on the bench. This shoe we are selling at \$2.50".

In connection with a great many other things besides shoes, it will be found on investigation that it is not the manufacturer who is always to blame for high prices, but in most cases the retailer is the culprit.

This is the position I have maintained with very many articles for years without eliciting strong support of my contention. I noticed the other day, however, that Senator Smoot, I think, had caught on to this phase of the matter and had mentioned it in his speech in the senate.

I might say in closing that linen thread is not used altogether in sewing shoes, either the uppers or soles. Many years ago Geo. W. Lasalle, now deceased of Lynn, Mass. demonstrated that cotton was far superior to linen thread, not only for upper sewing, but for sole sewing, so far as wearing qualities is concerned. Silk is used for uppers more largely because it looks better after being worn. Cotton would almost entirely supersede linen for sole sewing, but for the prejudices of the people. It has been drummed into them for generations that linen ~~was~~ superior to cotton, and the manufacturers generally have not had the moral courage ~~generally~~ to combat the idea.

If you will take a linen thread between the thumb and finger of both hands, keeping your fingers so near together, that there will be only perhaps one eighth of an inch of thread between, and work them rapidly back and forth until the thread breaks, and try a similar experiment with a cotton thread of the same size, you will find that the cotton thread will stand the test very much longer than the linen.

For a straight pull the linen may be equal to the cotton, but in wearing a shoe it is the lateral pull that one gets in walking more than a straight pull.

It is frequently the case that where soles are sewed on with linen thread, the thread breaks and the shoe has to go to the cobbler to be resewed long before the sole is worn out.

I trust you will pardon my allusion to this matter, but I have been reading your articles for a great many years, beginning with the standard oil series, and feel that you have a very practical mind and perhaps might be interested in what I happen to know about shoes.

Yours truly,

M. T. Richardson

P.S.--- To get manufactured products into the hands of the consumer without excessive expense is a great ~~expense~~ *problem*

In the case of the shoe costing \$2.25 to the retailer, which he retails for \$3.00, you will see that it costs the wearer of the shoe almost half of the manufacturer's price of the shoe to get possession of it.

This percentage, of course, will not hold good with respect to every manufactured product by any means, but it sometimes seems to me that the consumer has to pay a great deal more than he ought to.

I have been told and believe that in the case of cheap grades of shoes the manufacturer is satisfied with a net profit of two cents a pair and even in some cases one cent a pair. You will see therefore that it is not the manufacturer who is the "robber baron", but it is the retailer in most cases.