

Dime for the Show

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THE gaudy splendor of a circus enclosed by four walls is the atmosphere that surrounds a dime store. The windows along the street are as posters advertising the main attractions to be found within. Headless mannequins attired in cheap cotton dresses or disembodied heads sporting out-dated headgear give the impression that a side show is about to start. When one enters the store, the smell of cotton candy is replaced by the sight of the counter, but the odor of peanuts roasting is still present, coming from the never-ceasing cooker to be found near the front of the store. Signs on the counters cry out their wares in the fashion of barkers along the midway, while the popular tunes of the day are blared out by an ancient phonograph instead of the traditional band.

Just as each performer tries to top the next, the counters are individual "acts" trying to "outshow" and "outsell" each other. Showmanship plays just as important a role in merchandising as it does in the ring under the big top. Handbags with gloves draped over the handles lie in scarf-swirled backgrounds. Spools of thread march in military rows across handkerchief fields. Pliers, hammers, and wire clippers vie for first place on a gleaming glass shelf. And above the entire performance fly the banners of the store, tablecloths flaunted on grade A clothesline. All of this entertainment is under the supervision of the ring master, the manager.

The spirit of gaiety catches up with even the most reluctant shopper as he or she roots madly through the ninety-eight cent hose. The undernourished children pressing their noses against the already streaked candy bin glass, the impatient customer patting her foot on the worn wooden floor, and the exhausted clerk anxiously waiting for the closing bell are all a part of the spectacle. This flashy show has had a long run and has played to many large audiences. The performance is lengthy and is usually a matinee. The weekly "late show" is staged at the convenience of the townspeople, for their attendance is important to its survival. "The greatest show on earth" may be the motto of the circus, but there is even a greater show everyday in almost every town in our country. That is the show that goes by the title of "The Dime Store."