

Collier's

15c

November 12, 1949



BEGINNING—

Valley of the Tyrant

A HARD-FISTED NOVEL OF THE NEW WEST

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Members of the Oneonta Department Store family gather in Fred Bresee's office. Left to right: Wilmer (son of Lynn), Lynn, Fred (standing), Clyde (at desk) and little Mark Bresee, 2, who dropped in for a visit

Bresee's boasts it has the best food in town. Here, waitress Muriel Lawyer jokes with customers at the Health Bar. The couple chatting with her are Irwin Anderson, Oneonta optometrist, and his wife



WE'RE

By GORDON MANNING

Gimbel's may not tell Macy's—but why shouldn't Bresee's? They're proud of their success formula: Old-fashioned, friendly service streamlined for 1949

AFTER twenty years as a yard-goods clerk, Elsie Miller knew the signs of an angry customer. She was ready, braced for the storm, as the sharp click of a woman's heels came to a sudden stop in front of her counter. She patted her white hair quietly as the customer plopped a bundle on top of the plate glass. There was a sharp ripping of string.

"Just look at this dress!" the woman fumed, unfurling a cotton print. "Fast red, they told me. Look at it. Pink. All pink, collar and cuffs and everything. Pink. And I hate pink!"

Elsie examined the garment's collar.

"But, madam," she said, "this doesn't carry our label."

"Of course it doesn't," the customer snapped. "I made it myself. But it's your cloth. And you said the color wouldn't run."

Elsie clucked in sympathy. She picked up the phone by her cash register and softly addressed the mouthpiece. "Will you please call Mr. Lynn?"

The short, elderly man who came down the stairs and across the floor smiled and bowed to everyone he passed. Midway, he stooped to pick up a scrap of paper. He paused at another counter to tidy a merchandise display. Elsie could sense that the mood of the waiting woman was changing as she watched him.

"Mr. Lynn," the customer said as he walked up, "I came in mad this morning but nobody can ever stay mad at you."

"H'm," Mr. Lynn said. He smiled and looked at the dress. "Isn't this a shame! It's a well-made dress. Our 49-cent cloth, wasn't it? It ran, uh? Will you take some new cloth or would you prefer your money back?"

The customer swallowed hard.

"To tell you the truth, Mr. Lynn," she said, "I think I should be paid both for the cloth and for my work. I spent two weeks of my spare time making that dress."

Few merchants would feel they could afford to settle claims on such liberal terms. But Lynn Bresee, eldest of the three brothers who run Bresee's Oneonta Department Store in upstate New York, was fully prepared. He actually gave that customer, in return for 3½ yards of 49-cent cloth whose color ran, a smart, \$15 ready-made dress.

The handling of this complaint was not entirely typical of "Mr. Lynn." But the case was not unique, either. Customers of Bresee's usually get what they ask for; the very least they can count on is their money back, on the spot, at the slightest hint of dissatisfaction. With the Bresees—Lynn, Clyde and Fred—that guarantee is a legacy from their father, Frank. On it they have built what they proudly call "The Biggest Small-Town Store in America." In a city of 12,000 inhabitants, they do an annual business of more than \$2,000,000—a fat figure for a place four times that size.

From the foothills of the Catskills and the banks of the upper Susquehanna, farmers and village folk of the rich dairyland triangle between Utica, Binghamton and Albany travel 40 miles and more to Oneonta to shop at the Bresee store.

There, in the middle of the "main block" of Main Street—once a Tuscarora Indian trail of the Six Nations—they make their headquarters for the day under one roof, eating their meals at the Bresee lunchroom (the best food in town, incidentally), cashing their checks (Continued on page 38)

TELLING YOU, MACY'S



Customers sit in comfort at "bar" studying patterns as saleslady Anne Perry stands by, ready to assist. Symbolic wall design was done by store art director



In display, novelty is the thing. Lampshades are lighted from the inside—a sensible device that catches the eye of a customer, Mrs. Lucy Bossio



Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus (the Clark Chaplins in real life) inspect part of the Christmas display created by Lucy Cohoon, art director at Bresee's

The appeal of modern décor is important. But the Bresee brothers agree it is the store's policy of friendly service that attracts customers from miles around



radio, she said, for ever since that tough one in O.C. she had stayed away from the arena. When Billy won, she got all dolled up because he always liked to go out night-clubbing after polishing off an opponent. But this time Billy hadn't shown up.

That was the first time it happened. I wish I could say, for Shirley's sake, that it was the last. But Billy had a big season that year, knocking off the three leading contenders and after every spectacular win he could be found at a ringside table at the Waikiki Club, an expensive trap his new managers owned a piece of. Those two grifters also saw to it that he became acquainted with the ladies of the chorus. I guess it was just a case of too much happening all at once. Overnight a small-town punk was the Big Town's hero. His percentage in the ball-park fight was \$168,000. You need something special to take that kind of dough in stride.

The third time it happened I sat it out with Shirley. "Why don't you divorce the bum?" I said.

But Shirley shook her head in a way I had seen before, in West Liberty, Oklahoma City and points east. "No, Windy, that's not what I want," she said. "I've got to stay with Billy."

Well, there's only been one fighter who could hit the late spots and keep on winning, and Kid Bonnard was good but he wasn't Harry Gonn. His fourth time out after winning the title he ran into a tartar in the person of José Ribera, a young, tough Mexican who had been training at Stillman's while Billy was training on Fifty-second Street.

The Kid never had taken my advice to master the finer points of boxing, and up till this night youth and speed and strength and a murderous left hook had



"I think he's finished, dear—
—he's blowing up the bag"

COLLIER'S

AL MUELLER

carried him through. But some of Billy's zip had obviously been left behind in the Waikiki.

By the end of the third round Ribera was giving the Kid the same kind of treatment Monk Wilson had handed him back in O.C. Only this time Billy had nothing left for an emergency.

No matter how many marks I had against him, it was kind of tough to have to watch the Kid being counted out.

I went back to the dressing room to see if there was anything I could do. The Kid had one eye shut tight and an egg-shaped swelling over the other one. He was sitting on the rubbing table with his head bent low. Moran and Fay were telling him what a bum he was. They

had nothing to worry about, because the way they had it rigged, they would own a piece of Ribera if he won the title.

The Kid was in no mood for the Waikiki that night. "Where you wanna go?" I said.

"Where d'ya think?" he said. "Back to Shirley's."

When she took him into her arms, the Kid began to cry. She put him to bed and put cold compresses on his head to reduce the swelling.

I dropped around the next night to see how everything was getting along. The Kid was still in bed and Shirley was clucking around him like a contented hen. "Windy," the Kid said, "Shirley wants me to go back with you again. How about getting me a rematch with Ribera? I want to win my title back."

Well, the Kid had run out twice, but if that's what Shirley wanted, it was all right with me. I lined up the Ribera match and the Kid went back into training.

About a week before the fight, Shirley called me again. "Windy," she said, "I want you to do me a favor. I want you to take Billy on a good two-fisted bender. Every night this week you can wind up at the Waikiki or any place you like."

"But, Shirley," I said, "have you gone nuts? The Kid isn't in tiptop shape as it is. A couple of late nights and—"

"Do it for me, Windy, and don't ask too many questions."

Well, I'd do anything for Shirley, even cut myself out of a share of the title. Which is exactly what I did. Kid Bonnard was just the burned-out shell of the champion he had been, in that Ribera fight. Ribera belted him out in less than two minutes of the first round.

I brought him around with smelling

salts. His jaw was swollen and his ego was shrunk. "Maybe we oughta go to the Waikiki," I said. "It may cheer you up."

The Kid just shook his head. "I go home to Shirley."

Shirley didn't have a champion any more. But she had Billy. The Kid was over the peak now and going downhill fast. He took some awful pastings before we finally convinced him that it was time to rack up. But every time he got beat he'd go right home to Shirley and she'd patch him up, make him comfortable, nurse him back to health.

When the Kid hung up the gloves after a bad night back in O.C., they decided to settle down there. The Kid must be crowding thirty now, but he still rides that motorcycle. Actually, if you ask me, he's living off Shirley, but to hear her tell it he's developing a couple of protégés who are about to make them a million dollars. Well, maybe so. When you've got that much faith and heart, I guess anything can happen.

The other day I dropped over to the restaurant where she's a waitress again. "Hello, Shirley," I said, "how's every little thing?"

"Just swell, Windy," she said. "You ought to come up and have dinner with Billy and me some Monday night. We just moved into a cute little apartment."

I knew what that meant. They had dropped down a peg to a one-room flat with kitchenette. I've got one of the hottest stables in the country now, so if Shirley had stuck with me she could have been riding around in town cars and living with the best, instead of having to hustle for tips and living on lean street with a low-life like Billy Bonnard.

But the funny part of the whole deal is, even if I figure she's winding up with the wrong fella, she'll never see it that way. The funny part is, she's happy. THE END

We're Telling You, Macy's

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

(without charge or delay) at the Bresee cashier's cage, and taking care of all their material wants from shoe repairs in the basement to custom-made furniture on the top floor. It is even possible for a Bresee customer to have his entire house redesigned with no more trouble than making up his mind about the pattern of the curtains and the wallpaper; and many farmers are acquiring, through the Bresees, complete new baths and kitchens complete with electric garbage disposal units.

Under certain emergency conditions, shoppers' shirts have been washed and ironed by Bresee's home laundry demonstrators. Food has been brought in by service truck and kept in sales-model refrigerators to prevent it from spoiling in kitchens miles away when the electric circuits were out of order. Last-minute Yule gifts have been delivered at midnight on Christmas Eve. All of which gives the store a warm and homey atmosphere. But what really brings in the customers is the dependability of the home accessory repairmen, who can be summoned on the run at any hour of day or night.

There is nothing in the least philanthropic about the Bresee store's concentration on service. It is a piece of hard-boiled business practice. The cost of maintaining the money-back guarantee is repaid many times over by the volume of sales it helps create. That has been true ever since old Frank Bresee set himself up as a merchant.

"Mr. F.H.," as he was better known, was born within the marketing area of the store which now stands as his monument. July 23, 1864, was the date, and the place was the township of Hartwick, about 20 miles north of Oneonta. A

farm boy, F.H. got to school in the village of New Lisbon for only six years. Then he hired out to cut and split wood with his father at 40 cents a cord.

At the age of eighteen, after one bitterly cold day during which the two Bresees netted only 20 cents apiece chopping an unusually difficult stand of timber, Frank announced to his father that he would never work as a woodcutter again. Because he always had been intrigued by the spiel of a notions peddler who visited their farm from time to time, young Bresee decided to invest all his savings, about \$50, in Yankee notions and prize packages and sell them from door to door. On December 20, 1882, he set out on foot with a full satchel. His first day's sales of \$2.29 produced a profit of \$1.24 to start him off on a lifelong career of retailing.

One of the prize possessions of the Bresees today is the ledger which the founder carefully kept of his first year's peddling. For his initial trip on the road, the first yellowed page lists part of that December day's sales. It reads: "1 fine comb 10¢, profit 5½¢. Quire paper 10¢, profit 5¢. Prize package 10¢, profit 5¢. Safety pin 1¢, profit ½¢. 3 darning needles 1¢, profit ½¢. 1 pr. shoelaces 2¢, profit 1¢. Linen thread 3¢, profit 1¢. Silk thread 3¢, profit ½¢. Salve 25¢, profit 12½¢. Buttons 17¢, profit 7¢. ½ doz. buttons 5¢, profit 2½¢. 1 cake soap 10¢, profit 4¢." Frank's net income that year, entered on the last page of the ledger, was \$197.15.

As soon as he could afford it, Frank bought a horse and wagon to increase the range of his route. On February 28, 1884, he married Ella C. Benjamin and they moved into the attic of his father's home at Hartwick. Ella kept the stock

of merchandise in order while Frank was on the road, often making direct sales herself from the house. In the evenings they frequently entertained at old-time square dances. He played the fiddle and she the piano. In other early ledgers belonging to Mr. F.H., there are frequent entries such as this one: "Earned a-fiddling, 50¢."

In 1885, Frank bought out a merchant at South Hartwick and set up his first store. A lifelong Democrat, he was appointed postmaster of the village the following year by President Cleveland. His annual salary for that work was the amount of stamps canceled in a year—\$75. At various times during the ensuing years he moved about upstate, buying, operating and then selling small stores in Laurens, Hartwick, New Lisbon, Fly Creek, Schenevus and Sidney.

Nomadic Way of Life Ends

His three sons were born during this hopscotch existence. Finally, in 1899, Ella insisted that they settle down to raise their family in one place. So F.H., in partnership with his brother-in-law, Fred Cooper, opened the Oneonta Department Store in the Baird Block building, only a few doors from the site of the firm's present location. Six sales clerks were employed for the opening. The store day began at 7:00 A.M. six days a week and closed when the last customer left, often as late as 10:00 P.M.

Six months after the opening Cooper sold his interest in the store to Frank; since then every share of stock in the establishment has remained in the Bresee family. Ten years later the store moved up the street to its present site. On this spot it has grown to its 1949 size of more

than 125,000 square feet of selling and storage space in 48 departments.

Anecdotes about Mr. F.H. abound in Oneonta. He was a tall, thrifty, friendly man with piercing gray eyes which twinkled merrily behind his spectacles when he was enjoying one of his many practical jokes. He was proud of his store.

In later years most of Mr. F.H.'s free time was spent in wandering about from department to department, hands clasped behind his back, whistling softly to himself.

"Always be doing something," he told an idle salesman one day, sweeping several neatly sorted piles of men's socks into one big heap on a counter. "There, straighten those out. It will give you something to do," said the founder good-naturedly. "And when you've finished that, start turning all those socks inside out and right side to again. When you're busy, you attract customers."

This theory also worked in reverse for anyone who wanted to attract Mr. F.H. One of the store's maintenance men once was observed by a department head pounding the floor with a hammer for no obvious reason. Asked why he was thus engaged, the carpenter said, "Mr. F.H. will be along in a matter of minutes." Sure enough, the senior Bresee rounded the corner a moment later, tugging at his mustache and calling, "What's going on here?"

The founder spoke to every customer he encountered, regardless of whether he knew him. It was he who instituted Bresee's courteous service policy, for which the store now is widely known. Clerks were ordered to give cash refunds to those requesting them regardless of the condition of the returned goods. Even if the dissatisfied customer had no

STOUT MEN—
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looking 'round?



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FREE
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sales slip, Mr. F.H. would replace the goods or give back the money.

"Some people would take advantage of Mr. F.H.," recalls Clara Conrow, head of the hosiery department and employed at Bresee's since 1918. "I remember that we used to have a buy-dresses-on-approval plan. One day a group of middle-aged ladies came in and bought black dresses under this guarantee. The next afternoon they were back to return them. Mr. F.H. knew they had worn the dresses at the funeral of a friend, because he was there himself, but he returned their money with a smile. 'The little money we lose on such transactions, Clara,' he once told me, 'will come back to us tenfold in satisfied customers.'"

A shrewd judge of merchandise and markets, F.H. never lost his love of buying and selling. Even after he established himself permanently in Oneonta, he continued to buy out other stores in the area when they ran into trouble. All in all, he purchased the stock of about 200 other shops during his career.

One of his most unusual appraisals was in the town of Sidney, nearly half-way down the Susquehanna Valley toward Binghamton. While waiting for a train there one day, Mr. F.H. noted some commotion in a near-by store. He walked over and was told that the owner was selling out. Some other merchants already had made their bids, but Bresee asked if he might bid, too. He walked quickly around the store, making rapid calculations on the back of an old envelope, and submitted his offer.

"The store is sold to Mr. Bresee of Oneonta," the owner announced, and there was consternation among the low-bidding local merchants. One of them walked over to Frank and said, "Mr. Bresee, I'll give you \$500 for your purchase, over and above your bid." Bresee accepted and boarded the next train for home, that much richer.

Always First at the Store

After his wife died in 1932, Grandfather Bresee had only three loves—the store, his fiddle and baseball. He went to the store every morning of his life, the first one on the job. In later years he limited his active retailing to the jewelry department, one of his pet projects. For this he insisted on being paid a salary of only \$12 a week.

Sometimes when he was alone in his office, Mr. F.H. used to sit at his cluttered roll-top desk and play the fiddle softly to himself, dreaming perhaps of days gone by when he and his wife used to keep the couples hopping at square dances. When the baseball season came, however, he laid aside the fiddle and seldom missed a high-school, college or Class C game of the Oneonta Red Sox in the Canadian-American League.

He died of a heart attack at Nehawa Park, the city's tree-bordered baseball diamond, on May 26, 1941, while watching a game between Hartwick College and Cortland Normal School. His last words, spoken to his son Lynn who sat beside him, were: "That Hartwick team needs a new pitcher."

Frank Bresee's three sons share all but 1,413 of the 3,500 shares of the store's common stock. The 1,413 belong to the founder's three grandsons: Wilmer, son of Lynn; Philip, son of Clyde; and Robert, son of Fred. Wilmer, now thirty-nine, is Bresee's personnel manager, a vice-president and secretary of the corporation. Philip, twenty-five, is learning the business in the ready-to-wear department.

The Bresees attribute much of their success to "the weekly meetings of the firm" which are held every Monday morning in Fred's office. Only the family attend these "clear-the-air sessions" and the arguments are often heated. However, they don't break up until every problem is settled. Two votes by

any one of the three senior partners are enough to veto or adopt a policy decision which has been in dispute long enough to warrant a showdown. However, the firm has established clear boundaries of authority—Lynn, finance; Clyde, merchandise; Fred, advertising and promotion—which are seldom overstepped.

The three brothers sleep, eat and breathe the store. And they are as devoted to one another as they are to the business. All day long they work in adjoining offices, and at night go home to big houses on adjoining maple-shaded streets in the town's eastern residential district. There they visit with one another via private back-yard sidewalks which link their properties.

Even in the summer they live close together in cottages on the west side of Goodyear Lake near Oneonta. The brothers, along with Wilmer, often walk to work together down Main Street, and usually eat lunch side by side in the blue-trimmed Health Bar at the store. Every Wednesday they attend the Kiwanis Club luncheon together. All three are Masons and registered Republicans.

Although they're close together spiritually, the brothers are so different otherwise that they scarcely seem members of the same family. One veteran employee analyzed their differences this way: "If the three Bresees went to a race track, Mr. Fred would bet on a horse because he liked its color and spirit. Mr. Clyde would study the ancestry of the animal and its running record before parting with his money. And Mr. Lynn just wouldn't bet."

Mr. Lynn, at sixty, is considered the "balance wheel" of the organization. Now chairman of the board, Lynn ran the firm all alone as president for three wartime years when Clyde, Fred and Wilmer were in the Army.

"My two brother were Post Exchange officers," Lynn often jokes, "and my big job these days is to unwind the red tape they brought back from the service with them."

A stocky, thin-lipped man with white hair and an infectious smile, Mr. Lynn keeps his ice-blue eyes on every penny coming in and going out of the store. He personally checks all bills, discounts and contracts, and signs all checks. Every Tuesday morning, payday at Bresee's, the eldest brother makes his weekly pilgrimage up Main Street to the Citizens Bank and Trust Company, where he is a director, and brings back the payroll for the store's employees in the firm's old, gray cash bags.

Shy and quiet-spoken, Lynn, more than the others, feels that he has inherited the mantle of prudence worn so regally by his late father. He has been with the store steadily since 1906, the

year he started out as a clerk for five cents an hour. Like his father, Lynn is interested in real estate and owns more than 30 apartments in Oneonta. During the day he wanders through the store, frequently stopping to chat with a customer, to make a sale or to turn out an electric light burning in an unoccupied room.

Typical of his frugality is his statement that he hasn't bought a pair of new shoes in three years. Although Bresee's has a modern shoeshop, Lynn prefers to take his old Oxfords to Bill Stanley, the cobbler in the basement shoe-repair shop, for regular mending.

Mistaken For the Janitor

Lynn likes to putter around the store. Once a new employee, who saw him sweeping down a flight of steps with an old broom, mistook Lynn for the janitor. Only the intervention of a veteran sales clerk averted an embarrassing incident. The newcomer was going to ask Lynn's help with some heavy boxes. It wouldn't have been a catastrophe if he had, however. The eldest brother would have pitched in gladly. Lynn takes a paternal interest in all employees, especially in matters pertaining to their health. "He has passed out more vitamin pills, cough drops and free medical advice to the help than all the doctors in Oneonta," a clerk once said.

Easygoing Mr. Clyde, the middle brother at fifty-five, serves as Bresee's president. Handsome and dapper, the trim, wavy-haired executive probably is the best merchant among the three brothers. As merchandise manager, it's Clyde's job to buy the goods and get them to the store on time for the best sales period. He has a knack of getting top values for Bresee's during these days of close markup.

Clyde joined the firm in 1911, and at first showed little aptitude for retailing. He frequently took two-hour lunch periods to play tennis, his favorite sport as a youth. One day as he was returning from one of these games, his father stopped him by the door and put it to him this way: "Do you want to play tennis for a living, or do you want to make this store your career?" The youth decided on the spot in favor of retailing.

"And I haven't been on a tennis court since that day," Clyde vows. He spends his excess energy now on bowling.

Most of Bresee's merchandise is purchased by 35 buyers with Mr. Clyde's counsel and approval. Once the merchandise gets into the store, he speeds it along, with a sign tacked up in the basement marking room: "If it's down here, it ain't selling."

Although Clyde is liberal with em-



COLLIER'S

"Hold everything—she's flying!"

PERRY BARLOW

ployees and is the most popular of all the Bresees in the store, he knows the value of a dollar. In case he should forget, though, there's a small sign above his desk which reads: "Money isn't everything in the world. Sometimes it's not more than 99%."

Barnum of the business is big, fifty-one-year-old Fred Bresee. In the store's art department there's a modernistic painting shot full of yellow lightning, green triangles and what look like loose piano keys flying through space. It is the work of the staff artist, Miss Lucy Co-hoon, who describes it as her emotional reaction to Mr. Fred. "I call it 'Dynamo'," she says. That word certainly describes the breeziest of the Bresees, even if the painting requires some special interpretation.

A bald, bustling, bespectacled individual, Fred possesses a firecracker mind which explodes almost hourly with new promotion stunts to attract more customers to Bresee's. He joined the firm in 1915, and his booming voice, vigorous arm waving and boundless enthusiasm have been familiar to Oneontans ever since. The youngest brother constantly races through the store, bounding up the flight of stairs to his modernistic, leather-paneled office—"my padded cell"—two steps at a time, even when on routine business.

A dominating personality whose fine sense of humor sometimes is marred by a stubborn streak, Fred has come up with some original ideas for advertisements, window displays, promotions and store trimmings which have had the flair of a professional showman. It was largely through his insistence that the store began a \$100,000 modernization job when the boys returned from service in 1945. Old counters and fixtures were ripped out. Streamlined display cases were installed, along with shadow boxes, fluorescent ceiling and fixture lights, wider aisles and tile floors.

There was so much moving of departments during this renovating period that it provoked some of the old customers. Two of them supposedly met in the front of the store one day, and one asked, "Where is the shoe department now?"

"Don't know," answered the second peevishly, "but if you stand here for a few minutes it'll probably go by."

A Touch of Show Business

When this work was well along, Fred, who believes that "store business is show business," started to fire up the stunts. Looking for "a second Christmas" to perk up sales in the "soft" month of July, Fred picked on his favorite entertainment—the circus. The Bresee Circus was first held in 1947 and it's been an annual two-week summer fixture ever since. An estimated \$3,000 is spent each July to engulf the entire store in a circus atmosphere with red and white bunting, popcorn, balloons, mechanical animals, colored shavings, circus music and real clowns. Each department features circus specials with attractive bargains listed on side-show posters. The 1949 "big top" drew 31,000 persons and pushed sales 20 per cent.

To sell towels one week, Fred strung a clothesline from the front end of the store, through the main floor and upstairs to the department which handles them. On it he hung 240 towels. These flapping rectangles naturally led customers to the source, and more than \$500 worth of towels were sold.

On the store's 50th anniversary last June, Fred staged a big parade down Main Street. All the salesgirls in the line of march wore black skirts, white blouses and carried gold canes. The men clerks wore gray suits and gold neckties. There was a civil ceremony and two special supplements in regular editions of the Oneonta Star.

The people who pass Bresee's 10 dis-
Collier's for November 12, 1949

play windows are no longer surprised by anything they see there. Baby alligators have crawled about, white mice have appeared in cages and there has been a live fox and even a real cow. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals complained about the fox, and he was removed. The cow, too impatient to wait for the S.P.C.A., kicked out one of the plate-glass frames and walked out.

As Fred points out in his more explosive moments, promotions are only as good as the personnel behind them. Bresee's is proud of the fact that 55 of its 200 employees have been with the firm more than five years. All sales clerks work on a bonus basis, and take enthusiastic part in a continuous race for \$10 bills which go to every member of the department which shows the biggest improvement in monthly sales over the same period of the previous year.

Sales Courses for Employees

Records of this race are kept on a wall chart in the personnel training room where regular instruction meetings are held, on company time, for all employees. Each employee spends half an hour a week in this room with his particular group listening to the Bresees talk about store lore, future plans, salesmanship, or selling techniques, or watching educational films. And always, there is emphasis on courtesy toward customers.

"The Bible tells us," Fred stormed at one group after he observed several of them being brusque with customers, "that Samson slew a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass. I wonder how many sales at Bresee's were killed last week with the same weapon?"

One third of all the Bresee's sales are made on credit. The firm has issued more than 10,000 charge accounts, which they call "courtesy cards"; nearly half of these are active every month. Mail orders come in from almost every section of New York State, from other cities in the East, and even from as far away as Belgium and Japan.

Oneonta has five rival department stores, including units of three big chains. Their managers respect the Bresee store's integrity and enterprise, but have a growing resentment against what one chain-store boss calls "leading the town around with a ring in its nose." He was referring specifically to the Bresee practice of staying open Thursday night.

Eager to give their employees a longer week end, the Bresees back in 1946 closed up on Saturday nights—the traditional night to shop in most rural areas—and started a long day on Thursdays. For two years they pioneered alone. Then everyone swung over because Bresee's brought such a mob to town.

Now the chains are eager to open again on Saturday nights because they find their stores pretty much deserted Thursdays when the big crowd is up the street at Bresee's.

"Don't know why they're mad," one neutral observer says. "The others haven't got the flair and won't spend the funds to promote their goods like the Bresees do."

The Bresees are not, of course, standing still. Some new change appears in the store practically every day. Right now they've started a fund out of profits to equip the place with escalators.

The three brothers were discussing this step recently in typical family fashion. Lynn and Clyde mentioned how wonderful it would be to see those moving stairs taking customers to their big second floor to buy more rugs, furniture and other merchandise.

"Yeah," said Fred, "can't you see those escalators at Christmas? We'll invite some church choirs here, dressed in robes. While they're standing there in a group, being hauled upstairs, they can be singing carols." THE END



Bristol Last

Style 4528
Brown Calf
Rubber Heel

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Only a Short Step to Nunn-Bush
Satisfaction.. Why Not Take It?

You pay only a little more for Nunn-Bush shoes . . .
but what a difference in satisfaction that little more
buys! It is necessary to *experience* Ankle-Fashioning
before you can know the advantages Nunn-Bush shoes
offer in greater comfort and added miles of smartness.

See Your Local Nunn-Bush Merchant

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