

# IMPRESSIONS

of Manchester, Robert-  
son & Allison's,

FROM BEGINNING TO END.

Described as Only a Talented  
Woman Can do It.

ONE OF CANADA'S COMMERCIAL  
INSTITUTIONS.

Department After Department is Looked  
in and Some Idea Given of It—The Estab-  
lishment as a Whole—The Unvarying  
Courtesy of the Attendants.

The stranger who visits St. John for the first time, will be impressed by many things. The streets, which seem in most instances hewn out of the solid rock, and are in some places so steep as to make one falter at the mere thought of climbing them; the variety and brilliancy of the shops, and the liberality with which their entire fronts are decorated so that on a sunshiny day—and the sun was shining brilliantly the day I was there—the effect gives a wonderful air of brightness and holiday dressiness to the city, which is very attractive.

The width and extent of King street, and the beauty of the delightful little square nestled in the heart of the city and called "King Square," were both pleasant surprises to the unaccustomed eye, and the glorious harbor with its busy fleet of vessels, its wide sweep of anchorage, and its spacious wharf accommodation, made me wonder if I had not made some mistake and come to the wrong city, for it did not seem possible that this could be the port supposed to be fraught with dangers, many and various, for ocean liners.

Coming up King street my eye was attracted by an imposing building, bearing in gold letters the legend "Manchester, Robertson & Allison." Now, I had very often heard of this firm, and of the magnitude of their establishment, as well as the extent and variety of the business carried on by them; and as the journalistic mind is ever on the alert for new impressions and eager for information, I crossed over on the impulse of the moment and entered the store.

I had no definite plan of action in my mind. I wanted to see the entire working of that large business. But how could I, an utter stranger devoid of all credentials, expect to obtain the freedom of the building, and the necessary permission to "make a survey and report."

"Nothing venture, nothing win," so I purchased two neckties to gain time for cogitation, and while I was waiting for the mysterious little ball which flew along a miniature elevated railway to bring me my change, I inquired if I could be shown through the establishment. After that all was plain sailing for me; I was treated with the unfailing courtesy that the Canadian ever shows to a stranger. The clerks in the different departments were requested to give me all possible information, and an efficient member of the staff was detailed for escort duty, as they say in military circles; and thus I began my tour under the most favorable auspices.

Beginning at the very beginning, as the fairy tales do, and entering at the door to the right, one sees first a long counter, with numberless ladies in front and a score of busy clerks behind it. So long, indeed, is it that the farther ends seem lost in the mists of obscurity. At this one finds every variety of small wares, each in their regular compartment, which is defined by an invisible line, which is nevertheless as rigidly maintained as the laws of the Medes and Persians. You ask for hosiery at the glove counter, for example, and the clerk in charge says respectfully, "Next clerk but one, please." And so there is no confusion, no pushing past each other, or getting in each other's way. Each has his position and he keeps it.

It is to this counter that the initiated come for laces, which include every species of lace, from the richest flouncing to the quarter-inch wide Valenciennes, with which baby's tiny bib or pinafore is to be trimmed. Black, white, cream and coffee colored laces, in endless variety, are draped on the show counter, which is opposite the selling counter.

Here also one comes for dainty frilling, in bewildering profusion and of every imaginable tint and style; for collars and cuffs; for gloves and ribbons, and, most wonderful of all, for an unlimited choice of fancy work, in every new design, slippers, cushions, footstools, airy trifles for the drawing room, or my lady's chamber, Berlin wools, hosiery, yarns, Hamburg embroidery, fringes, ruches, nets braids

and linings, gimps, ornaments of every description, not forgetting those necessary adjuncts for making up all this finery, silks, twists, threads and buttons, which have a little compartment to themselves.

To the left, and opposite the far end of this counter, the housekeeper finds everything her heart can desire in table and house linen, damasks, towels, table napkins, quilts, sheeting, pillow cottons, the latter so nearly made up that it seems only necessary to cut off a length and slip the pillow in. There is to be found every kind of flannel, of white cotton, of shirting. There are table damasks with borders, in self colors and in crimson, delicate cream-colored squares for 5 o'clock tea tables, and wee d'oyleys to go with them.

Turning to the left, and still going onward—for by this time you have become accustomed to the fact that going through Manchester, Robertson & Allison's means a long walk, and that it is an establishment of long distances—you pass into a dress room, which contains nothing but ladies' dress goods. Around the four sides of the room are dress goods of every kind, except silk. Facing the door, as you enter, are the mourning shelves, to the left, you find crepes of every description

complete knowledge of what suits the coarser half of creation; but everything that is new and fashionable in ties, gloves, collars, hosiery, etc., in immense variety, is to be had there as early as in London, New York or Paris.

Passing out of this region of masculine supremacy in search of fresh worlds to conquer you step into the elevator, if you are so disposed, and repose for an instant on a crimson plush divan till you reach the next floor. I was not so disposed myself, for I fancied I could see a good deal more by walking up the stairs, and being still in the pride of youth, a flight of stairs had no terrors for me.

Directly over the ladies' dress department is the silk room or as it is called, "The New Room," from being the latest addition to the building. This room is set apart for silks, satins, plushes, velvets, and all the expensive varieties of dress goods. Here you will find everything of the richest and daintiest that can charm the eye or gratify the taste. The very newest fabrics from foreign looms find their way to the silk room at M. R. & A's almost as soon as they appear in the land of their birth. I saw *crepe chiffons* which made one think of the oriental gauzes with which the Sultana's draped their charms in the Ara-

ladies mantles from the fur lined cloak of generous dimensions to the shortest and most fetching of jackets or the jaunty "four in hand" cape. There are cloaks of silk and wool broche fur lined; mantles of black brocade silk lined with every variety of fur, grey squirrel, Hamster, mink and musk. Most of these are direct importations from London, Paris and Berlin. There are dolmans and *visettes* of Greenland seal, and of silk seal plush or sealette in finest quality.

All these goods are hung on specially made racks, which display them to the best possible advantage and are most convenient for the customer.

Here also are the trimmest and neatest of ulsters, most of them made in Berlin. I noticed one long cloak of the popular Prussian shape of wool *broche* in an oriental design, something like the Paisley shawls of a generation ago, lined with Hamster fur; another of black corded silk, heaviest Ottoman cord, as it used to be called, lined with grey squirrel; the trimmings of these garments are in every variety, seal, beaver, black marten, bear and skunk. Seal skin jackets in all lengths were also prominent features of this department and children's cloaks and jackets appeared in endless variety.

grades of upholstery and house furnishing goods.

At the head of the stairs which descend to the first floor, is an upright glass case containing samples of every known variety of curtain poles, chains brass ornaments, brass rods and rings for portieres, indeed everything in brass that is required for the drawing room, the library, or the staircase furnishings.

Turning to the counter, the task of looking through even a fraction of all the novelties contained there, seemed well nigh hopeless, and so I can only speak of what attracted me most. First came the greatest variety of curtains and portieres; some of the latter seemed rich enough for an eastern palace, and are well worthy of description. One set were of terra cotta plush royal, with border and dado of oriental brocade in gold, and terra cotta of a darker shade. Another set were of turcoman chenille, in a dull old gold with border and dado of a mahogany color. This turcoman chenille is a species of silk tapestry, and is rich beyond description.

A set of window curtains in Irish point lace next attracted my attention; they were part of a special importation and were very beautiful.

One of the latest arrivals was an assort-

being unloaded, and the goods distributed with marvellous rapidity throughout the building by the freight elevator.

A gentle reminder from the courteous clerk, recalls me to consciousness of the fact that "time is still a-flying," and there is much to see yet. So we pass into another large room, and are met by the clerk in charge, who spares no pains to make my visit both pleasant and profitable. This, he informs me, is the Show Room, where are displayed oil cloths, linoleums, rugs, mats, union and hemp carpets.

Here the most notable features were the rugs, which were simply exquisite. Every style, every color, every quality, from the Royal Axminster, with its delicate pale colors and its deep, subdued tones of dark colors, to the modest tapestry hearth-rug.

Beyond this room is another, of still more spacious proportions, which is set apart for the higher grades of carpets, and the walls of which are lined with rolls on of Axminster, Wilton and Brussels.

First of course come the Axminsters. One was a veritable poem in wool. The ground was of a pale blue grey, flecked with darker shadows, which seemed to represent water, and over it were scattered water lilies in tints of palest pink and palest primrose, with leaves of faint neutral green. The border was half a yard wide, and matched it perfectly.

A room carpeted with this lovely design would be a joy forever, or at least for a lifetime. For halls and staircases there are samples for customers to choose from and then the order is sent to England, and the carpets manufactured in any design wished for. I was shown two Axminster carpets which had been specially manufactured for a house now in course of erection in St. John. The dining room and library carpets were alike, a ground work of different tones of electric blue, with varied shades of color in the rich dark, almost indescribable flowers and arabesques one sees in old Persian rugs, and the body of course was of kindred design. The drawing room carpet showed prevailing colors of subdued old rose, and a delicate shade of old gold, or amber. Rugs and borders had also been manufactured to match. To walk on these carpets was itself a luxury. The way I know this is because I tried.

Next in order come the Wiltons, in rich dark scarlets and crimsons, and subdued yellows, thick and heavy and luxurious, and accompanied by their own special borders and hearth rugs. Then Brussels in all styles and at all prices. Tapestries so thick, and in such handsome designs that they might almost be mistaken for a Brussels, too.

Beyond this room again is still another, in which are the lower priced tapestries, ingrain and hemp carpets. Here also are kept linings, bindings, door mats and rugs.

Coming back to the starting point I paused to glance at the ponderous rolls of English oil cloths, ranged against the walls on their great rollers. Some of them were twenty-four feet wide, and each roll weighed a ton.

In connection with the carpet rooms, there is a special department for cutting, making and fitting carpets. A staff of men are kept for measuring and cutting, and a number of women for sewing. Looking out of the window down into the court, one may see the carpenter shop, where, during the season when there is little work doing at carpet making, those men are employed in making curtain poles, clothes racks for displaying goods, and doing the hundred and one "odd" jobs necessary in business of such magnitude.

Standing at the front windows of the largest carpet room one looks out on Prince William street, while from the back window one sees Germain street through the alley already mentioned and the main building faces on King street, yet it does not quite occupy a square.

Just here let me mention that this portion of the building is one of the landmarks of St. John, from the fact that here the fire stopped on the ever memorable 20th of June, 1877. Here it was first brought under control and that side of the street saved. Indeed it was mainly owing to the herculean exertions of the firm members, who were untiring in cheering their devoted staff of assistants, and encouraging them both by example and advice, that this part of the city was saved.

Having seen all that was to be seen here we retraced our steps, and descending a short flight of stairs we reached the shirt making department, where some 25 young girls were seated at a long table running through the centre of the room, all busily engaged in working up yards upon yards of white cotton. In front of each girl is a sewing machine which runs by steam, thus doing away with all the objectionable treadle work. The machines are set in motion and stopped by what looked to me like a little treadle, which was lightly pressed by the foot, but I could not see it very distinctly.

Beneath this room is the engine, which supplies the motive power for the sewing machines. In this room is done both the custom and order work, and also the work of the ladies underwear department.

All of the girls looked bright and viva-



A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE CITY OF ST. JOHN.

and at all prices. On the right hand side of this same row of shelves are the mourning dress materials, Henriettas, cashmeres, crepe cloths, everything, in fact, that pertains to mourning.

The left of the entire room is devoted to colored wool dress goods; and here you find every novelty that the brain of Dame Fashion can conceive and carry out; endless varieties of costumes from the imported robe rich in embroidery and braiding, to the stout, sensible, and ever popular homespun. Nuns veiling and albatross cloth in delicate evening shades, dainty chailies with their pale grounds strewn with flowers; finest cashmeres and merinos in all possible colors and every imaginable variation of shade.

The right hand side is devoted entirely to cotton and linen goods, prints, muslins, lawns and ginghams, which latter are conspicuously unlike the material known to our mothers and grandmothers by that name; indeed they seem to me more like the muslins of old times, both in delicacy of color and fineness of texture. Here are to be found robes of embroidered Swiss muslin, of chambray in palest pink, in heliotrope, in cream color, in green, and in grey, prints in all colors and styles. Sateens in such delicate tints and designs that they are easily mistaken for China silks, English cambrics, Victoria lawns, everything in fact into the manufacture of which cotton enters.

One of the peculiarities of this room is the fact that it is partially underground as the entire building rests on the side of a hill which slopes up gradually and encroaches to a certain extent on the two lower stories which follow the conformation of the rock, for the hill is in reality a steep cliff.

The dress room is lighted by a row of large square windows which run across the entire side of the room facing the door; they are placed above the shelves and at least eight feet above the floor.

To the Gentlemen's Furnishing Department is devoted, the left front, as it were, of the building, having its own separate entrance and show window, which correspond to the entrance and window of the ladies department. Each has its own number also, 27 and 29 King street, as well as a door of communication inside at the foot of the first staircase.

As a gentleman cannot do justice to the ladies' departments of this great establishment, neither can a woman pretend to a

bian Nights. Perhaps it might be as well to explain that *crepe chiffon* is a flimsy material very like *crepe de chine*, only that it is striped or figured in a brocade design, and is used for evening dresses. It comes in all pale shades from cream to pale blue and pink.

Box after box was opened by the untiring clerks, who displayed in rapid succession to my admiring view rolls of *faille Francaise* and Bengaline silks in every color from black to palest cream and ivory white. I saw some white brocade with just the faintest ivory tinge, so highly prized by our grandmothers, which for their thickness and richness might almost have rivalled the fabrics worn by the belles and beaux of the First Empire.

Here also I saw some novelties in wool, which I fancy were allowed to associate with their more aristocratic relatives on account of being such new comers. They were homespun in newest shades of brown, green, navy and electric blue, which were embroidered in silk, in medallions and flannels. These, I was told, were the very latest importations for the Autumn trade. China and India silks, foulards, everything you could ask for in the satins, satin brocades, velvets, velvet brocades and plushes, was to be found at this counter. Silks for wedding and bridesmaid's costumes are a specialty, and the choice is varied in the extreme.

Facing the silk and satin counters, is the department for furs of the smaller kind, such as muffs, boas, shoulder capes and caps. Here you find boas, from the collar shaped boa with flat ends which reach the foot of the dress, and are finished with tails of the furs, to the tiny collarettes, and strung ostrich boas for children, indeed children's furs seemed to receive special attention.

In ladies shoulder capes there were the newest shapes in heavy, warm garments, with the stylish Medici collars and revers in front; also the comfortable collars which come far above the ears and are the very essence of warmth and luxury. These garments are in beaver, bear, Persian lamb, astrachan, the luxurious seal, the serviceable mink and the equally serviceable and ever fragrant marten. Perhaps beaver is the favorite from its combined warmth and richness, its comparatively moderate price, and the advantage it possesses of being so universally becoming.

Further back still comes the cloak department, where one can see everything in

In addition to this, almost unlimited choice of outdoor wear, there is in this wonderful room still another advantage. Across from the silk counters is another long counter, almost the entire length of the room, devoted to every kind of mantle and ulster cloth, ladies' cloths, wool brocades, sealettes and plushes in silk and wool, waterproof cloths and heavy homespun.

In connection with this department there is a cloak and mantle making room where every kind of ladies outdoor garment is made either to order or for custom. Fur linings are kept on hand and covered and made up to suit customers. I believe, but I am quite sure on this point, that even ladies riding habits are made to order, and daintily furnished fitting rooms are provided for ladies who come to be measured or fitted. Special cutters and tailors are employed for the making of jackets and ulsters.

I had almost forgotten to mention one style of cloak which struck me particularly. It was of English make and was called a Heptonette cloak. It was of plaided material and looked like an ordinary dust cloak of the Killarney or peasant pattern, made of a material like light quality serge, but possessing the quality of being absolutely impervious to water.

Gossamers were also to be found in this room—which had not the least appearance of being crowded—gossamers of every shape and size, from the expensive English waterproof ulster, to the cheap and useful article of waterproofed cotton.

Fit companions and room mates for these were to be found English umbrellas in all styles and makes, from my lady's tiny silk sunshade to the corpulent family umbrella, which might well shelter the head of paterfamilias.

Jerseys and knitted wool goods of every possible description also found a place here, cardigan jackets for wear under fur cloaks, dainty "fascinators" of every tint, clouds and children's hoods and jackets, tiny baby's boots and jackets. In short so great a variety of everything, that, like Mark Twain's tired horse, I "wanted to lean up against something and think for a while" before going any further. But time pressed, the afternoon was waning, and my escort's time was precious, so I pulled my wits together and started once more.

This time our objective point was the long, spacious room set apart for the higher

ment of silk and satin, eider down puffs, or spreads. These are sufficiently handsome for drawing room use, and each spread is accompanied by a sofa cushion to match.

Many of these were dreams of beauty; one was of cherry colored satin, embroidered in centre design and border, with lace applique and gold colored silk; with cushion of the same. Another was of figured foulard in pale blue, with design of old rose flowers; both spread and cushion were finished with a fantastic little puffed frill of satin at the edge.

Others were of sateen with satin or India silk borders. Others still of cotton, just ordinary eider down spreads. I saw also numerous little three cornered cushions in satin and plush with ribbons attached, to hang them over chair backs. Table and piano covers abounded in tapestry, chenille, brocatelle and cloth.

For upholstering furniture there was every variety of fabric, from silk brocatelle to cretonne. Art muslins, art serges, endless choice of every color and material, and then turning to the more solid and less showy household requirements, one can find an equally unlimited choice of articles suited to all tastes, and, what is more important, all purses. Here are blankets and comforters galore, gimps and fringes, with the aid of which the economical housewife may recover and brighten up her own sofas and easy chairs, and even brass racks to aid in the performance of the task.

The left side of this room is devoted altogether to gentlemen's cloths. Here there is every requisite for finishing the good work begun in the gentlemen's department down stairs, and thoroughly clothing the outer man. Cloths and suitings of every style lay piled upon the counters and shelves, from the lightest of summer serge to the heavy ulster cloth, which will soon fulfil its mission of protecting its owner from the chilling blasts. Inverness capes and mackintoshes are included in this department, which also embraces ulsters and, I believe, fur coats.

Standing at a broad window in the rear of this room, just as one passes out into the carpet rooms, one can gaze down into the flagged court-yard, around which the various buildings which compose this great establishment are grouped, and watch the loaded trucks, coming in through a wide brick alleyway, which leads directly in from another street, drawn by the firm's own stalwart dray horses, and also watch them