

## OUR CANADIAN PUBLISHERS AND SOME OF THEIR METHODS

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There is probably more popular ignorance on the subject of book publishing in Canada than on that of almost any other business. The public knows in a general way how most commercial undertakings are carried on, how the necessities of life and many of its luxuries are produced and how various commodities are marketed, but in the matter of the making and distribution of books, there is a good deal of uncertain and unreliable information abroad. For instance, it is commonly assumed that a book, which bears on its title page, the name of a Canadian publisher, has been manufactured by that publisher; that the sale of the average volume in the Dominion amounts to at least several thousand copies; and that book author and publisher are making a good thing out of the Canadian market. In reality neither of these conditions is true.

When it comes down to solid fact, book publishing in Canada pure and simple, omitting school book publishing, which is a business in itself, is so limited in scope and so unprofitable in operation that if the entire production were lumped together, it would scarcely produce a decent living for a single publisher. This is a drastic statement and requires some explanation.

The great determining factor in all publishing is necessarily the market. Other things being equal, the book which appeals to the entire English-speaking world is going to be printed, bound and published just where it will enjoy the largest sale. This will, of course, be in London and, because of certain copyright restrictions, in New York, or Boston as well. As for Canada, because of its comparatively small market and the absence of any copyright regulation requiring manufacture here, it will not be as profitable to print an edition in Toronto as to import an edition made in England or the United States. So Canadian publishers, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, secure British or American-made books and issue them under their own imprint. In the hundredth case they would probably make a special Canadian edition, the prospective sale being sufficient warrant for such a course.

So much for the book of general appeal. When it comes to a volume of professedly local interest, such as a history of Canada, a biography of some prominent Canadian, or a descriptive work dealing with a part of the Dominion, the situation is reversed. The possible sale for such a book outside Canada is reduced far below its possible sale in Canada and, consequently, the logical place to make the book is here. But the number of these books is decidedly limited, as compared with book production in either London or New York; hence the statement that book publishing in Canada, as commonly understood, is small and unprofitable.

The situation then is that there are some ten or twelve publishing houses in Canada, practically all of which are located in Toronto, engaged in the work of securing and marketing Canadian editions of books published originally in England or the United States. This they do as part of a general book business which consists of jobbing to the booksellers of Canada the general publications of various British and American publishers. On the other hand, the task of producing the small number of purely Canadian books that are published annually is in the hands of only three or four houses, the others finding it unprofitable to undertake such work or carrying it on in a very limited way.

The oldest existing publishing house in Canada and co-incidentally the largest producer of Canadian books, is the Methodist Book and Publishing House, the publications of which are issued under the imprint of William Briggs, the Book Steward. The business of the Book Room dates back to 1829, when the Christian Guardian was started and a small depository for the sale of books was opened. For a time the manager of the Guardian superintended both the paper and the book department, but in 1843 a book steward was appointed for the purpose of handling the books specially.

Until 1865, when Dr. S. Rose became book steward, not much was done in the way of publishing beyond the weekly paper and some pamphlets but in that year the making of bound books was begun. In 1878 Dr. Briggs succeeded Dr. Rose in office, and



REV. DR. BRIGGS.  
Head of Methodist Book and Publishing House.

has ever since been in charge of the book business. Under his direction the company has expanded its activities in many directions and has built up a large publishing organization.

William Briggs has made and published most of the important Canadian books that have appeared of late years. The Cartwright, Ross and Young volumes of reminiscences have been brought out under his direction. He is the publisher of the poetical works of Robert W. Service, and has published the novels of H. J. Cody, Nellie L. McClung and various other Canadian authors. Were all the books issued by him removed from our libraries the sum-total of Canadian books would be very small indeed.

The second Canadian publishing house in point of age, is that of the Copp, Clark Company, who are, perhaps better known as large producers of school books. At the same time they have carried on for a great many years a general book publishing business. The firm originated in 1841 under the name of Hugh Scobie. It later became known as W. O.