



CURRENT NOTES AND COMMENTS
OF INTEREST TO THE TRADE.

Getting Behind The Times.

The recent going-to-the-wall of two of the best-established American publishing houses within the past few months has led to much comment, and, indeed, to a good deal of astonishment. The causes which led to such results have been widely discussed, and the question has broadened out into that of whether the fate of publishers on this continent is going to be a happy one at all. The London Saturday Review, speaking editorially on this subject, attributes the recent failures to the fact that a prolonged continuance of success had led to carelessness in typography and some of the minor details such as go to make up an attractive book. "For years," it says, "certain of the more conservative publishers went on issuing books in which the matter was thought to be of so much more importance than the manner, that very little attention was paid to the small niceties of book-making, only sufficient regard being given to the general make-up to use clear type and sufficiently-strong paper and binding to satisfy the demands of less-exacting readers." The Review goes on to show that new firms began to turn out finer work and daintier handicraft; and, while at first they only got the opportunity of putting

their work on the books of young and comparatively unknown authors, gradually the difference began to tell, and the houses which were keeping strictly in accord with the times began to receive many of the better class of writers. Book-buyers are of varying tastes and classes; but there is a very large proportion of them who are governed much by the appearance and attractiveness of the article, and even the best writers will, in time, have to bow to the verdict of the vast majority. The lesson is plain. Attention to the small details, and constant watchfulness for novelty, is an essential to success. This is not true of publishers only, but of dealers.

The Price of Paper Books.

The question of what price ought to be paid for paper editions of the better class of books is a much vexed one, and has often come up for discussion. Many merchants amongst the booksellers contend that there is no reason why the public should be condemned to pay 75c. for these editions. When a book exceeds four or five hundred pages, they say, there is some reason for the demand, and they can face their customers without flinching, but when one of 150 pages is put on the market at this price,

buyers say they would sooner get it in cloth, if they are to pay such a price, and it is well known that few books of this kind are bought in cloth, unless for presents. The booksellers claim that were the price reduced to 50c., the demand would be so much greater that any immediate loss would be more than compensated—that it would, in fact, act in the same way as penny postage or any other reduction, which has been regarded with fear and trembling in the first instance, but proved a great blessing in the end. Of course, it is well known that after the first edition of a book is out the expense is a trifling matter, and thus leeway might be made up. On the other hand, the publishers claim that the actual cost of getting out the book is so near the margin that any such decrease would be impossible.

A publisher recently stated that if they made 2c. per book they would be well satisfied. The price of paper at the present time is up, as also the price of labor, though this latter makes very little difference in the book-making business. The position of the booksellers is this, that they dislike making their customers pay a price which they feel is too much, while, at the same time, they are not making any decent profit themselves. The price paid for a 75c. book is generally 55c., and after about 10 per cent. has been taken off in handling expenses there is not much left. Certainly it would have a good effect if the better books could be sold at 50c., as it would crowd out to