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DISCOURAGING sign of the times is the large number of chattel mortgages that are being given on stocks of books and stationery goods. These pledges are reported to be more numerous than they were a year ago, and in too many cases are for amounts almost hopelessly beyond redemption. Even for the smallest amount a chattel mortgage is a hard thing to outlive by any ordinary book business. There are lines of trade in which a man of push and with fair chances may calculate upon the future as a solvent of business difficulties, but it is usually best to assume in the book trade that what cannot be done now will not be easier to do a year hence. It is better to lack ballast than to be over-freighted with stock that is not paid for. A man will have a stronger incentive to labor hard and live economically, if his object be to work up to a big stock of his own, than if it be to work up to the payment of a big debt.

* * *

Publishers are too prone to make collections of, and publish in sets, the complete works of any author who has made a name for himself. There are writers who have made one strong bid for fame, and on the strength of that one alone are entitled to it. If that single effort had not been successful, all else they wrote would have speedily passed into oblivion. But the demand for collected writings recalls from obscurity all the second-rate or inferior works of the author who has written one meritorious or successful book, and keeps the market inundated with works of comparatively little

worth. The wheat should be separated from the chaff. If a man wants to buy *The Raven*, the work upon which Edgar Allen Poe's title to fame sufficiently rests, he is unlikely to buy five or six large volumes, to dilute, as it were, the merit of the masterpiece in a mass of mediocrity. There is an increasing class of book buyers who have only sufficient time on their hands and room on their shelves for the best, and it would be a good thing if particular works were more frequently selected for publication. It would undoubtedly stimulate book buying. The successful writers of more than one or two books are few.

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An event which touched the mainspring of a wide popular demand for one class of book these days, was the death of Sir John Macdonald. The interest in his life and work was acute and general, affording a basis for a large trade in a published biography of him. And the biography was ready nearly as soon as the demand. A very large number of volumes will be sold, but that does not avail the trade anything. The salesmen through whose exertions these volumes will be sold are traveling on the road with prospectus and order book, visiting the farmers, mechanics, professional men, in short all classes of readers, to persuade them to buy a copy. The trade have simply to stand by and look on at one of the rare opportunities to make money in their line being enjoyed by others. To book agents is given the fullest protection by publishers against the competition of the book trade, while it is another of the grievances of the book trade that it is afforded not the least protection against the competition of big bazaar and tea store traders. The trade, it seems, has to be the scape-goat in any case. Publishers who have to be beholden to the trade for the sale of a great part of their stock ought to be just and considerate enough to give the trade the benefit of any special chances. It is upon special opportunities that the bookseller has to depend to make anything.

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One hopeful fact is that book-agents are not so plentiful as they once were. Advertisements are open week after week for agents, while in any other class of service there is no trouble in getting a vacancy filled at once. Under "Situations Vacant" all the other classes of employes wanted are not so numerous as agents. The reason is that the work is very disheartening. Agents have become odious to the people, and a man is not so ready as in more favorable times to take to the lot of the book selling tramp. He has to submit to much that outrageous to his self respect, if he has any. The book store man, as a resident and well known respectable citizen, with sufficient insight into men to keep him from degenerating into a bore; could take up the occupation of book agent and put it on a perfectly unexceptionable footing. If book sellers as a class would make a dead set at all book agencies there would be an indirect good of great importance sure to flow from it. It is this: The requirement imposed on itinerants to sell at a fixed price, would have to be observed by the trade, thus profits would be secured, and the stress of competition would be more or less relaxed by the general introduction of the same principle into other lines.

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"Author," on another page, speaks from the standpoint of a writer who has had unsatisfactory experience of the trade as a medium for the distribution of native works. While there are many energetic booksellers, there also undoubtedly are a great many who do not realize that there is nearly or quite as much depends upon the salesman as there is upon the book. A well read scholarly customer will often buy upon the recommendation of his bookseller. The local demand does not go before the book, it usually follows the sale of a few copies of it. In many a town one or two reading men are able to make a considerable sale for a book, and it would sometimes pay to make a present of a copy to such a man who numbers many readers among his friends. A considerable part of the success of the book agent is due to the fact that he laboriously loads his memory with extracts from the book he seeks to sell. A requirement of his employers is that he shall know certain passages of the book word for word.