

## The Retail Merchants' Association of Canada.

Proceedings of the Convention of the Booksellers and Stationers' Section of the Retail Merchants' Association of Canada, held in Toronto on October 17, 1902.

**T**HE first convention of the Booksellers and Stationers' section of the Retail Merchants' Association of Canada was held in their board-room, Medical building, on Friday morning, October 17, 1902.

A large number of delegates were present, representing the principal cities and towns of the Province.

The proceedings commenced at 10 a.m., and, upon motion, W. Tyrrell, of Toronto, was unanimously chosen to take the chair, and E. M. Trowern, central secretary, to act as secretary for the meeting. A large number of letters were read from booksellers and stationers from all parts of the Dominion expressing themselves as being thoroughly in sympathy with the work of the association. W. Tyrrell then delivered the following address:

### CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS.

Gentlemen and fellow booksellers and stationers,—I feel sure you will admit that no formal welcome is necessary on the part of our local association. We are all working for the same end, and to see you here is very great encouragement to those of us who, so far, have been doing what we could to improve the business upon which we are all embarked and in which our time, our money and our energy are invested. Nevertheless, it is a great privilege to be associated here with you this morning in an attempt to bring about conditions more equitable and just to booksellers, and yet it gives me a curious feeling to be placed in the honorable and responsible

any one set of causes. At first thought, many of us are inclined to blame publishers, wholesale dealers and the Government for the unfair conditions which now surround us, but I think you will also admit that we ourselves must share some of the fault, not only on account of our readiness on many occasions to do business at the expense of our rivals, but also for our neglect and indifference to the broad interests of the trade. But our business now is not so much with causes as with remedies, and for this purpose we have now met together. Judging from the number of letters we have received from all parts of the country, there can be no doubt that the greatest grievance which now oppresses the booksellers is the impossibility of getting any reasonable profit from the sale of school books, and this question, so vital to all dealers throughout the country, will be the first to occupy your attention.

Some method by which a uniform selling price for school books can be maintained by all dealers from one end of the country to the other is the ideal which we seek. Next to that, and very important to the booksellers in the larger towns and cities, is to devise some plan by which a similar uniformity of price may be obtained for all new works of fiction and general literature, and I believe that there ought to be little difficulty in securing such an arrangement from our publishers.

### THE NET SYSTEM.

The most promising means by which this can be obtained is the adoption by the publishers of what is known as the "net system." This system has been successfully introduced by the publishers of Great Britain and the United States, to the great benefit of booksellers in those countries, and customers now have the satisfaction of knowing that they are buying their books as cheaply from their favorite booksellers as they could if they spent hours in nerve-wasting energy looking for the cheapest store.

As there may be some here who are not familiar with the workings of the "net system," I will venture to explain very briefly the practice of English and American publishers. The first step is the formation by publishers and wholesale dealers of an association, united for the purpose of coercing all retail merchants who cut or reduce the price of any book published at a net price. Obviously such an association must include in its membership all the publishers and jobbers of the country in which it is formed. At best there can be little hope of success, if any influential publisher remains outside of the association. Having thus united, the association agrees to exact from all retail dealers alike the following conditions: All books issued under the "net system" are sold to dealers on the sole condition that, for one year from date of publication, they obtain the full net price from every customer except public libraries, which are allowed 10 per cent. discount, but no more. Should any dealer be discovered selling net books at less than the full published price, plus the postage, if mailed, he is at once "black-listed" in the offices of all members of the association, and until he agrees to stop cutting prices he cannot obtain further supplies from any member of the association.

This plan has been found to be wonderfully successful in actual practice, both in the United States and Great Britain, and no better evidence of its profitability can be found than the fact that the number of "net" books is continually increasing. When we consider the enormous difficulties which had to be encountered in a country so large as the United States, we cannot but admire the spirit and determination of the publishers, who realized the precarious condition to which booksellers were being driven, and their experience and success should be a source of encouragement to our publishers when they have to meet difficulties of a similar nature.



MR. WILLIAM TYRRELL

Chairman of the Convention

position of chairman to so important a gathering, for I know that there are others here who would more ably fill the position—others whose experience is greater and more intimate than mine, especially with some phases of the difficulties, which we hope to remove.

Before going further, let me say that it would, perhaps, be well for us to remember that, many though the difficulties are which we have to encounter, yet, these are not the result of