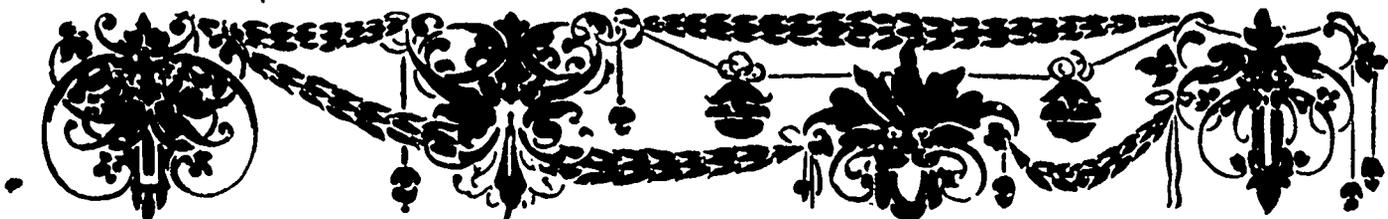


The Bookseller and Stationer



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TOPICS OF TRADE INTEREST.

Since our last issue there has been considerable discussion of the school book question, and the interview in these columns with the Ontario Minister of Education.

SCHOOL TEXT BOOK QUESTION. His views were not definite enough to set aside the grievances of the trade, and, from the letters we have received, it looks as if the trade would want a more definite and systematic plan than the mere assurance of the Department that in future changes would be announced a sufficiently long time ahead.

But new interest has been aroused by the statement in the Legislature by the Minister, in replying to a question from Mr. Graham, of Brockville, that it was the intention of the Government to consider how far they could supply text books free to the school children of the Province to a modified degree at least.

Now, this startling departure in policy, if carried out, would be of far-reaching importance to the trade. Already the school boards in certain places have been taking the book business out of the hands of the regular trade, and giving the books to the children free. For a Province to do it on a large scale would be little short of a revolution. We consider the policy outlined to be objectionable and unbusinesslike in the last degree. We do not believe that the Ontario Government will carry it out, when once they fully consider it. The Minister's statement is more like a "feeler" thrown out to test opinion, and our advice to the trade is to protest strongly against any

further socialistic invasion of the book trade by municipal or Provincial authorities.

THE BOOKSELLER AND STATIONER is informed that the Government have not yet seriously considered the question, or what part the wholesale or retail dealers would play in any suggested system of free books. In fact, we do not believe the thing would work at all. In every State of the American Union, except California, the free book idea has proved a failure, and in California they are very tired of it. It would not be in the interest of this Province to adopt it, and certainly it would not be in the interest of the trade. Because, no matter how little profit there may be in this branch of our business, it is a very proper part of a bookseller's dealings and its abolition would still further limit his sphere of profit.

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A few letters received from vigorous and intelligent dealers will serve to show how opinion in the trade is tending. Some of these letters are private, and the writers merely state their views, not **OPINIONS OF BOOKSELLERS.** for publication, but as an evidence of their interest in the present discussion. A Hamilton correspondent writes: "So far as Hamilton is concerned, I do not think that the school book trade is a very large factor in the sum total of the business of our booksellers, as the schools are well supplied by the board of education, and, outside of the firm that happens to get the contract, very little is done by local dealers. Personally I am not in favor of the Government supplying direct."

Says another valued correspondent in Ontario in the course of a letter: "Every dealer can tell you that the holidays in the schools make a very considerable difference in the amount of business done by them. The daily sales of the average dealer in the bookselling business are much smaller than in many other lines of trade, and every dollar's worth of business lost is all the more felt by him, and the expenses are just the same, school books or no school books. In the majority of book and stationery stores after New Years, during the slack season of the Winter months, and again in September and October, were it not for the school trade the amount of business done would be very much less than it is. If the Government carry out the idea of free text books for all public and separate school pupils, they are going to give another hard blow to a very large number of business men and women throughout the Province, who are being for many reasons hard enough pressed. For I do not think that there is another line of business that is being so badly cut into as the book and stationery and fancy goods business. And free school books would be an injury to the dealers without being a corresponding amount of benefit to the people generally. The Government could please the people just about as well if they were to make fewer changes in the school books, both for the public and high schools. Let them authorize the best books that they can get for the schools all through, and then allow them to run as they used to do years ago. I know that when I started in business the same books would do for one child after another of a family as they went through school, but of late years a pupil will have to make two or three changes before he gets through, and I know