

THE DEPARTMENT STORES.

SOME RECENT PHASES OF THE SITUATION.

COMPLAINTS of department store cutting are more numerous this month than we ever remember to have heard them. The trade all over the country assert that the injuriously low prices asked for every kind of stationery seriously affect the local merchant, and in towns near the large cities the dealer finds his business steadily shrinking. It is hard for a man who has been in books, stationery and wall papers for many years to find his volume of trade diminishing, and the profit on what is left approaching the vanishing point. When this is being done by competition that is not legitimate the misfortune is doubly hard to bear. That selling below cost by these stores is at the root of the evil, there is plenty of evidence. The most recent illustration relates to dry goods, but the argument is just as correct, for the same policy is being pursued in lines that concern the bookseller. A Toronto wholesale house sold a customer, who happened to be in town, some print goods. The customer went to a department store in the city and found the same goods for less money. He returned to the wholesaler and complained. The latter said there must be a mistake, as the goods had been sold to the department store by himself at the same price he was charging his country customer. In order to convince the merchant, who seemed dubious, the wholesaler finally produced his ledger and proved the truth of what he said. The department store had actually been losing money on every yard sold. Against such a state of things it is hard for any local dealer to continue in business at a profit.

In a large town west of Toronto there is a bookseller who has been in business for a long time. He stated to a friend in Toronto last week, that he was simply selling out his stock, only buying for immediate necessities, and would ultimately be forced, he feared, to give up the store. Fortunately his private investments furnished him with a comfortable living, and it was nothing but the impossibility of maintaining the book and stationery business at a fair profit which would determine his line of action.

How to meet the competition is the great question. No one appears to have a plan thought out, and even the trade as a whole

are not united on any course. It seems likely that the booksellers' section of the Toronto Board of Trade will meet to consider present conditions, and the result of their conference will be looked for with interest. To illustrate the widespread character of the competition, we might instance what a correspondent in the Northwest has to say. He intimates that the catalogues of Toronto department stores are to be found all through the most remote settlements on the prairies, and that the Hudson Bay Co. find some of their trade taken away by people writing direct to Toronto.

It is said in Toronto that the labor unions are disposed to take action, by insisting that articles sold to their members shall bear a stamp showing that the goods are neither made, purchased or sold below cost. This would work easily enough in the case of clothing and similar articles, and a leading bookseller told the representative of this journal that he thought the system could be extended to books and some lines of stationery. The trouble is, however, he pointed out, that the families of the working people are amongst the most persistent buyers at department stores, and the labor unions would have to begin at home. The remedy, at the outset, rests with the people themselves, and as long as they are weak enough to buy below cost, forgetting that it is to their ultimate injury (and who doubts this?) the evil will continue.

A bookman of experience from England, who visited Canada lately, assured THE BOOKSELLER AND STATIONER that the same competition was making rapid headway in the Old Country also. For his part, he thought it would develop into socialism in the end, the merchant being done away with, and the state doing the distribution itself. Personally he was strongly opposed to such a system, but could see no other outcome to the disastrous competition now going on. We do not believe it is as bad as that in Canada, but present tendencies are not to be neglected, and our advice to the trade is this: meet frequently and compare notes, discuss particular phases and transactions that have come to the knowledge of one dealer or another, drop trade strife, and often you will be able to devise a remedy for some special grievance where a remedy for the whole evil may not suggest itself.

CONSIDER THIS POINT.

WE have previously mentioned the fact that the passage of the Canadian copyright law would give domestic publishers exclusive control over certain books which would be specially selected for their suitability in this market.

This would provide the bookellers with a number of paying books, that is, if the publishers stood true and declined to sell to department stores which cut prices. The publishers ought to do this. Unless they want to see the ruin of their retail customers throughout the country, this is what their best interests would incline them to do. Consequently, the booksellers have a direct concern in promoting copyright, which cannot long be staved off.

It is not likely, from present accounts, that the question will come up this session of Parliament. The movement possesses the great advantage now of having one of its most indefatigable and able promoters in the House—Mr. John Ross Robertson, M.P. for East Toronto. Mr. Robertson has already shown himself a keen debater, and when copyright comes before the House of Commons he will be there to deal with every point raised. The speaker, Hon. Mr. Edgar, will continue to be of use to the cause, since it is in no sense a party question. On the Opposition side Sir C. H. Tupper is thoroughly in sympathy with the Canadian demand, and as the only point really left unsettled is the sale in Canada of the original English edition of a book, we may expect to see a law in force before another twelve-month is reached.

VERY CHEAP MAGAZINES.

WE cannot altogether agree with the views of our esteemed contemporary The London News in the article copied elsewhere in this issue. There are good magazines, and all The News says about them is true. But the cheap magazine (five cents or less) is not wholly a boon. The photograph mania is apt to undermine good artistic work. The articles in the cheapest magazines are necessarily inferior in style, accuracy and permanent value. The money spent on them would be better invested in a good newspaper. The booksellers will tell The News that the sale of magazines interferes with the sale of books. Some people