

BOOKS and NOTIONS

ORGAN OF THE

THE BOOK, STATIONERY & FANCY GOODS TRADES OF CANADA

VOLUME I }
No. 1. }

TORONTO, AUGUST, 1884.

{ ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION
FIFTY CENTS.

BOOKSELLING AS A PROFESSION.

It would seem an affectation to speak of bookselling as a profession, though it will be granted that it rightly comes under the category of intellectual occupations. But is this all we can claim for it? Traditionally the vocation of the bookseller has ever been an honourable one; and though a modern age and modern methods of trade have somewhat shorn it of its honours, and lost for it no little of the reverence which was wont to be paid to the commerce of literature, bookselling still ranks high among trade-guilds; and of those who follow its calling not a few are to be found who make a name for themselves as authors and win distinction as the friends and patrons of letters. But while bookselling stands high as an intellectual occupation, must there ever remain a conventional distinction between the class known as literary men and those who employ them or are employed of them? In other words, between the writer and the vendor of books must there be a gulf so wide as to separate utterly those who may be ranked among what are called the professions from those who merely follow a trade? The answer to these questions may be put in the colloquial phrase, that "much depends."

But before going further, let us here be understood as desiring to make no case for the trade on behalf of any of its members who have a weakness for unsubstantial honours, or who affect to deck themselves in borrowed plumes. Far otherwise is our object. Our purpose is rather to say a word or two in modest praise of the occupation of bookselling; and, in attempting to exalt his vocation, to endeavour to incite the bookseller to extend the range of his reading, and to more adequate preparation for his pursuit.

Whether society shall or shall not rank the vocation of bookselling with that of any one of the so-called professions, in reality, need trouble no one. To the bookseller what is of importance, is, that he shall fit himself for his work. That instead of being simply a vendor of books, he shall be a student of books, know something of their contents, be able intelligently to talk of them, and, if need be, to counsel enquirers in search of information in regard to the books they desire to read, and may find pleasure and profit in reading. It may be that the typical bookseller has undoubted claims to share in the

honours of the *litterateur*, as, in like manner, it may be said, that the dispensing chemist, by virtue of his education and experimental knowledge, has a right, in many instances, to be classed with the scientist. But the man who most honours his calling is not the man who allows his mind to be ridden by a grievance, and who owes the world a grudge should his attainments go unacknowledged. Whatever honours a man becomes possessed of they had better come to him than be sought. It is an old saying that "merit is modest," and in the sum of things few really fail to achieve the success or win the fame to which they are honestly entitled.

In a material age the commercial aspect of bookselling is naturally the one that is most looked at. We have heard it said that the intelligent student of books is not likely to be the best salesman. This, it would be easy to prove, however, is a fallacy; for educated people, as a rule, do not want the attentions of an officious shopman; while what they do want, is the information that a well-informed reading man, who keeps himself *au courant* with the thought of the time, is able to supply in regard to both contemporary and standard literature. It may be that the latter will sell fewer poor books; but this again should be to his advantage, while it will undoubtedly further the interests of literature. What can be gained by ignorance, it is as difficult to see in bookselling as in anything else. The bookseller who ransacked his shelves for Puckle's "Comic Selections!" while his customer had asked him for a work on "Conic Sections," not only got laughed at for his ignorance, but lost a patron.

The truth is, more than ever before, is there need of the educated bookseller. The scope of modern reading is nowadays so wide, and the range of literature so extensive, that to be fairly versed even in bibliography requires no little amount of application and study. The man who puts these into his business, unless otherwise handicapped, is sure to succeed. Competition no doubt is keen, and the trade of recent years has been strangely cut up; but there is always room for brains, and the possession and use of them may be trusted to bring their reward.

In the last quarter of a century the book trade has lost much of its honourable repute in the competition which has arisen between houses, in the overcrowding of the trade, and the consequent lowering of the in-