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CURRENT TOPICS.

NOTWITHSTANDING depressing weather conditions, which have effectually tied up business for the past six or seven weeks, the wholesale stationers and fancy goods dealers do not feel any apprehension with regard to the approaching season. Such concerns as

Outlook for Stationery Trade engage in manufacturing are working to their full capacity to meet orders already ready in and to fill up the gaps for next Fall. Their optimism is based largely on the success of the first few weeks of the new year, when a record business was done and also on the facility with which collections are being made, a condition not so noticeable in other trades. Travellers have had severe experiences and have been quite unable to cover ground. The result has been that they have frequently been bunched in towns, a circumstance which does not materially assist trade. Wherever a mail and express service has been possible, the situation has been somewhat relieved. The expectation is that with the opening up of the lines of communication, a record business will be done.

PUBLISHERS, with but one or two exceptions, anticipate a small season. The number of really first-class books is noticeably small and no publisher has many more than two books of exceptional merit on his list. This paucity is especially notable among works of fiction.

The Publishing Season where there is of course the usual number of mediocre books, but very few novels by notable writers. The deficiency is somewhat compensated for by a stronger line than usual of biography, history, travel and books of like character. If the tendency of readers is to consume such books as these, either the public has become more desirous of reading books of information or it has silently expressed its weariness for the type of fiction latterly served up. Owing to the exceptional weather conditions of the past month, which have held back paper and other supplies, the publishing season in Canada has been considerably postponed and only a few Canadian editions of Spring books have been placed on the market. The result will probably be that during March and April a large number of books will appear almost altogether.

BOOK sales for the past month have been confined principally to last Fall's publications. Several 1903 novels have attained considerable popularity and still sell remarkably well. Notably is this the case with Molineux's "Vice-Admiral of the Blue." Of the newer books "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm," by Kate Douglas Wiggin, is undoubtedly the leader, and will enjoy large sales.

Fiction Sales.

In the more sensational list, "The Lightning Conductor," by the Williamsons, enjoys popularity. On the whole no one book can be said to be exceptionally the book of the moment. Readers' demands are scattered over a large number of favorites. Several books by noted novelists are promised shortly. Winston Churchill, Henry Harland, Eden Phillpotts, Louis Tracy, Max Pemberton, Mary Johnson and several others are represented on the Spring lists, as a consultation of our list will prove.

EVERY year for a month or two preceding the opening of Parliament, there arises an agitation for the reform of the postal system so far as the postage on newspapers and periodicals is concerned. This year the agitation is as loud and prolonged as ever. The main argument adduced in support of reform is that the publications of the Motherland are seriously handicapped in the Canadian market owing to the high rate of postage from England to Canada as compared with the rate from the United States to Canada; the former being 8 cents per lb., the latter only one cent. A second argument lies in the fact that Canada has to pay the carriage of the huge mass of United States publications mailed to this country, while the United States only has to pay for a remarkably small importation of Canadian publications. Some would advocate the imposition of a duty on the periodicals from the States. Many would deprecate such a course. All would like to see the English publications placed on a competing standpoint and none would more desire this than the booksellers of Canada. Any step which may be taken that will assist them in building up a business in English monthlies and weeklies will be well supported by them and the simplest course would appear to be the reduction of the postal rates between England and the Dominion.

The Postal Agitation.