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FRENCH - CANADIAN BOOKSELLING

ARTICLE II.

The Character of French Literature Sold.

IT is only within the past ten years that French-Canadians may be said to have awakened to the beauty and power of their own literature. This has resulted in what few bookstores there are expanding and finally assuming a fairly flourishing aspect. French-Canadians have been voluminous writers and the entire range of literature has been delved into. Newspapers, both daily and weekly, periodicals and magazines of every description, a fairly typical French-Canadian list of fiction, have had a ready reception. However, when the great bulk of fiction is considered France itself still supplies an increasing demand.

The Extent of the Field

While it might appear that the French-Canadian trade is on the high road to prosperity and is in no danger of running into serious pitfalls, it is nevertheless true that the future presents an almost impossible field to conquer. It is evident that the reading public in the Province of Quebec and parts of the Maritime Provinces show a steady inclination to substitute English literature for French literature in a good many cases. More and more French-Canadians are reading English and they find the varied field opened to them is even more interesting and instructive. Further than this, the few French bookstores have to contend with the same inherent difficulties which confront their English friends. This is mainly seen in the tendency for the public to read the modern newspaper of magazine character and the various racy periodicals. As yet, cut prices and such evils have not been resorted to, owing to the restricted nature of the field. Another serious objection to the propagation of French fiction especially, is the fact that a good deal of literature from France is totally unsuited to the French-Canadian's taste. Another class of literature which very wisely is prohibited by both customs and church is that with any taint of immorality attached. In addition, the church has a list which must not be infringed upon. This excludes any works which in any manner attack or ridicule

the clergy. When the question of price is considered the twenty per cent. duty and heavy freight cause good fiction to be sold at rather an exorbitant figure.

If supply regulates demand then the extent of sales of French literature of every description in Canada may easily be estimated. Montreal contains three regular jobbing houses which dispose of not only the French-Canadian literature, but the importations direct from France. These houses are C. O. Beauchemin & Fils, Granger Freres and Deon Freres. In addition to these there are almost innumerable printers and publishers on a very small scale who reprint French authors' recent works without permission. Even the retail field is limited almost exclusively to Montreal and Quebec. Montreal has some half-dozen fairly prosperous bookstores, and Quebec about the same number. In a few of the other cities scattered throughout the province, English as well as French novels are handled in so-called French bookstores. Montreal stores largely specialize, one dealing extensively with religious works, another with high-class fiction, and still another with popular fiction. With a possible exception of two stores, the stock carried is much less than the smallest English bookstore in Montreal.

French Fiction

Although alleged illicit reprints are flooding the French-Canadian market, direct importations from France are more noticeable on the shelves of the bookstores. These are always paper-bound books, and prices range in popular fiction ten, fifteen and twenty-five cents, and in the better class of fiction at 90c. This scale of prices illustrates where the volume of trade is done. The profit on these lines is in the neighborhood of 25 per cent. The 90c. line sells for 70c. in Paris and pays a 20 per cent. duty as well as freight. The 25c. line is 20c. in France and is a collection of old favorite authors. The 10c. line is worth 6c. in France and includes a very good class of old fiction.

French publishers usually sell in Canada by catalogue