

THE OVERPRODUCTION OF BOOKS.

The enormous output of books in late years surprises everyone; few facts are more familiar, few are more commonly remarked, and few arouse such confusion of mind as to where they came from, why they exist, and how they find buyers and readers. In the year 1895 no fewer than 5,580 new books were published in England, besides 935 new editions of old books. In a single month the New York Times, to which we are indebted for these facts, has received more than 400 books for review.

The output is indeed so large that one might be tempted to infer that the proportion of books published to manuscripts offered for publication is becoming every year much larger than it formerly was. But the fact appears to be that this proportion, instead of changing in that way, is changing in the other direction. With all the increase in publications, there has also been increase in writing. Frederick Macmillan, at a recent dinner in London, stated that his house in one year had accepted only 22 books out of 315 that were submitted; while Mr. A. Chatto, in a published interview, affirmed that his house accepted an average of only about 13 for every 500 submitted.

Surrounded as we have been by a flood, we have, therefore, to thank the publishers that we are not in the midst of a deluge. Assuming that Mr. Macmillan's ratio is the ratio of all publishers, and provided all submitted manuscripts had been published, but excluding the unknown factor that the same manuscript was often submitted to several publishers, we should have had instead of 5,580 new books, 72,540; while the same computation, with Mr. Chatto's figures as a guide, would have given us 212,040 books, or nearly 700 for each day of the year, exclusive of Sundays.

The causes of this increase in the number of books are not far to seek. Cheapness of production—cheaper composition, cheaper paper, cheaper binding—is a great one, but a greater is the increase in the number of those who read. Popular education here shows some of the results of its work. But who shall say why 313 persons should continue to write books when only 22 can have them accepted, or why 500 should write them when only 13 can hope for acceptance? Is this also due to the spread of popular education and the resultant ambition to write?

The ability to write has become a common accomplishment; that is, the ability to write what is fairly grammatical. Scores of persons who write books which they hope to see published probably do not realize that something more than correct sentences is necessary. Provided they have a subject, with some knowledge of it, all that remains necessary from their standpoint is to write correctly. They do not know that correct writing no more makes a good writer than correct use of mechanics' tools makes an architect. No mere grammarian ever was an artist in words; indeed, the greatest artists in words have sometimes not been grammarians at all.

The future probably holds for us little hope that the number of books will decline; on the contrary, they are more likely to increase in number with the years. But we need not despair; despair remains only for the librarians—for Mr. Spofford and Dr. Billings. The great public will be protected, for the good books will live and the bad ones will surely die—and the death will be a natural one. There were millions of houses in the ancient world, but only one Partheon. Italy has had millions of buildings, but the Pantheon, St. Marks, and St Peter's still stand, as they will stand for some ages longer. We may get our 5,000 or our 10,000 books each year, but it will still remain true that not more than one really