

BOOKS AND NOTIONS,

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E. Desbarats, Manager.

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THE MODEL BOOKSELLER.

A DEEP seated lament is often heard among the book jobbers of this young country that our booksellers are not familiar with publications, ancient and modern, as they should be. It seems to be too true that the bookseller of this country is generally a dealer also in stationery and fancy goods. If he is, then you cannot deceive him as to the value of stationery, for he is thoroughly posted on all the different makes and qualities of the long ranges of papers. You cannot tell him anything about values in fancy goods. When he glances his eagle eyes over a sample, he knows, within a few cents, the price per dozen. He has thoroughly mastered the facts, and is prepared to do business on his knowledge. From that he expects to reap a gain, because it enables him to pay only what an article is worth. Moreover, he knows just what will sell in stationery; never loads his shelves with unsaleable goods, and turns his money over several times a year. If he finds a line unsaleable in the regular way he adopts some little expedient to clear it out.

But start to test the knowledge of such a man on books. He knows what he ought to pay per shilling if it is an English book, and by looking at the binding of a book he can tell within fifteen or fifty cents of what a book will bring, if it sells for anything less than two dollars. For books which sell over that price he has no use; he can not see why a small book should be a large price. But get down to paper covered books, and the Canadian or United States bookseller is at home. You cannot fool him there. He under-

stands their value; but don't ask him anything much about a book bound in cloth.

What is the result? Simply this; paper bound books are sold where cloth bound books should sell; trashy literature is disseminated through the country degenerating the minds of the mass of book-readers. People forming a taste for reading will take books that are pushed on them. Give them trashy novels, and their taste will not rise to that height whence they catch a partial glimpse of knowledge, and long for glances down the broader vistas. One elevating movement on this northern continent has been the Chautauqua reading circles. This movement has done a great deal towards cultivating among the youth of our land a taste for more intellectual reading than is found in the majority of paper bound novels. Booksellers can help on this movement by making themselves masters of the new works published, which can be done only by the careful reading of book reviews and book notices. The dealer cannot make bricks without straw, and the reviews of all the latest works are always published sufficiently, so that no man may want for information if he will only take it.

Looking at the matter more selfishly, it can easily be seen how beneficial to the bookseller such a change would be, in the matter of profits. If higher class literature were demanded by the public, the gross sales would be enormously increased, and profits materially enhanced. The book-selling business in the Dominion of Canada, which has never reached a high plane, would be raised from a back trade to a noble profession. No more noble and manly profession exists in the broad world of to-day than the directing of the public mind into proper channels of literature, and booksellers may take a leading part in this if they would but rise to the occasion and their opportunity. Some few dealers here and there are leading along proper lines, but there is needed a more radical change.

The bookseller must not refuse to handle cheap literature, but while keeping it he should handle small quantities of the newest and most deserving works, and push these. There is more profit in selling half a dozen dollar novels than in selling two dozen twenty-five cent copies. This is a point which should be carefully borne in mind by every ambitious and thoughtful retailer of books. A competent critic of the trade expresses the belief that there has been an improvement in the past year's trade in this direction. Let the good work go on.

CHRISTMAS LESSONS.

Fancy goods are being sold more largely by the dry goods dealers. These men sell on closer margins than ordinary fancy goods dealers and thus are gaining the trade.

Booklets sold fairly well, but evince no symptoms of a firm hold on the affections of the public. They may sell for another season or two, but those who know say it will be in decreasing quantities.

Calendars had a very fair demand. Their sphere is too limited to expect much from them. They were shown in great

variety, and in rural districts will sell better next year.

Flat cards sold in small quantities. Comics and novelties lead, but the quantity was not sufficient to allow of much profit. The wise dealers are buying more in variety than in quantity. They will continue in favor with certain classes for some years yet.

Christmas numbers sold better than ever. In Toronto they sold extremely well; the largest quantities being sold by enterprising youngsters, who worked on the maxim that everything comes to him who goes after it. They sold a large number of copies. The city booksellers sold less than in former years. The rural booksellers sold, in most cases, more than ever. The city dry goods stores sold a few copies; but it is probable this will not occur again, as better arrangements will be made to centralize the trade with one firm. Thus the distributing can be easily and perfectly regulated, and no copies given to dry goods houses. By concentrating the business all in one distributing house, the retailer can afford to carry less stock, as he is assured of getting copies whenever he needs them, and in such quantities as he desires. No doubt the sale of these holiday numbers affected very much the sale of cards and booklets.

Annals, we are sorry to notice, are declining with regular booksellers. The firms who control them have allowed them to get into the hands of the dry goods houses, and that settled the profit business. But just as soon as this happened the sale of both separate numbers and bound volumes began to decline. The bookseller is slow to see some things, but he knows how to get even with men who happen to make a slight mistake in regard to business procedure. The future of the annual trade is very uncertain. Some change must be made or it is doomed. And this in spite of the fact that some of the annals contain the best reading that could possibly be disseminated through a reading community.

THE POET LAUREATESHIP.

The Pall Mall Gazette publishes a number of responses to the question: Should the Poet Laureateship be continued or abolished? Prof. Huxley writes that the position of Court Poet is a survival of a different state of society, yet it is undesirable that any state recognition of the value of literature should disappear.

Prof. Max Muller says that when ever the time comes and the nation longs once more to honor a living poet, there will be no difficulty in reviving the cherished laurel wreath. In the meantime no greater honor could be paid the dead Laureate than leaving the place vacant.

Mr. Lecky, the historian, says he would be sorry if the position should be abolished.

Sir John Lubbock, President of the London Chamber of Commerce, writes in favor of the retention of the office.

Prof. Blackie says the Laureateship ought certainly to be continued, as evidence that the highest person in the realm takes public notice of the exercise of one of the highest functions of the human soul.

Prof. Dowden declares that the post should cease to exist.