

customer wishes, put their capital into the better-paying "gin-cracks," and let books "take care of themselves."

This, as we have already pointed out, affords opening for the undermining of the regular trade by "agents' books." The more enterprising retailers fall into the cut-throat fashion themselves, and vie with each other in selling books "close," and now some of the general stores come in and offer books at very nearly cost price, and attract customers for their other goods. It is safe to say that the forty per cent. discount generally allowed does not average more than ten per cent. profit in the retail sale throughout the country; we doubt if the figures would be even so high.

On the other hand the publisher is to be heard. He complains that he is forced to advertise the "mailing notice, because it is the only way in which the retailers can be compelled to keep his books in stock. In other words, he competes with the retailer to keep him enterprising. "Publishers must find a market for their books, and if the retailers will not offer that market, they must go beyond the retailers for their customers. Under the present state of things, the first edition of a new book, save it be by a popular author or otherwise exceptional, would remain on the shelves unsold if it were not pushed directly into the hands of book-buyers and an indirect demand thus brought to bear upon the retailer, from those who hear of the new book through those who have bought it from the publisher. It is claimed that no one would be so foolish as to take the trouble of writing, the chances of mails both ways, and the likelihood of the book being battered on the way, when he could buy quicker a fresh copy at a book-store near by, and that in fact orders are sent to the publisher direct customarily only when the desired book has been inquired for in vain. As to the underselling, the answer of the publisher is *Et tu quoque!* The retailers themselves do it, and should not complain of us for following their example. In short, the dispute between the publisher and the bookseller is in each claiming as cause what the other considers to be effect. One says, "We must cut into you because you don't keep up stock!" the other says, "We can't keep up stock because you cut into us!" The truth is, as frequently happens, between; cause and effect are here, as elsewhere, mutual, and react each upon the other. Undoubtedly, as a matter of history, the demoralization arose originally from the too great increase of discounts, but it is questionable, now that the evil has grown, whether the removal of the original cause would be at all an adequate remedy; whether a general reduction of discounts now would have the effect that booksellers hope and agree it would. After a man has touched poisoned ivy, taking it away from him doesn't cure him forthwith.

But certainly so terrible an evil to the trade must admit of some remedy, partial if not complete. The discussion of this means carries us into a still broader field, and to the consideration of a question which underlies all these discussions as to authors' books, the agency system, the "introduction" of school books, and the difficulties of which we have specially given th

history and explanation in this article. That question involves a consideration of the distinctive character of the trade in books, and the remedial measures we find for underselling and like disastrous practices, we propose to give in a further article on "The Unity of the Trade." Meanwhile we shall be glad to hear from correspondents who may have new light to shed upon these subjects, or new suggestions to make. It is advisable that this discussion should be continued in the trade organs, until discussion shall culminate in definite action on the part of the trade.—*Weekly Trade Circular.*

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