

BOOKS and NOTIONS

ORGAN OF THE

THE BOOK, STATIONERY & FANCY GOODS TRADES OF CANADA

VOLUME II }
No. 10. }

TORONTO, MAY, 1886.

{ ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION
FIFTY CENTS. }

ALL ABOUT CHRISTMAS CARDS:

THEIR HISTORY.

Seeing how general the Christmas Card has become, it may surprise those who send and receive them to learn that there is no little doubt as to the public benefactor to whom we are indebted for this happy idea. Some time ago there was a lively discussion on the subject. Various claims were put forward, and promptly dismissed as untenable; so that after the expenditure of a good deal of unseasonable acrimony the question was left pretty much where it began. Sir Henry Cole, who dabbled in a great many things, and was somewhat liberal in his ideas of the credit to which he was entitled for originality, is declared to have had the chief share in suggesting the Card as it now appears. An eminent Royal Academician states from his own knowledge that in the year 1846, at the instance of the then Mr. Cole, who was devoting much time and ingenuity to the application of artistic treatment to unconsidered trifles, he designed and drew the first Christmas Card, pure and simple. It had long been the practice of some artists to execute etchings for a similar purpose, to be circulated among their friends only. By-and-bye, however, the season's greetings came to be inscribed upon an ordinary calling card decked with robins, holly sprigs, figures, snatches of landscape, and similar superfluities. The new plaything rapidly won favour, its popularity being hastened by the pictorial menus devised in foreign countries, and also, perhaps, by the analogous forms in which the French began to exchange assurances of peace and amity on the Jour de l'An. This is the artist's version of the beginning of a practice which has now taken so vast a development. The antiquary has, however, something to say on the question which, while leaving the narrative of the birth of Christmas Cards intact, shows that this, like many other "novelties," must be traced back to a much earlier date. We need not remind any one of the old-fashioned card playing at Christmas, or that Sir Roger de Coverley sent each of his tenants a pack of cards and a string of pig's puddings at Yuletide. That might be beside the question. But the British Museum contains specimens of cards on which some kindly soul has inscribed a hope that his friend might have a happy New Year, and in more than one a scrap of old English Christmas poetry seems to have

been written for a similar purpose. For instance, the lines addressed by Herrick to Sir Simon Steward, "A jolly verse, crowned with ivy and with holly, That tolls of winter tales and mirth," was probably sent with the poet's "duty" to his friend, and for exactly the same reason that we despatch a more hackneyed reminder.

In truth, the beginnings of the Christmas Card may be traced to a prototype much closer to its modern representative. During the eighteenth and the early years of the nineteenth centuries, it was the custom in many of the Continental countries to send a visiting card at the period of the year when the Christmas Card is sent nowadays, and in a few old-fashioned places the practice is still continued. But these old *cartes de visite* were elaborate works of art, on which as much taste and skill were lavished as are nowadays devoted to book plates. Some of these masterpieces of Choffart, Moreau, Gravelot, and St. Aubyn are still in existence. The card of the "two Countesses of Windischgratz" is surrounded by cupids suspending a scroll on which appear the words, "Bénédiction du ciel." Fischer, of Berne, makes a rebus of his name, while Adam Bartsch, the famous author of the "Peintre Graveur," has engraved on his card a spaniel holding in its mouth a piece of torn paper with the date "1795," and the words, "Adam Bartsch has the pleasure of presenting his compliments and good wishes for the New Year." It is, therefore, very clear that whatever may be the merit of Sir Henry Cole in giving the practice of sending out Christmas and New Year Cards a fresh start, he was anticipated in the invention which his friends attributed to him. The truth seems to be that the artists kept alive a kindly custom which the rest of the world had permitted to fall into abeyance. Be this as it may, it is well to remember, that, apart from their offices in softening the asperities of life, and keeping the oft slender thread of friendship from snapping, the preparation of these cards is a sensible increase to our English industries.—*Standard*.

It has been predicted over and over again that the Christmas-card trade was doomed. The prophets will be wise not to fix the date of final dissolution too positively, for the process of decay is likely to be protracted almost indefinitely. It is quite certain that the end is not going to be reached this year. There