

A PROFITABLE SIDE LINE.

“ONE of the most profitable side lines I have touched for some time has been religious photographs—reproductions direct from the most famous paintings of the world.”

This remark was addressed to BOOKS AND NOTIONS by T. O'Brien, St. John, as he proceeded to show the tail end of what had been a considerable stock of excellent photographs. Mr. O'Brien's firm has a good connection with the Roman Catholic inhabitants, and the bulk of his sales were to the members of that church, though they were not by any means confined to it. On several occasions he had been asked for such pictures about Christmas time by customers who wanted to give a small present to one or two of the good sisters at the various convents and religious institutions in acknowledgment of little kindnesses done. He had supplied them with cheap chromos representing scenes in the life of Christ, and he heard they were very much appreciated.

Shortly before last Christmas it occurred to him that he should have something better than chromos, and in looking about came across some samples of very excellent photographs—the very thing he wanted—made by a German firm, the Berlin Photographic Co., which has an office in New York. The size which took best was Boudoir, an 8 x 10 heavy black card with bevelled gold edges and lettering stamped in gold. These sold at \$1 each, and gave a clear profit of about 40 per cent. Cabinets sold at 50c. He also sold a few very large at \$4, all of which gave about the same relative profit. In addition to his local sales his advertisements in the local and church papers brought him customers from other parts of the Dominion. He made sales even as far west as British Columbia. During the recent conference of the Catholic Mutual Benevolent Association his store was frequented by the delegates, a number of whom purchased one or more to take home. A few went to the States with the numerous tourists who have crowded the Maritime Provinces this year.

Those which sold best were: “Immaculate Conception” (Murrillo.) “Last Supper.” “The Annunciation.” “The Sistine Madonna.” “The Holy Night” (Muller.) Since O'Brien & Co. have taken them up a number of other firms have put in a stock, several of the music stores making a specialty of them.

Readers who may decide to try them should be careful not to stock up. Buy as few as possible until you know how they take in your locality. Get samples from the different dealers and select the most attractively got up. They will sell better if nicely mounted. Some of the firms have half tone engravings of many of their best pictures and from these a selection might be made. There should be no difficulty in getting a lot for examination and those

which are not suitable could be returned. Most of the dealers have photographs of many other subjects besides religious. Some of the humorous paintings take well. There are other firms which handle these. Some of them are much the same as the Berlin Co's goods, while others are inferior, the reproductions not being so clear. Dealers should be careful to select the finest only. They cost a little more but sell better.

TRADE BY THE SEA.

Traders who covered the Maritime Provinces this fall are in a happier mood than they have ever been. Orders in nearly all instances exceed those of preceding years, and the tendency is towards a better class of goods. In some places a few cheap tawdry novelties in stationery and fancy goods are bought by dealers who cater to the small fishermen's and farmers' trade. The majority of people will have none of them. This is seen by the display in the windows of the leading stores. There are certainly no such fine stocks shown by any one store in the large cities of the other provinces as are to be seen in the good retail establishments in Charlottetown, Halifax and St. John and a few other Maritime Province points. They are more after the very fine displays in the up town stores of Boston and New York.

THE CHRISTMAS CARD SEASON IN ENGLAND.

A CORRESPONDENT of BOOKS AND NOTIONS recently had an interview with Messrs Raphael Tuck & Sons, of London, England. Messrs. Tuck are one of the leading firms of Christmas card publishers in the world, and one of the members of that house gave our correspondent some interesting particulars respecting the trade there.

“The general public,” said Mr. Tuck, “have very little idea of the great care that is necessary for the efficient production of even the most insignificant Xmas card. For instance, every card issued by us comes before me at least twenty times, for revision of details and criticism, and this merely represents what may be called the ‘editing’ process, the actual work of producing the card, in its mechanical and artistic details, necessitating attention from quite an army of persons, who all contribute towards its final beauty. When you remember the large number of our new designs, the amount of work involved will be readily appreciated. We have two markets to cater for—the general public and the trade—and what suits the one, does not always satisfy the other. For example, the trade sometimes imagine that because a particular card pleased the public last season, therefore it will be equally well received this year. But we, who have our finger on the public pulse in

this respect, frequently know better. People who bought a card last year of a particular design will frequently not buy a similar one again, because it is old to them, and they naturally think that what is old to them must also be old to their friends. Hence, there is a constant craving for novelty, and it is our business to find out in what direction the public taste is traveling, and to follow it as well as possible. Of course, we do not always content ourselves with following popular taste, and very often endeavor to lead the public to a higher appreciation of the best artistic works. Some time ago there was a great rush after the most efficient reproductions of the Old Masters; but this craze seems to have almost died out, and the public are now asking for something of a little less severe character. They want the most perfect form of art work, but also with a little more dash and fire. If you contrast the Xmas cards of, say, ten years ago, with those of the present day, you will readily perceive what immense strides art education has taken in England and in many of our colonies. The ‘daubs’ that so delighted mature people ten years ago would not be tolerated now by mere children. We spend thousands of pounds every year in simply trying to find out what the public want. So netimes we find that a card does not ‘catch on,’ and then it is simply withdrawn, although an immense amount of time, labor, and money may have been spent upon its production. It is quite useless trying to force anything down the public throat; and although we have immense facilities for creating a demand, yet we could not sell any card that was not popular on its own merits. As regards the purely technical side of card production, I would say that, practically, all the printing is done in Germany, but most of the finishing-off and touching-up is done in England. All the designs are by English artists. The German designs would not sell here. Some years ago we tried to do the printing of our cards in England, but, although we purchased German plant and machinery, and had German workmen to do the work, yet the trial was quite a failure. The pictures came out all spotted and blurred. I can only attribute it to the better atmosphere in Germany. As regards our own trade, I may add that our sales this year have exceeded all former years by several millions, and our total sales for the year run into so many figures that a mere enumeration of the totals would convey no adequate idea of the trade. Some idea, however, will be gained of the magnitude of our operations when I say that the Postmaster-General always sends a representative to us shortly before Xmas to ask what sort of season we have had, so as to enable him to gauge what extra staff will be required at Christmas in the post offices in London and the country. Our trade alone increases the postal revenue by several thousands of pounds, representing many millions of penny (2 cent) stamps and Xmas cards.”