

CHICAGO BOOK PUBLISHERS.

BY THE EDITOR.

I SPENT two days of last month in Chicago among the book publishers, and had, withal, a pleasant time. I went over by the C. P. R., and everybody who travels by that route is sure of courteous attention and an enticing trip.

The leading publishers undoubtedly are Laird & Lee. They have a neat set of offices on Wabash avenue, and carry a large stock of books. Although only in business some seven years they have made a pile of money. Their first great success was Conklin's Manual, which they sold by advertising it in nearly every paper in the United States. Mr. Laird is a bright Canadian, and looks after the editing and publishing. Mr. Lee is a salesman and business man of unquestioned ability. Their latest success is W. T. Stead's book, of which they have already sold, Mr. Lee informed me, 60,000 copies, and have started on another edition of 30,000. They have a splendid list of books, and are on the high road to success.

F. T. Neely was away from home, but his able manager, Mr. Hobart, was very much on deck. Mr. Neely is extending his list very rapidly, and seems to be doing a heavy business. He sells very largely to railway news companies as well as to the regular book jobbers and retailers. He is publisher for Colonel Richard Henry Savage, whose latest book, "The Anarchist," has been a pronounced success.

The Chas. H. Sergel Co. is doing a good business, but suffered severely about a year ago, when the suicide of Mr. O'Donohue brought down the H. J. Smith Co., the Nile C. Smith Co., and others. Mr. Sergel's first success was "The Kreutzer Sonata," of which he sold nearly half a million copies. He was the first to bring out "Dodo," and did well with it. He deals largely in dramatic literature and in South American histories.

The W. B. Conkey Co., have about 1,200 hands employed in printing and binding. They have done little publishing as yet with the exception of Ella Wheeler Wilcox' poems, and the Peck's series. When the Morrill Higgins failure occurred, they got quite a stock of plates, and will do some publishing in the near future. Mr. F. K. Morrill is now with this firm. The manager of the business, under Mr. Conkey, is Robt. McLaughlin, a Toronto boy, who learned the printing in his native town.

The Veronee Pub. Co., on Clark street, do a small trade in spuy literature. Their books are not suitable for the Canadian trade.

The E. A. Weeks Co. have been in business only a year, but already have an excellent list of twenty five cent books, in very attractive covers. Mr. Weeks was con-

nected previously with some of the firms who failed in the recent crash among the publishing houses in Chicago. To-day he has one of the best paying businesses in that city, and is rapidly extending.

Donohue & Henneberry have a big block on Dearborn street, and do a general printing business, as well as book publishing. Their leading thing in books is their line of juveniles, which were sold in Canada last year for the first time. They will have an exceedingly attractive line this year, which should commend itself to Canadians who desire something out of the ordinary.

The Schulte Pub. Co. have a great book entitled "Hell up to Date." It was brought out two or three years ago in large form at about \$3, as a subscription book, and was entitled "Hades up to Date." In this form it was a failure. It was then brought out in a dollar edition, with a new title, and its sale immediately ran away up into the thousands. The author is "Art Young," an artist on one of Chicago's leading dailies. Beyond this they publish very little of interest to Canadians.

Rand, McNally & Co. publish a large number of books little known in Canada. Their maps and atlases are much better known. They do a very large and paying business, and deal less than other houses in ephemeral literature.

The National Book & Picture Co.'s flat was in a state of disorder when I visited it, owing to a fire which gutted the flat above them a few days before. They have the Every-Day Cook Book for which they have quite a demand from Canada.

On the whole it must be acknowledged that these Chicago publishers, although they deal in cheap literature, are more enterprising than their New York competitors. The New York houses are failing; the Chicago houses are prosperous. True, trade has been somewhat flat since the bank panic of June, 1893, but it is reviving, and the Chicago houses have all weathered the storm and are stronger to-day than ever.

A remarkable fact must be noted. Very few of the publishing houses have printing and binding establishments of their own. Only three have so far as I know, viz.: Rand, McNally & Co., The W. B. Conkey Co., and Donohue & Henneberry. All the others let their typesetting, stereotyping, printing and binding out to contract, and confine themselves to the selling of the books after they are printed. I suppose this is due to the fact that a printing and binding establishment is profitable only when actively and continuously employed to its utmost capacity. Book publishing follows the seasons somewhat, and hence continuous employment for printing presses might not be possible. This plan affords a firm an opportunity of specializing more

than if all the processes in the development of a book had to be carefully understood and watched.

The Chicago publishers do an extensive trade with Canada and the Eastern States, but the bulk of their trade is with the Middle and Western States. Here the 25 and 50 cent paper books and the class of literature I have referred to as "ephemeral," finds its greatest outlet. The civilization of the west is not yet stable enough to admit of library editions being sold in very large quantities. The wilder life of "the new west" takes a wilder class of literature and a cheaper class of book.

Just now the publishers are somewhat disturbed over the amendment to the postal law which has been proposed by the Postmaster-General. Their books are published as serials, like magazines, once or twice a month, and pay the same postage—1 cent per pound—as is paid by all magazines and newspapers published in the United States. For many years the postoffice has been distributing these books at a loss, and the Postmaster-General proposes to exclude them from the privileges accorded to magazines and newspapers and make them pay eight cents per pound postage, just as cloth-bound books do. This proposal is now before Congress, and should it become law it will have the effect of cutting off the supplies to small retailers throughout the United States and Canada and throwing the business more into the hands of jobbers. The booksellers most affected will be the California men. The freight rate from Chicago to San Francisco is \$4 per hundred. An increase from \$1 per post to \$8 per post or \$4 per freight on every hundred pounds of books, would be a heavy tax on the western dealers. But if the books are now being carried at a loss, they can only look back with pleasant memories to the day when they got more than they deserved out of the Postoffice Department. One effect may be to increase the number of publishers in California and neighboring States.

The recent change in the duty collected on books shipped into Canada will also affect the Chicago publishers' trade. It increases the cost of 25 cent books about two or three cents, according to the size of the books, being highest on the largest and best books. It remains to be seen whether this will be a benefit to Canadian publishers or not—at present it is not a benefit to Canadian booksellers and newsdealers.

I came back to Canada with a glad feeling of relief. I was tired of hearing people discuss Coxey's Army and General Kelly, tired of hearing about coal miners' strikes, Polish laborers' strikes, the question of foreign labor, the breeding of small-pox and other diseases among the new slaves of the United States, "the European laborers"; tired of hearing men wonder if Congress would settle the tariff business inside of a year, etc. As