

PROPOSED HIGHER RATES OF POSTAGE FOR PERIODICAL BOOKS.

A postage bill is now pending in the House of Representatives, which promises if it becomes a law, to serve as a wholesome check on the publication of poor literature. It provides that all publications purporting to be issued periodically, and to subscribers but which are merely books, or reprints of books, issued complete or in parts, bound or unbound, sold by subscription or otherwise, shall be subject to postage at the rate prescribed by law for third class matter, and not as at present by the rates of newspaper postage. If passed, this bill will increase the postage bill of certain firms, which are not in the habit of paying copyright, 800 per cent. It is naturally arousing organized opposition. There are no financial interests to give it organized support.

Fortunately the examination of the working of the present law furnishes proof enough of the wisdom of changing it. To gain the advantage of newspaper rates the publishers of cheap literature issue their novels with all the regularity of a newspaper office. One of these publishers if no more, turns out six new novels a week during the fifty-two weeks of the year. Under such a system, if a good story is not forthcoming, a bad one takes its place; if a saleable one is not to be had, an unsaleable one is sent through the postoffice. It is better to sink a few hundred dollars in an unmarketable book than forfeit the postal privileges. In this way many a volume finds its way into print, not from any merit of its own nor to satisfy any demand of either good taste or bad taste. When once published it finds some buyers, and when once bought finds some readers. Thus the present postal rates have aggravated our overproduction of bad books while displacing good books.

The taste of the reading public is much better than the bloated book-market of today would indicate. The mass and character of our present cheap literature is due in large measure to the accidents of trade. Paper has been a drug on the market. Our "popular libraries" have therefore been a beneficial junk shop to paper manufacturers. But for cheap paper, cheap works must be found, and in the present condition of our copyright laws the most vapid English production is better from a mercantile point of view than most American writing.

There is no possible danger that our books will be above the tastes and beyond the means of the reading public. We shall always have light literature for the mentally tired, sensational literature for those whose tastes demand it, and, let us hope, cheap literature for us all. But let it be literature, not surplus paper hurried through the presses; let it be such literature as we want not such as the publishers can get for the least money; and may every book be published to sell and not one published as a de-

vice for saving postage. This last change is in itself worth having and the bill which promises it worth fighting for.—From the Commercial Advertiser.

ARE FREE SCHOOL-BOOKS DESIRABLE.

In answer to an inquiry for statistics concerning the advantages of supplying school-books by public taxation as against the system of private purchase, we received recently an interesting letter from Messrs. Van Antwerp, Bragg & Co., which we take the liberty of printing, as it contains information not generally accessible nor widely known:

As publishers of school-books, it does not make any material difference to us who our customers are, whether they are States, counties, cities, towns, or private dealers, but the question of books supplied by public taxation is one that, as citizens, we are interested in, and as persons connected with the publishing business, we are familiar with all the facts surrounding the question.

So far as we know, the law passed the Legislature of Massachusetts without contest or discussion, and since the passage of the act there have been great efforts to justify the law by the showing of cheapness, and the comparing, with assertions wholly groundless, regarding the expense of supply under terms of open competition and sales by private dealers. If Massachusetts expends 67 cents per year for the text-books of each child, her expenditures are at least one-sixth greater than ever were proven under the system of private purchase. There are some States and some communities which are supplied with special books in such a manner as to enable publishers to know absolutely the quantity supplied. The statistics from such States show that the average expenditure per pupil is less than 50 cents per annum. Again, the ratio of school-children to the total population is an item of information furnished by the census reports of 1880. The total population is also given. The total school-book production at that time was about \$5,000,000. From this data, it is easy to estimate the average expenditure for the United States, which is again found to be less than 50 cents per pupil. We have never seen any figures showing a higher expenditure than these for each pupil, except such as were based merely upon the estimates of those who were wholly unfamiliar with the subject—wild and extravagant guesses of men who had their own ends to serve and who were fostering some scheme for their own private advantage. For example, when the bill was pending in Indiana last winter, assertions were made that millions of dollars' worth of school-books were sold in that State each year, and it was claimed that we sold the majority of them. By an examination of our books, we were able to take oath that our sales for the entire year to the dealers in

the States of Indiana for the year preceding the date of this assertion were less than \$98,000. Under their new law, which was passed by the reckless use of such assertions both in the newspapers and in the legislative chambers, the expense thus far to the people directly has been two or three times this amount, and the expenses for the officials' fees and salaries for carrying on the business have been fully as much as the total expenses for books in the previous years.

We do not know where authority was obtained for the statement that the average expense in Massachusetts was 67 cents. The city of Springfield, last year, according to the reports of city expenditures given in the Springfield Republican, spent an average of 80 cents for each pupil in the common schools. Other towns in the western part of Massachusetts make equally as bad showing.

Now if, under the free book system, the average expenditure for school books extends from less than 50 cents per pupil to 67 cents or 80 cents per pupil, and the school attendance is, as is claimed, largely increased, it is manifestly to the interest of school-book publishers to have laws passed for free books, but we honestly believe that such laws would be injurious to the best interests of the people.

It is not possible that children shall be taught to take as good care of public property as they will of their own private property. It is not possible that the same habits of cleanliness and neatness can be enforced if dirty, half-worn, disease-infested books are placed in the hands of the children. The report of the Health Officer of the city of Boston, for last year, certified to the increase of contagious diseases from the use of free school-books. It is entirely proper that the State or community shall pay all such expenses as are necessary, and as are common to all the children in school. Such expenditures include the cost of the building its furniture, apparatus, and material used in connection therewith, such as fuel, chalk, maps, charts, globes, books of reference, and other material, but when it comes to the purchase of such articles as are intended for the particular use of each child, we do not see wherein a line can be drawn between all the articles that are essential for the child's attendance at school. He must have clothes and shoes as well as books. He must have food as well as books. These are equally essential to the child's attendance, and the books are the smallest item on the list. Why should one be procured at the expense of the State, rather than the others? It seems to us, indeed, that the commencement of this public support of children will lead step by step to the complete support of all who shall desire it. If the parent is entitled to receive school-books for his children for their use in school, why not other articles that are equally necessary?—Publishers' Weekly.