

THE BRITISH PRESS YEARS AGO.

SOME interesting reminiscences of the growth and distribution of English newspapers many years ago have lately been furnished by Mr. Heywood, of Abel Heywood & Son, news agents, Manchester. Mr. Heywood says: "The contrast in the condition of business between the two years, 1832 and 1899, can scarcely be comprehended now by those engaged in our trade. I am just old enough to remember a little of the news trade when the newspaper stamp duty had been reduced to a penny, prior, of course, to its total repeal in 1855. At that time, parcels of stamped newspapers were carried by mail trains free of cost, being, in fact, sent by post in bulk. These parcels we used to cart from the post office, though they would, no doubt, have been delivered by postmen if we had waited long enough for them. The newspaper parcels for our customers in various parts of the country were sent from London by post in the same way. But, within the experience of my father, the tax on every paper published was 4d. (with a reservation that certain literary and trade papers should not be considered to be newspapers), and few papers were published in England at a lower price than 7d.; every almanac, too, whether a book, sheet, or slip, paid a duty of 1s. 3d. The character (as well as the size) of such newspapers as were printed then was far inferior to that of the press of the present day. In a letter written to my father by Richard Carlile (one of the foremost men of his time), in opposing the 'taxes on knowledge' in 1835, says. 'You may not remember, but the state and spirit of the press in 1817 was deplorable in comparison to what it is now.' How much more despicable in comparison with the 'state and spirit' of the press of to-day!

"The more enlightened of the men in our trade of that time banded themselves together to obtain the abolition of the hated stamp—the 'blood mark,' as they called it, from its being printed in red. In London there were Carlile (quoted above), Henry Hetherington, James Watson, J. D. Collett, and many others, some of whom I knew as a child. In the country there were my father; Robinson, of Edinburgh; Love, of Glasgow; Hobson, of Ashton; and an unnamed host. Seven hundred and fifty of them were fined or imprisoned, or both, for daring to sell a poor little paper called 'The Poor Man's Guardian,' without a stamp, and in defiance of it, for a penny. My father, refusing to pay a fine, was imprisoned for four months in Manchester New Bailey; was afterwards three times fined; and after all, on Hetherington's appeal, the Court of Queen's Bench decided that 'The Poor Man's Guardian' was not a newspaper at all, within the meaning of the Act. News-vending in those days was an exciting and perilous undertaking.

"In the address which my father issued in 1864, he tells how, in his earlier experience, parcels for country agents were seized by the police and confiscated; servant girls carrying bonnet and other boxes were stopped and searched; the coach offices in London were besieged by the police, in order that they might examine every suspicious-looking parcel. 'My parcels,' he said, 'were often put in hampers in which shoes are usually packed, and were directed to a shoemaker's in Oldham street.'

"The reduction of the tax from 4d. to 1d., in 1836, put an

end to the publication of unstamped papers, and the press started out, though still fettered, on its great and beneficent course, but the number of newspapers published was still comparatively small, though it became too large for the Excise Office to manage the stamping in the old way, and several largely-circulated papers were permitted to print the stamp in black at the same time as the paper itself. This stamp carried the paper free by post for a certain time (I think three months), on any number of journeys, and it was common for papers like 'The Illustrated London News' to be posted again and again under the same original stamp.

"The newspapers of smaller circulation had to either send their blank sheets to the stamp office to be stamped, or to purchase them ready stamped, which the enterprise of two large papermakers in Lancashire enabled them to do. Both these makers realized enormous fortunes, mainly perhaps because printers got a short credit from them which the stamp office would not give.

"Few of my customers will remember any of these things, but it is well that they should be reminded of what their fathers and grandfathers had to go through. The newsagent's business is still a laborious one—one of the most laborious in existence—but it is carried on with a speed and regularity, and also, it may be said, with a profit which was impossible in the early days I have ventured to recall. It now goes on, from perfection of machinery securing absolute regularity of issue, and from the punctuality of railway trains, with the steady certainty of machinery itself, without the harass of the old days, but with something like pleasure as well as profit. It is perfectly wonderful to recall, even in my own experience, the labor of the newsagent's calling as it was, and to compare it with the comparative ease of to-day.

"In the other branches of the business in which I am engaged, the changes have not been less than in the news trade, but they are of less general interest. The use of machinery in printing and binding operations has produced the greatest change in those departments; while the abolition of the paper duty and the introduction of wood pulp in the manufacture of paper, by enormously reducing its value, has caused the largest change in what is classed as 'stationery.' Everything made of paper is four or five times as bulky for the money as it used to be, so that we all want larger premises than we did, to house the same amount of value, and have to dispose of four or five times as much bulk as we did, to bring the same turnover."

Charles E. Roche, who the old timers will recollect as a member of The Toronto Mail staff, is now on the editorial staff of The Daily Mail, London, Eng.

A contrivance, which will prevent the pilfering of newspapers from the doorstep, has been patented by Julius Bruhns, Philadelphia. It consists of a plate designed to be fastened to the jamb of the door, and to this plate are extending jaws, one fixed and the other movable, and both supplied with inwardly projecting teeth. The loose jaw is normally retained in close relationship with the fixed one, by means of a spring. The folded paper may be readily thrust between these jaws, but it is impossible to remove it, without destroying it, until the door is opened. This gives the movable jaw a wider action, and enables the proper person to take the paper without difficulty.—Newspaperdom.