

We hear of one or two cases already in which actions are to be taken. Many current books come under this class, in fact many of the best selling of current novels. How is the bookseller to know what these books are? He buys and sells in good faith. He is liable to be pounced upon by the agent of a British house and made to pay penalties for selling certain books. Formerly the Canadian Government avoided this by collecting the royalty on these books of 12½ per cent. But this was abolished in 1895 in the expectation of our having a copyright law of our own, and the Government do not propose to revert to it.

It seems but fair that the trade should be protected in some way meanwhile. The Government, a few weeks ago, stopped the prohibition of these reprints and a quantity have been ordered and sold. Having permitted this, the Government should now, pending a settlement of the whole question of copyright with the Imperial authorities—such as Mr. Laurier will discuss when in England—see that the owners of copyrights give the Canadian trade a warning that in future they will be prosecuted if found selling unauthorized reprints. But the present stock should be exempt. We think the trade deserves this much protection, which would stave off actions that are very likely to be taken.

A CONCESSION.

It is understood that the Postmaster-General will allow the trade the former privilege, withdrawn last January, of paying postage on their magazines in bulk, instead of forcing them to stamp each package separately. This will enable the dealer to do the magazine business of his district, instead of driving it to the United States. It gives us our own market, as we can compete on equal terms with the States. Without this privilege the New York or other American house could post direct to individual subscribers in Canada, using our mails. This was a manifest injustice.

Bentley & Son will publish "Letters from the Black Sea during the Crimean War 1854-55," by Admiral Sir Leopold George Heath, K.C.B. This new work is full of interesting reminiscences of the great war of the fifties, and contains in an eminently readable form a concise and vivid recital of events occurring under the eyes of the writer.

IMPORT OF REPRINTS.

IMPORTANT PETITION TO GOVERNMENT FROM THE MONTREAL TRADE.

From Our Special Correspondent.

MONTREAL, June 5.—The following petition of the book trade of Montreal, which was drafted by a special committee of booksellers after a most careful investigation and consideration of the matter, was endorsed by the entire trade of the city and presented by their representative to the Minister of Justice in Ottawa prior to the bringing down of the revised tariff. It sets forth in a concise manner the situation of the bookselling interests of the country at the present moment.

It might appear strange that sane business men should approach a Government with a request for increased taxation on imports, but the case is a unique one and a brief inspection of it will indicate the motives which prompted the petition.

By abolishing the prohibition of reprints of British copyrights the Government certainly did what was just and right, but their action placed the bookseller, who offers for sale a reprint, authorized or pirated, at the mercy of the owner of the British copyright, who can without question, under the Imperial Act of 1842, prosecute any vendor of reprints. The attention of the British authors and publishers has been forcefully directed to this by animated discussions of the matter, which have recently taken place, and their shrewdness will immediately indicate where their interests lie.

Apart from all other considerations, the book trade of Canada should not be obliged to appeal to the clemency of the English publishers when their own Government can, by taking advantage of the Imperial Act of 1847, secure them from molestation in the honorable pursuit of their business. This is the keynote of the whole matter, and the Montreal trade are actuated solely by a wish to be secured from the dread of legal proceedings, which have been already threatened by one or two of the largest publishers in England.

By their petition they place on record strong evidence of their good faith, and if the Government do not see fit to grant their request it is quite reasonable for the booksellers to demand that the Government should accept the responsibility of contesting an action taken under the Act of 1842, and secure beyond peradventure the rights of booksellers in Canada.

The petition reads as follows:

Sir Oliver Mowat, K.C.M.G.,
Minister of Justice, Ottawa.

SIR.—The booksellers of Montreal respectfully petition for a reconsideration by the Government of that portion of paragraph 599 of the new tariff, which prohibits the importation of reprints of British copyright works, and also the temporary suspension of said pro-

hibition without the further addition and imposition of duty on reprints of copyrights as authorized by the Imperial Act of 1847, and in order to demonstrate the seriousness of the present situation and the equity of their appeal submit to you the following points bearing on that particular clause:

The Imperial Parliament in 1842 passed a copyright Act covering the British Empire, which Act prohibited absolutely the importation of foreign reprints of British copyright works into any part of the British dominions. This drastic measure was followed by loud protests and urgent requests for repeal or modification from the Provincial Governments, with the result that in 1847 the Imperial Parliament passed another Act authorizing Her Majesty to issue an Order in Council to suspend that portion of the Act of 1842 relating to the importation of foreign reprints whenever any Provincial Government made provision for the rights of authors by imposing a special duty for their benefit. The Canadian Government imposed a copyright duty of 12½ per cent., which continued in force until 1895, when the Government for reasons of its own gave notice that on and after July 23, 1895, the 12½ per cent. duty would no longer be collected, and thus at once revived the Imperial Act of 1842, so that importers of reprints were then, and are now, importing at the risk of a penalty of confiscation and fine.

Should your Government prohibit without restriction all reprints of British copyright works, as per the budget speech of April 23rd, a great and lasting injury will be done to the people of Canada. The wonderful strides made in literature intensify the outcry of fifty years ago against the injustice of the British Act of 1842, and which resulted in its modification in 1847. Reading matter has through that modification become accessible to the masses of to-day, and if relief be not granted a serious setback will be given to the progress of education and literature.

If, on the other hand, schedule "C" of the tariff of 1894 be incorporated into the new tariff without the addition of the British copyright duty on reprints, a very dangerous state of affairs will exist. No bookseller can honestly import from the United States any book copyrighted on both sides of the Atlantic without the risk of prosecution under the Act of 1842; the advantage of copyright now enjoyed in the United States by the British author under the American Copyright Act of 1891, not affording any relief or safety for Canada against the conditions of the Act of 1842, although under the American Act the need for the protective power of the Act of 1842 has vanished.

While the legitimate bookseller must desist from importing under the constant fear of prosecution, private individuals and agents who exhibit no stock can import without fear, as the Canadian Government accept no responsibility in the matter of prosecution.

The remedy for this deplorable state of affairs lies in the re-imposition by your Government of the copyright duty on reprints of 12½ per cent. This extends to the importer the protection of your Government and at the same time safeguards the interests of the British author. The present tariff can grant no privileges which publishers of books in Canada do not at present enjoy under the Canadian Act of 1875. The fact that book publishing in Canada has always been at a low ebb is not the result of legislation, but the altogether too limited market for editions of general books.

An important feature of the press of to-day is the large space devoted to book notices and criticisms. These are of themselves a source of education, and supplies therefor are drawn almost exclusively from the authorized American editions, the English houses not having adopted the habit of sending to Canada books for review, and even were they to do so the anomaly would exist of Canadian papers being at least ten days behind American periodicals in reviewing the same book.

The booksellers keenly recognizing the position of affairs, petition the Government to revive, in addition to the Imperial Act of 1842, the subsequent Act of 1847, and Canadian legislation consequent thereon, in its entirety, which consists in the collection of 12½ per cent. copyright duty, in addition to the revenue duty.

This appeal is made, not alone in the interests of the booksellers of Canada, but of the whole reading population of the Dominion, and merits the prompt and serious consideration of your Government.

The only action so far taken by the Government has been the abolishing of the prohibitory clause, and it now rests with them to indicate the protection which they will extend to the booksellers.