

*The Opinions of certain
Authors on the
Bookselling Question.*

LONDON:
JOHN W. PARKER AND SON,
WEST STRAND.

TO
THE RIGHT HON. LORD CAMPBELL ;
THE VERY REV. THE DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S ;
GEORGE GROTE, ESQ.

WE respectfully lay before you the copy of a letter which appeared in the *Times* newspaper on the 5th instant,* and the copy of an Address to Authors, and others connected with literary property, circulated by us,† together with copies of letters which we have received in reply to the 'Question' proposed.

In addition to the letters contained in this pamphlet, we have received many verbal communications, but in no one instance have we been directed to refuse supplying retail booksellers on account of their selling at reduced rates of profit.

JOHN W. PARKER AND SON.

West Strand, May 14th, 1852.

* Page ix.

† Page xi.

THE BOOKSELLING QUESTION.

To the Editor of the Times.

SIR,

IN the recent discussion respecting the book-trade, the subject has been pretty fully dealt with by the representatives of the trade, as far as publishers and retail-booksellers are concerned. Those discussions have, however, raised a question necessarily affecting other interests than those of manufacturers and sellers of books; and we have found it needful to consult authors, and others interested in literary property, as to their views and wishes on the subject.

We have accordingly submitted for consideration the following Question, requesting that answers and observations may be forwarded to us, with permission to make use of them in furtherance of a settlement of the matter in dispute. But as there are many persons interested to whom we have not the means of forwarding a private communication, may we beg to be favoured by your powerful aid in making our request universally known?

QUESTION.

‘If a retail bookseller, of ascertained credit and respectability, applies to your publisher for copies of any book in which you are directly or indirectly interested, which he is ready to purchase on the terms at which the publisher has offered them to the trade at large, but with the avowed intention of retailing his purchases at a smaller profit than that provided for between the wholesale rate and the retail price fixed for single copies, do you consider the intention to sell at a low rate of profit a good and sufficient reason why the publisher should refuse to supply him with books which he is ready to purchase and to keep in stock at his own risk?’

We are, Sir, your obedient servants,

JOHN W. PARKER AND SON.

West Strand, April 30th.

*To Authors, and Others connected with Literary
Property.*

As you must necessarily have felt some interest in the recent discussions respecting the book trade, in which you are concerned, as well as the publishers and booksellers, who have appeared for themselves only in the matter, I beg to state that I have not taken any part in the proceedings of the Booksellers' Association, and that I withdrew my name from the list of its committee previous to the late interview with Lord Campbell.

Should his lordship, and the other eminent persons who have taken the trouble to act with him, succeed in framing conditions for the future dealings between publishers and booksellers, calculated to be satisfactory to the public, and acceptable to the parties immediately concerned, I shall willingly and promptly act upon such decision. But the discussion has raised a question so essentially connected with the daily working of the trade, and necessarily affecting other interests than those of the manufacturers and sellers of books, that I think it due to authors and all connected with literary property, that they should be consulted by the publishers as to their views and wishes on the subject.

I therefore venture to request that you will forward to me, at your earliest convenience, an answer to the following question, with any observations you may think proper to add, and give me permission to make such use of it, in furtherance of a settlement of the matter in dispute, as I may find useful and necessary.

QUESTION.

‘If a retail bookseller, of ascertained credit and respectability, applies to the publisher to purchase any book in which you may be directly or indirectly interested, on the terms at which those books are offered to the trade at large, but with the avowed intention of retailing his purchases at a smaller profit than that provided for between the wholesale rate and the selling price of single copies, do you consider the intention to sell at a low rate of profit a good and sufficient reason why the publisher should refuse to sell the books, which such retailer is ready to purchase and to keep in stock at his own risk?’

JOHN W. PARKER,

FOR SELF AND SON.

West Strand, April 30th, 1852.

sold for more than it is worth, or, in other words, that the public is defrauded.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

JOHN CRAUFURD.

John W. Parker, Esq., West Strand.

South Darenth, near Dartford, Kent, May 3rd, 1852.

My dear Sir,

The 'Question' you have propounded to me is one of very serious import to authors, who publish. I can assure you, when the first issue of the *Architectural Antiquities of Rome* took place, the India paper copies sold for 25 guineas, and the plain 18 guineas. I made the allowance to the trade of, I think, 30 per cent., with an understanding that none were to be offered to the public at less than the above-named price: but it soon appeared, that several retail men inserted in their catalogues such a price, as showed at once they were willing to sacrifice me, and 20 per cent. of the allowance offered them; the consequence to me was, that the chief offender, who had my books, never paid me anything at all; and I could not maintain the price in the market that my subscribers had paid. The sale of the book was damaged by this conduct.

The Roman Antiquities were followed by those of Mediaeval Italy, and also the revived Architecture; but these I would not supply the retail men with copies of, but sold them to the public who needed, or applied to me.

I have always thought the 30 per cent. allowance to the retailer of books, such as might be altogether dispensed with. Why should not the publisher of such a work as my *Encyclopedia of Civil Engineering* be enabled to sell to the public at the same terms he sells to a bookseller? As to a bookseller, or retailer rather, who is ready to purchase and to keep in stock at his own risk, wishing to sell at a low rate of profit, it is mischievous; as he at once alters the value of the article, which another capital has produced: and when one man advertises a 3½ guinea book for 3 guineas or less, the publisher's arrangements are injuriously interfered with.

Why should not all the great publishers have a counter, where any one may, money in hand, be treated like a retailer, and buy his commodity without the interference of the middle man; who taxes unnecessarily the article he handles? I have in my time expended four, or five thousand

pounds on books—a third of which would have been saved by such an arrangement—and my costly antiquarian and architectural copies of books would have been attainable to many more than they now are.

The subject is, like all others where there are middle men, most mischievous, and needing a change. Look at hops, grown at a cost of 40*l.* per acre. The grower and consumer never meet, but the factor looks at each, and pockets all the advantages which are to be had out of the growth.

Believe me, my dear sir, sincerely yours,

EDWARD CRESY.

Messrs. Parker.

Down, Farnborough, Kent, May 5th, 1852.

Sir,

As an author of some scientific works, I beg to express strongly my opinion, that, both for the advantage of authors and the public, booksellers, like other dealers, ought to settle, each for himself, the retail price.

I am, your obedient servant,

CHARLES DARWIN.

Deanery, Hereford, May 3rd, 1852.

Gentlemen,

I think every retail bookseller ought to be allowed to sell at any rate of profit he may think proper, and I certainly should wish any publisher of a work in which I am interested to supply it to such retail bookseller at the trade price.

I have always thought the trade regulations a great check to the sale of books among the lower and middle classes, and I have no doubt that in this way they have been very detrimental to the cause of education among the lower orders, and about which the public are at present so much interested.

I think I could very clearly show this by facts which have come under my own observation.

I am, gentlemen, your obedient servant,

RICHARD DAWES.

To Messrs. Parker.