

THE LONDON TIMES BOOK CLUB.

A LONDON syndicate operating under the cover of an organization named the *Times* Book Club, ostensibly a circulating library scheme backed by *The Times*, has been playing havoc with the book business in London for the past month or two, and is now preparing to invade Scotland on the same lines. The plan of the syndicate seems to be first to stimulate the circulation of *The Times* by supplying books through a circulating library scheme to *bona fide* yearly subscribers to *The Times*, which obtains the books from publishers at favorable rates. Having fulfilled their function in this direction, the syndicate recoups itself by throwing the books on the market a few months after publication on the pretext that as they have been used by the members of the club they have become second-hand or shelf-worn. This would be bad enough if the books so offered were restricted to those actually circulated by the club; but it seems that the syndicate has also dragged the market for remainders in all quarters in order to make as big a showing as possible at its so-called "rubbish sale," at which several weeks ago 600,000 books, good, bad and indifferent, were slaughtered at prices ranging from five pence upwards. The result was a temporary paralysis of not only the booktrade, but also of the circulating library trade, as both the booksellers and the libraries in and near London withheld their orders for new books until they might learn how their interests would be protected in the future.

The Publishers' Association of Great Britain, realizing that the course of *The Times* Book Club, if persisted in, would make book-selling practically impossible and publishing still less profitable, is seeking to enforce a six months' limit for the sale of second-hand net books. The principal libraries at once expressed their willingness to adhere to such a rule, but *The Times* Book Club declined, preferring to consider a book as second-hand "where it has been used by more than two subscribers, and when it is returned in such a state that it cannot be sold as a new book;" notwithstanding this assertion by "The Thunderer," the *Times* Book Club gives its published assurance that the copies sold by it will be "in every respect as good as new."

While the Publishers' Association is further considering how to cope with this difficulty, Macmillan & Co., Ltd., alive to the danger, and intent upon guarding the interests of their constituents, have issued the following notice to the trade:

"Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ltd., regret to find that copies of 'The Life of Lord Randolph Churchill,' which was published less than five months ago, are being offered for sale by the managers of *The Times* Book Club at a very great reduction from the published price.

"As the book is being advertised by *The Times* Book Club at the head of a list of 'remainders,' the publishers fear that an impression prevails that this work, which is one of the most important of their recent publications, has been 'sold off' at waste-paper price. As such an impression would be most damaging to them as publishers, Messrs. Macmillan & Co. wish it to be understood that this is not the case. *The Times* Book Club bought a considerable number of copies of this book at ordinary library rates. The copies now offered are presumably those which have been in use in the circulating library.

"In the absence of any agreement as to the time for which a bookseller must have had a copy of a net book in his possession before he can offer it at a reduced price as a '*bona fide* remainder,' it is difficult to see how a publisher is to prevent a dealer from selling a book at less than it cost him to buy; but Messrs. Macmillan wish it to be understood that they have not been consenting parties to the transaction referred to above.

"Any retail bookseller having an account with Messrs. Macmillan who has bought a copy of 'Lord Randolph Churchill' from them, and finds himself unable to dispose of it in consequence of the *Times* advertisements, is invited to communicate with them."

The situation is a grave one for the English booktrade and should also be studied in advance by the American booktrade, as it is not unlikely that the scheme above described will find imitators in this country. As the *London Bookseller*, in commenting on the question, says: "Unless the publishers unite and put their foot down to prevent this unfair dealing, it is clear that no bookseller will be able to stock a new book of importance, if he is to be faced by the possibility, indeed it would seem the probability, of its being sold by the *Times* Book Club at remainder prices in the course of a few months. Such uncertainty makes immediate drastic action on the part of all the publishers imperative."