



“ENTERED AT STATIONERS’ HALL.”



ALL who read must often have noticed the above brief formula on the title-pages of books and magazines; and many may have asked themselves what it means. Only a little way out of the busy thoroughfare of Ludgate Hill there may be

found a long, paved passage, where a strange quiet always reigns in the midst of the noisy City. This is the entrance to Stationers’ Hall Court, and leads direct to the Hall, a large building rebuilt after the Great Fire of London in 1666, when the Stationers’ Company are said to have lost property valued now at £200,000. To the right of the Hall is an office-door, with the inscription, “Copyright Registry,” and it is here that an entry is made of the book or magazine of which it is desired to retain the exclusive right of publication. This can be done on the spot in the presence of the clerks, who are there from ten till four, or they will furnish proper forms on payment of one penny each, which the author or proprietor can fill up at home, with the signature of one witness. This paper is called “Form of Requiring Entry of Proprietorship,” and runs thus:—

“To the Registering Officer appointed by the Stationers’ Company.—I [name], of [address], do hereby certify that I am the Proprietor of the Copyright of a Book, intitled [title of the volume]; and I hereby require you to make entry in the Register Book of the Stationers’ Company of my Proprietorship of such Copyright, according to the particulars underwritten.”

Then follow blank spaces for the title in full, name of publisher, and place of publication, name and place of abode of the proprietor of the copyright, and date of publication. This declaration, with the signature of

one witness, must be returned to the office; and the particulars having been copied into the Register Book by the appointed officer, the words “Entered at Stationers’ Hall” can be placed upon the volume, which is henceforward protected. The fee for the entry is five shillings; and it must be borne in mind that no book will be registered until it has actually been published. When this has been done no persons can print and sell copies of the book, unless by arrangement with the registered proprietor. If they do so it is called “pirating,” and renders the offender liable to an action at law.

In what is familiarly known as “The Book Act” (legally “An Act to Amend the Law of Copyright”), passed in 1842, it is stated that the “word Copyright shall be construed to mean the sole and exclusive liberty of printing, or otherwise multiplying copies.” That is to say, a person who has published and registered a book has a property in it; and the law is that this right shall be his during lifetime, and seven years after death—so that the heirs may reap benefit from it. But as the author might die immediately after publication, it is enacted that if the “term of seven years shall expire before the end of forty-two years from the first publication of such book, the copyright shall in that case endure for such period of forty-two years.” Also, if a book is not published till after the decease of the writer, then the copyright lasts for forty-two years from the date of its issue. Consequently, copyright can never expire under forty-two years, but may endure much longer if the author lives to old age. Of course, he can sell or dispose of the copyright just the same as with other property; but it should be remembered that it is regarded as personal property, like money in the funds, and not as real property or land, and if the proprietor dies without making a will the proceeds from it are distributed as money would be.

Entries in the Register Books may be inspected on payment of a shilling, and a certified copy will be given on payment of a fee of five shillings. To cause a false entry to be made is a misdemeanour, and subjects the offender to prosecution and penalties.

“Ent. Sta. Hall” will be found on many songs and pieces for the piano, for a musical composition can



be registered in the same way, and become copyright ; also dramatic pieces. There is also a copyright in designs, engravings, and even photographs and valentines, &c. Newspapers are registered at Somerset House ; but the period of copyright in their publications is so brief that practically they have none at all (except the title), and telegrams, &c., issued in one may be seen (as *quotations*) in another within a few hours.

International copyright—that is, the rights of authors and publishers in foreign countries—is at present a very sore subject, and generally considered to be in an unsatisfactory state. In France, at least recently, to secure copyright, a copy of the work had to be deposited at the Ministry of the Interior, which established ownership in France and, more or less, in thirty-seven states with which a convention existed. In the United States the formula of entry runs :—“Entered according to Act of Congress in the year— by A. B., in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.” Fee, one dollar. The condition of affairs with respect to the United States is particularly awkward, since to obtain copyright there an author must either be a resident or a citizen ; consequently, an English author legally has no copyright in America, while if he published there first he would lose his copyright in England.

A Royal Commission has been recently appointed to inquire into the copyright question, with a view to the ultimate adjustment of these difficulties.

The right of a man to the book which he has written, as to the house which he has built, was recognised in England from the very earliest times ; but the present system of registration seems to have grown up out of political and religious controversies. The Stationers' Company was incorporated in 1556, in the Roman Catholic days of Philip and Mary, whose charter to the company recites that many persons (*i.e.*, Protestants) had not only published books exciting to sedition, “but also to the renewal and propagating very great and detestable heresies against the faith and sound Catholic doctrine of holy mother, the Church ;” and therefore a Company, consisting of a Master, two Wardens, and ninety-four freemen, was established to have the exclusive right of printing. They had power to search shops and houses for suspected books, and to burn them ; and any one printing and not a member of the Company, or resisting their search, was liable to three months' imprisonment, and 100 shillings fine. Entry in the books was, in fact, a check on the publication of political or religious works offensive to the Government. In succeeding reigns, the same power was exercised against certain sects of the Protestant religion by the dominant Church, though itself Protestant. James I. gave the Company the exclusive right (except the king's printer) of issuing primers, psalters, psalms, and almanacs, the A B C and Catechism. Charles II.'s charter, 1684, specially confirms the “public Register kept in their common Hall,” and every one who was or should become a member of the Company, “and shall become a proprietor of any book or copy, either by gift or purchase from the author, he shall enjoy the sole right of print-

ing such book.” The Universities were excepted from the almanac restriction ; and the Stationers' Company once paid them £1,000 a year for their right of selling those popular books. In 1678 the Company issued an ordinance against the setting up by any person of a “press in a hole,” by which was meant the surreptitious printing and publishing of books without the permission of the Company. The penalty was £50 fine ; and £5 reward was offered for the discovery of such a secret press. The early Registers of the Company narrowly escaped destruction in the Great Fire ; they are still preserved, and contain a mass of valuable information. At first there are few entries of books ; the memoranda chiefly relate to the internal affairs of the Company ; but as time goes on the entries become more numerous, and the fee for registration ranges from fourpence to sevenpence. Here is a copy of a notable entry :—“2 Novembris, 1614. Nathaneel Butter. Entred for his Coppie vnder the handles of Master Sandford, and both the Wardens, Homers *Odisses*, 24 bookes, translated by George Chapman. VID.” Sixpence was the registration fee for that famous translation. Later down the Corporation seems to have lost its character as a political engine, and assumed a commercial aspect, making an immense income by the sale of almanacs, &c. When at last the press of this country was freed from the trammels which had so long restrained it, and printing and publishing became open to every one, without let or hindrance, the chief importance of the Stationers' Company (apart from their private affairs) centred in the Register Books, and so it still remains. They do not now exercise the slightest control over literature ; they simply afford an inexpensive and easy means by which every author or publisher can protect his property. At the same time, the constitution of the Company has reverted to its original and proper condition ; for in 1875, out of 312 of the livery, 300 were really “in the trade.”

A copy of every book published has to be delivered to the British Museum ; the Bodleian Library, Oxford ; the Public Library, Cambridge ; the Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh ; and Trinity College, Dublin. It is not, perhaps, generally known that the nation itself has a certain copyright at large as it were. By Section V. of the “Book Act” it is provided that, as it “is expedient to provide against the suppression of books of importance to the public : be it enacted, that it shall be lawful for the Judicial Committee . . . . on complaint made to them that the proprietor of the copyright in any book after the death of the author has refused to republish, or allow the republication of the same, and that by reason of such refusal such book may be withheld from the public, to grant a licence to such complainant to publish such book.” Those who thought such a provision necessary even so short a time since as 1842, could have had but a faint idea of the enormous trade which would arise in books in a few years. In 1877 we are quite certain to get any book “of importance to the public” published without the assistance of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.