

A foe to American schools

George Augustus
Gates

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A Foe to American Schools

By
President George A. Gates



A Foe to American Schools

A Vacation Study

By

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At a session of the College Section of the South-eastern Iowa Teachers' Association, held at Oskaloosa, Iowa, March 5, 1897, President G. A. Gates, of Iowa College, Grinnell, Iowa, read a paper setting forth the disreputable business methods of the enormous school book combination called the American Book Company. The College Section, by vote, endorsed the paper and heartily approve the suggestion that it be published.

FRED C. DEMOREST,

Secretary.

Mount Pleasant, Iowa, March 9, 1897.

A FOE TO AMERICAN SCHOOLS

"For myself I wish to say that, after many years of acquaintance with school work in this country, I consider the present modes of introducing text-books . . . as among the most degrading influences in the work of American public schools."—Pres. G. Stanley Hall, Clark University.

"We ask our patrons and correspondents to look around them and view the business transactions of this company and its agents. * * * We invite such a test."—The American Book Company.

Whether the American Book Company is technically a trust or a monopoly I do not care to discuss. The question has been in the courts more than once. The fact that the company is still doing vigorous business is presumptive evidence that it is not such a trust as present laws can reach. But that proves nothing. There are hundreds of illegal trusts in active operation which the laws have not been able to suppress.

The origin of this combination seems to be as follows. There was a firm of school book publishers located in the middle West notorious for the unscrupulousness of their methods in introducing their books. About 1890 this firm took the initiative in entering into a com-

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bination with several others. Probably more than ninety per cent. of all the school books in the country were in the hands of the publishers who went into that combination or have since been admitted directly or indirectly. By indirectly I mean that they are members of the American Book Company, at least to such a degree that they have no competition with it, or that they have sold outright to the American Book Company their common school books, though the books continue to bear the names of the firms which first published them. By directly I mean that the American Book Company owns a controlling share of the stock of these other firms. It is incorporated in New Jersey, though it has no office, either branch or general, in that state. The reason for seeking incorporation there is acknowledged to be "because its laws are more liberal to corporations;" in other words, because of the absence from New Jersey statute books of anti-trust legislation. It is said that trusts have incorporated in New Jersey to the amount of nearly a thousand millions of dollars.

The extent of the operations of this company is enormous. The business in common school text-books in the United States amounts to between five and six million dollars annually. Of this the American Book Company does between four and five millions; another

company one-half million; two others a quarter million each; all others together less than half a million. It has been having almost a monopoly of the common school book trade of the country. In many cities and counties this company sells more than ninety-five per cent. of all the common school text-books, and in the whole country it controls between seventy-five and eighty per cent. of the business. Even the notorious Standard Oil Company has no such monopoly as this. One of the American Book Company's agents not long ago said to a representative of another firm: "We can spend more money in a year than you own. We are going to wipe you off the face of the earth." It has been repeatedly proclaimed by men in high positions in this combination that their purpose was either to absorb or destroy all competitors. The American Book Company is a monopoly, so far as the school book business is capable of being monopolized, their many assertions to the contrary notwithstanding. The statements often made by its agents that there are one hundred and fifty competing firms is hardly a compliment to the intelligence of their hearers. That some small printing house puts out privately one or two books which are somewhat used as text-books, is not sufficient ground for the use of the term "competing firm."

This "combine" is yet hardly a half dozen years old, but in that brief time, by most assiduous devotion to the whole range of devices known to such combinations, it has filled the land from West Virginia to Oregon, from Mississippi to Vermont and back again to California, with reports of its ill deeds. "Trust methods," a term needing no definition to any American intelligent enough to be interested in this pamphlet, seem to be the established and authorized manner of procedure in introducing their books and keeping them in use. These methods are made up of bribery, cajolery, threats, promises, political intrigue, securing the election of teachers and boards favorable to themselves, suborning local newspapers, silencing opposition. Concerning trusts and trust methods we know very well what opinion is held by legislatures, courts, political economists, scholars and all citizens intelligent upon this subject. It is the same old story, so old that the American people are becoming apathetically weary of it: the gradual growth of corporate consciencelessness. Men who in private life and their own private business, or even in their own firm's business, are exemplars of commercial integrity and a high standard of business honor, seem doomed as if by some awful fatality to lose all business conscience and interest in keeping business on

high planes the moment they enter into a "combination." Men who would instantly discharge a tricky agent from their own employment will wink at every sort of business dishonor that comes short of being detrimental to financial success in the agents of the corporation. If corporations have no soul, combinations of corporations seem to lose all pretense to conscience. A business firm, or even a corporation, usually has a pride in building up a character and earning a reputation for all high things; a trust, or any combination given to trust methods, cares for none of these things. Like the others this Book Combination is always ready for a fight, constantly in the courts, having apparently one dominant maxim: to win at any cost, over any rival.

It is only justly charitable to believe that the worst developments have come about by unconscious drifting. The strain after immediate business success blinds to clear perception of methods. Agents soon learn that the one fact which meets enthusiastic approval of the management, is success. The means of that success are not critically questioned. Thus it has at length come about that large sums of money are spent with no accounts rendered or required. One of their agents is reported to have said that he was allowed one thousand dollars a month for "extraordinary expenses."

with no nearer specification. What this sturdy six-year-old infant may grow into is fairly pre-saged by its present attainments.

That some business firm is carrying on its affairs in a scandalously immoral fashion is not so much of a novelty as to be worthy of the attention of a pamphlet like this. If it be a very large firm it might still be left to the ultimate doom of its unrighteous success. But here is a great school book publishing company doing business in every part of the United States, which has an influence directly upon immense numbers of American youth, probably the majority of all, and indirectly upon every American citizen. This company practices through its agents about every evil that has come to be associated with the phrase "trust methods."

These methods have been exposed repeatedly, in private circulars and public press. The circulars have been issued mostly by rival publishing houses and are therefore subject to the suspicion that they are compiled and scattered for purely business reasons. No such judgment can be passed upon this writing.

The Company's Challenge.

What the old theologians used to call the "occasional cause" of the writing of this paper is the fact that there recently fell under my

eye a circular signed by the American Book Company, one or two passages from which I quote:

"We ask our patrons and correspondents to look around them and view the business transactions of this company and its agents. * * * We invite such a test."

"No school officer or Board of Education which has ever dealt with us, can truthfully say that we have not been just and fair in our dealings."

"We do strive to win and retain the confidence and esteem of the educational public."

It is my purpose in this pamphlet to pick up the gauntlet which the above challenge throws down and "view" a few of their transactions, though I can of course only hint at the character of the business methods of this book company, and in no fair measure even suggest the volume of its iniquity. Yet I hope to offer a little tribute of attention to it that may merit the challenger's respect.

Bribery.

One explicit charge which this paper makes against the American Book Company is bribery. Whether the bribery is of such sort that the courts can take technical cognizance of it, I do not care to discuss. The reader can judge whether it is bribery in the common meaning of the term. This practice is the very common method of introduction of their text-books.

This bribery takes on all the countless forms which those who are practiced in its arts understand. It is one thing to be practically assured that a good deal, of bribery is going on, although there may be accessible no adequate proofs of it. But in this case there is abundant and overwhelming proof. Let it be borne in mind that bribery is in its very nature secret, and that therefore only rarely, in one case among thousands, is it possible to get the actual facts. I count myself fortunate, therefore, in having secured several such facts. That most of this bribery is of a petty order only makes the case the more pitiable, in that a special contempt is added to moral indignation.

1. From Illinois.

I have recently had in my possession a bank draft for a considerable sum of money which was given to a prominent lawyer who was the partner of a member of the school board in their city. This check is signed by the manager of the American Book Company in one of the largest cities in the Union. On the back of the check is this indorsement: "This check was offered to me in the nature of a bribe and I refuse to have it cashed." I do not care to discuss the question whether this was a case of genuine bribery or not; I am willing to leave that point with the gentleman

whose name was signed to the above endorsement.

2. From Iowa.

In one of the large cities, on the Mississippi River in Iowa there was a case of attempted bribery concerning which the following affidavit is in my possession, made by the city superintendent, who has no objection to the use of his name, if desired:

"I, _____, of the city of _____, Iowa, being duly sworn, do hereby state:

"That I am now and have been since September, 1893, the superintendent of the _____ public schools;

"That on or about the twenty-third day of July, 1895, a gentleman representing himself to be an agent of the American Book Company, called at deponent's house and offered to assume and pay all the expenses which might be incurred in a pleasure trip to be made by the deponent with wife and child from the deponent's home in _____, 'up the river' to Duluth and vicinity and return, if the said deponent would recommend and cause to be adopted by the Board of Education of said city of _____, a complete list of text-books published by the said American Book Company;

"That the said gentleman, on the same day, repeated the offer to deponent while walking with him from the _____ Hotel in the said city of _____ to deponent's home, three or four blocks away;

"That when the deponent refused to recommend the said list of American Book Company's books, and after other books were adopted by the said Board of Education, the said gentleman became very angry and threatened to 'get even' with this deponent."

3. From New York.

"I, _____, of the city of _____, being duly sworn, do hereby state:

"That I am now and have been since the spring of 1895 one of the School Commissioners of the city of _____, representing the _____ ward of said city in the Board of Education;

"That on or about the _____th day of _____, 1895, a gentleman representing himself to be an agent of the American Book Company, called at deponent's house in said city, and offered deponent _____ dollars in certified check, his car fare and expenses to _____, if he would go to _____ and stay until after the meeting of said board, at which said contract was to be awarded, it being well known that deponent was in favor of _____ (the books of another house) from a card which deponent caused to be published in the _____ newspapers."

4. From Illinois.

In a large city an agent of the American Book Company offered the probable receipts of a proposed deal, estimated at three hundred dollars, to be used as an election fund to secure a "desirable" school inspector at the city election. Assurance was given that five hundred dollars would willingly be paid to the superintendent to leave the American Book Company's books in the schools,—that is, not to make the contemplated change. A last resort was threats, in which the agent said to the superintendent that had the agent known that the superintendent was a candidate for his pres-

ent position, the position could not have been secured without assurances of friendliness to the American Book Company; another year the man would not be in his position. The superintendent is still in his place!

The same agent about the same time offered one of the members of the school board of that city from five hundred to a thousand dollars if the member would help the agent to secure the defeat of the action of the board by which the American Book Company's books had been dropped. Lawyers were hired and petitions were circulated by men employed for that purpose. This case was one of the bitterest fights the company has had. The opposition to the company was led by the superintendent of schools himself. It was probably as significant a defeat of the great combination as they ever suffered at the hands of a city superintendent. They say the fight is not yet over. The superintendent says he hopes so, but has no compromise to accept. He can sacrifice his position, but not his manhood. He writes: "I am not a public reformer, but a city superintendent of schools and do not care to be drawn out of my special line of work to fight book companies for a public that encourages their present methods and holds in suspicion every

Whether "public" or not, he has evinced teacher that opposes them."

some stalwartness as a reformer. Though offered by the agents of the monopoly influence in education, money, etc.; though threatened "with all the powers of my house," as he phrased it, "with five million dollars back of it;" though threatened with loss of his position, this superintendent accepted the challenge of war. As a result the American Book Company lost readers, spellers, arithmetics, geographies, grammars, etc.,—everything, in fact,—in that city.

5. From Montana.

A recent letter from a superintendent of schools in a large city contains the following:

"Mr. A., City Superintendent of ———, my predecessor, received last year for services rendered to the American Book Company the sum of four hundred dollars. Other superintendents and teachers throughout the state received sums of money, but I happened to know the amount paid Mr. A. only. A number of school men were offered various sums which were refused. I was of the number."

This is an instance of one of their most vicious practices; namely, the securing of school principals, superintendents and officials as their own agents by payment of stipulated sums in the form of salary. What right has a school teacher or officer to put himself in a position where his judgment cannot be fair concerning text-books? There are hundreds of such cases throughout the country.

6. From Michigan.

"State of Michigan, County of ———. SS.

"———, being duly sworn, deposes and says that, on or about the twenty-third day of November, 1895, ———, agent American Book Company, gave instructions to ——— (keeper of a saloon in the village of ———), to give all the voters of the school district all the whiskey, beer and cigars they wanted until after school meeting, and stating that he would pay for the same."

7. From Iowa.

A city superintendent told me this: "A member of the school board contemplated offering a resolution to change a certain unsatisfactory American Book Company text-book. He consulted me and I informed him that it could not be done because of an existing contract for the American Book Company book. I mentioned this to one of their agents, who promptly offered me money for a 'vacation trip' in recognition of my 'services to the company.' The offer was not accepted."

8. From Iowa.

A high school principal introduced one of the combination's books, without even the knowledge of any book agent. He was offered a sum of money for what he had done, but sharply resented the offer. This and the above instance show how deeply fixed is the habit of bribery and semi-bribery, even when the case in no wise calls for it. Such reported in-

stances as these furnish a hint as to how much unreported bribery must have been going on to form so obstinate a habit.

9. From Iowa.

In the midst of a "book fight" in a county in Iowa, when the county board were about to select the school text-books for five years, a local politician, intimate with an American Book Company agent, asked a member of the board: "Would two hundred dollars be any inducement to you to recommend certain books?" A negative reply ended the transaction.

10. From Illinois.

During what has come to be known as a "book fight," a local politician in a certain town visited a member of the school board in his own office in the interests of the American Book Company, and spoke substantially as follows: "We want your vote against _____'s Geography. We do not want to expose ourselves to a trial for bribery, but I will give you a hundred dollars for that pen on your desk." The offer was refused and the conversation was published.

11. From Washington.

A recent letter contains this gem:

_____, April 4, 1896.

"I saw a photo-engraving of a check of five thousand dollars given by an agent of the American Book

Company to a member of the State Board of Education of Washington, in consideration of his vote."

(This is not quite exact. The check was actually given by a detective firm doing business in Portland, Oregon. It was indorsed by the Lieutenant Governor!)

12. From Missouri.

Every one of the above cases is explicit testimony, often in the form of sworn affidavit. I add one other in which any lack of explicitness is more than made good by its peculiar suggestiveness. In one of the six largest cities in the Union the school board was to select textbooks for a considerable period of years. Many changes were contemplated and of course representatives of the book publishing firms were all on hand. At that time a high official of the American Book Company, the Superintendent of Agencies of a large section of the United States, visited this city in person. During a brief stay he got a check for two thousand dollars cashed by the clerk at the hotel where he was stopping. Of course this representative of the American Book Company may have had some legitimate use for two thousand dollars in pocket money; but I do not think any one familiar with the habits of American business men will have any doubt as to the purpose for which, under the circumstances, two thousand dollars was obtained in

cash, which was secured at the office of a hotel rather than at a bank where such transactions usually take place.

“Agents Sometimes Act Against Orders.”

The ready and actual reply to all this is that some agent, in his zeal amid the exigencies of competition, may so far have forgotten himself as to do these disreputable things. To which the rejoinder is prompt: First, the American Book Company explicitly asks, in the circular quoted above, to be tested by the transactions of its agents; second, at least two instances have been given in which the transactions were made by the highest officials of one of their largest branches; but in general, the character of the agents engaged in bribery on a large scale has been perfectly known for some years, but these agents are retained in the service of the American Book Company and promoted. The only thing apparently which this company demands of its agents is that they put in and keep in its books. One would think that the question of method was never raised from headquarters. Indeed these considerable sums used for bribery must be perfectly known at some “headquarters.”

I have in mind one agent in particular whose performances are quoted anonymously above (he is a man who is responsible for one

of the most flagrant cases of bribery), who is an ignorant, coarse, profane, obscene, characterless man. He was an agent of the original firm out of which grew the American Book Company, and has been with the latter from the first. To the public school men and women of a whole state where his agency is, those who have been long enough in school work to become acquainted with the ways of these book men, this man's character is notorious. He must have been for years perfectly well known to those who employ him. He is a hustling, unscrupulous man, who, until he is known, can have success in the introduction of books; and he is doubtless kept in employment because of that success. It might be a matter of less consequence if he were a salesman of mere material goods; but for such a man to be engaged in work among educators, to associate with high-minded competitors, to be turned loose upon half a commonwealth, as a perpetual corrupting influence among school boards, local politicians, and the weaker sort of teachers, is nothing less than a calamity. This is by no means an isolated instance. Men whom it would be no discourtesy to name in this pamphlet, for their names have been published abroad in the land, who have been before grand juries on criminal charges of bribery, are still employed by the American Book Com-

pany in general agencies of great cities and states. The utmost stretch of charity in the direction of supposing that irresponsible agents are chargeable with all this, falls far short of covering the facts. Indeed it has been frankly stated by a high official in this company, that "boodle" is really the only way nowadays to win in the introduction of common school books.

One of the commonest of their trust methods is offering "even exchange" on the books of all competitors.* "Even exchange" means that the American Book Company offers to take out of a school all books published by other firms and replace them without cost with their own books. This of course is sheer loss and can only be done with the purpose of crushing out their competitors and repaying themselves by future sales. The American people understand that this is the regular method of iniquitous trusts. If the American people are not yet sufficiently familiar with it, it would be difficult to imagine what extent or quality of tuition would make any people familiar with any method.

Again I say all this is bad enough in ordinary business; but what does it mean when

* "Even exchange" is practised to some extent by other firms in competition with the American Book Company, but not by most nor by the most reputable. It is an abominable practice.

this sort of characterlessness marks that line of business which influences directly and indirectly nearly every child in America? This is a matter of the largest and profoundest patriotic concern. Its dishonor strikes at the very heart of the nation and the coming years are sure to reveal moral and social and political disaster traceable to the domination of this school book monopoly.

The Terror of Teachers.

One reason why information concerning definite facts is difficult to obtain is the terror which this great concern inspires in superintendents and teachers. I have already referred to their methods of promise and threat. Such masses of evidence are before me touching this point that it seems almost useless to try to discriminate by selection. Here is an extract from a typical letter from a city superintendent of a large city, one of the ablest in his state:

"I am aware that there are thousands of teachers who would regard their positions insecure should they say a word against this company. I am aware that many election results are the unseen manipulations of this house. I am also aware that this house does on a large scale what some other houses do on a smaller scale, because perhaps of smaller ability. When a man is open to purchase, and so many men are without being conscious of it, it is a great temptation to an am-

bitious book agent to use the opportunity against his competitor. When once the practice has been indulged, it is put down in the stock of the agent as an inducement to be applied upon any necessary occasion. For the agent who succeeds there come promotions, blindness as to methods, etc., by the house, and thus the pernicious practice grows.

"Allow me to suggest an explanation for the timidity of school principals. Many of them are effectually silenced by the premeditated policy of the publishers. These have made gifts of books, they have offered privileges for handling books, they have solicited correspondence, they have used all the wiles of the devil, until the unsuspecting school teacher has built up a line of suspicious evidence in the letter-books of the publisher which would destroy his influence if hurled down upon him in the midst of a book fight. I have known this from the inside for fifteen years, and yet some of my correspondence with book houses, if placed before the public with my enemies' interpretations, would not help me in time of a book fight. One who has not seen it from the other side can scarcely comprehend the deviltry with which a man is pursued by these book fiends who spare neither character nor honor in their greed for spoils."

Thousands of teachers in this land would breathe more freely, were the grip of this book company loosened from local politics. These teachers, whose means of earning their daily bread is at stake, feel themselves helpless in the presence of an organization that has power to dismiss them, if they dare to press objections to the company's books. One of the commonest of these petty methods is paying

teachers' hotel bills when at association meetings. A considerable degree of subtle influence is thus gained over school principals and superintendents, though they may not intend to suffer it and indeed may not be quite conscious of the amount of it. It is surprising that sensible school men can be so easily caught.

These instances can be duplicated almost without limit, but for the purpose of this paper probably nothing would be gained by mere repetition.

Political Methods and Influence in School Affairs.

An agent of the American Book Company recently remarked that the true definition of an honest school board man is: "One who, when he is once bought, stays bought." Another made the remark: "We have political 'pulls' that you smaller companies know nothing about." Another says he received this instruction from headquarters: "Go down there"—naming a certain town—"and attend to those pulls." Another said to a certain principal of a high school: "You ought to be promoted from the principalship of the high school to the superintendency of the schools in the city. I have a good deal of influence with this city board, and if you will help me in

introducing my books, I will see to it that within a year you shall be in the superintendent's position." One of the preceding statements of direct bribery is from the superintendent that is referred to in this case. He is still superintendent in the same city!

An agent of the American Book Company said to a city superintendent of Iowa: "You will be wanting a better position some day. Whenever you desire a change write to the American Book Company. We have great influence and will be glad to aid you."

The same agent in the same conversation said: "We are taking steps to have Mr. ——— elected county superintendent. You see we look out for our business interests far ahead."

In one Western state an interesting campaign has been going on during the last year. The American Book Company's publications have been used almost exclusively in that state for some time. An opportunity came for a change. Mr. ———, an agent for the American Book Company, a man who had been in court for bribery in another state, went to look after matters. A member of the school board in a large city of that state said to him: "Won't the American Book Company give us something in place of ——— Arithmetic? We are thoroughly dissatisfied with that book. We need something better." The agent's re-

ply was the modernized form of the classic phrase, "Go to now," with definite specifications. Pressed yet further, the agent plumply asserted: "No other books will be offered you." This conversation came to me very directly from the man who was one of the parties to it. The clamor for a change by the teachers in the state became so great that the State Board of Education felt compelled to take up the matter. Finally the State Board did recommend a new list of books, with many changes, and a large number of places hastened to adopt them. Then the American Book Company sued out an injunction against the school board of one city. This deterred many boards from making changes, which was, of course, the real point the monopoly was after, for the case was not decided in the supreme court till about a year later, when the decision was against the American Book Company. Meantime the sales of its publications went merrily on.

A credible report reaches me from the same state that during a prolonged legislative contest, which at bottom was mostly nothing but a fight between rival publishing houses using the state legislature for their arena, agents of the American Book Company went to the length of attempting to bribe the representative of a competing firm, offering him five

thousand dollars to betray his employers by withdrawing from the contest. This failing, they offered four thousand dollars to another man to accomplish a similar betrayal. They even put a certified check for this amount into the hands of a local banker. These offers of money made their appearance soon after the arrival at the capital of a very prominent representative of the American Book Company's branch in one of the largest of American cities. It is a record all the way through of utter disregard of the educational wants of the schools, of intimidation, and of bribery. And yet but for the influence of some modest school book companies not yet absorbed or driven from the field by the American Book Company, the schools of that state would have been helpless.

Here is a letter from a city in Michigan:

"My two years upon our School Board of Education have demonstrated that the American Book Company aim to control the board in all matters by, first, employing several local agents whose only business is to strive to create a demand for the American Book Company's books or to see that the same are not exchanged. Second, these agents are political wire manipulators with the leading local politician as their chief. Third, they have plenty of money to purchase the open support of our newspapers which, when a fight is on, charge ten to twenty cents per line for everything published in defense of action against the American Book Company's interests. Fourth, by money used at elections to secure the defeat of all trustees recog-

nized as unfriendly to the American Book Company."

An agent of the American Book Company has boasted that he shaped the school book legislation of ———— Territory. Some members inquired about his constant presence in the legislature, but he had "his men" on the floor, who saw to it that he was not disturbed.

A letter says: "I have evidence that causes me to think that they spent ten thousand dollars to carry the recent primary elections in this city for the purpose of nominating five members of our school board suitable to them. They only saved one out of the five."

In a large Eastern city a partner in the law firm of the mayor has been known avowedly working for the election of such men to the school board as would be favorable to the American Book Company.

William Lloyd Garrison recently wrote in the Boston Transcript as follows: "Dr. ———— has been a valuable member of the text-book committee, and there is good reason for the belief that the failure to renominate her on the Republican ticket was due to the influence of a powerful school book publishing syndicate which labors everywhere and unceasingly for the nomination and election of school officers who shall be pliant to its demands, and the defeat of those whom it can neither bribe nor influence."

In a recent book war in a far Eastern state, where they adopt books for five years, and have a system of county supervisors, the American Book Company have employed nearly all of these supervisors as agents, to work in all towns, except where they live, which would not look well. This is nearly as bad as their other custom of hiring teachers as their agents, when no one knows them to be such agents.

A part of the plan of campaign adopted by the American Book Company, which is put to service very vigorously in many parts of the country, includes the securing of the appointment of its "friends" as instructors in County Institutes of Teachers. These institutes generally last from two to four weeks and are held during the months of the summer vacation. The agents of the American Book Company show a great deal of activity and fertility of resource in securing such appointments. They are also specially adept in obtaining influence among those who determine what books shall be used in Teachers' Reading Circles and Pupils' Reading Circles.

A certain agent of the American Book Company paid the traveling expenses of two women, county superintendents, to a meeting of their State Teachers' Association. It was a long distance in one of our Western States

Not long after this the state superintendent appointed this agent as a state "Institute Conductor." When informed that the man thus appointed was an agent of the American Book Company, he said: "I did not know that. I made the appointment on the strong recommendation of two county superintendents," naming these same two women. Thus was this astute agent able, in the double capacity of the American Book Company's agent and instructor in Teachers' Institutes, to reimburse both directly and indirectly the outlay of his employers' money for the traveling expenses of county superintendents.

In a city of Ohio, really the birthplace of the American Book Company, it has long had things all its own way. At the last report eighty-five out of the ninety-five books used in the schools are American Book Company publications. They have all of the standard and regular studies.

In Oregon the county superintendents and the state examiners, aggregating forty-one persons, choose text-books for the state for six years. Ninety-eight per cent. of their list is from the American Book Company. Mr. Thomas N. Strong, of Portland, Oregon, chairman of the school book committee of the citizens' committee of one hundred, says: "I am informed that twenty-one of the votes cast

were almost duplicates, a somewhat remarkable thing, considering the fact that the voters did not meet and probably had hundreds if not thousands of text-books to select from."

There is overwhelming evidence that this company makes use of all known political arts to influence elections, and put men into office who will be its tools. There is no small danger in allowing a private corporation to elect those who manage our public education. That is not a wise way to make sure of securing disinterested competency. One cannot but be aware of the fearful comment which all this makes on the venality of school officials among our American people. The method has been so much in vogue that book men frequently receive suggestions, rising in some instances to demands, for substantial contributions to teachers and school officials, in consideration of the use of certain books. But this paper has to do more with the bribers than the bribed.

A representative of the American Book Company, whose attention was called to these charges, first made general denial of all dishonorable practices. Confronted with affidavits of attempted bribery, he suggested that "affidavits may be bought." Perhaps; but not usually from city superintendents who consent to have their names appear in this pamphlet. He was finally reduced for answer to this:

"Well, we are no worse than the other book companies." Let us see about that.

Compared with Other School-Book Publishing Companies.

The question may be asked, do not the other school book publishing houses use these same methods in introducing their books in competition with the American Book Company? The answer is, no. While not all the representatives of other firms are entirely above criticism, their sins, compared with those of the American Book Company, are as molehills to a mountain. The newspapers are constantly reporting the iniquities of the American Book Company. Now it is California, now Oregon, then Washington; then follow Springfield, Illinois; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Saint Louis; Kansas City; Oklahoma; Vermont; West Virginia; Baltimore; Topeka; Joliet; Indianapolis; Cleveland. One or two such newspaper reports might not be so very significant, but the unanimity and multitude of them concerning the American Book Company compel the conclusion that there are ugly facts, growing out of a settled policy, which produce these reports. (See appendix.)

I have talked with several agents of different publishing houses. I have yet to hear one condemn the business methods of any of the

others, no matter how sharp the rivalry might be; but all with absolute unanimity tell the same story concerning the American Book Company's methods. Some of these school book agents of other firms are as fine business men, intelligent, educated gentlemen as one ever meets. None feel more keenly than they the dishonor brought upon the whole school book business by the unscrupulous methods of the American Book Company. The unintelligent or the inadequately informed or those of smaller experience are very likely to judge all school book publishers' agents to be of similar character to the American Book Company's agents. Reason enough, then, why these honorable publishing houses, which are verily doing the nation service by honest emulation in the production of high grade text-books, should unite in condemning the disgraceful methods of this powerful combination. Of course the answer is easy that these things are said because of business rivalry and envy. To which again I can only reply by saying, having taken pains to make the acquaintance of large numbers of the representatives of the various book firms, I know whereof I write in the above characterization.

Of course in all this allowance must be made for the fact that all business firms will now and then be imposed upon by an unworthy

agent. It must also be acknowledged that there are some high minded men serving as agents of the American Book Company. But this is true: That in many instances agents have left the American Book Company because of the dishonor of their methods and are now either in other business or serving as agents of other companies. It is also true that a few who have been agents of other companies are now with the American Book Company. Reason enough for it. In some instances larger salaries are offered. In many others the demands of strictest integrity and clean business methods imposed by other firms stand in the way of successful service on the part of men habituated to succeed by quite other methods.

There is probably no other publishing house in America or elsewhere that feels called upon to issue pamphlets and brochures in defense of itself. The right kind of business firms do not need to assert themselves to be "honorable gentlemen" over their own signatures. It is difficult to conceive of an "attack" on some men and companies, however "false and libelous" it might be, that could force the retort: "We are honest men." "Qui excusat, accusat."

Improvement in Text-Books.

Much might be made of the fact that while the American Book Company has on its list

many valuable books written by the ablest authors, it is also true that their list contains some of the most disgraceful trash. They have many antiquated books. The general public of course cannot judge of this. But let the question be asked of intelligent teachers or any one familiar with the school book publications of the last quarter century. Now what does this firm do, especially in our frontier or "back-woods" states, when it can secure by some of the methods mentioned above control of the school book trade, but put in these out-of-date books. Books that are referred to nowadays as a laughing stock by intelligent teachers are foisted upon whole states for a series of years. The agents know that the territory is completely in their power. It is monopoly in its most odious form.

This discloses one of the subtlest dangers of school book monopoly. If it could be made complete, improvement in school text-books would languish. For instance, the American Book Company has had a practical monopoly of all geographies used in the country. Ergo, no new geographies were issued. Recently an admirable new book has been published by another firm. The result is that there is a fight all along the line. The teachers set up a clamor for a change, the matter is laid before the city and county school boards with whom

the decision lies. The book men get information of the discussion and rush to the field. Then begins the old story of bribes and promises and threats by the American Book Company's agents to secure the retention of the old books. My point here is that the only hope for improved text-books in geography has been the fact that the monopoly power is not quite complete.

Even in cases where the American Book Company has good books, it will, when it can safely do so, palm off its old stuff instead. The reasons for this are obvious; there are no longer any royalties to pay on those books; the plates are all on hand; the cost of manufacture is almost nothing, and the profits are large. This is indeed short-sighted business policy; but it seems to be deemed shorter-sighted to confess the inferiority of books now in use, by urging, merely in the interest of the pupils, a change to better books.

Need of Reform in Methods of Introducing Text-Books.

There will have to come in America some regulation concerning the introduction of text-books. It is outrageous that a keen and persistent agent can often secure the adoption of a text-book through clever manipulation of school boards in the face of opposition of the

teachers who, when reasonably permanent and competent, should determine the choice of text-books. In some localities boards, after considerable experience, have put the entire responsibility of the choice of text-books in the hands of the proper committees of teachers. Whenever this has been done much better results have been secured.

This fierce competition in common school books is enormously expensive. Who pay these bills? It can be none other than the poorer boys and girls of America. It is always the poorer, generally the poorest, classes that are exploited by these combinations. This common school book business is very profitable. Books that cost six or eight cents to make sell for from eighteen to thirty cents. A good part of the difference has to go into, not legitimate, but illegitimate expenses; salaries and traveling and "sundry" expenses of agents engaged in these corrupt practices; lawyers' fees and court costs; purchase of newspapers and all manner of bribes. Still the large margin of profit is worth the toil and fiery competition to win. I have this competent testimony from a publisher of school books: "The prices of school books are outrageously high and should be reduced about one third. This would still leave the publishers a handsome profit above expenses of agents, transportation, book

exchange, advertising, and—money which some put into election funds to secure members of school boards favorable to them.”

The impudent claim is put forward that this book monopoly makes school books cheaper. Well, if it does, it is because it is compelled by its still remaining competitors to do so. To reduce the price of books to the people is not what the American Book Company is in business for, and such claim is not made in good faith.*

The Gravest Danger.

There is yet to be noticed the most danger-

*The same claim is industriously kept to the front by the Standard Oil Company. But the only reason the Standard Oil Company does not sell oil for fifty cents a gallon is that it dares not, in other words, it cannot. The people cannot be crowded beyond a certain point. The trusts are very cautious. There is not another so taking card they can play as to foster the delusion that they are making their wares cheaper. A sovereign people was never caught so easily. The argument drawn from the fact that oil is now cheaper than formerly, is so wide of the mark in the presence of the most ordinary intelligence, as to be fairly reckoned irrelevant. The vital question is: how much cheaper might it have been, if the several hundred millions of dollars in profits had not been taken out of its cost to the people? I have heard a college president assert that it is to be recognized to the honor of the Standard Oil Company that they have reduced the price of oil to the poor, who use the most of it. He really believed it, probably. Extensive and leisurely investigation into the soundness of the belief may have been somewhat hampered by the fact that one of the high officers of the Standard Oil Company is on the board of trustees of that college!

ous factor in all this matter: the power to determine what shall be taught to American youth. This company has rushed into the field with a cavalier book on Sociology, which they have been trying to introduce into higher schools and colleges as a text-book. It appears at an epoch in the history of industrial civilization when the most significant feature thereof is the almost miraculous growth of trusts and analogous combinations. It appears in that one of the foremost nations whose perpetuity is most endangered by them. The subject of trusts belongs in this department, Sociology. How does the topic fare? In this book of nearly four hundred pages, just eleven lines, in three different places, are given to the whole subject of trusts, combinations and monopolies. In each place they are defended and excused.

Does any one suppose that this company will father a book and foster its universal use by the pupils of a nation, whose pages tell the truth about monopolies, as the truth ought to be told? The only ground for supposing so is indeed this: These combinations are so powerful that in time they become utterly indifferent to any ordinary range of public opinion. Indeed, all the ghastly exposures seem to be good advertising. The American Book Company is quite welcome to this contribution of mine. Is

it safe for the best interests of the nation's next generation, that such a monopoly be allowed to determine the nature of that generation's instruction concerning monopoly?

Already the money power (I have no reference to money, but only to plutocracy) has laid a heavy and successful hand upon the lips of the great metropolitan journals of America. He is ill informed in these matters who does not know that there are scores of young editorial writers in America, college and university trained men, who cannot put out their real opinions in the papers which they serve for pay because they must earn their living. The same power has laid other heavy hands on more than one institution of higher learning. About ten years ago a graduate of Iowa College was lecturer in Political and Social Science in one of the half dozen strongest universities of America. He failed of election to the professorship on the distinctly avowed ground of discrepancy between his views concerning the rights of the common people and the opinions of the millionaire chairman of the board of trust of the university, a large donor to its resources. That he has ever since held an equally high position in another equally strong institution, is evidence that the cause of his defeat was not incompetency, which in this case was not even charged. This is not a solitary instance. With-

in a year the politicians of a certain state demanded the removal from the chair of Political Economy in the State University one of the ablest economists in America. He is accustomed to speak straight out for right, and that interfered with their trade, and with the interests of the dominant party. The president of the university explicitly stated that he dared not face the actually threatened reduction of appropriation by the legislature if the professor were retained, and he was compelled to resign.

There is real danger in America of the development of an educated proletariat, found chiefly in editors' sanctums, professors' chairs and the pulpit.

But if this same plutocratic money power can get control of the books of the common schools of America, that is more dangerous than any influence in newspaper, or church, or university, or college. It may possibly be that such domination of the instruction given in the public schools has not entered into the conscious plans of the School Book Monopoly. I am only indicating the logical outcome. I have no such uncomplimentary lack of confidence in their intelligence and business shrewdness, as to doubt their ability to grasp the vision of this factor in the future of their scheme. Certainly were I a member of this

Book Company and interested solely in its financial success, I should consider myself exceptionally dull not to include all this in the business. The subtle and patient attempt at the shaping of public opinion is a sufficiently general and familiar weapon in the armory of trust methods.

This paper need not be prolonged by an attempt to make clear or enforce the conclusions to which it leads. Materialistic "business" policy already reigns to a ruinous degree in all our American life. The "bourgeois" philosophy of life has things so much its own way that that is pretty nearly true which Matthew Arnold said of us: "You are too beastly prosperous." Up to this time our common schools and colleges have been the most successful training schools of wholesome democracy. Not yet to any dangerous extent have either politics or ecclesiasticism been able to exploit for their own ends our public schools. But what these have failed to do, "business" may yet accomplish. Mere materialistic greed, stark cupidity, may succeed in simply using the public schools for money making, with every higher element ignored. But surely not for very long. American civilization is not yet ready to put up for sale its own next generation. Cannibals devour some of their own children, keeping enough alive, however, to

perpetuate their race. But no people was ever so low as to sell its children. As well sell them outright, as to permit unrestrained money power to determine the constitution of their minds and shape their dominant sentiments. It ought to be deemed less dishonorable to sell the body of a child into slavery than to give away a child's soul into the possession of a power whose only interest in it is measured by the amount of money that can be made out of it. The doctrine of "laissez faire" will have borne its final fruit, if the teachers of a nation shall be practically chosen by the secret influences of a private corporation, and the books from which the nation's children are taught shall be selected by the methods set forth in this review.

It is not the purpose of this pamphlet to injure the American Book Company. I have not the least desire to do that. That would be sheer malice. The necessity of its form may make the paper seem vindictive, as if some personal grievance lay behind it. That is not the case. I have no personal acquaintance with any member of this company; have never transacted a dollar's worth of business with them; have no pecuniary interest in any of their competitors, nor in any book published. This pamphlet is written from the point of view of those whose life work lies in the line of educa-

tion, and who share the pride of all Americans in America's public schools and higher institutions of learning and training. One can use Standard Oil and be placidly angry at the necessity that compels his contribution to this most gigantic trust in the world. One can perforce eat sugar, although its sweetness is somewhat acidulous from the knowledge of how our American Senate was "held up" by the Sugar Trust for a profit of some thirty millions. But not with such equanimity may any patriotic American remain quiet, seeing the school book business of America in the grip of a monopolizing combination. There is nothing about which Americans are so sensitively jealous as the schools for the common people. Alas for the day when we are not so sensitive!

As things now are this monopoly has in it grave danger for that interest which is the highest for any nation, viz., the training of its young. The nearly half million teachers of America have a right to demand that school book publishers join their ranks, in training America's coming generation in high ways of living, thinking and feeling. This is verily the chief part of the teacher's work. By far the greater part of American teachers are proudly conscious of this, their eminent function. It is in the interest of the hundreds of thousands of my fellow teachers, whom, as I have met, I

have learned to honor for the nobility that is in them and their work, that I have done this painful task. No man ought to take pleasure in doing such work, except, indeed, the pleasure of the consciousness that it ought to be done. My only desire is that this writing may be one small seed among the many similar ones more abundantly and widely sowed every day now, which may grow into a crop of convictions by and by among the people. Sometime the people of this nation will begin to rub their eyes open and to think of "getting up" to go about their national housekeeping with the seriousness of a great nation. There is no doubt about the coming of such an awakening sometime, nor about the ultimate results that will issue from it.

Appendix

Let one quite recent example suffice for an illustration of what is constantly appearing in the newspapers. This is from the Cleveland, Ohio, "Plain Dealer," September 16, 1896. Mr. House was a member of the school council of the city of Cleveland:

To the Honorable School Council: While the facts hereinafter stated in no way influenced the report of your committee on text books, and while it is somewhat unusual to bring to your notice matters which do not come within the scope of the subjects upon which this council has power to legislate, yet, justice to your honorable body and duty to the public alike demand that the reprehensible methods made use of in the attempts to thwart the fair and honest judgment of your committee, should be exposed. And, in order that no injustice may be done to the various members of publishing firms who presented their books to the committee for consideration, and whose honor and integrity is unquestioned, it may be stated here that the methods referred to were made use of in the interests of one concern only, namely, the American Book Company.

This company has practically monopolized the sale of school books in this city, for many years, and it is simply quoting local history to say that its name was unpleasantly associated with the public criticisms which led to the overthrow of the old and the inauguration of the new system of school government in Cleveland.

When your committee was appointed it found the American Book Company in possession of the field. It found books in use which were many years behind the times; indeed, some of them had been in use over a quarter of a century. It became evident to the committee that our schools could not, unless some changes were made, keep pace with the advancement of recent years in educational facilities. But the committee was told by some who had watched school affairs that there would be trouble if it dared to interfere with the American Book Company. The tactics of this company soon became apparent.

First came a circular letter from the American Book Company, warning the members that it had discovered "a decided sentiment among all classes of people against general changes in books," and also the information that "a great number of school officials have expressed their satisfaction with the plan of selecting all of their text books from our list."

Further on the letter shows how the board might make changes which would be perfectly satisfactory, notwithstanding the alleged sentiment against changes. It says: "Where boards of education have made changes in text books as would enable them to supply the schools exclusively from our list we have been glad to quote an exchange price for the corresponding old books in use." Immediately following this case came a shower of

newspaper interviews in which the absolutely false charge was made that the changes would cost more money. This falsehood has been industriously circulated, and used as a pretext for abusing the committee and this council, by a paper whose editor is an ex-agent of the American Book Company.

Anonymous letters were received by members of the committee from pretended patrons of the school protesting against a change. One anonymous writer said he was the father of six children and was very poor. This letter was written upon the costliest of linen paper. After this came through the newspapers insinuations of a veto if changes were made. And all this took place even before the committee had had an opportunity to hold its first meeting. And right here I wish to say that this committee respected the well known sentiment of this council in favor of open meetings, as far as possible. Supt. Jones, however, did not wish the recommendations of the supervisors and teachers published. As it is no part of the duty of the teachers to give opinions on text books, and as they were given only out of courtesy to the committee, their wishes were respected. It may be here remarked incidentally that these were the written recommendations which the clerk of this council publicly charges that a representative of the American Book Company wanted him to steal from the superintendent's desk.

The committee's report, which provided for better books for the schools and a saving of over \$3,100 for the people, was adopted by your honorable body four weeks ago. The succeeding meeting was held last Monday. Just before the hour of meeting arrived, an acquaintance called at my house and said he wished to see me privately. He then informed me that Mr. Sargent was going to send in a veto of the text book resolution, and that he was interested in having the veto sustained. He said he understood that Mr. Buss had written me a letter, and expressed surprise when told I had received none. He urged me to side with the director. Not meeting with a favorable response, he made the inquiry, "Suppose you get \$300 by staying away from the meeting, would that be worth considering?" Upon receiving a prompt negative, he asked, "Would it do any good to raise the amount?" He admitted that he had received \$50 for a retainer to help keep the American Book Company's books in the school. He said Mr. Howard, of the American Book Company, was in the city; that he had been at the Imperial Hotel, but that place had closed up and he was then at the Kennard House, keeping dark.

I reported this incident to several members of this council upon my arrival at the meeting. It found its way into the newspapers under the heading of "bribery," and I have been called upon to give the name of the party who called upon me. This I should certainly do if the ends of justice could be thereby attained. It seems to me that a matter of much greater importance than the name of the misguided individual who called upon me is the question, "Whose agent was he?" This I have made known. Notwithstanding that an innocent family would suffer from the disgrace I was willing

that the agent should be dealt with as the law might direct. With this purpose in view I obtained legal advice, and was informed that the facts as stated would not justify a charge of bribery, or attempted bribery, under the present laws. This is to be regretted, but being true, no good can be accomplished other than that already accomplished by giving to this council and to the people all the facts, which, it may be confidently asserted, will not fail to have a discouraging effect upon those who may hope to influence this council or its committees by dishonorable methods.

In order that there may be no misapprehension with reference to the matter treated in this communication, I have made oath to the facts stated. Respectfully submitted,

MARTIN HOUSE.

State of Ohio, Cuyahoga County--ss.

Before me personally appeared Martin House, this 14th day of September, 1896, who made oath that the facts stated and allegations made in the foregoing communication to the school council are true.

ALFRED CLUM, Notary Public.

Received, and upon motion of Mr. Boutall same was ordered to be made part of the official proceedings of the council.

The same paper, issue of February 28, 1897, contains the following language: "What can a certain book company gain in this city by defeating the present members of the school council? Nothing, because books have been adopted for five years and cannot be changed. Still, the company made a threat that it would defeat any member who voted against it, and money is now being freely used for that purpose. If the present councilmen are defeated, then the book company can go to other cities and say: 'See, they voted against us. We retired them to privacy. We will do likewise with any one else who votes against our books.'"

In the course of a speech of considerable length, School Councilman Mark Daykin said: "I was visited by a certain agent, who spent no time in showing the merits of his books, but who tried to point out that if we did not use his old, highpriced books, it would mean political disaster to me so long as I should live; but to continue them in use would assure me success in any campaign in which I might enter. These, gentlemen, are the reasons for the changes made. Agents for a company which did not succeed in frightening the members of the committee have made the boast that no member of the present council shall be re-elected even if they are compelled to spend \$10,000 to prevent it. The fight is now on."

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