

Leipzig's close connection with the Fair for the last five hundred years, however, is the main cause of its historic association with the trade.

As far back as 1470 a Booksellers' Fair was held at Leipzig. It was then not advisable to carry the unsold books back to their place of origin, owing to the then rather complicated, limited and insecure possibilities of transport. Their publishers were wise enough to leave them at Leipzig, where they were handed over to a so-called "commission agent" who stored them up for the next fair, and who was authorized to execute the orders arriving between the fairs. Thus booksellers, and even scholars, got accustomed to buying their books in Leipzig. Important booksellers appointed their own commission agent there. These agents bought the books from the publishers' representatives, and sent them to their booksellers, if possible in collective consignments, bales or boxes, in order to reduce forwarding expenses. Such activities kept pace with the growing of book-stores at Leipzig.

This ancient custom is still the basis of the book trade centre: on the one hand the stores of the various publishers, on the other the bookseller's middleman, on both sides the endeavour to save expense.

German publishing houses are scattered all over Germany just as their special province, their more or less close connection with their local cultural and spiritual links, and their personal preferences require. This means certainly a decentralization of the German publishing trade which fact is, as stated above, mitigated, or even remedied by the centralization at Leipzig.

The publisher has in addition ample opportunity to have his books printed and bound in Leipzig, and can thus avoid forwarding expenses.

Another advantage, this time for the bookseller, is the fact that he sends all his bookorders in one letter to his Leipzig commission-agent instead of to the various publishers. His agent has all these orders distributed at once through the Leipzig Book Trade Organization to the respective Leipzig publishers, and the various agents of other publishers (there are about thirty such agencies in Leipzig, some of which were founded more than a hundred years ago). These orders are executed in most cases on the same day, and then carried to, or fetched by the bookseller's agent, so that the books can be despatched by bale or post all together on the same day, or at any rate with the least possible loss of time. Such centralization of the book trade in the era of the aeroplane, high speed, radio, and the ever-growing impatience of the public, is only possible if delays are avoided.

In the course of time this marvellous booksellers' organization, founded by the Leipzig publishers and commission-agents, has been tested from all conceivable points of view, improved and augmented by its managers and experienced staffs, and by mutual advice, and has thus developed its characteristic punctuality and reliability. In particular the so-called "Quick Service" is really the only way of ordering,

getting, and sending off the books wanted, within about eight hours. Consequently the Leipzig booksellers' organization (let us call it here the exchange centre of orders and books) is the connecting link between and among the Leipzig commission agents and its publishers. It is little wonder that practically every firm wishes to benefit by it. The booksellers receive the bales and parcels a day or two later, they know exactly when the books ordered are likely to arrive, and their customers are satisfied. Special railway trucks leave Leipzig on fixed days every week for all important German towns, and for Amsterdam, Basle, Zurich, Prague. The commission-agent, together with his skilled staff is, however, not merely the executor of orders, the forwarding agent, but is frequently also his business friend's banker,—making payments on behalf of his bookseller, and acting as trustee to his publisher—. Even advance payments are made by him. This financial give-and-take-service is indeed an advantage both to bookseller and publisher, since it saves a good deal of trouble. Those small payments to each other disappear altogether; the commission-agent receives a lump sum from his bookseller, and pays a lump sum to his publisher. Needless to say, open and occasional credit is often granted to the agent's business friends. Also foreign firms avail themselves of this financial exchange service, since the prevailing currency difficulties render such a channel of easy payment almost a necessity. The central point in this respect is again the Leipzig commission-agent. But also in other multifarious transactions he is always ready to lend a helping hand to his friends. Beyond the exchange of books and money he gives all kinds of information, he traces titles of books by means of his complete collection of catalogues, and through the "German Library", the latter having huge card-indexes and the like; he gives advice in confidential matters, solves questions connected with organization, law, book trade regulations, bookkeeping, etc., etc. In short he is the German and foreign business friend's mediator, and confidant.

In conclusion, quite a number of German and other booksellers prefer to cover their whole demand from a Leipzig wholesaler. By so doing they have the advantage of writing only one order for books and periodicals, and their suppliers keep them informed of the important publications, and other events in the bookmarket.

This outline is meant to give the reader an idea of the compass and the development of this Leipzig book exchange together with all its advantages and possibilities, and that not only for the exchange of the German book, but also, at least in part, for foreign publications between many countries.

All this is, and will be, a strong and amicable bond between the book trade and the various Leipzig representatives. The economic importance of the Leipzig centre is an assurance that will remain the channel and sound basis for future co-operation between the publishers and booksellers of nearly all nations.

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