

(Copy Right of printed Books.)

R E P O R T

FROM

COMMITTEE ON ACTS of 8 *Ann.*, and 15 & 41
Geo. III. for the encouragement of Learning,
by vesting the Copies of printed Books, in
the Authors or Purchasers of such Copies.

Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be printed,
17 June 1813.

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THE COMMITTEE appointed to examine several Acts passed in the 8th Year of Queen *Anne*, and in the 15th and 41st Years of His present MAJESTY, for the encouragement of Learning, by vesting the Copies of printed Books in the Authors or Purchasers of such Copies, and for other purposes therein mentioned; and to report, whether any and what Alterations are requisite to be made therein, together with their Observations thereon, to The House;—

HAVE, pursuant to the Order of The House, proceeded to consider the said Acts; and have received various statements, and examined several persons connected with the printing, the publishing, or with the sale of Books; and, after much attention bestowed on the subject, they beg leave to observe,—

THAT although great changes have taken place in the literary systems of this Country, since the first of the Laws referred to them was enacted, on which the others depend; yet they conceive that the substance of those laws is proper to be retained; and in particular that, continuing the delivery of all new works, and in certain cases of subsequent editions, to the Libraries now entitled to receive them, will tend to the advancement of learning, and to the diffusion of knowledge, without imposing any considerable burden on the Authors, Printers, or Publishers of such works. But that it will be expedient to modify some of the existing provisions,—As to the quality of the paper, which may fairly be reduced from the finest sort and largest size, to that used in the greater part of an edition;—By substituting a delivery on demand, after due and proper notice has been given of the publication, to a distribution in the first instance:—And by affording an alternative with respect to subsequent editions in certain cases.

Your Committee would however suggest one exception to these rules, in favour of *The British Museum*; this National establishment, augmenting every day in utility and importance, ought, in the opinion of Your Committee, to be furnished with every publication that issues from the press, in its most splendid form.

Having presumed to advise certain regulations with the view of lightening as much as possible the pressure, whatever may be its amount, on all those connected with the publication of Books, Your Committee would be wanting in the discharge of their duty, were they not to recommend a strict enforcement of such obligations, as for useful purposes remains to be discharged: By annexing suitable penalties to the neglect of performing them; and perhaps in some cases by adding the forfeiture of Copyright.

The attention of Your Committee has naturally been directed to the late decision in the Court of King's Bench, ascertaining the true interpretation of the Statute of Queen Anne; and they find, that, previously to that decision, an universal misapprehension existed as to the real state of the law; and that works were undertaken, and contracts made on the faith of long established usage. Your Committee are fully aware, that, in expounding the law, no attention can be paid by Courts of Justice to the hardships that may incidentally be produced; but it will deserve the serious deliberation of Parliament, whether all retrospective effect should not be taken away from a construction, which might be thought to bear hardly on those who have acted on a different understanding of the law.

Lastly; Your Committee have taken into their consideration, the subject of Copy Right; which extends at present to fourteen years certain, and then to a second period of equal duration, provided the Author happens to survive the first. They are inclined to think, that no adequate reason can be given for this contingent reversion, and that a fixed term should be assigned beyond the existing period of fourteen years.

17 June 1813.
