

G. P. Putnam's Sons

In Publishing for Business

EDITH M. STERN

WHEN you step out of the elevator on the second floor in a building on 45th Street, just west of Fifth Avenue, and enter the conventionally furnished reception room of G. P. Putnam's Sons, one of the first things that catches your eye is a framed certificate of membership in the Merchants' Association. There are no attempts to create atmosphere with sentimental evocations of more than a century of publishing; the latest Putnam titles aren't strewn about the anteroom nor first editions of James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving exhibited in glass cases. And as you proceed through a maze of corridors and close-packed, paper-laden offices, to the tune of clacking typewriters, the impression of a business firm stripped for action is reinforced.

Melville Minton and Earle H. Balch, who merged their firm of Minton, Balch and Company with Putnam's in 1930, are chronologically, at least, among the "younger publishers" who mushroomed pyrotechnically during the 1920's; psychologically, they were not. President Minton had been selling for Charles Scribner's Sons ever since he had left school in Red Bank, New Jersey. Vice-president Balch, via the University of Minnesota and Harvard, had had his previous publishing experience right in the editorial department of the house of which he is now editor-in-chief. Except for taking up the defense of "The United States vs. Married Love" in 1931, which made possible the circulation of Marie Stopes's steady seller in this country, the new owners of the old house no more set out to slay Mrs. Grundy than their bearded forerunners.

The two partners, who complement each other in both personality and abilities, smoothly carry on a heritage that is a mixture of sound business and editorial discrimination. George Palmer Putnam, their spiritual ancestor and founder of the firm, began his energetic career in 1829 as employee in a small New York bookstore, at the munificent salary of twenty-five dollars a year and maintenance. Subsequently he sold for a Boston publisher; compiled an Index to Universal History and a monthly register of new publications while he was still in his teens; invested \$150 to become

a partner in the publishing house of Wiley and Long in 1833; staged the first Book and Author dinner in 1837; and next year, with the firm's name changed to Wiley and Putnam, went to London, where he established the first American publishing branch in England. In 1847, while in London, he gave a stranded American printer, Bayard Taylor, some temporary clerical work to relieve his financial distress; this resulted in the acquisition of a first-rate publishing property, for Taylor's book of travels, issued next year, sold more than 100,000 copies during forty years, and new Taylor volumes met with continued popularity.

When George Putnam returned to America in 1848, Wiley and Putnam were dissolved, and the firm name became George P. Putnam. His next editorial coup was represented by the works of Washington Irving. The writer's works had been three years out of print, because his Philadelphia publishers didn't consider them of "permanent value." Irving, desperate, was ready to turn to some other means of making a living, when Putnam offered him a proposition which, for the time, was a miracle of generosity. At about the same time, Hawthorne's "Mosses from an Old Manse" and Lowell's "Fable for Critics" came out under the Putnam imprint to the greater glory of the list and of American letters. A short-lived monthly, which went under in the panic of 1857, numbered Longfellow, Emerson, and Bryant among its contributors.

But publishers don't survive by literature alone, and in the mid-nineteenth century the "Gone With the Wind" of its day was on the Putnam list. In 1850 a weighty manuscript was submitted by one Susan Warner, who used the pen name of Elizabeth Wetherell. Putnam's manuscript readers advised against publication, but his mother read and liked the novel. "My son," she urged, "if you never publish another book, publish this! Providence will provide!" The book was "The Wide Wide World" and Providence did provide. After weeks of meager sales, the first enthusiastic review was from a Providence, R. I., newspaper; the first large order from a Sunday School in the same town. After that, sales leaped to 40,000 in



Major George Haven Putnam headed the publishing house founded by his father for fifty-eight years.

a few months, and ultimately topped a million. Miss Warner's later novel, "Queenie," was almost as successful.

Six years before his father died, in 1866, George Haven Putnam, Major in the Civil War, entered the business and headed it for fifty-eight years. With the advent of other Putnam sons the firm again changed its name, this time permanently to G. P. Putnam's Sons. Like his father, the Major lived twenty-five hours a day. He wrote books on the copyright law; he made sixty-five trans-Atlantic crossings; he was active in civic affairs. It was he who urged young Theodore Roosevelt to run for the New York State Assembly. For a while Roosevelt was a special partner in the firm: he offered many ebullient suggestions, few of them practical, but at least he did contribute "The Naval War of 1812" and several other books to the list. Under the Major's regime Frank Crowninshield and Burges Johnson were both Putnam employees; the first modern-type detective story, by Anna Katharine Green, was published in 1878; and balance sheets in the early 1900's were sweetened in more ways than one by the novels of Myrtle Reed and of Florence Barclay, whose "The Rosary"—personally guaranteed by Mrs. Putnam—sold over a million.

George Palmer Putnam, a grandson of the founder (one of five grandsons to serve at various times with the firm) began an association with Putnam in 1918 that was responsible for many of the books of adventure and exploration that appeared on the list, among them Lindbergh's "We," the series of "boys' books by boys," and the works of William Beebe, Martin Johnson, and Rockwell Kent.

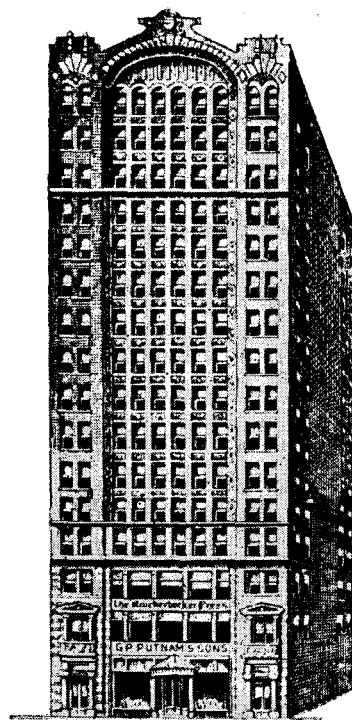
When Major Putnam died in 1930, the family invited Minton and Balch to take over. They brought with them

the works of John Dewey, the novels of Alice Grant Rosman, and a number of juveniles, still, today, marked MB in the Putnam catalogue. Their staff includes both pre- and post-MB personalities. Frederick A. MacGillivray, editorial advisor, is its oldest member; he came to the firm in 1890. John W. Sommer, salesman, joined in 1902. Robert F. Vermell, manager of the production department, has been there since 1904. Ruth S. Yetter came to Putnam's in 1927 to head an educational department that follows up the publication of the first American book on nursing in 1878 by specializing in histories and texts on nursing. G. Theodore Zignone, treasurer and secretary, joined the staff in 1929; Quentin Bossi, sales manager and athlete, in 1931. Clarence B. Boutell, advertising manager, arrived at Putnam's in 1937 by way of the Tecolote Book Shop in Santa Barbara, Calif., Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., and *The Saturday Review of Literature*.

F. H. Hettinger, who was with Charles Scribner's Sons for 21 years and then with Minton, Balch, is now a member of Putnam's Board of Directors. Edgar W. Porter, Dean of American Book Travelers, represents the house on the Pacific Coast and originally came to publishing from bookselling. James V. Malloy, who has been a book salesman for 36 years, has been with Putnam's for the last nine, and now covers Boston, the larger cities in Northern New England, and the Middle West.

Kennett L. Rawson worked in the editorial department in 1936 and next year became editor. Aside from a Yale degree in 1933, his prerequisites for occupying an editor's chair are probably unique. Rawson held important jobs both on Macmillan's arctic and Byrd's second antarctic expeditions: he is the author of "A Boy's Eye View of the Arctic," and collaborator with Admiral Byrd on the section on the physical nature of Antarctica in the 1938 *Encyclopaedia Britannica Yearbook*.

RAWSON'S past does not indicate the only evidence of wanderlust in the stable old house, for its list is strong on travel books and includes the works of Admiral Byrd, William Beebe, and Roy Chapman Andrews. Characteristic among its publications, too, are numerous solid, expensive volumes, never discussed by lady lecturers nor demanded by circulating library members, but which run along steadily with a quiet and profitable sale to individuals and institutions. There are, for instance, histories of the Marine Corps, the Army, and the Navy; a series of field books; opera books; and such authoritative, special-



—From an old line drawing.
G. P. Putnam's Sons still have their offices in this historic publishing building at 2 West 45th Street, in New York City.

ized works as "The Franciscan Missions of California" at \$3.75 or "The Mammals of China and Mongolia," of which Volume XI, Part Two, costs \$10.00.

From the beginning the Putnam Bookstore was identified with the publishing firm, and for many years was under the management of Irving Putnam, the Major's brother. Since 1933, however, the bookstore has been under separate ownership.

Current magnum opus of the house is Winston Churchill's "Blood, Sweat and Tears," May Book-of-the-Month Club selection. Its success is not merely fortuitous, because of world circumstances, but a combination of vision and plugging. Before publication, Bossi organized "Churchill Clubs" with memberships of one hundred, two hundred and fifty, or five hundred—each membership representing an advance order, and prizes for the dealers and clerks bringing in the most members. As a result, twenty-five leading book dealers averaged 353 advance orders from customers before release date. That Putnam's had the book to sell, however, was an editorial triumph. Some years before Churchill was a member of the cabinet, several publishers had turned down his "Great Contemporaries"—twenty-one portraits of world figures, one of them a man named Adolph Hitler. Putnam's took the book, partly on the vague possibility of a similar volume on American personalities, partly on faith in Churchill's future—Boutell, for one,

prophesied that he "would be Prime Minister some day." "Step by Step" came next, and then the current best seller's predecessor, "While England Slept." Originally its title was "Arms and the Covenant," and Putnam's asked for a snappier substitute. When it came up at editorial meeting as "The Lotus Years," everyone decided that was even worse, and diligently worked on a better and effective "While England Slept." Not until after publication was it discovered that a London representative had happily misunderstood the second suggested title; the word, it transpired, had been *Locust*, not *Lotus*.

Neville Henderson's title, "Failure of a Mission," which breaks every publishing kind of Hoyle in being negative—and is perfect—is, on the other hand, his own. Nor is he on the Putnam list by natural progression from previous writings. The work was editorially conceived in the New York office, and when he was asked to write the book, he demurred. His Majesty's Ambassadors didn't publish their experiences; it simply wasn't done. Finally the London agent prevailed upon him to write his story.

When it comes to fiction, however, Earle Balch disapproves of editorially conceived books. "I like a book to pour out," he told me. "I'm sure, for instance, that Sholem Asch was thinking out 'The Nazarene' all his life. And Allen Tate said, 'I want to write a biography of Stonewall Jackson.' The best books come that way."

In such an attitude, as every author knows, there is dignity, sincerity, and sensitivity. And though Melville Minton assured me vehemently that he was primarily interested in the profit element in publishing, he, too, is unmistakably one of G. P. Putnam's and the Major's "sons."

ANSWERS TO LITERARY QUIZ

1. Marmion.
2. Sam McGee.
3. Gerald O'Hara.
4. Oliver Twist.
5. Lady Macbeth.
6. Hamlet.
7. Mrs. Gummidge.
8. Sir Galahad.
9. Casey Jones.
10. Mike Flannery.
11. Tiny Tim.
12. Richard III.
13. Ali Baba.
14. Topsy.
15. Shylock.
16. Little Orphan Annie.
17. Priscilla.
18. The Ancient Mariner.
19. Puck.
20. Portia.

Reading for Defense

WHAT THE CITIZEN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE NAVY. By Hanson W. Baldwin. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1941. 219 pp., with index. \$2.

WHAT THE CITIZEN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE ARMY. By Harvey S. Ford. The same. 1941. 230 pp., with index. \$2.

WHAT THE CITIZEN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE COAST GUARD. By Hickman Powell. The same. 1941. 194 pp., with index. \$2.

Reviewed by FLETCHER PRATT

WITH these three volumes the house of Norton announces its entry into the field of military publishing. It is a perilous enterprise, but the house is to be congratulated. It has collected three men of real ability under the same tent and opened its new circus with a star performer in each ring. No better general pictures of the armed services have appeared or are likely to; and at least two of the volumes will probably remain standard works for some time.

If Mr. Ford's army book is an exception to the last statement, it is not his fault, but that of the present state of our national military development, which has thrown our whole army setup into a state of flux while that arm is being expanded from an "initial protective force" of under 200,000 men to a mass machine of ten times that number. Mr. Ford copes with the difficulties of the situation as well as anyone could. He tells about the arms—infantry, cavalry—and what their functions are in modern war; he talks of the supporting services, such as the quartermaster corps; the officers and men.

But he does not illustrate the shoulder-patches of the various divisions, for example. He cannot; there are new ones every day, and not even the Washington authorities are sure what they all look like. He does not describe the tactical organization of a U. S. division in the field. He cannot; the big shots of the General Staff have not yet decided what it is to be.

By contrast the information in Hickman Powell's Coast Guard book is as established as the orbit of a major planet. The Coast Guard has changed in nothing but mechanical equipment since it was founded by Alexander Hamilton, and shows no sign of future change, for it has functioned throughout the history of the republic with an enviable efficiency. It is unique in national services; does so many things

of more than municipal value—in meteorology and iceberg patrol, for example—that it has attained the startling position of an armed force of the United States whose expenses are partly paid by grateful foreign powers. Mr. Powell brings out the nature of these services rendered and of the men who render them; and since the Coast Guard is, after all, a small force, he has room in his book for illustrative anecdotes that make it, as pure reading matter, the best of the three.

Which is by no means a disparagement of Hanson Baldwin's outstanding job on the navy. If a chatty book, full of clever anecdotes, were to be written about that service, nobody could do it better than Mr. Baldwin. He knows the service inside and out, and in this volume, he has chosen to convey in a small space a large amount of what he knows, rather than to assume knowledge on the part of the reader and to be amusing on a basis of mutual acquaintance.

The ships—what they cost and look like, where they are built, what their functions are; the officers—how they are trained, what their duties are, their pay and prospects; the men—their daily life and hopes; the airplanes; the fleet—how it conducts operations of tactics and strategy, all these are the matters covered by Mr. Baldwin.

He has over Mr. Ford the advantage of dealing with an M-day force—that is, one that will not be altered by war, save through the multiplication table. But he also has over most writers two advantages that owe nothing to the subject. He has an English prose style that allows him to be informative without didacticism, and energetic without inaccuracy; and he has a mind which allows him to hunt the essential fact through forests of detail and bring it back alive.



(From "America & Total War," by Fletcher Pratt.)

Curtiss P-40's

The Tightened Belt

IF WAR COMES TO THE AMERICAN HOME. By S. F. Porter. New York: Robert M. McBride & Co. 1941. 304 pp., with index. \$2.50.

Reviewed by PALMER HARMAN

THE average non-combatant American did not fare so badly during the first World War. There were meatless and heatless days, which nobody took too grimly. The cost of living soared, but so did the national income. As compensation for the strain and the overtime work there were the silk skirts and the stock market where "war babies" beckoned toward riches.

How will it be this time? This is the question which Mrs. Porter tries to answer in her book. She, like most thoughtful people, believes that the pattern will not be repeated. Yes, there will be a boom—more people at work, more money paid out in wages. But more of the flood of circulating money will be sluiced through the United States Treasury, where a large part of it will be drained off as taxes. The government will keep a tighter rein on production, business men will be told what they may do, the line between profits and profiteering will be drawn at a lower level.

All this means a lower standard of living if Mrs. Porter is right—and she probably is. But it is a complicated question and the answer depends largely on how well we use our resources. We have the man power and machine power to turn out a great deal more than we did a quarter-century ago, and men and machines cannot be absorbed in war industries in a week or a month. Meantime, they might be producing the things which everybody wants, postponing the pinch on living standards, and at the same time producing some extra dollars for Mr. Morgenthau. But the general productive machine was running rather feebly before we launched our defense and lend-lease program and there is not much reason to believe that it will be greatly speeded up, only to be taken apart a little later and transferred to military work.

Faced with this prospect, the American family will need to prepare as best it can for what is coming. Here is a situation to think about, and Mrs. Porter raises the questions and suggests some answers, which the reader may accept or reject according to his lights. The book deals with a vital concern of the American home, to which most people have given too little consideration. Harry Scherman provides an informative introduction.