

Unfinished Business for the Presses

1. Social Sciences

I KNOW of no business—except perhaps that of retail merchandising—which is more fiercely competitive than the publishing trade. This, on the face of it, should be regarded complacently, and yet it is not an unmixed blessing. For a good part of publishing has become more and more simply merchandising. Once patterns of popularity are set (often by costly promotional campaigns)—whether those of scatological “historical” novels or textbooks in the social sciences—no publisher seems to be happy unless he is in possession of a completely competitive list. All these novels of ladies who end up by being better than they should be or college texts in history, economics, and politics not only seem to be but usually are very much the same. Given the first successful one and you have them all. “I have something like it,” apparently is the motto, of a great many of our commercial houses.

I am not prepared to say what the reasons for this interesting state of affairs are. Undoubtedly, the economics of overhead costs have much to do with it. To a certain extent, the institutionalization of the larger houses is a factor. Our current tax policy—which doesn’t encourage risk capital as much as it should—also plays a part. In any case, commercial houses seem to be concerned less and less with the long pull.

Here are opportunities for the university presses which should, in the end, not only pay handsome dividends but which should strengthen their positions in the fields of scholarship and taste. I suggest a series of projects for university presses which will endear them to the intelligent lay reading public and permit them—as university institutions—to continue as the guardians of American culture. Some of these projects require large amounts of capital. There is no reason why a holding company of the university presses might not be formed to finance some of these ideas collectively.

1. We need badly a whole series of new reference works, notably these three: a really good atlas; a new historical atlas; and a new many-volume encyclopedia. All those currently being sold in these fields are badly out of date. Most of them never were started in the United States and represent simply American additions—and afterthoughts—to English, Scottish, and German works. It is high

time we had enough cultural independence and pride to produce significant American reference works.

2. We need to keep alive certain outstanding works of American scholarship, which, having been printed in small editions, are now unobtainable. Examples are: J. Allen Smith, “The Spirit of American Government”; Norman Ware, “The Industrial Worker”; F. H. Knight, “Risk, Uncertainty and Profit”; J. M. Clark, “Studies in the Economics of Overhead Costs.”

3. Certain great works of European scholarship have never been translated in their entirety or at all. Why not make them available to the American public? I cite a few: Eduard Meyer, “Geschichte des Altertums”; Werner Sombart, “Der Moderne Kapitalismus”; Max Weber, “Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie” and, also, his “Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.”

4. I should like to see whole series of books about special themes. Many of the books I have in mind have never been translated; most are out of print. Here are some of the series: “The History of Capitalism”—Weber, Hilferding, Brentano, Strieder, Sée, Pirenne, etc. “Business Cycle History and Theory”—Tugan-Baranovskii, Lescure, Juglar, Aftalion, etc. “The Muckrakers”—Steffens, Tarbell, Russell, etc. “Abolitionism and Slavery”—Calhoun, Helper, Channing, Cairnes, etc. “Money and Banking Controversy in the United States”—Sumner, Laughlin, Taussig, etc.

5. We have had regional books, river books, lake books about America. Why not a group of books which hit off the spirit of specific epochs in American history—all of these to be reprints of contemporary works? Take the period of the eighties and nineties: how better recapture those decades than by reissuing Howe’s “Story of a Country Town,” Bellamy’s “Looking Backward,” Donnelly’s “Caesar’s Column,” Sumner’s “What Social Classes Owe to Each Other”?

6. In this connection, somebody should reprint in cheap editions some of the earlier great American histories, e.g., Bancroft, Hildreth, Adams. The English are always reprinting Macaulay and Green.

7. I should like to see every four or five years (after they have stood the test of time) collections of articles from the learned journals.

8. I should like to see some one take the subscription book business away from the people running it now. Some of the subscription books are still pretty good; but most of them

are old, and the new materials being tacked on to bring them periodically up to date are simply scandalous. There is no reason why popular histories and reference books shouldn’t be really good ones.

All this sounds as though I wanted to set the university presses at simply reprinting other people’s books. That is not entirely the case. Keeping important books alive is a significant function; making good reference books is not only legitimate but it is a crying need; developing an interest in the American past is a proper cultural and educational task for university agencies.

The university presses should continue printing the kinds of things they are doing so very well these days: learned monographs, important works of scholarship, studies of current affairs. In addition, I should like to see them fill the aching void left by the commercial houses as they neglect more and more the reference field, subscription books, scholarship, and good and permanent reprints. It is about time we began to cultivate America more, and one of the ways of doing it is by relating our living past to our present interests and needs.

LOUIS M. HACKER.

2. Biological Sciences

THIS is a large order. I do not honestly know the answer. I should like to talk to the man who does. In my profession it is bad form to indulge in conjecture outside the decent privacy of the workshop. I do not enjoy breaking the rules of my guild, but here goes.

It is no disparagement of university presses to say that they exist because professors write what no one else wants to print. Some good men have done a great deal to modify that tradition, and more power to them. On the other hand, the tradition can stand on its merits. I am thinking of scores of learned monographs which, in the free language of the trade, “no one ever reads,” and which are nevertheless woven into the very fabric of modern life and literature. More than one successful trade author has fattened himself on such supposedly indigestible pabulum.

Now the business of getting new truth is a high and delicate mission, and those enlisted in it deserve every help we can give them. Their quest involves the printing of notebooks for limited circulation, as well as the keeping of personal records and notes.

Where these printed reports must be book-length, sound, solid, and scholarly, it is the business of the university presses to continue getting them out

For briefer reports from the field and laboratory, the proper medium of publication should be the professional journal. I quarrel with those university presses which encourage the publication of such material in the form of *separata* for sale, thus keeping them out of the regular periodical file and adding to the financial and clerical burden of the professional who needs them. If the university presses wish to help the cause of biological science here, they should do so by providing the author with reprints of his articles from the professional journals—from borrowed plates if necessary—for use in the essential business of making exchanges with his colleagues.

Much biology is regional in character. And here, I suspect, there is a reservoir that should be tapped. In the smaller colleges, satellites geographically to the universities which maintain presses, there is good scientific ability which is often dissipated. The staffs of these colleges are well trained. The divines, politicians, and administrators who preside over them are alert enough to the value of graduate degrees when they go ahiring. Frequently the men and women they hire become unproductive. Often they are underpaid and overworked, but they suffer more, I think, from lack of intelligent encouragement than from their other handicaps. A truly regional press ought to build them into its corps. It might try, at the very least.

This brings us to the matter of regionalism. Regionalism is more than crude geographic determinism. It is much more than provincial quaintness. Regions exist because of the ways in which human culture interacts with the natural environment. The boundaries of regions are flexible, expanding or contracting according to the particular problem in view, whether it be industry, subsistence, minerals, education, or politics. Within any region, human activity must be related to the general biological principle that life and environment are inseparable and interdependent parts of a whole.

I should like to see encouragement given to writers who can interpret this wholeness, both to their colleagues and the laity. Only when this concept becomes implicit in our thinking will we begin to see that we live in a universe of law, as binding and as majestic as any ever revealed to the poetic intuition of the prophets.

PAUL B. SEARS.

3. Physical Sciences

MOST research in the pure physical sciences has broad implications, whereas many studies in biology and the earth sciences necessarily are quite local in their applications and in the interest they arouse. This helps to account for the small number of articles on physical science appearing in published proceedings of state academies of science; it also explains why one important function of many university presses—encouragement of regional studies and literature—has comparatively little significance for some of the physical sciences.

Numerous applications of physical principles, as in the various branches of engineering or applied meteorology or geophysics, may of course have a strong regional slant. Moreover, an occasional monograph or treatise may be so highly specialized that only a limited edition is warranted. When such material is of real value, grants-in-aid usually can be obtained, so that publication is possible without financial loss. It seems appropriate that publications thus subsidized should be sponsored by a university rather than by a commercial press.

But the contributions of a university press that could be of greatest significance today are those connected with socio-economic and humanistic aspects of the physical sciences. The public is thoroughly aware that our culture in its material aspects has been profoundly affected by technologic advances and that we are continually facing problems of how best to utilize the results. Less generally or consciously understood, however, is the radically new character of many concepts that long have been emerging from the sciences, and the extent to which they are in serious conflict

with traditional beliefs held precious by many people; yet we must face the expectation that it is by these new views that our culture will eventually be dominated. Still less generally appreciated is the extent to which tested methods and techniques of the sciences provide the individual with the means for attacking any question of fact and the probability that these procedures will eventually be utilized to solve many of the crucial problems of living.

There has been wide discussion of the more obvious social and technologic trends influencing our industrial and living conditions; yet we know that the present rapidly progressing shift in our culture is much more fundamental than this. It involves our patterns of thinking and of values, as these have been affected by changing conceptions of the scheme of nature and of the individual and his relations to society. The new pattern of thinking that is emerging from the physical sciences has scarcely touched large and important areas of knowledge. Now, the task before us is not only to inculcate these concepts that are to dominate our new culture, but actually first to formulate them; that is, to interpret their human and emotional significance. Until this is done, the scientific outlook will never become really *functional*—affecting the behavior of the great mass of people.

In the opportunity to help carry out this dual task the university press occupies an almost unique position. For this is a task, not for science alone, but also for creative literature and art. To paraphrase some words of Emerson: a Raphael must paint the wisdom of science; a Handel sing it; a Phidias carve it; a Shakespeare write it; a Wren build it; a Luther preach it. The physical scientist's function here is not that of a Dostoevsky or a Ruskin or even a Jules Verne. Rather, he should do for society what no one else can do: render physical knowledge so significant for his capable colleagues in the humanities, arts, and social fields that they will be able to complete the cultural interpretations. No agency is in a better position than is the university press to foster such coöperative effort among various creative workers and to help in devising effective ways to make the results available to the people.

Here, then, appears to be still another way in which the university press can continue leadership in new intellectual domains, a role that it has already recognized as essential if it is to be an integral part of the university community of scholarship.

DUANE ROLLER.

