



Reference and Subscription Book Publishing

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AMERICANS HAVE, FROM THE START, been great makers and users of reference books, with a decided partiality for those of a practical bent. In the relatively short existence of this nation an amazing variety of sound, usable reference tools have been produced, some of them labor-saving devices of the first order that still have no counterparts in many areas of the world. Since we have every reason to be proud of our past achievements in this field, it is wise to examine our present activities and note whether we are moving ahead or simply resting on the oars.

Because certain fields, such as religion, art, music, science, and technology, as well as certain types of publications, particularly government documents and children's books, are being treated in other articles, this discussion will be limited to a survey of adult reference books of general scope, encyclopedias, yearbooks, dictionaries, directories, bibliographies, indexes and the like, along with brief treatment of reference works in literature and several of the social sciences.

Librarians know that any book which answers a question serves as a reference book, but the ordinary reference book is designed, both by its arrangement and its treatment, to be "consulted for definite items of information rather than to be read consecutively."¹ Subscription books are those books or sets sold by subscription, either by mail or more commonly by sales agents who deal directly with the purchasers.² Encyclopedias, some dictionaries, and certain special classes of books on religion, medicine, and practical arts are still marketed by subscription methods. The books discussed here will be mostly the usual reference and subscription works; again, since the range of reference books is so wide, it seems better to confine this discussion to the types of adult reference books listed in Constance Winchell's *Guide to Reference Books* and its supplements, with a few inevitable exceptions.

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In colonial days, American printers and publishers were essentially utilitarian, since the belles lettres could so easily be imported from abroad, and there was scanty native fare to put beside them. There were, then, the flavorsome almanacs by such masters as Ben Franklin or by numerous lesser practitioners, handy little books frequently thumbed to pieces; the legal handbooks and justices' assistants, such as George Webb's *The Office and Authority of a Justice of the Peace* (1736) or *Every Man his Own Lawyer* (1768); the popular medical handbook, *Every Man his Own Doctor, or The Poor Planter's Physician* (1734); the how-to-do-it books, like the *Complete Letter Writer*, *The Young Clerk's Vade Mecum*, *The Compleat Housewife*, numerous ready reckoners and mathematical tables. There were collections of laws, even some historical reference books, such as Thomas Prince's *Chronological History of New-England*, but most reference works were strictly practical.³

With the establishment of the republic a nationalistic urge for distinctly American educational tools led to Noah Webster's speller, grammar, and dictionaries, the first distinguished American reference books, along with Nathaniel Bowditch's *The New American Practical Navigator* of 1802, one of the first American reference works to achieve international fame. From here on the list grows steadily, increasing rapidly after 1860. Although the *Encyclopaedia Americana* (1829-1833) was largely translated from *Brockhaus' Konversations-Lexikon*, there were, none the less, American additions, and the *New American Cyclopaedia* (1861-63) was a sixteen-volume set of clearly American compilation and outlook, to be followed by the *International Cyclopaedia*, later the *New International Encyclopaedia*, of such excellent repute for ease of use and readability. Not to be forgotten is the long span of *Appleton's Annual Cyclopaedia*, a model for later encyclopedia yearbooks. Joseph Worcester's dictionaries long vied with Webster's, and in the *Century Dictionary and Cyclopaedia* the United States produced a superb work embodying scholarly accuracy and breadth combined with attractive illustrations and encyclopedic data. Funk and Wagnalls' standard dictionaries were also of high quality, to provide active and salutary competition for Webster's.

The marketing of books by traveling agents or canvassers had begun in colonial days, had flourished in the early republic and reached a peak in the years following the Civil War. Dictionaries, encyclopedias, Bibles, historical works, and practical manuals were favorites, along with sets of standard authors like Dickens or Scott, gaudily bound

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and lavishly illustrated. Swarms of book peddlers plied cities, towns, hamlets, and even the outlying farms. Families which would never have visited a bookstore—and there were few enough of them—frequently succumbed to the persuasiveness of the salesman and bought the encyclopedias or poets they hoped would give them a breath of that culture they dimly revered.⁴

American dictionaries and encyclopedias won their greatest sales by such marketing, although they were also available in bookstores. Particularly successful was the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1875–1889), which was sold in the United States in competing editions: the authorized edition was presented in dignified but aggressive advertising; two competing editions, priced low because of the absence of international copyright, were carried by subscription agents over most of the country and enabled countless families to own a fine reference work for the first time. Actually, the pirated reprints were superior to the authorized edition since they contained new articles on American topics to supplement those in the regular set. Dodd, Mead and Company boosted the sale of the *New International Encyclopaedia* by an elaborate sales organization and Charles Scribner found no difficulty in selling the *Cyclopaedia of Music and Musicians* at twenty-five dollars for three volumes. A still greater campaign began with the eleventh edition of the *Britannica* (1910–1911), marketed by direct mail, subscription salesmen and bookstores alike, with much success. By such means did the American public begin to value reference works, even if it could not as yet be discriminating in its selection.⁵

It is impossible to record adequately the many nineteenth-century reference works of quality, but the following list will testify to books which either served their local needs admirably or won international repute for their ingenuity, convenience, or comprehensiveness. *Poole's Index to Periodical Literature*, the *A.L.A. Index*, the Peabody Institute's *Catalogue of the Library*, the *Library of the World's Best Literature*, Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* along with Hoyt's *Cyclopaedia of Practical Quotations*, Allibone's *Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors*, Thomas' *Universal Pronouncing Dictionary of Biography and Mythology*, the *Century Cyclopaedia of Names*, *Lippincott's Gazetteer of the World*, Larned's *History for Ready Reference*, C. K. Adams' *Manual of Historical Literature*, and *Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities* achieved more than national fame. There were also such

useful works for Americans as Ayer's *American Newspaper Annual*, the series of national and trade bibliographies by Sabin, Evans, Roorbach and Kelly, to be followed by the *American Catalogue of Books*, the *A.L.A. Catalog*, *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, the *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, *Harper's Encyclopaedia of United States History*, Larned's *Literature of American History* and Channing and Hart's *Guide to the Study of American History*.

There will be occasion to cite a few of the major twentieth century reference and subscription books as the different categories of reference works are discussed, since many of them are still doing valiant service in revised and modernized versions. Except for subscription book publishers, and perhaps such specialized publishers as H. W. Wilson, R. R. Bowker, and the American Library Association, reference book publishing would appear to follow the general trends in popularity and promotion of the different subject fields, in which reference titles are usually only a very small part, although their sales over the years may be highly profitable. One of the chief aims in studying the period from 1946 to 1957 is to discover whether American publishers turn out valuable new works, adequately revise valuable old ones, or simply concentrate on superficial books providing a quick profit.

William Jovanovich, in his interesting lecture, *The Structure of Publishing*, calls publishing reference books "an altogether mysterious pursuit."⁶ Tradebooks are made by amateurs, textbooks by amateur specialists, but reference books, he says, are made by professionals. He is referring, incidentally, to subscription encyclopedias, excluding works such as dictionaries, almanacs and the like. "Here are products made by craftsmen in scholarship and sold by craftsmen in merchandising, and the key word in that sentence is merchandising."⁷ The reference book publisher sells to bookstores, to libraries, to educational institutions; he may sell door-to-door or by direct mail. In 1955, subscription reference books reached about \$148,000,000 in net sales, indicating that volume had almost doubled since 1948, an increase Jovanovich attributes to larger school enrollments and more extensive subscription sales to the general public. Naturally, in the field of encyclopedias, few titles are issued yearly, since a well-established encyclopedia may last several generations, with careful revision and modernization; again, since from \$750,000 to \$2,000,000 has to be invested in scholarly dictionaries or atlases before a single copy is sold, publishers are not likely to be rash.

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According to the *Census of Manufactures* for 1954, more than 25,860,000 copies of encyclopedias and subscription books were sold at over \$89,000,000, representing a dollar increase of 41 per cent over the previous figures for 1947. The American Book Publishers Council considers the census figures too low for encyclopedias, and in their 1956 annual survey the following statistics are cited: 1952, \$106,800,000; 1953, \$121,250,000; 1954, \$128,700,000; 1955, \$148,750,000; 1956, \$190,800,000. By 1956, foreign sales of American subscription books had climbed to \$6,500,000. On this basis it was easy to predict a subscription-reference total for 1957 of \$200,000,000, for domestic sales alone. Theodore Waller, vice-president of the Grolier Society, estimates that 95 per cent of these sales is through door-to-door selling, only 5 per cent to schools and libraries; also, from 15,000 to 20,000 sales representatives of encyclopedias are now in the field, marketing sets ranging from \$60 to \$600.⁸⁻¹³ The printing of a successful ten- to thirty-volume encyclopedia may run from 100,000 to 400,000 copies, with "approved" lists and standards greatly aiding the sale of certain works. On the basis of the above figures for encyclopedias, it is obvious that subscription books are second only to textbooks, which netted \$234,550,000 in 1956; and if it were possible to estimate the sales of ordinary reference works in the fields of the humanities, the social sciences, and the pure and applied sciences, the yearly sales of reference books would top those of any other category. Since the scale of this business is so immense, it is all the more imperative to consider the quality of the output, and, as encyclopedia and subscription book publishers are deriving such profits from the American public, to determine if they are giving it its money's worth.¹⁴

One need only look through the pages of *Subscription Books Bulletin*, which serves as the watchdog against mediocrity masquerading as quality. In issue after issue recur the same phrases, "not recommended" because of poor revision, superficial treatment, inaccuracy, carelessness in statistical data, inadequate coverage, poorly-printed illustrations, and worn and broken type. Reading this chronicle of worthlessness becomes monotonous, but exasperation rises at the same time when one considers how many citizens are gulled every year with the same sort of fraudulent goods. If regular American advertising is blatantly specious, what can be said of the unscrupulous subscription book salesman's methods? Most of the people he deals with know nothing of *Subscription Books Bulletin*, and are helpless in his hands.

There are about twenty encyclopedia publishers of some size, with

smaller firms appearing and disappearing every few years. Theodore Waller says that six or seven major firms account for 90 per cent of the business, with about fifteen or twenty principal titles.^{15, 16} It is a pleasure to record that perhaps five of these publish works of good quality, works which the American public can buy with complete confidence. Possibly some of the encyclopedias are priced too high, but no one will be defrauded by purchasing them.

The two giants, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the *Encyclopedia Americana*, are of unquestioned merit. Both follow the practice of continuous revision and are reasonably successful in keeping these large sets abreast of modern knowledge. Yet they have become enslaved to their own advertising about up-to-dateness and are leading people to judge their products on recency rather than fundamental coverage of the past. Even with yearbooks, no encyclopedia can be up-to-date in all subjects; only in the days of completely new editions, as for the fourteenth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in 1929, was such a state achieved, and then only relatively. Yet one is inclined to wish that there could be a really complete revision every thirty years, so that everything could be revalued and rewritten, if there were need, instead of concentrating all revision in a few areas where the rapidity of change forces constant revision, as in science and international affairs. When, however, Walter Yust, editor of the *Britannica*, notes that their yearly editorial budget runs in excess of a million and a half dollars, with the possible costs of a complete revision mounting to between five and ten million dollars—figures which Stanley Mase, vice-president of the Grolier Society, publishers of the *Americana*, finds substantially comparable to their own costs—it is understandable why revision cannot be more profound.¹⁷⁻¹⁹

Both *Britannica* and *Americana* have made impressive revisions since 1946. According to the publishers, the *Britannica*, from 1946 to 1950, added 434 new articles, revised 1,573, made 9,684 minor corrections; from 1951 to 1956, 30,027 articles were changed in some fashion, and 467 A and B pages, 1187 text pictures, and 1,898 pictures were added on insert plates.²⁰⁻²¹ The *Americana* claims even more extensive revision and has figures to substantiate its claims.²² Although the publishers declare that they follow a regular schedule of revision, one can be pretty sure by now that no ten-year plan is being observed for all subjects, and that many areas of the humanities and social sciences, with some in science, have been neglected for a quarter of a century, in the *Britannica*, at least. And even if many of the older

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articles require little change, why cannot the editors be clever enough to bring the bibliographies up-to-date, so that the user may be aware of recent writings on the subject?

Both encyclopedias are adding pictures, most of them good, but why cannot they have better maps? Probably because American map publishers are unable or unwilling to turn out maps on the level of those found in European encyclopedias, usually physical maps of great accuracy. American encyclopedias, with the notable exception of the *World Book Encyclopedia*, do not even provide physical maps for the states of the United States.

If the publishers of *Britannica* and *Americana*, in their struggle for sales, attempt to popularize these works by writing down and oversimplifying, what a triumph that will be for mediocrity and even illiteracy! The great value of these sets resides in their fine scholarly breadth and accuracy, their refusal to dilute adult knowledge, and it would be a sad day for Americans if such works were impoverished for a few more dollars in sales.

The third large work, *Collier's Encyclopedia*, aims avowedly to appeal to the high school level and above. With its simpler style and its emphasis on topics of recent interest, with a decided indifference to much of the achievements of the past, especially in the humanities, it serves as a useful supplement to the major encyclopedias. It has the great advantage of newness, since the whole set was fresh in 1950, but lacks the authority and balance of the older sets.

The *American Peoples Encyclopedia* (Spencer Press) is not quite on the same level, nor is it so expensive, but it, too, practices continuous revision with considerable success and serves as a substitute for the major sets in homes that cannot afford them.

Although the *World Book Encyclopedia* and *Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia* are not entirely within the scope of this article, they should be commended as admirable examples of the school-level encyclopedia, and they are infinitely superior to so many of the sets aimed to appeal to that level and slightly above. There is no space here to detail the merits and deficiencies of the numerous sets on the market; anyone who is interested should consult *Subscription Books Bulletin* (now *The Booklist and Subscription Books Bulletin*, since September 1956) for the assessment of these works. Some of them, such as the *Grolier Encyclopedia*, the *New Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia* or *Everyman's Encyclopaedia* which is really British, of course, but marketed here, are possible choices for home use, if

people are not interested in the breadth of information available in the larger sets.²³

The other sets, those that are "not recommended," are often reviewed several different times, sometimes only once, by *Subscription Books Bulletin*. The reviews are searching and the reasons for non-recommendation are clearly stated. Such titles as the *Universal World Reference Encyclopedia*, the *World Scope Encyclopedia*, the *Champion Encyclopedia*, *Richards' Topical Encyclopedia*, the *Americana International Encyclopedia*, the *New Standard Encyclopedia*, the *World Home Reference Encyclopedia*, and the *Home University Encyclopedia* provide a fair sample of the sets that did not win approval. Some are, apparently, only mediocre; others are patently trashy and dangerously close to fraudulent. Some day, it is hoped, the American public will be educated enough to reject these worthless volumes, but not in the near future.

Two encyclopedias remain to be mentioned, both single-volume works, the *Columbia Encyclopedia* (Columbia University Press) and the *Lincoln Library of Essential Information* (Frontier Press). The first is one of the finest of the smaller encyclopedias, more than a match for many of the multi-volume sets. The *Lincoln Library* is a serviceable volume, on a lower level, whose merits for library and home use have long been recognized. Both are well-balanced in their coverage of the past and the present and would be much more valuable for many homes than the shoddy encyclopedias found there.

From here on, only the high lights in reference publishing can be mentioned, nor is there space to give as much concrete evidence as one would like for the frequent generalizations offered. Yet enough of the major titles will be listed to give a picture of the publishing achievement in the areas studied.

In the years from 1946 to 1957 the encyclopedia yearbooks generally reflect the merits of their parental sets. The *Americana Annual* has, perhaps, made the greatest strides, but, to a large degree, because of the ever-present quality of the competing *Britannica Book of the Year*. *Collier's Year Book* has shown distinct improvement since the appearance of the encyclopedia.

While the *World Almanac* (New York World-Telegram) is as indispensable as ever, the *Information Please Almanac* (Macmillan) is, in some ways, less valuable than when it started in 1947, having lost many of its good surveys and special articles. An older yearbook that has become more valuable in this period is *The United States in World*

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Affairs (Harpers), with its objective summary linked to a companion volume of documents.

The unabridged dictionaries, Webster's and Funk and Wagnalls', have been kept reasonably up-to-date by added pages or plate changes or both together, and are works of high quality. For modernity of approach, whether in word list, definitions, American pronunciation, coverage of colloquial expressions and good illustrations, the *American College Dictionary* (Random House) and *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (World) are both notable, and have already become favorites, alongside the more conservative abridgements, also well revised, published by Merriam-Webster and Funk and Wagnalls.

One can heartily acclaim Mitford Mathews' *Dictionary of Americanisms* (University of Chicago) and note that this work was published by a university press. Trade publishers have been willing, however, to undertake new editions of such esteemed works as Berrey and Van den Bark's *American Thesaurus of Slang* (Crowell) and the *NBC Handbook of Pronunciation* (Crowell), and there is Marjorie Nicholson's revision of Fowler for Americans, the "faster Fowler," *Dictionary of American-English Usage*, still not really comprehensive or practical enough for American needs. Some will, perhaps, favor Bergen and Cornelia Evans' *A Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage* (Random House), although this is more verbose and frequently less practical than its rival.

When American publishers turn out books like the splendid *Holt Spanish and English Dictionary* (Holt), as well as the revision of Cuyás' standard Spanish-English dictionary (Appleton), there seems little to complain of in dictionary publishing, even though better works on abbreviations and American usage would be welcomed.

American publishers have already provided a strong foundation for biographical reference in such works as the *Dictionary of American Biography* (Scribner), the *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (White), *Who's Who in America* and other Marquis publications, *Current Biography* (Wilson) and new, enlarged editions of *American Men of Science* and the *Directory of American Scholars* (both Bowker). Two exceptionally fine new works appeared between 1946 and 1957, Appleton-Century's *New Century Cyclopaedia of Names* and the H. W. Wilson Company's *Biography Index*. It is reassuring to find an American publisher undertaking a large-scale work like the *New Century Cyclopaedia of Names*. Good editing and sound sup-

port by the publisher are essential for high quality reference books, and this work may serve as a model. The *Biography Index* evidences that knack for the practical approach that has made the Wilson Company unequalled in its field.

Most of the Wilson Company's famous indexes and bibliographies were established before 1946. Viewing the major titles only, one can conclude that the Wilson Company is, quite simply, indispensable. One may be sorry that, in this period of international responsibilities, American librarians chose to exclude foreign-language periodicals from the *International Index*, but who could weigh such minor points against Wilson's total achievement?

Another leader in this field is the R. R. Bowker Company, which has added to its standard publications such valuable new titles as the *American Library Annual* and the two versions of *Books in Print*, which provide author, title, and subject approaches to American books now available for purchase. And then there are the invaluable publications of the Library of Congress, including its great new printed catalogs, with current listings of union catalog entries, its *New Serial Publications*, and special bibliographies too numerous to mention. The American Library Association and other associations, both national and local in their scope, have many useful reference works. Library reference tools of this sort are characteristic of American publishing and have brought it world-wide fame.

Reference works in the humanities do not fare too badly, considering the funds and attention lavished on the technical fields and the social sciences. The large-scale works of previous years are, however, conspicuously absent. Since American publishers appear to prefer the cheap, popular-practical books, it is left for the wealthy European countries to provide magnificent works like the *Dizionario Letterario Bompiani* or the *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, or even smaller works like *Cassell's Encyclopaedia of Literature*, although the latter work was at least republished here by Funk and Wagnalls. This firm has to its credit the valuable *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*. It is certainly to be hoped that the American scale of living has not priced this country out of the possibility of publishing high quality works.

The Philosophical Library is steadily producing its Midcentury Reference Library, intended to fill the reference gaps in most fields, but a plethora of titles unfortunately does not compensate for lack of good editing, competent authorities or general scholarly outlook.

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The good volumes in the series are almost completely lost amidst the inadequate. The H. W. Wilson Company provides, in the humanities as in other areas, a goodly number of practical aids, having published a supplement to the popular *Twentieth Century Authors, British Authors Before 1800*, supplements to the *Costume Index* and the *Speech Index*, and two new indexes of American and European paintings, in the years since 1945.

Reference works in literature are published by relatively few firms. Appleton-Century is responsible for two fine single volume histories of English and American literature, one of which, Baugh's *A Literary History of England*, has become a standard work in the ten years since its appearance. Their *New Century Handbook of English Literature* is a treasure-house of facts to supplement the history. Macmillan scored a success with the *Literary History of the United States*, as did Dutton with Van Wyck Brooks' history of American literature, *Makers and Finders*. Oxford, always reliable in this field, published the distinguished *Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, also the *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, as well as new editions of its quotation dictionary and the companion to American literature. William Rose Benét's *The Reader's Encyclopedia* (Crowell), new editions of Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* (Little, Brown) and Stevenson's *Home Book of Quotations* (Dodd, Mead), Mencken's *A New Dictionary of Quotations* (Knopf) and Stevenson's *Home Book of Proverbs, Maxims and Familiar Phrases* (Macmillan), all deserve grateful recognition and show the characteristic reference books favored by American publishers. It was left to the university presses to do some of the big tools, such as Blanck's *Bibliography of American Literature* (Yale), Granger's *Index to Poetry* and the *Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature* (both Columbia).

Thus new American reference works in literature are not at all numerous, in contrast to the excellent record achieved in the past, and the picture is much the same in the fine arts and music, where there are almost no large-scale achievements of distinctly American origin.

In the social sciences, American publishers, as might be expected, have made a much better showing. It is no surprise that American publishers should have done well by business. A great array of fine books, mostly by specialized firms but some by general trade publishers, leaves very few gaps in this field. Prentice-Hall, McGraw-Hill, Ronald, Wiley, Dartnell, Forbes, the Twentieth Century Fund, and

numerous smaller firms have turned out the bulk of the material, while the massive services published by Moody, Standard and Poor, Commerce Clearing House, Prentice-Hall, and Fitch are among the most successful American reference tools. The bibliographic guides to business materials are especially fine, among them E. T. Coman's *Sources of Business Information* (Prentice-Hall), Marian C. Manley's *Business Information* (Harpers), and Paul Wasserman's *Information for Administrators* (Cornell University Press), all providing different and valuable approaches to this abundant material.

Education, which is also big business in America, has been well served. Most successful are the directories and guides, some of them new editions of old favorites, such as *American Universities and Colleges* (American Council on Education), others new works like *Lovejoy's Vocational School Guide* (Simon and Schuster), Fine's *American College Counselor and Guide* (Prentice-Hall), Feingold's *Scholarships, Fellowships and Loans* (Bellman), and Chambers' excellent *Universities of the World Outside U.S.A.* (American Council on Education).

In sociology, except for textbooks, most of the publications are the work of societies, associations, and government agencies, such as the American Association of Social Workers, the American Public Welfare Association, the Russell Sage Foundation, the American Foundation for the Blind, and the divisions of the United States government concerned with sociological problems. Much the same is true of reference works in political science, with governments here playing a major role.

Geography possesses some magnificent works like the *Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer of the World* (Columbia), easily the finest in the field for scholarly accuracy and comprehensiveness, or Wright and Platt's *Aids to Geographical Research* (American Geographical Society), the best bibliographic guide to the subject. The American Geographical Society's *Current Geographical Publications* is the only good current bibliography anywhere. Yet American atlases seem pale indeed when compared to the *Times Atlas of the World* or even the *American Oxford Atlas*, although Rand McNally and Hammond have turned out good, cheap atlases with no pretensions.

The United States has had in the past an enviable record in the production of historical reference works, a record partly sustained in the last decade. Many of the older, standard works are still useful, some have been completely renewed, and there are several fine new

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achievements. Students have waited forty years for the *Harvard Guide to American History* and have been well rewarded for their patience. The large-scale histories by one author are mostly superseded by vast cooperative sets, but Lawrence Gipson's *The British Empire Before the American Revolution* (Knopf) proves that such work is still possible. Two scholarly cooperative series are *The Rise of Modern Europe* (Harpers) and *The New American Nation* (Harpers), both impressive works highly creditable to the initiative of this famous old publishing house. Doubleday's *The Mainstream of America* is most interesting, on a more popular level. There are numerous good small histories of the United States, such as Bailey's *The American Pageant* (Heath), superb illustrated histories like Butterfield's *The American Past* (Simon and Schuster) and Davidson's *Life in America* (Houghton), with ever more numerous works on the Civil War, American presidents and other topics suitable for pictorial display. Richard Morris' *Encyclopedia of American History* (Harpers) is certainly one of the best reference tools for the subject, on much the same principle as Langer's fine *Encyclopedia of World History* (Houghton). With small works of every variety and some impressive large ones, published by firms like Macmillan, Harpers, Holt, Scribner, Houghton, McGraw-Hill, Prentice-Hall, and Heath, American publishers have done ample justice to American history, with no slighting of Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

As one scans reference books, there are gaps and inadequacies to be noted, but not a great many. The major problem is to distinguish between quality and mediocrity in present as well as potential reference books. Certain publishing houses can generally be relied upon to turn out fine reference books; others are more interested in sales at the cost of authority, accuracy, and maturity of presentation. Even though American publishers appear reluctant to engage in large-scale works, many of which are carried out by European firms, this hopelessly brief survey has disclosed valuable general works, more in the social sciences than in the humanities. Certainly, American publishers are not just resting on their oars, except perhaps in the humanities, but neither can it be said that they are putting all their strength to them. Good reference books are surely more vitally needed in the complex world of today than they were in 1900. Even though the design of the modern American home makes books practically impossible, some really fine reference books might be granted space on the shelves.

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