

The College Library as Publisher

As librarian of Colby College, Mr. Rush has recognized and used the opportunity to experiment with an interesting aspect of library publishing.

ONLY nine college libraries are active as publishers.¹ This is a relatively small number when one considers the hundreds of college libraries in the United States and the wealth of material deposited in these which if known would be of immense value to scholars and students.

Perhaps a rather detailed account of the publishing done by the Colby College Library during the past seven years, demonstrating what a library can do in making known the wealth of its special collections with little or no actual expense to the library, might be of interest to other libraries.

Our first such undertaking was in 1936 when the library staff felt that its Thomas Hardy collection had grown to such an extent that a checklist of the collection would be of value to librarians, teachers, and students. Through the cooperation of the college treasurer, the college financed the publication of two hundred copies which sold for one dollar and fifty cents each. After the publishing arrangements were completed, we prepared a mailing list of some five hundred libraries and Hardy students whom we thought might be interested in owning a copy. A one-page printed announcement was mailed out to

these five hundred prospects. The book was copyrighted, and an announcement of the publication was listed in the *Publishers' Weekly*. Also some local publicity was made of our new venture in several of the newspapers in the state. By the end of the first year, these announcements brought requests for some one hundred twenty-five copies. At this time orders had almost entirely ceased to arrive, so a follow-up letter was mailed to those on the original mailing list from whom we had not yet received orders. This time a mimeographed letter was sent. The entire two hundred copies were completely sold out within four years after publication, and the college treasurer had been reimbursed for the original outlay. It was evident from the number of libraries buying the checklist that libraries found it a useful reference volume.

Our next bit of printing was a two-page invitation to an exhibition of Thomas Hardy material held in the Colby library from June 6 to June 21, 1937. In this instance the printing cost was assumed by the college with no expense to the library. In addition to this the Colby chapter of Phi Beta Kappa financed the printing of one hundred fifty copies of a four-page souvenir program, a striking feature of which was a facsimile of the manuscript of Hardy's poem *To Shakespeare*. In almost any college town there are to be found similar organizations which are willing to help finance such worth-while projects. The library financed the print-

¹ Dwyer, R. F., comp. "Directory of Publishers." *Cumulative Book Index*, 1942, p. 1239-68.

ing of two hundred copies of a sixteen-page catalog describing the two hundred items on exhibit. Colby had been receiving regularly many items on an exchange basis, but up to this point there was nothing to offer in exchange, so the library felt justified in undertaking the publication of this catalog. The response from the libraries receiving the catalog as an exchange and from the publicity received from it, led us to repeat the experiment. On May 7, 1938, commemorating Robert Browning's birthday, we published an eight-page catalog describing a Browning exhibit held in the library. The following month we issued a twelve-page catalog entitled *A Jekyll and Hyde Exhibition of Books by and about T. J. Wise in the Colby College Library*. Copies of these catalogs were sent to the editor of the book review section of the *New York Times*. Considerable space in the rare book department was devoted to them. In connection with the library's exhibition celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Thomas Hardy, we published a sixteen-page catalog describing the items on display, copies of which were sent to the libraries with whom we enjoy exchange relations.

In 1939 an unusually good addition to our Thomas Hardy collection was received from the library of Miss Rebekah Owen. In order to make this material known to Hardy students elsewhere, a ninety-five-page monograph was issued. Again we were successful in getting the cooperation of the college treasurer. Two hundred copies were issued at one dollar each, and early in 1941 the book was sold out.

In the autumn of 1939 the library tried a new scheme of meeting the printer's bill for exchange items. In October of that

year we exhibited what seemed to us an unusually good Robert Frost exhibition. This was written up so that it would make desirable news for the college paper and at the same time merit being sent to libraries, students of Frost, and collectors. The college paper accepted the article, and we had several reprints made before the type had been disbursed. The cost of these reprints, which were used as exchanges, amounted to very little.

By this time we had begun experimenting with new schemes for paying the printer's bill. The two which we tried the following year were both successful. We issued in book form for the first time two of Thomas Hardy's short stories under the title *Revenge Is Sweet*. They appeared in three different printings. The twenty-five numbered copies of the first edition sold at fifteen dollars to collectors and libraries wishing first editions. The second and third printings were for exchange purposes. The demand for copies of the first edition was much more than we had expected; they were all sold within a short time, thus paying the cost of printing all editions.

As a usual thing, it may not be wise for a college library to go beyond its own resources when publishing. Here again, however, friends may be gained as well as valuable publicity for the library. Twice we have undertaken such a venture, but in both cases it was for the purpose of obtaining material in a permanent form for our own special collections. The work in preparing the material for publication required very little time of the library staff. Our first such undertaking was *A Descriptive Catalog of the Grolier Club Centenary Exhibition, 1940, of the Works of Thomas Hardy, O.M., 1840-1928*. This eighty-page catalog was prepared by

a member of the Grolier Club but was financed entirely by Colby College. However, not knowing just how the catalog would be received by libraries and in order to get the college treasurer to advance the money for the printer's bill, it was necessary to receive a written assurance from two of the Grolier Club members that they would meet any deficit that might occur. On that basis we published four hundred copies and have sold over two hundred and fifty copies at one dollar and fifty cents each. This has paid for the publishing.

In connection with our Thomas Hardy exhibit commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, we published a sixty-two-page illustrated catalog. From the newspaper publicity alone given to this exhibition, the library has completely sold out the two hundred copies which it had printed at one dollar each. Not only the local papers but also New York and Boston papers have carried many articles favorable to our publications. The *New York Times* twice devoted nearly a whole page in its book review section to this particular publication, and the *London Times Literary Supplement* gave it a full column on the front page. We sold copies to three foreign countries and have been unable to fill dozens of orders.

The library published (for exchange purposes) on Jan. 11, 1942, an eight-page pamphlet in connection with Colby's William James Centenary Exhibition.

The demands for *Revenge Is Sweet*, our first attempt at reissuing Hardy stories, led us to reissue two other little-known Hardy items, *The Thieves Who Couldn't Help Sneezing* and *Maumbury Ring*. The latter had never before been published in book form and had never been pub-

lished in America in any form. These two books were published by us in 1942 at two dollars each. They both received commendation in the *New York Times Book Review* section and were sold out within a few months.

Up to this point we had not really undertaken any big printing jobs—that is, big in a financial way. The largest one was the Grolier catalog, the cost of which was guaranteed by certain members of the Grolier Club. This time we wanted to publish a centenary bibliography of Hariana. The cost of printing one hundred fifty copies of this two hundred seventy-six-page book amounted to five hundred dollars and was paid out of the library's budget. Up to this point, we had more than broken even on all of our publications, so we decided to swing it ourselves. It took us only a short time to reimburse the library and in less than a year the entire one hundred fifty copies had been sold at five dollars apiece, netting the library a neat little profit. This was put aside for the use of future publications. Again considerable space was received in the New York and London papers.

By this time we were convinced that libraries and scholars were finding most of our publications of some interest and value. Lawrence C. Wroth devoted most of his column on "Notes for Bibliophiles" in the June 27, 1943, issue of the book review section of the *New York Herald Tribune* to the Colby library publications.

In order to make available in printed form more such information from and about the rare materials in our library, it seemed advisable to us to issue a regular quarterly bulletin. Thus, the *Colby Library Quarterly*, backed financially by the Colby Library Associates, made its first appearance in January 1943. Again we

took advantage of issuing a reprint for exchange purposes. This time it was *A Tennyson Exhibition* from the first number of the *Colby Library Quarterly*.

This year in commemoration of the birth of Henry James we issued for exchange purposes an eight-page pamphlet containing a list of the first editions of Henry James in the Colby library and a genealogical chart showing the various connections of the James family with Colby College.

We have just published a volume of Edwin Arlington Robinson letters to Howard Schmitt, printed by the Southworth-Anthoensen Press of Portland, Me. We were able to issue this volume at a reduction for all prepublication orders.

One of our next experiments will be in the bibliographical field. We hope to have ready for the printer early in 1944 a bibliography of the writings of Rufus M. Jones, who is a native of Maine and is "the greatest spiritual philosopher living in America since William James."

In becoming a publisher it is not neces-

sary to own a press; the local printer may be able to handle the job. However, unless the local printer is an exceptionally good one, it will pay in the long run to do business with a well-established firm even if you have to go quite a distance to obtain the services desired.

It should be a pleasure and certainly will pay dividends for any library if the librarian sees to it that occasionally some information is prepared regarding treasures which can be passed on to other institutions, scholars, research students, book collectors, etc. This does not mean that the library staff should do the actual work in preparing the material for the press, but they should be responsible for having it done. The library staff knows who of the college faculty are interested and capable of doing the actual editing. Their job is to get these people to do the work. The librarian should be a good judge of whether or not the material is really worthy of passing on to other institutions and know which institutions and individuals are apt to be interested in the material.

Canadian Agricultural Documents

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