AMERICAN PUBLISHERS' SERIES

A CRITICAL ESTIMATE

by

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One cannot be a librarian, bookseller, or student, without being continually confronted with books published in series. After some experience, the names of a few of the best known series, become as familiar and suggestive as the names of well known authors, but the large majority of series are unknown in this manner. This is not surprising when one remembers that the publishers are constantly announcing new series, and notes the large list in the appendix of the last volume of the American catalog.

In attempting to make somewhat of a critical estimate of American publishers' series, the subject has been approached from a librarian's standpoint, although the conclusions reached may be of value to those not engaged in the library profession. The librarian in purchasing books, is forced to make a decision as to the value of many of the series, and the advisability of purchasing all the volumes, provided funds permit, or only a selection. It was with the hope of aiding in this difficult matter that the investigation embodied in this paper was undertaken.

Nothing within the writer's knowledge, has ever been written on this subject; the work therefore has been based, on correspondence with reputable American
publishers, a careful study of printed material furnished by them, consultation of select and annotated lists of books, and conversation with scholars, who know the merits and demerits of many of the series from practical use of the volumes. The method by which information was obtained from the publishers was to enclose in a letter, explaining the reason for the desired information, eleven questions, with the request that the answers be filled in as far as possible, and returned.

The following are the questions which were asked.

What do you consider the work of an editor of a series?

Which do you consider the best one of your series (i.e. authoritative and well written) on each of the following subjects.

1. Philosophy?
2. Religion?
3. Political science?
4. Education?
5. Natural science?
6. Useful arts?
7. Fine arts?
8. Literature?
9. History?
10. Biography?

The following is the list of publishers, to whom the questions were sent. One star indicates that the publishers sent their latest cata-
logs and announcements, but did not answer the questions. Two stars indicate, that in addition to sending the catalogs the questions were returned answered.

Appleton, D, & Co.
Century Co.
*Crowell, T.Y. & Co.
*Dodd, Mead & Co.
Harper & Bros.
*Houghton, Mifflin & Co.
*Little, Brown & Co.
**Lippincott, J.B. & Co.
**Longmans, Green & Co.
**Mc Clurg, A.C. & Co.
Macmillan Co.
**Putnam's, G.P. Sons.
*Scribner's, Charles, Sons.
The replies of Messrs Longmans, Green & Co., G.P. Putnam's Sons, and A.C. Mc Clurg & Co., showed much thought and were very helpful. The catalogs and announcements received from the publishers, were supplemented by the trade lists and catalogs in the University of Illinois library, the study not being limited to the publications of the firms mentioned above.

In order to get an understanding of the different kinds of series and their value, it seems best, first to give a general definition of the term "series", and then
note the many variations. This method of procedure will give as it were a broad scheme of classification, by which the different series may be grouped, provided the ingenious publisher does not in the meantime create other variations.

The word "series", as applied to the publication of books is not defined in any of the standard dictionaries, but the commonly accepted meaning among publishers and librarians is; works on similar subjects, written in similar style by various authors, uniform in mechanical make-up and price, and having a series title in common, in addition to the individual titles of each work. The volumes of the series are issued at intervals, usually irregular, the number of volumes to be included in the series, unlimited, and often all the volumes of a series edited by some person, competent to supervise the work.

Examples.

College histories of art, Ed. by J.C. Van Dyke. Longmans, Green & Co.

At this point it seems best to make a digression and discuss a question which naturally suggests itself at the outset; what is the work of an editor and does it add to the value of a series. Several of the publishers answered the question on the work of an editor of a series, as has been noted, and information was also obtained from a professor who had contributed to an edited series. The reply of Messrs Longmans, Green & Co., sums up in the most satisfactory
manner, all the information obtainable on the subject.

"In general an editor of a series should plan the entire work, choosing the subjects, selecting the authors, and editing the manuscript. He should see that (a) the same point of view is taken by each author. (b) The subjects discussed should be treated as part of a whole, and that undue importance should not be given to minor subjects or individualities of the author. (c) To regulate the spelling of names of places (e.g. it would not do for one author to speak of Mohammed, and another of Mohomet.) It is usual for an editor to write a general introduction for the entire series, and sometimes especial prefaces. The above applies to honest, reputable work only. It is too often the case that the editorial work consists in merely writing a profunctory essay, to introduce a number of books got together with no system, or for no reason but that they are easily obtainable and indicate to the publishers a source of profit".

In studying the work of an editor of a series, it became apparent in conversing with several professors of the University of Illinois, that one cannot always be guided by the name of the editor of the series; for often the editor does not do his work as thoroughly as outlined by Messrs Longmans, Green & Co. and may be hampered by restrictions of the publisher. English men of letters, edited by John Morley, was used as an example of a series in which some inferior work is found, despite the reputation of the editor. Editorial work done by departments of universities, may generally be relied upon for careful scholarly work.
In regard to series which have no stated editor, it must in justice to them be said, that occasionally the editorial work is carefully done by the publishers, and may be equally as good as the work of a stated editor. We cannot therefore draw a definite line of value, between series having editors and those which do not, for the work must be judged by its merits, rather than by the reputation of an editor, or by the absence of an editor's name.

To return to the discussion of kinds of series; it has been stated in the general definitions, that the works composing series, are on similar subjects and written in similar style, but this is not always the case.

There are series composed of works on subjects which bear no relation to each other, the object of the series being merely to group works which can be used for educational purposes. For illustration see- The university series, Ed. by Professor William Knight. Chas. Scribner's Sons.

In this connection it is necessary to speak of series, which cover so many aspects of a broad division of knowledge, that it can hardly be said the volumes are on similar subjects, or written in similar style. The International scientific series, published by D. Appleton & Co. is the best known example of this statement. This and similar series illustrate a convenient method for grouping a number of popularly written books, with a view of having a better sale, than if they were published as isolated volumes. The point of the commercial value of series will be discussed later.
It has also been stated in the general definition, that the volumes composing the series are written by various authors. This is the general rule, but there will be found occasional series in which all the volumes have been written by one author. The treatment of the subjects in such a case will naturally be more uniform. This point is illustrated by Handbooks of music, by G.P. Upton, A.C. Mc Clurg & Co. Series of this kind are found particularly in fiction for children; the author giving a series name to stories which are similar, such as adventures and travels, or those which are sequels.

Series in general are not limited to the number of volumes; they may contain, but there are instances when the publishers and editors, desiring to treat certain phases of a limited subject, in logical development, map out at the outset the number and sequence of the volumes which are to compose the series. A good illustration of this limited treatment, is found in Epochs of American history, complete in three volumes, edited by Hart. Longmans, Green & Co.

In all the kinds of series noted up to this point, the majority of the works were prepared especially for the series, there being however in some series a few works which had previously appeared as isolated volumes.

Series entirely composed of material which had previously existed must next be mentioned, and they fall naturally into two divisions. Series which are composed of material on similar subjects,
and those which are composed merely of different forms of literature. These series can not be said to have their works written in similar style, but they conform in other respects to the definition of series.

Series composed of reprinted material on similar subjects, represent in general, material drawn from obscure and not readily accessible sources, and put into convenient and popular form. It will readily be seen that series composed of such material will be more or less valuable. The value depending largely upon the careful selection and editing of the material. A well known example is American history leaflets, edited by A.B. Hart & Edward Channing, issued bi-monthly. A. Lovell, N.Y. Another example of a slightly different character is found in Economic classics, edited by W.J. Ashley. Longmans, Green & Co.

The series which are composed of reprints of various forms of literature, (i.e. poetry, drama, fiction, etc.) are of several forms. The most valuable are those which are composed of the poetry and prose of famous authors, edited for educational use, and commonly known as college texts. Many of these series of college texts, contain valuable original work by the editors not to be found elsewhere. The following three series which are highly recommended by a professor of English literature will serve as examples.

English readings for students. Henry Holt & Co.

Temple dramatists. Macmillan Co.

In this connection the Riverside literature series published by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. which is so well known and widely used must be mentioned. Its numbers are issued periodically, and are composed of selections from the best American and English literature, edited for school use.

There are also a large number of series, composed of selections of the best literature, which are not designed for the use of students. These series are sometimes limited to a particular form of literature, as poetry or fiction, or include examples of all forms. They are issued by the publishers either in very cheap or fine editions; the object in both cases being to insure a successful sale. The series in cheap editions are of course in the majority, and the paper covered novel "library", such as Harper's Franklin square library and the Hudson library of G.P. Putnam's Sons, although not always made up of reprints, may be mentioned in this connection. The distinguishing features of these libraries or series, are regularity of issue, and yearly subscription rates for all the numbers, which may also be purchased singly.

The series published in fine editions are designed largely for holiday and gift books, and make very attractive volumes, as the Elia series of G.P. Putnam's Sons, and the series published by T.B. Mosher, Portland, Maine. An interesting although not an important item in regard to these series, was noticed in examining the list of publications of G.P. Putnam's Sons. They have reissued in less expensive
form, and under the series title, The world's classics, the more impor­tant volumes of their series, Knickerbocker nuggets. No other instances of this kind were noticed, although many others may exist.

The title of the last named series is suggestive of the variety in titles chosen by the publishers for their many series. One is almost inclined to think the publishers are hard pressed to find suitable series titles, in view of the fact of the many peculiar ones occurring in their catalogs. The following are a few which were incidentally noticed.

Black and white series.
Boy with an idea series.
Bric-a-brac series.
Dainty series.
Fly-leaves series.
Iris series.
Ivory series.
Jumbo series.
Odd number series.
Parchment series.
Phenix series.
Portia series.
All the various kinds of series, which the writer has been able to find, having been noted, it is necessary to form an estimate of their value as a whole, and to make some suggestions in regard to their purchase and use. In discussing the work of an editor of a series, the statement was made that often poor work is found in a series despite the fact of a good editor, and this fact of the intermingling of good and poor work is true of all series. There are no series of which all the volumes are uniform in value; therefore every volume must be judged apart from its series connection, on its own individual merit.

It naturally follows that the publication of works in series is largely of commercial value, the publisher being the one who derives the greatest benefit from them. Messrs A.C. Mc Clurg & Co., made the following statement in a letter replying to the questions which were sent to them. "Very brief experience in publishing books convinces the thoughtful publisher, that books which can be properly and intelligently grouped in series, have a much better chance of a successful sale than books published merely as isolated works". It will be remembered that this point was mentioned in reference to series similar to the International scientific series, and it may also be said that a series must be popular in form or designed for use as text books, in order to be very successful. The reputation of a series may be established by a number of good volumes, and then inferior work may be put into the series.
In view of these facts, purchasers or users of works published in series, must be watchful and discriminate wisely in making selections, for it will be found in some cases, that an isolated work will treat a subject more satisfactorily than a work in a series. These remarks do not of course apply to series made up of reprints of the work of famous authors, the only difficulty in regard to such series being to obtain careful criticism of those edited for educational use.

It is not necessary in view of the object of this thesis, to outline methods for determining the value of individual works, for the librarian is familiar with the tools for this purpose; book reviews and reliable annotated lists. In this connection however it may be said that a few critical notes on certain selected series, may be found in Leypoldt & Iles, List of books for girls and women and their clubs.

In conclusion the following carefully selected list of important series, which are worthy of careful consideration, is given. This list does not include any of the series previously noted as being made up of reprints, and is confined as the entire discussion has been to American publications. It must be said however in this connection that a clearly defined line can not in all cases be drawn between American and English publications, because of the fact that several publishers have both New York and London houses. The recommendation of professors competent to judge works on the several subjects represented by the series, has been obtained for.
every series given in the list, which is as has been intimated a select list of the more important series.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Editor</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
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<tr>
<td>American history series.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chas. Scribner's Sons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>College histories of art.</td>
<td>J.C. Van Dyke.</td>
<td>Longmans, Green &amp; Co.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Epochs of modern history.</td>
<td>E.E. Morris, J.S. Phillipotts, &amp; C. Colbeck</td>
<td>Longmans, Green &amp; Co.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great educators.</td>
<td>N.M. Butler.</td>
<td>Chas. Scribner's Sons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harvard historical studies.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Longmans, Green &amp; Co.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Library of economics and politics.</td>
<td></td>
<td>T.Y. Crowell &amp; Co.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>Publisher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Makers of America.</td>
<td>Dodd, Mead &amp; Co.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Periods of European literature.</td>
<td>George Saintsbury. Chas. Scribner's Sons.</td>
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<td>Questions of the day series.</td>
<td>G.P. Putnam's Sons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story of the nations.</td>
<td>G.P. Putnam's Sons.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Studies in economics and political science.</td>
<td>Longmans, Green &amp; Co.</td>
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<td>Twelve English statesmen.</td>
<td>Macmillan &amp; Co.</td>
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