

Review Articles

Paperbacks

The Paperbound Book in America: the History of Paperbacks and Their European Background. By Frank L. Schick. New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1958. xviii, 262p. illus. bibliog. \$7.50.

There is a whole generation of readers today which must take completely for granted the profusion of paperback books on sale in drug stores, subway and bus stations, supermarkets, and other places likely and unlikely. The pattern for paperbacks had already been established when this generation came upon the reading scene, and its members, if they ever think about it at all, probably would not admit that there are any unlikely places to find printed books offered for sale, and would find it hard to believe that there was ever a time when things were any different. But just a half step ahead of this generation is the one which can remember when things were different. Its members can often be identified through their inclination to refer to paperbacks generically as "pocketbooks" in the same way and for the same historic reason their parents spoke of electric refrigerators as "frigidaires." These are the people who are bringing up their babies on multiple copies of the paperbound edition of Dr. Spock (having learned that when the baby has attained sufficient mobility and strength to reach and tear up books, it is time for a new copy of Spock, and probably for a new baby as well), and the ubiquitous paperback has become so much an accepted part of their lives, with Spock for the nursery, cookbooks for the kitchen, dictionaries for the reference shelf, and home repair manuals for the workshop, that they too are beginning to lose sight of the fact that the flow of paperbacks grew from a trickle to a deluge during the last fifteen years.

It is appropriate, then, that a formal, documented history of the rise and diffusion of the paperback should appear now so that

this development can be placed in its proper perspective. This perspective, as it is delineated in *The Paperbound Book in America*, establishes the evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, development of paperbacks. To be sure, the year 1939, when Pocket Books, Inc. launched its first ten titles, can be cited as the opening phase of what appears to have been a revolution in publishing, but, as is shown in this book, the revolution was not in the publishing format but rather in the methods adopted for promotion and distribution. To support this contention the history of the book is traced from the very beginning of printing, with emphasis laid on the various attempts to extend the ownership of books, and their consequent influence on ideas and people, by reducing production costs. Viewed in this light, the paperback of today, everywhere available and priced within reach of virtually everyone, is the culmination of the effort which began when the printing press made it possible to multiply copies of books; was advanced by the scientific and technical developments which yielded cheaper paper, and cheaper and faster methods of typesetting and binding; and brought to fruition only within the last twenty years, when radical changes in distribution and promotion techniques finally tapped a market to match the productive potential.

The first part of this book is devoted to the history of inexpensive book publishing (a term which is sometimes, but not always, synonymous with paper covers), in Britain, continental Europe, and in the United States prior to 1930. To a certain extent, of course, this is a summary history of the book, the details of which have a familiar sound to anyone who has an interest in the subject. But it is told from the special standpoint of this study so that the Tauchnitz editions, Penguin Books, the American dime novels, and cheap "libraries" of the nineteenth century assume their proper place in the progression toward the contemporary American paperback.

Part II is given to a topical and chronological account of American paperback publishing between 1939 and 1957, including an account of the government's entrance into the paperback field (in cooperation with the

Council on Books in Wartime) with its Armed Services Editions, those convenient and well-chosen books which made bearable the inevitable and interminable military formation, waiting in line; the textbooks published for the Armed Forces Institute; and Overseas Editions, Inc., a joint government and private enterprise project which made possible the widespread distribution of cheap books in the liberated areas of Europe and Asia late in the war. Other topics covered in this section include a summary of changing techniques in the manufacture of paperbacks, a survey of the observable trends in the kinds of titles produced, distribution methods and facilities in both the United States and abroad, and relationships between authors and publishers. The last is concerned with contracts and royalties, especially as they differ between hard- and soft-cover publishing. There is also a brief history of the censorship of paperbacks, an activity which has had to adapt itself to the peculiarities of this form of publishing and has done so with a degree of success that makes many people uncomfortable. The treatment of each of these subjects is necessarily brief; each of them is worthy of getting, and capable of supporting, extensive study, and one of the values of Dr. Schick's book is the definition of areas which undoubtedly will be given detailed examination.

In many ways Part III, a list and description of the contemporary American publishers of paperbacks, is the most interesting and valuable section. Here is where the revolutionary aspects of the paperback phenomenon, the promotion and distribution methods, are discussed, with a rather long account of the cheap book's breakthrough to the mass market through the pioneer efforts of Pocket Books, Inc. Like all contemporary history this account has been created largely from the written and spoken recollections of the participants and still retains much of the excitement of the events. In addition to Pocket Books there are brief histories of about seventy-five other producers of paperbacks, divided into groups of exclusive paperback publishers, magazine, trade, textbook, religious, and university press publishers. The list is impressive, even to one who conscientiously searches the racks of a

well-stocked store at regular intervals. Inevitably, considering the still burgeoning state of paperback publishing, the list is not complete; it was probably incomplete the day the final draft of the manuscript went to the printer and would require a quarterly or even a weekly supplement to keep it up to date. But as it stands it is an eloquent testimonial to the flourishing state of paperback publishing to about the latter half of 1958, and also a very useful reference tool for identification of the various paperback lines.

This study is accompanied by eight pages of illustrations and completed by a selected bibliography. The illustrations, photographs of some of the stages in the development of the paperbound book, add little to the dimensions of this survey, although it must be admitted there will be a mild surprise for many in seeing the picture of a paperback incunabulum (Hans Schönsperger's 1482 edition of *Von Ordnung der Gesundheit*), a certain pleasure in viewing the busy pictorial covers of the dime and nickel novels, and a little nostalgia in re-encountering the no-nonsense military covers of the Armed Services Editions. The balance of the illustrations are of contemporary paperbacks, and while they admittedly show trends in cover art, as well as a trend can be shown this close to the fact, the covers reproduced are too familiar, either as titles or as types, to have much impact on the contemporary reader, although changes in taste and technique may make them more meaningful in the very near future. Although the bibliography necessarily includes many of the same titles that turn up in support of any history of the book, the section devoted to periodical articles and separate book chapters will send the searcher to journals he normally might not consider, titles like *Chemical Week*, *Law Library Journal*, *Chemical Age*, and *Business Week*.

It always seems a pity when books about books are not the best examples of their kind, and typographically this book leaves much to be desired. It is also regrettable when a title which deserves a permanent place in the bibliography of bookmaking exhibits so many typographical errors. Neither of these elements affects the content of the book and is probably only further

evidence of the kind of sentimentality self-proclaimed book lovers like to allow themselves.

There is increasing evidence of a quickening interest in the history of American publishing. This interest is bound to result in much more being written about paperbacks and their part in the reciprocal relationship between publishing and society. Points of departure for dozens of studies are established by *The Paperbound Book in America* and it should form a foundation from which further investigations will arise.—Howard A. Sullivan, *University of Detroit Library*.

Information Storage And Retrieval

Information Storage and Retrieval—Theory, Systems, and Devices. Edited by Mortimer Taube and Harold Wooster. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958. 228p. (Columbia University Studies in Library Service, no.10.)

The Air Force Office of Scientific Research, through contract with Documentation Inc., organized a symposium in Washington, D. C. on March 17-18, 1958, which was designed to explore the theoretical and engineering approaches to the solution of information storage and retrieval problems. More specifically, the recurring leit-motif throughout the symposium was the desire to secure the emergence of some "common agreement concerning the nature of the problem or problems and the direction in which solutions are likely to lie. . . ."

The careful preparation for the symposium is reflected in the first part of this publication, the six working papers which define the scope and limits of the problem, the historical solutions, the present state of theory, and of devices and systems, as well as the possible future tendencies in these areas. The rigor of concept formation is reflected in the "Terminological Standards," terms and their definitions as used in the working papers and as a guide to the invited discussants. In themselves, the working papers serve as a crystallization of the ap-

proaches to this field by the people engaged in the development of information storage and retrieval systems and concerned with the underlying theoretical constructions. The formulation of concepts, and the very language employed in describing the relationships under consideration, may strike an unfamiliar note to the traditional librarian without familiarity with the mathematical and computer-engineering flavored orientation of the text. Nevertheless, it requires no major adjustments to identify the library relatedness of the working papers, or to appreciate the purpose of the questions posed by each of them.

The discussion which follows the working papers, comprising the second part of this book, permits more than one assessment. If the success of the symposium were to rest on the agreements achieved through the reported discussion, it will have failed. To the extent that positive results are recognized, they emerge by exhibiting the wide divergence of views, the totally variant approaches, and the inherent difficulty of disciplining discussants with a diversity of background. Each of the discussion topics was related to the working papers and was introduced by a prepared statement delivered by one of the discussants. In a number of instances the discussion departed radically from the intended subject into quite unpredicted directions. Dr. Taube's introductory statement on "The Logic of Retrieval Devices" was followed by an animated and even emotionally charged discussion on the relationship between computers and the human brain, quite the liveliest discussion throughout the symposium; it did not, however follow from or contribute to Dr. Taube's discussion outline.

The editors faced a formidable problem in editing these discussions and reducing them to manageable size for publication. The working papers will undoubtedly have a longer valued reference use; the reported discussion, though lacking the preconceived structure of the working papers, will have considerable interest and value to the discriminating reader. Such discrimination will tend to seek comparisons with the eventual proceedings of the International Conference on Scientific Information similarly held in Washington in November of 1958. The par-