



The Association of American University Presses, Inc.
One Park Avenue, New York, N. Y. 10016 · 212 889-6040

Notes on the Remarks of

President William Sloane

at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American University Presses

June, 1970

We have much to give and much to take from each other. That is, in a very simple sort of way, what I want to talk about tonight. What we have to receive from each other, and what we have to give, not only to each other, but to the world in which we are and in which we serve.

But I do not mean wholly the "what" but also the "how." The "how" concerns ourselves, and the "what" concerns everybody. Thus, I suspect this homily may turn out to be a not always fortunate mixture of what appears to be God's Will of a Sabbath evening on the one hand, and some suggestions for calves foot jelly making on the other.

From time to time I shall employ the first person singular, but I hope to be forgiven for that on the grounds of length of service. I have come recently to recognize that Father Time and I are in an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation. So let me say at once that when I refer to the remote past before some of you were matriculated into anything, I do so for the sake of the youngest among us, who have the greatest stake in the past. My own is almost zero -- I survived it.

When I discuss the future, as I hope to try to do, I am addressing myself most particularly to my near contemporaries who, like me, have the largest stake in what is now to come. Their stake in the future is immediate and urgent and central.

And when I try to discuss the present, it is intended as talk about a year or so each way from this particular moment in calendar time and geographical space.

The opinions expressed hereafter are entirely my own, but I confess to hoping that you will find that some of them are as much yours as mine. If not, I hope that the disagreements will prove as useful as disagreements among us have often proved in the past.

First, I think we are, as a group, as an association, far more fortunate in many respects than we were a year ago at this time. I think so because I believe we are today more directly and usefully connected with the world in which we operate. More obviously, we have virtually achieved the

momentum, the professionalism, and the service usefulness we have hoped for from our own association.

I believe it also because we have been able to participate publicly and usefully in a broad spectrum of social action in which we have played our own good and valued share. I think here of our contributions to the work of the Joint Committee, to our continuing participation in the National Book Awards and National Book Week, to the work of several of our committees to creative enterprises such as the National Council on the Arts, the ongoing efforts to solve the problems of translation and cultural and professional interchange, and, though it may appear a controversial judgment in certain respects, to maintain and even enlarge a base for future internationalism.

We are stronger also because all of our numerous committees have worked toward increased effectiveness, even committees like the one on production quality. I would have sworn a year ago the Production Committee could not be improved upon. Well, perhaps the committee isn't any better and it's just that I like the book selections this year a bit better.

We are stronger, too, because we have gone back to first principles and begun, through the Goals and Programs Committee, to test and check what we do as a professional association. I do not really believe that we ever, in earlier years, forgot to ask ourselves the basic professional questions, but we are continuing to do so, and in the two best possible ways -- the disestablishmentarian way and the antidisestablishmentarian way.

We are stronger, professionally, because we have learned in this past year that the almae matres, the fostering mothers whose names we bear and whose houses we share, can also be in trouble beyond their human and professional resources to solve. Indeed, I think we have come to see that neither administration nor faculty were ready for what our present turned out to be. I hope later to say something about the equally obvious fact that we, as academic publishers were not ready either. Forgive an obviously over-easy comment: Our own books have hardly prepared us for what has happened to our mothers and ourselves.

We are, as you will discover in detail during the business sessions, managing our affairs with competence. In AUPS, and particularly in the Educational Directory, we have what a storm-wary sailor would call a sheet anchor to windward. In short, our association is solvent, it is working, it is receiving from many sides a notable degree of self-sacrificing and skillful support -- some twenty boards and committees, all active, attest to the fact that we believe in the values and usefulness of our professional commitment.

Beyond that commitment, furthermore, we have been developing an admirable solidarity in a very American way. Our regional meetings are increasing in number and scope, Our exchanges, not only of technical information but also of opinion and insight have increased year by year. Most of us today see ourselves in both a regional and national-international light.

We are sometimes divided in our opinions, as publishers ought forever to be in the interest of free speech. But we need not be divided beyond that point. Our methods should remain clear and directly subject to inspection and, if necessary, rejection. In this area of democratic approach to our professional association, we seem to have a long record of majority concurrence. But even if that unanimity does not endure always and forever, we are democrats and we do believe in that major tenet of democracy -- the acceptance by the minority of the decision of the majority,

All of us, furthermore, consider ourselves to be men of good will, as our sponsoring institutions believe us to be, and themselves to be. Why, then, do so many of us worry about what is going to be coming up next, what is going to happen to us? Let me not attempt to answer that question simply or at once. Instead, turn the clock back a year and look at what confronted us as elements of the university enterprise. What were the problems confronting us then?

First, then, was the question of ethnic minorities and their exclusion from the professional levels of the communications trades. We did not come out well on that level, once we took a look at ourselves. The able and quiet-voiced report of the committee on Education and Training proved, upon the solid basis of a well-planned questionnaire, that while our gross employment percentages were more or less nationally average, we had almost no Black or Spanish American or Indian voices among us.

Second, a year ago we found ourselves without a breath of a voice about what should have been a prime publishing responsibility of us all (as it has been of a few individuals among us), the environmental crisis. In a university press, every day ought to be Earth Day among the procurement editors. In this area our publishing has been bad enough to discourage all but the most academically specializing young people.

In the past year we have watched a set of protests against the war in Southeast Asia ricochet into protests also against the ROTC and university military involvement by even for God's sake, the Land Grant Colleges. The whole issue has become major on many of our home heaths. Yet few of us have published usefully in the area of military philosophy, strategy or history. In our post-World War II catalogs we have indicated a policy of military publishing abstention which has left the field, with a few honorable exceptions in our own ranks, very largely to a single imaginatively conducted commercial publishing imprint.

Who among us found any manuscript to publish for the young about Che Guevara? Who among us reconsidered the theories of Mahan and Clausewitz? As publishers we passed down the other side of the street and left it to faculty direction to decide what kind of manuscripts were going to be evoked. Our younger faculty members were often scholars who had not had any direct military experience -- as was far from the case in the forties and the fifties.

We have indeed suffered from the same sins as our brethren on the faculty. More specifically, faculties say that what they teach is what they say it is, and we, that what we publish is what our scholar-certifiers unto us say it is. It is this comfortable world which we can no longer enjoy. Our faculty friends have found themselves floundering in the face of the question of relevance.

They are no more equipped to answer this question than we are. The point is that they can no longer say of any manuscript we ask them to evaluate for us that it is or is not truly relevant, but only whether, in the view of the reader, it meets the prevailing standards of scholarly acceptability. To repeat the much-borrowed phrase from Yeats, our academic center has not held. There is a measure of challenge in that, at least for me.

Challenge or not, the fact is that not one of the problems which confronted us a year ago has diminished or been met and driven from the lists. Urban crisis is with us still and racial antagonisms and their social malfunctions are with us. The poor are still poor, and there is still the disgrace of hunger in the land. Our campuses are still unquiet, many of our best young people still disaffected. And so it goes down the long calendar of these 1969 troubles and storm warnings.

What is now worse is that a second set of social horrors has been added to the list of last year. We have each his own catalog of these new monstrosities of social configuration, and in mentioning my own guess as to the worst of them I do not mean that what wakes you in the middle of the night is any less fearful than what wakes me. But if I could eliminate from my own nightmares three ingredients, I might be able to sleep enough to awake refreshed against the older problems.

The first of these is the Cambodian adventure, broadly considered. I have been in the Far East, as others of you here also have. The horror of an extension of a hopeless Asian military commitment does not need any comment from me. For the young to be asked to fight a war without any patriotic feeling or emotional commitment -- to be asked to fight as a drafted body, requisitioned out of its human setting -- well, what was that we were saying in 1812 to the British about press gangs and the rights of the Yankee sailors?

The second is the Brocken-shadow of a grave recession. If it comes, it may well curb our publishing, damage our authors, demoralize our staffs, and cripple us from meeting the other challenges which confront us. We are mostly not corporation executive types but rather professional editors and bookmen. We cannot face a real recession without the utmost trepidation. We do not now operate at profits. We are subsidized. We cannot easily invent useful economies. And we have learned before that books and publishing early feel the axe of directed retrenchment.

The third of these nightmares of mine is perhaps worse than the two others combined. We have lost our most priceless asset -- the capacity and will of people, naive and sophisticated alike, to believe that professional and apparently disinterested people are to be believed when they say something. Our imprints, severally or jointly, have been damaged by the credibility gap which has everywhere in our world destroyed the special sanctity of professional communication. Our books are threatened with a loss of sanction.

I, for instance, can no longer automatically believe in the disinterestedness of an author on a topic of any appositeness to this present time of ours. Readers of my press's books will be equally wary of the very same words, no matter how skillfully edited and published. Side by side with the loss of credibility we have all watched the book distribution structure become overburdened with hasty publishing programs designed not so much to fill publishing gaps as to exploit one or another social crisis -- race, environment, urban decay and many others.

It is presumable by now that the books a university publishes are as much subject to student and faculty review as are the research grants, government contracts, and areas of special instruction which have been the targets of objection and sometimes violent protests in the past year. The fact that our publishing has largely escaped this kind of focal attention is basically a tribute to two aspects of our books -- their extreme specialization, which relieves them of the onus of general social irrelevance, and their blandness. Much of the latter attribute we owe to our procedures of manuscript appraisal.

What I have been talking about in the past few minutes is a series of simple and profound changes in our condition. Scholarly publishing now has more dimensions than it used to have. It has domestic, on-campus dimensions for both good and ill which we have not yet fully realized. It can no longer confine itself to the disciplines of scholarship and research, but must consider the human and social impacts of scholarship, research, and academic advancement.

Simultaneously, academic publishing is beginning to have a very varied and public impact which makes it the affair of many nonacademic people. A book like George Sternlieb's THE TENEMENT LANDLORD affects a whole city, even a whole nation, in a hundred ways. We cannot confine ourselves to our university bailiwicks even if we want to do so.

We shall find increasingly that the justification for our existence and the validation of our subventions is indeed that relevance for which so many students have been agitating. We shall need to make common cause and equal partnership with our faculty friends, but we shall need also to demonstrate that our contribution to the higher educational process in the United States is not merely as professionally qualified service personnel to faculty authors. In short, we shall need to place our publishing first.

If I am right about this -- and it could well be the subject of an entire speech -- it follows that what we here think and feel about the bitter and obsessive problems of the present moment in history is no more important than what each and all of our fellow citizens think and feel about these matters.

What matters infinitely more about us is what we feel and guess and judge to be the problems of the year 1980. Equally important, we matter enormously if we manage to do something effective, as publishers, about the year 1980. That means starting today, and it means accepting the enormous burdens of responsibility of many kinds which go with any such reorientation of a part -- but a very centrally important part of our publishing, of our planning and of our development.

We can do a great deal about the year 1980 by implementing the truth that serious publishing, if it be well and interestingly performed, prepares the key minds of a society for new knowledge and new social action. I need hardly cite the individual books and authors which have changed the course of American life. In my day, whole areas of awareness were opened up by book publishing. The Rivers of America series made the American land a part of each citizen's heritage. ROAD TO SURVIVAL and SILENT SPRING rang as many bells of alarm as Paul Revere ever set to swinging. The books of J.B. Rhine added a whole new dimension to the American vocabulary. In the thirties a series of impassioned books by foreign correspondents alerted American intellectuals to the nature of the Fascist horror. Books about the Dead Sea Scrolls changed much of the pattern of religious thinking in many segments of our society.

This surely is not a point which requires any emphasis from me. But in translating the general truth that books can and do alter the course of a society into the general procedures of academic publishing, a point needs to be made. Such publishing, to be effective, needs effective writing, and that means, among other things, the best possible editing. The

best possible editing includes copy editing, but it also includes a very great deal more -- a sense of style, a familiarity with the best modern writing in many fields, a broadly catholic approach, a strong sense of identification with the reader. This last is what separates the men editors from the boy editors.

In planning book procurements for 1980 we should give high priority to interdisciplinary writing. The American public, including American intellectuals, are not organized into academic departments, and even if that were not so, departments rarely speculate. And publishing for 1980, as I see it now, in 1970, commences as speculation.

Somebody once described the Powder River as being "a mile wide and an inch deep." The time has come for us to be a mile wide, and dredge for depth as we go along. We have been too narrow. It sounds ridiculous to say so, but I am convinced that we tend to be too academic. Our students are not academics, at least in undergraduate years. Many of our readers are not academic.

We shall need to do a much better job right away soon, and well before 1980, if we are to catch up with the rate of the changes in which we are living. We shall have to learn to evoke from our communities the books which 1980 will need for survival, and maybe even a few for delight. Obviously we cannot slough off the disciplinary, departmental, and service publishing which is a part of our reason for being. But the conveyance of new knowledge and the interpretation of existing knowledge, and the professional adaptation of those knowledges to the thinking people of 1980, that is our most important target.

Finally, let us congratulate ourselves upon our own good luck. We are born into a time where we are needed and where there is work for us to do. We are in good company, both here, among ourselves, and more widely abroad, on our campuses and in the mainstream of American intellectual professionalism. We conduct our lives in a society which, however restless and at odds with itself, still permits and believes in the individual contribution and still opposes regimentation. We have the strength and the tolerance for change. Our blessings far exceed our troubles.

The weekly editorial page of Publishers' Weekly, a page which is conducted with distinction and refreshingly balanced judgment, is headed each week by a quotation which I take the liberty of borrowing in concluding these remarks. The words come from the Preface to Maxims of the Law, published by Francis Bacon three hundred and forty years ago: They say: "'I hold every man a debtor to his profession; from the which as men of course to seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they of duty to endeavor themselves by way of amends to be a help and ornament thereunto."