

*W. Warder Norton
founder
and first president*



WARDER NORTON'S IDEA

*Storer B. Lunt
president
W. W. Norton & Company*



by George P. Brockway

Warder Norton had an idea. Like many good ideas, it was a simple one, and also harder to realize than to put into words. Years later, after the publishing house that bore his name was well established, he wrote it down for his colleagues:

Let us all make the necessary vows that we will stick to our business of publishing the best books we can lay our hands on and then keep our hands on them for as long as may be.

This statement, signed with the initials "W. W. N.," now hangs with Mr. Norton's picture on the wall of his company's conference room. On another occasion, Mr. Norton compressed the idea into the three words of the firm's slogan: "Books That Live." The statement and slogan still guide the deliberations of those responsible for the operations of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. In its concern for books of permanent importance, the firm has had, from its beginnings, a parallel objective to that of the library world.

Warder Norton incorporated his company in 1923 and published his first books in 1924. He had had no previous publishing experience but came to publishing through his interest in adult education and work on the board of directors of the People's Institute at Cooper Union and as chairman of the New School Association.

As an offshoot of this work, he had been instrumental in persuading his friend James Harvey Robinson to publish *The Mind in the Making*. He thus became infected with the publishing virus, and soon established his own company, originally called The People's Institute Publishing Co. The first books were issued in separate chapter-length pamphlets or "lectures" (most of them were indeed transcriptions of lectures), which were then gathered together in slip covers. This part of

Mr. Norton's original idea proved cumbersome; and within a year the name of the company was changed to the one it has borne since, and its books thenceforth looked like books, albeit distinctively designed ones.

The young firm was most modest in its beginnings. Mr. Norton and one assistant formed the staff and operated from a two-room suite of offices. On more than one occasion Mr. Norton himself delivered a rush order to the post office or to a New York account, carting the books in a child's express wagon.

Modest as the new firm was in size and material resources, its list was notable from the start for the inclusion of authors of the highest caliber. Among its earliest "Lectures-in-Print" were books by John B. Watson, Everett Dean Martin, and Harry A. Overstreet (the first book in the long and continuing Overstreet-Norton association was *Influencing Human Behavior*, now in its 30th printing and still actively selling). Other early Norton authors included John Dewey, Bertrand Russell, Thomas Hunt Morgan, Lillian Gilbreth, and Lancelot Hogben.

Expansion came rapidly. By 1930 the staff had grown substantially and included five of the present eight members of the Board of Directors. Two other staff members have more than 25 years' service. The fact that so large a proportion of the early staff is still active in the business has given the still relatively young firm a remarkable stability and continuity of policy.

The first lists of publications leaned heavily in the direction of philosophy and psychology, and here, too, expansion was rapid. Through the personal interests of Mrs. Norton, a list of books on music was soon launched. This list, steadily added to over the years, is generally recognized as the most distinguished in

America, and very likely in the world. Paul Henry Lang, Professor of Musicology at Columbia, and author of the standard one-volume history, *Music in Western Civilization*, which Norton published in 1941, is now music adviser to the firm and is general editor of Norton's ambitious History of Music Series, of which five titles have already been published. An interesting and successful experiment was the publication in 1951 of *Masterpieces of Music before 1750*, an anthology of relatively short musical selections. Subsequently Norton, in co-operation with the Haydn Society, underwrote the recording of these selections on three LP records, which have been enthusiastically received by the general public and widely used in the colleges.

Norton is world-renowned also in the field of psychiatry. In addition to many titles by Sigmund Freud, the firm is the publisher of the works of Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan. Other leaders in this field published by Norton include Franz Alexander, Erik H. Erikson, Otto Fenichel, and Jurgen Ruesch. Several of these titles have achieved astonishing sales: for example, English and Pearson's *Emotion Problems of Living*, a comprehensive introduction to the subject, recently extensively revised, has sold over 125,000 copies.

The firm was slow to publish fiction and even now seldom has more than three or four novels on any season's list. The quality of the firm's fiction, however, has been high. Henry Handel Richardson was one of the first novelists to appear under the Norton imprint; and recent lists have included critical and popular successes by Gerald Warner Brace, Clemence Dane, Igor Gouzenko, Douglass Wallop, Carl Jonas, R. Prawer Jhabvala, Elinor Pryor, and Charles O. Locke.

Although Norton has never published juveniles as such, the house has been gratified to find that a number of its successful adult titles have proved to have a large and continuing sale as books for older boys and girls. Foremost among these, of course, are Ralph Moody's engaging reminiscences of his boyhood (*Little Britches*, *Man of the Family*, *The Fields of Home*, and his most recent book *The Home Ranch*) and Paul Brickhill's moving and exciting *Reach for the Sky* and *The*

Great Escape (the latter recently re-issued).

The backbone of the Norton list continues to be what it has always been: the loose category known as general nonfiction. Here are books of information ranging from *Mathematics for the Million* to *How to Lie with Statistics*; autobiography ranging from *An American Doctor's Odyssey* through *Burma Surgeon* and *Fleet Admiral King* to *My Forty Years with Ford*; contributions to knowledge ranging from Cannon's *The Wisdom of the Body* to Ortega's *Revolt of the Masses*; delightful word-and-picture books like *Period Piece* and *The Silent Traveller in Paris*; works of illumination like Barbara Ward's *Faith and Freedom* and Edith Hamilton's *The Greek Way* and *Witness to the Truth*.

Given the solid nature of many of these books, it was natural that Norton should expand into the college field, and this was done in 1930, originally under the direction of Robert Farlow. Many of the trade books, especially those on music and psychiatry, find a wide acceptance in the colleges. In addition, the college department has a separate publishing program of its own, which is especially vigorous in English, Spanish, German, History and Economics. During 1956 the department published two handsome and compact anthologies, both in two volumes, both containing a million and a half words of the best reading, together with helpful historical and critical introductions. These are *The American Tradition in Literature* and *World Masterpieces*; the former is already used in 156 colleges, and both have found a wide audience of readers among the general public.

After Warder Norton's untimely death in 1945, Storer B. Lunt, formerly Vice-President and Sales Manager, became President. An editorial board, which had carried on the firm's publishing program under Mr. Norton, continued to direct the firm's affairs. This board now includes, besides Mr. Lunt, Howard P. Wilson, Robert E. Farlow, Katherine Barnard, George P. Brockway, Eugene P. Healy, and Eric P. Swenson. They have seen the firm double in size, while maintaining the same high standards, since World War II. They will continue to carry out Warder Norton's idea to publish more and more "Books That Live," and to find more and more readers for them.