

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (11th Edition)



HE reputation and the authority of the Encyclopaedia Britannica have for many years been household words in all English-speaking countries. To affirm that its authority has ever been acknowledged with frank and unqualified acceptance by all intelligent persons is to state no more than the literal truth. Its long career as the most comprehensive work of reference has given it during 140 years of continuous existence a pre-eminence which has never been approached—and appears to be unapproachable. In its own way it stands forth so conspicuously that no other book in any language can be compared to it. Regarded from the point of view of a vast literary monument erected by scholars, each successive generation adding to it, strengthening it, perfecting it, broadening its foundations, and widening its proportions, it has come to possess a character and a dignity all its own. It is, in short, the only work in which have been preserved the best traditions of the scholarship, the ideals, and the tireless initiative of the English-speaking race.

The last edition, which gave an entirely new survey of knowledge, was the Ninth, issued between 1875 and 1889. It was built on lines of greater comprehensiveness than any of its predecessors, and its literary contents reached a higher level of excellence than had previously been obtained. Since it was completed, the progress of discovery and the application of the scientific spirit to every branch of activity have resulted in a virtual reconstruction in the premises and conclusions upon which a large part of the knowledge of that day was based. It is not necessary here to recapitulate the lines along which this astonishing revolution has been made. The fact remains that a work affording an entirely new and original survey of universal knowledge, constructed on the same lines of comprehensiveness that marked the Ninth Edition and maintaining its high standing, was not only necessary—it was inevitable.

AN OLD REPUTATION: A NEW WORK.

Behind the twenty-eight volumes and Index of the Encyclopaedia Britannica now announced by the University of Cambridge stands the experience gained in the making of ten complete and original editions by various publishers, from Colin Macfarquhar in 1768 to The Times (London) in 1902. But the needs of the twentieth century call for something more than another revision, and the (Eleventh Edition) was accordingly designed as a new work from start to finish. The editorial cost alone—the sum paid to contributors, editors, and editorial assistants during eight years—has been £163,000 (\$815,000), more than twice the literary cost (£60,000) of the Ninth Edition. As a result of this vast expenditure, nearly all articles in the last edition have been superseded by new ones, and thousands of new headings never before published in the Encyclopaedia Britannica have been introduced. In those cases where a fresh survey, in the opinion of the most competent experts, could discover no better basis for an exposition of a subject than the article in the Ninth Edition, or its supplement, it has been carried forward with necessary alterations. Of the 40,000 articles in the new edition, eighty-five per cent. are entirely new and fifteen per cent. are traceable, with changes slight perhaps in extent, but often important in quality, to the last edition. It can be asserted with confidence that the large investment involved has resulted in the best and most conscientious exposition of universal knowledge the present day affords.

THE UNIVERSITY AND THE BOOK.

The passing of the copyrights into the keeping of an ancient institution devoted to learning will give the Encyclopaedia Britannica, for the first time in its history, the character of a public enterprise rather than that of a private undertaking on the part of one publisher after another.

The department of the University of Cambridge, known as the Cambridge University Press, was established nearly 400 years ago, and has been devoted to the publication of books held by the University itself to be of permanent value, thereby spreading its influence outside academic or local limits. The fact that the copy right of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Eleventh Edition) has passed into the keeping of the University will seem of good omen to scholars in every part of the world, for such a work possesses so vast a power for good that its dignity and stability should be secured from the vicissitudes of private enterprise. Nothing that Cambridge University has done to further the University Extension movement has given greater promise of wide usefulness.

The University of Cambridge (England)