

**PUTNAM'S HANDY BOOK  
SERIES. THE BEST  
READING: HINTS ON  
THE SELECTION OF BOOKS**

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Putnam's Handy Book Series. The Best Reading: Hints on the Selection of Books by  
Anonymous

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**ANONYMOUS**

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# The Best Reading.

HINTS ON THE SELECTION OF BOOKS; ON THE  
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PRIVATE; ON COURSES OF  
READING, ETC.,

WITH

A CLASSIFIED BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR EASY REFERENCE.



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## PREFACE.

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ONE of the most obvious conclusions of the intelligent reader who glances over *any* manual of this sort, will be that it is *incomplete*—that it certainly does not exhaust the subject.

This little book claims no exemption from the inevitable imperfections of all attempts of this class. Perhaps one of its merits may be its comparative brevity; and its sins of *omission*—numerous as they may be—will probably be more excusable, in the judgment of most readers, than would be the error of burdening such a manual with an inordinate collection of titles, indiscriminately copied from the enormous mass of publications which crowd the market.

We have aimed at a middle course between a meagre catalogue of a bookseller's collection, and the elaborate comprehensiveness of a general bibliography. Under some four hundred different themes or topics, we have quoted briefly the titles of such books on each subject as are best known, and most surely acceptable either in American or English editions. We have included in these selections only those works which are likely to be consulted by the general reader; and we have OMITTED (excepting a few leading specimens): I. Law Books. II. Theological and Religious Treatises. III. Sunday-School Books. IV. Technical works in Science and Art. V. School Text-Books. VI. Many anonymous and doubtful Novels.

Doubtless there are also accidental omissions of good books under the several departments which we *have* undertaken to fill: but this is inevitable in the present crude state of all sources of information as to recent publications. We have expended many months of patient labor in collating catalogues, both English and American, and we trust that a large proportion, at least, of all the best accessible books, relating to each subject indicated, will be found chronicled in our lists, under their respective heads.

EDITIONS—REPRINTS, ETC. In all cases where English books have been reprinted in the United States, the American editions have been quoted, rather than the original. In some instances, however, the English editions being also supplied in this market, and usually being superior to the Reprint, they are also mentioned.

PRICES QUOTED are, usually, the nominal retail prices of the publisher, for copies bound in cloth. These are frequently changed and modified; and, in most cases, libraries can be furnished at a considerable reduction from the published price, especially when many books are purchased. Many English publications have been largely reduced in price since their first publication; and the reduced price has been quoted in this volume, rather than the original price.\* Such European books as can be readily purchased in the American market are priced in American currency; others, imported only occasionally, are priced in sterling. The ordinary cost in cur-

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\* After most of these pages were stereotyped, the prices of Bohn's Libraries, for instance, have been reduced to \$3.00 and \$1.40 per volume.



rency, at present (January, 1872), when duty and expenses are added, is about 40 cents per shilling sterling, or \$8 per pound sterling; but this rate is variable. The present tariff, practically, adds about 40 per cent. to the cost of all European books except those more than twenty years old, which are now admitted free of duty. The exemption from duty can be claimed on all books when they are specially imported for incorporated institutions; but ALL purchasers are now exempted from paying duty on books printed prior to 1851.

In several instances we have mentioned works in their proper places that are now out of print, or that have not been found in booksellers' lists, and these are, therefore, not priced. Most of them may be found in some shape, or may be consulted in the older libraries. The **ADDENDA**, beginning on page 194, include titles of the latest publications, and also several which were omitted in their proper places. At the end of this list is a select catalogue of **BOOKS for YOUNG PERSONS**, followed by a list of the leading literary **PERIODICALS**.

The task of indicating in any adequate manner "the best" books on any one topic is obviously a delicate and difficult one. Any such comparisons are "odious," as well as arbitrary. In some departments we do not attempt it at all. But in others we have endeavored to give some aid in making selections, by marking those books which are presumed to be best, on the whole, for those who are making partial selections, according to their needs and their means. Thus:

*a.* means simply that the book indicated is probably

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the safest, on the whole, for those who want the best of the smaller works on the subject, at *moderate cost*.

*b.* means the best of the more important, elaborate, and more costly books on the same themes.

*c.* (used in a few instances) indicates a further choice for those who may require more than one book on the same subject. In many instances works of high character have not been marked at all; the choice will be made by the reader.

Works of Fiction are marked by a double sign, indicating, to some extent, the relative estimation of the best (recent) critics, as to each work, and as to the general position of each author.

In the plan and arrangement of this work, and the selection and classification of titles, we are largely indebted to the valuable aid of Mr. Frederick B. Perkins, whose suggestions in regard to "The Owning of Books," "Book Clubs," and "Courses of Reading," are given at the end of the Bibliographical list.

If, as will surely be the case, the judgment of others should differ from ours, and our suggestions of relative values should be in some instances reversed, we may still presume that our classification will prove to be convenient and useful. The excellent works of Bishop Potter, Pycroft, Prof. Porter, and others, will still be consulted for general counsel on the methods of selecting books, and of reading them to the best advantage; but we believe the present classified list of modern publications is more comprehensive, for its purpose, than any other now in print.

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The difficulty, in some cases, of assigning a book to its proper heading, is partly obviated by a repetition of the title in the places where it may be sought, or by cross references.

This tabular record of books now in the market is supplemented by a brief selection from the wise words of good men, on the general subject of books, libraries, and systematic reading—which are better worthy of consideration than any suggestions of our own could be.

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The PRICES quoted are, in nearly every instance, those for the books in cloth binding. The additional net cost of binding in "half calf extra" (the library style usually preferred) is for duodecimos from 75 cents to \$2 per volume; for octavos from \$1.50 to \$3.50 per volume.

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