

AMERICAN
LIBRARIANSHIP

AMERICAN
LIBRARIANSHIP
From A European Angle

*An Attempt at An Evaluation of
Policies and Activities*

By Wilhelm Munthe



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PREFACE

IN March 1936 I received a letter from the president of the Carnegie Corporation, Dr. F. P. Keppel, in which, to my surprise, I read that the Corporation was inviting me to make an unhurried visit to the United States and Canada at my early convenience, as a basis for preparing a report on present American library policies and practices.

In a more personal part of his letter, President Keppel explained that within the past few years the Corporation had furnished the funds for surveys of library conditions, nearly always conducted by Americans, in many parts of the world. These surveys, frank and sometimes almost brutally critical of existing conditions, had, he believed, done much good and would do more good as time went on. However, it occurred to him that services of this sort would come with better grace from those who were known to be willing and ready to take the same medicine which they had been prescribing so freely for others. He then consulted friends in the library profession and found them unanimously in favor of the extension of an invitation to a librarian from the continent of Europe to act as prescribing physician. They were also unanimous in naming the undersigned as their first choice.

No doubt there are those who will find fault with this choice, and let me admit right here that I share their feelings. The misgivings that I had in accepting the invitation reassert themselves with added force now that I am attempting to collect my impressions and fulfill the second part of my assignment—the writing of a critical account based on personal observation. In any case, it has taken time to digest the impressions of a trip that lasted from September to November 1936 and extended through 36 states and 4 Canadian provinces.

Fortunately, through my two previous trips I had become

somewhat acquainted with the principal libraries in the Boston-Chicago-Washington triangle, but this time I went far beyond the usual library itinerary. I had occasion to visit libraries in the Northwest, along the whole Pacific coast, throughout the mountain states and in the Southeast.

When an experienced American colleague and friend heard about the task before me, he wrote: "Do people take you for a commission? Or have you supernatural powers?" In fact, here really was a job for a full-sized commission, but to offset this my employer had given me a free hand. His advice, as I started on my far-flung journey, was "See what you like! Go where you like! Don't worry about statistics! Read our professional literature or let it alone! Talk with whomever you like, but don't trust anyone. It is your own personal impressions that we are after."

Well, I have tried to use both my eyes and my ears, and I have also talked to everyone, from leading personalities to young assistants. And a librarian can hardly keep himself from reading professional literature. So when I came home I started to wade through it, but soon realized that I would never finish that way. So I stopped short, took my notes and a few handbooks and retired to a country cabin about 100 miles from Oslo, and there this report took shape.

I have not made it my aim either to glorify American libraries or to track down their faults. It has been maintained by American skeptics that the overwhelming praise so consistently bestowed upon the libraries of the new world has some connection with the hospitality and affability that always greets guests from abroad. "Visitors hesitate to criticize the libraries of their hosts. . . . Certainly it is difficult for an American librarian to believe entirely in all the excellencies of American libraries, as sometimes portrayed by our visiting colleagues."¹ One can readily understand this when, for example, in a recent travel account one reads that the author has not "met a single librarian

¹Brown, Charles H., in *Festschrift Georg Leyh*. Leipzig, 1937, p.330.

throughout the whole rank and file of the profession who did not seem to be just fitted for the post he or she held!"

If I maintain a more subdued tone in my report it is not because there was any lack of hospitality, but because I have a definite assignment. For that reason, too, I do not find it fitting here to thank individual American colleagues for help and information. Nor is it at all certain that they would appreciate having their names appear in connection with this book. But to all who have shown me kindness and have given me of their time I herewith tender an invisible handclasp. I shall make an exception by naming here my three collaborators: my secretary, Mrs. Lizzie Prytz; the translator, Dr. John J. Lund of Duke University Library; and Mrs. Emily Miller Danton, who has prepared my report for publication. Let me add also my thanks to the American Library Association for its generous offer to publish my manuscript without any attempt at censorship or schoolmasterly corrections.

It is a well known fact that one word of criticism is remembered longer than ten of approbation. And should any of my American readers be irritated by what may possibly seem an unwarranted critical remark, I ask them to remember that I am merely exercising the prerogative that I assume is mine by virtue of being the European who has the greatest superficial and at the same time personal acquaintance with American libraries.

Finally, I ask my employer, President F. P. Keppel, to stand by me and hang out that American sign that all Europeans have heard about: "Don't shoot the pianist, he's doing his best!"

W. MUNTHE

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INTRODUCTION

IN a way I am responsible for the appearance of this book and for that reason I have been asked to contribute a prefatory note, but really there is little I can add to what Dr. Munthe himself has written. In his own Preface he tells how the book came into being and why. Whether the objective in mind has been reached is for the reader, and particularly the librarian reader, to say.

For the hundreds of us in this country who are fortunate enough to know the author, it is not only figuratively, but literally, true that his book speaks for itself. As I read, I can see in my mind's eye the author's powerful frame and vigorous gesture, and in my mind's ear I can hear his resonant voice. And this, by the way, is a tribute not only to the author but to the translator and editor as well.

No guest has been more welcome to our shores than Dr. Munthe, and he himself bears witness that we have been hospitable hosts, but there is nothing of the bread and butter letter in what he has written. There is a ring of sincerity in his praise, and, when he thinks we need it, he hits straight and hits hard. Incidentally, his treatment of certain aspects of American education is quite as frank as anything he has said about our librarianship. But "faithful are the wounds of a friend," and when our friend is also a skilled surgeon the wounds he may inflict will, I am confident, prove healing as well.

F. P. KEPPEL

I

America and Europe

THE American library movement had its origin in England. It came like a tidal wave, first to the Atlantic states, where it gathered force and impetus and then flowed out over the hills and plains of the rest of the new world. But later the tide changed and sent a refreshing stream back to Europe, reaching first the British Isles and then the Scandinavian countries. Today this library wave is breaking over the newer European states, and even the old conservative Romance countries are feeling the force of it.

But in the wake of this one there followed another wave in the form of a new spirit of scientific research, emanating from the old European seats of learning, first and foremost from the German universities. It reached the American colleges and universities, and not only brought with it more and more of Europe's historical book treasures and current scientific literature, but resulted generally in a strong European influence on American scholarly libraries.

Now the tide is about to change again. Perhaps, however, there will never again be just a single strong current in one direction across the Atlantic, but instead a reciprocating flow of secondary currents and undercurrents. There will be a continual give and take between the countries on both sides of the ocean; each will both teach and learn from the other. In any case, a fruitful field for cooperation is opened to the librarians of the old and new world.

But there is still a great deal of prejudice to be overcome. In the first place we have the old story of the mote in our brother's eye and the beam in our own. The east still suspects the west of superficiality, and the west in turn thinks the east is overly conservative. Many will

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Books and Reading in America and in Europe

THE Centennial Exhibition of Philadelphia in 1876 became the birthplace of the American Library Association but it also marked the last resting-place of the American Book Trade Union. This organization had fought for the establishment of a cultural book trade after the European fashion, with fixed prices and uniform trade practices. Its death brought a reversion to the unregulated practices of underselling, auctioning of remainders, subscription selling and agent solicitation, not to mention competitive pirating of foreign literature, thereby ruining the market for American authors.

Precarious Situation of the American Book Trade. The conditions under which the American book trade operates have improved but little since then. The most recent attempt at ordering the situation was made by the National Recovery Administration in 1934, when it introduced a "code" for the book trade. Among other things this prohibited underselling of new books within six months after publication. But no sooner had the beneficial results of even such modest protection begun to be felt than the Supreme Court invalidated all the NRA codes as unconstitutional.

It is no wonder that the ordinary American bookstore does not prosper. It lacks all the safeguards that the central and northern European countries have found it necessary to set up for the sale of that cultural instrument called the book. A European book dealer must have his professional training and must put up bond, but after that he can, even in the smallest provincial town, carry a large

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The American Public Library

IN the minds of Europeans, the American library movement stands out primarily as that gigantic endeavor to persuade a large, heterogeneous, pioneer population to turn to the book as the great fountainhead of culture. This task is of course one that every country must take up, but nowhere has it been done with such determination and zeal as in the United States. Nor has any other country produced such striking results.

But when we look more closely we discover that the credit for all this belongs neither to the federal nor the state governments. It is paradoxical but true that in the country with the highest library development the government has actually done the least for libraries. They have been left entirely to local initiative. Until recent years the federal government considered all library work outside the District of Columbia as none of its concern, and most state governments have confined themselves to the mere enactment of frame legislation.

However, it is not difficult to understand why public libraries have been forgotten or neglected by the states. America and Europe both had the old idea that they were a luxury that each community would itself have to provide for—if it felt the urge to do so. Only in connection with institutions of higher learning was a library considered an essential element. But even at the state universities there was a long period when the library led a very miserable existence, and to a certain extent it does so even today.

No Competitors. As mentioned in the foregoing chapter, it was natural that the need for public libraries should be felt more strongly in the United States, due to the lack of an organized book trade. In

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The City Library

WHEN a European librarian comes to America on a study trip, he immediately directs his course toward the great and renowned million-dollar libraries and plans his itinerary with a view to taking in as many of them as possible. There is something fundamentally wrong in this. He ought rather to concentrate his attention on libraries of the same size as those with which he is familiar at home, and which it is intended should some day benefit from his travel experiences.

But to the big libraries he is drawn as a moth to the light. And who will deny that it is the experience of a lifetime to wander from department to department in one of these enormous structures and see the functions of one's own library magnified to gigantic proportions? Each of the numerous diversified tasks that a single employee at home must find time for is here developed into a special routine or a separate branch of the service. Every process has, so to speak, been isolated and appears in its pure state. Details, that under less extensive circumstances could be ignored by the librarian or dealt with in hit or miss fashion, have here become so frequent and of such import that special techniques to handle them have had to be developed and inserted into the working routine.

Nowhere else can one get a more vivid impression of what a composite mechanism a modern library really is. As seen by the public it is a book exhibit and a bookstore with hundreds of thousands of individually selected books on open shelves, a giant reading club with dozens of study rooms for specialists, an unrivaled newsstand, a book storehouse of international scope, a museum of rare books,

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Lending and Reading

WHEN we come to the technical arrangements of the interior of the library building we enter a field where the United States has been the leader for nearly half a century. Europe has been able to sit back and enjoy the fruits of America's passion for experimenting. In the cases where we haven't taken over her improvements, it is usually because we simply haven't had the means to keep up with the American pace. The public library of Oslo, for instance, changed its charging system three times in the space of fifteen years, from 1897 to 1913, each time adopting a new American system. So, if we Europeans were to advance any criticism of American library practices, it would more likely than not be turned back upon ourselves as having been unable to devise anything better.

The Open Shelf. In the history of public libraries the most radical break with tradition was the introduction of free access, or the open-shelf system, around the end of the last century. This innovation seems to have originated simultaneously in the United States and in England, but America became the one to follow it through. After that it successfully invaded and established itself in all the northern and several of the central European countries. Open shelves are, however, still the exception in France and Germany—not to mention southern Europe.

Open access was such a daring step that there was no lack of pessimistic prophecies, some even on the ground that it was downright immoral to expose respectable citizens to such temptations.

Control of Exits. However, when it came to putting the system into

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The Departments

To attempt any detailed discussion of the long series of reading rooms for special subjects that are to be found in the big municipal libraries would take us too far afield. Throughout the 1920's a strong tendency toward departmentalization was in evidence, growing out of a desire to make the library a useful tool in the service of all the interests and professions represented by its public. There were, for example, separate rooms for history, sociology, business and industry, science, technology, music, fine arts, local history and genealogy. But this is an expensive set-up. It requires considerable duplication of books and presupposes a rather large staff of subject-trained librarians. And the depression has made libraries more cautious on this score. Several departments have instead been combined and the lines of division drawn less rigidly, as exemplified in the physical arrangements of the Baltimore and Rochester buildings.

It is only in the very largest libraries that the collections in these various departments can be said to reach the level of a real research library. The cost of the large number of expensive periodicals that would be required in each subject is alone enough to prevent this. But at any rate the important books are there and also the more representative periodicals, so that the non-professional reader can find the technical information he wishes and the professional man can keep himself posted on new developments. As the size of the library decreases, however, the stock of special literature drops even more, until it becomes rather a gesture toward knowledge than a real contribution. In the majority of departmentalized libraries the

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A Pessimist Looks at the Public Library

IN order to advertise the fact that its circulation of fiction had gone down in the last few years from 67 per cent to 58 per cent of the total, a certain library issued a triumphant leaflet portraying a battalion of stalwart non-fiction books making an onslaught on a band of weaklings labeled FICTION and driving them in wild rout across the battlefield.

As a victory bulletin we might say that it was slightly premature—fiction was still actually ahead. But what will be the ordinary taxpayer's reaction upon seeing such a picture? Heretofore the aim of all library propoganda has been to convince him that the circulation of books is in itself a worthwhile social function of the library. And now it suddenly appears that the library harbors two hostile forces. His first thought is bound to be that there is no sense in letting his money be used to support both belligerents—and so: no more money for fiction! Is this the effect the library intended?

Fiction versus "Non-Fiction." This leaflet—which, by the way, is used by several libraries—merely symbolizes in crude fashion the attitude that the depression has brought to the fore within the library world. And it has gained such general recognition that it can now almost be called a moral code. No longer is it proper for a self-respecting library to have too high a percentage of fiction¹ in its circulation. Non-fiction—an unfortunate negative makeshift to designate what we would call subject reading—is what counts.

Libraries have, of course, always encouraged the dissemination of

¹For the benefit of European readers it is perhaps well to mention that "fiction" is a considerably narrower concept than "belles-lettres" or "die schöne Literatur"—it includes stories, novels and tales, but not drama and poetry.

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The Best Reading for the Largest Number

UNLESS this excellent A. L. A. battle cry is to be a contradiction in terms it will have to be taken to mean "The best reading the largest number will read." Translated into buying policy, it can, even in theory, only mean buying from the level on which the patrons stand and upwards as high as they can be made to follow—and in practice it usually means simply striking an average.

Value Theory and Demand Theory. A compromise between two well-defined theories is thus involved. The one places the greater emphasis on literary values and the educational function of the library; the other introduces the democratic principle of the right of the majority to demand that a tax-supported institution buy the books they want. In the initial stages of the library movement the value theory had its day, but in the 1890's the demand theory began to gain ground, and at its door we can lay the responsibility for the great preponderance of fiction that still characterizes most of the smaller and medium-sized libraries.

As separate and clear-cut principles both of these theories are to be found only on paper, nor is there any point in discussing them before we have determined a standard of literary values and have made an analysis of the reading public. As a matter of fact, the last fifteen years have seen the growth of a considerable literature on these very questions. The material that has been brought to light is not all of equal importance, but our attention has been focused on various factors that have heretofore not been taken into account

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The Library and the Community

THE modernization of the popular libraries of northern Europe that took place at the turn of the century had as its controlling pattern the American public library, and thus brought about a certain uniformity and standardization, not only of methods and techniques, but also of administration. Hence there is today an amazing conformity in the structure of Scandinavian public libraries. In every case it is the city council, elected by popular vote, that organizes the library and appropriates money for building and operating expenses, in exactly the same manner as for public utilities and other civic enterprises. The city council also appoints a library committee to act as intermediary between the librarian and the proper municipal administrative body. It is, furthermore, the council that fixes all salaries in accordance with the regular municipal scale, and makes all the more important appointments—having first invited suggestions from the librarian and the committee. In the four northern countries there are very few deviations from this arrangement.

Government and Administration. Consequently, a Scandinavian visitor to the United States cannot help being surprised to find that such wide diversity prevails in the elements of municipal library administration. It may possibly also be that our American colleagues did not themselves realize how great this diversity was until Carleton Joeckel in 1935 published his great work, *The government of the American public library*—probably the most thorough-going scholarly monograph in American library literature.

From this investigation, the 310 cities with over 30,000 population

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The Regional Problem

A GLANCE at the map of the United States, with its many rectangular shaped states, each divided into counties and these again into six-mile square townships, immediately gives the impression that here must be the ideal country for regional library organization. How convenient and how simple! But it is not long before the realization dawns that this checker-board dissection is one of the greatest hindrances in working out a rational plan. The surveyors who laid down the boundaries seem to have had slight ability to foresee the development of traffic arteries or population centers.

But the administration of all these divisions must at any rate be simple and free from the mass of petrified traditions that we are burdened with in Europe? The fact is, however, that these many hundreds of entities within each state constitute each a sort of miniature republic and, in line with the general American tendency, further subdivide their own territory and impose special taxes for every new social undertaking. As an example, there is Wayne county, which comprises the Detroit metropolitan district, and contains nine cities, mostly adjoining or surrounded by Detroit, with eighteen townships and sixteen villages. In this one county, which is of average size, we find 145 separate governments, 100 of which are of some importance. There is also the further division into 113 school districts, and many others. Each of these units levies its own taxes.

Haphazard Growth. Coming to the library situation in Wayne county, we find the confusion even greater. Five cities have their own public libraries—exclusive of special libraries; one city has a

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A National Library Service

EVEN if each state were to appropriate sufficient funds to wipe out the discrepancies among the libraries of the various communities within its borders, this would still be but a step on the road toward uniform library service for the whole nation. The inequalities in the financial resources of the several states would still remain. We need only mention the enormous difference between California, with \$4,007 per capita wealth, and Mississippi with \$1,216; or between New Jersey, with a population of 537 per square mile, and Colorado with 10.

A. L. A. Asks for 100 Million Dollars. Hence, it was entirely reasonable that the American Library Association should consider the question of federal aid at the time the depression set in and the federal government began giving grants of millions of dollars to provide employment and keep social institutions functioning. In 1931 the Council proposed that the Association apply for a government grant to be expended over a period of ten years for equalizing and stimulating county and other rural public library service. The figure was set at \$100,000,000—a sum big enough to take away the breath of any European librarian—but in those days Washington was no niggard. The matter came up again later at several yearly meetings, but with the figure reduced, first to sixty and then to fifty millions, and the purpose expanded to include library facilities in general.

It was obvious that if the government should appropriate a sum of this size, which would amount to federal financing rather than federal aid, Congress would also reserve to itself control of its dis-

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The College Library

THERE is nothing more difficult for a continental European to understand than the American liberal arts college. We ourselves have nothing that corresponds to this half university and half *gymnasium*, that every year absorbs upwards of a hundred thousand American boys and girls in their late teens, and four years later sends them out into life's struggle with a social upper-class diploma, robust in health, rich in pleasant memories, and aglow with the light of general education, along with which we detect a faint trace of scholarship.

The expression "upper class" is not to be taken literally. In fact, college students come from nearly all levels of society, for, in America, as we know, young people go to college either because their parents did or because they didn't. Later on, too, we find college graduates in all walks of life. Actually college graduation now means little more than a high school education did a generation ago. As Carl Sandburg has so wittily said: "Cauliflower is cabbage with a college education."

What a College Is and Is Not. A liberal arts college—and this is the only type that concerns us here—is not intended to be a university kindergarten nor a miniature university. Neither is it meant to be a vocational school; it has a special place of its own as an institution devoted to laying the foundation for the humanistic and cultural growth of the individual. It is the business of a university to explore the universe, of a college to explain it. Hence many of the advocates of the college idea view with sorrow the frequent tendency to narrow college work down to specialized departmental work lacking a higher

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The University Library

IN the year 1865, Daniel Coit Gilman, librarian of that venerable institution, Yale College, asked for an assistant to keep up the fire in the library stove. His request was refused, and he resigned. Today Yale has a monumental library plant that houses two million volumes and employs a staff of 200 persons. In 1876, the same D. C. Gilman founded Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Patterned along German lines, it became the first really American university to engage in productive scientific research on a large scale and on the same high level as European universities.

These two facts, perhaps better than any others, give an idea of the rate at which American university libraries have grown within the last two generations. At the same time they indicate the two distinct traditions that the modern American university has tried to combine: on the one hand the old English college tradition, and on the other that of the German university. The latter of these, however, was unable to manage without the support of the former. Even Johns Hopkins University, intended primarily for graduate work, had to include a small undergraduate college.

Liberal Arts College and Research University. This peculiar combination of an English-American liberal arts college and a continental university is what makes it so difficult for European visitors to appreciate the problems that American universities, both state and endowed, are facing today. A glance at one of these peculiarly American institutions shows us an enormous undergraduate college, a superstructure of a graduate college with much smaller enrollment, and a row of annexes in the form of professional schools for

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Education for Librarianship

IN Europe we are accustomed to hearing the library schools of the United States spoken of as one of the strongest assets of the American library movement, so it will no doubt come as a shock to many to know that no library institution has been subject to more violent attack than these particular training schools.

Melvil Dewey's Start. It was the categorical necessity of supplying the personnel requirements of such a large number of libraries, either in the process of rapid growth or in the initial stages of organization, that gave birth to the American library school. Melvil Dewey started the first one in 1887 while he was librarian at Columbia College. This was a one-year school and quite elementary. There were but 22 students in the first class, and for the first two years the school existed as a loose appendage to the college, and that by sufferance only. Columbia was not sorry to see Dewey take it along with him to Albany, when he became librarian of New York State Library two years later. As early as 1890 one of the members of the first class, Mary Wright Plummer, founded Pratt Institute School of Library Economy, and in the course of the next two years two other women graduates organized their own schools. This sort of intrepidity never fails of notice in Europe.

The curriculum in these early library schools was very simple: cataloging, classification (mainly according to Dewey's system, which was thus effectively propagandized) and other routine processes, with practice in actual work and in library handwriting (another of Dewey's inventions). Later there were courses in book selection and reference work and in the history of libraries and of

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Advanced Courses in Library Science

BESIDES the University of Chicago there are now four other universities whose library schools make it possible for the ordinary student to continue beyond the first-year curriculum. They are Columbia, California, Illinois and Michigan.

Specialization. As a rule this advanced work leads to the master's degree, at the end of a year devoted in part to a deeper penetration of the subject as a whole, and in part to more intensive specialization within its several branches. Technique and routine are relegated to the background and instead the way is opened for combining the library course with other studies that meet the needs of prospective librarians, whether in chemical, medical, or any of the various other types of libraries.

But the emphasis tends, by and large, to center itself about the writing of a thesis for the master's degree. So the immediate result of advanced study manifests itself in an ever-increasing row of type-written theses on the shelves of the library school, where they lead a fairly unnoticed existence.

Value of the Master's Thesis. It is true, of course, that the student's interest in writing such a dissertation rests in the first instance on the consideration that it is the means of acquiring a useful academic degree; but at the same time it does serve to introduce him to the principles of active research. In this one instance, at least, he has been compelled to go to the sources himself and has thus set up a counter-balance, as it were, to the passive and superficial acquisition of information that of necessity characterizes the first-year curriculum.

XVI

University of Chicago Graduate Library School

EVEN those European librarians—and their number is by no means small—who are constant readers of the excellent publication, the *Library Quarterly*, have difficulty in placing this “super-school.” It is obviously of a different type from the French *École des Chartes*, nor can it be compared to the training given by European universities for advanced library service.

Well, American librarians are themselves a little hazy about the status of the Chicago school, which is perhaps one reason why it has not been accorded that central position to which it would naturally be entitled in the development of the American library.

Need for an Institution for Research in Library Science. The school originated out of a desire to make library work subject to scientific study, from a cultural and sociological point of view. Not that the majority of actual workers in the profession felt any such desire very keenly—on the contrary. Big library chiefs flattered themselves that librarianship was an art, not a science. Other librarians were simply empiricists and pragmatists, relying on their own experience in the trial-and-error school, or borrowing methods that had already proved their worth in other libraries. They did not bother themselves about investigating the principles upon which these methods presumably rested. In the last analysis, they looked at the whole profession of librarianship from within, and were more concerned about the opinions of their colleagues than about the changing demands of society. So they were not in the least attracted by the

XVII

Librarianship a Feminine Vocation?

THIS is a touchy point. But we cannot avoid saying something about the overwhelming preponderance of women in the library profession. It is a situation that has obtained ever since Dewey started his first class in 1887, with 19 women and 3 men. Dewey himself foresaw that women were going to be forced out into the vocational and professional world, and it was his idea that they had a better chance in libraries than perhaps anywhere else. Women liked to work with books and literature. It was a quiet sort of business, in which even a timid soul could do good work, without having to come in contact with the coarser side of life. Nor was library work as nerve-racking as teaching.

Library Schools Attract Girls with and without Initiative. Furthermore, Dewey's elementary and didactic method of instruction was rather well suited to women, who found it easy to accept and subordinate themselves to his dynamic personality. And later it developed that for those who had personal initiative and independence there was a broad field of action in the library world.

On the other hand, it is true that right from the start but few men were interested. In those glorious days of "progress" there were so many more attractive pursuits open to them. So it was for the most part only those with strong leanings toward literary studies and activity that sought admission to library schools. From an economic standpoint a library career was not so bad for a single woman, but it had little to offer a man intending to start a family.

Influence on Salaries. Economically, then, there developed a vicious circle: Women took over the library positions because the low salaries

XVIII

The Staff

IN comparing the position of the personnel in European and American libraries, we can best begin by noting two opposite attitudes toward the members of the profession. According to one, the librarian is the representative of the state or the community, vested with a transcendental executive authority. According to the other, he is simply hired "on efficiency and good behavior" to perform a certain job for a definite period or at the pleasure of a governing body. The first approach we find best illustrated in the old world; the other is, or was, common in the new. Probably neither is to be met with in its extreme form any longer, since rapprochements between the two are constantly taking place, yet it is true that they are still quite distinct.

Not until we come to America do we European librarians realize how fundamentally bureaucratic we are. We come from countries whose political administration has long been in the hands of a traditional office-holding hierarchy. In the course of generations there have been evolved fixed requirements for appointment and promotion, definite grades, titles, salaries, age limits and pensions. The older national and university libraries are merely reproductions in miniature of the government's hierarchical pyramid. Even the newer public libraries that followed American models are now trying as far as possible to make their internal organization correspond to that of the city administration as a whole. When we think of a library's personnel requirements we think in terms of regular grades of service and fixed salary scales.

Hence the situation in American libraries strikes us as extremely

XIX

Library Buildings

IT was not my original intention to discuss library buildings in this survey; I was going to content myself with referring to the English translation of the account I wrote after my first trip in 1930.¹ But now that I have decided to take up the subject here, I do so not merely because the United States has been the leader in this field for the last fifty years, but because a library building is more than just a place where library activities happen to be carried on—it is an inseparable part of these, an actualization in stone and steel of the aims and purposes of the library. I shall, then, attempt to outline, as well as can be done without the help of pictures and floor plans, my own interpretation of the main lines of development as exemplified in the more recent library buildings.

A. UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES

With the building of the Boston Public Library (1890), we have the beginning of the modern American type of design for both university and public libraries. It was characterized by the entrance in the center of its broad front, the monumental central staircase within, and the long rectangular main reading room on the second floor—the stacks occupying the wings, with an open court in the middle. The difficulty in this arrangement was that the only possible place for the delivery desk was at the edge of the stacks on one side of the building, and from here the distances to other sections of the stacks were unnecessarily long. Yet we find this mistake repeated in Harvard's new library (1915), because the center of the building

¹*Library Association Record*, Ser. 3, vol. 2: 238, 283, 341, 371. 1932.

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