

PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE

Reviewed by

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"Eratosthenes" in the *Library World* recently excoriated his fellow-librarians for their assaults upon themselves. No other profession is so prone, he says, to lay bare its foibles and frailties to public view. Why, after all, must we be always wrong? Why not, for a change, extol our virtues?

Right "Eratosthenes" may be. Among ourselves this abasement may amount to disloyalty, particularly if publicity precedes intra-mural attempts at redress; but to expose our weaknesses in the public press to our patrons who need no advertisement of our sins, real or fancied, may be downright foolhardy. It is quite possible, on the other hand, that such self-flagellation has a salutary effect on the profession as a whole. Certainly few of us can have failed to enjoy, perhaps somewhat sadistically, the articles last spring in *Library Journal* about "what's wrong with libraries," and the *A. L. A. Bulletin*, November, 1945, repays close attention. The first few pages are taken up with an article by Robert Mitchell Lightfoot, Jr., "A Librarian on Leave Looks at His Profession." In the succeeding pages several librarians in the armed services and in camp libraries answer Mr. Lightfoot and "discuss librarianship in the light of their service experiences." This discussion grew out of a questionnaire sent to A. L. A. members in service and service libraries which is next summarized and analyzed, question and answers, in the *Bulletin*.

It is distinctly humbling to read over and over again that libraries need humanizing and even more so to discover the simple solutions offered by these

librarians who have seen service libraries humanized and vitalized.

Emphasis is placed on the application of sound business methods and on the extension of cooperation as in purchasing and cataloging. A union catalog "indexing the worthwhile material in surrounding libraries and schools is a necessity of the future, preventing duplication and aiding the serious student, no matter how small the local library."

That relegation of such details as must be retained after "stream-lining" and simplification of routines to a clerical staff and the minimizing of rules to effect better service need to be mentioned are painful admissions of guilt. Can it be possible that clinging to worn-out methods and routines and details and the fear of letting a time-worn record go by the board lest it "sometime" prove useful, though it never has in the past, be laid at the door of that "feminizing" influence so often referred to in this series of discussions and in many others?

More than twenty years ago John Cotton Dana raised the question as to whether or not the tax-supported library should leave the field of light reading matter to rental libraries and to the purveyors of cheap editions of books. This point is discussed again by a librarian who feels that "our duty in this field has been performed; now everyone can afford to buy or rent evanescent reading material. Furthermore, the use of light reading as 'bait' is hardly substantiated by the facts; as for its use to increase the circulation totals, well, we shall simply have to devise a new measurement for library activity."

Federal aid is so nearly unanimously favored by these librarians that it can hardly be said to be argued. The statistics in answer to this part of the questionnaire are rather surprising.

One courageous young man puts his head fairly in the mouth of the lion of the opposition by going so far as to approve not only aid itself but a certain amount of federal control as well.

Since library buildings are considered even by many of our kindest critics to be something less than good, *Pointers for Public Library Building Planners* (Chicago, A. L. A., 1945) by Russell J. Schunk should be helpful. Mr. Schunk outlines the responsibilities of the three players on the "smoothly-functioning team" which will successfully achieve the planning objective: the library board, the librarian, and the architect. He mentions the necessity of determining the most valuable functions of the library in the particular situation at hand. His very practical little book gives aids to "selling the project," remodeling, and even to moving. Much useful detail is included in the section: "Structural Information"; and "Miscellaneous Information" deals with "the many things needed in addition to the professional equipment." The "Reference Data" in the appendix goes into specific detail on such matters as over-all building cost, book capacity, floor space, shelving, lighting, and heating and ventilating.

Books Published in the United States 1939-1943 (Chicago, A. L. A., 1945) was prepared by Charles F. McComb, Chief Bibliographer of the New York Public Library with the aid of other librarians and institutions. The purpose of the list was "to inform reference libraries, governmental agencies, and individual scholars in war areas of important American books published since the beginning of the war, and to serve as a buying list for books to be purchased for libraries in war areas with funds provided by the Rockefeller Foundation." The books included are those "generally considered significant

contributions to knowledge in their respective fields or books embodying the results of recent research." Included are 1406 books arranged by subject, and there is an index. Although the list was designed primarily for reference libraries in war areas, it is especially recommended to librarians who wish to check their purchases of recent years by a competent guide and to those who may be seeking advice in special fields.

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