

sole rule for accepting a book as a gift seems to be that it is one not already in the collection. It seems to make little difference whether some other library might be able to use the book to better advantage or not. It may be embarrassing to persuade a potential donor that books he wishes to give to one library might better be deposited in another.

The policy of accepting publications obtainable as gifts and buying without too much system has resulted in some situations which seem almost ludicrous. Many libraries have collections of German doctoral dissertations, all relatively easy to obtain, but when it comes to dissertations from universities in minor European countries, not one copy may be found anywhere in the United States. We have had no system for cooperative acquisition.

Without doubt, certain cities in this country are generously provided with research material. The various libraries in many cities have duplicate copies of publications which are little used, while in other sections of the country no copy can be found. Certainly research would be greatly stimulated by a redistribution of research publications on the basis of need, especially in view of the shortage of such publications, which is certain to become worse. The proposal to transfer certain collections which are duplicated in one

city to other cities, or even to other countries, has more merit than appeared at first. Possibly microprint will eventually solve all of our problems, but the day for that does not appear to be at hand. A millennium has the habit of remaining at a distance when we attempt to approach it.

#### *Union Catalogs*

One more bit of heresy. Except for local use, the writer cannot see the reason for union catalogs, outside of the Library of Congress, in the regions east of the Mississippi. An air mail letter can reach the Library of Congress within twenty-four hours. We can obtain information as to the location of a book more satisfactorily from the National Union Catalog of the Library of Congress than from any other source. Why write a center in Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, or even Philadelphia, when more information can be obtained from the Library of Congress than from any of these cities? For the benefit of libraries in the immediate neighborhood of Chicago, a union catalog at Chicago might be of assistance, although it would be expensive. For most librarians, the union catalog of the Library of Congress will be the final recourse no matter what other union catalogs may be set up.

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Comment by KEYES D. METCALF

## Division of Fields of Collecting

Mr. Downs's article is admirable in every particular—as a statement of fact and for its critical judgment about the adequacy and the practicability of what has been accomplished or proposed in the way of cooperation in the past. It is difficult to say more or to supplement what has already been said.

Three minor comments are submitted on the present situation, however. First, the Harvard foreign newspaper microfilm project is still going strong, although it has not been possible to keep up the microfilming of papers from parts of the world that were occupied by the totalitarian powers. Second, as a librarian in the Boston area, I am glad to go on record to the fact that the New England Deposit Library has been running along smoothly, financially and otherwise, in spite of

the fact that lack of manual labor has made it impossible for libraries to send as much material to the deposit library as would have been the case in other times. It is expected that a second unit will be needed soon after the close of the war. And, third, it seems worth while to suggest that the critical point in cooperative cataloging lies in whether or not the Library of Congress or any other agency that might take its place can ever bring itself to accept cooperatively prepared copy without full revision. So far, alterations have cost more than they are worth. They have tended to hold back the whole cooperative cataloging program, which in the postwar period should be ready to expand greatly.

In addition to these comments, further con-

sideration of division of fields seems called for. The research libraries of the country, as Mr. Rider explains so well in his book *The Scholar and the Future of the Research Library*, have been doubling on the average every sixteen to twenty years for generations. I am sure that Mr. Rider will agree that, after a library reaches a certain size and age, the rate of growth must stop. I am not ready to name the age, or to say whether the size is one, five, or ten million volumes. I might have said three million, since the New York Public Library, Harvard, and Yale have slowed up since reaching that figure, if I had not just finished reading the 1944 *Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress* telling of a net increase of 481,733 volumes in that library in one year. It seems evident, however, that the growth of libraries, like the rate of growth of anything else, whether it be that of an individual, the population of a country, the number of students in a university, or the size of ships, cannot increase indefinitely. The growth of libraries must slow down partly because of the lack of material to collect—it is impossible to believe that the number of books published will double every sixteen years indefinitely—but it must also slow down because the cost of building construction, of acquisition, of cataloging, and of service will at some point become so great that they will take more money than is available. The library in a university, for instance, cannot continue to increase its expenses more rapidly than other parts of the university without taking a larger and larger percentage of the total resources, and there is a limit as to how far a library can go in that way without becoming more of a nuisance than a blessing. When the time comes that the rate of growth must decrease and the library finds that it cannot continue to collect as extensively in all fields as in the past, it is suggested that there are at least four different courses of action that may be taken, as follows:

1. A library can definitely adopt the policy of becoming more selective in all fields. This is perfectly possible; but am I mistaken in believing that a library that is selective in all fields, and not really outstanding in any, may be a very good library but can never become a great library—a library with a country-wide reputation to which visiting scholars will come

in large numbers, a library where productive research can be carried out on a large scale, a library that can be called truly outstanding?

2. A library may continue to try to do everything that it has done in the past but do it less and less well. It will then become overextended, the quality of its direct service to the public and of its cataloging and its collections will all decline, and it will become a Grade C or D library compared to others. It would not be difficult for any of us to think of a number of libraries that have become overextended, have tried to do more than they could with the funds that were made available to them, and have fallen down on the job. I am sure none of us wants to slide into that group deliberately if we can help it.

3. A library, when it finds that it cannot continue to keep up with its previous rate of growth, instead of trying to cover all its present fields might, for part of its work, fall back on interlibrary loan; on sending many of its advanced students to other libraries to find their material; on microfilm reproductions for particular items that are wanted; or, if Mr. Rider's dream comes true, on microcards. All of these throw the burden on someone else, while providing little or nothing in return, and sooner or later would result in an unbearable situation and a loss of reputation.

4. A library might finally go along with a division of fields, as proposed by the Metcalf-MacLeish-Boyd committee and outlined in *College and Research Libraries* for March 1944.<sup>1</sup> By this plan a library would become more selective in most fields but more inclusive than before in certain limited fields for which it agrees to assume responsibility and for which it will freely furnish books to others by interlibrary loan, by photographic reproduction, or by caring for visiting scholars, thus retaining its self-respect when it calls on other libraries for help.

Having lived with this plan for some months now, it is easy to see the objections to it. It is not going to be easy to organize on even a small scale. It is going to be very difficult to persuade libraries to reach the necessary agreements and, having reached them, to continue with them. There will be frequent complications when a university professor who has built up a strong collection dies or transfers to another university, with the result that his collection proves to be in

<sup>1</sup> Metcalf, Keyes D., and Williams, Edwin E. "Proposal for a Division of Responsibility among American Libraries in the Acquisition and Recording of Library Materials." *College and Research Libraries* 5:105-09, March 1944.

the wrong place for future use. It should be admitted that the plan is not a cure-all, but it will help when it comes to the specialized collections. It is these special collections that are most expensive to acquire, catalog, and maintain, but it is of first importance to have them somewhere in the country, and a co-operative program in connection with them seems desirable.

Note may properly be made here of progress in the above-mentioned committee's plans. The surveys of Belgian and Mexican publications have been completed; those for Sweden, Spain, and Peru are well under way; others will come along in due course. The results so far are enlightening. For Belgium it was found that 79 per cent of the titles selected

from the 1937 lists as being of possible interest to research libraries cannot be found in any one of the fifty-five libraries that reported. These include practically all of the large general research libraries in the country. The total cost of all the priced items published in 1937 would have been only \$1160. That is, if one university library had been willing in the year 1937 to acquire all books of research importance published in the regular trade in Belgium in that year, it would have cost the institution only \$1160, and the other libraries of the country would have felt secure in their knowledge that they could be selective as far as Belgium was concerned, because all the material could be readily found elsewhere in the United States.

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Comment by RAYNARD C. SWANK

## Cooperative Subject Bibliography

The librarian who reads Mr. Downs's article "American Library Cooperation in Review" may feel proud of the cooperative achievements of his profession; and, if he is a cataloger or a bibliographer, he may feel, as does this author, especially pleased that no field of library activity is more notably represented than the bibliographical. To union lists, union catalogs, bibliographical centers, descriptions of resources, and cooperative cataloging, more than half of Downs's review is devoted.

Yet these achievements represent for the most part but half the field of enumerative bibliography—that half which concerns the description and location of specified books or collections. The other half, which concerns the listing of books pertaining to specified subjects, is but meagerly represented. This omission is not an oversight. Indeed, it accurately reflects the present stage in a normal development of bibliographical enterprise.

The foundation upon which any system of subject bibliography must rest is patently the finding list. Unless books can be located, there is no point in seeking references to them in subject lists. That this foundation is already being well laid at the interlibrary level is evidenced by an impressive array of such cooperative works as the *Union List of Serials*, *American Newspapers, 1821-1936*, and

the *National Union Catalog in the Library of Congress*. Yet it is equally patent that the finding list can never achieve its greatest usefulness without subject catalogs or bibliographies to supply references to books which subsequently need to be located. Provision for an adequate subject approach to library materials, also at the interlibrary level, is the indispensable next step in the development of a complete bibliographical system.

The librarian thus far has not altogether neglected this other half of the general bibliographical problem. The cooperative cataloging project, although primarily concerned with descriptive cataloging, aids in the assignment of subject headings for books entered in the card catalogs of individual libraries. But the subject catalog of the individual library complements the author catalog of that library only, not the union author catalog or the union list. As long as a person selects books from the subject catalog of one library, he will have no use for a finding list of books in other libraries. At the interlibrary plane a partial subject lead is offered by descriptions of the resources of various groups of libraries; but, valuable as these general descriptions are, they do not actually supply references to the materials on any subject. For lists of actual references to subject matter not contained in particular libraries, one must still depend