

of librarianship. The report will also serve as a continuing source of well assembled and well presented data on California libraries nowhere else obtainable, since virtually all of the data presented was obtained by questionnaire, conference, or interview, and therefore is in no sense a synthesis of previous studies.—Harold L. Hamill, *Los Angeles Public Library*.

University Librarianship

Scholar's Workshop: Evolving Conceptions of Library Service. By Kenneth J. Brough. Introduction by Robert B. Downs. Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1953. xv, 197 p. \$4.50.

In *Scholar's Workshop* Kenneth J. Brough has assembled a considerable amount of historical evidence to show that during the past three-quarters of a century university librarianship has de-emphasized the traditional custodial function in favor of greater attention to "service."

After a rather brief treatment of the character of the library of the typical American colonial college, the author traces the development of the libraries of Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Chicago, from roughly 1876 to the present, in terms of their position in the academic community, their clientele, the nature, extent and accessibility of their collections, their personal assistance to the reader, and the role of their librarians.

In the preface the author sets forth seven questions which the study proposes to answer:

What opinions have existed concerning the importance of the library in the university?

How have the functions of the university library been defined?

What differentiation of services has been considered desirable for the several classes of clientele of the library: professors, graduate students, undergraduates, and non-university public?

What thoughts have arisen about the nature and extent of the materials which the library should collect?

What ideas have emerged concerning the accessibility of books?

What conceptions have evolved with relation to the kind and amount of aid to be given readers?

How has the role of the librarian changed?

This is an interesting list of questions, and the answers of Mr. Brough provide us with a useful body of data. However, these are questions of fact: interpretation is secondary. The author asks only "what?" or "how?" rather than "why?" The plan of this undertaking, therefore, was limited from the start since causality, synthesis, and interpretation were not given prime importance. To be sure, one cannot properly criticize an author for accomplishing what he has set out to do, but one does have the right to question the objective. To write library history in terms of a changing pattern of library functions and objectives, and to relate those changes to the forces in our society which produced them would give to the evolution of the library as a social agency a new depth and meaning, but the study here reviewed does not provide the richness that it might have evinced.

Basically, the work is weakened by the failure to suggest that the changes that were taking place in university librarianship were paralleled by similar developments throughout the *entire* library field. What was happening in university librarianship was also happening, in much the same way, in public libraries as well. Yet the author does not make this explicit to the reader. Nor does he address himself to the problem of the causes that brought such changes about. These forces that lie beneath the surface should have been explored, and such exploration would have given the book a more significant depth.

Observations may also be made of the treatment of facts. An excessive amount of space is devoted to the attempt to establish the authenticity of the story told of J. L. Sibley, and incidentally of practically every other university librarian, concerning his excursion to retrieve from Agassiz the only two books missing from the Harvard library collection (p. 2, 16-17). The lengthy discussion (p. 132-134) of the New England Deposit Library makes no mention of Francis X. Doherty's definitive study of the subject (*Library Quarterly*, v. 18, 1949, p. 245-54), and only refers to the far more significant Midwest Inter-Library Center with a footnote (p. 133). Since the study is limited to but four university libraries, many interesting movements toward increasing inter-library cooperation are not discussed.

The chapter on the role of the librarian fails to present with any degree of fullness

the very important shift from the librarian as custodian to the librarian as bookman, bibliophile, and man-of-letters, to the present librarian as administrator and specialist in management. Yet there is probably no single development more important than this in altering the complexion of the profession of librarianship.

While these are negative points, and the study runs counter to the approach to library history for which this reviewer has long argued, the volume, based on a doctoral dissertation at Stanford, is carefully written and documented and should serve as a source of information to students of university library history.—*Jesse H. Shera, School of Library Science, Western Reserve University.*

Subject Classification: A Comment

Anent Dr. Mortimer Taube's very informative and entertaining review, in the October 1953 issue of *C & RL* of Henry Evelyn Bliss' *Bibliographic Classification*, I think it is about time that someone came to the defense of shelf classifications in libraries. They have been almost generally maligned these past few years with hardly a voice raised in protest. I am not speaking of any shelf classification in particular, since librarians as a whole seem to feel the same way about the particular one they have fallen heir to, *i.e.*, that they are poor things, but mine, and after all so much better than the one that belongs to my neighbor. Despite the fact that the general impression seems to exist that shelf classification is a dead dog at which everyone can take an occasional kick, they are still very vigorously alive and likely to remain so for a considerable length of time. Studies have pointed out to the point of ennui that subject bibliographies, card catalogs, "coordinate indexes," etc. are "better" and "more effective" than shelf classifications, but fail to make clear that this sort of comparison entirely missed the point that shelf classifications cannot be expected to serve the same purposes as these other methods of information control. Shelf classification is at best only an auxiliary method of organizing materials for use, and because of the shortcomings of the other methods it is a most necessary auxiliary. Since location symbols are necessary in any case, shelf

classification serves a double purpose and are certainly more desirable than location symbols that have no subject significance. As a perennial browser I can only regard with horror the present advocacy of the elimination of shelf classification. I have a suspicion as well that many of the people who use libraries, who to date seem to have had a very small voice in the controversy, would feel the same way about it.

It should seem apparent to anyone that alphabetic and classified arrangements which Dr. Taube has gratuitously thrown together under that much maligned and ill-used term "semantics" are not the same thing at all. By framing his case with a very judicious choice of terms, he has made them appear equivalent techniques with the implication that it is a matter of complete indifference or pure whim which arrangement one chooses. A selection of any other group of terms almost at random will indicate that this is not so, *e.g.*:

Bicycles	Cycles
Cycles	Unicycles
Guitarists	Bicycles
Musicians	Tricycles
Tricycles	Musicians
Unicycles	Violinists
Violinists	Guitarists
Zither players	Zither players

The basic difference between the two methods, of course, is that whereas both may be embodied in the form of word symbols, classifications are not bound by the symbols used to embody the meaning, while in the alphabetic system the word symbols are the basis of the arrangement. Dr. Taube does his cause no service by appearing to confuse them.

Classification is a process that is inevitable no matter how one may choose to disguise it, and by the nature of the case it is especially inevitable in libraries. A library classifies materials in the process of ordering them in conformity with its acquisitions policies and in dividing them in subject departmentalized libraries. Despite the animadversions of the scholars, shelf classifications will continue to be used for a long time in libraries, and in view of the current and continuing practice, the whole discussion sometimes seems somewhat academic.—*David A. Kronick, Reference Section, Armed Forces Medical Library.*