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THE AMERICAN LIBRARY SINCE 1876

THE advances made by our libraries during the past half century have been almost entirely in the direction of making their contents more accessible, and this direction has been determined by the spread of the opinion that books are not for the few but for the many. The result has been the rise and development of the form of public library now common throughout a large part of the country. This is so different an institution from any that was known in earlier times that it almost merits a distinctive name, the former connotations of the word "library" being largely foreign to its present functions. This transformation, however, has been very largely limited to the field of libraries organized and supported by municipalities. Its fundamental points have come to be free access and home use. In other words, the extension of accessibility has been first in the direction of letting readers see and handle the books themselves instead of being restricted to a catalog, and second, in that of allowing readers to use books at home instead of confining such use to the library building. Obviously, this kind of extension could not well apply to large special libraries, such as that of an historical society or a library of science, like the John Crerar in Chicago. In such cases there has undoubtedly been great increase in accessibility, but this has taken the direction of more convenient buildings, better catalogs, and an improvement in book stock, both in quantity and quality. All these points, of course,

have been considered by the public library also. As regards the university library, accessibility here has been increased by extending use to the whole student body. Formerly university libraries were regarded as intended for the use of members of the faculty and of graduate students; use by undergraduates was rather discouraged than otherwise, except occasionally and in some special directions. The present opinion, which regards the university library as a source of instructional material available directly to the student and treats courses of instruction very largely as directions and opportunities offered to the student for the use of this material, indicates a revolution in our methods of education which is almost as great as that experienced by China when she discarded her old classical system some twenty years ago. It is right for me to point this out, although I am not the one to dwell on the details of its methods and results. I shall confine myself to my own field—that of the public library.

Some may not agree with me in my conclusion that the foundation stones on which this at present rests are free access and home use. This conclusion forced itself upon my mind somewhat against my own inclination during my recent trip to China, where I found that these were the two things about our free library system that were not understood and the only two that were not in use to some extent throughout that country. There are many Chinese libraries today which require for their conversion into public libraries of the American type simply the thorough introduction of these two features, and, unfortunately, they seem to be the features that there is least likelihood of introducing at the present time. Home use was the one first introduced among us. Like all innovations, it came into being under a cloud of suspicion and dislike, and even today there is a widespread impression that if a book is read at home, it must be in some degree inferior to a book read in the library. This impression

also appears in the idea that a reference library, meaning one where use is confined to a library building, must necessarily be of a higher class than a circulating library, meaning one where the books may be used at home. Evidently this is an absolutely unreal distinction. The present tendency, where use is not hampered in some way by unfortunate rules, or the provisions of bequests, is to regard the book stock of a large library as a unit. Any particular volumes may be used either in the building or at home, and although there are obviously reasons for restricting the general use of a very large number to the library building, such restriction is based on convenience of use rather than on any judgment connected with superiority.

In fact, we all know that a very large part of the use of books in the building of a public library is trivial and that, conversely, a very large part of home use is of the most serious character. Works of light fiction are very commonly read in the library, and books on the higher mathematics, on philosophy, economics, and the physical sciences are taken home. That the general introduction of home use has been accompanied by a much larger use of fiction in our libraries is due to the fact that the older libraries either did not include fiction at all or did so to a very small degree. I regard the introduction of home use as one of the most important steps in the process by which the modern public library has been able to further popular education.

As regards free access to shelves, which came much later, it has been able to live down to a much greater extent the stigma with which it also began its career. Almost half the period that we are considering had passed before it began to be even discussed, and then only one or two librarians of reputation would venture to approve it unreservedly. It has made its way to practically universal use in the face of the opposition of some and the very cautious advocacy of others solely because the users of the library

wanted it and would not be denied—a noteworthy demonstration of the fact that the public is now enjoying in its large libraries an institution in which its own desires have taken a great part in the direction of its development. The objections to free access, unlike those to home use, are based on no fanciful considerations. They are most substantial, being first that free access involves greater opportunity for theft, of which advantage has been taken to an astounding degree by the dishonest, and that it offers an equally great opportunity for the confusion of the books on the shelves. Its advantages, which are obvious to every user of the library, have been so great that neither of these objections has been given weight in comparison with them. The thousands of books which large libraries lose yearly by theft may be considered as part of the price that they are paying for the privileges that their readers demand.

It is surprising to how great a degree all the other instruments of accessibility have been influenced by the two that I have just been discussing. A building in which there are to be free access and home use can not properly be the same in its arrangements as one in which these features are absent. Free access means arrangements by which the public may easily stand at the shelves, without being too far removed from supervision while doing so, and the immediate location of reading space with chairs and tables for the use of the volumes. Home use involves machinery for charging and discharging the books and for recovering those that are not brought back at the assigned limit of use.

The latest public library building, that of the Cleveland Public Library, may serve as an illustration of some of the things to which I have just called attention. In it the book stock is treated as a unit, the matter of the place of use—whether in the library or at home—being considered as incidental. Practically every volume is on open shelves and so located as to be available for this kind of use, and the machinery for charging

and discharging has been much developed and located in the most convenient manner. This building is expensive to operate, but it is also efficient; and it is probable that efficiency and increased expense are in future going hand in hand in large libraries, the increased expenditure being put into more efficient operation and this in its turn giving greater satisfaction to our masters—the public—to such an extent that they willingly grant the necessary income.

The other handmaids of accessibility will in turn be found to stand on the two foundation stones already mentioned. For instance, group service, beginning with the children's room, ending for the present with the business library, and doubtless to go on into further ramifications, could hardly be carried out without both of them. The Traveling Library, or deposit, which has been developed to such a degree largely in connection with this form of service, involves indeed a kind of double circulation, the books being removed from the library shelves to go to the headquarters of the group by which they are to be used and then being taken out again by the individuals forming the group.

I will leave the interested reader to follow out this line of thought for himself. He will find, I think, that every advance in the service rendered by popular libraries has been due to an increase in accessibility and that this is closely connected with free access and home use. This is true of physical extension, such as the provision of books in greater number and variety, the establishment of branch library systems, of county libraries, etc., the different kinds of publicity work, community center service, visual service such as the display of prints, fabrics, or other objects, greater care and volume in cataloging, indexing, and the preparation of lists, advisory service to readers, inter-library loans, house to house delivery by parcel post or otherwise, the issue of printed or duplicated material, co-operation with other agencies for the distribution of ideas,

such as lecture courses, the theatre, radio, and the moving picture, municipal reference service to the city government, the story hour, and the improvement of public service by attention to staff welfare. All these things, which are stones used to build up that fabric of accessibility which is the characteristic of the present American public library, are founded on or closely connected with the ability of the individual reader to select his book and to take it where it will be most convenient for him to use it.

We are frequently reminded that it will not do for us to assume that more than a very small proportion of reading is done through the agency of a public library. This, of course, is true. The fact that our institution constitutes an important agency for the distribution of ideas should not blind us to the existence of many other agencies which are also doing satisfactory work. The existence of these agencies is a good reason for co-operation among them all, but it is no reason why any of them should give up its efforts or should weary in the labor of trying to improve and extend its influence.—ARTHUR E. BOSTWICK, in *The Library Journal*.

Buffalo, N. Y., is in the midst of a great school-building campaign. Twelve new buildings are under construction, including a \$2,000,000 high school; and plans are in preparation for two other buildings. This has become necessary because of failure for years to provide accommodations to meet the needs of this rapidly growing city.

Co-education has been reestablished in the high schools of Paterson, N. J. In 1923 the segregation plan was adopted, but after a trial of two years the board of education decided to return to co-education. The superintendent of schools is of the opinion that since men and women live together they should grow up together.

ENGLISH NOTES

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ENGLISH TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

THE English Teachers Section of the Virginia State Teachers Association convened at 9 o'clock, November 25, 1925, in the Art Building, Norfolk, Va., with President H. A. Miller presiding.

The minutes of the last annual meeting were read by the Secretary, Anna S. Johnston; her report as Treasurer showed a balance of \$32.58.

Mr. H. A. Miller then gave a résumé of his two years' administration, showing that the following objectives had been accomplished:

(a) A list of the English teachers of Virginia was compiled and published in *THE VIRGINIA TEACHER*.

(b) A section of *THE VIRGINIA TEACHER* was devoted to the publication of articles interesting to teachers of English during the months of January-June, 1925.

(c) Several districts (A, B, D, I, and K) have organized English Associations auxiliary to the State Association. Activities of District A were reported by Miss Lula Daniel of the Fredericksburg State Teachers College; of District B, organized as "The Tidewater Association of Teachers of English," by Anna S. Johnston; and of District D, by Mrs. L. G. Diehl. All these reports showed active interest by the local associations and really valuable results of the meetings held in these districts.

(d) An attempt was made to get a speaker of note to address the English teachers at the annual meeting, but this attempt failed.

Suggested aims for the future were:

(a) We should try to complete the organization of the districts and if possible organize the counties separately.

(b) *THE VIRGINIA TEACHER* was chosen