

By FRANCIS L. D. GOODRICH

Theodore Wesley Koch, 1871-1941

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HOW CAN ONE evaluate personality? Its attributes may be listed and qualifying adjectives added but the picture is inanimate, cold, and colorless. The motion of a hand, the inflection of the voice, the smile, the glow of responsive interest cannot be described. They must be experienced to be understood. They are more than surface manifestations of characteristics. They are a part of personality, the spontaneous expression of an inner force which is the individual himself, an entity which is his alone and which sets him apart from all others. A personality may be negative, or positive, or neutral, but whatever it is, it affects all with whom it comes in contact. It is the foundation upon which both success and failure are built. In reviewing the career of a man, one must always keep in mind this intangible factor of personality.

Theodore Wesley Koch was endowed with an unusual personality. It was the key to all that he did. Without a comprehension of that fact the vicissitudes of his life cannot be understood. His was a nature censorious only of inartistic and shoddy work and base motives. He had a gift for friendship. He did not live to know how wide was his circle of influence. It extended far beyond the localities in which he was a resident. Each lecture which he delivered added to it, and each visitor to the university who was privi-

leged to meet him immediately came under the spell of his charm. He was known and loved throughout the United States and in many European countries.

Mr. Koch spent his boyhood in Philadelphia, where he attended the public schools and the University of Pennsylvania, from which he graduated with the A.B. degree in 1892. That was the period when the classics were the basis for such a degree. He then went to Harvard for two years, where he specialized in modern languages, receiving an A.B. in 1893 and an M.A. in 1894. All this was accomplished before his twenty-third birthday. There was no chapter of Phi Beta Kappa at the University of Pennsylvania when he graduated; he was elected to membership in that fraternity by the Pennsylvania chapter in 1908.

His introduction to library work was through bibliography and bibliographic cataloging, probably the best possible foundation for a library career. His was distinguished for scholarship and for a scholarly interpretation and application of library techniques. For five years he worked on the catalog of the Dante collection at Cornell. This was printed in two volumes and is the basic reference tool on Dante. It is truly a monumental work, an adequate description of one of the greatest collections in the world on one of the most notable figures in all literature. This catalog established Mr. Koch's reputation as a bibliographer of the highest order. It also started him on his

literary career as his first two published articles were developed from his studies in connection with the catalog: *Dante in America*, written for the Dante Society in 1896; and *The Growth and Importance of the Cornell Dante Collection*, a pamphlet published by Cornell in 1900.

The years 1900-01 were spent in study at the Collège de France, University of Paris. It was during these years that Mr. Koch acquired his understanding of the French people and his fondness for them and for their country, which drew him back to Paris many times. It stimulated and refreshed him, as no other vacation ever did, to cross the ocean and spend a few days or weeks in the libraries and bookstores and among the art treasures of that fascinating country. Unfortunately, he was never able to carry out his ambition to complete his studies for a doctorate at the University of Paris. Late in his life his link to the country was officially recognized when the French government decorated him in 1940 with the Cross of the Knight of the Legion of Honor.

On April 1, 1902, Mr. Koch became an assistant in the Library of Congress in the Catalog Division. Here he was associated with Dr. Putnam and the distinguished group of librarians then serving there. They were his loyal lifelong friends. These years acquainted him with the intricacies of the administration of a large library and prepared him for the librarianship to which he was soon called.

At Michigan

An invitation was extended him in 1904 to become assistant librarian at the University of Michigan, a post which he accepted in the fall of that year. The following year when R. C. Davis, who

had been librarian for many years, was made librarian emeritus, Mr. Koch was promoted to the position of librarian, a post which he held actively until 1915. He was then given a year's leave of absence, and he officially severed his connection with the university in the summer of 1916. A change of administrators and policies caused him to relinquish this librarianship.

When Mr. Koch went to Ann Arbor he found the library a traditional type, administered by a scholar for scholars. It was his task to modernize it in every way. The book collection was exceptional but not in the least popular, the staff was far too small, the building inadequate, and technical methods antiquated. In a few months he had transformed the place from a static to a dynamic institution. To one who knew it in 1903 and then again in 1907, the changes seemed phenomenal. The reading room had been refurnished and provided with a reference collection of several thousand volumes in place of the single case of encyclopedias and dictionaries. The upper walls were adorned with portraits of men distinguished in the university or elsewhere, and the museum had lent it beautiful vases from its collection of Chinese ceramics. The periodical room had been opened to the public, and a more popular type of book occasionally appeared in the new books case. The whole cataloging procedure was reorganized, the purchase of Library of Congress cards being inaugurated. Student circulation was instituted and proved very popular.

In the summer of 1909 courses in library methods were offered for the first time at the University of Michigan. This experiment was eminently successful, and the practice was continued until the de-

mand for instruction in library science necessitated the organization of a department of library science at the university in 1926.

Credit is also given Mr. Koch for starting the movement for a new library building for the University of Michigan and for carrying forward the campaign until the appropriation for it was forthcoming.

In 1916 after some months of rest and recuperation from a serious illness, he went again to the Library of Congress, this time to head the Order Division for a period of four years. He was then ready in 1919 to start upon the last era of his career, the twenty-two years spent at Northwestern University, which ended as he was about to retire in the early spring of 1941.

At Northwestern

Mr. Koch repeated at Northwestern much of the story of his reorganization and innovations at Michigan. When he went there he found a mediocre library attempting to serve a rapidly developing university. He left it a distinguished collection, housed in an unusually beautiful and commodious building, and administered by a competent staff, serving the needs of a large and exacting body of faculty and students.

In addition to his functions as librarian, he was often called to serve on faculty committees, both special and standing. For many years he was on the Norman Wait Harris Lecture Foundation Committee, acting as chairman recently. He was a member of the Committee on Honorary Degrees and of the Faculty-Alumni-Student Committee. When President Snyder was to be inaugurated Mr. Koch served on the committee of arrangements for that occasion.

Other Professional Interests

Although his official duties were taxing, Mr. Koch found time for other professional interests. He was a member of the Evanston Public Library Board from 1922 to 1937. He was vice president of the American Library Association in 1928 and served on numerous committees of that organization. From 1930 to 1932 he was president of the American Library Institute. He was active in the Bibliographical Society of America, contributing to its *Papers*. At the end of his life he had the responsibility and the pleasure of the presidency of the Caxton Club of Chicago, an organization which gave him ample scope for his bibliographical, artistic, and social talents. Earlier he had been chairman of its program committee. He was a member of the University Club of Evanston and at one time its president. He also served that club as chairman of the program committee and chairman of the library committee. His other clubs were Wayfarers, Cliff Dwellers, MacDowell Society, Alliance Française, French Club of Evanston.

In beautifying the libraries at Michigan and Northwestern Mr. Koch expressed one of the cardinal principles of his life. His esthetic sense was keen. Although not himself a creative artist, he required beautiful things about him and wished everyone to have the inspiration which they afford. His joy in a work of art was infectious, whether it was a printed page or a bronze bust. The Charles Deering Library at Northwestern is a monument to him in this, as in many other respects. Each detail of ornament was carefully considered, and many weeks were spent by him in the architect's office developing them.

Early in his professional career Mr.

Koch began to give the lectures for which he was so widely known. His first interests were Dante and bookplates. His catholicity of interests is shown by the subjects of his talks. Usually they were illustrated with the finest of slides, his personal property. They include: "Carnegie Libraries," "Famous Old World Libraries," "Present Day Library Buildings," "Literary Forgeries of the Nineteenth Century," "Books and Libraries."

Publications

Mr. Koch's publications were numerous. They fall naturally into four periods. The first decade was bibliographical from the catalog on Dante to *Carnegie Libraries*. The second decade was descriptive, the result of his trips to the great libraries of the world: the Bodleian, the British Museum, the Bibliothèque Nationale, and the Imperial Public Library, St. Petersburg. The last of the series was *Old-Time, Old-World Librarians* in 1914. These articles were published, for the most part, in *The Library Journal*, with reprints. They are now of even more importance as they describe conditions that are past history. This period also included the pamphlets published for and about the University of Michigan Library.

The third period was shorter, the time of the first World War, but it was prolific. There were at least seven titles in four years. The series commences with a pamphlet of some fifty pages entitled *Books in Camp, Trench and Hospital*, of which there are two editions, both 1917. It ends with *Les Livres à la Guerre*, 408 pages, 1920, a translation of his *Books in the War*, 1919, which, in turn, was an

elaboration of his *War Libraries and Allied Studies*, 287 pages, 1918. These pamphlets and books give the history, not alone of the American effort to furnish books for the soldiers, but also of the British. They are popular accounts of that work, but are essentials for its history.

The fourth period covers nearly two decades from 1923 to 1940, with some fifteen titles, besides a number of leaflets. The key to this period is *Tales for Bibliophiles*, 1929. The original works and translations all deal with book collecting, the pleasures of acquiring, owning, and reading books. These years also saw an increasing emphasis on fine printing. The books are unpretentious in size, but each is a work of art. Format echoes content. They are books for the bibliophile in every sense. It is a joy to own them and to read them. The leaflets, notices, and such so-called ephemeral material for which Mr. Koch was responsible during these later years, are really collectors' items because they were so carefully designed and appropriately printed.

Mr. Koch's wife and daughter have received very many tributes from his wide circle of friends. These testify to his unusually charming personality and to his professional sagacity. The monuments which will keep his memory fresh to those who were privileged to know him are his writing for bibliophiles and his building at Northwestern University. They both are tangible expressions of his personality, and from them later generations may understand something of the character of the unassuming, friendly scholar and librarian, Theodore Wesley Koch, who died in Evanston, Illinois, on March 23, 1941.