

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA,  
STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, NO.  
13: THE LIBRARIES OF  
THE AMERICAN STATE AND NATIONAL  
INSTITUTIONS FOR DEFECTIVES,  
DEPENDENTS, AND DELINQUENTS**

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## PREFACE

In publishing Miss Curtis' study of institution libraries, I am sure the University of Minnesota is rendering a notable service not only to libraries and public institutions, but also to the general public which is still shockingly ignorant of how its institutions are really administered. This little volume stands unique in its field, as it brings together a large amount of first-hand material secured through original research, in addition to collating scattered papers on single phases of the problem. It administers a definitive refutation to the popular fallacy that institution libraries are a fad and that inmates of such institutions can not and will not make use of them. I confess to having been surprised at finding how many institutions looked upon their libraries as integral parts of their work. Any undue elation was checked, however, by observing how uneven the library equipment runs and how far we still have to go before it becomes really adequate in many places.

The popularizing of institutions as the result of their gradual coming under state control, and the consequent raising of standards of care, has meant that they house an increasing number of superior patients, capable of appreciating means of culture and refinement. Hence the tendency to carry over into the institution the function of books as part of normal free cultivated life. But more than that: books and music have been demonstrated to possess therapeutic value both in preventive and reëducative work for the handicapped mentally or physically. Their value for the convalescent has long been utilized, as in the tuberculosis sanatoria. And as preventives of nervous disorders they have been scarcely less popular. But only recently has their value as a preventive of incipient dementia or as a restorative in certain cases of insanity been recognized.

Add to these facts the further discovery that good books aid in the morale and discipline of an institution for juvenile delinquents; that these delinquents are voracious readers; that the habit of reading creates a "diversion" from less constructive habits; that in reformatories the library plays the rôle of continuation school; that in the care and education of the feeble-minded books frequently are the most potent means for focusing and energizing a sluggish mind; and you get some idea of how significant and practical this problem really is.

The free population of this country, with its more or less irresponsible attitude toward the public library would do well to follow the example of the prisoner or the insane or the feeble-minded; for Miss Curtis, herself instructor in a university library school, shows how inmates not only do not destroy their books, but even conserve them as their most precious treasures. And when it comes to comparative use of library facilities the

institution records are astounding. The annual turnover per volume in some institutions runs as high as 29 issuances, and 15 is quite common. The ordinary city must hump itself to approach within siege-gun shot of such a record.

The war has added its confirmation of these facts. In the light of them we understand perhaps more clearly why the American Library Association has been making its "drive" for books and library staffs in army training camps. Many of the same conditions are common to the camp and to the institution.

Miss Curtis in making this study has done pioneer service to the cause of mental therapeutics and has added a notable chapter to the library's record as an agency for practical social welfare. It is one more straw indicating how the current of thought flows away from conceiving the library as a jewel box to be kept under lock and key, and toward a more dynamic faith in its powers as an institution for all the children of all the people. Who will, therefore, dare hereafter to call such special libraries fads or seek to obtain a charitable glow by unloading upon soldiers or upon state institutions moldy books of sermons, trashy novels, antiquated catalogues and fashion books, or other such publishers' junk?

ARTHUR J. TODD

## CONTENTS

	PAGES
Chapter I. State and national institutions.....	1-3
1. Historical sketch.....	1
2. The problem of employment, education, and recreation.....	2
Chapter II. The place of the library in the institution.....	4-30
1. The insane hospital.....	4
2. The institution for the feeble-minded.....	16
3. The institution for delinquents.....	19
4. The reformatory.....	22
5. The prison.....	25
6. The institution for inebriates, the sanatorium for tuberculosis, the orthopedic hospital.....	28
7. The home for soldiers, the school for dependent children, the schools for the blind and the deaf.....	29
Chapter III. History of the movement for state supervision of institution libraries.....	31-34
Chapter IV. The administration of the institution library.....	35-47
1. The book collection and the book fund.....	35
2. The library room.....	38
3. The library service.....	40
Chapter V. Activities of library associations in regard to institution libraries.....	48-51
Chapter VI. The future development of the institution library.....	52-53
Bibliography.....	54-56