

**PAPERS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE
FOURTEENTH GENERAL MEETING OF THE
AMERICAN LIBRARY
ASSOCIATION HELD AT LAKEWOOD, N.
J. WITH SESSIONS AT BALTIMORE AND
WASHINGTON, MAY 16-21, 1892**

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AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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BOSTON

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

1892

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CONFERENCE OF LIBRARIANS.

LAKEWOOD, N. J., BALTIMORE, WASHINGTON,

MAY 16-21, 1892.

THE ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT, W. I. FLETCHER, LIBRARIAN OF AMHERST COLLEGE.

THE peculiar circumstances under which I assume this position will, I am sure, be sufficient to excuse the desultoriness of the few remarks which, on so short notice, I have been able to throw together for your consideration this evening. When, but a few days ago, I found that the duties of this position would devolve on me, it chanced that my mind was already occupied, to some extent, with a line of thought which I at once saw was the only one on which I could hope to be in the least prepared to speak on this occasion. In developing this line of thought, as best I could in the few days left me, under the pressure of other absorbing duties, it has presented itself to me under two phases, and I have hesitated which phase I should make most prominent by letting it give a name to my theme. Under one phase my subject would be, "The public library of the future;" this subject has peculiar fascinations for the castle-builder, and derives great interest from the marvelous development of library interests in the recent past, pointing to still greater things in the near future; but one must needs hesitate to assume the role of prophet when it is noted how rapidly the conditions, both physical and social, on which predictions must be based, are changing. Only a seer may venture to forecast the future, otherwise than by a careful study of present indications and past progress. The progress so far made and the indications at present available in this field are too full of variety, and even inconsistency,

to furnish a basis for calculations as to the future, and delightful as may be the attempt to peer into that future, a sober second thought prompts me to come at my subject on the other and more practical side. Hence, I bring you as my theme, "Some library economies," and wish to be understood as using the word "economies" in its most usual and homely sense.

"Library economy" is a much-abused and an ambiguous term. As a name for the craft of the librarian it is singularly infelicitous, and yet no other term is so much used—in fact none other has yet been found—to express in English the idea of the German "Bibliothekswissenschaft." "Library science" may be considered a literal rendering of this term, but it does not convey to the average mind the idea intended. He will confer an immense benefit on our fraternity who shall furnish an intelligible and satisfactory name for the science and art of "book-keeping" in its noblest sense. But whatever library economy may mean or may not mean, we can all understand library economies as signifying the practical carrying out of the third member of the triple expression serving as a motto for this Association. Lest some of you may have neglected to carry in mind so rudimentary an attachment of the Association as its motto, you will allow me to remind you that it is "The best reading, for the largest number, at the least cost."

"The best reading"—in one form or

another this subject has formed the theme of much of our discussion. A proper selection of books for purchase is one aspect of it. It is significant that these words, "The best reading," form the title of the excellent work by W. S. Sonnenschein which our committee on the A. L. A. catalog have accepted as a basis for their work. Before this session is over you will have your attention drawn to the plans of that committee for revising and improving this book along the lines long ago laid down for the famous "A. L. A. Cat.," which, though often said to be dead, justifies its name by proving to have nine lives at least. But to most of us the greatest interest in "the best reading" has centered in efforts to induce readers to use books of the better sort. No further *raison d'être* for the Association need be asked for than what it has accomplished in this line.

When we come to the second clause in our motto, "for the largest number," we reach the great subject of library extension. What wonders have been and are being wrought in this direction! The day of libraries for the few is past, and libraries for the many—yes, for everybody—is the watchword of recent progress. Since our last meeting at least one other State—proud New Hampshire, the mother of the American public library system—has followed the example of Massachusetts in legislating for the positive encouragement and financial assistance from the State to towns, in the establishment of public libraries, while the great Empire State itself, by legislation just enacted, makes public libraries an integral part of her great State university system. I find no reason yet to withdraw my prediction, made last year by the Pacific, that the time will come when all our communities will be required by law to maintain libraries as much as to maintain schools.

Another phase of this work of library extension deserves notice. Two years ago, come September, one of the most significant movements ever made in the interest of library extension was set on foot when the endowment fund of this Association was established. From the energetic men who

have charge of the raising of this fund you will hear a report at this session. Let it be understood as widely as our influence goes that the double use to which the income of this fund is to be devoted means the best reading for the greatest number most emphatically. The cause of library extension awaits more than anything else the thorough informing of the people as to the work. When the endowment fund begins, as it very shortly will, to yield an annual income of some hundreds of dollars, a wide and (let us hope) judicious distribution of just such information will be made. The people of those parts of the country where this movement is in its infancy or wholly unknown will be told how great are its advantages and how easily and cheaply they are to be obtained. Heaven speed the endowment fund!

Perhaps the ideas covered by the expression "at the least cost" have not engaged our thought to such an extent as have these others. We have gloried in the size of the figures which represent the expenditures of communities or the gifts of individuals for the establishment and support of libraries. I fear we have not often enough considered whether these sums were so expended as to produce the best results. Let me make it clear at this point that I am not here to advocate the saving of public money in the sense of having less expended on libraries, but rather to plead for such economies as shall save money from accessories to be applied to essentials. "More books" is the demand of every library. How hungry, how insatiable are our libraries for books! That terrible hunger which gnawed upon the vitals of political shysters excluded for a quarter of a century from the pantry of Uncle Sam is as nothing. The greed of the daughter of the horse-leech, crying "Give! give! give!" is satiety itself compared to the cravings of our partly filled shelves, or even of shelves already apparently bursting with plenty, for more books and yet more books. It is to meet this overwhelming demand for books that library economies are called for. As the old patriotic legend says, "Millions for defense, not a cent for tribute," so the

library calls for millions for books, not a cent for wasteful expense.

But it is time for me to come down to something specific and definite. I propose to point out certain library economies as being practical and at the same time largely neglected. In the first place there is economy in library buildings. Library architecture "is the tune we 'librarians' do delight in," to judge by its constant recurrence on our programs; let us have it with variations by a little talk about the cost of library buildings. What is a fair ratio of dollars in cost of a building to volumes accommodated? How may the ratio change if the volumes are not accommodated, but "stored?" How may it change again as more or less provision is made for the accommodation of readers, students, classes, lectures, etc.? These are questions only to be properly answered when something like library statistics have been collected, and — what is vastly more important — collated, by some bibliothecal Carroll D. Wright. I have lately had the pleasure of examining the new library building of the Hartford theological seminary, planned, I think, mainly by our brother Richardson, (not H. H., but he of Princeton, the "encyclopaedia" man). I find there a fire-proof building of brick with stone trimmings, neat, sufficiently ornate, with unusually large provision for study and lecture-rooms, which will shelve, in such a way as truly to "accommodate" not far from five volumes for every dollar of cost. Compare this with some of our monumental buildings which represent \$2 or \$3 for every volume "stored" (not accommodated)! What is the difference? It is simply the difference between library economy and library extravagance.

The Mercantile libraries of St. Louis and of New York have shown us how a large city library building may be constructed on strictly business and utilitarian principles, and be made to contain (and accommodate) three or four volumes for every dollar of cost, while built in the most substantial and thorough manner. (As to the capacity of these buildings, I am figuring on the basis of the whole structure being devoted to library

purposes, as it may ultimately be.) Nor is there omitted in either of these buildings any appeal to the esthetic sense which need be expressed by a building intended for use and convenience. Let it be understood that a public library is first and foremost an institution for practical every-day use, and the battle for economy in building is won. A comparatively small sum will add to a building, simple and utilitarian in its general plan, sufficient ornamentation to make it elevating and refining to the taste of all who enter it.

One requirement, which seems to have been singularly overlooked in many of our library buildings, is that of economical administration. The arrangement of the offices and work-rooms with reference to the delivery and reading-rooms is a problem deserving great attention from the economical point of view. It is often a great object to employ one attendant to attend to two or more departments of work at the same time. I gave considerable thought, not long since, to the arrangement of these administrative parts of a library building, with the view to enable one person at certain hours to take care of the entire library and reading-room, and at the same time to do conveniently such ordinary routine work in cataloging, labeling books, etc., as the lulls in patronage would permit. Where any economy is practiced, these things must be looked after. A building may be so arranged (actual examples are not wanting) that the additional expense of administration consequent upon its erection may represent the interest of a sum larger than the cost of the building — which is thus practically doubled.

I had in mind to allude to certain economies of a minor sort connected with the arrangement of the shelving, etc., but must pass them over for the present. The next department in which I will enter a plea for economy is that of cataloging. On this subject I hesitate before expressing myself so radically as is justified by my profound convictions. But the duty of expressing convictions is only second to that of having them, and I must have my say. If the words be not those of truth, as they are assuredly those of

soberness, they can do no lasting harm. My first demand for economy in cataloging is in the department of subject catalogs. Nine years ago, in a brief published article, I made an arraignment of the system of subject catalogs as carried out in many libraries, especially in the larger ones, on the score of wastefulness through unnecessary repetitious work. I went so far as to question whether the whole field of subject cataloging ought not to be abandoned by the catalogers of libraries and turned over to the index-maker and the bibliographer. My feeling that this is so is only growing stronger as time passes. Our subject catalogs answer the question "In *what books* shall I find the information I desire?" A constantly increasing number of bibliographies, indexes, and manuals enable a library, without a subject catalog, but well furnished with such helps, to give the needed direction.

But while few libraries as yet will give up the advantages coming from the possession of a fairly good subject-catalog, most librarians are prepared to admit that large portions of the field covered by such catalogs (the "analytical" references, for example) may be omitted from the catalog and be better furnished in published indexes. My plea here is for a more generous and hearty coöperation for the carrying out of this transfer. If the ten libraries in the country which expend most on the cataloging department would reduce the expense each by \$1,000 annually, and put the money thus saved together for their mutual benefit, indexing work could be done, as a result, and printed, that would be worth to each of these libraries much more than its cost, and would be equally available everywhere else. The "A. L. A. Index," now at press, is a feeble attempt at this sort of thing. But thus far we have only been playing at coöperation. May we not hope to see something done this year more worthy of the opportunity open to us in this line?

Now I must pay my respects to the author-catalog. When I have deprecated elaborate subject-cataloging, I have always insisted that every library must have its author-catalog, including title headings for anonymous books,

kept sharply up to date, and made with the utmost accuracy and completeness possible. This is *the* catalog, and must be maintained with even more vigilance and carefulness if it be the only catalog. But there are indications of a possible great economy in this department also being brought to pass. Various experiments have been made in the line of printed catalog cards furnished to libraries from a central bureau, but these experiments have not succeeded. Now there is an effort making to establish such a system of cataloging, and to give it a firm financial basis through the support of the book-trade. In the case of new publications, a card-catalog quite up to date and always strictly alphabetical is a desideratum of the bookseller as well as of the library; and it is believed that through uniting the booksellers and the libraries a constituency will be found sufficient to support the scheme. A beginning once made, there will be rapid progress. Whole ranges of titles common to libraries of any size will be furnished by the central bureau; and as it constantly increases its stock of titles, it will be prepared to furnish to new libraries an increasing proportion of the cards needed for the catalog. The scheme of furnishing electros of titles, instead of cards, may work in with the other. Mr. Growell, the accomplished editor of the *Publishers' weekly*, is publishing a series of articles in the *Library journal* on coöperative cataloging. In the forthcoming number he will give an interesting account of his extended experiments, and plainly foreshadow the establishment of a system for the supply of title "logotypes" as one of the probabilities of the near future. Thus the coöperative movement seems to promise to meet the demands of the printed page catalog as well as of the card arrangement.

And what need there is for something of the kind! See a thousand libraries at once cataloging the same book, and by the same rules and methods! What is the printing press for? Be assured, my friends, that when a practicable scheme for saving this enormous reduplication of work has been set on foot we shall have to

shelve all notions, and give up all our pet methods that stand in the way, and "keep step to the music of the union." The business men who are back of us will have their eyes open and some day the cry will go up in our camp, "The Philistines are upon you." These Philistines may not know as much as we do about books or about Cutter's rules, but they are quite apt to know a good thing when they see it and they pay for our bread and butter. Happy shall that librarian be who knows enough in these transition times to put the butter on the right side of his bread. We are not to trim our sails to every breeze, but we must suit them to the trade wind which in the long run is our dependence for making port.

As you perceive, the field of my subject is so large that I can only cover it on the "touch-and-go" principle, and I must pass on. Classification is the next head to be hit. I have often had a word to say about this subject in our meetings and have been a student of it for 30 years, but I think I have learned more with regard to it very recently than in all the time before. I am sorely tempted to go into the subject in general, but must inexorably confine myself to its economical bearings. Economy demands in classification as elsewhere two things—simplicity and effectiveness; the latter because that which is simple without being effective is likely to be extravagant rather than economical. I hail with satisfaction the present tendency away from book classification and toward book *arrangement*. There is a distinct reaction from the effort at extremely close classification, which aimed to locate a book by its subject, most definitely and minutely stated, to an exact arrangement in larger classes which shall provide for each book its precise place, making minute subdivisions unnecessary and accomplishing a better result. The Cutter author table, and other devices by which new books fall into precisely the one right place, have come sufficiently into use to lead to the employment of more comprehensive classes. I have taken one section after another as fiction, the classics, English literature (and other literatures),

and arranged them on this principle of large classes with exact placing by alphabetical or other order of the books in the classes, and feel sure this is the coming system. As to effectiveness there can be no doubt, and for simplicity it is greatly superior. Economy will be immensely served by the removing from the list of the librarian's duties the elaboration of a carefully constructed, logical and minute classification, or even the application of such a system elaborated by some one else. The increasingly rapid progress of development in all sciences and all literatures too demands that library classification shall be ductile and not run in a mold like cast-iron. We must classify and reclassify as time goes by, and we ought to be on our guard not to let reclassifying become a difficult and therefore expensive work.

I wish to emphasize this thought that libraries must be continually reclassified to keep abreast of the constantly changing aspects and relations of different departments of knowledge. I see before me one of our university librarians who promised us a few years ago a paper on "The duties of a librarian to his successors," but failed to carry out his promise, presenting, with an apology, only an outline of his intended paper. He gave us the hint that one of the chief duties of a librarian to his successors was to see that he was not, like Sinbad the Sailor, loaded with an old man of the sea in the form of a rigid and elaborate classification supposed to be good for a hundred years.

On only one other department of library work do I care to speak this evening, lest I weary you. And what I wish to say in this regard may be thought to come only by the dragging-in process, within the scope of my theme. I am persuaded of two things, however: first, that you will not insist on my sticking absolutely to my text, and second, that after all, the reform which I have now to advocate is in the best sense an economy. We librarians must find how to place ourselves more constantly and serviceably between the public whom we serve and the books. We have been too content to be *Dei ex machina*, leaving those who use the