

Review Articles

A New Guide

The Administration of the College Library.

Guy R. Lyle. H. W. Wilson Co., 1944. 601p.

There could be no better proof that the college library as a factor of education is coming of age than the growing volume of significant literature on the subject. It is encouraging that the last dozen years have seen the publication of several excellent books in the field, beginning with William M. Randall's descriptive study of the library in the American liberal arts colleges. Brown and Bousfield then analyzed circulation work in college and university libraries; Randall and Goodrich gave to the profession the most lucid exposition of the principles of college library administration that we have; Douglas Waples described better ways of evaluating the college library; Blanche Prichard McCrum revised and expanded her well-balanced estimate of standards for a college library; B. Lamar Johnson told how he had vitalized library service at Stephens College; and, finally, Harvie Branscomb considered critically the task of teaching with books. Along with these major writings went a tremendous amount of interpretation and description of modern college library work, presented in the form of periodical articles. At first sight, therefore, the publication of Guy R. Lyle's stout new volume might appear rather superfluous. But a careful reading of the book will show that it actually fills a very important gap and that we owe to the author a considerable debt of gratitude. The thanks of the profession are to be extended also to his three collaborators, Paul H. Bixler (whose chapter on book selection and acquisition is especially praiseworthy), Marjorie J. Hood, and Arnold H. Trotier. Their contributions fit in so well that the reader gains the impression of having before him the work of one mind.

Lyle, who combines rich experience in college library work with teaching in library schools, is the first writer in this field who thinks primarily of the needs of the young student. Not that previous authors had

neglected them, but they had other audiences more on their minds, usually either the college librarian and his staff or the college administrator. For this very reason, they did not feel obligated to give a complete picture of all aspects of college library work. This led to the uncomfortable situation that syllabi for library school courses in college library administration had to include a wide variety of selections from books and periodicals in order to cover the ground. But anybody who has ever taken such a course knows that it is practically impossible for the beginner to absorb in a limited period a large measure of widely scattered and sometimes repetitious material. Therefore, it was a splendid idea to present the newcomer to the profession, or to this particular branch of library work, with an introduction that gives him a well-rounded picture of all the pertinent problems involved in it and that concentrates on college library administration exclusively.

Lyle has a clearer and more appealing style than have many other textbook writers among librarians; he is more down to earth than most of them. Even a library school student completely lacking in professional experience will grasp from this text the larger issues at stake. If he wants to dig more deeply, he can do so easily, thanks to Lyle's usually rather full list of references.

However, not only the library school student, but also the college librarian and his staff, will find the book rewarding. For the author does not just rehash what he read somewhere but gives his public the benefit of his own wide observations and the results of questionnaires, correspondence, and visits. His findings are set forth without any intent of arousing controversy. He deserves appreciation for well-balanced judgment and for fair presentation of both sides where there is argument on an important topic. This writer feels that there is hardly a single statement on the whole six hundred pages to which he would wish to take exception, even though naturally he might here and there

have put emphasis on different aspects of a problem.

It is to the author's credit that he starts his book with an excellent chapter showing the ties that bind the college library to the changing trends in college instruction. There is nothing that a beginner needs more badly than to see this close interrelationship. Throughout the volume Lyle continues to stress this educational aspect. He speaks of the necessity for the college librarian to be in constant touch with the administration and to keep alive the interest of the college president in this department of his institution. College librarians ought never to be satisfied with hearing the library praised as the "heart of the college" by their superiors on solemn occasions; they should labor day by day to gain and preserve the sympathetic understanding of the educational significance and the future needs of the college library on the part of the president.

Certainly, Lyle's remarks on the relation between faculty and librarian are also very much to the point. The general principle, he states, must be simply "that the library can function effectively only as a part of the whole instructional unit." In this connection, the present writer would like to put forward again his thesis that in the smaller liberal arts college there is hardly a need for a faculty-library committee. The librarian will get better results if he is not hampered by the predilections and ambitions of a few professors who more or less accidentally have been appointed members of such a committee. Its mere existence may easily become, in a small college community, an impediment for the librarian who wants to work as closely as possible with every single instructor, regardless of rank, and who wishes to minister to his particular needs. If the librarian desires moral support on campus for some worthy purpose, he will find it more easily from those library-minded scholars on the faculty who believe in his work than from any committee. Naturally, these remarks do not apply equally to the situation in large colleges, where a faculty-library committee will be inevitable; however, readers of Jacques Barzun's recently published brilliant book on *The Teacher in America* know that even in big institutions committee meetings may not always be profitable.

It has been often stated that as librarians we can expect to command the respect of the faculty only if we are meeting them on even terms. That raises once more the question of proper training for the college librarian. Lyle believes it impossible for him to be a scholar in the sense of an eminent specialist or research man: "His work allows him no time for the continuous application to a single subject which is essential for the specialist." But Lyle agrees that the college librarian certainly must have the instincts and sympathies of a scholar and should be familiar with the methods of research. He also stresses repeatedly the necessity of possessing a broad academic background.

This reviewer for one is convinced that the college librarian of the future ought to master thoroughly one field of knowledge; it will depend on the individual case, whether or not he should take a Ph.D. degree in that subject. This full scholarly preparation, combined with proper professional training, would assure the college librarian a strong position among his teaching colleagues on the faculty; they would have the feeling that any day he could join them in the classroom instead of interpreting the book collection of the library to the college community. There is also food for thought in the criticism which Lyle reports, that chief librarians often lack the vision and ability to play an active part in the formulation of college policy.

Lyle offers some pertinent suggestions regarding personal contacts with students: "The successful librarian is at the service of each student who needs help in his studies, guidance in outside reading, or advice on personal problems. . . . The quality of sympathy is the least dispensable." This point deserves stressing, since Barzun in his thought-provoking book complains "that a love of administration together with something like a defensive attitude, has conspired to make the librarian's relation to students rather less satisfactory than it could be. Librarians doubtless develop through their training a passionate love of books. But need it be so possessive?" Certainly, most of us will agree that a college librarian who spends his time thinking about new rules and regulations, instead of planning for making books more freely accessible, has missed his calling. We do not need red tape!

Many other points that Lyle raises would also deserve comment. Space does not permit discussing here, however, various questions that have vexed many a college librarian, be it the desirable size of the open-stack book collection, the usefulness of browsing rooms, or the educational value of departmental libraries. Suffice it to say that

the forward-looking college librarian will do well to buy not only a copy of Lyle's book for the library but to add another to his private collection. It is one of those fairly rare volumes of our professional literature that warrants re-reading.—*Felix E. Hirsch, librarian, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y.*

The Eleventh Catalogers' Yearbook

Catalogers' and Classifiers' Yearbook No. 11, 1945. Compiled by the Division of Cataloging and Classification of the American Library Association. Chicago, A.L.A., 1945. 96p.

This, the eleventh number of the *Catalogers' and Classifiers' Yearbook*, represents a resumption of the series (the tenth number appeared in 1941) after the plans for a quarterly journal were at least temporarily abandoned. Sponsored, as in the past, by the Division of Cataloging and Classification of the A.L.A. and under the general editorship of a special committee of which Margaret Oldfather, of Ohio State University, is chairman, the volume closely follows the pattern and format of its predecessors.

The first six contributions to the symposium were presented originally at the Milwaukee Conference in 1942. That their publication has been so long delayed seems not in the least to have diminished their usefulness—a virtue which may be either attributed to the timelessness of their contents or to the eternal repetitiousness of library literature, depending upon one's point of view. To these have been added two special papers by Robert B. Downs and Herman H. Henkle and the text of the report made at the close of 1943 by the Library of Congress to the General Education Board concerning the status of the cooperative cataloging project. The compilation concludes with a listing of the officers and committees of the Division of Cataloging and Classification, and the entire work is dedicated to the memory of J. C. M. Hanson. Truly a modest libation for one whose career was so distinguished.

As one might expect, the implications of the new A.L.A. catalog code loom large in the several papers, for it was during the period covered by these essays that the

A.L.A. Catalog Code Revision Committee brought to completion its preliminary work. But if one were to point out a common denominator for all the papers which comprise this collection, it would be a recognition of the growing awareness among catalogers that they are on the defensive against charges of steeply mounting cataloging costs. That these accusations are not without foundation is evident from the seriousness with which all the writers regard them and the impressive array of statistical evidence that is beginning to accumulate from cost analysis investigations in various types of institutions. It is too easy to dismiss the seriousness of the growing financial burden involved in the maintenance and expansion of our swelling card catalogs as being merely an inevitable by-product of the increasing size and complexity of libraries themselves. The problem is much more than a mere exercise in the projection of a parabolic curve; it strikes at the very *raison d'être* of the dictionary catalog and asks frankly and bluntly whether the instrument really justifies the tremendous expense involved.

Julia Pettee, in the opening paper of the collection, hastens to defend the "authorship principle" elaborately set forth in the new code as being in reality a long-term economy and denies that the code should be made a "scapegoat" for "all the costs that new modern demands make upon our catalogs" (p. 19). Grace P. Fuller is equally staunch in her support of economies made possible by the present methods of establishing corporate entry; and a similar point of view is maintained by Clara Beetle when she writes of personal authors and anonymous classics in the Library of Congress catalog.

That the card catalog is a focal point in library operation is implicit in the trilogy on