

is quite capable of the solution of that problem whenever it is given sufficient money and authority to put a specific program across. The distribution of a much more limited number of publications to the people who want and need them is apparently a much more difficult problem, calling for the best judgment and planning of which archivists, librarians, and scholars are capable.

The American Library Association and its Committee on Public Documents have long been at work on the problem, not without some success in certain specific fields, but no major attack on the problem as a whole has in recent years been allowed a considered hearing in either congressional or bureaucratic halls. The most recent such attempt is reported elsewhere in this issue. Its probable success is not yet known, but even if all of its recommendations come to pass for the duration of the war and are allowed to stand during the peace that is to follow, the resultant plan of document distribution will not yet be the best of all possible plans.

The time for the development of such a plan is probably not yet. The chaotic maldistribution of government publications which now obtains in this country and others must probably become a good deal worse, a good deal more tangled and impossible to handle before the learned professions assemble willing hands and ample funds to upset the whole apple cart and begin anew. Such beginning anew must start with a current and comprehensive bibliography broadly planned on a sound basis of adequate and permanent documentation of all items as they are published, must follow through with ample stocks of all publications to meet known and anticipated demand, must provide im-

mediate and complete distribution of all or selected documents to the libraries and archives known to be fully equipped in space, administration, and personnel to care for them properly, and must make available immediately on publication or on application those documents which individuals, scholars, and farmers alike need and want for the prosecution of the many activities government publications are designed to assist. Such a distribution program would somehow cut the gordian knot of sales versus free distribution, somehow resolve the apparently irrepressible conflict between printing and processing, and silence once and for all the vociferous critics of "wasteful distribution." The statement on "Government Publishing in Wartime" is a step in the right direction; many more such steps and a few leaps and bounds are needed if the millennium in document production, documentation, and distribution is to be achieved in our time.  
—*LeRoy Charles Merritt, State Teachers College Library, Farmville, Va.*

*Subject Guide to Reference Books.* Herbert S. Hirshberg. American Library Association, 1942. xvi, 260p. \$4.

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE of this book can best be given in the author's own prefatory statement that it "attempts to provide an alphabetic subject guide to the books needed by libraries for the answering of questions frequently asked. It is designed to be a ready reference tool for the librarian's desk and to point the way to or recall sources of information in books commonly held as well as some less well known." To this purpose it is admirably suited.

It is an alphabetic list of topics covered at lengths which vary from the five titles

cited under "Art Prices" or the four under "Slogans" to the twenty pages devoted to "Biography," well organized under fifty subheads. Material on about half the topics is subdivided, most commonly into bibliographies and reference sources but in some cases under headings more specifically related to the subject. Perhaps a score of subjects are as elaborately divided as "Biography," with the plan of organization outlined at the beginning of the unit. The selection of subjects was based on analysis of reference inquiries in the public libraries of Cleveland and Akron and the library of Western Reserve University, and further influenced by the existence or nonexistence of reference books in a field.

According to the index, nearly two thousand titles are included, some 450 of them not in Mudge. (See Appendix A. The eleven months' advantage of this volume, which includes "latest available editions and new titles up to December 1941," over the second Mudge supplement, 1938-40, would account for a few of these.) Perhaps a score of general reference books—encyclopedias, yearbooks, periodical indexes—are entered under each of a dozen or more different headings (the palm is borne off by *Lincoln Library*, forty-one entries, the *World Almanac* running up with thirty-one), but the mean number of appearances per title is still probably not over two, and 70 per cent appear but once. Annotations for a repeated item differ from subject to subject, indicating its special usefulness in each connection.

Mr. Hirshberg's second purpose, to provide an aid for teaching reference in library schools, is ably defended in his preface. I believe no reference librarian and few teachers of reference will dispute

his claim that the best preparation for practical work is the "inductive method" of learning books by actual use to meet specific needs, and certainly his subject breakdown into more than two hundred small units makes for specific and practical acquaintance with the titles cited under each. It seems inevitable, however, that in his own teaching Mr. Hirshberg must deal with these small subjects in larger constellations such as he presents in his "Classified List of Units" (p. xiii-xvi). I think it equally certain that most library schools give half to two thirds of the reference course to a subject approach, devoting only an introductory term to the mastery of basic types (among the general tools) whose characteristics and peculiarities recur again and again in subject reference books. The chief difference between the two methods, then, would be in the amount of emphasis placed on "historical and bibliographical facts, necessary in a bibliography like that of Mudge," on recognition of types of reference material in many subject fields, and on practical problem work.

The realistic question facing most reference instructors is whether the ideally best method is the simplest and most workable in the average library school situation. The first-year course in general is admittedly burdened to the limit with detail which must be mastered, cataloging and reference being chiefly responsible, and any legitimate simplification of that detail seems justified. Reducing the number of titles learned or examined in reference is desirable, and classifying both general and special-subject reference tools by types has proved mnemonically helpful. Short of a controlled experiment, presenting the same material by the two methods to matched

groups, one has only subjective opinion to offer; but it seems probable that the more conventional would prove as efficacious as the inductive in learning two thousand books, of which 70 per cent (this by statistical sampling of the index) are mentioned in connection with but one subject and therefore seen but once.

Another difficulty in the way of the more practical method is that it requires an immense amount of problem work. The preparation of fruitful exercises to cover a couple of hundred small subjects is time-consuming for the instructor and must be freshly done each season lest books become so worn or soiled at given pages as to reduce their value as both problem and practical reference material. The time needed for any kind of check upon the results of numerous problems is also large and, without aid in revision, not to be undertaken lightly. Moreover unless reference classes are small or resources and space permit of duplicate or even multiple copies of books to be consulted, search in a large number costs students much time and energy. In short, where a library

school depends on a reference collection not of its own but of its parent institution, lacking duplicate copies and used by other students and staff members, instructors may well find themselves unable to apply the inductive method to an extent which could make it effective.

These comments are not to be construed as negative criticism of Mr. Hirshberg's pedagogic method. Western Reserve Library School trains first-year classes of eighty or more students, and it is improbable that all the conditions under which they work are ideal. It would be most interesting to fellow teachers of reference to hear in more detail how a veteran at the game achieves his indubitable success, and we shall look eagerly for the appearance of the workbook to accompany the present guide, which he tells us is in progress. In the meanwhile the guide will be a considerable aid to colleagues in their own teaching of subject reference work, by whatever basic method they present the material.—*Jeannette H. Foster, Drexel Institute School of Library Science, Philadelphia.*