

Review Articles

Documentation

Documentation. By S. C. Bradford. London, Crosby Lockwood & Son, 1948, 156p. 10/6.

More than half a century after La Fontaine and Otlet began their work in developing improved techniques for the bibliographical analysis of printed and nonprinted documents, the English speaking world has remained without a basic treatise on the principles of documentation. The absence of such a work may in large measure explain the failure of American librarianship to keep pace with such developments in France and other European countries. The publications of the International Federation of Documentation, and scattered contributions widely dispersed throughout a miscellaneous variety of journals, have but imperfectly interpreted the meaning of documentation to those on this side of the Atlantic who should be most interested in the field. The late Mr. Bradford's little volume, then, is an attempt to bring together for the first time, in a systematic treatment, the basic principles and problems of documentation in a manner which will make them most useful to the English speaking world. In effect the volume is an addition to our shelves rather than to the literature of documentation, since it is largely an assembly of previously published articles; a method of compilation which almost inevitably results in a sacrifice of cohesiveness. For all that, it remains a useful volume and librarians generally can read it with profit and be grateful for it.

Quite properly the book opens with a consideration of the nature, origin, and purpose of documentation, an approach particularly appropriate for American readers to whom the concept of documentation is still generally unfamiliar. After a provocative consideration of the problems inherent in alphabetical subject indexing the author begins his vigorous defense of the Universal Decimal Classification, a theme to which he reverts all too frequently throughout the entire book. The remainder of the volume is largely concerned with the documentary chaos which the author finds at present characteristic of the work now being carried on by the variety of English organizations working in

the field, and his own rational plan for more adequate bibliographic coverage of scientific literature—a constructive program that is somewhat less convincing than his criticisms of the existing situation.

The author's treatment of the semantic problems inherent in alphabetic subject indexing, and his contention that such subject headings are themselves a concealed classification, are both admirable, but he seems to be unaware that these same weaknesses are also implicit in all of our existing systems of book classification, and that because of the physical form of the book itself and the multiplicity of concepts which a single volume may contain, no schematism can assemble in one place even a substantial proportion of the total library resources on a given subject. Admittedly Mr. Bradford is primarily concerned with a classification of *the literature*, rather than a shelf arrangement of books which of necessity is largely predetermined by their physical format. This freedom from the restriction of the codex form does not solve the problem of classification if the terminology of the discipline is not precisely defined or the relationships among its subordinate disciplines but imperfectly understood.

It is Mr. Bradford's excessive enthusiasm for the Universal Decimal Classification which will probably arouse the greatest criticism in this country. Though the U.D.C. is based upon the scheme devised by Melvil Dewey, the length of its notation, the intricacy of its details and the complexities attending its application have made it so extremely unpopular with American librarians that it has been almost completely neglected in the United States. One wishes that this book had been less a tract for the U.D.C. and more of a general consideration of the problems of classification as applied to bibliographic organization.

More constructively important is the author's proposal for an integrated system of special libraries under the leadership of a central library of science and technology. Such a system would promote an expansion of the librarian's activities to include more

effective organization of bibliographical operations and the more adequate indexing and abstracting of scientific and technical literature. His central library would coordinate the acquisition program of the system, function as a clearing house for all phases of interlibrary cooperation and promote centralized cataloging and indexing. This appeal for the expansion of traditional library functions and the greater concern on the part of librarians with the bibliographic organization of their resources may well be considered with profit by American librarians, who have all too long been indifferent to an area in which they should be assuming the initiative.

Confronted by this chaotic state of British documentation, and urging a coordinated system of special libraries in science and technology, Mr. Bradford reaches the climax of his argument in his proposals for a plan for complete scientific documentation throughout the scholarly world. This program urges the development of an international network of existing agencies concerned with indexing and abstracting of scientific literature, each agency operating in its own clearly defined area and transferring to the others all materials relevant to their particular fields. Though it would rely solely upon voluntary cooperation for the control of its constituent parts, the failure of any one of which might seriously endanger the success of the whole, the author believes that the results of such effort would bring to the bibliographic organization of scientific literature a thoroughness of coverage and a directed effort that are now conspicuously lacking. The objective is certainly meritorious, but voluntary cooperation on an international level is at best an uncertain

foundation stone upon which to rest so important an undertaking. One can hope that Mr. Bradford is right, but past experience and present realities engender skepticism.

Perhaps enough has been said to indicate that the constructive proposals of this book are less successful than the picture it presents of the present state of documentation and its criticisms of the existing situation. The chaos of documentation, especially in the field of the social sciences, in this country is even greater than that found by Mr. Bradford in his native England. If the book will serve no other purpose, at least it should focus the attention of American librarians upon the importance of the problems which it raises, the need for much greater attention to the promotion of more adequate bibliographical controls, and the desirability of effective exploration and original investigation in the field. It is to be hoped that the newly revived American Documentation Institute may eventually achieve at least some of Mr. Bradford's desired goals. Already there is considerable evidence that workers in medicine, pure science, and technology are growing increasingly concerned over the inadequacy of their bibliographical services and classification systems, and even the social scientists are beginning to think seriously about an effective abstracting medium to fill the need left by the demise of *Social Science Abstracts*. To such activity librarians can ill afford to be indifferent, and if Mr. Bradford's book should arouse some stirring in the library world, its results may well be the author's best memorial.—*Jesse H. Shera, Graduate Library School, University of Chicago.*

Literature of Mathematics and Physics

Guide to the Literature of Mathematics and Physics, Including Related Works in Engineering Science. By Nathan Grier Parke, III. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1947, 205p. \$5.00.

Here is a welcome companion piece to those subject guides which already exist in chemistry and engineering. As the first of its kind in this specific field, this book is "intended to be of most help to those who do not necessarily have a detailed knowledge of

mathematics and physics." It provides the reader—be he scientist, student or librarian—with a general orientation in the literature available and indicates landmark books as well as further sources of information.

The author has divided his presentation into two parts of somewhat varying quality. The first part is concerned chiefly with general information on methods of study and reading, the use of the library and the technique of the literature search. One cannot help but feel