

## Book Reviews

***The Librarian and the Machine: Observations on the Applications of Machines in Administration of College and University Libraries.*** By Paul Wasserman. Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1965. 170p. \$5.75 (65-25320).

This is a sane book in the insane world of academic librarianship. Temperate and calm, it is eminently readable, has a useful "reading list," and is adequately indexed. Without entering the soggy field of library philosophy and arraying our Big-endians against our Little-endians, Dr. Wasserman, presently dean of Maryland's graduate library school, believes we must adapt the machine to do our data processing even while we wait, in civilized expectancy, to be shown whether it can indeed retrieve information from large general collections at a price we can afford. His evaluation of the advantages automation will bring and his words of caution regarding expectations and operations are judicious and thoughtful. The academic librarian would do well to force the book upon his computer science people and the faculties of his science departments. It might spare him the vast amount of gratuitous but frequently fatuous advice he receives in such quantity.

The author looks both backward and forward. He notes the belated impact the computer has had on libraries. He also examines the Florida Atlantic experiment, the Columbia-Harvard-Yale medical libraries project, and a few of the other attempts to cope not only with the so-called information explosion, but, more importantly, with the burgeoning record-keeping accompanying it. He reports, but does not really judge, or even evaluate, these efforts. Since his book was conceived there have been small indications, at least, that some of the efforts are not achieving the success we had hoped they would. None of us is likely to tout his failures, but Dean Wasserman pays indirect tribute to those who have made our mistakes for us. Dean Wasserman briefly but specifically surveys coordinate indexing, the key-word-in-context indexes, MEDLARS, and selective dissemination of information. This is a useful summary, but more important is his recognition of the profession's

desperate need for user studies. He is probing one of our sore spots here, but performing a service the while.

The various roles our professional organizations, the computer companies, research scientists, and business and industry have played in bringing us to an awareness of what computers can do for librarianship are touched on. While recognizing, but not belaboring, the fact that librarians are wary of computers, Dean Wasserman, perhaps in charity, does not finger the library schools as the villains of his piece. He recognizes that our whole profession suffers from the fact that for years non-selective admission policies and low financial rewards have produced librarians sketchily educated in the genteel disciplines (English, history, music, or even, heaven forbid, French!) who are hostile to machine techniques. He has sympathy for the human problems involved, but is hopeful that an increasing awareness of the need for experimentation and change will move us further along the road from amateurism to professionalism.

If the book has a fault, it is that his comments on the quality of the new men—that exciting bunch of madmen and mechanics, dreamers and scholars—who hopefully will give us the leadership we need so badly, are curiously understated. Perhaps he is going out of his way to reassure those of us who do not know COBAL from Cockney that we need not fear for the traditional value and functions of librarianship. In fact, the growing number of lively young men like those in the select Committee on Library Automation is one of the bright spots of the profession. Not only have they "savvy" and style, but they know library problems and have demonstrated an impressive professional competence. A few of them are even bookmen!

Paul Wasserman merits our thanks for his "observations."—*Stuart Forth, University of Kentucky.*

***Ontario Libraries, a Province-wide Survey and Plan, 1965.*** By Francis R. St. John Library Consultants, Inc., Toronto: Ontario Library Association, 1965. 182 p. \$2. (Cover-title: A Survey of Libraries in the Province of Ontario).

To ask of a multibrary survey "what are its conclusions?" is naive these days. They deal with cooperation and the interdependence of libraries. Ask, rather, about the libraries surveyed, or the sponsoring organization, and you will be better able to assess the value of the surveyor's recommended levels and techniques of cooperation.

The present survey was commissioned by the Ontario Library Association, but paid for by a direct provincial grant since it was expected that this report would form the basis for new legislation. Its scope was the broadest possible: *all* types of libraries—public, university, college, school, special, and government. Can a provincewide "plan" for a province of six million people and four hundred thousand square miles, incorporating all these diverse types of libraries, be presented in under two hundred double-spaced typescript pages?

This is not to suggest that each square mile demands a square inch of report space, but rather to ask what such a report might be expected to include of: (1) background information; (2) isolation of problem areas; (3) principles to be observed in finding solutions; (4) technical and administrative details of suggested solutions; and (5) supporting statistical evidence.

It would be kind to suggest that much of the first could be omitted since Ontario's librarians are perfectly aware of it. But why omit the important historical framework of, say, the independent religious college libraries and then spend half a page on such trivia as Ontario's scenic spots? The problem areas are identified: geographic imbalance, administrative inefficiency of small units, lack of ready communication even among nearby libraries, and lack of provincewide coordination. A less superficial treatment, however, might have lent a greater air of authority through more obvious attention to local circumstances than to a procrustean use of old published statistics and generalized norms.

The principle of cooperation is certainly valid, but the surveyors ride it so hard that one wonders if they even considered the tempering role of tradition, of day-to-day work efficiency, or of library purposes. In proposing concrete steps toward an integrated library system, this report unfor-

tunately falls between two stools. It specifies many solutions in administrative detail rather than leaving the principles to be worked out as the time of application and the local circumstances demand. This approach is not in itself bad, but every proposed solution becomes suspect when it is found that the ramifications of some have not been thought out carefully enough by the surveyors to indicate their impracticality. Of particular interest here is the fact that the province's academic librarians are now on record as severely critical of many aspects of the report's view of their place in the grand scheme.

This is unfortunate, for the approach and conclusions of the "St. John Report" are not in general poor or invalid. And for Ontario's libraries, the report has already had the salutary effect of increasing certain provincial grants and of obtaining press headlines. Should one ask for more? For readers of this journal, this report will tell something about Ontario's conditions and needs, very little that is new or detailed about the practical operation, of cooperative efforts, and much about how not to write a survey report.—*Ronald Hagler, The University of British Columbia.*

***The Role of the Library in Improving Education in the South.*** Ed. with an introduction by Hallie Beachem Brooks. Atlanta, Georgia: Atlanta University School of Library Service, 1965. 112 pp. Apply.

In the Spring of 1965 the Atlanta University school of library service, with the cooperation of the Emory University division of librarianship, sponsored a conference on "The Role of the Library in Improving Education in the South." To provide an opportunity for defining the role of the library in the South's efforts to solve a variety of economic, educational, social, and cultural problems; to communicate to nonlibrary groups the need for joint concern as well as the fact that libraries can make a significant contribution to programs designed for social betterment; to consider specific methods of planning and implementing all types of programs concerned with advancing the cause of education in the South: these were the purposes of this conference which was made possible by a