

Book Reviews

A History of Libraries in the Western World, by Elmer D. Johnson. New York and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1965. 410p. \$8.50. (65-13554).

When a heathen came to Rabbi Hillel and asked him to explain the whole Torah on one leg, he answered: "Do not unto others as you should not want them to do unto you—the rest is commentary. Go and study." Anyone who is asked to write a compendium of library history is faced with the same problem. It is impossible.

Mr. Johnson has bravely struggled through hundreds of monographs on one or another phase and period in the history of libraries. At the end of each chapter he has listed "further reading." That his book seems abrupt and somewhat statistical is hardly his fault. How does one describe the British Museum in two pages? One could hardly get the flavor of the King's Library in that space. One could not possibly understand the scope and depth of the special collections of authors, subjects, and periods which that institution has published from several score lines of typing. (The volume is a photoreproduction of typed pages, an inexpensive form of printing apparently favored by books on libraries and librarianship.)

Bravely, Mr. Johnson starts out with papyrus and clay tablets, and works his way methodically through to sixty-seven hundred volumes on French culture collected by François Bouvier at Michigan State University. It is a long and tortuous road along which he progresses, and at every signpost he has had to make a difficult decision. How much can he say before he has to rush on? As many lines had to be devoted to that pioneer public library founded in 1656 by Captain Robert Keayne in Boston, which had no lasting influence and was destroyed by fire in 1747, as to the considerably larger, richer and far more influential Newberry Library in Chicago, which still flourishes.

It is difficult to suggest how the work might have been better. As a rare-book man I might have savored in greater detail and with more flowery description some of the

monumental collections of the past. A public library specialist might have dwelt with more loving care on the development of modern branch systems. One interested primarily in the emergence and importance of the hundreds of specialized technical collections would have underlined more heavily their impact on contemporary life.

No scholar will be happy with Mr. Johnson's book. Most of its inadequacies are the result of the immensity of the scope. Most of its inaccuracies are the result of the inadequacy of the secondary sources upon which the author was forced to rely. One is somewhat overwhelmed by statistics. No matter how one reads numbers they fail to appraise quality or usefulness. That St. Louis County had four hundred and thirty-five thousand volumes in 1962 does not tell us much more than that Gabrielle de la Tour, Countess of Montpensier, owned over two hundred volumes in 1474. Yet, how does one describe the *Bibliothèque Nationale*?

As a textbook for library school courses in library history, Mr. Johnson's work will be most useful. Names, dates, some facts, a bibliography obviously incomplete but at least challenging, and a skeletal outline for fleshing are there. This is not the gospel, but it is an introduction to verses in the gospel. But woe to him who relies upon the index. It can only be described as primitive. To the reader one can only repeat the words of Rabbi Hillel: "Go and study."—*Edwin Wolf 2d, The Library Company of Philadelphia.*

The Modern Manuscript Library. By Ruth B. Bordin and Robert M. Warner. New York: The Scarecrow Press, 1966. 151p. \$4. (66-13734).

This volume is intended to guide libraries and librarians in the management of manuscript collections. It serves this purpose admirably, reflecting the best of current practices. Each facet of a well-rounded manuscripts program is instructively discussed: collecting, processing, preparation of finding aids, administration, public relations. The model for discussion (and a fine one)

is the University of Michigan's Michigan Historical Collections with which both authors have been associated. Even the "best," however, leaves something to be desired. Unlike Schellenberg's *Management of Archives*, the book is not innovative, although there is need for innovation in the fields it covers.

With respect to collecting policy, it would have been well to state a broad guideline such as the following; "Once a subject field is chosen, manuscripts should be acquired on any aspect of the subject for which there is inadequate primary source material." Acquisition of photocopies to buttress manuscript holdings misses attention, as does the administration of manuscripts on microfilm. In many libraries administration of photocopies has been neglected. There is, however, a good discussion of the legal problems of photocopying and the acute problem posed by "loss of control" of photocopied material. Acquisition of records of current organizations should have received attention; such records are a growing component in modern manuscript holdings.

Need for innovation is greatest in the area of arrangement and description, and it is here that the authors should have presented the over-all problem as one for which no generally accepted solutions have been found. For example, in this reviewer's judgment, too much time in manuscript libraries is spent in the kind of minute subject analysis of manuscripts advocated by the authors; T. R. Schellenberg's innovative "broad subject" approach is a better guide to practice. However, neither he, the authors, nor manuscript librarians as a group recognize and react to the fact that most users approach manuscripts by *names*. Psychologically the user has already linked names with his specific subject(s) thereby rendering largely superfluous the library's painstaking, specific subject analyses which are, at best, inescapably erratic.

Reflecting current practice, the authors discuss different kinds of finding aids: guides, inventories, catalogs, and indexes, each being suited to particular kinds of manuscript groups. Yet, in this reviewer's opinion, if there is to be progress, recognition must soon be given to the need for a *single interphased system* using cumulative indexes that guide the user from single

leads (name, subject, or date) to all units having the desired manuscripts. In part, the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* does this unwittingly, however inadequately. The authors properly stress the priority of a published comprehensive guide to the entire holdings in preference to guides to individual units, although along the way the latter are good for publicity.

The basic concepts of rule of provenance, order of provenance, and original order are not clearly distinguished. There are helpful appendixes with models (pp. 123-47).—*Richard C. Berner, University of Washington.*

The Power and the Dignity: Librarianship and Katharine Sharp. By Laurel Ann Grotzinger. New York: The Scarecrow Press, 1966. 331p. \$8. (66-13735).

Katharine Lucinda Sharp was one of librarianship's early prophets. In 1893, she founded a library school that became the graduate school of library science of the University of Illinois. A careful study of her career has long been needed, and Grotzinger has done it well.

Born in Elgin, Illinois, in 1865, Miss Sharp was graduated from Northwestern University in 1885. After a period as a teacher and then as assistant librarian of an endowed public library in Oak Park, Illinois, she went to Albany in 1890 to attend Melvil Dewey's library school. After graduation, she undertook several short-term responsibilities and then, in September of 1893, was employed to found a library and a library school at the Armour Institute in Chicago. During the summers of 1895 and 1896 she also directed short courses at Madison, Wisconsin, under the sponsorship of the state library association.

The library school at the Armour Institute was both popular and successful. As originally planned, it was to be a highly practical program designed to train technically competent library assistants. Miss Sharp sought to raise the academic requirements in order to produce librarians qualified at a higher level than that of mere technicians. She was successful in introducing a second year into the diploma program, but the library science curriculum, as she conceived it, was not entirely compatible