

How much is the library appreciated? / by Charles Perry Fisher.

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HOW MUCH IS THE LIBRARY APPRECIATED?

BY CHARLES PERRY FISHER

Librarian, College of Physicians of Philadelphia.

WHILE I am sure that we are unanimous in our belief that the library is appreciated, yet how far that appreciation extends, and how we can broaden and create a permanent interest in the library is worthy of a little of our time for discussion. I have omitted the word medical from the title to permit of wider views and comparison if it is thought advisable.

My experience is limited to one locality and, in a practical sense, to one library; but I think it highly probable that in connection with this subject what applies to one place will, in a degree, apply to all. For a quarter of a century I have watched over and given my time and attention to the growth of a library, and my earnest endeavor has been to create a feeling of personal interest in its affairs and development. From the beginning I turned naturally to those who made use of the library for assistance by either word or deed, and not a great period of time had elapsed before I had formed an opinion which later years have proven many times; that, while all readers or workers greatly appreciate the library, especially if it contains the books desired, their interest seldom lasts longer than the time required to complete the work in hand. It is this class that we should endeavor to stimulate to a more permanent interest in the development of the library. There are exceptions, great and noble exceptions, men who are ever loyal; but it should be our effort to assist in relieving the burden of a few and distributing the load among the many.

While money is not, by any means, the only assistance desired, yet it is a most important factor; occasions may arise in the history and growth of all libraries when an unexpected expenditure of money must be made at short notice; or, an opportunity for the betterment and advancement of the library allowed to pass, in some cases for all time; in most cases for a long period of years. My task has required me to make repeated calls upon the generosity of the men connected with the institution which I represent for subscriptions of money, and my experience has been that only by personal solicitation

could I hope for success. Appeals by letter, official or unofficial, receive scant attention, in no case have I known the replies to reach fifteen per centum.

Now the men I call loyal in their appreciation and interest, are those who remember the library at all times and in all places, at home or abroad; the remembrance comes automatically, it is not necessary to charge the mind or make an effort to remember, interest in the object has made so deep an impression that memory is roused by the slightest subject that is analogous. Think how often, and in how many ways, the library may be benefited without the expenditure of money; in most cases merely a suggestion, with the name and address of the library, will bring prompt results; in some cases, institutions for example, a slight effort is required in the form of an appeal to the parties in authority. Publications of societies of all countries, books and pamphlets from the authors, and the mass of material accumulated by publishers, editors and individuals that ultimately finds its way to the paper mill; would, in a majority of cases, by a few words opportunely spoken, become the property of the library. In the large cities the librarian, by his own efforts, can gather large quantities of material useful in some form to the library; but this influx could be increased many times, if the members and others connected with the library, could be induced to give some thought to it during the course of their daily lives.

It should be made clear to the donors, and to the public, that all gifts are appreciated: a donation of a handful of old periodicals should be as promptly acknowledged as the presentation of a box of books. There are many persons too modest to think of sending what might be termed rubbish to a library, especially if the library be one of any size or pretention; yet but a few words would be necessary in order to induce them to make the trial, and when they found the gift promptly and politely acknowledged, with a note added that the library will be glad to send for anything in the future, is it not plausible to suppose that a large number would become regular donors?

If these few remarks, together with other suggestions which I trust will follow; or, any part of them that may be thought desirable, are printed in such a form as will enable the librarian to bring the matter pointedly before his readers and visitors, I believe the result will be of lasting benefit.

Discussion.

MR. HUNTINGTON, of Brooklyn, thought that Mr. Fisher's experience was shared in common by librarians in most localities. The practitioners *actively* interested in the library were apt to be comparatively few, and it had been his observation that similar conditions prevailed in institutions and organizations of all kinds. In the medical library he believed that by personal solicitation and the right words spoken at the right time and place the librarian himself could do most in stimulating the interest and activities of those whose custom it was (if they took interest at all) to "point with pride" and self-complacency at the collection of books gathered through the efforts and sacrifices of others.

DR. DOCK spoke of the exaggerated value some donors placed on old books simply because of the fact that they were old. Age itself did not necessarily mean value. He cited an anecdote of an old lady in his vicinity who possessed a copy of an old edition of Buchan's "Domestic Medicine" which she knew was very valuable, but which she was willing to sell to the library for \$100. She became most distrustful of the library authorities when her offer was politely declined, and she was told that the book had slight, if any, value. In another case a doctor in the country had been led to give to the library a collection of more recent, yet out-of-date, textbooks when he was informed that they would not fetch more than five cents apiece in the market. After sending them to the library he got the idea into his head that he had been misinformed as to their value, and wrote and requested that they be sent back to him. Dr. Dock thought one function of the librarian ought to be to explain to people the rapid depreciation in value of old scientific books.

MISS METTA M. LOOMIS, of Chicago, inquired as to the advisability of the library's sending for books which it did not want.

MR. FISHER stated that it was his policy to send for everything that was offered. He had a push cart for this purpose and saved the expense of an expressman.

MR. HUNTINGTON thought it unwise ever to refuse a donation to the library, no matter how slight its value.

MR. FISHER, in response to an inquiry as to what the medical library should keep, stated that he did not believe

in keeping a large number of the purely "trade" drug journals. In his case these were turned over to the Library of the College of Pharmacy.

MISS M. C. NOYES, of Baltimore, stated that she thought the medical library should keep these journals.

DR. J. B. EAGLESON, of Seattle, spoke of the desirability of interesting dentists in the medical library, and inquired as to what attempts, if any, had been made in this direction.

MR. HUNTINGTON stated that in Brooklyn the dentists took a very active interest in the medical library. The local dental society met in the medical library building, and the dental section of the library was called "The Library of the Second District Dental Society, being the Dental Section of the Library of the Medical Society of the County of Kings," this latter in recognition of the active interest taken by the dental society in building up this section of the library. The books were owned by the medical library, but the dental society gave very liberally each year for the purchase and binding of dental books and journals. Members of the dental society were granted the privilege of borrowing books from the library, both medical and dental, the dental society guaranteeing the library against any loss.