

THE VALUE OF A PUBLIC LIBRARY TO A COMMUNITY

THE value of a public library to a community is so evident that discussion of the matter almost approaches the humorous. In Harrisonburg we learn this value in what is perhaps the most forcible of all ways; we learn it by experience, the experience of doing without.

Scarcely a day passes in the work of our city schools which might not be helped by the resources of a public library. And certainly our first thought, in considering the value of a library to a community, turns to its young people. In New York City more than one third of its seven million library books circulate among children. Books of reference, history, biography, music, fiction, all are needed to assist students in their search for higher education. This is a day of parallel work in schools. In our local high school, for example, the English course requires the reading of two books every month. The present school library has become inadequate to the increased number of pupils. What is needed is a public library affording more books. In a recent essay contest, because of little material at hand, it was necessary to send to the public libraries of Washington and Richmond for books to furnish information needed.

Then there is the teacher's side of the question. If a pupil's progress is but the reflection of a teacher's work, the lack of a public library is a handicap from this standpoint. For no teacher can do his or her best without proper facilities. Without suitable books of reference for pupils, an instructor is surely at a loss.

Furthermore, a teacher likes the helpfulness of books on his own account. Many personal school questions may be answered or problems solved if there are books available.

Nor is the value of a public library confined to school days. In many instances the library takes up the task of training where schools leave off. The New York libraries, for example, have children's reading rooms and story hours where often only some exciting bits of a story are related. The story-teller stops short with these words, "And the rest of the story may be found in the books on the library shelves." In this

way the children become interested, and want to read books that otherwise would appeal to them only as "dry reading." Fifteen hundred children have been known to apply for books at one time, at one place.

Andrew Carnegie knew how to appreciate the value of public libraries. In his younger days, when struggling upward, Mr. Carnegie devoured all the books he could find. When wealth came, he did not forget this lack of his youth. He determined, so far as he was able, to prevent other boys from suffering the same unsatisfied hunger for knowledge. And so he became a "builder of libraries." His shrewdness and keen-mindedness saw opportunities in this branch of public service not equaled by any other.

A public library in a community has a business value. In considering our sister city, Winchester, do we not speak of its library as one of its assets? Are not home-seekers attracted by its combined educational advantages of library and splendid schools? Also, to libraries the public often turns for information on social and industrial questions.

Last but not least, the recreation advantages of a public library are unlimited. Owen Meredith has jocosely said, "We can live without books," but surely it would be a sad sort of living. No matter what the environment, with plenty of books available, the poorest person may live in a land of dreams. How often we hear the remark, "I can rest better by reading than in any other way."

"No opiate like a book that charms
By its deep spell the mind's alarms."

One of the leading physicians of the country, who specializes on diseases of the mind, tells us that "It is almost impossible to estimate the therapeutic value of reading" and that "we must consider it in this light as well as in its relation to occupational and recreational work."

A community library encourages the reading of the best books by older readers; it teaches the children, through its close, sympathetic touch with the schools, to turn towards the real things of life, by directing and encouraging their reading in the right direction; it encourages a community spirit, as usually the library is a community center; it fosters civic pride; it helps, by its circulating features, to keep boys and girls

on the farm; it exerts a far-reaching influence for betterment that cannot be put into words.

In the future, every community will feel it as necessary to have its public library as to have its public schools.

Our community should have a public library.

JANET HOUCK.

THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Ignorance is the menace of civilization. If America continues to grow, the minds of her people must grow. The schools alone cannot satisfy this need for continuing the intellectual growth of American citizens. In America today, 85 per cent of the boys and girls are in school until the age of 14 years. After that, but one in five continues school until the age of 18. Then what happens? A scanty few go on to college or university and the others do not. Is this the end of their education then? Must their mental growth cease when the school doors close behind them?

There must be some way out. Some way to continue the educational growth of American citizens. And there is a way. That way is the public library. It is America's continuation of school. It is the most democratic of American educational institutions. It is free to every person—color or race, nationality or creed make no difference. It is free to every person who wishes to read, and who is willing to read. If the schools will only teach the reading habit, the library will educate the world, for the public library of America is free to every new idea, free to every fresh point of view; nothing is barred because it is new or radical or different. The public library is free from party politics; it is free from religious intolerance and prejudice. The public library provides information on all sides of every important question—so far as its funds will allow.

The citizen has his duty toward the library. First of all he should encourage larger appropriations of funds. Too many people are being turned away because there are not enough copies of certain books to supply the demand, or not enough money to

buy all the books that should be on the shelves. More than half the people of the United States do not have library facilities of any kind. The educational facilities of the library have not been recognized as they should be; with that recognition will come greater service.

Democratic as the library is, its service should be greatly extended. The librarians should be prepared to give more service, more encouragement and sympathy to their patrons, whether to help the half literate foreigner or the scholar. The public should be made to see that the library is a continuation school. While the library is useful and helpful, it has still not reached its maximum of helpfulness or usefulness and it cannot do so until the people themselves realize what it has to give them.

WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE.

FUNDAMENTAL REFORMS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COURSE OF STUDY

DO WE need reforms in our elementary school course of study?

Probably the presentation of a few facts may point to the truth that reforms are needed.

First, the world has made rapid strides and civilization, in its progressive mastery of varied energies, includes education, and education includes the course of study.

Second, there exists an appalling amount of injustice, error, stupidity, and misery. The schools know this, and the machinery of education should constantly be directed against these insidious foes.

Practices which once may have proved adequate have become obsolete and ineffective. Even the founders of our Republic were influenced by the ideas of John Locke, among which was the *tabula rasa* theory, namely, that the mind is a tablet on which could be inscribed anything that one wished to write. Consequently all men are equal. No individual differences, here; none of the facts and principles of modern science; no biologists in these deliberations. And ever since then, because of our democratic notions of equality we have been trying to hitch some very ordinary wagons to stars of the first magnitude. One of the curses