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THE INDIRECT INFLUENCE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

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The first way in which the indirect influence of the library can be exerted is through the life and character of those selected to administer it. This may seem to go without saying, and the general high character of those chosen to library position has been such that their influence has been properly exercised, with very few exceptions. It is worth remembering, however, that the personality of the librarian is one of the important elements which determine for what the institution is to count in the community and that the best results in the way of religious education can be obtained from a library whose staff have an experimental knowledge of religion—to use an old but appropriate phrase. The life of the librarian and his assistants will have much influence on the community, and that influence can be exerted in a thousand ways outside of the library walls. Addresses may be made before churches and Sunday schools, part may be taken in church work in the hours not devoted to library work, advice and suggestion may be given as to the selection and use of books by Sunday schools, mission study classes, church guilds, boys' and girls' clubs of various kinds connected with the churches of the locality, and in scores of little ways in intercourse with the people one meets one may add to their religious information and improve their religious standards.

In the selection of books for the library, it is right to remember that the majority of the patrons are Christians, and that although, fortunately, we have no State church, we recognize the existence of God in the proceedings of our legislatures and of our courts. Books should be procured and placed in the library which clearly and ironically describe the nature, history, and usefulness of that relation of God to man which all men have sought to comprehend, groping after the Divinity, if happily they might find Him. Books of honest doubt may also be properly placed on the shelves. There is no room in a public circulating library for works of blatant infidelity, though a great reference library may preserve such books for the scholar. The question of the moral character of the books bought is also one which must be passed on by the library. The librarian is, of necessity, forced to be a moral censor. He has to expend the public money for the common good, and dare not waste it in provision of deleterious, worthless, or immoral literature. On the other hand, prudishness must be avoided, and a purchase and restricted circulation to adults for suitable purposes is proper of works of the literature

of power which have artistic worth, although their lack of proper moral standards renders them unsuited for general use.

Having bought the books, the library should next see that the borrowers have brought before them such books as it is most desirable for them to read to educate them from a religious point of view. In this connection, we should remember that religious education has two purposes from the point of view of the library. Some books are adapted to elevate the character, to strengthen the moral fiber, to give lofty ideals, to enable one to resist temptation, to call up examples for imitation, while other books have as their chief purpose to give information on religious matters, such as many church histories and books on missions. The public library should supply books in both of these classes, and by well arranged and annotated lists, make them accessible to the public.

The public library should co-operate with the pastors and with the Sunday school; providing references for the former and suggesting suitable books, or even loaning such books to the latter. Some churches have called their Sunday schools Bible schools, but the institution is too wide for that title. By catechetical instruction, it endeavors to give the form of sound doctrine; by mission study, it endeavors to keep the scholars apprised of the progress of the Kingdom of God on this earth. The library has as great and imperative a duty to co-operate with this religious school, as it has with the public school, which is held upon week days.

The public library has an especial duty to all teachers, and not last of all to religious teachers, in providing them with the best possible works which they may use as sources for reverent teaching of God's will, as shown by nature or as revealed to men. The best possible facilities should be provided for teachers, that they may be properly equipped to convey to their pupils the truth, as it has been disclosed to the world's scholars in their reverent search therefor.

The experience of the Enoch Pratt Free Library is of some interest in connection with our subject. In 1884, my father, Dr. Lewis H. Steiner, was appointed the first librarian, and, in preparing lists for purchase, he was careful to procure such books as would have an elevating ethical influence and would meet the needs of religious men of any denomination. The policy he instituted has been continued up to the present day. We have bought and placed on our shelves the important exegetical commentaries on the Scriptures, the best books on religious history and on missions, the chief dogmatic and doctrinal treatises of all parts of the Christian church, and many of the leading devotional works and collections of hymns. We have not confined ourselves to Christian books, but have also put in the library English translations of

the sacred books of other religions and many of the books in which these religions are discussed. In the branch libraries, the size of the collections and the lack of demand for sectarian works have induced us to purchase only those books which deal with the Bible, with Christianity as a whole, or with the great non-Christian religions. Believing that religion and philosophy should go hand in hand, we have provided for our readers those philosophical books which have achieved renown and are of permanent value.

At the present time in the central library and the branches there are about 15,000 volumes of religious works. Although both my father and myself have been members of Protestant churches, the library's strength in Roman Catholic books has become such that, in 1900, Rev. John F. O'Donovan, S. J., wrote that the library had then "a collection of works by standard Catholic authors, which will challenge comparison with that of any other public library in the country." In order "to call the attention of the Catholics of Baltimore to the patent fact" just mentioned, and "to interest them in the work of enlarging this collection and, especially, of making constant use of the works it contains," Father O'Donovan prepared and printed an "unofficial catalogue" or "List of the Catholic Books" in the library, which list a local Roman Catholic book dealer sold. This classified and annotated list comprises 87 pages and shows how the public library can be used by the churches to provide reading for their members. I have wondered, sometimes, why other branches of the church catholic have not done the same.

In 1895, we began preparing monthly lists of books helpful for teachers of the International Sunday-school lessons, and posted them on our bulletin board for a number of years.

In 1901, the library began to send books to public schools and other institutions for a period of a fortnight, and in 1904 this service was extended so as to cover Sunday schools, making only one difference in the regulation, by permitting a box of books taken out on a Saturday to be returned sixteen days thereafter, so that the books drawn from the Sunday school on a Sunday might be kept for two weeks, and returned to the library on the Monday following the expiration of that period. In September, 1904, after experimenting with one or two Sunday schools, a circular letter was sent to every church and synagogue in the city, offering the use of our books for the nominal payment of twenty cents for each box, which is just the sum which we pay the delivery company for transportation. The Sunday schools prepare lists from our finding lists and send these lists to us no later than Friday morning. The lists are then looked up and the books which can be sent are placed in boxes to be sent out on Saturday

morning. Any book in the library, which may be asked for, will be sent except reference works, or those of exceptional value. During the past year twenty Sunday schools and other church organizations drew books, and one of these continued to use our books throughout the entire summer. Most of the Sunday schools find that it is better to have the children who are delinquent in returning books pay the fines, rather than have the Sunday school itself pay them. One of the most efficient of the Sunday school librarians. Mr. Charles R. Ditman, of the Hartford Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, recently made a very interesting report of his experience with the library, as follows: "The first deliveries were made to us in October, 1904. From that date to February 1, 1905, is not included in this report, as it covers only a portion of our fiscal year. During the year 1905-1906 our library was open thirty-eight weeks, and during 1906-1907 thirty-seven weeks, having been closed during the summer months and at Christmas. The distribution was as follows: 1905-1906, prose fiction, 734; juvenile, 417; poetry, 4. Essays and general literature, 30; biography, 63; history and travel, 103; biology, 27; miscellaneous, 3; total, 1,381. Number using library, 47.

1906-1907, prose fiction, 765; juvenile, 445; poetry, 2. Essays and general literature, 20; biography, 43; history and travel, 51; biology, 31; miscellaneous, 16; total, 1,373. Number using library, 50 (about one-third of average attendance).

"It will be noted that prose fiction and juvenile comprise the much larger proportion of the books read, but there is a fair percentage of more substantial reading.

"The librarian makes all the selections for each week's delivery and, with some few exceptions, selects the books for those using the library. The short time in which he has to work prevents any other plan. In selecting the books, no effort has been made to confine the selections to works of religious character. It has been his purpose, however, to obtain the best of modern literature, particularly in the matter of works of fiction and juvenile works. In this he thinks he has succeeded, and the use of the library has been a constant source of entertainment and instruction to the members of the school. Many desirable books have reached these scholars, that otherwise would not have been read."

We have found that, where there is a methodical and painstaking librarian in the Sunday school, there is no trouble in continuing satisfactory relations; but that, where a careless or unsympathetic person has charge of the work, the sooner we strike the school from our list of institutions the better for all parties concerned. It may be added that the use of the books of the

public library need not supersede the use of books from a library belonging to the school, but may well supplement a small and well chosen collection, which is permanently the property of that school.

Other librarians have done less, some have been able to accomplish more; but the record that I know best has been given as an example to show that the libraries of the country are in general trying to exert their influence, direct and indirect, towards the proper religious education of the communities in which they are placed. State library commissions are also sending traveling libraries to Sunday schools in the rural districts, and the effort is made to help in whatever way is possible.

Christianity is a religion of a book and of the greatest of all books, and the vast majority of those interested in religious education in the United States are Christians. To make that book fully "understood by the common people," the help of other books is needed, and these are being furnished by the public libraries. With greater harmony between the library and the workers in our churches, yet greater results can be obtained, and the library may be not the least of the means which shall lead men to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Lord.