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Madras Library Association

Publication Series, 2

THE FIVE LAWS OF LIBRARY SCIENCE

The Five Laws of Library Science

BY

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BY

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BY

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1931

TO
THE BELOVED MEMORY
OF
SRIMATI RUKMANI

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PREFACE

BY

THE MADRAS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

WITH the object of spreading the essential ideas of the Library Movement and of directing thought towards the creation of a library service suited to our country, the Madras Library Association published in 1929 a collection of articles on the Library Movement contributed by persons interested in the subject and this collection has enjoyed a wide circulation throughout the country.

With the present volume on the "Five Laws of Library Science"—the manuscript of which Mr. S. R. Ranganathan has been good enough to place at the disposal of the Association—the Madras Library Association commences the publication of a series of books on the technical and practical aspects of library work.

The Association hopes that the publication will serve its purpose and further the cause of the Library Movement in India and elsewhere.

FOREWORD

THE library movement is of comparatively recent origin in western countries and is the result of democratic influences which obtained an ascendancy towards the end of the last century. The desire to extend the benefits of learning to the people at large suggested the foundation of numerous public libraries. The possibilities of libraries as instruments of popular education have ever since occupied the attention of those interested in this movement. Much thought has been given in recent years to the best methods of popularising the use of libraries.

The vast increase in the number of books published year after year and in the additions made to libraries has given rise to a large crop of questions regarding the organisation, administration and management of libraries. Men's outlook in regard to these matters has undergone a radical change. Libraries are now regarded not as precious possessions to be jealously preserved from the intrusion of the vulgar, but as democratic institutions for the profit and enjoyment of all. How to attract readers to libraries, how to extend to all classes, the facilities for using them, how to render the maximum amount of help to those who desire to use libraries and how to save the time of the readers and the library staff alike are questions which, simple as they may seem, demand no little

thought, imagination, skill and experience from the librarian.

A large mass of literature has grown up about this subject. Library Associations have been started in many countries, chairs have been founded in several Universities for the teaching of library management; and numbers of library journals have come into existence. Attempts have been made to systematize the knowledge on this subject and it is now claimed that it has attained the status of a science. Whether the organisation and management of libraries is to be regarded as a science or as an art, it is needless to consider. There can be no doubt, however, that there are certain essential principles underlying the management of libraries according to present day needs and conceptions.

The author of this book has sought to expound these principles in a systematic form. He has been able to reduce them to five cardinal principles and has developed all the rules of library organisation and management as the necessary implications and inevitable corollaries of his five laws. Once the laws have been stated, they appear so obvious that one wonders that they were not clearly realised and worked out before.

Mr. Ranganathan's treatment of the subject is clear, logical and lucid. He has brought to his task extensive knowledge of the literature on the subject of libraries, personal acquaintance with the methods of management of libraries in Britain, a trained analytical intellect and a fervid but

enlightened enthusiasm for the library movement. He has been the pioneer of the library movement in the Madras Presidency and has been carrying on an energetic propaganda to spread it. He knows how to rouse and sustain the interest of the reader and has produced a very attractive and readable book. I have no doubt it will meet with wide appreciation and soon come to be recognised as a standard text-book of Library Science.

The Madras University is fortunate in possessing the author as its librarian. Its library has developed in his hands into a live human institution, which aims at a helpful personal touch between the staff and the readers who use the library. The enormous increase in the issue of volumes since the author took charge of the library is a striking testimony to the soundness of the principles on which it has been run and to the efficiency of his management in spite of the very defective housing conditions under which the library has been working.

The publication of this book by the Madras Library Association is not the least of its claims to the gratitude of the public.

P. S. SIVASWAMY AIYER.

INTRODUCTION

I

THIS is one of the most interesting books that I have read in recent years upon our profession. It is unique, I believe, in that it attempts for the first time a comprehensive survey by a librarian who has a peculiarly Indian mind, and reflects his own racial culture on the basic theories of the art of book distribution as it is understood in the modern library world. To those who are new to our work it may be a wonder that so much can be made out of what superficially appears to be so simple a craft, but a perusal of Mr. Ranganathan's pages will take the beginner a long way along the path of enlightenment.

Mr. Ranganathan is unusually equipped for his undertaking. It is now several years since he placed himself for a while under the direction of the lecturers and teachers of the University of London School of Librarianship, and he became particularly associated with me. I found that he was a man of considerable culture, very original in his outlook, persistent and undeviating in his investigations, and wisely given to considering any suggestions that might be made to him. Not only did he attend the lectures in librarianship at the University of London; he made an intensive study of library work of all types by visits to libraries

in various parts of the country. For some time he studied every day in the Croydon Public Libraries, where I watched his work with interest. He examined the processes of every department, and spent much time considering and criticizing the various processes. All the way through he was seeking the reasoning that lies at the back of all our doings.

Not only was he interested in books and libraries, he spent some of his leisure in examining the educational methods in the schools of the towns, and their relationship to libraries. His critical outlook went so far that he even started on a new classification of books. This, as he tells us in a later part of this volume, is employed in the University Library at Madras, and in a few other Indian libraries which are beginning to classify their books.

Such a course of study and such an attitude of mind could not fail to produce a type of librarian whose work would be of importance. The work before us is proof of this.

II

The practice of librarianship long preceded the formulation of any laws whatsoever. In all crafts this is so, of course. It is only slowly and from the continuous experience of workers that a theory can be deduced and given a statement. Ours may claim to be, however, one of the oldest crafts in the world, and some of the quite ordinary

processes which have now been brought to such perfection that Mr. Ranganathan is able to formulate their results as "laws", existed in embryo form in the Assyrian libraries and probably in earlier ones. The clay tablet catalogues in the British Museum prove to us that there were then not only libraries, but a systematic library science. In later but still early years the work of such librarians as Callimachus in the libraries of the Pharaohs shows methods of management, especially in the classification of books, that are the wonder of modern librarians who have considered them.

Every great nation in the past has had its public libraries, even if their use was sometimes limited to special classes of the community, and in the general anarchy of European civilisation which followed the fall of the Western Roman Empire the monasteries still preserved and added to their libraries.

Library history was largely influenced by this monastic preservation of books, because for centuries libraries were limited to colleges and to other protected buildings, and their use restricted to the inhabitants of these institutions. To preserve the book was of as much and even of more consequence than to get it used. That spirit has been passing away since the middle of the nineteenth century. The great libraries of the world, with varying degrees of generosity, have been thrown open to external readers, and the attitude of the *conservateur* has given place to what I have ventured to

call elsewhere the exploiter of books as the right description of the librarian.

The principal factor in the modern attitude towards libraries and books has been what are known in England and America as "public libraries". This term to-day has quite a different meaning from what it had before 1850. Then, public libraries were public in much the sense in which the public schools of England are public; that is to say, they were limited in their use very largely to the governing classes. The modern public library is a municipal institution supported by towns for the free use of the citizens without discrimination. They were Anglo-Saxon in their origin, and came into being at about the same time in Great Britain and in the United States. These libraries have now been built up with a special technique of their own, with, in many cases, very large stocks of books, and, literally, millions of readers.

One of the most significant social factors of the last half of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth centuries has been the widespread development of the reading habit amongst western peoples. Even the more conservative nations of Europe have now developed systems of libraries more or less on the Anglo-Saxon model.

III

The modern view, then, of libraries is that which regards all the population as its clientele.

Even in university and research libraries facilities are now given to serious students without difficulty almost everywhere. This is the attitude which the librarian in India will, I hope and believe, make his own. It must be quite clear, however, that universal rules or notions must always be given a local and individual application. I do not think the library methods of America, much as I admire them, are root and branch suitable for Europe or even for England. The psychology of the people varies, and variants in library practice must be made to meet this fact. Even more amongst the peoples of India, with their immense history, powerful traditions, and distinctive racial qualities, the application of merely Anglo-Saxon ideas to a thing so intimate, personal and spiritual as literature, without modification, may not be wise. I have had many foreign students in the libraries under my care, and I have always tried to impress upon them that what they learn from us should always be considered carefully in the light of the needs of their own home countries. I feel that this is immensely important in India.

This, to my mind, gives its special value to Mr. Ranganathan's work. He deals with all the questions which exercise the minds of European librarians. Book selection, with a catholic mind which has determined that all sides shall be heard, and that no personal preference shall have undue influence; the best methods of library furnishing and equipment; a considered statement of what can be done by the catalogue and by the classification:

these will be obvious to the reader. He writes, too, as an educationist—as all good librarians should—and I hope he has made quite clear that the development of a literate nation, with a full love for its great literature and a right understanding of the value of books, must begin with considered and generous provision for children.

In the West every child is a potential reader; it must be so in the East, even in places where the children have not yet had opportunities to do much reading or to get access to books.

IV

A wise American librarian once remarked to me that a log of wood with a book at one end and a librarian at another would make a perfect library. That was a picturesque exaggeration, of course, but it is the personal element that the librarian brings into the library which gives it its vitality. Many libraries, alas, lack vitality; they have staffs, but no librarians. The spirit of the real librarian has never been more beautifully or wisely shown than in Austin Dobson's epitaph on Richard Garnett, one of the greatest librarians of the last century:—

“Of him we may say justly,—Here was one
Who knew of most things more than any other;
Who loved all learning underneath the sun,
And looked on every learner as a brother.”

The implications of this are profound enough to humble the most accomplished librarian. It

implies that the librarian must be a man of acquisitive mind who closes his mind to no subject of human interest. He is always a learner; he must always be awake to and welcome every development of human thought and every adventure of the human spirit. He must, however, be a man educated not only in the general sense but in every operation and process of libraries. He must be a lover of other men. When young people come to me as aspirants for library work I ask them, “Do you love books?” They invariably reply that they do, but I ask them next, “Do you like people and serving people?” I rejoice that in India there are men who now have taken in hand the choosing and training of librarians. What the country holds in the way of libraries I do not know fully, but with its great literatures, in so many forms, there are no doubt many fields of research and many library possibilities as yet undreamed of even by the Indian himself.

Here, then, is a book that may be an inspiration to all those who, in higher or humbler office, will serve India in her libraries. Conceived in a broad, ungrudging spirit, it must enthuse those who enter upon our profession in that country with the immense, if sometimes undramatic, possibilities of a library. It will show it to be not merely a collection of books which accumulates age and dust, but a living and growing organism prolonging the life of the past and renewing it for this generation, but giving also to this generation the

best that its own workers, thinkers and dreamers
have to offer.

W. C. BERWICK SAYERS,

Chief Librarian, Croydon

Lecturer in the University of London School of Librarianship

Examiner in Library Organization to the Library Association.



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