

SAMUEL LEASK'S PAPER AT LIBRARY MEETING

CONSIDERS QUESTION, WHO SHOULD BUY THE BOOKS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES—THE LIBRARIAN OF THE TRUSTEES?

Said Samuel Leask Saturday at the Librarians' convention in this city:

There are two distinct kinds of buying, involving entirely different kinds of ability in the buyer. Buying for the satisfaction of a personal desire or need is comparatively simple, while buying for the satisfaction of the desires and needs of others is a task of great difficulty and many complications. Book buying for a public library is of the latter kind, and it will be interesting to review briefly some of the considerations by which the action of such a buyer is determined.

In considering a proposition to buy a book for a public library the following questions, among others consciously or unconsciously have to be asked and answered:

Is the book in stock?

If yes, is the number of copies on hand sufficient to meet the demand?

If not in stock is there evidence of a demand for it?

If not in stock and there is a demand for it, does any feature of the book render it objectionable for general circulation?

If the book is not in stock and there is no demand for it, is it a work of sufficient merit to justify creating a demand for it by placing it in an open shelf collection and otherwise advertising it?

This leads to the further question "What books are in stock on the same general subject and to what extent do they meet the needs of readers?"

Does the book belong to a class of which there is a relatively large collection in stock, or is the collection on this subject relatively small and incomplete?

Is there money available to buy the book?

If there is money available, is the purchase of this particular book the best possible use that can be made of it, considering the

and club duties, as well as church, society, charitable and civic activities, all compete in turn for their time, energy and attention. If men, the struggle for a living as workman, professional man or business man makes large drafts on their time and vitality. Presumably, their selection as a library trustee was not accidental, and implied a certain amount of devotion to the public good. This means time devoted to the promotion of the public welfare in various ways, the result being that as a rule the library becomes to the average library trustee one among a hundred competing interests to which at the best only a fraction of his or her time can be devoted. Among trustees personal leanings and preferences in the matter of books and authors are apt to be quite pronounced from lack of close contact with the great mass of readers, whose interests and mental limitations as varied as their other individual characteristics.

Now, having sketched the librarian and trustees we come to the question as to which of them is best qualified to answer the (questions) with which we started. In a collection of, say, 10,000 to 30,000 volumes, is the librarian or the trustees most likely to know whether a given book is or is not in stock? Surely the librarian. Features in a book rendering it objectionable for general circulation may be passed upon by the average trustee as well as by the librarian if attention is called to them, but usually the trustee will be too busy to read all the doubtful books, and will not be situated so as to hear them discussed. Consequently, here again the librarian's knowledge and judgment will be an invaluable guide, though if she is wise she will refer doubtful books to the trustees and defer to their judgment and authority if they decide against purchase.

(to be continued.)

WILLIAM LEASK

mands and interests of readers?

This is a formidable array of interrogatories, but no intelligent and careful bookbuyer can afford to disregard any one of them in spending the people's money. The question I am asked to answer is: Who is best qualified to deal with these questions—the librarian or the trustees?

Before proceeding to answer this question, let us ask two more: Who is the librarian? and, who are the trustees?

The librarian I am referring to is the librarian of a small or medium sized library, an entirely different person from the librarian of a large library, whose duties call for qualities of a kind not demanded in the librarian we are to consider. Our librarian of Palo Alto, San Jose, Watsonville or Santa Cruz is an all-round kind of person who does a little of everything from book-mending to book-buying, including usually a large amount of desk service. In a collection of 5000 to 30,000 volumes this kind of a librarian has her stock well in hand, that is to say, she does not to any great extent depend on a shelf list or catalogue. She has handled and examined every book as it arrived, has usually accessioned and classified the new additions and has a knowledge of at least the outside of every volume in the collection. She is in daily personal contact with the readers, assists them in their selections and researches listens to their complaints and suggestions. In this way she becomes acutely aware of the weak places in her stock, and if she is competent and systematic she has at all times a long list of books in demand which are not in stock. If she is observant, she will also note the books that are never read and usually will know the reason why, either lack of interest on the subject or the availability of other works on the same subject which for some reason are more attractive. The librarian, consequently, knows what she has; she knows the subjects in which readers are interested, and she knows the books that are not read. As a result of contact with many minds each with its own trend and favorite field, her personal bias in regard to books and authors tends to disappear and in that connection she usually becomes broad in her sympathies and interests. Her reading of book reviews and library literature keeps her well informed regarding the most prominent of the new books and the manner in which they are being received by the reading public.

So much for the librarian. Now, who are the trustees? You will find that whether they be men or women they are usually busy people with many and varied interests. If women, home duties, professional duties