

## The Subject Ph.D. and Librarianship

ENTRY INTO THE FIELD of librarianship for holders of the Ph.D. degree in the various subject fields may be either fortuitous or by design. In the case of fortuitous entry, very often the new librarian has been teaching or has held administrative or research positions and because of an interest in some phases of librarianship, perhaps through bibliographical studies, enters the library field. His success or failure in this venture, from the point of view of professional librarians, depends on how well he is able to pick up the basic tools of his new occupation.

The other type of entry into the field of librarianship, entry by design, is generally made by the younger Ph.D.'s. The Ph.D. is a specialist's degree, and for the most part is considered training for college teaching, if for anything. Those who do not wish to teach enter other professions, such as industrial and private research, government service, editorial and abstracting work, and sometimes library science.<sup>1</sup> Some decide that their profession should be librarianship while writing their dissertations and thus are able to take the library school courses while still graduate students. Others come to the decision after they have taken the degree and enter library school for the necessary training courses at a later date. In either case, they follow the library school curriculum and emerge as professionally trained librarians.

The problem for the library school oc-

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence S. Thompson, "Some Cultural Determinants of Scholarly Librarianship," *Library Quarterly*, XXIII (1953), 261-62.

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casioned by the presence of these holders of advanced degrees in varying subject fields is one that has become increasingly present and one that is not simple to solve.<sup>2</sup> The library school curriculum, especially since the schools became graduate schools instead of training institutes, is divided into two kinds of courses: core courses in the essential library techniques, and cultural or specialized courses in the wider field of librarianship. The core courses—bibliography, information sources, cataloging, classification and documentation—are the unique contribution of the library school. One cannot acquire more than a smattering of any of them anywhere else. They are essential to the training of a librarian. The cultural or specialized courses pertain to the educational, sociological, historical, public relations and administrative sides of librarianship and some of them could be omitted with no great loss.<sup>3</sup> A course in research methods is mandatory for the student starting graduate work for the first time. The possessor of an advanced degree, on the other hand, may find it of dubious value because research methods are precisely what he has been learning during the three or more years already spent in graduate school. The same thing applies to some extent to history and theory courses. They are essential for the new graduate student, while the holder

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, W. Stanley Hoole, "Of the Librarian's Education," *American Scholar*, XIII (1944), 120; E. H. Wilson, "Advanced Degrees in Subject Fields," *CRL*, VI (1945), 269-70; Robert B. Downs, "Preparation of Specialists for University Libraries," *Special Libraries*, XXXVII (1946), 212; Harold Lancour, "If Librarianship Is a Learned Profession," *Library Journal*, LXXVI (1951), 1076; Herman H. Fussler, "Readjustments by the Librarian," *Library Quarterly*, XXIII (1953), 225.

<sup>3</sup> Views of a somewhat similar nature recently have been expressed by Margaret Egan in her paper, "Education for the Librarian of the Future," at the Conference on the Practical Utilization of Recorded Knowledge, Cleveland, January 16-18, 1956.

of a subject degree may be ready for more advanced work.

In addition to the possible factor of repetition in some aspects of the library school curriculum, there is the problem of the length of the whole course.<sup>4</sup> A two-year library course leading to a master's degree in library science is too long for a person who has already spent three or four years in graduate school. By a little burning of the midnight oil, which will not really bother any holder of a Ph.D. degree, the core courses can be covered in one semester. For the other topics, perhaps advanced reading might be advisable, or graduate seminars.

The library school provides some very essential knowledge which the Ph.D., for all his lengthy training, lacks. His first important gap is in the use of reference materials. The location of source material, as taught in subject fields, usually is sketchy because emphasis is primarily on criticism. The student wastes much time making inefficient literature searches. After only one semester of information sources he is considerably better equipped for his research. His second lacuna is in using the card catalog. Here again the graduate student (and even his professor) has missed much and wasted a tremendous amount of time by not being able to find his way through the standard dictionary catalog. No instruction in how to use a catalog is half as valuable as knowing how to make one. This is important both for entry and in the use of subject headings. If the library course in reference and cataloging had come at the beginning of the graduate student's career instead of at the end, no doubt considerable time and energy would have been saved, particularly in gathering material for the dissertation.

The third weak place in the advanced

graduate student's technical knowledge is in documentation.<sup>5</sup> Here, to some degree, specialists in various subjects, as documentalists, have attempted to fill in gaps in bibliographic control, and excellent subject bibliographies and other aids are available in many areas. But much remains to be done. The contributions to learning produced in this field demand highly specialized knowledge even more than library training, though the latter is also essential. The subject Ph.D., with the further addition of capability in library science, is ideally educated for documentation, and his interest in this field is advantageous if he prefers to be connected with a library in a research institution.

Most of the Ph.D.'s in subject fields, being academically minded, gravitate towards university libraries.<sup>6</sup> Obviously they are particularly well suited as to background for the reference, bibliography and cataloging fields. A library director trying to secure faculty status for his staff finds it helpful to be able to point out that some of his people have the same academic background as the teaching staff. Furthermore, as subject specialists they fill needs connected with the development of specialized collections, and very likely it is as subject specialists that most subject Ph.D.'s may expect to find their forte in library work.

The subject specialist or scholar-librarian is, in a manner of speaking, neither fish nor fowl. Should his first interest be his subject or librarianship? And, as a corollary, should he expend his research energies on his subject field or on some

<sup>4</sup> Wyman Parker, "College-Library Personnel," *Library Quarterly*, XXIV (1954), 354; Downs, "Preparation of Specialists for University Libraries," *Special Libraries*, XXXVII (1946), 209-13; J. Periam Danton, *Education for Librarianship* ([Paris]: UNESCO, 1949), pp. 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> "Documentation . . . is that aspect of librarianship concerned with improving graphic communication within and among groups of specialists; it involves that portion of librarianship which treats of the materials and needs of research and scholarship, and hence it is particularly concerned with abstracting, indexing, classification, searching operations, compilations of bibliographies and similar means of meeting specialized information requirements." Western Reserve University, School of Library Science, "Program for Documentation Specialists," [Cleveland, 1956].

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, *op. cit.*, 261-62; Robert B. Downs, "Are College and University Librarians Academic?" *CRL*, XV (1954), 14; Robert B. Downs, "Academic Status of Librarians—A New Approach," *CRL*, VI (1946), 8.

aspect of library work? These are very real questions. It is important to the subject Ph.D. to be able to keep up with his main field of interest and to make contributions to it. Some professional librarians concerned with the matter assume that his occupational choice will predominate and hence one hears discussion as to whether he is better off with a Ph.D. in a special subject or in librarianship. Actually to be worth his salt, the *subject specialist's* first interest must be his subject.<sup>7</sup> His first duty as a librarian is to his subject field. He has no choice in the matter.

The subject specialist's major interest in his subject is necessary to keep him abreast of current developments in the field. It is impossible to keep up to date in every area of knowledge. It is extremely difficult even to keep track of one's own branch. One must subscribe to the basic journals, attend conventions, read innumerable books, articles and reviews, following the literature as best one can with inadequate tools. What earthly use would a subject specialist be if he ceased acquiring knowledge in his subject the day he joined the library staff?

It is true that the scholar-librarian must keep up with the developments in library science, too, but here at least he can pick and choose, and concentrate on those facets of the field which are of the greatest use to him. Furthermore, literature in librarianship has one great advantage over that in his subject field: most of it, in the present early stage of development, is comparatively easy to understand. An article on the Library of Congress classification of rare books simply does not require the background for one on "The Place of the *Turba Philosophorum* in the Development of Alchemy," or "Fontana's Laws of Irritability." An exception to this comment is

<sup>7</sup> Robert Kerner, "Essentials in the Training of University Librarians," *CRL*, I (1939), 33-34; Matthew A. McKavitt, "Subject, Method, Scholarship and the Library Manual," *Special Libraries*, XXXIII (1942), 359.

necessary in referring to current work in documentation, some of which is highly technical.

When it comes to his own research, perhaps the subject specialist will be able to devise some combination of interests. Otherwise original studies in his own subject field would probably be more significant and congenial, and since much of this work must be done after normal working hours, he might as well have the pleasure of pursuing his own bent. The important point is that he should do something. As a scholar he has an obligation to do research. If he is merely content to sit back and "provide service" as a librarian, the Ph.D. has been a waste of time; moreover, the library which hires him is not getting the full value of his talents. The library should not be a refuge for those who are afraid of productive scholarship.

The subject specialist who wishes to escape from the academic world may find his niche in one of the myriads of special libraries flourishing at the present time. These libraries require talents and specializations of all kinds, particularly in the sciences. They offer possibilities for flexibility in administration and for experimentation impossible in more formal or well-established libraries. Many of the current interesting developments in cataloging and in reference work, for example, are coming from these libraries. The combination of subject specialization and library training is ideal for the special library.

In contrast to the subject specialist, the Ph.D. who enters the library field in another capacity not only has more choice as to his field of research, but also as to the type of career he wishes to pursue. The first and most obvious possibility is in administration. A large number of academic libraries still choose their chief librarians and major department heads from the ranks of the professors. The argument is that an ex-professor under-

stands the needs of his erstwhile colleagues better than anyone else, and there is something to be said for this line of reasoning. A tremendous literature has appeared in library publications regarding the education and professional requirements for library administrators and specialized library personnel.<sup>8</sup> The controversy over whether the "untrained" librarian does as well as one who has been especially trained for library work has by no means been settled. The possessor of a Ph.D. in library science is considerably better equipped for the special administrative duties connected with a library, but may have difficulty convincing the faculty of his academic sympathies. The Ph.D. in a subject field, who holds an additional degree in library science, has the advantage of being on both sides of the fence at once.

Other major fields of librarianship, notably reference, bibliography and cataloging, are also open to the subject Ph.D. In a library having subject divisions, he may spend his time in reference work connected with his own subject or in the broad general field of which his discipline forms a part. General refer-

ence also may be appealing because of the great variety of information encountered. Bibliographic work, which would combine his special interests and librarianship, may prove a happy solution. Certainly there is a great need for bibliographic studies, critical bibliographies, detailed indexes, informative abstracts and other research tools requiring a high degree of specialization on the part of the compiler. The cataloging field also opens a wide area to his talents. Classification and subject headings in particular are extremely difficult without considerable background knowledge. Perhaps the reason these subjects and cataloging in general are unpopular in library school is that most students lack the resources one gains through advanced study and cannot find frames of reference in the vast areas covered by the classification schemes. A person with an organizing type of mind may find cataloging even more rewarding than reference work.

Of all the types of library work available, the new discipline of documentation offers some of the most interesting possibilities for the subject Ph.D. who wishes to carry on research in a combination field of his subject and librarianship. Documentation is rapidly becoming of paramount importance because of the difficulty of recovering essential information from the constantly increasing mass of published material, particularly in article, report and non-printed form. The selection of subject headings and index terms and the construction of workable codes for mechanical selection are jobs for the specialist. When one considers the low retrieval factor obtained with present subject headings,<sup>9</sup> for example, compared with the potential availability of material in library collections, the matter of getting data out of storage becomes a prob-

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Nathan van Patten, "Discussion," *CRL*, I (1939), 34; Louis R. Wilson, "What Type of Research Librarian?" in *Changing Patterns of Scholarship and the Future of Research Libraries; A Symposium in Celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the Establishment of the University of Pennsylvania Library* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951), p. 115; Sydney B. Mitchell, "Libraries and Scholarship," *The Library of Tomorrow; A Symposium*, ed. Emily Miller Danton (Chicago: American Library Association, 1939), pp. 70-72; Charles E. Rush, "The Librarian of the Future," *The Library of Tomorrow*, p. 100; Downs, "Are College and University Librarians Academic?" *CRL*, XV (1954), 14; Lawrence C. Powell, "Education for Academic Librarianship," *Education for Librarianship; Papers Presented at the Library Conference, University of Chicago, August 16-21, 1948*, ed. Bernard Berelson (Chicago: American Library Association, 1949), pp. 136-37, 139; Bernard Berelson, "Advanced Study and Research in Librarianship," *Education for Librarianship*, p. 224; Carnegie Corporation of New York, *Report of Informal Conferences on Library Interests*, Dec. 8, 1930, Feb. 24, 1931, Apr. 27, 1931 (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1931), pp. 46-47; Downs, "Preparation of Specialists for University Libraries," *Special Libraries*, XXXVII (1946), 209-13; Harry L. Lash, "So You Meditate a Ph.D.," *Library Journal*, LXXVI (1951), 149-50; Eugene H. Wilson, "Advanced Degrees in Subject Fields," *CRL*, VI (1945), 268-70; William H. Carlson, "The Doctor's Degree," *CRL*, VI (1945), 264-68; Harriet D. MacPherson, "Degrees as They Affect College Librarians," *CRL*, VI (1945), 270-73; Hoole, "Of the Librarian's Education," *American Scholar*, XIII (1944), 112.

<sup>9</sup> Oliver L. Lilley, "Evaluation of the Subject Catalog; Criticisms and a Proposal," *American Documentation*, V (1954), 41-60.

The training of patrons in the proper use of encyclopedias is a closely related subject, but one not pertinent to the present discussion. It ought, however, to be pointed out that, on the basis of the facts

brought out above, a recent encyclopedia does not materially affect the educative role and responsibility of the librarian to see that the books in his care are used to the best advantage.

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lem of vital importance. Some urgent needs in documentation research are: truly flexible classification schemes, suitable for subject headings and mechanical selection codes as well as for classification *per se*;<sup>10</sup> a new approach to subject headings, possibly with points of access in classified index proportions; machines for literature searching based on some principle other than the dichotomy; and studies in language engineering, linguistics and semantics to provide a basis for reduction of the ambiguity in terminology, especially in subject headings and in machine language codes.

The place of the subject Ph.D. has been discussed, mainly from the point of view of the holder of this kind of doctorate. The provision of library training to potential librarians with such a background offers an opportunity for the

schools to develop flexibility in their programs. On the other hand, the core curriculum in librarianship is a necessity for work in any aspect of library science, including subject specialties. The Ph.D. who becomes a subject specialist librarian may still maintain his paramount interest in his subject field, whether in an academic or a special library. Those more interested in professional librarianship will find positions in administration, reference, bibliography and cataloging for which the doctorate has a distinct advantage. The whole new science of documentation practically requires advanced study in subject fields as a prerequisite to accomplishment. The problems which must be solved before the library can reach its greatest fulfillment as a functioning storehouse of information pose a real challenge to every branch of the library profession. In this respect, the subject Ph.D. has an important contribution to make, whether as a conventional librarian, a subject specialist or a documentalist.

<sup>10</sup> The essential unity of problems in these three areas has been pointed out in Brian C. Vickery, "Developments in Subject Indexing," *Journal of Documentation*, XI (1955), 1-11.

## Second Annual Midwest Academic Libraries Conference

The second annual Midwest Academic Libraries Conference will be held at Marquette University in Milwaukee, May 10 and 11, Friday and Saturday. Three speakers have already been engaged, Robert Downs, Ralph Esterquest, and the Academic Vice President of Marquette University. Invitations will be sent to all academic libraries in the Middle West after March 1.