

Review Articles

Social Function of Libraries

Social Functions of Libraries. By Bartholomeus Landheer. New York: Scarecrow Press, 1957. 287p. \$6.

In many respects this is one of the most amazing books this reviewer has read. It is repetitious and longwinded. It is full of misprints. It has statistical tables which were never filled in. It has unfortunate, if not bad, grammar. It is a curious combination of philosophical musing, sociological examination, and statistical inquiry into cultures and libraries, with often only a modicum of organization. But perhaps the most unfortunate thing of all is that underneath is a great deal of information, careful thought, and competent insight on the highest plane concerning the role played by libraries, that is worthwhile but that requires an excess of patience to uncover.

Dr. Landheer attempts to answer from a sociological standpoint the question "Why libraries?" He asks: who reads and why, in different types of cultures, his thesis being that reading is an answer to individual needs, felt differently by individuals as the density, complexity, pressure, and development of their society varies. Writings to satisfy these needs fall into five categories: devotional, cultural, achievement, compensatory, and informational. Writers, at least of the truly creative sort, are likewise answering a need felt to communicate, to comment on and justify their position and their society. The artistic writer lives in a world apart, and the stimulus to write presupposes a certain maladjustment. Writing puts him in the dynamic, as opposed to the static, element of society, and it is hoped that his products, although essentially personal, are likewise of meaning to others.

The discussion of—indeed almost attack upon—the accepted concept of "efficient readership" or "maturity in reading" is well done. No one value standard can be set upon reading or material until one investigates the individual reading instance and analyses the reasons for it. Good reading for one person becomes bad for another, and

this is not in terms of political or religious denunciation but in terms of the sociological and psychological needs of the individual.

Predictions on the future of libraries, as on anything these days, are perhaps questionable, but Dr. Landheer can see their becoming ever more necessary in an increasingly differentiated and faster culture. "The function of a library is not the spreading of knowledge, but the development of human personality. . . . Reading to be enjoyed requires time and the ability to rethink the thought-processes of others. Reading does not mean 'to be told something by someone who knows it better.' . . . Reading means to absorb what is essential to one's mental structure, and this process has no general rules of speed or capability." Given these needs, there can never be of making many books an end.—G. A. Harrer, *Stanford University Libraries*.

American Fiction

American Fiction 1851-1875, A Contribution Toward a Bibliography. By Lyle H. Wright. San Marino, Calif., The Huntington Library, 1957. xx, 413 p. \$7.50.

With *American Fiction, 1851-1875* Lyle H. Wright brings his admirable bibliography of this field across the first full century of the national life of the United States. This volume is a supplement to Mr. Wright's *American Fiction, 1774-1850*, first published in 1939 and reissued in a revised edition in 1948. Publication of the second volume marks the completion of a bibliographical project that can be verily described as monumental.

Combined, the two volumes record a total of 5,604 titles, with sixty more titles listed for the last quarter century covered in the second volume than for the whole seventy-seven years treated in the earlier compilation (2,832 titles against 2,772). Even this figure de-emphasizes the increased literary activity of the expanding country in the mid-nineteenth century as Mr. Wright's criteria for listings in the new publication were somewhat more stringent than those for the earlier volume.