

evidence of the kind of sentimentality self-proclaimed book lovers like to allow themselves.

There is increasing evidence of a quickening interest in the history of American publishing. This interest is bound to result in much more being written about paperbacks and their part in the reciprocal relationship between publishing and society. Points of departure for dozens of studies are established by *The Paperbound Book in America* and it should form a foundation from which further investigations will arise.—Howard A. Sullivan, *University of Detroit Library*.

Information Storage And Retrieval

Information Storage and Retrieval—Theory, Systems, and Devices. Edited by Mortimer Taube and Harold Wooster. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958. 228p. (Columbia University Studies in Library Service, no.10.)

The Air Force Office of Scientific Research, through contract with Documentation Inc., organized a symposium in Washington, D. C. on March 17-18, 1958, which was designed to explore the theoretical and engineering approaches to the solution of information storage and retrieval problems. More specifically, the recurring leit-motif throughout the symposium was the desire to secure the emergence of some "common agreement concerning the nature of the problem or problems and the direction in which solutions are likely to lie. . . ."

The careful preparation for the symposium is reflected in the first part of this publication, the six working papers which define the scope and limits of the problem, the historical solutions, the present state of theory, and of devices and systems, as well as the possible future tendencies in these areas. The rigor of concept formation is reflected in the "Terminological Standards," terms and their definitions as used in the working papers and as a guide to the invited discussants. In themselves, the working papers serve as a crystallization of the ap-

proaches to this field by the people engaged in the development of information storage and retrieval systems and concerned with the underlying theoretical constructions. The formulation of concepts, and the very language employed in describing the relationships under consideration, may strike an unfamiliar note to the traditional librarian without familiarity with the mathematical and computer-engineering flavored orientation of the text. Nevertheless, it requires no major adjustments to identify the library relatedness of the working papers, or to appreciate the purpose of the questions posed by each of them.

The discussion which follows the working papers, comprising the second part of this book, permits more than one assessment. If the success of the symposium were to rest on the agreements achieved through the reported discussion, it will have failed. To the extent that positive results are recognized, they emerge by exhibiting the wide divergence of views, the totally variant approaches, and the inherent difficulty of disciplining discussants with a diversity of background. Each of the discussion topics was related to the working papers and was introduced by a prepared statement delivered by one of the discussants. In a number of instances the discussion departed radically from the intended subject into quite unpredicted directions. Dr. Taube's introductory statement on "The Logic of Retrieval Devices" was followed by an animated and even emotionally charged discussion on the relationship between computers and the human brain, quite the liveliest discussion throughout the symposium; it did not, however follow from or contribute to Dr. Taube's discussion outline.

The editors faced a formidable problem in editing these discussions and reducing them to manageable size for publication. The working papers will undoubtedly have a longer valued reference use; the reported discussion, though lacking the preconceived structure of the working papers, will have considerable interest and value to the discriminating reader. Such discrimination will tend to seek comparisons with the eventual proceedings of the International Conference on Scientific Information similarly held in Washington in November of 1958. The par-

allels of precirculated working papers, discussion limited exclusively to participants, absence of clear consequence or explicit agreement on conclusions from the discussion, are all very striking. They suggest the question as to whether the field of information storage and retrieval possesses the requisite coherence to benefit in full measure from these undertakings.—Henry Dubester, *Library of Congress*.

A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing

A Passion for Books. By Lawrence C. Powell. Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1958. 249p. \$4.50.

Commenting on Sydney Mitchell, Dr. Powell says, "His classroom courses had names and numbers, but actually they were all classes in Sydney Mitchell." In the same spirit this review is a discussion not so much of what Powell writes in this book but of Powell himself.

But before wading into this controversial subject, I find it pleasant to say that now and then Powell shows unusually fine descriptive powers as a stylist. For instance, in his chapter "Bookmen in Seven-League Boots" he succeeds as well as any living writer in telling you what it is like to fly across an ocean and a continent in a fast airplane. This chapter is a classic of travel writing.

And then in the first chapter, when Powell is expressing his contempt for some of the experts in management who run libraries these days, he says, "I know that I am not alone in my belief, my love, and I call on booklovers everywhere to close ranks, face the invaders, and give them the works, preferably in elephant folio." This sentence evokes a good clear image and it's good writing. In fact, most of Powell's prose is sprinkled with sentences that bristle with force, although most of the style is reminiscent of Gissing and Trollope. It could be said that Powell himself was born a century too late, although I am glad he was.

Let me say straight off that I am for Powell more than I am against him. He is without doubt a sheep in wolf's clothing and if you are not careful when reading him, you

will be thinking that he cares more about the "velvet" feel of a book than he does its content. Curiously enough, when he begins to wax eloquent on this point, his prose is least evocative and clear. At times it becomes positively mushy.

Powell *does* care about what authors say, he does sometimes write about the contents of books (see chapters beginning on pages 97 and 238, for example) and he does understand that the physical book is a carrier for ideas and expressions. But his point is that the book itself is an artform and that as a work of art it makes an important cultural contribution when its artfulness matches perfectly its contents. Also, he thinks we should have reverence for the physical book as a memorial to the intellectual history of man, just as we revere the medieval cathedral because it expresses the religious life of man.

But, don't all librarians think this? Indeed not. Most librarians who have been trained as social scientists or as humanistic scholars are inclined to regard the physical book merely as an "idea-husk." Their interest is in the idea, the expression, or the intellectual contribution. For them, the microfilm would do just as well as the original edition. This is pretty much the way I feel about books.

And they are right, too, in their own terms, just as Powell is right in his. But these are two different kinds of intellectual worlds. Powell doesn't object to the existence of the other world. He merely says that we librarians ought to be people who want the best—the idea housed in the physical format that best matches, in an artistic sense, the idea.

Since 1931, the year of the Waples-Thompson debates, the pendulum has swung far toward the social scientist-administrative expert kind of librarian. Powell now has his hands on the pendulum and is shoving it back in the other direction, but there are others with him. Who will be happy when it rests, motionless, at the bottom of its arc? Not Powell, not you.

Powell hates to admit it, but he knows that the university librarian, during the last twenty-five years and today, has had to spend much of his time on non-bookish matters—such as developing Farmington Plans, M.I.L.C.'s, centralized cataloging procedures, National Union Catalogs, and many other