

# Recent Publications

## BOOK REVIEWS

***Mexico's Library and Information Services; A Study of Present Conditions and Needs.*** By Carl M. White. Totowa, N.J.: Bedminster Press, 1969. 106p. \$5.50.

This slender volume is more than a simple recounting of current library conditions and needs in Mexico; it is also the author's *apologia pro vita sua*, and a fine one it is. Indeed, helpful though the book may be to the agency that commissioned it and to the nation that is its subject, its value may be even greater as a succinct and rational position paper on the essential role of libraries in national growth. The wealth of Dr. White's extensive experience in the activities of libraries in developing lands assures a level of credibility to the volume that is unlikely soon to be matched in another.

The first chapter, a general essay entitled "Libraries in the Building of a Nation," really carries one of the two major burdens of the book. In this reviewer's judgment, it deserves to be reprinted separately—it is capable of standing by itself—and distributed widely among advisors, civil servants, opinion leaders, industrialists, and others who find themselves involved in planning and implementing programs of national growth. The conceptualization of a rational plan for library development in a country, Dr. White argues logically, is possible only as an integral segment of general national planning.

"Nation-Building in Mexico" is the second chapter, and the second theme of the book begins here. In it the author examines the changing educational, professional, technical, and economic composition of Mexican society; speculates as to their future; and considers the role of libraries as both causes and effects of the changes. In Chapter 3, "Mexico's Library Capability," he appraises current levels of library service and examines critically the reasons usually given for their not having developed more fully.

Chapter 4 describes "Modern Library Service for Modern Mexico." Herein Dr. White outlines the characteristics of library service he feels are necessary fully to support present and future stages of Mexico's social development. In the fifth chapter he described "The Federal Government's Part" in library development, especially the establishment of a statutory body with both responsibility and authority to effect appropriate library services. The sixth and final chapter concerns "Manpower for an Emerging Profession."

The present study, together with Paul Bixler's *Mexican Library* (Scarecrow Press, 1968), was done for the Ford Foundation in October 1966. In the library community, it will be of considerable interest to Latin Americanists, to librarians concerned for the international aspects of their work, and to students of comparative librarianship. Most of all, however, it should stand for a long time as a model for librarians who find themselves involved in the development of library plans for other nations in the world where similar conditions and circumstances prevail.—*David Kaser, Cornell University.*

***Caxton and His World.*** By N. F. Blake. New York: London House and Maxwell, 1969. 256p. \$7.95.

William Caxton, the earliest English printer, has been the subject of numerous literary, bibliographical, and historical studies. Surprisingly, there has not been a major reassessment of his career since William Blades' *The Life and Typography of William Caxton*, a landmark work published in 1861-63. And so it is with special pleasure that we receive the excellent synthesis provided by N. F. Blake of Liverpool University, an accomplished Caxton scholar who has been writing significant articles for over a decade. *Caxton and His World* is both an exploration in biography and an evaluation of his literary attainments.

In the role of historical detective Blake moves deftly through the maze of scattered and incomplete records pertaining to Caxton's life. Blake has probably exploited Caxton's prologues and epilogues more imaginatively than any previous writer. Further, the narrative is measurably enhanced by the inclusion of summaries of past research and a selective bibliography devoted to works by and about Caxton. From the "meagre results" of his investigation Blake says that Caxton was born between 1415 and 1424 in Kent, of parents who belonged to the professional or merchant class. By the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to Robert Large, a distinguished London mercer. For almost thirty years Caxton lived in the town of Bruges, Belgium, where he became a prominent businessman and was involved in international diplomatic machinations. He did, however, find time to buy and sell manuscripts, a fact which refutes those who claim that Caxton abruptly decided to become a printer. In an attempt to still two bibliographical controversies, Blake concludes that Caxton learned to print in Cologne and that he taught printing to Colard Mansion, not vice versa. Returning to Westminster in 1476, he printed his first item in England that same year.

Blake continually reminds us that Caxton's mercantile experience influenced every phase of his publishing operation, from choice of material to editorial practices, and that in evaluating Caxton, many critics have been guilty of applying contemporary standards to an earlier age. Taken in this light, Caxton's work as editor, translator, and prose stylist falls into a more realistic perspective. Caxton reflected rather than molded the literary fashions of the time as evidenced by his many translations of French chivalric romances and the issuance of many devotional books. Because most of Caxton's projects were executed under the patronage of the courtly estate, texts were selected to gratify their tastes. He was not willing to sacrifice the financial security of a safe market to become a literary pace-maker. The publication of classical authors was left to mainland printers, probably as an economic expedient. Caxton's respect for textual authority was sometimes cavalier and his translations were often insensitive-

ly literal. For example, Caxton did not select the best available manuscript for his edition of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and he considerably modified Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* during editing.

In a final, illuminating chapter on the man and his reputation Blake looks at Caxton criticism over five hundred years and offers his own appraisal. The Caxton critical tradition has centered around antiquarians and men of letters. Generally, historians have elevated Caxton because of his unchallenged position as England's first printer while many literary critics have complained that his books lacked linguistic elegance and catered to the aristocracy. Gavin Douglas, a sixteenth century translator of *The Aeneid*, wrote that "I red his wark with harmys at my hart." Shifting blame from the man to his times, Edward Gibbon pronounced: "In the choice of his authors, that liberal and industrious artist was reduced to comply with the vicious taste of his readers." Blake's ultimate judgment is cautious and detached. Caxton was a consummate businessman whose greatest achievement was the introduction of printing to England, but whose books mirrored rather than transformed the period. By way of confirmation, Caxton beckoned with honest charm in his advertisement: "late hym come to Westmonester into the Almonesrye at the Reed Pale and he shal have them good chepe."

Blake's estimate of Caxton is quite fair, if reserved. He tends, however, to under-rate Caxton's versatility as a printer-publisher and his contributions to the enrichment and codification of the English prose language. It is perhaps unfair to criticize an author for not writing about an aspect of his subject that he has explicitly exempted from consideration, but it is nevertheless regrettable that there is no discussion of Caxton's typography and its relationship to the history of printing. And since Caxton was an important transitional figure between scribal and typographical culture, we need to know much more about the impact of his printing activities on Western society and thought. Blake has written an impressive biography and literary critique that will very likely come to be regarded as a seminal contribution to Caxtonian scholar-

ship.—Arthur P. Young, *State University of New York, College at Cortland*.

**Library Science.** By John Farley and Stanley Lewis. New York: College Notes, Inc., 1969. 101p. \$2.95.

In a brief preface to *Library Science*, it is stated, "We would like to thank the numerous college faculty members throughout the country who have requested that this type of book be published to supplement the textbook in their classes." Apparently the purpose of this publication is to supplement instruction in the use of libraries at various academic levels. It cannot be questioned that there is a need for good publications to accomplish this purpose.

However, it is regretted that *Library Science* is the publication that has evolved to meet this need, for this publication presents libraries and librarianship in a negative and frequently erroneous manner. It could do nothing but discourage students from considering the field of librarianship as a career.

Even though the copyright date of the publication is 1969, it is assumed that the manuscript was completed early in 1967. All statistics given are for 1966 or earlier and all bibliographies and suggested reading lists (with the exception of one entry) are dated 1966 or earlier. As a matter of fact the majority of the entries in the suggested reading lists are in the 1940s and 1950s. In discussing reference books and encyclopedias, generally no dates or editions are given. However, it is unfortunate that when some editions are given the latest edition is not identified, as new editions have appeared since the preparation of the manuscript. It is also regretted that there is minimal discussion of standards for various types of libraries. Those referred to have frequently been superseded.

In an attempt to cover the total field of librarianship in this publication, which unfortunately is titled *Library Science*, the brevity of statements frequently causes misunderstanding or results in statements which are misleading or redundant. Brevity has not been a blessing in this publication. I quote one paragraph completely to illus-

trate this point. "Environment, a combination of many factors, affects reading. The availability of reading matter is an obvious environmental factor affecting reading." (p. 69). Many other examples of verbiage with little meaning could be given.

*Library Science* is a typical "College Notes" publication. It is paperbound, with very cheap paper, frequent typographical errors, both in the text and in the suggested readings. If it were current and up-to-date, if all statements were correct, and if the challenge of contemporary librarianship and the excitement of the changing scene of librarianship due to the educational explosion and the related problems of information organization and control were conveyed to the reader, this volume might have had merit.—John T. Eastlick, *University of Denver*.

**Books for Junior College Libraries; a Selected List of Approximately 19,700 Titles.** Comp. by James W. Pirie. Chicago: American Library Association, 1969. 452p. \$35.00.

Intended primarily for transfer, or liberal arts programs, with emphasis on support of curriculum, *Books for Junior College Libraries (BJCL)* ". . . endeavors to present, as any good college library collection does, a microcosm of the world around us . . . [but] does not attempt in any way to cover the vast area of terminal and vocational courses offered in junior and community colleges." (Preface.) Limited to books, it is a good selection of titles backed by substantial authority. The method by which it was compiled is logical—start with the shelflists of three outstanding junior college libraries, winnow the best from these, and add significant new titles. This procedure, plus extensive use of authorities from the various disciplines, points to a quality product.

This is a quality product, but is it the product which is needed? A comparison of *BJCL* with *Books for College Libraries (BCL)* reveals that, if pre-1964 titles are discounted, there is an overlap between the two of more than 70 percent. It will be remembered that *BCL* purposely omitted