

The Traveling Library

What it Should Give the People as Indicated by Nebraska's Experience

THE brief two years' existence of the Nebraska Public Library commission has been so crowded with experiences that it ought not to be difficult to discern something of what the commission should be to Nebraska by considering what it has been.

Although the traveling library represents but one of the many activities of this commission, it is, perhaps, our most successful instrument in the work of library extension. The term "library extension" is interpreted to include everything, from the purchasing of a book by a citizen who has no library in his home, or the substitution of a good book for a poor one on the family book shelf, to the starting of a school library in a rural school, or a public library in a village or city. Thus it comes that this commission is just as much interested in awakening the desire for good and useful reading in the remotest home as in encouraging the establishment and correct administration of public libraries. We believe that there is no surer way to inspire people with a desire for books at home, at school, and in the library, than to give the people an opportunity to see and read the best and most attractive books the book trade affords. This, then, is the first task set for the traveling library—a task so magnificent in its possibilities that the accomplishment of but a small portion of it would justify the expenditure of all state funds so far devoted to this commission, as well as affording ample satisfaction to those who have had the work in charge.

The first traveling library was sent out from this office in December, 1901. It went to a barber shop in Loup City, where, during the three months of its stay, 279 books were borrowed. The barber was an intelligent man, and deeply interested in the welfare of his community. He had the true library spirit. If he found a book that he thought would interest some special person, he called that person's attention to it. He read or looked over all the books and was able to talk about them with the borrowers. We have had many other librarians who were equally interested, and to whose intelligent and helpful spirit has been due, in a large measure, the results that justify our pride as Nebraskans, the achievements of the past two years.

The librarians of our traveling libraries are not paid for their work as librarians, except in terms of satisfaction in being of service to others. The libraries have been kept in school houses, dwellings, stores, hotels, postoffices, depots, newspaper offices, parsonages and a variety of other places—and the business men, ministers, teachers and others who have served as librarians have responded loyally to the instructions and suggestions from this of-

fice. We have insisted that the use of the books must be free to all members of the community, and that all who get mail or trade in the town are eligible as borrowers. In this way, the books have reached many remote neighborhoods. At intervals, additional suggestions go out from this office. As soon as the finances of this commission will permit, some one from this office will systematically visit the places where traveling libraries are located, helping to organize local library associations, and to create interest in the books and extend their usefulness. In time, we expect to emulate the example of the Wisconsin Free Library commission and hold library institutes for the librarians of our traveling libraries.

These are some of the things the traveling library should accomplish. It is a mistake to suppose that collections of books, however choice their selection may have been, can be live factors in education without intelligent and earnest administration. The locomotive is a magnificent creation—but it has to be manipulated with brains, as well as brawn, or it is of no more use than a heap of scrap iron. The same may be said of libraries. The right book must reach the person who needs it, as well as the person who wants it, if the library is to act as an educational leaven. The lump will remain a lump unless the leaven is properly distributed. We have now sixty-one traveling libraries, and the sixty-one librarians in charge of them have so generally caught the spirit of using the library as an educational force that we feel that the time is at hand when personal work with them will prove the efficiency of the leaven, and justify any reasonable demands that this commission may make upon the state treasury or the generosity of public-spirited Nebraskans.

Our traveling libraries have gone to eighty-nine different places in fifty-seven counties. At this moment they are visiting points ranging from Salem in Richardson county, around to McCook, Bridgeport, Alliance, Gordon, Laurel and Wisner. A number of them are in rural school houses or at crossroads stores. In the two years since the first library went out, the libraries have made 163 round trips, and fifty-nine libraries are now out. During this time, 19,748 volumes have been borrowed. The total number of volumes is about 2,400, so that each book has had an average circulation of 8.2 times, and the average number of borrowers at a place is fifty-one, so that the total number of different persons enrolled as borrowers is in the neighborhood of 4,500. When it is considered that most of the books borrowed have been read by several persons in addition to the borrower, it can be seen that our 2,400 books have been made good use

of. Up to this time the commission has cost the state about \$7,000. If we had done nothing but purchase the books and administer the traveling libraries, the average cost of buying one book and circulating it eight times would have been \$2.50. Anyone at all familiar with library statistics would testify that the money was well spent, provided that the books were of proper character.

A traveling library, as we make it up, contains forty volumes, one-fourth of which number are fiction for adults, one-fourth juvenile fiction and the rest, history, travel, useful arts, etc., equally divided among children and adults. Experience has proved these proportions. The fiction is most carefully selected. Each library contains some of the old, standard novels, and some of the later, popular books. Many novels of the realistic school, that could, with perfect propriety be put on the shelves of a large city library, are omitted from our traveling libraries. We aim to have nothing that is not wholesome in tone and uplifting in influence, or that may not either instruct or amuse. Special attention is given to the selection of children's books, for we believe it pays to give the boys and girls of Nebraska every possible chance. That the libraries have been appreciated could be shown by the correspondence of this office. Several small public libraries, whose entire income is exhausted in the expense of administration, are permanent stations for traveling libraries. This arrangement gives such libraries fresh books every three months and enables them to keep up interest. A permanent station is a place that has paid for one traveling library upon condition that we send a succession of libraries for five years. Harvard, Osceola, Culbertson, Douglas, Murray, Wakefield, Dannebrog and Valley are our permanent stations and we are shortly to have several others.

The permanent traveling library station is a nucleus for a little local library. In a number of cases the traveling library has grown into a full-fledged public library in an incredibly short time. The presence of the books in the community helps create the desire for more books and for a permanent collection.

We have four school traveling libraries in the hands of the county superintendents of Burt, Hamilton, Box Butte and Kimball counties. These books are being used by the superintendents to interest teachers and pupils in school libraries, in the expectation that the establishment and better selection of school libraries will result therefrom.

Our special loan collection is part of the traveling library scheme. Any Nebraskan who finds that the resources of his own community are inadequate in any given line of study is entitled to our assistance, so far as our limited means permit. We have

many books now in the hands of individuals, clubs and schools as special loans for study purposes. A wide range of subjects is covered. One man in Logan county has borrowed books on stock judging and poultry; in Burt county we sent a farmer's wife books on child study and domestic topics; a farmer in Pawnee county has a number of books on American history; women's clubs all over the state have books on the subjects they are studying. This feature of the work is capable of indefinite extension. Indeed, if it were not for the books given to us by the Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs and the possibility of sometimes supplementing our resources with those of our university library, we could not do this work with the limited funds at our command. In the future we expect to greatly extend our special loan work along practical lines, working in co-operation with the officers of farmers' institutes, women's clubs, state associations, schools and libraries to the end that the arts of comfortable living and intelligent industry may be promoted.

A beginning of what we expect to see become a large collection on veterinary, medical, technical, agricultural and related topics has been deposited in this office through the efforts of Dr. Peters of the Nebraska Experiment station. These books are deposited here to be loaned to the people of Nebraska. Any state society having a loan collection along the lines of its special interest may deposit its books with us, to be cared for and loaned to those who need them. There is no limit to what may be accomplished in this direction.

Only last week a library association was formed in a school district in Otoe county, with a traveling library as a foundation for its work. The library is in a farmer's home, and, under the intelligent guidance of this man, what splendid work those forty volumes can do this winter! If the secretary of this commission had but the means and the time to organize similar associations all over the state, what a wonderful amount of latent possibility could be developed and directed!

The traveling library is our best appliance for promoting the mission of books—for a good book is ever its own best argument. It is the endeavor of this commission so to use the traveling library as to encourage the public and private purchase of more and better books by the people of Nebraska. The results of the past two years are only partially tangible, as the best results of all such work can never be a matter of record. The future of this phase of the work is magnificent and inspiring, and has no limit save the boundaries of Nebraska and the provision made by the state for forwarding the work.

EDNA D. BULLOCK, Sec'y,
Nebraska Public Library Commission,
Lincoln, Nov. 23, 1903.

Some Recent Contributions to History's Light

A COLLECTION of eight papers on the early history of what is now designated the Central states appear in a volume by Ruben Gold Thwaites, under the title, "How George Rogers Clark Won the Northwest." Prof. Thwaites is a member of the staff of the Wisconsin Historical library. His papers have been printed separately heretofore, but have been revised and made more cohesive in the present volume. The chief historical sketch which gives title to the volume comprehends the operations of Clark's expedition against the British during the revolution. In 1777, Clark, then a typical frontiersman, organized an expedition of 150 border pioneers, with the approval of Patrick Henry, governor of Virginia, for the avowed purpose of capturing the chain of forts extending from Detroit to the Mississippi, controlled by and under the influence of the British. The first of the forts to succumb was Kaskaskia, in Illinois. Next Cahokin surrendered. The following year Clark and his bold frontiersmen marched 230 miles to Vincennes and captured that post, the strongest of all, without firing a shot. Vincennes was the richest prize captured and its fall practically ended British control of the then northwest, or what now comprises Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and Michigan. Besides driving the British from this vast territory, Clark became a terror to hostile Indians north and south of the Ohio. Even at this early period Clark had in view an expedition to and through the real northwest to the Pacific coast and had consulted Thomas Jefferson and other public men on the subject. The honor was reserved for his younger brother, William Clark, who with Meriwether Lewis, accomplished the historic trip in 1803-5.

Other papers in the volume include the division of the northwest into states, the Black Hawk war, the stories of Mackinac and La Pointe, the Draper manuscripts, etc. Published by A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago.

"A Short History of Mexico," by Arthur Howard Noll, of the University of the South, Sewanee, Tenn., is one of the very few histories of our neighboring republic in the English language. The author spent eighteen months in the Mexican cap-

ital, collecting material for the volume, which he has condensed and arranged in convenient form. Apart from the historical importance of the volume it has enhanced value by reason of the commercial ties which are drawing the two republics closer together. Americans in increasing numbers are mighty factors in the development of the resources of Mexico, furnishing the capital, the energy and skill needed to upbuild an industrial republic. Knowledge of the history of the country is necessary to a proper understanding of the people and their institutions, and this Prof. Noll supplies in a compact

volume. Published by A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago.

"Raiding with Morgan," one of "The Young Kentuckians" series, by Byron A. Dunn. This volume concerning one of the most picturesque figures of the civil war reveals some of the most stirring incidents of these exciting times. In it are mentioned only the greatest of General Morgan's raids, and the author has endeavored to narrate them with historical accuracy as regards time, place and circumstance. In many instances the general's own reports have been followed. There is, too,

a beautiful romance, in which Lieutenant Pennington, one of General Morgan's bravest and most daring officers, makes his last raid into what was hitherto the "enemy's country." This time no enemy is in sight, but instead there are beautiful flowers and wedding bells. Published by A. C. McClurg & Co.

Since seed must be planted in the spring in order that they may germinate and grow, and since youth is the spring of life, it is equally true that the impressions made upon the mind of the young are the ones which endure. So in the light of this reasoning Mr. Sprague has a valid excuse for bringing out a life of Napoleon Bonaparte, written with a special view of interest in the boy. Mr. Sprague has succeeded in adopting a conversational style which is well calculated to attract young readers. He brings the little Napoleon down to the ground and unites him in spirit with the boy of today. This is a great advantage gained, inasmuch as the average boy has no use for another boy who is, or was, a prodigy. Let the youth feel that the famous man was once only a careless and irresponsible boy like himself and you may awaken ambition, but let the hero be covered with a mystery, and set apart as a wonder, and you find no spirit of emulation awakening in the young reader's mind. Mr. Sprague says: "We have seen that he was one of a number of children, and that the home was not one of ease and idleness. The little Napoleon had no doubt his share of the work to do. How well he did it we are left only to surmise from the nature of the man into which he developed. He says of himself that he was not a good-natured boy, and that he was inclined to be morose and quarrelsome. That he was always getting into trouble with his brothers. We can almost venture to guess that he was inclined to be imperious and want his own way, which does not always make a boy popular nor conduce to peace. He must have been something of a warrior from the beginning.

The book is well bound in cloth and the cover is adorned with a picture of the Little Corporal. There are 236 pages, clear print, and a number of excellent engravings. A. Wessels & Co., Publishers.

Biography Ranges Wide

PORTRAITS of the "Sixties," by Justin McCarthy, is an exceedingly interesting series of pen portraits of men and women prominent in the life of London forty years ago. Mr. McCarthy settled in London in the early sixties for a life of journalism and literature and became intimately acquainted with the subject of his sketches. The author has worked entirely from his own abundant store of impressions and experiences, without depending upon the records of others. Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle, Tennyson, Cardinal Newman and a long list of people of note are pictured as Mr. McCarthy saw them and knew them in daily life. To his delineations of men and manners he brings the gifts of rich experience, trained powers of observation, a genial sympathetic spirit, and a polished and agreeable style. Harper & Brothers, publishers, New York.

It would be a difficult task to discover in John A. Howland's brief biography of James Whitcomb Riley a verification of the maxim, "Poets are born, not made." No one questions the infinite charm and homely pathos of his muse nowadays, but his biographer does not present any symptoms of the divine afflatus in tracing Riley's youthful years. Young Riley did not dream the idle hours away or pore over books, wear long hair or lose himself in mental cogitations. He was just like any

harum-scarum boy of a country village,—fishing, hunting and swimming in season, raiding orchards and melon patches, and earning the customary tattoo of the parental strap. Perhaps his chronic dislike of work indicated the poetic spirit. He preferred the village band to his father's law books, and, like every healthy boy, considered a circus a joy forever. Sign painting was his first trade. Then followed a season of patent medicine, vaudeville, and after that real work on newspapers. It was in such inspiring surroundings that he burst into poetry and song and started up the ladder of fame. Mr. Riley is 51, but he doesn't look it in the picture. Published by Handy & Higgins, Chicago.

Julian Ralph, the well known correspondent, undertakes to tell in a 200-page volume the essential elements for "The Making of a Journalist." The first essential is brains; the second, newspaper work. These two elements properly assimilated constitute the foundation of success in journalism. The journalist, so-called, is one who has graduated from the newspaper treadmill and carries a roving commission. Mr. Ralph has gone through the various grades of newspaper work, and draws upon his varied experiences of twenty-five years to show the trials and hardships, successes and disappointments lining the paths of journalism.