

The City Library.

Mr. Pentzer's farewell remarks to the library board, which are reprinted here from the *News*, express distinctly the 19th century library spirit. From the time when the knowledge of how to read was confined to a few who were supposed to have made a trade with the devil for his mysteries in black and white, up to the present time when there is still a vestige of the feeling that books must be handed to the many by the few, that the many cannot with safety be allowed to make their own selections from the shelves. In some of the largest libraries of this country the principle that the books are the people's has been put into practice. The people go to the shelves, look up the book they wish, being directed thereto by attendants who replace the books on the shelves after closing hours. Reports from these libraries show that very few books are stolen in comparison with the increased number loaned. As Mr. Pentzer says the idea of a public library is not so much to assist the research of the learned, there are special libraries for them, but to get the poor and ignorant into the reading habit, to accustom them to the sight of books, to the handling of them, till they are as intimate with books as those who have libraries of their own. The city library is a public one, the people are taxed to support it, and the library board should see to it that the people have free access to the books and extra work would be recompensed by the interest in books, which is the only important and final reason for the library's existence.

As Mr. Pentzer was about to retire from the board he made a brief address of leave taking, in substance as follows:

MR. CHAIRMAN—On retiring from this board I wish to express my appreciation of the many courtesies shown me by fellow members and for that spirit of fairness that has accorded to me the right of opinion on questions on which I have not agreed with the majority. I wish also to give my tribute of praise to our librarian. I have found her at all times patient, kind and faithful, anxious to make the library helpful to the greatest number of persons.

My work on the board has made it necessary for me to become acquainted with the past history of this library and I have noted with pleasure the changes that have been made from year to year in the line of improvement. Even in the short space of three years great progress has been made. Our rooms are well adapted and easy of access and our opportunities for good have been greatly increased. From the small beginning of a few volumes donated by philanthropic citizens, from the little library supported by voluntary contributions, our library has grown into a field of usefulness, where it may become one of the great public libraries of the west. These who supported it in its struggles for existence in a frontier town twenty years ago, deserve great praise. They did a noble work. If they have kept pace with the progress of events and are in touch with the new conditions that the library must meet now their retention on this board is wise and a just and proper recognition of past service. If they have not kept informed of what is being done in the library world and are content with the achievements of the past, their reappointment on the board is very unfortunate.

A public library belongs to the people and they should have the largest possible use of it. The value of a library depends not on the number of books on its shelves but on the number of readers. A public library is a powerful factor in the education of the people. I do not think the assertion is extravagant when I say that our library, if judiciously handled, would be a stronger

educative force than our public schools. In every progressive city, the public library is in the closest possible touch with the common schools. Every progressive library, every library that is up to date, seeks the teacher as a means of reaching the pupils under her care and extends to her every privilege she will use. I could cite you to the great work done in this line in Omaha, Milwaukee or Denver, but I would at once be met with the statement that these libraries have a large fund to draw on and are able to do more. The argument is not good, but I will yield to it and beg leave to call your attention to a few items in the report of the librarian of the Mankato, Minn., public library for the year ending March 1st, 1897. The little city has a population of about 10,000. The library received from all sources, \$2,513.84, about half of our fund. Out of this they spent for books, 1,201.31, which, if I am not mistaken, is a larger sum than we ever expended in any one year. The library has less than 2,400 volumes and put 33,141 books in circulation in the year, issuing each volume on an average thirteen times. During the year, as an experiment, free access was granted to the shelves for the selection of all books other than fiction and the plan has been so satisfactory in every way that there is no intention of changing it. There has been a marked decrease in the use of fiction and a great increase in the lines of better reading. Grateful acknowledgement is made for the help received from teachers.

I ask your patience while I call your attention to a few plain facts. In the first year of my membership of this board, I was astonished to find that in this city of schools and colleges that the attitude of the public library toward the public schools was one of absolute unfriendliness. This has been manifested in various ways. Instead of seeking the teachers we have refused them the right to use the library in such a way as to make it helpful to them in their work. A written request from one of our teachers to be allowed to select books for his school was treated with contempt, and the member of this board presenting it with absolute rudeness. When I carried books to my own schools, I did it in open violation of the rule of the board. My work is with the children, and much of it has been among the poorer children of the city. I know their needs. The library was established to help just that class. Again and again I have urged with what earnestness I could that some means be provided by which these children would be helped to select the better books of our library instead of the trash with which the shelves are so well stocked.

Our board is composed of nine members with equal duties and equal responsibilities. We are the servants of the people and they have a right to know what we are doing and also a right to criticize our official acts. No member can delegate his duties to another, nor should he permit another to assume to discharge his duties for him. I think you will readily admit this, and yet there has been a disposition manifested on the part of at least one member to control the affairs of the library in the interest of one element of our population regardless of the rules we have adopted. Not only that, but political methods have been introduced to dictate the appointment of members and the organization of the board. I ask you in all seriousness, would it not be better to manage this library in the interest of the people for whom it was established, the people who are not able to buy their own books, rather than in the interest of a part of the community able to secure what books they need without special assistance? "The worth of a book is in its use" is the motto of the best library in the west. I urge you to adopt it and give the people the largest possible use of their books.

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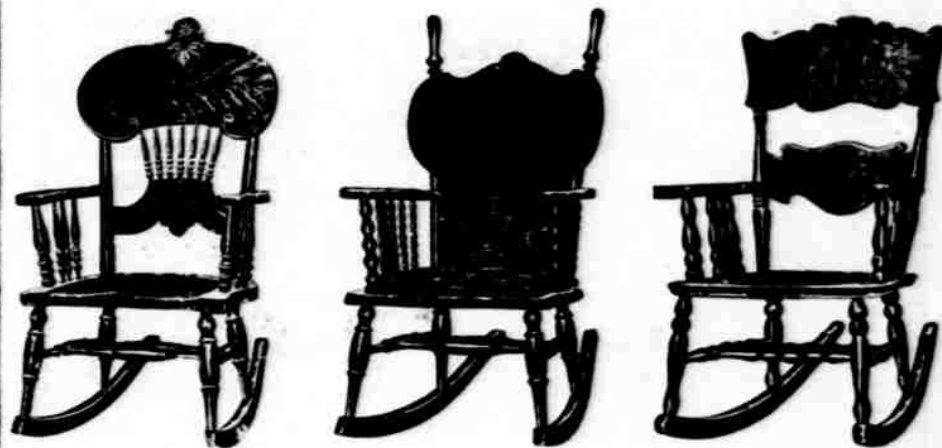
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