

EDITORIAL COMMENTARY

Recently we have received two publications which call for some comments here. One is *Libraries in China*, composed of a series of papers written on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of The Library Association of China, and the other is *The Chinese Year Book*, a bulky volume of nearly two thousand pages. Both books tell us a good deal about what is being done at the present day in China. Reading them, we find much that ought to hearten us, and much also that will "amaze the troubled midnight and the noon's repose."

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First, let us begin with praise. Considering the gravity of the library situation in China, to which we have adverted in these pages last November, we are glad that such a body as The Library Association of China, composed of librarians and of all those who are interested in the Library Movement in China, is taking its work seriously. In the words of Mr. T. L. Yuan, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Association, by "serving as a control and coordinating agency, it has contributed a great deal in the promotion and acceleration of library activities in China and in widening the mental horizon of the nation. . . . While it is true that library facilities in China are far from perfect, yet a perusal of the articles on different phases of library work will undoubtedly leave one the impression that the Chinese libraries, beset with one handicap or another, have forged ahead, steadily and persistently." All this is true enough. Members of The Library Association are therefore to be congratulated for doing work which badly needs doing, and but for them would perhaps never have been done at all.

China has need of more libraries. It is a shameful thing that the most bookish nation in the world should have so very few good

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public libraries. Middle schools and colleges have sprung up by the hundreds during the last few years. The same is not true of our libraries. And yet of the two, public libraries are decidedly more desirable. They reach a wider public, and what is more, they cater knowledge and learning to only those who thirst for them and who are therefore in a position to benefit most by them; whereas in a college, more often than not, knowledge is crammed down the throats of very unwilling learners who would, many of them, be better employed in earning their living in farms and counting-houses than by sitting in class-rooms. Elementary education ought to be compulsory for everybody, but beyond that, class-room education is of doubtful value to the great majority. The superstition that to be well educated a man must pass successively through the Primary School, the Middle School and the University is not only silly but is also responsible for much waste of time and money to the nation. It would do the majority infinitely more good to spend what time they can spare from their work in libraries, where they can browse at will on just such subjects as they are really interested in, than to be pent up in class-rooms for hours on end, where they are taught a lot of things they have no love for. Knowledge obtained in the latter way is like water poured on a duck's back: it doesn't stick. But knowledge acquired by love is the only sort of knowledge that is worth while: it stays and serves for delight, for ornament and for use. That is what real education should do; and public libraries are the most likely places for people to acquire such an education. For this reason, we strongly endorse the sentiment contained in the concluding part of Mr. Chiang Fu-tsung's paper on "National Libraries in China": "Aside from the National Library of Peiping and the National Central Library, national libraries should be established in such cities as Canton, Wuchang, Chengtu, Sian and some other centres. At least, the original plan of five national libraries should be carried out in the near future. Meanwhile we sincerely hope that the well-equipped college and university libraries in China will render similar service to the reading public before different national libraries come into existence." All we have to add to that is this: the more libraries, the better; and we hope also, besides the Government, some public-spirited men with wealth and

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learning will come forward to endow libraries as they have so generously endowed hospitals. We need plenty of hospitals for the cure of our bodies. But we also need libraries for the health of our minds.

One thought has occurred to us in reading Mrs. Tai's paper on "Medical Libraries in China". It is one thing to have libraries, but it is just as important to have good qualified librarians. In a small library of one thousand books, a trained librarian is not necessary. When the books get to anywhere around ten thousand, it is absolutely necessary to command the services of a trained librarian; otherwise the usefulness of a library is considerably reduced, and a multitude of books instead of proving a blessing will be a curse. What is the use of having a vast collection of books, if the books are not "gettable"? Proper cataloguing, classification, arrangement, etc., are essential. Many libraries in China, in spite of the fine number of books they have, are of no earthly use to the public, for the simple reason that the books in them cannot be got hold of. It is invidious to quote instances, but we are sure such is the case with many college and provincial libraries. This situation can be easily remedied. And one way The Library Association of China can help to bring about a more satisfactory state of affairs in library management throughout the country is to agitate for some sort of action by our Government to prevent any but fully qualified librarians from having charge of college and public libraries.

Many things still remain to be done with regard to the Library Movement in China. But a splendid start has been made by The Library Association, and during the ten years it has been in existence it has borne good fruit. The spirit its members have shown deserves the compliment of emulation by every public-spirited citizen.

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Mr. Kwei Chungshu (桂中樞) and the Board of Directors and Officers of The Chinese Year Book Publishing Company are to be heartily congratulated for bringing out *The Chinese Year Book*. The book has been got together entirely under Chinese editorship and management. Most of the papers in it have been "specially prepared by renowned authorities in their respective fields of endeavour and learning". The names of its contributors inspire

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confidence in the authenticity of all the data given in their papers. Besides this, they are men well known for their independence of mind. This latter quality in its contributors is the best guarantee that *The Chinese Year Book* is out not for propaganda, but to give accurate and unbiased information about modern China.

There is hardly any important phase of modern Chinese life which has been left out. One regrettable omission, however, occurs. We don't find anything on Modern Chinese Art. We have no doubt this omission will be made good in the second issue of *The Chinese Year Book*. What is remarkable is not what has been left out, but what has been put in. Some of the papers, those on "Public Finance" and "Foreign Relations", for example, are most comprehensive. There is very little to add to them.

In some cases, too much is said about the past, and too little about the present. For instance, in Mr. Ku Chieh-kang's "Historical Sketch", we wish he would have given two-thirds of his paper to recent Chinese history and one-third to the historical background, instead of the other way round. In a book of this kind, the past should only come in by way of explanation of the present. In an article of thirty pages, say, about three pages would do very well for the historical background; otherwise the article would lose its value as a Year Book paper. What may be good for a learned journal may be bad for a Year Book.

Another suggestion we would like to make in order to improve future issues of *The Chinese Year Book* is to have all articles written, not solely for information, but also for their readability. Mr. Wang Yun-wu's "Publications" is a model in this respect. It is short, to the point, and very interesting.

But all in all, this first issue of *The Chinese Year Book* is the best of its kind that has appeared so far. In an undertaking of such dimensions which requires the cooperation of so many men and women, perfection is not to be expected. In spite of all care to make it as accurate as possible, some mistakes are bound to have crept in. But that it will prove itself useful to all who will have occasion to turn to its pages for information about China, we have no doubt. And usefulness is the *sine qua non* of any Year Book.

W. Y. N.