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An Experiment in the Selection of Library Books for Storage

ELSEWHERE in this issue of the BULLETIN articles by Kimball C. Elkins and Keyes D. Metcalf have provided the reader with statements concerning both the historical background and the present situation of the New England Deposit Library. It is the purpose of this note to describe the practical measures that have been taken in one field — the Greek and Latin classics — for the transfer of little used material from the stacks of the Widener Library at Harvard to storage in the New England Deposit Library.

The decision to begin with the classics in such an experiment was made chiefly because a member of the library staff with advanced training in the classics was available for the work of selection, not because the classics are by any means dead at Harvard or because it was thought that there might be more disused books in that field than in any other. Before any practical measures were taken, the Librarian met with the members of the Classics Department to lay before them a plan for selecting books from the Greek and Latin classifications in Widener for withdrawal from the shelves to storage, and the approval of the Department was given. I was then instructed to proceed, but before beginning I conferred with the Chairman of the Department, both to solicit his suggestions and to outline my own ideas on how the selection should be

made. Work was therefore begun with the approval of the faculty members most concerned, and it was naturally stipulated that they should have an opportunity to examine all books selected for transfer, with the prerogative of returning to the shelves any that they decided it would be undesirable to remove from Widener.

There were three main groups of material to be dealt with: texts of classical authors, translations of their works, and works about classical authors (books dealing with classical civilization as a whole and in its details are given another classification in Widener and so did not enter into consideration). It should perhaps be stated here that since the selection was made by a member of the staff of Harvard's rare book library, it was possible at the same time to remove from the open shelves large numbers of books for the shelving of which the Houghton Library is now responsible, i.e., books printed on the continent of Europe up to 1600, books printed in the British Isles up to 1715, books printed in America up to 1815, and certain other books that by reason of typography, binding, or association value are appropriate to the Houghton collections.

It might be thought that in a field such as the classics, in which editions of classical authors have been produced one after another for almost five hundred years, many of the earlier editions

might easily be dispensed with in favor of late editions in which more exact and scientific methods of scholarship have provided us with infinitely better texts. But while the text of a classical author is the core of any edition, the notes, comments, and interpretations of the editor of that text are often of great importance to the serious student. It must be admitted that just as often they are of very little value, and occasionally they are worthless (witness A. E. Housman's caustic comments on the edition of Manilius produced by the unfortunate Elias Stoeber of Strasburg, 'a city still famous for its geese'); but even a poor edition may have a negative value for an inquiring mind. It was therefore decided to leave at least one copy of every seventeenth- and eighteenth-century edition of a classical author in the Widener stacks; of nineteenth- and twentieth-century editions more than one copy has often been left, depending on the editor, since these would naturally receive heavier use.

This decision nevertheless allowed for the weeding out of a good many books, because there were often four or five editions of one work by one editor on the shelves. When this was the case, the latest edition has usually been kept (an *editio maior* always taking precedence over an *editio minor*) and the others sent to storage. An exception has sometimes been made in the case of nineteenth-century *editiones stereotypae*, usually of small format and type and containing no notes or critical apparatus. These seem of little practical use, better and more readable texts being in all cases available. Exception has also been made in the case of abridged and simplified

texts intended for secondary schools, since it is not the function of a university library to provide this class of material.

As for English translations, it has had to be borne in mind that these are used by a far larger group of readers than any other material in the Greek and Latin classifications, since an acquaintance with the ideas of classical authors is basic in so many fields of study. Selection of these for transfer to storage has therefore been made very sparingly, being for the most part restricted to early editions of translations of which there were several later editions on the shelves. It has seemed possible to store several eighteenth-century editions of Whiston's translation of Josephus, for example, because there were half a dozen or more nineteenth-century editions alongside them. Foreign language translations, however, have been another matter. French, German, Italian, and Spanish translations of classical authors appear to be very little used, and far larger numbers of these have been sent to storage. Even here, however, the exercise of a certain amount of judgment has been necessary. French or German translations have been left on the shelves in cases where there was none in English. Translations into well known foreign languages made within the past ten or fifteen years have in most cases been left, whereas translations into lesser known languages (Polish, Swedish, Modern Greek, and so forth) have usually been removed.

The third class of material, works about classical authors, whether historical, critical, or interpretative, has been left nearly untouched, since in this field it would have been a very

invidious matter indeed to attempt to decide what might and what might not be used. Undoubtedly there are hundreds of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Latin works of exegesis and as many hundreds of nineteenth-century program dissertations that have not been taken off the shelves since they were put there; but since books may be used within the Library without having a charging stamp entered in them, there is no way of knowing for certain whether they have been used within the past twenty years or not. It has therefore seemed wiser to leave this material intact. An occasional exception has been made if there were two or more editions of a seemingly little used work; and also in a few rare cases where an original work in a little known language was also available in translation.

The classical collection at Harvard is in the nature of things one of the oldest in the Library and contains many books dating back to the very beginning of the reconstruction after the disastrous fire of 1764. This collection has also been built up by some very distinguished gifts, notably the many classical texts given by Thomas Hollis, Harvard's great eighteenth-century benefactor, and the Richard Ashhurst Bowie collection given by Mrs Edward D. Brandegee of Boston in 1908 in memory of William Fletcher Weld. A subsidiary problem that had to be faced in selecting books for storage was to decide whether books from such collections as these should be sent along with those of ordinary provenance. The decision was made easier by the consideration that these collections had never been kept together as a unit anyway, but had been

scattered to whatever classification their subject matter indicated. Books given by Thomas Hollis are to be found on every floor of the Widener stacks, and those of particular interest by reason of binding or autograph annotation are shelved in the Houghton Library.¹ The Bowie collection is largely classical, but much of it constitutes rare material and is also shelved in Houghton. Thus there seemed no real reason to retain in Widener books from such collections as these simply because of their provenance. The books are, after all, being stored, not disposed of; and no breach of faith with the donors is involved in storing such portions of their gifts as are no longer much used.

From this brief description of the considerations that have been followed in the selection of books for storage in one particular field, it will be seen that the problem has been approached from a conservative point of view, as is perhaps fitting for classicists. It has really amounted to a weeding out of *duplicate* material. It must not be supposed, however, that the method of selecting books for storage in a field like that of the classics can be applied to all fields. The classics present a situation in which the duplication of texts as such makes up a large proportion of the

¹A card catalogue of Hollis books at Harvard, with data on accession, binding, and annotation, is maintained in the Office of the Editor, in Houghton, where information concerning titles not previously recorded is always welcome. The catalogue was begun by the late Professor Chester Noyes Greenough, who was particularly interested in the scope of Hollis' donations as indicating the political and philosophical backgrounds of his philanthropy. See Caroline Robbins, 'Library of Liberty—Assembled for Harvard College by Thomas Hollis of Lincoln's Inn,' *HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN*, V (1951), 5-23, 181-196.

books on the shelves; and at Harvard it has been possible to achieve the desired aim — that of providing space for the growth of the Greek and Latin collections for perhaps the next twenty years — simply by removing a portion of this duplicate material. This situation, however, does not obtain in fields such as history or economics or linguistics, and in such fields the problem of deciding which books are likely and which less likely to be used is far more difficult. As the process of selective removal here described is extended to other parts of the Library, we shall undoubtedly learn that the criteria for selection are not the same in any two fields. In general, however, it can be said that such selection ought certainly to be entrusted to someone well versed in his subject, and it ought

always to be done in collaboration with those members of the faculty most concerned; but it must also be done with an eye to the needs of readers outside the field of that particular department. Whoever undertakes to do such selection must expect a certain amount of criticism and must be prepared to change his mind in particular cases. It is a work of compromise at best; no librarian likes to send books away from his library, and no faculty member likes to see them go. But when problems of space make it impossible any longer to put off some process of weeding the library's collections, every effort should be made to see that the selection is done in such a way as to cause the least inconvenience to the fewest people.

JAMES E. WALSH

Fact into Fiction in *McTeague*

FRANK NORRIS came to Harvard in the autumn of 1894 as a special student, seeking to learn under Lewis E. Gates what he had failed to find at Berkeley in four disappointing years.¹ Taking up residence in 47 Grays Hall, he enrolled in English 22, Gates's creative writing course, and turned his attention to the business of becoming a writer. The results of his one year of study, although not immediately apparent, were important,

¹ Lewis E. Gates, A.B. s.c.l. Harvard 1884, had been instructor in forensics and English since graduation. He became Assistant Professor of English in 1896, and of Comparative Literature in 1901, but ill health forced his resignation the following year, and he remained quietly in retirement until his death in 1924.

for at Harvard he wrote nineteen chapters of a work which, when it was published four years later, became a major event in the history of the American novel. In gratitude to the man who, Norris declared, taught him more about writing than anyone else, he dedicated *McTeague* to 'L. E. Gates of Harvard University.'²

²The Harvard Library possesses, appropriately enough, a portion of the autograph manuscript of *McTeague*, consisting of twelve leaves and two fragments, corresponding to pp. 137-158 of the first edition (New York, Doubleday & McClure Co., 1899). This is apparently a first or early draft, being much corrected, yet it apparently also served as printer's copy. It came to Harvard in 1920 from Randolph Edgar, of Minneapolis, together with a complete set of Norris 'firsts' from the same source.

Linnaean books from the Arboretum and the Gray Herbarium continue on deposit in the stacks of the Houghton Library, whence they may be drawn for consultation in the new Herbarium.

Mrs Lazella Schwarten, formerly Librarian of the Arnold Arboretum, is now Librarian of both the Arnold

Arboretum and the Gray Herbarium and is in charge of both libraries in the new building. She is assisted by Mrs Patricia Lewicki and Mrs Yvonne Meigs. Dr Richard Schultes has recently been appointed Curator of the Orchid Herbarium of Oakes Ames and is in charge of the Orchid Library.

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