

■ This article discusses the great importance of a library to education. A library of well-selected books and publications is the source of a university's strength, blood, and warmth; it is its lamp of learning.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A LIBRARY

I am here to rejoice with you that a great thing has been accomplished, and ask you a question: What kind of library is this going to be?

The successful transplanting of a new heart gives promise of renewed vigor and extended life to the academic organism which it serves. For truly the library building is the heart of any college campus, from which the life blood of learning flows to every other part of the organism.

A college may have a weak physical education department and still be great, but not a weak library! Its department of economics may be a withered hand, its English or history departments myopic eyes, its biology department a sour stomach, and its administration a slightly addled head, but if its li-

brary heart is adequately supplying the needed library materials, the college can function and fulfill a major part of its purpose — namely, education — in whatever other parts of the curriculum are healthy.

This library building is not really the library, in spite of the modern usage recorded in Webster's International, . . . *Library* in its original, etymological source derived from the Latin *Librarius*, "of books," implying any collection or assembly of books, and I am sure that President Meyer and his staff know this and mean to see to it that this fine building is increasingly supplied with the materials that are the essential muscle of the organ.

In using the term, "library materials," I meant that the modern library cannot be adequately supplied if

stocked ~~only~~ with books and other printed matter. Every library must stretch its budget somehow to include, to some extent, the era of recorded sound and sight. It is simply intolerable today to limit study of Shakespeare's plays to the printed text when there are magnificent sound recordings and even motion pictures available for library and classroom use. We cannot ever hear Lincoln's voice speaking the Gettysburg Address, but we can and should forever be able to hear Churchill speaking his immortal "blood, sweat, and tears."

Truly the records of history, of literature, and of science will never again be limited to the written or printed word, and whether film, microfilm, electronic tape, or plastic disc is the medium, the modern library must increasingly provide the means of preserving and serving these new forms to those who learn.

As for the librarian, his role has become, in spite of his best efforts perhaps, more nearly like that of the operator of a department store

or supermarket, checking in merchandise by label and checking it out by label. He does well even to keep his shelves in order and see that customers do not leave with items unaccounted for. Certainly, being a librarian is no longer, even in a small college, a part time job for one of the elder professors.

Even if one is not a librarian, he cannot be wholly unaware of what has been called the "information explosion," and the problem it presents to education in general and to the library in particular. For example, in the year I went to college (1923), the Library of Congress held 3,089,000 books, of which 89,000 had been added to the collections that year. Last year it held nearly 15 million books, over 400,000 of them acquired that year. In 1923 the Library of Congress had so few sound recordings that it did not even keep count of them, but last year it held 225,000, of which nearly 25,000 had been added that year.

As a teacher of literature and history, like many of my colleagues, I used to la-

ment my students' lack of background. But we must face the fact that although to read one book may have been sufficient for Thomas Aquinas, as he proudly insisted, that book is by no means necessarily the one to lead the lists of books that college freshmen should read today. I venture that there are at least ten books published in the last year which are more important for a college freshman to read now, and I will go out on a limb by naming two of them: *The Body*, a 552 page compendium of scientific knowledge by Anthony Smith and *Concerning Dissent and Civil Disobedience*, a 64-page paperback legal essay by Abe Fortas.

Oliver Goldsmith, observed two hundred years ago that "The volumes of antiquity, like medals, may very well serve to amuse the curious: but the works of the moderns, like the current coin of a kingdom, are much better for immediate use?"

The question "What kind of library?" is related to the question "What kind of curriculum?" which has been troubling the academic world as long as I can remember. The student rebellions on college and university campuses during the last two years have indicated pretty clearly two things: 1) whatever the faculty and administration may have thought was a good way to run higher education, a great many students (and some faculty) did not think so; and 2) the rebellious students have a great deal to learn. That's why I think Justice Fortas' book might well be required reading! The trouble with most of us is that we think we have already learned, until we are brought up against events which make it all too clear that we must continue, or begin all over again. — *Excerpts from the address at the dedication of the Heterick Memorial Library by Dr. Roy Basler, The Library of Congress.*