

IV^e SECTION.

1^{re} Question.

HOW THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
ATTENDS TO THE CHILD READERS
AND COOPERATES
WITH THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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The Boston Public Library devotes much attention to educational work with children. Rooms at the Central Library have been set apart for this, and separate provision is made for young readers at each of the branch Libraries. It has been found expedient to provide accommodations for children apart from the adults. There is necessarily more or less confusion at times, owing to the presence of considerable numbers of children in the library buildings, and the work with children must be separated in order not to interfere with the entirely different use made of the library by adult readers and students. The advisability of this separation has been proven by experience, and this plan is generally followed in American public libraries.

Library work with young readers is regarded as important from an educational point of view, but being, in a sense, elementary, should not be permitted to interfere with the operation of the library in other directions, and its use by others than children.

The Boston Library has always been rather conservative in dealing with children, and has avoided duplicating such purely educational work as properly belongs to the schools,

for example, merely elementary or kindergarten work, and various other detailed effort in behalf of child readers which is carried on in some American public libraries and which has been called « faddish » by those not in sympathy with it. Particularly, it does not provide for mere recreation on the part of the children, apart from such legitimate recreation as is afforded by the use of good books. For example, it does not provide play rooms, games, and only occasionally a story hour.

The shelves are open in the childrens' rooms and readers are at liberty to select books for themselves. Effort is made as far as possible, however, to influence children in the choice of good reading and to lead them to the best books from those less good. In the collection thus placed before children some standard authors are included and a certain proportion of books not juvenile.

These reading rooms are furnished with low tables and chairs, the bookshelves are low and in every respect the rooms are designed to be convenient and attractive libraries for younger readers. By the assignment of special assistants to the work with children a personal relationship, which is productive of the best results, is established between individuals and the library. Children must be at least ten years of age to become card-holders enabling them to take out books to be used at home, but may then take out two books at a time ; and it is the use of these books taken freely from the library which largely determines the growth of the reading habit in many houses. Not infrequently the children's books serve to initiate foreign-born parents into the mysteries of the English language.

Although the youngest children do not have this privilege of borrowing books they nevertheless visit the reading room at the Central Library with their older brothers and sisters to look at picture books or occasionally to listen to the reading of stories. In this way a library habit is cultivated and the children see the best books as soon as they are able to profit by them.

A large part of the work done for children is in connection

with the public schools, sometimes through the teachers, more often directly with the children by supplying material to be used in their studies. It is hoped that no child will leave school without a personal introduction to the library and an understanding of the way to use it.

*Coöperation of the Boston Public Library
with the Public Schools.*

The Library issues special cards to teachers, multiplies copies of books at the Central Library, sets aside copies for the special use of school pupils both at the Central Library and the branches, prepares useful printed lists, and sends portfolios of pictures to teachers. It has also issued circulars calling attention to the opportunities offered at the Central Library and the branches and making suggestions as to the best use of these opportunities.

The Library now supplies over one hundred schools and nearly six hundred individual teachers and it sent to them last year twenty-two thousand two hundred and sixty three volumes.

The chief feature of the work is the sending of books directly to the schools, as is done generally now in large cities and towns in the United States. The books sent are for topical reference or miscellaneous reading. The Library does not supply reference books, such as encyclopaedias or gazetteers, nor text-books in use in Boston, nor sets of many copies of one book. Fiction is not supplied as a rule unless it is standard or didactic in character. The books sent to the high schools are chiefly for topical reference. If Roman history is being studied, the teacher will have books bearing on that subject. In the grammar schools, not only books for reference and collateral use are wanted, but also sets for miscellaneous reading. In the latter case a teacher who is anxious to improve the taste of her pupils and encourage the habit of reading may ask for fifty books suitable for this purpose and will receive in return some standard juvenile fiction and biography, poetry, history and nature books. It seems as important to cultivate

in pupils a taste for good reading and to encourage the intelligent use of the Library agencies as to help them directly in their studies, and the testimony of many teachers is to this effect.

Each set of books is made up to meet the special demand, not kept as a unit and shifted from one teacher to another. There is no time limit, as a rule. The books may be kept through the school year or returned and replaced several times. Under this system, the teachers receive freely, so far as the resources of the Library permit, just what they need for their classes, with only so much formality as the safety of the books requires. It rests with the teacher whether the books shall be taken out of the building or not, and the method of recording books taken is likewise left to the teacher.

It was long ago found that the Central Library was not equipped for supplying more than a part of the schools with books, and the collections of the large branches were therefore utilized. Extensive duplication became necessary, since much the same books are in demand all over the city. Of some books there may be ten copies at a large branch and twenty-five or thirty in the Branch Department, Central Library. The schools that get their books from the Central Library depend chiefly on what is called the Deposit Collection, a library of 33,000 volumes kept at Central for the express use of the reading rooms, and schools, and lent for use at various institutions and for study classes.

An essential feature of the work of the Library with the public schools is the apportionment of all the grammar and high schools among the branches and reading rooms for purposes of coöperation. Each custodian of a Branch (Branch librarian) is therefore in effect a school librarian also. She takes annually applications for cards upon which books may be lent for home use, visits the schools from time to time, keeps informed of the topics being studied, and recommends or reserves books that are called for by pupils. The large branches are reservoirs from which books are sent directly to the schools, as they are from the Central Library. A branch may have at schools at one time perhaps 1100 volumes from

its collection, for the most part in small lots. The reading rooms (minor branches) are agents who forward applications for books to the Central Library or to the neighboring branch. A reading room will have one or two schools to care for, a branch sometimes as many as six or eight. By this system of assignment it is possible to do work that never could be done directly from the Central Library. But even were this not the case the plan would still be desirable, for it acquaints the teachers and pupils of a district with the local branch library, the one to which they should resort. It has been found that the presence of library books at a school rather stimulates than otherwise the use of the neighboring branch. The growing practice of the School Department of requiring children to read certain books has caused greater demands upon the branches and reading rooms. The Library aims to have practically all the books and poems contained in the various School Documents, and adds and duplicates from time to time as new lists are published by the School Committee.

An important help to the schools is the reference work done by the custodians and assistants at the branches and reading rooms. In the late afternoon and evening children from a neighboring school will resort to a branch or reading room to study their home lesson or find material for compositions. Books best suited to meet these demands are provided and the branch employees become experienced in helping the children to use them. One custodian of a reading room very near a large grammar school was elected by the teachers at one of their meetings an honorary member of the teaching force of the school.

Besides books, portfolios of pictures have been sent from the Fine Arts Department, Central Library, to school teachers, upon application. These consist of mounted halftones and colored photographs, made up for the most part of representations of architecture, sculpture, general views of countries, and pictures relating to industries. They are distinctly of educational value and are in greater demand every year by teachers. Last year 860 portfolios averaging about 25 plates each were issued, as compared with 173 in 1904. There are

also monthly exhibitions of photographs and halftones at the branches and reading rooms, designed specially to be of interest to teachers and pupils.

To supplement these pictures provided by the Fine Arts Department, Central Library, collections have been formed at the branches of inexpensive pictures likely to be of use to teachers in their work. They are chiefly representations of birds or animals, or are related to geography, physical and political, history, folk-life, or the industrial arts. Many of these pictures are cut from periodicals and mounted at the branches. Lists of them have been printed and distributed to teachers. The number of pictures lent in the year 1909, chiefly to schools was 17,772, an increase of 60 per cent. over the number for 1908. In one month 713 pictures were lent from one specially well-equipped branch without any solicitation on the part of the custodian. The lending of these pictures is not only of definite value to the schools but it advertises the neighboring branch, and leads to greater coöperation between teachers and the Library in the use of the books. These pictures are also on exhibition from time to time at the branches and reading rooms, and the exhibitions are planned with teachers and pupils in view. They are often made to illustrate current events, or to follow the seasons.

The parochial schools of the city have the same library privileges as the public schools, and several of them are regularly supplied with books.

Books are sent to vacation schools and playgrounds.

Books are not so much needed at evening schools but some have been sent. Applications for cards are taken in many evening schools.

The aims of the Library in what it does for schools may be expressed as follows :

1. To be as useful as possible to schools as city institutions.
2. With the assistance of the teachers to cultivate in the pupils the habit of reading at the one time in their lives when they are capable of acquiring it.
3. To acquaint them with the Public Library now so that they will be likely to use it after they have graduated from school.

After the grammar school, the Library will be the chief educational opportunity for thousands of them. They ought, therefore, to become acquainted with it now. From the library point of view these objects can best be secured by such methods as having Public Library books in the schools, and by the other activities described above. It is found that the reading of library books under the supervision of a teacher is a valuable introduction or supplement to the independent use of the Library.

A reference and study room at the Central Library is assigned for the use of pupils in the schools. In it are the simpler reference books and those which contain material likely to be of use in the preparation of lessons both for High and Grammar schools. Assistance is always rendered to those pupils who are at a loss how to proceed in looking up a subject. In this room books may be reserved for the use of classes who come to consult them. Teachers may ask to have books on a certain subject so displayed that they may send individuals to use them or the teachers may bring classes and direct the use of the Library material themselves.

There is also a collection intended especially for kindergarten teachers, containing the songs and stories used in their work together with the educational books and magazines which they require.

Instruction on the use of the Library, the card catalogue and reference books is given at the Library to classes from the public schools. The usual method of procedure is for the upper grades of the grammar school to come with a teacher during school hours, the time being allowed them according to a previous arrangement between the school authorities and the Library.

This instruction takes the form of simple teaching exercises which have been found helpful to children during a term of years and which teachers themselves often find of use. Its substance is as follows :

1. Arrangement and classification of books.
2. How to use books.
Title pages.

Table of contents.

Indexes of various kinds.

Symbols and signs.

3. Catalogue considered as the index to the books of the Library.

Arrangement of a dictionary catalogue.

Discussion (with examples) of printed matter on catalogue cards.

4. Simple reference books as :

Dictionary.

Encyclopaedia.

Biographical dictionary.

Gazetteer.

History for Ready Reference.

Statesman's Year book.

Talks of a more advanced nature, embodying information on the use of the Library are given from time to time at the Boston Normal School.

Portfolios of pictures are lent to the schools by the Library. These pictures are especially selected to illustrate studies where the use of pictorial material is desirable and they are classified with regard to the school needs. Besides the collections intended for class room use, the larger, more valuable pictures are available, with specially illustrated books, for classes to examine at the Library.

As aids in school work, analytical indexes are made, lists of holiday books are prepared and books required for supplementary reading in the different grades are bought and duplicated to supply the demand.

The Library issues, at intervals, printed lists which are planned with especial reference to school needs. These have included recently.

Helpsin the study of Boston history,

A List of Books on Abraham Lincoln.

A brief List of Books about Gardening for Boys and Girls.

A close relationship is maintained with the Boston Home and School Association.

The Chief of the Childrens' Department at the Library is chairman of the Committee on children's reading of that Association and provides lists of books for teachers to recommend their pupils, also meeting with them occasionally for that purpose and speaking informally about Children's books.

