

## THE LIBRARY.

The Editor of THE VARSITY has kindly asked me to explain in these columns the purpose of the book shelves just erected in the reading room of the Library building. It is a very general custom in public libraries and especially in college libraries to place a certain number of reference books immediately at the disposition of readers. The advantages of such a practice are obvious. Without the trouble of hunting up titles in a catalogue or bibliography, and the delay of obtaining the volume desired through a clerk at the delivery desk, readers are enabled to consult an assortment of books already carefully selected as the best or most suitable to their supposed needs.

The only matters then open to discussion are, first, the dimensions to which such a selected reference library may extend, and secondly, the principle of selection. Perhaps, in theory, the greater the quantity of books thus made directly accessible to readers the better; but the number of volumes is limited by the space available for shelving, which shall be conveniently accessible to all readers, and also by the expense of service involved. Calculations of cubic feet and of dollars and cents must, therefore, ultimately settle the question of quantity. A more difficult problem is that of determining the lines on which a selection should be made. A sound working basis, I take it, is to aim at meeting the requirements of the average rather than those of the exceptional reader. Recondite subjects need not be represented at all, nor the minutiae of any subject. In our own library the specializing student is admitted to the stack-room on the recommendation of his professor, so that the collection of books in the reading room has no interest for him in relation to his special line of work. But when the ordinary subjects of general interest and the best books or those most suitable to the ordinary reader on each subject have been selected the object of the reference collection has not been entirely attained. So far, the taste and thirst for knowledge of the ordinary reader have alone received attention. But in a university library there are, in a sense, no ordinary readers. All are exceptional, all are specialists more or less. Is it possible to recognize and provide for the range of their interests as exceptional no less than as ordinary readers? Perhaps it is. Fortunately, university students are not as a rule specialists in individual isolation, but in groups. An attempt may at any rate be made to satisfy the needs of the average student of each specializing group, in order to increase the usefulness of the selected library of reference books.

The last consideration brings me to a practical suggestion. The undergraduates in Arts have organized themselves by their societies and clubs into groups of individuals interested in the same subjects and working more or less on the same lines. Apart from the text-books prescribed or recommended in the calendar and by the professor during term, which it is not intended to place on the reading room shelves, the topics of discussion in the various societies probably represent the subjects most interesting to the members of the different groups. It is not easy for a librarian to keep himself informed of what is going on in student circles except by the help of the students themselves. I would suggest, therefore, that each society or club depute one of their number to let me know from time to time what subjects or topics are engaging their attention. As far as possible I shall be glad to meet their wishes and place on the shelves in the reading room whatever books the library possesses on such subjects, or a suitable selection of them.

In conclusion, there is one necessary condition of a reference collection being made directly accessible to

readers—the volumes may not be taken from the reading room. To do so would be to appropriate to the use of a single individual what is intended for all. Under special circumstances, of course, this principle may be violated and a volume may be withdrawn from the reference collection and lent, but as a general rule the books placed in the reading room must be such as are not likely to be required for home study.

H. H. LANGTON.

## PROF. WRONG'S LECTURE.

Yesterday afternoon Prof. Wrong delivered a lecture on "What the Historian Should and Should not Attempt" before a large and appreciative audience.

After describing the rise of the modern historical school he proceeded to discuss what the historian should and should not attempt. He defined the historian's duty as that of laying bare the truth about events, and pointed out the difficulties in the way of discovering the truth. The historian is dependent upon documents. First of all it is hard to find all the documents, widely scattered as they are, and when found their authority must be determined and their accuracy tested. A whole science of criticism is involved in this. Unlike the investigator in the field of physical science the historian has material often deliberately untruthful. The garbage of a court scandal he has to work through. Above all the inaccuracy and incompetence of his witnesses make his path difficult. Prof. Wrong quoted an amazing account of the city of Adelaide written by Mr. Froude from personal observation. Mr. Froude describes Adelaide as in a valley through which a river flows, and as having 150,000 well-fed inhabitants. In fact Adelaide is not in a valley, there is no river, and there were only 75,000 people, some of whom were half starving when Mr. Froude was there. The historian, he explained, has enough to do to learn the truth from his erring witnesses without undertaking anything else. He must not therefore attempt to interpret the designs of Providence regarding man, or to champion the history of any favored race, or to teach patriotism, or to become the ally of the politician. He is simply the interpreter of human act and motive in the past, and must confine himself to the field prescribed for him if he is to discharge his duty to society.

The topic for the Y.W.C.A. on Jan. 16th will be "Hindrances to serving Christ," particularly "Perils of College Life."



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