

In the Planning of a Library



Card File at Calvin Library

BY LESTER DE KOSTER,
A.M., A.M.L.S.
Director of the Library

■ THIS is the story of two small books. Rather, it is the story of what two small books did.

Rather more, it is the story of what two small books mean to the planning of the new Calvin Library.

Let me begin it here:

Dr. Karl Schottenloher, a distinguished German scholar who has just completed compiling seven huge volumes which gather together more than 50,000 titles of books and articles dealing with the Reformation in Germany — this is, I notice, becoming a long sentence. Let us start over: this Dr. Schottenloher wrote in 1951 another two volumes. In English the title of these two is: *Books Move the World*.

This is a comforting thought to the scholar. It makes his work seem important, if unappreciated. Just to think that one of *his* books, mind you, should move the world, ever so tiny a bit! Refreshed by the thought, he redoubles his effort. We trust he has not lost sight of his goal.

It is a comforting thought also to the librarian. Those rows and rows of volumes, stretching down the aisles — by no means quite so dead and lifeless as they seem: it is indeed a happy idea. Not that the lover of long aisles of books did not know that they were more alive than they seemed to those who passed by in haste! Who has not entered a library at night and almost expected to hear earnest conversation whispered all over the building, the voices coming from between the covers of countless volumes? And perhaps a conversation not always whispered, either; for imagine the friends and the enemies shelved side-by-side. Why, if

you came in just before the dawn, when the arguments had been getting hotter all night, you might hear the building echo with violent and angry syllables. As I recall, without going to look it up (librarians are always being obliged to “look it up”) Christopher Morley’s *Haunted Bookshop* was a place where the arguments among the books got so out of hand that they would be found tumbled on the floor when the morning light at last silenced them again. I suspect that all book lovers almost, *not quite* but *almost*, accept this as possible.

■ ANYHOW, Dr. Schottenloher wrote his books, and I presume scholars and librarians rejoiced at the title. And, what is more, this is the story of how two books did, and will, “move” things in the planning of the new Calvin Library.

One of those books was published in 1944. The author was, and is, a librarian, Fremont Rider by name. His book has a jaw-breaker title: *The Scholar and the Future of the Research Library*.

Love and Faith

Enola Chamberlin

*Although my slow and earthly feet
Still heavily tread the sod,
My heart in love goes soaring up
To lightly walk with God.*

*And though the eyes He gave see not
When earthly days are dim,
Through faith I can behold the light,
The light which comes from Him.*

*Oh seek, He said, and you shall find,
Oh claim, it will be yours,
And seeking I have not the all
Which my pure faith insures.*

Los Alamitos, Calif.

Mr. Rider had an axe to grind. He wanted to change something. He did.

By a careful study of statistics, he could prove to most people’s satisfaction that the great university libraries were doubling their size every 16 years. If you shelved one million titles this year, you would shelve around two million titles by 1975. The big American universities had been growing at this pace — I think it is called geometrical progression — for more than 100 years: 2-4-8-16, and so on. This explained, said Mr. Rider, why libraries kept growing out of buildings.

As I say, Mr. Rider had his eye on something. He was interested in microcards. A microcard is a 3x5 card. On it are printed, in very small type, 72 pages of an ordinary book. Put the card in a reading machine, and you get back the ordinary size pages on your reader screen. Three or four cards make up one ordinary book. Put them in your card catalog drawers, and presto! you have the beginning of a library in the card catalog alcove. No more shelving; no more pushing out the walls! Like that!

Well, Mr. Rider found some followers, but like most prophets — if such he will prove to have been — he also found some tomato throwers. Some of these latter characters argued that his figures were wrong. Libraries do not grow that fast. But he defended himself there, and his figures are now commonly quoted. In fact, our own Library has doubled its size in the last eight years.

The other doubters went to work on microcards. Students don’t like them; readers are cumbersome; you can’t have rows and rows of readers in your reading rooms; etc.

These arguments carried more weight. There has been steady growth in the development and use of microcards. But they have not taken the place of books for ordinary student use; and they will no doubt never do so. The microcard is a research tool. It is the cheapest way to obtain, and to store, certain research materials. And this, after all, was what Mr. Rider was writing about — do you remember the title of his book? And we will make this use of them in our new Library.

But the problem of *space* for growing collections of books remained.

And at this point enters the second small book.

I hope you will wish to read of it, and its importance to the new Library in a following article.