

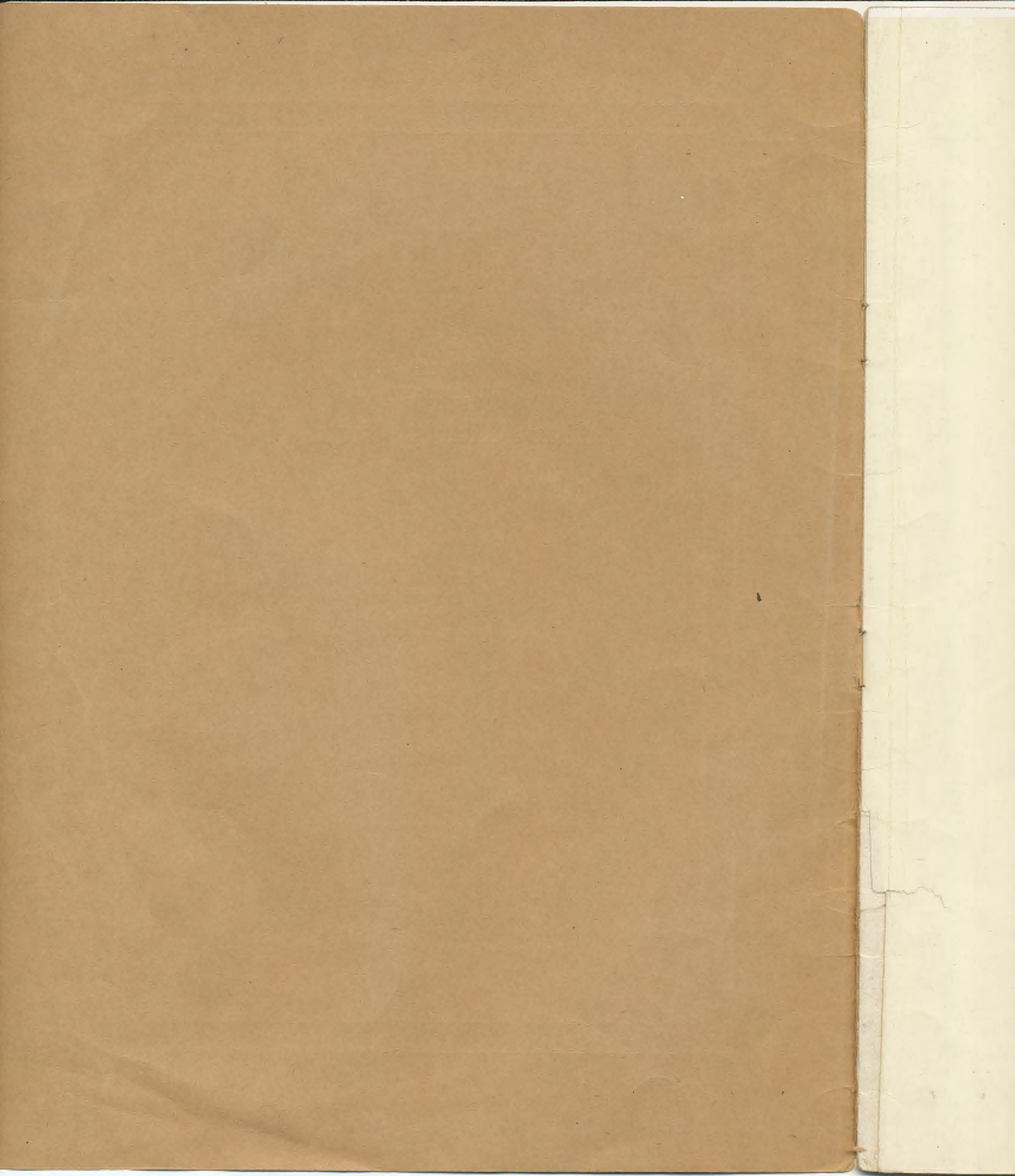
New York Library Club

Meeting
In Memory of
Mary Wright Plummer

Stuart Room
New York Public Library
Thursday Evening
November Sixteenth
1916

Participating

American Library Association
New York Library Association
New York Public Library
Library School of the New York Public Library
New York State Library School
Pratt Institute
Library of Congress





Mary Wright Plummer

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A LIBRARY LIFE

A SYMPOSIUM IN HONOR OF THE MEMORY AND IN GRATITUDE FOR
THE WORK AND INFLUENCE OF

Mary Wright Plummer

September marks the Earth's first slumbering
But Nature sleeps for strength to build anew,
And ere the last leaf falls and Summer's thru,
The ground is pregnant with the unborn Spring.
We will not mourn without remembering,
That you who long have worked so well and true
To do the things your brave heart bade you do,
Can never cease to be a living thing.

The earthly time allotted Man is brief,
And we are many who with heartfelt grief
Now mourn what seems the passing of a friend.
But years to come shall echo with your praise
And bring fond memories of bygone days,—
For friendship such as yours can never end.

FORREST B. SPAULDING.

THERE is a small group of members of the American Library Association to which it owes most of its ideals and much of the guidance which has brought such success to the Library movement in this country.

In this group Mary Wright Plummer held a prominent place. What would it mean if we were to eliminate from its history all she accomplished—all she did for library school training, all her professional papers and text books and, what has counted most of all, the inspiration and enthusiasm with which she passed the torch to her pupils, so many of whom are now

in the front rank of library workers all over the country.

It is not possible to over-estimate our loss, but I would rather dwell upon the thankfulness we feel for having had some association with the richness of her life. It was a revelation of her wide friendliness to hear at the last conference of the Association so many expressions of high regard and affection which came with the expressions of sorrow because of her absence.

So much of what she did, and so much of what she was, still lives abundantly, that it will be a long time before we realize that she is not still with us.

It is a great satisfaction to acknowledge for the American Library Association our indebtedness to her influence, which will long be a very part of library work.

WALTER L. BROWN,

President, American Library Association.

This symposium includes addresses, revised and condensed, made at the memorial meeting in the Stuart Gallery of the New York Public Library Nov. 16, 1916, of which a report is printed elsewhere. The last portrait of Miss Plummer, which was taken at the close of 1915 and published in the LIBRARY JOURNAL for January, 1916, is duplicated in this number, and may replace the earlier print as frontispiece in the bound volume, or be used for framing.

SOURCES AND OUTGIVINGS

WE are to do honor and to give thanks for a friend, a helper, and a leader in a great profession; and that honor can best be done by emphasis on the work and the influence which her name means to all of us. I shall therefore not ape the genealogical fiend who is a bane in our libraries, or delve into biography and bibliography in particulars, but an American as well as a Chinaman may honor and revere his forbears, and a student of man must emphasize heredity and environment in the making of character. It is good to know that Mary Wright Plummer came of Quaker and pioneer stock, and that she was born—" 'twas sixty years since"—in that quiet Quaker town of Richmond, Indiana, which has sent forth so many men and women of worth into the larger world. Her quiet manner came from the Quaker stock, her energy and power from the pioneer stock. As you have journeyed down from among the hills, along a river made up of the rills from the mountainside you have come sometimes to a lovely lake, calm and unruffled, mirroring on its placid surface the beauty of sky and shore. Then as you come further down the valley you note where the reserve force from that reservoir is transformed into power, and in these modern days you see next those almost unseeable filaments which convey this power to far-off and varied fields of industry. It seems to me that this is peculiarly a simile and a symbol of our friend and her life, her work with its far-reaching influence, silent and invisible, which all of us know, which we in part only represent in this gathering here, and which will go on far beyond the life which is closed, the life of any of us now and here present.

It was not until the plentitude of womanhood, in fact, until more than half of her years as we now count them, had passed, that Miss Plummer came to her life-calling in this great library profession, which she honored, and in which we have honored her. But earlier she had come into touch with the literary life, for the magazines, at least early in the '80's, were publishing poems from her pen, which were collected

afterward, tho but fifteen of them, in the charming privately printed volume of 1896. Those poems show a depth of thought and feeling, a breadth of view and vision, a height of poetic and felicitous expression that mark her as a real poet; and the few poems reflect very wonderfully the currents of life and of death, of doubt and of faith—those many elements which made her soul. That lovely poem "My own," in which she voiced the tender yearning to touch and mother little children, which is a part of true womanhood, prophesied her interest for children in the library. That exquisite sonnet on life which reaches so high and feels so deeply; and too, the poem on the "Conquest of the air," not there published, but which it is proposed to include in a reprint volume, in which she expresses dread lest the messenger of the air should not be the dove of peace, but the instrument of war—these spring from the deeps of her mind. Of course, with her Quaker soul she longed for peace, and yet she was ready to do her part in any valiant fight that might call for her, in any work which she undertook to do, and to which she rose, calling others to the cause. And these poems are but the expression of the great soul facing such life work.

She was a pioneer, as you well know, in library work, for it was only the pioneers who became members of that first class of 1888 in the first library school which called her and fitted her for the library profession. Before the Friends Association, and later before this very club she read, in 1897, a paper which was reprinted in the LIBRARY JOURNAL for November of that year, and which prophesied in a wonderful way the purposes and the methods of the children's library of today, in a development which then only the highest imagination could reach. In her library work, as you know, she reaped all honors of achievement and of fulfillment and of the highest usefulness. It was in 1890, after a year at St. Louis, and after her first visit to Europe, that she came to us in Brooklyn, and became associated with the Pratt Institute Library, where she remained either as the Director of the Library or of the Library

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School until she came in 1911 to her great work in shaping the Library School of the New York Public Library. In 1891, she was a member of that first party to California, one of the bright and shining members of that pilgrimage, and out of that journey, in a visit, I think, to the Mission of San Juan Capistrano, came a charming little story which represents one of her achievements in another field of literature. I need only recall that she was president of the New York Library Club, of the Long Island Library Club, which was for a time separated from this, of the New York State Association, and of the American Library Association; and even our own country was not the only field for her work.

She was in every way great, a great woman, a great friend, and a great librarian. She was also in her way a great scholar, for she mastered not only French and German, but Italian and Spanish, and made herself so sympathetic with the latter country as to compile the volume from the modern Spanish novelists on "Contemporary Spain," as well as to compile for the children the "Stories from the Chronicle of the Cid." She was a great traveler also, and from her travels in Mexico and Canada came her two books of travel for children, "Roy and Ray in Mexico" and "Roy and Ray in Canada"—not great books, but happy and useful books for the little people she loved so well. You perhaps all know her "Hints to small libraries" and her "Seven joys of reading." It is impossible, however, to follow into the several fields of her work the many details of her achievements. All that and more will be told you, I think, by those who will come to you reflecting the shining from the many facets of her many-sided life.

There is always one thought present in my mind when I come to think of such a life as this. It is the doctrine of the apostolic succession translated into the secular world. In this our friend was a most shining example. We often hear the classic simile of passing the torch on from one to the other. Perhaps in these modern days the simile transforms itself, as I have suggested, into those invisible currents which reach far afield, which no man can see, and

which no man can to the end measure. But I may mention one or two specific instances which will show you how much her life meant in such relation. In this palace of the people, the greatest public library of the greatest library system in the world, where she did the last of her great work, we may well remember that it was thru her suggestion that the present Director of the library made choice of the library calling and ultimately came to this place in association with Dr. Billings, whom we last honored in this room. It was from her lips that he learned of the library profession, and found in it his true calling in turn. And when he went to Pittsburgh, there he started the school for children's librarians, as a specialization from the library school which she had developed from the training class at Pratt Institute. How much that means in library work, this first school for children's librarians in Pittsburgh, you know better than I. But there is a still more striking example. Among the students in Miss Plummer's classes was Miss Wood, whom you know as the Librarian of Boone College in China, a lighthouse for that dark empire, an empire ready to receive, not that civilization of the west which comes by force of arms, but that higher and finer civilization which this profession and this building and Miss Plummer and Miss Wood represent. The Boone College Library became at once the source of library inspiration for China; and last year Miss Plummer had the pleasure of graduating from this school Mr. Seng, who had no sooner got back to China with immense ideals, immense hopes, immense purpose for the deliverance of his people, then came Mr. Hsü who is now a student in this school. There you will see has been a leading out from this one woman, thru one person after another, so that the antipodes are really to be helped and guided in large measure by her influence. Everywhere thru the library world she is known and remembered, for in 1900 she represented us in the library councils of the Paris Exposition. Everywhere in Europe, she had friendships as with Professor Biagi in Florence, her intimate friend, and with others in England, in

France and in Scandinavia. All these count as her friends, catching up her inspiration and extending her work. It is a radiation of influence, this true apostolic succession that I would emphasize to you as the real meaning of this life which is closed after a generation of work.

I speak of the radiation of influence but I think that in her case we should speak rather of the radiance of influence. For it was a shining light which went forth from her into the dark corners, into all parts of the library work, into all parts of the library world. That is a great thing to leave behind. We can scarcely hope for ourselves any greater achievement, any greater thing to leave behind us when we go; and now that she is gone we do not so much mourn her as we rejoice, not in her perfected work, but in the work which will always be perfecting thru the many people who follow her and honor her. Now in her own words, "Life has loosed these fingers from her gown," and she is no more with us. We may well remember the faith that was hers, as expressed in the poems and the life work which were her self. And as I leave this presence, I can do no more than hope for each librarian who is here that he or she, especially in relation with the children, who are the wards of this library profession, may cherish and fulfill the ideals which our friend has left to us.

R. R. BOWKER.

AT THE FIRST LIBRARY SCHOOL

THE occasion is notable in that no less than six distinct associations, to all of which Miss Plummer belonged, are vying with one another to do fit honor to her memory. Of these six, three are associations of librarians in the city, in the state and in the nation. The others are the alumni of three library schools. Speaking for the first of these schools, in which she was a pupil, the part that falls to me is to recall her student life.

Her early years had been spent in Richmond, Ind. From a child she was more than fond of books. One of her family speaks of her as a "book hungry" little girl, and adds, that by special dispensation she was admitted to the privileges of the public

library of the town as soon as it was opened. She spent a year in special study at Wellesley College in 1881 and '82. Whether she came in touch with the special library interest that we know to have been active at that place at about that time, we do not know. For the following four years her home was with her family in Chicago and she was busy in giving private lessons. One day she saw an advertisement—it must have been in a Chicago paper—of a school of library economy soon to be opened at Columbia College. "There," she exclaimed, "that is what I'd like to do," and at once, she wrote to New York for particulars.

There were 40 applications for admission, from among which 20 were accepted; three men and seventeen women; and Miss Plummer became a member of the first class in the first school.

The school for library training was an experiment. For years it had been a hopeful dream gradually taking shape. The men behind the great library movement were planning for four things: 1, a journal; 2, an association; 3, a school and 4, a state department to promote and supervise library extension. The journal and the association were secured in 1876. In 1883, Mr. Dewey became chief librarian of Columbia College and asked the trustees to establish a library school. In 1884, they consented to do so on three conditions:

- 1, that it should cost the college nothing;
- 2, that instruction be given by the library staff in addition to their usual duties;
- 3, that the school be held in the library with such accommodations as might be found there.

The librarian was in earnest, the conditions were accepted and notice given that in two years the new department would be opened. This would have been in the fall of 1886. But a fresh obstacle appeared in the form of a great and unreasoning dread of introducing women to the college and the plans, so far advanced, were warmly contested at the last moment on that account. But reason prevailed and the school opened in the first week of January, 1887, for a term of three months.

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school a rather crude affair. They had lectures enough but they had little to work with beyond the skill and earnestness of their teachers and their own enthusiasm aided by the college library and a few catalogs and bibliographies. They brought their chairs into one alcove to listen to lectures and carried them back to tables in other recesses and corners where they practiced the library hand and struggled with accession sheets and card slips. The rules for cataloging were not so well settled as they have since become and many were the questions and debates over technical details. Instructors and pupils came into close relations with each other and the students, being anxiously desirous of learning, there can be no question that they learned.

We have on record, in addition to the annual report of the director, four printed statements regarding the work of that first term. The A. L. A. was profoundly interested. The school had been discussed on its platform for four or five years and there was a committee to watch, examine and report upon the progress and character of the school. At the summer meeting of 1887 at Thousand Islands, the committee reported. Each of the three members, Mr. Green of Worcester, Mr. Foster of Providence and Miss James of Wilkesbarre had visited the school. Miss James had spent two weeks with them. With one voice they approved and praised the school, for its thoroughness, its breadth and the spirit of enthusiasm which prevailed. Mr. Green, feeling that some slight criticism was due, ventured to say that the atmosphere seemed to be "slightly feverish."

In order to present to the association a more complete picture, a student was then introduced. Miss Plummer had taken her rank as leader of her class and, with that clear simple way of writing, of which she was mistress, she told the convincing story. "Perhaps," she began, "no body of instructors ever had a more expectant class or one more ignorant of the subject to be entered upon. . . . It is almost a wonder that the ferment of energy and enthusiasm with which we listened to and attempted to follow our instructions did not burst out

the walls of the superannuated building. It was a clear case of new wine in old bottles." She described the several items of the work done and the wonderful spirit shown by the students, adding a word to be remembered. "One feeling," she said, "was common to the class, that, whatever place and whatever division of labor might fall to our lot, we should not be satisfied with less than our best work, now that we had a standard. With the untried enthusiasm of tyros we even yearned for small libraries in straitened circumstances that we might show how much could be done with a little." That spirit of devotion which she then expressed and afterward taught is still the glory of the library work.

The expected term of three months was found insufficient and, on unanimous request of the class, was extended to four months. In the following October, a class of eleven members including nine of the original class of 20, began their senior course of seven months, accompanied by a junior class of 20. Miss Plummer, in her senior year, was also an instructor. One of that junior class, Miss Underhill of the Utica Public Library, has contributed the following letter:

"My recollections of Miss Plummer as instructor are not so distinct as are my remembrances of her personality and her earnestness and enthusiasm. I remember seeing her in frequent consultations with Miss Cutler over disputed cataloging problems and our cards frequently bore red ink traces of her careful scrutiny.

"We used to corral her occasionally when we were struggling with joint authorship, 'sees' and 'see alsos,' the difference between editors and compilers and other problems of equal mystery, because she had a way of making clear such troublesome and bewildering things. All this was in the library room, a part of the old college, in one of the funny little alcoves.

"Her own desk stood in the college library proper not far from the horribly-respected classed catalog, filled with cards of various hues and many colored inks, and close to the shelves weighted down by all the fearful bibliographical tools: and