

library list of subject headings and is admittedly subjective.

A second difference to note is that each of these major heads is separated by long essays from the classified headings, the chronologic sub-headings, and the sequential references. Something comparable can be found in reference literature in the case of volume 19 of the *World Book Encyclopedia*. But the *Syntopicon* differs not only because of the intervening essays but because of the chronologic rather than classified or alphabetic sequence of sub-heads.

A third difference to note is the inclusion of two features, usually found elsewhere in reference books, as part of the index. One of these is the Bibliography of Additional Readings, which is arranged alphabetically by author, with no analysis by the 102 ideas or subheads. The other feature is the Inventory of Terms, a sort of alphabetical finding list for the headings used.

Overwhelmingly the impression left on this reviewer is that the *Syntopicon* is unnecessarily complex. At times one feels as though the indexing staff responsible for the *Syntopicon* is about to come to grips with some fundamental problems that have frustrated indexers for years. But at other times and especially while reading the 80-page appendix on "Principles and Methods of Syntopical Construction" one has the uncomfortable feeling that the author is one of those intelligent readers who has spent his reading life either taking for granted or minimizing the importance of indexes until this moment when called upon to assume responsibility for constructing one, and then, suddenly aware that indexing is a fundamental, but still not fully initiated in the art, sets out to philosophize about elementaries explained in the first few days of library school.

The inadequacy of the *Syntopicon* as an index seems, to this reviewer, to stem from a faulty concept of a reference book. "The *Syntopicon* does not contain the answers, but only a guide to where the answers can be found in the pages of the great books." (Preface XXII). According to the editor, "This fact distinguishes the *Syntopicon* from all other familiar reference books, which contain *within themselves* the answers to the questions on which they are consulted." Of course, this isn't quite so. *The Essay and*

General Literature Index, for example, a "familiar reference book," shares the *Syntopicon's* distinction, as do numerous other bibliographies and indexes. As a matter of fact, the *Syntopicon* as well as these other bibliographic reference tools, often do contain within themselves the answers to some of the questions for which they are consulted.

From the standpoint of the readers' adviser in the public library the *Syntopicon* will not be an easy tool to use. For quick reference the quotation book will be better for a few words on almost any idea in the *Syntopicon*. So will the good encyclopedia index, the *Essay and General Literature Index*, the new Granger's *Index to Poetry*, and volume 50 of the *Harvard Classics*.

The great contribution of the *Syntopicon* will probably be in the field of public relations. It may, through all the dramatic attention it has received in the press, serve to bring some of the long overdue appreciation due the much underrated art of indexing.—Louis Shores, Florida State University, Tallahassee.

With the publication in *Has Limitations as* 54 volumes of the *Great Reference Tool Books of the Western World*, the Hutchins-Adler-Barr group has taken another step in the direction of promoting the study of the books they consider fundamental to an understanding of western thought. This set, much like other similar ventures in the selection and publication of great works, consists of many books that are standard works to be found in most library collections. So the librarian may very well hesitate in acquiring it for the library. But there has been added to this collection a unique topical index, called the *Syntopicon*, which gives it an importance not previously achieved by any similar set of volumes. It makes easily accessible the contents of the works included in a way they have not been made accessible before, either through bibliographies, dictionaries, concordances, encyclopedias, or indexes to individual works. The thoroughness with which the *Syntopicon* performs its task and the manner in which it does it, make it an outstanding intellectual achievement and an important new reference tool for the scholar, the student, and the reference librarian—this, regardless of the extent to which one may agree with the

selection represented in the set and with the aims of the group that has promoted this venture.

The primary function of this index as a reference tool is to locate passages on specific topics treated in the works of this collection. This it does through an unusual combination of alphabetical, classified, and chronological arrangements of topics and citations. In addition there are tables of cross references and an inventory of terms, alphabetically arranged, that serves as an index to the topics under which references are listed. Thus the *Syntopicon* covers all possible approaches to the contents of the books—broad, specific, comprehensive, casual, and developmental.

The subjects treated in the works have been classified under 102 concepts, or great ideas, considered elemental and basic to the whole tradition of thought. Fourteen of these—astronomy, dialectic, history, logic, mathematics, mechanics, medicine, metaphysics, philosophy, physics, poetry, religion, science, and theology—deal with specific branches of learning or fields of inquiry. Concepts such as beauty, courage, God, justice, and sin comprise the remaining 88 great ideas. These concepts are presented in chapters arranged alphabetically for convenient reference. Each chapter consists of five parts—an introductory essay that traces the development of the idea and the various meanings it has had, and states the problems and controversies it has caused; an outline of the major themes included in the idea; the references to passages in the works arranged according to topics; a table of cross references to topics under which related materials may be found; and a list of additional readings in works not included in the collection.

Because of their content and style of presentation, the introductory essays constitute in themselves a useful encyclopedia of thought for the general reader as well as a means of orientation to a particular idea. But the real value of the *Syntopicon* is in its references. These are presented in systematic order under the topics or subjects into which each idea has been divided. The arrangement of the topics, of which there are approximately 3000, follows a specific and uniform pattern under each of the ideas. Primary and coordinate topics consider first the meaning of the idea; second, the principal classifications or divisions

of the thing which the idea signifies; and third, the significance of the idea in the fields of learning. Subordinate topics usually "represent an analytical development" of the theme stated in the primary topic. The following selection from the chapter on Democracy illustrates the kinds of topics into which an idea is divided and the order in which they are presented:

1. Conceptions of democracy
2. The derogation of democracy
 - 2a. Lawless and mob-rule: the tyranny of the majority
4. The praise of democracy
 - 4a. Liberty and equality for all under law
 - 4a(1). Universal suffrage: the abolition of privileged classes
 - 4a(2). The problem of economic justice
7. The growth and vicissitudes of democracy.

Citations under each topic are arranged in the order of the volumes in the set; this makes the order chronological except that Bible references always precede the others. If two or more works of an author are cited under the same topic, they are arranged chronologically also. The unit of the citation may be very small, *e.g.* 3 lines in a poem, or it may be an entire work. In a spot check of 20 pages in as many different works it was also occasionally found that a page would not be cited except within a citation for the entire work.

For the reader who wishes to follow an idea through comprehensively, the systematic arrangement of topics under each idea is a convenient outline of its scope and with the passages in the collection that cover the whole of it. Cross references at the end of the chapter that refer to related headings, and a list of additional readings in works not included in the collection are additional aids to him. If he wants to read extensively on a specific subject in one or all of its aspects, he can find the headings relevant to his interests easily and quickly by consulting the alphabetical inventory of 1798 terms at the end of the second volume.

Only one approach to the contents of the collection has not been included in the *Syntopicon*—there is no way to determine under which topics a specific author and work are indexed except by checking every page of the two volumes. This, something every reference

librarian might consider an added convenience to its use, is really a minor deficiency; it certainly does not represent an approach with which the editors were particularly concerned. But there are other limitations to the *Syntopicon* as a reference tool that are somewhat more important. These can be attributed mainly to two considerations of the editors in the preparation of the index. First was their desire to be detached in their presentation and to "avoid the formulation of any systematic order" since such an order "belongs more properly to the exposition of doctrine." As a result, no attempt is made to distinguish the significant statements on a topic from the minor and less important ones. This will not be a deficiency for the person wanting to find all passages in these works that may be at all relevant to the subject of his interest. But the person interested only in finding the more important and significant statements on a subject will have the tedious and time-consuming task of examining all references to it. The second weakness of the index results from the editor's aim to make the *Syntopicon* an instrument for teaching as well as an index in the limited sense of that term. This has led to a certain amount of over-indexing. In the spot check referred to earlier, a passage in Herodotus (p. 107c-108c) approximately 150 lines long was found cited under 11 ideas and 37 topics; portions of the same passage were found indexed under an additional 7 ideas and 34 topics, for a total of 18 ideas and 71 topics. This particular passage deals with the merits and deficiencies of three forms of government—democracy, monarchy, and oligarchy. Pages 211c-15a of the *Fifth Ennead* of Plotinus are indexed in whole or in part under 15 ideas and 25 topics. Three lines from Virgil's *Eclogues IV* are indexed under the topic "Sources of art in experience, imagination, and inspiration." Such detailed indexing is often the result of the overlapping character of the ideas and the parallel structure of the topics under each of them; sometimes it can only be accounted for by the editor's desire to explore and note every possible implication and interpretation of a passage in their attempt to make the *Syntopicon* a teaching instrument. None of the passages examined could be considered irrelevant to the topics under which they were indexed, but the relevance occasionally seemed

too obscure and too insignificant to justify the citation. Of course this would be a useful feature to a person wanting to make a detailed thematic analysis of any of these works.

The *Syntopicon* is unquestionably an important new reference tool. It makes it possible to approach the contents of the great books in a variety of ways that will be useful to the scholar and the student interested in the history of ideas and in locating passages on specific topics in this group of books. But this is not a tool that the unsuspecting freshman, who is normally satisfied with a Sunday supplement treatment of a subject, will be happy with if he is looking for materials for an essay on subjects such as virtue, God, or beauty.—*Joseph S. Komidar, Northwestern University Library.*

Early American Public Library

Evolution of the American Public Library 1653-1876. By C. Seymour Thompson. Washington, Scarecrow Press, 1952. \$3.00.

Since the 1930's, and more particularly since the 1940's, several significant works in library history have appeared, among them Gladys Spencer's *The Chicago Public Library* (1943), Sidney Ditzion's *Arsenals of a Democratic Culture* (1947) and Jesse H. Shera's *Foundations of the Public Library* (1949). These volumes, based on extensive and intensive research in primary materials, sought to relate the rise of the library, meaningfully, within a broad social history frame of reference. Many fields still lie unexplored, especially in library biography, and many corners of covered fields still remain to be illuminated. Meanwhile some gaps are being filled and much valuable information is being made available by such studies as George B. Utley's documented and informal *The Librarians' Conference of 1853* (1951) and E. McClung Fleming's comprehensive biography *R. R. Bowker: Militant Liberal* (1952). It is a pleasure to place next to these on the students' shelf Mr. Thompson's carefully planned *Evolution of the American Public Library*, a work calculated to paint a picture of the modern American public library as it emerges from the convergence of two channels which, flowing from the Renaissance and Reformation, were constantly broadening and deepening: