

Book Reviews

Let ERMA Do It. The full story of automation. David O. Woodbury. Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1956. xiv + 305 pp. Illus. \$5.

David Woodbury's 12th book about some of the mysteries and achievements of science and technology, written for the nontechnical layman, is one of his best. The first half of the book, "This business about automation," is an absorbing discussion of the development of automatic devices and techniques in relation to the concomitant social and economic changes. By citing experience, Woodbury advances the thesis that automatic manufacturing and accounting or computing processes have not displaced human workers—they have freed them for more skilled occupations and better pay. They have increased the general level of employment by requiring more persons to plan and make decisions instead of performing the same routine operations day after day. The analysis of certain major business functions or manufacturing processes facilitates an understanding of what can be done, more and more, by mechanics and electronics, and what man still must do. Why have the motor-car industry and petroleum refineries been so receptive to, and successful in, automation? Why cannot the manufacture of beer and of pretzels be made automatic in a similar manner?

The second part of the book, "ERMA and her friends," is a description of several of the outstanding electronic devices in current use, or now being developed. One of the earliest, ERMA (Electronic Recording Machine—Accounting), has revolutionized the keeping of depositors' accounts and the issuance of monthly statements in banks. ERMA's other friends, such as UNIVAC, ENIAC, MANIAC, SAGE, RAM, and MAGGIE, are introduced so clearly that anyone who adds or subtracts can understand what they are intended to do. Perhaps MAGGIE or one of her future offspring may some day keep the AAAS membership and journal subscription records. So far, the extraordinary electronic devices are not substitutes for human brains, yet they do decide between predetermined alternatives. The future, however, will

witness great improvements in the capacity and versatility of these machines. The concluding chapter, "Where do you and I fit in?" leaves the reader with the task of finishing the story insofar as his own future activity may be related to the rapidly expanding world of automation.

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Documentation in Action. Jesse H. Shera, Allen Kent, and James W. Perry. Based on the 1956 Conference on Documentation at Western Reserve University. Reinhold, New York; Chapman and Hall, London, 1956. 471 pp. Illus. \$10.

At the beginning of 1955, the School of Library Science of Western Reserve University brought together a group of some 19 people from various organizations and institutions to help plan a conference which would concern itself with the following aspects of documentation: (i) use of recorded information; (ii) improvement of the availability and utility of such information; (iii) development and application of new methods, systems, and equipment; and (iv) training of personnel. Together they planned a symposium which was called the Conference on the Practical Utilization of Recorded Knowledge. It was held in January 1956. *Documentation in Action* is, in effect, the proceedings of the conference.

In reviewing a work of this type, one cannot help comparing it with the proceedings of the Royal Society Scientific Information Conference, which was held in London a little over 7 years before the Western Reserve University conference. In many respects, the programs and purposes of the two conferences are similar.

One is also tempted to compare the Western Reserve conference with the projected International Conference on Scientific Information, now being organized by the National Academy of Sciences in collaboration with the American Documentation Institute. Here, again, the program and organizational structure

are quite like those of the Western Reserve conference. In all three conferences, the basic scheme appears to be much the same. All involve working committees and working papers which deal with different aspects of librarianship and documentation.

The thing that most clearly distinguishes the Western Reserve conference from the other two conferences is the nature and derivation of its working papers. In both the Royal Society conference and the projected international conference, a basic criterion of the papers is originality. The working committees in the Royal Society conference were asked, and those of the international conference are being asked, to enlist the aid of specialists in the conduct of firsthand investigations in the problem areas defined by their planning committees. This method is calculated to bring forth original papers based on original research.

In the case of the Western Reserve conference, the accent is on essay-type papers in which groups of experts, from their own knowledge and experience, sum up the problems and developments of the day and the possible significance of these problems and developments. In some instances, the resulting working papers lean very heavily on the past literature in the field of documentation and librarianship for their substance. In other instances, we have "thought" pieces, which reflect the professional feelings and opinions of the writers.

In any attempt to summarize and synthesize contemporary ideas in a field, one must tread the very fine line that divides the informative distillation from the stereotyped rehash. *Documentation in Action* falls on both sides of the line.

The first part of the book consists of seven chapters which review "present requirements, methods and problems" in documentation. It begins with a well-developed glossary of documentation terminology. This is followed by a discussion of interorganizational endeavors in the dissemination of information. This subject was apparently uppermost in the minds of the organizers of the Western Reserve conference. Twelve of the 26 chapters in the book touch on it in one way or another.

The third chapter is a sort of exercise or demonstration in the use of operations-research in formulating decisions. It does not seem to fit in with the other six chapters in the first part of the book. The fourth chapter gets back on the track with a discussion of the present status of education in librarianship. The fifth chapter leaves the track again with a rather overlaid discussion of the characteristics of recorded information.

The sixth chapter is given to an exhaustive and informative inventory of