

It is not possible to quote all the comments nor to name all the people who were responsible for the idea and who worked with zeal to carry it to fruition. However, there are certain people who should be especially mentioned; among these are the Misses Gertrude Annan, Marjorie Darrach, Janet Doe, Mary Louise Marshall, L. Margueriete Prime, and Mr. William Postell.

In June 1951 a Committee on Special Publications was appointed "for the purpose of taking care of the publishing of texts other than the BULLETIN." This committee was composed of Miss Gertrude Annan as Chairman, Miss Janet Doe, and Miss Mary Louise Marshall. In June 1952 this Committee reported as follows: "The first publication considered by the Committee is Miss Estelle Brodman's doctoral thesis. . . . The Committee feels that this is a significant contribution to the study of the development of this important subject and recommends that it be sponsored by the Association. The Committee further suggests that this be number one of a series of monographs that the Association may from time to time find worthy of issuing." In its 1953 report the Committee expressed the hope that the thesis would appear in print before another meeting of the Association. That hope was fulfilled when Medical Library Association Publication No. 1 appeared. It was decided to call it "Publication" rather than "Monograph" in order not to exclude from such a series in the future anything that was not a monograph, such as a scholarly, annotated bibliography within the scope of medical librarianship.

We hail those who had the vision to make the suggestion of such a publication series and we also hail all those who gave untiring help while the manuscript was being completed and going through the press. We hope that this first publication will be followed by many others as worthy to be published in the Medical Library Association Publication Series.

MILDRED E. BLAKE, Chairman
Publication Committee

A PLEA FOR RESEARCH IN THE MEDICAL LIBRARY

The term research has taken on such nuances of meaning in the past century that it has entered the realm of the complicated and the esoteric. To many people, as a result, it has seemed impossible of achievement outside a large institution with much space, an abundance of equipment, and a numerous staff. Indeed, it almost seems as if research has become the sacred cow of all scientific endeavor, something that is apart from ordinary life. That this is true in other fields as well as librarianship is shown by a recent article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*¹ whose author points out that there is now, "an uneasiness born of the belief that research is necessarily a

¹ Bean, William B. Opportunity for research in general practice. *J.A.M.A.*, 154: 639-642, 1954.

matter of abstruse formulas, complex apparatus, and high voltage, which the novice had better leave alone . . . Far too many simply give up without a try."

But it is *not* necessary to set up elaborate schemes or to deify the concept of experimentation to try out new ideas. The first man who chipped a stone to fit his hand more comfortably than the chance stone he picked up was an experimenter *sine nomine*, and the use of card catalogs instead of book catalogs was just as much an experiment as Urey's work on heavy water. The advance of knowledge, as Isaiah pointed out, is slow, "For precept must be upon precept . . . line upon line . . . here a little, and there a little."

It may be argued that libraries are not set up to handle research problems. For example, it is often said that a library is an organization whose main purpose is operations and not research; as such it is not equipped to cope with possibly non-productive work: it does not have the manpower "cushions" to release staff members from other duties, it does not have the space, and frequently it does not have the people trained in the techniques of experimentation. In some libraries, moreover, rigid compartmentalization makes it difficult to switch people or equipment from one type of job to another.

Even granting that all this is true, however, it is still possible to do research in an ordinary medical library. The important thing is not the size of the institution in which the work is to be carried out, nor the size of the problem, nor even the reputation of the workers involved in the research. (As Dr. Bean also points out, "In the sceptical mind of a few of us, the feeling is gaining weight that research by caucus and committee will not yield the necessary clues.") What is important is the logical fashioning of the questions to be asked in the research and the reasoned ordering of the circumstances in the experiment so that the questions asked will be answered unequivocally. Just as good medical research is carried out in small clinical centers, so good library research can be carried out in small hospital libraries. What is needed is not size but vision. Surely medical librarians have this!