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Scientific Books and Libraries.

WHEN the Goths overran Greece, so Montaigne relates, "the only thing that preserved all the libraries from the fire was, that someone possessed them with an opinion that they were to leave this kind of furniture entire to the enemy, as being most proper to divert them from the exercise of arms and to fix them to a lazy and sedentary life". Although an author and a 'bookworm', Montaigne himself confessed that he preferred the stimulus of conversation and debate to the "languishing and feeble motion" of the study of books, of which incidentally he too had seen examples "made of things that were never either studied or understood". One wonders how the Goths would have behaved, or what classical tag the French essayist would have quoted, had either been invited to catalogue, arrange, and house, if never to use, only that portion of the scientific literature of the nineteen-twenties that is generally admitted to be of permanent value. It is, however, idle to prophesy, for has not Mr. Belloc told us that a prophecy (when it is scientific) is always and invariably absolutely and totally wrong?

In any event, scientific authors do not write books with the intention of pleasing or amusing, although both results have been known to follow their efforts, but with that of recording, of instructing, of stimulating inquiry by the offer of new bases, fresh views, or even the galvanism of polemics. In other words, scientific books and journals are intended to be the servants of the multitude rather than the friends of the few.

Desirable as they might individually be, a rabble of undisciplined servants would be of little use; informative as they might separately be, a motley collection of ill-arranged, ill-catalogued, and ill-indexed books or inadequate abstract journals would do little more than represent a considerable waste of money and effort. The subject of the training of librarians for special libraries was discussed by Mr. A. F. Ridley, of the British Non-Ferrous Metals Research Association, at the recent conference at Cambridge of the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux (ASLIB). When it is remembered that a chemical library, for example, has to accommodate and classify journals containing original records of research, dissertations, patent specifications, treatises and handbooks, abstracts, reviews, indexes, bibliographies, dictionaries and encyclopædias, tables and catalogues, some of broad outlook and others of narrow scope, and that the

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custodian of the books is also the mentor of their readers, the specialised yet comprehensive character of his charge becomes apparent. There are said now to be appearing more than twelve hundred journals which publish at least an occasional paper of chemical interest; when to this total are added publications other than of the journal class, and the whole is then extended to include other sciences, the dimensions of modern scientific literature can be appreciated.

In every section leaders of the scientific army help us to digest the mass by summaries and criticism; abstract journals and indexes help us to follow closely the course of development in a particular direction; reports summarise the abstracts; monographs engrave the milestones and label the route; books and articles portray its attractions; some of us run in the race and others are clerks of the course, whilst many contrive successfully, often brilliantly, to combine the two rôles.

So hot has the pursuit become, so rapidly are records made and broken, that sooner or later the cry of standardisation had to be raised. Scientific men, individualists as they are in many ways, are at pains to introduce uniformity into their methods and their observations, but the librarian finds insufficient uniformity in the presentation of their published records. From the utilitarian aspect, from the point of view of the research worker or the teacher, no less than from that of the custodian, this lack of uniformity is a disadvantage which is worth analysis and some measure of co-operative agreement.

This matter also was dealt with at the Cambridge conference of ASLIB. Dr. Wilfrid Bonser discussed the ideal form in which, from the librarian's point of view, a journal should be produced. Dr. Bonser would be the first to agree that the importance lies not so much in the convenience of the library staff, although this is by no means to be overlooked, as in the fact that what the librarian can arrange correctly and catalogue accurately can be the more quickly and completely rediscovered by the user. He indicated, for example, the difficulties which an unfortunately selected title, an inconsistent size, or an inappropriate division of articles may cause. He referred to inconvenience arising from certain practices involving title-pages, contents, and index, and mentioned absurdities which irregularities in the time of appearance may produce. The price of journals is also of general concern. So far as it affects scientific periodicals collectively, the matter has reached a somewhat acute stage.

It has long been impossible for more than the

fortunate few to maintain a scientific library with any pretence to adequacy, and it has now become necessary for most important libraries to allow financial considerations a measure of precedence over scientific requirements. Scientific workers, although usually securing for themselves little material profit from their investigations, generally finance on some co-operative plan the publication of their own work, so that the results of their studies may freely serve as the starting-point for the work of others; moreover, they generally find it necessary to purchase in addition reports of the work of other groups, as well as to subscribe to journals and other serial publications of ordinary business enterprise. Thus both the individual worker and the librarian, budgeting within definite, although widely different, limits, dislike violent fluctuations in price and—having for a few years subscribed to a new journal at a moderate price—particularly resent the demand for ever-increasing subscriptions for parts issued at irregular and always more frequent intervals. It is fair to add that the object of Dr. Bonser's criticism is not a British publisher.

Another paper which was read at the same conference, by Mr. H. Rottenburg, was concerned with the indexing and classification of 'one-man' collections of data. The object of the discussion was not, of course, to attempt to lay down rules, for in his methods of acquiring and preserving information perhaps more than in many other characteristics one man differs from another. The paper did, however, disclose methods which, in various hands, have proved advantageous and made suggestions which will doubtless prove acceptable. The hints which Mr. Rottenburg offered ranged from types of bookcases and the vagaries of loose-leaf binders to the use of the decimal classification.

Both the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux and the Library Association have found it necessary to direct attention to the serious deterioration of documents and printed matter in public record offices and libraries, and it is satisfactory to know that steps are being taken with the view of securing the permanence of such records in the future. A committee has been appointed to consider the formation of a panel of expert translators, and the possibility of procuring greater uniformity in the size of journals is being canvassed. The report on the year's work of the Association included reference to the inquiry bureau, to the bulletin and directory, and to plans for the publication of a catalogue of the London borough libraries and the Guildhall library.