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Editorial and Publishing Offices

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LIBRARY RESOURCES OF GREAT BRITAIN

AN important chapter in the McColvin report on the Public Library System of Great Britain dealing with co-operation, specialization and national projects emphasized the urgent need for a thorough and realistic survey of the whole field of special and non-public libraries. Such a survey, Mr. McColvin urged, would disclose a wealth of material which is not fully recognized and utilized, and would stimulate co-operation both between non-public libraries themselves and between non-public and public libraries. It is a necessary preliminary to a sound organization and development of the specialized resources of the nation.

This view was endorsed at subsequent discussions on the rehabilitation of European special library and information services during the Conference last September of the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux, and the importance of such a survey has since been urged by Mr. G. Woledge, librarian of Queen's University, Belfast (see *NATURE*, Dec. 11, p. 687). A good deal of attention is being given to this question by the University and Research Section of the Library Association, which is considering the publication of a report on the post-war development of university and research libraries as a complement to the McColvin Report. The rehabilitation position, coupled with the problem which may well confront all libraries in completing after the War their broken and interrupted series of scientific and technical periodicals, will certainly enforce some attempt to plan systematically the distribution of available resources. Moreover, without some measure of co-operation, any efficient distribution of the book resources of Great Britain in view of present publishing difficulties is well-nigh impossible.

The basis for any such efforts must clearly be a survey of existing collections in all forms of special libraries, within and without the public library system of Great Britain, the functions they serve and their relation to the general needs of the country. The first step before any such inquiry can well be initiated is clearly to determine its scope, and on this point discussion of the proposal can most profitably at present settle. In such discussion, however, it is necessary to have a clear idea of the nature and extent of existing university and research libraries, their resources and the services they render, the form of present library co-operation, and the needs of the users of such libraries and the services they are entitled to expect.

In regard to the last, Mr. Woledge has already indicated some essential points. In an adequate system, both special libraries and special collections in general libraries will be required ; also reference collections and collections for loan. The geographical accessibility of reference collections must be considered, and the provision of the shelf access which is more easily supplied in a separately organized special library or department than in a section of a general library. Again, in addition to shelf-arrangements

which facilitate 'browsing', the collection and arrangement of ancillary material such as cuttings, off-prints, photographs, with all that is implied therein in the way of expert and specialized staff, must receive attention. Whether regarded from the point of view of an information system, the stimulation of creative thought or general education, the system must provide for the needs of the general reader as well as the specialist and research worker.

It is not, of course, suggested that the university and research libraries of Great Britain are not already, in themselves and through the system of voluntary co-operation developed in the last twenty-five years, already making most valuable contributions in such ways in supplying the material required for the advancement of knowledge. The problem is to determine whether the present extremely heterogeneous units, differing widely in age and size, could be knit to the general advantage into some more formal or informal structure. That need not affect the independent status of the individual libraries, to which some will attribute much of their present sense of responsibility, or the voluntary character of the existing system of co-operation. Under present conditions the individual libraries can scarcely continue to render the most efficient service to their own special clientele, and expend to the best advantage their available resources, unless regard is had to their position in the national system and the help which they might receive from, and give to, other libraries.

The university libraries are the properties of the bodies they exist to serve, and the interests of those bodies have naturally a first claim on their services. Almost without exception, however, they have recognized that part of the service which a university owes to its community is to make available, within the limits of its means and to those qualified to make use of them, such of its resources as are not available elsewhere and are not needed for its daily work. They have been glad to welcome outside readers and to lend their books to other libraries, and the contribution thus made to the advancement of knowledge is by no means insignificant.

The so-called 'special' libraries are also the property of various kinds of corporate bodies—local and national learned, scientific and professional societies, government departments, research associations, industrial and commercial firms, newspapers, etc. Although such libraries need feel even less obligation than the university libraries to the general public, their resources have been increasingly made available, if not generally, at least to other libraries whether special or public. Frequently they are the only source of supply of much specialized literature, and their co-operation in the national organization for inter-library lending through the National Central Library has been far more important than any statistics could show.

Besides these, there is a further group of government libraries the primary obligations of which are to the public in general; it should be unnecessary to say anything here about the importance of the British Museum as a reference library, or of the Science

Library as a source of scientific periodicals for loan. The great municipal reference libraries, although in most ways associated more closely with the work of the public lending libraries than with that of other research libraries, are none the less an important part of the country's resources for research, and besides all these groups there is the National Central Library, the organizing work of which has facilitated the full utilization of their resources.

No organization which leaves any of these groups out of account can claim to make anything like full use of Great Britain's library resources. A national scheme must provide for their voluntary participation on a national as well as on a local and regional basis. Given such co-operation, there should be no inherent difficulty in the allocation of public funds to provide for the strengthening or maintenance of any particular special collection which might be desirable in the public interest as a result of the proposed survey.

Without minimizing the importance of adequate staffing and housing of libraries, both special and general collections, or of efficient administration, the most urgent need is that of a survey of actual book resources as a basis for framing policy. An administrative survey is undoubtedly needed, but whether it should, as Mr. McColvin appears to imply, be combined with the urgently needed survey of the contents of libraries, may be questioned. Both are large projects, but they demand different qualifications in those responsible for carrying out the survey. Administrative reform, it is true, might sometimes be required before a special library could co-operate effectively, but that can scarcely apply to the appraisalment of its holdings in the survey.

Much material for the survey of book resources in Great Britain is no doubt already in the possession of the National Central Library and of the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux. The co-operation of both these bodies may be expected, but most of the present material will require re-examination. It is not enough in framing a policy merely to know of the existence of a special collection; information as to how far it is complete, how fully it is kept up to date, how far books are available for loan and in non-lending collections, and how adequately it is organized, is essential. The survey should bring out the weaknesses as well as the strength of the book resources of Great Britain.

There are other questions as to the extent of the survey which require determination. One is the inclusion or exclusion of local collections, most of which form part of the public library service and are often in very small libraries. It may well be decided to leave manuscripts and theses to a subsequent survey. Questions with regard to periodicals will probably arise, and the survey can be no more than a first step in the co-operative selection of periodicals, though it should assist the allocation of 'runs' where insufficient copies are available.

On the basis of such a survey, it should be possible to frame a policy which could be based on agreed principles, and to decide which collections could be most profitably developed in general and on what

lines. It would enable libraries to plan the development of their special collections, and though much more will remain to be done, such a survey is almost an essential preliminary to the co-operative purchase of periodicals.

The first objective in such a policy must clearly be the establishment of one full collection in a single library, such as is provided for many subjects by the British Museum and other great general libraries. No system of inter-library lending can take the place, for certain types of research, of a library where any reasonable demand can be satisfied at short notice. It is best that such a library should not lend its books, or at least do so sparingly, but Mr. F. C. Francis's paper on the British Museum as a special library, read at the autumn conference of the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux, gives some idea of the problems that must be faced in attaining even this objective. We cannot assess the value and completeness of special libraries for this purpose without regard to the amount of material contained in more general works or series.

On the other hand, it is not so essential that the second objective, a full collection of books available for inter-library loan, should be in one library. Further development of the co-operation in this field which has been so marked in the last twenty years may be expected, chiefly on the lines of further specialization related to individual and to general needs, in the medium-sized general libraries, mainly reference libraries and university libraries. It may well prove that the greatest need for financial assistance is in this field.

The third objective should be a full collection, which may or may not be identical with one of the collections already mentioned, allowing access to the shelves and suitably arranged for that purpose. The importance of open-shelf libraries properly arranged so as to provide for and even encourage 'browsing' is often overlooked. The value of such 'browsing' in stimulating thought during research has been repeatedly demonstrated, and the special libraries and information departments might consider whether the re-arrangement of their material so as to permit free access to public material at least on the part of their own staff would not be worth while. Apart from that internal advantage, it might facilitate fuller participation in inter-library lending, though as Mr. McColvin has emphasized in his report, one of the objectives of a carefully planned policy should be to provide books where they are most wanted and thus reduce inter-library loans to a minimum.

The mere size of the great general libraries of Great Britain tends to preclude the supervision and shelf-arrangement necessary for open access collections of this type, and this function may fall to the special libraries or information departments. Again, every subject needs the provision of books in each of these three ways, though the relative importance will vary from subject to subject. For some subjects, more than one full non-lending collection may be required; overlapping or duplication must be considered in no narrow spirit. Questions

of local as opposed to national book provision would rightly be disregarded by the survey, which none the less must examine the desirability of ensuring that certain large classes of literature, which cannot, and should not, be repeated in all libraries, exist in duplicate or triplicate for inter-library loan.

If any such survey is to be initiated in time for its results to be available when the replanning of libraries and replenishment of stocks become possible, it is imperative that it should be set on foot without undue delay. As a first step, the question of the scope of the inquiry and survey requires immediate consideration, and in this the views not only of librarians but also of users of libraries are alike important. The goodwill of all concerned in furthering the co-operation, which has been such a feature of the inter-war period, and in building up a network of special libraries and special collections in general libraries so as to cover the whole field of knowledge, or in the co-operative collection so far as possible of particular items such as periodicals, will be essential. Nor should its importance be overlooked by scientific institutions, to whom the housing of their existing libraries, as Sir Henry Dale indicated in his presidential address to the Royal Society, is already a matter of concern, and it should be assured of the warm support of all those who recognize that plans for the expansion of the universities must include generous provision for the libraries, both books and buildings.

AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

(1) Basic English and Its Uses

By I. A. Richards. Pp. 127. (London: Kegan Paul and Co. Ltd., 1943.) 3s. 6d. net.

(2) Basic for Science

By C. K. Ogden. (Psyche Miniatures, General Series No. 95.) Pp. ix+314. (London: Kegan Paul and Co. Ltd., 1942.) 3s. 6d. net.

LAST September, when Mr. Winston Churchill received an honorary degree from the oldest of American universities, he spoke of the common task awaiting our two peoples in the service of mankind. Himself the son of an English father and an American mother, and a supreme master of our common tongue, he did not see why we should not try to spread the use of our language even more widely over the globe. He went on:

"Some months ago I persuaded the British Cabinet to set up a Committee of Ministers to study and report on Basic English. Here you have a plan. There are others, but here you have a carefully wrought plan for an international language capable of very wide transactions of practical business and of interchange of ideas. . . . What was my delight when, the other evening, quite unexpectedly, I heard the President of the United States suddenly speak of the merits of Basic English. . . . Harvard has done more than any other American university to promote the extension of Basic English. The first work on Basic English was written by two Englishmen, Ivor Richards, now of Harvard, and Ogden, of Cambridge University, England, working in association."

The latest works by Ivor Richards and C. K.