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LIBRARIES AND RESEARCH NEEDS

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THE University and Research Section of the Library Association has now formulated proposals regarding the post-war development of the university and research libraries of Great Britain. These proposals overlap in some respects the recommendations of the Council of the Association made in consequence of Mr. L. R. McColvin's report on "The Public Library System of Great Britain", but also deal with a group of libraries, some of which come within the scope of the former proposals and almost all of which are of special interest to the man of science. Reviewing the place of the university and research libraries in a national system, and considering in succession the national and the local organisation of book resources for research, the new report* will be carefully studied by all who recognize the importance of scientific and technical books as tools for industrial research, apart altogether from the wider field which they present for research in the arts, the humanities and the social sciences. Its recommendations, which have already been adopted by the Council of the Association, are in substantial agreement with the recommendations of the earlier report where they overlap, and they represent developments which the Council considers are needed to enable the university and research libraries of Great Britain to carry out their work efficiently and to make their full contribution to the national life.

The libraries with which this report is concerned differ widely in age, in size and in scope, and have in common only their function of supplying materials for the advancement of knowledge. Some of them, like the university and university college libraries, are the property of the bodies they exist to serve, and the interests of those bodies have naturally a first claim on their services. Almost without exception, the university libraries, however, have recognized that a part of the service which a university owes to the community is to make available, within the measure of its means, and to those qualified to make use of them, such of its library resources as are not available elsewhere. Other libraries which are also the property of corporate bodies, such as the learned, scientific and professional societies, industrial research associations, Government departments, firms and newspapers, owe their services to the bodies which establish and maintain them, and need feel less obligation than the university libraries to the outside public. For much specialized literature they are the obvious and often the only source of supply. But while a firm's library clearly could not make its resources generally available, all these libraries have rendered much more assistance to outsiders than any statistics can show, and many libraries in both these groups have, as 'outliers' of the National Central Library, placed their resources fully at the disposal of those who need them.

* Library Association. University and Research Libraries of Great Britain: their Post-War Development. Pp. 16. (Library Association, Chaucer House, Malet Street, London, W.C.1, 1946.)

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While these libraries have already shown that they are willing to undertake obligations as part of the organised book resources of Great Britain, it must be remembered that they are rightly proud of their independence, which for practical reasons also they would be most unwilling to surrender. Moreover, many even of the university libraries are neither staffed nor equipped to handle easily the mechanical side of any considerable expansion in the inter-library lending through the National Central Library. The abnormal conditions of the last few years, with the interruption to runs of European scientific and technical periodicals and the scarcity of copies reaching Great Britain, have put a premium on lending books and periodicals, which has severely strained such resources as these and like libraries possess for dealing with merely the packing and postage involved.

If these libraries are to undertake obligations as part of the organised book-resources of Great Britain, due regard must be had to such circumstances. Like considerations to a certain extent may apply to a further group of Government libraries, such as the British Museum or the Science Library, the primary obligations of which are not to a particular department but to the public in general. Finally, there is the group of great municipal reference libraries, including commercial and technical libraries, which in contents, staffing, organisation and function have for long been a very important part of the country's resources for research. Apart from definite schemes for co-operation which they have initiated, as at Sheffield, such libraries have always welcomed readers outside the boundaries of their authorities, and more recently they have made their resources available for inter-library lending as freely and profitably as the university and special libraries.

Outside all these groups stands the National Central Library, the organisational work of which has made possible the utilization of their resources, and the collections of which, though limited by financial stringency and damaged during the War, are not unimportant. The development of the National Central Library in the last thirty years out of the Central Library for Students does not appear to be well known to scientific workers, although its Information Department, which is concerned with applications for books not available in its Library Department, and traces them and arranges for their loan, can be a research tool of the first importance. Apart from the fact that the National Central Library's collections are intended to supplement existing provision, on the ground of the services of the Information Department alone there is ample reason for implementing the recommendation of the McColvin Report that the National Central Library should be recognized as an integral part of the national system, and guaranteed a reasonable permanent means of existence and the wherewithal to plan for the future and for whatever developments the well-being of the country demands.

The address on the National Central Library which Mr. R. H. Hill gave to the London and Home Counties Branch of the Library Association at Brighton on

October 6, 1945 (*Library Association Record*, December 1945), should be of interest to scientific workers who wish to form an opinion as to the place of the National Central Library in the nation's system of libraries for research, and it will be noted that in the present report the Library Association urges more adequate financial support for it. In making this recommendation, the report has in mind not merely the work of the National Central Library in administering the whole system of inter-library lending, which it is assumed will be continued and extended as the indispensable basis of the proposed developments, but also that the importance of its own resources for research will increase.

The principal recommendation of the Library Association's report, however, is a survey of library resources in Britain for research. This, it is urged, is the first step to secure the fuller co-ordination required in the interests of economy and of efficiency, but which is at present hampered by uncertainty as to how far the different fields of knowledge are covered by different libraries. To supply this information, to show library administrators where the country's collection of books is redundant and where it is deficient, and to show the reader where he will find the collections most useful for his purpose, are the prime objectives of the survey. Much of the material for such a survey is probably already in possession of the National Central Library and of the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux, and the report suggests that a co-operative scheme should aim at providing for every subject or group of subjects at least two collections as complete as possible, one from which books are never lent, and one of books available for loan.

Similar surveys locally in each region of Great Britain are also recommended and might lead to even closer co-operation. The report instances, for example, the organisation of a reference and a loan set of the Public Record Office publications, the Sheffield scheme for pooling technical periodicals and the local collection of local literature. A survey is also desirable of the many old endowed libraries, such as those of cathedrals, parishes, churches, colleges and schools. Some of these are admirably catalogued and well known, while others are little known and inaccessible. For such a survey a special committee would be required to offer advice where needed on questions of cataloguing and preservation. Production of a short directory of such libraries, as a first objective, might be followed by a series of uniform catalogues or a union catalogue. A union catalogue has already been undertaken for books earlier than 1700 in cathedral libraries. This aspect of the survey obviously closely touches the work of the British Records Association and the Historical Manuscripts Commission in establishing the National Register of Archives.

The report recommends that all libraries agreeing to take part in the national and local systems of library co-operation should be eligible for a share in any public funds which may become available for the provision of books. While such grants would involve guarantees that they were rightly expended,

and in particular that they were not used in relief of the normal library expenditure of the institution, they would not interfere with the independent administration of the libraries, and, as already indicated, the report stresses the necessity of retaining the present system of voluntary co-operation of independent institutions. The preliminary survey of national resources would involve a certain expenditure, but it is not anticipated that the developments proposed would involve much additional finance. The building of the collections indicated as necessary would be achieved in part by the better direction of existing expenditure which the survey itself would make possible, though it is suggested that the survey would probably point to the desirability of further expenditure on periodicals at the Science Library.

These are the main features in the report of interest to scientific workers. There is some discussion of the professional aspects of work in research libraries, such as the qualifications of staff, salaries and training; but the report is one which deserves attention by all who realize the extent to which books form the primary or ancillary material for the prosecution of research, and the consequent necessity for adequate supplies of books in the many fields of industry, commerce, education and administration.

It would not be claimed that the proposed survey of national book resources is the only direction in which co-operation between libraries, and indeed between libraries and the users of libraries, is desirable or possible. The increased contacts which may result from the survey may well be expected, for example, to stimulate two developments which are long overdue in Great Britain, and which would be of immense service to the reader and buyer of books, whether private or for a library, and in stimulating the browsing and wide reading which is such a fruitful habit for the student and research worker to acquire. The first of these is the production in Britain of something corresponding to the *Quarterly Book List* which has been issued in the United States since 1945 by the Superintendent of Documents, United States Government Printing Office. This list is produced under the guidance of an advisory committee with Mr. L. H. Evans, librarian of Congress, as chairman, and including representatives of such bodies as the National Research Council, the Army Medical Library, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Social Science Research Council, the American Library Association and the American Council on Education. The *List* originated in a recommendation of the Inter-American Conference for the Maintenance of Peace, held in Buenos Aires in 1936, and in promptitude of publication and the authority of its annotations is far ahead of the *Aslib Quarterly Book List*, which is all that is available in Great Britain to replace the British Science Guild's "Catalogue of British Scientific and Technical Books", last published in 1930. The United States *Quarterly Book List* gives the names and occupation of its contributors, but the annotations are unsigned because the Library of Congress assumes full responsibility for all material appearing in the *List*. While it is highly selective and neither comprehensive nor

exhaustive, it should be invaluable to those wishing to keep abreast of current contributions of the United States in the fields of the fine arts, literature, philosophy and religion, biography, the social sciences, the biological sciences, the physical sciences, and technology. Merely from the point of view of national prestige, a production of like quality in Britain is desirable.

The second development is a matter which more closely concerns the universities themselves and on which Bruce Truscot just touched in his "Redbrick University"; and although he discusses the question of reading, books and libraries more fully in the freshman's guide, "First Year at the University", just published, he does not quite get to the heart of the matter—the priceless value of really good bookshops as a stimulus to the book buying and browsing for which he pleads. The contrast in this respect between Oxford and Cambridge and some of the towns in which 'Redbrick University' is located is almost unbelievable; and if by some means of co-operation between librarians and publishers, the standard of bookshops accessible to provincial universities could be raised to something approaching that which prevails in Oxford and Cambridge or in London and Edinburgh, for example, a real service would be done to learning. Meanwhile, it may well be hoped that publication of this report by the Library Association will not only stimulate initiation of a survey of the national library resources for research, but will also promote co-operation between libraries and librarians of all types, locally as well as nationally. Creative thinking and clear definition of objectives are essential for the successful launching of practical schemes which will ensure a more adequate supply of the books which are the essential tools of research and their most efficient handling from the broadest point of view.

A CRYSTALLOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO STEREOCHEMISTRY

Grundlagen der Stereochemie

Von Prof. Paul Niggli. (Lehrbücher und Monographien aus dem Gebiete der exakten Wissenschaften, Chemische Reihe, Band 1.) Pp. 283. (Basel: Verlag Birkhäuser, 1945.) 32.50 francs.

WITH the detailed problems of classical stereochemistry developed first in organic chemistry under van 't Hoff and Le Bel, and twenty years later in inorganic chemistry under Werner, this book is not directly concerned. It is not a text-book of stereochemistry, but rather a presentation of the fundamental principles on which a comprehensive stereochemistry can be developed. The author's distinguished contributions to the geometrical theory of crystal structure and to mineralogy are well known. In recent years the highly successful developments of crystal chemistry, particularly in the direction of the silicates and other mineral structures, have added to and deepened this background. Consequently it is not surprising if the treatment is found to follow lines perhaps unfamiliar, but nevertheless very stimulating, to the chemist.