

Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux

THE twelfth annual conference of the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux, held at St. John's College, Cambridge, on September 20-23, was of more than usual interest to those concerned with the use and dissemination of scientific and technical information of all kinds. In his presidential address on "Interpretation of Science" Sir Richard Gregory referred to the neglect of scientific material to-day by writers of all kinds, as compared with writers of the nineteenth and earlier centuries. Science needs, he pointed out, not only writers to make its achievements intelligible to general readers, but also poetic and other interpreters who will expound its intent and influence by artistic representation or performance. Poetry, like other forms of art, should follow on the heels of knowledge, and Sir Richard quoted examples of the expression of observations of Nature and science in classical literary style, as well as of the poetic interpretation even of mechanised science. Literary genius has as yet rarely found inspiring themes in the great achievements of modern science, and, until this is done, the full appreciation of science and its achievements by mankind would be wanting.

This appeal for the creation of a new school of poets of science who employ their genius to interpret scientific truths with accuracy and genius was fully in harmony with the two major themes of the Conference. The first of these was a symposium on "Special Libraries and Their Problems", covering questions concerning the recruiting, training and future possibilities of special library staff. The discussion was opened by a paper by Mr. J. D. Cowley, on "Training for Special Library Work", who described the training given at the London University School of Librarianship, of which he is director, and the modification of its syllabus to overcome the practical difficulties experienced. Regarding librarianship as including "sympathetic and informed aid in the interpretation of material for study and research", the training aims at providing men and women who are not only trained in the technicalities of handling the material of research, but are also sufficiently informed in the subject of that material to interpret it and pass on the information gained in an acceptable form to others. The question whether training in librarianship should precede or follow training in research has yet to be decided, and some difference of opinion on this point was revealed in the subsequent discussion. Mr. Cowley's remarks about deficiencies in linguistic ability in graduates seeking admission to the course were endorsed in the subsequent discussion from experience in recruiting for information service. Mr. Cowley remarked that the School of Librarianship has so far failed to attract the really first-class science man.

Mr. Cowley's paper was followed by others on the "Functions of a Technical Information Bureau", by Dr. E. S. Hedges and Dr. C. E. Homer, who described the work of the Bureau of Technical Information of the International Tin Research and Development Council, and by Mr. F. H. Smith. Mr. B. Fullman, information officer of the British Non-Ferrous Metals Research Association, discussed "Information

Work as a Career for the Scientist" and pointed out the possibilities in such work for a man of first-class training and originality. The success of information work and the rewards accruing from it are largely dependent on the personality of those engaged in it, and a similar view was expressed in a paper by Mr. T. M. Herbert, research manager of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway.

The second major theme of the Conference related to co-operation between industry and the public library services. Opening this discussion on September 22, Mr. R. Brightman, of Imperial Chemical Industries, Ltd., pointed out that the possibilities in this direction are only just beginning to be appreciated with the growth of special libraries in industry itself. The organisation of such internal library services is an essential preliminary to co-operation with external organisations, and Mr. Brightman then indicated some of the ways in which co-operation has already proved possible and further possibilities in which co-operation would lead to the more effective use of existing resources. Other constructive suggestions were made by Miss E. W. Parker, of the Mond Nickel Co., Ltd., in a review of the use made by industry and commerce of the public libraries in the London area, while Mr. J. P. Lamb described the progress of co-operation between local industries and the public library services in Sheffield. The value of personal contact between industry and the public librarian was emphasised both in these papers and in the discussion which followed.

Following on a paper on the new University Library on September 21, by Mr. H. C. Stanford, secretary of the library, members of the Conference visited the new University Library building. In the afternoon, Sir Stephen Gaselee gave a valuable paper on the "Libraries and Sources of Information in Government Departments", including descriptions or notes on the chief libraries represented in the 'Circle of State Librarians'. Sir Stephen Gaselee testified to the willingness of the Foreign Office library and other departmental libraries to deal with private inquiries, so far as facilities permit.

The annual report of the Council presented to the annual meeting indicated a slight increase in membership, but the necessity for an augmented income, if the work is to be developed adequately, was emphasised. Reference was made to the inauguration of a scheme for the issue of a quarterly list of recently published scientific and technical books, each book recommended by an expert qualified to judge the book in question. The list is intended mainly for the guidance of public and general librarians. During the year, a London and Home Counties branch was inaugurated, several meetings of which have already been held.

Other papers read before the Conference included one on reference books and their use, by Mr. B. M. Headicar, which dealt particularly with lesser-known books of this type, an account of the work of the Council for the Preservation of Business Archives by Mr. A. V. Judges, its hon. secretary, and an admirable analysis by Mr. R. S. Lambert of the response to information of all kinds supplied in the broadcasting services.