

ASSOCIATION OF SPECIAL LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION BUREAUX

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

THE twentieth Conference of the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux, held in the Portland Hall, Polytechnic Extension Building, London, during September 15-16, drew the largest attendance of recent years, and the new *venue* provided more of the opportunities for informal discussion and contacts which were such a useful feature of the residential conferences arranged before the War. Even at the *conversazione* at the Royal Institute of British Architects on the Friday which preceded the formal opening it was evident that this was appreciated; and there was, further, a clear desire for a conference to be held in a northern and industrial centre which afterwards found expression at the annual general meeting and in the discussion which followed Mr. E. N. Simon's paper, "Some Problems of the Special Librarian in Industry". The liveliness of the discussion on that paper, like that on Mr. E. J. Carter's paper on "The Planning and Equipment of Research Libraries and Information Bureaux", indicated that the time available was all too inadequate. Indeed, the general impression was gained that these two sessions, with that at which Miss M. Bateman presented her paper, "Some General Desk Reference Books", the discussion on the book shortage over which Mr. L. J. F. Brimble presided, and some opportunity for informal discussion of the ideas thrown out by Prof. J. D. Bernal in his opening address, would have provided more than enough, in addition to the formal business, to satisfy the majority of those attending.

In contrast to the usual practice, the Conference opened with the annual general meeting at which the report of the year's work was presented. Membership has risen to 530, and the subscriptions increased to £1,500. Grants of £300 from the British Council and £1,000 from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research were received during the year, and the income and expenditure account shows a surplus for the year of £241.

Only two Library Training Courses were held during the year, and the second of these did not end until July 1945. The first issue of the *Journal of Documentation* appeared in July 1945 and non-member subscribers to the ASLIB Book List now number 424, including 230 copies distributed through the British Council. Preliminary steps have been taken towards the compilation of a "Directory of Medical Libraries and Sources of Information", and a new edition of the "Select List of Standard British Scientific and Technical Books" is also in preparation. The Publications Committee has also been responsible for editing a guide to "British Sources of Information", commissioned by the British Council for the use of libraries overseas. ASLIB has also collaborated with the Library Association and the National Central Library in compiling a list of American periodicals missing in transit or through enemy action during recent years. This is the first step in a scheme by which it is hoped that some replacements may be obtainable through co-operation with American libraries, even when the issues in question are out of print.

Following the annual meeting, Prof. J. D. Bernal gave a challenging address on "Information Service as an Essential in the Progress of Science". Dealing primarily with the user's side of library service in relation to research, Prof. Bernal made a strong plea for closer co-operation between the librarian and the research worker and for a fuller understanding of each other's needs and problems. The modern information service should endeavour first to secure that the right information in the right form was sent out to the right people, and, secondly, to arrange that facts of diverse origin which might bear on any particular topic should be correlated for the study of that topic. The very fact that the productive capacity for scientific information increased so greatly, while the absorptive capacity did not increase, accentuated the importance of these distributive and integrative aspects of library service, and Prof. Bernal suggested that in the future the librarian should be master of the material itself and be in a position to present it in forms different from those in which he receives it. It is the librarian's job not merely to accept material as sent to him, but also to demand that the material be presented in the appropriate forms for passing on. This implies a much closer relation between the librarian and the research worker as well as between the function of the librarian and that of the publisher, and Prof. Bernal referred to the way in which war-time experience of the dangers of departmentalism in information service had emphasized the unity of the whole question of scientific communications. It had become clear that, so far as information service for furthering research was concerned, a thorough recasting of the whole system was required, and the present period of rehabilitation offered a unique opportunity for a new start.

The primary unit in scientific communications was the individual scientific paper dealing comprehensively with one topic, and in Prof. Bernal's opinion the scientific journal had ceased to be a really satisfactory means of distributing scientific information. He suggested that the individual scientific paper was the proper basis for distribution as well as for publication. Under the proposed scheme the papers, after being passed for publication by referees, would be forwarded by scientific societies to a national centre which would act as clearing house. The papers would be published in three lengths: in full, possibly as microfilm; in the main, printed; and in summary or abstract. Prof. Bernal visualized a unified abstract service. For indexing, the title of the paper would be sufficient for most purposes. The scientific societies would retain their editorial functions, but it was particularly important that the scheme should be on an international basis from the start, and librarians who were able to appreciate the need for order and uniformity in the presentation and distribution of information should stress to scientific societies and governments the folly of independent action.

At the afternoon session when Sir Frederic Kenyon presided over a symposium on "Links with the U.S.A.", there were some striking omissions. Miss Taylor read a paper by Dr. R. H. Heindel on "The American Library in London" and indicated that this was likely to be retained in some form or other. The arrangement by which H.M. Stationery Office will act as a sales agent for the publications of the U.S. Government Printing Office was also mentioned as likely to operate in the near future,

and the paper was supplemented by a list of some guides to American publications. Mr. R. H. Hill read a joint paper with Mr. E. G. Tayler describing the Bureau of American Bibliography established at the National Central Library on January 1, 1938, and the collaboration of the National Central Library with the Committee on International Relations of the American Library Association in the distribution of American books and periodicals to men serving in the British Forces at home and overseas. Mr. W. C. Dalgoutte described the British Information Services in New York and the work of its four divisions—information, including the library, which is the main link between the organization and American libraries; press and radio; general, including speakers and circulation; and films; and he referred to the growing demand for information on Britain's financial and economic position. In a paper on the work of the American and British Commonwealth Association, Major W. E. Sinnett referred to plans for an Anglo-American Library of Reference which were in abeyance with the formation of the American Library under Dr. Heindel, and to the foundation of an Anglo-American Institute of Cultural Relations and Study. Mr. L. R. McColvin outlined cultural relations with the United States organized by the Library Association, and a paper by E. S. Cavanaugh on the work of the Special Libraries Association was read by Miss Ditmas in which the proposal for an Educational and Cultural Organisation of the United Nations was welcomed and reference made to Mr. Archibald MacLeish's plan for inter-library loans on an international basis to help the devastated libraries in Europe.

A paper on exchanges of staff and students between British and American universities, by Mr. R. A. Johnson, appeared singularly out of date. Taken from an article published in October 1944, it omitted all reference to the more recent arrangements such as that between the University of Manchester and the University of Virginia. Among papers presented in person were those of Mrs. Beatrice Warde describing the operations of the "Books Across the Sea" societies and of E. A. Ford on the "Educational Work of the English Speaking Union", but in an overloaded symposium there was little reference to the scientific field and none at all either to the work of the Scientific Offices in Washington or in London or to the important proposals in the recent report of Dr. Vannevar Bush.

By way of contrast, almost the whole of the following session was given over to lively discussion of Mr. E. N. Simon's paper. Possibly Mr. Simon overstressed the need for education inside a company—his own experience on this point was not generally corroborated—but there can be no question as to the importance of more propaganda on the part of ASLIB. The Association has sometimes tended to preach too much to the converted, and Dr. W. H. Brindley's suggestion for more joint or conjoint meetings of ASLIB with the scientific societies and professional associations should be followed up. Mr. Simon himself indicated that the primary task of the information officer is to direct his clients to reading, not to read for them, and in fact the technique of good showmanship is an important part of the equipment of a first-class works librarian as of the public librarian. Mr. Simon gave frank expression to a number of problems, internal and external, with which most librarians are confronted, and succeeded in conveying a point of view that is not always recog-

nized. Not every librarian appreciates the harm that is done by automatic reminders or recalls, whether or not the borrowed volume is actually required for use elsewhere, though, of course, every librarian knows that in the absence of a reminder system the book may never come back, whether it is in use or not. The question of co-operative translations Mr. Simon discussed at some length and also the functions of ASLIB, and if all his strictures could not be maintained the plea for a northern conference received strong support. Such a conference should do much to remove the main burden of Mr. Simon's strictures on the Association—that its discussions are conducted in too general terms, insufficiently related to specific problems; and if at the same time the suggestion that active steps should be taken to enlighten chambers of commerce, sales managers associations, bankers, municipal officials and others as to the importance and value of information services is adopted the steady growth of the industrial membership of ASLIB may in itself supply whatever further impetus is required for the movement urged by Mr. Simon.

Mr. Edward Carter's paper on the planning and equipment of research libraries and information bureaux at the Sunday morning session, over which Mr. S. W. Gibson presided, alone would have given value to the Conference for the industrialist, but once again the session was overloaded by bringing in Mr. C. E. A. Bedwell's paper on "Hospital Library Accommodation", which not only curtailed the discussion but was clearly regarded by the majority of those present as extraneous, if indeed it fell properly within the sphere of ASLIB at all. Mr. Carter emphasized the importance of flexibility of plan and freedom to expand and suggested accordingly that the least possible amount of equipment should be fixed. Increase in size inevitably compels changes in the qualitative elements of a library's organizations, including the main plan elements, doorways and walls as well as equipment, and changes should be allowed for, even if they cannot be calculated in detail. Moreover, provision for expansion should cover not merely straightforward increase in holdings but also increase or intensification of service. Usually this will mean more staff for whom workplace must be found, and this is often difficult except at the expense of reader-space even if the sound principle is observed—not, however, mentioned by Mr. Carter—that only those members of the library's staff actually responsible for service to readers should be located in the reading-room itself.

Without dealing in detail with library planning, Mr. Carter indicated his objections to the university type with reader's bays and emphasized the desirability of the librarian's own room being situated where he will be in close contact with both readers and staff. On lighting and acoustics he made many important practical observations, and his comment that it is as important to prevent noisy conditions in rooms where staff are at work on tasks demanding concentration as in reading rooms will be appreciated. He pointed out that a sustained background noise of traffic or machinery is generally not troublesome and can even be helpful in muffling foreground disturbances such as conversation, a squeaky pen and so on. Readers prefer, he finds, to sit facing rather than alongside each other unless the space between adjacent readers is very generous. Something more than minimum seating comfort is one of the amenities which any but the poorest research body should

afford, and all shelving should be adjustable. Mr. Carter's whole paper is packed with observations, notes on minimum standards, and data for calculations for accommodation and design which should be valuable even to the experienced works librarian, and further comments on a number of his points are to be found in S. Rowland Pierce's "Some Notes on the Planning of Research Libraries", who expresses the opinion that where doors are not provided to the bookshelves there should be no books between twelve or eighteen inches of the floor.

There is room for more discussions of the type that followed Miss M. Bateman's paper on "Some General Desk Reference Books" at the afternoon session on September 16, though the speakers betrayed a tendency to think in terms of specific reference books rather than those of a general, all-round usefulness. This session was followed by a discussion on the great book shortage, over which Mr. L. J. F. Brimble presided. This was opened by a paper by Miss E. M. R. Ditmas who, after recapitulating the causes of the shortage, referred to its effects in education and research and its bearing on Empire intercommunications and the re-establishment of cultural relations with Europe. In regard to research, Miss Ditmas quoted figures supplied by the research department of a large firm carrying on research of vital national importance, showing how the position has steadily deteriorated since 1942 and the dependence on American rather than on British books—a dependence which, with the termination of Lend-Lease, may have serious repercussions on industrial and scientific development if books are regarded as articles of luxury or merely a commodity of trade. The immediate demand for British publications is far in advance of the normal pre-war demand, while stocks are at their lowest. The discrepancy between supply and demand grows monthly, but the remedy must take account of labour in both the paper-making and the printing and book-binding industries as well as transport and materials.

In the lively discussion which followed, Miss Ditmas's remarks in regard to the effect of the book shortage on research was stressed by Dr. V. E. Parke and other speakers, including the chairman, who expressed the opinion that books needed for research and for the universities were more important than those needed for schools, where the numbers run into hundreds of thousands of volumes. Reference was made to the possible help of the American Library in arranging facilities for inspecting American books which could not be obtained on approval, and the chairman endorsed a deserved tribute paid by Prof. R. S. Hutton to the services of Messrs. H. K. Lewis and Co., Ltd., and other leading booksellers in procuring American literature. Mr. H. L. Jackson, of Messrs. H. K. Lewis and Co., Ltd., thought that Miss Ditmas had given a very good account of the position and that the shortage was most acute in the educational field. Confirming that the labour position rather than the paper shortage* was the most acute difficulty, he suggested that it would be better to send a deputation with a resolution rather than submit a resolution only from the Conference. After further discussion a resolution was approved suggesting that the Council of the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux should take definite action along such lines, either by a deputation to the Ministry of Labour or other Ministry or by way of resolution.

* Since this discussion was held, a fifteen per cent increase in paper allocation has been announced.

CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF MARINE ORGANISMS

THE data on the chemical composition of marine organisms are widely scattered; hence Prof. A. P. Vinogradov's paper on "La composition chimique élémentaire des organismes marins" (*Trav. Lab. Biogéochimique, Acad. Sci. URSS.*, Pt. 1, 1937, Pt. 2, 1941, Pt. 3, 1944) is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the elemental chemical composition of marine plants and animals; it is in Russian. Essentially it represents a compilation of many thousands of elemental analyses of marine organisms, and the bibliography alone, printed in double columns in close type, occupies 44 pages. The data presented are accompanied by extensive critical discussion and comments. Part 1 embraces Algae, Bacteria, Protozoa, Porifera and Coelenterata; Part 2, the remaining Invertebrata and a part of a chapter on the chemical composition of respiratory pigments; and this chapter is carried over to Part 3, which also contains additional notes on the composition of Invertebrata, composition of Pisces, composition of skeletal parts of animals, a general summary and special chapters dealing with the problems of geology and evolution from the biogeochemical point of view.

Although the collection of analyses appears to be enormous, its usefulness in its present form is somewhat limited, mainly because the analyses are usually confined to certain chemical elements found in certain parts of organisms (soft parts, skeleton, ash, etc.), and there is no attempt made to evaluate the composition of complete organisms. This means that any attempt to give a generalized view of the chemical composition of individual species is bound to be rather vague, and any comparison between them very difficult. This fault certainly does not lie with the author, whose perseverance in collecting these data is truly remarkable. In spite of these difficulties the author makes an attempt to trace the relation existing between the composition of organisms and the composition of the ocean and to find out the major changes in chemical composition of organisms during geological time.

From the point of view of geology, or rather of biogeochemistry, as this branch of science is now called in the U.S.S.R., an especially important question is that of the concentration of certain chemical elements by marine organisms, which often leads to the deposition of rocks of biogenic origin, such as limestone, diatomite, manganese and iron ores and petroleum. "Marine organisms, concentrating certain elements and dispersing others during the process of their living activity, are performing complex and varied geochemical functions. Their chemical elemental composition, as shown by thousands of analyses, does not appear to be a simple reflection of the chemical composition of the surrounding medium. The varying chemical composition of the organism is determined by their physiological character, which in its turn is produced by lengthy interaction between each organism and its medium. On closer investigation we can discover that the chemical composition of the organism reflects its genetic history." According to the author, each species of organism is characterized by its own chemical composition, which has remained more or less constant throughout geological time, and only new species show a marked change in composition.

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